



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

Master's degree Project in International Business and Trade

Onboarding and Culture

A multiple case study on the effect of culture in user-onboarding

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Date: Spring 2022

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Acknowledgements

Throughout this paper we have been fortunate enough to have been given a lot of support.

First of all, we would like to thank our supervisor Niklas Åkerman. Åkerman helped us to align our paper and aided us into pinpointing the track of this study. His insightful feedback allowed us to push for a deeper and more focused paper.

Secondly we would like to thank all participants of this study. Thus, we thank Henrik Vallentin, Olle Josarp, Gustaf Terning, Harry Forsman and Tehrie Tyrie for their participation and for taking time out of their schedules to be a part of this study.

Thirdly, we would like to thank our fellow students who have helped us with feedback throughout this paper, a special thanks to Ivan Kalami and Skander Sriha who have been giving us continuous feedback throughout this project.

Fourthly, we would like to thank the School of Business, Economics, and Law at the University of Gothenburg for five years of study as well as the knowledge and the memories that came with those five years.

Abstract

This study investigates how digital platforms handle cultural aspects during the onboarding process. The goal was to better understand the role culture has during the onboarding process to increase the likelihood of a successful internationalisation of digital platforms. The data gathered was mainly done through conducting interviews with employees at different companies which could be described as being digital platforms. These companies all had prior experience with onboarding new users on new markets. The study showed that culture plays an important role in the onboarding process and it needs to be taken into consideration to succeed when internationalising. When there were larger differences in culture, more actions needed to be taken by digital platforms to succeed. Trust was the key factor that contributed to success and trust is mainly built through the cultural factors of shared language, common heritage and religious beliefs. These factors all contribute to personal values and beliefs. When humans feel more similar to each other, trust is being built more easily.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Since the end of the 20th century the world has changed quickly, a lot of these changes can be correlated to the emergence of the internet. With that major new invention, many industries have faced changes. Meanwhile new business opportunities have arrived on a great scale. One of these newer types of business are digital platforms (Reuver et. al, 2018). Digital platforms have challenged many old industries, where for example the travelling industry is a notable one. Digital platforms such as Hotels.com and Booking.com have changed the industry as a whole. The change followed by the internet revolution has created challenges for most businesses. Digital platforms, since being built entirely on the internet are in theory quite easy to move and establish in a new market. However, this is not always the case since digital platforms create their value from users and without users, the business does not generate value for anyone (Stallkamp & Schotter, 2019). No one would use Facebook if there were no friends to interact with and no one would use Airbnb if there were no rooms to book. Therefore the main objective for a digital platform is to acquire users and get them to use the platform. The challenge when moving to a new market is that the platform starts all over, given that the network effects are location bound. Therefore this dilemma is very interesting from an International Business perspective.

A big part of user acquisition is user onboarding, and user onboarding can in short be described as education. The term onboarding refers to how you educate a user and how you get them accustomed to the platform. While acquisition is solely the process of acquiring a user, getting the user to sign up to your platform. Within this paper however, the term user onboarding will include both these definitions. Therefore it will include both the acquisition part and also the user onboarding part. Since education in some form always involves a human perspective this will be influenced by culture. Culture can affect many different aspects of behaviour and therefore influence how a user perceives a digital platform. The effect that culture has on acquiring users is therefore the purpose of this study. In order to fully understand how to onboard users in an international context it is important to understand how culture comes into play since culture affects several behavioural aspects of humans, and

therefore users. In order to fully understand the way culture impacts the onboarding process, it is important to first understand digital platforms, the importance of users (i.e. the network effect), user onboarding, and culture.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Background to Digital Platforms

How the term digital platform is defined can differ quite drastically depending on the source. There are several different definitions of the term depending on who you ask and from which context it is being used in. It is therefore important to clarify how a ‘digital platform’ is defined in this thesis.

This thesis will take on the ‘non-technical’ definition of digital platforms. The non-technical view, views the digital platform as a platform where users can make transactions with one another (Abdelkafi et al., 2019; Asadullah et al., 2018). Basically the function is to create a ‘room’ where different actors can interact, most commonly a supplier and a customer. For example, on Facebook the normal user can be seen as the ‘supplier’ as the data the user generates are used to generate personalised ads, which is then sold to the ‘customer’, normally a company (Facebook, 2022). The groups, or actors present on the app or website are then interdependent on each other (Abdelkafi et al., 2019; Gawer, 2014; Hagiu and Wright, 2015; Ye et al., 2011).

The customers and suppliers are then a bit more unclear than in a traditional company. For example in the case of Hotel.com, the suppliers are the hotels and the customers are the users. However, it is the hotel that pays the kickback fee back to Hotels.com and could therefore also be seen as a customer, exemplifying the complication of it. Regardless, the digital platforms all share the same function, even if it is a social media platform selling views and data to advertisers or if it is eBay where the transaction is very clear and the suppliers and customers are clear. In many cases the users are both suppliers and customers, eBay being an example, Airbnb another and Uber as a third. However in the Netflix case, the supplier is for example not a user since the supplier is the production company.

1.2.2 Background to Network Effects

Since the actors within a digital platform are interdependent on each other network effects occur. Network effects are the effect that explains that the value of a digital platform increases as more users, customers and suppliers join the network. For example, the value of Facebook increases every time a new user joins. The value of Facebook lies in the fact that you can reconnect with old friends, and add new friends as they enter your life. If none of your friends use Facebook the value significantly drops. The same goes for other digital platforms, you would not use Airbnb if it only had one apartment in Amsterdam, nor would you go through the effort of taking nice pictures of your apartment if there were only a few active customers. In summary the network effect is that more users attract more users, and not in the way of the traditional aspects such as word of mouth but rather in increasing the value of the product and therefore, according to traditional business strategy such as Barney (1991) the competitive advantage of a company grows when the value of the product/service sold increases (Aals et. al, 2019; Zhu and Iansiti, 2019; Stallkamp and Schotter, 2019).

According to Aals et al. (2019) and Zhu and Iansiti (2019) the ‘network effect’ is a reason why some platforms gain traction and get new users at a rapid pace while others fail. However, many authors express the egg and the chicken issue that comes with the network effects. As mentioned earlier with Airbnb, travellers only use it since it has wide offers, and renters only use it since it has travellers. Therefore Airbnb needs travellers to attract renters and vice versa, thus a chicken and the egg problem. Many authors have mentioned this issue in regards to digital platforms (Evans, 2003; Stallkamp and Schotter, 2019; Caillaud and Jullien, 2003).

Network effects can according to Stallkamp and Schotter (2019) be either nationally bound or cross-border effects. A cross-border effect can for example be Airbnb, if they have several apartments in Spain, and only Spain, then users from for example the Nordic Region will still be attracted to using the platform since Spain is such a popular vacation spot for them. Another example of a cross-border network effect is Netflix, being an American company and having the majority of their content in English they can establish themselves in all countries where English is being taught. A national bound network effect could for example be a food delivery service, one would not care if a food delivery service has all restaurants in Belgium registered on their app if you live in Italy, the same goes with for example Uber, the drivers

still need to be present in the country of the user and vice versa. Stallkamp and Schotter (2019) then explains that a digital platform with only national bound network effects practically needs to start over when entering a new market, meaning that if deploy your platform in a new country the entry will almost be identical as the actual start of the platform.

1.2.3. Background to User Onboarding

In this study the term onboarding will refer to how a company attracts a user, gets them accustomed to the platform, and educates the user in order to make them a recurring user. The approach for this can be different, and different authors have different views on how this can be done the most effectively. Most of the research has been made in regards to UX design, the actual design of the platform. However, many companies use other types of onboarding tools such as seminars, webinars and other types of methods that would fall outside of the UX design (Megyeri and Szabó, 2021).

The term ‘Onboarding’ was originally a term used within human resource management. The term aims to describe the process of assimilating new team members. The aim is to align the organisation and employee with each other. According to Bradt and Vonnegut (2009) onboarding is “the process of acquiring, accommodating, assimilating and accelerating new team members.” There are several positive aspects of a successful employee onboarding, one of them being higher talent retention according to Bradt and Vonnegut (2009).

The term has since been translated and used to describe how users of a digital platform can be onboarded. The core aim is to have as successful users as possible and to minimise the turnover of customers. Thus, increasing user retention. According to Hullick the primary objective with customer onboarding is to increase the amount of activated customers, as well as increasing the amount of satisfied customers. An activated customer is a recurring user that uses the digital platform on a regular basis. An activated customer can be measured in many different ways (Strahm, 2017). According to Renz et. al (2014) the term onboarding can be translated into a ‘user perspective’. The term ‘user perspective’ is used to describe a sum of methods that aids the new user to become accustomed to a new digital product.

The main research lies within the IT-development area and UX design aspect of user onboarding. For example a study by Strahm (2017) investigates the relationship between user

onboarding and minimalistic UX design. Strahm (2017) gives some insights into how a company can create an onboarding strategy and how the design of the application can generate a higher customer retention rate. A similar study was also conducted at Chalmers, where a case study of the bookkeeping platform, Bokio was made where the researcher looked at how different onboarding strategies made users more engaged and how to increase user retention. However this study by Carlén (2017) also has a more technical approach with more focus on the Computer Science aspect of onboarding and customer retention than on the business aspect.

1.2.4. Background to Internationalisation

Internationalisation within this study mostly offers a context. Internationalisation in this study is defined broadly in order to give a broad context, therefore internationalisation is viewed as the process of leaving the home market and expanding into a new market. The entry mode into a new market is not specified. Within this context, if the digital-platform company offers their platform in another market than their home country they are viewed as international. The clarifications and description of the term does not need to be deeper than such. Some aspects from the IB-literature will be discussed and touched upon, however not discussed very deeply. Market knowledge will be discussed but with a major focus on culture. According to Johanson and Vahlne (1977) knowledge of business climate and cultural patterns makes up market knowledge. Thus, understanding the culture of a country when internationalising is a form of market knowledge.

The process of internationalisation includes several aspects. Such as mode of entry as discussed by Hill et al., (1990), Morschett et al., (2010) and also the timing of entry as mentioned by Gaba et al., (2002). The actual process of internationalisation is described by several authors such as Johanson and Vahlne (2009) that describes how expanding into markets with less cultural distance is beneficial since it increases the market knowledge. Another aspect of the internationalisation process is described by Cavusgil and Knight (2015) that describes born global firms. Firms that in their nature are global, these firms are most often run by entrepreneurs that rapidly try to internationalise the company, these companies also view their customer base as global. The processes will not be analysed in this paper since it lies outside of the scope of the research. However, since the context is international it is important to understand these aspects.

1.2.5. Background to Culture

Culture is a hard term to define into a single term. In 1952, a pair of American anthropologists named Kroeber and Kluckhohn tried to do so. They ended up with 164 different definitions. However, it is needed to define the meaning of culture within this study, the definition will thus not be universal and will apply to the context of this study.

This paper will define culture in a similar fashion as to how Tata and Prashad (2015) defines culture. Culture is defined as beliefs and values that are widely shared in a society as shared behaviour patterns, as values, ideas and other symbolic behaviour-shaping systems visible in a society. However this paper will also consider laws and regulations which according to Jing and Graham (2008) affects regulations and policy makings.

Culture can be seen as a society's personality according to Solomon (2004). This then means that members of a culture share the same beliefs, values, norms and traditions. Since these aspects influence so many minor decisions in every person's everyday life, consumer behaviour is hard to fully grasp without considering the cultural aspect.

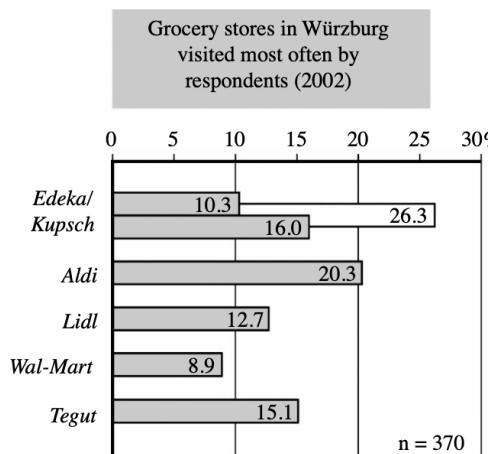
Culture is one of the most influential components of human behaviour. This is due to the fact that many parts of human behaviour are governed by values which are highly connected to the culture in which we act according to Spencer-Oatey (2012). Those same values also affect the norm in our society and therefore guide our behaviour even in smaller ways such as styles of greeting each other. The second thing that according to Spencer-Oatey (2012) influences our human behaviour are underlying assumptions, underlying assumptions are assumptions that the majority of the people within the culture take for granted and assumptions that they make without considering it. These assumptions will determine how the members of the culture feel, think and perceive. These taken-for granted assumptions are very powerful since they are not debatable within the culture. These assumptions are for example that the school should educate, business should make profits and medicine should cure. These assumptions are so strong that one could be considered stupid or ignorant for questioning them.

According to Mironenko and Sorokin (2018) culture includes both material objects as well as non-tangible components. The material objects being artefacts, jewellery etc. The

non-material components being languages, literature, art, science, etc. Furthermore they elaborates and explains that culture also involves processes such as collective modes of behaviour that are heavily influenced by customs and traditions.

