Outsourcing Dinners - a study about trust-enhancing measures of meal kit companies

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Abstract

**Purpose** - The purpose of this study was to explore how companies that sell household services work with trust-enhancing measures. We reviewed the industry segment of meal kit companies and aimed to generate findings representative for this industry.

**Methodology** - The study applied a qualitative research methodology where seven semi-structured interviews with company representatives were held.

**Findings** - Trust-enhancing measures were performed when the companies emphasised competence through their communication of company values, values connected to high grocery quality, the work behind recipe creation and lastly by providing educational content which portrayed them as the experts. Another trust-enhancing measure was the use of consumer reviews.

**Implications** - For household service companies to enter the consumer’s personal sphere, enhancing trust is key. This can be done through conveying that the companies have the expertise needed to fulfil their promise - this to assure the consumer that he or she does not need to worry.

**Contribution** - To the best of our knowledge, few studies have considered company trust-enhancing measures within the context of outsourcing household services. Consequently, we hoped to contribute to literature and shed light on this phenomenon.

**Keywords**: trust-enhancing, meal kit, trustworthiness, reputation, website, assurances
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Uppsala 29th of May 2018

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Anna Blom                          Jenny Borg
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1. Outsiders in our homes

Over the past years, Sweden has experienced a strong increase in demand for household services, such as cleaning, child care and grocery shopping (SvD, 2018). This trend is said to be strengthened by RUT - a tax-reduction of household services that was instated 2007 (Sköld, 2009). Half of the value-added tax is now reduced from the invoice, making the service cheaper (Skatteverket, 2018). As an example of the trend, there was a 25% increase in using the RUT reduction in 2017 compared to the previous year (SvD, 2018). However, the growth of purchasing household services cannot stem only from RUT - it is also argued to be an effect of a shift in consumer attitude. Today, more and more people seem to be willing to let companies perform household chores that they normally have done themselves and there is an increasing consumer acceptance of having outsiders entering their private spheres (Sydsvenskan, 2016). Even though the RUT-reduction and a shift in consumer attitude are strengthening the convenience trend, it is not the only reasons that we hire outside help. Today's scarcity of time is put forth as the main reason for this increase in hiring companies to perform household work (Svenskt Näringsliv, 2006). Hence, we are not only buying a service - we are buying more time for ourselves and something that makes our lives more convenient.

1.1 Trust and the private sphere

In exchange for the convenience of buying household services, we have to open up our homes and private lives to outsiders and let them do tasks that used to be done by us. In order to let companies into this private sphere, trust is essential whereby these service companies must be able to create it (de Ruijter, van der Lippe & Raub, 2003). The idea of what is considered to be a household service has expanded and today this includes tasks such as IT-help, help with children’s homework and gardening (Skatteverket, 2016). The scarcity of time is argued to be a key driver in the trend of demanding solutions that help consumers save time (Svensk Digital Handel, 2016). In Sweden, there is not only an increase in outsourcing household work - more people are also outsourcing their meal planning (Dibs, 2017). This is done through the popular concept of meal kits - a pre-packed grocery bag accompanied with recipes, conveniently delivered to the consumer’s door (Persson, 2014). The fact that consumers are willing to have a hired outsider clean their home and to look after their children, is the same principle as having a hired outsider choose what you cook for dinner and deliver the groceries.
1.2 Meal kits and trust
The phenomenon of inviting a hired outsider into our private sphere can be studied through the concept of meal kits. This is interesting from several perspectives. First, this form of meal planning has become increasingly popular; 14% of consumers between the ages of 35 and 44 currently are or have used the service (Dibs, 2017). In 2016, 4% of Swedes had a meal kit subscription and that number had increased to 9% in 2017 (Dibs, 2016; Dibs 2017). In addition, as the meal kit service is an online-based service, trust is even more important because e-commerce is associated with more risk. This is stemming from the fact that you pay before the service is delivered (Park, Gunn & Han, 2012), and from concerns of sharing personal data online (Eastlick, Lotz & Warrington, 2006). There is also an added layer of risk for service companies because the consumer cannot experience the service in advance as when buying a product (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). The consumer can touch and feel a product and adjust expectations accordingly while there is a risk that a service will not meet the consumer’s expectations. Hence, for a service purchase to happen, the consumer needs to trust that the company is able to meet the needs and expectations (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). This makes it even more interesting to study a household service company in relation to trust.

1.3 The company perspective
Trust is something that has to be developed and much literature on consumer trust focuses on determinants of trust (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002; Wakefield, Stocks & Wilder, 2004; Patokorpi & Kimppa, 2006; Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Agag & El-Masry, 2017; Bojang, Medvedev, Spasov & Matvevnina, 2017; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014) and what effects trust has on behavioural outcomes like purchase behaviour or consumer satisfaction (Sahi, Sekhon & Quareshi, 2016; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Chen, Wu & Chien, 2015). Furthermore, the research on trust-enhancement has largely held the consumer perspective while there are fewer studies on the trust-enhancing activities that companies perform. Rehman, Qingren and Weiming (2017) conducted a study on the topic of organisational trust-enhancing activities. The authors present a model of trust-enhancing measures developed over time, which ultimately can help to optimise and manage company trust-enhancing activities. Gregori, Daniele and Altinay (2014) have a comparative approach when investigating key variables that affect consumer trust in affiliate websites. They study the determinants of trust both from the organisation’s and the
consumer’s perspective in order to identify discrepancies. However, the study is limited to the context of affiliate websites. After reviewing existing literature, it is clear that there is a need for further research on trust-measures measures from the company perspective. More studies of the company perspective can help to provide an understanding of the challenges and possibilities for companies when aiming to enhance trust. As trust has become recognised as key in lowering risks and because the phenomenon of opening up the private sphere requires consumer trust, it is important to study how companies in this industry actually work with enhancing consumer trust.

1.4 Purpose and research question
The purpose of this study is to explore how companies that sell household services work with trust-enhancing measures. This study explores the company perspective and the industry segment chosen to represent these companies are specifically meal kit companies. As this is relatively unexplored, we hope to contribute with theoretical and empirical insights. The research question is as follows:

How do companies that offer household services enhance consumer trust?

2. Theoretical framework
The theoretical section begins with definitions of trust and continues with trust in the business relationship. Then, the theoretical concept of trustworthiness is presented along with assurance, reputation and website aspects in relation to trust, which are then summarised.

2.1 Definitions of trust
Trust is a widely studied topic and has been defined from various research perspectives - for example economics, psychology, sociology, marketing and information science (Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Xu, Centefelli & Aquino, 2014). There are many different forms of trust and trust can refer to a specific individual or a whole company - resulting in a complexity when defining the term (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Mayer’s (1995) definition of trust is frequently appearing in literature: “a willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the truster, irrespective of the ability of control of the other party” (cited in Pennanen, Tiainen &
Louma, 2007, p. 28). One well-cited definition of trust within a business relationship context refers to when someone believes in another party’s integrity and reliability (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). A third definition is that the trustee has positive expectations of the other party and therefore accepts some kind of vulnerability (Rosseau, 1998, p. 395, cited in Moriera & Silva, 2015).

2.2 Trust in the business relationship
Trust is an essential part of any type of relationship and there is a great body of research on relationship theory. The business relationship can be seen as one type of relationship, with its own separating characteristics. For example, there are linkages that bind two parties together within a business relationship, for example legal bonds or other written agreements, that you normally do not have in personal relationships (Cannon & Perreault, 1999). Additionally, there is at least one organization involved in the business relationship, which entails that the relationship adjusts to that organization’s operations and goals (Cannon & Perreault, 1999). In the business relationship, trust is required in order for a long-term and valuable relationship to be established, developed and maintained (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). It has also been recognised as important for the effectiveness of communication (Rehman, Qingren & Weiming, 2017), and for the strength and commitment to the relationship (Palmatier, Houston, Dant & Grewal, 2013; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Salo & Karjalouto, 2007; Rehman et al., 2017). In fact, both literature and companies nowadays place a large emphasis on relationship-based marketing based on trust (Xu et al., 2014; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). With the rise of importance in relationship-oriented marketing, the number of studies on trust in relationships has increased (Palmatier et al, 2013), and companies have identified the value that lies within long-term relationships with consumers (Xu et al., 2014).

2.3 Trustworthiness
As stated previously, consumers need to feel confident that the company can perform and fulfill the consumer’s expectations in order for a purchase to happen. These beliefs are often referred to as consumer trusting beliefs and are defined as the consumer’s perceptions of how trustworthy a company is (McKnight et al., 2002; Yousafzai, Pallister & Foxall, 2005). Trustworthiness is a concept that contains many terms, so by breaking down the concept into different theoretical
terms, we can better understand which company activity can be connected to which term. Most commonly, trustworthiness has been made up with terms such as honesty, reliability, fulfillment, competence, benevolence, integrity, credibility and quality (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010) as well as predictability (McKnight et al., 2002) and transparency (Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Because there are several definitions of trustworthiness, these terms often overlap (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). For instance, reliability refers to the perception that the company stands by its words, although integrity has also been defined this way (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). McKnight et al. (2002) presented the trustworthiness construct as a part of a trust-building model in which different factors and the consumer’s willingness to trust would influence trust in the company. In the model, the terms in the trustworthiness construct are narrowed down to competence, benevolence and integrity.

