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The importance of using influencer marketing in order to create brand awareness in international markets for e-commerce companies

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons why e-commerce companies work with influencer marketing in order to create brand awareness in international markets. In order to conduct this research, relevant aspects of the phenomenon have been identified and consequently analysed in relation to traditional marketing strategies and international markets. By following a qualitative research method, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and how companies use influencer marketing vs traditional marketing strategies can thereby be acquired. This was done by acquiring primary data from four different e-commerce companies that works with influencer marketing. The companies are all located in Sweden and active in international markets. The thesis has followed a deductive research approach, due to that the research area was considered to be rather unexplored, and thus a better pre understanding of the research area seemed warranted. Furthermore, the literature review that has been done includes theories related to international marketing, social media, word of mouth, brand awareness and influencer marketing. The literature review has resulted in a conceptual framework, which demonstrates the relations between the different theories.

The conceptual framework has thereafter been used in order to analyse the empirical data, which has been derived from the interviews with representatives from four companies. The empirical findings are then presented together with analysis and discussion in the following chapter. Moreover, the empirical findings/analysis chapter visualizes the similarities and the dissimilarities between the theory and the findings. The analysis chapter additionally involves a discussion and is structured in accordance with the conceptual framework and the questions asked. The following and final chapter of the thesis presents the conclusions that have been derived from the analysis.

The main theoretical implications that this thesis has resulted in, involves filling the research gap as well as providing a definition of the phenomenon of influencer marketing in a context of international business. The main practical implication is that an understanding of influencer marketing creates word of mouth and brand awareness. This in a combination with being active on social media can consequently help e-commerce companies to internationalize into new markets. As this thesis introduces the phenomenon of influencer marketing in a new context, it provides new information about the topic. Furthermore, the research can be valuable for e-commerce companies that have entered, or plan to enter an international market.

The authors furthermore present the theoretical and practical implications and provide recommendations and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Internationalization; international marketing; social media; influencer; influencer marketing; brand awareness; e-commerce; marketing; word of mouth
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1 Introduction

In the first chapter a background will be presented to the chosen subject. Further on the problem discussion will be introduced and research questions and purpose. This is all tied together in an outline figure.

1.1 Background

“It was not the traditional established brands like Swatch or Rolex that cracked the code on how to sell watches in the 2010s, it was a dude from Järífälla that has not even turned 30 yet” (Wallenberg, 2016)

Filip Tysander grew up in a normal Swedish family in Stockholm (Byttner, 2015). He was not the best student in school but in his early days he got interested in sales. When he was 20 years old he was backpacking in Australia where he met an Englishman called Daniel Wellington. Filip got inspired by the style of the watch the Englishman had, a Rolex Submariner with a textile strap and went home a started the company called Daniel Wellington. To get the product out on the market he sent the products to Instagram influencers with the simple requirement to post one photo of the watch on their feed (Mottola, 2016). This resulted in smart and artistic pictures of the watch on Instagram and other social media platforms which created a buzz around the brand and made the brand iconic among young adults.

One new and interesting sales channels is today available on the Internet, namely the social media (Sterne, 2010). It has become increasingly important in the 2000s, making it possible to express viewpoints freely, both for individuals and businesses. The definition of social media is websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking (Sterne, 2010). By getting the consumers to do the marketing for the product there was not a need for a vast marketing budget and in that sense the followers on social media became ambassadors for Daniel Wellington’s brand (Wallenberg, 2016). In five years Daniel Wellington had a profit margin of 50%. While in times where innovative companies such as Spotify have changed the way we listen to music, Daniel Wellington has not actually changed anything other than finding a new way of selling an ancient product. Some claim that Daniel Wellington was the first to understand the potential of using influencers in their marketing and since then many companies have followed (ibid). Influencers are a person with the ability to affect purchase decisions of others because of their (or perceived) authority, knowledge, position or relationship (Katz & Lazard, 2006).

In 2016 the online beauty company Lyko announced that they will focus solely on interactive digital marketing and desert their traditional marketing activities (Allhorn, 2016). This meant that the company concentrated on influencers on social media platforms and the definition of this is influencer marketing, which is a process where the company identify individuals who have an influence over a specific target audience in
order to be part of a brands campaign towards increased reach, sales or engagement (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). The strategy was called “highlighted by Lyko” and involved influencers that highlighted their own beauty favourites on their individual platforms and in that way Lyko could reach a broader mass. The motivation for this change of marketing strategy was that the consumers are active on social media such as YouTube, Instagram and Facebook and therefore Lyko should be where the consumers are (Allhorn, 2016). These examples highlight the importance of successful and innovative marketing strategies, and therefore this thesis will present various aspects of influencer marketing.

Marketing is the spine of any organisation and through it companies bring innovation, awareness of products and builds relationships with their consumers and a result from successful marketing is increased sales (Akbar, et al., 2017). The human activities aiming to satisfy needs and wants through exchange processes are vital for any business looking to survive and gain profit (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008).

“The primary reason for the success or failure of a business is determined by the success of failure of the marketing effort” (Tracy 2014, p.7)

The internet implementation in the marketing process delivers instant international reach and with the use of social media being a popular marketing strategy some say that traditional marketing practices are being phased out (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). What makes social media so popular is the way they enable consumers to interact and share information and the marketing message and brand exchanges created by consumers results in a word-of-mouth communication and a buzz about the brand. In 2017 there was 2.46 billion people that used social networks around the world and in the year 2021 it is expected to be 3.02 billion people (eMarketer, 2018). As of 2017, Internet users spent approximately 135 minutes (2.25 hours) per day on social media sites (Entrepreneur, 2017). As a consequence, companies find great value in generating brand awareness on these platforms. Consumers source products and services of interest and those that have overwhelmingly fulfilled their specific requirements and desires. When a company wants to have a presence in a social network they can engage their consumers in a casual, personal and direct way and this is appreciated by the consumers and they become more receptive towards the brand (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). What managers need to realize is that a great amount of information is being communicated via social media and this information is directly influencing the purchase and post-purchase behaviour of the consumers. The consumers are no longer passive receivers of marketing materials but use the social media to interact with the company which increases the consumer engagement (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2018).

The online environment has led to the need of new marketing activities especially conducted on social medias (Guercini, Mir Bernal , & Prentice, 2018). The internet has been regarded as a key tool for business growth internationally for a long time and e-commerce is considered to be an effective mean of expanding a business globally. The
prevailing purpose for a company to internationalize is to improve the potential for expansion and continuing growth (Entrepreneur, 2017).

The internet is effectively reducing physical liabilities, information gaps and operational threats, making it easier for e-commerce’s to internationalize and tap into new markets. E-commerce is rapidly growing and thus gives opportunities for selling one’s products globally and making new market entries (Jones, 2018). The process of internationalization can be defined as the increasing of the involvement in the international operations (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988).

According to Duncan and Moriarty (1998) this kind of communication is called two-way communication as it consists of both interacting and listening to the consumers. This can result in building or destroying important brand relationships. Furthermore, the authors state that marketing is more communication dependent and that communication is the primary element in managing brand relationships. Companies are trying to move away from one-way communication and by using social medias in their marketing they can achieve word-of-mouth marketing through their consumers (Papasolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). Word-of-mouth is an informal mode of communication between consumers and it plays an important role in shaping attitudes towards the brand (Johnson Brown & Reingen, 1987). This communication has been used by companies for many years and a new way to perform it is by using a celebrity in connection to the brand - recognition.

By connecting the brand with, for example, a local celebrity as a means of localising marketing strategy and connecting with consumers the entry to the new market is made possible (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). According to Spry et al. (2011) brands that use celebrities or famous people in their marketing can improve the brand credibility and it can be used by global firms seeking entry into a new national market. Connecting a brand with a celebrity is not a new market strategy since it has been done for a while and companies are spending a great deal of resources on the strategy, for example Pepsi made a $50 million contract with Beyoncé (Zamudio, 2015). It can be claimed that celebrity endorsement can be understood as a brand alliance between a recognised person who has a human brand, and a corporate brand and these two influences the consumers’ feelings toward the brand and purchase intention. Although, before any brand credibility can take place the consumers must recognize the brand. This is called brand awareness and relates to the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which is does (Rossiter and Percy, 1987).

A brand can be understood as the relationship between the organization and its audience, especially in a social media context (Kapferer, 2008). People are in general aware that a brand is known when it is in fact, known. Brand awareness, in this sense, is a collective phenomenon. Furthermore, awareness can be considered as a value for the brand when it correlates with appreciated dimensions. For example, high quality, reliability, trust, closeness to people and price/ quality ratio (Kapferer, 2008). A brand is necessary to establish awareness in order to be recognized and remembered. Achieving this involves creating salience with consumers, increasing brand name identity and connecting it to
product category. This is necessary particularly for a new brand. The approaches to create, maintain and increase awareness, nevertheless, depend upon the context. Building brand awareness requires increased familiarity of the brand through constant or repeated publicity (Aaker, 1991).

There are a few reasons why companies engage in celebrity endorsement and they are that people appreciate to see familiar faces on products, since it catches the viewer’s attention (Anon, 2016). People want to identify themselves with these celebrities, thus they are inspirations for a majority of their fans. These celebrities open up new demographics and furthermore the consumers believe in getting high quality products if they are promoted by a familiar face and people remember the ads after seeing it. Even in the fashion industry, a study by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) showed that the most influential people are those that consumers themselves can relate to. Consumers having a high level of confidence in influencers means that influencer marketing has a greater impact on consumers than other marketing measures (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005).

1.2 Problem discussion

An internationalization process is defined as a firm’s activities to move beyond domestic markets and enter new international markets (Singh, 2011). Studies show that an e-commerce company’s internationalization is often hasty compared to an ordinary multinational due to the ease of entering the market via the web and consequently influence the consumers (Luo, et al., 2005).

These consumers have more sources of information nowadays due to their access to the internet (Stanton & Paolo 2012). The consumers are more connected, a phenomenon which encourages companies to get out of their traditional marketing strategies due to the difficulty of reaching out to consumers as a result to the persistent competition for consumer attention. The infinite quantity of information available through the high number of new digital media platforms has resulted in consumers becoming less interested in corporate trademarks which are mainly delivered by traditional media (Singh, Veron-Jackson & Cullinane 2008). This is therefore problematic for companies wanting to gain a competitive advantage through their marketing strategies.

Through social media, companies can use word-of-mouth to consumers in an everyday way (Brown & Hayes 2008). Nielsen (2012) states that 92 percent of consumers worldwide trust marketing through word-of-mouth and recommendations more than on traditional forms of advertising from the companies themselves. Social media has therefore become an enormous part of the consumers purchase decisions and companies takes advantage of this. Previous studies have often revealed a high commitment from consumers and the expertise and recommendations of social media profiles such as influencers is highly valued (Sassine, 2017). A recent study emphasized the value of influencers capability to inspire their followers and thus implicitly affect their consumption choices. Inspiration was identified as a factor increasing the credibility of
influencers and compensating for the otherwise negative view that consumers were shown to have (ibid). Although, since influencer marketing is comparatively new, convincing findings are therefore restricted and this is problematic for companies wanting to engage in influencer marketing. It is furthermore problematic thus influencer marketing is a new phenomenon that is still constantly evolving and changing, and it represents a fast-growing area of research (Brown, 2018).

Gillin (2008) states that traditional marketing is still important, even though the traditional ways of marketing are influenced by the viral world in which people live. In order for a young person to feel engaged in the brand, there has to be an emotional link between the consumer and the brand in question (Brown J., 2018). The challenge for the business is to find the right influencer for the brand and to characterize the message. Hence the message is, in many cases being mediated through the influencer’s own social-media channels and this brings a higher credibility towards the brand (Gillin, 2008). Studies show that branding is important when increasing a firm’s performance and brand awareness is a strong factor contributing to a company’s market performance (Homburg, Klarmann, & Schmitt, 2010). Research shows that in order to build a brand credibility and brand awareness the company needs to invest in relationship building with influencers and in order to indirectly engage with the company’s target consumer base (SanMiguel & Sábada, 2018). This is problematic thus the company need to make an analyse of the influencer and his or her ability to influence the followers because the numbers of visitors can be misrepresented, or the followers can be bought. Furthermore, it is important that companies are aware of what the consumers and influencers are posting about their products in order to improve their products and services (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

The subject influencer marketing is of great relevance, since in Sweden alone, about half a billion SEK was spent on influencer marketing-related activities in 2016 (Thor, 2017). For brands and marketers in fashion, there are therefore economic reasons for increasing their interest in the relationship between fashion influencers and followers. A type of influencers can be celebrity endorsers, which refers to famous people who promotes a product. Previous research in the field is relevant as it describes the impacts of famous persons influence over consumers (McCracken , 1989). Within the research areas "celebrity endorsement" and "fandom" there is a certain focus on the follower, but these studies focus on actors, musicians or athletes rather than social media profiles.

1.2. 3 Research gap

For organizations and companies that want to use social media and influencers for marketing purposes, knowledge is required to succeed through these channels (Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi, 2012). As far as influencer marketing is concerned, we see that it is highly relevant for managers to learn more about this and realize the proliferation it can provide. One of the most distinctive approaches that companies can use to reduce company resources are, according to Saravanakumar and SuganthaLakshmi (2012), to turn to social media as a marketing channel. Since influencer
marketing is a new marketing strategy it has only been researched on what impact influencers have on consumers (Sudha & Sheena, 2017) and what kind of influencers are influential and where to find them (SanMiguel & Sâbada, 2018).

Based on the problem discussion above, the research gap has been identified as a lack of research concerning the use of influencer marketing in e-commerce companies to reach international markets. This thesis will therefore investigate why e-commerce companies use influencer marketing and if they use it in order to move to new markets. Based on the theories we identified and the data we collect from companies we aim to fill these gaps with the findings of this thesis.

1.3 Research question

Which are the reasons for using influencer marketing to create brand awareness in international markets for e-commerce companies?

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse e-commerce businesses marketing strategies that mainly focus on influencer marketing. Based on the chosen theories we will analyse the advantages of using influencers as a part of the business brand awareness and to reach international markets.
1.5 Outline

The chapter presents a background regarding our topic followed by a problem discussion, research question and purpose with this thesis. The chapter finishes with an outline figure.

In this chapter relevant literature and theoretical frameworks regarding the subject will be presented.

This chapter presents the choice and motives for the chosen methodology. The choices made are argued for as to why they are considered appropriate for this thesis.

In this chapter, the empirical findings from the conducted interviews with the chosen companies will be presented. We will connect the empirical findings with our own discussion and voice, look at similarities and differences, and discuss this in relation to the theoretical frameworks.

In the final chapter a summarize of main arguments and answer of the research question will be announced. Recommendations and suggestions for further research will, consequently, be presented.

*Figure 1: Own model of outline*
2 The theoretical framework

In this chapter, we will present the theoretical framework, on which the thesis is based. The chapter begins by introducing internationalization as an overarching concept, where entry strategies of e-commerce companies and globalization will be further explained. Consequently, we will discuss international marketing and the importance of word of mouth and entering the world of social media. This will lead us in to celebrity endorsement and this thesis main topic; influencer marketing.

