Aalto University
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THE IMPACT OF CUSTOMIZATION ON EMAIL MARKETING AUTOMATION IN THE B2B CONTEXT

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Abstract

The impact of customization in email marketing automation in the business to business (B2B) context is yet to be studied comprehensively and precisely. The paper aims to understand the impact of customization on email marketing automation, thus providing insights for marketers to form more strategical customization practices in order to improve marketing performance.

Literature regarding customization, email marketing automation, customer's perception such as feeling unique, relevant, intrusive and privacy concerned was briefly reviewed. Two scenarios based online experiments were conducted to study the phenomenon. Study 1 tested the effect of customization of the subject line of the email on the probability to open the email, while study 2 tested the effect of customized content of the email on the receiver willingness to respond to the email. Quantitative research method with Analysis of Variance (Anova) were used to test the effect of customization on different measures.

The main findings represent that customization has a positive and significant impact on the email marketing automation performance, varying from subject to content. In short, customization of the email content has a more significant impact than the customization of the subject. Both subject and content customization has a positive and significant effect on perceived uniqueness. In addition, content customization also has a significant effect on attitude towards the email and especially on call to action of the email- intention to join the CXO community. It is noticeable that customization does not have any significant impact on perceived intrusiveness, privacy concern and relevance of the email, from both subject and content perspectives.

Regarding originality and value, the research advanced the knowledge of customization and its application in email marketing automation, providing actionable insights that marketers can apply into their jobs. Practically, it is potential to apply the insights of customization on email marketing automation into other marketing activities such as advertising automation.

Keywords customization, personalization, marketing automation, email marketing, email marketing automation, perceived uniqueness, intrusiveness, privacy concern, perceived relevance.

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1. Introduction

It has been criticized that mass emails are sent to customers, despite their preferences. This negatively affects marketing performance and eventually damages the relationship between a brand and its customers.

Email marketing plays an essential role in the marketing landscape yet facing challenges in customization implementation and optimization. Email marketing automation stepped into the game to scale up the customization practices. For example, it enables emails to be sent with personal variables, under specific trigger and time (Heimbach et al, 2015).

1.1 Research problem and objectives

Customization is a driver of marketing and communications efficiency and effectiveness (Salonen & Karjaluoto, 2016). However, the impact of customization in email marketing automation in the business to business (B2B) context is yet to be studied comprehensively and precisely.

The phenomenon this master's thesis seeks is to describe and understand deeper understanding on how marketers employ customization in email marketing automation. To achieve the goal, the main research question is:

What is the impact of customization on email marketing automation in the B2B context?

To answer the main research question, these aspects of customization effects are studied: perceived uniqueness, customer attitude, relevance, intrusiveness, privacy concern and call to action conversion.

The research used two experiments to collect data, the first one is to study the subject customization and the second is to study the content customization. More detailed hypotheses to study the main resaerch question are listed in the Literature review chapter.

1.2 Key concepts

This section explains briefly the key concepts of this study.

Marketing automation

Marketing automation can be considered as a strategy to transform marketing management as well as a tool to automate marketing operations by utilizing technology and data (Mero et al., 2020). Buttle (2015) listed several attributions of marketing automation, including email marketing, social media, content marketing, and lead management.

Marketing automation

Email marketing automation is the process of sending customized emails to target a segment, group, or even individual by utilizing automation software or other technologies (Mullen, 2009; Sahni et al., 2018; Nguyen & Simkin, 2013)

Customization

Customization is a degree to which a customer can create, choose and make changes to services and products according to what they prefer (Teng, 2010). In the context of email automation, customization is a one-to-one marketing approach, which can deliver the right message at the right time to the right customer (Peppers et al., 1999; Huang & Zhou, 2018).

Perceived uniqueness

According to Sivanathan & Pettit (2010), customers have a desire to feel unique and special. Customization provides customers with the opportunity to express their individuality and uniqueness through the products they purchase. Customized email marketing can make people feel unique by recognizing their individual needs and preferences and providing them with personalized content that is relevant and valuable to them.

Intrusiveness

Li et al., (2013) explain intrusiveness as a psychological consequence or perception that happens when a customer's cognitive procedures are interfered with. Intrusiveness refers to the degree to which customers perceive customization as being unwanted or unnecessary.

Privacy concern

Privacy concern refers to the degree to which customers are worried about how their data is being used and who has access to it. As businesses increasingly collect and use customer data to create customized products and services, customers may become concerned about the security and confidentiality of their personal information. (Bansal et al., 2015).

1.3 Research structure

This research includes five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, context, key concepts, main problem and research question.

Chapter 2, literature review, presents in-depth relevant theories of the key concepts, focusing on email marketing automation and customization phenomena.

Chapter 3 discusses methodology and findings. These include introducing data collection methods, describing the experiment development, analyzing data and describing the key findings of the research.

Chapter 4 concludes the thesis will summarize the results, discuss managerial implications as well as the limitations of the present study. Suggestions for future research are also provided.

2. Literature review

This literature review aims to provide an overview of the existing research on email marketing automation customization, including its benefits, challenges, and its impacts on conversion rates and customers' perceptions.

2.1 Email marketing automation

Marketing automation can be considered as a strategy to transform marketing management as well as a tool to automate marketing operations by utilizing technology and data (Mero et al., 2020). Additionally, marketing automation is emphasized as a technology leveraging customization and data-driven approaches to enhance efficiency and effectiveness of marketing operations. By integrating technology and marketing tactics, marketers get to understand customers deeper, thus be able to make the best matched offers instantaneously (Ginty et al., 2012). Therefore, business should consider marketing automation as a core pillar in building company communication and engagement strategies (Dijkstra, 2008; Del Rowe Sam, 2016).

Buttle (2015) listed several attributions of marketing automation, including email marketing, social media, content marketing, and lead management. However, this study will concentrate on email marketing only. Generally, email marketing's objective is to generate brand awareness, trust and loyalty (Mullen, 2009). Especially, under customers' permission, a highly relevant email message is definitely one of the most powerful digital marketing communications (Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015; Hartemo, 2016; Zhang et al., 2017).

Email marketing automation is the process of sending customized emails to target a segment, group, or even individual by utilizing automation software or other technologies (Mullen, 2009; Sahni et al., 2018; Nguyen & Simkin, 2013). It enables businesses to communicate and reach out to potential and existing customers more efficiently and effectively (Bagshaw, 2015). Although email marketing automation can be applied in various industries and fields, this research focuses on email marketing automation in the context of business to business (B2B), and excluding business to customer (B2C), due to author's interest towards B2B context.

Marketing automation software allows customized emails to be triggered specifically and tracked precisely (Baggott, 2007; Mullen, 2009; Heimbach et al., 2015). Tracking enables marketers to gather various data such as email opening time, clicking a link or image in the email, how long email is opened and read, attached file downloading or even opting out from the email list. In addition, the system also records if an email is successfully delivered to recipient's email or categorized as spam or even bounced. This information can be utilized wisely by marketers to adjust the content of the messages to improve the campaign performance. For instance, email easily lands on spam folder when it contains wordings which spam filters categorize as spam words. Then the emailing system directs the email automatically to the spam folder. Acknowledging this fact, marketers should avoid using red flag wordings to minimize the risk of being categorized as spam.

