How do SMEs in Sweden perceive the usage of SEO

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How do SMEs in Sweden perceive the usage of SEO?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study has been to find out how SMEs in Sweden perceive SEO as a marketing tool. In order to answer the purpose of the study, we have selected five small and medium enterprises to take part in their stories and perceptions of SEO.

As a method, we have used interviews to be able to answer the purpose of the essay. We have chosen not to focus on a specific industry because the purpose has been SMEs as it is the majority of Sweden's companies. In the thesis, coding has been used as an analysis tool to interpret our collected material.

The results show that there are varied opinions about SEO. However, The majority of informants perceive SEO as a complex system. The essay shows that IP1 and IP5 informants use SEO as a marketing tool but still do not understand SEO completely. The informants use social media as a marketing strategy to reach out to potential new customers and to focus on the word of mouth model. The study also shows that the informants who use SEO see it as an opportunity to grow and make a name for themselves in the industry in which they operate. Because SEO ensures that companies can be at the top of the list on Google among their competitors and thus easier for potential customers to find the company's website, the company gains a more extensive customer base and grows its business.
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1. INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to study the strength of marketing and how companies reach a bigger target group using Search engine optimization (SEO). This thesis will delimit Digital Marketing and focus on SEO and how small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Sweden perceive SEO and its usage. There are always different perceptions about things. Hence some companies perceive SEO as unnecessary and time-consuming, while other companies grow big by using SEO as a marketing tool. This thesis is going to study different companies' perceptions of SEO.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Sweden has about 1.2 million companies, and 96 percent of them are small companies that have around ten or fewer employees. Furthermore, small and average companies take 99.99 percent of the market with employees around 0-249. In Sweden, the most prominent companies are 0.01 percent and have about 250 employees or more (Persson, 2021).

Research carried out by SCB indicates that small companies are companies with less than 50 employees in them (Levin & Weström, 2003). Levin & Weström (2003) wanted to gather more information about small companies and their growing process. In the study, the author brings up essential factors on how small companies should prioritise their resources to grow. The first factor is skills development of the company's employment, depending on a few customers, competitive situation, and introducing a new product and export (Levin & Weström, 2003). To improve the company, they should work faster, better and cheaper (Hess, 2012). The second factor is Knowledge, which affects the company's development opportunities because the increased level of knowledge in the digital world has transformed competent development into a production resource (Levin & Weström, 2003). Furthermore, to do something that the competitors do not (Hess, 2012). The third factor is companies' needs for individuals, and customers are important because it contributes to companies constantly striving for development (Levin & Weström, 2003). According to Hess (2012), it is important to focus on what the customer thinks is important and to appreciate them. The fourth factor is that Small companies with export have a more prominent shot at expanding than the companies that do not export (Levin & Weström, 2003). Export is fundamental for
SMEs to grow (Persson, 2018). The fifth and last factor introduces a new product because the digital world and competition strive after small companies that develop new knowledge and technology to apply in their services and products. Companies must be innovative to emerge victorious from a competitive working market (Levin & Weström, 2003). According to Goodman (2012), companies should use social media, e-mail, blog posts, and more to make them interested and connect to expand. Small companies often have a small budget and minimal staff (Couzin & Grappone, 2011).

Another critical aspect that a former study shows is the importance of marketing. Marketing is an essential factor for companies, especially SMEs, to become recognised. There are different ways to advertise an organisation and reach out to a bigger target group. For example, this could be social media or search engines, where customers search for products and services that the companies offer. The search engine is an essential way for an organisation to grow and establish itself. According to Taiminen och Karjaluoto (2015), a small business can benefit from digital marketing and social media to reach a broader target group (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015). In general, it is challenging for Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to participate in digital marketing due to the economic situation (Berg, 2020). A study done by Halligan & Shah, 2010 shows that small companies do not have the resources as big companies have to advertise themselves. Furthermore, small companies lack financial, IT and administration resources compared to big companies (Tillväxtverket, 2020)

In Sweden, 97 percent of the population use the internet to search for information (Internetstiftelsen, 2018). Due to the increasing digitalisation, people's shopping habits have changed in nature; nowadays items are often purchased online as opposed to in a physical shop. The digital world has contributed to big changes in the marketplace for customers shopping, which entails considerable challenges for companies. When individuals search on the internet, it only takes a few seconds, and there are thousands of links to different web pages of similar companies resembling products. Digitalisation has resulted in intense competition among the companies to be seen and the increment of their market shares. That is why companies need to stand out from the crowd (Bråth & Wahlgren, 2017). Another way for companies to advertise themselves is through search engines, and this strategy is called Search engine marketing (SEM). According to research, companies that use search engine
marketing (SEM) are growing faster than using any other marketing tool. If an unknown SME succeeds in getting on top of the ranking system compared to a well-known company, the user will remember the unknown because it was on the top and feel that it is unique. Therefore, many companies compete to be on the top of the ranking system list (Dou et al. 2010).

SEM has two parts, the first one is Search engine optimization (SEO), and the second one is Paid per click (Chaffey & Ellis- Chadwick, 2019). Search engine optimization (SEO) gives you advantages compared to your competition when you are ranked on top of the search list (Bråth & Wahlgren, 2017). 28,5 percent of Google users click on the first link, 15,7 percent on the second link and 11 percent on the third (Southern, 2020).

Figure 1. Google CTR per ranking (Southern, 2020).

In 2009 it was over 12 billion searches each month and approximately 400 million web searches every day. Furthermore, Google has a 65 percent market share, and they handle 2,400 searches per second (Enge et al., 2010). According to Bråth and Wahlgren (2017), SEO is one of the best marketing alternatives for companies to increase sales. Many organisations understand the weight of SEO, but the marketing strategy is still at an early stage (Bråth & Wahlgren, 2017). The competition is low due to a lack of recognition, and the potential of SEO, particularly in small countries such as Sweden, is still small. Many companies do not understand the power of SEO (Invise, 2015). The companies that use SEO get a strong lead
because they get away cheap and reach out to a broader target group that searches after products and services that companies sell. About 90% of Sweden's population searches for products and services on the internet. An example Bråth and Wahlgren mentioned in their study “Guldläge på nätet” if 10 000 people were searching online for bikes every month, then you would get 3250 potential customers visiting your website every month if you were on the top of the ranking list (Bråth & Wahlgren, 2017). From an e-commerce perspective, SEO can work as a powerful e-commerce tool because SEO can help both small and big companies sell to a global target group. SEO can also aid SMEs to advertise at a low cost and strengthen the brand (Dou et al., 2010).

1.2 PROBLEM

E-commerce is dominating the market compared to physical stores for the time being. It has led to an increment in customer loyalty which has affected physical stores in dropping both customers and revenue. One reason for this is that consumers find it more convenient and time-saving to shop online than shopping in stores. It is also much easier to offer customised and personalised solutions for customers using e-commerce (Linzbach et al., 2019). Therefore, companies have chosen to invest in their SEO since it entails many benefits for the organisation (Barry & Charleton, 2009). However, on the other hand, there are still some companies that do not use SEO. Companies can face significant consequences that still choose not to use SEO as a marketing strategy, despite the benefits it contributes to (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). SEO is a great marketing tool for achieving a high ranking on the SERP. However, using SEO, companies can increase their profit, reach out to a larger target group, and become more successful (Barry & Charleton, 2009). An excellent example of a company that started small and developed into one of Europe’s most extensive clothing sites using SEO is Zalando. The company is often ranked in the top five websites for clothing brands. The company has over 7 million SEO visits every month (Bieth, 2019).

A study done by Lin (2011) shows that SMEs in China find SEO value for the company’s success. In China, SEO went up to 4,62 billion in 2010 and continued to grow throughout the years. SMEs that work with digital marketing are companies that benefit from SEO. These enterprises are also the ones that use SEO the most. Lin (2011), makes it known that 56,6% of users only look at the first two pages that pop up after searching the keywords through
research. Which makes it essential for companies to focus on getting a high ranking in the chosen search engine (Lin, 2011). Barry and Charleton (2009) studied SEM strategies amongst SMEs in Ireland who worked with SEO earlier. This study highlights the importance of using SEO as a marketing tool. They state that enterprises in Ireland have noticed the importance of SEO and aim to reach a higher ranking in the SERP. In Ireland, they wanted to invest both time and resources in their work with SEO (Barry & Charleton, 2009). According to Boughton & Singh (2005), SEO has increased in America, making the competition for exoteric keywords high. This contributes to an increased difficulty for companies to afford and bid for higher rankings (Boughton & Singh, 2005). Murphy and Kielgast (2008), show that many SMEs in the hotel industry have a terrible attitude towards SEO and therefore choose not to use it as a marketing tool. These organisations do not consider it is necessary for them despite the benefits it offers a company. Murphy and Kielgast state that these companies put themselves at risk of losing contact with the customers and decreasing their return-on-investment (ROI) (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). SEO is preferable to traditional methods as it attracts more customers (Khraim, 2015). There is a bigger chance that the customer recognises a high ranking company over a company that does not have a high ranking on the SERP, even if that company is less known (Dou et al., 2010). Companies need to include digital marketing in their marketing strategies to become even bigger and have a strong position in the market (Taiminen & Karjaluoto, 2015).