One case of showing the importance and effect of culture is Walmart's expansion into Germany. Walmart, is not a digital platform as described earlier however, they still exemplify how culture can create issues when internationalising. The lessons learnt from Walmarts internationalisation process could therefore also be applicable on digital platforms. Why Walmart is chosen as an example is that they famously failed to establish themselves on the German market. They entered the German market in 1997 but after only nine years in 2006 they decided to shut-down their German branch completely, the reason for the withdrawal was in large part due to Walmart's failure to adapt to the local German culture (McDonald, 2017). The Walmart case in Germany is therefore very interesting to analyse as its a prime example of the importance of culture in the internationalisation process.

Figure I



Note. Figure I is sourced from: *Consumer acceptance and market success WalMart in the UK and Germany*. By Pioch, E. et al. (2009). *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 37(3), 205-225.

As seen in the figure above the market share of Walmart in Würzburg 2002 was far behind its competitors. The German legislation limits the amount of time a store can be open to 80 hours per week, the practice of Walmart having its stores open all day was therefore not possible in Germany (Hunt et al., 2018). According to Shurrab (2014) another cultural difference was the practice of Walmart employees smiling and greeting customers. This practice is appreciated

in the US, but in Germany it is perceived as strange and could be interpreted as flirting. Walmart also appointed Americans in executive positions which did not understand German and made English as the official company language. This caused a divide between workers at the lower levels and executives as employees felt like 'outsiders'. Germans put great pride into communicating in German, even though English is well-known among the population (Shurrab, 2014). The German labour force is heavily unionised while Walmart is known for its resistance to unions, this also created conflicts when operating in Germany as workers are used to representation at higher company levels (Landler and Barbaro, 2006). These cultural aspects all contributed to the failure of Walmart on the German market therefore stressing the importance of understanding the cultural differences between countries when internationalising.

1.3 Problem Discussion

The majority of newly founded digital platforms fail and never get into the public knowledge. We tend to focus on the great successful ones but forget how many failures there are to one Airbnb or Uber (Parker et al., 2016). There are many reasons why a digital platform fails, but as mentioned earlier the onboarding process is crucial when companies seek to grow their user base. The onboarding process is an interaction between a company and its customers and users therefore, when putting this in an international perspective (i.e. when a digital platform established themselves in a market outside of their home market) the cultural aspect comes into play as it is dependent on human interaction. The cultural factor therefore makes the onboarding process different depending on in which culture or nation it's being employed in. When companies internationalise they face the challenge to adopt the onboarding process to the local market to succeed. This very challenge can therefore be crucial to whether the entire internationalisation process of a company succeeds or not. Many researchers view the customers or users as a single entity neglecting the cultural differences, therefore also affecting the onboarding process. This is then the main problem when putting onboarding in an international perspective, that the users are different since they are affected by the culture. Acquiring users has been researched earlier, and the main focus has been on networking effects, i.e. the network of users and how they create value for the digital platform. However these studies, such as Stollkamp and Schotter (2019) who only mentions culture aspects in the

aspects of networking effects. They then described how countries with for example similar languages can have cross-border network effects. Onboarding itself since it involves users and the obvious fact that humans are being onboarded human behaviour plays a major role. A big part of human culture is culture, since culture forms underlying assumptions that in turn shapes human behaviour. Thus, to achieve these network effects and to actually acquire users it can be important to understand cultural aspects.

Evans (2003) also has conducted research within the importance of users without mentioning cultural aspects. According to Brouter et. al (2016) the cultural aspect is a limitation to their study and actively chose not to include this factor. Finding these aspects in other studies were also not done. The research within onboarded is already restricted, and how the cultural aspects plays a role is not discussed or researched. Therefore, a gap has been identified, this gap is interesting enough also apparent in blog posts, websites and other non-academic sources. The gap identified is that the cultural aspects of onboarding (including user acquisition) is not appropriately examined in the existing literature.

1.4 Problem question and purpose

The purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding of cultural aspects within the onboarding process (within onboarding user acquisition, user retention and educating users will be included) and how it affects the internationalisation of digital platforms. This study will therefore address this issue and integrate the cultural aspect into the onboarding process and its importance to a successful internationalisation process.

How do digital platforms manage cultural aspects in order to facilitate the onboarding process during internationalisation?

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework discusses 2 different subjects. First of all is User Onboarding, in this chapter a clarification of the term is described as well as a clarification of some of the more popular onboarding strategies complemented with psychology theory in order to explain why certain strategies work. Furthermore Network Effects are presented in order to explain how users affect the product of a digital platform and the different types of Network Effects that exist. Finally culture is explained and how it interacts with the other factors to connect the theory with the research question. Culture is a broad subject and a selection of sections of culture is presented such as, trust, cultural differences in learning and education, humour and overall cultural distance.

2.1 User Onboarding

User onboarding is as mentioned earlier a process where a user goes from not knowing about a digital platform to becoming proficient in using it and using it regularly, in this process the user needs to learn about the platform in order to obtain all its value. According to Megyeri and Szabó (2021) user onboarding contains three stages. The first stage being the information seeking process. Where a potential user sees a platform as a potential solution to their issue, information search is also mentioned by Kotler (2000) as the second step of the buying process (of any product or service). Information search can also come from external sources, such as through seeking advertisement information or by consulting friends and family, or from internal sources like the consumer's own knowledge and experience (Assael, 1987).

According to Megyeri and Szabó (2021) the second step of user onboarding is the realisation of the value of the platform by the user. The “aha-moment” was according to Strahm (2017) coined by Hullick and the importance of the “aha-moment” is for the user to realise the value and create engagement. The other important factor in Hullicks onboarding strategy is to quickly reach a quick win. The “aha-moment” is what can be seen as a cue from a psychological standpoint and the quick win then being the reward. According to (2019) cues that signal a reward, in this example the ‘aha-moment’ signalling the value of the product and the reward being attaining that value and hopefully solving a problem for the user, can create a very powerful motivation in acquiring that reward. Rewards can function as a reinforcement to a Pavlovian motivational learning (Ostlund, 2019). This can therefore explain why Hullick

stresses the importance of a quick win in order to motivate the user to continue to explore and learn about the function. According to Megyeri and Szabó (2021) it is important to encourage the frequent use of the digital platform. This can be done with tutorial videos, tooltips, or interactive product tours.

The third step is when the customer continues to gain perceived gains and becomes a frequent user and highly values the services offered by the platform (Megyeri and Szabó, 2021). This can be seen as the end goal of the user onboarding journey.

2.1.1. Different Onboarding strategies

There are a couple of different onboarding strategies that companies can employ, two of these are one by Hullick, and one by Higgins (Strahm, 2017). Both Higgins and Hullick can be seen as well-renowned experts within the field of onboarding and in growing digital platforms. Other ways of onboarding users are the ‘gamification method’ as described by (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011).

Hullicks strategy is quite easy and builds on the ‘aha-moment’. Hullicks strategy is to quickly get the user to see the ‘aha-moment’. The reasoning behind this is that the user, if spending too much time on the platform before realising the value, will choose to abandon the platform. The most important aspect for a user to determine if a platform will generate value for them is if it ‘improves the life of the user’ and if it ‘is easy to use’ (Tiongson, 2015). When the user understands the value of the product and sees how the platform can create value for the user, the amount of time the user is willing to invest in order to obtain that value is increased (Appboy, 2016; Yardley, 2009). Therefore, this is the underlying reasoning as to why the “aha-moment” needs to be reached as soon as possible. The next step in Hullicks strategy is then to reach the value as soon as possible. Hullick calls this a quick win (Strahm, 2017). For example, a small win could be when you start following a few accounts on Twitter and your timeline is no longer just an empty space. Basically it gets the user quickly engaged into the platform and keeps you engaged as you learn the platform's different functionalities. However as explained earlier the quick realisation of value and quick win might aid the digital platform in their onboarding efforts on a psychological level.

According to Higgins (2021) one way to successfully onboard is to use guided interactions and a more tutorial way of introducing the user to the platform. He proposes using free samples and teaching the user by doing. Free samples also build trust between the digital platform firm and the user. This goodwill can reward the platform with lower throwaway trial accounts as it builds trust between the parties. By keeping the onboarding journey personal this will lead the platform to serve the user and not the other way around. The onboarding journey needs to be viewed as a personal experience that users go through continuously as they learn and gain new experiences through interactions with the platform, as each person is unique (Hassenzahl, 2010). In 1998 Costigan, Ilter and Berman conducted a research examining how trust among employees can affect the motivation of employees within their work. They examined several different types of trust and found that all types of trust had a positive correlation with how motivated the employees were at their job. The same could be translated to onboarding, that trust builds motivation. This can explain why Higgins (2021) stresses the importance of personalised experiences and trust.

Another onboarding strategy that has become more popular in the last few years is gamification. According to Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) gamification is basically to use different elements that have been used in games for non gaming contexts. Gamification is described to provide the user with a fun experience and a reward. They exemplify this with the case of feeding broccoli to a child. The fun is pretending the fork to be an aeroplane and the reward is to provide the child with a reward such as a cheese sauce after the broccoli has been eaten. According to Duhigg (2012) in psychology this is known as a cue and a reward, the cue being the fun part, the child wants to play, and the reward being the cheese. This system drives several aspects of a human's behaviour and habits are what enables us to do fairly complex tasks such as driving out of our garage while simultaneously turning on the radio, being on the phone and fastening our seatbelts with a very limited focus. Forming a habit is something that many digital products have used in order to keep us as loyal users. Thus gamification can provide two very important factors into the onboarding journey, firstly while creating a fun experience for the user they are engaged longer, and by later on providing a reward it creates a habit for the user to use the product. The cues however do not need to be a game, it can also be a push notification on your phone, an email with a text such as "We haven't seen you in a while" etc.

However, the main idea of using gamification elements is to motivate the user to keep being engaged and basically is a way to support and motivate users in order to complete one or several tasks. This can be used in the onboarding process so that the user completes several tasks and has fun as they are learning about the product and understanding the ins and outs of the product (Toscani et al., 2018). According to Zichermann and Cunningham (2011) ‘everything has the potential to be fun’, they base this notion on extremely popular games that are in fact boring tasks made into a game, they mention Farmville, a game where you plant and harvest crops, Diner Dash where you wait tables, Diaper Dash, a game where you change diapers and Sally’s Salon where you do peoples nails and hair. They explain that the task that players complete in a game is not necessarily what makes the game fun, rather it is the mechanics of the game. Given this notion anything can be fun, if disguised with good mechanics. They further explain how the ‘fun’ part needs to be primary, not a secondary priority. According to their research, when the fun comes second the learning will be harmed since the users lose interest and motivation.

An important part of gamification is the flow, this is being defined as being ‘in the zone’ (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011). This is basically a state between anxiety and boredom. Game developers strive to create this flow in their games, it provides the user with a state of mind where they lose track of the outside world and time and is calm and focused in the game. How to achieve this is to test different functions until you find the sweet spot between boredom and anxiety.

All theories regarding onboarding agree, however in different words, that the user needs to be engaged in what Megyeri and Szabó (2021) calls the second step of the onboarding journey. Either by creating small wins quickly, building trust or by simply making the process as fun as possible. All three of these aspects are heavily influenced by the behaviour of the user being onboarded.

2.2 Network Effects

Earlier in this paper it is explained how network effects can benefit the users as it helps to show the value of the platform. However, those network effects can help the digital platform to grow. This is a point mentioned by several authors and studies and can be defined as the chicken and egg problem which is the problem of acquiring users without any users (Evans,

2003; Stallkamp and Schotter, 2019; Caillaud and Jullien, 2003). According to Jullien (2003) in order to attract buyers the platform needs sellers and vice versa. This problem is one of the toughest challenges a digital platform business has to overcome (Evans, 2003).

Brouthers et al. (2016) also discusses this aspect of digital platforms. As to where they are in nature, they are easy to scale but are very dependent on their network of users. Further mentions that these types of business needs a large enough network to generate value on the platform. Thus, these businesses can avoid encountering liabilities of foreignness but instead can encounter liabilities of outsidership if they do not have enough users. The first term can be defined as the additional operating cost endured by foreign businesses compared to local firms (Nachum, 2015). The latter is more focused on being 'outside' the relevant people network that the firm operates in, rather than psychic distance which the first is concerned with (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). Thus highlighting the importance of active users on digital platforms as this is the main value adding function in an already developed digital platform.

Stallkamp and Schotter (2018) further elaborates on the network effects and stresses that companies need to examine whether their network effects are geographically bound, or if they are international. For example, Netflix can without having Swedish shows enter the Swedish market and just provide the Swedish users with American movies and series. This as the Swedish market is already familiar with American films and culture, which makes them potential customers. When they have the Swedish users the Swedish suppliers will come as well (suppliers in this case being production companies). This can be seen with Netflix as they nowadays offer domestic productions to the Swedish market as well. Stallkamp and Schotter (2018) then mentions that if the platform's network is geographically bound then the platform will encounter the same chicken and egg problem that they did when they initially started in their home country. They say this is the case for most companies, the other type could be regarded as 'born globals' as their global network effects makes them able to deploy their platform globally as for example Youtube. They then further elaborates this and explains that if the network effects are location-bound then so are also the firm specific advantages. Meaning that if a platform without any type of non-location-bound network effects establish themselves in a new market then the firm-specific advantages are non-transferable.

