

**EXPECTATIONS, OBJECTIVES AND USE OF
DIGITAL MARKETING IN FINNISH ICE HOCKEY
SPONSORSHIP - CASE LIIGA OY**

**Jyväskylä University
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract <p>Sport sponsorship is an essential source of revenue for professional sport organizations. The nature of the sponsorship relationship has shifted towards a collaborative approach where both parties are expected to provide value for the relationship. To be able to attract sponsorship investments in the future, sponsored organizations need to develop ways to provide more value to the sponsoring organizations. Technological developments and the emergence of digital media provides various new opportunities for sponsors and sponsoring companies. Effective leveraging of sponsorship requires developing specific sponsorship objectives and understanding the nature of new digital outlets. The purpose of this study was set out to provide information that would help to develop sponsorship relationships and help organizations to increase the value of the sponsorships. Thus, this research set out to explore the expectations and objectives of the sponsoring companies for their sponsorship. Additionally this study aimed to acquire information sponsors' perceptions and utilization of digital media. The study was conducted by interviewing six sponsor companies of Liiga Oy. The results showed that the expectations and objectives of the sponsorship were relatively superficial and the main objective of sponsorship was often limited to increasing brand exposure and visibility. Sponsors perceived digital media and digital marketing opportunities as very important for sponsorship. However, the sophistication in the utilization of digital media varied significantly between organizations. The lack of human and financial resources were identified as the most significant challenges in their sponsorships. In the future, sponsored organizations could educate sponsoring companies about the possible ways to leverage the sponsorship more effectively. Joint planning sessions and increasing collaboration in leveraging activities could provide significant value for both parties in the sponsorship relationship.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Sponsorointi on elintärkeä tulonlähde useimmille urheiluorganisaatioille. Sponsorointi on siirtynyt jatkuvasti enemmän kohti yhteistyösuhdetta, jossa sponsoroinnin arvo luodaan yhteistyönä. Sponsorointitulojen takaamiseksi myös tulevaisuudessa, urheiluorganisaatioiden täytyy kehittää ja uusia tapoja sponsoroinnin arvon kasvattamiseksi. Teknologian ja digitaalisen median kehitys tarjoaa sponsoreille ja sponsoroiduille organisaatioille jatkuvasti uusia mahdollisuuksia sponsoroinnin hyödyntämiseksi. Sponsoroinnin tehokas hyödyntäminen vaatii sponsoreilta tarkkaan suunniteltuja tavoitteita sekä ymmärrystä digitaalisen median kanavista. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tuottaa tietoa, jota voidaan hyödyntää sponsoroinnin kehittämiseksi ja auttaa urheiluorganisaatioita kasvattamaan sponsoroinnin arvoa. Tästä syystä tutkimuksessa selvitettiin sponsoreiden sponsoroinnille asettamia odotuksia ja tavoitteita. Lisäksi tutkimuksen avulla pyrittiin tuottamaan tietoa sponsoreiden näkemyksistä digitaalisen median mahdollisuuksista sponsoroinnille sekä tämänhetkisiä digitaalisen median hyödyntämisen tapoja sponsoroinnissa. Tutkimuksen tulokset perustuvat kuuteen Liiga Oy:n sponsoreille toteutettuun haastatteluun. Tulokset osoittivat, että sponsoreiden odotukset ja tavoitteet olivat yleisesti melko pinnallisella tasolla ja sponsoroinnin päätavoitteena pidettiin yrityksen näkyvyyden lisäämistä. Kaikki sponsorit pitivät digitaalista mediaa ja digitaalisen markkinoinnin mahdollisuuksia erittäin tärkeinä, mutta digitaalisen median hyödyntämisen edistyneisyys vaihteli yritysten välillä huomattavasti. Resurssien puutos koettiin useissa yrityksissä suurimmaksi haasteeksi sponsoroinnille. Tulevaisuudessa sponsoroidut organisaatiot voisivat pyrkiä informoimaan sponsoreita erilaisista hyödyntämismahdollisuuksista. Yhteiset suunnittelutapaamiset ja yhteistyö hyödyntämistoimissa voisi kasvattaa sponsoroinnin arvoa molemmille osapuolille.</p>	
Asiasanat Sponsorointi, urheilumarkkinointi, digitaalinen markkinointi	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Sponsorship is an increasingly important source of revenue in today's professional sport. Professional sport has become an increasingly commercial activity and most sport organizations are dependent on sponsorship income. Constantly increasing competition for sponsorship investments requires sponsored organizations to improve the value of sponsorship for their sponsors (Biscaia, Correia, Ross & Rosado, 2014). Sponsorship value can be understood as the benefits derived from investing in a sponsorship, such as the right to associate with the brand and utilize the image and properties of the sport organization for promotional purposes, and the ability of the sponsorship and sponsored entity to help the sponsor realise their sponsorship objectives. According to Farrelly, Quester & Burton (2006) the primary objective for sponsoring companies is to utilize the image of the sponsored organization to achieve business objectives, such as improving and changing brand image and fostering consumer's purchase behaviour. Thus, the value of a sponsorship can come from multiple sources, for example from utilizing athletes or properties in promotional activities or simply communicating the association with an entity or an event (Farrelly et al., 2006). Advances in digital media and marketing technologies provide companies with new ways to create value for the sponsors. For example, traditionally sponsorships have been based on achieving passive exposure through traditional media outlets. Today's digital media outlets provide sponsors the opportunity to achieve multiple different objectives through sponsorships. The question is, how well have companies learned to leverage the digital opportunities. According to (Cliffe & Motion, 2005) strategic activation of sponsorships may provide a platform for unique value creation.

At the same time the nature of sponsorship has shifted towards a reciprocal business relationship, where both parties are expected to bring value to the relationship. This is demonstrated by the sponsors' growing expectations of the sponsored organization as an alliance partner (Farrelly, 2010). For the relationship to function properly, sponsors need to clearly define what they expect and what they want to achieve from the relationship. The failure of sponsors to express their expectations and desires can lead to dissatisfaction and ultimately to the breakdown of the relationship (Farrelly, 2010). Clearly stated expectations

and objectives are also required to be able to evaluate the performance of sponsorship (Meenaghan, 2013) which further highlights the importance of clearly stated and specific expectations and objectives.

Advances in technology and digital media provide sponsoring companies with unprecedented opportunities to reach and communicate with consumers. At the same time, the emergence of new channels, shopping environments and interactions with customers require updated understanding about customer and brand management processes and marketing metrics (Kannan et al., 2017). This evolution challenges marketers to constantly evolve with the technologies, but at the same time offers tremendous potential for marketing communications as well as sponsorships. From the brand management perspective it is crucial to understand how the digital environment affects the creation of the brand and how it modifies and strengthens the brand (Kannan & Li, 2017).