Many people use the internet. Ninety-five percent of the population in Sweden use the internet. Ninety-six percent use the internet to search for information via Google, and 61 percent do so daily, which shows how important it is for companies to include SEO in their marketing (Internetstiftelsen, 2019). Only 44 percent of companies in Sweden state that they use SEO (WSA, 2018). SEO is not only one of the most effective ways to get seen on the internet but also a great way to increase sales (Bråth & Wahlgren, 2017). SEO will continue to grow, and all companies that own a website should aim to get high rankings through SEO since most people use their phone, computer or tablet when searching for a product or service (Hill, 2014).

Previous research has shown that there are many good aspects of using SEO, as mentioned before. Nevertheless, there is not much research that unravels why SMEs do not use SEO. This study aims to clarify how companies use SEO as a marketing strategy and give a
positive result. To provide an answer, we want to determine how SMEs in Sweden perceive SEO usage and implement it as a marketing strategy.

1.2.1 Research Gap

The previous research, done by (Barry & Charleton, 2009), about SMEs in Ireland and SEO strategy has proven that SEO is a great marketing tool for companies. They have studied search engine marketing strategy amongst SMEs in Ireland. According to Barry and Charleton (2009), SEO is good to use for keyword development of the website and that several SMEs in Ireland have positive thoughts about SEO. SMEs in Ireland put resources and time on search engine marketing (SEM) for the Future. The study shows that the majority of SME in Ireland use SEO or Paid Search. The biggest majority lack knowledge to measure SEM effectiveness. The study also shows that many small and medium enterprises in Ireland have big plans in the future to pay and spend more money and resources on SEO. Barry & Cherleton (2009), describes that one of the top goals of SEO as a marketing tool is to give small and medium enterprises a chance to be visible. The study shows that if companies want to expand, they should be on the top of the first page of the SERP. Furthermore, the study shows that even if the companies right now lack comprehensive tools to see if SEO is effective, SMEs seem to have a vision for SEO. They see SEO as an effective marketing tool to reach a bigger audience (Barry & Charleton, 2009).

A study by Murphy and Kielgast (2008) has been done on how small and medium hotels use SEO for advertising themselves. The purpose of their study has been to find out about the hotels' usage of SEM to make themselves more available to existing and potential customers. The study concludes that small and medium-sized hotels that they did their research on do not use SEM. Due to this, the hotels lack marketing strategies and do not put any effort into their websites. According to Murphy and Kielgast (2008), the consequences of this can be that small hotels risk marginalising, losing contact with their customers, and fail to maximise their returns on their websites. In the study, the researchers interviewed the hotels that use SEO, however, to a minimal extent and lack the knowledge of using it and are not engaged in the usage of it. The majority of them had a negative perspective towards SEO, according to Murphy & Kielgast (2008). Furthermore, they describe that most informants in the study had a critical attitude towards SEO; they meant that SEO was not relevant. The thing that
mattered for the small and medium hotels was the local population. Because they are popular and well-known among the local population and therefore did not feel the need for SEO (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008).

However, due to this, there is a lack of research towards SMEs usage of SEO in Sweden. This thesis is studying how SMEs in Sweden perceive the usages of SEO, if they perceive SEO positively or negatively and if they use it.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to find out how SMEs view SEO as a marketing strategy. Furthermore, to learn if SEO constitutes a part of their daily marketing. Do many SMEs use SEO, or do they not use it at all as part of their marketing strategy? Do they have a positive or negative attitude towards SEO?

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1.4 Definitions
In this episode, key concepts to reach a deeper understanding.

- Search engine optimization (SEO) is a digital marketing strategy; its function is to improve the position or practical ranking in the natural or organic listings.
- Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that have 0-249 employees.
- Search Engine Marketing (SEM) database that assists individuals to a website that suits them after their needs.
- Search engine results pages (SERPs) is a search engine that you use when searching with a keyword, and the page will pop up on, for example, Google.
- Paid per click (PPC), Paid search is one of the plugins of digital marketing; PPC allows individuals and companies to advertise their ads through their search engine result pages (SERPs). PPC function is pay per click.
2. FRAME OF REFERENCES

2.1 Search Engine Marketing (SEM)

Search engine marketing (SEM) is a technical database that assists individuals to a website that suits them after their needs. Examples of search engines are Google, Bing and Google-owned Youtube (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Search engine marketing is an essential tool because both companies and individuals can use paid advertisements to pop up on the search engine results page (Wordstream, 2020).

It promotes an organisation through a search engine to achieve its goal by delivering relevant content to the search listings, which will assist consumers to click through to the destination website. We also use this when searching for different product brands or type in URLs into google; this type of searching is called Navigational Search (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Two techniques form SEM, the first one is Search Engine Optimization SEO which develops better results from natural listings, and the second is paid per click that delivers results from the paid ads to the search engine (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

2.2 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The SEOs function is to fulfil improving position or practical ranking in the natural or organic listings. SEO contributes to the fact that individuals can find what they are looking for instead of searching on several sites (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Navigation is essential for a website because it helps visitors find the content they are searching for quickly (Google, 2011). It is important to note that the purpose of an SEO content provider aims to provide quality content to increase website rank or page rank (VKV, 2020). The meaning of SEO is to optimize the website, so it achieves visibility searches in the search engine on Google (Gilan & Hammarberg, 2016).
To simplify it, one can divide SEO into two parts On-page which involves focusing on the website, heading, and paragraphing images. The other is called Off-page links, such as social media, mentions and consumers’ opinions of the company (Gilan & Hammarberg, 2016).

Search engines alternatives such as Google’s and Bing’s natural listings are below the highest pay per click, or sponsored links as the search engine will get higher ads from making sponsored ads more visible. The organic position (or ranking) is dependent on the algorithm that uses each search engine to find relevant pages with a keyword (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Furthermore, these lists do not cost anything, nor do clicking on a link. However, it can cost SEO companies to promote business by making websites higher in rankings (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Companies do not need money to use SEO; they can focus on organic, which means a low cost or no-cost optimization (Couzin & Grappone, 2011). SEO is about optimizing all website pages, not only the home page (Kloostra, 2015). The SEOs cost depends on what the company needs to get help with. Several companies do not have the competence or time and hire an agency (Invise, 2015).

Search engine optimization takes a long time to build up. Because of this, several companies hire agencies that are experts in this area. Building up SEO takes about 6-12 months to achieve results and get higher up in the ranking on Google. This is because Google does research on how essential web pages are to the search engine to be on the top ranking on Google. It is essential to use keywords that describe the business and what they offer. This will lead to Google being able to rank companies higher because of the keywords that made it easier for the search engine. Nevertheless, this alone is not enough. The website’s speed also plays a significant role in the ranking since Google ranks websites according to their speed in providing customers with relevant information. The speed of the website is affected by the size of the letters, pictures and videos. That is why it is essential to think about having high speed on the server and the size of the webpage (Sekund, 2020).
2.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of SEO

The great advantage of SEO is that companies do not pay for activities and movements in the same way that consumers do when using paid marketing channels such as PPC-marketing with google ad words. This way, the total expense is reduced when advertising companies with SEO instead of advertising with other obstacles; this is a definite way to maximise business efforts. SEO will give companies results, and as soon as they start SEO efforts, traffic will increase at a steady pace. Using tools to track how many visitors companies' web page has and seeing when more people are visiting companies' sites, and sales will be higher than before (Chowdhury, 2017). Furthermore, searchers often want to find what they are looking for on the first page. If they can not find it, they will search for something else (Andrews, 2021).

The disadvantages of SEO are that it will take a long time for search engines to see a change using this marketing strategy. It takes time for companies to see the results they have been aiming for by using SEO. The issue with SEO is that it can take up to hours, days, and even weeks to collect all the information from this type of marketing, which means that it takes a long time for the entrepreneur or company to find out the result of marketing. This targeting strategy is not for entrepreneurs aiming for quick results (Digital Agency, 2020). Instead, it is a long term investment and there is no guarantee of the results and high competition on the market with SEO (Carney, 2021).