2.2.1 Lock-in effect

Customer loyalty in the digital realm could be seen as more dependent on the ‘lock-in effect’ compared to traditional firms which rely on such things as brand recognition, relationship, value, service, status etc. However, the ‘lock-in effect’ can be seen as especially noticeable on digital platforms. The ‘lock-in’ effect is mostly affected by two factors, network effects and switching costs (Prud’homme, 2019). The ‘lock-in’ effect can create loyalty by simply making it harder for users to switch platforms, therefore creating a kind of forced loyalty more apparent on digital platforms.

A platform with a large number of users often attracts other companies to join their system. For example, many business systems or platforms today have a built-in integration to Hubspot (a well renowned CRM system), and also to the most popular accounting platforms. This adds value for both the business system and the CRM system/accounting platform and thus they are enhancing eachothers lock-in effects. It makes it hard for you to change from Hubspot to another CRM system since this would equate to you losing your connection to your overall business system (Srinivasan and Venkatraman, 2010). According to Prud’homme (2019) all network effects are not equal and do not generate the same value. He also highlights the fact that these network effects differ from the network effects found in a physical-world since they are not tied to any piece of hardware. He then also mentions that the costs of switching products within the digital world are different from the costs of switching in the physical world. To understand these different types of costs associated with switching platforms the The Digital Lock-in/VEIF-model is presented (Prud’homme, 2019).

Figure II, The Digital Lock-in/VEIF-model

Switching cost type	Mechanism	Principals for optimizing platform	Examples of ways to operationalize
Data embeddedness in digital platform	Valuableness of personal data attracted to platform (V)	The "value" of data should be primarily thought of in terms of its value to the user, although its marketing value to the firm and advertisers can be secondarily considered. Platforms should be designed to enable users to more easily communicate with others, compare themselves to others, compete, create, learn, be entertained, participate in a cause he/she is otherwise highly engaged in (be it work or leisure), and/or otherwise reach a goal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital space to curate life memories • Digital space to create and store work-related data/tasks • Digital space to create and store art, music, movies, and other leisure media
	Amount of valuable personal data easily and deeply embedded in platform (E)	Designed to enable effortless uploading of data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drag and drop function • Progress saved on platform • Machine learning/algorithms recommend content tailored to users' tastes based upon past data provided by the user
Data switching barriers in digital platform	Informal barriers to switching platforms (I)	Designed to make it time consuming or otherwise complicated for users to download their data in the value-added form in which it has been embedded in the platform in order to move it to a location not connected to the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No function to download data (e.g., organization of data, history of communications, etc.) directly from platform, although could be copied manually
	Formal barriers to switching platforms (F)	Platform imposes contractual terms or intentional technical restrictions making it effectively impossible for users to download their data in the value-added form in which it has been embedded in the platform in order to move it to a location not connected to the platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No way to download data/content or even straightforwardly manually copy it • Contractually prevented from copying data/content

Note. Figure II is from 'How Digital businesses can leverage the high cost for consumers to switch platforms'
 By: Prud'homme, D. (2019). LSE Business Review: London

The above model explains two different types of switching costs, firstly valuable data embeddedness and secondly, data switching barriers. According to Prud'homme (2019) these two costs need to be incorporated together in order to properly lock-in the customer.

The “V” shown in the model could for example be the memories that you receive on Facebook, if you were to switch platforms from Facebook, all those memories will be erased.

The “E” is the personal data that is embedded in the platform, for example if your playing a video game then the, ‘E’ will be your save progress, for music streaming platforms this would be your playlists, the data they have gathered in order to get their automatically generated playlists personalised for the user based on what they usually listen to.

The “I” in this model is an informal barrier to switching platforms. This could cause difficulties in downloading your data and switching it from one platform to the other. For example, you cannot download your Facebook timeline and move it to another social media platform.

The “F” mechanism of the model is the formal barriers, such as contract and other barriers. For example, you are not available to download your data from every platform.

An example of a type of platform that has difficulties incorporating this VEIF model are taxi-services like Uber; the data a user saves there is not particularly valuable. Mostly it is payment related data and previously saved trips. Therefore it is easy for a user to try several of these services and switch platforms (Prud'homme, 2019). Another example of these types of services are platforms where you order home food, electric scooters and other smaller transactions. Harder switches are for example music streaming services and business systems. Changing business systems for example is a rather costly procedure since it takes time to learn a new system, educate all employees and transport all the data necessary.

The lock-in effect exemplifies how digital platforms can create long-term customers and how an onboarded user can be transformed to a lifelong customer where they hardly can change platforms. Therefore powerful lock-in effects can be viewed as a compliment to

2.3 Culture

According to Spencer-Oatey (2012) which explains that culture should be regarded as separate from universal human nature and from individual personality. It should be separated from human nature since it is not inherited, it is learned. We are not born with values, beliefs or any other cultural aspects, those are thought. Human nature could be regarded as our operational system, that grants us the ability to feel joy, pain, fear, anger and other emotions, however what we do with these feelings and what makes us feel these feelings are modified by culture. Overall, culture affects our behaviour in several different aspects as it influences our behaviour and feelings.

2.3.1 Cultural Distance

Cultural distance is a term used by several authors and according to Shenkar et al. (2022) was coined by Kogut and Singh (1988). According to Cho and Padmanabhan (2005) almost no international business studies can be complete without considering cultural aspects. Hofstede (2001) defines cultural distance as the degree to which the shared norms and values differ from one another. The basic and essential differences in regards to culture are language, ethnicity, religion, social networks and social norms. Cultural differences then create a distance on culture resulting in how countries differ from one another. However, the distance point of view represents only a narrow part of cross-cultural interaction and they argue that there needs to be a paradigm shift in the approach to cross-culture research (Shenkar et al., 2022). Instead of viewing entities as unitary and independent they should be viewed as relational and dependent on the mutual relationship that they develop. There needs to be a paradigm shift in international business research with focus on what happens during cross-cultural interactions and how it affects international business rather than just accepting old frameworks (Ibid.).

Another measure of cultural distance can be language. This as according to West and Graham (2004) language is heavily linked to both cultural boundaries as well as national boundaries. Furthermore they explain that language and values are connected with each other due to language being an antecedent to various cognitive processes, which in turn is an antecedent of values. An article by Nisbett (2003) explained that the language spoken influences the way we think. Therefore sharing a language will most likely lead to sharing of values.

2.3.1 Cultural effects on human behaviour

According to Hofstede (1991) certain parts of culture are in fact visible however, their meanings are invisible. Since the meaning lies only in the interpretation of their insiders. This is being exemplified by Spencer-Oatey (2012) with the example of the 'ring gesture' where one would put their thumb and index finger together in order to create a ring. In the USA, the UK and Canada this would be interpreted as conveying agreement, approval or acceptance, however in several Mediterranean countries this is regarded as an insult. Thus, the meaning lies within the interpreters of the insiders, the insiders being the ones within the culture. Hofstede (1991) famously described 5 dimensions of culture. (1) *Power Distance*, which is the acceptance of power being distributed unequally. (2) *Individualism and collectivism*, a individualistic society is a society where the ties between individuals are loose, and a collective society is where the individuals are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that protect individuals. According to Walsh et al. (2008) a clear divide between Eastern/collectivistic and Western/individualistic cultures can be seen in how service is perceived. Western consumers are harder to 'please' as they are more individualistic and are more likely to express dissatisfaction compared to eastern consumers (ibid). (3) *Masculinity vs. Femininity*, a masculine culture is a culture where social gender roles are distinct, and in a feminine culture the roles are not as clear and overlap. (4) *Uncertainty avoidance*, which is how threatened people of a culture feel in regards to uncertain or unknown situations. (5) *Confucian dynamism*, which is in regards to the orientation of a culture, defined as a continuum with long and short term orientation. Values associated with long-term association are thrift and perseverance, and for short-term are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's 'face'.

These dimensions affect how people act and behave in societies. However, there is criticism against Hofstede's model including that it generalises with regards to gender roles and that his survey method has a narrow selection mostly focused on middle class men (Moulettes, 2007). Other criticisms against Hofstede's arguments are that there are contradictions in his models. For example, Sweden is identified as being the most feminist culture in by its '*Masculinity vs Femininity*' dimension as well as being ranked highly democratic and modern in the '*power distance*' dimension, still Sweden has yet to have a female prime minister (Moulettes, 2007). It can be noted though that in 2021, Magdalena Andersson was appointed the first female prime minister in Sweden (Regeringskansliet, 2022).

2.3.2 Trust and personal engagement

Trust can be defined as the expectation of one party that another party will behave favourably towards other parties or to the own party (Barber, 1983). According to Couch and Jones (1997), trust can be a generalised expectancy or a trait or it can be described as something that can change depending on the situation. According to the Hullecks strategy described above, one way of creating engagement is by providing personal engagement and building trust. In regards to personal engagement and the digital platform being personal with the user, culture needs to be accounted for as shown in the case with Walmart in the background of this study. Personal engagement could be seen as the emotional level to which the user feels connected to the platform. The Walmart case shows that what is acceptable in one culture, might not be seen as acceptable in another.

The Scandinavian countries are known for their degree of trust between both individuals and the government. According to Mathiasen (2020) this is rooted in the common Lutheran faith. During the 16th century Gustav Wasa broke with the catholic church and placed himself as God representative on earth, this can be seen as the beginning of this interconnection between religion and government and has implications to this day (ibid.). Even though secularism is more common nowadays, this integration between state and society still exists which contributes to the high level of trust in the Scandinavian countries (Thue, 2020). This can be directly traced to the Lutheran heritage of the Scandinavian countries (ibid.).

A basic requirement to build trust and engage with a customer is communication. The common language for cross-border communication is English. However, the use of English might not be as effective in all cultures. For example, in Italy, Germany, Spain and France where English is not as common as in other European countries, which is a big reason as to why they have dubbed movies (Truchot, 2002). For example when doing business in France it would be advisable to know the language due to two primary reasons; firstly since not everyone in France speaks English, secondly since it can be regarded as rude or obnoxious to only speak English when doing business in France. This is due to the fact that France has a language preservation policy rooted in both their culture and legal system. For example, the Toubon Law is a law that mandates the use of French in official government publication, advertisements, all workplaces etc. (The law does not concern private, non-commercial communications, for example non-commercial web publications by private bodies nor does it

concern films, books and other types of communication beyond commercial activity. France might be the country in Europe that best exemplifies the issues of not speaking the native language, however similar issues are also apparent in Germany, albeit to a lesser extent (Takhtorva et al. 2015).

2.3.3 Cultural differences in humour and games

The way people look at humour is also something that differs across cultures, therefore it needs to be taken into consideration when building onboarding strategies based on humour and games. As mentioned earlier, one pretty popular onboarding strategy within UX-design is gamification that builds on making the onboarding journey as fun as possible in order to increase engagement and lower the abandonment-rate of users. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, our culture affects our emotions. Thus, it is important to understand how culture can affect our perception of fun and humour in order to appropriately understand how culture and onboarding are correlated. The importance of fun is also different between cultures, some cultures regard it as more important than others.

According to Apte (1995) westerners are more prone to believing that humour is a natural feature of life and will use it wherever and whenever possible. In Western society, humour is important enough for us in order to be a requirement when choosing a life-partner. People that engage in humour are often seen as positive and attractive people (Bressler et al, 2006).

However, according to Chen and Martin (2005) this is not the case in China, due to Confucianism, during the Qing dynasty between 1644-1911, the way of a gentleman required restraint from laughter in order to demonstrate dignity and social formality. Even though the Qing dynasty has fallen and humour has seen a rise within Chinese society these cultural aspects still live on and Chinese people still feel uncomfortable when encountering loud laughter. A Chinese student mentioned that they rarely use humour as a coping mechanism for laughter when comparing themselves to Canadian students. According to Martin (2007) all humans use laughter and humour, however the time and place is strongly influenced by cultural norms, beliefs, attitudes and values.

According to Khaled (2016) which describes gamification more specifically, the issue of mixing it with culture quite nicely by using the Scandinavian “Janteloven”. Janteloven is a

cultural concept in Scandinavian countries where you never should stick out, since by doing so you are stating that you are better than others which is something you should never say. Thus, gamification based on achievement and competition might not be adequate in such a culture. Since games in fact reward some behaviour and in some cases discourage others, what it rewards and discourages should align with what the person playing the game values. If they are not aligned with the game world we are in, the game world being a sort of culture, the game world can have aspects that we view as socially or culturally unacceptable (Huizinga, 1950). However, this may not always be applicable in gamification since gamification operates in a non-game context, thus a separate world is not created, a world where killing for example is accepted will most hardly be the case within gamification. Therefore, according to Khaled (2016) the culture world of the game becomes the same as the material world that the person playing the game is in. This creates issues, exemplified through if a Japanese worker beats his superior in a game this can create a socially strained scenario since hierarchy and respect for elders is very characteristic for the Japanese culture (Ibid.). The same problem might occur in egalitarian societies where certain applications make users “show-off” their achievements. For example, fitness apps have these types of functions where in some societies users become motivated by seeing others achievements and in some societies it is seen as bragging.

