



Customer Success Stories:

The perfect way of advertising elaborate solutions?



Master thesis

Master Communication Studies

University of Twente

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Table of contents

Abstract	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Theoretical Framework.....	6
2.1. Storytelling	6
2.2. Comprehensibility	7
2.3. Message credibility.....	8
2.4. Persuasion.....	9
2.5. Personal features in customer success stories	10
2.5.1. Photos	10
2.5.2. Narrative perspective	11
2.6. Research design.....	13
3. Method.....	14
3.1. Design.....	14
3.2. Stimulus materials	14
3.3. Pre-study.....	17
3.4. Measures.....	18
3.5. Manipulation check	19
3.6. Procedure.....	20
3.7. Participants	20
4. Results	22
4.1. Effects of informational text vs. customer success stories	22
4.2. Effects of portrait photos and narrative perspective	23
5. Discussion.....	24
5.1. Effects of informational text vs. customer success stories	24
5.2. Effects of portrait photos and narrative perspective	25
5.3. Limitations & future research.....	26
6. Conclusion.....	28
7. References	29
Appendix A - Conditions	33
Appendix B – Pre-study	38
Appendix C – Questionnaire	41
Appendix D – Significant tests demographics	48

Abstract

In order to persuade new customers, B2B organizations use customer success stories in their marketing mix. In this form of storytelling organizations use their existing customers in order to attract new customers. A customer success story tells the story of the problem(s) a particular customer encountered before he did business with the organization and how the organization helped him with that problem. It is a commonly seen piece of content marketing used by B2B organizations, however little is known about the effectiveness of customer success stories. Therefore this research studied the marketing effects of customer success stories.

The study featured a two (with or without portrait photo) by two (1st or 3rd person narrative perspective) design with one control condition (informational text). In total 206 respondents were equally divided over five conditions and filled in an online survey. Other than hypothesized, results did not show any difference between customer success stories and informational text on perceived comprehensibility of the text, credibility, attitude (towards the content and the product) and purchase intention. Neither the presence of a portrait photo, nor difference in narrative perspective (1st person vs. 3rd person) yielded a significant difference.

The results of this study indicate that customer success stories on their own are not as powerful in terms of marketing as expected. Moreover, portrait photos do not seem to make a story more credible, nor more persuasive. This suggests that organizations should reconsider the expected effects of customer success stories in their marketing mix. For literature the results of this study suggest that the effects on storytelling should be reconsidered or at least be mitigated. However, there are some limitations to this research, therefore future research is needed to fully explore the marketing effects of this tool.

1. Introduction

Nowadays nearly 9 out of 10 B2B consumers use the internet in their buying process, making online marketing a vital part of the marketing mix. Knowing that B2B influencers do an average of 12 online searches prior to visiting a specific company website and that about 71% start with generic search queries (Snyder & Pasheema, 2015), it is logic to think that businesses should not only push their company name or product but also generate content related to their brand in order to be more present on the internet.

No wonder that on the internet, consumers are overloaded with information about brands and products. So when organizations do have their attention it is crucial for them to communicate the information in a proper manner. They want to make sure that consumers remember what they communicate, but more important, they want to change the attitude and behaviour of consumers so that they will buy their products or services.

One way organizations try to accomplish this is by using their current customers to promote their product and or brand. This can, for instance, be done with a ‘customer success story’. This is a form of content made in collaboration between the organization and an existing customer. It is a piece of storytelling in which the customer endorses the organization and tells about the success of doing business with that company. It is similar to user generated content like a review by a customer, however in this case the organization generally takes the lead in generating the customer success story.

There is little to no research on customer success stories, but in practice customer success stories are popular marketing communication tools in the marketing mix of B2B organizations that sell complex products or services. Perhaps organizations think that a customer success story is great for explaining elaborate products and services and pointing out the benefits in a more credible way than just writing down the benefits. However, this has not yet been scientifically tested. This raises the question if customer success stories really can be an effective marketing communication tool.

As there is little to no research on customer success stories itself, other related topics such as storytelling, reviews and (online) word-of-mouth might help to predict and support the effects of customer success stories. For example, research by Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2008) has shown that storytelling can be an effective marketing effort in the travel business. Another example is the research by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2004) as they found the positive effects of online reviews on the sales numbers for e-vendors.

Studies like this acknowledge the marketing effects of storytelling, reviews and word-of-mouth. Because customer success stories share multiple characteristics storytelling, reviews and (online) word-of-mouth, it suggests that customer success stories can be an effective marketing tool as well. Therefore this research will explore the advertisement effects of customer success stories. This study can be relevant for the marketing strategy of (B2B) organizations, as it measures the effectiveness of a widely used marketing tool. If there is

found an effect, this research can give advice on how to optimize customer success stories in order to improve the effects on areas like attitude, persuasion, credibility and comprehensibility.

This study also adds scientific relevance because it will further explore the effects of storytelling on marketing. More general, this research will broaden the knowledge of the effects of different forms of writing on the behaviour of people. For this study, the general research question will be: *What are the marketing effects of customer success stories on new potential customers?*

2. Theoretical Framework

As described in the introduction, there is little to no research on customer success stories in particular. However, storytelling strongly relates to this form of content marketing. In the light of this topic, comprehensibility, persuasion and credibility will be discussed. Moreover, the possible effect of adding personal features of the endorser in customer success stories will be discussed.

2.1. Storytelling

A popular form of content marketing is storytelling, it is no coincidence that Pulizzi (2012) describes content marketing as *“the idea that storytelling is key to attract and retain customers”* (p. 116). As the name implies, customer success stories are a form of storytelling. Stories are a part of our everyday life, it is a natural way to exchange information because all of our knowledge is stored in stories. Moreover, to retrieve knowledge we also use stories (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Gilliam & Flaherty (2015) developed the following definition of a story: *“A story is a discourse dealing with interrelated actions and consequences in chronological order”* (p. 133). This means that a story is coherent by nature and has a structure with a beginning, middle and end. Herein might lie the strength of storytelling. Stories are often shared with others (Dudukovic, Marsh, & Tversky, 2004) which make stories a good tool if to spread a message. Moreover, stories are compelling, they bring pleasure or can touch a person, and they are more persuasive and memorable than statistical information (Dyer & Wilkins, 1991).

Storytelling is a widely used instrument. It can for instance be used to overcome traumas (Levy, 2011), for educational purposes (Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer, & Lowrance, 2004) and in sales practice (D. A. Gilliam & Flaherty, 2015). Another popular practice of storytelling in organizations is a corporate story. A corporate story is a story about an organization with a message that is meant to create a new point of view or to reinforce an opinion or certain behaviour (Gill, 2011). Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) define a corporate story as *“a structured textual description that communicates the essence of the company to all stakeholders, helps strengthen the bonds that bind employees to the company, and successfully positions the company against rivals”* (p. 144). Thus, a corporate story can be used as a tool for both internal and external corporate communication. Internally it can for instance be used to motivate employees. An external example of a corporate story could be a story about the work ethic in order to interest new job applicants. The reason that stories are used for these purposes is that stories have the ability to create an emotional connection (Snowden, 2000). This makes the knowledge retrieved from these stories also more memorable (Szulanski, 1996).

Another external example of stories used in organizations are customer success stories, which are, as mentioned before, stories in which the customer of an organization endorses the organization and tells about his/her experience with their product and organization. There is no blueprint for customer success stories, but

practice gives us some insight. Usually a customer success story includes one or more of the following subjects; a company profile of the customer in which they are introduced. The problem that the customer encountered before they engaged with the organization or the goals they had which the organization helped to reach. The approach / solution the organization came up with to solve the problems or reach the stated goals and finally the results and main benefits of the solution that the organization gave. Therefore, customer success stories seem very suitable to explain the benefits of the product in a comprehensive way.

This type of corporate story is mainly popular among B2B organizations selling elaborate products or services. These products / services are qualified as high involvement products / services and this might be the reason that customer success stories are mainly used by these B2B organizations, as it requires an fair amount of involvement to read a customer success story.

The information on storytelling suggests that storytelling might be a more effective way to advertise a product than using normal informational text, which is plain text. This is mainly because the former can be memorized better, it has educational effects and is more persuasive. Therefore it is expected that customer success stories are a more effective advertisement instrument than informational text.

2.2. Comprehensibility

An important marketing goal for organizations with elaborate solutions is to explain their solutions in a way that consumers understand what their solution entails as well as remember what is explained. A good tool to achieve this could be storytelling. As mentioned above stories tend to be longer memorized because good stories have the ability to create an emotional connection (Snowden, 2000) (Szulanski, 1996). Another, more complete explanation for the effects of storytelling on a person's memory is the fact that stories often have reference points or points of recognition. These reference points can be almost anything, for instance a location, an action, decision or conclusion and they cause awareness by the reader. The more reference points a story has the more memorable a story is (Schank, 1999).

Storytelling does not only has a positive effect on memory but also has an educational effect. An example of this is a study by Isbell, Sobol, Lindauer and Lowrance (2004), as they found that both storytelling as story reading has a positive effect on the education of oral language for children at an age between 3 to 5 years. Because a story has a structure with a beginning, middle and end it is easy to understand stories as well as to learn from them. Moreover, they can increase understanding of abstract concepts by making them more concrete (Green, 2008). This could be explained by the fact that, as mentioned before, all of our knowledge is stored in stories and to retrieve that knowledge we also use stories (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Stories make it possible to give an explanation of what is stated, they can tell the 'why' behind stated information (Simmons, 2006). Storytelling can also be used the other way around, because by writing stories we tend to learn and remember information better (Robin, 2006).

Based on these findings we can state that stories make it easier to remember and understand new information. Moore and Zabrocky (1999) also support this and state that storytelling makes information more comprehensible than informational text. They state that informational text is more difficult to process than narrative text. Because informational text is usually less familiar and less predictable than stories, informational text is more attention demanding. This leaves less resources available for text comprehensibility (Budd, Whitney, & Turley, 1995). Moreover, because a story is more structured and cohesive than informational text, it is easier to process the information, making it quicker to read and easier to recall the information (Petros, Norgaard, Olson, & Tabor, 1989).

This suggests that a customer success story is more useful to advertise an elaborate solution. Therefore this research will also study the differences in comprehensibility of the text between a narrative text and an informational text. It is expected that text is perceived as more comprehensible in a customer success story than in an informative text.

2.3. Message credibility

When organizations advertise their products or services, they want their message to be credible. One of the reasons is that credibility can increase the attitude of the message. A research by Tormala, Briñol, and Petty (2006) showed this by letting participants read a persuasive message, with either strong or weak arguments. Only afterwards they learned that the source was highly credible. It was found that messages with strong arguments gained more favourable attitudes after knowing that the source was highly credible, while for the weak message the effect was reversed. Thus, credibility strengthens the initial attitude towards the message, and thus effects the persuasive strength of the message.

In order to understand the effects of credibility, it is key to know what it entails exactly. According to Fogg and Tseng (1999) credibility can be described as believability, e.g. if a person is credible, he is believable. Credibility is a perceived quality, which means it only exists when someone is evaluating the content and therefore credibility is a perception from the evaluator. The key components of credibility are trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness can be defined by terms like believability, truthfulness, unbiased (Fogg & Tseng, 1999; van der Heijden & Verhagen, 2004). The term describes the perceived morality of a source. Expertise entails the competence and knowledge of a source (Fogg & Tseng, 1999). However, this research focusses mainly on the content of the message rather than the source, therefore the first component trustworthiness is leading, however expertise can also be shown by providing quality information.