2.1.1 The positive impact of email marketing automation in B2B context

There are numerous studies emphasize the benefits of email marketing automation in improving marketing performance, building up customer engagement and relationship, boosting sales, eventually increasing return on investment (ROI) for companies in B2B context (Riemersma & Jansen, 2006; Ginty et al., 2012; Buttle, 2015; Heimbach et al., 2015).

The market is becoming more and more competitive, which is also reflected in how customers demand more relevant touchpoints in their customer journey. Email automation enables marketers to group their target audience based on different criteria such as demographics, behavior, and interests, allowing them to send tailored messages that are more likely to be relevant and engaging (*Email Marketing Benchmarks: Key Data, Trends and Metrics*, 2013). Technology, such as email marketing automation software, empowers marketers to send more customized messages to recipients with a bigger scale, and simultaneously saves a lot of time and resources for manually gathering, sending and analyzing campaign results. Especially with a more relevant and matched email, customers are more interested in taking call to action and eventually willing to buy for instance. (Mullen, 2009).

The use of email marketing automation has become increasingly popular in recent years, as it allows businesses to save time and resources while still delivering high-quality, personalized content to their customers (*Email Marketing Benchmarks: Key Data, Trends and Metrics*, 2013). Digital marketing experts suggest that email marketing automation can be a valuable resource for building customer relationships and improving engagement (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). By automating repetitive tasks, such as sending welcome emails or abandoned cart reminders, businesses can focus on more important tasks, such as creating and optimizing their email campaigns. Additionally, automated emails can be scheduled to be sent at the most optimal times, increasing the chances of them being opened and read. This can increase open rates and click-through rates, ultimately leading to increased conversions.

Marketing performance is improved by efficiently and effectively measuring and utilizing the gathered data via marketing automation software. Key performance indicators such as opening rate, click rate, lead conversion rates are recorded automatically. Consequently, metrics are applied by following actions such as follow-up emails, display ads or social media ads to nurture the customer experience and journey. For example, a study by HubSpot found that email marketing has an average return on investment of $36 for every $1 spent (Kirsch, 2023). More fast- responding and relevant touchpoints highly contribute to upgrading marketing performance and eventually increasing ROI in marketing activities of a brand. (Chaffey & Patron, 2012; Järvinen & Karjaluoto, 2015).

2.1.2 The negative impact of email marketing automation in B2B context

As with any technology, there are also potential drawbacks and challenges that must be considered in using email marketing automation, drawing on a range of academic and industry sources.

One of the main disadvantages of email marketing automation is the lack of human touch. According to a study by Campaign Monitor (2018), automated emails have a lower open rate 34% compared to emails sent manually by human beings 57%. Automated emails come across as impersonal or robotic, which makes it difficult to create a personal connection with customers or prospects. (*The State of Email Marketing*, 2019).

Another risk of email automation is over usage of email sequences. Businesses might be tempted to send too many customized emails, consequently leading to irrelevant and redundant emails. According to Neil Patel, high unsubscribe rates are often caused by irrelevant content and too many emails being sent (Neil Patel, n.d.). When setting up the automation, this can be avoided by considering the recipient's preferences and engagement. For example, marketers might set a sequence of 10 steps of emails to keep sending to potential customers until they reply. Some receivers tend to ignore the emails when they are not interested. However, it might irritate them when the emails keep spamming their inbox constantly. It is important for businesses to strike a balance between sequence automation and relevance to avoid this issue.

The risk of errors is another possible downside of email automation. Email automation requires a certain level of technical skill and attention to detail, so there is a risk of errors or bugs that can affect the delivery or performance of emails. Additionally, if not set up properly, automated emails might be flagged as spam or unwanted.

In conclusion, email automation also has some potential drawbacks, such as the lack of human touch, over usage of email sequences and the risk of errors. Businesses should carefully weigh the pros and cons of email automation and consider the recipient's preferences before implementing it. By doing so, they can ensure that they are able to take full advantage of the benefits of email automation while minimizing the risks.

2.2 The positive impact of email automation customization

Customization has become a key strategy for businesses in recent years, as it allows them to tailor their products and services to the specific needs and preferences of individual customers (Kotler, 2016), and blends into the customer experience and journey (Hayes, 2019).

Customization is a degree to which a customer can create, choose and make changes to services and products according to what they prefer (Teng, 2010). Customization is likely to bring figurative value and generate a favorable rapport between the brand and its customers (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Bock et al., (2016) also emphasized the important role of customization in customer trust and loyalty from an emotional perspective. Evidently, there are many examples showcase the advantages of

customization. For instance, customized offers represent an ideal identity as a customer's desire, thus reaching customers' ideal selves (Belk, 1988). In addition, customers' attachment to an offer is increased through customization, which further represents the self-concept (Belaid & Temessek Behi, 2011). Self-expressive customization, as a self-concept extension, illustrates individual identity or the identity they want to have. Customization aims to underline particular components as well as reveal personal identity such as socioeconomic roles, ethnicity, traits. (McConnell, 2011).

In the context of email automation, customization is a one-to-one marketing approach, which can deliver the right message at the right time to the right customer (Peppers et al., 1999; Huang & Zhou, 2018). As a result, customization enables businesses to tailor their communications with audiences, generating a more relevant and engaging experience with new and existing customers, which eventually leads to increased customer satisfaction and loyalty (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

In this study, customization and personalization are entwined in this research under the same meaning. Salonen & Karjaluoto (2016) stated that customization and personalization are closely interlinked concepts which generate synergies when incorporating them.

Scholars who have investigated email marketing automation found that email customization enables B2B businesses to increase relevance and engagement with

target customers. Specifically, by customizing emails to a particular group of audiences, such as C-level or decision-maker positions, messages are ensured to reach the right people with the right tone of voice and relevant call to action (Srivastava & Roychoudhury, 2021). Additionally, data such as browsing behavior or payment history is strategically utilized to sharpen customized messages, eventually driving more engagement and conversion (Dinev & Hart, 2004).

Marketing customization and automation have been blooming in recent years due to the rapid change in digital market, allowing customers to be more demanding for products and services (Kalyanaraman & Sundar, 2006; Sunikka & Bragge, 2012). Brands competes in providing not only customers' wants and needs, but rather their beliefs and interests (Khodakarami & Chan, 2014). Hence, businesses should constantly update with trends and emerging technologies, that secure the most customized offerings, to carry on efficiently and effectively (Kalaignanam et al., 2008).

With the development of technology, the phenomenon of hyper-customization has come along the way. Miller (2014) and Bulik (2018) concluded hyper-customization levels up customer communication by ensuring every single element of a communication (name, location, segment, image, offer, timing, etc.) is specifically reached out to the right customer. Recently, technology enabled marketers to send more detailed customized messages to group or even individual customers. As a result, business can increase the relevance of the communication to their recipients. More relevance communication means offering a better fit with customers' references which leading to improve buying

intension (Franke et al., 2009; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2011), while lower matched offering cause irritation (Thota & Biswas, 2009) or even negative attitudes whether the message is opposite to customers' interest (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004).

It is also recommended that email content should be customized based on the customers' behaviors and preferences which empower them (Mogos & Acatrinei, 2015). Customization enhances relevant and inclusive feeling from customers towards the brand. Hence it increases the possibility of opening and taking the call to action of the email. (Sahni et al., 2018). For example, an e-commerce business can set up an automation that sends an abandoned cart email to a customer who has added items to their cart but has not completed their purchase. The email can be customized to include the items left in the cart and a customized offer or promotion to encourage the customer to complete their purchase.