In conclusion, it is hard to determine what is viewed as “fun” globally, and to what degree fun can be used when the context is rather serious. For example in professional apps, meant to be used in the workspace, too much emphasis on the fun-part as gamification theory advocates can be seen as inappropriate in for example Chinese culture. Also when the game is designed it is important to make sure that it aligns with the values of the society as a whole. According to Khaled (2016) it is hard to examine how gamification affects non-western societies since it has not been used to the same extent outside western societies.

2.3.4 Cultural differences in learning and education

According to Simy and Kolb (2009) culture was the second largest factor regarding differences in learning style. The learning styles are abstract and concrete learning styles. Whether the student learns by doing or by watching each of the learning styles gains two other learning styles. In total there are four learning styles represented in the matrix below.

Figure III

	Active Experimentation (Doing)	Reflective Observation (Watching)
Concrete Experience (Feeling)	Accommodating (CE/AE)	Diverging (CE/RO)
Abstract Conceptualization (Thinking)	Converging (AC/AE)	Assimilating (AC/RO)

Figure III, Learning styles. (Based on Simy and Kolb, 2009)

Thus there are two preferences that together create the four different learning styles. Simy and Kolb (2009) argues that thinking and feeling are two separate entities and that a person is unable to think and feel at the same time. Watching and doing are also two separate entities. Important to note, is that all people can learn from all learning styles. However, the most optimal approach can be different.

Diverging learning styles are for people that are able to view concrete situations from several different angles. They tend to collect information and use their imagination to solve problems. *Assimilating learning styles* are for people that prefer information to be given clear explanations rather than practical examples. These types of people prefer to learn by reading, or through analytical models. People with a *converging learning* prefer to experiment new ideas, and to work with practical applications. *Accommodating learning styles* is more hands-on and relies on intuition rather than logic. Thus, the student learns by feeling and doing.

The biggest factor being educational specialisation, followed by culture and then gender, educational level and lastly age. For example they found that countries that are high in uncertainty avoidance, future orientation, performance orientation and institutional collectivism had more of an abstract learning. They saw that countries such as Germany and

Singapore have more abstract learning styles and that countries such as Italy and Brazil had the most concrete learning styles (Simy and Kolb, 2009).

The difference between abstract and concrete learning styles is that abstract learners rely on logical, analytical and theoretical ideas, while concrete learners rely on people for information gathering and are more likely to base judgements on feelings. Differences between countries in regards to active and reflective learning styles was also found (Simy and Kolb, 2009).

The ideas and results presented by Simy and Kolb (2009) are not unique and have been discussed before. Nisbett (2003) presented a new perspective on learning where he challenged the thought that everyone perceives and reason the same way. He mentions that westerners (Europeans and Americans) are more categorical since they focus more on particular objects in isolation from their context and believe that by understanding the rules of something they can control that thing. In contrast East Asians put things in more of a context and believe that things are so complex that they need to be put in a context in order to understand it. This can be correlated into East Asian societies being influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, in other words they are influenced by the culture, beliefs and values. He also mentions that individualism vs. collectivism also influences how different cultures learn and perceive information. In regards to these aspects, when trying to educate a consumer/user to use a certain product or service, or to educate them on the value of a product these dimensions can apply.

2.3.4 Cultural differences in sustainability

According to Tata and Prasad (2015) the national culture heavily affects the beliefs and attitudes of people and this in turn affects how sustainability issues are met. As the cultural aspects play such a role in how likely we are to engage in sustainability oriented actions, it can explain why some countries take this question a lot more seriously than others. According to McCarty and Shrum (2001) there are two aspects which act as a mediator between national culture and sustainability initiatives. Those aspects are *Importance* and *Inconvenience*. Importance is determined by how our perceived benefits of engaging in sustainability initiatives, and inconvenience is regarding the perceived cost of those initiatives, both

considering time and resources. Thus beliefs and values of a society can affect how a culture views sustainability oriented actions.

2.3.7. How culture can have an effect on law making

As mentioned in the background of this study, law making is viewed as a part of culture within this study.

Varner and Varner (2014) discusses how culture and laws are interconnected. It is mentioned how culture affects laws and how laws affect culture. One example mentioned is how agricultural societies can make laws that respect the rights of individuals and make guarantees that those laws will be followed and those rights preserved. Another example is how laws can be made for ensuring the equal value between men and women, those laws are dependent on the cultures view on men and women and their equality. However, they also acknowledge that culture does in fact change, however it happens very slowly. Historical events are another example of something that can affect the making of laws (Thatcher, 2000). The laws then have an effect on the business landscape in a country (Varner and Varner, 2014). Another argument by Kocbek (2008) is that legal language is not a universal language and therefore there are several legal languages and every legal language reflects the history from which it derives. One example mentioned by Varner and Varner (2014) is the term of *force majeure*. In French this term refers to an event that happened outside of the control of the company such as acts of God, natural disasters etc. While in the US there is no clear definition of the term.

2.4. Theory Synopsis

The theoretical framework of this study involves three parts; Onboarding, Network effects and culture.

The onboarding section describes different onboarding strategies. These strategies are complemented with different studies from other study fields since the underlying mechanisms behind these strategies are not declared. Therefore, an effort for describing these mechanisms have been done by complementing these strategies. The strategies presented were, Hулlicks strategy that focuses on quick wins and quickly realising the value of the platforms (Strahm,

2017). Secondly it was Higgins strategy that focuses on personalised experiences and service and lastly gamification that focuses on creating a game-like onboarding experience (Higgins, 2021, Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011). Hullicks strategy was further explained by using maslovian theory and by using the cue-and-reward theory of habits in order to explain why this is important rather than just stating it (Strahm, 2017). The small wins create small rewards, the rewards encourage us to go on. The cues are then what Hullick calls the “aha-moment” (Ibid.). Higgins strategy needed to be further explained with how trust and motivation correlates, for this HRM-studies needed to be used. Gamification differs in this sense and is more researched than other strategies, gamification focuses on the fun part and focuses on keeping the user engaged by entertaining the users (Zichermann and Cunningham, 2011). All these strategies however agree that keeping the user engaged is the main objective of the onboarding strategy, however the means in order to engage the users differ from, small-wins and cues, to personalised experiences and trust building to game-like experiences. An efficient onboarding leads to more users, which is the main goal of onboarding. More users equals more value for the platforms and this phenomenon is known as ‘network effects’. The important aspect of network effects is that by increasing the number of users on the platform the value of the platform is increased through this effect. This increases the product value. Secondly, how these network effects are in an international context, are they regional or if they are international. Lastly, the digital lock-in effects were explained. The digital lock-in effect is one part of user management as it locks the users into the platform and creates exit barriers for the users to leave the platforms. Onboarding and network effects shows the importance of acquiring users. Onboarding being such a subject correlated with human behaviour culture becomes important when put into an international context. Thus the first section of the culture part of this chapter looks at how culture changes and influences the human behaviour of the members of the culture. Hofstede's (1991) five cultural dimensions were used in this regard. Then, the subchapter ‘Trust and personal engagement’ was used in order to see how trust is built in different cultures. This is to be connected with Higgins (2021) onboarding strategy where trust is an important part. Therefore, when onboarding is put in an international context the theories explained in that subchapter can help to show that trust is gained and viewed differently in different cultures. In order to explain how gamification theory might differ in different cultures the subchapter ‘Cultural differences in humour and games’ shows how humour is viewed differently among cultures. For example Chen and Martin (2005) explains how loud laughter and jokes are uncomfortable in Chinese

culture. Khaled (2016) explains how the Scandinavian 'Janteloven' might interfere with gamification elements such as leaderboards and 'showing off' progress. Huizinga (1950) explains how gamification elements need to be representing the physical cultures aspects in order to relate with the user. In the subchapter 'Cultural differences in learning and education' it is explained how different learning styles are affected by culture. Since onboarding primarily is about teaching a platform these elements can affect how efficient onboarding is between cultures. Cultural differences in sustainability explains how different cultures values sustainability efforts. This is correlated with Hullicks strategy since a sustainability oriented 'quick win' might not be triggering a reward in some cultures. How culture affects the lawmaking in a country is also important in regards to product value and Hullicks strategy since a platform needs to follow the law within it operates in order to be valuable.

3. Methodology

This chapter, methodology, includes a description of how this study was conducted. The chapter also describes why the research was conducted the way it was conducted, as well as limitations and critical aspects of the methodology. The aim of this chapter is to grant the reader a transparent view into the methodology used, so that the results of this study can be interpreted correctly by the reader. This chapter includes, research approach, research design, data collection, quality of research as well as ethical considerations.

3.1. Research Approach

3.1.1. Abductive Research

In the beginning of the planning process of this research, both inductive and deductive research was considered. Simplified, an inductive research approach is when researchers build new theories based on new empirical findings, and deductive research is when empirical findings are tested on already established theories (Merriam, 2002). Since prior onboarding theories are often lacking in the cultural aspect, they needed to be complemented with other studies in order to explain why for example, the strategies work. This as the cultural factor could play a big role in if a specific onboarding strategy works or not. There is therefore a need for combining theories with empirical findings to answer the research question. According to Dubois and Gadde (2002) abductive research has the possibility of taking advantage of the systemic character of theories as well as the systemic character of empirical findings. Therefore yielding a more complete match between the two, this being important as our empirical findings are culturally focused, while the theories are more based on the onboarding process. Thus, an abductive research method was chosen. In this sense the theoretical framework was created by systematic combining, which is an abductive research approach where the theoretical framework is constantly changed during the writing process as empirical data is collected (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). In this case, an abductive research approach was used in order to maximise the use of data collected.

The initial motivation behind this study came from Babak Mahjouris work, since he is working with a digital platform highly involved in developing an onboarding strategy as well as the international expansion of the firm he works for. When trying to research these topics

for his work he found that the prior research was lacking, even though several people he talked with, even in other digital platform firms, mentioned onboarding as such an important factor for these types of firms. He later on discussed this with Karl Derehag who also became interested in the subject. Thus, the broad scope of the study was determined. The first step was then to conduct a literature review, deep-diving into the research on digital platforms, their expansions and all things related to user acquisition, user retention and education of users. This was important in order to identify a research gap. In order to identify the gap, “neglect spotting” was used (Sandberg and Alvesson, 2011). Neglect spotting was apparent in several studies where it was apparent or stated that culture was neglected and that users were seen as constant regardless of their country or culture. When the gap was identified and the need for further research was apparent a purpose, research questions and theoretical framework was identified. These three aspects served as a basis for the research design.

3.1.2. Qualitative Research

As earlier stated, the research purpose of this study is to deepen the understanding how culture aspects affect onboarding of users for digital platforms. Research can be divided into two different types or streams of methods, those being qualitative and quantitative research. The main difference is that data in qualitative research is based on words and in quantitative research it is mainly based on numbers (Bell et al., 2019). As our research question is connected with culture and culture is a highly ‘human’ factor, we decided to make our research based on the qualitative approach. This as qualitative research seeks to view the world through ‘someone else’s eyes’ and this is crucial to answer the cultural aspects of our research question. The onboarding process is measured differently between companies and onboarding can be hard to quantify which further makes the quantitative approach unsuitable for this thesis. Our limited access to ‘hard numbers’ and with most of our empirical findings being generated through interviews which generated words also strengthen the decision to base our research on the qualitative approach. This allowed the research to gain a deep understanding of how interactions with users differ between cultures. In some cases the differences were very subtle, meaning that it would be hard to catch those aspects without having a conversation with the participants of this study.

A quantitative research approach would not be able to gather information and insight in the same way as qualitative research. For example, the differences found in the learning process

in regards to the hierarchy aspects between workers and management could be harder to spot by conducting research through the quantitative approach, as the differences are hard to put into numbers.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Multiple Case Study

A case study is a study where the researchers conduct an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomena (Saunders et al., 2016). What is being researched in this paper is an ongoing phenomena regarding how digital platforms manage cultural aspects within their work, thus a case study felt appropriate. According to Ghauri and Grønhaug (2005) case studies are especially suited to answer questions that begin with ‘why’ and ‘how’ such as the problem question in this thesis. It is also suited for answering questions about current events and filling knowledge-gaps (Ibid.). This study fits well into both of the above characteristics. However, since this research seeks to deepen the cultural perspective in the onboarding process of digital platforms several cases needed to be used. This as one case simply would not generate enough data or reach the required level of trustworthiness in the study. Primarily since digital firms have several different onboarding processes depending on several different aspects such as; strategy, complexity of the product, and whether the platform targets businesses or consumers etc. As we wanted to also capture differences between companies and some companies were only present in certain areas a multiple case study was chosen. When having a ‘multiple case study’ there is an ability to observe cross case differences and similarities, therefore decreasing the risk of false conclusions (Eisenhardt, 1989). Having several cases offers the researchers an opportunity to examine the results between the cases. In this particular research it offers another very important factor, it offers the opportunity to examine how different cultures affect different types of onboarding. Since several cases means insight into different markets this offers a greater insight into different markets. This could be solved with one case of a company acting in several cultures, however that would not enable the research to examine cultural effects between different types of digital platforms. The choice of conducting a ‘multiple-case study’ is therefore a means to broaden the perspective and to better facilitate answering the research question. The digital platforms studied were chosen by both the accessibility of the companies themselves and they had to

operate across cultures to some degree to make it possible to generate data for answering of the research question.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Data Sources

Within this study both primary data and secondary data was used. Primary data is data collected by the researchers during the time of the research, secondary data on the other hand is data collected by others during other studies or data collected for other reasons. (Bell et al., 2019). The reasoning behind using secondary data lies in the issues finding companies to interview in Asia or outside of Europe as well as earlier mentioned the struggles in finding a social media platform to interview. Thus, a secondary source of data was the only viable option in order to gain insight outside of Europe as well as gaining insight into how culture affects the onboarding process for social media platforms. To gain some insight in culture outside Europe was important as the likely differences in the cultural aspects would be larger across large geographical distances. In a perfect world, this research would have been conducted by using a primary data source for all of the empirical findings. However, the tight schedule this research was under as well as the limited network of the authors made it not a possibility. There were some efforts to find primary data sources outside of Europe but they failed, therefore it was resorted to use secondary data sources instead. Lastly, secondary data was used in the background to exemplify how culture is an important issue in IB studies on a general basis.