2.1 Internationalization

Internationalization refers to when companies decide to make their operations international by, for example, exporting, establishing sales offices abroad or simply creating possibilities to sell abroad (Johansson & Vahlne, 1977). Internationalization is defined as the propensity of a firm to move beyond domestic markets and enter international markets (Singh N., 2011). Many firms start their international operations when they are still comparatively small and gradually develop their operations abroad. Internationalization is a gradual learning process in which the rate, sequence, and direction of international expansion is a function of a firm’s experience, capability, and evolution (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005). The term international generally refers to either an attitude of the firm towards foreign activities or by carrying out activities abroad. There is a close relationship between attitudes and actual behaviour. The attitudes are the basis for decisions to undertake international ventures and the experiences from international activities influence these attitudes. The assumption of Johansson & Vahlne (1977) is that the firm first develops in the domestic market' and that the internationalization is the consequence of a series of incremental decisions.

The web reduces the risk of barriers, simply because it can minimize the physical international presence by leveraging the web and limiting the company’s direct exposure to country-specific markets risks (Singh N., 2011). One of the quickest and most effective ways to tap into global markets is consequently to influence consumers and enter via the web. E-commerce companies are less physically- and culturally-constrained than traditional businesses (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005). The acceleration of globalization and the growth of emerging economies present significant opportunities for global business expansion. Web globalization requires an interdisciplinary collection of skills from areas such as international business and marketing, advertising, project management, IT and e-commerce, language technology, linguistics and intercultural communications (Singh N., 2011). Nevertheless, major online challenges that companies face in terms of selling their products globally are issues related to international e-commerce capabilities. Examples of these are managing multiple languages, shipping methods transactional ability, localizing, local language consumers support, documentation, legal issues and optimizing international sites. Elimination of intermediaries means that the internet has led to companies being able to sell directly to consumers all over the world. E-commerce companies can therefore use their online presence and capabilities instead of using intermediaries (ibid).
The internationalization process of e-commerce companies is, as above mentioned, rapid in contrary to ordinary multinationals (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005). This is in accordingly to what Singh (2011) states that one of the quickest and most effective ways to tap into global markets is consequently to influence consumers and enter via the web. Firms tend to start internationalization in those markets they can most easily understand, where perceived market uncertainty is low, thus it is easy to predict opportunities. The world has under the two latest decades changed radically thus geographical and cultural boundaries have been drastically lowered due to developed technology (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008). This creates a harder competition but a bigger potential for every company. Research emphasizes the importance of knowledge accumulation (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005). As firms become more familiar with the foreign markets, firms will gradually reach a fairly advanced stage of international involvement evolving from exporting to high forms of international operations. One attempt should be seen as an effort to complement or develop, rather than dispute or challenge, existing theories of internationalization. For traditional multinational companies, their speed of entry is incremental. For e-commerce companies, their speed is likely to be rapid. This proposition arises from the following uniqueness of these compared to traditional multinationals (ibid). An e-commerce is a more exposed yet more flexible system permitting multidirectional flow of products and information through the worldwide internet cloud (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005). In a traditional multinational, channels of transactions and communication are surrounded in physical workplace that is closed or quasi-closed. Compared to a traditional multinational, an e-commerce trusts a more synchronized system to exchange information in a real-time approach allowing rapid responses to the needs of consumers. Knowledge and business transactions accompanied by traditional multinationals located in different countries are limited by physical and cultural boundaries (ibid).

2.2 International Marketing

The emerge of an open world economy, the globalization of the consumer and the expansion of internet access increases the interdependency and interconnections of nation economies across the globe (Lowe & Doole, 2012). Most companies are now selling to, buying from, competing against or/and working with companies all over the globe (Albaum & Duerr, 2011). This has led to that the marketing environment around the world has become more global in many ways and Cherunilam (2010) defines international marketing as marketing in an international competitive environment, whether the market is home or foreign. International marketing is, what the firm does in order to reach over national boundaries and, in a more complex matter, it involves the establishment of manufacturing and processing facilities on other markets and coordinating marketing strategies across the globe (Lowe & Doole, 2012). As goods, services, technologies and ideas move more easily across national boundaries small and medium-sized companies, as well as giant multinationals, have increased opportunities to enter foreign markets (Albaum & Duerr, 2011). Even an individual with a sufficiently good product, service or idea can now find consumers abroad if he or she understands international marketing.
Small domestic businesses with a well-designed web page have potential to exploit new opportunities and receive orders from consumers abroad. Thus, how international marketing is defined and interpreted depends on the level of involvement of the company in the international marketplace (ibid). It can involve export marketing hence as the firm markets its services or goods across national boundaries. International marketing including activities, interests or operations in more than one country where the goods normally will be sold and lastly global marketing where the entire organization focuses on the selection of global opportunities and investigates different markets that provides competitive advantage (Lowe & Doole, 2012).

There are some reasons why a company wants to go international and these are the technological advances and lowered costs in communication (Albaum & Duerr, 2011). This can include the development of internet and e-commerce companies that possesses sophisticated and diverse software that support a wide variety of the business functions. A firm which plans to go international has to make a series of strategic decisions such as market selection decisions, entry and operating decisions and marketing mix decisions (Cherunilam, 2010). This is because the foreign market is characterized by a number of uncontrollable variables. New communication network such as social media sites have enabled the gathering of information from consumers which provides new opportunities for businesses to identify their target consumers. This is done by collecting information about consumer preferences, demands and suggestions as well as advertising directly to the consumer. Furthermore, the development of logistics and supply management provides more opportunities for businesses thus moving goods around the world is done with increasingly efficiency and with lower costs. The increased importance of innovations and advances in technologies, strategies and business models that spreads more rapidly makes companies realize the advantage of being ahead. The danger of failing to adjust to new conditions have increased greatly (ibid). Increased incomes due an increasingly diverse population in some markets that provides new and segmented markets provides additional opportunities for companies. These niched markets that emerges creates a need to respond to the increasing diversity in demand. The lowering of different barriers such as governmental and trade barriers results in gives companies the opportunity to participate in different market easier. Lastly the increased competition for companies is another reason for why a company want to go international and why they will keep developing (Albaum & Duerr, 2011).

The success of international marketing depends to a large extent on the appropriateness of the marketing mix (Cherunilam, 2010). The elements of the marketing mix; product, promotion, price and psychical distribution should be suitably designed so that they may be adapted to the characteristics of the overseas market. Furthermore communication plays a vast part of international marketing activities thus it is not enough to only make a product or service available, the company needs to provide information to the consumer that he or she needs in order to make an purchase decision (Albaum & Duerr, 2011). Due to the complex marketing environment the promotion in international marketing is often compound and it is important to develop an effective international marketing communication (Cherunilam, 2010). This can be done through identifying the target
audience thus for the same product the target audience may vary in different countries. Determining the communication objectives is a mean to effective international marketing, and this is decided dependently on where the product is in the product life cycle. Determining the message is crucial, thus different markets with different environments calls for different messages to be appropriate for each market. Making a decision concerning the budget is an important but difficult task that needs to be done (ibid).

According to Lowe and Doole (2012) the understanding of the economic environment and the developments are important for the international marketer in order to understand how they impose on the marketing strategy. The economic development of a market influences the lines of business and method by which a business can be carried out in a market (Albaum & Duerr, 2011). The social and cultural environment including religion, language, customs, traditions and beliefs, tastes and preferences, social satisfaction, social institutions, buying and consumption habits are additionally important factors for companies to consider when performing international marketing (Cherunilam, 2010). One common reason for failure by companies in foreign markets is the failure to understand the cultural environment of the new market and as a result fail to formulate an appropriate business strategy. The demographic environment including factors such as size of population, population growth rates, age composition, family size, nature of the family, income levels have a significant implication for businesses. These are factor that can indicate the purchase power within the foreign market. Lastly Cherunilam (2010) mention the technological environment which refers to the type of technology in use, the level of the technological developments, the speed with which new technologies are adopted and diffused, the technology policy are important factors to consider. As mentioned the technological advances are one of the reasons why international businesses will keep develop thus the internet provides major opportunities (Albaum & Duerr, 2011).

2.2.1 The role of internet in international marketing

The Internet has revolutionized international marketing practices (Lowe & Doole, 2012). This has resulted in a vast emerge of e-companies due to the increased speed and lowered costs (Albaum & Duerr, 2011). Technology is a major driving force both in international marketing and in the move towards a more global marketplace (Lowe & Doole, 2012). The impact of technological advances can be seen in all aspects of the marketing process. The abilities to gather data on markets, management control capabilities and the practicalities of carrying out the business function internationally have been revolutionized in recent years with the advances in digital communications. Internet has meant increased opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises and rapid internationalization for many. It has enabled them to substantially decrease the costs of reaching international consumers, reduce global advertising costs and made it easier for small niche products to find a critical mass of consumers (ibid). Because of the low entry costs of the Internet it has permitted firms with low capital resources to become global marketers, in some cases overnight (Lowe & Doole, 2012). The average person is exposed to about 200 to 1000 sales communications a day (Silverman G., 2001). Every day people
are exposed to television commercials, print ads, drive time radio, billboards on buses, subways, road and buildings, telemarketers, direct mail, sales people, internet banners, brochures, matchbook covers, airplane streamers and blimps (ibid).

Internet has led to an explosion of information to consumers, giving them the potential to source products from the cheapest supplier (Lowe & Doole, 2012). The Internet, by connecting end-users and producers directly, has reduced the importance of traditional intermediaries in international marketing as more companies have improved the online capability to deal direct with their consumers, particularly in B2B marketing (ibid). Thus, it is the information age, and consumers are inundated with overwhelming quantities of information and consumers do not have time to investigate and deliberate. That is why traditional advertising is on the decline (Hickman, 2017). It has become the efficient new platform for conducting worldwide market research and gaining feedback from consumers. Thus, the Internet produces a fundamentally different environment for international marketing and requires a radically different strategic approach affecting all aspects of the marketing process (Lowe & Doole, 2012).

Across the globe, the internet means different things to different people, where the internet can easier gather information as a unit of communication for people (Krishnamurthy & Singh, 2005). The international market strategy online is different to the domestic thus different market have different environments and cultures (Cherunilam, 2010). Cultural factors have been shown to have a significant impact on how internet user’s browse, shop and even influence their expectations from a particular web site. Research has shown that culturally adapted web content leads to better usability, more favourable attitude toward the site and higher purchase intentions. Access to information technologies is varied and a digital divide exists across nations and within nations. Countries with only a low penetration level of the internet/web are likely to not have the critical mass to sustain a local e-commerce operator or internet service provider (ibid). The potential for marketing on social media and the Internet is limited in such environments. Two users situated in different corners of the globe may be accessing the same page using entirely different technologies and computing environments. As international recognition of the internet and web increases, the scope of international marketing on the internet now transitions from possibility to reality. Regarding the combination of marketing and internationalization the concept of international marketing is interesting, this involves the firm in making one or more marketing mix decisions across national boundaries (Lowe & Doole, 2012). Since websites can be accessed cross country lines, this internet marketing actors exert influence in the country of their origin and across borders (Krishnamurthy & Singh, 2005). Thus, a company needs to establish an online presence. Companies now routinely create country-level sites to deepen their presence within a country.

2.2.2 The role of social media on international marketing

Hearn et al. (2009) state that originally corporations used social media sites in order to interact with existing consumers, maintain a corporate image, improve internal
communication and reach out to new markets and audiences. However, the trend is a shift from business-to-consumer communication towards consumer-to-consumer communication where the consumers produce their own content and industries are starting to explore how to take advantage of this. In this communication world, social medias are a natural extension. Consumer-generated media are considered being one of the greatest informative tools for marketing and it results in word-of-mouth communication, and a buzz about the brand (PapaSolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). This makes social media a powerful tool to use in an integrated marketing communication campaign thus consumers around the globe demonstrate a preference toward the use of social media in creating messages regarding brands and corporations and exchanges these through blogs, video sharing, forums and social networks. The company’s consumers and partners have become the new marketers who drive the conversation about company’s brands (Brown E. , 2012). Social media provide an unparalleled platform for consumers to publish their personal evaluations of purchased products and thus facilitate word-of-mouth communication (Cherunilam, 2010). However, digital communication, via online consumer review sites, has enabled an immediate information flow to a wider audience as a single message can affect all site visitors (Chen, Fay, & Wang, 2011). With the increasing use of emerging technologies such as the mobile web, consumers have started to participate in other different social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook). The evolving pattern between marketing variables and consumer online-posting behaviours observed in the last decade can shed important insights for social-media marketing (ibid).

According to Brown (2012) people need to connect with each other and the need to interact virtually has driven the massive explosion of platforms designed to help people connect and communicate. People have always liked to live in groups and it is nothing new that people connect with each other over common interests and they are still striving to connect in the same social groups and achieve the same personal goals but now they want to do it online. This shift in how people communicate has the ability to exceed geographical, demographical and political boundaries (ibid). Weber (2009) states that social medias are being used by people to communicate with like-minded, to learn about products and services, to shop more efficiently and to connect with distant relatives and friends around the world. He continues with stating that marketers are moving from being broadcasters to aggregators in the sense that the marketer does not fully control the message that is being sent out. Companies are finding new ways to interact with their consumers and with the help of social media they can gain long-term relationships with their consumers (PapaSolomou & Melanthiou, 2012). The long-term success of promotional campaigns and the integration of marketing communications are affected by the effective use of information and communication technologies including the use of internet. This internet implementation in the marketing process offers an instant international reach (ibid).

2.2.3 The role of E-commerce on international marketing

An increasing number of small and medium sized enterprises use e-commerce worldwide at different levels of their business (Ramanathan, Ramanathan, & Hsiao, 2011). Since e-
commerce provides an innovative way of using available resources efficiently, it may affect different sub-functions of a firm differently. Thus, innovative ways in which e-commerce is implemented in a firm will help improve its overall business performance. Changes in technology and society and the role of the online environment is vitally important for e-commerce businesses when it comes to the marketing activities (Guercini, et al., 2018). Typical areas in which the marketing activities of a firm can be improved using investments in electronic technologies are online advertising, consumer’s awareness and brand recognition (ibid). These marketing impacts are generally based on several factors and may not be specifically attributable to e-commerce impacts. For example, design of a website or an online advertisement require more initial investments but less follow-up investments in contrast to order processing capabilities that may require investments at regular intervals (ibid). The power of the internet has generally helped both small firms and big firms alike in terms of online advertising, and there need not be a specific advantage for larger firm in this aspect. Insofar as consumer’s awareness and brand recognition are results of online advertising (Ramanathan, Ramanathan, & Hsiao, 2011).