*Competence* is explained as the consumer perception that the company can perform what the consumer expects (McKnight et al., 2002; Gregori et al., 2014) and as the perception of the company having the skills and expertise to effectively fulfil what the company has promised the consumer (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Xu et al., 2014; Gregori et al., 2014). Examples of how to convey competence are through the quality and layout of the website and the accurateness of the provided information (McKnight et al., 2002). Similar to this, the perception of quality is related to an expectation of a positive outcome (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Given these similarities, this study treats quality to fall under the scope of competence.

*Benevolence* is when the consumer perceives the company to act in the consumer’s best interest (McKnight et al., 2002; Xu et al., 2014; Gregori et al., 2014), even though new conditions might emerge (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). It has also been explained as the perception that the company does not only focus on profit maximisation (Lee & Turban, 2001). Kantsperger and Kunz (2010) encourage companies to build benevolence together with credibility as they argue that it is key to the company trust-enhancing. Gregori et al. (2014) further claim that benevolence is important but for the sake of managing sensitive consumer data such as financial details. Enhancing the perceptions of benevolence can be done by offering a guarantee or can be emphasised in communication and advertising (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010).
Integrity is the consumer perception that the company is honest and wants to keep promises (McKnight et al., 2002; Xu et al., 2014) and is also often referred to as reliability or credibility (Gregori et al., 2014). The term integrity is similar to benevolence, but integrity refers to the company keeping its promises, rather than wanting the best for the consumer. Gregori et al. (2014) argue that integrity is central to e-commerce as the consumers do not have much choice but to rely on the information on the website. The information therefore needs to be perceived as both truthful and reliable (Gregori et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2014). Furthermore, literature suggests that perceptions of integrity can be instilled by the company keeping to some commonly accepted and shared values, for instance by conveying honesty in their marketing efforts (Lee & Turban, 2001).

A fourth factor that serves a company’s trustworthiness, although not included in McKnight et al. (2002) is transparency. In this context, transparency means the consumer perceives that the company is transparent with its operations. Nilashi, Jannach, bin Ibrahim, Esfahani & Ahmade (2016) define transparency as to be able to explain company decisions, while Kanagaretnam, Mestelman, Nainar & Shehata (2010) define the term as giving the consumer complete information to use as the basis for a purchase decision. Kang and Hustvedt (2014) studied transparency in a CSR context and define it as being open about company processes and as accountability towards stakeholders.

These four terms will make up for trustworthiness in this study. Notably to point out is that even though competence, benevolence and integrity are the most commonly used terms when referring to trustworthiness, there are also findings suggesting that not all three are central to trust—at least not in all contexts. For instance, Gregori et al. (2014) identify competence and integrity as core determinants to trust within the context of affiliate websites and argue that these two are central for the formation of trust to occur, while benevolence is not. An explanation to this is that consumers do not expect companies to put the interest of the consumers before their own in this specific context. However, Kantsperger & Kunz (2010) who studied trust within the context of service companies, argue that benevolence is crucial for companies aspiring to enhance consumer trust. Despite this discussion, this paper will use these dimensions, as consensus seemingly agree in using these (Xu et al., 2014; Lee & Turban, 2001; Yousafzai et al., 2005; Park et al., 2012;
Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010) as well as the term transparency (Kanagaretnam et al., 2010). To summarise the terms; competence is the perception of the company having the skills and expertise needed to meet the desired outcome, benevolence is the perception of the company acting in the best interest of the consumer, integrity is the perception of the company keeping its promises and that it is truthful and lastly, transparency is the perception that the company is open about processes, decisions and gives complete information.

2.4 Assurances

Assurances are several aspects that have been identified in the literature to provide the consumer reassurance in some kind of way. First, structural assurances are assurances often linked to an online environment and have received support for its role in online trust (McKnight et al., 2002; Yousafzai et al., 2005; Kim, Ferrin & Rao, 2008; Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Bojang et al., 2017). These have presumably emerged in a response to the risks and uncertainty associated with the online environment. Included in structural assurances are security policies, privacy policies, legal and regulatory compliance which all should be easy to access and to understand (Yousafzai et al., 2005). Another way is to offer a guarantee, which is a way for companies to decrease the perceived consumer risk with a purchase (Yousafzai et al., 2005; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). For consumers, a guarantee acts as a safeguard that can alleviate the perceived monetary risks (Yousafzai et al., 2005). For companies, a guarantee can strengthen the perceptions of competence, integrity and benevolence (Yousafzai et al., 2005). A third way is to use trusted third-party assurances (Lee & Turban, 2001; Gregori et al., 2014; Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007; Bojang et al., 2017). A third-party assurance is defined as a trusted external party verifying certain company processes visible on the website, for instance with a seal that confirms that the company payment system is secure (Yousafzai et al., 2005). However, there are some discussions on the role of third-party assurances in trust. Some studies suggest that seals are not important when the trust is about to establish, but the only function as a bonus to an already established trust (Wakefield et al., 2014). There are also studies that argue that there are different types of seals (Karimov & Brengman, 2014), and that some types are central to trust, while others are not (Gregori et al., 2014). Clearly, there are diverging views on the importance of third-party assurances, whereby we argue that it is definitely interesting to further investigate.
Summing up, assurances in this study are aspects that provide a set of structures or reassurances to the consumer. Structural assurances refer to the security and privacy measures on a company’s website. Guarantees offered by the company reduce the perceived risks with the purchase in terms of the consumer not being satisfied or the company not fulfilling promises. Lastly, a third-party assurance is a third party verifying or recommending the company, which is often done through a seal placed on the company website.

2.5 Reputation

Company reputation has been proven to influence consumer trust (McKnight et al., 2002; Kim & Ahn, 2007; Park et al., 2012) and that it is critical to trust (Bojang et al., 2017; Gregori et al., 2014). McKnight et al. (2002) define reputation as attributes assigned to something based on second-hand information. Kantzperger and Kunz (2010) identify reputation as an aspect that affects consumer perceptions of benevolence and argue that a good reputation reassures that the company is not acting only in their own interest. Gregori et al. (2014) argue that company reputation also influences perceptions of competence and integrity, because the company has already proven its capabilities to gain the reputation. Furthermore, Kantzperger and Kunz (2010) state that if consumers cannot form a personal relationship with a service company employee, a good reputation becomes even more important.

Reputation is by nature relatively out of the company’s control since it is based on what others say or write about the company. Spoken second-hand information, or word-of-mouth, can even be more effective in improving a company’s reputation than the use of advertising (Salo & Karjaluoto, 2007). While word-of-mouth is spoken, reviews are written feedback from consumers that are seen to convey the firm’s trustworthiness to new potential consumers (Yousafzai et al., 2005). To use reviews has become a common strategy for e-commerce companies to gain credibility as consumers tend to view consumer reviews as more credible than information from the company itself (Utz, Kerkhof & van den Bos, 2012). Previous literature has been focusing on numerical ratings and ignored the text comments, whereby Pavlou and Dimoka (2006) studied and showed that outstanding text comments increased the seller’s credibility and benevolence. In regard to reviews, either numerical or in text, reputation is established from a collective judgement from the company’s customers through their use of online rating (Agag &
El-Masry, 2017). The rating system creates a sense of community among consumers and potential consumers where the latter assesses the company’s credibility and trustworthiness from the collective’s rating (Agag & El-Masry, 2017).

Internet and social media have made it easier for consumers to leave reviews and for companies to address these reviews. The term for when a company takes care of a consumer complaint is service recovery and has a big impact on the consumer’s trust if done well (Chaparro-Peláez, Hernández-García & Urueña-Lopez, 2014). In turn, the trust generates positive word-of-mouth for the company (Chaparro-Peláez et al., 2014). Today, it is common to review or rate companies on social media, for example Facebook or TripAdvisor. While a traditional website is better for communicating competence, social media is used by companies to create a more affect-based commitment from consumers (Calefato, Lanubile & Novielli, 2015). Companies invest in social media channels in order to “come closer” to their consumers, to build social bonds with them because social media enable person-to-person interaction that traditional channels do not (Calefato et al., 2015). For example, a company is able to meet a consumer who has left a review on the company’s social media page and the service recovery can begin here.

In summary, a good reputation can alleviate the consumer’s perception of risk and hence work as trust-enhancing (McKnight et al., 2002; Park et al., 2012). In this study, reputation includes word-of-mouth, rating, reviews, how the company handles feedback and service recovery.