3.3.2. Selection of companies and Candidates

This research required empirical data such as cases as earlier described. As cases could through conducting interviews generate primary data. However, there was also some use of secondary data in cases when interview's could not be conducted. The selection process followed a technique called *judgement sampling* (also known as *purposive sampling*), the technique means that the researchers selects specific participants based on certain qualifications and traits (Suen et al., 2014). Within this study, the first requirement was of course that the respondent worked for a digital platform that has active users. This was a very basic and rather broad requirement but was necessary in order to fully examine how culture

affects onboarding, since onboarding is quite specific to a digital platform, given this researcher definition of the term. Onboarding, the second requirement was that the company had some level of cross culture interactions. The objective was to examine several digital platforms that operated in somewhat similar geographical areas, this to better capture specific cultural differences. There was some interference with the possibility to cross-examine modes of onboarding since some platforms are more complicated than others meaning that the modes of onboarding (how to acquire users, the training of users etc.) differs depending on how complicated the platform actually is. However, how cultural aspects affect different types of onboarding is greatly benefitted from using different types of onboarding. The requirements amount to a very broad range of companies to investigate, however not all companies are willing to answer questions regarding their onboarding since it can be viewed as quite sensitive. Therefore, after several attempts to contact respondents outside of the author's personal and professional networks the only companies and interview objects willing to participate were those that had some kind of relationship with the authors. Thus, all interview objects have a personal or professional relationship with Babak Mahjouri (the complications of this matter are discussed below).

The purposive sampling method comes with some limitations. The main one is that the samples are not random, meaning that important representatives of the population can be left out within the sample. The generalisability of this study would therefore be higher since if the sample was completely random (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). A low number of interviews also gives the research a lower degree of generalizability. However, the subjects were not selected depending on whether the authors believed that the respondents would give favourable answers or based on any biases.

When choosing who to interview the selections were different. When interviewing Event Logic, the CEO seemed to be the most suitable choice since the CEO has a strategic overview. Since Event Logic was used to examine the preparation of an internationalisation into a new culture the CEO seemed to be the person who could give us the best answers. The CEO of any company is responsible for the general management, therefore the CEO should be suitable to answer questions regarding the internationalisation process. This as the choice of internationalisation is a highly strategic one and would involve senior management. Mahjouri works at Event Logic and knows the organisation well and confirmed the CEOs

suitability to participate in the questioning. Event Logic was chosen both as the company was easily accessible through Mahjouri and they were known to have prior experience in areas connected with the research question. When interviewing mResell, the selection of candidates was based on both recommendations from mResell as well as Mahjouris own experience from working at mResell. Harry Forsman was first contacted due to his broad role and long experience at the company, at the end of the interview with Forsman the researchers asked if any other employee at mResell should be interviewed and Forsman recommended the CMO Gustaf Terning. For Bokio, Olle Josarp was chosen since he is the team manager for the support team at Bokio, thus he has a very good understanding and deep insight into the onboarding procedure at Bokio. Lastly, Tehri Tyrie was selected due to her long experience in different companies and within onboarding. Tyrie offered the research broad insight from different companies, something that was greatly appreciated since this study does not take industry or company specifics into consideration.

3.3.3 Interviews

The interview with the respondent being based in Gothenburg was conducted face-to-face. This was the interview with Henrik Vallentin, the CEO of Event Logic. The rest of the interviews were conducted over Zoom since respondents were based in Doha, Helsinki, and Stockholm. Using Zoom offered the opportunity to record all interviews and left the researchers free to actively listen and think through all the answers and ask correct follow-up questions. A recording could also have been done in face-to-face interviews, however after testing the recording devices available for the researchers it was determined not to be suitable since the audio was not clear. In this case notes were written manually and the automatic transcription program was not used. The biggest disadvantage of Zoom interviews (or any other video-communication system) is according to Bell et al., (2019) that it is hard to fully read and interpret facial expressions and body language.

Figure IV Interview map

Name	Company	Position
Gustaf Terning	mResell	Chief Marketing Officer
Harry Forsman	mResell	Director, Business Development
Terhi Tyrie	Best Western & STR Global	Various
Henrik Vallentin	Event Logic	Chief Executive Officer
Olle Josarp	Bokio	Banking Operations Associate

After each interview, the summary of the empirical findings was sent to each respondent in order to confirm that the findings were correctly gathered. All interview respondents agreed to be recorded and all subjects agreed to have their name and company mentioned in the report.

There are multiple strategies to choose from when conducting interviews, for this study it was decided that the interviews would be conducted in the ‘semi-structured’ way. According to Bell et al. (2019) it both enables specific questions to be answered and gives room for the participants to express their own views. The semi-structured approach allows for predefined questions that are complimented with follow-up questions. This allows for the interview to be fluent and have a natural flow to it. The ‘semi-structured’ interview style facilitated the answer of the research question, while still keeping the perspective of the interviewee. The interview questions were written for each company specifically, a lot of questions were reused such as questions regarding background, how they work with onboarding, some minor questions were altered to make them fit each company individually. For example, when questioning mResell sustainability aspects were included in questions regarding the cultural aspects, this as mResell were the only company that could incorporate this perspective in its cultural aspects as they are a company selling hardware products and use sustainability in their marketing to some degree. The other companies being software companies and therefore sustainability were not deemed important in these companies. Thus, before every interview a research of the company, their website, UX-design and other information publicly available was gathered in order to create an interview appropriate for each company and respondent. Some respondents also requested to see the questions beforehand.

According to Adams (2015), the semi-structured interview style comes with a number of drawbacks, including that they are time consuming, labour-intensive and require sophistication. The work of transcribing the interview can take hours and therefore use up limited labour resources that could better be used elsewhere (Ibid.). For this reason it was determined to use the Microsoft Automatic Transcription service to automatically transcribe all but one interview, which were done manually due to lack of a reliable recording device. The use of this automated system resulted in large time savings, the drawbacks being as it is automated, some smaller errors in translation could be present. The transcription was therefore gone through and errors adjusted to make it as accurate as possible.

The interviews were conducted by Karl Derehag, with Babak Mahjouri being present. The reasoning behind this was that by doing this more thoroughly answers could be obtained. Mahjouri has an inside view of the companies and personal relationships with all participants and that might affect the answers given as the participants might 'assume' prior knowledge. An example of this was that some interview subjects said things such as "as Babak already knows", thus it was important for the sake of this thesis for Karl to interrupt them at these occurrences and ask them to clarify.

3.3.4 Secondary data

The secondary data was collected through findings presented in a case study conducted by Millward in 2016. In which he analyses the Chinese digital platform 'We Chat' and their attempts to internationalise. The use of secondary data enabled us to get some insight into why 'We Chat' failed to internationalise, in this case it would be hard to obtain primary data. This as neither of the author's has any connections with the company 'We Chat' or any connections in China. The usage of Secondary data presents some benefits such as, it is time saving compared to obtaining primary data, it offers access to data otherwise inaccessible, it can be of good quality if published in a renowned magazine (Emerald, 2022). Drawbacks are that the data might not be complete, require a fee to acquire, it might not match the research question and there is lack of control over the quality of the data by the researcher (Ibid.).

3.3.5 Data Analytical Process

The importance of having a systematic approach to analyse the data gathered is expressed by Bell et al. (2019). Step one was to gather the data according to the previous sub-chapter. The second step was to summarise all the findings first per interview and company and lastly for all subjects. The interviews were summarised based on background information, onboarding and cultural aspects, the same structure was used for all companies and subjects in order to keep it structured.

After the findings were summarised and structured appropriately the analysis was conducted. First based on an intra-firm level, how every company was affected by culture, and then on an inter-firm level how the aspects of culture differ between the companies. Mainly the culture was used to analyse how it affects the onboarding process. How different cultural aspects affect different aspects of onboarding is the main objective of the analysis given the research question. Connecting these aspects together with the internationalisation then creates a proper answer to the research question.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Quality of Research

According to Bell et al., (2019) when conducting research three basic criteria must be fulfilled in order to make the research ‘trustworthy’ and ‘truthful’. These are *reliability*, *replicability* and *validity*. Reliability is if the results generated by the study are repeatable if the study is conducted again. The nature of qualitative research with a higher degree of subjectiveness makes repeatable results harder to achieve therefore, reliability is most important when conducting quantitative research. Replication is if a study can be done again by another researcher, this is connected to reliability as replication is necessary to be able to see if the same results are being generated again. For replication to be possible it must be described in the study how it has been conducted, this shows the importance of the method chapter in the research papers. The last criterion Validity is about the integrity of the conclusions created by a research study. Validity can be simply explained as how well the results generated represent the real world (Bell et al., 2019). As qualitative research is more subjective than quantitative research, different criterias to determine the quality of the study can be used. In this study to increase the validity of the study a couple of measuring criterias has been used. These include the following: during the interviews answers were followed up

by ‘control questions’, that served the purpose of ‘double-checking’ the answers given and increasing the likelihood of detecting deceiving statements. By doing this we ‘challenge’ the interviewee, this strategy is especially good when the person being interviewed is familiar with the setting as was the case in this study (Tanggaard, 2008). The interviewees were also presented with the results from the interviews to give them the opportunity for feedback, and to clarify statements after the interview or correct statements.

When conducting qualitative research consideration must be taken that there could be a higher degree of subjectiveness in the study compared to quantitative research. As noted above qualitative research tends to view the world through someone else’s eyes, this can make it hard to fulfil the criteria of *reliability*, *replicability* and *validity*. For example, the results could depend on who is interviewed and therefore be hard to replicate. Because of this strategies must be developed to ensure the quality of the results generated. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the three criteria mentioned above could be adopted to ‘trustworthiness’ to better suit qualitative research.

According to Bell et al. (2019) this practice is called ‘respondent validation’ and serves to increase the credibility of the study and is a part of the concept ‘trustworthiness’. Another way of increasing the trustworthiness of the study was to gather the data from multiple sources, this has been done by holding interviews with different people and with people holding different positions within the companies (Ibid.). By ensuring a high level of trustworthiness the level of ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ of the study is increased.

3.6. Literature Review

When conducting the literature review a couple of strategies were used to make sure the sources were trustworthy and reliable. In the example of using articles as a source the practice of ‘peer-reviewing’ is a way to increase the reliability of an article. According to Bell et al. (2019) an article is ‘peer-reviewed’ when it has been reviewed by other scholars in the same field of research, during this process neither party has any knowledge of the identity of the other. The outcome of these reviews will later determine if the article will be published. The purpose of this is to increase the quality of the articles and their credibility. The results of these reviews are later used by the journal editor to determine if it should be published or not.

In prestigious journals only 10 percent of all articles submitted are published and often only after several attempts, ‘peer-reviewed’ articles are therefore associated with a lengthy feedback record (Bell et al., 2019). The literature review in this study mostly contains articles that have gone through this process, this to increase the level of confidence that the data collected is of high quality and trustworthy. Articles were obtained by using the tool ‘Supersök’ that is provided by the University of Gothenburg. “Supersök” offers access to articles that otherwise are inaccessible. This as some articles are published in journals that require subscription fees. “Supersök” also shows if the specific article has gone through the ‘peer-review’ process or not and in which journal it's been published, therefore simplifying the selection process. During this study the main mission has been to use articles that are peer-reviewed and published in well-renowned journals. However, studies within the fields of user-onboarding are quite new and there have been some issues in regards to obtaining any credible studies for the literature review, therefore some exceptions were made. However, when trying to explain underlying mechanisms in the onboarding strategies, studies from other fields of studies were used and connected to onboarding strategies, and those studies followed the criteria set out for the theoretical framework.

3.7. Ethical aspects

Ethical dilemmas exist in all kinds of research but how to face the ethical dilemma differs between individual researchers. In order to be a credible study ethical factors need to be taken into consideration. The person being interviewed has been informed about the nature of the study and how their answers will be used, this to fulfil the criteria of ‘informed consent’. According to Bell et al. (2019), the principle of ‘informed consent’ is that of ensuring the participants gain enough information about the study and how its being conducted, before they decide whether to participate or not.

The Swedish Research Council (2017) has published a few points in order to have ethical studies. According to their paper you should tell the truth within your research. Something highly valued by the writers of this study. However, one issue is to ensure that interview subjects are telling the truths. Some measures mentioned above in this chapter were taken in order to ensure the truthfulness of the interviews, however it is impossible to ensure the truthfulness in the same way as the writers can control themselves. Another point mentioned by the Swedish Research Council (2017) you should openly account for methods and results.