Using this definition, potential customers would look for cues that confirm or disprove the trustworthiness and expertise of the information they find about the company and product or service. However on the internet this can sometimes be hard, since a lot of information is difficult to verify. Since information

about a product or service is usually published on the organization 's own website, that information might be seen as unreliable. Moreover, consumers are more and more aware of the marketing process and often feel that information provided by companies lack objectivity (Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, & Scott, 2007).

By adding a third party, for instance another customer, to endorse the product, the credibility could perhaps be raised. Research by Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) has proved this, as their study found that credible endorsers lead to a positive attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and purchase intention. In case of customer success stories a current customer acts as an endorser of the product or service and the organization.

Because a standard informational text does not include an endorser, a customer success stories to spread a message is likely to be more credible than using informational text. Therefore it is hypothesized that the message in a customer success stories is more credible than the message in an informational text.

2.4. Persuasion

Persuasion is one of the, if not the most important aspect of business (McKee & Fryer, 2003). The ultimate goal for businesses is to convince people to buy their product or service. Therefore an advertisement is always used to persuade people to act in certain behaviour. For example, think of an anti-smoking campaign to persuade people to quit smoking. However, in most cases advertisement is used to persuade people to buy their product or service. This could be directly by focussing on the product, for instance by persuading people with a special deal or indirectly, for instance by building brand recognition, brand trust or a certain image.

In customer success stories this goal is the same, namely convincing the audience that they should do business with that company. This is done by letting a customer tell about his experience with their product/service and or company in a narrative way so that new customers can imagine what it is like to use their product and what the benefits are of doing business with that company.

As mentioned, customer success stories are a form of storytelling and storytelling seems to be a good way to persuade someone. McKee and Fryer (2003) even state that the best way to persuade someone is by telling a compelling story. Stories are persuasive because they do not need to defend the correctness of what is claimed, because the story already explains what is claimed (Dahlstrom, 2014). Moreover, a typical characteristic of a story is the cause-and-effect relationship of the content, i.e. something happens because of something else. This leads readers to one conclusion, which to them looks like the only possible conclusion, although many other things could have happened (Curtis, 1994). Therefore, there is less need to defend a claim, making it easier to persuade someone.

Another reason why stories are persuasive is the fact that stories are engaging and they can transport people into a narrative world. This makes people less likely to interrupt reading the story. Additionally, it leads to a high use of emotional and cognitive resources which makes it difficult for people to counter argue

a claim. Moreover, the amount of details and concrete information help to make a story more memorable and influential (Green, 2008).

Thus stories seem to be a good tool to persuade people. Research by Gilliam, Flaherty and Rayburn (2014) also supports this, as their qualitative study indicates that storytelling is a good and appreciated way for transferring information, establishing credibility, as well as persuading buyers. As mentioned, the goal of a customer success story is to persuade people to change their attitude and buy the product.

Therefore this research will study the effects of customer success stories on attitude towards the content, attitude towards the product and purchase intention. However for elaborate solutions the threshold to immediately buy a product might be too high. Therefore the intention to try the product will also be taken into account. Thus, it is hypothesized that customer success stories will result in a more positive attitude (towards the content and the product) than informational text. Moreover, it is also expected that customer success stories will also result in a higher purchase intention than informational text.

2.5. Personal features in customer success stories

There is no fixed blueprint that states which elements need to be present in a customer success story, so there might be elements or characteristics that could enhance some of the marketing effects. By adding personal features of the endorser to the success story it might be that the proposed effects are strengthened.

2.5.1. Photos

As mentioned, credibility is important in advertising. Therefore, enhancing the credibility of a customer success story could improve advertisement effectiveness of this tool. A possible way to increase the credibility is by adding personal features (Briggs, Simpson, & De Angeli, 2004). This can be done by giving the readers a face to look at. By using pictures of the person in the customer story, the story might seem more personal. Theory on the effects of using photos of the main character of the story on credibility are mixed but mainly positive. For instance Riegelsberger, Sasse and McCarthy, (2003) found that the use of photographs of people decreased trustworthiness for e-vendors with a good reputation and increased trustworthiness for e-vendors with a bad reputation

Results from a study by (Fogg et al., 2001) show that formal photos from the author of a web article increase the credibility of the article. However, this only counts for formal photos, as casual photos decrease the credibility of the article. Tanis and Postmes (2003) also state that small cues like portrait pictures and first names reduce ambiguity. However, the presence of photos of people is expected to only build trust when the portrayed persons are perceived as trustworthy (De Vries, 2006). Nguyen and Masthoff (2008) found similar results. Moreover, they add that the perceived credibility is topic dependent, meaning that a photo of a person will be perceived differently in terms of credibility when placed near information about different topics.

Concluding, photos can increase the credibility of a message, but there are some precautions choosing the right photo in the right setting. Therefore, it is expected that adding a credible and matching photo from the main character of a customer success story increases the credibility of the message. Consequently, enhanced credibility would also effect the persuadable effects of the content, as credibility enhances persuasion (Conger, 1998). Therefore, it is also expected that adding a photo from the main character of a customer success story increases the attitude (towards the content and the product) and the purchase intention.

2.5.2. Narrative perspective

Another way to add personal features of the endorser to the customer success stories could be to change the narrative perspective. Where informational text is mainly written in the second person perspective, customer success stories mainly written in the third person perspective. However, other more personal marketing instruments, for instance word-of-mouth and customer reviews, are written in the first person perspective and have proven to be very effective. Therefore, it is good to look at what the effects of those ‘instruments’ are.

Word-of-mouth marketing is interpersonal communication between consumers concerning a product, service or a brand. Word-of-mouth, or WOM, is an extremely powerful instrument since 84% of consumers trust recommendations from family, friends or colleagues (Nielsen, 2013). This does not only counts for B2C consumers but also for B2B consumers, since 91% B2B buyers are influenced by word of mouth (Incite Group, 2014).

One of the reasons that WOM is so powerful is the fact that consumers are more and more aware of the marketing process and often feel that information provided by companies lack objectivity. Therefore they search for more independent sources to help them decide in their buying process and this effect is also confirmed by the fact that classic marketing is becoming less effective (Smith et al., 2007). Instead people reach for other sources such as fellow consumers, which they find more reliable (Arndt, 1967). WOM is particularly powerful for high-risk products because consumers try to gain information to reduce their risk and to better compare competitors. These are often experience products or services because it is difficult to judge those products of services beforehand (Harrison-Walker, 2001).

With the rise of social media we have seen that a lot of word-of-mouth conversations have transferred to the online environment in the form of social media conversations and written reviews. This form of word-of-mouth is called electronic word of mouth, or eWOM. One of the advantages of eWOM is that those messages can reach a larger audience, due to the fact that online more people can hear the message and that often these messages stay on the internet for a long time. Moreover the internet has a vast range of platforms to publish messages, from social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to forums, blogs, vlogs, and product comparison websites where consumers can review products. Although most recommendations online are not from familiar people 88% of consumers say that they trust online reviews written by other consumers

as much as personal recommendations (BrightLocal, 2016). Moreover, written reviews have shown to be effective when it comes to pushing sales in an online environment (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2004).

Based on the information above it can be concluded that this kind of user generated content can be very influential in a buying process. In customer success stories the principle is the same, however it usually is orchestrated by the seller. These customer success stories are produced in different forms. Mostly they are written in a third person perspective, in this case the company tells about the experiences of the customer, sometimes alternated with quotes from the customer. Sometimes however the story is completely written in first person perspective, where (it looks like) the customer tells the story. Based on the advantages of (electronic) word-of-mouth one would suggest that the first person form would be more effective.

Therefore, this research will investigate the differences between these two writing perspectives. Thus, it will be hypothesized that customer success stories written in the first person perspective result in a more positive attitude (towards the content and the product), result in a higher purchase intention and are more credible than customer success stories written in the third person perspective.

2.6. Research design

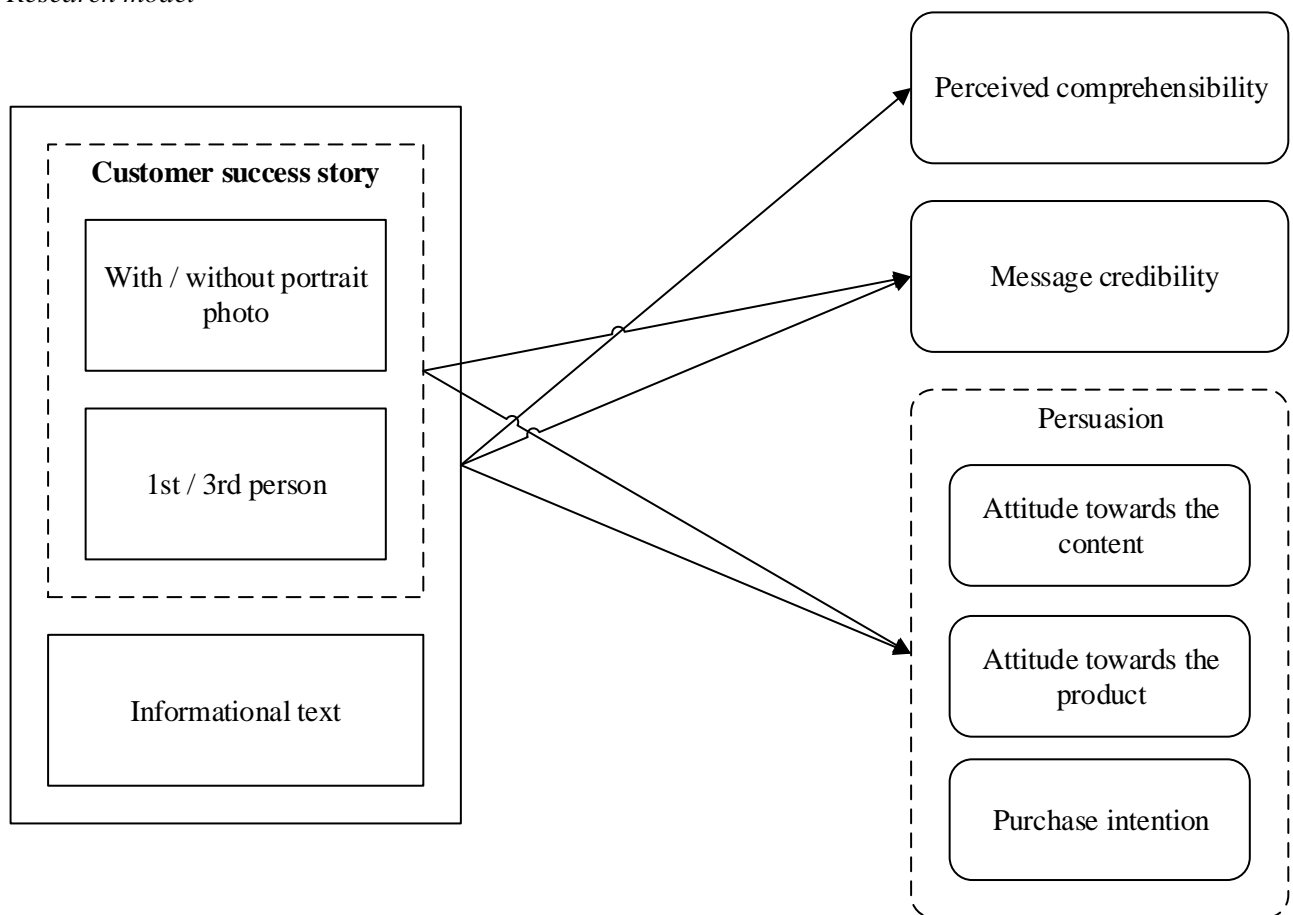
Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses have been designed:

- H 1:** *Customer success stories (a) are perceived as more comprehensible, (b) are more credible, result in a more positive attitude (towards (c) the content and (d) the product), (e) result in a higher purchase intention than informational text.*
- H 2:** *Adding a photo from the main character of a customer success story will increase the effect on (a) credibility, attitude (towards (b) the content and (c) the product) and (d) purchase intention.*
- H 3:** *Customer success stories written in the first person perspective (a) are more credible, result in a more positive attitude (towards (b) the content and (c) the product), (d) result in a higher purchase intention than customer success stories written in the third person perspective.*

The research model below, which is a two by two design with a control condition, visualizes the proposed effects explained in the theoretical framework.

