

**Contributions of business support
services to the internationalization of
SMEs**

Case of Grow to Market

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Abstract <p>Nowadays, small and medium sized companies are the driving forces of economic growth and internationalization. However, SMEs face challenges within internationalization which creates a demand for business support services, BSSs. Grow to Market is a private BSS that specializes in helping companies to internationalize.</p> <p>The objective of the research was to analyze the actual contribution of BSSs to the internationalization processes of companies by implementing a case study of Grow to Market program. The research adapted a network approach of internationalization as a theoretical framework which evaluated networking alongside different support types. The theoretical framework allowed to investigate companies' internationalization levels before and after attending to the Grow to Market program. The research approach was qualitative, and the primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Grow to Market Business Director and two companies that have participated to the program in 2017-2019. Grow to Market Annual report and companies' websites were analyzed as secondary data.</p> <p>The findings reflected a connection between internationalization processes of participated companies and the contribution of the Grow to Market program. The main support types that had a major impact on the internationalization were networking, market knowledge and advice & consultancy. Grow to Market provides an access to its network which in turn is a key to provide specific market knowledge through advice & consultancy via Grow to Market's network members.</p> <p>The novelty of Grow to Market and limited secondary sources were limitations of the present study. Further longitudinal investigation of Grow to Market or a comparative study between other BSSs would be helpful in order to analyze companies that are beginning international operations or to analyze continued influence of BSSs.</p>		
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Tiivistelmä <p>Nykyaikana pienet ja keskisuuret yritykset toimivat talouskasvun ja kansainvälistymisen eteenpäin vievänä voimana. Pk-yritykset kuitenkin kohtaavat haasteita kansainvälistymisessä, mikä luo kysyntää liiketoiminnan tukipalveluille. Grow to Market on yksityinen liiketoiminnan tukipalvelu, jonka päämääränä on auttaa yrityksiä kansainvälisille markkinoille.</p> <p>Tutkimus tähtäsi ymmärtämään liiketoiminnan tukipalveluiden vaikutusta yritysten kansainvälistymiseen toteuttamalla tapaustutkimus Grow to Market -ohjelmasta. Tutkimus sovelsi teoreettista viitekehystä, joka keskittyi verkostoitumisen näkökulmasta kansainvälistymiseen yhdessä eri liiketoiminnan tukipalvelumuotojen kanssa. Tämä mahdollisti yritysten kansainvälistymistasojen tutkimisen ennen Grow to Market -ohjelmaan osallistumista ja sen jälkeen. Tutkimus oli kvalitatiivinen, ja sen primääridata kerättiin haastattelemalla Grow to Market -ohjelman esimiestä ja kahta 2017-2019 ohjelmaan osallistuneen yrityksen edustajaa. Grow to Market Annual Report ja yritysten verkkosivut toimivat sekundääridatan lähteenä.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset heijastivat yhteyttä Grow to Market -ohjelman ja yritysten kansainvälistymisen välillä. Tulokset näyttivät, että Grow to Market -ohjelma edesauttaa kansainvälistymistä antamalla tukea laajan verkoston myötä. Tärkeimpiä tukipalvelumuotoja, joita ohjelma tarjosi, olivat verkostoituminen, markkinatuntemus sekä neuvonanto ja konsultointi. Ohjelman verkoston kautta yritykset pääsevät käsiksi markkinatuntemukseen, jonka verkoston jäsenet tarjoavat konsultoinnin ja neuvonannon kautta.</p> <p>Grow to Market on suhteellisen uusi ohjelma, mikä osoittautui tutkimuksen yhdeksi rajoitukseksi, sillä kirjallisuus aiheesta oli rajallista. Tulevat tutkimukset voisivat keskittyä laajemman pitkäjäsen tutkimuksen tekemiseen esimerkiksi vertaamalla eri liiketoiminnan tukipalveluita, jotta saataisiin lisätietoa kansainvälistyvistä yrityksistä ja tukipalveluiden vaikutuksista.</p>		
Avainsanat (asiasanat) Kansainvälistyminen, pk-yritykset, verkostoituminen, Grow to Market, liiketoiminnan tukipalvelu		
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Globalization is a fact, because of technology, because of an integrated global supply chain, because of changes in transportation. And we are not going to be able to build a wall around that. - Barack Obama 2016

Nowadays it is common knowledge that our world is highly globalized, and the world economy is focused on international trade. No country can successfully thrive without any foreign country connections or partnerships due to continuous developments and changes, as Obama stated in aforesaid quote.

Internationalization as a concept is on display while talking about the world's economy. Previously, the concentration was mainly on large companies that were conveniently able to expand into a new international market, however in today's world, small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are taking role as leaders in driving economic growth (Dar & Mishra 2019, 1-2). Yet, SMEs encounter more or less challenges within the actual internationalization process (Ruzzier, Hisrich & Antoncic 2006, 476). Smaller companies have fewer resources, such as lack of knowledge (Zarei, Nasserli & Tajeddin 2011) or networks and connections (Torkkeli, Puumalainen, Saarenketo & Kuivalainen 2012, 28), compared to the larger companies. This increases local competition and SMEs' disadvantage (Etemad 2004, 2). However, it is noted that the successful performance of companies is highly dependent on internationalization and new market expansion (Dar & Mishra 2019, 2; Matusinaite & Sekliuckiene 2015, 21).

Based on the previous statements, SMEs should aim to expand their business into international markets, but the process evokes questions about limited resources and knowledge. Business support services (BSSs) are established in order to help and guide companies with proficiency and expertise in different fields (Ammetller, Rodríguez-Ardura and Lladós-Masllorens 2014, 11). That is to say, SMEs could benefit from available BSSs by gaining more knowledge about international markets in order to expand business into a new country successfully.

Internationalization causes challenges among SMEs all over the world, including Finland. Finland is a relatively small country; it has 303 890 km² of land area (Worldometer 2020). Finland is a Nordic country which is located in Northern Europe sharing a western border with Sweden, eastern border with Russia and northern border with Norway. Besides proportionately small geographical area, the population of Finland is only 5,5 million (OECD 2018). Finland's main industries focus on ICT and electronics, healthcare, forest industries, bio and circular economy, energy, cleantech (Business Finland 2020), metals, chemicals and shipbuilding (Finland Economy Profile 2019). The main export is pulp and paper alongside forestry, in which Finland is a major producer (Finland Exports 2020; Statistics 2020; Finland Economy Profile 2019). Other exports are machines, telecommunications equipment, cars, other forestry products, refined petroleum and metal (Finland Exports 2020; Finland 2020). Still, Finland faces a challenge in exporting (Finland Economy Profile 2019). There is a need for acceleration of exports in order to improve the economy of Finland (Finland Economy Profile 2019). To clarify, exports are directly connected to internationalization (Agarwal & Feils 2007, 165).

The relative number of SMEs in Finland is substantial. SMEs cover 99,7% of the total share of companies in Finland while large companies cover only 0,3%. In addition, the number of people employed by SMEs is 65,3% of total share. There have been efforts to increase the international involvement through organizations, such as Team Finland and Business Finland that aim to help companies expand internationally. These organizations intend to help companies to enter international markets by improving exports. (SBA Fact Sheet 2018.)

This thesis will consist of a case study of Grow to Market (GTM), which represents a role of the BSS provider, such as abovementioned Team Finland and Business Finland. GTM is one of the growth programs that Innovestor provides alongside Kasvu Open and Tahdo Uudistua. GTM is recognized as the largest private internationalization program in Finland that aims to help growth companies to enter a new market in the USA or in Sweden; it is an "express way to global business" (For growth companies 2020). The program is based on matching companies with the right people in the target market, which therefore accelerates international expansion.

1.2 Motivation for the research

There is a need for SMEs' internationalization in early stages due to rapidly changing business environment (Matiusinaite & Sekliuckiene 2015, 21). Finland is a small market which increases the international expansion of firms. That is to say, small and medium sized companies are eager to expand into new and bigger markets in order to grow their profits and to encounter a greater demand (Zarei, Nasser, & Tajeddin 2011) which therefore boosts their growth and development.

Internationalization involves concepts such as exporting and foreign direct investment (FDI) (Agarwal & Feils 2007, 165). The table below illustrates the differences in exports/GDP ratios and outward FDI stocks/GDP ratios between four Nordic countries, Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The values of exports/GDP ratios and outward FDI stocks/GDP ratios are expressed as percentages.

Table 1. Exports/GDP ratio & Outward FDI stocks/GDP ratio comparison 2017. Adapted from OECD (2019a, b, c, d).

	Finland	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Export/GDP ratio	38,5%	54,5%	36,2%	45,3%
Outward FDI stocks/GDP ratio	48,3%	66,8%	63,0%	75,9%

The export/GDP ratio of Finland is 38,5% (OECD 2019a) while Denmark's is 54,5% (OECD 2019b). The export/GDP ratio of Norway is 36,2% (OECD 2019c) and Sweden's is 45,3% (OECD 2019d). When giving a table a glance, it is noticeable how Finland has scored the lowest percentages with one exception. The export rate of Finland is 38,5% while Norway's is 36,2%. As the previous table justifies, Finland needs to concentrate more on improving internationalization through exporting and FDI.

The research will benefit SMEs in Finland, if and when they consider expanding their business internationally. The research examines the role of BSSs, in this case Grow to Market, and how they contribute to the internationalization of SMEs. Hence, SMEs are able to evaluate whether they would benefit from outsourced services provided by BSS, and in general, gain more knowledge about available services that aim to

help companies in variety of different areas. The author's assumption is that the research will positively support the importance of BSSs and highlight their influence especially in business networks.

Besides the convenience for SMEs, the research will benefit Grow to Market program. The research will examine program's role from networking perspective and how it has impacted the internationalization process of SMEs. The research might provide new aspects or improvement ideas for GTM in order to renew and update business operations in the future.

I have always been interested in internationalization and how global business has an influence on the world's economy while being one of the driving forces of it. In summer 2019, I was given an opportunity to do an internship in Innovestor Ignite and to be a part of Grow to Market team as a trainee. During the summer, I gained a real-life insight about the internationalization process of SMEs and what it requires. Being part of a BSS provider gave me a better understanding about the role of service that aims to help SMEs to enter a new market. In other words, I experienced the BSSs' perspective in internationalization process of SMEs. From my point of view, it is more common to experience what it is like to be part of an SME instead of a service that they might use and benefit from. It is an intriguing fact that countries are depending on each other in order to perform well and be successful due to integrated supply chain, as Obama noted (2016). Grow to Market has based its business on broad network and creating connections.

1.3 Research approach and structure of the thesis

Previous two subchapters partly reviewed Finland and the country's challenges with export rates and internationalization. Through literature in preceding subchapters and in forthcoming Literature review, the research problem is stated; exports and international expansion are components that cause challenges in Finland especially among SMEs. This research is done in order to gain a better understanding for SMEs' internationalization process by highlighting the contribution of BSSs (case of Grow to Market) to the process. To improve the export rates and internationalization in Finland, it is important to gain more knowledge of whether the role of BSSs should

be enhanced and to find out whether there is a strong linkage between SMEs internationalization and BSS. Therefore, the research aims to answer to the following research question:

“How do business support services contribute to SMEs’ internationalization?”

The research objective is to understand and analyze the real impact of BSSs in growth companies’ internationalization by evaluating Grow to Market as a concept and companies who have participated to the program.

In order to be able to answer to the abovementioned research question, the research will consist of an empirical study; the research will be qualitative and consists a case study of Grow to Market. The intention is to examine Grow to Market program from BSS’ perspective and to find out its contribution to the internationalization process of companies that have attended GTM program previously. The main methods are briefly explained below while further information is provided in the third chapter, Methodology.

Qualitative research focuses on non-numerical data which is indicated via voice and words expressed aloud. The data can be in form of text, images and open-ended questions that can be collected via in-depth interviews for instance. (Creswell & Creswell 2018, 18; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 482.) Case study instead concentrates on thorough and deep study of a specific case; within this research the case will be GTM program. Case study is restrained to time. (Creswell & Creswell 2018, 14.) According to Creswell and Creswell (2018, 14), Yin (2009, 2012, 2014) defines that a case study is based on collecting accurate and comprehensive information. Based on these statements, case study fits this research well because the aim is to analyze BSS’ contribution to internationalization process thoroughly via in-depth interviews. The qualitative primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews will be conducted with a representative of Grow to Market program in order to analyze program’s main activities as a BSS. The author will also conduct semi-structured interviews with the representatives of companies that have participated to the GTM program. Semi-structured interview suits this research well due to a possibility to be flexible and spontaneous during the interview if some intriguing aspects come forth. Within a semi-structured interview,

the interviewee has a list of questions and themes, but if needed, some questions can be left out or the order can vary depending on the interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009, 320).

In order to be able to analyze and organize the data, the research will adapt a network approach of internationalization as a theoretical framework. This theoretical framework will be implemented within the interviews when evaluating companies that have participated to the GTM program. When implementing the network approach, companies' internationalization process can be examined before and after consuming Grow to Market program's services.

Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of five different chapters, in which the first one, Introduction, covers background, motivation towards the topic, research approach, and finally the structure of the thesis. The following, second chapter is a Literature review, which critically examines different theories, scholars and aspects connected to the topic of BSS and internationalization of SMEs. The literature review is a theoretical overview that aims to help in providing deeper understanding over the topic. It includes an adapted theoretical framework, network approach of internationalization, which will be implemented in the research. The third chapter is Methodology. The chapter provides a deeper review of the research approach and context, how the data was collected and analyzed in order to proceed the research. Lastly, it contains verification of results. The fourth chapter presents the results and findings that were gathered from primary and secondary data in data collection phase. The last and fifth chapter is Discussion. The chapter defines an answer to the research question, reflects a practical implication and an assessment of the results in the light of literature, refers to the limitations of the research, and finally considers suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Business support services

Business support service is a term that occurs in a variety of articles, journals and books in the business field literature. Besides BSSs, a reader might end up encountering diverse terms such as public support services, external support services, business support, business assistance services or commonly support services. An exact definition for the abovementioned term is controversial. According to Ammetller, Rodríguez-Ardura and Lladós-Masllorens (2014, 11), BSSs aim to advice and help emerging companies while providing them professional knowledge and expertise. Therefore, the term, business support service, can be explained through what the main activity of the service is. The assistance, that support services provide for companies, has different forms (Mole, North & Baldock 2017, 477). For instance, support services can provide help with physical locations and equipment (Abduh, D'Souza, Quazi & Burley 2007, 75), social interactions and co-operation opportunities through networks (Ammetller et al. 2014, 12; Hackett & Dilts 2004, 41), counselling and support through coaching (Abduh et al. 2007, 75; Ammetller et al. 2014, 12). Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse and Groen (2012, 112) emphasize the importance of coaching which defines “one-to-one support” between a mentor or a coach and a company. Sivaev (2013, 907) instead determines business support to signify guidance, for instance, with financial and legal concerns. The resources that BSS provide, can either be tangible or intangible. Tangible resources refer to physical and financial support and assets, and intangible resources instead determine intellectual property, skills and knowledge inside the company. (Soetanto & Jack 2013, 436.) Additionally, Robinson and Stubberud (2014) underline meditation as part of intangible resources. Within this concept, meditation refers to networks and support in creating contacts. (29.)

Besides BSSs, another term that appears in the literature is highly connected with support for businesses; the term is business incubator (BI). Business incubators are referred to as instruments or services that aim to help and accelerate the growth and expansion of new firms (Abduh et al. 2007, 74; Bruneel et al. 2012, 110). Commonly,

previously covered BSSs can be offered by business incubators (Ammetller et al. 2014, 11). BIs can provide guidance with office locations, networks and general resources (Bruneel et al. 2012, 110). Generally, the main aim of business incubators is to support start-ups by providing them the required help, so that the small companies will become independent and self-contained in the market (Abduh et al. 2007, 75). Some of the business incubators are organized or supported by the government. As in most of the OECD countries, government is involved in providing help and support to SMEs through external support services. (Mole, North & Baldock 2017, 477.) OECD refers to Convention on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development which nowadays has 36 member countries across the globe that cooperate together. OECD countries work together with global issues while creating 80% of the world's trade with partners. (OECD 2019e.)