2.6 Website aspects

A website’s quality and features include a wide range of aspects that make up for a consumer’s perception of the site and are often not separated as such in reality. Web design contains what the visitor sees, e.g. layout, colours, images and navigation. An e-commerce website can be viewed as the equivalent of a salesperson that a physical store would have (Park et al., 2012; Gregori et al., 2014; McKnight et al., 2002). Just as it is important that a physical store or office look professional, is it crucial that the website also signals this is where the company and consumer meet (Yousafzai et al., 2005; Wakefield et al., 2004; Patokorpi & Kimppa, 2006). This is supported by findings that perceptions of high website quality often lead to high perceptions of trustworthiness. In particular, the website quality has a strong link to competence (McKnight et
al., 2002; Yousafzai et al., 2005). Besides professionalism, colours and images play an important role even though this is contextual, meaning that there is no right recipe for colours and images. Therefore, it can be helpful to use the concept of attractiveness, introduced by Wakefield et al. (2004). It means that a website’s credibility is connected to how well the consumer accepts the message, i.e. how persuasive the website is. Attractiveness has a significant effect on consumer trust and is mainly derived from the layout and web design according to Wakefield et al. (2004). Connected to this is the importance that the look of the website is aligned with other communication from the company (Patokorpi & Kimppa, 2006). In addition, the website’s user-friendliness is also derived from the web design in the sense that it is depending on the interface and functionality. This factor is considered an important antecedent of consumer trust (Kim & Ahn, 2007; Park et al., 2012; Yousafzai et al., 2005).

Somewhere in between web design and information quality is usefulness. The term user-friendliness mentioned above refers to the interface and user experience while the term usefulness refers to how useful the site is to the visitor. In other words, this is how well the functionality responds to what actions the visitor wants to take (Agag & El-Masry, 2017). Usefulness, for example the search function and navigation structure, is essential to the perception the website gives to the consumer (Kim & Ahn, 2007). However, the usefulness does not only stem from functions and website interface but also from the information on the site. Information quality on a vendor’s website is crucial because consumers use the information as a base for their decision-making (Gregori et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2008; Patokorpi & Kimppa, 2006; Yousafzai et al., 2005). A website should clearly disclose contact information and policy statements, such as privacy- or security policies (Yousafzai et al., 2005). Lastly, system quality entails website factors that must work - hygiene factors. Kim and Ahn (2007) state that a well-designed and well-functioning website can be seen as a capability and something that tells the consumer that the company will fulfill its promises. The site quality increases the consumer’s willingness to trust the online vendor (McKnight et al., 2002; Bojang et al., 2017).

Summarising, the website presents a wide range of trust-enhancing aspects that are divided into three categories for this study. Firstly, web design which includes graphics, layout and user-friendliness. Secondly, information quality refers to all text information on the website, such as
information about price, the service, contacts and about the company. The last category is system quality that refers to hygiene factors that make the website work, e.g. loading speed and working links.

2.7 Summary of theory
The theory for this study is presented in the figure below. Important to point out, the terms used in the theory are the result of a review of literature about B2C online trust, where we have selected the terms that most frequently occurred and then sorted them in categories. Hence, this summary is not a comprehensive compilation of what theoretical concepts that can be included in trust and trust-enhancing measures.

![Figure 1. Summary of theoretical terms used in consumer trust.](image)

3. Method

*In this chapter, the methodology of this study is outlined. Firstly, the research design is explained, then the approach of selecting, collecting and processing data is presented. The method chapter finishes with an ethical discussion and methodological limitations.*

3.1 Research design
To answer the research question of how online-based companies that offer household services enhance consumer trust, an abductive research approach was applied which is a when the researcher goes back and forth between theory and empirics (Awuzie & McDermott, 2017). First,
an empirically interesting phenomenon was identified which was also theoretically unexplored, and connections to the theory on trust were drawn (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Lipscomb, 2012). The abductive approach has received criticism because the approach is based on the researcher drawing connections from empirics to theory and that this is not scientifical enough (Lipscomb, 2012; Awuzie & McDermott, 2017). Hence, how well the researcher knows the theory will affect the connections drawn (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Nevertheless, there are studies that argue for its usefulness and it is also argued to be good in theory building (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative semi-structured interviews with representatives from meal kit companies were conducted. The purpose was to identify which actions companies perform that could be trust-enhancing. Hence, the study was exploratory, and interviews were considered as the most suitable method because they allow for follow-up questions and a dialogue which resulted in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 139 & 320).

3.2 Selection of case and companies
As mentioned, the meal kit industry was selected to represent the household service industry. The reason for this was because of their growing popularity, making the case interesting. In addition, the meal kit service is online and a service that cannot be experienced in advance, which adds layers of risk for the consumer whereby trust is interesting to study. In the industry, there are both companies that focus solely on providing meal kits and there are meal kits from the largest grocery chains. This study focuses on the pure providers because grocery chains are likely to bring part of their already gained consumer trust with them to the meal kit business, making it misleading to study them in the same context as the pure providers. In addition, it was not relevant to include companies that are active in other businesses. Even though Axfood, the owner of the grocery chains Willys and Hemköp (Andersson, 2017), acquired Middagsfrid in 2017, we chose to include Middagsfrid in the selection because it is a different brand and was bought relatively recently. The selected companies should have been active for at least five years because we argue that this should be a sufficient amount of time to develop processes and their website, which we argue is important when investigating trust-enhancing. We scanned the Swedish meal kit market in accordance to our criteria stated above and found that the population was around 15 companies. With this insight and the purpose to receive a good view of the
industry, we argue that to interview seven companies was sufficient. Linas Matkasse is by far the biggest in the business in terms of turnover and even though we do not have primary data from them, we argue that the number of participating companies is still enough to cover the industry well, in addition with secondary data from Linas Matkasse. A big and a small company have similar processes even though they are performed on different scales. Because of these criteria, we applied a non-probability purposeful sampling for the interviews where we contacted companies that met our criteria and interviewed those that wanted to participate (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 261). This sampling technique is based on our judgement and criteria, hence might not be representative of the total population (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 287). However, this method is appropriate when there are limited informants, which is the case here (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 287). The table below shows a summary of the participating companies:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Role of interviewee</th>
<th>Geographical coverage</th>
<th>Turnover 2016 TSEK¹</th>
<th>Concept/niche</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Måndagsfrid</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Most areas in Sweden, 300 different area codes</td>
<td>74 667</td>
<td>Broad concept, family target group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matkomfort</td>
<td>CEO, founder</td>
<td>Mälardalen</td>
<td>48 247²</td>
<td>Tasty sauces, food by real chefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Årstiderna</td>
<td>Marketing- and sales manager</td>
<td>All of Sweden south of Uppsala</td>
<td>35 000³</td>
<td>Organic groceries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mat och Ro</td>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>South and west of Sweden</td>
<td>19 213⁴</td>
<td>Locally produced groceries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familyfood</td>
<td>Co-founder, CEO</td>
<td>Småländ, south-east of Sweden</td>
<td>9 827</td>
<td>Locally produced groceries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veckans Middag</td>
<td>Co-founder, CEO</td>
<td>South of Sweden, Stockholm, Uppsala</td>
<td>7 775</td>
<td>Many choices, allergy adapting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gröna Kassen</td>
<td>Co-owner, CEO</td>
<td>South of Sweden, Uppsala and Stockholm</td>
<td>1 728</td>
<td>Vegan recipes, mainly organic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Overview of interviewed meal kit companies

¹ Source for turnover figures is www.allabolag.se, search results found from the company names.  
² Turnover for 2017.  
³ Source: https://www.arstiderna.com/om-arstiderna/press  
⁴ Turnover for 2017.
3.3 Operationalisation

An interview guide (see Appendix A) was developed prior to the interviews. The theory contains concepts that may be too abstract to be captured in qualitative interviews. Therefore, the concepts were operationalised to make the theory more tangible (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 677), as displayed with examples in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part of theory</th>
<th>Example of theoretical term/concept</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Corresponding literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>“How do you communicate to potential customers that you can deliver the service you say that you can deliver?”</td>
<td>Gregori et al., 2014; Kantsperger &amp; Kunz, 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>“Can you tell me about your company values?”</td>
<td>Xu et al., 2014; Lee &amp; Turban, 2001; McKnight et al., 2002.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>Guarantees</td>
<td>“Do you work with customer guarantees?” and “If so, how and what is the purpose?”</td>
<td>Yousafzai et al., 2005; Kantsperger &amp; Kunz, 2010.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>Customer reviews</td>
<td>“You have published some customer reviews on your website, can you tell me about the work behind this? What is the purpose?”</td>
<td>Utz et al., 2012; Pavlou &amp; Dimoka, 2006; Agag &amp; El-Masry, 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Web design, information- and system quality</td>
<td>“How do you work continuously with the website?”</td>
<td>Wakefield et al., 2004; Patokorpi &amp; Kimppa, 2006; Kim &amp; Ahn, 2007; McKnight et al., 2002.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Examples of operationalisation

3.4 Interview execution

When reaching out to the companies, we explained the study topic and purpose and the company – if participating – provided us with someone with appropriate knowledge and experience. The purpose of the interview guide was to give structure to the interview session and help to make sure that all matters we wanted to cover were discussed. The questions were formulated as openly as possible to allow the interviewee to speak freely about the topic (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 391). Telephone interviews were the preferred option with regards to the fact that company representatives participated voluntarily and we wanted to lower the threshold for them. In
addition, several companies are located outside of Stockholm, making telephone interviews the best option for geographical reasons. The interviews took 30-45 minutes each and were all conducted in April 2018.