2.3 Brand awareness in international markets

Branding can be traced back to ancient Egypt where brick makers placed symbols on their bricks to identify their products, brand names however occurred later in the sixteenth century when whiskey distillers had wooden barrels with the name of the producer burned in to the wood (Farquhar, 1989). A brand can be defined as a name, term, sign, symbol, design or a combination of them which has the intention to identify the goods and service of the seller in order to differentiate them from competitors (Keller K. , 1993). The brands purpose is to enhance the value of the product beyond its functional purpose and this is further defined as brand equity (Farquhar, 1989). Brand equity gives added value to the product and from the firm’s perspective it can be measured by the incremental cash flow from association the brand with the product. On the other hand, brand equity from a consumer’s perspective is reflected by the increase in attitude strength for a product using the brand (ibid).

Traditionally, a brand has been understood predominantly as an identifier of goods and services, that permitted the company to separate its products or services from competitors (Keller K. L., 2013). In a competitive world, it has become essential for brands to stand out from their competitors. Companies need to practice a marketing strategy or a combination of some strategies to stand out from competitors. This could be from good content, reach, consumer service or low prices. It can be even asked if companies are capable to brand something through paid marketing techniques (Kapferer, 2008).

Keller (1993) defines consumer-based brand equity as the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand. The brand can have positive or negative consumer-based brand equity based on how the consumer respond to an element in the marketing mix for the brand compared than they do to the same marketing mix element when it is attributed in a another way (Keller K. , 1993). The
content and structure of brand knowledge is important because they influence what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand and what response there is to the marketing activity for that brand. The dimension that distinguish brand knowledge and affect the consumer response are the awareness of the brand and the favourability, strength and uniqueness of the brand association in the consumer’s memory (ibid).

According to Keller (1993) brand knowledge is defined in two components, brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness is related to brand recall and recognition performance by consumers and brand image is referring to a set of associations linked to the brand that consumers have in their memories. Rossiter and Percy (1987) state that brand awareness is related to the strengths of the brand trace in memory and it is reflected by the consumer’s ability to identify the brand during diverse conditions. To be more specific, brand awareness relates to the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which is does.

Macdonald and Sharp (2000) argues that brand awareness is an important choice tactic for consumers, whether they are facing a familiar or repeat choice task. Additionally, they state that some consumers are enticed to break their habits using an awareness heuristic many show a tendency to return to this habit. According to Homburg et al (2010) the branding is important for increasing a firm’s performance and brand awareness and market performance has a strong connection with each other. A distinctive brand is one of the most effective means for a business to distinguish themselves from their competitors and often it is more beneficial for a business to focus on one strong brand rather than many sub-brands (London, 2003). Creating and maintaining a strong brand is a continuous process and it becomes worth what it is spent on both for promotion and protection.

Word-of-mouth is an unpaid form of promotion, in which consumers tell other consumers about brands, products or services (Goehring, 2016). Electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), therefore, refers to consumer-based brand or product promotion within digital channels. This has direct relationship with brand awareness and it has become one of the most powerful marketing tools. Additionally, this is because people have greater trust towards brands and companies that are recommended by friends and family, 84 percent of global consumers believe that WOM is the most trustworthy source of product recommendation. Furthermore, 77 percent of consumers are more willing to buy a new product when they learn about if from family or friends.

Electronic WOM is associated to the number of new members who subsequently join brand sites (Bailey, 2014). Therefore, encouraging WOM may be beneficial for a brand. One possibility is to create a competition, a reward system or offer some sort of incentives that will be compelling to new consumers. Consumers might need a reason to share information, and having incentives attached to a campaign may increase the feeling of sharing something valuable (Bailey, 2014).
However, increasing the number of followers by offering incentives does not necessarily affect engagement positively, as it may lead increasing the number of followers that are not truly interested in a brand. Additionally, it needs to be remembered that not all word-of-mouth is positive. Negative word-of-mouth may increase negative brand awareness. Therefore, social media actions, content and brand communication should be promptly considered to avoid mistakes that may hurt brand image (Bailey, 2014).

2.4 Social media

Social media can be defined as a tool that allows anybody to communicate with everybody and create consumer-generated content (Sterne, 2010). Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social media as web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public/semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. They continue by stating that what makes social network sites unique is that it enables users to articulate and display their social networks. The key concept behind social media is to share content with those that the users identify as friends or followers that has chosen to view this content or information (Agresta, Bough, & Miletsky, 2010). Social media is commonly understood as media that foster social interaction, collaboration, sharing and participation (Fuchs & Sandoval, 2014). Social media allow people to communicate to the rest of the world in a new way than before. Previously, people used phones that represented one-to-one communication and now the internet provides many-to-many communication (Sterne, 2010). The difference between social media and other communications channels is that on the social media channel more people can create the content (Agresta, Bough, & Miletsky, 2010).

According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) the trend towards social media can be seen as an evolution back to the internet’s roots, hence it re-transforms the World Wide Web to what it was intended for when created: a platform to facilitate information exchange between users. Boyd and Ellison (2008) state that the cultures that emerge around social network sites are varied. Thus some sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks while others help strangers connect based on shared interest, political views or activities. Some sites attract a diverse audience while other attract individuals based on common language or shared racial, sexual, religious or nationality-based identities. Sites provide platforms for new information and communication tools such as mobile connectivity, blogging and photo/video-sharing (ibid).

Different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and similar have gained astronomical numbers of users in less than 10 years (Noor Al-Deen & Allen Hendricks, 2012). This has had the consequence that social media has become an integral part of the contemporary classroom, a part of advertising and public relations industries, a part of political campaigning and numerous other aspects of our daily existence. Many business executives have social media on their agenda when it comes to the business marketing strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). According to Evans (2012) There are
some characteristics that separate social media from traditional medias such as newspapers, television, books and radio. These are that social media changes constantly, social media involves a number of different social channels and social media is participative, which means that the audience is assumed to contribute to the creative process and/or generate content (Evans, 2012).

2.4.1 Marketing on social media

From a marketing point of view this can be both positive and negative for companies conduct their marketing on social medias (Evans, 2012). Historically companies have been able to control the information available about them through strategically placed press announcements and public relations managers (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). However, if the company learns how to influence the crown effectively a significant and defensible market position can be gained based on social acceptance (Evans, 2012). The social medias can be used by the company in order to build the business with the help of a community of supporters. In order to get this positive effect, the company needs to listen to the crowd. This can be done by collecting information from the consumers that is made possible by the social medias (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). This information can be used in order to modify and improve what the company is offering and through that the company is influencing the online conversation (Evans, 2012).

When a company wants to perform marketing activities on social media platforms there are five points to take in consideration according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). The first is to choose social media platform carefully, thus there are endless social media applications to choose from and new ones are appearing daily. Being active on every single one is not possible and therefore there is a need to identify which platforms where the company’s target audience is active on. Secondly the company needs to choose whether to pick an application or create their own. In some cases, it might be beneficial to exist on established social media platforms and from that benefit from its popularity and user base. However, there might be situations where the right platform is not available yet, for example Fujifilm launched their own social media platform with the purpose to build a community of photo enthusiasts. Thirdly, according to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), it is important to ensure activity alignment. This refers to when existing on various social media platforms it is crucial for the company to ensure that the activities on these platforms are aligned with each other. One of the goals with existing on social media is to reduce uncertainty and therefore mixed messages across different channels is needed to be avoided. Fourth, constructing a media plan integration is important. Fifth and lastly, making sure that everyone has access to the social media platforms.

When performing these activities, the company’s presence on social media platform can result in positive effects on the purchase decision of the consumer (Evans, 2012). This can be explained by the classic purchase funnel that starts from awareness continues to consideration and end in purchase. According to Evans (2012) social media platforms is the primary awareness tool for companies and their brands. Tiago and Verissimo (2014)
argues that efforts from companies engaging in marketing on social medias should lead to increased consumer engagement and stronger relationships with consumers. Therefore, they consider the web as being a useful tool for marketers when creating a strong brand and gaining competitive advantages.

2.5 Influencer marketing

Influencers are described as people who have built a sizeable social network of people following them (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2016). They allow their followers to engage in private life in the form of everyday events, experiences and personal views through blog posts, vlogging, and short-term content on channels such as Instagram, Snapchat, etc. Influencers distinguish themselves from common known persons in such a way that they are considered available, trustworthy, intimate and interactively interacting with their followers, making its posts highly related to the followers (ibid).

Katz and Lazard (2006) detected the presence of opinion leaders in their research, individuals who are capable of influencing the behaviour, opinions and attitudes of their followers in an almost invisible and unconscious leadership in a person-to-person, daily, intimate and informal manner. Influence can be defined as a force that is created by one person and that causes a reaction in or by another (Brown & Fiorena, 2013). The research of SanMiguel and Sábada (2018) adds that leadership influence is based on know-how and relationships of trust that are established. The power of word-of-mouth has been understood by marketers since these kinds of messages are seen as more credible by the public and are therefore likely to be acted upon (Brown & Fiorena, 2013). These kinds of recommendations are seen as more authentic compared to the traditional marketing methods that are created by savvy marketers (ibid).

When brands use influencers as a marketing campaign to reach and create an image at the influencers base of followers, it is called influencer marketing (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2016). According to Sudha and Sheena (2017) influencers can be journalists, celebrities, bloggers, magazines and brand advocates whom impact consumers purchasing decision based on their personal opinion, ability and position and they are often considered being experts in the field by the consumers. They continue by defining influencer marketing as a process where the company identifies individuals who have an influence over a specific target audience in order to be part of a brands campaign towards increased reach, sales or engagement. According to Brown and Fiorena (2013) influence marketing is the orientation of marketing tactics around individuals that are identified as having influence over other individuals. It is a way to expand to a new audience and gain them into being loyal consumers through trust and authenticity (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Katz and Lazard (2006) state that some individuals serve as personal transmitters for others and through them messages from the mass media are able to reach otherwise unexposed people. Furthermore, they continue with stating that when a mass media influence-attempt coincides with an interpersonal communication this influence has a greater chance of success.
Sudha and Sheena (2017) have divided influencers into four different categories and they are;

- Traditional influencers - individuals in conventional PR agencies and celebrity figures in a specific area of subject expertise,
- Emerging digital influencers - these are bloggers and individuals that have recognized a large audience following and drive through leadership in a specific space,
- Influencers by connection - individuals that have hundreds of Facebook friends and/or Twitter followers,
- Influencers by topic - individuals that are opinion leaders for certain topics.

These different types of influencers have diverse social media platforms that they are active on and these are fashion blogs, video platforms such as YouTube and apps such as Instagram, Pinterest or Tumblr. It is on these platforms that the influencers build the relationship of trust that is needed for influencing consumers. According to Brown and Fiorina (2013) some key elements in any decision-making process is the emotional aspect of the brand message and the timing when sharing with the recipient. For a generation that lives in a fast-paced world, convenience and quickness is the key to success (Sudha & Sheena, 2017).

Influencer Marketing is about influencing a group of people within one's social networking network, buying a company's products or services (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). Companies pay influencers in return for displaying the products on their channels. Through influencing social media marketing, companies can keep track of what consumers think and think about the company and the products as well as analyse the content (Evans, 2012).

As marketing on social media has become more and more popular, surveys have been conducted in response to how followers perceive sponsored posts (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014). The fact that influencers are paid, or receive discounted products as compensation for the companies, creates unaffected attitudes by the followers towards the sponsored posts. Attitudes are not affected even if reports that it is a sponsored post. This may have to do with the followers feeling confident in influencer if the influencer is honest and explains that the post is a collaboration. Consumers are addicted and affected by social media recommendations before they finish a purchase. They believe that the recommendations of other users on social media are positive (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014).

2.5.1 Celebrity endorsement

According to McCracken (1989) a celebrity endorser is an individual who enjoys public recognition and uses this recognition on behalf of a product by appearing with it in an advertisement. Celebrity endorsement has the purpose to influence consumers’ feelings and attitude towards advertisement and a brand which can increase the purchase intention and consequently increase sales of the brand. Spry et al. (2011) defines celebrity
endorsement as something that influences advertising effectiveness, brand recognition, brand recall, purchase intentions and purchase behaviour. Celebrity endorsements can serve a valuable role in developing brand equity and through that brand awareness. Furthermore, it can enchant a brand's competitive rivalry and it will be more effective when it is integrated across the elements of the marketing mix (Till, 1998).

A celebrity endorser should be an individual who is supposed to be credible based on attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness and this credibility of the endorser will subsequently be transferred to the brand (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). Local celebrities that mainly operate on the local market can be successful in influencing brand equity for selected global brands and this can be used by firms wanting to gain entry to new national markets as a marketing strategy to connect with new consumers and boosting their brand. Choi and Rifon’s (2012) research suggests that there is a need for a perceived fit between the celebrity and the promoted product for effectiveness in the advertising and that similarity between the consumers’ ideal self-image and the celebrity image adds explanatory power to the effects of celebrity endorsement. When a consumer observes a celebrity as possessing an image close to his or her ideal-image, this consumer is likely to rate the ad more favourable and increase purchase intentions (ibid).

2.6 Word of Mouth

Modern-day marketing is about creating illusions about products, variously called product image, positioning, brand identity and other buzzwords (Silverman G., 2001). According to Silverman (2001) the illusion is that marketing elements are selling companies products. However, the reality is that people are buying, often not necessarily in response to the company, but in response to what they hear from other independent sources. People gather information from marketing materials, including salespeople and advertising, resulting in a discussion about the product with their friends. They buy in response to what other people say about the product. This is defined as word-of-mouth and refers to the informal communication between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services (Anderson, 1998). Dichter (1966) states that when a consumer believes that an ad is a sales tool instead of information or guidance he/she feels threatened and rejects the advertising claim. However, when the consumer experience that the ad speaks to him as a friend or unbiased authority, creating the atmosphere of word-of-mouth, the consumer will more likely accept the recommendation. If the one who recommends the product or service is interested in him and his wellbeing and this recommender's experience and knowledge with the product or service are convincing the consumer is more likely to accept the recommendation (ibid).

The messages from word-of-mouth communication are seen as more credible and authentic by the public (Brown & Fiorena, 2013). Most marketers have only recently realized that getting the consumers to sell their products is the best way to increase sales (Silverman G., 2001). Dichter (1966) states that the power of the word of mouth is dependent on the speakers’ motivation, hence if he or she gets something out of speaking out of the product or service. Dichter (1966) continues by dividing the motivation to talk
about a product or service into four categories dependent on the level of involvement from the speaker. First is the product-involvement which refers to that the experience with the product can only be relieved by recommending it. Secondly is the self-involvement which serves as a means through the speaker gratifies certain emotional needs. Thirdly is the other-involvement which refers to as the recommendations of the product serves as a gift to the other person as it is a thoughtful recommendation of love or friendship. Lastly is the message-involvement that refers to recommendations that is mainly stimulated by how the product or service is presented in advertisement or commercials, it is not necessarily based on the speaker’s experience with the product.

