



**THE SUPPORT OF AN ENTREPRENEURIAL COMMUNITY ON SELF-EMPLOYED  
ENTREPRENEURS' INTERNATIONALIZATION**

Lappeenranta–Lahti University of Technology LUT

Bachelor's Programme in Business Administration, Bachelor's thesis

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Sami Sutinen

Examiner: Post-doctoral researcher Anna Vuorio

## ABSTRACT

Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT

LUT School of Business and Management

Business Administration

Sami Sutinen

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This bachelor's thesis is aimed at exploring the phenomenon of how an entrepreneurial community may assist and support in self-employed entrepreneurs' internationalization activities within the community. The purpose of this research is to examine the theoretical concepts of entrepreneurship, internationalization, and entrepreneurial community as well as to coherently combine the theoretical concept of digitalization with each of these subjects. The previous research literature provides academic views on the topics separately, yet this thesis aims to uniquely consider a novel phenomenon which may benefit entrepreneurship in the future. Digital international entrepreneurship operating within a community is an increasing trend which requires more in-depth research.

This is a qualitative research conducted as a content analysis, and the empirical data is collected through interviewing three of the community's entrepreneurs. This entrepreneurial community operates in Finland, and it consists of multiple consultative entrepreneurs from various fields. This community is not yet engaged in international operations.

According to the results, the community's attitudes towards internationalization are open, even though the phenomenon is not yet perceived current. The support of the community is experienced as essential considering the future internationalization activities. Digitalization today creates unlimited opportunities to implement international business aspirations. Through meaningfulness and opportunities, it is possible to transform the concept of internationalization into a norm in everyday activities within the community. Thus, with the comprehensive support from the community, the entrepreneurs manage to build rewarding networks abroad as well as successful international careers in the future.

## TIIVISTELMÄ

Lappeenranta-Lahti University of Technology LUT

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Kauppätieteet

Sami Sutinen

### **Yrittäjämäisen yhteisön tuki itsensä työllistävien yrittäjien kansainvälistymiseen**

Kauppätieteiden kandidaatintyö

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Tämän kandidaatintyön tarkoitus on tutkia, miten yrittäjämäinen yhteisö voi edistää ja tukea itsensä työllistävien yrittäjien kansainvälistymistoimia yhteisön sisällä. Tutkimuksen päämäärä on tarkastella yrittäjyyden, kansainvälistymisen ja yrittäjämäisen yhteisön teoreettisia käsitteitä, sekä yhdistää näihin aiheisiin johdonmukaisesti ja teoreettisesti myös digitalisaatio. Aiempi tutkimuskirjallisuus sisältää akateemisia näkökulmia aiheista erikseen, mutta tämä tutkielma pyrkii käsittelemään ainutlaatuisella tavalla uudenlaista ilmiötä, joka voi hyödyttää yrittäjyyttä tulevaisuudessa. Yhteisön sisällä toimiva digitaalinen kansainvälinen yrittäjyys on kasvava trendi, joka vaatii perusteellisempaa tutkimusta.

Tämä on kvalitatiivinen tutkimus, joka on toteutettu sisällön analyysinä. Empiirinen aineisto on kerätty haastattelemalla kolmea yhteisön yrittäjää. Tämä yrittäjämäinen yhteisö toimii Suomessa ja koostuu useista eri alojen konsultatiivisista yrittäjistä. Yhteisöllä ei ole aikaisempaa kokemusta kansainvälisestä toiminnasta.

Tulosten perusteella yhteisön asenteet kansainvälistymistä kohtaan ovat avoimia, vaikka ilmiötä ei ole koettu vielä ajankohtaiseksi. Yhteisön tuki koetaan välttämättömäksi ajatellen tulevia kansainvälistymistoimia. Digitalisaatio luo nykyään rajattomia mahdollisuuksia toteuttaa kansainvälisiä liiketoimintapyrkimyksiä. Merkityksellisyyden ja mahdollisuuksien kautta kansainvälistymisen käsite voidaan muuttaa yhteisölliseksi normiksi jokapäiväiseen toimintaan. Näin yhteisön kokonaisvaltaisella tuella yrittäjät voivat rakentaa antoisia verkostoja ulkomaille sekä menestyviä kansainvälisiä uria tulevaisuudessa.

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### Appendix 1 Interview questions

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective of this thesis is to explore how an entrepreneurial community could build adequate support and a foundation for self-employed entrepreneurs to expand into the international market. The aim is to help the community to develop the idea of internationalization more approachable for entrepreneurs to expand their businesses in the future. The number of self-employed entrepreneurs working online is constantly growing and with it, entrepreneurial research is becoming increasingly important, as in the future it may be possible for most of a company's development work to be outsourced through entrepreneurs (Blaising, Kotturi, Kulkrani & Dabbish 2021, 1). Already, employee careers no longer consist of sets of steady jobs in traditional large organizations (Blaising et al. 2021, 1) rather there has been a wide-ranging change in self-employed workers in recent years. Increasingly, self-employed entrepreneurs are highly educated as well. This is understandable in its own right, as the sectors, in which entrepreneurs or freelancers work, demand exclusive skills on a project basis in the dynamic, and even international, economy. (Burke & Cowling 2020, 390) This is a ponderable fact and as a result the characteristics and interests of both workers and work today are shifted towards a new kind of multi-client work.

For companies, it is easier to outsource certain processes. That is part of the reason for the emergence of project or task-based contracts (Blaising et al. 2021, 1). This has also created a change where self-employed individual entrepreneurs are now highly educated. Entrepreneurs in general are the first to create innovation, job creation and entrepreneurship. Significant value in changing the roles and qualities of freelancers also comes from an economy where highly skilled self-employed workers create value which is highly categorized. However, it must be remembered that this does not mean all self-employed workers or all companies. (Burke & Cowling 2020, 391) Yet, highly educated employees, who have previously worked in organizations, have begun to work more as freelancers, which has led to employees', or in fact entrepreneurs', careers today becoming less structured and freer but also more difficult to predict than before (Blaising et al. 2021, 2). On the other hand, digitalization and digital platforms have brought customers, for instance, closer to individual entrepreneurs. Therefore, it is not surprising that online entrepreneurship has grown enormously (Blaising et al. 2021, 1).

However, individual self-employed people often operate by themselves and see other players in the same field as competitors. Working as an entrepreneur lacks the sociality, support, and security, for instance, that employees get, or at least should get, in a normal day job (Blaising et al. 2021, 13). There are many different solutions to these problems. The desirable environment around an individual entrepreneur can be both a place and a collective mechanism to facilitate and interpret different social ties, foster entrepreneurship collectively, and make basic resources available to all so that the knowledge and tools needed to meet new business challenges can be turned into innovation (Julien 2007, 116). In this thesis' context this the milieu is defined as a community. According to the definition, a community can be understood as a self-defined group of people who feel that their membership distinguishes them from other members of society, and their continued membership is valued high enough to create restrictions on behavior (Hindle 2010, 608). Every single operator is a self-employed entrepreneur, and they are able to work together to solve business and societal problems. Other entrepreneurs are perceived as support and help when there are tasks that cannot be completed alone, for example.

All of this will eventually lead to the construction of internationalization. Activities that have not yet been concretely carried out with the help of this particular community need to be scrutinized in advance. An internal motivation must be found to enter the external market. Finding and exploiting new opportunities for entrepreneurship internationally can also bring novel competitive advantages (McDougall & Oviatt 2000, 904). The entrepreneur obtains challenges and lessons to be learned, the community as a whole gains new kinds of resources, and society also benefits more from internationalization than ordinary entrepreneurship, especially if import activity is a critical source of income for a country. Entrepreneurs as producers of economic growth and wealth are also discussed with special attention in the economic literature (Castaño, Méndez & Galindo 2016, 1690). Changes in society internationally also stem from international entrepreneurship. When the entrepreneur is the source of innovation, they are a big part of the change inside the country as well as outside the borders.

## 1.1 Background and key concepts

This chapter explores the background of entrepreneurship and the current state of international business related to the topic. Based on this, central terms for the thesis are clarified to create rational

limitations for doing the research. There are many motives for entrepreneurship, but money or wealth is generally not the main reason to start being an entrepreneur. A person desires to become an entrepreneur regardless of financial reasons (Abreu, One, Brouwer & van Leeuwen 2019, 589). Partly for this reason, entrepreneurs are, in principle, the determining factor in prosperity and the flexibility of society (Cuervo 2005, 293). In other words, the relevance of work takes precedence over prosperity. Meaningfulness is also strongly related to the fact that an entrepreneur finds the inefficiencies of the surrounding, or more distant, societies, and with innovation builds wealth by eliminating those inefficiencies (Cuervo 2005, 297). An entrepreneur benefits from entrepreneurship in many ways, including non-financial practices (Abreu et al. 2019, 589). Furthermore, entrepreneurs can be classified according to their fields as well. Many have drifted to work for themselves, while some are highly educated and have actively and consciously pursued the opportunity. It is probably not surprising that the incomes of the latter are also significantly higher (Burke & Cowling 2020, 391). While working as an entrepreneur, there are various new practical things to be learned. In addition, entrepreneurs are able to create new networks, for example. This thesis takes advantage of this perspective, as the opportunity to internationalize can also be realized through learning. For entrepreneurs, modern times are social and full of opportunities.

Currently, there are clear trends in the international market. Networks are widely utilized in business because they are discussed to be the most important resource for a company or for an entrepreneur (Johannisson 1990, 10). The international pandemic has speeded up the change of internationalization, which, however, began even before the pandemic. Information technology companies are the biggest drivers of internationalization, leaving more traditional companies to focus on localization. (Pisani 2021, 3) When it comes to internationalization, rapid internationalization has been a trend recently, and the state of the research community behind the studies has started to become more stable, providing a basis for observing modern internationalization. A community that operates mostly through remote action would be a good example of creating novel internationalization without excessive physical contact.

Based on these phenomena, it has been possible to build a whole for this thesis. Entrepreneurship, community, and internationalization are clear themes in this thesis, which are brought together by the digital aspect due to it being an important part of every theme in this context. An entrepreneur is defined in this context as a person who acts as a high-skilled freelancer. A previous study has found that being a freelancer is a large part of today's job market (Burke & Cowling 2020, 389).