3.5 Processing primary data
All interviews - the source of primary data - were recorded and transcribed shortly after the interviews were held, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2012, p. 550). In addition, to record the interviews made the conversation itself freer as no pauses for note taking were necessary. A common approach when analysing qualitative text is to start with identifying categories that the data can be structured into when coding (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 557). When first approaching a large amount of text, a sense of unclarity and chaos can arise simply due to the volume of text and to process the text. Dividing it into parts is a way of handling this (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015, p. 220), and the transcripts were coded according to the four categories from the theoretical summary with one colour per category. For example, text related to website aspects was coded with a green background. In addition, a fifth colour code was used to capture information in the transcripts that were assessed as interesting or important but that did not fall into any of the other four categories. Coding and categorising of the data were done to acquire a structure of the data and to see similarities and differences in the answers (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 562). The coding process was done on copies of the original transcription, to keep the original intact if re-coding was necessary or if something went wrong during the process, as advised by Hedin and Martin (2011).

3.6 Triangulation
To strengthen the validity of the study, the interview data was complemented with secondary data (Farmer, Robinson, Elliott & Eyles, 2006). To use data from different sources both strengthens the validity of the findings by limiting bias and can also yield more sophisticated interpretations when looking at the phenomenon from different angles (Decrop, 1999). Secondary data was collected through written material from company websites, social media channels as well as non-written material, for example images on the website (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 258). The secondary data was for example “About us” texts, text about recipes and third-party seals. This study includes secondary data from Linas Matkasse even though they
declined interview participation. The reason for this is that they are the biggest company in the business and we argue that they have an impact on the industry that we did not want to lose. Therefore, we still chose to collect secondary data from them. All secondary data was collected during March and April 2018. By comparing data from the interviews and material on the different company channels helped to assure a consistency between what the company said and what was communicated to consumers. Aside from using and comparing different sources, we independently coded and analysed all data to prevent any influence in the interpretation of each other. The independent coding and interpretations were later on compared. This is another way of triangulation which further contributes to the validity of the research results (Farmer et al., 2006).

3.7 Ethical aspects
As always in academic research, it is important to take ethical aspects into account. In particular, because this study contains business specific information from named companies as well as thoughts from the interviewed individuals, it is bound with high ethical demands. The ethical discussion mainly regarded how the interviews were conducted and how the interviewees were treated. Firstly, a rule is to inform the interviewee of the purpose of the study and on which terms they were participating (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 222). Prior to the interviews, the participating informants were informed of the study objectives and that they did not have to answer questions they did not want to answer. Their participation was on a voluntary basis, thereby complying with the principle of consent (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). Lastly, there is the matter of confidentiality where Vetenskapsrådet (2002) states that participating individuals should be given confidentiality and the researchers must safely store their personal information. For this study, none of the interviewees asked for anonymity because the questions focused on company activities rather than sensitive personal information. In addition, the study’s validity benefitted of not having to conceal company names and role of the interviewee. Lastly, the authors have tried to act professional and respectful in contact with the interviewees.

3.8 Limitations
Like most studies, this study has its methodological limitations (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 380). Firstly, telephone interviews resulted in that non-verbal cues were missed (Farmer et al., 2006), and the lack of face-to-face interaction might also compromise the trust the interviewee placed in
us as interviewers. This might have limited the amount of information the company wanted to share with us (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 381). In order to avoid leading the informant, we tried to ask as open questions as possible (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 389). While this was considered beneficial for the validity of the results, it might also imply that the results were affected by what the interviewee chose to talk about. Considering this, the risk for researcher bias was reduced by the triangulation. Continuing, as the interviewees either had founded the company or had a central position in the company, it could be assumed that they would convey the company favourably – a risk of participation bias (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 381). Furthermore, interviews were chosen to explore the interviewee’s own meanings and perceptions (Saunders et al., 2012, p. 383). While this data collection method was found the most suitable one for the purpose of the study, the nature of semi-structured interviews constrained the reliability of the study. However, the interviews were recorded and transcribed which improved reliability. With the method chosen for this study, we did not attempt to generalise the result from onto other industries. For that, it requires a study with a more comprehensive scope.

4. Results

In this chapter, results from interviews and secondary data will be presented according to the themes that emerged during the coding process. The themes are: company values, quality of groceries and service, flexibility towards consumers, website aspects and reputation.

4.1 Meal kits are a convenience

The majority of the companies place significant weight on the fact that their service provides inspiration, variation and saves time. Familyfood describes this as: “It is in our time to not have to think. There are so many choices we ought to make today. Which school, what kind of job, which electricity provider and so on. I think many people think ‘oh how nice, someone else has already made the choice for me’.” (interview 2018). Matkomfort says that their consumers buy both time and quality when they are choosing for you, and adds “you do not have to think” (interview 2018). They claim that the consumer gets good food that is healthy and varied while saving time. A similar thing is stated on Middagsfrid’s website, they state “You do not have to plan or think of variation. You get inspiration and you do not have to keep track of organic, additives or red-listed fish - we do it for you!” (middagsfrid.se A, n.d.). Also Mat och Ro has
noticed the tendency of people having less time and demand solutions to handle this and therefore launched meal kits that require even fewer pots and less cooking time (interview 2018).

4.2 Company values
Some of the companies argue that the awareness of how food consumption affects both the environment and our health has increased (Middagsfrid, interview 2018). Connected to this, all companies make sure to communicate their company values, which are related to the food itself.

4.2.1 Sustainability
Several companies in this study have a clearly communicated sustainability profile, for example all groceries in meal kits from Årstiderna are completely organic. They claim that they want to “encourage more people to eat more greens and less meat ... both from a sustainability- and health perspective” (interview 2018). For Årstiderna, it is a prerequisite that all products are organic - they even claim that it is the foundation for their entire identity. Further, they do not collaborate with farms if they do not share the passion for better food (interview 2018). These values are communicated mainly through the products that are chosen for the meal kits, as well as in all their marketing channels, for example their website, social media and the recipe folder that follows with the delivery (Årstiderna, interview 2018). Gröna Kassen’s values are similar as they guarantee that 90% of the ingredients are organic. They are also positioned towards the meat-free side as they only offer vegan meal kits (gronakassen.se A, 2018). They state that their philosophy is strongly driven by a personal conviction that we all feel better by not eating meat (interview 2018). These values are communicated on their website, where they state that a vegan diet is positive for our health, the planet and the animals; “Many of us would probably skip the steak if we were forced to watch how it looks inside the walls of a slaughterhouse.” (gronakassen.se B, 2018).

The sustainability aspect of food waste is a frequently brought up matter. To prevent food waste, Gröna Kassen re-packs all dry goods such as pasta or flour to adjust for the number of people receiving the meal kit (interview 2018). Matkomfort is more outspoken that reducing food waste is one of their biggest missions: “We do not want to have any food waste at all, and by adapting the meal kits based on portions, we help you to not throw away food. Both the environment and
you gain from this, as you do not have to pay for something that is not used” (interview 2018). They have developed a way of working where they start every week with an empty warehouse and order produce after receiving their orders to make sure that they are never left with any groceries. According to them, how they work to reduce food waste is communicated in every possible channel (Matkomfort, interview 2018). A similar view is shared by Middagsfrid who also aims to reduce plastic use in the meal kits and this is something they have identified as a key topic within their target group (interview 2018). The biggest company in the business, Linas Matkasse, also highlights the importance of lowering food waste and presents that they have less than 1% waste from their procurance of groceries (linasmatkasse.se A, n.d.).