Table 1

Research model



3. Method

The method section clarifies the design of the research, as well explain stimulus materials, including the pre-study for creating the stimulus materials. Moreover, it explains which measures were used, what the procedures were and which participants participated in this study.

3.1. Design

To study the effects of customer success stories, this research used a two (with or without photo) by two (1st or 3rd person narrative perspective) between subjects design with a control condition. This leads to four different customer success stories and one control condition, which is the informational text in second person perspective. The research contains to the following five conditions:

1. Informational text (control condition)
2. Customer success story without portrait photo in 1st person narrative perspective
3. Customer success story without portrait photo in 3rd person narrative perspective
4. Customer success story with portrait photo in 1st person narrative perspective
5. Customer success story with portrait photo in 3rd person narrative perspective

The control condition was chosen to compare customer success stories with informational text. To do this, the four customer success story conditions were combined and compared to the control condition. Two of the customer success story conditions are written in the first person perspective and two in the third person perspective. Both of these have one version with and one version without a portrait photo. Nonetheless, all five conditions contain the same information.

3.2. Stimulus materials

Participants were shown one of five different stimulus material, based on the five conditions. So either the informational text or one of the four customer success stories. The stimuli were images that looked like a supplier's website. The supplier was a fictitious developer of CRM-software. This was chosen because customer success stories are commonly used in business to business sales and CRM-software is a general software system that can be used in most organizations. All conditions tell something about the advantages of the CRM-software.

The informational text stimuli does this by describing the advantages in second person perspective, which is common for standard informational text. An example of sentence in this condition is: *"Reports and dashboards provide a real-time valuable snapshot of the status of your company, so you can quickly see what needs to be adjusted."* The customer success stories are either written in the first-, or the third person perspective. Both of these stimuli versions also have a version with a portrait photo. An example of a sentence

in the first person perspective customer success story is: “Through dashboards and clear reports we have quick insight into the performance of our company and can see what needs to be adjusted at a glance.” An example of a sentence in the first person perspective customer success story is: “Through dashboards and clear reports CarLease has quick insight into the performance of their company and can see what needs to be adjusted at a glance.” Image 3.1 and 3.2 show an examples of the control condition stimulus and one of the customer success story stimuli. All versions of the stimuli can be found in appendix A.

Image 3.1

Example stimulus material, Stimuli 1: Informational text (control condition)

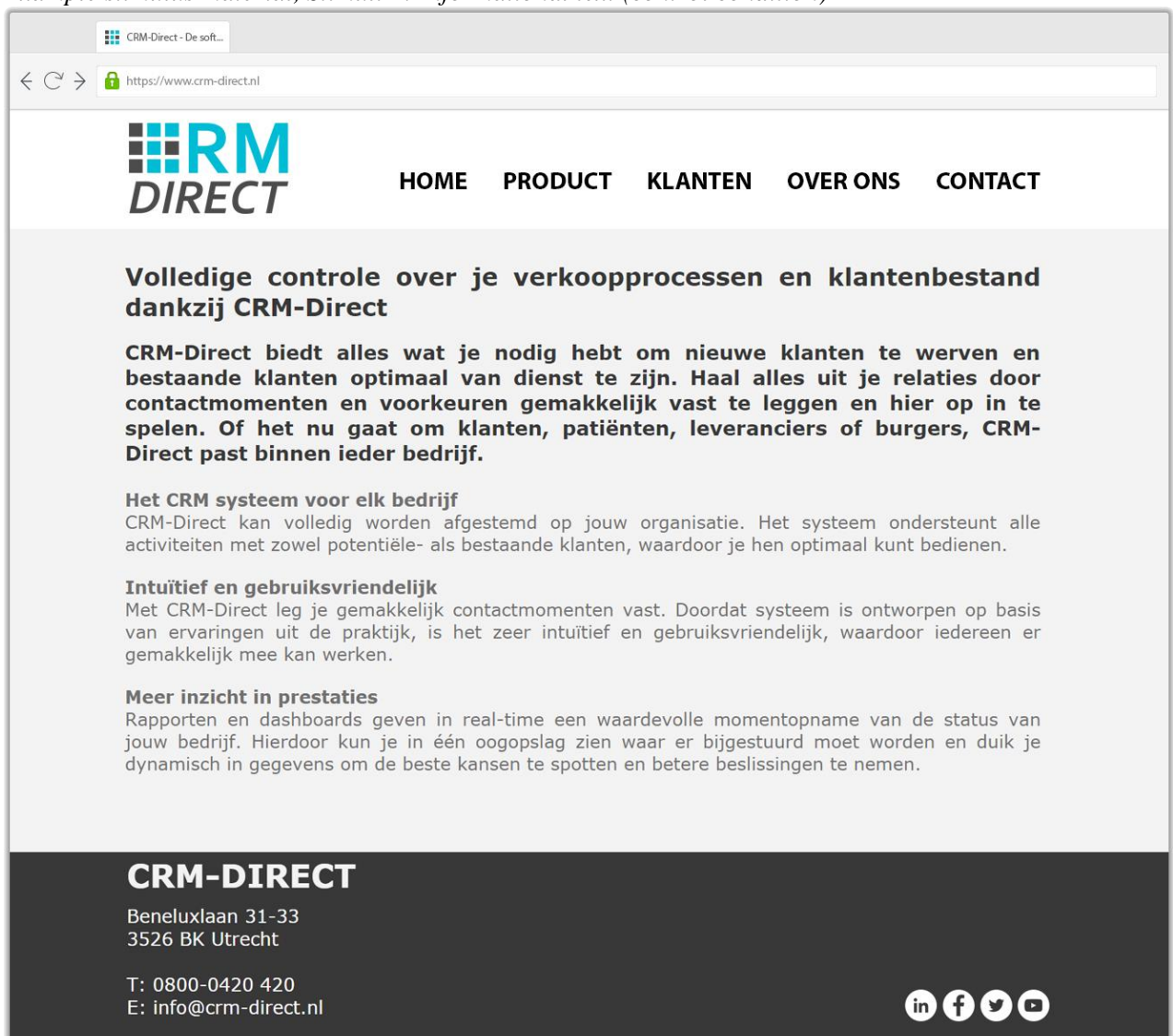
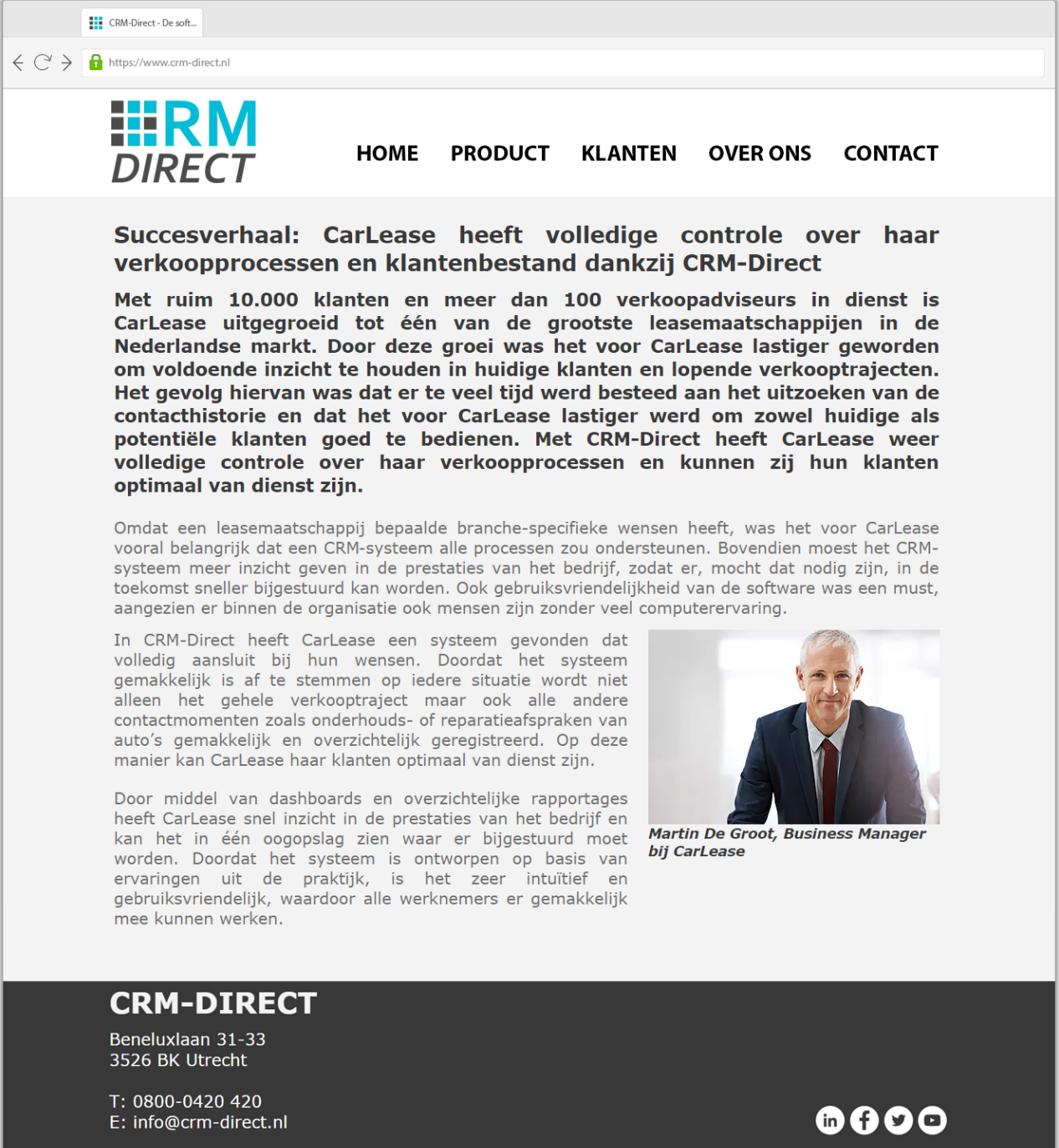


Image 3.2

Example stimulus material, Stimuli 5: Customer success story with portrait photo in 3rd person narrative perspective



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.crm-direct.nl>. The website header features the CRM-Direct logo and a navigation menu with links: HOME, PRODUCT, KLANTEN, OVER ONS, and CONTACT.