While sponsorship has undoubtedly received significant attention from academics during the last four decades, many areas still lack appropriate research. For example, more qualitative research on sponsors' motives is needed (Hartland, Skinner, & Griffiths, 2005) and research on sponsors' expectations towards/about sports and actual effects of sponsorships is also relatively scarce (Itkonen, Iltanen & Matilainen, 2007, 9). Researching the expectations and objectives of sponsors is crucial, because the lack of clearly and formally stated objectives can lead to negative sponsorship outcomes (Farrelly, 2010).

Finally, sponsorship evaluation has traditionally been a central challenge in sponsorship relationships. The emergence of digital analytics may provide assistance in measuring the effectiveness of sponsorship activities in the digital environment, thus providing increased measurability for this area of sponsorship. Sponsorship effectiveness measurement has been a central topic for a long time in the sponsorship literature. However, the growing magnitude of sponsorship investments combined with the sponsor's increasing expectations has brought sponsorship evaluation under increased scrutiny. Another reason for the interest in the measurability of sponsorship effectiveness, is the emergence of digital analytics which can help evaluating the effectiveness of digital activities.

According to Olkkonen (2006) the connection between sponsorship and marketing in scientific literature has been severely underdeveloped and superficial. Since then, the development of digital media and marketing has aroused interest in the academic world and the convergence of sponsorship and marketing has since been receiving increased attention. For example, the utilization of social media within the sponsorship context has received attention from academics. Despite increased interest towards the subject, the connection between digital marketing and sponsorship is generally still fledgling. Thus this research topic is timely and relevant and can provide valuable insights for organizations looking to develop their current sponsorships or acquire new ones.

This research sets out to explore the objectives and expectations of sponsoring companies. As the name of this master's thesis implies, sponsorship is approached from a marketing communications perspective. Sponsorship is understood as a commercial investment with expectations of return on investment. Based on a review of academic sponsorship literature, Walliser (2003)

argues that “sponsorship is clearly understood as a communications instrument and is therefore considered as a commercial investment”.

The aim of this study is to find out what do sponsoring companies actually expect from the sponsored organization and what kind of objectives sponsors have set for sponsorships. The central question here is that why do companies sponsor and what do they expect to get in return for the investment. Another central question is that how do sponsors leverage their sponsorship relationships to achieve sponsorship objectives. Of particular interest in this study is the utilization of digital and social media for leveraging purposes. The purpose of this study is to provide information that can help to develop sponsorship relationships and increase the value of sponsorship. Another purpose of this study is to help sponsored organizations improve their sponsorship offerings and respond to the growing demands and expectations of their sponsors.

This study has three (main) research questions. The main question is:

Q1: What are the objectives of sponsoring companies and what do sponsors expect in return for sponsorship?

In addition, two sub-questions were formed to gain insights in more specific aspects of the sponsorship:

Q2: What is the role of digital media and digital marketing in sponsorship?

Q3: What are the central challenges in achieving the objectives of sponsorship?

2 SPORT SPONSORSHIP

One of the main characteristics of modern sport is its increasingly commercial nature (Laurell & Soderman, 2018). Sport has become a global business activity (Baena, 2016; Morgan, Adair, Taylor, & Hermens, 2014) and many professional sport leagues are dependent on commercial revenue, such as sponsorships (Morgan et al., 2014). In many sport industries, organizations are experiencing difficulties in increasing their revenue through traditional money streams such as ticket sales (Baena, 2016). This has further increased the importance of commercial sponsorships in financing professional sport. Without commercial support, many professionally run sport organizations could not operate at their current level (Morgan et al., 2014). As the competition for sponsorship investment is increasingly tight, sponsors are required to understand how to become more valuable for sponsors (Biscaia, Correia, Ross, & Rosado, 2014).

Contemporary sport sponsorship took its first steps in the late 19th century (Mccarville & Copeland, 1994). Since then, sponsorship has slowly evolved through patronage, corporate philanthropy and early forms of commercial sponsorship in the late 1970's and early 1980's to its current commercial form. The appearance of corporations in the sporting world was in part the result - but also the facilitator of the growth of the sport industry (Mason, 1999). Commercial sponsorship experienced its initial boost in the late 1960's and early 1970's, (Meenaghan, 1991a; 1999). In the 1970's most sponsorship activity was still considered as a form of philanthropy whereas during the 1980's a more sales focused approach was starting to gain ground in the industry. (Berrett & Slack, 1999).

The industrialization and urbanization during the 20th century along with the technological advances facilitated the development of commercial sport (Sage, 2016 p. 104) and contributed to the increasing early interest in sponsorship (Mccarville & Copeland, 1994). Societal changes, such as increased leisure time and availability of sports and arts also played a role by increasing available sponsorship opportunities. At the same time, technological developments broadened the audience of sports and created new sponsorship opportunities. (Meenaghan, 1999.) Television brought sports to people's living rooms, significantly broadening the audience of sporting events (Rowe 2011, p. 34). The

emergence of television also shaped sport towards a more commercial direction in the 20th century (Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Smith, Evens & Iosifidis, 2015). In fact, Sage (2016, p. 150) argues, that media technology and modern commercial sport evolved together.

Other early factors contributing to the growth of corporate sponsorship investments were among others, the search for alternative advertising media due to the restrictions in tobacco and alcohol advertising (Meenaghan 1991b; 1999), developments in the communications technology and increasingly globalized market economy (Meenaghan, 1991a). Additional contributing factors were the increasing costs in the advertising media, increased media coverage of sponsored events and growing advertising clutter in the traditional channels (Meenaghan 1991b; 1999). Initially sponsorship was considered as a cost-effective alternative for traditional media (Cornwell, 1995; Lee, Sandler & Shani, 2002).

The year 1984 was a significant year for the sponsorship industry, as the Los Angeles Olympics that year were the first Olympics that depended entirely on private money, primarily through corporate sponsorship (Shannon, 1999). The shift to a more commercial direction received a lot of criticism, even from the level of the Olympic committee (Shannon, 1999.) Sponsorship as a means of sport marketing provided companies a medium to keep advertising restricted products to live and television spectators through sporting events (Shannon, 1999).

During the first decades of the commercialization of sponsorships the industry progressed slowly. In the early 1990's sponsorship was still often viewed as philanthropy and decisions were made based on the interest of senior management, not based on the assessment of benefits received from the investment (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Crompton 2004) or qualified information (Meenaghan, 1991a). Significant sponsorship investments were made without properly understanding the nature of the communication process (Farrelly, Quester, & Burton, 1998). Later in the 1990's the industry started to grow fast and the growth rate of sponsorship investments exceeded all other forms of marketing or promotion investments in the 1990's (Crompton 2004). The vast growth of companies involved in sponsorships and the increase in the value of sponsorship investments was followed with the demands of accountability from the corporate world, which increased the need to understand sponsorship better as a marketing medium. (Meenaghan, 1999).