2.2.1 Customization increases the feeling of being empowered and unique

According to a study by Deloitte, 36% of consumers express a desire for more personalized products and services (*The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020*, 2020). This demonstrates the growing importance of customization and unique experiences under the eyes of consumers. Furthermore, customization in email automation can help businesses to create a unique and memorable experience for their customers. By incorporating unique design elements and personalized content, businesses can create emails that stand out from the competition. This can help to increase brand recognition and establish a loyal customer base.

According to Sivanathan & Pettit (2010), customers have a desire to feel unique and special. Customization provides customers with the opportunity to express their individuality and uniqueness through the products they purchase. Customized email marketing can make people feel unique by recognizing their individual needs and preferences and providing them with personalized content that is relevant and valuable to them. By tailoring emails to each recipient's specific interests and needs, businesses can create a personalized experience that sets them apart from other generic marketing messages. This can lead to a higher level of satisfaction with the product and the buying experience. Therefore, based on the above discussion, it leads to hypothesis 1, which proposes significant impact of customization on perceived uniqueness.

> **H1**: The more customized email automation becomes, the more unique customers perceive.

Customization to express personal identity highlights that customized offer is exclusive, unique and differentiated, hence nurturing value and reference matching. By differentiating in offerings towards customers' preferences, customization has a fundamental impact on setting a premium price and taking price advantage, increasing profit while preventing pricing competition. (Xia & Rajagopalan, 2009). Scholars also found that customers are more willing to pay and even with a more premium price for services or products representing uniqueness (Franke et al., 2010; Merle et al., 2010).

The psychology of customization corresponds with customers' desire to control their environment (Bright & Daugherty, 2012). Since customization gives room for customers to choose the offer based on their preferences, it may manipulate customers and give them an illusion that they can control the surrounding environment. Consequently, customers receive the message, under the sense of self-control, more personally relevant and hence act more favorably towards the brand. (Kalyanaraman & Sundar, 2006; Sundar & Marathe, 2010). This leads to hypothesis 2, which is about the impact of customization on relevance perception.

> **H2**: The more customized email automation becomes, the more relevant customers perceive.

In addition, Faranda (2001) and Chandran & Morwitz (2005) added that an increase in perceived sense of control is synced with consumption experiences and satisfaction. Previously, Rubin (1993) also discovered a positive correlation between pleasure and control desire. In the context of interactive marketing, scholars found that control desire is a fundamental factor in acquiring pleasantness. Particularly, business can let customers choose what kinds of emails they want to receive: new products launch or sales season for example. By that, when receiving the email, customers feel more controllable, because it is allowed by themselves. Hence, it is likely easy for them to consume the email content and take action forwards. If customers agree to receive emails related to sales of a brand. They would feel happy to receive that email and even start shopping by clicking on the link in the email. That is exactly what a brand expects in conversion, but it was customized wisely which makes it look like everything is controlled by customers. Thus, this forms the third hypothesis of customization and customers' attitude.

H3: The more customized email automation becomes, the more positive attitude customers tend to develop toward the emails.

All in all, customization in email automation is a powerful marketing strategy that can make customers feel unique and valued. By incorporating personalized elements, businesses can create emails that stand out from generic marketing messages and create a personalized experience for each customer. This approach not only increases engagement and drives sales in the short term but also fosters a connection between companies and their customers, ultimately leading to increased loyalty and retention in the long term.

2.2.2 Customization increases conversion rates

According to a study by Experian Marketing Services (2014), customized emails have a 29% higher open rate and 41% higher click-through rate compared to non-customized emails. Customized email campaigns can be created to target specific groups of customers or prospects, with different content, offers, or calls to action tailored to each group's interests and needs. This allows businesses to send more relevant and engaging emails, which can increase open rates, click-through rates, and ultimately leading to higher conversion rates in general.

Dynamic content, which is a way to personalize email content for each individual recipient based on their data, preferences or actions, is also an important aspect of customization in email automation. For example, businesses can personalize the subject line, greeting, or specific call to action based on the recipient's name, past purchases or interests. The same study by Experian also found that personalized emails have a conversion rate that is six times higher than non-personalized emails (*Experian Marketing Services Study Finds Personalized Emails Generate Six Times Higher Transaction Rates*, 2014). This suggests that customization can be an effective way to increase the likelihood that customers will take desired actions, such as making a purchase or signing up for a newsletter. This leads to the fourth implication.

> **H4**: The more customized email automation becomes, the more likely customers respond to the calls to action in the emails they receive.

2.3 The negative impact of email automation customization

While customization can have many mutual benefits for both businesses and customers, it also has the risk of having a negative impact on customer attitude. This is because customization can increase the feeling of intrusiveness and concern about privacy among customers (Dinev & Hart, 2004; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

2.3.1 Customization increases the feeling of intrusiveness and concern about privacy

Li et al., (2013) explain intrusiveness as a psychological consequence or perception that happens when a customer's cognitive procedures are interfered with. Intrusiveness refers to the degree to which customers perceive customization as being unwanted or unnecessary. When customization goes beyond what is desired by the customer, it can create a sense of intrusion and discomfort. For example, if a business uses customer data to create targeted advertisements or promotions that are deemed invasive or unnecessary, this can lead to feelings of intrusion among customers (Srivastava & Roychoudhury, 2021). Similarly, if a business uses customization to push products or services that customers do not want or need, this can also lead to feelings of intrusion (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). This can negatively impact customer attitude towards the business, as customers may feel like their privacy is being invaded or that their preferences are not being respected (Dinev & Hart, 2004). As discussed above, the follow hypothesis is formed:

H5: The more customized email automation becomes, the more customers might find it intrusive.

Since the fundamental of customization is consumer data, consumers naturally concern about possible privacy violations which might lead to their biased attitude towards email marketing (White et al., 2008; Goldfarb & Tucker, 2012; Sahni et al., 2018). Higher degrees in customization, like listing personal identification or transaction information, increases intrusiveness feeling and thus negatively affects the customer's attitude towards the brand (van Doorn & Hoekstra, 2013). Customization requires customer insights and personal data which might overcome an unnecessary level of information (White et al., 2008; Tucker, 2014). Despite the benefit of relevance when utilizing more customized content, more personal data also irritates feelings of intrusiveness which prevents customers to take actions forwards (Li et al., 2013; Okazaki et al., 2013; Morimoto & Chang, 2006). Intrusiveness is also perceived as an offended and annoying matter which causes contrast reactions to what company aims for (Clee & Wicklund, 1980; Ying et al., 2009)

Privacy concern refers to the degree to which customers are worried about how their data is being used and who has access to it. As businesses increasingly collect and use customer data to create customized products and services, customers may become concerned about the security and confidentiality of their personal information. (Bansal et al., 2015). This can lead to feelings of unease and mistrust among customers, which can negatively impact their attitude towards business (Kotler, 2016). Additionally, if a business is not transparent about its data collection and usage practices, this can further exacerbate concerns about privacy (Dinev & Hart, 2004). Hence, the hypothesis is stated as follows:

H6: The more customized email automation gets, the more concerned customers become about their personal privacy.