Succesverhaal: CarLease heeft volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct

Met ruim 10.000 klanten en meer dan 100 verkoopadviseurs in dienst is CarLease uitgegroeid tot één van de grootste leasemaatschappijen in de Nederlandse markt. Door deze groei was het voor CarLease lastiger geworden om voldoende inzicht te houden in huidige klanten en lopende verkooptrajecten. Het gevolg hiervan was dat er te veel tijd werd besteed aan het uitzoeken van de contacthistorie en dat het voor CarLease lastiger werd om zowel huidige als potentiële klanten goed te bedienen. Met CRM-Direct heeft CarLease weer volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en kunnen zij hun klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

Omdat een leasemaatschappij bepaalde branche-specifieke wensen heeft, was het voor CarLease vooral belangrijk dat een CRM-systeem alle processen zou ondersteunen. Bovendien moest het CRM-systeem meer inzicht geven in de prestaties van het bedrijf, zodat er, mocht dat nodig zijn, in de toekomst sneller bijgestuurd kan worden. Ook gebruiksvriendelijkheid van de software was een must, aangezien er binnen de organisatie ook mensen zijn zonder veel computerervaring.

In CRM-Direct heeft CarLease een systeem gevonden dat volledig aansluit bij hun wensen. Doordat het systeem gemakkelijk is af te stemmen op iedere situatie wordt niet alleen het gehele verkooptraject maar ook alle andere contactmomenten zoals onderhouds- of reparatieafspraken van auto's gemakkelijk en overzichtelijk geregistreerd. Op deze manier kan CarLease haar klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

Door middel van dashboards en overzichtelijke rapportages heeft CarLease snel inzicht in de prestaties van het bedrijf en kan het in één oogopslag zien waar er bijgestuurd moet worden. Doordat het systeem is ontworpen op basis van ervaringen uit de praktijk, is het zeer intuïtief en gebruiksvriendelijk, waardoor alle werknemers er gemakkelijk mee kunnen werken.



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in f t y

3.3. Pre-study

As mentioned, two of the five conditions contained a portrait photo. However, not any photo could just be chosen, because the presence of photos of people is expected to only build trust when the portrayed persons are perceived as trustworthy (De Vries, 2006). Therefore, a small pre-study was conducted in which the five different persons in the portrait pictures, which can be found in appendix B along with the statistical test scores, were judged on credibility with a scale set of five items ($\alpha=.85$). Moreover, the believability of them having the job of business manager at the company in the customer success story (one question). There was chosen for portrait photos of middle aged men in a business setting, as they are a common group in the position of business manager.

Results of the pre-study can be found in table 3.3 and showed that all persons in the photos were perceived as credible and would also be believable as business manager. It turned out that there was no significant difference in the results between the five persons and all photos could be used. Therefore, photo 1 (image 3.4), which has the highest grand total (10,94), was chosen to be used in the stimuli.

Table 3.3

Means (SD) on credibility and believability of them having the job of business manager (N=20)

Photo	Mean (SD) Credibility	Mean (SD) Believability job	Grand Total
1	5.09 (.90)	5,85 (.75)	10,94
2	5.16 (.76)	5,30 (1.08)	10,46
3	5.29 (1.02)	5,25 (1.02)	10.54
4	4.51 (.95)	5,40 (.89)	9,91
5	5.00 (.96)	5,50 (.97)	10,50

Note: Measured on a 7-point scale where 1=totally disagree and 7=totally agree.

Image 3.4

Chosen portrait photo (photo 1)



3.4. Measures

An online survey was used in order to research the hypotheses mentioned in the theoretical framework. This was chosen in to allow for easy distribution and to reach the sample size needed. Below the used scales are explained. A full version of the questionnaire can be found in appendix C.

Perceived comprehensibility

Perceived comprehensibility was measured using a scale set that was created by Kamalski, Lentz and Sanders (2001) and covers the attraction, acceptance, accessibility and consistency of the text. This was done because exactly measuring if respondents really understood everything would be very hard on a large scale. Moreover, prior knowledge would have played a larger role than with this scale set. The scale set consists of eleven items measured on a seven point bipolar scale. Examples of these bipolar scales are *not readable – readable*, *unprofessional – professional*, *difficult – easy* and *incoherent – coherent*. The construct *perceived comprehensibility* was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .885.

Message credibility

To measure the construct of message credibility, a scale set, developed by Flanagin and Metzger (2000) was used. The scale set consists of five statements where respondents had to answer to what degree they agreed (*totally disagree – totally agree*) with the statements. Example statements are "*I think this text is believable*" and "*I think this text is trustworthy*". The scale was originally developed to measure media credibility but has also been successfully used to measure message credibility (viz., Freriksen, 2014). The *construct message credibility* was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .831.

Attitude towards the content

Attitude towards the content was measured with a three item scale set by Anastasiei and Chiosa (2014) which was based on (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989). These items were *extremely bad-extremely good*, *extremely irritating-extremely pleasing* and *extremely uninteresting-extremely interesting*. The construct *attitude towards the content* was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .889.

Attitude towards the product

The scale set to measure the attitude towards the product was based on a scale set by Duncan and Nelson (1985) which was featured in the Marketing Scales Handbook by Bruner and Hensel (1992). The scale set contained eight statements. The statements were altered to match the product in this research. Examples statements are: "*If I used CRM Direct, I would probably like it.*" and "*I think CRM Direct will add value to my company.*" Respondents had to answer on a seven point scale to which degree they agreed (*totally disagree – totally agree*) with the statements. The construct *attitude towards the product* was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .913.

Purchase intention

In order to measure the purchase intention, respondents had to answer on a seven point scale to which degree they agreed (*certainly not – certainly*) with the following three statements:

1. *I would try the product CRM Direct.*
2. *I would buy the product CRM Direct.*
3. *I would recommend the product CRM Direct to other companies.*

The scale set, is used in multiple studies, for instance (Moon, Chadee, & Tikoo, 2008), sometimes in slightly altered or with an extra scale. The construct *purchase intention* was reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .855.

Reliability analysis

After recoding negative items, a reliability analysis was performed in order to analyse if the scale items could be combined to scale sets. All Corresponding items turned out to be highly reliably and therefore the items were combined as scale sets. The individual Cronbach's α per scale set can be found in table 3.5.

Table 3.5

Reliability analysis on scale sets (N=206)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Comprehensibility	.885	11
Credibility	.831	5
Attitude towards the content	.889	3
Attitude towards the product	.913	8
Purchase intention	.855	3

3.5. Manipulation check

The survey, which can be found in appendix C, consisted of two questions to check if the intended manipulation worked. The first question was if the webpage they were shown included a photo. The second question was in which narrative perspective the text was written (1st person, 2nd person or 3rd person). The results of the manipulation checks can be found in table 3.6. Almost all participants filled in the first question correctly. The second question turned out to be a bit more difficult for participants, however still the vast majority filled in the corresponding narrative perspective. Based on both manipulation checks that in general the intended manipulation worked.

Table 3.6

Manipulation checks (N=206)

	Condition 1:	Condition 2:	Condition 3:	Condition 4:	Condition 5:
	Informational	CSS 1st	CSS 3rd	CSS 1st	CSS 3rd
	text	person	person	person + photo	person + photo
Portrait photo					
Yes	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>	37	39
No	39	40	39	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
Narrative perspective					
First person	<u>7</u>	33	<u>7</u>	33	11
Second person	26	<u>4</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>8</u>
Third person	<u>2</u>	<u>6</u>	26	<u>3</u>	22

Note: Underlined digits are filled in incorrectly.

3.6. Procedure

The criterion for participants to participate in this research was that they at least had to be 18 years old, because the product in this study is business software. These participants were recruited via social media and personal contact by the researcher. They were asked to voluntarily participate in this research. After accepting to voluntarily participate, each participant was randomly assigned to one of the five conditions. Before they saw the stimulus material the participants were confronted with a case. In this case it was explained that they had to imagine they were the person within an organization that was responsible for the purchase of a CRM-software system. After an internet search they stumbled upon the website of supplier saw the following web page. After the explanation of the case they had to read the web page (stimuli) carefully and thereafter they had to fill in the questionnaire with the measures stated above. A complete list of the questions in the right order of the survey can be found in appendix C.

3.7. Participants

The goal was to find 40 respondents per condition (200 in total), this goal was reached. In total 206 participants filled in the questionnaire, evenly distributed among the conditions. Detailed demographics can be found in table 3.7. 71 of the participants are women (34,5%) and 135 are men (65,5%). The youngest person was 18 years old and oldest person was 69 years old. The average age of the participants was 33,77 years old. Most participants are highly educated (HBO and WO) (N=150), the other 56 participants are middle to low educated (MBO and middle school). The mean years of work experience was 11,65 years and of the 206 participants, 70 had experience with CRM-software in the past.

When taking a first look at the demographics between the five conditions there are a few demographics that look unequal compared to the other conditions. Therefore, the demographics between the five conditions were tested for significant differences (test results can be found in appendix D). For *gender*, *education* and *experience with CRM-software* a Chi-Square test was performed. For *age* and *mean years of work experience* a one-way ANOVA was performed. On none of the demographics a significant difference was found between the five conditions.

Table 3.7

Demographics (N=206)

	Condition1: Informational text	Condition 2: CSS 1st person	Condition 3: CSS 3rd person	Condition 4: CSS 1st person + photo	Condition 5: CSS 3rd person + photo
Total participants	42	43	40	40	41
Gender					
Women	13	14	9	16	19
Men	29	29	31	24	22
Mean age	36,26	30,28	35,58	35,93	31,00
Education					
Basisschool (or similar)	0	0	0	0	0
Praktijkonderwijs (or similar)	1	0	0	0	0
VMBO (or similar)	0	0	1	0	1
HAVO (or similar)	0	2	1	2	2
VWO (or similar)	0	1	0	1	2
MBO (or similar)	12	10	4	9	7
HBO (or similar)	22	17	25	21	19
WO (or similar)	7	13	9	7	10
Mean years of work experience	13,81	8,47	13,25	13,63	9,27
Experience with CRM-software					
Yes	15	18	17	13	7
No	27	25	23	27	34

4. Results

In this section of the thesis the results of the study will be presented. First we will look at the effects on the dependent variables between informational text and customer success stories. Thereafter we will examine the effects *portrait photos* and *narrative perspective* has on the dependent variables. The results are analysed for all cases. The results were also tested without the cases that failed the manipulation check, however this did not result in different outcomes.

4.1. Effects of informational text vs. customer success stories

To test whether there is a difference in effect on the dependent variables when people are exposed to an informational text or customer success stories, an independent sample t-test was conducted. To test this the informational condition (condition 1) was compared to the customer success stories (the total of condition 2 to 5).

Levene's test for equality of variances was significant for comprehensibility ($p=.008$) and attitude towards the content ($p=.009$), meaning that equal variances are not assumed ($p<.05$). For credibility ($p=.968$), attitude towards the product ($p=.588$) and purchase intention ($p=.380$) there is no significant outcome, meaning that equal variances are assumed.