Companies have also begun to favor gig labor and “just-in-time” labor (Blaising et al. 2021, 1). The entrepreneur in question generally works from home for several clients, usually in project work, pays his taxes, and does not hire any employees (Huđek, Tominc & Širec 2020, 56). The entrepreneur works in the business-to-business market as a provider of various consulting services. Self-employed are practicing a specific profession for themselves despite the risks. (Parker 2004, 6) Thus, when referring to an entrepreneur, a self-employed entrepreneur or a freelance entrepreneur, this thesis always refers to the same entrepreneur as defined above.

When the concept of community is discussed in this thesis, it signifies a specific community of entrepreneurs selling and carrying out the consultation services provided. Social as well as business contacts are essential in today’s global environment (Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 88). The use of networks assists in defeating diverse challenges for example caused by lack of resources (Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 89). Social network and business network are defined as separate concepts. Social network comprises personal ties while business network is a constant exchange in economic activities (Vasilchenko & Morrish 2011, 90). When reversing the network into a community as a concept, it is important to understand that an entrepreneurial community includes factors of both, social and business, networks. An entrepreneurial community encourages to capture new market opportunities and builds personal relationships (Lichtenstein, Lyons & Kutzhanova 2004, 6-7). However, in this thesis context, the community that operates around an entrepreneur consists of several entrepreneurs in different fields. Community action takes place mostly through digital platforms. Digital platforms mainly refer to shared cloud services, messaging services, video calling services, and others that enhance shared communication and operation. The community also has its own office, which enables hybrid work within the community. In addition, the community provides leisure activities to increase learning as well as to ensure spending time together.

Increasingly, it can be demonstrated that the social networks of the individual self-employed entrepreneur are built within a broader societal context. This also means that the social network has an impact on every aspect of the business. (Kwon, Heflin & Ruef 2013, 981) At this stage, however, internationalization means that an entrepreneur would start doing business internationally. Internationalization is usually a process that leads to a solid foothold in a foreign market (Castaño, Méndez & Galindo 2015, 1691). Studies show that connections as well as different relationships are almost inevitable, both at home and abroad, for small and medium-sized businesses that intend to

expand abroad in some way (Rodrigues & Child 2012, 24). So far, only a few of the community's entrepreneurs have lived abroad, yet business has not been conducted internationally. When referring to internationalization in this thesis, it is limited into the opportunity for an entrepreneur to start operating internationally with the support of the community. This person may not gain a permanent foothold in the market but might gain long-term partners from companies operating abroad. In this thesis, the internationalization of an entrepreneur is a combinational definition of multiple, previously defined, concepts. Together they create this more concise concept which determines the internationalization of a single high-skilled entrepreneur by delivering projects to countries abroad.

## 1.2 Research problem and questions

The goal of this thesis is to arouse discussion about internationalization inside as well as to build a foundation for this specific entrepreneurial community to start developing future business activities more international. In addition, the purpose is to evolve the entrepreneurial mindset more international on an entrepreneurial level. An entrepreneur needs to understand the backgrounds and consequences of different actions. Positive business expectations are created by market availability which will lead to tougher competition and better innovation (Castaño et al. 2015, 1690). In other words, tougher competition motivates the entrepreneur to innovate and invest. Indeed, in the service sector, entrepreneurs are more innovative when there is more potential competition (Castaño et al. 2015, 1691). Thus, it can be said that an environment that is excessively easy also reduces the company's or entrepreneur's development opportunities. Hence, it is important to realize that applying to even a slightly more challenging environment creates new opportunities. In addition, the human capital, that entrepreneurs and society have, increases innovation among service sector entrepreneurs (Castaño et al. 2015, 1690).

As mentioned, there are more novel opportunities and potential competition in the international market, compared to the domestic market. Given the important role of business networks internationally, it is relevant to consider the community's assistance to the individual entrepreneur. It would be worthwhile for companies to internationalize precisely through a domestic network, according to network theory, however, in internationalization, networks can be very different (Evers

& Colm 2011, 552). It creates a wide range of opportunities, and no one's experience is the same as some other's when it comes to exploiting networks in internationalization processes.

Personal relationships facilitate and provide a variety of opportunities (Witt 2004, 394). This is partly because the implementation of new projects requires awareness and the pooling of resources. These can be executed by utilizing the network of the company, or in this case of the entrepreneur. (Evers & Colm 2011, 552) When it comes to the issue that networks are critical to international expansion, it is also known that other companies are operating in networks to reach their full potential. In addition, market environments both internationally and domestically are part of building the corporate networks. (Schweizer, Vahlne & Johanson 2010, 344) As a result, almost all the activities that companies carry out together can be seen as network building. Even closer to the subject of this thesis is that the importance of relationships is also emphasized in the choices and processes related to the internationalization of small and medium-sized enterprises (Evers & Colm 2011, 552).

However, the goal-oriented cooperation of the entrepreneurs on international markets is yet infrequently examined in research literature. Based on this entity, a research problem for creating and using entrepreneurial community for entrepreneurs' internationalization is found. There are a large number of entrepreneurs within the community who operate in their home country. Based on the theory mentioned earlier, it is noted that most of the needs for internationalization already exist within the community. It is important to determine what kind of support the entrepreneur requires from the environment or the community to be able to seize a series of new opportunities. Reflecting on all previous discussion, the main research question was composed as follows:

*Q1: How an entrepreneurial community can support a high-skilled entrepreneur to think internationally?*

The main research question is intended to cover diverse views regarding the overall phenomenon. There are numerous self-employed people in the digital entrepreneurial community who act as freelancers. The purpose of the question is to seek an answer to how the surrounding entrepreneurial community can support internationalization, in general. The

response coming from the entrepreneurs of the community creates a way to deepen into their attitudes on this topic. At the same time, this knowledge can be used to build a more encouraging environment to explore new opportunities. In order to obtain a broad answer to this question, three sub-research questions have been created to support the main research question.

*Q2: How entrepreneurs and their attitudes towards internationalization are affected by an entrepreneurial community?*

*Q3: How can an entrepreneurial community internationalize?*

*Q4: How do digital platforms affect international entrepreneurship?*

The second question seeks answers to how the entrepreneurial community influences entrepreneurs on a concrete level and their general attitudes towards internationalization. Thus, the logic of why a person operates in the domestic market rather than abroad can be understood. The third question aims to answer how the international aspect could be integrated into the entrepreneurial community's daily actions. With systematic and coherent data, it is easier to develop operations and structure in the right direction. However, support and security are paramount in many activities, especially in internationalization. The fourth question looks at the impact of digitalization from the perspective of international entrepreneurship. When operating in an environment where most of the actions works through a digital platform, it is also necessary to take this into account in international operations. After understanding the background, it is easier to see whether the exploitation of the digital platform affects attitudes towards internationalization.

### 1.3 Limitations and methods

This bachelor's thesis is conducted as a qualitative study. Thus, the desirable limiting strategy would be to focus on the research topic as distinctly as possible rather than trying to cover too many views simultaneously. When the limiting is managed to be done precisely enough, the study will include more potential to deepen into the relevant themes of the research instead of addressing multiple aspects in a simple manner. (Puusa, Juuti & Aaltio 2020) This thesis' contents will be limited on an entrepreneurial consultative community operating in Finland, for now. The

summarized background for this decision consists of two matters. First, the community is a rather modern unity on the field, in general, and second, exploring the internationalization view will benefit the community as well as prospectively other operators on the field in the future. The data for the empirical part is collected through personal interviews with three of the community's members with different backgrounds considering entrepreneurship and life, in general. Since this thesis is built on a novel and unique approach, it is justified to utilize even a small yet appropriate sample as empirical material (Puusa et al. 2020). The interview data is categorized and divided into appropriate themes. By combining the generalized empirical findings with the comprehensive observations from versatile previous academic literature it is achievable to apply all the data and information gained and to, eventually, propose relevant conclusions which then can be further examined and benefitted from in future research.

Traditionally, private entrepreneurs do not know how to utilize networks, or the power of a community, when expanding to new markets, but also considering this thesis' research, the entrepreneurs' personal implementation of the community's resources has, eventually, only a minor role. Instead, the limiting of this study is designed to focus particularly on how the community may inspire and support the entrepreneurs in prospective future internationalization activities. Hence, also internationalization strategies, for instance, are described only superficially as a part of the theoretical framework. The purpose of briefly presenting the different models is to clarify the understanding of the topic of internationalization since the aim of this study is not to create an internationalization strategy for the community. The limited focus is rather on examining the entrepreneurs' attitudes towards internationalization as well as the level of the community's resources to support the atmosphere in developing their everyday operations onward international activities. The digital aspect will be presented as a coherent part of both international markets and entrepreneurship as well as community.

#### 1.4 Structure of the study

The structure of this thesis consists of the theoretical part and of the empirical part. The previous chapters of the introduction part present the topic as well as an understanding of the concepts. In addition, the research problem is described, and the background of the research questions is explained. Once the purpose and backgrounds of the thesis have been presented, various theories

related to the phenomena will be explored. That is, previous research will be delved into deeper, and a theoretical foundation will be built by combining the main points of each separate topic into one large entity. Initially, the international market is generally reviewed. The most common internationalization strategies as well as digital internationalization will be got acquainted with. After that, an international perspective of entrepreneurship will be discussed. It defines international entrepreneurship, as well as digital entrepreneurship, as they are critical concepts when studying the phenomenon. Finally, a brief overview on how digitalization affects the community, in which entrepreneurs operate, as well as on how the digital community affects the entrepreneur, will be presented.