The beginning of the 21st century was met with significant changes in both business and society, such as the rapid innovation and adoption of new media technologies. These changes also had significant implications for the sponsorship industry. (Meenaghan, 2013.) For example, the way in which media content, such as sport and advertising was able to reach consumers changed radically in the beginning of the 21st century (Santomier 2008). Technological developments and the emergence of digital media has since then provided sponsors with plenty of new opportunities to communicate with consumers through multiple digital platforms, which has led to the increasing value of sponsorships (Santomier, 2008). The significant growth of the sponsorship industry is also due to the increased sophistication in companies' approaches to sponsor-

ships, such as attempts to improve measurement of sponsorship returns and widening sponsorship objectives (Santomier 2008).

2.1 The nature of commercial sponsorships

Sponsorships are exchange relationships between a sponsor and a sponsored organization (Farrelly & Quester, 2005; Meenaghan, 1991b) where the sponsoring company buys the rights to utilize the image, associations and exposure of the organization to achieve business objectives. In return, sponsored organizations receive financial support from the sponsor. (Meenaghan, 1991b.) The sponsorship partners form a business relationship, where both parties aim to achieve predetermined objectives (Farrelly & Quester, 2005). In essence, sponsorship partners engage in the sponsorship to gain benefits that they cannot acquire themselves. Thus, both parties need to figure out what is it they have to offer, that the other partner is interested in, but cannot attain on their own. (Mccarville & Copeland, 1994.)

According to Meenaghan (1991b), sponsorships should be regarded similarly to advertising, because money is invested in commercial purpose and should not be confused with other types of corporate giving that do not include business motives (Meenaghan, 1991b). While advertising and sponsorship share similar objectives, the way they achieve them and mediate the message is significantly different (Walliser, 2003).

The expectations of mutual returns inherent in sponsorship relationships distinguishes sponsorships from other forms of support, such as philanthropy and charity (Copeland et al., 1996). Tsiotsou (2011, p. 557) defines sponsorship as “a business agreement between two companies in order for both parties to mutually benefit and accomplish their profit and non-profit objectives”.

The growth of the sponsorship industry in the last three decades has led to the growth in the size of sponsorship investments (Morgan et al., 2014). As a consequence, the amount of money invested in today’s sponsorships has made sponsorship effectiveness a central theme in the (sponsorship) field (Olkkonen, 2006; Tsiotsou, 2011) and led to increasing demands of identifiable returns on investment (Jensen, 2016; Morgan et al., 2014), which means that marketers and sponsorship decision makers are increasingly accountable for their sponsorship investments (Delaney, McManus, & Lamminmaki, 2016).

The growing expenditure accountability in many businesses has put sponsorships under the microscope and increased the requirements of sponsorship evaluation (Tripodi 2001). Accountability pressures have also resulted in increased interest in measuring and evaluating the impact of sponsorship investments (Crompton 2004). To secure financing in the future, sport organizations need to develop strategies to provide performance data for sponsorship decision makers (Delaney et al., 2016).

The changing value opportunities in sponsorship have led to changes in approach towards sponsorship. Sponsorship relationships are increasingly perceived as co-marketing alliances and opportunities for brand alignment. Spon-

sponsorship partners also have an increasingly shared sense of strategic intent (Farrelly, et al. 2006). The nature of sponsorships has also evolved towards a more proactive and reciprocal, collaborative approach (Farrelly et al., 2006). The focus of sponsorship is shifting towards a more relational approach (Donlan & Crowther, 2014).

2.2 Sponsorship definition

Despite the vast amount of research on the topic of sponsorship, the term sponsorship still lacks a universally accepted definition (Tripodi, 2001; Walliser, 2003). The understanding of the sponsorship term also varies in different countries (Walliser, 2003). However, according to Walliser (2003) sponsorship is generally thought of as a communications tool, and thus commercial by nature.

Several definitions of sponsorship exist in scientific literature. Most of them are fundamentally similar, even though there are differences in terminology and focus (Cornwell, 1995). An often cited in sponsorship literature is the early definition of commercial sponsorship established by Meenaghan, (1991b, p. 36):

“Commercial sponsorship is an investment in cash or kind, in an activity, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity”.

In other words, in return for the sponsors’ investment, the sponsor is allowed to exploit the commercial potential of a particular activity. According to Meenaghan (1991b, p. 36) a sponsor essentially buys two things when investing in a sponsorship:

- (i) the exposure potential in terms of audience and
- (ii) the image associated with the sponsored activity in terms of perception

Meenaghan’s definition describes the nature of the sponsorship relationship between sponsor and sponsee. However, this definition solely considers the rights of associating with a sponsored organization and does not include marketing or advertising activities, or “sponsorship activation” which would require additional investments. Another popular definition is the one of Tripodi (2001). According Tripodi (2001), despite the lack of a universal definition, there is a consensus on the underlying factors that describe sponsorships. These characteristics are:

- (i) utilisation of sponsorship as a marketing tool or promotional instrument and
- (ii) utilisation of sponsorships to gain commercial benefits.

With these characteristics established Tripodi (2001, p. 83-84) defines sport sponsorship as:

“The provision of assistance by a commercial organisation (sponsor), in cash or kind, to a sports property (sponsee), in exchange for the rights to be associated with that sports property for the purpose of gaining commercial and economic advantage”.

According to Cornwell & Maignan (1998) sponsorship not only demonstrates an association between a sponsor and a sponsored organization, but also includes the marketing and communications activities to leverage the sponsorship investment. Both elements are necessary for the sponsorship to meaningful as an investment (Cornwell et al., 1998).

To this basis, Cornwell (et al., 1998, p. 11) argue that sponsorship involves two main activities:

(i) “An exchange between a sponsor and a sponsee whereby the latter receives a fee and the former obtains the right to associate itself with the activity sponsored

(ii) “marketing of the association by the sponsor”

Sponsorship leverage or ‘activation’ refers to communicating about the sponsorship relationship through different marketing communications (Cornwell, Weeks, & Roy, 2005). More specifically, leveraging is a broader term referring to any marketing communications related to the sponsorship. Activation, in turn, refers to communication promoting interaction, such as engagement or involvement between the consumers and a sponsor (Weeks, Cornwell, & Drennan, 2008).

2.3 Sport marketing and sponsorship

Sport marketing was one of the first sport related topics to gain attention from academics. Originally sport marketing was viewed as a commercial tool for sport organizations. Since then it has broadened to an umbrella term covering a variety of promotional elements, such as sport advertising and commercial sponsorship. (Manoli, 2018.) According to Shannon (1999) sport marketing can be divided in two categories: marketing of sports and marketing with sports. Marketing of sports means marketing sport events or sport equipment, whereas marketing with sports means marketing non-sports products through sporting events or athletes (Shannon, 1999) as depicted in Figure 1. In essence, sport marketing means “the specific application of marketing principles and process-

es to sports products and to the marketing of non-sports products through association with sport” (Shank, 2009).