According to the independent sample t-test there is no statistical evidence that the mean scores on comprehensibility, attitude towards the content, credibility, attitude towards the product and purchase intention significantly differ between informational text and customer success stories. This means that hypothesis 1 is completely not supported. The mean scores in table 4.1 confirm the small differences between informational text and customer success stories.

Table 4.1

Independent sample t-test, and mean scores (SD) Informational text vs. customer success stories compared by dependent variables (N=206)

Scale	t	p (2-tailed)	Informational text (N=42)	Customer success stories (N=164)
Comprehensibility	.635	.527	4.62 (.76)	4.71 (.91)
Credibility	-.065	.948	4.13 (1.14)	4.12 (1.12)
Attitude towards the content	-.440	.661	4.23 (.92)	4.15 (1.23)
Attitude towards the product	1.134	.258	4.50 (1.12)	4.70 (.99)
Purchase intention	.335	.738	3.99 (1.13)	4.06 (1.25)

Note: Measured on a 7-point scale where 1=negative and 7=positive.

4.2. Effects of portrait photos and narrative perspective

After examining the effects of customer success stories compared to ordinary informational text, the differences within the success story characteristics were examined. To examine the effects of *portrait photos* and the *narrative perspective* on the dependent variable, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted. To perform a 2x2 MANOVA test, two dummy variables were created; *photo* and *narrative perspective*.

For all dependent Levene's test for equality of variances was non-significant on a level of $p < .05$ meaning that equal variances are assumed. Box's M (35.14) was not significant ($p = .904$) ($p > 0.001$) meaning there is no significant difference between covariance matrices of the dependent variables across groups. Therefore, the assumption of homogeneity of covariance across groups is not violated and Wilks's Lambda is an appropriate statistic to use.

Results show there was no significant main effect for *portrait photos* on the dependent variables ($\Lambda = 0.96$, $F(5, 156) = 1.15$, $p = .337$). For *narrative perspective* there was no main effect either ($\Lambda = 0.97$, $F(5, 156) = .90$, $p = .486$). Nor there was an interaction effect for *portrait photos* and *narrative perspective* ($\Lambda = 0.99$, $F(5, 156) = .35$, $p = .883$). The mean scores in table 4.3 confirm the small differences between 1st person (condition 2 and 4) and 3rd person (condition 3 and 5) and photo (condition 4 and 5) or no photo (condition 2 and 3). Due to the lack of significant main- and interaction effects no further analyses were conducted on these factors. This means that hypotheses 2 and 3 are also rejected.

Table 4.3

Mean scores (SD) of the dependent variables divided by all customer success stories (N=164)

Scale	Condition 2: CSS 1st person	Condition 3: CSS 3rd person	Condition 4: CSS 1st person + photo	Condition 5: CSS 3rd person + photo
Comprehensibility	4.85 (.97)	4.83 (.99)	4.48 (.95)	4.65 (.83)
Credibility	4.18 (1.22)	4.13 (1.23)	4.00 (.98)	4.18 (1.06)
Attitude towards the content	4.16 (1.33)	4.34 (1.28)	3.94 (1.23)	4.18 (1.09)
Attitude towards the product	4.69 (1.05)	4.81 (1.10)	4.47 (.93)	4.83 (.87)
Purchase intention	4.06 (1.42)	4.08 (1.39)	3.90 (1.09)	4.21 (1.05)

Note: Measured on a 7-point scale where 1=negative and 7=positive.

5. Discussion

In this section the results of the study will be discussed and possible explanations will be proposed. Moreover, limitations and suggestions for future research will be addressed.

5.1. Effects of informational text vs. customer success stories

Previous research has shown that storytelling is good way to attract customers (Pulizzi, 2012), tell the essence of a company/product (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007) and makes the message more memorable than informational text, suggesting that storytelling would be a more effective way to advertise a product than using normal informational text. Moreover, other research states that stories are more comprehensible (Moore & Zabrocky, 1999), establish a more positive attitude (Gilliam et al., 2014) and are more persuasive (McKee & Fryer, 2003) than informational text. This makes stories also more credible and a great tool to sell products (Gilliam et al., 2014)

This research however found no statistical evidence that the mean scores on comprehensibility, attitude towards the content, credibility, attitude towards the product and purchase intention differ between informational text and customer success stories. For companies this implies that solely using informational text or customer success stories to sell their products does not differ.

These results are similar to earlier studies by (Scheerder, 2015) and (Hengeveld, 2016). They also studied the effects of storytelling and also found little to no differences. Scheerder (2015) studied the effects of corporate information and corporate stories, regarding non-profit and profit organizations. The study did find a small positive effect for corporate stories on the variables *interestingness* and *perceived patient centrality*, regarding non-profit organizations. However for other variables no effect was found, moreover for profit organizations there was not found any effect on the tested variables.

Hengeveld (2016) studied the effects of storytelling on *brand experience*, *brand attitude* and *brand trust*, as well as the effects of *employee testimonials* and *employee pictures*. The study did not find any significant difference between storytelling and informational text. The results of these two studies, as well as this study, suggest that, although theory indicates different, storytelling on its own is not as powerful in terms of marketing as expected.

A possible explanation for the lack of difference between informational text and customer success stories in this study is that consumers are not substantially more interested in the experiences from other customers and the story on how the company helps the customer with their challenges. Instead the informational text, which is shorter and perhaps more clearly and to the point, can already be revealing and convincing enough. A reason for this could be that customer success stories require a fair amount of involvement, as generally

they are longer. Moreover, just as in this study, they are mostly for high involvement products. However, in this study, involvement was not taken into account.

Another explanation could be that customer success stories are not believed as real stories from existing customers and therefore not as persuading as literature suggests. This could be because customer success stories are, other than user generated content, not (completely) developed by the customer itself. Moreover, it is published on the website of the supplier, which could make it less credible. Scores on credibility confirm this, as customer success stories are not more credible than informational texts. However, they are also not less credible than informational texts. This suggests that people see informational texts and customer success stories as evenly credible, however this could decrease the persuadable effects of customer success stories.

5.2. Effects of portrait photos and narrative perspective

Literature suggests that portrait photos can make a credible story more credible, provided that the person in the photo is judged credible as well (e.g., Fogg et al., 2001). Moreover, credibility can also positively affect the persuasiveness of a message (e.g., Tormala, Briñol, & Petty, 2006). This suggests that portrait photos of credible people can enhance the persuasiveness of a customer success stories.

However, in this study there was no main effect for portrait photos on, credibility, attitude towards the content, attitude towards the product and purchase intention. This suggests that, although literature disagrees, portrait photos do not make a story more credible. Moreover, it does not affect the attitude (towards the content and towards the product) and the purchase intention. This implies that portrait photos do not make a story more persuasive. Therefore, companies should reconsider if they want to spend their time and money creating credible pictures for a customer success story.

When looking at the manipulation check, we can see that nearly all respondents were aware of the possible presence of a portrait picture. Therefore, the scenario of participants not seeing the photo can be excluded. A possible explanation could be that the story was not credible enough on its own, and therefore, was not strengthened by the portrait photos. However, this yields the question of how credible a story should be on its own, because the same stories without photos were rated 4.18 (1st person) and 4.13 (3rd person) on a scale of seven, which can be considered credible. Another possible explanation could be that people are maybe starting to get used to the trend that organizations make more and more use of photos and characters in marketing communication and therefore the effects wear out.

The second story characteristic that was measured was the narrative perspective. The theoretical framework predicted, based on literature of word-of-mouth and reviews (e.g., Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2004), that narratives written in the first person perspective will be more credible and therefore also be more persuasive. Results of this study, however, refute this prediction. There was not found a main effect for

narrative perspective on comprehensibility, credibility, attitude towards the content, attitude towards the product and purchase intention, although again, for comprehensibility this was not hypothesised.

This suggests that it does not matter in which narrative perspective a customer success story is written. For companies, this means that explaining a case about one of their customers works just as well as letting them tell the story. It should be noted that this is based on texts that are published by the company and on the company's website and not written reviews published by the customer on for instance their own website or an independent platform.

An explanation for the lack of difference in effect on credibility and persuasion between a story written in the first person and a story written in the third person could be due to the fact that the third person stories is also very much written towards the customer. Therefore, although the stories are noticed by the reader as having different narrative perspectives, they might be perceived very similar as a story about and by the customer.

5.3. Limitations & future research

To ensure the validity and reliability of this research multiple steps were taken, such as a large sample size, However, there are some limitations to this research that should be mentioned to correctly interpret the results of this study and that should be taken into account in future research.

First, for this study a convenience sample was used to get the appropriate amount of participants. This resulted in a sample of people that probably have never been in the situation of buying a professional software system, let alone CRM-software. This is confirmed by the question if the participant ever had used a CRM system in his or her life. More than 65% of the participants stated to never have used CRM-software. Therefore, the sample was not ideal for this study. To get more realistic results, a sample of participants that are actually in a decision making unit for the purchase of CRM-software and are also in need for a (new) CRM system, would have been ideal. However, then it would have been almost impossible to get a reliable sample size for this study.

Second, as mentioned before customer success stories are mainly used for high involvement products, such as software used in the conditions in this study. However, the involvement of participants was not measured. Therefore, future research should take into account the product involvement of the participants and measure this as well.

Third, for this research an online survey was used. This research method is great for finding general differences between constructs. However, to find more subtle and perhaps unforeseen effects, another research method might be more effective. Therefore, a follow-up study could use a different research method, for example in-depth interviews, preferably with the correct target group. This method could focus on the

subtle and unforeseen differences between storytelling and informational text. This method might find new effects and which could give insight in how to optimize stories for better persuasive results.

Fourth, the conditions in this study were completely fictitious, this was done because this research was carried out independently and to make sure prior knowledge to an existing product would not affect the results of this study. Although multiple steps were taken to make it look real and also several participants afterwards mentioned that they thought the product was real, it could be that the conditions were perceived as fake and therefore influenced the results. Future research could use existing customer success stories from real companies.

Fifth, in this study only one product was tested. This product was chosen because the product is quite general that is used in all kinds of organizations. Although there is no particular reason to suggest that this product would not be suited to be used in a customer success story, it could be that other products or services will give different results. To test the differences, customer success stories from multiple product categories could be compared in a new study.

Sixth, photos did not seem to affect credibility, nor attitude towards the content, attitude towards the product and purchase intention. Although almost all of the participants (from condition 4 and 5) correctly stated that they saw the picture, it could be interesting to what degree they looked at the picture, as well as which areas in the picture they looked have. Moreover, different positions of the picture could be compared. This could be tested with an eye-tracking device.

Last, this research studied two characteristics, photos and narrative perspective, to influence the effects of customer success stories. However there are multiple characteristics that could be studied such as quotes from customers or the length of a text. In addition to future research, an interesting follow-up study would be to test the differences between customer success stories and real written reviews. This is suggested because customer success stories and reviews have multiple similarities, for example, they both tell the story of a customer and the experience with a product or service.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to explore the differences between informational text and customer success stories on comprehensibility, credibility, attitude (towards the content and the product) and purchase intention. This research was carried out to broaden the effects of different forms of writing on the behaviour of people. This would then also give insight in how to optimize the effects of customer success stories in the future. Literature predicted that customer success stories would score better on comprehensibility, credibility, attitude and purchase intention. Moreover, it was expected that portrait photos would strengthen these effects and that a customer success story written in first person would score better than a customer success story written in third person.