Goldfarb & Tucker (2011b) further explained that privacy concerns were previously restricted to government issues as private lives under common sense. With the growth of digitalization and information technology, customers' data has become easier to collect, store and utilize by companies. However, marketing campaigns are negatively affected due to the government also tightening the privacy-related regulation. European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) strictly set boundaries to data processing for marketing purposes, which consequently affects customization. Specifically, Article 5(1)(c) of GDPR stated that privacy data should be adequate and relevant to necessary information which purely addresses the intended purpose. If a company approaches a person directly via email without their permission. It is totally legit for recipient to question the business ground based on GDPR. Furthermore, along with security and privacy issues, data breaches are one of the main concerns when storing and dealing with a massive database of customers (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). Due to the fast speed of technology development, policy and regulation are not following which causes a gap in data collection and its application security.

In addition, Goldfarb & Tucker (2012a) noted that customers' concern in sharing private information increases over time. Meaning that the older people get, the more unwilling they are to share data which is due to privacy relevancy perception shifting. Additionally, people are more sensitive toward privacy concerns when they notice they are under an identical and automotive marketing campaign. Dolin et al., (2018) realized that customers drop the communication immediately when they noticed their data is collected and used with intention.

In the context of email marketing, customers specific content is likely to increase privacy concerns, consequently, decreasing the campaign performance. The scholars also identified possible risk of triggering customers' negative reaction by using customer information such as first name, which make customers reject the offers. On the other hand, the research also found that customization content might increase the email marketing campaign. This depends a lot on what information is used in the message and the customers' awareness in controlling their data. For instance, it is not likely to irritate customers by email with their names on it if they had previously given the information and allow companies to contact them regarding certain matters. (Sahni et al., 2018).

Plangger & Watson (2015) further stated that it is challenging to provide better customer experience without multiple data points of customers since what they offer would not match customers' preferences. Additionally, customers, who exchange their information for loyalty program benefit for example, are skeptical about their data privacy simultaneously. The loyalty program was intended to gain benefits for the brand, and turned out to cause various fire backs, regarding both customer psychology and legal ground. (Belli et al., 2022; Jai & King, 2016; Steinhoff & Palmatier, 2016).

It is important to note that these concepts of intrusiveness and privacy concern are subjective and can vary from person to person. What one person may find invasive or concerning, another person may find acceptable. (Srivastava & Roychoudhury, 2021). Furthermore, as technology and customer preferences continue to evolve, the boundary of what is considered intrusive or concerning can shift. This highlights the need for businesses to continuously monitor and adapt their customization strategies to ensure they match customers' expectations. (Verhoef, 2003).

2.3.2 How to reduce the negative impact of customization

The balance between keeping customers data safe and utilizing it effectively to gain benefit for the business gains a lot of interests from many scholars (Haenlein et al., 2022).

First, businesses can be transparent about their data collection and usage practices which provides customers handy clarifications of how their data is being utilized. This can help to build trust and mitigate concerns about privacy. (Kotler, 2016). Plangger & Watson (2015) also added that dialog between company and its customers enable willingness to share data in exchange for better customer experience.

Second, businesses can be selective in the data they collect and use, and only use customer data that is necessary for the customization of products and services. This can help to avoid feelings of intrusion among customers. For instance, instead of business-level data, companies can switch to generalized and anonymous data when addressing customer behavior (Haenlein et al., 2022). Furthermore, data minimization and anonymization are two common approaches in dealing with data concern in marketing context. Data minimization represents the method of gathering only necessary data and disposing of it after usage. Anonymization is the practice of manipulating the data to remove the identity of the data point, by using techniques such as encrypting or randomizing. (Wedel & Kannan, 2016).

Third, businesses can give customers control over the customization process, allowing them to choose the level of customization they are comfortable with. This can help to ensure that customization is tailored to the specific needs and preferences of each customer, rather than being imposed on them.

Customization is a valuable and impactful strategy for businesses to tailor their products and services, however, simultaneously the risk of having negative influence on customers' attitude is undeniable. The feeling of intrusiveness and concern about privacy are the two main negative impacts of customization. Businesses start paying attention to implementing more secure privacy practices, aiming to build better relationships with customers (Wedel & Kannan, 2016). Businesses can mitigate these negative impacts by being transparent about data collection and usage practices, being selective in the data they collect and use, and giving customers control over the customization process.

All in all, summary of hypotheses is presented in the table below.

Summary of hypotheses
H1: The more customized email automation becomes, the more unique customers perceive.
H2: The more customized email automation becomes, the more relevant customers perceive.
H3: The more customized email automation becomes, the more positive attitude customers tend to develop toward the emails.
H4: The more customized email automation becomes, the more likely customers respond to the calls to action in the emails they receive.
H5: The more customized email automation becomes, the more customers might find it intrusive.
H6: The more customized email automation gets, the more concerned customers become about their personal privacy.

Table 1 Summary of the hypotheses

3. Methodology, empirical analysis, and findings

For this research, I conducted two scenarios based online experiments. In Study 1 I tested the effect of customization of the subject line of the email on the probability to open the email, while in Study 2 I tested the effect of customized content of the email on the receiver willingness to respond to the email. I used Prolific platform to recruit participants to my studies.

In both studies the participants were asked to read carefully the following Scenario:

“Imagine you are Tony Stark, a CEO of Global Talent- a growing HR SaaS company in Finland. Your company offers a platform to help clients look for and manage employees. This is a compact platform assisting HR activities in many levels: from recruitment, onboarding, taking care of employee's wellbeing, to paying salary and compensation to employees.
Your company revenue is 5M in 2021 and has 30 headcounts
Your company aims to grow European wide, and then on the global scale as well
As a CEO, Tony is responsible for managing the company and expanding network to look out for opportunities to grow companies faster.”

Figure 1: Tony Stark CEO of Global Talent

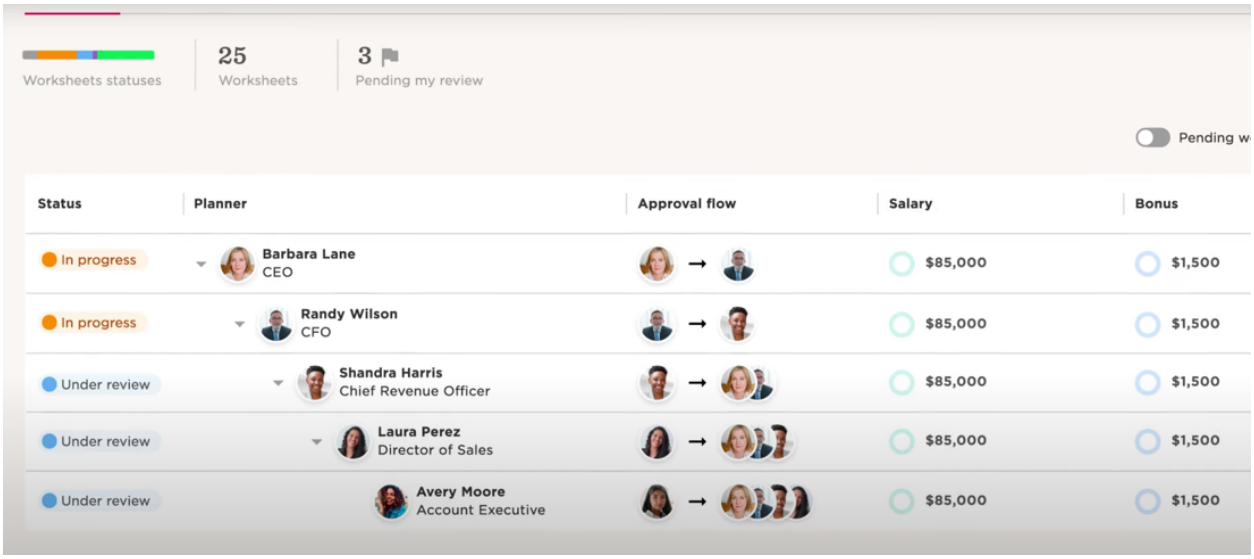

Figure 2: A screenshot of Global Talent platform

I will now elaborate further on each of the experiments in more detail.