2.3 Search Algorithms

SEO is controlled by the search algorithms that make it work. The search algorithm is the data that the user finds. Search algorithms are problem solvers and evaluate answers and then give a solution to the problem. The search algorithm takes the problem, for example, a word or a phrase that has been searched. Due to this, it aims through the database, with keywords and URLs with words related to the search. Afterwards, the search algorithm returns the words or phrases that have been searched (Ledford, 2008). The ranking system is not only one algorithm but a series of algorithms to give searchers the essential information (Google, 2020), like pictures, companies and services that find what suits the search best (Sekund, 2020). An example of this is if a web page gets many searches, it will be ranked on the top of Google, contributing to more visitors (Sekund, 2020).
For the search algorithm to give good results, Google needs to analyse the words in the search to know their meaning. Google creates different language models and interprets different words; an example could be spelling mistakes. Furthermore, Google has a synonym system to calculate what the searcher means (Google, 2020).

Google uses eight algorithm updates; The first algorithm is called Panda that gives web pages a quality score used as a ranking factor (Search engine Land, 2020). The second algorithm is Penguin and it is to rank sites and evaluate different factors (SEJ, 2021). Hummingbird is the third algorithm that allows Google to interpret search questions and search the results they are looking for. With Hummingbird, is it possible for a web page to be on top of the rank when a searcher writes down a question but does not need the exact words the searcher asks for. The fourth algorithm is mobile, which is a subsequent search update. From 2018 forward, a desktop has shifted to the mobile version for all web pages. Furthermore, Google ranks which web pages through how fast the mobile version is. The fifth algorithm is RankBrain, a part of the Hummingbird algorithm and its function is a machine learning system for Google to help understand the meanings of the questions. The sixth algorithm is Medic, and its function is to update medic and impact disproportionately affected medical web pages and help with other problems such as finance, law and education. The seventh algorithm is Bert that handles language processing to understand the search question better. The last algorithm is Google's core update: Google core is an update to Googles’ previous updates (Search engine Land, 2020).

**2.4 Plugins for SEO**

There are six top Plugins for SEO that give the best results. SEO Package is a popular WordPress of SEO plugin available and an updated tool to improve the website (Staff, 2020). The first plugins are all in One SEO Pack developed in 2007 (Thomas, 2017); its function is to distinguish on the configuration page. All in one SEO pack helps companies choose an alternative directly, allowing them to select options directly off the bat or make any changes to the plugins. When making an All in one SEO pack plugin, it needs a home title, Home description (description about your company) and home keywords that will describe your
site, for example, Fashion lover (my home keywords would look like dresses, skirts, jeans and more). All in one SEO pack gives companies complete control of the search engine optimization for their blog (Sabin-Wilson, 2013). Companies have complete control over the search engine optimization for their website (Sabin-Wilson, 2013).

The second is the Google XML sitemaps which generate an XML sitemap that sends an automatic signal to Google, Yahoo, Bing and Ask.com. This means that when the business owner's website holds a sitemap, the site's crawler can more efficiently crawl the website. One of the bonuses on the web map is the one that sends a signal to different search engines every time an entrepreneur publishes something (Sabin-Wilson, 2013). A Sitemap was created to help website owners tell the search engine how crawled and indexed they want to be. Arne Brachhold developed Google XML sitemaps, Google (XML) Sitemaps Generator for WordPress (Muldoon, 2020).

The third is called redirection, which helps companies switch from the old web page to WordPress or, for example, when companies aim to change the URL structure of an already well-established web page. This indicates that companies can handle 301 redirects; when the URL of a web page has changed, a 301 redirect notifies search engines where they can find the new URL on the page (Sabin-Wilson, 2013). As mentioned above, it can manage 301 redirects and also keep track of 404 errors. The aid of This plugin is to clean up all loose ends in the website (Goodley, 2020).

This signifies that a site owner can easily add breadcrumbs to the site and that they need to add a variety of codes to a template to get navigation links displayed on companies web pages (Sabin-Wilson, 2013). To achieve pagination for companies WordPress site, the plugin is the opportunity to display page links at the bottom of each archive page or category page (Sabin-Wilson, 2013).

The last part is about robot meta, which involves allowing the site owner to check how their site is collected by the search engines so that they avoid content and do not want to be noticed by the search engines and control what the search engines can do and do not enter (Pecánek, 2020).
2.5 Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs)

Search engine results pages is a search engine used when searching with a keyword, and the page will pop up (Webb-statistik, 2020). For example, when searching for a word on Google through organic search results, paid Google ads. When searching for something on Google, SERPs will get it for you (Backlinko, 2020). SERPs are the pages that Google and a lot of other search engines show in response to a user’s search query (Hardwick, 2020). Below you can see examples of this:

![Figure 2. link building (Backlinko, 2020)](image1)

![Figure 3. When did Google start (Backlinko, 2020)](image2)

There are ten blue links in the picture above, which are organic results that have an excellent chance to be clicked on; however, it appears that there are more “No Click Searchers” than before, as seen in the second picture. Individuals do no longer click in when they see the results of what they have searched. Instead, they can see it on the first page, as the picture above shows, when searching for “When did Google start”, and it pops up directly (Backlinko, 2020).

The chart attached below shows that “No Click Searchers” have increased (Fishkin, 2018). According to Eva 2019 approximately, 34 percent of all desktop searches have no click and 62 percent no click on the mobile.
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2.6 Stages involved in producing search engine listening for the natural listening

To find the best option, it is vital to understand the basis of what the SERP is generating in ordering to develop the marketing. Companies must understand the ranking processes, which can contribute to being one step ahead of the competitors and achieving more robust traffic levels. Below is a picture illustrating what is required in search technology (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).
As seen in the picture, using crawlers is to identify significant pages for index rates if there is any difference. Crawling is done by robots. The robots open web pages and fetch a reference URL for the page to do analysis and indexing afterwards. Using an index is that the search engine should flexibly find essential pages for the searcher instead of looking at different pages to find what they are searching for. The search engine "inverted" index creates a lookup table for the documents containing specific words. Also, the words are not sorted according to what is most applicable. The importance is that the documents then evaluate the most relevant set of documents to be returned in the SERPs real-time as it is entered with the search query. Hence the first vital documents will be retrieved from one runtime version of the index at a particular data centre. Afterwards, there will be a rank on the search engine results page that all documents will be calculated (Chaffey & Smith, 2017).

The search engine processes what the searcher is looking for and accepts it. When you write a query in the search engine, you will be located through their IP address, and then it is up to a particular data centre to process everything. Besides that, ranking occurs in real-time for a specific question to return to a sorted list of particular documents. Afterwards, the query will be seen on the search results page (Chaffey & Smith, 2017).

2.7 Paid Per Click (PPC)

Pay per click is one of the plugins of digital marketing used in Google and Bing, for example. These search engines allow individuals and companies to advertise their ads through their search engine result pages (SERPs). PPC function is pay per click. The definition of this is that each time an individual clicks into an ad, the companies pay for it (Search Engine Watch, 2018). Pay per click is a way to be number 1 in the ranking instead of SEO uncertainty. Pay per click works as an advertisement bid on keywords on their product and services (Morgan et al., 2011).

The ads contain text at the top and bottom of the organic search results or shopping ads displayed above the search result. Beyond this, there is another pay promotion called Product Listing Ads (PLAs) which shows the product’s pictures and pricing on the advertisement; this account can cost 50 cents per paid search ad (Chaffey & Smith, 2017). Product listing ads
give companies an excellent opportunity to be a step ahead the competition that for example expanded text ads (Mialki, 2019) Below you can see (PLAs), picture of shoes and under the pictures are expanded text ads (Mialki, 2019).

![Google search result for 'women's new balance running shoes'](image)

Figure 6. Product Listing Ad (Mialki, 2019).

## 2.7.1 Advantages and disadvantages of paid per click

The advantage of paid per click is that you only pay when consumers reach your website. This is cost-effective because companies choose how much they want to spend. Furthermore, you can choose a specific target group, demographic Besides Location, languages and more. (Business Info. Co. UK, 2020). PCC listing is significantly faster; they take a few days to reach compared to SEO which can take weeks or even months (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019).