After the theory part, the focus centers on the research methods used in this study. The results obtained in the study are then analyzed. First, a general overview on how the analysis is carried out considering qualitative research is discussed. Second, the data collected will be introduced. The relevance of opportunity and meaningfulness in entrepreneurship will be discussed first since that can be used as a starting point for exploring the internal motivation of entrepreneurs. Next, entrepreneurs' views on the community will be described. This is followed by a review of the data collected of international business and strategies as an entrepreneur as well as the attitudes towards internationalization, in general. Then, it will be looked at how the advancement of the entrepreneurial community towards an international community could succeed and how digitalization would affect the phenomenon discussed. Finally, the research questions are answered as well as the reliability is evaluated on the basis of the results of this study. In addition, the future research is reviewed, and conclusions are drawn from the entire research.

## 2. INTERNATIONAL MARKETS

Companies often prospect international markets. Today, several new companies seek to internationalize almost immediately after their establishment, such as start-ups, and older companies enter the international market at a slower pace, respectively. However, in short, internationalization is when a company transcends the borders of its own country (Schweizer et. al 2010, 343). Indeed, the global market has been in turmoil in recent years. It has led to the extensive process of globalization that has been going on in the world's economies for a long time. This allows more opportunities for companies and entrepreneurs to place products and services on the market. This openness to new markets positively creates novel opportunities for business growth, leading to further fiercer competition and better innovation. In this way, internationalization is also experiencing wider activities. (Castaño et al. 2016, 1690)

As companies internationalize, they are trying to build business networks to expand their operations around the world. In recognizing opportunities during an internationalization process, networks are important for a company (Chetty & Stangl 2010, 1729). Small businesses and even individual entrepreneurs are also building their networks. Internationalization is risky which, however, can be decreased by networks sharing information and giving access to new markets as well as technologies (Chetty & Stangl 2010, 1729). It must be remembered that in strategic alliances, the operation between a small entrepreneurial activity and already an established one is different from the traditional alliance between multiple large companies. This is mainly due to the fact that, for example, the learning ability as well as the organizational compatibility of an individual entrepreneur are very different compared to a larger organization. Thus, the bargaining power in building strategic relationships is also in a very different position depending on the parties between which the alliance will be established. (Das & He 2006, 114)

### 2.1 Common internationalization strategies

This section reviews a few general internationalization strategies to understand internationalization from a company perspective and to realize what to consider in planning expanding operations abroad. Perhaps the most common and most used is the Uppsala internationalization model.

According to it, the internationalization of a company is treated as a process in which companies slowly enter culturally and functionally comparable foreign markets (Glowik 2016, 113). A comparable foreign market may include similar language, cultural matters, and business practices for example (Chetty & Stangl 2010, 1727). Entering this kind of market would be desirable because the company has only limited information about foreign markets (Glowik 2016, 113). The idea is to establish a strong foundation in domestic markets first. After that, a company executing Uppsala model starts to export through a subsidiary located in foreign market. (Chetty & Stangl 2010, 1727) In this model, the problem is that the internationalization procedures do not create a continuous process. Companies may have to exit the market or change their tactics as they expand. In addition, this model does not consider companies that internationalize early, as the Uppsala model is based on experience and knowledge. (Glowik 2016, 113)

The formerly known transaction cost theory, now called internalization theory, is also one of the best-known models of internationalization. It focuses on trading costs as the main impetus for moving to foreign markets. The imperfection of the market and the organizational capacity of companies can be explained by this model. (Glowik 2016, 113) Incompleteness can be, for example, tariffs created by the administration of the target market, which this model cannot take into account due to their irregularity (Glowik 2016, 55). Internalization theory requires rational thinking and must consider knowledge and skill factors. On the other hand, transaction costs are difficult to quantify, which makes it hard for the model to act as a cornerstone of internationalization. It also does not contemplate aspects related to behavior, such as entrepreneurship. (Glowik 2016, 113)

The third, more traditional and more popular, model is the network model. According to it, the company's position in the corporate network as well as the connections between the companies determine the success or failure of the company's internationalization. However, domestic business networks are proposed to be a company's way to internationalize (Evers & Colm 2011, 552). The network may include, for example, manufacturers, suppliers, customers, or other stakeholders. Communicating information within the network is an important part of success. Nonetheless, this entity is difficult to test because the effect of the variable is empirically impossible to determine due to its complexity. (Glowik 2016, 115) When many parties are operating according to the same goals and guidelines, the whole process can be slowed down. However, digitalization has accelerated



operations in many areas, which has gradually led to companies rapidly entering the international market. (Glowik 2016, 95)

Perhaps the latest phenomenon has evolved partly due to digitalization, a new model of internationalization, born globals. These companies can be, for example, start-up companies that strive for excellent international performance as soon as possible or from the outset (Knight & Cavusgil 2004, 124). Rapid internationalization is interesting, as new companies often have few human and financial resources, for example, and yet rapid internationalization is successful for many firms. However, this born global phenomenon, explaining why those companies internationalize rapidly, has not yet been studied much. (Knight & Cavusgil 2004, 125) This can be said to be an important way of doing business internationally in the future, as it is urgent that companies are already growing internationally in a world where parties have been brought figuratively closer to each other due to digitalization.

## 2.2 Digital internationalization

Modern times have also created opportunities for smaller operators to expand in international markets. Increasingly, companies are utilizing internet strategically in their operational activities (Pezderka & Sinkovics 2011, 1). Besides being a communication tool, a controlling tool, and a collaboration tool, internet provides a rapid tool for internationalization (Pezderka & Sinkovics 2011, 1). Due to this, less resource-intensive business expansion is no longer hampered by the costs of internationalization. Globalization, the internet, and modern communication technologies on different platforms have played their part in bringing the global market closer to every company. (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 4) This type of relentless combination of entrepreneurship and digital technologies has laid the foundations for the emergence of a new type of entrepreneur based on the use of the internet to launch various entrepreneurial development projects (Giones & Brem 2017, 45).

Internet's impact on the internationalization of the company has attracted the attention of researchers, who have paid more and more attention to the issue (Sinkovics, Sinkovic, Jean & Kuivalainen 2013, 131). As the popularity of internationalization has grown, so have the reasons

and tools for doing so. The internet has at least increased interest in internationalization, as many jobs can be done from home. However, the role of the internet as an alternative to the physical presence or as a sales channel remains unclear (Sinkovics et al. 2013, 131). In other words, it is not possible to say directly how the internet platform acts as an environment for sales when there is no possibility to go on-site to sell. Many factors can also affect its operation. For example, an international pandemic may have facilitated an increase in remote connections. In international business, the internet has been shaping the understanding of physical distance by reducing it (Deng, Zhu, Johanson & Hilmersson 2022, 3). This can have both positive and negative effects on the perceived distances between different parties.

In general, a few studies have also focused on companies gaining access to international markets via the internet through a slightly grey area which is due to negative pressure or unpleasant atmosphere of internationalization. Digital internationalization is not wrong in itself, but how it is delivered also determines the credibility of a company or an entrepreneur in an international market (Jean, Kim & Cavusgil 2020, 1). Simultaneously, potential problems may arise in other areas. Risks and uncertainties are raising their heads as digital platforms are used to promote and accelerate internationalization (Luo 2021, 345). These various uncertainties can arise both in a company and in the encounter with customers. Foreign buyers cannot necessarily be sure of various factors of the procedures during the virtual purchasing process (Deng et al. 2022, 3). There is no face-to-face interaction, which would also increase reliability in payments, delivery, and quality. Now, products are often unknown, so implementing and selling a product or service can be tricky. (Deng et al. 2022, 3)

### 2.3 International entrepreneurship

International entrepreneurship has previously been defined as a new innovative activity aimed at creating value and growth in a business organization abroad (McDougall & Oviatt 2000, 903). International business has undergone tremendous changes as international entrepreneurship has become a major factor on the field (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 4). On a more modern note, international entrepreneurship is defined as finding, realizing, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities beyond national borders to create the goods and services of the future (Oviatt & McDougall 2005, 7). However, it has been observed that researchers often combine

entrepreneurship with three different dimensions as well. These dimensions are innovation, proactive behavior, and risk-taking. (McDougall & Oviatt 2000, 903) Partly due to change and modernization, it has been thought that the terminology of international entrepreneurship can be clarified. It is believed to be a combination of innovative, proactive, and risky behavior that transcends national borders to create added value in an internationalized organization (McDougall & Oviatt 2000, 903). So far, examining the treatment of the term more precisely, it is found that the term is more abstract and more sensitive to be used in various meanings. In this way, a single self-employed person can take advantage of the concept to expand their job description internationally.

Over time, international entrepreneurship has had many different meanings. Recently, perhaps the most common description of international entrepreneurship has been that it describes a process of creatively seeking and exploiting opportunities outside the local market of a company while pursuing competitive advantages (McDougall & Oviatt 2000, 902). Entrepreneurship, unique offerings, and strong international networks are a way for a resource-poor and inexperienced company to overcome its challenges in the international world. A self-employed entrepreneur can be seen to operate as such a company, which could encourage them to seize the opportunity of entering international markets as well. It is therefore relevant to examine how an individual entrepreneur could take advantage of this opportunity. Born-global companies apply for international markets early in business while they are still young entrepreneurial start-ups (Knight & Cavusgil 2004, 131). These companies are overcoming international challenges by leveraging their unique capabilities. Young companies seeking to enter the international market perform a wide range of entrepreneurship, perseverance, innovation as well as a wide range of supply, which makes up for the lack of assets. In addition, this wide range can be well-tailored to the customer's needs. (Cavusgil & Knight 2015, 6)

With a small business being flexible, building relationships with large operators can play an important role in lowering costs, adapting to an asymmetric environment, and managing other responsibilities of a small business in an international environment to survive (Rodrigues & Child 2012, 25). Entrepreneurs do not traditionally build long-term relationships with companies. However, as a self-employed highly skilled entrepreneur in a modern work environment, these long-term relationships maintain income and allow to work jointly with multiple companies. Yet, a certain type of counterproductive relationship can lead to an increased risk of becoming overly

dependent on the client company (Rodrigues & Child 2012, 26). Internationally, on the other hand, this may provide an opportunity to gain better foothold in another country.