In general, the concept of BI is relatively old, since it was created in the USA already in the 1950s, and later on the concept expanded globally. Nowadays, there are approximately 900 business incubators in the European Union alone. (Bruneel et al. 2012, 111.)

There is a rising question whether the external BSSs have an actual importance within SMEs' everyday business operations. The following chapter will examine the connection and importance of BSSs with SMEs. As noted previously, BSSs and BIs intend to support and help start-ups. They exist in order to prevent SMEs to fail in early stages (Abduh et al. 2007, 74). Therefore, the role of support services is significant. For instance, SMEs own an excessively vital role in providing jobs and being part of an employing force in emerging economies (Ngoma, Ernest, Nangoli & Christopher 2017, 96). For instance, in countries such as Finland, Germany and Canada, SMEs account for 60 to 70% of employment (Piza, Cravo, Taylor, Gonzalez, Musse, Furtado, Sierra & Abdelnour 2016, 11). In order to keep the employment rate as high as earlier mentioned, the relevance of BSSs must be emphasized among SMEs. BSS is referred to as a complex system due to a significant variety of different support programs that can be implemented either at a national or local level. National level support refers to a larger scale and nationwide guidance at lower costs. On the contrary, local support focuses on specific areas and markets on a smaller scale. (Sivaev 2013, 907-909.) As an SME is recognized as a likely user of BSS,

it is essential to acknowledge the variety of support programs that are feasible (Ammetller et al. 2014, 12). Besides everyday operations in the domestic market, there is also a connection between support services and internationalization. The role of BSSs will be enhanced when SMEs begin the process of expanding their business into new markets. In early stages of internationalization, SMEs are vulnerable (Audet & St-Jean 2007, 165), and there is a need for external help in order to access new market. The concept of internationalization will be covered in chapter 2.2 Internationalization of SMEs.

An argument can be made towards using or not using external support services. A company or an entrepreneur must decide whether the support services in question will be useful and pragmatic for the business or not. According to Ammetller et al. (2014, 16), the decision to use external support services demands thorough thinking and a major involvement unlike simple decisions that are made quickly. The use of external services also depends on the background of the company (Boter & Lundström 2005, 251) and the previous experiences of an entrepreneur (Ammetller et al. 2014, 16).

As indicated previously, BSS provides a variety of programs and services that aim to benefit companies. As specified by Mole, North and Baldock (2017), companies search for support services in order to create competitive advantage in the market based on BSSs' advice. The researchers state that the advice increases the knowledge inside a company which therefore leads to achieving a competitive advantage over competitors. The use of BSS also reinforces the information and knowledge, especially with small companies when they have less resources. Companies are able to take advantage of new markets when expanding internationally with the help of external support services. (478.)

Conversely, there are some reasons that restrain or limit the use of BSS. Audet and St-Jean (2007) define reasons that are reflected from the BSSs' perspective. Lack of confidence among support services or the weak quality in performance are some of the reasons that can limit the use of BSS among SMEs that aim to find help. Companies will not consume BSS if the fit is unsatisfactory between the service provider and the company that is in need for support. Otherwise stated, the demand does not match the supply. Visibility of BSS can be shoddy due to poor marketing and

the service can simply be too expensive for the consumption of SMEs. (166.) On the other hand, Mole, North and Baldock (2017) determine a few reasons from SMEs' perspective that might restrict the search for external support services. Some companies might have inadequate information and consequently they cannot make a known decision about whether to use external support service or not. This is a consequence of lack of resources; small companies cannot have all information and access to resources that larger companies have. SMEs can have doubts about the value or reliability of the service. A common worry is whether the use of BSS is worth the expenses it causes and if the company has enough time to implement the given advice. Another typical concern is trust for the support service. Can these services be trusted? Companies must examine if the possible benefits and advice will be useful enough and whether the service provider is able to understand the real problem a company is having. (479.) All these reasons define the decision that a company must make in order to find a BSS that will fit with their needs.

2.2 Internationalization of SMEs

In the midst of international business, there is the process of internationalization of firms (Johanson & Kao 2010, 23). As internationalization is rather a broad concept, the exact definition for the term is disputed. Different authors can determine the concept in fractionally disparate ways. As stated by Johanson and Vahlne (1977, 23) internationalization process determines an expansion of a firm's activities into other countries by enhancing the company involvement internationally through learning and experiencing. Ngasri and Freeman (2018, 221) instead consider internationalization as process that involves operations over international borders through diverse networks and exchanges between companies. According to Dar and Mishra (2019, 3), Welch and Luostarinen (1988, 84) define internationalization as "increasing involvement in international operations". Similar interpretation concentrates on highlighting the importance of knowledge and its transfer from one country to another. The process of internationalization is regarded to increase experiential knowledge and learning (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 23), and whether a firm is able to adapt the knowledge in a short period of time, there is a possibility for successful and quick international expansion (Tsang 2018). On the contrary,

Maldonado, Pinho and Lobo (2018) dispute that the role of knowledge and learning is threatened due to increased research about international new ventures (INVs) that highlight the individual knowledge instead of experiential knowledge of a company. Internationalization can also be illustrated through geographic scale when integration and operations of companies happen in variety of countries instead of one domestic market in one country (Ruzzier, Hisrich & Antoncic 2006, 477).

SMEs have been mentioned plenty of times within this research and their role is notable. By definition, SMEs are independent relatively small companies (OECD 2005). According to OECD (2005), an SME is defined through the number of employees working for the company. For instance, in the European Union, the stated number is 250 employees. Hence, if a company has less than 250 employees it is recognized as a medium sized firm. In addition, 50 or fewer employees represent a small company, while fewer than 10 employees define a micro company. These numbers can vary depending on the country. Besides the number of employees, financial resources and turnovers have been used to determine SMEs. Small and medium sized companies are provided more financial aid than for big corporations. If evaluating turnovers, 50 million euros is the limit for a medium sized company, 10 million euros for small company and 2 million euros for micro companies in order to be defined as an SME. (OECD 2005.)

As a concept, internationalization has been studied from various perspectives over the years (Ruzzier et al. 2006, 476). International markets have changed radically when segmentation and separation between large and small scaled companies have been reduced by removing trade barriers in international level (Dar & Mishra 2019, 2; Etemad 2004, 1; Etemad & Wright 1999, 4). In other words, big corporations and companies were a dominant force in the past while SMEs were not given the same concentration and hence, they were left in the shadow (Ruzzier et al. 2006, 477). Besides the fact that the role of SMEs was relatively limited, nowadays *de facto*, they are one of the driving forces of economic growth (Dar & Mishra 2019, 1; Ruzzier et al. 2006, 477) and an essential part of the world economy (Audet & St-Jean 2007, 165). Today, all companies have access to necessary operators for business, such as customers, suppliers and networks due to globalization (Etemad & Wright 1999, 4).

Yet, the process is still considered to be increasingly challenging for SMEs (Ruzzier et al. 2006, 476). For instance, SMEs face challenges in gaining knowledge that is required to enter a new target market (Zarei, Nasserri & Tajeddin 2011) or they lack resources related to networking and co-operation which would help companies to create a competitive advantage (Torkkeli, Puumalainen, Saarenketo & Kuivalainen 2012, 28). Competition between multinational enterprises (MNEs) and SMEs can be harsh by cause of SMEs' levels of resources being lower which therefore creates a disadvantage. In addition, some SMEs might find the competition unusually crucial which creates a sense of "defenseless against larger firms" due to their strategies finding a better position in the market. (Etemad 2004, 2.)

Even though there are challenges within the process of international expansion, there is a need for SMEs to expand their business internationally in early stages due to higher competition and rapidly changing business environment (Matusinaite & Sekliuckiene 2015, 21). Besides, the successful growth of SMEs is usually depending on internationalization of the business (Dar & Mishra 2019, 2; Matusinaite & Sekliuckiene 2015, 21). Early internationalization has been prominent in formation of concepts, such as international new ventures or born globals (BGs), the latter being covered later. These both focus on the concept of rapid international expansion in early stages of the firm development. (Hilmersson, Johanson, Lundberg & Papaioannou 2017, 22.)

Matusinaite and Sekliuckiene (2015, 22) have specified determinants of early internationalization which include three categories: entrepreneurship and business orientation of managers, organizational factors and contextual factors. Along with these, Vătămănescu, Andrei, Nicolescu, Pînzaru and Zbucea (2017, 207) describe that the determinants of early stage internationalization are related to pull and push forces, which are connected to external environment (pull) and entrepreneur and company capabilities as internal factors (push). According to Andersson (2015), especially entrepreneur capabilities are important for international operations. In addition, entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is brought forth. EO is defined as "decision-making practices and managerial philosophies" (Wales 2016, 4), alongside with activities and intensions that are entrepreneurial by nature (Wach 2015,14). It is

regarded as a catalyst for the growth of SMEs (Ngoma, Ernest, Nangoli & Christopher 2017, 97).

Although there is an external pressure to international expansion, there are plenty of motives which drive the intentions of SMEs to expand their business globally. These include for instance, increased profit, greater foreign demand, support from the government (Zarei, Nasser, & Tajeddin 2011) and many others such as competition, human capital, possibilities to broader social interaction (Francioni, Pagano & Castellani 2016, 196-202) and tempting location (Rammer & Schmiele 2009, 26). Competition was previously interpreted as challenge; however, it is also a driver of internationalization. In the home market, SMEs face competition with large corporations and companies that have an advantage in more rapid expansion into new markets and access to resources (Rammer & Schmiele 2009, 18). Notably in international new ventures approach, competition is characterized as a key driver of companies' internationalization process (Kazlauskaitė, Autio, Sarapovas, Abramavicius & Gelbuda 2015, 45). The competition in the domestic market will drive companies to explore new foreign markets. This concept is referred as market opportunity. (Rammer & Schmiele 2009, 26.)

While INVs and BGs being briefly mentioned previously, there are variety of models and theories explaining internationalization. The following subchapters will examine commonly known Uppsala internationalization process model and Born global theory of internationalization.

2.2.1 Uppsala internationalization process model

The original Uppsala internationalization process model was created in 1977 by Johanson and Vahlne (Forsgren 2016, 1135), and it is referred as the traditional model of internationalization (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt 2004, 59). The original model still remains highly popular and highly cited source, but over the time it has received plenty of critique due to varying aspects and opinions about the internationalization process (Welch, Nummela & Liesch 2016, 783-784). The model considers internationalization as a step by step process (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt 2004, 59) in which the firm starts operating in another country via representative, then creates a

subsidiary and later on forms manufacturing plant in the target country (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 24).

The internationalization model is based on market knowledge and commitment, commitment decision and current activities (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 26). The Figure 1 below explains the separation between stage, on the left, and change, on the right, aspects. Market knowledge and commitment are included in the state aspect and commitment decisions and current activities being part of change aspects.

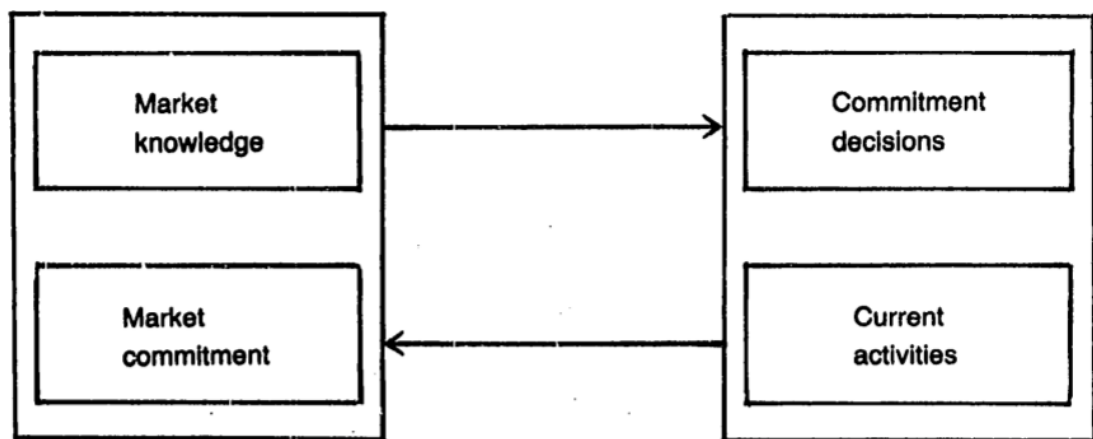


Figure 1. The basic mechanism of internationalization - State and change aspects (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 26)

The model reflects the relationships between aforesaid four variables; market knowledge and commitment have an impact on commitment decisions and current activities, and these vice versa are able to change market knowledge and commitment. (ibid., 24.)

Johanson and Vahlne indicate two key concepts: experiential knowledge, which is reflected to the market knowledge (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 28), and psychic distance (Brewer 2007, 45). The researchers note that knowledge is a fundamental part of the internationalization process, and it is developed through experience (Johanson & Vahlne 2009, 1415). Experiential knowledge therefore determines knowledge that is obtained through own experiences (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 28). The concept of psychic distance refers to differences in the domestic market compared to the foreign market (Brewer 2007, 45; Chetty & Campbell-Hunt 2004, 59). These include, for instance, disparities in language, political systems, culture,

education and development of industries (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt 2004, 59). Brewer (2007, 45) notes that higher psychic distance between countries reduces opportunities to expand business into the other country. It is easier to start an internationalization process within a country that is familiar, and hence, has only little psychic distance (ibid., 45).

Later on, in 2009, Johanson and Vahlne created a revisited model due to promptly changing global business environment (Johanson & Vahlne 2009, 1411). The revisited model considers how “network outsidership” is causing challenges in international expansion (Yamin & Yusuf 2018, 2). The model sheds light to the importance of networks and relationships (Johanson & Vahlne 2009, 1413) and how network insidership is stepping into the picture while overshadowing the market commitment (Yamin and Yusuf 2018, 3). Consequently, the model concentrates on increasing the role of business networks (Johanson & Vahlne 2009, 1413). To cite the researchers: “Given the business network view, we add to our model the concept of relationship-specific knowledge, which is developed through interaction between the two partners, and that includes knowledge about each other’s heterogeneous resources and capabilities.” (Johanson & Vahlne 2009, 1416). By this quote, Johanson and Vahlne (2009, 1416) state that interactive relationships increase the development of knowledge.

Previously mentioned term, network outsidership came forth. According to Forsgren (2016, 1136), if and when a company does not have a stable position in a network in a new foreign market, the situation is concerned as “liability of outsidership”. The main aim is to transfer from outsidership to the insidership in the network. As outsidership is defined as not having a position in a network, insidership instead refers to creating relationships and combining resources with potential partners in business environment. (Blankenburg Holm, Johanson & Kao 2015, 338.)

Briefly, new revisited model takes a new networking aspect (Forsgren 2016, 1142), while it is based on the traditional Uppsala internationalization process model (Vahlne & Johanson 2017, 1092). Vahlne and Johanson (2017) characterize that the model of internationalization has endured the same, including the same contents and structure, as they were presented in 1977. Although, the model is developed a little further. (1092.)

The main aim is still to consider the traditional Uppsala internationalization process model, which underlines the importance of knowledge (Vahlne & Johanson 2017, 1088) and how internationalization is a stepwise process (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt 2004, 64).