4.2.2 From farm to fork
For Familyfood, it is important to purchase locally produced groceries. Covering Småland and some municipalities in Västergötland, their narrow geographical scope enables them to offer local groceries (interview 2018). Their meal kits are assembled and picked up by drivers at a local organic egg farmer, with whom they have a long-standing collaboration with. Familyfood emphasises their local edge in their communication and tries to show their close work with producers and expresses a notion that this is important for consumers: “I think our consumers think that it is important how the food is being produced and that it is fun to follow the food ‘from farm to fork’ - that is an experience as well” (Familyfood, interview 2018). To offer local produce is something that other companies have as an ambition too. Veckans Middag only includes Swedish meat and chicken in their meal kits and expresses a support for local producers by buying from them (interview, 2018). Local produce and quality often go hand-in-hand according to Veckans Middag: “Our customers appreciate the high quality and the fact that there is a lot of local and organic groceries in the bag”. Matkomfort (interview 2018) agrees with this view and says that their main produce is always Swedish and fresh. Mat och Ro stresses that locally produced food is prioritised over organic produce: “There are obvious advantages with organic food, but organic from China is something that we do not view as an advantage. We instead work with local and this is something I view as more important” (interview 2018). This emphasis on locally produced food is their key message in all their communication.
4.2.3 Extensive information about groceries

When it comes to the groceries, many companies make sure to point out that the food is natural. Middagsfrid claims that the foundation for their food philosophy is good groceries without additives or other industrially produced ingredients (middagsfrid.se B, n.d.). This philosophy is shared by Familyfood and states that “We offer completely unprocessed food when you think about it. The only semi-manufactured product we sometimes include is sausage. But otherwise, we try to have as clean produce as possible” (interview 2018). Matkomfort also takes pride in their food that they say is healthy and without additives (interview 2018). Middagsfrid provides thorough and extensive information about ingredients and the company claims to be very restrictive with additives and state that "Middagsfrid assures that the food does not contain any monosodium glutamate (E621), AZO-colours, saturated fat or artificial sweeteners like aspartame and sucralose" (middagsfrid.se C, n.d.). Linas Matkasse’s website has a similar page where thoughts about ingredients and nutrition are explained (linasmatkasse.se A, n.d.). Middagsfrid argues that their consumers are very conscious and demanding, as of which they want to provide information on what groceries have been chosen and why (interview 2018). It is partly to convey that they do a good job, but also to assure the consumer that he or she has made a good choice of meal kit, according to Middagsfrid. Årstiderna who uses organic products, claims that organic food naturally does not contain additives or flavour enhancers (arstiderna.com B, n.d.). Furthermore, Gröna Kassen informs the consumers about the negative effects of additives, flavour enhancers and GMOs through their website and how their meal kits are free from such (gronakassen.se B, n.d) as well as what constitutes a good vegan diet (gronakassen.se C, n.d). Another way to emphasise transparency of ingredients is to state the different local producers that supply the groceries. Familyfood, Årstiderna and Veckans Middag all include a list of their local producers on their website (familyfood.se, n.d.; arstiderna.com C, n.d.; veckansmiddag.se B, n.d.).

4.3 Quality of service

Naturally, the quality of the offerings is something that all companies want to highlight. This is done through emphasising the high-quality groceries, the convenience with the respective offering and how the recipes are created.
4.3.1 Communicating quality

All companies emphasise their high-quality groceries and state that this is a key reason to their competitiveness. As a quality mark, Matkomfort says that their main groceries are always Swedish and fresh and highlight their home-made sauces and fonds (interview 2018). Mat och Ro also emphasise their quality; “we select our produce very carefully and I think consumers feel safe knowing what they get when buying from us” (interview 2018). This is something they push in all their communication and they, along with other smaller meal kit providers, believe that since they cannot compete on price they must focus on quality. For instance, Veckans Middag says that they are more expensive in comparison to the big chains, so they must keep a high quality all the way (interview 2018). Similarly, Familyfood says “We have decided that we do not want to lower the price because we want to show that the food is worth it and that you get very high-quality food” (interview, 2018). Gröna Kassen has even turned their small size into an advantage as they write on their website that because they are not bound to any big chain, it is possible for them to offer fun and selected products (gronakassen.se A, n.d).

4.3.2 Recipe creation

An essential part of the convenience aspect of the meal kit is the included recipe. The weekly recipes are usually displayed on the website, a few clicks from the home page. It then varies how detailed the company is when communicating the dishes - some publish only the title of the dish and some publish the entire recipe. Linas Matkasse and Middagsfrid include pictures of the meals (linasmatkasse.se C, n.d.; middagsfrid.se E, n.d.). However, what is clear in all cases is that the menus are conveyed in a neutral manner without descriptions about flavour, tastiness or any other expressive word. Despite the lack of descriptive and selling communication about the recipes and meals, many companies highlight the work that goes into creating the recipes. Middagsfrid describes the work as: “It is actually very comprehensive and quite resource-demanding. We have six full-time chefs, we call them menu-planners, but they are chefs or nutritionists that work here. They plan, partly by looking for ideas for meals around the world, partly by test-cooking” (interview, 2018). Gröna Kassen collaborates with a chef that creates all menus for them, who they try to highlight in their communication: “We have a good chef named Erika Frost who runs a restaurant in Gothenburg and she creates the dishes every week. ... We do quite a lot of advertising about her so most of the customers know about her.” (interview...
In addition, Veckans Middag and Matkomfort state in the interviews that they also create the meals with chefs and put effort into the dishes that go on the menu.

4.4 Flexible service

The majority of the companies in the meal kit business are regional and deliver to limited areas. The fact that they are rather small in comparison to the bigger grocery chains or Linas Matkasse and Middagsfrid is something that they view as an advantage because it enables them to be flexible towards consumers.

4.4.1 Flexibility as an advantage

A recurring word when speaking with Familyfood is flexibility - something they want to offer their consumers from the outset: “We are always very flexible towards the consumers. We work close to our consumers and suppliers and because we are a small business, I think it makes it easier for us and our consumers feel that it is OK to also ask us” (interview 2018). In addition, they maintain a flexible approach on holidays and if consumers forget to cancel their order they try to find another consumer that can take the order instead (interview 2018). Mat och Ro also tries to meet specific delivery requests as much as possible, by either canceling the meal kit or deliver it to another address (interview 2018). Flexibility is also obvious when something has gone wrong with the service, for example if a product is missing in the bag. Veckans Middag states: “If it’s customers that live close to where we are, we try to bring the missing product to them. It costs us a little bit extra, but we think it makes the customers happy” (interview 2018). Familyfood has a similar approach whereby a customer is missing something in the bag, they check to see if they have a driver nearby who can drop off an extra product, otherwise they compensate by giving a free fruit bag or a discount on the next meal kit.

4.4.2 Fast and personal service recovery

To be able to carry this flexibility, consumers need to reach out so that the company has an opportunity to address the issue. Matkomfort is proud of their customer service: "They are very personal and many have worked there for so long so they understand that it's a matter of just solving the problem - to make the customer happy and satisfied” (interview 2018). Veckans Middag works in a similar way with service recovery as they try to have as close communication
with their consumers as possible. They say that the majority of customer service matters are handled through email, or phone if it is an urgent matter. They have their own drivers that go by the same schedule every week, which enables them to answer questions right away: “In some cases, we even know the names of the children and such. And if they have any questions they can ask us right in the doorway and get an answer without the driver or delivery firm telling them to call some telephone central” (Veckans Middag, interview 2018). Gröna Kassen states that they feel that their customers understand that they do not do anything wrong on purpose, which is why they have forgiving customers. However, if something has gone wrong they answer as fast as they can, which is also a reason for the high acceptance they perceive that their customers have (interview 2018). While Mat och Ro says that they have received praise for their flexibility in handling customer queries, this has also resulted in many emails and phone calls which is why they instated My Pages on their site (interview 2018). They did not want to instate My Pages at first as they thought it was impersonal but have done it now for efficiency purposes.

Middagsfrid’s customer service relies on a standardised manual when handling customer service issues (interview 2018). Despite this, Middagsfrid acknowledges that dinners are a sensitive matter: "if something is missing or there are groceries that are of bad quality, this becomes an issue for me and my family because we have not bought any other food and we need to make dinner for the children... So, we need to show understanding and act fast so that the consumer is not too dissatisfied or that the dinner did not go as planned” (interview 2018).

4.4.3 Adaptive guarantees

The two biggest meal kit companies, Linas Matkasse and Middagsfrid, offer a written quality guarantee on their website. If a consumer is unhappy with Linas Matkasse’s service after receiving four deliveries in a row, their guarantee can be used (linasmatkasse.se B, n.d.). However, they do not state what the customer is compensated with, and neither does Middagsfrid. Middagsfrid writes: “The most important thing for us is that you are satisfied. When we have been given the trust to deliver our product home to you, we want that you find the products to be of high quality and in good condition. It is also important that the deliveries arrive when promised. For that reason, we offer generous customer warranties so that you do not need to worry if anything would go wrong” (middagsfrid.se D, n.d). Middagsfrid argues that it is more important that the consumer becomes happy, than the cost of the compensation
(interview 2018). Årstiderna has a quality guarantee on their website, saying that if a product is missing or does not live up to their quality standards, the consumer will be compensated if bringing this to Årstiderna’s attention (arstiderna.com D, n.d.). Matkomfort also offers a quality guarantee on their website (matkomfort.se A, n.d).

For the smaller actors in the business, it seems that they offer a guarantee in practice although it is not stated on the website. For example, Veckans Middag tries to communicate with the consumer and solve the problem at hand: “We try to maintain the communication with the consumer. Often, they are really happy if we send a new product and something extra with the next delivery.” (interview 2018). Familyfood also applies flexibility when it comes to service recovery. They have developed a praxis where they compensate a late delivery with 200 SEK but emphasise that they try to remain open to see what they can do in every case (interview 2018). Lastly, the principle of judging each case separately is applied by Gröna Kassen as well: “We compensate everyone quickly. If something has gone wrong, they get a compensation and there is no scale there.” (interview 2018).

4.5 Website and social media

Updates of company websites and social media channels are rather limited among most of the companies. However, some express a desire to be more active with the digital channels but are constrained by little time and knowledge. Working with third-party assurances is not actively done either.