### 3. COMMUNITY SUPPORTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Entrepreneurship is one of the key issues in sustaining society. Entrepreneurs are an explanation for the income of society, but also the variation in dynamics (Cuervo 2005, 293). An entrepreneur has a role to play in finding, valuing, and implementing the opportunities that come with entrepreneurship. These opportunities include new products and services, organizational forms, processes, raw materials, and new markets. (Shane & Venkataraman 2000, 218) There are many areas to be explored in entrepreneurship. Its broad understanding will help build a better future for novel opportunities. Entrepreneurship is a dynamic process that turns opportunities into solutions (Elia, Margherita & Passiante 2020, 3). Yet, entrepreneurship's processes have changed radically causing digital platforms to be necessary.

#### 3.1 Entrepreneurship going digital

The demand for online entrepreneurs has grown a lot in recent years. Internationally the market, for example, has grown by 50 percent in three years. (Blaising et al. 2021, 1) This will not only affect the change in the market, but also self-employed entrepreneurs. Initially, the concept of digital entrepreneurship began to refer to the creation of new businesses as well as the development of existing ones by innovating new digital technology tools and experimenting with their use in these so-called test companies (Elia et al. 2020, 2). From this, however, it has transformed into a more specific as well as a multidimensional concept. Thus, it is not known in advance how the new unique form of work will affect entrepreneurs' experiences of their careers or their progress, nor their impact in the long run (Blaising et al. 2021, 2).

Long-term commitment as an online entrepreneur can include a variety of burdens, such as reputation-related, emotional, financial, or relationship-related ones. These potential burdens constitute the overhead costs of maintaining an entrepreneurial career. (Blaising et al. 2021, 1) The well-being of entrepreneurs can be facilitated, among other things, by the surrounding social community, which, in addition to work, also provides leisure activities similar to larger work organizations. Working online also eases these burdens by providing an opportunity to try new things, such as skills, and by providing opportunities from outside the platform as well (Blaising et

al. 2021, 3). When working online, there is access to the internet at all times. Recent research shows that there is a huge potential in working as an online entrepreneur as well as a large number of role development opportunities (Blaising et al. 2021, 4).

However, there are also downsides to working online. The cost of maintaining a career was strongly related to the lack of social support and connections as long-term effects (Blaising et al. 2021, 13). Sociality is a major factor in working life, which is difficult to replace for entrepreneurs who often work online alone. Thus, they do not have access to mentors or colleagues, unlike in a traditional organization (Blaising et al. 2021, 13). For example, there are no daily meetings with colleagues in the coffee room. In addition, managing customer relationships online is seen as a source of frustration and uncertainty as the career is beginning to advance without regular face-to-face connections (Blaising et al. 2021, 14).

### 3.2 Entrepreneurial community making an impact on the entrepreneur

An entrepreneurial community includes personal ties with other operators. Yet, entrepreneurs' contribution to compensate the decrease in economic activities within a community is crucial (Lichtenstein et al. 2004, 6). That way, also a community has the possibility to support entrepreneurs in engaging into new markets. In addition, entrepreneurs are being combined into a distinguishable community that supports each other, exchanges resources, and shares information. A community has its obligation to elaborate the entrepreneur. (Lichtenstein et al. 2004, 6) However, digitalization as well has contributed to the unification of different entrepreneurial actors. Simultaneously, it has provided support for various entrepreneurial processes and for the emergence of digitally entrepreneurial communities (Elia et al. 2020, 1). The digital ecosystem contains and is based on a network of different entrepreneurial actors who have interacted together to create new types of businesses. Potential entrepreneurial factors include entrepreneurs, investors, service providers, and business incubators. The potential organizations they form provide innovative digital services or products and focus in particular on the use of technologies in their design. (Elia et al. 2020, 4) This is also the basis for creating entrepreneurial networks. Yet, a more formal description of the community or the ecosystem dimension could be relevant. In this way, the impact of digital technology on the nature of the interaction between different actors in identifying resources as well as partners in the entrepreneurial process could be understood. (Elia et al. 2020, 1) For example,

digital infrastructure enables interaction within the community and also facilitates remote operations. In practice, this infrastructure is defined as a set of digital technology tools as well as systems that provide communication tools, collaboration capabilities, and computing capabilities (Elia et al. 2020, 5). Its use is thus a socio-technical process that has been defined as digitization in its broadest sense (Tilson, Lyytinen & Sorensen 2010, 3).

Rewarding connections between private actors are enabled by virtuous communities of entrepreneurship. A good example of this is the connection between a large company and an innovative micro-enterprise, where both are open to integrate an entrepreneurial culture into the larger organization and are ready to establish new relationships with individuals, resources, and potential contacts seeking entrepreneurial activity. (Brown & Mason 2017, 16) The digital entrepreneurial community consists of interdependent entrepreneurial agents who, when organized themselves, can seize opportunities by utilizing a complex system of services and tools. It enables action and interaction to work at all stages of the entrepreneurial work process. (Elia et al. 2020, 3) Maximizing the market potential of digital solutions is possible through an entrepreneurial community that brings together a variety of stakeholders to optimize the process from idea to practice (Elia et al. 2020, 5). In terms of the number and diversity of existing entrepreneurial actors, the richness of the community is possible in terms of perspectives as well as multidimensional contributions. This allows for the creation of an open environment where each individual can collaborate with others as well as create unlimited innovative concepts. This kind of environment provides opportunities for future breakthrough innovations and successful companies. (Elia et al. 2020, 7)

## 4. RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter reviews the way the data has been collected and addressed for this thesis. The research's perspective from a theoretical point of view will be introduced, the models used will be described, and their cause-and-effect relationships will be explained. Similarly, how the material is collected, how it is made, and what motives have been used to choose that specific method are discussed in more detail. This provides a basis for being able to analyze and utilize the data later in the search for an answer to the research questions and, thus, to the research problem. In principle, a research always has an approach that determines whether the research is qualitative or quantitative, and whether it is empirical or non-empirical (Puusa et al. 2020). This thesis is based on a qualitative research, which is also an empirical research considering the characteristics of the data collected.

### 4.1 Qualitative study as a methodological trend

This thesis' data is qualitative. Hence, the study is called a qualitative research. It has been influenced by many different perspectives. These include hermeneutics, phenomenology, and poststructuralism. Currently, different views on hermeneutics dominate qualitative research which means that the research topic is written in the light of previously researched information on the topic. This, together with the material to be acquired and its interpretation, is also combined with previously researched information. (Puusa et al. 2020) In other words, previously researched material on the topic will be studied, new material will be collected, and then compared to the theory. Through it, an answer to the prospective research questions can be found. When interpreting the material, the aim is to bring new perspectives to the topic (Puusa et al. 2020). However, in order to preserve the authenticity as well as the reliability of the data, it is important to interpret the materials sensitively (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 114). By answering the research questions based on all previous work, it is possible to build novel theory on the basis of it and challenge the existing views.

Qualitative research typically seeks to understand the phenomenon in question from the perspective of the subjects (Puusa et al. 2020). It is therefore important to get close to the subject without directing the actions. On the other hand, it is impossible to understand others' experiences (Puusa et



al. 2020). The world experienced by another person can differ greatly from the other for many different reasons. To facilitate this, there are many different methods for understanding another person's view on the world and on the topic being researched. Qualitative research has received a lot of influence from various disciplines, such as philosophy and educational sciences (Puusa et al. 2020). As a result, different schools have been built that utilize different methods in their research (Puusa et al. 2020). In practice, the method means how the subject of the research is approached, and how the questions of the research are answered (Puusa et al. 2020). This also provides an opportunity to create new perspectives on the subject mentioned earlier. Typically, however, the method is a concrete way to gather material for conducting a study (Puusa et al. 2020). Qualitative research has also different perspectives. Most of the methods used in qualitative research focus on varying phenomenology (Puusa et al. 2020). According to it, the aim is to find out how people experience the phenomenon in which they live (Puusa et al. 2020). Indeed, this thesis seeks to address the phenomena of entrepreneurship, the digital platform, and internationalization that are taking place within the entrepreneurial community by combining them into one broader phenomenon. However, in qualitative research, different methods have much in common. For example, they are inductive, which means that conclusions are sought on the basis of the data collected (Puusa et al. 2020).

Again, this thesis deals with people's experience of the phenomenon around them. Research can be described as a social construct created through the interaction between different actors and this phenomenon under study (Puusa et al. 2020). Qualitative research generally focuses on the examination of a person's subjective experiences and views. On this basis, there has also been a negative debate regarding the credibility and reliability of qualitative research (Puusa et al. 2020). In this study, data collection is based on reliable interaction with the community members. It is also conceivable that the collection of data in a qualitative study is not the extraction of information, but the interaction with the subjects of the study (Puusa et al. 2020). The aim of this study is to construct the material objectively, and to select individuals with a different background to operate within the community.

#### 4.2 Interviews as a material acquisition method

The purpose of a qualitative research is to collect research data. Various types of interviews are used as the most common data collection methods (Puusa et al. 2020). The interview usually has a pre-set goal that the discussion aims to achieve (Puusa et al. 2020). In other words, interviews are less often conducted from a purely general perspective. This particular goal also affects the way how interviewees are interpreted, and how the subjects are understood (Puusa et al. 2020). In practice, the aim is to gather data from which credible conclusions can be drawn about the phenomenon being studied (Puusa et al. 2020). In goal-oriented activities, therefore, there are certain prejudices that will be tested on the basis of social interaction and the analysis based on them. Thus, the interview can be thought as targeting the contents of consciousness and thinking. To conclude, the interview is not objective as a method of data collection. It is important to remember that the parties to an interview always influence each other when it comes to interactive conversation (Puusa et al. 2020). It is the interviewee's subjective view or interpretation of the phenomenon and the related themes (Puusa et al. 2020). Thus, the material collected is influenced by the individual factors from which the final conclusion is drawn.

There are reasons why interviews have been so used as a data collection method. First, it is very flexible. Because of this, it serves many different purposes, making it suitable to use in a number of different situations (Puusa et al. 2020). As the interview is subjective, it is possible to select people who are sure to have expertise on the field in advance. The interviewee may even know about having the right experience or some knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation, which is the methodological advantage of the interview (Puusa et al. 2020). From an interview, as much information and a diverse picture of the target phenomenon as possible will be wanted (Puusa et al. 2020). The aim is to take this into account when selecting people for the interviews. Therefore, a random selection of individuals may also negatively affect the conclusions. In this thesis, too, discretion has been used in the selection of people in as many ways as possible. At the same time, however, all individuals are from the same community, so the results are also comparable.