2.2.2 Born global theory

Born global theory is a reflection of companies' rapid internationalization at early stages of their life cycle. Even though the term can be misleading, only a few of born global firms are actually developed while operating internationally. In reality, the internationalization happens in early years of formation. Born global firms are small and young, and usually these companies are equipped with limited tangible resources that might restrain the internationalization process. (Knight & Liesch 2016, 93-94.) Still, born global companies ambitiously see "the world as their marketplace" (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 4). As an important underscore, besides BGs, the process of quick international expansion is also considered with international new ventures (Knight & Liesch 2016, 93-94.) Over the years all the way from 1990s, both of these terms, born globals and international new ventures, have appeared in the literature (Øyna & Alon 2018, 157), and yet, the definitions for these are controversial (Crick 2009, 454). Even though, both terms may appear within similar concepts, they have a slightly different meaning (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 4). As stated by Oviatt and McDougall (2005, 5) international new venture is "a business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of out puts in multiple countries". Cavusgil and Knight (2015) dispute the INVs by defining born globals as "entrepreneurial start-ups that, from or near their founding, seek to derive a substantial proportion of their revenue from the sale of products in international markets". Born global concept accentuates the young age of companies that aim to expand their business internationally through exporting as their main channel. (4.)

As previously mentioned, born globals have limited tangible resources such as lack of human or financial resources, but on the contrary they aim to have strong intangible resources and capabilities (Knight & Liesch 2016, 94). According to Falahat, Knight and Alon (2018), these capabilities refer to company's know-how and expertise in

specific areas. The researchers underline the importance of knowledge as part of organizational capabilities which creates a base for innovation. Born global companies benefit from organizational capabilities that are fundamental part of internationalization at early stage. These capabilities help to overcome being new or foreign in a new market. (938-939.) Previously mentioned entrepreneurial orientation is included in organizational capabilities (Falahat, Knight & Alon 2018, 939) that refer to firm's competencies to innovate, being proactive and being able to take risks (Felzensztein, Ciravegna, Robson & Amorós 2015, 148). EO has a vast role in supporting with BGs' internationalization process (Knight & Liesch 2016, 97). In accordance with Falahat, Knight and Alon (2018, 940), the performance of companies in foreign market is improved if the company has powerful entrepreneurial orientation.

Besides intangible resources and capabilities, general circumstances in today's world make expanding business internationally a bit easier. With these circumstances, Cavusgil and Knight (2015, 4) refer to internet and technologies that make communication between different parties effortless. Due to these, it is possible to internationalize in early years after the company formation when the expenses are not as high as they used to be (ibid., 4). Literature of born globals and early internationalization also highlight the importance of networks and creating relationships (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 8; Ngasri & Freeman 2018, 225) which is nowadays easier due to previously mentioned access to internet and broad communication systems. The concept of networks will be discussed in the following chapter 2.3 Theoretical framework.

During the last decades, BGs have appeared and acquired more attention and interest worldwide by challenging traditional internationalization process that was mostly implemented only by larger companies (Knight & Liesch 2016, 93). Born global theory gives a contrary view to the traditional Uppsala model which defines that only after acquiring domestic market there is a possibility for international expansion (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 5; Falahat et al. 2018, 938). Due to developing and numerous appearing born globals, our time can be called "the modern era of globalization" (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 4). According to Knight and Liesch (2016, 97) born globals are nowadays rapidly increasing their importance in world economy. As

stated, approximately 20% of newly formatted companies are recognized as born globals in the European Union (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 5; Knight & Liesch 2016, 98). The same researchers determine BGs having a great role in contributing to economic development; BGs generate expertise and knowledge for international transfer, advocate high-value-added operations and support establishment of new industries (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 5; Knight & Liesch 2016, 98).

Since born global theory is relatively recent, there are few theoretical issues that occur within the concept. The overall research about born global firms is not fully developed nor structured. For instance, existing model is lacking clarified measures and definitions. (Knight & Liesch 2016, 98.) Therefore, the theoretical base of born globals is incomplete which creates a possibility for future studies (Øyna & Alon 2018, 176). According to Knight and Liesch (2016), extended research would help to develop existing models further by explaining how BGs are able to create a successful internationalization process. Commonly accepted terminology would create more clarity within different studies and researches. (98.)

2.3 Theoretical framework

In addition to the above explained internationalization models and theories, this research will evaluate and adapt a network approach of internationalization as a theoretical framework.

Networking as a concept

The term network has come across in previous chapters, as well in variety of literature over the years (Vinuesa 2016). Networks are defined as “sets of connected exchange relationships” that appear within a company (Johanson & Kao 2010, 18). In turn, according to Chetty and Holm (2000, 79), networks refer to relationships and connections between different companies. The researchers underline term “collaboration”, when determining networks; co-operation between companies and suppliers, partners, customers etc. is formed through company’s competitive forces and capabilities (ibid., 78). As an enormous benefit, creating contacts and links is easy nowadays due to already existing communication networks and internet (Fonfara, Ratajczak-Mrozek & Leszczyński 2016, 1), and actually, formation of

networks is modifying the global economy throughout (Parkhe, Wasserman & Ralston 2006, 560).

While the world is becoming more global day by day, in order to become successful and grow in the market, it is necessary to have a broad network with business and social relationships (Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 88), especially when a company is aiming to expand its business internationally (Vătămănescu et al. 2017, 207). As it has been covered in previous chapters, small firms have fewer resources than large corporations which enhances the role of networks. Small firms must use and benefit from networks in order to defeat being foreign and new. (Felzensztein, Ciravegna, Robson & Amorós 2015, 147; Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 89.) How are these companies able to do it? When having a broad network, a company can further support its growth in a new market by having trusted suppliers, partner companies and loyal clients (Felzensztein et al. 2015, 147). Entrepreneur's network has a substantial role (Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 91), and the use of personal contacts as company resources is common among entrepreneurs when expanding to new markets (Felzensztein et al. 2015, 147). These networks can even define where the new foreign market locates, that a company is aiming to acquire. If an entrepreneur has a broad and strong network in country X, it might be an obvious next market due to an access to information about a foreign market through existing position in a network. (Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 91.) On the contrary, Parkhe, Wasserman and Ralston (2006) mention few difficulties in relationship formation. Country's cultural aspects and background have a significant effect on creating partnerships. Different attitudes about collaboration, diverse cultures and habits and general eagerness to rely on "outsiders" have an impact on network formation. (563.) If a company can overcome challenges, it can gain necessary intangible resources, such as knowledge, when it is able to create reliable strategic relationships with business partners inside the network. Moreover, knowledge and experience are referred as crucial sources in order to expand business into a new market successfully. (Johanson & Kao 2010, 18.)

In addition, Hånell, Sharma, Nordman and Tolstoy (2018, 17) underline the importance of networks from innovation perspective by further explaining Johanson and Kao's statement about significance of knowledge. When companies are able to create connections in a foreign network, they gain an access to knowledge which is a

critical component in internationalization process. Moreover, knowledge and internationalization have a connection to innovativeness of a company which therefore is, again, one of the key factors of firm's success in a new market. (Hånell et al. 2018, 20.)

Network approach

There are plenty of different models and frameworks that aim to explain internationalization but one of the predominant frameworks focuses on networks (Johanson & Kao 2010, 2). When considering the research question “*How do business support services contribute to SMEs' internationalization?*”, network approach of internationalization seems to be the most suitable due its intention is to explain the internationalization process as a whole (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 190). After the network approach was published in 1988 by Johanson and Mattsson, plenty of other concepts and frameworks have been formed. A vast increase in network theories has also caused confusion among different studies due to that terms defining networks or relationships are used in different ways. (Johanson & Kao 2010, 5-22.)

The network approach is convenient because the research examines internationalization over networking. Figure 2, see below, “Classification of networking and internationalization” (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 183) explains how internationalization and networking theories have been divided based on origin and area.

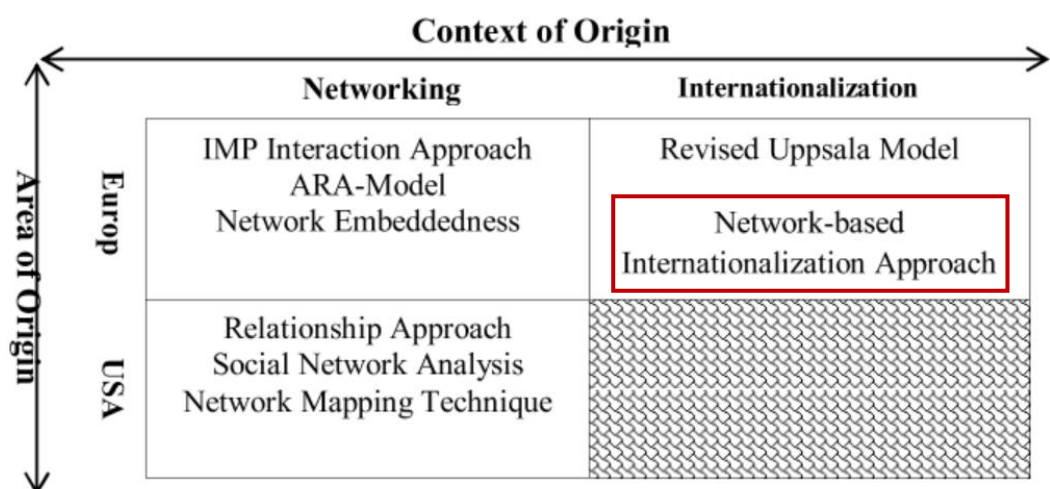


Figure 2. Classification of networking and internationalization (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 183)

Context of origin on the horizontal axis defines two columns, networking and internationalization. Area of origin on the vertical axis illustrates Europe and USA as origin areas of different theories. (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 183.) As stated by Hosseini and Dadfar (2012), internationalization theories, on the right column, aim to explain internationalization processes as they are through adapting a networking perspective. Instead, networking theories, on the left column, are general and can be adapted in many different concepts. (183.) By examining the differences between different theories, network-based internationalization approach seems to fit well within this research.

According to Johanson and Kao (2010, 4), the network approach focuses on observing the market through firms' commitment to long-term relationships which, in turn, creates a mutual network. These long-term relationships, also called exchange relationships, take time and effort to form. The term exchange refers to firms' capabilities to "change counterparts" with each other. (Johanson & Mattsson 2015, 2.) Companies must invest time and resources in order to create relationships and to interact with suppliers, customers, distributors and other parties in the same network. By doing so, firms acquire a position inside a network which assists in gaining, previously mentioned, information and knowledge about a new market that is not available outside of the network. (Johanson & Kao 2010, 4.)

Johanson and Mattsson (2015) determine a distinguishing interfirm dependence between different relationships. It explains how companies that share exchange relations have a direct and specific dependence. Furthermore, a company has "indirect and specific dependence relations to those firms with which its counterparts have exchange relationships" (3). Figure 3 illustrates the relationships between companies.

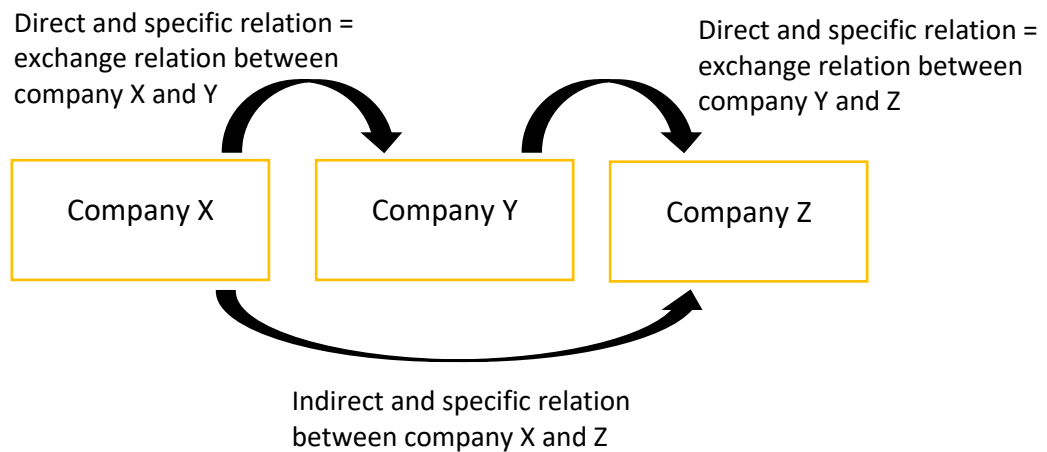


Figure 3. Interfirm dependence based on Johanson and Mattsson (2015)

Due to interdependence, companies are depending on resources of others (Johanson & Mattsson 2015, 4). Johanson and Mattsson (2015, 4) refer the relationship as “mutual orientation” between two companies, which determines a company’s willingness to interact and assumption that the other company will do the same. In general, companies are able to develop and deepen the relationships and connections when they have a stable position in a network (Hadley & Wilson 2003). The position in a network enables a company an entry to resources that other companies control (Chetty & Holm 2000, 81). As it is noted by Hadley and Wilson (2003), different internationalization patterns can and have been explained by examining developing relations and networks.

As the general description and aim of network approach is explained, Hadley and Wilson (2003), Johanson and Mattsson (1988) illustrate four positions in internationalization which creates a framework for network approach. The position is determined through the degree of internationalization of the network and the degree of internationalization of the firm, and moreover, the position is one of the key elements in internationalization process (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 187). These four positions are called the early starter, the late starter, the lonely international, and the international among others (Hadley & Wilson 2003). Figure 4 illustrates the relationships between these four components.

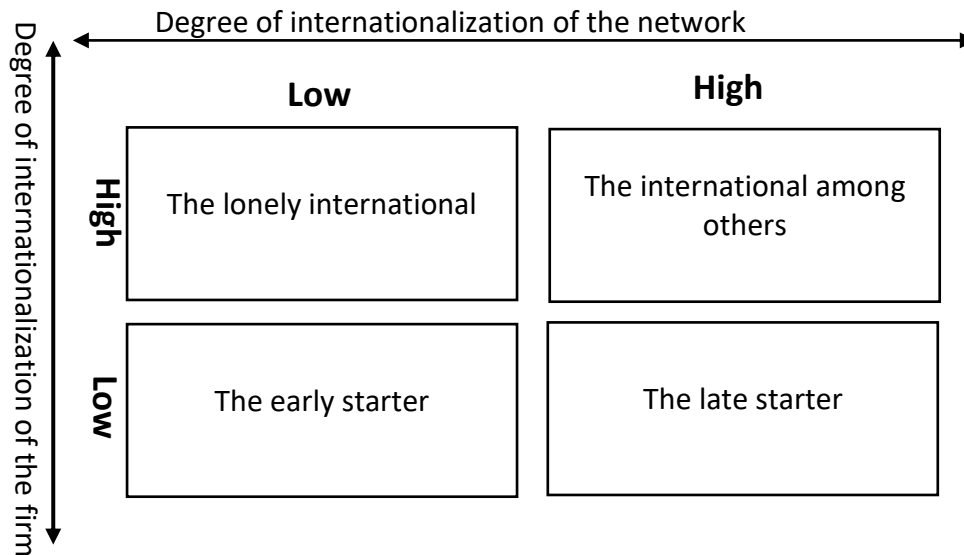


Figure 4. Network based internationalization approach (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 188)

The early starter determines a company that does not or has only few international relationships (Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 187) while its competitors and suppliers share the same situation with lack of relationships (Chetty & Holm 2000, 80). According to Hadley and Wilson (2003), the early starters have poor channels within the foreign network where a company is aiming into. The early starters do not have access to information about a foreign market and their knowledge is minimal (Chetty & Holm 2000, 80; Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 187). Although, when companies decide to commit into a new market fully, it will create more substantial relations and channels inside the network (Hadley & Wilson 2003). Acquiring knowledge is difficult due to nonexistent operations with other parties in the new market (ibid. 2003). Chetty and Holm (2000, 80) argue that the early starters should consider the use of external services, agents or support services, in order to enter a new market successfully. Since the early starters do not have experience about running a business in a foreign market, their knowledge is slight (Hadley & Wilson 2003).