In regards to the method of this study full transparency has been the main goal. This to ensure that readers can fully understand how the research has been conducted and for readers to properly evaluate the study upon reading it. In regards to the results of this study, the same goal and mission has been set. By presenting the results without interpretations and by having all interviews except one, transcribed with audio recordings the raw data can be presented as objectively as possible. Due to the organising of the empirical data during this study this research follows another point raised by the same paper, that you should keep your research organised through for example documentation and filling. Another point raised by the Swedish Research Council (2017) is that all commercial or other types of interest should be clearly stated. Since one of the authors of this study, Babak Mahjouri, has a either professional or private relationship with all interview subjects and has a history of working with mResell as well as currently working for Event Logic in regards to internationalisation and onboarding one could argue that he gains professional advantages by doing this research and that the insight gained most likely will be used within his work. The fact that Babak Mahjouri is working for Event Logic and also that his work involves many of the aspects being research is something known to all interview subjects and for his thesis partner Karl Derehag. However, this has not created any issues in regards to this study, but instead has acted as an extra piece of information and background knowledge going into this research. Thus, it can be viewed as if Mahjouri has a different motivation for this study than pure academical, this issue has been handled by discussions with Derehag in order to ensure that the research answers the research question and no other alternative motives.

Other aspects of research ethics have been raised by Patel and Davidsson (2019), they have outlined 4 requirements to follow for ethics within research; *the information requirement, the consent requirement, the confidentiality requirement and the utilisation requirement.*

All four of these requirements have been followed during this entire research. *The information requirement* means that the authors should inform all participants of the study of what the use of this information will be used for. The authors have told all participants that the interviews are conducted in order to write a master's thesis, the topic and scope of the study has also been clarified after the interview, by doing so the information requirement is fulfilled. *The consent requirement* means that all participants of the study shall give consent to be participating, since all participants have agreed to interviews this requirement is also

fulfilled. *The confidentiality requirement* means that all participants should be protected in regards to confidentiality, this requirement has been fulfilled by asking all participants if we are allowed to write their name and company. However, all participants' full names and companies have been stated since no one opted for an anonymous solution, thus every participant can be found. However, this is done in full consent of all participants (the consent was given verbally and is recorded for all interviews. *The utilisation requirement* is a requirement stating that the information gathered should only be used to the stated purpose towards the participants, this is also fulfilled since the only use of this information is in regards to this study.

By following recommendations from several sources, the authors of this study strongly feel that the ethical aspects of this study are in accordance with good research practice.

4. Empirical data

The Data collected in this study is done by conducting interviews with three companies, mResell, Bokio and Event Logic as well as with Tehri Tyrie who has several years of experience in onboarding users across Europe. These case studies will be divided and presented individually. The cases in this study is primarily focused on the personal experience of the respondents in order to gain insight into how culture affects onboarding. The focus of the interviews has been how the companies are affected by cultural differences when internationalising and in correlation with user-onboarding specifically. Lastly, the case of WeChat is presented.

4.1 mResell

mResell is a company that refurbishes and resell smartphones and computers, focused on Apple products (mResell, 2021). To get insight in their operations two interviews were conducted with employees at mResell, these being Harry Forsman and Gustaf Terning. mResell operates in a total of 10 countries including Sweden, Finland, Spain and Australia among others. According to Forsman their business model is to buy used products from people and then examine the products in their central warehouse to check the functionality. They will also clean the device externally and erase the files if present. If deemed satisfactory it can be resold directly, otherwise reparations are needed. These can be a change of battery or a screen replacement. After going through this process the device can be resold to a customer on the mResell platform. They also offer the customer 12 months warranty and 14 days free returns. The business model is therefore to offer customers a middle ground between buying used products from a private individual or buying a new product, offering some guarantees otherwise not available on the second-hand market. There is also no direct interaction between the seller and the buyer as compared to traditional second-hand purchases.

4.1.1. Onboarding

mResell uses different strategies with regards to onboarding. Forsman uses the terms user acquisition and user retention as interchangeable to the term onboarding of users. To acquire users they primarily use google ads for advertisements, but some other social media channels such as Instagram are also used. During the last year mResell encountered challenges in the user acquisition, this as a competitor aggressively tried to penetrate the market backed by a

€100 million capital investment. This raised mResell's 'cost per customer' for user acquisition on average by 70 percent. mResell has therefore reacted to this by shifting to other channels and investing in marketing automation. As the cost of acquiring new customers increased the importance of keeping old customers on the platform. When a new customer enters mResell's webpage they are required to enter their email address before being presented with an offer. This is an example of how mResell works with 'onboarding'. As the customer has entered her or his email address, they can send an email to a potential customer if they detect that they had attempted a purchase but not completed it. This being an example of automation in the onboarding process. Another example of how mResell works with automation is that they contact customers through email, when a product they previously showed interest in gets available in stock. This is used a lot for devices with a high 'rotation time', such as the iPhone 13 which is usually sold within a day getting in stock. Terning identified mResell as being a 'product driven' company instead of being a 'brand driven' company. This can be attributed to the fact that mResell sells Apple products which have an extremely strong brand. Even though it would be preferable that customer's buy from mResell because they identify with mResell as a brand, it's simply unrealistic to achieve this as Apple is so strong as a brand. The main focus for mResell is to position themselves as the premium alternative to buying refurbished Apple products. A way to increase the 'premium feel' of mResell is that they work with the whole experience when making a purchase. This is manifested everywhere from how it feels when the customer opens the box with the product, to the way customers interact with the support if something goes wrong. Employees that work with customer service go through a lengthy training process which makes them not only 'support agents' but can take decisions of their own. For example they have the authority to negotiate prices with the customers. All customer service agents also speak the local language when they interact with the customers as Terning believes that it increases the trust level of the customer towards mResell when communicating in their native language. Terning also identifies the importance to have correct translation on each nation's web-site, it needs to be translated professionally. According to Forsman it would basically be impossible to conduct business in Italy and Spain without having the support team speaking the local language.

mResell did not educate the market in regards to buying second-hand products or educating the users in regards to circular solutions. Terning and Forsman mentioned that they entered markets where their competitors already were present in order to minimise the cost of

advertising. Forsman mentioned that he did not perceive any difference in how their competitors educated their users in these regards between cultures. This type of education is done through marketing and showing customers that buying second-hand products are “safe” and secure.

4.1.2. Cultural aspects

Forsman said in the interview that during the past mResell used to run each country as a separate entity, with a service partner in each country being responsible for the refurbishments. However, during the last three years the refurbishment centre and management have been consolidated to Stockholm in Sweden. The reasons behind this according to Forsman was that it was easier to find qualified personnel and people with multiple language skills. Having everything under the same roof also made communication easier and with less friction. The exception to this is the operation in Australia which is still run locally with a third-part actor being responsible for refurbishments. The goal is to bring the Australian business in-house in the near future. The operation in Australia is similar to how mResell operated before they consolidated their operations to Stockholm.

Forsman at mResell identifies that customers behave differently across countries. For example, in the Spanish and Italian markets customers tend to be more suspicious and have lower ‘conversion rates’ than the nordic markets. ‘Conversion rates’ being the percentage of customers completing the process from first interaction to a purchase as described by Forsman. Forsman found a correlation of the conversion rates depending on where the marketing agency was located, when it was moved from Finland to Sweden the conversion rates increased in Sweden while it decreased in Finland. He would also prefer to have a custom made web-page tailored for each market. In Italy there is a preference of ‘cash on delivery’, where the customer pays when receiving the product. This as there is more suspicion towards using credit cards or other online payments options on an unknown site. Both Terning and Forsman identified the importance of using the right method of payments adopted to the local market. A current challenge for mResell is that they currently do not offer cash as a payment option, which is a preferred method of payment in Italy. In the case of Spanish customers they tend to ask more questions and spend more time on the website before making a purchase. This despite having a lower conversion rate compared to the Nordic markets or Germany. The average shopper in the Nordics or Germany are therefore

more efficient in their shopping process compared to the southern Europeans. Another cultural difference was that on the Swedish site an Asian man was on the frontpage, this was recognised by Spanish management as problematic. This as Spanish customers perceived the Asian man representing products with lower quality. This led to a change on the Spanish website to a local person. This made mResell more aware of the importance of listening to local customs and cultures. There are also differences to how much customers value the sustainability aspect when buying refurbished products. The sustainability aspect is more important in Sweden than in Finland, and Sweden is identified by Forsman as the most 'eco-conscious' market. While in Italy and Spain this is not really a big deal when a customer makes a purchase decision. However, in all markets the price factor is the most important, the difference seems to be more how people justify the purchase of a used device instead of a new one. As Terning said: *'It is easier to tell people at a party that you bought a used phone for the climate instead of saying you are just cheap'*.

4.2 Terhi Tyrie

Terhi Tyrie has worked at two different digital platforms, one of them being the booking platform for Best Westerns booking platform and the other being STR Global, a statistics platform. She has worked with the onboarding process in Finland, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Denmark, Estonia and the UK.

4.2.1 Onboarding

According to Tyrie who has worked at several different digital platforms including Best Western and STR Global, it's not common to use any specific measurements with regards to onboarding. If not, special circumstances require it. The onboarding process was done both through webinars and training 'on-site'. The 'on-site' training was preferred as it was easier to show the system and was more successful with regards to training new users. However, when geographical distance did not allow 'on-site' training it was done online through Teams or similar services.

4.2.2 Cultural Aspects

With regards to the cultural aspect some differences were identified mainly between the Scandinavian countries, the Baltics and especially Poland. For example, Poland has a much higher degree of hierarchy in their work culture compared to Scandinavia. This manifested itself in that managers in Poland want to go through training before their employees so that they can have understanding prior. Even though the training was identical they preferred to split up into training management and employees separately. Management in Poland do not want to 'show' their employees that they are lacking in knowledge during training, this can be attributed to a more hierarchical organisation style compared to Scandinavia according to Tyrie. The importance of learning through the use of each native language was also identified, so translators were used during training. However, this created another problem that information could be distorted or changed when passing through the translator and would be hard to spot. Learning through the use of each native language was important in all regions but even more so in the Baltics and Poland where knowledge in English is lower compared to Scandinavia. Tyrie also made the point that the population of Scandinavia is more

‘tech-savvy’ compared to Poland and the Baltics, ‘tech-savvy’ can be explained as the level of prior knowledge and experience of users with information technology systems. Being more ‘tech-savvy’ actually presented a challenge with the learning process, as people in Scandinavia had the approach ‘ok I already know this’ and did not listen as carefully to the given instructions. They also raised more criticism to how the system was built and this in contrast to users that had lesser prior tech knowledge, as was common in the Baltics and Poland. There people tended to listen more carefully to instructions and accepted the system without questioning. Tyrie preferred to give instructions to people who were less ‘tech-savvy’ even though they might struggle more with the initial learning. However, Tyrie mentioned that since they are more ‘tech-savvy’ it was easier to show the more complicated platform, in her case STR Global being the more complicated platform, in those cases she did not need to put as much effort on the setup portion (such as log-in, creating an account etc.). Therefore it was easier to get the Finnish users more proficient users as they more easily could grasp the more complicated functions of the platform. She furthermore mentions that the more ‘tech-savvy’ users in Finland were educated slightly differently in the platform. For those users she could let them scroll around the page and explore for themselves and then they could ask if they ran into any problems. She mentions that this is because they are more used to using digital platforms and that if you know one platform it is quite easy to learn a new one. Furthermore she mentioned that the language barriers also played a role, she could not use ‘techy’ words when describing the platform since their knowledge in English is lower, in some instances they also needed to use a translator. As mentioned earlier, the Finnish user's prior knowledge could also act as an obstacle since they do not listen as carefully since they feel as if they do not need to listen as carefully.

Tyrie identified that as a native Finn she could more easily identify and ‘connect’ with people from the Baltics than an executive from Britain. She attributed this to the common historical heritage of both Finland and the Baltics, with these nations sharing borders and fighting wars against Russia throughout history. For example, Finland fought a war over their existence during the 1940s and managed to remain independent, the Baltic countries can relate to this as they gained their independence from Russia as late as in the 1990s. This creates a special bond between these countries that an Englishman cannot relate to according to Tyrie. In the case of Estonia they also share a similar language with Finland and have a tradition of watching Finnish television which has given Estonians knowledge of the Finnish language

that contributed even more to the common understanding between these nations. Tyrie said this common heritage was a great asset when doing business in the Baltics compared to officials coming from for example England. She mentioned that some of her executives in the UK had accompanied her in Lithuania and that the cultural barriers had made the recipients of the training not understanding anything and they were too shy to say something so when she reached out to them later she understood that they needed to retake the training.

Furthermore, Tyrie mentioned that she currently works at a school in Doha and she mentioned that her belief is that people learn in the same way. She mentions that Doha is very international and the kids she teaches are from all over the world, and she does not perceive any differences in learning outside of prior education and that some children have been a part of a better educational system prior to joining her classes. She also mentioned that she experienced that all the users she educated learned in the same way as well.

4.3 Event Logic

Event Logic is a digital platform that delivers a tool for planning, procuring and managing events, meetings and conferences. The platform mainly targets companies for their needs within events, meetings and conferences. The tool is a SaaS solution and is currently active in Sweden and recently began its operations in Finland. The platform is an intermediary service where customers (event bookers) can make bookings at different suppliers (such as hotels, bus companies, performers etc.). Both user types communicate within the platform and use the platform.