3.1 Experiment 1: Study the effect of customization of the email subject

I conducted a scenario based online experiment and used Prolific platform to recruit 200 participants who work in B2B companies. The experiment also had demographic questions of age and gender to help categorize attendants. The average age of the participants was 42.47%. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest was 71, giving a wide spectrum of aged respondents. The majority of participants were men, the distribution of gender being 70% men (140 participants), 29% women (58 participants) and 1% prefer not to say (2 participants).

The experiment is between subjects with two conditions: 1) customization (treatment group) and 2) non-customization (control group). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the two mentioned conditions. After showing participants the story of Tony and his company, the scenario started categorizing as below.

For the participants in the treatment group (i.e., customization), the scenario I presented to 99 participants is they received an email with a customized subject: “Invitation for Tony to join our CXO network”. The first name of the receiver-Tony is included in the email subject. The screenshot of how the email subject looks in their inbox was shown to participants as below.

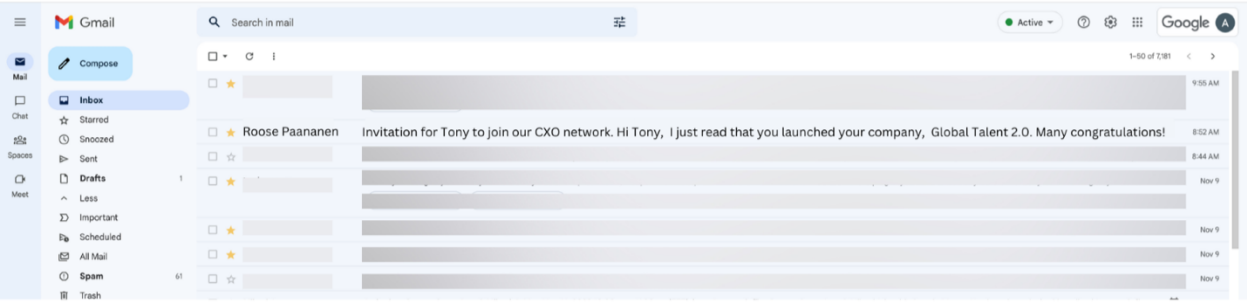

Figure 3: A screenshot of how customized subject looks in email inbox.

For the control group (i.e., non-customization), the scenario I presented to 101 participants is they received an email with a non-customized subject: “Invitation to join our CXO network”. There is no first name of receiver- Tony is included in the email subject. The screenshot of how the email subject looks in their inbox was shown to participants as below.

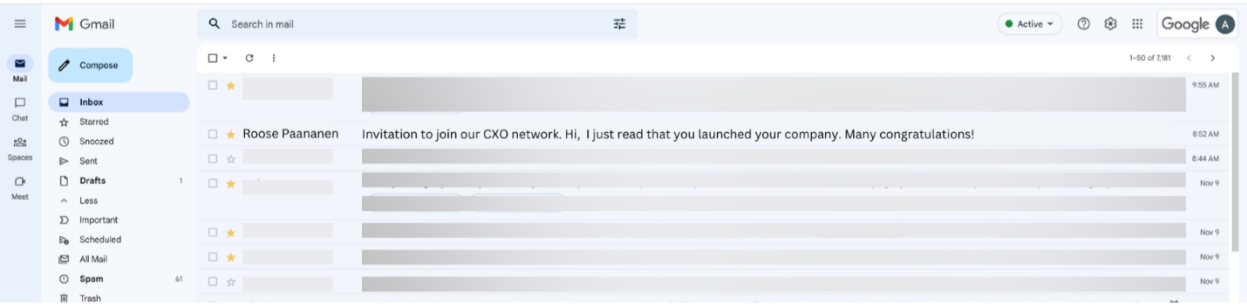

Figure 4: A screenshot of how non-customized subject looks in email inbox.

3.1.1 Experiment 1: Measures

In addition to the main dependent variable, intention to open the email, I collected other measures: Perceived Uniqueness; Intrusiveness; Privacy; Attitude; and Relevance. The measures' scales are constructed from previous studies, summarized table is listed in the appendix at the end.

Perceived Uniqueness

To measure Perceived Uniqueness, I used a 3-items scale adapted from the research of Şimşek & Yalınçetin (2010). The items are: "The email I received made me feel unique."; "I feel that the email sender recognized my uniqueness."; and "I feel that the email sender chose me because of my unique features."

The items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The Likert scale was built to measure attitudes by quantifying the participant's degree of disagreement or agreement to a series of statements in a scientifically validated manner (Joshi et al., 2015; Malhotra et al., 2017). Although Likert scales are often 5-pointed, this study was measured on a 7-pointed scale, aiming to collect a wider range of selections which enables higher reliability of respondents' answers (Joshi et al., 2015).

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale for Perceived Uniqueness is unidimensional (Eigenvalue = 2.81; variance explained 94%) and reliable (alpha= *96.65%).

Intrusiveness

To measure Intrusiveness, I used a 4-items scale adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I think this email is obtrusive.”; “I think this email is disturbing.”; “I think it is uncomfortable that personal information is used in this email.”; and “I think the email sender knows a lot about me.” The fourth item (compl = 0.2038) does not go in the same direction as the first three items. Looking at the items, it can be noted that the subject of the item 4th (about the sender) is different from the one of the first three items (about the email). This means that it measures a different concept.

After removing the 4th item, I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale now is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=2.44; variance explained 81.4%) and reliable (alpha= *88.47%).

Privacy

To measure Privacy, I used a 3-items scale adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I am concerned about threats to my personal privacy.”; “I have lost all control over how my personal information is used in the email.”; and “I begin surrendering my privacy when I check my email.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=2.49; variance explained 83%) and reliable (alpha= *89.7%).

Attitude

To measure Attitude, I used a 6-items scale adapted from the research of Huang & Waddell (2020). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I think that the subject of the email is appealing.“; “I think that the subject of the email is good.”; “I think that the subject of the email is persuasive.”; “I think that the subject of the email is attractive.”; “I think that the subject of the email is sophisticated.”; and “I overall like the email.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=4.97; variance explained 83%) and reliable (alpha= *95.7%).

Intention to open the email

To measure Intention to open the email, I used two measures: 1) 3-items scale and 2) single item scale from 0 to 100. The 3-items scale was adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “The likelihood of opening the email is large.”; “The probability that I would consider opening the email is large.”; and “If I am going to open an email, the probability of opening this email is large.” The single item scale was to ask participants the probability (from 0 to 100) they would open the email after reading the subject.