The interview method is divided into several different types of research interviews. They differ mainly in the degree of structuring which means the maneuverability of the interview. It describes how to proceed in a free-form or alternatively structured way in an interview. (Puusa et al. 2020) The type of interview used in this thesis is a semi-structured interview and it is therefore reviewed in this section. In this style of interview, the order of the interview questions is constant, and it

proceeds according to a pre-set frame (Puusa et al. 2020). The format of the questions is predefined as well and standard in the same way as the whole body of the interview. The questions are also to be asked from the interviewees in a same invariant manner. On the basis of this entity, answers and views on pre-defined topics are obtained for each interviewee according to their own words. (Puusa et al. 2020)

### 4.3 Analysis from the material

The acquisition of the data is deeply linked to the analysis of the data (Puusa et al. 2020). However, the analysis ultimately provides answers to the research problem and questions. The acquisition of the material and the performance of the analysis are always influenced by the researcher's preconceived notion (Puusa et al. 2020). Due to that, it is crucial to get properly acquainted with the research topic. Thus, it is also important to combine the perspectives presented in the literature with the details of the empirical data (Puusa et al. 2020). This is how the previous knowledge and the new research get combined into novel views. Yet, what makes it challenging as well is the fact that there are technically not included any specific directions on how to finally carry the analysis out correctly (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 113).

The description, the interpretation, and the understanding of the target phenomenon are the aims of the data analysis (Puusa et al. 2020). Hence, the researcher might need to adjust and verify both the research questions and the data regularly during the analysis work for managing to conclude the accurate and relevant observations (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 113). The researcher's ability to interpret and understand the phenomenon under study has a large impact on the quality of the data analysis (Puusa et al. 2020). In the stages of the content analysis, the researcher is initially supposed to distribute categories describing the phenomenon based on the data (Elo & Kyngäs 2008, 108). This makes it easier to find common themes in the material for conducting the qualitative research. The themes can be used to explain the general behavior around a phenomenon. Eventually, the themes are analyzed, which helps to find a solution to the research problem. (Puusa et al. 2020)

## 5. RESULTS

In this chapter, the data collected is reviewed first by describing and analyzing it, followed by finding common themes that are justified by utilizing the previous theory. The text in this chapter is mainly based on the interviewee's answers reinforced already with occasional analysis and discussion of the researcher as well in order to articulate the issues diversely enough. The interview part of the study has been conducted in a Finnish entrepreneurial community. In total, three interviewees were chosen for the study from this Finnish entrepreneurial community. There are a variety of professionals in this community, whose backgrounds considering entrepreneurship vary on a personal level. As a result, the interviewees have been selected with a differing range of experience and expertise in order to obtain the most heterogeneous picture possible of the community's response to the phenomenon. Despite their different backgrounds and experiences, the individuals provided extensive and informative responses related to the three main themes of the interview. The themes in question were entrepreneurship, community and internationalization.

The aim was to structure the interview in a way that each theme would be combined to the discussion and to create a certain kind of environment which would enable the interviewee to describe their answers from their own perspectives. As mentioned earlier, the interviewee's own view of the phenomenon under study is critical when conducting a qualitative research (Puusa et al. 2020). The interviews were conducted in Finnish. Every interpretation and prospective quotation will be translated from Finnish to English and, therefore, it is not possible to implement this text exactly according to the original interviews. However, it has been possible to use the Finnish language when categorizing and building the analysis, which makes the analysis carried out for the conclusions relevant and well justified. Each of the interviewees are self-employed consultants, with areas of expertise ranging from sales, recruitment, and community building to management consulting. The interviewees were excited to answer the questions related to the topic without restrictions, stating their own point of views fairly and truthfully. This section is followed by table 1 summarizing some characteristics of each interviewee as well as of the interview with them.

*Table 1 Summary of the interviews*

INTERVIEWEE	AGE	ENTREPRENEURIAL EXPERIENCE	INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE	INTERVIEW DURATION
Male	20-29	7 years	No experience	46min 45sec
Female	20-29	1 year	No experience	36min 40sec
Male	30-39	18 years	Only partly	38min 27sec

In the interviews, there were two males and one female with ages between 20-39. The interviewees' experiences from working as an entrepreneur vary from one year to eighteen years, without specific international experience. The first interviewee has his background particularly in sales activities, yet, he has participated in the community's internal projects as well. For the second interviewee with the least experience, the know-how as a consultant is still limited which could be noticed considering the interview answers. However, noting the same themes being repeated as when interviewing the more experienced individuals, it could eventually be seen to have a positive impact on researching the phenomenon. The third interviewee has been doing project work for international companies as well as internationalization projects for clients, yet not actual international entrepreneurship has been conducted. For each interviewee, the journey to become an entrepreneur has been very different. The interviewees have become an entrepreneur through a summer job opportunity, through an entrepreneurial school, or otherwise through an opportunity as well as their own interest.

### 5.1 Meaningfulness and opportunistic entrepreneurship

This chapter serves as a basis for both the empirical part of this thesis and the original purpose of the entrepreneurial community in focus of this thesis. Meaningfulness is a concept that often comes up in the conducted entrepreneur discussions. Many have a desire to make the world a better place. As such, the concept of meaningfulness is the construction of abstract and relative perceptions which everyone will implement in their everyday life and work in their own way. Thus, meaningfulness serves as a basis for everything people do. Through genuine affection, it is possible to perform a variety of performances that ultimately produce certain value. This can be linked to the

basic factors of entrepreneurship, in general, strongly as well. These topics were continuously repeated during each interview. Even though the similar views on meaningfulness could be noted from the interviews, the first interviewee also mentioned a need for adrenaline and excitement in the everyday working life.

*“... what genuinely interests you, what you find meaningful, and what kind of change you want to see in the world...” – interviewee 2*

*“... I am somehow adrenaline hungry, and I need to experience excitement somewhere, entrepreneurship works pretty well for it...” – interviewee 1*

An entrepreneur easily has the vision to make the world a better place and that is where the whole idea of entrepreneurship comes from. This is another view which was repeated in the interviews. On a practical level, it is divided into a few different levels at which the concrete change in the world can take place. On a personal level, it is needed to find the particular experimentation in focus interesting. If an entrepreneur is somehow forced to act against their own values or visions, the motivation will not stay up for long. Purpose and interest are few of the key factors in creating new opportunities for business ideas. In addition, the operational level must be considered. The service an entrepreneur provides must be perceived by the customer as needed. Today, there are a lot of potential customers even globally which leads to the realization that there is a market for almost everything and everyone. However, customers may still run out of markets the size of Finland if the product and the brand are not interesting or coherent enough. Hence, products and services that interest both the entrepreneur and the customer should be developed. This is also important to remember in non-domestic markets.

*“... the goal of my whole life is to be an entrepreneur...” – interviewee 2*

*“Managing to build the world towards being a better place, and build the kind of services your customers need ...” – interviewee 1*

Entrepreneurship basically starts with the meaning, according to all interviews. If an entrepreneurial career is kickstarted only for the sake of money, the hustle may come to an end rather quickly for it

not being motivating enough. A person may need to be able to fulfill themselves on a deeper and more meaningful level. On the other hand, a person's need to become an entrepreneur has created a unique way for them to create relevance, in general. Meaningfulness is usually a way to create goals. In other words, entrepreneurship can either act as a tool towards achieving those goals or be an end in itself. In general, this certainly depends on the industry in which the company is located, but an entrepreneur selling consulting activities can be involved in a very wide range of business fields and operations. Therefore, the entrepreneur also has the opportunity to influence many different areas by reaching a goal and creating meaningfulness for themselves. Hence, meaningfulness may motivate daily doing as an entrepreneur. On the other hand, an entrepreneur needs opportunities both at the beginning of the career and at a later stage. These opportunities can be created by oneself, or they can arise through past action. The first interviewee mentioned that in the light of money or prosperity alone, running a business does not motivate to act any longer. Through a variety of inspiring opportunities, it is possible to learn something new and to see how it develops the business. This can create a spark for entrepreneurship. The surrounding world, especially as an entrepreneur, is constantly changing. In terms of business, new opportunities also often mean expansion. As Finland is a very small country, operations in other countries may expand the business and its opportunities. From that point of view, internationalization will also be very important.

## 5.2 Community

Entrepreneurship is easily perceived as lonely. Loneliness is also one of the disadvantages of self-employment for self-employed entrepreneurs. The interview answers highlighted the inevitable meaning of the community mindset in getting to know new people as well as managing to nurture the existing relationships within the community. This community surrounding the entrepreneurs eliminates the feeling of being lonely. From the beginning, when a new person enters the community, efforts are made in order to create relationships with others, and time is taken to get to know others. People that have much in common are easy to be found in an entrepreneurial community. Yet, as the second interviewee stated, each member has the space to be their own true self, and to bring out their own unique skills for others to use as well. In an organization like this, people are the core of every action, because they are the ones who create the value. In order to get the most out of this kind of entity, it requires everyone to be self-sufficient as well as structured on

the part of the community. It is important that there is one or more people in charge who are responsible for maintaining the interaction and the opportunities. The valued communality is easily lost if no one has the responsibility to lead it. It does not necessarily mean leading others but developing and transmitting the community from one party to another.

*“Here, the people are the core of everything”* – interviewee 1

*“... it is easier to maintain the motivation to learn new things...”* – interviewee 2

There are huge advantages to the community as well but harnessing and learning skills as a whole brings the most opportunities for everyone. Individuals complement each other, and all skills can be found within the community. Due to this, there are no requirements to rely on external assistance, and also the value creation remains within the community’s entrepreneurs. Inside the community, it is possible to utilize the knowledge of others either in one's own activities, in one's own projects, or otherwise only to aid learning. When there is a large community, there are a lot of people interested in different things. It brings many development opportunities when it is possible to discuss common interests, and also maintain interaction in the free time. In addition, the presence of many professionals inside the community makes the community a safe surroundings where anyone can be contacted at a low threshold. According to third interviewee, for example, the key factor is to have a group of colleagues with whom to share authentic feelings. This stepless community also reduces competition. Entrepreneurs tend to see others as competitors, and compare themselves to others, which in turn does not eventually take the action any forward.