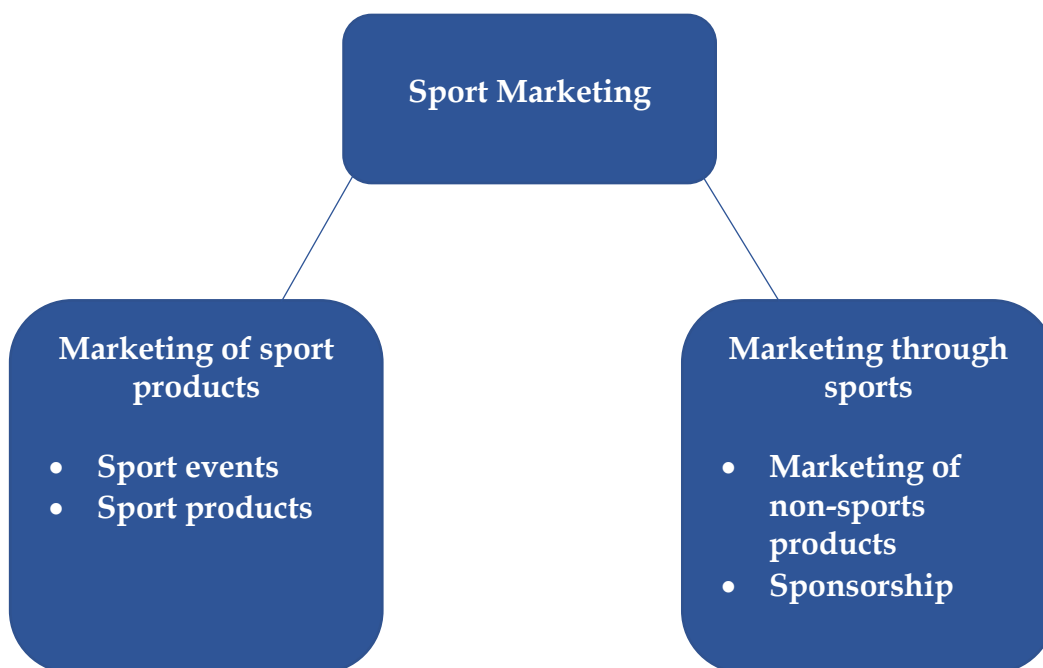


FIGURE 1 Categories of sport marketing (Shannon, 1999)

Sport offers a unique platform for marketers (Cornwell et al., 2015). Marketers have recognized sport’s ability to create emotional responses in consumers (Tripodi 2001) and sponsor companies are utilizing the emotional impact of sports to connect with consumers through new media outlets (Santomier 2008). Emotional value may be created through sponsorships by linking the brand to an activity, which consumers have an emotional affiliation with (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). Sport allows marketers harness the emotions related to the sport to their marketing communications to provide emotional experiences for the fans (Bal, Quester & Plewa, 2010). Another benefit of sport marketing is that marketing on a sport related platform appears to generate more favorable consumer responses. It seems that consumers generally hold a more positive attitude towards marketing through sport. A more positive attitude might also have positive effects on purchase intention. (Cheong, Pyun & Leng, 2018.) One reason behind the more positive response might be the more indirect nature of sponsorship, compared to advertising (Mason, 2005).

Today’s sport marketing possesses unique characteristics and includes areas from branding and fan engagement to service quality and corporate social responsibility (Manoli, 2018). According to Dees (2011) today’s sport marketing consists of engaging, interacting and building strong relationships with consumers and fans, allowing fans to participate in the development of the sport product or service. Jin (2017) argues that sponsorship has emerged in sport as a marketing tool that can be leveraged to increase awareness and understanding

of companies and their products. For sponsors, the main objective of sport sponsorships is to leverage the association with the sponsored organization to shape their corporate image and influence behaviors and perceptions of targeted stakeholders. For sport organizations, the primary benefit are the fees received from sponsors in return for the right to associate with the sport organizations' properties in their promotional activities. (Farrelly, Quester, & Burton, 2006.)

As stated before, commercial sponsorship can be seen as a subcategory in sport marketing. Early academic contributors on the marketing aspect of sponsorship such as Cornwell & Maignan (1998) and Cornwell (1995, p. 15), who coined the term sponsorship-linked marketing, which was defined as "the orchestration and implementation of marketing activities for the purpose of building and communicating an association to a sponsorship" to represent this convergence of sponsorship and marketing. According to Cornwell (1995; et al., 1998), the term sponsorship inherently includes marketing and communications activities to leverage the investment. Cornwell (et al., 1998) suggest, that to have any value in terms of marketing communication, active communication of the sponsorship relationship is necessary. According to (Farrelly et al., 1998) the term sponsorship-linked marketing inherently contains the intentional use of sponsorship as the basis of commercial activities. Based on an extensive literature review, Walliser (2003, p.5) commented that sponsorship "is clearly understood as a marketing tool".

2.4 Sponsorship from corporate perspective

Sponsorships are increasingly utilized in integrated marketing strategies of sponsoring companies (Morgan et al., 2014). The basic function of corporate sponsorship is to achieve marketing communications objectives and it can be used as a cost-effective way to achieve image and awareness objectives (Meenaghan, 1991a). Sponsorship can be an excellent instrument for building and developing relationships with diverse audiences, such as customers, employees and local communities (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998), while its versatile nature enables it to be utilized for many functions of the marketing mix (Meenaghan, 1991a). Sponsorship can be utilized effectively in altering and improving company reputation and image (Amis, Slack, & Berrett, 1999) similarly to advertising (Meenaghan, 1991a). However, simply entering a sponsorship agreement is not sufficient for building brand equity or achieving sales objectives. Instead, leveraging activities are required to promote the brand and engage fans to achieve these objectives. (Tsordia, 2018).

As mentioned, sponsorships are a very versatile platform for connecting and communicating with a range of different stakeholders of a company. Stakeholders can be the employees of the sponsoring company, share- or rights holders of the company or trade associates such as distributors or suppliers. In internal communication, sponsorship can be utilized in an attempt to strengthen company culture and enhance employer image. Utilizing sponsorships in

internal communications can improve employee morale, perceptions of the company and create an increased sense of unity within a company. (Meenaghan et al., 2013.). Sponsorships can also be utilized to communicate the meaning of the brand to the employees, while simultaneously improving the working environment (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). For example, Vodafone has utilized sponsorships successfully in building emotional connections with their employees, enhancing and cultivating internal culture through sponsorship related incentives (Cliffe & Motion, 2005). From a B2B perspective, sponsorships can be utilized for branding purposes, but also as a platform to create and maintain business relationships or to arrange corporate hospitality events with business partners (Meenaghan et al., 2013).