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue= 2.90; variance explained 97%) and reliable (alpha= *98.4%).

Relevance

To measure Relevance, I used a 4-items scale adapted from the research of Huang & Waddell (2020). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I think that the email is important.”; “I think the email is relevant.”; “I think the email is appealing.”; and “I think the email is involving.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue= 3.57; variance explained 89.5%) and reliable (alpha= *96%).

3.1.2. Experiment 1 Analysis and Results

I conducted Anova to test the effect of customization on different measures.

Intention to open the email

On the first measure- the 3-items scale, the results show that there is no significant effect of customization on intention to open the email (F199 =1.93, p=.166). On the scale of 1 to 7, the average intention to open the email in the customization condition is 4.62, while in the non-customization condition it is 4.25.

On the second measure- the single item scale from 0 to 100, the results also show that there is no significant effect of customization on intention to open the email (F199 =.52, p=.471). On the scale from 0 to 100, the average probability to open the email in the customization condition is 62.08%, while in the non-customization condition it is 58.75%.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized subject does not affect customers intention to open that email.

Attitude

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on the attitude of customers towards the email (F199 =2.18, p=.142). The average attitude of participants in the customization condition is 4.39, while the average attitude of participants in the non-customization condition is 4.09.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized subject does not affect customers attitude towards the email.

Perceived Uniqueness

The results show that there is a significant effect of customization on perceived uniqueness (F199 =3.64, p=.058). The average perception of uniqueness of participants in the customization condition is 4.26, while the average perception of uniqueness of participants in the non-customization condition is 3.8.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized subject does affect customers' perception about uniqueness on the email.

Intrusiveness

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on perception of intrusiveness (F199 =1.02, p=.313). The average perception of intrusiveness of participants in the customization condition is 2.48, while the average perception of intrusiveness of participants in the non-customization condition is 2.66.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized subject does not affect customers' perception of intrusiveness.

Privacy

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on perception of privacy (F199 =.29, p=.593). The average perception of privacy of participants in the customization condition is 2.61, while the average perception of privacy of participants in the non-customization condition is 2.51.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized subject does not affect customers' perception of privacy.

Relevance

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on perception of relevance (F199 =2.75, p=.099). The average perception of relevance of participants in the customization condition is 4.58, while the average perception of relevance of participants in the non-customization condition is 4.2.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized subject does not affect customers' perception of relevance.

3.1.3 Discussion

To sum up experiment 1 result, customized email subject only has significant effect on receivers' perception of uniqueness, while does not have any effect on Intrusiveness; Privacy; Attitude; Relevance; and Intention to open the email.

On a positive side, study 1 proved that customization has a significant effect in making people feel unique and being recognized, while it does not make them worried about their privacy and intrusiveness. In fact, having recipient's name on the email subject might be common these days that people would easily understand and accept. Furthermore, if people had given the company the right to connect them in the future regarding certain matters, it is totally natural to have their names listed on the email subject.

On the other hand, customization does not change people's attitudes or relevance' perception towards the email such as feeling appealing, attractive or relatable, which eventually does not have effect on open rate- which is the main focus variable of the experiment 1. It is crucial to acknowledge that customized subjects do not increase email open rate. Therefore, in practice, if the main goal of marketers is to increase the open rate of email campaigns, they might want to consider another strategy rather than customization as making it customized might not have any effect on the goal of the campaigns.

3.2 Experiment 2: Study the effect of customization of the email content

I conducted another scenario based online experiment and used Prolific platform to recruit 200 participants who work in B2B companies. The experiment 2 also had demographic questions of age and gender to help categorize respondents. The average age of the participants was 42.5%. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest was 71, giving a wide range of different aged respondents. The majority of participants were men, the distribution of gender being 68.5% men (137 participants), 30.5% women (61 participants) and 1% prefer not to say (2 participants).

The experiment is between email content with two conditions: 1) customization of the email content (treatment group) and 2) non-customization (control group). The participants were randomly assigned to one of the two mentioned conditions. After showing participants the story of Tony and his company, the scenario started categorizing as below.

For the participants in the treatment group (i.e., customization), the scenario I presented to 99 participants is they received an email with customized content. Specifically, the customized content is Tony and his company- Global Talent. Below is the customized email content which was presented to the participants in this group.

The subject is: Invitation for Tony to join our CXO network.

The email content is:

Hi Tony,

I just read that you launched your company, Global Talent 2.0.

Many congratulations!

Being a CEO is never an easy job, especially in the context of new -companies, as Global Talen, is even more challenging.

Understanding the pain point of you Tony and many other CEO out there in the world, I'd like to send you an exclusive invitation to join our CXO network, meaning you'll get opportunities to:

- *Join peer-led discussions and social networking events.*
- *Benchmark your strategies and get inspired by other talented CXO.*
- *Connect with solution-providers and unlock new opportunities and business goals for Global Talent.*

It would be great to have a quick call with you Tony in the upcoming weeks to kickoff CXO network membership for you. How is your schedule?

Hope to hear from you soon and have a great day!

Best,

Roose

Roose Paananen

CXO network coordinator

XO Meet & Greet | cxo.fi

For the control group (i.e., non-customization), the scenario I presented to 99 participants is they received an email with non-customized content. Below is the non-customized email content which was presented to the participants in this group.
The subject is Invitation to join our CXO network.

The email content is:

Hi,

I just read that you launched your company.

Many congratulations!

Being a CEO is never an easy job, especially in the context of new-companies, as yours is even more challenging.

Understanding the pain point of you and many other CEO out there in the world, I'd like to send you an exclusive invitation to join our CXO network, meaning you'll get opportunities to:

- *Join peer-led discussions and social networking events.*
- *Benchmark your strategies and get inspired by other talented CXO.*
- *Connect with solution-providers and unlock new opportunities and business goals for your business.*

It would be great to have a quick call with you in the upcoming weeks to kickoff CXO network membership for you. How is your schedule?

Hope to hear from you soon and have a great day!

Best,

Roose

Roose Paananen

CXO network coordinator

CXO Meet & Greet | cxo.fi

3.2.1. Experiment 2 Measures

In addition to the two main dependent variables, Intention to join the CXO community and Intention to book a call with the email sender which are the call to action of the received email, I collected other measures: Perceived Uniqueness; Intrusiveness; Privacy; Attitude; and Relevance. A summarized table of measures is listed in the appendix section at the end.

Perceived Uniqueness

To measure Perceived Uniqueness, I used a 3-items scale adapted from the research of Şimşek & Yalınçetin (2010). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “The email I received made me feel unique.”; “I feel that the email sender recognized my uniqueness.”; and “I feel that the email sender chose me because of my unique features.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale for Perceived Uniqueness is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=2.77; variance explained 92.6%) and reliable (alpha= *96%).

Intrusiveness

To measure Intrusiveness, I used a 4-items scale adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I think this email is obtrusive.”; “I think this email is disturbing.”; “I think it is uncomfortable that personal information is used in this email.”; and “I think the email sender knows a lot about me.” The fourth item (compl = 0.1527) does not go in the same direction as the first three items. Looking at the items, it can be noted that the subject of the item 4th (about the sender) is different from the one of the first three items (about the email). This means that it measures a different concept.

After removing the 4th item, I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale now is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=2.30; variance explained 76%) and reliable (alpha= *84.49%).