Dichter (1966) continues by dividing motivation of listening in to categories, hence the motivation of the listener that affects how the listener is influenced by the recommendation. Dichter (1966) calls it different influential groups and they are; commercial authorities which refers to persons who are professional experts or sales persons that due to their training or work appear to have a deeper knowledge about the product. Celebrities are another influential group that included movie, TV, radio and theatre personalities who are consider having authority. The third influential group is connoisseurs that includes personalities that are perceived as having a close and authentic, however not professional, contact with the product. He or she is a consumer and is perceived by the listener as someone alike himself only with more special product knowledge. Shares of interest is another influential group and it refers to speakers that have something in common with the listeners, are in the same stage in life or have similar interest or taste. The fifth group according to Dichter (1966) is intimates, this group includes the influence of a relative or someone that the listener has a close relationship with. This is not necessarily expressed by words but by the speakers’ action, for example when a mother uses a certain brand to wash the house this works as a recommendation or advice for the children. People of goodwill is referring to when the listener sees the speaker as a person who is genuinely interested in his or her well-being. The last group is bearers of tangible evidence which includes situations where the listener is influenced by the speakers’ demonstration of the product.

The world of marketing revolves around word of mouth, not around sales and advertising, since word of mouth is able to reach more people faster and provides more credibility towards the product or service (Silverman G., 2001). Getting people to talk about the product, favourable, to the right people in the right way is important thus according to Dichter (1966) traditional advertising cannot sell against personal influence. This results in that individuals influence people to buy the products in the way they make reviews, videos or try out products and share their thoughts (ibid).
2.7 Conceptual framework

The literature review has shown that internationalization of e-commerce companies is rapid in contrary to ordinary multinationals. This is because e-commerce’s is more flexible due to their presence on the Internet. The results are that the companies are less physically and culturally restrained than traditional businesses. During the process of internationalization international marketing is an important factor when reaching new consumers. To be able to reach these new consumers awareness of the brand is necessary. The internet and social media expansion has increased the interconnection between people across the whole world which creates a two-way communication between the company and the consumer (Lowe & Doole, 2012). This can be performed on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. On these platforms different profiles acts as influencers which has the power to influence their followers to purchase companies’ products. This has been done for a long time by companies collaborating with celebrities however today it is done on social media instead on the Red Carpet. These influencers create word-of-mouth that generates awareness towards the company.
3 Methodology

In the following chapter, we will explain the methodological framework that has been used in order to conduct the thesis. The methods that have been used and why these methods were considered to be suitable for this study will be presented. The chapter will begin by presenting the chosen research approach and why this approach was chosen. Thereafter, we will explain the selected research methods and the types of data that were collected, followed by which techniques that were used in order to collect the data. After a discussion of ethical considerations, a presentation of the operationalization will conclude this chapter.

3.1 Choice of subject

The choice of subject can be explained by the relevance of the topic and an interest from the writers. The writers of this thesis are exposed on a daily basis to Influencer marketing and have noticed the rapid development of the phenomenon. One of the writers of this thesis has experience from working with this marketing strategy and from that has useful insight on how companies collaborate with influencers. Both writers have useful contacts that can help with getting a bigger understanding on the subject and how it can be used in order to reach new markets. The broad potential and the extended area of use have gained bigger attention due to the continuing process of globalisation and digitalisation. Therefore, the writers find the subject worth researching since it is highly relevant and still an interesting area.

3.2 Deductive approach

The relationship between the theory and the empirical data is explained by the research approach and it can be divided into two different categories; these are the inductive and the deductive approaches (Ghauri & Groenhaug, 2010). The inductive research originates from empirical data and takes its start from observations and has a purpose of finding a general truth from the observations. The deductive research originates from logic and starts from a general truth, applies it to a single case trying to avoid generalizations (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). There is a third way of conducting research, the abductive approach, which combines the inductive approach and the deductive approach. When using this, the researcher uses the two different approaches back and forth throughout the study and this can be said to be the most common approach when performing a qualitative study. The abductive approach starts from an empirical basis, similar as induction, however it does not reject theoretical presumptions and that makes it closer to the deductive approach (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

A deductive approach in a study is often related with less risk since conclusions that are drawn from the research approach are based on a logical process based on a general set of known premises (Ghauri & Groenhaug, 2010). When using a deductive approach, the researchers make assumptions that originate from theories, earlier research or the
researchers own perception of the surroundings. Theories and literature are studied explained in order to be used as platforms for collecting data, and from that the empirical data is being analysed and discussed together with the theoretical framework. When using the deductive research approach, it is required that the theoretical framework is operationalized in order to demonstrate how it can be empirically tested (Merton, 1967). We primarily worked from a deductive approach by writing the theoretical framework before the empirical collection. We structured the interview guide based on our written theory and designed questions after this.

Considering that the purpose of this thesis derives from a theoretical framework a deductive approach is a suitable approach for this thesis. Furthermore, the area of research is relatively unexplored and therefore the thesis derives from the theoretical framework already established. The aim is to use a conceptual framework based on this theoretical framework and connect it with the empirical data that is gathered, and this is, according to Ghauri and Gronhaug (2010), how a deductive approach is to be performed. As mentioned by the authors the deductive approach has a reduces risk of an incorrect conclusion, this is another argument why we have chosen this approach for our thesis.

3.3 Qualitative research

There are two distinctive ways how to carry out a research process; one has a more scientific nature while the other is reflective or experiential in nature (Davies, 2007). The terms qualitative and quantitative are used in business and management research to differentiate both data collection techniques and data analysis procedures (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Quantitative is mainly referring to any data collection technique, such as questionnaire, or data analysis procedure, such as graphs, that generates numerical data. Qualitative is referring to any data collection technique, such as interviews or focus groups, or data procedure that generates non-numerical data. According to Bryman and Bell (2011) the quantitative research contains a deductive approach on the relationship between theory and practical research where the focus is mostly on testing of the theory. They continue by stating that the qualitative research mainly has an inductive approach on the relationship between theory and research where the focus is mostly on generating theories. According to Davies (2007) when doing a quantitative research, the purpose of the research is to discover answers to questions through the application of scientific procedures. In contrast, a qualitative research locates the observer in the world (ibid).

In this thesis, a qualitative method is taken, since it is conducted as a small-scale study where data is collected from interviews with selected companies. As the purpose is to find out why e-commerce companies work with influencer marketing there is not a need for doing questionnaires in order to get an understanding of what consumers perceive is on the subject. Furthermore, in a quantitative research there is no hypothesis. Instead the theory works as a direction of interest from where the researchers collect their data. According by Bryman and Bell (2011) the qualitative approach is conducted by having a starting point from the theoretical framework. Considering our starting point was in the
theories we gathered information and chose relevant companies to interview a qualitative research was suitable for us.

According to Davies (2007), small sample interviews enable the researcher to reach conclusions that are specific to the topic and gives an explanatory depth to the subject. This is one further reason why this thesis will be conducted by using a qualitative method. By doing the interviews with the companies that are chosen for the reason that they work and have experience in working with influencer marketing, the thesis will gain a conclusion that is highly relevant to the question. In order to answer our research question there was not a need to make a field study or survey since we consider these methods not providing useful information.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of conducting a qualitative research (Denscombe, 2016). Denscombe (2016) argues that one of these disadvantages naturally concerns the issue of data being less representative compared to quantitative research. As the findings of a qualitative research often derive from a small number of interviews, the generalizability of this method can thus be questioned. However, Yin (2009) mentions two different kinds of generalization: analytical and statistical generalization. Of these, only analytical generalization is considered to be suitable when conducting a qualitative research as it allows generalizations to be derived from a smaller number of data collection units, whilst statistical generalization does not (Yin R. , 2014). The analytical generalization can help a researcher to acquire deeper understanding of particular concepts, which consequently results in that this thesis derives its generalizations from an analytical ground (ibid). The aim of these generalizations is to provide further knowledge and understanding about the choice of using influencer marketing to reach international consumers and markets.

3.4 Data Collection

In order to move on in the research process, there is a need to create an overall picture of the problem area in the beginning of the process (Christensen , Engdahl, Grääs, & Haglund, 2010). Collection of data can be done through interviews, observations and questionnaires or be obtained from previous research, government publications, census registers or similar. These different approaches give different sorts of data, and it is often divided into two categories, these are primary and secondary data (Kumar, 2014). Secondary data is data which is already composed by previous research with other purposes. Secondary data develops knowledge about the topic area and provides advantages when it comes to specifying the problem formulation and purpose with the research. Primary data is collected by the researcher through respondents with knowledge and experience of the topic that is researched (Ghauri & Groenhaug , 2010). This kind of collection is made by conducting interviews or focus groups.

Ghauri & Groenhaug (2010) states that primary data is considered to provide more relevant information regarding a specific research problem, which is why we have decided to establish our research findings based on primary data. Christensen et al. (2010)
points out that primary data is a complement to secondary data and should be applied in cases where secondary data is insufficient. In these circumstances, the researchers themselves have to conduct investigations to find out their question (ibid). Thus, the data one collects collectively are called primary data, meaning in our case the four interviews.

### 3.4.1 Selection of companies

In order to gather the empirical data for this thesis four companies have been selected for interviews. In order for them to give the right insights on the subject the following selection criteria have been applied:

- The companies must be e-commerce companies
- The companies must have made collaborations with influencers in their marketing
- The companies must have international activities

This type of selection is called purposive sampling (Denscombe, 2016). Sampling is traditionally divided into probability and non-probability sampling (Merriam, 2016). Probability sampling is related to random sampling that allows the researcher to draw statistical generalizations of a sample and therefore it is argued that it is not an appropriate strategy when doing a qualitative research. Purposive sampling is a part of non-probability sampling and it assumes that the researcher seeks to discover, understand and increase insights in a certain area (Denscombe, 2016). It allows the researcher to consciously select the samples to be used in the study. This is therefore considered to be the appropriate sampling method when gaining insights in why e-commerce companies use influencer marketing.

Based on the criteria that have been established these four companies and respondents were selected in order to collect the empirical data from:

**Corlin Eyewear**

Corlin Eyewear is an e-commerce company that focuses on luxury designed eyewear that have a reasonable price (Eyewear, 2018). The company was founded in Kalmar, Sweden, in 2017 and they can be seen in social medias with their collaborations with influencers, both Swedish and from other countries. The company provides shipping of their products all over the world.

**Twistshake**

Twistshake is an e-commerce company with child-care products such as baby bottles, tableware and pacifiers amongst other things (Twistshake, 2018). The company was founded in 2011 in Sweden by Vienar Roaks. On Twistshake’s webpage pictures from social media all over the world can be seen exposing the different products.

**Jollyroom**

Jollyroom is an e-commerce company that provides products for children from ages 0-12, babies and for pregnant women (Jollyroom;, 2018). The company was founded in
2010 and can be found in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. The company has 300 employees and has over 1 million registered consumers. The company can be found on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and LinkedIn and can be seen through their collaborations with influencers.

**Ellos**

Ellos is an e-commerce company based in Borås, Sweden, that offers products for the home and clothing (Ellos, 2018). Ellos is a part of the Ellos-group and has about 700 employees spread around the Nordic region. The group has over 1.5 million active consumers and became an e-commerce business in 2017. Ellos has a physical store in Stockholm. Ellos can be seen on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Pinterest and from their collaborations with influencers.

### 3.4.2 Primary data

The number of interviews being conducted in this thesis is four and they are designed according to the semi structural way in which the respondent's answer was recorded. By recording the answers given by the interviewee a transcription of the interview could be done. According to Harboe (2013) this eases the process of interpreting the results. Before conducting the interviews with the chosen companies, a test interview was made, where the answers were noted, which showed that it was possible to then analyse, structure and categorize these. The notes and analyses were placed on purpose, through research questions and the theoretical reference framework, to measure relevance and have subsequently served as a tool and have been able to list the central and comprehensive themes in the research.

Conducting interviews is an approach of gathering primary data which captures the responses from a person and their perception of reality (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Interviews are commonly utilized in qualitative studies. Moreover, these can be conducted in several ways, such as one-on-one between the interviewer and respondent, and between interviewer and a group (Bryman, 2011). Researchers can conduct the interview face-to-face, via telephone, or with the use of internet-aided programs such as Skype. Benefits of face-to-face compared to telephone interviews are that it might be easier to establish trust between the interviewer and interviewee, and that the interviewer can play on the emotional expression of the interviewee (ibid). In this research, we have chosen to collect our primary data by conducting both face-to-face and telephone interviews. The reason for this is mainly due to accessibility of firms that was willing to be interviewed. The choice of e-commerce companies is spread out throughout Sweden and one of the respondents is situated in Chicago, USA therefore telephone interviews provided an easy access to firms situated in different parts of the world.

Collecting the primary data through interviews can provide an understanding of how the phenomenon is experienced from companies working with it (Bryman, 2011). Therefore, we have chosen to use primary data as an important source of information when gathering
our empirical findings, due to the detailed and tailored data a primary source can offer. This will furthermore result in a higher credibility of the conclusion and the result can be applied to practical marketing activities.

3.5 Structure of interview

An interview can be conducted according to the researcher’s agenda and can be structured according to the content and questions that the researcher wants answers to (Kumar, 2014). The structure of the interview can be incredibly strict, called structured interview, where the interviewer keeps to predetermined content and questions, where only direct answer to the specific questions are sought (Kumar, 2014; Saunders, et al., 2012). An interview can follow a flexible structure, called unstructured or semi-structured interview, in which the respondent can answer freely and in-depth to general and open-ended questions (ibid). According to Skärvad & Lundahl (2016) a semi-structured interview, is an appropriate choice when the researcher has a predetermined topic and a set of questions that needs to be answered. Saunders et. Al (2012) further suggests that, unlike the structured interview, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to follow up responses with follow-up questions. It gives the researcher the possibility to adapt the structure of the interview based on the respondent (ibid). Semi-structured interviews are preferred in explorative studies, as this allows for more in-depth answer about a process and the attitude of the respondent, while still covering questions that needs answers (ibid). Therefore, the semi-structured approach to interviews will be used in this thesis. This will allow the thesis to get full and rich information regarding Swedish e-commerce firms’ experience of influencer marketing aiming to reach international markets and consumers.

The main topics will be covered by following an interview guide, however the interview will largely be unstructured, which according to Saunders et al. (2012) allows the respondent to answer freely. In order to give the respondents an insight of the research area and a chance to prepare for the questions, we provided them with a simplified interview guide prior to the interviews. This enabled us as well as the companies to ensure that the respondent would be able to provide us with relevant information. The respondents in this thesis did have access to the interview questions approximately one week in advance and was briefed on the main topics. The reason for providing the detailed interview guide is that it was requested from the respondents and from that they could decide which employee would be the most suitable for providing detailed answers. One of the interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings, whilst one of them were done by telephone, one via Telephone and one through E-mail, due to geographical and logistical reasons. Our ambition was to conduct all of the interviews face-to-face, since it is argued by Holbrook et al (2003) that a face-to-face interview generally provides the interviewer with a higher response quality than what a telephone interview normally does. Furthermore, it is argued that a face-to-face meeting may result in a relationship built on trust between the interviewer and the respondent (Holme & Solvang, 1997). However, as mentioned there was not a possibility to conduct one of the interviews face-to-face and therefore we considered telephone being the best alternative.
3.6 Quality of research

3.6.1 Validity

Validity is described as a measure of how relevant and credible all phases of the investigation is in relation to the problem discussion (Harboe, 2013). Validity is to which extent the operationalization measures the investigated concept (Ghauri & Groenhaug, 2010). Thus, it is popular by researchers to present validity as being either internal or external (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). The red thread throughout the research and thesis is important. The internal validity assumes that all parts of the essay should be relevant to the problem discussion (Ghauri & Groenhaug, 2010). The external validity assumes that the research is relevant in the so-called "reality" and it may therefore be questioned if the essay tells a true story or if the conclusions can be generalized to other similar research (ibid).