The fast growth of the sponsorship industry has led to the development in sponsorship management frameworks in many companies (Tripodi, 2001). Increased competition in the sponsorship market combined with the increasing investments on sponsorships makes careful and effective management of sponsorship investments crucial to gain competitive advantage and ensure effectiveness (Fahy, Farrelly, & Quester, 2004; Morgan et al., 2014). In many companies, sponsorship management tactics were developed to be able to systematize the evaluation and selection process of sponsorships (Tripodi, 2001). Developments in the media environment and increasing value of sponsorships have also required companies to develop new management and marketing practices (Santomier, 2008). The emergence of new channels, shopping environments and interactions with customers require updated understanding about customer and brand management processes and marketing metrics (Kannan et al., 2017).

From the corporate perspective, a central theme in the sponsorship industry during the last couple decades has been the increase in accountability requirements. Marketers and sponsorship decision makers are increasingly accountable to demonstrate the benefits of sponsorship. (Crompton, 2004; Delaney, McManus & Lamminmaki, 2016; Hendrickson, 2012; Tripodi, 2001.) The costs of sponsorships have been constantly increasing, which has driven companies to the search for new and more effective ways of communicating to their target audience (Dees, 2011).

2.4.1 Sponsorship as a marketing communications tool

When it comes to marketing communications, companies have a broad selection of communication tools available to communicate their message to the consumer. One such tool is the use of corporate sponsorship of sports, events or arts (Dees, 2011) of which sport sponsorship is the most utilized form (Tsiotsou, 2011). According to Walliser (2003) sponsors of sport are in general perceived more positively compared to sponsors of other objects, such as art. According to Meenaghan (1991b) the functions of corporate sponsorship place it naturally alongside public relations, advertising, selling and sales promotion as the basic function of corporate sponsorship is to achieve marketing communications objectives.

Around the millenium marketers' search for new marketing mediums and the development of communications technology contributed to the increase in the appeal of sponsorship as a marketing tool (Tripodi, 2001). Since then, sponsorship has developed to an important and visible part of the marketing communications mix and plays an important role in companies' marketing communications today (Kim, Lee, Magnusen, & Kim, 2015).

Today's digital media allows sponsors to integrate strategic marketing activities with sponsorships and sport sponsorship has become a credible and important aspect of brands' marketing communication in establishing dynamic customer relationships (Santomier, 2008). In today's marketing, brands seek to be involved in consumers' daily lives and experiences through sponsorships and social media (Cornwell & Kwak, 2015) and sponsorship can provide marketers a medium for creating and delivering valuable customer experiences (Cliffe & Motion, 2005).

To achieve optimal results, sponsorships should be integrated with other marketing communications and included in the company's communications strategy (Tripodi, 2001; Amis et al., 1999). To maximize the effect of sponsorship on company's overall marketing impact, it must be leveraged with promotional activities, such as direct marketing and online activities (Tripodi, 2001). Santomier (2008) adds to this by arguing that "for sport sponsorships to reach their full potential they must be activated through a number of marketing channels". Leveraging is connected with positive sponsorship outcomes, especially when it activates the audience (Weeks et al., 2008). Successful activation of a sponsorship is a blend of resource quantity and activation quality, thus simply having a large budget does not guarantee sponsorship success. Marketers should not rely on sponsorship itself to deliver results but seek to actively engage and interact with their targeted customers through the sponsorship. (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013.)

Sponsorship is often referred to as "impoverished media", which means that without activation, sponsorship remains as a tool for creating logo or brand awareness, and does not communicate a complete message. (Cornwell, 2008) Simply entering a sponsorship agreement is not sufficient for building brand equity or achieving sales objectives. Instead, leveraging activities are required to promote the brand and engage fans to achieve these objectives (Tsordia, Papadimitriou, & Parganas, 2018) and sport marketers should extensively promote sponsorship through different types of communication (Tsiotsou & Alexandris, 2009). According to Erdogan & Kitchen (1998) some sponsorships fail because they are not sufficiently leveraged. Sponsors should powerfully support the linkage, so that the association does not perish in the consumer's minds (Erdogan et al., 1998). Actively leveraging a sponsorship can help aligning the sponsored property with the sponsors brand (Cliffe & Motion, 2005).

2.4.2 Sponsorship objectives

As all other marketing tools, sponsorships should also be utilized to reach set objectives (Tripodi, 2001). According to Hartland, Skinner, & Griffiths (2005) the

marketing objectives of a company should contribute to the broader corporate objectives and that sponsorship is an important part in many companies' marketing strategy. Thus sponsorship objectives should always support the larger marketing strategy (Horn & Baker, 1999). Setting sponsorship objectives is important, not only for the selection of sponsorship targets, but also for the evaluation of the sponsorships in terms of reaching the objectives (Tripodi, 2001). When developing a sponsorship plan, sponsors need to determine which objectives and outcomes are most valuable to them and identify the antecedents that can lead to desired outcomes (Kim et al., 2015).

According to Meenaghan et al. (2013, p. 448): "The clear specification of precise objectives is an absolute priority in all successful evaluation programs". The ability of a sponsorship to deliver on its objectives should be an essential consideration when considering marketing communications. The role and objectives of sponsorship in a company's marketing communications need to be clearly defined so that performance of the sponsorship can be evaluated. Broad statements as objectives, such as "improving brand image" are not clearly defined objectives. (Meenaghan, et al., 2013.) Careful evaluation of sponsorships allows companies to create sponsorship objectives that are complementary to the company's marketing strategy and thus improve the impact of the sponsorship to the company's overall marketing (Tripodi, 2001).

In general, image and awareness objectives have been the primary objectives in sponsorship and sponsorship research has also focused on companies' pursues of these objectives (Walliser, 2003). According to Farrelly et al. (2006) and Zafer Erdogan & Kitchen (1998) sponsors' primary objective is to influence the behavior and perceptions of their target customers, by utilizing the image of the sport organization to shape and enhance their own. Hartland (et al., 2005) found that corporate objectives, such as improving brand awareness, brand or corporate image and reputation were stated as lead priorities by sponsors. These are followed by marketing objectives that include brand positioning, reaching target markets, increasing sales and building meaningful long term relationships with customers (Hartland et al., 2005). According to Baena (2016) branding is now one of the most important ways for sports organizations to achieve growth.

Meenaghan (1991) and Tripodi (2001) divide sponsorship objectives in corporate and brand objectives (Meenaghan, 1991; Tripodi, 2001), which are represented in Figure 2 below. Corporate objectives include increasing public awareness of the company, altering company image, building relationships or enhancing staff motivation (Meenaghan, 1991; Tripodi, 2001). Brand objectives in turn include brand awareness, brand image, brand positioning and increasing sales and market share (Meenaghan 1991; Tripodi, 2001). Even though the sponsorship industry has experienced significant changes and sponsorship objectives have become more diverse, these basic objectives are still in the core of corporate sponsorship. Other common objectives of sponsorship include cognitive objectives, such as awareness objectives, affective objectives, such as liking and attitude and behavioral objectives (Cornwell et al., 2005). According to Meenaghan et al. (2013) a significant transition in sponsorship objectives has been the transition from "badging" to building relationships. Experience and

engagement related qualities have also become of increasing interest in marketing and branding communications (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 2013).