The late starters instead, are operating in a market environment that is already internationalized, in which companies' suppliers, competitors and other collaborative companies have expanded their business globally to new markets (Chetty & Holm 2000, 81; Hadley & Wilson 2003; Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 188). The late starters have indirect relationships with other foreign partners through partner companies, suppliers and competitors (Chetty & Holm 2000, 81; Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 188). If

referring to previously explained interfirm dependence, see Figure 3, the late starters determine an indirect relation such as companies X and Z represent. The late starters are behind their competitors when considering knowledge; foreign activities in a new market are not familiar enough which causes lack of knowledge. Forming strong relationships and networks is hard, and competitors aim to have more experience about the foreign market. (Chetty & Holm 2000, 81; Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 188.) Hadley and Wilson (2003) present a statement that the late starters still have an advantage based on knowledge. Companies can enhance their knowledge by imitating operations of other companies with whom they have indirect relationships with. Improving indirect relationships facilitates with forming a position in a network which, therefore, strengthens experiential knowledge. Moreover, the late starters do have a higher level of international, foreign institutional and foreign business knowledge when comparing to early starters. (ibid. 2003.)

The third position in the model is **the lonely international** which has plenty of experience and knowledge about a foreign market. The lonely international is highly internationalized but its competitors, suppliers and other companies are lacking international activities due to their concentration on domestic market. These companies have an advantage over their competitors because the lonely international has an existing and stable position in a network. Increasing knowledge and its development, the lonely internationals operate in more diverse markets that enhances a company's competences to succeed. (Chetty & Holm 2000, 80-81; Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 187.) Hadley and Wilson (2003) dispute an interesting aspect; the lonely international has a benefit as highly internationalized company and therefore, its foreign institutional and internationalization knowledge are higher than the late starters'. On the contrary, the late starter has higher foreign business knowledge than the lonely international because the network of the lonely international is unilateral. (ibid. 2003.)

The international among others refers to a position inside a network in which the whole environment and all other parties are operating internationally while having access to knowledge and resources about the foreign market (Chetty & Holm 2000, 81; Hadley & Wilson 2003; Hosseini & Dadfar 2012, 188). Corresponding to Chetty and Holm (2000, 81), the internationals among others have compact relations and

networks that, in turn, create possibilities to implement entries to new markets through strategic partnerships. Hadley and Wilson (2003) define an exceptional knowledge amid the internationals among others due to their high level of knowledge and skills within one foreign country. The researchers also underscore the great interdependence in the network. The internationals among others have highest level of foreign institutional-, foreign business- and internationalization knowledge compared to the other three position that were explained above. (ibid. 2003.)

Between these four positions, the levels of knowledge vary among companies which create a connection to internationalization process (Hadley & Wilson 2003). As represented by Hadley and Wilson (2003), international knowledge is important when it is laid out on firm level while the differences in knowledge should be distinguishable depending on firms' level of internationalization. Experiential knowledge, through international network and company's capabilities, creates added knowledge which is determined as a benefit. Lastly, the greatest impact on company's network is formed via foreign business knowledge when a company has awareness and comprehension over other companies that are forming global networks. (Hadley & Wilson 2003.)

In addition to Johanson and Mattsson's theory, the theoretical framework must be adapted in order to create a better fit within this research. The above explained model is focusing on how companies are internationally positioned compared to their network members. There can be movement between these four positions when a company's internationalization process improves. The issue with this framework is that it does not fully explain how the network can improve the internationalization. Therefore, the author has expanded this framework by defining different ways that make the movement possible through the use of BSSs. This theory extension is based on the report of ECSIP Consortium and European Commission.

ECSIP Consortium (2013, 43-44) evaluates BSSs in the European Union by different business characteristics and how BSSs' supply and demand is spread out within the EU member states. This research is interested in the business characteristics. ECSIP Consortium (2013, 43) divides these into non-financial, financial and other support. However, this research evaluates all types of support without dividing those into three separate categories. According to ECSIP Consortium, non-financial support

consists of (a) workshops & seminars; (b) staff training; (c) trade missions, trade fairs & matchmaking events; (d) information on rules and regulations; (e) information on market opportunities; (f) identifying & arranging meetings with potential clients; (g) advice & consultancy; (h) business cooperation and networking; and (i) sectoral programmes. Financial support instead includes (a) credit guarantee scheme; (b) subsidies, grants; (c) tax incentive; and (d) low interest credits. Other includes (a) insurance services; and (b) other. (ibid. 43.) As previously states, this research will examine business support types without division into categories.

Table 2. Business support service types adapted from ECSIP Consortium (2013, 43)

Workshops & seminars
Networking & business cooperation
Specific market knowledge
Match making, trade missions & fairs
Advice & consultancy
Information on rules & regulations
Information on market opportunities
Staff training
Identifying & arranging meetings with clients
Sectoral Programmes
Information on insurance services
Access to capital & funding
Other

Table 2, see above, determines different forms of support that BSSs provide. These are used in order to find out how BSSs contribute to SMEs' internationalization process. To sum up, network approach is used to determine companies' position compared to the rest of the network and business support characteristics are used to define how companies achieved the specific position.

3 Methodology

Methodology chapter contains more detailed information about the research, and what will be done within this empirical study with the purpose of being able to answer the research question. As stated in the introduction chapter, the objective of this study is to investigate BSSs' actual influence on the internationalization process of SMEs through a case study of Grow to Market. The adequate research question was the following: *"How do business support services contribute to SMEs' internationalization?"*.

3.1 Research approach

At the beginning of a research, different research approaches should be evaluated in order to define whether a qualitative or a quantitative approach applies better within the study. Both, qualitative and quantitative are used broadly in business research (Saunders et al. 2009, 151), even though their object has been determined in slightly contradicting ways. There have been many arguments and even debates over which method, qualitative or quantitative, is more suitable for social research (Alasuutari 2009,4). This research is a qualitative study because the aim is to find and investigate a relationship between Grow to Market's contribution and SMEs' internationalization and examine the aforesaid connection in-depth. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews while the researcher is able to observe comprehensively, as it is typical for qualitative studies.

According to Bengtsson (2016), the concentration in qualitative research is in forming a deeper understanding in human condition (8), human behavior, attitudes and opinions in social context (Creswell 2014, 4; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 7; Kothari 2004, 5), and how these are reflected through the researcher's own observations (Kothari 2004, 5). Qualitative research is based on qualitative data which refers to non-numerical data that are expressed in words or visuals such as pictures and videos (Bansal, Smith & Vaara 2018, 1189; Saunders et al. 2009, 480). Quantitative research, instead, refers to the data that are based on numbers and statistics that can be expressed on different standardized data displays (Bansal, Smith & Vaara 2018, 1189). The data collection can be, for instance, in form of a

questionnaire or survey (Creswell 2014, 155; Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 6; Saunders et al. 2009, 480).

It is typical for a qualitative research to collect the data, for instance, through focus group interviews, group discussions, projective techniques and in-depth interviews (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 7; Saunders et al. 2009, 151; Kothari 2004, 5) that allow the researcher to cultivate a theory based on the collected data (Saunders et al. 2009, 480). As explained by Creswell (2014, 186), after the qualitative data collection, the researcher must examine the data by organizing it into several categories in order to evaluate it specifically. Qualitative study is an interpretive research which means that there are issues that have an influence on the research results; these include personal, ethical and strategic problems (Creswell 2014, 187). It is important that the researcher identifies the possible bias that he or she might cause due to differences in background, values, gender, history and culture. All these affect the interpretations that the researcher makes. (ibid.) In other words, the researcher must find his or her position within the qualitative research (Creswell 2014, 64).

Qualitative research has its strengths as well. As stated by Maxwell (1996, 17), the focus on specific people and situations, alongside a prominence with words instead of numbers, enhances the strengths of a qualitative research. Maxwell (1996) notes that there are five research purposes that match well with qualitative approach. Qualitative research approach is suitable when the aim is to understand the actual meaning, specific context, process of actions, causal explanations, and identifying unanticipated effects (17-20.) In addition to the qualitative research approach, this research is explanatory by nature. According to Saunders et al. (2009, 140), the explanatory research aims to examine a situation in order to explain a connection or relationship between different variables; in this case the connections are GTM's contribution and SMEs' internationalization.

Creswell (2014, 187) suggests that the researcher, when using a qualitative approach, should decide whether to use a case study, ethnography, nomenology, narrative or grounded theory as a research strategy. Within this qualitative research, a case study will be implemented as a research strategy. More precisely, the study will consist a

case study of Grow to Market. The concept of Grow to Market will be further explained in the following subchapter 3.2 Research context.

As noted by Yin (1981), the main intention of a case study is to evaluate “a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (59). Investigating a case thoroughly and deeply is a distinguishing part of a case study (Yin 2014, 16). A case study strategy concentrates on an event or a circumstance in single settings while the number of cases can vary from one to several. Data collection methods can vary; the data can be collected through an interview, archives, observations or questionnaires depending on whichever is the most suitable. (Eisenhardt 1989, 534.) When doing a case study, it is suggested to use more than one data collection method (Creswell 2014, 14), hence, this research will analyze primary data, which is collected from interviews conducted with companies that have attended Grow to Market program, and secondary data from companies’ websites. Creswell (2014, 14) underlines how case studies are “bounded by the time and activity”. The case study strategy is suitable for this research because the author wants to profoundly understand and examine a real-world case of Grow to Market program and its contribution to the internationalization process of growth companies that have attended the program in the previous years.

3.2 Research context

After introduction and literature review that extensively addressed the topic, it is important to emphasize the research context which in this case is Grow to Market program. Grow to Market is a BSS provider and its main intention is to help Finnish growth companies to enter a new international market.

Grow to Market is an internationalization program that is run by Innovestor. Innovestor, founded in 2014 (Innovestor Oy 2020), is an early-stage venture capital investor and they provide co-investment possibilities as well as growth programs for companies (Who we are 2020). Innovestor consists of three main components that are Innovestor Venture, Innovestor Direct and Innovestor Ignite which all focus on different areas; Innovestor Venture is about fund management while Innovestor

Direct provides co-investment opportunities. Innovestor Ignite consists of three different programs, Grow to Market, Kasvu Open and Tahdo Uudistua, that all share a common goal in helping businesses to grow and develop their businesses. (Introducing Innovestor 2020.) As previously stated, Grow to Market is an internationalization program that is designed for companies that are planning on heading to a new international market. Kasvu Open instead is concentrated on helping start-ups and start-again companies to grow inside Finland via extensive coaching with growth experts. Tahdo Uudistua is a new business renewal program designed for SMEs that plan to develop their business model. (For growth companies 2020.) Regardless, the research has its main interest in Grow to Market program and its key activities.

Grow to Market was established in early 2017 (Grow to Market Annual Report 2019). The program was divided into three separate target markets, the United States, Sweden and China, until 2020 when the concentration was shifted fully to the markets in the United States and Sweden. This research will concentrate on the timespan of Grow to Market from 2017 until the end of 2019, and therefore, it also considers all the three markets. The program refers to different target markets as Grow to USA, Grow to Sweden and Grow to China programs.

GTM program consists of four main steps. These are preparation sparring, orientation workshop, 3-5-day excursion and materials & final report.

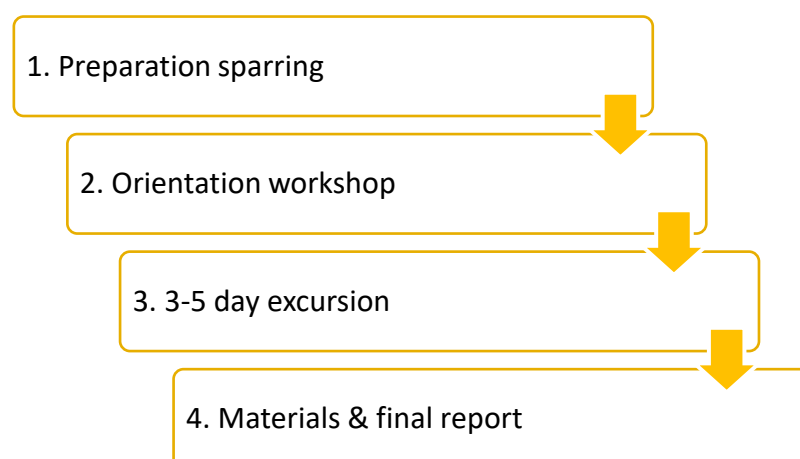


Figure 5. GTM program content (Program information 2020)

The very first step of the program is preparation sparring which refers to communication and co-operation before the actual program starts. It includes

emails, phone calls and co-working between companies and partners of the program. The following step is an orientation workshop in which all participating companies will meet each other and attend coaching sessions with growth experts. Participating companies will gain a valuable feedback for instance, for pitching their business. General feedback will assist companies to prepare themselves for the excursion. The orientation workshop is held few months before the excursion to the target country. The third and the main step is three to five -day excursion trip to the target country. Grow to USA program is held in New York and Grow to Sweden in Stockholm. Grow to China's destination is Shanghai. Usually, there are 6 to 15 companies participating in the program. During the excursion, GTM provides coaching with network members and an access to information and specific market knowledge about a target market. Participating companies will meet GTM partners and they have a possibility to expand their network. After the excursion, GTM will create a final report based on companies' feedback and experiences. The report and other materials will be given to the companies to keep. (Program information 2020.)

Previously mentioned Kasvu Open has a notable trademark; the program is totally free of charge. Grow to Market program instead has a participation fee. The orientation workshop is free to attend, but the actual excursion costs a few thousand euros depending on the target country. Grow to USA programs charges 4590 euros plus VAT and Grow to Sweden trip costs 3450 euros plus VAT. (Program information 2020.)

Grow to Market program has an extremely broad network in the USA and Sweden including over 200 growth experts that intend to support and help growth companies by providing know-hows and knowledge. (Grow to Market 2020.) The network includes partners, local experts and network members that offer specific advice and experiential knowledge through personal experiences within the market. The broad network is adapted through new companies that attend to Grow to Market programs either in the USA or in Sweden.

3.3 Data collection

Within this research, **primary data** will be collected in order to answer the research question. As explained by Wilson (2010), primary data collection refers to that the data is exclusively collected for the particular research instead of using already existing data. The researcher himself or herself will collect the data through interviews, observations or questionnaires. (135.)

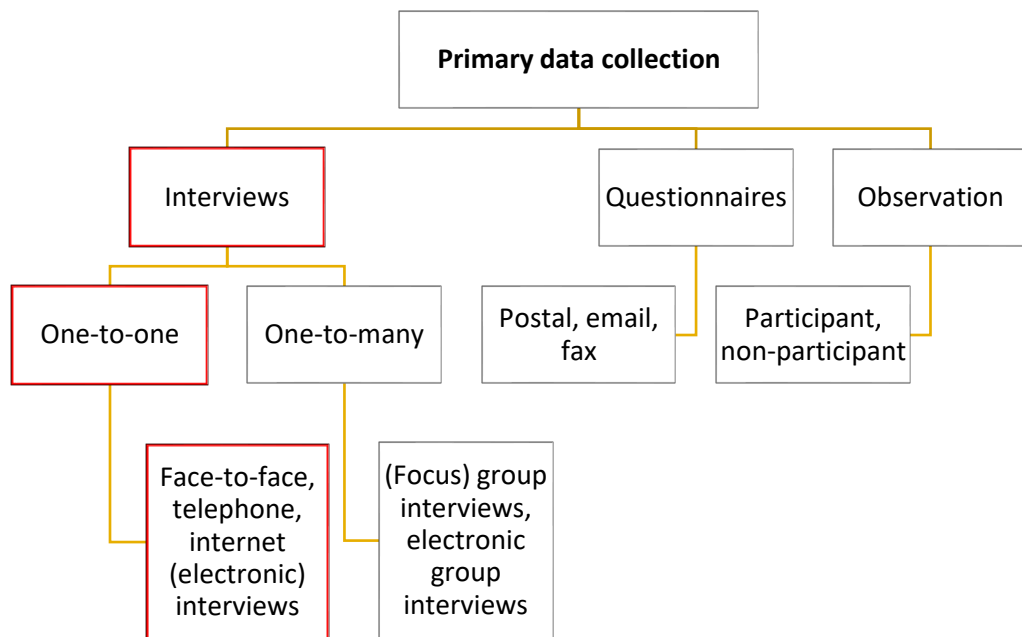


Figure 6. Primary data collection tools adapted from Saunders et al. (2009, 321) & Wilson (2010, 137)

Figure 6, above, determines primary data collection tools. The boxes with red outlines determine the choices that this research will implement.