4.5.1 Mixed effort on the website

Given that the transaction when ordering meal kits occurs online, it is no surprise that all companies work with their website to some extent. However, the frequency of updates varies among the companies and some stress the importance of it, while others focus their attention on other channels. Matkomfort places emphasis on their website: “Everything we do results in that the consumers end up at the website” and continues “If the website does not feel serious, I don’t think we stand a chance” (interview 2018). Matkomfort repeatedly stresses how important it is to convey that the company is serious through the website, to have graphically appealing content, that it must be easy to use and that it contains as much information and reviews as possible. The
purpose is to lower any barrier for new consumers and to increase the feeling that the website is secure. Årstiderna views the website as a channel to convey company values and that it is important for the transactions: “The website is a platform for a presentation of us as a company as well as being a place for existing customer to place new orders. We want our website to reflect a good picture of who we are as a company as well as function as a convenient way for consumers to order through.” (interview 2018). Middagsfrid works extensively with their website as they do daily updates and view it as a crucial channel to communicate news and their company values (interview 2018). They acknowledge however that they should be better at communicating what they do good - also through their website (interview 2018). Familyfood assigns much less effort to their website that was updated 5-6 years ago and has not changed much since. They think the website primarily serves the purpose of acquiring new consumers and also say that limited resources is the reason to why it is not updated (interview 2018). Another small company, Gröna Kassen, struggles with the functionality of their website and is something they have received criticism for. They say “we are very bad at the digital part, this is really a weakness for us. This is also something that has to do with us being on a small scale” (interview 2018).

4.5.2 Little focus on third-party seals

Most of the companies have at least one seal displayed on their website and Matkomfort is the company that uses seals most extensively with five different seals at the bottom of their homepage. They view these as something that conveys that they are serious; “we are proud of these and want the consumers to feel safe that Matkomfort is a serious company” (interview 2018). Årstiderna has one seal at the bottom of their website – EU organic - and state that “we collaborate with farmers all over Europe in order to deliver the best ecological groceries of the season” (interview 2018). They want to highlight the fact that all their produce is 100% organic which is the core of their identity. At the top of Familyfood’s website, they have placed an award seal that they are winners of locally produced food in 2013. However, seals are not something they actively work with and they say that they barely knew that the award existed until they were nominated by LRF\(^5\) (interview 2018).

\(^5\) Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund
4.5.3 Struggling with social media

As with the website, the use of social media in the form of Facebook and Instagram varies among the companies. Middagsfrid frequently updates both of their social media accounts, often with “behind-the-scenes” photos on Instagram which is to show how much time and resources they put behind the meals and to highlight the quality with their chefs (interview 2018). Interestingly, Familyfood finds that their Facebook channel is more important to them than their website. They believe that their consumers turn to their Facebook channel, not their website, if they need to contact them (interview 2018). Therefore, Familyfood claims that Facebook is their largest channel for communicating with consumers and they try to update it once or twice a week to get more followers and engagement. A time constraint is felt by Veckans Middag who says that they do not have enough time to update their social media, although they wish they could. Lastly, Gröna Kassen explains a cautious relationship towards Facebook after experiencing a case where a consumer made a complaint which gained negative attention. They do however a few campaigns every other month, from which they see increased consumer interest.

4.6 Reputation is important

A good reputation is seen as important among the companies and the majority use customer reviews, although the objectives of these vary among the companies. For instance, Middagsfrid displays several customer reviews on their website and says that the aim with these is to be as transparent and open as possible (interview 2018). However, it is also seen as a fun thing to publish because they are proud of their good reviews. Aside from publishing the reviews online, Middagsfrid works actively with collecting customer reviews. They invite their consumers on a weekly basis to provide feedback on last week's meal kit, and they claim to spend much time reading these (interview 2018). They ask for feedback on if the cooking was quick enough, easy to understand the recipe, if it was tasty, if everyone in the family liked it, what they thought about the nutritional content and if the dishes were sustainable enough. Veckans Middag also publishes consumer feedback on their website, but say that it is more as a fun thing rather than something they actively work with (interview 2018). Matkomfort has no reviews directly placed on their website, but has added a plugin from Reco.se that shows the current customer rating of Matkomfort (matkomfort.se A, n.d). This plugin redirects the website visitor to the Reco site.

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6 A software module that is downloaded to the website as an extra function.
with all customer reviews - both good and bad. While this is not something they actively can manage, they state it is a good tool to convey transparency; “It is clear. It is honest...It is very transparent. We are proud of what we do and are very proud of what our consumers think. We want to be as open as possible.”. Årstiderna uses the plug-in Trustpilot with which they primarily see as a tool to collect feedback from their consumers to identify areas of improvement (interview 2018). Lastly, Mat och Ro thinks their work with the reviews are important as “I believe the consumers think it is nice to read such before making a decision [to buy a meal kit]” (interview 2018).

The companies seem to rely much on word-of-mouth and a positive reputation. For example, Familyfood claims that it is difficult for them to communicate with potential consumers and say “we do not have any large marketing budget, and therefore we trust our consumers to tell their colleagues and friends about us and that we offer a good meal kit” (interview 2018). Veckans Middag is also dependent on word-of-mouth and tries to encourage their current consumers to recruit a consumer by offering a gift when a referred consumer orders a meal kit. Similarly, Mat och Ro also stress this to be an important channel to reach new consumers. Hence, they employ a referral program in which they encourage their consumers to recruit friends and colleagues and in return get a free meal kit for every four meal kits the new consumer has bought (Mat och Ro, interview 2018). Word-of-mouth and referral are important for the larger actors too. In fact, Middagsfrid claims that this is one of their largest channels to acquire new consumers and that they should work more actively with these (interview 2018).

5. Analysis

To find out how the companies are working with trust-enhancing measures, the results are analysed using the trustworthiness construct and theory of assurance, reputation and website-related measures. Trustworthiness refers to the terms competence, benevolence, integrity and transparency. The section focuses on the company activities and how we interpret these in terms of trust-enhancement. The chapter is structured to cover the result sections in the same order.
5.1 Competence to enhance trust

Evident from the companies' marketing, website and during the interviews, it is important to communicate values and the high-quality groceries. This section of the analysis corresponds to the result parts about company values and quality of groceries and service, i.e. parts 4.2 and 4.3.

5.1.1 Values are about the groceries

All companies talk a lot about their company values, which are also clearly communicated through their channels. The majority of the values are connected to the groceries. For example, Årstiderna’s values about organic produce, Gröna Kassen’s plant-based meal kits, Familyfood’s local groceries, Matkomfort’s commitment to lowering food waste or Middagsfrid’s emphasis on clean food without additives. Since the physical product of the meal kit is food, it may not be strange that the company values are closely related to the groceries. As the companies communicate their values, they communicate that their groceries are of high quality. As the term quality often is seen as to overlap with perceptions of competence (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010), it can be argued that the companies are enhancing perceptions of competence by communicating these kinds of values. Further, it could be argued that organic local unprocessed food is in line with what most people consider to be good and healthy food. Sticking to commonly accepted values like this is sometimes defined as showing integrity (Lee & Turban, 2001), whereby to talk about grocery-related values can also be seen as a way to convey integrity. So, if the companies emphasise their values related to their groceries, one could draw connections to the terms competence and integrity. Tendencies of benevolence, that is to show care for the consumer (Xu et al., 2014), can also be identified in many of the companies' values, for example Gröna Kassen whose philosophy is strongly driven by a personal conviction that everyone feels better by not eating meat (interview 2018). This value states that they want to help people feel better, i.e. an expression of meaning well. Another example that could be connected to benevolence is that Middagsfrid states that they avoid any type of additive and strive for “clean food” as far as possible and the reason is to provide the best groceries to their customers (middagsfrid.se B, n.d). This can be seen as an act of benevolence as it shows caring for the consumer (Xu et al., 2014).
With these connections to theory, it could be argued that the communication of the values that correspond to sustainable and healthy food could be seen as a trust-enhancing measure as this enhances perceptions of competence, integrity and benevolence.

While the emphasis in the communication of values and food philosophy can be treated as a trust-enhancing measure, it can be discussed. For instance, even though it could be argued that connections trustworthiness could be drawn with theory as a basis, this does not necessarily mean that the consumer actually perceives communication about values as trustworthy. The companies, on the other hand, might not even reflect on the fact that communicating these values might be a trust-enhancing measure. For instance, the companies might talk about their values because they are passionate about what they believe in, for example Gröna Kassen’s strong conviction of vegan diet or Familyfood’s passion to support the local producers.