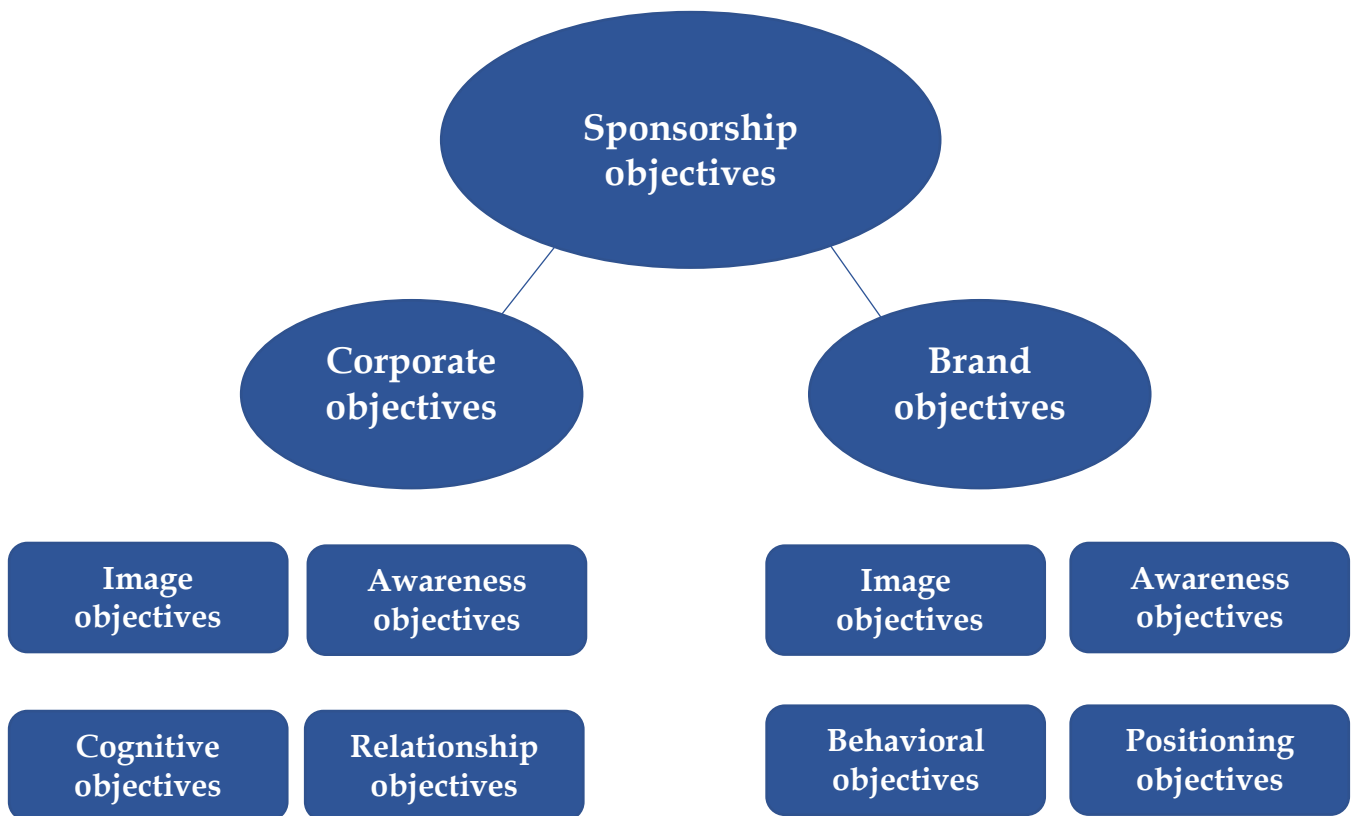


FIGURE 2 Sponsorship objectives (Meenaghan, 1991; Tripodi, 2001)

2.4.3 Sponsorship effects

The value of sport sponsorship can be derived from multiple different sources, such as naming venues, utilization of athlete endorsers and brand or product positioning in a sporting event (Farrelly et al., 2006.) How sponsorship actually works is not yet fully understood (Cornwell, 2008) but there are several possible explanations, such as: effects of mere exposure, reactivation, congruence, low-level processing and social identification (Cornwell et al., 2005). According to Chen, Stotlar, & Reams (2007) sponsorship can have both behavioral effects such as purchase intention and word-of-mouth and attitudinal effects, such as image and awareness effects. It can also have other affective consequences, such as increasing positive and favorable attitudes and liking (Kim et al., 2015).

A central factor in achieving desired consumer effects through sponsorship is building a link between the sponsor and sponsored organization (Cornwell et al., 2005). According to Kim et al. (2015) the fit between a sponsor

and a sponsored organization and consumers' perception about the sponsors motives are significant drivers of sponsorship effectiveness. The importance of fit between the sponsor and sponsored organizations has been one of the more popular research topics and a vast body of sponsorship literature supports the importance of fit on sponsorship effectiveness (Olson & Thjømmøe, 2011). Perceived fit can also improve brand related outcomes, such as awareness and it has a strong effect on brand equity (Tsordia et al., 2018). Smith, Graetz, & Westerbeek (2008) proposed that instead of maximizing exposure, sponsors should focus on sponsorship image matching and fit as sponsorship can build associative links between sponsors and sponsored organizations (Kim et al., 2015). Consumers have stronger responses to sponsorship, when they see a fit between the sponsor and sponsored organization (Speed & Thompson, 2000). If the link between a sponsor and sponsored organization is not direct, the sponsor should communicate the meaning through marketing activities (Zafer Erdogan & Kitchen, 1998) as active leveraging can help aligning the sponsored property with the sponsors brand. (Cliffe & Motion, 2005;) and enhance perceptions of sponsor's motives (Kim et al., 2015).

According to Amis et al. (1999) sponsorship can be utilized effectively in altering and improving company reputation and image. Sponsorship can help in achieving brand and image objectives (Meenaghan, 2013) and be utilized as a brand equity-building strategy to enhance brand image (Tripodi, 2001). Brand equity is an intangible resource which can increase the perceived value of products or services in the customers minds (Amis et al., 1999). In other words, brand equity is the market's perception of a brand (Cornwell et al., 2005). Sponsorship can also achieve behavioral outcomes, such as positive word of mouth, purchase intent, loyalty and information seeking about the sponsor (Kim et al., 2015). The effect of sponsorship to actual purchase behavior is somewhat controversial and remains questionable (Zaharia, Biscaia, Gray, & Stotlar, 2016).

According to Amis et al. (1999) sponsorship can provide competitive advantage for sponsors. To achieve competitive advantage, the sponsorship should be able to increase the value of the products or services of the company in the eyes of customers and help the company in differentiating from its competitors (Amis et al., 1999). According to Erdogan et al. (1998) in order to achieve competitive advantage, sponsorship communications should be integrated and supported with other marketing communications, such as advertising. Proper management and sufficient leveraging of the sponsorship allows differentiating from competing brands. A higher leverage was perceived to significantly facilitate differentiation. (Cornwell, Roy, Cornwell, & Steinard, 2001.) To be able to differentiate in the cluttered sponsorship environment in sports, companies today have to be innovative and have a clearly defined sponsorship campaign (Amis et al., 1999).