The author will collect the primary data through interviews, more precisely, one-to-one interviews that are conducted either face-to-face or via electronic tools such as Skype or Zoom where the interviewer and the interviewee still share a head-to-head connection. Within all interviews, face-to-face interview is not possible because some interviewees are located in a different country. Saunders et al. (2009) determine distinctive ways how the interview can be categorized. One common way to define different interviews is labelling them as structured, semi-structured and unstructured or in-depth interviews. (320.) The author will conduct a semi-structured interview within this research. A semi-structured interview is non-standardized which means that usually the interviewer has a list of questions or themes but

depending on the interview some questions or themes might vary and some might be left out. The order can also be alterable and supplementary questions can be added. (Saunders et al. 2009, 320.) Due to the nature of the interview content, the data must be audio-recorded so that the researcher is able to analyze the data properly (ibid., 321).

A structured interview instead generally concentrates on collecting the data through standardized and prearranged set of questions in form of a questionnaire. Even though the definition consists of a term questionnaire, it is still an interview-administrated interview. Basically this means that the interviewer reads the questions for the interviewee and records the responses. This method is generally used for a quantitative research instead of a qualitative study. Unstructured interviews concentrate on examining a topic thorough with an in-depth aspect. This data collection method is highly informal, and the interviewee is assigned to talk openly about the topic. (Saunders et al. 2009, 320-321.) Based on these facts about different primary data collection methods, a semi-structured interview is the most suitable because the author wants to collect useful and specific information about the topic. Through questionnaires or observations, the data would be limited and insufficient when examining a particular topic profoundly.

Creswell (2014, 191) notes that interviews have limitations as well. Interviewer bias can occur which refers to interviewer's comments, tone and non-verbal behavior that might have an impact on interviewee's answers (Saunders et al. 2009, 326). Besides, the surroundings have an influence; the interview is held in agreed time and place, instead of natural settings (Creswell 2014, 191).

As the research includes an interview, it is important to give a thorough thinking as to who will be the interviewees. With the intention of answering to the research question, the most suitable interviewees would be individuals that are connected to the BSSs and to the SMEs that have participated to the GTM program. The author will conduct an interview with a business director of Grow to Market and with two of companies and their representatives who have participated to the GTM program in years 2017-2019. The total number of interviews is three. The table below provides a general overview of individuals interviewed and the interview details.

Table 3. Interviewees and interview details

	Company	GTM program	Language	Date
Anna-Mari Blek	Innovestor, Grow to Market Business Director	-	Finnish	6.2.2020
Company 1 representative	Company 1	Grow to USA	English	5.2.2020
Company 2 representative	Company 2	Grow to Sweden	Finnish	20.2.2020

Anna-Mari Blek as a Grow to Market business director, later referred as GTM director, was a clear choice for an interview as she was willing to provide specific information about GTM. The interview with Grow to Market representative will be conducted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the program's main intentions and key activities that form the business model. The interviews with the company representatives will provide information that can be used to evaluate GTM program's actual impact to the companies' internationalization process. Company 1 represents a firm that participated to the Grow to USA program once during 2017-2019. The company did not have ongoing business operations in the US market before or after attending to the GTM program. However, company 1 was highly internationalized in the Europe before attending to the GTM program. Company 2 participated to the Grow to Sweden program once during 2017-2019. The company did not have ongoing operations in Sweden before the GTM program but was successfully able to expand their operations to the new market after the program. Therefore, company 2 is currently operating in Sweden. Both companies will be presented anonymously in the thesis.

The interview questions can be found in the Appendices section, Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. Appendix 1 includes questions from the interview that was conducted with Anna-Mari Blek, and Appendix 2 considers questions from the interviews with the companies.

When conducting an interview, ethics must be considered. Before proceeding further with the interviews, interviewees were clearly informed about the intention of the

research and where the collected data will be used. They were notified that participating in the research is voluntary and the interview can be done so that the company name and the company representative stay anonymous if desired so. Anna-Mari Blek gave her permission to publish her name and position as a Grow to Market business director. Participated companies instead are presented anonymously.

Besides primary data, **secondary data** are taken into account. Secondary data refers to already existing data that have been collected by some other researchers in the past (Saunders et al. 2009, 256; Wilson 2010, 169). Secondary data can be found in a variety of different forms such as reports, thesis, newspapers, textbooks, internet sources, dictionaries, academic journals, statistics et cetera (Wilson 2010, 169-170). This research will examine Grow to Market annual report from 2019 and the websites of the companies that have participated to the GTM program with the purpose of finding relative information that could support answering to the research question. The websites of the companies are used in order to evaluate the companies' internationalization levels at the moment. However, the use of secondary data is limited due to novelty of the GTM program; the number of existing sources or literature of GTM is minimal. Besides, due to anonymity of the companies, the author is restricted to site the company websites.

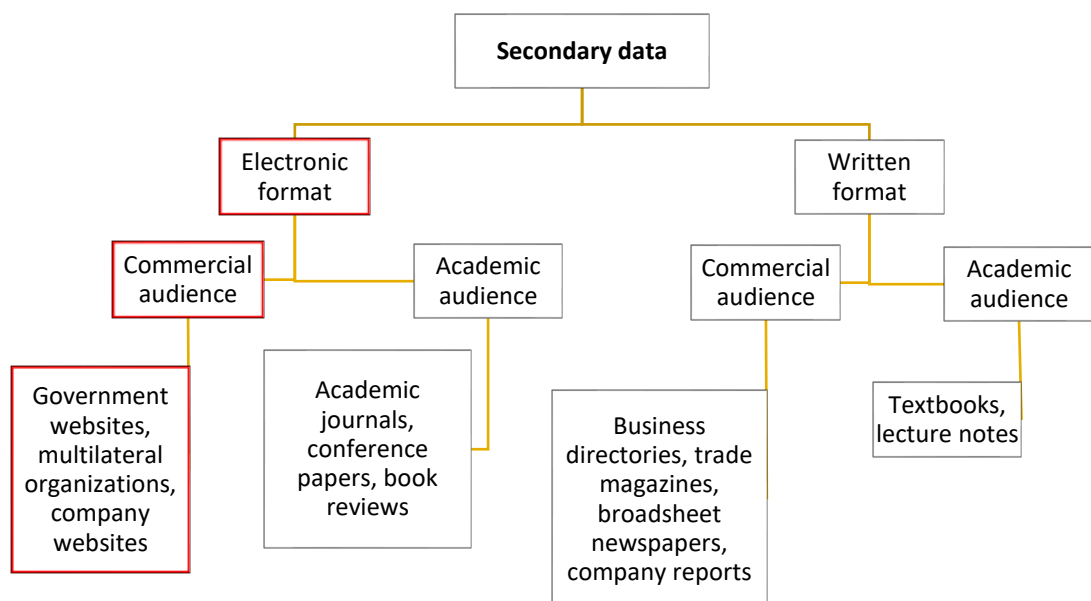


Figure 7. Secondary data collection adapted from Wilson (2010, 175)

Figure 7, above, determines secondary data classifications. The boxes with red outlines represent the choices that the author have decided to implement.

To sum up, the thesis will consider both, primary and secondary, data although the main concentration will be in evaluating primary data.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis chapter further describes the techniques that are used to analyze and evaluate the qualitative data that are collected through primary and secondary data. According to Wilson (2010, 254), Glaser (1992) determines qualitative data analysis as “any kind of analysis that produces findings or concepts and hypotheses, as in grounded theory, that are not arrived at by statistical methods”. Wilson (2010, 253) also notes that a qualitative data analysis can be implemented in a variety of ways; there is no designated way to do it. The researcher presents a four-step model for qualitative data analysis. The steps are as follows: (a) transcribing the data; (b) reading and generating categories, themes and patterns; (c) interpreting the findings; and (d) writing the report. (Wilson 2010, 255.) Creswell (2009, 197) disputes the abovementioned steps by presenting a following more detailed model of data analysis.

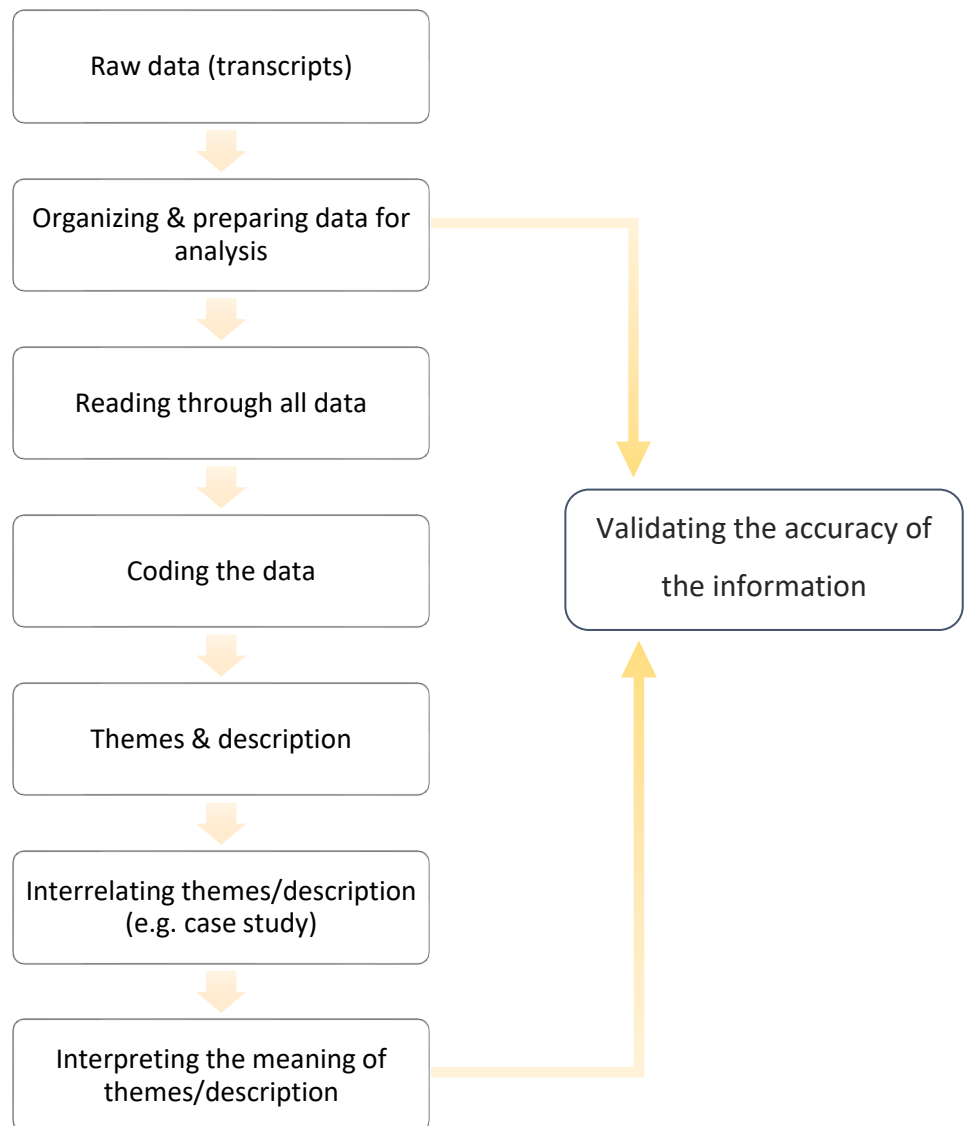


Figure 8. Data analysis in qualitative research (Creswell 2014, 197)

This research will adapt a qualitative content analysis as a technique as it equates with the research objective. The qualitative data will be analyzed while other parts of the thesis develop; the author will start analyzing the first interview right away while writing and organizing the structure for the results chapter (Creswell 2014, 195). The research will use the qualitative data analysis model, Figure 8 see above, as a base for the data analysis.

First, the author collects the raw data by recording the interviews and then transcribing those into transcripts. This way the data will be organized and prepared for the analysis. The next step is to read all the data in order to provide a general picture. The following step is coding. According to Creswell (2014, 197), coding refers to a process in which the data is organized into chunks that are labelled with a

specific category. The data will be categorized based on the adapted theoretical framework. The author aims to detect general codes that are expected and then surprising and unusual codes. Table 4, see below, illustrates the codes that the author used to specify particular themes based on the theoretical framework.

Table 4. Codes and support types

T1	Workshops & seminars
T2	Networking & business cooperation
T3	Specific market knowledge
T4	Match making, trade missions & fairs
T5	Advice & consultancy
T6	Information on rules & regulations
T7	Information on market opportunities
T8	Staff training
T9	Identifying & arranging meetings with clients
T10	Sectoral Programmes
T11	Information on insurance services
T12	Access to capital & funding
T13	Other

Then, the author develops themes based on the codes that emphasize the major findings. The coded data together with the themes will be used as a base for structuring the Results chapter. The interpretation of the data is structured with narratives and tables in order to define a clear formation of the data.

3.5 Verification of results

Within this chapter, the author provides information regarding the concepts of validity, reliability and objectivity. In conformity with Silverman (2005, 209), the

researcher must provide the reader with the procedures that were used to assure the reliability and validity within the research. Silverman (2005, 209) states that “there is little point in aiming to conclude a research dissertation” if aforesaid activity is left out.

Validity

Internal validity designates the accuracy of the findings, and whether the results are accurate regarding the research question (Creswell 2014, 201; Saunders et al. 2009, 157). As noted by Silverman (2005, 210), “By validity, I mean truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers”. To improve internal validity, the author formed a research question and examined literature in order to create a literature review which closely observes the topic. The theoretical framework was considered and adapted, and methodology, including data collection and data analysis, was designed with the purpose of answering the research question. To enhance validity, the author carefully chose and invited participants to take part into the interviews. The decision to interview aforementioned individuals improves the validity of the findings; Grow to Market business director is able to provide specific information about GTM program and interviewed companies can reflect their personal experiences about how GTM program contributed to their internationalization process in a new market. It fulfills the purpose of the case study when the case is being examined in single settings with a deep focus. Besides, the interview questions were designed in a way that considers the theoretical framework and the research question in the interest of providing valid results.

External validity refers to generalizability. In other words, it reflects whether the research results and findings can be adapted or used in another research. (Saunders et al. 2009, 158.) This research is a case study in specific settings, which therefore arouses a question about external validity. This research does not aim to develop a theory that could be applicable to other settings or research. The author takes into account that the research profoundly examines one individual case that cannot be adapted in other settings nor does it provide general results.

Reliability

According to Creswell (2014), Gibbs (2007) defines that qualitative reliability denotes that “the approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (201). This means that when analyzing a phenomenon, it should keep providing steady results (Wilson 2010, 116). Yet, there are threats to reliability. Time error, also referred to participant error, takes place when the data is collected during defective, not-ideal point of time. Time error can be reduced when the interview is implemented during different times of the week or day, when the timing is “neutral”. That is to say, the timing has an impact on the research findings. (Saunders et al. 2009, 156; Wilson 2010, 117.) The author takes this into consideration when scheduling interviews with the interviewees. Interviewees are queried about the preferred timing and location so that the time error can be minimalized. Participant bias, instead, refers to a situation in which the interviewee is conforming the organization or manager’s thoughts and policies rather than openly denoting personal opinions. Another threat is observer influence, bias and error, which define interviewers impact on the interviewee through behavior and how the interviewer interprets the results. (Saunders et al. 2009, 156; Wilson 2010, 117.) To assure the reliability of the data, the data collection methods were premeditated well with a correspondence with the literature, research question and objectives. The data were collected from carefully chosen individuals who were able to provide concrete information in order to answer the research question. Moreover, the data as well as the transcripts were thoroughly analyzed and cross checked to prevent findings from possible errors.