Another positive benefit of PPC is measurable ROI, where it can see how favourable the campaign has been and how many visitors have seen the advertising. Beyond that, companies can see a statistic of how many clicks on the ad and if the visitors enjoyed the ad as they wanted. With PPC, companies can track phone calls and put them on a list to fit into the target audience (WSI, 2020).
The disadvantage is that organic listings will always be at the top of search listings as SEO is long term, while Paid per click is the short term solution. Beyond this, companies cannot keep their pay per click budget, and companies will disappear from the list. Furthermore, it appears that 85% of those who search the Internet click on organic listings first. While 10-15% click into pay-per-click sponsored ads (WSI, 2020).

### 2.8 SMEs perception of SEO

In this chapter, we address SMEs' perception of SEO. However, first of all, what is perception? Perception is a function that helps us stay informed about relevant aspects of our environment and the relationship between both. The shaping of purposeful actions is mainly done through our perception of things (NE, 2020). The process for this is named the perceptual process, in which we gain information about our surroundings and create an experience. This is crucial for our survival. Perception also allows us to act in different situations (Cherry, 2020). In other words, perception is the processes found in our brain, which we through them can interpret sensory impressions. This is made with the help of our five senses: taste, sound, smell, sight, and touch. This also includes the cognitive processes needed to process the information we get (Cherry, 2020). It is through our perception of things that different choices are made (NE, 2020).

Sweden has about 1,2 million companies where SMEs make up 99,99 percent of them, and the rest are bigger companies (Persson, 2021). Only 44 percent in Sweden claim that they use SEO in their marketing strategy (WSA, 2018).

As mentioned before, SEO is a great marketing tool that companies should invest in if they want to succeed (Barry & Charleton, 2009). Many enterprises put much effort into their SEO and are aiming to reach a higher ranking in the SERPs, including companies in Ireland. They have noticed the importance of SEO and its benefits (Barry & Charleton, 2009). However, some companies still have a terrible attitude towards SEO and do not find it necessary despite all the benefits of this marketing tool. An example is SMEs in the hotel industry (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). “Most website owners perceive SEO as a dark art, shrouded in mystery” (Boag, 2012). A reason for this is that many companies find it unnecessary due to a lack of
knowledge. Other reasons are that it is easier for big companies to invest in their SEO than for SMEs. This is because small enterprises might not have the money or time to invest even more in their SEO, such as hiring more employees and great consultants and making an investment in content and web design. This could also be because Google favours some brands over others due to their sizes and the user behaviour data that shows what pages people prefer to click on. The website’s size also plays a big role in why some companies choose not to use SEO. More prominent websites have more information and keywords, which means they will have a better chance of getting a high ranking position on the SERPs than a small company’s website that is not just newer but also offers less information and keywords to compete with. Nevertheless, despite all this, it is still worth taking the risk. At least, companies have a chance of being seen and becoming recognised online (Gabbert, 2019).
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Method

Before we explain the type of method we have chosen to carry out the study, we will briefly describe the type of scientific approach we have taken. The deductive approach is based on the researcher examining reality on the basis of previous studies done on the subject. In other words, the researcher tests reality through empirical study and then puts them in relation to previous research done on the subject to draw conclusions (Söderbom & Ulvenblad, 2016). This is precisely why the deductive approach is relevant in our study because we have taken part in previous research and theories on the subject. After that, we have tried precisely these in relation to our empirical data, i.e. our interviews that we have as a basis. Based on previous research and theories, we have tried to interpret our material and then draw conclusions from our thesis.

This section of the thesis will explain which method has been used in this study. Qualitative data is used to get more profound answers by penetrating the surface to gain a better understanding. Additionally, in the thesis, secondary data has been used to collect information about the subject and primary data when performing interviews (Christensen et al., 2016). Qualitative data has been used in this research to define words, pictures and theory or theory hypothesis. With the qualitative data, there is no need for a predetermined structure. A personal interview was chosen because of its advantages, where the interviewer has control over the situation, complicated questions can be asked, the material can be shown, supplementary questions can be added, and unclearness can be clarified (Christensen et al., 2016). The respondents consist of employees within the selected companies. These two methods have been chosen to diminish sources of error (Christensen et al., 2010). The meaning of qualitative data is to get more profound answers than answers obtained through quantitative data (Holme & Solvang, 1997).

The reason for choosing Qualitative data instead of quantitative data has been to create a deeper understanding of the subject. With Qualitative data, we can collect data that describes phenomena rather than measure them. Furthermore, you can also receive opinions, views and
impressions around the subject, which are considered attractive to investigate (Christensen et al., 2016). Qualitative data was chosen to get varied responses from the respondent and interviews were performed in this study. Whilst with quantitative data, it is not possible with surveys because, in this study, it would not be engaging with yes or no answers but rather a more profound and detailed explanation of SMEs perception and their view of SEO.

Quantitative data mainly consists of figures, which aids to draw the general basis that is gathered. In this study, we have been interested in the background behind SMEs' perception of SEO. Because of this, qualitative data have been chosen rather than quantitative data in this study. With qualitative data, more profound research about the subject can contribute to a deeper and better understanding. Through that, we can then create conclusions about the statistical facts. Because we have used qualitative data, this means that the interview questions are structured and not alternative questions in this study (Christensen et al., 2016).

In this thesis, a semi-structured interview has been implemented, which means it already has a theme to start with, also called an “interview guide”. The questions for the interview are based on information gathered from the literature, and to get the knowledge and purpose of this study, they shall be answered (Bryman & Bell, 2017). A semi-structured interview has an open question, which contributes to the respondent being able to express themselves with their own words. After an open question, it usually follows a supplementary question that contributes to helpful information from the respondent and diminishes misinterpretation (Christensen et al., 2016). Furthermore, the supplementary question allows a researcher to go “of script” (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

As mentioned above, an interview guide was used. The interview guide has been based on the topic that has been interesting in investigating. The interview guide has thus served as support for us to ask the right questions and get answers. During the interview, predetermined questions were asked and based on answers from the respondents; we came up with follow-up questions. It was challenging in various ways since some of the informants were brief in their answers, which meant that we had to ask more follow-up questions to make the interview come alive to get answers to our questions.
Below you can see how the Interview questions are based:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1-3      | *Introduction*  
Information About the company |
| 4-8      | *Marketing*  
What marketing tools the companies use |
| 9-11     | *SEO*  
How the companies perceive SEO |
| 14-15    | *SMEs*  
Do they want to expand, and how they look at their current situation |
| 16-18    | *Obstacles and opportunities*  
Plans for the company |

### 3.2 Type of research

This section will describe what type of study that has been used to answer the purpose of the study. Since the purpose is based on how SMEs perceive SEO, the descriptive purpose is most appropriate because it answers questions and is often based on “how” questions, such as how the usages of SEO look within SMEs (Christensen et al., 2016). It has been decided that this research has a descriptive purpose because of the lack of knowledge on how SMEs perceive SEO.

The reason for not choosing an explanatory purpose is because the phenomenon is unknown. Furthermore in this study, it is not interested in causation. The explanatory purpose means that the researcher wants to explain the phenomenon that he already knows about (Christensen et al., 2016).
3.3 Population and Sample

This section will explain which population has been used in the study and which samples have been made to get the best answers to be able to answer the purpose of the essay.

In Sweden, SMEs cover 99,99 percent of the market (Persson, 2021), it is impossible to interview them all. However, it is possible to take a sample of them and thus draw conclusions. Therefore, this study has chosen to delimit five SMEs and draw conclusions about them depending on the respondents' stories. How SMEs were selected is based on the type of selection we have made. If the researcher uses qualitative data, a strategic selection is the best alternative. Qualitative data is used that is interviews, this has been most suitable for this thesis. Within strategic selection, there are different parts, and it has chosen the strategy non-randomly (qualitative) because it has been determined that the respondent has insight and knowledge of the subject (Christensen et al., 2016). This thesis focuses on SMEs' perception of SEO and views on it, and non-random selection has been most appropriate for this study. It has not been chosen to focus on a specific industry because that is partly not the purpose of the thesis and partly that it is SMEs that we have been interested in.

Based on this, we contacted various SMEs around Sweden who have come to our attention in various ways. Many of the contacted companies did not respond to the request, and many chose to decline. However, in the end, five companies chose to do an interview, which also resulted in the five informants we interviewed for our essay. It should be said that some of our interviews have taken place while others have taken place digitally. Partly because of the covid-19 pandemic and partly because the respondents were in other cities and the time did not suit either the respondent or us. This has been challenging for us to deal with because it is not the same thing to interview a person in real life then do it digitally because you can not interact with the respondent the same way.