Traditionally, media exposure on television or press have played a major role in sponsorship (Meenaghan et al., 2013). Even though exposure is important, mere exposure seems to have minimal effect on behavioral and attitudinal objectives but as a means of increasing awareness exposure can be beneficial for sponsors. (Kim et al., 2015.) In addition, marketing messages in medi-

ums, such as the television cannot be customized or tailored to fit the individual needs of the recipients (Baena, 2016). This suggests that sponsors should reconsider the benefit of aiming to merely gain maximal exposure, especially if the price is high. Mere awareness is neither sufficient to increase purchase intention (Biscaia et al., 2016; Zaharia et al., 2016). Increase in purchase intention is only likely to increase if consumers' attitudes toward sponsors become favorable (Zaharia et al., 2016). For example, sponsoring an athlete who is perceived positively, this might contribute to the attitude formation towards the sponsor (Biscaia et al. 2016). Finally, if sponsorship fails to go beyond the awareness stage it is not able to improve the attitude towards the sponsors or influence purchase intentions (Zaharia et al., 2016) Even the intention to purchase is not always a predictor of actual purchase behavior, but this can depend on the type of the product or service in question (Zaharia et al., 2016).

According to Donlan (et al., 2014), event sponsorship can provide valuable benefits for sponsors looking to achieve relational objectives. By creating "marketing spaces", sponsors can facilitate interaction and create value adding experiences (Donlan et al., 2014). Providing an interactive brand experience in an event can enhance sponsorship recall and awareness and impact consumer attitudes. For the best results, brand experiences should focus on the social aspect of the experience. Brand experiences can increase sponsor awareness and better sponsors recall and thus be a powerful strategy. (Fransen, Rompay & Muntinga, 2013.)

2.4.4 Selection of sponsorship targets

After identifying the desired role for sponsorship and compatible objectives, the logical next step is the selection of appropriate sponsorship targets (Meenaghan, 1991b). Careful evaluation of sponsorships allows companies to create sponsorship objectives that are complementary to the company's marketing strategy and thus improve the impact of the sponsorship to the company's overall marketing (Tripodi, 2001). Sponsors can utilize a variety of different sponsorship strategies, depending on their objectives and how they want to utilize sponsorships. For example, sponsors might aim to leverage sponsorships as an advertising vehicle to convey marketing messages or as a targeted communication to a particular audience, such as fans of a selected sports. (Cornwell, 1995).

Similarly to planning any other marketing communications, a situation analysis regarding general market-related factors as well as specific sponsorship-related factors should be established when planning engaging in a sponsorship (Cornwell, 1995). A core component in the selection of any marketing communications option is its ability to play a particular role (Meenaghan et al., 2013). In other words, when considering a marketing communications tool, its ability to deliver on its objectives should be a key selection criterion. To effectively target a desired audience, sponsors should be able to recognize their target audiences and focus on the audience most relevant for their objectives

(Cornwell, 1995). According to Amis et al. (1999) it is also important that the sponsored organization is perceived positively by the target market.

As sponsors often have several sponsorship opportunities, they need to evaluate the certainty of expected outcomes in a particular relationship. Thus, sponsorship decisions are functions of perceived value and probability of desired outcomes. To provide assurance and decrease uncertainty of the potential to deliver expected outcomes, organizations looking for sponsorships should provide indicators of past performance. (Copeland, 1994.) To identify and select suitable sponsorship opportunities, sponsors should set up a sponsorship policy (Cornwell et al., 2005; Meenaghan, 1991b) that represents the company and its vision (Meenaghan, 1991b). According to Cornwell (2008, p. 52): "A sponsorship policy is the document a company crafts that typically explains what a company will (and will not) sponsor, which audiences should be targeted, the quantity of sponsorships that should be undertaken over a given period, and the level of sponsorship devoted to each".

Awareness, media coverage, exposure, and increased sales are traditionally identified by companies as desired characteristics when considering sponsorships. Sport organizations should also be able to demonstrate their ability to execute on these objectives to attract sponsorship investment. (Copeland, Frisby, & McCarville, 1996.) As companies are adapting to the new value creating opportunities of sponsorship, marketing skills, commitment and willingness to collaborate are perceived positively. On the contrary, lack of commitment in adapting to the changes can significantly harm the sponsorship relationship. (Farrelly et al., 2006.) To highlight the possible benefits provided by their unique resources, sport organizations could be more proactive in helping sponsors to understand the cultural and social values attached to the particular sport and how sponsors can best leverage the unique qualities of the sport organization to engage with their customers (Farrelly et al., 2006). Sport organizations that are able to differentiate from other sponsorship applicants and communicate how they can fulfill the sponsor's objectives can maximize their potential to attracting sponsor support (Copeland et al., 1996). According to Jensen (2016) sponsors are willing to pay a premium for marketing opportunities in environments with less marketing clutter and provide them with dominant positioning. When assessing potential sponsorships, sponsoring organizations evaluate the concrete benefits received and the support received from the sponsored organization Morgan (et al., 2014).

2.4.5 Evaluating sponsorship performance

The basic function of measuring sponsorship outcomes is to decide about continuing or terminating a sponsorship depending on the successfulness (Horn & Baker, 1999). It is important that sponsoring organizations establish evaluation systems, not only to enhance the setting of objectives, but for the ability to provide evidence to justify continuance of the relationship (Farrelly, 2010). A better understanding of the sponsors' actual objectives and what is actually achieved would enable sport organizations to better provide assertion of the value creat-

ed, and thus help sustaining lasting relationships (Hartland et al., 2005). According to Meenaghan (2013) increased accountability and measurability requirements are the most significant challenges in sponsorship today.

Sponsorship decision makers and sport managers are more accountable for their marketing and sponsorship investments than before (Delaney et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015). At the same time, the expectation of proving the return on sponsorship investment and demands for measurement is constantly increasing (Crompton 2004). This has led to more emphasis being put on understanding the effects and effectiveness on sponsorships to not only justify sponsorship investments but also maximize sponsorship benefits (Kim et. al, 2015). However, even today, sponsorship performance measurement remains a common challenge for both sponsors and sponsored organizations. To secure financing in the future, sport organizations need to develop strategies to provide performance data for sponsorship decision makers. Marketers and sponsorship decision makers are increasingly accountable for their sponsorship investments (Delaney 2016) and the requirements of proving the return on sponsorship investment and demand for measurement are constantly increasing. (Crompton, 2004.)