5.1.2 Educating to show competence

Most of the companies have extensive information about the food’s origin and ingredients on their websites and write about how food affects health and the environment. For example, Gröna Kassen writes about vegan nutrition and Middagsfrid explains why they exclude ingredients with additives. This could be seen as efforts to educate the consumer and this type of communication may be connected to the trustworthiness construct in the way that the companies provide such information and material to demonstrate their expertise in the field. By applying this logic, this measure would be in line with the definition of competence with the consumers perceiving that the company has the necessary skills, abilities and expertise to fulfill their promises to the consumer (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Gregori et al., 2014). However, to publish educational content as such to convey expertise is presumably not new or unique for this industry but it can be argued that it is of particular importance for meal kit companies. As the meal kit companies claim themselves to have conscious consumers that demand good food, one could argue that emphasising expertise in this topic would be essential - to showcase that the companies know what is considered to be good, healthy, sustainable and nutritious food. This trail of thought can be strengthened by the statement from Middagsfrid who says that providing this information can assure their conscious consumers that “they have made the right choice” of meal kit provider (interview 2018). In the same way, it may be important for Gröna Kassen to convey expertise in
vegan nutrition so that the consumer trusts that he or she receives all the necessary nutrients in the meal kit and would not need to worry. In short, educating the consumer can be seen to enhance consumer trust by showing expertise that is perceived as competence.

5.1.3 Assuring the quality of the recipes

All companies agree that a part of the convenience aspect is that the food comes with recipes, which is a main reason as to why people buy meal kits. The consumer gets variation, inspiration and does not have to think about the dinner planning. Because the recipes are such a big part of the offering, one would assume that the quality of the recipes would be communicated more and in more selling terms. Nevertheless, the dishes are presented in neutral terms only describing the food, such as “Salmon with roasted potatoes and herb sauce”. According to McKnight et al. (2002), competence is the ability to meet the promised outcome. It can therefore be argued that if the companies promise a delicious dish, they are risking that the subjective opinion of the consumer can lead to them being perceived as less competent if the consumer does not like a dish. In other words, if perceptions of competence can be strengthened by showing that you have the capabilities of fulfilling a promise (McKnight et al., 2002), it can be argued that the companies may think it is better to stay on the safe side with objective descriptions of the meals and avoid the risk of not being able to keep the promise - thereby possibly risk losing competence in the eyes of the consumer.

While it can be argued that there are risks of describing the dishes expressively, some companies seemingly have found a way to avoid this risk while still highlighting the quality of the meals. It seems that this risk is avoided be letting consumers know that the companies have chefs and nutritionists that create the dishes. For instance, the companies use social media to show how their chefs create the recipes. By applying the logic of Kantsperger and Kunz (2010) that quality can be related to competence, it could be argued that the chef’s expertise in this case might become a quality stamp. It is to say that the meals will taste good without having to say anything about the taste in particular. In line with theory on competence (McKnight et al., 2002), to have chefs creating recipes may ensure competence as it could be argued that convey skills and capability to make tasty dishes that everyone in the family will like and that the recipes will fit into the everyday life, i.e. not being too complex or time-consuming. In relation to this, the
companies also push the fact that their meal kits are pre-tested by test pilot groups or by themselves in their respective kitchen. This presumably also works as a way to show competence because the consumer only gets the tastiest and best recipes are used in the meal kit.

The literature states that when a consumer is purchasing a service, there is often some kind of risk involved, due to not being able to touch and feel the anything in advance (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). Quite naturally, this is the case when someone subscribes to meal kits because the consumers do not know which meals they will receive. While values around the groceries can be seen as competence as analysed in the section above, chefs that create recipes can be seen as competence that dampens the risk that the meals may not be an instant favourite. In addition to this, the companies are also quick to accentuate the work of making sure that the recipes contain all the needed nutrients. This can be a way to convey that the company effectively can meet the desired outcome - further alluding to the quality and competence aspect (Gregori et al., 2014).

5.2 Flexibly serving consumers
Flexible and personal customer service was emphasised by all companies. This flexibility can be connected to both competence and integrity, which reassures the consumer that the company fulfills its promises and has the skills needed to do so (Gregori et al., 2014). This section corresponds to part 4.4 from the results.

5.2.1 To fulfill promises
The companies claim to be very solution oriented in their approach to serving consumers. Many companies go out of their way to be flexible with service recovery, and this flexibility helps them to ensure that they keep their promises. The flexibility is explained as necessary by some of the firms, which involves finding solutions that fit the consumer the best, though this might increase the company's effort and short-term costs. From this, connections to both reliability, competence as well as benevolence can be drawn (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; McKnight et al., 2002). It can be assumed that the companies are flexible to show reliability and that they are capable in fulfilling promises, which would be aligned with literature’s view of integrity and competence (Gregori et al., 2014). For instance, Middagsfrid states that the dinner is a sensitive matter and they need to make sure that the meal kit is delivered on time and in full (interview 2018).
addition, by flexibly serving consumers despite a short-term cost is to show care for the consumer’s best which increases the perception of benevolence (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). In summary, to be flexible in the service leads to the companies fulfilling their promises, which is perceived as reliable and competent which corresponds to the trustworthiness construct. Though this is not unique for meal kits as most companies presumably need to deliver their promise or else they would not have any consumer left, it could be argued that it is even more important for just meal kits. As the companies say, the consumer must be able to rely on the companies to provide them with their dinner (Middagsfrid, interview 2018).

5.2.2 Guarantees
Middagsfrid acknowledges the perceived consumer risks with purchasing meal kits; for example delivery on time, that ingredients can be missing or of poor quality and the risk of not liking the recipes. Guarantees can help to alleviate perceived risks, according to Yousafzai et al. (2005) and Kantsperger and Kunz (2010). However, none of the companies say that their purpose to use guarantees is to lower any perceived risk but more as a way of showing their high quality as in line with competence (Gregori et al., 2014). Årstiderna’s guarantee states that they will replace any product that does not comply with their high-quality demands (arstiderna.com D, n.d.). Here is a discrepancy with the literature - the companies seemingly use guarantees to showcase their high quality (middagsfrid.se D, n.d), while theory states that guarantees should be used to lower consumer risks (Yousafzai et al., 2005). However, it is possible that the companies still view guarantees as lowering risks, but they did not communicate this during the interviews. Benevolent tendencies might also be related to guarantees. For example, Middagsfrid states on their website that they offer guarantees, so the consumer does not have to worry about anything (interview 2018), which indicates that they put the best interest of the consumer first (McKnight et al., 2002; Xu et al., 2014). This also corresponds with how literature argues that the perceptions of a company’s benevolence can be strengthened by the use of guarantees with generous conditions (Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Yousafzai et al., 2005).

5.3 The website serves its purpose
Literature states that a company website plays an important role in enhancing consumer trust (Park et al., 2012) because it affects the perception of competence (McKnight et al., 2002). The
companies in the study seemingly share the belief that the company website should convey that the company is professional and that you can trust the company. For example, Årstiderna states that the website is a way to show the consumers who they are, and that the website should reflect a good image of the company (interview 2018). Hence, the website should signal that the company also is capable of meeting the desired outcome by being professional (Kim & Ahn, 2007), which is a view shared by the companies. An example of how the companies work with their websites is displayed by Matkomfort’s. They stress the graphical appearance, work with user-friendliness and the information quality (interview 2018). This too could be related to literature as it is stated that it is important to provide enough and useful information or else the consumer might be reluctant to share personal information (Yousafzai et al., 2005). Possibly could this be a risk-reducing measure which would be supported by the statement from Matkomfort: it needs to have much information and customer reviews to lower any barrier (interview 2018). This work with the website would also be in line with what theory states about competence (McKnight et al., 2002).

Further, all companies state that the website is important. However, not all companies prioritise to update it (Gröna Kassen, interview 2018; Familyfood, interview 2018). Although the theory used in this study does not state that it is update frequency that enhances trust - it only states that the website should function well and look professional (Agag & El-Masry, 2017; Patokorpi & Kimppa, 2006). For this reason, there is no evidence that the companies that do not update their website suffer from this. Related to the website, Gregori et al. (2014) argue that third-party seals on the website can help to enhance consumer trust. Despite this, it is implied by the companies that they do not dedicate much thought to these, although they are at the same time happy with the seals they already have. Matkomfort for instance believes that these can help to convey that they are a serious company (interview 2018). By using the argument of McKnight et al. (2002) of the website professionalism affecting consumer perception of competence, it can be argued that third-party seals can enhance competence for the meal kit companies.

Social media is a channel the companies worked more frequently with even though there are time constraints here too. Literature stresses the importance of utilising social media to create affect-based consumer commitment (Calefato et al., 2015). Since social media platforms enable two-
way communication, it can be a way to strengthen personal interactions (Calefato et al., 2015), which is especially important for the larger firms that cannot be as personal in customer service. Given what literature states, it can be argued that the smaller companies with limited amount of updates might face untapped potential in enhancing consumer trust through a dialogue with their consumers.