The apprehension of valid data is considered to be less when conducting qualitative research than what it is in the case of quantitative (Holme & Solvang, 1997). The reason behind this is partly the closeness to the subject that can be established through a qualitative study, furthermore a study enables the respondent to control her/his contribution of data. Nevertheless, conducting qualitative research can result in that the researcher misinterprets the motives and signals of the respondents. It is thereby unfeasible for a researcher to demonstrate whether the gathered data is accurate and appropriate (Denscombe, 2016). However, there are certain steps that can be taken in order to increase the reader's perception of the research's validity. One of these steps concerns respondent validation, which involves making sure that the researcher has interpreted the gathered information given by the respondents correctly (Denscombe, 2016; Merriam, 2009). This allows a realistic check of the data by returning to the respondents with the gathered data and findings, so that they may validate the researcher’s understandings. Before considering interview questions it is therefore important to closely investigate the theories and create an operationalization. Another step to increase the validity of the study is through triangulation.

This is a method that involves examining and analysing the same set of data through different perspectives to obtain a better understanding of it (Kumar, 2014).

In order to increase the validity of this thesis, we insured that we had interpret their answers correct and contacted them afterwards, to give them a chance of revising the gathered data. By using respondent validation, according to Denscombe (2016) this ensures that any potential misconceptions were eliminated from the thesis. We believe that this could be of great importance since the area of research is unexplored in terms of international marketing, and the phenomenon may be hard to comprehend, which may result in misunderstandings. Furthermore, as we have interpreted the data separately, and thus have used different perspectives when understanding the content of it, we have through triangulation ensured that these interpretations can be regarded as valid this is in accordance of what Merriam (2009) states is appropriate.
3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the degree of standardization in the data collection process (Skärvad & Lundahl, 2016). It refers to whether the used instrument of research provides the same, or similar, consistent results when used repeatedly under similar conditions (Denscombe, 2010; Kumar, 2014).

Interviews should be as standardized as possible in terms of circumstances around the interview (Denscombe, 2010; Kumar, 2014). This is for the interviewee not to be influenced by these circumstances and thus to make it possible to give directed responses that are reflected by underlying factors of the interview. Reliability is usually said to be achieved in an interview if the results of the interview can be reproduced when using the same method in a future study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). It is argued that the study should be able to be reproduced with similar findings once again if the study is reliably conducted in the first place (ibid). Thus, the circumstances of the different interviews in a study should be as similar as possible, including the way in which questions are asked (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). However, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) further argue that a major focus on reliability in the interview phase can restrain quality answers, as the interviewer is constrained in how much he can diverge from the interview structure.

Considering that a qualitative research method has been chosen, the operationalization would most likely result in comparable interview questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). Moreover, the circumstances around the interviews were inherently different by nature. The interview was conducted similarly in each situation without drifting away from the main purpose or asking leading questions. To achieve this, the interviews were conducted in similar environments without any controllable surrounding factors affecting the respondent during the interviews. Harboe (2013) describes how important it is to be able to rely on the data collected, in our case data from the interviews. Another expression of reliability is trustworthiness (Harboe, 2013). There are various reasons why a respondent can provide unreliable answers that are false, in particular if they do not answer truthfully. This is nothing we can safely know, but we assume that our respondents have answered honestly and reliably. In order to confirm the reliability of this thesis we have presented our methodological procedure in a clear and distinctive manner. This is in accordingly to what Kumar (2014) states resulting in that the reader can achieve an understanding in how we gathered the empirical findings and how the conclusions were derived from these findings. Since every interview was conducted in a verbal manner and audio recorded, we were able to transcribe them word by word. Therefore, we have documented all the empirical raw data in both text and audio. Furthermore, we have provided the interview guide (see Appendix A) in order for the reader to gain an insight in what was asked. The interviews that were conducted in order to gather the empirical data were all done in Swedish for the convenience of our respondents. This required a translation of the responses into English, which accordingly to Skäravad and Lundahl (2016) could lead to some of the information being lost in translation.
3.7 Ethical considerations

According to Saunders et al. (2012) ethical considerations are to be considered throughout a research project. The researcher will be forced to take various ethical considerations into account at different stages of the research project. In western research, there are three frequently raised classical ethical considerations that need to be taken in account when conducting a qualitative research (Silverman D., 2011). The author mentions that it is are trust, confidentiality, and codes and consent. Trust is referring to the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer has an important responsibility not to ruin the field of research for future studies by making companies reluctant to participate in additional research. This can be achieved by showing respect when presenting the information acquired through interviews and carefully evaluating whether to present sensitive information acquired (ibid).

According to Bryman (2008) basic ethical issues include concepts such as volunteering, integrity, confidentiality and anonymity. As for anonymity, none of the chosen companies in this research desired this. Therefore, no anonymity was applied to any respondents. Nevertheless, if any company wanted anonymity, the collected material would therefore be presented and reported anonymously. As mentioned in the structure of interview part, all respondents received the questionnaire before the interviews. In order to build trust between the writers and the respondents, the collected material is kept in meticulous possession and will not be used for any purpose other than for the purpose of the thesis.

Codes and consent mean that the interviewees are entitled to know that they are being part of a research (Silverman D., 2011). Furthermore, they have the right to know what is being researched and they have the right to not participate anymore if they would prefer that. In line with this, Saunders et al (2012) presents similar thoughts as the researcher needs to inform the participant of the purpose of the study to make sure that the participant can give full consent. This was followed in the interviews conducted in the thesis. The participants were informed about the bearing concepts and the subject before the interview and if anyone would have desired they could have cancelled the interview at any time. If they wanted to change a question or not answer one, they had the right to do this as well. There is a need to let the participants read the work of the researcher before publishing, to make sure that the participant understands how their name would appear in the work, thus enabling them to give full agreement (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). These guidelines have been followed throughout the thesis as the respondents got a written document of how their opinions and thoughts would appear in the empirical chapter.

Quantitative research has been subjected to some criticism, with its knowledge-based and ontological grounds according to Bryman and Bell (2013). The disadvantages of a qualitative research can be seen in the interview objects and interviews themselves. If there is a close relationship with the interviewees that may affect the results. We as interviewers can influence the objects through our way of interviewing. How we choose to highlight the answers in the interview can be seen as something subjective. There is
unfortunately no mathematical formula about how to handle "emotions" statistically and objectively. In order to minimize this risk, we have for this thesis chosen professional and objective companies and respondents.

When conducting this thesis, we have ensured the transparency by presenting our methodological outline, together with the pros and cons of the selected methods. We have furthermore offered the respondents full anonymity and, if preferred, that the collected data cannot be traced back to them. When contacting the companies, we informed the respondents of the purpose of the study, and how they would contribute. This allowed them to gain a pre-understanding of the subject and a choice of whether they wanted to participate in the study. We have been meticulous with the primary read it thorough and requested frequent constructive feedback to make this as transparent as possible.

3.8 Operationalization

Before conducting interview questions, a thorough literature review is necessary to conduct, thus the theoretical frameworks are sometimes too abstract to be used directly for an interview (Furgerson & Jacob, 2012). A process is therefore necessary that will translate, break down and split up the abstract theoretical concepts to earthier and manageable variables. This is important when the analysis and empirical findings are going to be compared to the theories and to gain enough information that answers our research question. This process to measurability is called operationalization (Furgerson & Jacob, 2012). To make this concept measurable one has to move from the nominable (theoretical and formal) definition to the more operational (manageable) definition. From there, it is an increased possibility to formulate and choose more exact questions for the qualitative interview.

In the operationalization process, there should be a congruence between the concepts that will be investigated and the measuring instrument that is used (Harboe, 2013). The concepts from the theoretical framework are listed below as well as which interview questions they are connected to (See Appendix A). The reasoning behind them and why these are relevant to ask are vital to explain, because this will be one of the analysis and discussion main foundations. Moreover, the interview guide was built in a way that each set of questions was supposed to answer a specific part of the research question. In the figure below each cluster of interview questions will give answers to a particular part of the influencer marketing questions. Furthermore, according to Furgerson and Jacob (2012) this shows how the theoretical concepts were operationalized into real-world indicators of the concepts.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONCEPTS</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</th>
<th>REASONING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Company and respondent profile</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>These two general clusters of questions were asked to determine the position of the respondent, as well as to gain an overall base of information of the companies and in what area the respondent work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalization</td>
<td>11-12</td>
<td>To gain a wider understanding of how the company reach international consumers, new markets via influencer marketing and how successful this is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Marketing</td>
<td>4-7</td>
<td>We wanted to gain an understanding if the company works with other marketing channels or if they focus more on influencer marketing. If they still work with traditional marketing methods. Furthermore, we wanted to ask about the future of influencer marketing and if this marketing method will continue be suitable for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Awareness</td>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>We wanted to gain an understating of how the companies work with their brand and if they get a more recognized brand by collaboration with influencers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>This question was based on Social media however we wanted to ask about the results of communication based online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>To get an insight of which platforms the company is active on and why they use social media in their marketing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencer Marketing</td>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>This question was asked in order to find out why the companies work with influencers, if they have international influencers. We asked what kind of international activities they have and if they reach international consumers through influencers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1, 16</td>
<td>The first two questions are general which asks if the participant wants to be anonymous and whether they accept to be recorded. The reason for asking this is to follow the ethics of interviewing and giving them opportunity to express themselves freely. Furthermore, a measurement that was taken in order to conduct an ethical research and interview we offered the respondents full anonymity. Question 16 asks if there is anything the respondent would like to add to the questions previously asked. This is a way to assure that no loopholes were left uncovered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Own model of operationalization*
4 Empirical findings & Analysis

In this chapter, we are introducing our empirical findings, and simultaneously fits it with the theoretical framework. This interconnection is the basis for reaching a common understanding of why e-commerce’s use influencer marketing. As part of the understanding, discussions about marketing strategies and brand awareness have been analysed to find perspective in the area.

4.1 Application and importance

The structure is organized sections that represent different areas from each interview. We have chosen to combine the empirical and theoretical material, where we begin with the theory to further present the empirical findings and conclude this with our own analysis. The headings selected are based on the structure of the theoretical framework. This structure will give a good overview and further contribute to a good readability about this thesis results. Respondents and companies are presented again below to clarify the empirical findings when summarizing the results of our interviews.

In the Internationalization section the e-commerce companies argue about the easier access to new markets and entry to other countries through influencer marketing. In the International Marketing section, we will discuss different traditional marketing strategies in comparison to influencer marketing. Theories will be addressed and presented in a combination with our analysis and reflections, together with the respondent’s answers. In the Brand Awareness section, the respondents answered questions about the awareness and recognition of the brand through their collaboration with influencers. In the Social Media section, we will discuss how the companies define social media and the importance it has for the companies and their users. Furthermore, in the Influencer Marketing section, all the respondents' thoughts about why they use influencer marketing to reach markets will be addressed. In the Presumed future of influencer marketing part, the respondents discussed the outlook of influencer marketing and how they perceive the future. In conclusion, the concept of Word of Mouth and the importance of e-commerce already existing on the internet will be presented, and how this can contribute to easier purchase.

4.1.1 E-commerce companies

**Emelie Karlsson, Jollyroom**

Emelie is Marketing Coordinator on department Digital Communications & PR. Jollyroom is active in Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Germany. The company can, at the present time, deliver goods to the Nordic countries and Germany at the present time. Jollyroom was founded in 2010 and is a Gothenburg-based company and is now the largest children's and baby shop in the Nordic countries. With about 200 different brands and 35,000 items, Jollyroom offers a comprehensive range for pregnant parents with children up to 12 years old.
Delli Holmblad, ELLOS
Delli is Digital Marketing Manager. Initially, Ellos are active in the Nordics however they see opportunities to go global. Ellos is a major e-commerce company that has been around for 70 years. “We are a department store with focus products all within home and fashion with both own brands but many external brands” (Holmblad, Delli 2018-04-24)

Olle Sandberg & Tobias Göransson, Corlin Eyewear
Olle Sandberg and Tobias Göransson is the founders of the company and as the company is new there is no clear titles yet. However, Tobias is more focusing on the marketing of the company. Corlin Eyewear is an e-commerce company that focuses on selling sunglasses in their own brand on their own webshop. The company is based in Sweden and offers shipping worldwide.

Martin Åström, Twistshake
Martin is part-owner of Twistshake that is a Swedish e-commerce company that sells their own child-care products. Their focus is to create safe, functional and modern products that do not contain toxic substances. The company has an office in Sweden, China and in USA with warehouses, the company is active in 87 countries and provides worldwide shipping.

4.2 Internationalization through influencers

Internationalization refers to when companies takes their operations international through export, establishing sales offices abroad or by creating possibilities to sell abroad (Johansson & Vahlne 1977). The companies being interviewed for this thesis all have some kind of international activities, mostly the companies offer shipping abroad as a result of their international consumer base abroad.

Often the internationalization process of e-commerce is quite rapid compared to ordinary multinationals according to Luo et al (2005). E-commerce’s are more flexible when it comes to the flow of products and information through the internet compared to traditional multinational companies where channels of transactions and communication are surrounded by physical workplaces that are closed or quasi-closed. Sudha and Sheena (2017) defines influencer marketing as the process where a company identify individuals who have a specific influence over a specific target audience with the purpose of having them as a part of the company brands campaign towards increased reach, sales or engagement. When asking the companies if they work with influencers in order to reach new markets the companies provides examples of internationalization via influencers. Twistshake (2018) mentions that when there is a market where the company want to reach out to or expand even further in they can achieve it by reaching out to an influencer in that country and implement a collaboration. They mention that this is a simplified process for them in order to reach new consumers and it bring the value of being able to reach them in their own language. Jollyroom (2018) mentions that they recently entered a new market and through collaborating with influencers in that market they can intensify their
brand awareness. They responded that they consider it being a beneficial and effective way to do so through influencers in a new market. Corlin Eyewear (2018) mentions that through influencers the ease of reaching new markets is increased and they do it through taking their business model and apply it on the new market. However, Ellos (2018) responded that they have not used influencer as a method to reach new market. We interpret this as, considering the majority of the companies have used influencers in order to reach new markets, that influencer marketing is a way to internationalize the business. This supports Spry et al (2011) statement that local celebrities (influencers) can be used by companies wanting to enter a new market as a marketing strategy to connect with new consumers and boosting the company brand. One consideration to take, according to us, is that Ellos (2018) is not only using influencer marketing as a part of their marketing strategy thus they mix different marketing strategies, both traditional and digital. This might be why they have not done any internationalization through influencer thus they have other channels in which they gain an internationalization process from.