The results of this study however show that there are little to no differences between informational text and customer success stories. Moreover, portrait photos or differences in narrative perspective of the stories do not seem to significantly change the effects comprehensibility, credibility, and attitude and purchase intention. Based on the current study it can be concluded that customer success stories on their own are not as powerful in terms of marketing as expected. However, more research on storytelling should be carried out to fully explore the marketing effects of this tool.

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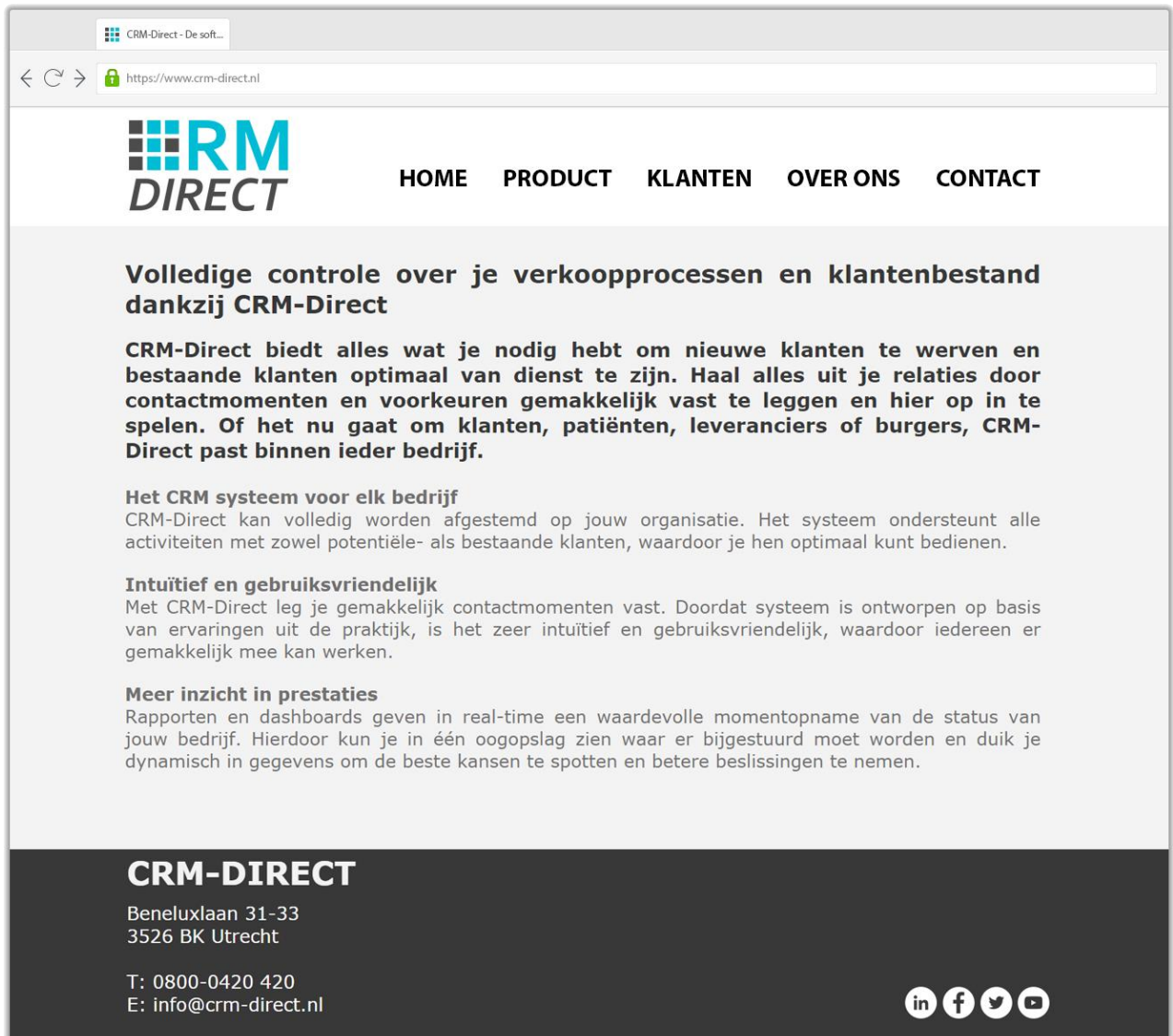
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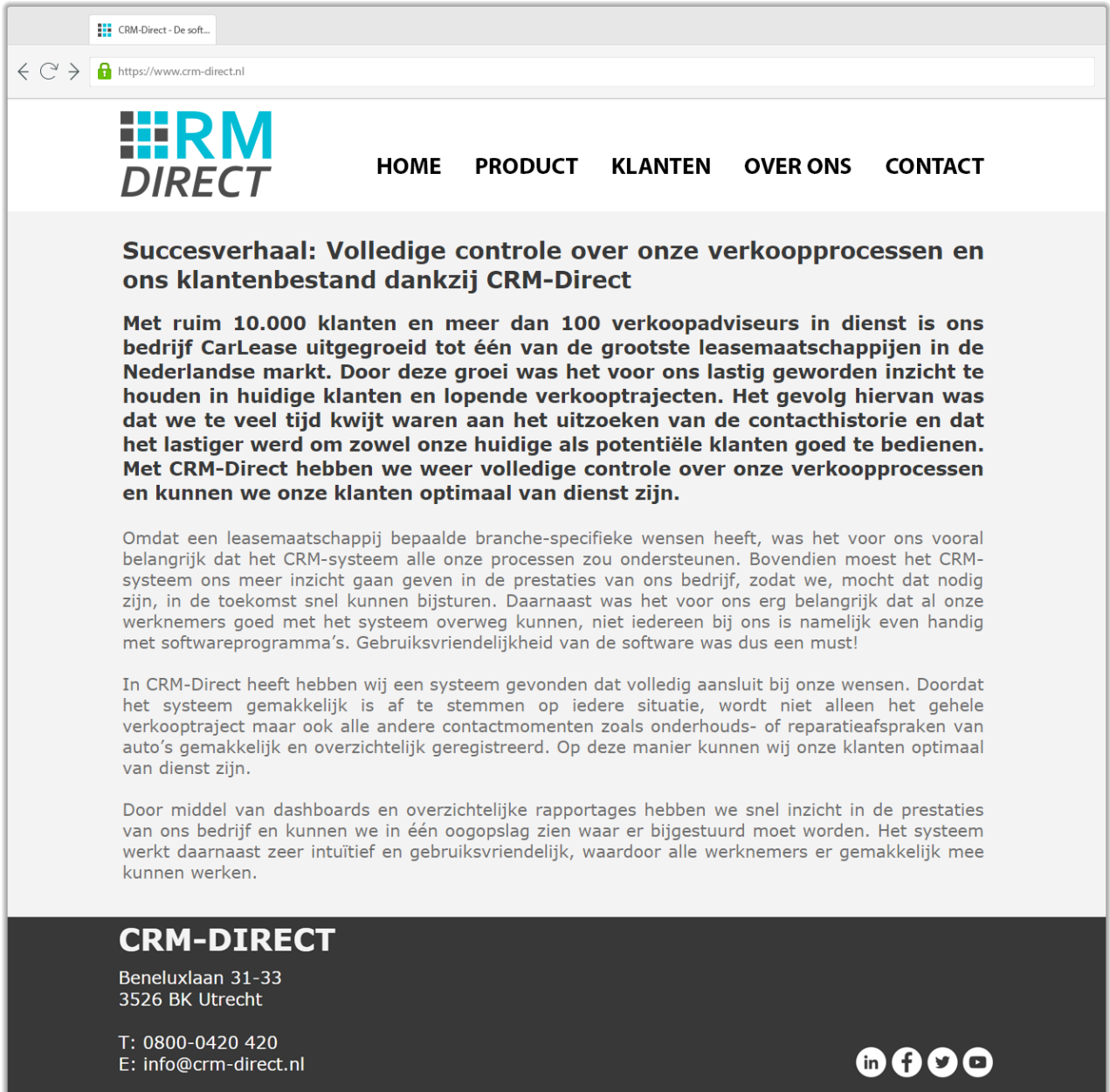
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Appendix A - Conditions

Condition 1: Informational text (control condition)



Condition 2: Customer success story without portrait photo in 1st person narrative perspective



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.crm-direct.nl>. The page features the CRM-Direct logo and a navigation menu with links: HOME, PRODUCT, KLANTEN, OVER ONS, and CONTACT. The main content is a success story titled "Succesverhaal: Volledige controle over onze verkoopprocessen en ons klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct". The text describes how CarLease, with 10,000 customers and 100 sales advisors, used CRM-Direct to gain better control over their sales processes and customer base. It highlights the system's ability to provide insights into sales performance and customer interactions, leading to improved service and efficiency. The footer contains the company address (Beneluxlaan 31-33, 3526 BK Utrecht), contact information (T: 0800-0420 420, E: info@crm-direct.nl), and social media icons for LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

CRM-Direct - De soft...

← ↻ → <https://www.crm-direct.nl>

CRM-DIRECT

HOME PRODUCT KLANTEN OVER ONS CONTACT

Succesverhaal: Volledige controle over onze verkoopprocessen en ons klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct

Met ruim 10.000 klanten en meer dan 100 verkoopadviseurs in dienst is ons bedrijf CarLease uitgegroeid tot één van de grootste leasemaatschappijen in de Nederlandse markt. Door deze groei was het voor ons lastig geworden inzicht te houden in huidige klanten en lopende verkooptrajecten. Het gevolg hiervan was dat we te veel tijd kwijt waren aan het uitzoeken van de contacthistorie en dat het lastiger werd om zowel onze huidige als potentiële klanten goed te bedienen. Met CRM-Direct hebben we weer volledige controle over onze verkoopprocessen en kunnen we onze klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

Omdat een leasemaatschappij bepaalde branche-specifieke wensen heeft, was het voor ons vooral belangrijk dat het CRM-systeem alle onze processen zou ondersteunen. Bovendien moest het CRM-systeem ons meer inzicht gaan geven in de prestaties van ons bedrijf, zodat we, mocht dat nodig zijn, in de toekomst snel kunnen bijsturen. Daarnaast was het voor ons erg belangrijk dat al onze werknemers goed met het systeem overweg kunnen, niet iedereen bij ons is namelijk even handig met softwareprogramma's. Gebruiksvriendelijkheid van de software was dus een must!

In CRM-Direct heeft hebben wij een systeem gevonden dat volledig aansluit bij onze wensen. Doordat het systeem gemakkelijk is af te stemmen op iedere situatie, wordt niet alleen het gehele verkooptraject maar ook alle andere contactmomenten zoals onderhouds- of reparatieafspraken van auto's gemakkelijk en overzichtelijk geregistreerd. Op deze manier kunnen wij onze klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

Door middel van dashboards en overzichtelijke rapportages hebben we snel inzicht in de prestaties van ons bedrijf en kunnen we in één oogopslag zien waar er bijgestuurd moet worden. Het systeem werkt daarnaast zeer intuïtief en gebruiksvriendelijk, waardoor alle werknemers er gemakkelijk mee kunnen werken.