4.3 Event Logic

At Event Logic Henrik Vallentin was interviewed. Vallentin works as the CEO of the company and has the overall responsibility of the company. He further mentions that the board sets his framework and that he works within these frames. Since the company is rather small he also explained that he is involved in sales, marketing, customer success, the finances of the company as well as product development.

4.3.1. Onboarding

Vallentin mentions that the onboarding needs to be divided into two parts. Vallentin mentions that since events and conferences are a complicated matter with several parts involved, thus the platform itself is also quite complex. Therefore, the users need to be educated regarding the platform, the functions and everything else that is needed to use the tool. Furthermore, he says that the mission is to build the flow of the platform in a way that makes it intuitive and simple for the users, this to get rid of other types of onboarding as webinars used today. The first part of the onboarding process is the implementation phase. During this time Vallentin mentions that when they sign a new customer, a company, they implement the company as a whole. After that process they turn towards the actual users themselves. They then conduct an education for the users, either on-site or through a webinar. They then demonstrate the whole platform, all the functionalities and how to create an event all the way to after the event has been completed. They also do Q&As in order to clarify anything that might have been missed or unclear during the presentation. Vallentin mentions that after the general introduction for a new company, some users might need some extra attention, either to try and use the platform and then return with questions towards the Customer Success team or by having one-on-one seminars and educations with certain users. There is also a chat function within the platform that enables users to ask questions as they are working within the tool. Furthermore, Vallentin mentions that the site has a knowledgebank with several commonly asked questions and where all the functions are described. This knowledge bank also includes 12 films that show and describe the platform. Vallentin also describes that they measure onboarding with several reports and that they consider a user to be onboarded when they have booked 3 events.

According to Vallentin, Event Logic doesn't actively employ measures to keep users within the platform, as they do not have any direct competitors offering similar services. This compared to for example, a CRM system where measures to limit users exporting their data

might be employed to keep them within the platform. Vallentin also mentions that they try to generate the most value for the customer in order to retain the users within the digital platform. This as there are some traditional competitors that aren't digital platforms that might still pose a threat. He also says that he feels that the "lock-in" approach feels outdated since people want to be able to export their data and gather their progress. Thus, Event Logic tries to keep their users by being the best option for the user instead of using a different type of approach.

4.3.2. Cultural Aspects

Vallentin explained that the newly started internationalisation process was customer driven. Since several of the companies they have signed in Sweden also have employees and offices in the rest of the Nordic region they requested that the platform also could be used in Norway, Denmark and Finland. According to Vallentin, they made the assumption that it would be easier to grow into the Nordic countries with their existing customer portfolio and then gradually add new customers when they are already present in those countries. Vallentin also states that a big reason as to why this was deemed as possible was the language. In Denmark and Norway, Swedish can be used and in Finland, English works well when signing customers. However, he mentions that it makes it easier if you have a Finnish speaking support member in order to take care of the users and suppliers within the platform. He explained that the prioritisation of which country to enter first was solely based on customer needs.

In preparation of entering new markets Vallentin explained that the language was the biggest factor. Event Logic put a lot of resources into translating the website, the email that goes out from the company. Vallentin states that it was very important to make sure that the language was correctly translated as the user would notice if it is poorly translated and that can harm the trustworthiness of the product. Event Logic also felt the need to hire a customer success team member who was Finnish speaking in order to properly support the Finnish market. When asked about his biggest concerns about entering a new market Vallentin commented that the biggest concern was that they were not as well-known in the other Nordic countries as they are in Sweden. This creates an issue when an offer comes from the platform to the hotels or other types of suppliers. Hotels are not very keen on cooperating with these types of services from the get go since they need to pay commission, therefore there is a need to create

a relationship with the suppliers and show that they will gain more bookings by cooperating. Another issue he mentioned is that Event Logic does not know very much regarding the event, meetings and conference market in the other Nordic countries. He assumes that the difference is quite small since they often classify the region into one class in different global reports. When asked regarding if they have perceived any differences in regards to onboarding or user acquisition it was deemed too early to tell and that the fourth wave of the Covid-19 pandemic has postponed many of their efforts.

Suspicious regarding the challenges of acquiring users in new markets was that it was suspected hard to reach through the noise and establish a stable foothold in the new market. However, as they went through the process of acquiring users when establishing in Sweden they already possess some knowledge in this field. It was also easier to gain suppliers in new markets as they already have brokers present there, which creates an incentive for the suppliers to use the platform. Vallentin expressed that ‘business is local’ and having good local market knowledge is important within each local market.

Vallentin expresses that he does not believe that it is not possible to launch the website only in English and have that as the only language when entering a new market. This as their biggest customer stressed the importance of good local language support when entering new markets.

As the users of the platform are traditional bookers such as executive assistants etc. The average age is a bit higher and their tech-savviness and proficiency in English is lower than the younger generation, thus English would not work as well. When asked if Event Logic would have a designated support team in Norway, Denmark and Finland, Vallentin stated that they will only have it in Finland. This as Norwegians and Danes are more used to speaking Swedish and English, however their experience in Finland tells them that they need to be more “local” in Finland.

4.4. Bokio

Bokio is an accounting platform used by primarily smaller companies. They offer a basic package for free and then sell additional functions. Bokio is a SaaS (Software-as-a-service) company and they have around 60 000 users in Sweden and around 6 000 users in the UK. This is currently the only two countries where Bokio are active. The interview respondent representing Bokio is Olle Josarp who works with 'Bokio corporate accounts' and is also a team leader for the support team.

4.4.1 Onboarding

At Bokio the primary onboarding process is conducted through the flow of the website. This through UX-design and the process that users go through in order to conduct their accounting. First all users get a two-month trial where all functions are available and they can test all functions before deciding what package they need. This gives the users an opportunity to test all functions before deciding which package they are interested in subscribing to. Bokio also has a comprehensive knowledge bank on their website. This knowledgebank does not only contain information regarding functions on the platforms but it also contains general information regarding accounting and how to post different business events. This has the effect of attracting new users to the platforms since they can be Googling a general accounting solution and end up at Bokios platform. They also use email in the onboarding process. When a user creates an account without setting up a firm within the platform they email the user a reminder and try to get those users started with the platform. Josarp holds regular webinars with users, where he shows the users functions of the platform and answers general questions regarding accounting. These seminars are designed to make sure that the users are successful at using the platform, but the users attending these seminars are already active users and can be considered onboarded, at least to Josarps definition. Bokio considers a user onboarded when they have created their account and set up their business on the platform.

4.4.2. Cultural Aspects

The reason as to why Bokio began their internationalisation journey in the UK is due to the fact that it is a very large market with similar accounting laws. This meant that their product already fitted the market rather well and they did not need to change the platform as much as they might have needed in another market. Furthermore the way Bokio acquired users in the UK was similar to the approach they had in Sweden, this mainly through marketing on social media and by organic growth (word of mouth). They have a bit more physical presence in Sweden with banners on trams and advertising on fairs etc. However, this is something that Josarp will attend in London, a fair to present the product so they are planning to increase that type of marketing as well. Accounting is a rather slow moving object since users usually have their data at one place and it can be a bit of a hassle to move it to a new platform. Therefore, there is a pretty strong lock-in effect within these types of platforms since you often have strong integrations already established with your bank for example. According to Josarp all platforms offer an opportunity to export your data out of the platform and that almost all platforms have an import option for new users. To eliminate the option of exporting data is not an option since this is a used feature in other functions throughout the accounting process. The option to export data is not actively advertised but is not hidden in any way.

The onboarding process as such does not differ between Sweden and the UK. However, the knowledge bank and the functionalities are not the same between the two countries. The platform needed to be complemented in order to fit the market needs and the accounting laws of the UK. Questions from various suppliers are quite similar in both markets. Bokio has a dedicated support staff that only works with the UK users. This as there is a need for specific knowledge only applicable to the UK market as there are legislative and platform functional differences between the countries. Therefore motivating the decision to have dedicated support experts serving the UK market. A difference in user interaction with the support staff is that in the UK customers use live-chat more compared to in Sweden. However, the customer expectations in the relationship with the support staff and how it works is similar in both countries.

4.5 Case WeChat

4.5.1. Onboarding

One example of a digital platform not succeeding in their internationalisation plans are the Chinese chat program WeChat. WeChat is extremely popular in China and tried to expand their success globally. However, they were not able to do so successfully (Millward, 2016).

There are several reasons to explain why they did not succeed. According to Millward (2016) the most obvious one could be the very strong network effects of their competitors, for example Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp. According to Cluster (2016) WeChat tried to make up for this by making expensive marketing campaigns, however since users only use chat applications if their friends are on them it is hard to convince users to switch from Whatsapp or Facebook Messenger (or whatever application they might use).

4.5.2. Cultural Aspects

Another reason, besides tough competition, explaining why they failed is that they did not offer the same functionalities abroad as they did in their home-country, taking away unique functions such as ordering food or ordering a taxi (Cluster, 2016). Having fewer functions lowered the incentives for people to use WeChat instead of keeping to already established digital platforms.

However, another reason for why WeChat never gained traction abroad could be due to the lack of customization for these new markets. According to Vodanovich et al (2017) the reason as to why WeChat had issues abroad is due to the fact that it is a representation of Chinese values. Vodanovic et al. (2017) mentions that there are two features within the app that clearly shows Chinese culture. First one being how the subscribe function works. A user can subscribe to a celebrity or newspaper but the owner of the account has full power of what comments are visible or not within the app, a clear representation of the respect for authority within Chinese culture. Secondly, you can only message people you are friends with and you can only see comments that your friends have made. This is according to Vodanovich et al. (2017) a clear representation of Chinese culture and 'well-mannered politeness' by not allowing acquaintances to necessarily see each other's comments.

5. Analysis

This chapter aims to analyse the findings and connect the findings with the theoretical framework presented in chapter two. The method for how the analysis is conducted is described in chapter three. The analysis section analyses 4 different factors in regards to culture and onboarding; Language and Cultural Distance, Trust and Onboarding, Product Value and Onboarding, and lastly Learning across cultures. These four factors have been identified from the empirical findings and theoretical framework.

5.1. Cultural Distance

Language is something all respondents of the primary data sources have mentioned. Sharing a common language decreases the cultural distance between two cultures. As explained by West and Graham (2004), language affects our personal values. Therefore, different languages should imply for a cultural distance. Cultural distance is the degree to which shared norms and values differ from one culture to another (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, by sharing a language, values become more similar and thus decrease the cultural distance between two cultures. This type of reasoning has not been described by any of the respondents but Forsman, Terning and Vallentin have uttered the sentence "business is local" and all of them have expressed an importance of speaking the local language. Forsman for example mentioned that it would basically be impossible to conduct their business in Spain and Italy if the language used was to be English. Vallentin also stresses the importance of language and that this has been communicated to Event Logic by Swedish customers with operations in Finland. Vallentin also states that it is important to have a correct translation between languages. Something that Forsman and Terning at mResell also confirms, that it is necessary to have native speakers handling customers in each country. Tyrie also expresses the importance of sharing a language, according to Tyrie, the fact that she was a native Finn was one of the reasons as to why she was made responsible for those areas. The cultural distance decreased and it was easier for them to understand each other. Tyrie furthermore mentioned that she could easily connect with the users in Estonia since they understand Finnish, something that made it easier for her to conduct her training. Thus by sharing a language the

cultural distance decreased and allowed for a deeper relationship to develop. The common language also aided the trust creating process between the users and, in this case Tyrie.

Tyrie also identified cultural differences, for example in Poland the work culture is much more hierarchical. While training people there she needed to divide employees and management in different groups. This was since the managers did not feel comfortable learning the same things as the employees and the managers felt the need to learn it beforehand so the employees were not able to see them lacking knowledge. The reason behind why Poland is more hierarchical is not clearly understood but it could be because Poland is catholic and does not share the Lutheran cultural heritage as Estonia or Finland does (Thue, 2020). According to Tyrie, sharing this heritage creates more common ground and thus builds trust. Another reason as to why this specific scenario is apparent in some countries but not in others can be due to what Hofstede (1991) called Power Distance. In Poland the accepted power distance is probably much greater than in Sweden and Finland for example. For that reason, the managers feel that they should assert their power by not being present in the training of the other employees. Similar behaviour would not be necessary or accepted in Finland or Sweden. One could also argue that the catholic value of Poland where the religion already makes the believers accept a higher power controlling them (the church) more accepting to a greater power distance in other areas, such as in the workplace. Therefore, these two factors can in fact affect each other. In Lutheran societies the culture is more swayed towards equal value, and that everyone is equal in front of God, this might be one explanation as to why power distances are less likely to be accepted in cultures that follow the Lutheran path of cristianity.

5.2 Trust and Onboarding

Mutual trust is identified as important during the onboarding process as it makes the customer more willing to buy a product or create an account on a digital platform. Trust can also act as a way of motivation for users to learn a platform (Higgins, 2021). Trust is hard to define, but according to Tyrie both common language and similar culture seems to increase the level of trust between actors. This is also central in the theories of West and Graham (2004), which puts great emphasis on the importance of language in the interactions between peoples as mentioned above.