E-commerce businesses are less physically and culturally constrained than traditional businesses and additionally the presence on internet allows the e-commerce to exchange information in a real-time approach resulting in a rapid response to the needs of the consumers (Luo, Zhao, & Du, 2005). According to Singh (2011) the web reduces barriers and limits a company’s direct exposure to country-specific market risks. Corlin Eyewear (2018) mention the differences there is in different markets when it comes to influencer marketing. According to them the market in Sweden, Germany, Norway and Netherlands has similarities however when working with Australia and Italy the market acts quite differently. They mention that there are difficulties with working with influencers from these countries thus the influencer culture is based on that the influencers work with each other in established networks and there is not a big focus on the followers. According to us this can result in that the purchasing power is not that big in these markets and therefore it is not quite as effective to work with influencers as it is in more organised market such as Sweden and Germany. We make the further reflection that when being an e-commerce business there are cultural differences that one cannot avoid, and it will act as barriers to the business success in the market. This interpretation therefore challenges Singh’s (2011) statement. However, Jollyroom (2018), Ellos (2018) and Twistshake (2018) did not mention this therefore we make the analysis that these barriers are not experienced as a problem for everyone.

Singh (2011) states that one of the quickest way and most effective way to get in to global markets is to influence consumers and to enter via the web. When asking the companies if they work with influencers in order to reach new markets, as mentioned, three of the company’s touch upon the fact of that the process of entering a new market is made simplified and gives quick results through cooperation with influencers. Therefore, we interpret is as Singh’s (2011) statement is confirmed through our empirical gathering. By making a collaboration with an influencer in a new market there is no need to have skills such as language, intercultural communication, localizing and optimizing international sites within the company as Singh (2011) mentions can act as barriers for internationalisation for e-commerce companies. We further interpret this as another
reason of why it is positive to use influencers in the marketing strategies thus it can reduce costs and resources for companies. However, Singh (2011) further states that a company’s presence online results in elimination of intermediaries thus they use their online presence and capabilities instead. We consider the use of the influencer as a kind of intermediary as a replacement of traditional intermediaries between the company and the new market and therefore this statement is challenged by us. As mentioned the influencer provides skills in language and culture and therefore takes a role as a middle hand between the company and the consumers in the new market.

4.3 International Marketing

TV networks are losing viewers, magazines are in trouble, broadcast and print ads are costing more and producing poorer results (Silverman 2001). People do not have the time for sorting through the info overload and therefore, word of mouth becomes a necessary time saver. Companies have realized that they can let a bunch of chosen people cut through the info, distil and refine it for their followers. One of the best way to make the purchase decision easier is for a trusted advisor to encourage the consumers to use the product and therefore promote the products via word of mouth. It is a way of getting other people to put in the work and risk of gathering information and trying products. According to Silverman (2001) the population are exposed to hundreds of ads, every day and that is the reason that traditional advertisements are declining and influencer marketing with their word of mouth is increasing. What Jollyroom (2018) mentions in the interview is in line with what Silverman (2001) states thus they have noticed that focus has changed and that there is a bigger focus on social medias and influencer marketing.

Lowe & Doole (2012) states that technology is a driving force in international marketing and to reach international markets. Jollyroom (2018) have noticed that there is a larger focus on influencer marketing as a result of the increase of users of social media and social networking. One of the reasons why they have chosen influencer marketing is because their target audience is found on social media. This is found by Cherunilam (2010) that social media sites have allowed the gathering of information from consumers which provides new opportunities for businesses to recognise their target consumers. Corlin Eyewear’s (2018) business models is to generate traffic towards the webpage and to strengthen the brand. This is done via influencers and Facebook ads and therefore they have not had the need to use any traditional marketing strategies such as TV commercials, newspaper and ads. One of the companies, Ellos (2018), uses television and radio, thus they invest heavily in influencer marketing and they call it an important channel for them as well. Twistshake (2018) is present on fairs around the world as a part of their marketing but other than that they focus most on marketing through social medias where they argue that the profit is bigger compared to traditional marketing strategies. According to Lowe & Doole (2012) the entry costs of the Internet is low that is has permitted firms with low capital resources to develop their marketing strategies and to reach international markets.
“A lot more people read the newspaper on the internet today, and that is why you have to be where they are- on the internet”-
Martin Åström 2018-05-03

We see resemblances with theory and as resulting in the declining of traditional advertisement Silverman (2001) speaks about and that the importance of word of mouth is increasing. Furthermore, we make the analysis that in the future we will not be exposed to traditional marketing methods in the same quantity that we as consumers are used to. Companies will perhaps continue to see the possibilities with new innovative ways of marketing in order to reach their target audience in an effective way. We furthermore conclude that influencer marketing gives people and products a human connection. The companies we interviewed are almost exclusively using influencers in their marketing of the company and the products. We can assume that the aim is that they want to get as much and broad exposure as possible in social media and be maximally visible to the identified target audience.

4.3.1 Traditional marketing versus Influencer marketing

According to Hickman (2017) traditional advertising is on the decline because of the increased use of internet by consumers and the overload of information it results in. This is according to Lowe and Doole (2012) the reason to why the internet is a different environment for international marketing and therefore requires a different strategic approach. The success of the international marketing is dependent on the use of the marketing mix hence the elements in it should be adapted to the new market. According to Jollyroom (2018) their most important thing they have in order to succeed with their business is their marketing mix. Different channels and actions fill different functions and those are brand awareness, brand identity, new consumer recruitment, loyalty, relationship and employer branding, according to Jollyroom (2018). Ellos (2018) states that by mixing different channels such as ads through their consumers, own social channels, organic ads and by analysing their collaborations they experience a good mix. Corlin Eyewear (2018) have not used any other channels to market their products and had no intentions to do so at the time of the interview, they believe it is impractical to spend money on tv- commercials that do not provide the same focus on their target groups as influencer marketing does. Twistshake (2018) states something similar but refers to social medias in general. Although Corlin Eyewear (2018) mentioned that if they were to use other marketing strategies they would focus on, for example, a niched newspaper in order to reach their target group. We analyse this as by using influencer marketing companies are able to reach their target group in a precise way that traditional marketing methods do not provides. Therefore, we make the interpretation that influencer marketing is suitable for companies with a narrow product portfolio and therefore do not have a vast consumer group in one market. We noticed that a majority of the companies had a hard time specifying how influencer marketing works for them compared to other communication strategies, but the overall tone was that they see the potential benefits from working with influencers. Jollyroom (2018) experience that influencer marketing fills a function for them in that sense that it provides a spread of the brand and provides credibility to their
business and their products. Therefore, they look at is as an important part of their marketing mix, although they add that all channels they use are important in their own way. Ellos (2018) states something similar thus they think that by using influencers they gain more brand building and relationship building but this is quite hard for them to measure. Twistshake (2018) states that through using other marketing strategies such as tv-commercials one reaches out to (2018) consumer groups that is not part of the companies targeted group. Corlin Eyewear (2018) agree by stating that by using other marketing strategies there is a risk that their message has a to big spread and as a result will reach the wrong consumer group. Furthermore, they state that because their use of influencers in their marketing strategies costs them nothing today they do not see a reason for spending money on other marketing strategies. By using influencers in their marketing, they can define their target group and see who are visiting their web shop. As Lowe and Doole (2012) states the internet have given vast opportunities to small companies such as Corlin Eyewear (2018) in that sense that is decreases costs for reaching out to new consumers. We make the analysis that it enables companies to gather data on markets and in turn use it in their marketing strategies, as Corlin Eyewear (2018) mentions.

Hickman (2017) states that companies are increasingly using influencer marketing in the marketing plan. Budgets are moved from television, radio and newspapers to social media, as results are measurable. One of the company’s states that they are using traditional marketing strategies and they state that all the different strategies fills their own function. Twistshake (2018) says that they are present on fairs around the world in order to market their brand. We demonstrate this as a result of that Ellos (2018) and Twistshake (2018) are a relatively recognised and more established companies compared to the other companies. The smaller companies focus more on the advantages that influencers contribute such as achieving a more niche marketing, and therefore this is where their focus is. Furthermore, Ellos (2018) have a wider target consumer base and that is the reason for why they use tv-commercials as a marketing strategy, for them it is positive to reach out to a wider audience while for Corlin Eyewear (2018) they see it as a negative outcome of using tv-commercial. They want to focus more on targeting their consumer base that is compared to Ellos (2018) smaller and more niced. According to PapaSolomou & Melanthiou (2012 the long-term success of promotional campaigns and the integration of marketing communications are supported by the use of information and communication technologies including the use of internet. This internet implementation in the marketing process offers an instant international reach and we can demonstrate that one of the main reasons for companies to use influencers as their marketing strategy is because of the instant and direct reach.

What we noticed as a connection between the companies is that they all mentioned that their brand is strengthened by using influencers in their marketing. Both in the sense that the brand gains a wider spread and that it becomes more recognised. This is accordingly to brand awareness where brand recognition, according to Keller (1993), is when the consumer can confirm previous exposure to the brand and from that distinguish the brand from other brands. The companies highlighted the importance of using reliable
influencers that could keep collaborations for a longer period of time. We draw similarities from this to Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) theory of opinion leaders. The authors mean that the choice of right influencers is crucial for the company to achieve its desired goals with its marketing, something we found in this thesis and analysis. The influencers that the company chooses for marketing and in its image-creating activities should be chosen from the group of existing opinion leaders. We consider this as if companies choose people who are already initially established and who have special skills in the field in question, the prerequisites for effective marketing are increasing. This makes it cost-effective and gives a strong and rapid impact on the consumers.

4.4 Brand Awareness and recognition through influencers

According to Farquhar (1989) a brands purpose is to enhance the value of the product and differentiate it from its competitors. Brand awareness refers to brand recall and recognition by consumers and the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind to the consumer (Rossiter & Percy 1987). Brand awareness and market performance has a strong connection with each other according to Homburg et al (2010) and a distinctive brand is one of the most effective means for a business to distinguish themselves from their competitors.

When asking the companies about how they perceive their brand is being affected through collaborating with influencers they all had a positive tone. Jollyroom (2018) observed the importance of finding the right profile to match with the company brand. A profile that has their target audience will have a high credibility and therefore will spread the brand in an innovative and interesting way. Ellos (2018) adds to that and mentioned the importance of working with the right profiles that are relevant to their target group and it is dependent on the situation of who and what is being exposed. Corlin Eyewear (2018) adds to this as they mentioned that a profile that puts a lot of effort in their posts, editing the picture and make the brand look appealing by composing the post in a professional way will bring more positive associations to the brand. We illustrate this as when wanting to gain positive brand awareness there is a big importance to find the right match between the brand and the profile. This is a continuous process for the companies thus they will always have to put effort in to finding new relevant profiles and this is accordingly to what London (2003) states when saying that maintaining a strong brand it is a continuous process. Twistshake (2018) mentions that for them it is important to create activity and through collaborating with influencer it is not only generating new consumers, distributors are finding the company through the recognition working with influencer brings to their brand. Therefore, we make the analyse that this brand awareness that is gained is not only positive for gaining states that brand awareness relates to the likelihood that a brand name will come to mind and the ease with which is does. We can demonstrate that when using an influencer to market the products, the awareness of the brand increases because it is seen on different social media platforms.

As mentioned earlier Corlin Eyewear (2018) states that they detected in some markets the influencer market is not as effective as in other market. Influencers are working in
networks and have lost the focus on their followers and therefore the buying power is not as effective as in other more established markets. From this we make the interpretation that this can affect the company brand in a negative way thus the consumers lose trust in the influencer and through that the brand they are exposing. We noticed a pattern from the companies that finding a match between the influencer and the brand is something they focus on in order to get a positive awareness to the brand. Therefore, we recognise this as being an important step to consider when conducting influencer marketing. We believe that even the companies influencers have an important part in the company's brand building. As mentioned earlier, the choice of influencers can be crucial to the company's brand image, as many influencers are already associated with a particular area or interest. It is therefore important to choose influencers that can strengthen the brand.

4.5 Effects of social media marketing

Sterne (2016) defines social media as a tool that allows anybody to communicate with anybody and create consumer-generated content. Because of the power of word-of-mouth and reaching millions of people in an instance, influencers can help brands to reach and influence consumers to purchase the products and buy into the brands (Silverman, 2001). The companies explained that the social media platforms are a place for social networking, marketing and a place for sharing entertainment and news.

According to Evans (2012) social media is an awareness tool for companies in their marketing and a company’s presence on social medias can result in positive effects on the purchase decision from the consumer. Many business executives have social media on their agenda when it comes to their business marketing strategies (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The companies we interviewed stresses that not only has the communication changed as a result of social medias but additionally corporate resource allocation and how they choose to work with their marketing. The companies claim that they now spend less time and resources on traditional marketing, such as newspaper ads and television advertising. It was mentioned that their resource allocation turned out just a few years ago and that their marketing increasingly focused on the digital environment. The companies pointed out that the marketing is focused on what they want to communicate, and towards which target group. Ellos (2018) described that it may be good to supplement any newspaper advertisement if they want to reach a slightly older audience because they believe in a combination between traditional and digital marketing strategies. Through the digital channels, they reach many consumers with considerable less resources, both time-consuming and economical. We interpret this as, in accordance to what Evans (2012) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2016) states, that social medias are a powerful marketing tool and more companies are realizing this.

Different social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have gained astronomical numbers of users in less than 10 years (Noor Al-Deen & Allen Hendricks, 2012). The two-way-communication and to listen to their consumers is important and accordingly to Sterne (2010) this is made possible by social media. Tiago and Verissimo (2014) says that marketing on social medias should lead to an increased consumer
engagement and stronger relationships. Corlin Eyewear (2018) mentions that they have a concentration and focus on Facebook and Instagram where the traffic is measurable and gives the required results. We reflect upon this and believe that Corlin Eyewear (2018) can be flexible in their marketing as they are still developing and growing which makes it important to build a positive association to the company. This indicates that they focus on the social media platforms where it is free to join and to market. This is a pattern we can see among the smaller e-commerce companies we interviewed. Ellos (2018) market themselves on social media platforms, such as blogs, Facebook, Instagram and online newspapers. Jollyroom (2018) mentions in similarity to Corlin Eyewear (2018), that they are initially actively working towards Instagram and Facebook and this is where their target group primarily are active on. They believe that it is one of the most important channels to market on and it is where most people are located. This is accordingly to what Tiago and Verissimo (2014) states that companies engaging in social media increases the relationships with the consumers thus the company reaches out to their target group.

