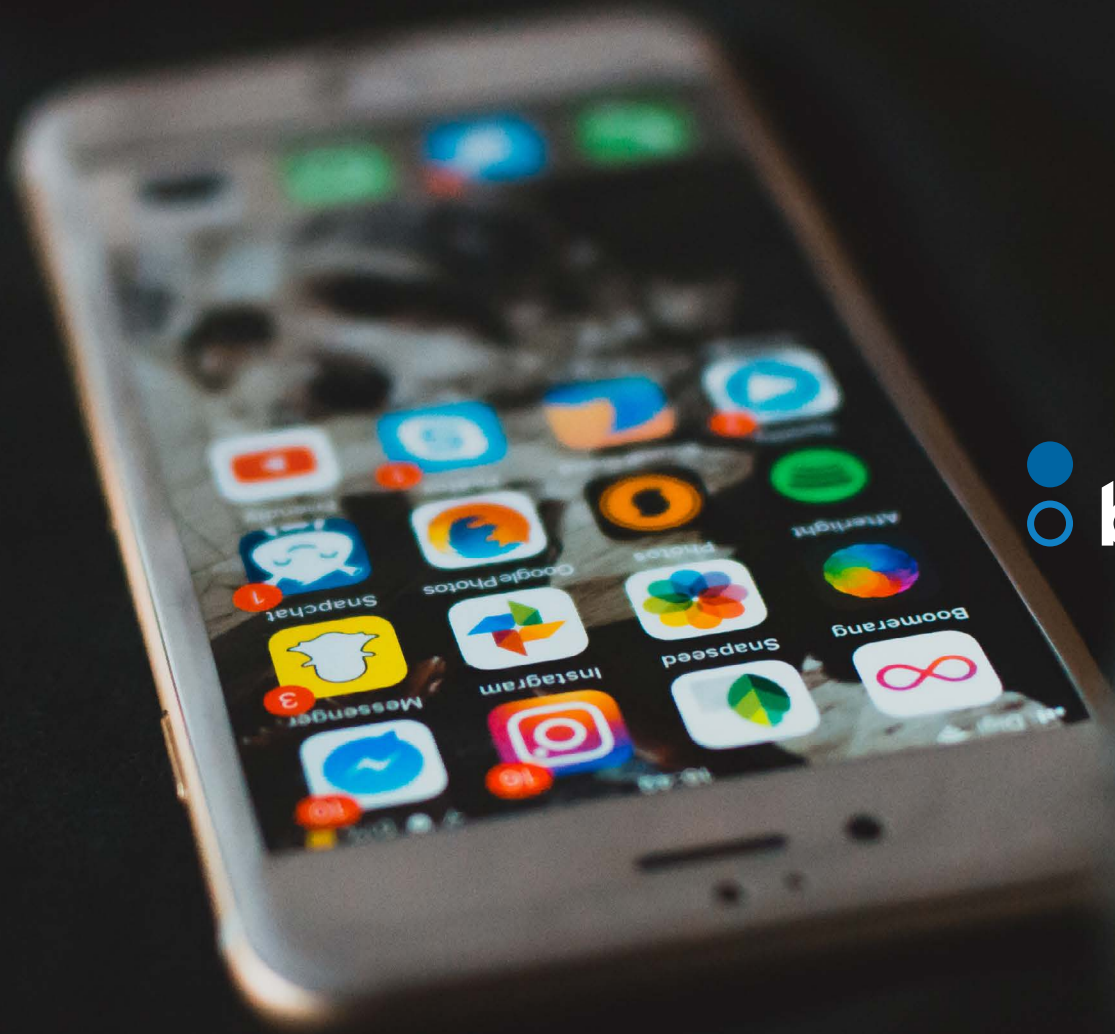


# The rise of mobile apps

A survey by Sandberg

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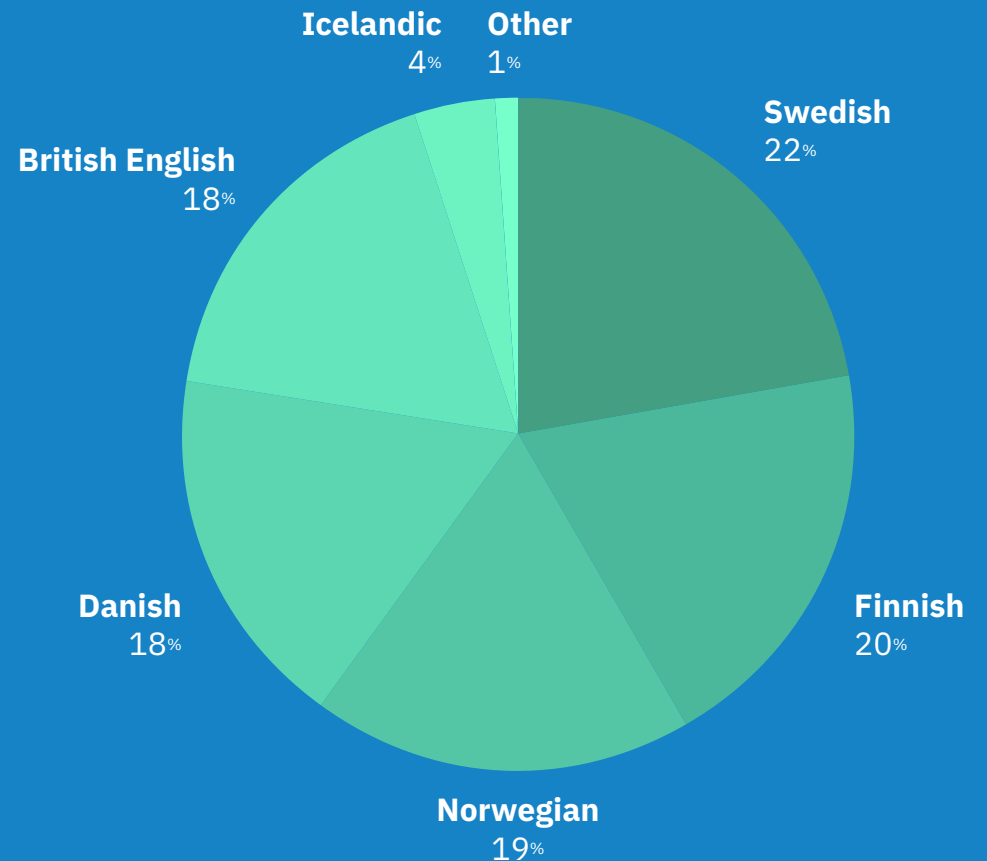
# Survey population