*“... important to have a group to share the good and the bad news with.”* – interviewee 3

In the end, however, the purpose of the whole community is to support the business through both supporting activities and purely business. Growing one’s own network and getting to know different people are widely perceived as desirable actions. In a large network, there can always be someone who may know another. This can create opportunities and is an excellent benefit in building a business. The community structure also brings many benefits to other community professionals. Finding a sales lead for another person gives a commission and thus the various



parties in the community benefit from it commercially. The possibility of cross-selling also provides new ways to develop operations, in addition to which it is also possible to utilize experts cross-cutting. The third interviewee described this topic more specifically. According to him, the community provides an opportunity to direct projects to the right people as well as to find competent factors to utilize in the projects. In business, building a network both within and outside the community also creates opportunities for successful companies and business ideas in the future.

### 5.3 International business and strategy for an entrepreneur

In entrepreneurship, especially among self-employed entrepreneurs, internationalization is seen as a relatively high risk. If it is poorly realized, it can lead to the death of the career and the company. On the other hand, if there is a willingness to build a large successful company, internationalization will be mandatory at some point. As Finland is a small country, there is only a limited market. The alternatives are to settle for the smaller Finnish market or to start expanding the market abroad sensibly. Internationalization can be seen from an entrepreneurial view in several ways. There were some differing opinions on the ways to internationalize in the interviews. Therefore, the strategy to internationalize needs a deep research before realizing it. For example, the second interviewee mentioned the possibilities in the Nordic countries and others did not bring forth specific areas. There may be customers abroad for whom different projects are being carried out. In addition, there may be an office in another country or there may be a member of the community expanding the community internationally. An entrepreneur working abroad can create a network there and thereby help others to internationalize.

*“It might be between the Nordic countries”* – interviewee 2

For internationalization to be seen as a relatively good opportunity, everyone advancing it needs to have a clear role on how to operate. However, the desire, as an entrepreneur, is to be able to export the brand internationally. There is a clear urge to make the brand known, and to make customers being aware of that the company is qualified in what it does. Therefore, as entrepreneurship brings

opportunities, it also brings responsibility to everyone, especially within the community. However, the decision to internationalize requires extensive background research before it can be put into practice. All three interviewees agreed on these themes. Yet, internationalization requires a good plan, as it costs a lot of money and other resources that need to be allocated properly.

The third interviewee brought out that the potential internationalization strategy can be shared into two parts. Either to work from Finland for international companies or from abroad for Finnish companies. Alternative choice could be to establish office abroad. It must be understood that building an international image and brand takes time. Therefore, expanding the market abroad is in itself both a risk and an opportunity. The riskiness was brought out on the first and the second interviews. In addition, it is easy to forget that the country where new international business will be built is not Finland. With it, it is important to invest time in the investigation. The first interviewee said that there are also examples of Finnish companies that have performed excellently in the Finnish market, but the same operating methods have not worked abroad. Hence, the importance of understanding the business culture of a particular country, the purchasing behavior of foreign customers, and the ways in which industries operate is essential for an internationalizing entrepreneur.

*“The way to do internationalization could be shared into two categories” – interviewee 3*

Without a stable situation and position, internationalization will not be relevant in the near future. In the top industry, where new kinds of community-based consulting services are being sold, the Nordic countries would be a rather easy target. On the other hand, the market must be viewed on a country-by-country basis, as no country can be expected to have a similar business environment to the domestic market nor to each other. Acquisitions are utilized in many industries to expand business to another country. On the other hand, in the consulting industry, it might be relevant to design a new startup company in another country through which to start operations. All in all, all three interviewees were agreeing on this topic, however, the idea of implementation was varying.

#### 5.4 Attitudes towards internationalization

Attitudes towards internationalization today vary from the perspective of a community entrepreneur but are eventually entirely open. The international world is fascinating, even without any experience of it. None of these three interviewees had an actual experience of working internationally, yet they all were excited about the possibilities it creates. The fascination increases interest in operating internationally. International entrepreneurship can be seen as a natural continuum as it begins to seek new opportunities and to expand its own worldview based on it. However, the third interviewee mentioned that internationalization as an entrepreneur is not absolute value itself. For internationalization, the idea model as well as capabilities often are already involved. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that a few people within the community have recently moved abroad, even in the absence of official international activities. With it, one seeing themselves as an international entrepreneur is natural. On the other hand, if there has not been a very wide awareness of internationalization in the background, it may be that thoughts on it have not yet warmed up. Naturally, in the early stages, internationality is not perceived as a very large part of an entrepreneurial career. An awareness and a desire to expand will eventually automatically shift thoughts towards internationalization.

*“... International world, it is exciting...”* – interviewee 2

*“Hopefully, the internationalization will be a big part of my entrepreneurship career.”* –  
interviewee 1

Internationalization can also be experienced as a certain goal. For example, the first interviewee said that it is his big dream and goal. Yet, the second interviewee disagreed on having an internationalization as a goal. However, later in the interview, she admitted on being interested in it. Working towards a goal makes it easier for an entrepreneur to spend time studying independently any subject as well as international entrepreneurship. It allows entrepreneurs to gain knowledge about issues that can go wrong internationally and about what opportunities there may be in different places and sectors. Risks can never be completely managed, but when there is the knowhow to prepare for all the possible risks, doing desirable background research is certainly a more stable approach even when the risks would be realized. As a result, it is an important idea to

be systematic when starting out as an international entrepreneur. A beginner international entrepreneur should be calculating, and not afraid of risk.

Openness to internationalization already creates the basis for its realization somewhere. In the interviews, it was repeated that the openness for internationalization is found in the community, but it is waiting for the right moment. The systematic nature of the internationalization process makes the whole more concrete. Getting a company's brand known abroad is not a rapid project, so it is needed to take a small piece at a time. There are occasional discussions between Finnish companies about operating abroad. On the other hand, as discussed earlier, it is important to understand the business culture of another country in order to build a viable business infrastructure in another country. There are many other aspects to it, but without an understanding, it is difficult to accomplish anything. However, the hope for internationalization is found, especially when it has not been possible for many, and its concrete implementation has not hit many.

*“We are kind of open for internationalization, but it is waiting for the right moment.”* – interviewee

2

As a self-employed entrepreneur in a community focused on consulting services, one could engage with start-ups to see the vast potential of the global market. For example, the community makes use of its own investment groups to help take each other forward and discuss issues which was brought out in the interviews. With internationalization, there could be taken advantage of similar groups to promote it. Depending on one's own interests and resources, background work could be done in advance, even if internationalization is not yet relevant. With the help of the group, it is possible to focus on planning as well as challenging, and this information can easily be shared with others afterwards. This way, knowledge and value remain within the community, taking the whole one step further, according to the first interviewee. When there is openness to foreign markets in the future and the work is done in advance, it is easier to prepare for the risks as well. Despite the lack of discussion, the willingness to support others and to be on the go from start to finish is a sign of confidence in the entrepreneurs. The self-confidence will increase since the help is around. The self-confidence is important in entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, as internationalization takes place, there will be a wide range of lessons to be learned in the community as a result of enlargement. In

addition to all the background work and support, internationalization is waiting for the right moment.

### 5.5 Building international community

One big step for the future is to build general support for the community where internationalization is the community norm. The integration of foreign actors into the network and community is an important piece of gaining new international business contacts. Expanding networks is not in itself a problem in international operations. According to the first interviewee, the focus is on whether it makes sense to make the community international or not, and how it will be implemented. Entrepreneurship in the community is not just about doing business abroad. It is also able to accumulate know-how internationally and network with people.

However, doing business internationally requires the right way to operate in a particular market. For example, it is difficult for a Finnish salesperson to sell as efficiently as a Portuguese one in Portugal. As the third interviewee mentioned, the operating systems are different in international markets. Knowledge of the language can make it easier, but it also does not guarantee strong results. Based on this, building a community internationally may require concrete action in the target country as well, utilizing local vendors and experts who have the best understanding of the country's business culture. The power of background work can also be seen here. Extending the networks to the target countries provides certain information in advance and lays the foundation for when internationalization is relevant. However, building networks does not yet require internationalization from the company, or the community. Yet, it will help future internationalization opportunities, according to the third and first interviewees. In the long run, the internationalization of other companies may be facilitated by the fact that certain companies already have networks in a particular country.

*“Operating systems differ in international markets compared to domestic ones.”* – interviewee 3

“The networks in other countries will help community's companies to internationalize in the future”

– interviewee 1

Building community support for all those interested in internationalization is important. Therefore, depending on the situation of the companies, other companies in the community may also be contributors. If funding is obtained through community companies, it would be possible to focus on one's own core business. The first interviewee said that while funding coming from outside the community, there is always a risk that there will be too much external pressure. Instead of maximizing results, one can build good support in the target country, after which focusing on increasing profitability and operating profit. Other companies will also benefit from this, as long as the value remains within the community. Financial support, but also a sense of security as well as a unique opportunity to center resources on other activities and development, generally serve as a broad positive impact of the community. However, the lack of competition within the community leads to an atmosphere where the general world of thought is to encourage others and the desire to succeed together.

*“There is no pressure to maximize the result when the funding comes from the community.”* –  
interviewee 1

*“Everyone could be networking in international startup events”* – interviewee 2

One goal could be to see the construction of a startup accelerator, where community could handle companies abroad, according to the first and the third interviewee. When there is the desire to grow, and internationalization becomes a kind of compulsion at some point, there will be a need to start looking for international companies to join the community or the startup accelerator. The second interviewee brought out that in Finland, such activities are promoted, for example, by various growth company events, from which perspective could be sought. If necessary, those who are interested in internationalization could also network through this. As within the community, international partners are seen as a resource, not as competitors.