In the study, we performed ethical considerations to protect our informants. The first is the information requirement, which assumes that the respondents are informed about the purpose and study process. We did this by informing the informants before they were interviewed. The second ethical aspect is the consent requirement, which means that the informants' Participation must be entirely voluntary and interrupted when they no longer want to
participate (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The informants were informed about this before the interview and during the interview. The third aspect is called the anonymity requirement, which assumes that all interviews and transcripts are stored securely and that the informants are protected by having fictitious names in the essay. We have protected them by naming them informants, such as IP1, where IP stands for an interviewed person. The fourth aspect is about the use requirement, i.e. that the material is only used for the purpose of the study, which we also did. The fifth is called false predictions, i.e. that the informants have received correct information throughout the process (Bryman & Bell, 2017).

Five interviews were performed from different SMEs; below, you can see what companies have been interviewed:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Interview code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B2C, Building Permit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CEO, Building permit</td>
<td>IP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2B, B2C, Tile Company</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Owner, CEO</td>
<td>IP2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2C, Café</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Owner, CEO</td>
<td>IP3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2C, Italian Restaurant</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Part-Owner, CEO</td>
<td>IP4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2B, B2C, Alcohol Libertad Champagne</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Owner, CEO</td>
<td>IP5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Instruments to collect the data

The following sections will describe the tools that have been used to collect our data. Interviews were used to collect our data; coding as an analysis tool has been most appropriate. In this thesis, coding is used to analyse the basis of the interviews. There is a general way to categorise data as a teacher or student has obtained in the research context. This is called coding, which researchers use to categorise their interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). The definition coding is that the researcher puts together one or several keywords from the interview because they later identify what they want to say. There are several codings that researchers use to get the material they want. In this thesis, open and focused coding is used to gather the material. The definition of open coding is to break down,
examine, compare and categorise the material (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Practically this means in this thesis, the material is thoroughly and well-read through from the five different representatives from SMEs line by line and then notes the comments that summarise different parts of the interviews stories. The purpose of this type of coding is that we want to be as open and curious as possible so we do not miss out on relevant facts in the data that Ahrne & Svensson (2016) describes. They mean that the researcher will initially not think so much about the whole material, even though they are familiar with theories and previous research. However, after a while, when the researcher or student has read through the material that he or she has at his or her disposal, he or she begins to use an increasingly limited vocabulary concerning things being repeated in the interviewees' stories. Which in turn, results in the researcher or student being able to set the same coding for the stories that are the same from the different informants; in connection with this, a pattern begins to emerge, which makes it possible for us to categorise these into different themes, so-called focused coding. In this study, the researcher has put together the found patterns made from the analysed material and created different themes (Ahrne & Svensson 2016). This study has transcribed all the material from the informants and then has gone through its stories. Based on the informant’s stories, and have coded different key concepts and then put them together from the different informants. When we did that way, different themes began to take shape, which also led us to arrive at three different themes that are presented in the empirical part.

### 3.5 Validity, Reliability, Credibility and Generalization

This section of the method will account for the study's strengths and weaknesses, and credibility. People often talk about validity, reliability, credibility and generalisation. When it comes to validity, it is all about the study’s validity. In other words, validity means whether the researcher or student is examining what he or she intends to study (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). The study is interested in SMEs perception of SEO, which we also examined, and in order to best answer the purpose of the study, it has been chosen to conduct interviews. What is worth pointing out is that the definition of small and medium enterprises are unclear. Some define small and medium-sized enterprises from 10 employees upwards (European Commission, 2013). As a starting point in our study, the source we used is the Swedish
Agency for Economic and Regional Growth, where they define small and large companies between 0-249 employees (Persson, 2021). This is exactly what we have assumed, i.e. that the definition for small and medium enterprises is between 0-249 (Persson, 2021).

This leads us to the second concept, which is reliability. Reliability means that the researcher or student can reproduce the results that emerge at another time or date with the interview guide used to interview the informants (Ahrne & Svensson 2015). Reliability is an essential part of a study because it is a way to question the credibility of a study. The study used an interview guide based on the subject area, i.e. questions that will address SMEs perception of SEO. This in itself strengthens the credibility of the essay because if another student were to use the same interview guide, they would most likely come to the same conclusions as our study.

Furthermore, there is much talk about credibility in a study in scientific contexts. This means that those who take part in a scientific study must trust the study (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). There are different ways for researchers to strengthen the credibility of their research. Transparency means that a good study can be discussed and criticised. Research that is impossible to criticise is usually one that has not given sufficient account of the research process, making it difficult for discussion and criticism. One way for the researcher to avoid this is to accurately explain the research process to make it easier for the reader to understand how the student has thought about their choices throughout the essay (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). In our essay, we have been transparent because we have, during the research process, accounted for our choice of method, theory, empirical material and more to guide the reader and thus create a common thread throughout the essay. Along with credibility, another concept has been used a lot in a scientific context, and that is generalisation. This means that the researcher should say something about a larger population than those that the researcher has examined (Ahrne & Svensson, 2015). When it comes to our study, we have aimed to conclude a larger population. Whilst it is that based on our five informants, it is difficult to conclude all SMEs in Sweden, based on five informants. Therefore, our conclusions are based on the five informants interviewed in the study. What can be done is to have interesting and critical discussions about all SMEs in Sweden based on our conclusions. However, it is not possible to generalise all SMEs, i.e. it is not possible to say that the results in our study
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say anything about all SMEs' perceptions in Sweden. This is because only five companies were allowed to take part in our study. However, this does not mean that the conclusions in our study are meaningless, but rather the opposite, as the discussions that emerge from the results open up for further in-depth study of the subject.
4. EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1 Lack of competence and knowledge

IP2 describes that he knows what type of marketing strategy SEO is. However, IP2 is honest in acknowledging that they do not understand what function it fulfils. IP2 also admits that he does not understand what SEO stands for. Based on the little knowledge IP2 has about SEO, he thinks it is good that SEO is a good marketing tool but not for IP2 because he does not use it for advertising his company IP2. Furthermore, IP2 says that the biggest reason why he does not use SEO to advertise his company is that he does not have a website that customers can visit. The company has previously used a website, but it is shut down. Partly because it no longer fulfils any function and the company is already known and popular among the local population, according to IP2.

Furthermore, IP2 said that the company does not plan to use SEO as a marketing tool in the future. IP2’s goal with the company is to expand within the next few years. However, IP2 does not believe that SEO as a marketing strategy can help their company to expand. Instead, IP2 believes that other factors play a role for his particular company to expand there, among other things, by hiring more people or other types of marketing strategies (IP2).

Another informant interviewed in the study shows to have the same views as IP2. IP3 said that he knows what type of marketing strategy SEO is as IP2. IP3 also describes that he has heard about SEO but is not familiar with its works (IP3). He said that he has heard about the marketing method; however, not that familiar with how it works. IP3 said that is also one of the reasons why the company does not use SEO. Partly because his company is too small to consider using it and partly because he does not understand its function, that is, what it can produce for results for his company (IP3). Furthermore, the informant says that there are no plans for the company to use SEO as a marketing strategy because he has no plans to expand his company and because he is satisfied with the company as it is now.

IP1 was interviewed for the essay, and his company uses SEO as a marketing tool but does not know the content and strategy it is aimed at. IP1 describes that SEO is not something that
he understands or fully understands what it is about. He uses SEO as a marketing tool because the supplier who created his website recommended that the company should use SEO to reach a broader target group (IP1). The informant says when he created the website they were also recommended to use SEO, which he has also started to do, according to the informant.

Furthermore, IP1 talked about how the company does not find it relevant to educate its staff, for example, in SEO or other ways to grow. IP1 believes that if they find the marketing method relevant and think that it can benefit the company, it is more cost-effective to buy the service if SEO, for example, helps the company grow and reach larger target groups, it is more cost-effective to buy the service from a supplier (IP1). According to the IP1, it is not a question of educating their staff to make the company grow, but rather it is about what priorities the company makes based on what resources the company has (IP1).

SEO as a marketing strategy is not only complex for the above informants that have been interviewed. IP5’s view of SEO as a marketing strategy, is also that it is complex. IP5 describes that SEO is very cumbersome and messy and that it is challenging to understand what it means. Due to this, IP5 said that there are many different types of SEO on the market, and many companies that use it as a marketing tool are deceived and confused by it (IP5).