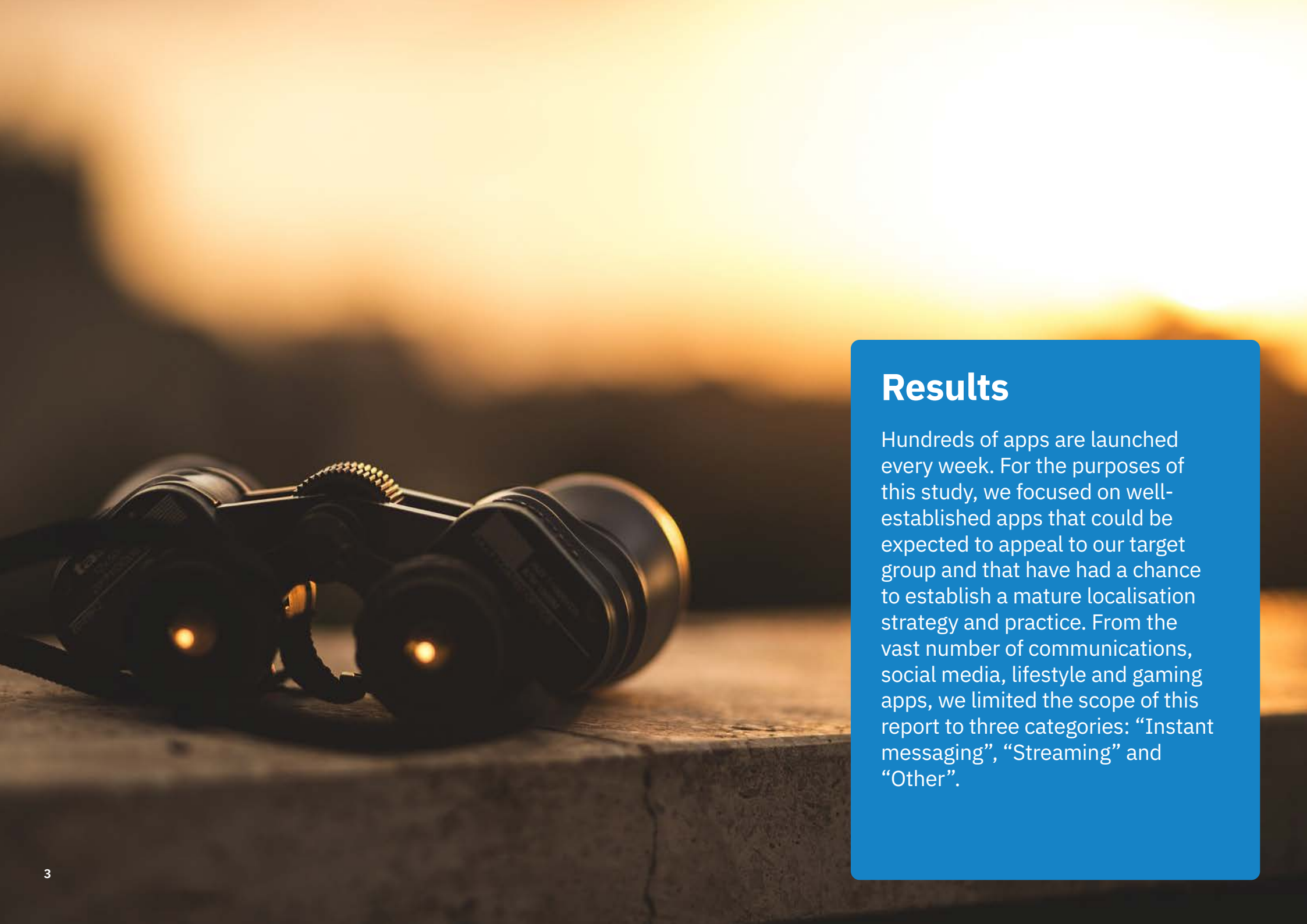
In January 2019, Sandberg launched a survey of language industry professionals and university students in our British and Nordic networks to learn more about their engagement with apps.

Which apps are used most frequently by this well-educated, internationally aware user group? Have their favourite apps been localised into Swedish, Finnish, Norwegian, Icelandic and Danish? Do the apps offer British English as an option? How does the quality of the app localisation affect their user experience?

## By language

Our survey population consisted of native speakers of Nordic languages and British English, all of whom are language professionals highly capable of using apps in foreign languages as well.