Privacy

To measure Privacy, I used a 3-items scale adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I am concerned about threats to my personal privacy.”; “I have lost all control over how my personal information is used in the email.”; and “I begin surrendering my privacy when I check my email.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=2.48; variance explained 82.7%) and reliable (alpha= *89.35%).

Attitude

To measure Attitude, I used a 6-items scale adapted from the research of Huang & Waddell (2020). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I think that the subject of the email is appealing.“; “I think that the subject of the email is good.”; “I think that the subject of the email is persuasive.”; “I think that the subject of the email is attractive.”; “I think that the subject of the email is sophisticated.”; and “I overall like the email.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue=5.05; variance explained 84%) and reliable (alpha= *96%).

Intention to join the CXO community

To measure Intention to open the email, I used two measures: 1) 3-items scale and 2) single item scale from 0 to 100. The 3-items scale was adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “The likelihood of joining the CXO network which was invited in the email is large.”; “The probability that I would consider joining the CXO network which was invited in the email is large.”; and “If I am going to join a network, the probability of joining the CXO network which was invited in the email is large.” The single item scale was to ask participants the probability (from 0 to 100) they would join the CXO community after reading the email.

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue= 2.70; variance explained 92.9%) and reliable (alpha= *96%).

Intention to book a call with the email sender- Roose

To measure Intention to open the email, I used two measures: 1) 3-items scale and 2) single item scale from 0 to 100. The 3-items scale was adapted from the research of van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “The likelihood of booking a call with Roose who was the email sender is large.”; “The probability that I would consider booking a call with Roose who was the email sender is large.”; and “If I am going to booking a call with the email sender, the probability of booking a call with Roose is large.” The single item scale was to ask participants the probability (from 0 to 100) they would book a call with Roose after reading the email.

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue= 2.83; variance explained 94.39%) and reliable (alpha= *97%).

Relevance

To measure Relevance, I used a 4-items scale adapted from the research of Huang & Waddell (2020). The scale goes from 1 (I strongly disagree with the statement) to 7 (I strongly agree with the statement). The items are: “I think that the email is important.”; “I think the email is relevant.”; “I think the email is appealing.”; and “I think the email is involving.”

I conducted a Principal components analysis and I found that the scale is unidimensional (Eigenvalue= 3.53; variance explained 88%) and reliable (alpha= *95.56%).

3.2.2. Experiment 2 Analysis and Results

I conducted Anova to test the effect of customization on different measures.

Intention to join the CXO community

On the first measure- the 3-items scale, the results show that there is a significant effect of customization on intention to join the CXO community (F199 =3.87, p=.051). On the scale of 1 to 7, the average intention to join the CXO community in the customization condition is 4.3, while in the non-customization condition it is 3.85.

On the second measure- the single item scale from 0 to 100, the results show that there is no significant effect of customization on intention join the CXO community (F199 =.67, p=.415). On the scale from 0 to 100, the average probability of joining the CXO community in the customization condition is 49.71%, while in the non-customization condition it is 46.25%.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content affects customers' intention to join the CXO community.

Intention to book a call with the email sender Roose

On the first measure- the 3-items scale, the results show that there is no significant effect of customization on intention to book a call with Roose (F199 =1.96, p=.163). On the scale of 1 to 7, the average intention to book a call with Roose in the customization condition is 4.31, while in the non-customization condition it is 3.97.

On the second measure- the single item scale from 0 to 100, the results show that there is no significant effect of customization on intention to book a call with Roose (F199 =.6, p=.44). On the scale from 0 to 100, the average probability of booking a call with Roose in the customization condition is 53.52%, while in the non-customization condition it is 50.05%.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content does not affect customers' intention to book a call with the email sender Roose.

Attitude

The results show that there is a significant effect of customization on the attitude of customers towards the email (F199 =4.38, p=.038). The average attitude of participants in the customization condition is 4.56, while the average attitude of participants in the non-customization condition is 4.13.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content affects customers' attitude towards the email.

Perceived Uniqueness

The results show that there is a significant effect of customization on perceived uniqueness (F199 =4.54, p=.034). The average perception of uniqueness of participants in the customization condition is 4.37, while the average perception of uniqueness of participants in the non-customization condition is 3.84.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content does affect customers' perception about uniqueness on the email.

Intrusiveness

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on perception of intrusiveness (F199 =.4, p=.527). The average perception of intrusiveness of participants in the customization condition is 2.59, while the average perception of intrusiveness of participants in the non-customization condition is 2.48.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content does not affect customers' perception of intrusiveness.

Privacy

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on perception of privacy (F199 =.08, p=.774). The average perception of privacy of participants in the customization condition is 2.54, while the average perception of privacy of participants in the non-customization condition is 2.48.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content does not affect customers' perception of privacy.

Relevance

The results show that there is no significant effect of customization on perception of relevance (F199 =2.36, p=.126). The average perception of relevance of participants in the customization condition is 4.6, while the average perception of relevance of participants in the non-customization condition is 4.24.

This result suggests that receiving an email with customized content does not affect customers' perception of relevance.

3.2.3 Discussion

To sum up experiment 2 result, customized email content has significant effect on intention to join the CXO community, receivers' perception of Uniqueness and Attitude, while does not have any effect on Intrusiveness; Privacy; Relevance; and Intention to book a call with the email sender.

On a positive side, study 2 proved that customization has a significant effect in making people feel unique, being recognized and attracted to the email, while it does not make them worried about their privacy and intrusiveness. Meaning that having receiver name and his company name listed on the email does make a difference.

On the other hand, customization does not change people's perception of relevance towards the email such as feeling appealing or relatable, as well as does not increase the probability of booking a call with the email sender.

It is crucial to acknowledge that customized content does not increase the call conversion rate of the email. Therefore, in practice, if the main goal of marketers is to use email marketing to gain sales call, they might want to consider another strategy rather than customization as it might not have any effect on the goal.

Comparing the two dependent variables: intention to join CXO community and intention to book a call with the email sender, the effect of customization is on the intention to join the CXO community. The reason might be because joining CXO community might have more related value to the recipient, rather than booking a call with Roose. It is acknowledged that as a call to action of email marketing, booking a call with email sender is way more salesy than joining a community regarding recipients' interest. Therefore, marketers should take into account what types of call to action they should mention in the email to optimize the conversion rate. In this case, joining the CXO community might not turn into sales immediately, but they can become a potential prospect for the company. After various nurturing touch points, they might potentially end up in sales in the future, which bring return on investment for the business. Sales is a process that takes time, especially in the context of B2B industry, hence having a community to engage and nurture prospects is a powerful strategy to create sales for the business.

4. Conclusions

This final chapter concludes the main findings of the research, followed by managerial implementation and some limitations and possibility for future research.

4.1 Discussion

This research aims to understand the impact of customization on email marketing automation, thus providing insights to improve its performance.

The results of the two experiments on subject and content are summarized in the table below.