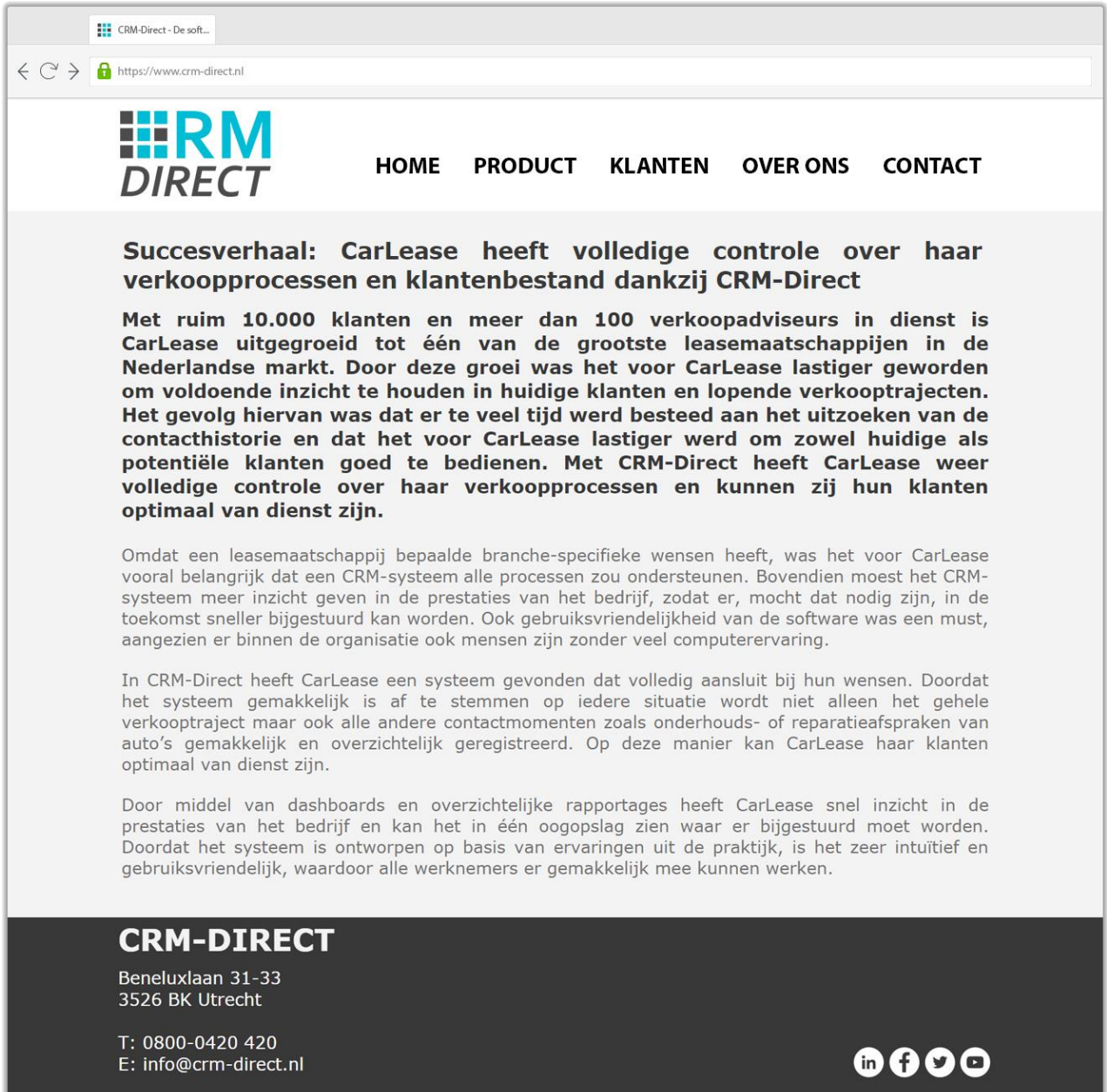
CRM-DIRECT

Beneluxlaan 31-33
3526 BK Utrecht

T: 0800-0420 420
E: info@crm-direct.nl

in f t y

Condition 3: Customer success story without portrait photo in 3rd person narrative perspective



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://www.crm-direct.nl>. The website header features the CRM-Direct logo and a navigation menu with links: HOME, PRODUCT, KLANTEN, OVER ONS, and CONTACT. The main content area is titled "Succesverhaal: CarLease heeft volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct". The text describes how CarLease, with 10,000 customers and 100 sales advisors, used CRM-Direct to gain full control over its sales processes and customer base. It highlights the benefits of the CRM system, such as providing insight into company performance and enabling faster response times. The footer contains the CRM-Direct logo, address (Beneluxlaan 31-33, 3526 BK Utrecht), phone number (0800-0420 420), email (info@crm-direct.nl), and social media icons for LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

CRM-Direct - De soft...

<https://www.crm-direct.nl>

CRM-DIRECT

HOME PRODUCT KLANTEN OVER ONS CONTACT

Succesverhaal: CarLease heeft volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct

Met ruim 10.000 klanten en meer dan 100 verkoopadviseurs in dienst is CarLease uitgegroeid tot één van de grootste leasemaatschappijen in de Nederlandse markt. Door deze groei was het voor CarLease lastiger geworden om voldoende inzicht te houden in huidige klanten en lopende verkooptrajecten. Het gevolg hiervan was dat er te veel tijd werd besteed aan het uitzoeken van de contacthistorie en dat het voor CarLease lastiger werd om zowel huidige als potentiële klanten goed te bedienen. Met CRM-Direct heeft CarLease weer volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en kunnen zij hun klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

Omdat een leasemaatschappij bepaalde branche-specifieke wensen heeft, was het voor CarLease vooral belangrijk dat een CRM-systeem alle processen zou ondersteunen. Bovendien moest het CRM-systeem meer inzicht geven in de prestaties van het bedrijf, zodat er, mocht dat nodig zijn, in de toekomst sneller bijgestuurd kan worden. Ook gebruiksvriendelijkheid van de software was een must, aangezien er binnen de organisatie ook mensen zijn zonder veel computerervaring.

In CRM-Direct heeft CarLease een systeem gevonden dat volledig aansluit bij hun wensen. Doordat het systeem gemakkelijk is af te stemmen op iedere situatie wordt niet alleen het gehele verkooptraject maar ook alle andere contactmomenten zoals onderhouds- of reparatieafspraken van auto's gemakkelijk en overzichtelijk geregistreerd. Op deze manier kan CarLease haar klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

Door middel van dashboards en overzichtelijke rapportages heeft CarLease snel inzicht in de prestaties van het bedrijf en kan het in één oogopslag zien waar er bijgestuurd moet worden. Doordat het systeem is ontworpen op basis van ervaringen uit de praktijk, is het zeer intuïtief en gebruiksvriendelijk, waardoor alle werknemers er gemakkelijk mee kunnen werken.

CRM-DIRECT

Beneluxlaan 31-33
3526 BK Utrecht

T: 0800-0420 420
E: info@crm-direct.nl

in f t y

Condition 4: Customer success story with portrait photo in 1st person narrative perspective

CRM-Direct - De soft...
https://www.crm-direct.nl


HOME PRODUCT KLANTEN OVER ONS CONTACT

Succesverhaal: Volledige controle over onze verkoopprocessen en ons klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct

Met ruim 10.000 klanten en meer dan 100 verkoopadviseurs in dienst is ons bedrijf CarLease uitgegroeid tot één van de grootste leasemaatschappijen in de Nederlandse markt. Door deze groei was het voor ons lastig geworden inzicht te houden in huidige klanten en lopende verkooptrajecten. Het gevolg hiervan was dat we te veel tijd kwijt waren aan het uitzoeken van de contacthistorie en dat het lastiger werd om zowel onze huidige als potentiële klanten goed te bedienen. Met CRM-Direct hebben we weer volledige controle over onze verkoopprocessen en kunnen we onze klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

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Martin De Groot, Business Manager bij CarLease

CRM-DIRECT


Beneluxlaan 31-33
3526 BK Utrecht

T: 0800-0420 420
E: info@crm-direct.nl



Condition 5: Customer success story with portrait photo in 3rd person narrative perspective

CRM-Direct - De soft...
https://www.crm-direct.nl


HOME PRODUCT KLANTEN OVER ONS CONTACT


Succesverhaal: CarLease heeft volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en klantenbestand dankzij CRM-Direct

Met ruim 10.000 klanten en meer dan 100 verkoopadviseurs in dienst is CarLease uitgegroeid tot één van de grootste leasemaatschappijen in de Nederlandse markt. Door deze groei was het voor CarLease lastiger geworden om voldoende inzicht te houden in huidige klanten en lopende verkooptrajecten. Het gevolg hiervan was dat er te veel tijd werd besteed aan het uitzoeken van de contacthistorie en dat het voor CarLease lastiger werd om zowel huidige als potentiële klanten goed te bedienen. Met CRM-Direct heeft CarLease weer volledige controle over haar verkoopprocessen en kunnen zij hun klanten optimaal van dienst zijn.

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Martin De Groot, Business Manager bij CarLease

CRM-DIRECT

Beneluxlaan 31-33
3526 BK Utrecht

T: 0800-0420 420
E: info@crm-direct.nl



Appendix B – Pre-study

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Credibility

Bonferroni

(I) Photo	(J) Photo	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Photo 1	Photo 2	-,07500	,29184	1,000	-,9138	,7638
	Photo 3	-,20000	,29184	1,000	-1,0388	,6388
	Photo 4	,57500	,29184	,517	-,2638	1,4138
	Photo 5	,08750	,29184	1,000	-,7513	,9263
Photo 2	Photo 1	,07500	,29184	1,000	-,7638	,9138
	Photo 3	-,12500	,29184	1,000	-,9638	,7138
	Photo 4	,65000	,29184	,283	-,1888	1,4888
	Photo 5	,16250	,29184	1,000	-,6763	1,0013
Photo 3	Photo 1	,20000	,29184	1,000	-,6388	1,0388
	Photo 2	,12500	,29184	1,000	-,7138	,9638
	Photo 4	,77500	,29184	,093	-,0638	1,6138
	Photo 5	,28750	,29184	1,000	-,5513	1,1263
Photo 4	Photo 1	-,57500	,29184	,517	-1,4138	,2638
	Photo 2	-,65000	,29184	,283	-1,4888	,1888
	Photo 3	-,77500	,29184	,093	-1,6138	,0638
	Photo 5	-,48750	,29184	,981	-1,3263	,3513
Photo 5	Photo 1	-,08750	,29184	1,000	-,9263	,7513
	Photo 2	-,16250	,29184	1,000	-1,0013	,6763
	Photo 3	-,28750	,29184	1,000	-1,1263	,5513
	Photo 4	,48750	,29184	,981	-,3513	1,3263

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Believability Job

Bonferroni

(I) Photo	(J) Photo	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Photo 1	Photo 2	,55000	,30487	,744	-,3262	1,4262
	Photo 3	,60000	,30487	,520	-,2762	1,4762
	Photo 4	,45000	,30487	1,000	-,4262	1,3262
	Photo 5	,35000	,30487	1,000	-,5262	1,2262
Photo 2	Photo 1	-,55000	,30487	,744	-1,4262	,3262
	Photo 3	,05000	,30487	1,000	-,8262	,9262
	Photo 4	-,10000	,30487	1,000	-,9762	,7762
	Photo 5	-,20000	,30487	1,000	-1,0762	,6762
Photo 3	Photo 1	-,60000	,30487	,520	-1,4762	,2762
	Photo 2	-,05000	,30487	1,000	-,9262	,8262
	Photo 4	-,15000	,30487	1,000	-1,0262	,7262
	Photo 5	-,25000	,30487	1,000	-1,1262	,6262
Photo 4	Photo 1	-,45000	,30487	1,000	-1,3262	,4262
	Photo 2	,10000	,30487	1,000	-,7762	,9762
	Photo 3	,15000	,30487	1,000	-,7262	1,0262
	Photo 5	-,10000	,30487	1,000	-,9762	,7762
Photo 5	Photo 1	-,35000	,30487	1,000	-1,2262	,5262
	Photo 2	,20000	,30487	1,000	-,6762	1,0762
	Photo 3	,25000	,30487	1,000	-,6262	1,1262
	Photo 4	,10000	,30487	1,000	-,7762	,9762

Appendix C – Questionnaire

Beste deelnemer,

Hartelijk dank voor uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. Door deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek helpt u mij bij het afronden van mijn masterstudie Communication Studies aan de Universiteit van Twente. Op de volgende pagina krijgt u een casus voorgelegd en ik wil u vragen deze goed te lezen. Vervolgens krijgt u een vragenlijst. Het is van belang dat u deze zo volledig en eerlijk mogelijk invult. Alle resultaten worden geheel anoniem verwerkt. Deelname aan dit onderzoek is vrijwillig en u kunt te allen tijde stoppen. Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen, neem dan gerust contact met mij op.