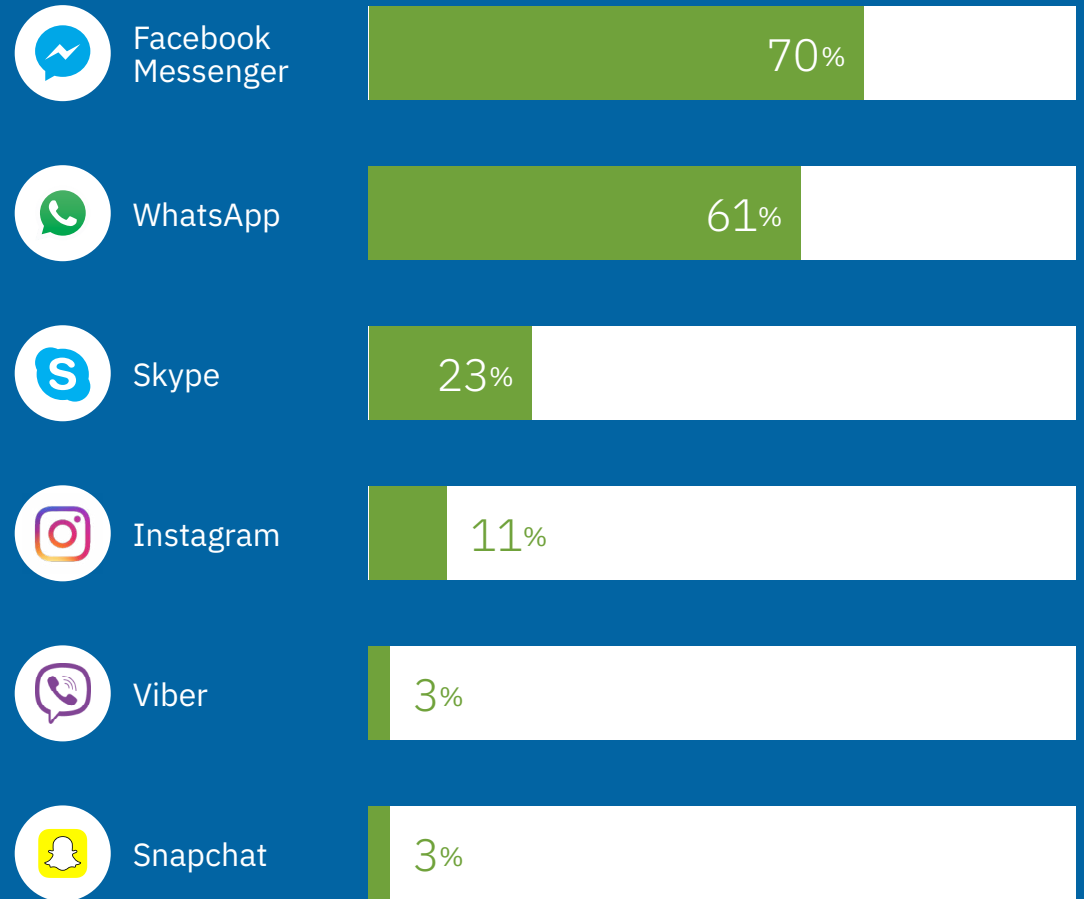


## Results

Hundreds of apps are launched every week. For the purposes of this study, we focused on well-established apps that could be expected to appeal to our target group and that have had a chance to establish a mature localisation strategy and practice. From the vast number of communications, social media, lifestyle and gaming apps, we limited the scope of this report to three categories: “Instant messaging”, “Streaming” and “Other”.