The author decided to enhance the validity and the reliability of the research through triangulation which means examining the data from different sources (Creswell 2014, 201). Maxwell (1996, 93) claims that triangulation as collecting data “from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” reduces systematic bias. The researcher emphasizes the importance of noticing the errancy with different methods in order to be able to triangulate the data (ibid., 94). Creswell (2014, 202) notes that clarifying the possible bias can improve the accuracy of the findings. The author acknowledges the bias and error that she might unintentionally cause. The author has a close relationship with Grow to Market program and its

representatives due to past experiences working in the company. This might have an influence on the behavior of the participants during the interview. There is a possibility that the author values some findings over others as her knowledge over the topic is constantly developing.

Objectivity

The aim of the research is to be objective and to provide accurate, reliable and valid findings that correctly answer the research question. Yet, the author recognizes that there is a possibility for subjectivity. Objectivity refers to that the data is properly collected in order to avoid subjective selectivity when analyzing results (Saunders et al. 2009, 194). The author has designed and decided the methodology for data collection and data analysis in detail so that the results will appear accurate and reliable. It reflects the objectivity within this study. The author recognizes that due to constantly developing knowledge of internationalization and SMEs, the results can be interpreted in a way that might have a bit of subjectivity. Nevertheless, the amount of subjectivity is reduced to the minimum since the research considers literature, theoretical framework and suitable methodology that form the structure of the thesis.

4 Results

Within this chapter the author presents the results that were gathered through the collected data. The chapter analyses the results in the light of the adapted theoretical framework which works as a base for the structure. The results chapter evaluates networking, market knowledge, advice & consultancy and other types of support provided by GTM as the main themes after an introduction. All the information written about the GTM program is based on the interview with the Grow to Market director unless the information is from a secondary source.

The intention of the interview with GTM director was to further define the ways how GTM contributes to the internationalization process of companies. The author used the adapted theoretical framework to define different types of support that GTM provides. According to the interview with GTM director, Grow to Market program contributes to the internationalization process through providing workshops &

seminars, networking & business cooperation, match making, advice & consultancy, information on rules & regulations, information on market opportunities, identifying & arranging meetings with clients, information on insurance services and access to capital & funding. Staff training and sectoral programmes, as well as trade missions & fairs are excluded from the adapted theoretical framework since GTM does not provide these as their services.

In addition, the GTM program provides an option “other” which refers to support that is not categorized under the abovementioned main support types that GTM provides. For instance, it can include support that the companies mentioned that they gained or other relevant support. In this case, the other includes support with pitching, companies preparation beforehand and action after the program.

The three most common support types that were frequently mentioned during the interviews were networking & business cooperation, specific market knowledge and advice & consultancy. These three themes create a structure for the Results chapter as they define the main subchapters.

4.1 Networking

Based on the interview with the GTM director, the existing network is the most important component when companies begin the internationalization processes. Therefore, the GTM program constantly contributes in supporting the network growth of the companies. First of all, the GTM director mentioned the high value of the broad network of the GTM program. According to the Grow to Market Annual Report (2019, 8), GTM program has 40 partners and 114 network members abroad in addition to the amount of network members in Finland. As noted by the GTM director, the high value of the GTM’s network can be explained in the following way: the network in the target market is familiar and well-known to the GTM program. Moreover, the network is already prepared and warmed up in order to help and support companies that are participating to the program. GTM director emphasized that all formalities are on minimum when the companies attend, for instance, the coaching sessions with local growth experts. The information that the companies gain from the growth experts and other network members is authentic and real. The

network of the GTM program is prepared for supporting companies that aim to internationalize which creates more value to the program. GTM director pointed out that with an unfamiliar network the situation would be reciprocal. If a company asks for guidance from someone unfamiliar or a brand new member of their network in the new market, there would be different kinds of politeness and courtesy rules and covers between these two parties. The company could not just jump in to the conversation about the needs and requirements of the successful internationalization process in the market. GTM director also noted that with most of the cases, attending companies' perception of the network is too narrow. The director compared the population of Finland to the population of New York which indeed is almost twice larger than the number of people in Finland. She underlined that it is not enough to know only a few people, the network must be expanded and its members must be valid and accurate.

The network members of GTM help companies to internationalize by providing specific information and market knowledge, which will be further covered in the following subchapter 4.2, based on their expertise. As explained by the GTM director, the network must be validated so that they can provide concrete information in order to support companies to internationalize; all network members have been invited based on recommendations of the other network members.

The GTM program supports the growth of the network in order to contribute to the internationalization process of the companies. First, the participating companies meet the relevant network members in the target country through one-on-one coaching and meetings. During the excursion the companies can have conversations and chats with the speakers and local growth experts. GTM director mentioned that usually during the program, the whole group will participate to diverse networking events in the target country. In addition, the GTM program introduces people, such as investors, to the companies. The GTM director noted that at the beginning of the excursion, GTM representatives guide the companies to think after every meeting who the relevant people are that they should meet, and that way to keep track of people they have met. That way the companies will gain relevant contacts with whom they can further proceed their operations. Overall, the companies' network grows during the program, as the GTM director explained. "As an average value, a

company gains a hundred new contacts during a Grow to Market program”, the GTM director explained.

When considering the network approach, which was thoroughly evaluated in the literature review chapter 2.3, the movement of a company between four positions can be traced by analyzing the company and its position during a particular time period. The author defined different possibilities of movement in the figure below in order to examine the movement of the companies in question.

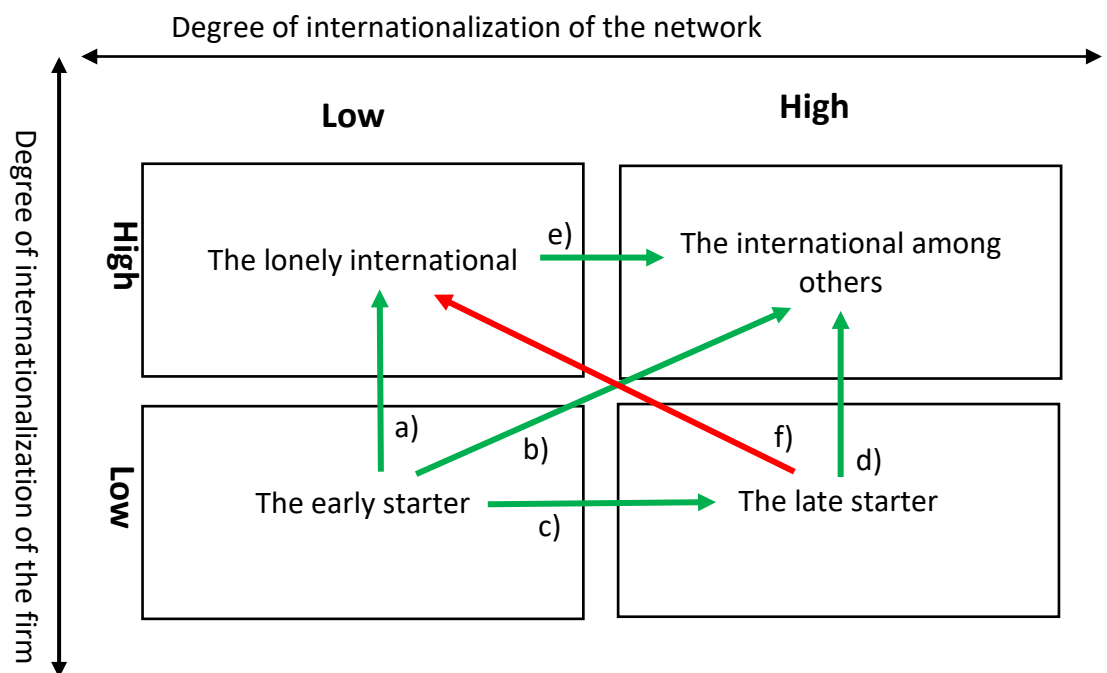


Figure 9. Movement on the Network approach table

To clarify, the movement pattern is based on network and internationalization levels in the target country, in this case USA, Sweden or China. It does not consider other international markets that a company might have conquered previously since the aim is to evaluate the impact of the GTM program to the internationalization process in a specific market. The arrows in figure represent the movement from point a to the point b during a specific time period.

Option a) defines a movement from the early starter to the lonely international. It determines a movement from a position in which a company and its network do not have any international operations to an end result where a company is able to successfully expand its business internationally while the network remains focused

on domestic market. Option b) illustrates a movement from the early starter, the same starting point as in option a), to the international among others. It defines a successful international expansion at the same time with the rest of the company's network. Option c) instead refers to a movement from the early starter to the late starter. Basically, it refers to that a company either does not aim to expand or it has failed in trying to expand its business internationally while its network has been able to start international operations. In other words, the network of a company has succeeded in internationalization while the company remains concentrated on domestic market. Option d) defines a movement from the late starter to the international among others. A company whose network is already internationalized is able to start international operations as well, which leads to all network members being international. Option e) illustrates a movement from the lonely international to the international among others. It means that, while a company is already international, its network is able to internationalize as well. Option f) is one example that in reality is highly unlikely to happen. This movement would begin from the late starter, in which a company does not have international operations while its network is international, and end up in the lonely international which means that a company would be able to expand internationally but its whole network would either disappear or fail in internationalization. A similar and undesirable movement would be a motion from the lonely international or the international among others to the early starter or the late starter as the intention of a company is to internationalize successfully. Regardless of all movement possibilities, there is an option to stay in the same position after the particular time period.

The author conducted interviews with two companies, company 1 and company 2, that both have participated to the GTM program during 2017-2019. From the interview data the author was able to trace the movement of the companies; what the starting point was before attending to the GTM program and what the position is today after attending the GTM program. A square with a B (before) refers to the point before attending GTM, and a square with an N (now) refers to a position of a company at the moment.

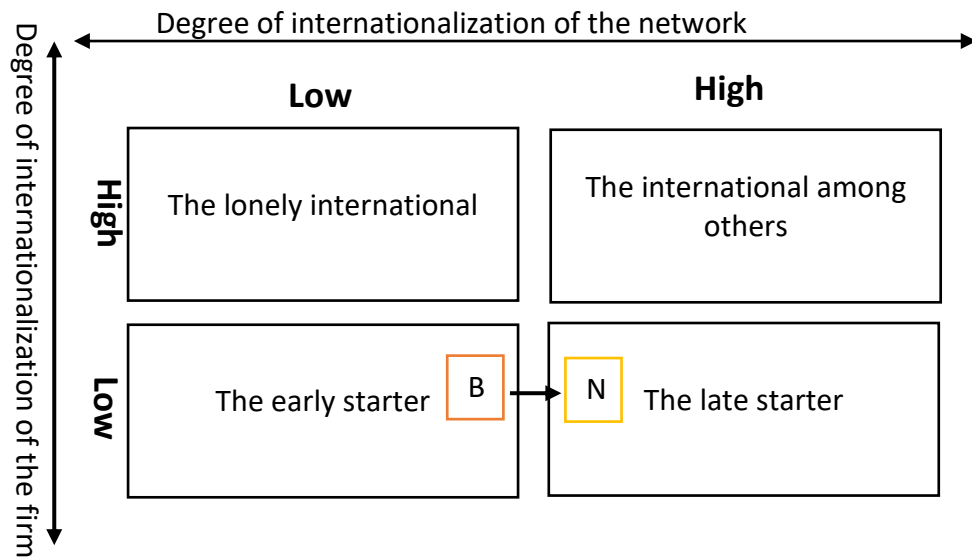


Figure 10. Company 1 movement based on Network approach

Company 1 participated in the Grow to USA program, and its B (before) position was defined as the early starter. The company reflected that their internationalization level and the internationalization level of their network was low in the US market before attending to the GTM program. On the contrary, company 1 was already operating in other international markets when attending to the program. It had operations in a variety of different European markets and its network was broad and international within the countries it had operations in. However, in the US market the internationalization degree was low. Company's N (now) point is located in the late starter box. The movement time period between these two points was two years. The company decided not to further proceed their internationalization attempts after attending to the GTM program. Therefore, the internationalization level of the company is low. However, the company's network improved and grew during the GTM program causing an increase in the internationalization degree of the network.

Company 1 representative disputed what the GTM director noted about the notable growth of the network. The representative stated that the company's network did grow during the GTM program, but the growth was not critical. He mentioned that overall the increase in connections was noteworthy, but he questioned the relevancy of the people they met. The company 1 representative also noted the short duration of the program. He stated that the program was surprisingly quickly over which at some points was challenging from the networking approach. Nonetheless, the

company 1 emphasized the value of meeting other companies and their representatives that were already operating in the target market. The representative mentioned that it was beneficial to hear about the real life and personal experiences of other companies when they were starting their international operations. Therefore, the company 1 representative highlighted the value of meeting other companies through the network.

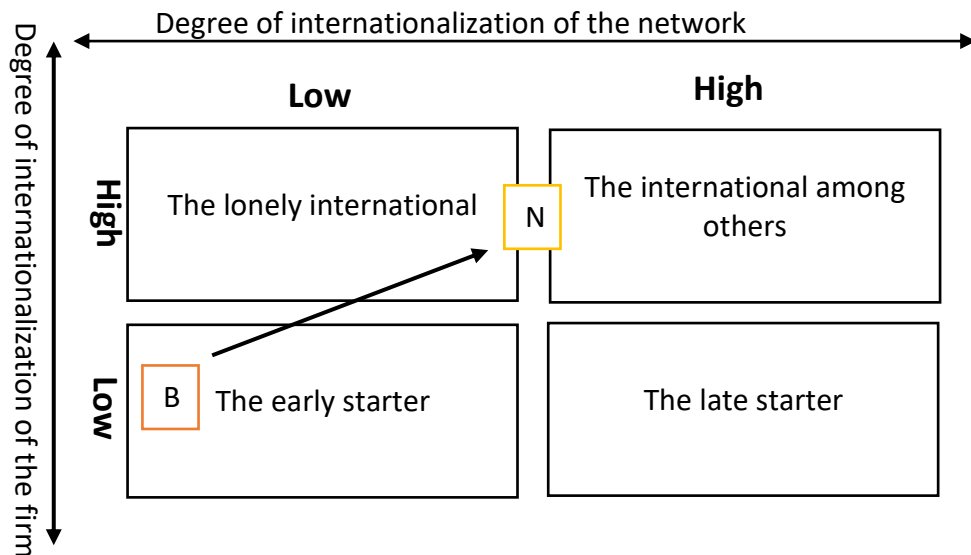


Figure 11. Company 2 movement based on Network approach

Company 2 participated to the Grow to Sweden program and its B (before) position was determined as the early starter. The company demonstrated that its internationalization level was low in the target market as the company did not have any international operations before attending the GTM program. The company representative explained that their network was relatively small and the network's internationalization degree was low as well. These two measurements defined the company position as the early starter. The movement of company 2 is notable when analyzing the chart. The N (now) position of the company 2 is located between the lonely international and the international among others. The company representative stated that the company internationalization degree has increased since the company has established on-going operations in the foreign market after attending to the GTM program. However, the representative noted that the degree of internationalization of the network has increased but it cannot be considered as high, which therefore impacts the position to be in the middle of the lonely

international and the international among others. The movement time period between these two points was one year.

Company 2 presented contrary views compared to the company 1. The company 2 reflected that it gained highly valuable and relevant contacts during the GTM program that contributed to their internationalization process. One critical new network member helped the company to actually begin the operations in the target market and supported them for instance with translations. Besides, the company emphasized the value in meeting other companies that are in the same phase or stage with the internationalization process. Company reflected that the peer support they gained from the other companies that participated in the same GTM program, was exceptionally beneficial. The network of the company grew in that dimension as well.