5.4 A good reputation can enhance trust

A good reputation is argued to be important in enhancing trust and this can be reached by good consumer reviews and word-of-mouth (Kim & Ahn, 2007; Bojang et al., 2017). This seems to be picked up by the companies, as most of them share consumer reviews either on their website or through a plug-in that displays all reviews on a third-party site. It can be argued that there is a difference between to publish selected reviews that are positive and to use a plug-in which displays all reviews. Matkomfort and Årstiderna use a plug-in and state that they do this for transparency reasons (interview 2018). Hence, they want to show openness and give the consumers complete information which is in line with what literature states are transparent (Kanagaretnam et al., 2010; Kang & Hustvedt, 2014). Moreover, Kangaretnam et al. (2010) argue that full transparency as a way of enhancing trust is to give the consumer unfiltered information to support their purchase decision. Considering this, it can be argued that the customer reviews themselves may lead to strengthened perceptions of trustworthiness. However, Utz et al. (2012) state that consumers tend to view what other consumers say more credible than what the company itself say. Furthermore, Pavlou and Dimoka (2006) state that an outstanding text review increases the company’s credibility and benevolence, which can indicate that it is still trust-enhancing to show selected reviews that are very positive.

Word-of-mouth can also be seen as trust-enhancing according to Salo and Karjalouto (2007) but the companies do not talk about it in this sense, but rather as a way to acquire new consumers. For example, Familyfood sees word-of-mouth as important to acquire new customers because they do not possess a large marketing budget, so they have to rely on word-of-mouth (interview 2018). This view is shared by Veckans Middag and Mat och Ro. Although the companies claim that the purpose of word-of-mouth is to gain new consumers, one can argue that a possible side-effect of this is a stronger reputation if consumers are speaking well of the company (Salo &
Karjaluoto, 2007). Since reputation influence the perception of competence and integrity (Gregori et al., 2014), positive reviews and word-of-mouth can still be trust-enhancing regardless of the company’s reasons for it.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how companies that sell household services work with trust-enhancing measures. The background to the study was the phenomenon where consumers buy household services that traditionally they have done themselves. This requires them to open up their private sphere, and here lies the motivation for the study. The companies that perform these services enter peoples’ private spheres and they must therefore build consumer trust. The meal kit industry was chosen to represent the companies that enter consumers’ private spheres. Following in this chapter, our conclusions will be presented.

Firstly, competence was conveyed by the companies through communication of company values. The values were all connected to what kind of groceries were in the meal kit and how these were sourced. It was very important to highlight the high quality of the groceries which would strengthen perceptions of quality which is part of the competence term. Further, to communicate values regarding sustainability and healthy food might have to do with integrity and benevolence in the sense that these show care for the planet and the consumer.

Another measure that was identified was the tendency to showcase their knowledge about groceries and diet, and thereby educating the consumers. This could also strengthen perceptions of competence as the company positioned themselves as the expert. All companies agreed that they have conscious and aware consumers, making it important to show their consumers that they possess the expertise, so the consumers do not have to worry regarding their dinners. In short, to educate consumers can be seen as a way to portray competence, and thereby to enhance consumer trust.

An interesting finding was that the recipes were communicated in a neutral manner even though they represent a big part of the convenience offering. We argued that the reason for not saying that a dish is tasty was to avoid the risk of not being able to keep that promise as taste is
subjective. Here, we saw a risk of thereby losing the perception of competence. To make up for the lack of selling recipe descriptions, they highlighted their expertise in recipe creation by emphasising their chefs and their work on the recipes. This can also function as assuring; that the recipes contain good food and contain all needed nutrients - so that the consumer arguably really receives convenience by not having to worry about the meals.

A finding that also spoke to the function of not having to worry about the quality and service was the flexibility of the companies’ customer service. This flexibility showed reliability and that the companies can keep promises, hence it shows integrity and competence. The competence concept was also evident regarding the use of guarantees, which the companies state had the purpose of showing their high quality. From theory, to use guarantees is a way to lower the consumer’s perceived risk but the companies did not view it as such. Instead, it was a seemingly way for them to show their high quality and competence. In addition, by offering flexible guarantees, it can be argued that the companies were portraying themselves as benevolent through showing that they put the consumer’s best first.

Regarding the website, all companies stated that they thought it was an important channel to communicate company values in and to convey that they were serious companies. Hence, the website would then be a tool in communicating competence. However, the companies did not assign much work to the website due to limited time and knowledge. Despite this, we cannot say that this must be an issue in regard to trust-enhancing as long as they have a well-functioning website to begin with. Neither can we say that frequent updates are trust-enhancing, only that a professional and well-functioning website is - at least according to theory. This argument differs from the use of social media whereby we argue that this channel requires more frequent updates. As theory highlights social media as a two-way communication tool, it can be more efficient for creating a more personal relationship with the consumers.

When it comes to reputation, the majority of the companies use customer reviews on their websites even though some publish selected ones and some publish all reviews using a plug-in. To use a plug-in strengthens the perception of transparency which would correspond to enhancing trustworthiness. However, we argue that both unfiltered reviews and selected reviews
enhance trust because the words of consumers are viewed as credible. As for word-of-mouth, this could be seen as an effective way of enhancing trust although the companies seemed to view it as a way to acquire new consumers.

To summarise the conclusions, by communicating values the companies were enhancing perceptions of competence and benevolence. Furthermore, the companies were displaying competence when publishing educational content that positioned them as experts. Competence was also recurring when it came to the recipes where they presented their knowledge and expertise in recipe creation by highlighting their professional chefs. As for the website, all companies agreed on its importance although they stated that they did not update it very often. However, the trust-enhancement does not lie in the frequency of updates, but in how well the website looks and functions. Lastly, when it comes to reputation we found that the companies used reviews which can be a trust-enhancing measure as it displays transparency and because the words of other consumers are seen as credible and therefore trustworthy.

6.1 Implications

The phenomenon explored in this study is that the search for convenience makes consumers open up their private spheres for household companies to enter. As these companies are invited into our private spheres when performing household services, they must be able to generate trust. In this case, convenience is achieved by freeing up more time and by not having to think or worry about the task that is performed. In short, we want more time and someone else to think for us - but it is at the expense of someone entering our personal spheres. From this study, we have seen that household service companies can enhance trust by conveying that they have the expertise needed to fulfill their promise to the consumer. By highlighting expertise and competence in any form of communication, this measure could enhance trust so that the consumer does not need to worry - which is argued to be part the convenience aspect of the phenomenon. In addition, to be flexible when solving any consumer issue is a way to demonstrate reliability which can also a trust-enhancing measure.
6.2 Critical reflection
As with any study, this one has its limitations. Firstly, since the ambition was to be able to draw a conclusion about the Swedish meal kit industry, one can oppose the fact that the entire industry was not covered. Therefore, one must be aware that the conclusions of this study may not be representative of the industry. Secondly, the research question aimed at the phenomenon of having outsiders performing household services, and by studying the meal kit industry we have only covered a specific part of the household service industry. Following this, there is a risk that the meal kit industry is not representative of the household service industry and other sub-industries.

6.3 Suggestions for further research
Because of the limitations mentioned above, there is a point of conducting a similar study as this one but with focus on a different part of the household service industry that is a part of the same phenomenon. It would be interesting to see similarities and differences between the meal kit industry and for example cleaning or childcare. Another suggestion is to make a comparative study which also includes the consumer side of the meal kit industry in order to see if there are any discrepancies. We have come to some conclusions about company activities that can work as trust-enhancing and it would certainly be interesting to see if the consumer perspective is congruent with the company perspective. Lastly, in order to get generalisable findings, a suggestion is to make a quantitative study on this phenomenon.
References


Appendix A - Interview guide

Intro:
I would like to start with thanking you for taking the time to participate in this interview, we really appreciate it. We are a two people writing this thesis but only I will interview you today. Before we begin, I want to ask if I am allowed to record this interview? It is for analysing purposes and only I will listen to the recording.

You do not have to answer anything that you do not want to answer and please ask for clarification of something I say is unclear. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Opening questions:
1. Meal kits are a relatively new way of shopping for groceries, how do you perceive their demand in the market?
2. Why do you think consumers choose to purchase meal kits?

Transition:
3. Why do you think your customers choose your offer in particular, instead of your competitors? (shipping, punctuality, preserved products etc)
4. How does it work from the point when the consumer order the meal kit until it is delivered?

Competence:
5. How do you communicate to potential customers that you can deliver the service you say that you can deliver?
6. Do you follow up what customers think of the service? How and why?

Integrity:
7. Can you tell me about your company values?
8. How do you communicate what you stand for?
9. How do you think about the produce and meals in the service? (Ingredients, nutrition declaration, organic, locally produced, climate compensation etc)
Guarantees:
10. Do you work with customer guarantees?
11. How? If yes, what is the purpose?

Customer service
12. How do you receive and work with customer feedback - both good and bad?

Reviews/ratings
13. You have published some customer reviews on your website, can you tell me about the work behind this? What is the purpose?
14. How do you work with customer reviews on other platforms, if you do this? (Facebook, Google etc)

Trusted third party assurance
15. You have some labels and certificates on the website, can you tell me about the work behind those?

Communication with customers
16. Except the website and delivery occasion, how do you communicate with your customers? (Social media, newsletter etc)

Website
17. How do you work continuously with the website? (Layout, information, colours, system quality etc)
18. What do you hope to achieve with the website?
19. How important is your website to build trust with customers, in your opinion?

End question
20. Do you feel that there is something that you as a company do in order to build consumer trust that we have not talked about today?