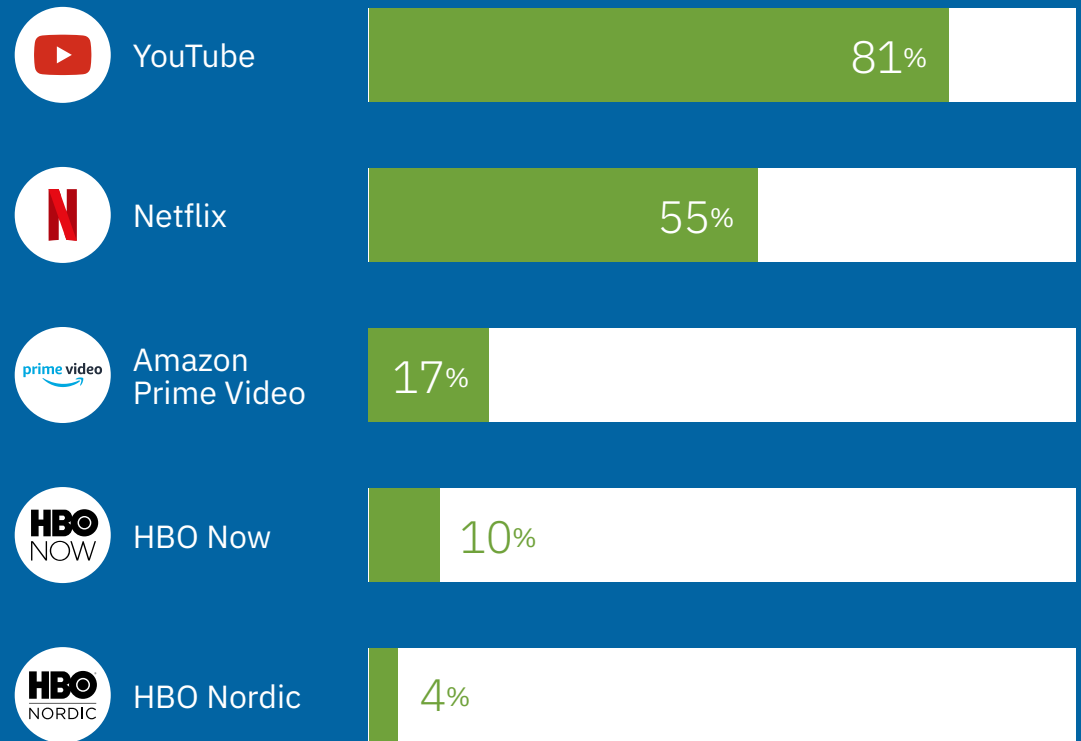
# Instant messaging

For online chatting and short messages, Facebook Messenger was by far the most popular app in our user group, closely followed by WhatsApp.