Marcel Kippers

m.kippers@student.utwente.nl

- ☐ Ik ga akkoord met de bovenstaande tekst en doe vrijwillig mee aan dit onderzoek.
- ☐ Ik ga **NIET** akkoord en doe dus **NIET** mee aan dit onderzoek.

LEES DE ONDERSTAANDE TEKST GOED DOOR:

Stelt u zich voor dat u de verantwoordelijke bent binnen een organisatie voor de aankoop van een CRM-systeem (CRM staat voor Customer Relationship Management). Dit is een softwaresysteem om al uw zakelijke relaties mee te beheren en contactmomenten met deze relaties te registreren. Belangrijk voor uw organisatie zijn de volgende punten:

- Gebruiksvriendelijke software
- Flexibele software, zodat het aansluit bij de specifieke wensen in de organisatie
- Gemakkelijk en overzichtelijk inzicht in wat er speelt binnen de organisatie.

U begint uw zoektocht online en komt op de volgende website van een leverancier van CRM-software terecht:

De volgende vragen gaan over de begrijpelijkheid van de tekst die u zojuist op de website van CRM-Direct hebt gelezen.

De tekst die ik zojuist gelezen heb vond ik:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Helder:Vaag	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Duidelijk:Onduidelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Prettig leesbaar:Niet prettig leesbaar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Moeilijk:Makkelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geloofwaardig:Niet geloofwaardig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Deskundig:Ondeskundig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Betrouwbaar:Onbetrouwbaar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Moeilijk leesbaar:Makkelijk leesbaar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Eenvoudig:Complex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Samenhangend:Niet samenhangend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Stokkend:Vloeiend	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De volgende vragen gaan over de aantrekkelijkheid van de tekst die u zojuist op de website van CRM-Direct hebt gelezen.

De tekst die ik zojuist gelezen heb vond ik:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeer slecht:Zeer goed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Zeer irritant:Zeer aangenaam	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Zeer oninteressant:Zeer interessant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De volgende vragen gaan over de geloofwaardigheid van de tekst die u zojuist op de website van CRM-Direct hebt gelezen.

	Sterk mee oneens	Oneens	Enigzins oneens	niet eens, niet oneens	Enigzins eens	eens	sterk mee eens
Ik denk dat deze tekst geloofwaardig is.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ik denk dat deze tekst accuraat is.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik denk dat deze tekst betrouwbaar is.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik denk dat deze tekst partijdig is.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik denk dat deze tekst volledig is.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De volgende vragen/stellingen gaan over de aantrekkelijkheid van het product waarover u zojuist op de website van CRM-Direct hebt gelezen.

LET OP: u dient zich voor te stellen de verantwoordelijke te zijn binnen een organisatie voor de aankoop van een CRM-systeem.

	Sterk mee oneens	Oneens	Enigzins oneens	niet eens, niet oneens	Enigzins eens	eens	sterk mee eens
Als ik CRM-Direct zou gebruiken zou ik het waarschijnlijk een goed systeem vinden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mensen zoals ik zouden CRM-Direct waarschijnlijk geen goed systeem vinden.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik verwacht dat de meeste mensen die CRM-Direct gebruiken tevreden zijn.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Over het algemeen zou ik CRM-Direct omschrijven als:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeer onaantrekkelijk: Zeer aantrekkelijk	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Sterk mee oneens	Oneens	Enigzin s oneens	niet eens, niet oneens	Enigzin s eens	eens	sterk mee eens
Ik denk dat CRM-Direct van toegevoegde waarde is voor mijn bedrijf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik denk dat CRM-Direct gebruiksvriendelijk is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik denk dat CRM-Direct niet gemakkelijk aansluit bij mijn bedrijf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik denk dat CRM-Direct mij gemakkelijk inzicht geeft in de prestaties van mijn bedrijf.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou het systeem 'CRM-Direct' proberen.							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeker niet:Zeker wel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou het systeem 'CRM-Direct' kopen.							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeker niet:Zeker wel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ik zou het systeem 'CRM-Direct' aanbevelen aan andere organisaties.							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Zeker niet:Zeker wel	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

De volgende vragen gaan over de inhoud van de tekst waarover u zojuist op de website van CRM-Direct hebt gelezen.

De tekst van de website die ik heb gelezen bevatte een foto van een persoon.

- ☐ Ja
- ☐ Nee

De tekst van de website die ik heb gelezen is geschreven in de:

- ☐ Eerste persoon (Ik, wij)
- ☐ Tweede persoon (jij/je, jullie, u)
- ☐ Derde persoon (Hij, zij, het, zij)

Wat is uw geslacht?

- ☐ Vrouw
- ☐ Man

Wat is uw leeftijd?

Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding?

- ☐ Basisschool
- ☐ Praktijkonderwijs (of vergelijkbaar)
- ☐ VMBO (of vergelijkbaar)
- ☐ HAVO (of vergelijkbaar)
- ☐ VWO (of vergelijkbaar)
- ☐ MBO (of vergelijkbaar)
- ☐ HBO (of vergelijkbaar)
- ☐ WO (of vergelijkbaar)

Hoeveel jaren werkervaring heeft u? (bijbaantjes niet meegerekend)

Werkt of heeft u in uw werk gewerkt met CRM-software?

- ☐ Ja
- ☐ Nee

Measures and items	Source
Perceived comprehensibility 1. Attraction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unclear – Clear Plain – Vague (r) Not readable - Readable 2. Acceptance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credible - Not credible (r) Unprofessional - Professional Unreliable - Reliable 3. Accessibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult - Easy Takes a lot of effort - Takes little effort Simple – Complex (r) 4. Consistency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coherent – Incoherent (r) Stagnating – Fluent 	(Kamalski et al., 2001)
Message credibility 1. I think this text is believable. 2. I think this text is accurate. 3. I think this text is trustworthy. 4. I think this text is biased. (r) 5. I think this text is complete.	(Flanagin & Metzger, 2000)
Attitude towards the content The text I just read I found: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely bad - Extremely good Extremely irritating - Extremely pleasing Extremely uninteresting - Extremely interesting 	(Anastasiei & Chiosa, 2014)
Attitude towards the product Liking the product (Strongly agree – strongly disagree) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> If I used <i>CRM Direct</i>, I would probably like it People like me would probably not like <i>CRM Direct</i> (r) I would expect that most people using <i>CRM Direct</i> would be satisfied. 	(Duncan & Nelson, 1985)

4. Overall, I would describe *CRM Direct* as (extremely appealing – extremely unappealing)

Positive beliefs about the product (*Strongly agree – strongly disagree*)

1. I think *CRM Direct* will add value to my company
2. I think *CRM Direct* is user friendly
3. I think *CRM Direct* cannot be easily fitted to any company (r)
4. I think *CRM Direct* gives me easy insight in the performance of my company

Purchase intention

1. I would try the product *CRM Direct*. (Certainly not – certainly)
 2. I would buy the product *CRM Direct*. (Certainly not – certainly)
 3. I would recommend the product *CRM Direct* to other companies. (Certainly not – certainly)
-

Appendix D – Significant tests demographics

Gender

		Condition 1: Informational text	Condition 2: CSS 1st person	Condition 3: CSS 3rd person	Condition 4: CSS 1st person + photo	Condition 5: CSS 3rd person + photo	Total
Gender	Female	Count	13	14	9	16	71
		Expected Count	14,5	14,8	13,8	13,8	71,0
	Male	Count	29	29	31	24	135
		Expected Count	27,5	28,2	26,2	26,2	135,0
Total		Count	42	43	40	40	206
		Expected Count	42,0	43,0	40,0	40,0	206,0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,937 ^a	4	,204
Likelihood Ratio	6,009	4	,198
Linear-by-Linear Association	2,625	1	,105
N of Valid Cases	206		

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13,79.

Age

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1415,495	4	353,874	1,971	,100
Within Groups	36095,320	201	179,579		
Total	37510,816	205			

Education

			Low education	Middle education	High education	
Conditie	Condition 1: Informational text	Count	1	12	29	42
		Expected Count	,2	11,2	30,6	42,0
	Condition 2: CSS 1st person	Count	0	13	30	43
		Expected Count	,2	11,5	31,3	43,0
	Condition 3: CSS 3rd person	Count	0	6	34	40
		Expected Count	,2	10,7	29,1	40,0
	Condition 4: CSS 1st person + photo	Count	0	12	28	40
		Expected Count	,2	10,7	29,1	40,0
	Condition 5: CSS 3rd person + photo	Count	0	12	29	41
		Expected Count	,2	10,9	29,9	41,0
	Total	Count	1	55	150	206
		Expected Count	1,0	55,0	150,0	206,0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7,496 ^a	8	,484
Likelihood Ratio	7,104	8	,525
Linear-by-Linear Association	,150	1	,699
N of Valid Cases	206		

a. 5 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,19.

Work experience**ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1123,033	4	280,758	1,707	,150
Within Groups	33066,098	201	164,508		
Total	34189,131	205			

Experience with CRM software

		Ja	Nee		
Conditie	Condition 1: Informational text	Count	15	27	42
		Expected Count	14,3	27,7	42,0
	Condition 2: CSS 1st person	Count	18	25	43
		Expected Count	14,6	28,4	43,0
	Condition 3: CSS 3rd person	Count	17	23	40
		Expected Count	13,6	26,4	40,0
	Condition 4: CSS 1st person + photo	Count	13	27	40
		Expected Count	13,6	26,4	40,0
	Condition 5: CSS 3rd person + photo	Count	7	34	41
		Expected Count	13,9	27,1	41,0
Total		Count	70	136	206
		Expected Count	70,0	136,0	206,0

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7,804 ^a	4	,099
Likelihood Ratio	8,367	4	,079
Linear-by-Linear Association	3,983	1	,046
N of Valid Cases	206		

a. 0 cells (,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13,59.