Krishnamurthy & Singh (2005) describes the internet as a platform where innovative technology has been built and a place where the user is treated as first-class objects. Platforms consist of different new technologies, including user comments, on a variety of popular social networks like Facebook and Instagram. Furthermore, the authors mean that the participants and users of social networks are at least as important as the content being uploaded and shared with others. Tiago and Verissimo (2014) states that in order to get a positive effect from the marketing performed on social medias the company needs to listen to their consumers. This is done by collecting information. The fact that the companies invest heavily in social media is thus they regard it as a unique platform to build relationships with their target audience. This is something we can detect as a pattern among the four companies thus they mention a strong drive to create a word-of-mouth and recognition on social media. Except being presence on fairs where the consumers can test their products, Twistshake (2018) is focusing on social media. The profit on social media is better and Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Google ads are important platforms according to them.

Twistshake (2018) points out that the main reason for using social media is that companies can reach their target audience in an effective way. According to Jollyroom (2018), an important parameter is that all collaborations should be beneficial to both parties, both the company and the influencer. Each individual collaboration is analysed before the cooperation, during and after the completion of cooperation. Before initiating a collaboration, a research of the profile's channels is made to determine if it is a relevant profile. During ongoing collaboration, the company have daily monitoring of how the cooperation goes on and after the completion of cooperation.

"It is good with the digitalization that you have data on everything. You can instantly see what has given a good effect or a good outcome, and what has not. Then you may have to adjust and change according to your campaign" - Martin Åström 2018-05-03
Ellos (2018) has a marketing strategy where they look at the traffic on the website and make measurements. They want to create a long term relationship with their influencers and therefore reach consumers. Corlin Eyewear (2018) works similar with collaborations with influencers and can therefore be bolder in their marketing where they do not have specific ambassadors for their products but mostly send out their products to influencers with good content and a popular profile. They state that they have no opportunity to analyse each post although they can see exact revenue on how affiliates perform. A popular influencer requires a bigger measurement of the results. Twistshake (2018) controls and analyse all the numbers, the profit, views, likes and comments and then they do an evaluation. The reflection we make is that companies being active on social medias constantly collect, process and analyses information from their consumers and uses this in order to modify and improve their marketing activities, this is in accordance to Tiago and Verissimo’s (2014) statement.

“Social media are important channels to reach target audience” -
Emelie Karlsson 2018-04-26

The common argument from the companies was that it is easier to target specific target groups through social media. With that, Corlin Eyewear (2018) clarifies that advertising is more effective than adding large sums to reach out to everyone, and instead placing less money on those who are actually interested. Furthermore, Corlin Eyewear (2018) describes that social media, especially Facebook, have given the opportunity to target a specific target audience wherever they want marketing to reach. The companies had many common arguments and reasons why they want to be seen on the social media. Even Jollyroom (2018) mentions Facebook and its ability to detail target audiences and that Facebook owns Instagram. Furthermore, they explained that it is possible to combine the two channels with the same target groups and to receive statistics on the two channels with two simple clicks. We believe that is important for companies to be active on different social media platforms in order to reach costumers and allowing them being a part of the marketing activities. This can be done though creating relationships with the consumers and it is accordingly to what PapaSolomou and Melanthiou (2012) states, companies are finding new ways to interact with their consumers and with the help of social media they can gain long-term relationships with their consumers.

“To be on social media creates incredible opportunities” -
Olle Sandberg, 2018-04-19

Spry et al. (2011) states that collaborating with local celebrities can be performed when companies wanting to gain access to a new market. All of the companies answer affirmative on the question if they reach out to international consumers through social media. Twistshake (2018) mentions that through the reach of Facebook they can influence millions of people in comparison with a local newspaper and it creates a wider spread by being a digital and e-commerce company. Corlin Eyewear (2018) previously had a more focus on the domestic market and realized the interest from international consumers. They noticed the power of influencer marketing and social media when they got emails from
all over the world from people wanting to purchase their products. Because of their simplicity to send their products to other countries they have the flexibility to attract influencers from abroad. This is accordingly to what Spry et al. (2011) mentions thus they state by using a celebrity in the marketing activities a company can enter a new market. We make the interpretation that doing this on social medias, as the companies mentions, is the modern way of what Spry et al. (2011) states.

4.6 Influencer Marketing

When brands use influencers in their marketing campaign in order to reach consumers it is, as mentioned, named influencer marketing (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2016). Collaborating with influencers provides a significant scope but a relationship to one's target group (Hickman, 2017). An influencer can be journalists, celebrities, bloggers or brand advocates that has an impact on consumers purchasing decisions (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). What we noticed during our interviews it that the companies mention that through this marketing strategy one reaches the target consumer groups more directly compared to other marketing strategies, and this is according to what Hickman (2017) states. The consumers follow the influencers they are interested in, so there are influencers that take part of the everyday lives of followers (Hickman, 2017). This is accordingly to what Twistshake (2018) mentions that when they are collaborating with a certain niched profile this profile has followers that are in the same stage in life and therefore they get more influenced by this profile. This creates a bigger credibility for their products. Jollyroom (2018) agrees with that and states that an influencer becomes an extended hand towards potential consumers for the company.

Word of mouth is a powerful tool as sending out messages towards consumer thus it is seen as more credible by the public and therefore is more likely to be acted upon, according to Brown and Foirena (2013). Ellos (2018) confirms this when they state that one of the reasons why they have chosen to work with influencers is because the word-of-mouth effect it creates is perceived as more credible by their consumers. We make the interpretation that influencer marketing is reinforcing this credibility even further in a positive way.

“Through influencer marketing we reach the target audience we want directly, effortlessly and it creates more credibility towards our brand”
- Martin Åström 2018-05-03

What makes influencer marketing stand out from other marketing strategies is that influencers have an emotional link to consumers often missed by businesses (Hickman, 2017). Influencer marketing is an effective tool for companies to make use of because today it is harder to reach consumers and capture their attention in the digital world, but to give companies a chance to market themselves more credibility. Influencer marketing is a way to gain loyal consumers through trust and authenticity (Sudha & Sheena, 2017). When being asked why they collaborate with influencers in their marketing many of the companies mentioned relationship is creating between the company and consumer.
Furthermore, the relationship that the profile builds with its followers is generating a credibility toward the brand. Twistshake (2018) mentions that when a post has been uploaded the followers of that profile often starts a discussion in the comment field where they have a dialog with questions that can quickly receive answers to and this generates a bigger credibility and a buzz around the brand. Jollyroom (2018) agrees with this stating that the marketing becomes more credible and genuine through conversation and generates other great values such as exposure, brand awareness, content, tracking and building long-term valuable relationships. This is in accordance to what Sudha and Sheena (2017) states hence that on the social media platforms it is where the influencers build relationships of trust that is key for influencing consumers. In order to create brand awareness and positive recognition we believe that it is necessary for the companies to engage in relationships with its consumers. This means that when content is uploaded on social medias the company should respond to comments or questions, resulting that the followers feels seen and encouraged. We believe that this creates a positive feeling towards the brand, resulting in positive word-of-mouth and purchase. To have devoted consumers is what we interpreted better than always trying to attract more.

After talking with the companies, we noticed that there are some key elements that are repeatedly being mentioned in connection to influencer marketing. These are that it brings a credibility and a more direct/niched message towards the consumers. We interpret this as being the main reasons of why companies cooperate with influencers and why they have a positive tone towards the strategy. Influencer marketing provides other benefits such as SEO, which means that companies get higher in rank on Google. SEO is search engine optimization is the practice of increasing the quality and quantity of traffic to the website (Hickman, 2017). This is mentioned by Ellos (2018) that they work with a lot as a result of influencer marketing. Corlin Eyewear (2018), Twistshake (2018) and Jollyroom (2018) mentions the benefits of being able to measure the results of the marketing.

According to Sudha and Sheena (2017) the key to success in the fast-paced world we experience today is convenience and quickness. The companies we interviewed often mention that the message being sent out through influencers is reaching the consumers directly and fast. We interpret that being active on social media platform as a company reduces many barriers there is between consumers and companies thus the companies have an easier time understanding their consumers’ needs and finding their consumers. We made the further interpretation that cooperating with an influencer brings the company one step even closer to the consumers and this gives many benefits that no company working with this strategy can ignore.

4.6.1 The presumed future of influencer marketing

Technology is a major driving force both in international marketing and in the move towards a more global marketplace (Lowe & Doole. 2012). Technology and the Internet has enabled companies to substantially decrease the costs of reaching international consumers and will continue to do so. It has reduced global advertising costs and made it
easier for small niche products to find a critical mass of consumers. Additionally, Brown and Fiorena (2013) states that marketers have understood the power of word-of-mouth and therefore focuses more on this.

“Because we operate digitally, where the conditions are constantly changing, we need to keep up to date and adapt our way of marketing”

- Emelie Karlsson 2018-04-26

Jollyroom (2018) mentions that their marketing strategy has worked well but are aware of market change in the future. Measurement is important to ensure that Jollyroom (2018) makes the right decision. Some strategies that have been working years ago does not work today and therefore they have to be innovative enough to try different strategies. Ellos (2018) says that influencer marketing is constantly evolving and refined. They believe that celebrities and influencers is on the rise and will develop ever more. Corlin Eyewear (2018) says that their focus will be where their consumers are. Corlin Eyewear (2018) believes that influencers will always be relevant thus it has been a relevant marketing strategy for a long time, although before it was conducted through celebrities that wore a company’s product on the red carpet or when being photographed by paparazzi. Today it is focused on to social media and it continues to grow with tougher and bigger competition between companies. Therefore, it is important to follow the flow of marketing strategies and social media. Twistshake (2018) mentions something similar thus they claim that today they cannot see an end to the influencer market, there will always be new profiles on the rise. However, they mentioned that they believe that there is a risk that the market will become saturated thus the consumers will become more used to the exposure of the influencer marketing. All the companies touch upon that they will be where the focus from the consumer is and right now they notice that it is on influencers. Twistshake (2018) mentions that they notice that their potential consumers are sourcing their products via influencers and as long as they do this they will focus on collaborating with these profiles. Sudha & Sheena (2017) states that collaborations is about influencing a group of people within one's social networking network, buying a company's products or services. We therefore demonstrate that this way of market the products will continue as long as there are influencers who encourage others to buy the products. We can clarify this as the fact as long as consumers react with purchasing power from influencer marketing these companies will continue with it.

Additionally, we agree with the companies that influencer marketing is something that will increase and that us as consumers can expect to see more of this in our social media feeds. However, we believe that there is risk of consumers being to exposed to this marketing method and therefore the purchasing power might decline. Therefore, we recommend that the companies need to keep develop their influencer marketing in order to create messages that are innovative and makes them unique from their competitors. Furthermore, we consider influencer marketing to be the most effective way for a startup web company to quickly achieve success. The new technology of social media platforms creates new conditions for newly established companies to increase their sales and gain wider exposure, as influencers spread information on their channels in social media.
choice of the right type of influencers becomes critical and crucial in order for maximum effect to be achieved. How and after which principles influencer then works and publishes will be crucial in order to maximize impact in marketing. As we have found in this thesis, the use of influencer marketing, with properly selected influencers, can make a decisive contribution to how a newly established web business can quickly get through and positive response to the market. Therefore, if the consumers perceive the influencer as serious and long-term in their commitment, the conditions create a loyal and profitable relationship between the consumers and the company in question.

4.7 Word of mouth generated by influencer marketing

Recommendations through word-of-mouth communication can be considered as more trustworthy than those coming from more commercialized channels with formal advertising (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). Once the information comes from personal sources that give positive comments about a product, it is more likely that the person who receives this information will become interested. Companies can reach millions of people in an instance by sending their products to social media influencers who then, in a personal and authentic way, introduces the products to their followers (Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2016). The new ways to communicate, which have become available through the Internet, creates a sense of closeness, even between unfamiliar people (Kapferer, 2008).

People who have never met can still feel connected with each other and a sense of belonging to virtual social groups on both an individual level but in relation to brands and organizations. As an e-commerce, Jollyroom (2018) can work with values in the form of relationship, inspiration and commitment. It is important for an e-commerce to work with their identity and with trust between the consumers and the company according to Jollyroom. Because these companies only are on the internet it is more important to build identity and commitment through these channels. Ellos (2018) works with collaborations and the effects from the influencers are vital. Corlin Eyewear (2018) mentions one thing that we reflect upon while conducting the interviews, where the consumers see a product and in a matter of seconds they can purchase the product on the website. The positive aspects of being an e-commerce and market on social medias is that they get a wider spread and the information spreads fast.

“We did not have any marketing activities or influencer collaborations in Germany. Suddenly we noticed an interest for our products from several consumers and this made us realize that this is a market for us”
- Tobias Göransson, 2018-04-19

According to Silverman (2001) people are often more buying in response to what they hear from other independent sources. People gather information from marketing materials, including salespeople and advertising, resulting in a discussion about the product with others. Twistshake (2018) mentioned that because they are an e-commerce they can create a more niched marketing and collect more information about the
consumers. The negative aspects are that the undeveloped countries are not working at the same way because of their undeveloped internet system and that is why the company not can reach these consumers. We understand the fact as being an e-commerce with marketing activities online is effective thus it enables the purchasing for the consumers. When a consumer is exposed to a product it is easy to find it and therefore as an e-commerce it is effective to link their web page instead of being a physical store where the consumer has to go to.

When the interview with Corlin Eyewear (2018) took place, they stated that their main focus is that they want to be seen outward. On the other hand, they have chosen social media because they are a small organization and there is a lack of resources. Furthermore, they state that the budget is an obstacle and social media is an effective media channel to use. Twistshake (2018) argues that it is a profitable communication method that companies should consider. In addition, he believes that campaigns can be directed directly to the consumers, rather than through traditional media, that has a more pushing effect on consumers. This can be linked with what Jollyroom (2018) and Ellos (2018) describes. They argue that the use of social media is an approach for building, strengthening and future-proofing a company's brand. The above reasons can be linked with the theories of Lu, Chang, & Chang (2014) where the authors argue that social media has many uses. Social media are symbolized by the value obtained from the combination of social and cultural, technological, and economic interaction and content generated by users (ibid). Furthermore, the authors states that social media contribute to an environment that calls for open two-way communication between parties, just as the respondents expressed. We noticed that the majority of companies were united and believed that communication today has changed, from this we understand that companies are working less to push out "pushy" advertising and instead try to convey a feeling of trustworthiness.

The development of internet has taken place from several angles. Krishnamurthy & Singh (2005), as the companies, expresses the ability to measure and follow up results in a different way than before. Furthermore, the authors explain that effective use of social media as a marketing channel can deliver measurable business results to empirical findings. The above reasoning of the companies is consistent with PapaSolomou & Melanthiou (2012) theories about word-of-mouth and the informal communication between private parties concerning evaluations of goods and services. We could see a connection between respondents' reasoning and what PapaSolomou & Melanthiou (2012) expresses. It is about how a company responds to negative feedback that generates the highest value. Many companies encourage their consumers to interact with the brand on different platforms and then provide feedback. Because consumers are a part of corporate value-creating processes, the authors mean that companies must open up to their consumers. They must dare bring the dialogue that later creates value in companies that had not been possible without the two-way communication that social media contributed to (ibid). The authors Saravanakumar & SuganthaLakshmi (2012) describe that many marketers lack the knowledge required by these channels to further enhance the empiric
findings. They describe the digital development giving companies the opportunity to take advanced marketing conditions.