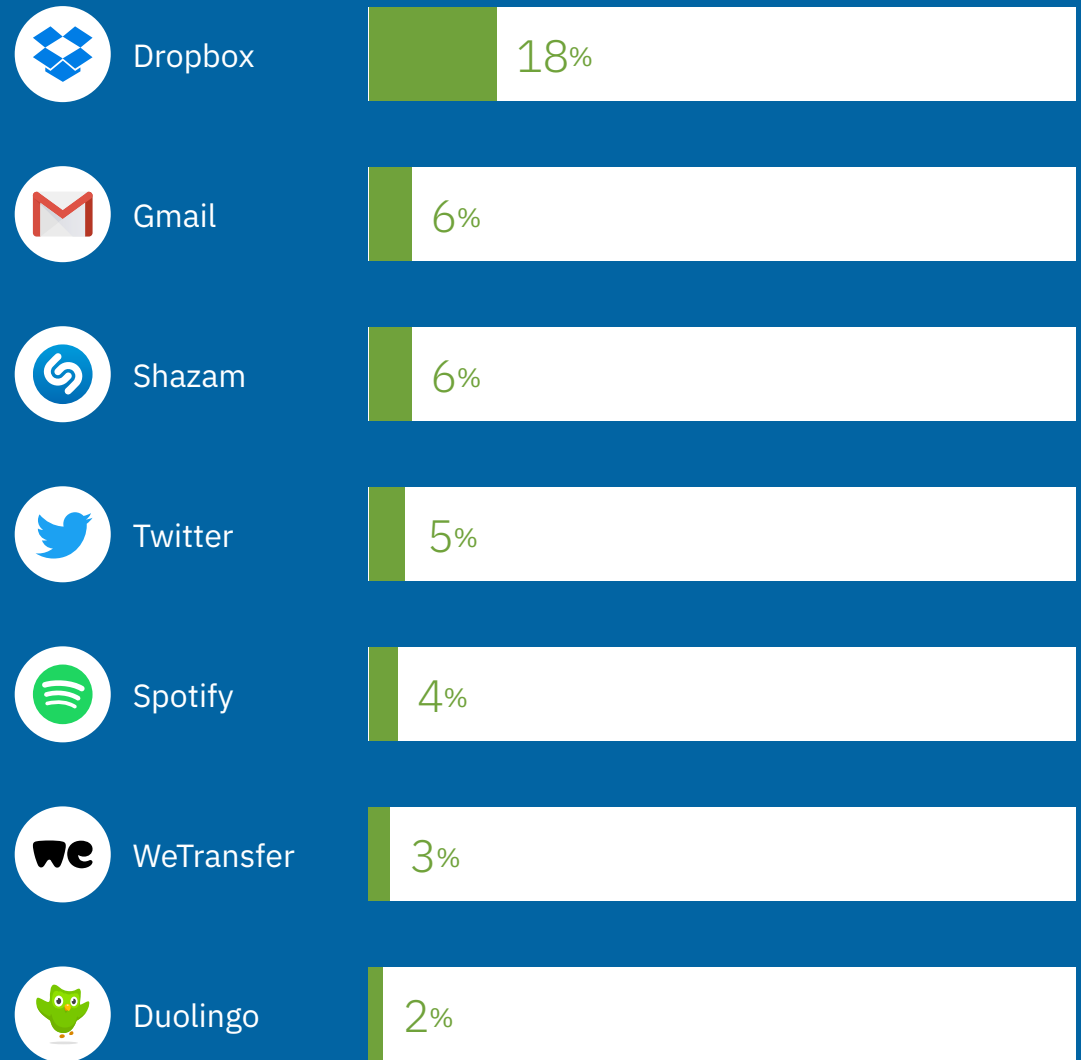
# Streaming

The Nordic market for video on demand is booming. One reason for this might be that the Nordic region has very high broadband availability compared to many other countries. YouTube came out at the top of our Streaming category, followed by Netflix (it should be noted that the survey made no distinction between free and paid YouTube use).



## Other

This category consists of other apps that our user group mentioned or brought up unprompted in the survey.



# Successful language localisation in apps



## Facebook Messenger

Facebook Messenger was highlighted as one of the best apps in terms of language localisation. This was not just because it supports Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, Icelandic and British English, but also because of the quality of the translations in the app. A Swedish user said “the language feels Swedish”, while a Danish speaker claimed “Facebook has been localised quite well because it’s been done with a sense for Danish humour. Even the text that could be tempting to keep in English (given most Danes understand the language) has been cleverly localised”.



## WhatsApp

WhatsApp is available in over 40 languages on iOS and in up to 60 on Android. As a rule, WhatsApp detects the language of the phone, offering support for all the Nordic languages and different variants of the English language.



## YouTube

YouTube offers full support for Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, Icelandic and British English, but many users find it hard to locate the language selector in their mobile app, probably because there isn’t one! The language selector is only available in the desktop version or a mobile browser. However, you can select your physical location through the mobile app, and this customises your feed.



## Netflix

In general, most of our user group felt that Netflix had been properly localised, with some even claiming they “can’t really tell it’s originally in a different language”. However, opinion was a bit more divided amongst the Finnish speakers, with statements such as “it’s a bit cumbersome in Finnish, and it’s a bit too American in tone”.