Tyrie, who has worked on several digital platforms, identified trust as important when building relations, this because she could easier build trust with people from the Baltics than her colleague from England. Tyrie contributed this to the fact that people from the Baltics could more easily identify with Tyrie because she is a Finn, which is a country that shares many characteristics with the Baltics nations and Estonia in particular, compared to England. Both Finland and Estonia share the Lutheran heritage and this can also be a factor for easier understanding between the peoples. This since religion is a basis for common values and beliefs. The historical factor as well cannot be understated with both the Baltic countries and Finland sharing Russia as a neighbour and faced its aggression throughout history. This contributes to lowering the cultural distance and facilitates the building of trust. Choosing an employee with closer cultural background to the customers was therefore a strategy employed by the company Tyrie worked for, to facilitate the building of trust from the customers.

mResell integrates the trust factor in some ways as well, including making their 'customer support agents' more than just a hotline to answer questions, they have authority to make independent decisions. mResell have separate customer service offices in each country, speaking the native language therefore adopting to the local market to build trust in their platform. This makes their business more local, something expressed by both Terning and Forsman as important. By showing that the local employees have authority within their market the users might not even notice that the company is not local. By using the local language mResell increases its trustworthiness in the eyes of the users according to Terning at mResell. This goes in line with the strategy outlined by Higgins (2021), where trust and personal relations are being identified as important in succeeding in the onboarding process. Both Tyrie and mResells work with personal relations but in different ways.

According to Higgins (2021) free-trials can be a way to increase trust as well, something used by Bokio. The primary goal of the free-trial was to show the users what functions are available since you can still use the Bokio platform for free, you would just be more restricted and forced to do more tasks manually. The trial's purpose is then to show the platform's functions that require a paid-plan but can also act as a trust builder between users and Bokio.

Forsman mentions that the checkout process at mResell is more simple in Finland and Sweden than in Spain. In Spain they need to fill in more information. He mentions that he personally would view this as a tedious process if he was the shopper, but explains that the Spanish users feel comfortable with this process. He also sees that they have a longer decision making process when purchasing a product. This might be correlated with a lower trust of purchasing products online in Southern Europe. According to Thue (2020) the Lutheran heritage in Northern Europe has contributed to a higher degree of trust between people and governments, while countries that are catholic have a lower degree of trust. This can be an explanation of why mResell finds Southern European customers more sceptical than customers in the north, this as both Spain and Italy are mostly catholic countries. With time the trust for governments applies for all types of institutions and companies can be seen as an institution similar to governments as well and therefore could also be affected by this theory. The theories by Mathiasen (2020); Thue (2020), therefore seems to be viable as both Italy and Spain are catholic countries and they both have a lower degree of trust towards institutions and need to have a more careful approach to shopping online. This carefulness is also visible in the preferred payment method of Italian which is cash-on-delivery. Paying in full only when the product is in the customer's hand. This type of carefulness can also be due to a higher uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty avoidance describes how threatened people of a particular culture feel towards an uncertain and unknown situation (Hofstede, 1991). It might be due to their religious heritage that the uncertainty avoidance is what it is.

5.3. Product Value and Cultures

Showing the value of the platform is discussed in all onboarding strategies which are described in this study. The strategies actually mainly differ when it comes to the motivation that users need in order to either obtain or understand that value. For gamification theory it is done by having a “fun” experience, for Hулlicks strategy it is by creating trust and being personal towards the user, for Higgins strategy (Strahm, 2017) it is by providing small wins and showing the value quickly through the “aha-moment”. Product value is discussed in the theoretical framework with network effects. Network effects increase the value of the product, the platform.

For some platforms however, cultural aspects can change the value of the platform. For example, as with the case of Bokio, the accounting laws in the UK creates a new demand for functionality in comparison to Sweden. When users are using Bokio they can quite quickly account for their taxes in Sweden, however if this is not apparent in the UK accounting system as well then a part of the value of the actual product is lost. Thus, it needs to uphold the same value even in the UK. Laws and culture are affected by each other and the legal system is affected by historical events that have happened within that particular culture (Varner and Varner, 2014; Kocbeck, 2008). Varner and Varner (2014) also recommends that it is important to understand why some laws are apparent in a country and one could learn that by learning about the culture. How laws affect the value of a digital platform is quite apparent in the case of Bokio. One of the reasons as to why Bokio chose to enter the UK was due to their similarities in accounting laws and the system they use for accounting. Thus, the cultural proximity in that regard can be viewed as one reason as to why the culture was beneficial in the case of Bokio. The similarities within the law making can be one of the more important reasons as to why Bokio could enter the UK without making huge amounts of modifications to their product. In conclusion, it is important to understand the laws and regulations of a country in certain digital platforms, and to understand the legal system one needs to understand the culture.

According to Cluster (2015) WeChat failed to launch some functionalities outside of China, making the value of the platform less, creating less of an incentive to make the shift for potential users. In that case the switching cost, as described by Prud’homme (2019) could be time (the I in the VEIF model) therefore if you are already using one of WeChat competitors

such as Whatsapp or Messenger you do not have the incentive to switch platform. Even if the rest of the costs of VEIF model are low, such as you can easily import all your contacts from one platform to another, the time it takes for the user (even if it is just 10 minutes) without a proper incentive, such as higher value, users can be reluctant to make that switch. Thus, the cost-benefit equation in the eyes of the user does not add up. In the case of WeChat there were also other types of cultural barriers that were evident. According to Vodanovic (2017) the subscribe function was designed per the chinese culture and therefore not as appreciated in other cultures, the second thing he states is the messaging function which also was tailored to the chinese culture. This shows how certain features of a function can be appreciated within one culture and not appreciated within another. By evaluating the value of a platform in the context of the new culture the platform will be launched in, the platform company can evaluate their product and see if the product is still valuable in another market. Even though a digital platform is easy to transfer, different types of cultural aspects such as the Chinese traditions or UK accounting laws can still mean that the value of the platform decreases in a new market.

Vallentin at Event Logic explained that one of his concerns when entering a new market is to specifically onboard suppliers. This concern might only concern suppliers for Event Logic at the moment since they already have bookers from in the countries outside of their home-market, as a result of their existing customer portfolio. Having suppliers in an intermediary platform is of course important because without a supplier there is nothing to book. This can be connected to the networking effects discussed in chapter two, since more buyers equals more value for the supplier-users and vice versa. However, since the customer with global employees and a global need for events, meetings and conferences can be classified as non-geographically bound, as described by Stallkamp and Schotter (2018), since the customers in Sweden can be carried over into Finland, Denmark and Norway (at least some customers). Thus Event Logic can leverage these customers when trying to acquire suppliers. However, by having a native Finn addressing the Finnish market for example (a country where, according to Vallentin, knowing the native language is important) can make the onboarding of the suppliers easier since it can more easily create trust (as mentioned above how common culture and language can create trust). This would then make the geographically bound assets (in this case the suppliers) more easy to obtain and thus creating higher value for the Finnish users. By paying attention to cultural differences it is viable to

assume that it can be easier to create a new network of users in a new country, as mentioned by Tyrie, this was the reason as to why she was given the responsibility of Finland and the Baltic countries.

Showing the value of a digital platform can also be different in different cultures. As mentioned by Forsman he believes that it would be optimal to have a marketing agency specifically for each country. So one agency in Italy covering Italy and one in Spain covering Spain etc. He mentioned that when they had a Finnish agency the conversion rates were the highest in Finland and when they switched to a agency based in Stockholm the conversion rates in Sweden became the highest. Forsman therefore believes that there might be a difference in what value proposition works best in each country. Furthermore he mentions that in an optimal world with unlimited funds a landing page designed for each country and thus “pushing” on different points based on each country. A correct value proposition on a landing page can create motivation for users to further explore the platform and thus generate more onboarded users, as explained by Strahm (2018) in regards to Hулlicks strategy.

One of mResells value proposition is the fact that their business model is sustainability oriented since it reuses devices and is a circular solution. According to McCarty and Schrum (2001) and Tata and Prasad (2015) different cultures view sustainability actions differently. One could assume that more sustainability oriented countries should value those value propositions higher. However, Terning mentioned that he does not believe that the sustainability factor plays a major role in the decision making process of the users on their platform. He believes that more focus lies on the price. However, sustainability factors could still play a role in the decision making of the users and therefore it could be beneficial to push on the sustainability oriented value proposition in those countries where the importance of sustainability actions are higher. This would be in line with what Forsman believes would be more beneficial, to have different websites with different value propositions for each market.

Another important thing for the platform of mResell when opening business in a new country is having the proper and most popular payment options on the site, as mentioned by Forsman. As consumers on a website it is fair to assume that most of us enjoy having our preferred payment method available at the site. An unknown payment method can both make us feel uncomfortable and unsafe when making online purchases. Thus, correct payment terms can

be seen as a part of the value of the platform. Correct payment methods can also increase trust, and a website can feel unserious if the payment methods the users are comfortable with are not present. This can then lead to abandonment at the check-out stage.

5.4. Learning across Cultures

In regards to learning across cultures a few of the interview subjects interviewed brought insight to this subject. The theory regarding the subject suggests that there should be some differences in both learning style (Simy and Kolb, 2009) and cognitive function (Nisbett, 2003). That learning should be affected by culture such as East Asian societies are affected by Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism sounds reasonable. The empirical findings fail to show us any of the sort. Forsman mentions that the markets they entered were already educated in regards to circular solutions and buying second-hand products, he also explained that he did not experience any difference in how the users were educated by their competitor. Tyrie however is currently working as a teacher in Doha where she educates children from all over the world. She mentions that all people learn in the same way and that was also her experience when educating users on a platform. Both Tyrie and Forsmans statements in this regard contradicts the theories outlined by both Simy and Kolb (2009) and Nisbett (2003), however the empirical data is not sufficient enough in order to test this appropriately. The platforms and companies used in this research are active in several countries however every platform, except mResell who are active in Australia, in this research are only active in Europe. The differences in learning described by Nisbett (2003) were between western societies and asian societies. Thus, the cultures examined in this research failed to examine those differences. This research failed to examine Nisbett (2003) and Simy and Kolbs (2009) theory, however one can assume that users within Europe learn in very similar ways. Even though according to Simy and Kolb (2009) Germany differs from Italy in learning style, both cultures were included in this research and no real difference was found. However, it might be more optimal to actually pay attention to those learning styles but it seems to be working with a universal learning strategy as well.

6. Conclusions

This paper evaluates *How do digital platforms manage cultural aspects in order to facilitate the onboarding process during internationalisation?*.

The most important aspect regarding culture when facilitating the onboarding process is the building of trust between the users and the digital platform. To facilitate the building of trust the language aspect is of high importance, not only to have a correct translation but to make sure that the translation is of high quality. Language in relation to the customer success team is also important. Local employees also help to build the trust between users and the company since the local employees already know the manners, values and beliefs of that culture. Thus, a local customer-success team eradicates almost all culture barriers. Having both language support for all cultures as well as having a local customer-success team is something all digital platforms can benefit from.

How then the onboarding aids the internationalisation process is mainly in regards to network effects. By listening and adjusting to the culture, by for example modifying the platform for the market, more users can be generated and onboarded in the platform. According to the network effects theory more users increase the value of the product. Higher product value can then generate organic growth with users being attracted to the platform due to its higher value. Thus, understanding the culture can lead to correct functions being implemented in correct cultures, generating higher product value for the users and thus easing the onboarding process. Then it compounds as more users create higher value and higher value creates more users. By adjusting for the culture trust can be built between the users and the digital platform. That trust can act as a source of motivation for the user being onboarded and thus can lead to lower levels of abandonment during the onboarding journey. An understanding for the culture can also help with the actual education between user and educator since the cultural barriers are lower. Thus, this thesis shows that within user acquisition, user education and user retention (what is called onboarding within this thesis) can in fact benefit from having culture taken into consideration. However, this paper is not comprehensive on the matter, therefore further research is recommended.

This thesis successfully fills in the knowledge-gaps identified within the problem discussion of this thesis. Since it shows how culture needs to be accounted for when developing an onboarding strategy. It also complements Brouter et al. (2016) with cultural aspects in regards to network effects.

7. Recommendations for future research

The two main limitations of this study is that no culture outside of western societies were examined as well as no companies with gamifications were examined. The fact that no other societies were examined was not planned within this thesis, as well as excluding gamification was not planned. However, no clear focus was made in regards to which cultures to examine and which onboarding strategies to examine. Another limitation of this study is that it does not examine how successful an onboarding strategy is when accounting for culture and when it does not account for culture.

Thus, a recommendation would be to examine how culture affects onboarding in more distant cultures, a recommendation would be to examine western societies and asian societies or african societies. This would most likely account for larger differences in culture and thus show more vivid examples of how culture needs to be accounted for in regards to onboarding.

Another recommendation would be to focus on gamification as an onboarding strategy in order to see how gamification aspects differ between cultures. Presumably, the most interesting results would be found by making an in depth case study following one company deploying a platform in two different cultures with gamification aspects in their onboarding.

Lastly, a recommendation for future research would be to examine how well digital platforms that account for cultural aspects onboard users in contrast to platforms that do not. In order to gain insightful results one company needs to be examined since different platforms are in nature different in regards to onboarding, some are easier to understand, some are more similar to already established platforms, some are more intuitive in their design etc. Thus one company would probably be the best to examine in order to make sure that the cultural factors is the only factor changing and everything else is constant.

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