The companies want profound relationships with their consumers, which is based on the fact that communication between the company and its consumers is working overtime. The influencers chosen by the company must be able to support the development of the company's values on a long-term basis. One factor in the selection is to review which other companies may or may want to use the same influencers. Consumers must therefore be pleased with the company and the products. When influencers effectively market the products it is possible to resemble Katz and Lazarsfeld's (2006) research. The research is based on the fact that particularly influential people and influencers forward information to the masses. These influencers get the role of qualified opinion leaders to their followers when they communicate personal experiences and perceptions. If the followers perceive these influencers as particularly knowledgeable and qualified in certain areas and see that they have deeper knowledge about certain products, they are even relying on product quality and feel safe in their product selection. Once confidence has been built up this way, these followers will, in turn, carry on this information. They become new influencers in the next step as they use and recommend the products. During the interview we therefore examined how word of mouth can influence brand awareness. When people discuss the company’s products and the influencers content and collaborations they further on generate brand awareness to others. Reflections can be made regarding that we are all in some way influencers.
5 Final chapter

In the following chapter, we will present conclusions, which will be derived from the analysis that was conducted in the previous chapter. Furthermore, we will provide the reader with recommendations and implications that this thesis has resulted in. In the final part of this chapter we will present limitations and give suggestions for future research.

5.1 Conclusions

In this more globalized world companies are trying to internationalize and find new marketing strategies to enter new markets with more consumers. It is therefore important for companies to have an understanding of which marketing strategies that will function for them. For e-commerce companies already existing online, there are possibilities where they already operate. Literature and previous research had indicated the importance of using influencers in the marketing strategy which not only is less time-consuming than traditional marketing strategies but decreases financial resources on marketing. Subsequently, the purpose of this thesis has been to answer the main research question: Which are the reasons for using influencer marketing to create brand awareness in international markets for e-commerce companies?

The literature review has demonstrated that influencer marketing is a marketing method that is recognized today and a method that is used frequently among companies, both e-commerce and physical companies.

Our empirical findings implicate that the phenomenon of influencer marketing is well known and used, although used in different ways. Smaller companies solely focus on influencers while bigger companies still wanting to reach a bigger target group and has more resources uses traditional marketing strategies mixed with influencer marketing. The main reason for e-commerce companies to use influencer marketing is thus they can reach their target group direct and they save financial resources. It is furthermore easier for consumers to make a purchase thus both the marketing, content and website are only a few clicks away and the purchase can be done in seconds. The empirical findings showed that if a company have a functional business model in their domestic market they can easy apply it in an international context. Our findings furthermore demonstrate that companies have found more international consumers through influencer marketing and influencer marketing builds stronger relationships with the consumers. Companies have a positive outlook towards the future in influencer marketing, although there are some concerns about the competitiveness and that it might lead to a need of more financial resources invested in the strategy.

The brand awareness of using influencer marketing is increasing when more consumers recognize the products from the company. Influencers taking pictures and spreading word-of-mouth communication on their social media platforms creates content and aesthetic pictures with the products which results in consumers being able to see the
products in its real habitat. International markets and consumers are easier to reach through today's web and social media and when influencers attract people around the world, their content and the message is broadcasted in seconds. Their content makes their followers influenced by the products shown which then causes them to purchase the products.

The conclusion of this thesis is consequently that there are positive reasons for e-commerce companies using influencer marketing to reach consumers, both on the domestic market and international markets. The process is done through reaching out to an influencer in the new market and performing a collaboration with this profile. After that consumers in that market are becoming more aware of the brand and it creates awareness of the brand. The business model that is being used in the domestic market can easily be applied to the new market. The empirical findings confirmed the question regarding finding new consumers abroad because of social media and the possibilities of being online. We believe that the increase of web shops and buying online has resulted in that the marketing should be conducted online.

Research regarding influencer marketing in the context of international marketing has so far been close to non-existent in business research, and a research gap has thus been identified. As the aim of this thesis was to contribute in filling the research gap, we conducted research regarding the influencer marketing phenomenon and the reasons why e-commerce companies use this in order to reach international consumers. The outcome of this thesis has demonstrated that influencer marketing simplifies and speeds up the internationalization process for companies wanting to enter a new market or simply want to strengthen the presence already established. By establishing influencer marketing as a business core marketing strategy and to put focus on social media a company can reach millions of new consumers in seconds.

This thesis has furthermore contributed to theory regarding influencer marketing in a context of international business, by identifying components of the phenomenon that can have an impact of internationalizing e-commerce companies. These components are brand awareness, social media and word-of-mouth communication. For e-commerce companies wanting to enter new international markets through influencer marketing these factors are important to consider. By using an influencer in the marketing, the brand is strengthened in that sense that it is located among the consumer’s awareness. If the marketing activities are performed on social medias, it enables companies to target a niched consumer group. Lastly the influencer marketing is generating word-of-mouth, and this gives the brand a great proliferation. A common point of view among the respondents of this thesis are that the competitiveness in the future will increase and consequently wealthier companies will realize the power of influencers. This leads us to believe smaller companies will have problem competing with the international competitiveness in the future.

The findings of the thesis demonstrate that traditional marketing strategies has been declining the latest years and that influencer marketing has increased among companies.
All of them have been identified in previous research and international marketing theories. However, two factors, namely the time possibilities for e-commerce companies active on social media, and the financial resources is important to add. The main reason for companies using influencer marketing is therefore the easy access for consumers then to purchase the products in just a few seconds.

5.2 Practical implications and recommendations

This section presents a decision base that can be used by companies selling products when influencer marketing and/or advertising in social media is being implemented. The practical implications that this study lead to may be useful to both companies that are on social media and those who have foundations to establish themselves through this marketing channel. We want to contribute to a more innovative mindset and large parts of the results can be implemented on most organizations. Because social media is proven to be functional thus it is cost-efficient to establish, we recommend companies to take this thesis into consideration and consider in measuring and follow up the digital campaigns.

The empirical findings of this thesis can furthermore be used by companies wanting to perform influencer marketing and realizing the benefits it provides. However, there are circumstances to take in considerations for the companies performing this strategy. These are the fact that the online environment is in constant development and rapid changes happens all the time. It is therefore important to take in consideration where the consumers are active and where their focus is and from that develop the business strategy accordingly. Hence, it is important to always be updated on the latest online trends. When implementing social media advertising, the tools should be used to optimize the message's frequency. In order for advertisements of low involvement products to be highlighted, it is important to reach those consumers who may be interested in the product type. We recommend companies that are interesting in influencer marketing to focus on finding the right profile for their brand. Important factors to consider are therefore that the company find reliable influencers with the right target group, with good content and purchase willing followers. This creates a bigger credibility thus there is a match between the brand and influencer. If this match does not exist there is a risk that the consumers will lose their trust towards the brand. Therefore, it is valuable for companies to put effort in the continuous process of finding right influencers in order to establish a strong brand. By understanding the relationship between an influencer and its follower, marketers can more easily find out what is the best way to influence them. Understanding how the relationship looks can contribute to increased knowledge about how easily we are influenced by influencer's message. Consumer organizations can thus benefit from research to possibly lobby for more stringent restrictions regarding the way in which marketing through influencer marketing is conducted.

Our findings further suggest that social media provides opportunities for companies, both new and established ones. When wanting to move away from the domestic market into new international markets, there will be barriers to overcome. By entering these markets through social media and influencers companies can reach consumers more easily, faster
and will less resources. We view that the need of understanding influencer marketing becomes important when companies wish to create awareness for their target group. Marketing a business in a traditional way, for example through advertising, printing or telemarketing, is not as optimal and does not ensure the speed of two-way communication and feedback that becomes important. Thus it is obtained when influencer marketing is the basis for company marketing and product development. Through this thesis, it becomes clear that for a new web sale (online store) factors such as speed, simplicity and cost-effectiveness are crucial. When marketing as well as sales and distribution takes place essentially digitally, relations building with consumers must be done quickly and cost-effectively. The company must adapt its market activities and product range to rapidly changing conditions. Using influencer marketing can not only convey and express the company's market ambitions and image but through their activities capture the needs of consumers / followers, is a critical success factor.

5.3 Limitations

Although this research was carefully prepared, we have identified certain limitations and shortcoming. During our research process we decided early to exclude the consumer perspective and merely focus on the companies point of view of influencer marketing. Therefore, we believe that our findings do not provide a credible result from a consumer perspective. Furthermore, considering the fact that the companies providing empirical data to this thesis are primarily Swedish the results are based on a Swedish point of view. Consequently, the conclusion may not be relevant for companies in other countries or markets with different business environments and different consumer needs.

The companies are all e-commerce’s and this might furthermore provide a partial conclusion that is not relevant for companies having psychical stores. Consequently, to generalize the results and in order to provide this thesis a further depth there could have been more companies analysed. Although, we have detected similarities between the four companies being interviewed and gained a certain confirmation of the theories we believe that the results of the thesis are valid. Another limitation was that the companies in the thesis were active in the international market to different extents. In cases where all companies are more equally committed it could be easier to draw general conclusions of the findings. Therefore, studies within each of the many sub segments of influencer marketing could improve results and give more detailed information about different markets, different categories of influencers and diverse companies. Our results are therefore presented as influencer marketing specific which applies to all companies in this sector unless otherwise is stated.
5.4 Suggestions for future research

The research of this thesis has highlighted and filled out the gap concerning influencer marketing in international marketing. In addition to this further research can be conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of influencer marketing. These are our suggestions for further research.

1. To investigate the barriers and negative aspects of influencer marketing and if it will affect the traditional marketing strategies further.

This might provide an understanding of the decline of traditional marketing strategies and why companies need to find new innovative marketing strategies. Additionally, realising the negative aspects and possible barriers that influencer marketing entails might provide suggestions for how to avoid these and how to perform this marketing strategy as efficient as possible.

2. To investigate the psychic aspects of followers and behaviour of them regarding the pressure of purchasing products seen on social media. To investigate what kind of pressure consumers feel today to purchase the products the influencer displays.

By investigating the consumer perspective, we believe that the research could contribute to a further depth of consumption and the pressure of social media. This can identify consumers buying behaviour and the psychological aspects of purchasing. This is relevant and interesting from many point of views. By evaluating, from a consumer perspective, how marketing of products through influencer marketing as well as advertising in social media without influencers affects consumer purchasing decisions, existing theory can enrich and at the same time contribute to rewarding implications of how companies should allocate their resources to successfully and cost effectively market their products.

3. The influencers view of this marketing strategy and to investigate both positive and negative aspects of being a company’s independent marketing channel.

By investigating the influencers point of view this can contribute to an understanding of the moral aspects of collaborating with influencers. This may provide a B2B perspective of this strategy.
6 References

Books, Articles and Online Resources


Furgerson, S., & Jacob, A. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews. Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. the qualitative report. 17 (6), pp. 1-10.


6.1 Interview participants

Sandberg, Olle and Göransson, Tobias, CEO, Corlin Eyewear.  
Face-to-face interview, 2018-04-19

Holmblad, Delli, Digital Marketing Manager Nordics at Ellos.  
Telephone interview, 2018-04-24

Karlsson, Emelie, Marketing Coordinator at Jollyroom.  
Telephone interview, 2018-04-26

Åström, Martin, co-founder and CEO at Twistshake.  
Telephone interview, 2018-05-03
Appendices
Appendix A – Interview questions

Extra
1. Vill du vara anonym och/ eller kan jag få spela in denna intervju?

Företaget och den intervjuandes profil
2. Vad är Din roll på företaget?
3. Kan Du berätta kort om företaget och vad Ni säljer?

Internationell marknadsföring
4. Vad för internationella aktiviteter har ni? Kan kunder från andra länder handla varorna eller är logistiken begränsad?
5. Gällande traditionella marknadsföringsmetoder så som tv-reklam, tidningsannonser, affischer eller direktreklam så har vi sett att allt fler e-handelsföretag väljer att lägga sin budget på Influencer Marketing istället. Hur ser Du på det och stämmer det för Er?
6. Vilka andra marknadsförings strategier har ni använt er av/ använder idag? Hur upplever ni att de fungerar kontra influencer marketing?
7. Hur ser Ni på framtiden? Är detta en marknadsföringsstrategi som kommer att fungera?

Varumärkesmedvetenhet
8. Tror/anser ni att ert varumärke blir mer igenkänt och/eller ihågkommet genom ert samarbete med influencers?
9. Analyseras all spridning och efter varje samarbete eller inlägg? Kan ni se att efter ett inlägg har gjorts att ni får större spridning?

Sociala medier
10. Företaget finns på sociala medier, har Ni valt plattformarna utifrån där Era kunder finns eller någon annan anledning?

Internationalisering hos e-handels företag
11. Upplever ni att ni når ut till en större kundbas (även internationellt) genom att marknadsföra er på sociala medier?
12. På vilket sätt kan det vara fördelar för er som är ett e-handelsföretag att marknadsföra på sociala medier?

Influencer marketing
13. Varför har ni valt att arbeta med influencers?
14. Har ni funderat på vilket sätt ni kan arbeta med internationella influencers för att nå andra marknader/ länder?
15. Hur har ni nått ut till fler internationella kunder via Influencer Marketing?

Extra
16. Är det något Ni vill fråga oss eller undrar över eller vill lägga till?
Interview questions

Extra
1. Do you want to be anonymous and/or is it ok that I record this interview?

The company and the interviewers profile
2. What is your title and role in the company?
3. Can you shortly tell us about the company and what you do/sell?

International marketing
4. Which are the international markets in which your company is active? Which communication strategies have you used/or are using today?
5. We have seen that e-commerce companies have set aside traditional marketing methods such as tv-commercials, newspaper-ads, posters or direct advertisement and instead focused on Influencer marketing instead. What is your point of view of it and is it something that this company has done?
6. What other marketing strategies have you been using/or are using today? Compared to influencer marketing how do you perceive that it works?
7. What’s your view of the future? Is influencer marketing something that will work in the long run?

Brand Awareness
8. Do you think that your brand gets more recognition and/or recalled through your cooperation with influencers?
9. After your cooperation with an influencer do you analyse the results? Can you see after a post has been made that your brand has gained bigger proliferation?

Social media
10. Which social medias are your company active and why those?

Internationalization of e-commerce companies
11. Are you reaching out to a bigger consumer’s base, international, through your marketing in social medias?
12. Are there any advantages for you as an e-commerce company to market yourselves on social medias, considering you already are based online?

Influencer marketing
13. Why have you chosen to work with influencers?
14. Have you considered to work with international influencers in order to reach other/new markets/countries?
15. Have you already reached international consumers through influencer marketing?

Extra
16. Do you have anything to add or ask us?