4.2 Why change something when it already works

IP2 describes that he has had his company for over 23 years and has no experience changing marketing strategy to reach a larger target group. Due to the company’s establishment, he has used many business cards and pens with the company logo printed on (IP2). He finds this necessary to attract customers to the company (IP2). With this type of marketing strategy, IP2 experiences that he reaches out to several different target groups such as private and turnkey contracts. Furthermore, IP2 describes why his marketing strategy works because he reaches the right target group and because the company has been around for a long time. This means that the local population is already aware of the company and are in no need of changing marketing strategies IP2. Beyond this, IP2 described that the company already has a lot to do
and that there is neither time nor need to use other marketing methods, including SEO. The informant has no feeling that SEO would make any changes for the company because they are popular and highly recommended among the local population (IP2). Furthermore, IP2 said that the company has plans to continue in the same way as they have done during the years that the company has been active. They choose to work in the same way as they have done during these 23 years and use similar marketing strategies as the company is established and has a stable market share (IP2).

IP3 also describes that their company does not find any need to change its marketing strategy as IP2. IP3 describes that the way the company advertises itself is the best alternative. The informant said that much of their marketing methods today are about Word of mouth (IP3). They are popular in the city and are recommended and presented to new clients (IP3). In other words, the informant believes that the company is already established, and the marketing takes place using the so-called word of mouth method (IP3). According to IP3, the key to the company's success is that they are appreciated by the customers who visit them and recommend them to relatives and acquaintances.

Furthermore, IP3 describes during the interview that word of mouth is an important part of the company's marketing strategy. However, it is not only the marketing strategy that the company uses to reach its current and future customers (IP3). The informant describes that in addition to the word of mouth model, they focus on social media. They use Facebook, which is an essential platform for them at the same time as they also advertise themselves on Instagram, where younger target groups are active (IP3)

Beyond social media, IP3 said they also have a website. IP3 describes that with the help of these marketing strategies, they have established themselves well among the population. The company has no plans to change its marketing strategies. Because the marketing methods they use work today perfectly for them (IP3). Due to this, the company has not encountered any significant concerns that have forced them to change its marketing strategies. The only obstacle they encountered is the current pandemic, resulting in a decrease in the number of customers. Otherwise, the company has not felt any consequences from its marketing methods that they use today (IP3). IP3 said that based on what he described above, the
company does not need to use SEO. Because the business is excellent without the usages of SEO (IP3). However, IP3 describes that there are undoubtedly significant advantages to using SEO as a marketing strategy but, IP3 does not see SEO as a benefit in his company. Because the company works as it should, and the informant is satisfied with the results (IP3).

IP4 was interviewed for this study and had a similar attitude to the above informants. IP4 describes that they currently use a lot of social media to promote themselves. They use social media such as Facebook, Instagram to reach their customers (IP4). Furthermore, IP4 said that the company that operates is a small village and that the restaurant is quite popular and known by the local population. The company has hardly any competition as they are popular and unique in their way, which results in them not finding a need to use other marketing strategies (IP4). The informant describes that they do not currently use SEO because they do not have time for it and are satisfied with their marketing strategies by using social media (IP4).

**4.3 To see opportunities when others see obstacles**

IP1 describes that the company has an optimistic approach to SEO as marketing strategies. Because it is easier when potential customers with just a word or click can find their way to them and their website. The informant describes that SEO is a good way for small business owners because they are usually at the last pages in Google search, among others in the same industry. For example, if a potential customer searches on Google for companies in that industry, they would probably be on the sixth and seventh pages on Google. However, With the usage of SEO as a marketing tool, small business owners like them can end up on the first pages of Google search, and it is also easier for them to attract new potential customers (IP1). Therefore, SEO is an excellent tool for small business owners to reach out to larger customers, according to IP1.

Furthermore, IP1 describes that the company does use SEO as a marketing tool even if they are in an early stage in their company. The informant describes that with the company being relatively new, they will use Social media to grow. They have plans to put more money and resources into the company and grow the business further (IP1). Due to this, the company
finds SEO an essential part of its marketing plan to expand its business. The informant describes a vital advantage of SEO and believes that the tool will play a crucial role in getting the company to expand further (IP1). Because in today's society, customers can search for companies that provide the services they request and the range on the market (IP1). Furthermore, IP1 said that other marketing tools could be used to reach other target groups in other cities. According to IP1, they do not have plans to use other marketing tools than SEO as the company thinks that SEO benefits more opportunity (IP1). The informant describes what the company uses for SEO to grow (IP1).

As IP1, IP5 perceive SEO as an advantage and have a positive attitude towards SEO. The informant describes that the company has hired several different suppliers working precisely to promote her company on Google (IP5). The informant describes that the company has used several different suppliers that provide SEO. Some of them still have agreements with and feel that it is paying off, while the others have suspended cooperation with the other suppliers (IP5). Furthermore, IP5 said that they cooperate with different suppliers who manage the company's marketing and hired a marketing manager to manage the marketing for the company (IP5). The purpose of this has been to see if it produces better returns while getting to know its target group on a deeper level, according to IP5. Due to this, the company does not only use SEO to reach their traditional and new potential customers but also advertise themselves with experiments to understand their target audience better (IP5).

Furthermore, the informant describes that the company has a plan to grow within the next few years, and that is why they are investing heavily in which target group they should target. To do this, they use SEO as a digital marketing tool, and they use other marketing strategies like social media (IP5). However, the informant describes that they see significant benefits from SEO to reach a broader target group and that the company sees a clear advantage of SEO that they will use more of (IP5). Because it is almost obligatory for the company to use SEO because they invest in several different countries, The company has made investments in the Middle East, Central Europe, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, among other countries. According to IP5, the company needs to invest in SEO to be seen in these countries and reach out to larger target groups, and thus, the business will grow. The company is currently investing approximately SEK 60,000 a month in SEO (IP5).
IP4 sees SEO as an opportunity even though the company does not currently use the digital marketing tool. The company has a positive attitude towards SEO and aims to use it in the future. The reason for not using SEO is partly because they have a broad target group and because they have used a lot of social media but, the company plans to expand to a chain company and to do that, they want to use SEO (IP4)
5. ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL DATA

In this section of the thesis, an analysis of the empirical material will be performed based on previous research and the theoretical frame of reference.

5.1 Lack of competence and knowledge

The first theme shows that the informants in this thesis have had some kind of knowledge about SEO. The companies that have been interviewed have heard about SEO as a digital marketing tool but do not understand what it is all about. It is also something that Barry and Charleton highlight in their study about small and medium enterprises in Ireland. According to Barry and Charleton (2009), SEM is good to use with keyword development of the website and that several SMEs in Ireland have positive thoughts about SEO. SMEs in Ireland put resources and time on SEM for the Future. The study chose that the majority of SMEs in Ireland use SEO or Paid Search. The most considerable majority lack the knowledge to measure SEM effectiveness (Barry & Charleton, 2009). The view of SEO that the informants have is similar to views on SEO in Barry and Charleton (2009); the informants in this study have a positive attitude towards SEO. However, the informants lack knowledge of what SEO is and what function it fulfils. An example of this is IP2 who describes that they know what type of marketing strategy SEO is. However, IP2 is honest in acknowledging that they do not understand what function it fulfils. IP2 also admits that he does not understand what SEO stands for. Based on the little knowledge IP2 has about SEO, he thinks it is good that SEO is a good marketing tool (IP2).

Boag 2012 also shows in his study that many SMEs who have a website have a sceptical view of SEO. They perceive it as follows: “Most website owners perceive SEO as a dark art, shrouded in mystery”. A reason for this is that many companies find it unnecessary due to a lack of knowledge (Boag, 2012). As Barry och Charleton (2009) and Boag (2012) describe in their study, the SEO concept is not easy to understand. Beyond this, it is not the only IP2 that sees SEO as a complex marketing tool, but most informants interviewed in the study.

Due to this, IP3 has heard about SEO but lacks knowledge of what SEO contributes. He describes that he knows what type of marketing strategies SEO is as IP2. IP3 also describes
That he has heard about SEO but is not familiar with its works (IP3). In the same way as IP2, IP3 does not know about SEO and its function. SEO as a marketing model has somehow come to their knowledge but not how it works in terms of content.

As IP2 and IP3 experienced, SEO is a complex system that is difficult to use. Similar to Boag (2012) study, many SMEs who have a website have a sceptical view of SEO. A reason for this is that many companies find it unnecessary due to a lack of knowledge (Boag, 2012). IP2 and IP3 are on the same road that they have heard about what SEO is generally about but not in detail. This can be interpreted in different ways as SMEs do not want to develop their business by taking advantage of SEO’s benefits. Hence, SMEs do not have the resources or knowledge to invest in SEO. Boag (2012) mentioned that it is easier for large companies to use SEO compared to SMEs. SMEs might not have the money or time to invest in SEO, such as hiring more employees and great consultants and making an investment in content and web design (Boag, 2012). However, IP2 and IP3 are not alone in thinking that SEO is challenging to understand.