The peer support was valuable; the spirit among us, all participating companies, was inspiring and supporting since we were all in the same boat sharing the lack of knowledge towards internationalization at the time. - Company 2 representative

According to the representative, the peer support created a team spirit among the participating companies. However, company 2 representative mentioned that being in contact with the other participating companies has more or less decreased after the program since there is no more events or occasions which to attend.

Through meeting other companies and local network members, company's network improved and grew during the GTM program. The company 2 representative mentioned that they gained several contacts which helped building the network in the target country. She noted that the value of the improved network might not even be seen yet, since some of the contacts can be more useful or beneficial later in the future. Still, the company 2 commented that the support that they gained through the network was more generic and relevant for starting a business in a new market instead of support that deeply focuses on one business line and industry specific information. In other words, from the industry perspective, the network of the company did not grow due to a lack of particular industry network members.

4.2 Market knowledge

According to the GTM director, usually companies lack required information about the internationalization process. Therefore, the GTM program aims to provide information and diverse aspects of internationalization so that companies will gain a stronger base of know-how in order to begin international operations in a new market.

The GTM program contributes to the companies' internationalization process by providing an access to market knowledge through the network and network members. The market knowledge can be divided into two categories; GTM provides general information over the target market and then, the program concentrates on specific market knowledge. During the program in the target country, GTM determines general information about the target market through its network members; the growth experts and coaches, some being local and some having personal work experience in the target market, are providing the information. The program focuses on locating where the market is and whether there even is demand in the aspired country. As noted by the GTM director, the program considers different strategies and common elements that should be recognized before starting international operations.

In addition to general aspects, the GTM program is centered upon providing specific market knowledge. The GTM director explained that during the program in the target country, every day has a specific theme which is focused on specific market knowledge. One theme is culture and cultural differences in the target country compared to the domestic market in Finland. As mentioned by the GTM director, for instance in the US market, a company must carefully pay attention to the presence, appearance and brand of the company. However, in Sweden in turn it is more important to draw attention to the presence of the country manager instead of a company as a whole; personnel branding is highly valued in Sweden. In China, colors play a huge role; it matters which colors are used and not used in company materials for example. The GTM program also covers how to talk, form a conversation and a whole team regarding the culture in a specific market. The GTM director noted that it is important to know how to negotiate with the locals and to know which numerical

values are important to mention and which words to bring up within a business conversation. Besides cultural aspects, the GTM program focuses on providing specific information about sales, marketing and branding within a particular market. Another theme focuses on risk management, juridical issues, taxation as practical aspects that must be taken into account as well. The GTM director highlighted that all previously mentioned themes are covered during the GTM program and the themes are designed based on the particular target market in order to support the companies with their internationalization processes.

While the GTM director clearly defined the GTM program's objective from market knowledge perspective, company 1 representative denoted the importance of information that was gained from the other companies that already had operations in the target market. As the company 1 representative mentioned, it always comes back to meeting the people. The network has the market knowledge that the internationalization requires. Company 1 emphasized that the specific information about the US market was practical since the market itself is a large foreign market. The representative indicated that the information about the typical sales methods in the market, what it is like to work there, and how the typical client behavior is defined were beneficial topics to cover even though the company did not further proceed their internationalization plans. He also underscored the value of the market knowledge that was gained from the other companies that presented their views about the business making insights. Company 2 presented a similar reflection over the specific market knowledge that the company gained during the program. The company 2 representative described that, the whole time during the program in the target country, GTM provided a lot of specific market knowledge. The representative emphasized the relevancy of the sales workshop with Vainu which focused on market knowledge about implementing sales and a sales strategy in Sweden. Likewise, the company 1 underlined the utility of the specific market knowledge about local regulations and legislations in the US market in order to successfully operate in a new market. Company 2 representative pointed out that the specific market knowledge was one of the most beneficial topics that the company gained during the GTM program. Based on the company representative, most of the knowledge and know-how cannot be learned from reading books. "The knowledge

from the market and business culture is something that you cannot learn by yourself”, company 2 representative explained.

According to the company 2 interview, the benefit was in gaining practical know-how that is required in order to successfully expand into a new market.

4.3 Advice & consultancy

The GTM program contributes to the companies’ internationalization process by providing advice and consultancy. As the GTM director explained, the GTM program intends to help companies to enter a new market with fewer risks and especially to prevent companies from trying to internationalize too early with too few resources. The GTM program is doing this through advising and providing consultancy via the network members who participate in the program as coaches and growth experts.

Advice and consultancy as a concept is implemented through the GTM program’s network members, and more specifically, through the one-on-one meetings in which the coach gets to know the company better as they are having an open conversation. The company is able to express its concerns and thoughts about the internationalization in a particular market and the coach can give advice or guide the company in the best possible way he or she can. Therefore, the advice and counseling are personal and designed for the specific company. Through all meetings, workshops and keynotes, the GTM program’s intention is to help the companies to recognize and see the big picture of the internationalization process.

The GTM director mentioned the benefits of being able to provide advice and consultancy; the guidance is always based on a company’s current situation from the perspective of a growth expert. Most of the time, the company has prepared and done research about the market beforehand and based on that, the company might have faced particular issues or challenges. The company can directly ask questions regarding the issue from the growth expert or coach, and in the best possible occasion, the expert can provide an advice as a solution for the problem. The GTM director noted that the GTM programs are generic which means that there are no limitations regarding the line of business nor industry. However, it means that the guidance is generic as well, but it is suited to match with the needs of the company.

Some coaches and growth experts might know more about technology industry while some have more knowledge about construction industry for instance. Yet, they are all experts in one or more areas regarding a particular target market and country. Based on that knowledge, they are able to provide consultancy and guidance for the companies no matter what the company's industry is.

According to the interview with the GTM director, the program can also be beneficial for companies that are already operating in the target market. The companies can participate in the program with an intention to grow and develop their businesses. Through advice and consultancy from the coaches and growth experts, the companies can gain updated information about the target market and take advantage of the guidance. Based on this advice, the company can further develop its business and operations. In addition, the GTM director mentioned that some participating companies exploit and adapt the given advice or support in another market as well. Some information or advice can be versatile and adaptable for a variety of different markets, especially when the information is generic.

While the GTM director determined the generic nature of the program as an advantage from advice and consultancy perspective, company 1 expressed a contradicting view. The company representative questioned whether the program is too generic. The representative reflected that some information was too general and therefore not as useful as it could have been. He mentioned that some parts of the program could have been more tailored for the companies. Still, the company pointed out that some of the learnings and information that the company gained from coaching were convenient. The company 2 representative, instead, stated that the company gained plenty of practical advice and consultancy during the program. The representative highlighted the value of getting versatile guidance from different people during multiple sparring and coaching sessions with the growth experts. That way, the company gained diverse information and possible solutions for the issues they had regarding the international expansion. The company 2 representative reflected that the company came into a conclusion about starting the operations in the target market after getting advice and opinions from different coaches and growth experts. The decision about international expansion was formed during the program as the company gained feedback from different perspectives. Therefore, the

GTM program had a critical role in the internationalization process of the company since the program had an impact on the decision making about beginning the international operations.

4.4 Other types of support provided by Grow to Market

This subchapter evaluates the other support types that the GTM program provides alongside abovementioned networking, market knowledge and advice & consultancy.

Workshops & seminars

According to the GTM director, there are several workshops during the program in the target country. However, she mentioned that the seminars are corresponding to key note speakers and their presentations within the program. The director explained that the workshops are a way to transfer market knowledge and advice from growth expert or coach to the company that is participating in the program. In addition, workshops also fall into networking category since the companies will meet and connect with the coaches during the workshops. Therefore, workshops have a role as tools for transferring knowledge and information between companies and growth experts.

Company 1 and company 2 both correspond to the GTM director's statement that workshops function as tools for exchanging information and connections. Company 2 noted that they gained the market knowledge through the workshops.

Match making

Match making concept is based on networking and more precisely workshops, the GTM director noted. She explained that the match making concept is based on having an X amount of companies that are matched together with a Y amount of coaches through the workshops and meetings. The ideology behind this is that the company is able to gain an access to desired and needed information from at least one of the growth experts. The GTM program does not find for every participating company a perfect match from their network to fulfill company's needs, instead the program provides a broader picture and various network members from whom the

companies can gain information. Company 2 representative mentioned that the match making concept was not visible but it was existing. The representative reflected that the company, indeed, found a perfect match during the workshop which allowed the company to begin the international operations in the target market. In addition, the representative reflected that at the beginning of the program, the company had a countless amount of questions and, if a coach or a growth expert did not have an answer to a specific question, they usually knew someone else who could help the company. Therefore, the network of a company grew since the coach linked the company with an external party who was able to further support the company in order to internationalize.

Information on rules & regulations

Based on the interview with the GTM director, information on rules and regulations is part of the market knowledge. As it was briefly mentioned in the chapter 4.2, the GTM program concentrates on providing specific information about legislation, rules and regulations in the target country as one of the themes during the program. Company 1 representative underscored the value of the information that the company gained from a key note speaker who was focusing on rules and regulations in the US market. The representative noted that the information was beneficial and that he was in contact with the speaker afterwards. Company 2 instead stated that the amount of information on rules and regulations was thin on the ground. The company was aiming to acquire information on specific line of business certificates, but as the GTM program is generic, the company was not able to find an answer to their query. Therefore, the company 2 had to figure out the solution by itself. The company representative, however, emphasized that the knowledge the company gained from a key note speaker was beneficial. The key note speaker was concentrated on providing information on regulations of employment and labour code in the target market in Sweden. The representative reflected that at the time, the company did not have anybody employed in the Swedish market yet. Hence, the gained knowledge was valuable in order to further proceed internationalization.

Information on market opportunities

The GTM director noted that, occasionally, there is information on market opportunities provided to companies. Nonetheless, the director mentioned that the market opportunities do not apply to all participating companies. She explained that for instance, the GTM program has close collaboration with Business Finland. Business Finland is concerned with what kind of know-how the participating companies have, and as the GTM director noted, Business Finland has an enormous amount of contacts in New York regarding the smart city theme for example. Therefore, if a participating company is focused on smart city theme, there could be a possible market opportunity through the network of Business Finland. Company 1 and company 2 both reflected that the program did not include any market opportunities since the program is generic. However, the company 1 mentioned that the program could be more tailored for the companies in order to gain an access to possible market opportunities.

Identifying & arranging meeting with clients

The GTM director explained that the main aim of the GTM program is not to identify and arrange meetings with clients. She stated that still, there is a possibility that some companies will indirectly meet possible clients, for example through the network members that attend the program as coaches or key note speakers. The director explained that at the beginning of the GTM program, some participating companies indeed thought that the program identified and arranged meetings with clients which caused misunderstandings among the GTM program and companies. Both, company 1 and company 2, noted that they did not get identified or arranged meetings with the clients from the program.

Information on insurance services

According to the interview with the GTM director, the program has an insurance company as a partner. Therefore, the companies are able to get information on insurances in the target market through the network of GTM. The company 2 representative reflected that the company did not gain critical information on insurance services. However, the representative mentioned that she believes that

they would have gained information if they had asked for it from the coaches or growth experts.

Access to capital & funding

As mentioned by the GTM director, the GTM program provides an access to capital and funding through the network. The program introduces and familiarizes the participating companies with investors. The director noted that, for instance, they in Innovestor invested in one of the participating companies last year. She explained that the program has plenty of investors on board with them in the target countries. Company 1 mentioned that capital and funding was a less relevant topic for them, and therefore, the company did not focus on the finance theme that much. Company 2 reflected similar views as company 1. The company 2 representative reflected that they gained information about finance and they visited Nasdaq office for instance. However, the finance theme was not the company's main focus.

Support with pitching

The support with pitching is the first support type that falls into the support category "other" as it is a minor type. The GTM director determined that the support with pitching, especially within specific markets such as the US market, is valuable and beneficial in order to internationalize. The director explained that in the interest of establishing international operations in the USA, a company must be able to pitch themselves successfully as it is part of the business culture there. As explained by the director, during the program companies will gain support in developing and polishing their pitches. Nevertheless, company 1 reflected that the support with pitching and the pitching in general was not the most useful concept. The representative noted that the generic nature of the program had an influence on it; the situation and the audience were not a right fit for the company.

Preparations beforehand

The GTM director emphasized the importance of preparations beforehand that are necessary with the purpose of internationalization. The director mentioned that it is important that the company has completed required field work in the target country beforehand. Companies should map the customer interface and they should have

the required and necessary resources in order to succeed in operating internationally. The director also underlines that it is substantial that the companies have understanding over active Finnish companies and actors that are currently operating in the target country. In addition, it is critical to acknowledge the wants and requirements of the business owners since it has an impact on the risk management and funding; what is the level of willingness and how to fund the internationalization process. Company 2 reflected that one of the greatest benefits was that the company critically evaluated and created a plan for internationalization with time. The company constantly gave the process a deep thought before, during and after participating to the GTM program.

Action after the program

According to the GTM director, usually after the program, companies face a situation in which they need to make a decision whether to proceed internationalization. The GTM director stated that roughly 50% of the participating companies decide not to continue international expansion into the target country. The director explained that some companies decide to wait and later on try expanding internationally. However, she mentioned that approximately 15-20% of the participating companies decide to begin the international operations immediately after the program. Company 1 is one of the companies that belong to the 50% that did not continue internationalization. On the contrary, company 2 was part of the 15-20% that promptly continued internationalization process after the GTM program.

4.5 Summary of findings

Since the research question aimed to identify how BSSs, in this case Grow to Market program, contributes to the companies' internationalization processes, the author had to evaluate interviewed companies' reflections about their experiences with participation to the GTM program.

Based on the results, the networking concept works as a base for many other support types that the GTM program provides in order to support companies' internationalization process. Both participated companies, 1 and 2, reflected that they met new and, in some level, relevant people during the program which caused

an increase in their networks. Company 2 even gained a connection that was a critical component in beginning the operations in the target market. However, both companies determined that the market knowledge was beneficial regarding the internationalization, although the market knowledge concept is run through the network members of the GTM program. When considering company 2, that was able to successfully expand its international operations into a new market, market knowledge, advice & consultancy and preparations beforehand played decisive roles as support types that the GTM program provided or contributed to. The company was able to internationalize due to that the company gained specific market knowledge (for instance information on rules and regulations and cultural aspects in the target market), advice & consultancy (the company gained feedback from different perspectives and had conversation with several growth experts that formed the decision to further proceed international operations) and the preparations that the company did beforehand (the company made an internationalization plan with time and gave it a deep thought in order to implement the plan successfully). The decision to expand the company's operations internationally was formed during and after the program.

In order to exchange information and knowledge, the GTM program has workshops in which the companies and the growth experts and coaches attend. Due to the nature of the workshops (open conversations, negotiations, exchanging views), they fall into networking category. The same way both companies emphasized the importance of information on rules and regulations which is a concept that falls into market knowledge category.

Therefore, based on the results and the reflections of the companies, the following support types are the major and most influential to the companies' internationalization processes

- networking,
- market knowledge,
- advice and consultancy,
- workshops,
- information on rules and regulations,

- preparations beforehand, and
- action after the program.

Based on the results that the author collected from the two companies, match making, information on market opportunities, identifying & arranging meetings with clients, information on insurance services, access to capital & funding and support with pitching were less critical support types. However, it is noteworthy to mention that some of these support types the companies defined as less useful due to their own interests that did not match with abovementioned support types.