Key findings	F_{199}	p	Key findings supported
The **subject customization** has a positive and significant effect on			
intention to open the email.	1.93	.166	No
attitude towards the email.	2.18	.142	No
perceived uniqueness.	3.64	.058	Yes
perception of intrusiveness.	1.02	.313	No
perception of privacy concern.	.29	.593	No
perception of relevance.	2.75	.099	No
The **content customization** has a positive and significant effect on			
intention to join the CXO community.	3.87	.051	Yes
intention to book a call with the email sender.	1.96	.163	No
attitude towards the email.	4.38	.038	Yes
perceived uniqueness.	4.54	.034	Yes
perception of intrusiveness.	.4	.527	No
perception of privacy concern.	.08	.774	No
perception of relevance.	2.36	.126	No

Table 2: Summary of the key findings and standardized path coefficients

From the table, both subject and content customization has a positive and significant effect on perceived uniqueness. In addition, content customization also has a significant effect on attitude towards the email and especially on call to action of the email-intention to join the CXO community. It is noticeable that customization does not have any significant impact on perceived intrusiveness, privacy concern and relevance of the email, from both subject and content perspectives.

Applying the key findings to answer the hypotheses, it is summarised in the table below.

Summary of hypotheses	Hypotheses supported
H1: The more customized email automation becomes, the more unique customers perceive.	Yes
H2: The more customized email automation becomes, the more relevant customers perceive.	No
H3: The more customized email automation becomes, the more positive attitude customers tend to develop toward the emails.	Yes
H4: The more customized email automation becomes, the more likely customers respond to the calls to action in the emails they receive.	Yes
H5: The more customized email automation becomes, the more customers might find it intrusive.	No
H6: The more customized email automation gets, the more concerned customers become about their personal privacy.	No

Table 3: Summary of hypotheses and results

From the table, as customized email automation increases, these effects follow: customers perceive it as increasingly unique; customers tend to develop more positive attitude toward the emails; and customers are more inclined to respond to the calls to action in the emails they receive. On the other hand, customization neither enhance: the relevant level customers perceive the emails; nor customers' intrusiveness; nor customers' concern about their personal privacy.

All in all, to answer the main research question: What is the impact of customization on email marketing automation in the B2B context? Email automation customization is indeed having an impact on customers' perceived uniqueness, positive attitude and likelihood to respond to call to actions, varying from subject to content. In short, customization of the email content has a more significant impact than the customization of the subject.

4.2 Managerial implications

Regarding managerial implications, this study aims to provide marketers and related parties in a B2B business with more understanding and concrete action to strategically take advantage of customization in email marketing automation.

Firstly, email marketing automation should be a comprehensive and integrated strategy covering various perspectives from technical, analytical, operational and strategic standpoints. Once the big picture is clear, it is efficient to identify effective email marketing automation blended with impactful customization. Additionally, it is potential to apply the insights of customization on email marketing automation into other marketing activities such as advertising automation.

Second, technology is a support, not a core. A company might invest a lot in picking more expensive CRM or marketing automation tool with the thinking of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of communication. Yet the value does not purely depend on advanced technology. Marketers must understand their customers, leads, prospects and audience the best to enable engaging messages which speak directly to them personally. In addition, it is worth noting that dealing with automation software is not always a straightforward task which bugs might happen at some point, even for the most advanced technology. Hence, acknowledging the risk and learning how to deal with consequences is a must in the email marketing automation context.

Third, allocating sufficient human resources for implementing customization in email marketing automation is essential. A good customization takes time to plan and implement. In order to approach customers with the best customized messages and channels, business should preserve enough resources for the activities. Customization can easily go wrong and cause backfire when conducting customization just for the sake of customization rather than emphasizing customers' value.

Fourth, marketers can be less skeptical about receivers' privacy concerns and intrusiveness since the study shows that customization does not have a significant impact on making customers feel attacked by data breach. However, basic regulation and GDPR should be still kept in mind as it affects the delivery of the emails, hence influencing the campaign performance.

Last but not least, it all comes to collecting, analyzing, managing and utilizing customers' data. All data should be treated carefully and strategically to bring benefits for business while controlling the risk of data breaches. Ideally, having all data stored securely in one database portal would help streamline the process, maximize the advantages in understanding customers' insights and minimize data risk when transferring between channels.

All in all, customization should come hand in hand with testing and experimentation. For example, A/B testing enables marketers to observe market reaction and readjust the customization to optimize campaigns performance. There is not any concrete formular for customization application into email marketing automation. The utilization varies depending on multiple variables which require practical testing to acknowledge the most applicable customization strategy for the business.

4.3 Limitations and future research

As with any research, this study is not without limitations. The research data was collected through experiments recruiting 400 participants to place as a CEO of a technology software startup. The participants' backgrounds may be different from a CEO, affecting perceptions and attitudes towards customization in email marketing automation. Even though, the experience set a precise amount of time at the beginning of the experiment for participants to read through and observe the idea of the story. However, we cannot ensure that they really understand the story and put themselves into the CEO's shoes. Consequently, their reactions and answers to the experiment's questions might be slightly affected. Ideally, the future research might look for a group of participants who are decision makers in a business to conduct the experiment to guarantee their background would not interfere with the answer's references.

Additionally, due to the rapid growth of email marketing automation, the result today might be easily outdated in the future which requires consideration when applying the knowledge into future study. Not only do technology developments impact the software itself, but also affect customers' perception of the software and customization approach. Hence, the result is highly aligned with the technology era. It would be interesting to study the topic again in the future and compare the findings to examine the changes and their impacts.

All in all, limitations occurred, yet they are minor. The research quality is ensured with holistic literature review, comprehensive experiment implementation and applicably quantitative research method. The study found interesting findings for the impact of customization on email marketing automation in the context of B2B business in 2023, reflected what has been studied in the past and build a foundation for further research in the future.

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Appendix

Chosen scales for this research	Previous research	Items
Perceived Uniqueness	Şimşek & Yalınçetin (2010)	"The email I received made me feel unique."; "I feel that the email sender recognized my uniqueness."; and "I feel that the email sender chose me because of my unique features."
Intrusiveness	van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013)	"I think this email is obtrusive."; "I think this email is disturbing."; "I think it is uncomfortable that personal information is used in this email."; and "I think the email sender knows a lot about me."
Privacy concern	van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013)	"I am concerned about threats to my personal privacy."; "I have lost all control over how my personal information is used in the email."; and "I begin surrendering my privacy when I check my email."
Attitude	Huang & Waddell (2020)	"I think that the subject of the email/ the content of the email is appealing."; "I think that the subject of the email/ the content of the email is good."; "I think that the subject of the email/ the content of the email is persuasive."; "I think that the subject of the email/ the content of the email is attractive."; "I think that the subject of the email/ the content of the email is sophisticated."; and "I overall like the email."
Intention to open the email	van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013)	"The likelihood of opening the email is large."; "The probability that I would consider opening the email is large."; and "If I am going to open an email, the probability of opening this email is large."
Intention to join the CXO community	van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013)	"The likelihood of joining the CXO network which was invited in the email is large."; "The probability that I would consider joining the CXO network which was invited in the email is large."; and

		“If I am going to join a network, the probability of joining the CXO network which was invited in the email is large.”
Intention to book a call with the email sender-Roose	van Doorn & Hoekstra (2013)	“The likelihood of booking a call with Roose who was the email sender is large.”; “The probability that I would consider booking a call with Roose who was the email sender is large.”; and “If I am going to booking a call with the email sender, the probability of booking a call with Roose is large.”
Relevance	Huang & Waddell (2020)	“I think that the email is important.”; “I think the email is relevant.”; “I think the email is appealing.”; and “I think the email is involving.”

Table 4: Scales chosen to study customization