An additional informant that we interviewed, namely IP1, gave the same picture as the informants above. He describes that he does not know what the content and the strategy is aimed at. IP1 describes that SEO is not something that he understands or fully understands what it is. He uses SEO as a marketing tool because the supplier who created his website recommended using SEO to reach a broader target group (IP3). The informants have heard good things about SEO but lack expertise in how it works. Informant 5 also describes the same things as the informants described above. She describes SEO as a very complex marketing tool. IP5 describes that SEO as cumbersome and messy, and challenging to understand what it means. Due to this, IP5 said that there are many different types of SEO on the market, and many companies that use it as a marketing tool are deceived and confused by it (IP5). Although IP5 uses SEO as a marketing tool, she finds it complicated, and therefore she uses an advertising agency that helps her with SEO.

Compared to the companies above, IP5 has hired an agency that helps her with SEO. Unlike the other small businesses, IP5 is a medium-sized company that requires more resources in terms of budget to invest in SEO. Boag (2012) describes that large companies have more
resources to invest in SEO than SMEs because they have money to invest in agencies that can handle SEO for them (Boag, 2012). Gabbert (2010) Like our previous research conducted by Barry and Charleton in (2009); this thesis shows that most informants also find SEO a complex marketing strategy. Informants perceptions are equal; SMEs have a hard time understanding how SEO works. However, what sets them apart is that small business owners do not have the right resources as a means, and large companies hire marketing agencies who can handle the marketing for them and take advantage of SEO even if it is difficult for them to understand. SEO cost Depends on what companies need help with; many companies do not have the competence or time, and resources to hire an agency (Invise, 2015).

In this thesis, the majority of interviewed companies do not use SEO as they do not understand the idea, while the two other companies use SEO as a marketing strategy. However, what the informants have in common is that everyone agrees that SEO is a complex marketing model. The consequence of SEO results is that the companies miss out on an excellent strategy to reach a larger target group because SEO has several benefits for SMEs to advertise themselves (Digital Agency, 2020).

Although IP5 uses SEO as marketing, she finds it complicated and therefore, she uses an advertising agency that helps her with SEO. Similar to our previous research conducted by Barry and Charleton in (2009), our thesis shows that most informants also find SEO as a complex marketing model. Some do not use SEO as they do not understand the idea, while others use SEO as a marketing strategy. However, what the informants have in common is that everyone agrees that SEO is a complex marketing model. The consequence of the informants' lack of knowledge about SEO can result in them missing out on an excellent position to reach a larger target group because SEO has several benefits for small business owners to advertise themselves. The great advantage of SEO is that Companies do not pay for activities and movements in the same way that consumers do when using paid marketing channels such as PPC- marketing with google ad word. This way, the total expense is reduced when advertising with SEO instead of advertising with other marketing tools. This is a definite way to maximise business efforts. SEO will give results, and as soon as companies begin with SEO efforts, traffic will increase at a steady pace. Using tools to track how many
visitors the page gets, companies can see when more people visit their website, and sales will be higher than before (Digital Agency, 2020).

### 5.2 Why change something when it already works

In the second theme, this study shows that some of the interviewed informants do not find SEO necessary. The informants are satisfied with the marketing strategy they use today. IP2 describes that he has had his company for over 23 years and has no experience changing marketing strategy to reach a larger target group. Due to the company’s establishment, he has used many business cards and pens with the company logo printed on (IP2). He finds this necessary to attract customers to the company (IP2). As Murphy's and Kielgast (2008), studied in previous research, the informant does not find SEO relevant as the company relies on its brand; they have good judgment locally. Murphy and Kielgast (2008), describe that most informants in the study had a critical attitude towards SEO; they meant that SEO was not relevant. The thing that mattered for the small and medium hotels was the local population. Because they are popular and well-known among the local population and therefore did not feel the need for SEO (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008).

Even if studies show that SEO is a great marketing tool, some companies still have a negative attitude towards SEO. (Barry & Charleton, 2009). Many enterprises put much effort into their SEO and are aiming to reach a higher ranking in the SERPs, including companies in Ireland. They have noticed the importance of SEO and its benefits (Barry & Charleton, 2009). However, some companies still have a terrible attitude towards SEO and do not find it necessary despite all the benefits of this marketing tool (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). There are 1,2 million companies in Sweden where SMEs make up 99,99 percent of them; only 44 percent in Sweden claim that they use SEO in their marketing strategy (WSA, 2018).

What this depends on is unclear, but one explanation (Gabbert, 2019) is that most Swedish companies consist of SMEs and do not have enough capacity and resources to use SEO. SMEs might not have the money or time to invest even more in their SEO, such as hiring more employees and great consultants and making an investment in content and web design. This could also be because Google favours some brands over others due to their sizes and the
user behaviour data that shows what pages people prefer to click on (Gabbert, 2019). The informants above describe that their companies marketing strategies that they use today is enough. The company is dependent on the Word of mouth method and the form of marketing they are using in the current situation. The company relies heavily on its brand and quality among the population and less on other types of marketing methods, including SEO.

IP3, who was interviewed, also shows a pessimistic attitude to SEO. As the company already has sound judgment and lives on its brand among the local population, they believe that there is no need for SEO to market themselves. The company finds SEO meaningless as it goes well for the company through today’s marketing strategy. IP3 describes that their company does not need to change its marketing strategy because it advertises itself works. The informant said that much of their marketing methods today are about Word of mouth (IP3). They are popular in the city and are recommended and presented to new clients (IP3). According to the IP3, the key to the company's success is that they are appreciated by the customers who visit them and recommend them to relatives and acquaintances. Like IP2, IP3 perceives SEO negatively, something that Murphy and Kielgast (2008) also describe; some companies still have a negative attitude towards SEO and do not find it necessary despite all the benefits of a marketing tool (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). As the company is popular with the local population, they find no need to invest in SEO because they do not really see what SEO could contribute when they are already established.

IP4 also gives the same picture; they are already popular with the local population, which is enough. The informant describes that they currently use a lot of social media to promote themselves. They use social media such as Facebook, Instagram to reach their customers (IP4). Furthermore, IP4 said that the company that operates is a small village and that the restaurant is quite popular and known by the local population. The company has hardly any competition as they are popular and unique in their way, which results in them not finding a need to use other marketing strategies (IP4). The informant describes that they do not currently use SEO because they do not have time for it and are satisfied with their marketing strategies to use social media (IP4).
According to Gabbert (2019), SMEs might not have the money or time to invest in SEO, such as hiring more employees and consultants and investing in content and web design. Similarly, IP3 says that The marketing that the company uses today works excellently. There is no need for SEO because they use social media to reach out to their customers. At the same time, the informant says that the company does not have time to invest in resources in SEO.

The informants who were relevant in the Murphy and Kielgast study were the informants from small hotel operations meant that SEO was not relevant for them. The thing that mattered for the small and medium hotels was the local population Because they are popular and well-known among the local population and therefore did not feel the need for SEO (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). In the same way, the informants in this thesis describe that they are already popular with the local population, which means that many recommend them to others who have not visited their business. Some informants have a negative attitude towards SEO partly because the company is already established, and because they cannot see what benefits SEO would bring to them.

5.3 To see opportunities when others see obstacles

When it comes to the third theme, some informants have a positive attitude towards SEO. Unlike our other informants, they see SEO as an opportunity to grow and reach out to existing and potential customers. For example, IP1 describes that the company has an optimistic approach to SEO as marketing strategies Because it is easier when potential customers with just a word or click can find their way to them and their website. The informant describes that SEO is a good way for small business owners like them because they are usually at the last pages in Google search, among others in the same industry. For example, if a potential customer searches on Google for companies in that industry, they would probably be on the sixth or seventh page on Google. However, With the usage of SEO as a marketing tool, small business owners like them can end up on the first pages of Google search, and it is also easier for them to attract new potential customers (IP1). Therefore, SEO is an excellent tool for small business owners who want to reach out to more customers (IP1). As in Barry’s and Charleton’s (2009) study, the informants have a positive attitude towards SEO. They also describe that one of the top SEO goals as a marketing tool is to give small
and medium enterprises a chance to be visible. That is why the results in the study show that one of the top goals of the companies is to be on the top of the first page of the SERP. Furthermore, the study shows that even if the companies right now lack comprehensive tools to see if SEO is effective, SMEs seem to have a vision for SEO. They see SEO as an effective marketing tool to reach a bigger audience (Barry & Charleton, 2009). This shows that IP1 had a similar view as the informants in Ireland had about the usage of SEO, in order to be able to reach a broader target group.