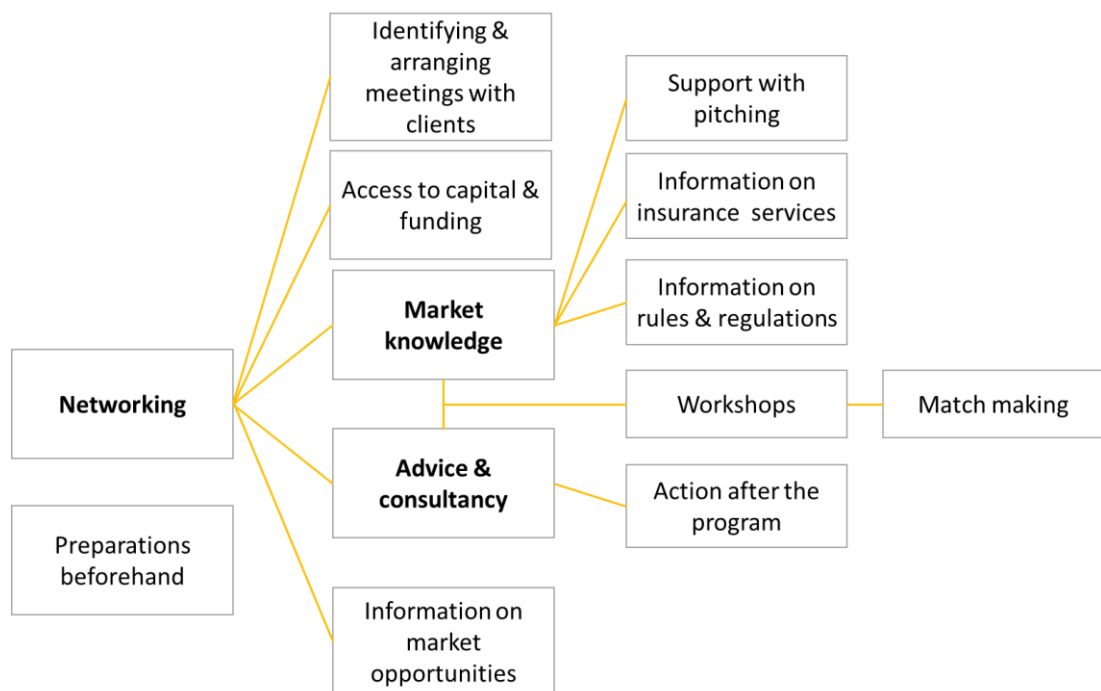


Figure 12. Restructure of support types

Based on the results, the author was able to restructure the support types, see Figure 12 above. The author found out that the networking concept works as a base for all the other support types except for the preparations beforehand since the network is not included in that stage yet. Similarly, market knowledge instead is a base for information on rules & regulations, information on insurance services and support with pitching. Advice & consultancy makes it possible to take the action after the program. Together market knowledge and advice & consultancy create a base for workshops and match making. Yet, this is all possible due to the network at the beginning.

5 Discussion

The main goal of the current study was to investigate the actual contribution of the BSSs to the internationalization of companies. The research was structured around a case study of Grow to Market. Based on the research objective, relevant literature was reviewed. The research adapted a modified theoretical framework based on the network approach of internationalization by Johanson and Mattsson, 1988. On the basis of the literature, the author was able to form a suitable research question:

“How do business support services contribute to SMEs’ internationalization?”.

With the purpose of answering the research question, the author conducted an empirical study. The research approach was qualitative and it evaluated primary and secondary data. The author conducted semi-structured interviews in order to gather reliable primary data which was used as the main data source. In addition, the author evaluated Grow to Market Annual Report as a secondary data source alongside the websites of the interviewed companies. The results were analyzed in the light of the adapted theoretical framework which also formed the results chapter structure.

Reflection of the main findings

The results of this study show that, in case of Grow to Market, the BSS has an impact on the internationalization process of SMEs’ as the companies participate in the program well prepared. The most influential support types and ways, how the GTM program assisted companies, were networking, market knowledge and advice & consultancy. It is relevant to recall that the other support types that the program provides can be categorized under the three main support types, see Figure 12. in chapter 4.5. Besides the abovementioned support types, in accordance with the results, information on rules & regulations, workshops, action after the program and preparations beforehand shared value.

Grow to Market program contributes to the SMEs’ internationalization process by providing an entry to the broad network of the program which in turn provides access to specific market knowledge and advice & consultancy via the network members. In other words, as it was reflected at the end of the chapter 4.5, an

efficient network functions as a base for the rest of the support types that the BSSs provide.

5.1 Practical and managerial implications

The findings of the present study suggest various courses of action to be taken by the Grow to Market program. The results encourage the GTM and the program managers to improve and develop the operations of the program with the purpose of creating more value for participating companies and to the program itself.

The generic nature of the GTM program was defined both beneficial and disadvantageous according to the findings. As a development idea, the GTM program could further concentrate on providing deeper and more detailed information and knowledge about the internationalization process as a whole. The program could emphasize its generic activities. As part of the operations, the program could underscore the value of preparations beforehand in order to form a selective process among companies that aim to internationalize. Moreover, GTM could create an online “databank” about which aspects are required and what needs to be considered regarding the internationalization before beginning international operations and participating in the program. The databank could be available for all growth companies that are aiming to internationalize. As a similar option, the databank could be arranged as an event or a webinar. Based on the databank, companies can evaluate whether they are ready and have required resources to begin international expansion. On the contrary, the generic nature was seen as a slight disadvantage since the program considers companies from all industries and business lines. GTM could develop the program based on the needs of the participating companies. The program should evaluate and get familiar with the companies in order to provide a more tailored program. For instance, the program could expand into new countries in Europe based on companies’ future market aspirations. Since the GTM program is Finnish based, expansion in Europe could be an adequate next step. For example, the GTM program could familiarize the participating companies with the German market since it is one of the largest markets in Europe.

Another practical implication is that the duration of the GTM program could be extended. In accordance with the findings, the program duration is fairly short compared to the broad contents of the program. As a development suggestion, the GTM program could be reformed to be more continuing. For instance, if the abovementioned notion about a more tailored program was implemented, there could be more events or online based webinars. These could be organized constantly throughout the year which would increase the engagement of the companies to the GTM program for a longer time period. In addition, GTM could be involved in companies' action after the program. In order to continue the network expansion, the GTM program could organize a networking get-together or event for all companies that have attended to the program over the years. As an alternative, GTM could create an online platform that is intended for previously participated companies. Through get-together events or online platforms companies would be able to share their experiences and knowledge with each other, and moreover, through these channels GTM can further improve its operations based on the commentary of the companies.

As a third practical implication, GTM could develop its promotion based on the findings of the study. According to the reflections of the interviewed companies, they both found value in meeting other companies that are in the same situation and meeting other companies that already operate in the target market while sharing their personal and real life experiences. Therefore, the GTM program could create a promotion plan for its operations based on this aspect. Through promotion and advertising that participating companies will gain knowledge through advice from the companies with personal experience, the program will engage the companies that are planning to begin international operations in the target country. It could create an attraction through the real life experiences of companies that attend the program as coaches and key note speakers.

5.2 Assessment of the results in the light of literature

Similarly to the findings in the present study, a prior study, the revisited internationalization model, by Johanson and Vahlne (2009, 1413) emphasized the importance of networks of the companies in the business environment when

considering internationalization. In order to succeed in the new market, small growth companies must take advantage of their network and constantly expand it to be broader (Felzensztein, Ciravegna, Robson & Amorós 2015, 147; Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 88). The findings of the present study show that the network of companies play a critical role in the internationalization process. The study discovered that due to BSS's, Grow to Market's, contribution to the internationalization process, company 2 was able to successfully begin international operations in a new foreign market since it gained relevant network members through the program. Based on the results, the author was able to determine that a strong network forms a base for the rest of the support that BSS provide such as market knowledge and advice & consultancy.

The original Uppsala internationalization process model by Johanson and Vahlne is focused on four variables, market knowledge and commitment, commitment decision and current activities (Johanson & Vahlne 1977, 26). That said, Johanson and Vahlne stated that the market knowledge is developed through personal experience (Johanson & Vahlne 2009, 1415), which is slightly contradicting with the findings of the present study. In accordance with the results, companies that attend the Grow to Market program gain and improve their market knowledge through GTM network members, not personal experience. The emphasis of the market knowledge is still vital when considering internationalization. As noted by Tsang (2018) and Zarei, Nasserri and Tajeddin (2011), a successful international expansion requires knowledge that is implemented over a short time period in the new target market. In addition, Johanson and Kao (2010, 18) stated that the knowledge plays a crucial role in international expansion as it is gained through network members. In this sense, the findings reflect the significance of the market knowledge.

The findings also underlined the relevance of advice and consultancy which, for instance, is a way to transfer market knowledge. According to prior studies, BSSs can support growth companies by providing assets through network (Ammetller et al. 2014, 12; Hackett & Dilts 2004, 41). The support can consist of counselling and coaching which happens between a coach and a company (Abduh et al. 2007, 75; Ammetller et al. 2014, 12; Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse & Groen 2012, 112). In respect of prior studies, the findings conform the emphasis of advice and consultancy. When

considering the abovementioned main aspects, networking, market knowledge and advice & consultancy, this study and the findings are in line with prior studies.

5.3 Limitations of the research

The present study has its limitations regarding accessing the data, yet the author considered the limitations as minimal. The author conducted three interviews with carefully chosen individuals; one of them was a Grow to Market Business Director and the remaining two were company representatives that had participated in the GTM program once during 2017-2019. The GTM director was able to provide deep insights about the program while the companies reflected their personal experience about attending the program. However, the author faced a slight challenge in accessing the secondary data due to novelty of Grow to Market. The program is relatively new and there is only a limited amount of secondary data available. The author reviewed Grow to Market Annual Report and used it as a main secondary data source.

To ensure the internal validity, the author formed a research question and reviewed literature that considered the topic closely. The author adapted a theoretical framework and designed methodology with the purpose of answering the empirical research question. The methodology was carefully designed in order to provide valid findings. Therefore, the author implemented interviews as a primary data collection method which were based on the theoretical framework. As it was previously mentioned, the interviewees were accurately chosen to improve validity.

As the present study is a case study, a question about external validity, or generalizability, arises. The study is focused on specific settings, and the author indicates that the research considers one individual case that cannot be adapted in other settings. The present research analyzed how BSSs, Grow to Market, contributes to the internationalization processes of the companies. Therefore, the study does not provide general results.

The data collection method that considered evaluation of the literature, research question and objectives was meticulously planned with the intention of providing reliable results. In addition, the data was collected from sources that were able to

provide accurate information regarding the research question. To avoid participant error and bias, the author provided the interviewees a possibility to choose the timing and the location of the interview. With the purpose of enhancing the reliability and validity of the study, the author used a triangulation method. The author evaluated the results from different sources to reduce bias. Besides, the author acknowledged the bias or error that she might have caused unintentionally. The author's knowledge over the topic was constantly growing, and hence, she could have put more weight on some results over others. This also could have caused subjectivity within the study. However, the author cautiously designed methodology so that she could implement data collection and data analysis in order to provide reliable and accurate results.

5.4 Recommendations for future research

To sum up, many questions and issues are yet to be resolved. It would be recommendable to conduct a research about other BSSs in Finland that are concentrated on internationalization and SMEs, such as Team Finland. For instance, the research could compare Grow to Market and Team Finland and study how they differentiate in providing support with internationalization since one is private, GTM, and the other is based on public services. Similarly, it would be intriguing to compare Grow to Market with another private BSS that was based on Sweden for example. Therefore, the comparison would happen from a country's perspective, and in that case, it would be a comparison between two Nordic countries.

Another research recommendation would be a study that is further concentrating on Grow to Market and the target markets of the program. For instance, the study could focus on finding detailed information about the target market differences and compare those. In other words, the study could compare Grow to USA and Grow to Sweden programs and aim to analyze the differences in the programs. It would be helpful for example, for further evaluation of networks in the target countries, since the US market is enormous compared to the market in Sweden.

In the future, as the Grow to Market program will have operated for a longer time period, it would be recommendable to conduct a longitudinal study of the companies

that participate in the program. The study could deeply evaluate the companies' state before, during and after the program. Afterwards, the results could be compared to previous companies or previous studies in order to track the program development and improvements or changes in the target companies that aim to internationalize. It would be helpful for the GTM in order to upgrade and develop its operations further. As an alternative, a longitudinal study could focus on a specific support type that the program provides. For instance, the research could evaluate market knowledge and how the support type has improved over the years.

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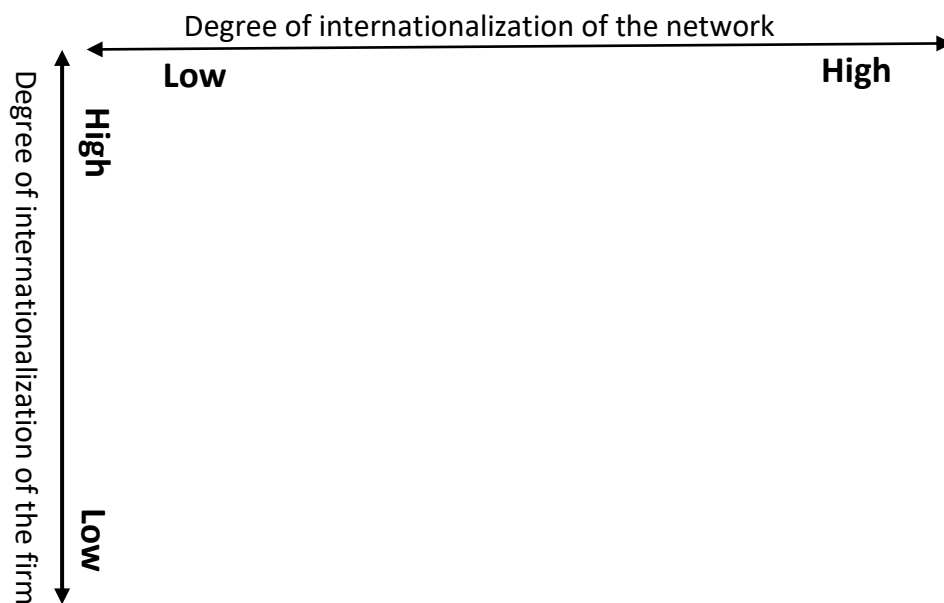
Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions with GTM Business Director

- What is the main aim or goal of Grow to Market program?
- What are the main reasons why companies participate to the GTM program?
- How do you support internationalization of companies?
 - In what ways? How are these seen in internationalization process?
 - List of different support types
 - Workshop, seminars
 - Staff training
 - Trade missions, trade fairs and matchmaking events
 - Information on rules and regulations
 - Information on market opportunities
 - Market knowledge
 - Identifying and arranging meetings with potential clients
 - Advice & consultancy
 - Business cooperation and networking
 - Financial support
 - Insurance services
 - Other
- How does GTM develop companies' networks in target markets?
- How many of the companies decided to enter a market after GTM program?
- Did companies enter the market successfully?
 - If not, why?
- Are there any differences in key activities depending on the market/country?
 - How are these differences seen?

Appendix 2. Interview questions with companies

- When did you attend Grow to Market program? Which program did you attend Grow to USA, Sweden or China?
- Did you already have international operations in some other country when attending Grow to Market program?
- Can you identify your company's position on the chart below before Grow to Market program? Can you identify what is your company's position now (on the chart below)?



- Did Grow to Market program influence your internationalization process?
- Can you reflect how GTM contributed in supporting your movement on the chart above?
 - How GTM contributed in helping your company from the beginning point to the point your company is in now?
- How Grow to Market program supported your company?
 - Market specific knowledge?
 - Workshop, seminars?
 - Staff training?
 - matchmaking events, trade missions & trade fairs?
 - Information on rules and regulations?
 - Information on market opportunities?
 - Identifying and arranging meetings with potential clients?
 - Advice & consultancy?

- Business cooperation and networking?
 - Insurance services?
What about financial support?
 - Familiarizing companies with investors
 - Other?
- Can you prioritize three main support types that you gained from GTM program?
 - Do you think that GTM helped to improve your company's network?
 - Which of your main network partners mostly contributed to your internationalization?
 - Did you utilize your network?