## 5.6 Digitalization making the difference in the community

Building a digital entity as a community is easier and more encouraging today than ever before. It has also been perceived to benefit the business and at the same time perceived to be a must for today's business. The third interviewee exaggerated by generalizing the fact that digitalization is necessary in internationalization. Digitalization itself brings more opportunities. Distances are disappearing and digital services are connecting people around the world. Digitalization is also creating a new kind of world. This has also been the basis for building the digital community. In terms of work efficiency, working remotely and digitally can bring much more. When there is no time in the office to talk to others, it is possible to accomplish more in a short amount of time, according to the first interviewee. However, the first interviewee challenged this by claiming the physical contact being for the good and even relevant for the business. Foreign actors will also be made to operate remotely, further connecting the community. Without digital activities, it would not be possible to connect foreign companies to the community or network. Operational transparency also increases the possibility of connecting international actors to the community.

*“Digitalization creates more opportunities.”* – Interviewee 2

*“It makes the world limitless”* – interviewee 1

*“...Physical contact is for the good...”* – interviewee 3

However, digitalization does not only bring benefits to the community or business. The digital perspective poses a challenge for building trust. It is impossible to know what kind of company there is in another country that one is cooperating with. Visiting a site to build trust or to keep the partnership together physically on site makes it easier, according to the third interviewee. It is a matter of whether it is possible. In addition, some customers may not be able to purchase through digital services or may not be used to making video calls, which the second interviewee brought out. It is not possible to shake hands at the time of the transaction, which also increases the difficulty of building trust with the partner. It is also not possible to know certainly whether there are as many digitalized companies abroad as in Finland, so this can also add challenges to the development of joint operations, in general. Even a foreign culture can be very different in its business, which is not easy to remember in a remote business. Being on site also gives the authentic experience of the activities of the target country. On the other hand, utilizing the digital platform makes it more efficient and saves time for both the entrepreneur and the customer, which came out

in all three interviews. It takes a lot of time to arrange and conduct meetings, so holding a short meeting online is a better option for each party. This will increase in the future if operations expand abroad.

*“Some customers do not know how to buy online” – interviewee 1*

*“Are somewhere as digitalized companies as in Finland, I do not know.” -interviewee 2*

As a whole, in a community with a wide variety of entrepreneurs, it makes the most sense to follow the hybrid option, according to the interviews. In the hybrid option, there is a possibility to operate remotely, or go on-site physically. Spontaneous interaction is left out without visiting the site but with the diversity of human types, that opportunity for those who are considered as extroverts can still be found. The digital community makes it easier to respond to different needs. This is clearly a great benefit, as flexibility and versatility enable the community, both at home and abroad, to make the most of different people and skills without wasting their time.



## 6. DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the empirical data that was previously reviewed. Simultaneously, it will be combined with and compared to the theory, describing and justifying the truthfulness of the empirical data. This entity is presented by answering the research questions as well. First, the questions 2-4 will be discussed in a reverse order, which will support the answer to the question 1. This provides a broad and relevant interpretation of the phenomenon of the study as a whole. The purpose of the study was to find out how an entrepreneurial community can be built in a more international direction and how it can encourage entrepreneurs to think more internationally. The theoretical framework was, thus, built on themes of international markets, entrepreneurship and digitalization as well as of the meaningfulness of the community. The empirical result data was categorized accordingly and presented mainly based on the interviewees' answers. Next, this entity will be discussed as diversely, yet as precisely according to the limitations, as possible. This may serve as a basis for building an international foundation for the community's future operations as well as for possibly assisting in and channeling the decision to internationalize.

### *Q4: How do digital platforms affect international entrepreneurship?*

Digitalization at a general level is essential in today's business as the interviewees and, for instance, Elia et al. (2020) as well as Cavusgil and Knight (2015) state. By utilizing it cleverly, it brings benefits to both the company and the customer. Digitalization has generated a lot of opportunities overall and, as Glowik (2016, 95) stated, particularly considering international operations as well. Distances have been shortened in the abstract, and communication with different parts of the world has become much easier. From the perspective of an international entrepreneur, this has also certainly reduced costs. In addition, there are new ways to maintain operational transparency in the use of the digital platform. As the interviewees presented, this makes it easier to build trust with international partners, for example, which can otherwise be difficult in the digital age.

On the other hand, this method also forces foreign partners to operate remotely. In addition, the digital perspective may create difficulties in building trust. As such, which fact the interviewees were worried about as well, the digital entrepreneurial procedures do not consider regional

differences, as some locations may not be that familiar with doing business or cooperating online. The interviewees elevated also the fact that technology intensity may vary around the world compared to only the Nordic countries, for example. Thus, taking the physical interaction completely away is not entirely a desirable direction either but benefitting from the hybrid model could create opportunities for every party. Utilizing the digital platform makes the whole more efficient and saves time for the entrepreneur as well as the customer. As noted in the empirical data, arranging, organizing, and conducting appointments really take a lot of time compared to conducting a remote appointment. Exploiting this to an increasing extent will also give the entrepreneur a competitive advantage if done correctly. With the help of the digital platform, it is possible to meet various demands from the perspective of the entrepreneur, the customer, and the community.

*Q3: How can an entrepreneurial community internationalize?*

According to the interviews, the attitudes of the entrepreneurial community in general are mainly open to internationalization. However, they may vary depending on the entrepreneurs' different backgrounds. On the other hand, non-existent backgrounds on internationalization may reduce the desire to act internationally. The interviewees support the view that the community tends to build a cohesive and educational culture, in general. Hence, creating and enhancing the idea of internationality within the community could be fruitful. In other words, the significant matter now, which the interviewees hoped for, considering advancing the international community would be to make internationalization the norm in everyday actions. For instance, Castaño et al. (2016, 1690) support this view on openness towards novel markets, opportunities, and growth as well as innovation and expanded internationalization activities. When the general mindset endorses the vision of international operations, it increases the overall interest and motivation considering the topic.

The meaningfulness as well as the significance of the community are again highlighted considering the theme of internationalizing the community's operations. Building an international community requires a lot of resources in many areas. The interviewees find it necessary to learn the right ways of operating in different target countries, as the business environments vary from region to region.

These issues can be solved with upfront action. As McDougall and Oviatt (2000, 903) state, proactive behavior is one of the key dimensions of entrepreneurship. Also, the interviewees suggest, for instance, that a general kickstart for internationalization operations could be facilitated by a team, with a special interest in internationalization, examining the field in advance so that others could later utilize this information effortlessly. In addition, expanding the community's network in different countries already reduces the risk of ignorance or incompetence towards the region since, as also Chetty and Stangl (2010, 1729) state, networks can be seen as essential during internationalization processes' opportunity recognition. Creating general support for internationalization as well as other activities will help every entrepreneur in addressing the topic more broadly without major worries about risks. Different and modern ways of working can be generated here even though according to Blaising et al. (2021, 2), the characteristics as well as the consequences of this novel and global way of working are yet to be seen. However, it can be interpreted from the interview data that it would be desirable even for the foreign operators to be integrated into the Finnish entrepreneurial community and networks. Shane and Venkataraman (2000, 218) as well mentioned the core entrepreneurial opportunities to include novel organizational forms. Other companies may be financing operations, according to their own resources, which reduces, for example, the pressure to maximize revenue. Security, financial support, and a unique opportunity to internationalize as a member of the community eliminate the unwavering hesitation to expand our own operations abroad.

*Q2: How entrepreneurs and their attitudes towards internationalization are affected by an entrepreneurial community?*

Through true affection, it is possible to produce maximum value. As Burke and Cowling (2020, 391) and the interview data state, the financial success as well as the motivation of entrepreneurs being highly educated and pursuing the meaningful opportunity are on a higher level compared to the entrepreneurs being drifted to the field or pursuing only the money aspect. When an entrepreneur decides to invest in their career, there is the desire to make the world a better place or change the world in the direction they envision. Simultaneously, of course, there is an effort to act in the best and most efficient way possible when it comes to growing and expanding their business. According to the interview data as well as to Blaising et al. (2021, 1), this journey towards a big, successful business as a self-employed entrepreneur includes various burdens and is very lonely.

Yet, establishing a career as a self-employed entrepreneur is becoming an increasing trend according to Burke and Cowling (2020, 389). The surrounding support and security would create a different foundation for pursuing various objectives as well as for increasing self-confidence. Therefore, the community built is beneficial as it may manage to eliminate the above-mentioned issues as well as to increase the benefits. As is highlighted in the interview data, the people and the entrepreneurs are at the heart of everything in the community, as the value creation is generated from their passion and work.

Growing the network and the community are generally desirable actions. Having an extensive network internationally creates good opportunities to develop new types of businesses, establish new business ideas and, above all, gain new partners and friends. Entrepreneurship brings opportunities and experiences that are not easily available otherwise. On the other hand, it also brings a lot of responsibility. In the community, the responsibility is even greater, as the entrepreneur also represents their community. In international operations, every entrepreneur must create a sensible plan to minimize responsibility and risk. Of course, the community creates good support and background, but the final execution is partly the responsibility of the entrepreneur.

It is recognized in the interview data that internationalization requires a lot of money and resources that need to be targeted properly. The distribution of financial support within the community also lays the foundations for internationalization. This is an example of how the community can also help its own members. As expanding internationally, others will also learn lessons about what can go wrong and what to consider. In addition, the results of internationalization will benefit others as the value within the community increases. The community's support for an entrepreneur interested in internationalization is crucial. It is essential that the support of others exists from start to finish, as it creates self-confidence in every area.

According to the interview data, there is an openness to internationalization as well as a desire to create the concept of it as a norm in everyday activities in the entrepreneurial community. The community is prepared to boldly support entrepreneurs to expand their operations abroad. Thus, internationalization will become a familiar and safe theme for the entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur will receive all the support and security that they are experiencing when operating even in the

domestic market. In addition, foreign actors operating within the network or even as a part of the community already create an international presence, in general. This way, the entrepreneurs' attitudes towards internationalization become more positive, there is more awareness of the topic, and it is eventually more effortless to enter the international markets.