# Applications lacking support for Nordic languages



## Dropbox

Almost one fifth of the user group uses Dropbox on a regular basis. The app offers language support for Danish, Swedish, Norwegian and British English, but not for Finnish or Icelandic. Like many other apps, the language of the Dropbox app is determined by the language settings of the phone.

SONOS

## Sonos

Sonos is an app for programming a premium wireless home sound system developed by the Californian company Sonos Inc. The app currently offers support for Danish, Swedish and Norwegian Bokmål, but not for Finnish or Icelandic.



## Philips Hue

Hue, developed by Philips to adjust your lighting to match your mood, is another app that detects the language set for the phone. Unfortunately, this does not always work: several users mentioned that the app failed to use the correct language. In January 2019, a Finnish user who had his phone's OS in Danish claimed that Hue had been installed on his phone in Italian.



## Clue


Clue is a female health app developed by BioWink GmbH for tracking ovulation, periods and the menstrual cycle. The app is becoming increasingly popular, but it does not provide support for the Nordic languages (except for Danish) or British English.



## Duolingo

Duolingo offers an interactive way of learning new languages, but the app does not offer support in the Nordic languages or in British English.





## Why does localisation matter in mobile apps?

Localisation is a way of increasing an app's exposure, of reaching new markets and increasing revenue. From a business perspective, localisation is intrinsically linked to growth and return on investment. From the user's perspective, localisation has a bearing on the quality of the product, the credibility of the company, the user experience and brand loyalty.



## Quality

For regulated products and services in the financial sector or life sciences, no one questions the need for professionally localised user instructions. It shouldn't be that different for mobile apps. Localisation enables people to use the product and service effectively, in the way it was designed to be used by those who developed the software. As one user pointed out, "good localisation makes you forget the app is actually localised to begin with, and makes the app more intuitive to use. Poor localisation makes an app annoying to use and feel cheap".