Beyond IP1, in this study, IP5 is also optimistic about using SEO as a marketing strategy. IP5 describes SEO as an advantage and has a positive attitude towards SEO. The company has hired several different suppliers to promote her company on Google and have several different suppliers that provide SEO (IP5). IP5 has agreements with and feels that it is paying off while the others have suspended cooperation with the other suppliers working on SEO (IP5). As SMEs that Barry and Charleton interviewed for their study, our informant has a positive attitude towards SEO. Barry and Charleton (2009) describe that even though it is currently impossible to measure how effective SEO is, SMEs still have an optimistic attitude to SEO. Despite this, many entrepreneurs choose to invest in SEO when ending up at the top of the list to be visible (Barry & Charleton, 2009). In the same way, IP5 describes that they are currently investing SEK 60,000 in their marketing plan to advertise the company. The informant also describes that since the company aims to reach a larger target group, it is essential to use SEO (IP5) because it has made significant investments in several different continents. The company has made investments in the Middle East, Central Europe, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, among other countries. According to IP5, the company needs to invest in SEO in these countries and reach out to larger target groups and thus, the business will grow. As the company aims to be visible, marketing becomes increasingly important as the competition is too intense. Therefore, marketing models like SEO become vital as it enables them to create awareness in the countries listed above. With SEO help, entrepreneurs can ensure that they are visible when potential customers need their service (Barry & Cherleton 2009).

Another informant who has an optimistic attitude to SEO is IP4. The informant describes that the company currently does not use SEO to advertise their company but has plans to do it in
future as they see great benefits with SEO. The informant states that they see SEO as an opportunity even though they do not use it at the moment (IP4). The reason for not using SEO is because they have a broad target group and because they have used a lot of social media, but the company plans to expand to a chain company and to do that, they want to use SEO (IP4). In the same way, as it appears in Barry and Charlton (2008), where many small businesses have big plans to invest resources in SEO, the informant in our study also has as their aim to expand (IP4).
6. CONCLUSION

In this section, the study results are linked to the purpose of the study to discuss whether it has been answered or not.

The study aimed to map SEO as a marketing strategy and its significance for small and medium-sized enterprises in Sweden. At the same time, the dissertation has had the task of mapping how small and medium-sized enterprises in Sweden perceive SEO and their attitude to it. The results of our study show a twofold view of SEO as a marketing strategy; some find it essential while others find it irrelevant. The informants who have a positive attitude to it see SEO as an opportunity to market themselves more effectively than they have done before. The positive companies about SEO use it in their marketing plan even if they find the model complicated. Some of them have subcontractors who handle their marketing, and that includes SEO. They have big plans to invest additional resources in SEO to reach a broader target group in the same way as the small businesses in Ireland, as Barry and Cherleton (2009) reported. The study also shows that many small and medium enterprises in Ireland have big plans in the future to pay and spend more money and resources on SEO (Barry & Cherleton, 2009). Barry & Cherleton (2009), describes that one of the top goals of SEO as a marketing tool is to give small and medium enterprises a chance to be visible. The study shows that if companies want to expand, they should be on the top of the first page of the SERP (Barry & Cherleton, 2009).

The thesis shows that some informants experience SEO as a complex system that they do not want to be associated with. They experience that SEO is not easy to understand what it fills for function. However, what is exciting and emerges in the study is that most informants who find the system complicated still believe that there may be a benefit. Although they find SEO a complex marketing model, they believe that there are benefits to the system. This is interesting because Barry and Charleton’s (2009) dissertation shed light on the same thing. Like our informants in Sweden, small companies in Ireland find the system complex. According to Barry and Charleton (2009), SEM is good to use with keyword development of the website and that several SMEs in Ireland have positive thoughts about SEO. SMEs Ireland put resources and time on SEM for the Future. The study chose that the majority of
SME in Ireland uses SEO or Paid Search. The broadest majority lack knowledge to measure SEM effectiveness.

Furthermore, the thesis shows that some informants do not see SEO as a necessary marketing method. The informants describe that they have a hard time believing what SEO as a model can produce for their particular business. They do not experience a need for SEO to reach out to existing or potential customers. The informants use traditional marketing channels to reach their target group, which they think they do. In this way, they rely on their marketing program and find no need for SEO in the same way as Murphy and Kielgast (2008) describe in their study. The majority of them had a negative perspective towards SEO (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008). They meant that SEO was not relevant. The thing that mattered for the small and medium hotels was the local population. Because they are popular and well-known among the local population and therefore did not feel the need for SEO (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008).

The informants' views are relevant and can be interpreted in different ways. It is possible that these businesses do not find any need for SEO because they are already famous and talked about by the local population. Another interpretation may be that these businesses that do not find SEO relevant may have difficulty understanding the strategy. Whatever the reason, SEO is an opportunity that these businesses miss whether they want to or not. Since SEO will give companies results, and as soon as they start SEO efforts, traffic will increase steadily. Using tools to track how many visitors companies' web pages have and seeing when more people are visiting companies' sites, and sales will be higher than before (Chadhury, 2017).

When connecting the conclusion to the problem picture, the digital market is becoming more dominant for companies. Studies show that various individuals are switching to online shopping (Linzbach et al., 2019). This means significant changes for companies to advertise themselves online and to compete to get customers. For companies to be ahead of the competition, an advantage is through SEO so that potential customers can find companies' websites (Barry & Charleton, 2009). However, in the problem picture, it is raised that many companies still do not use SEO.
There are still some companies that do not use SEO. Companies can implicate significant consequences that still choose not to use SEO as a marketing strategy, despite the benefits it contributes to (Murphy & Kielgast, 2008).

Many SMEs in Sweden do not believe in SEO as a marketing strategy that is challenging to generalise. However, in this study, the informants gave a hum about why they do not use SEO. The first reason is that SEO is complicated for them to use or have the resources to pay an agency to handle them. Due to this, many informants are small business owners and do not have the ambition to grow. They seem to be happy how the company is right to know to have sound judgment among the local population. However, some of the informants aim to grow, and there is a clear difference and show an increasingly positive attitude towards SEO even if they do not understand how SEO works. The conclusions drawn in this study's problem picture are that there is a problem: out of five SMEs, three of the informants do not use SEO. They partly do not understand the model and partly because they are satisfied with how they advertise today. It is a pity that SMEs do not use SEO because it is an important marketing tool that they miss out on. Hence, large companies today have been small companies and have benefited from SEO and grown enormously. An example of this is Zalando, which started small and developed into one of Europe's most extensive clothing sites using SEO. The company is often ranked in the top five websites for clothing brands. The company has over seven million SEO visits every month (Bieth, 2019).

6.1 Future Research
Based on the conclusions of our study, it is interesting to do a deep dive into the subject. The subject is an unexplored area, and there is much more to study. An interesting direction is to conduct a quantitative survey of SMEs' perception of SEO and their usage of SEO. Partly to find out more underlying reasons for SMEs' pessimistic attitude towards SEO in Sweden and partly to find out how SMEs have such a sceptical attitude towards SEO. In addition, with the help of quantitative research, it will be easier to draw conclusions about a larger population and conduct interesting and critical discussions.
1. Appendices of Interview Questions

Background
1.) Which company do you represent?
   a.) following question, What is your position in the company?
   b.) How long have you worked in your position?
2.) Where is the company located?
3.) How many employees does the company have?

Marketing
4.) What marketing tools do the company use?
5.) Which target group do you want to reach out to?
6.) Have you reached your target group by using your marketing tool?
7.) Has the company evaluated the marketing strategy?
   a.) If the answer is Yes, has it given the results of the new marketing strategy?
   b.) If the answer is NO, What is the reason for not changing the marketing strategy
8.) What obstacles have the company encountered with the marketing strategy you're using?

Search engine optimization
9.) Do you know about the digital marketing tool Search engine optimization?
10.) How do you perceive SEO?
11.) Does the company use SEO?
   a.) If YES, Can you explain how you work with SEO?
   b.) If NO, why have you not tried using SEO?
   c.) Does the company use another Digital Marketing tool?
   d.) Has the company thought about using SEO in the future?

SMEs
14.) Does the company have any goals to expand?
15.) Do you think the company's size matters to achieve innovations?
   a.) If Yes, is the company to add resources on innovations (educate staff members, find new knowledge etc.)?
   b.) If NO, is it budget related?

Obstacles and opportunities
16.) Do you think it is an advantage of using SEO compared to other marketing tools?
17.) How are your company's marketing strategy plans for the future?
18.) Do you think SEO is important to reach out to a bigger target group and to expand as a company?
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