*Q1: How an entrepreneurial community can support a high-skilled entrepreneur to think internationally?*

In general, internationalization is difficult for an entrepreneur without a stable situation and position, and it may not be possible to do so in the near future. As presented in the beginning of the results chapter, for the entrepreneur, meaningfulness is an important concept, as it generates the core motivation to work towards changing the world. In addition, Cuervo (2005, 297) highlights the significance of meaningfulness as a part of the core features of entrepreneurship, that is, identifying the inefficiencies to be eliminated in the surroundings. Also Shane and Venkataraman (2000, 218) state that an entrepreneur's tasks include for instance valuing the recognized opportunities. The value aspect is realized through know-how and meaningfulness, as is stated in the interview data, and not through financial aspects, as Abreu et al. (2019, 589) as well argue. As mentioned earlier, the entrepreneur's urge to change the world creates the spark in the beginning, which eventually transforms into a business idea. One of the community's tasks is to maintain this spark, even internationally. While internationalization is perceived as a way to increase revenue, the meaningfulness of international markets must also be remembered. That is why the community must build support for doing business internationally. An entrepreneur also has a strong need to fulfill themselves. The community has the opportunity to create an environment in which, with internationalization, it is able to accomplish these visions abroad.

There are a number of ways in which community support for internationalization can take place. Every entrepreneur is a whole of their own, so everyone also needs their own kind of support. However, the learning-to-success methodology widely used in the community is the most appropriate and beneficial way for almost everyone. Also, in the case of internationalization, a way of learning can be created in the community and through it also value and opportunity can be brought for others to create an international career with. International action cannot withstand many

major failures, but through small failures, building a profitable business in another country is an effective way to act. With the help of budgeting and calculation, it will be possible to prepare for these adversities. The pre-established and built foundation for internationalization in the community provides strong support for every entrepreneur on the eve of implementation.

According to the interview data, internationalization is easily seen as a high risk among entrepreneurs. Chetty and Stangl (2010, 1729) as well identify the riskiness of internationalization, yet highlight the significance of networks in decreasing the risk aspect. At a certain point in the development of a company's growth, the benefits of internationalization overcome the uncertainty brought by the risks. Thus, the international entrepreneurial community has an important role to play in creating a clear opportunity for progress. Therefore, there must also be clear roles for certain actors who are prepared to help and support. Transparency helps to lay the groundwork for internationalization to take place at some point. Even though an open environment and attitudes towards international business help to create goals for an international career, concrete action together through these goals brings eventually the desired results. Bringing together a certain type of start-up activity to promote internationalization at some point would certainly encourage entrepreneurs to think more carefully and specifically about internationalization. Digitalization has made it easier to operate remotely between countries than ever before, although it does not only provide positive benefits. The community has, therefore, an important role to play in maintaining and alleviating these difficulties that may arise from working with the digital platform. Thus, for example, a hybrid option works best, and building a startup entity in another country could support this structure.

However, one of the biggest cornerstones in the community supporting entrepreneurs' international thoughts, is creating the concept of internationalization as the norm in everyday activities. International operations in different countries require expertise in operating in the country. Within the community, through continuous learning and developing together, especially among those who are eagerly interested in the topic, community support can be generated for the entire organization. Building and maintaining a digital-based entity as well as actively networking in both domestic and international operations also support this norm. This way, every entrepreneur also feels that they are a part of an international entity, even if the expansion into external markets is not relevant yet today.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS, RELIABILITY & SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

This chapter concludes the themes of the entire thesis. The aim was to build a common vision of theories in various fields as well as of the empirical data in order to the entrepreneurial community to manage to create a more encouraging atmosphere for internationalization in the future. As the theoretical background suggests, self-employed entrepreneurship is growing rapidly. It increases the need to expand markets and opportunities in order to be able to grow the established businesses. The market is limited, especially in Finland. Companies in general feel the urge to broaden operations into international markets. Simultaneously, they have a desire to build global networks to increase the ease and efficiency in running a business as well as to decrease the risk aspect. There are several different strategies for internationalization. Modern digitalization has brought even accomplished international players novel opportunities to internationalize. As the popularity of internationalization grows, so do the tools for enhancing it. However, the downsides of digital internationalization may reduce interest in internationalization, in general.

Entrepreneurship is one of the most important things in sustaining society. Entrepreneurs have a lot of responsibilities within the society, as their job is to maintain the income as well as the flexibility and the resilience of society. This has created a new kind of higher education entrepreneurship. International entrepreneurship has also gained new dimensions with it. The purpose of an international entrepreneur is to find, implement, evaluate, and take advantage of opportunities in the international market. As a result of their own flexibility and relationship building efforts, small businesses are also able to create opportunities for themselves in international markets. In addition, the change in working life has led to an increase in the number of self-employed entrepreneurs as well as in the demand for employees working online. While working from home provides many benefits, it also causes financial, reputational, and relationship-related concerns. Therefore, loneliness is one of the biggest disadvantages of working as an entrepreneur online. Digitalization has also brought new possibilities for acting alone. Even though the community established mainly works on online platforms, there is still an opportunity to spend time with colleagues and meet each other physically in real life. There is also support and help if needed. Community diversity creates a

wealth aspect in business that no single operator can manage to provide without the surrounding community.

Reflecting on this background, an attempt was made to create a clear picture of and provide an understanding on how the community both could and should support entrepreneurs to internationalize. When there has been little focus on internationalization within the community yet, it is important to build a foundation and a support system for the future internationalization operations of the community. It was also essential to find out what kind of ideas the entrepreneur members of the community have about internationality, in general. As they are mainly open, it is important to find a way to have an international debate. Without commenting on how to internationalize, it is relevant to consider how the international community could be built. It can be used to find out how to make an individual entrepreneur think internationally. Essentially, internationality must be made the right norm. Even if internationalization is not possible at the moment, it would be good to have support and background work done when this opportunity is realized. Community support can become important in many places, so it is important for every entrepreneur to find their own support for their current situation. When an entrepreneur sees internationalization as a mere risk, there is no interest in trying it. With the right kind of support and discussion, these risks are driven down, and the benefits highlighted. In this way, the international community will be able to build and, in addition, international self-employed entrepreneurs.

This topic could be explored from more than only one perspective as well as in more depth. As a general study on novel views, this thesis may serve as a background for future research. First, since this thesis did not address the internationalization strategies further in depth, it could be studied how an entrepreneur would build one or more strategies for their internationalization. This same issue could also be explored on the community level. Second, the concept of digital entrepreneurship would be essential to examine more distinctly since the theme will increase its importance in the future, and for now, it was presented only as a coherent part of this thesis' other concepts. Last, international entrepreneurship through digital platforms could be explored in more depth. Further in the future when the entrepreneurial community would prospectively have expanded its international business operations, it was also to be interesting to study the success of these internationalization activities, for example, by region. However, this will only work once official action has been taken.



The purpose of this bachelor's thesis was to conduct a qualitative study of the impact of the digital entrepreneurial community on the internationalization attitudes of the self-employed entrepreneurs. The empirical data was extensively processed, albeit with a small sample. Due to the fact that the few interviewees are authentic as well as engaged members of the entrepreneurial community, the interview data can still be said to consist of reliable information. The interview data collected was rewarding and gave a realistic picture of the current situation, although it describes circumstances within this one particular community only. However, with the scope of the theory chapters, it was possible to combine and create versatile answers to the research questions as well as to obtain a comprehensive solution to the research problem. Since previous research similar to this study's views does not exist in effect, this thesis serves as a justified and appropriately universalized primary entity to further exploring the phenomena as well as to benefitting from in the future. The purpose of this thesis is to appear as a support integrity for the entrepreneurial community and as a basis for generating a novel international perspective within the community. The results can be utilized both in building a community base and in managing support for the entrepreneurs. It is important to understand this comprehensively before embarking on building an entrepreneurial strategy internationally. It would be reckless in the community to leave without support for internationalization. To summarize, supportive actions as well as atmosphere for the internationalization of the community should be instituted and scheduled appropriately early enough. Establishing a reliable plan, encouraging interactive discussion and enhancing comprehensive support will help the entrepreneurs. It is desirable that this will be considered and explored further in order to manage to advance the modern field of entrepreneurs as well as entrepreneurial communities considering international activities.

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## APPENDIX

## Appendix 1 Interview questions

The bolded questions start a new main theme in the interview.

Sukupuoli:

Ikä:

Kokemus:

Kansainvälinen kokemus:

- **Kuinka pitkään olet toiminut yrittäjänä?**
- Miten päädyit yrittäjäksi?
- Minkälaista liiketoimintaa olet tehnyt yrittäjänä?
- Mikä sinua motivoi yrittäjänä?
- Minkälaisia tavoitteita sinulla on yrittäjänä?
- **Millaiseksi koet yhteisön panoksen yrittäjänä työskennellessäsi?**
- Miten etänä toimiva yhteisö vaikuttaa työskentelyysi?
- Miten koet digitaalisesti toimivan yhteisön toimivan?
- Miten digitaalinen alusta yhteisön yhdistäjänä on vaikuttanut työskentelyysi yhteisössä?
  - o Millaisia etuja tai haittoja digitaalinen yhteisö on tarjonnut sinulle yrittäjänä?
- **Miten määrittelet kansainvälistymisen yrittäjänä?**
- Miten näet kansainvälistymisen osana yrittäjyyttä?
- Näetkö itsesi kansainvälisenä yrittäjänä? Kuvailisitko itseäsi?
- Missä määrin kansainvälisyys on osa omaa yrittäjäraasi?
- Miten yhteisössä suhtaudutaan kansainvälistymiseen?
- Miten näet yhteisön roolin kansainvälistymisessä?
- Miten yhteisön digitaalisuus voi vaikuttaa mielestäsi kansainvälistymiseen?
  - o Minkälaisia etuja ja haittoja digitaalinen yhteisö voi tarjota kansainvälisillä markkinoilla toimimiseen?
- Miten yhteisö voisi rohkaista etenemään kansainväliselle uralle yrittäjänä?