## Credibility

If you search for "scanner" in your app store, this will likely bring up more than 10 apps offering the same service. How do you make sure the user picks yours and stays with you when there is so much competition? You rarely get a second chance to make a good first impression. Language is one of the key factors when using an app for the first time. A poor translation will leave the user wondering how much you really care about them: "much like an unappealing layout, it colours your impression of the whole application on both a subconscious and conscious level".



## User experience

Since mobile usage overtook desktop usage back in 2014, user experience has become critical for the success of an app. User experience tends to be linked to the interface or navigation design, how interactions are arranged and how users move around in an app. However, language is a key part of the user experience, and companies need to evaluate the clarity of their original and translated UI messages to understand the overall effect. Good, intuitive localisation helps reduce the learning curve for your app and gives the user an unparalleled feeling of comfort: "[A properly localised app] feels like home and using the app gets another level of effortlessness".



## Brand loyalty

Language localisation is only one element of a long-term global strategy, but it might be the reason users love your brand. Just as Catalan speakers may have grown fonder of Booking.com since it launched language support for Catalan, Nordic people appreciate access to services in their own language. Their high level of foreign language skills may be misleading in this respect, and it is worth noting that the highly proficient linguists in our survey group made statements such as "it [good localisation] makes me emotionally attached to the app or OS, and keeps me from replacing with another competing app (or OS)".





**Challenges  
ahead**



## Localisation usability

Our survey revealed that many non-native English speakers preferred to keep their app and devices in English simply because they found it too complicated to switch from one language into another. As one of the users pointed out, “Nothing works if I don’t give permissions to Samsung. I am having a very hard time finding any settings in my phone and I am using a lot of time figuring out the ‘translation’. I would prefer more freedom to choose the language settings in different environments. I would like to have a Finnish and English keyboard on my devices but keep the environment English. In applications like Netflix, the translation is only silly or a bit annoying. It disturbs the watching experience. However, I do not mind using the English version. I would actually enjoy having access to several different versions of Netflix, so I could watch some of the programmes in the original language”.



## Context

Half the population of Europe claim to have mastered more than one language, and a quarter of them are able to speak two additional languages. Some like to set their phone to their native language, but prefer to use a work-related app in English. The links between location, nationality and preferred language are far from obvious and simple. As one of the users in our survey pointed out, “it depends on my use of it. For private purposes, [good localisation] means a lot, for professional use it doesn’t matter”.



## Geolocation

Unlike YouTube, not all apps take location into account, which is another important aspect of localisation. One of the users claimed “Buzzfeed localises the language but ignores location, so I see a lot of US-related articles I don’t understand”.



## Language variants

While many apps offer both British and American English, only a few give the users a fully fledged local experience. For instance, British English is available in many apps, but some still fail to recognise British spelling.



## Worse than nothing

If you are aiming to get more than just the gist of a message across, a poor translation can be worse than no translation at all. If a user switches their language setting back to English after a poor localisation experience, you have wasted money and tarnished their opinion of you. As one of the users interviewed said “good localisation makes a big difference while bad localisation is just irritating. Bad localisation is frustrating and makes me switch back to English”. A linguistically competent Nordic user can do that, but their cousin, who is not a professional linguist, may simply walk away or switch to your competitor’s app.

# References

- 1 Facebook Messenger language support
- 2 Facebook thread with users complaining about forced Hue localisation
- 3 “Mobile user experience (UX) design”. Interaction Design Foundation
- 4 “Europeans and their languages”. European Commission

# About Sandberg

Localisation improves the ranking of an application on the App Store or Google Play and multiplies the potential number of downloads and subscriptions. However, this greater visibility and reach comes with greater risks. Launching your application in new markets calls for an effective strategy.

Our survey talks about *why* you should localise, but you also need to know *how*. Partnering with a good language service provider enables you to focus on your strategy whilst avoiding language mishaps that can damage your brand.

Sandberg has 20 years of expertise in translation into English and the Nordic languages. In our team, you will find language experts who specialise in localising user interface and documentation for your type of application. If you plan to introduce your app into an English-speaking or Nordic market, we're here to help.

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