Traditionally the evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness has been based on measuring the level of media exposure and awareness levels (Meenaghan, 1991b; Meenaghan, 1999; Speed et al., 2000). This provides only a limited perspective to sponsorship effectiveness because sponsorship awareness is only one of many objectives of corporate sponsorship (Meenaghan, 1999) and according to Zaharia et al. (2016) solely measuring awareness is not sufficient for effective evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness.

Evaluating the effectiveness of sponsorship on sales objectives has proved to be problematic due to the difficulty of isolating the effects of sponsorship from other marketing activities and attributing results to the right actions and thus it has received less attention from researchers (Meenaghan, 1991b; Meenaghan, 1999). Recently the sponsorship industry has recognized that measuring sponsorship effectiveness through awareness and exposure metrics is not sufficient anymore. Instead, sponsors should focus on engagement and experience metrics. (Meenaghan, 2013.) According to Tsiotsou & Alexandris (2009) sponsors should also evaluate sponsor image, word-of-mouth and intention to purchase for evaluation.

Despite sponsorship receiving an increased share of companies marketing budgets and its significance in companies marketing communications, effective evaluation and the understanding of key factors influencing outcomes of sponsorship is generally lacking and deficient (Kim et al., 2015; O'Reilly & Madill, 2012). However, there is a clear consensus between sponsorship experts that an evaluation process is needed and that it is possible to evaluate sponsorships effectively and that the ability to evaluate performance is perceived to have several benefits, such as risk reduction, access to specific results and justification of future decisions. Evaluation is commonly focused on purchase intent, media measurement, return on investment and exclusivity. (O'Reilly et al., 2012.)

A key factor contributing to the difficulty of sponsorship evaluation is the lack of metrics and evaluation criteria (Copeland et. al, 1996; O'Reilly et al., 2012). Other common barriers for sponsorship evaluation can be the lack of communication and planning between sponsorship partners, motivation, the lack of resources, energy or capabilities and even fear of negative results (O'Reilly et al., 2012). Another key problematic in assessing sponsorship results as well as the results other marketing communications is attributing them to their respected activities. This is due to other simultaneous marketing activities, carry-over effects from previous marketing communications and uncontrollable variables in the environment (Meenaghan, 1991b; Crompton, 2004). The use of simultaneous other marketing communications makes it difficult to isolate the specific impact of sponsorship (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 2013).

Digital media outlets, such as social media, provide companies with more opportunities to monitor and measure performance through real-time analytics. This allows sponsors to evaluate the efficiency of different channels against set objectives (Meenaghan, McLaughlin, & McCormack, 2013) For example, the adoption of social media has enabled increased frequency in performance monitoring and measurement (Meenaghan, 2013). Developments in new media technologies can help address the challenge of attributing and isolating sponsorship effects (Meenaghan, 2013) because they can provide increased accountability through digital measurement methods (Santomier, 2008).

3 DIGITAL MARKETING

During the last decade, marketing has gone through significant changes, and technological advances have influenced almost all aspects of marketing (Langan, Cowley & Nguyen, 2019). Firstly, marketing nowadays is more data-driven and complex, with more tools and applications than ever before (O'Connor, 2015). Developments in digital technology have significantly reduced the information asymmetry between companies and consumers and allows new ways of reaching customers and promoting products and services (Kannan & Li, 2017). Digital marketing is a relatively young discipline, especially from the academic perspective but it is quickly changing the business environment, where companies operate (Kannan & Li, 2017). This makes researching digital environments in various contexts is especially important.

The continuous digitalization of today's business environment has significantly changed the way businesses are operating and interacting with consumers (Langan et al., 2019). Technological and economic developments combined with the consumers' changing lifestyles and values, have had significant effect on marketing communication (Cornwell, 2008). In today's business environment, information and communication technologies (ICT) are indispensable for companies (Wijaya, Spruit, Scheper, & Versendaal, 2011). The emergence of internet has changed the business landscape with immense speed (Kannan & Li, 2017) and facilitated new business models, which emphasize co-creation (Wijaya et al., 2011).

Developments in technology have also transformed the field of marketing communications (Hanna et al., 2011). The evolution of online communications has changed the nature of online communications from one-way communication to a more dynamic two-way communications (Abeza et al., 2013; Armstrong et al., 2014). A significant difference between digital and traditional marketing environments is the ease of sharing word-of-mouth through social networks and customer reviews (Kannan et al., 2017). Due to the development of internet to a sophisticated and expansive communication medium and its specific design for rapid and widespread information distribution, its potential as a marketing tool started to get recognized in the early 2000's (Iokamidis, 2007).

3.1 Development of digital marketing

Companies have always had to evolve and adapt to the development of new technologies (Saura, Palos-Sánchez, & Cerdá Suárez, 2017). Digital marketing allows new ways of value creation in digital environments for both companies and customers, through interaction and new customer experiences (Kannan & Li, 2017). It is obvious that the development of digital media platforms has changed the marketing field (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). The emergence of interactive digital media has shifted the contact between companies and consumers to a more interactive environment, where consumers can dictate the nature of marketing exchanges (Hanna et al., 2011).

Marketing in the internet used to mean the ability to quickly deliver marketing messages for a large audience. However this strategy is not effective for establishing and developing sustainable customer relationships (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). According to Cliffe & Motion (2005) consumers' perceptions of a brand are increasingly linked to their experience with the brand and thus it is crucial to understand how the digital environment affects the creation and how it modifies and strengthens the brand (Kannan & Li, 2017).

Kannan & Li (2017, p. 23) define digital marketing as "an adaptive technology-enabled process by which firms collaborate with customers and partners to jointly create, communicate, deliver, and sustain value for all stakeholders". According to Saura et al. (2017) digital marketing is the integration of different online marketing processes and tools on different platforms and social media, while Järvinen & Karjaluoto (2015, p. 117) define digital marketing as marketing that utilizes "electronic devices and channels to support marketing objectives", which includes marketing through search engines, websites, online advertisements, email and social media.

Digital marketing has several different sub-fields, such as search engine marketing, affiliate marketing, content marketing and social media marketing. Search engine marketing is based on the idea of appearing in the first few results of the search engine results page SERP (Saura et al., 2017). SEO is a technique of improving the ranking of a website in the SERP. From this stage forward, the actions can be tracked and analyzed to evaluate the success of this aspect of digital marketing. In general search engine marketing or SEM is based on the idea that it improves digital marketing through improving search engine visibility. (Saura et al., 2017.)

Another digital marketing tactic constantly growing in importance is digital content marketing (DCM). DCM is a marketing tactic, which aims to encourage consumer's engagement and trust and develop positive relationships with consumers. Digital content marketing can be defined as the "creation and dissemination of relevant, valuable brand-related content on digital platforms, to develop favorable brand engagement, trust and relationships". (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019, p. 27.) The central difference between digital content marketing and advertising is the indirect way in which DCM works. Even though DCM ultimately aims to achieve similar objectives as advertising, it does it through encouraging engagement and building trust and relationships with consumers

and aims to achieve these objectives in the long run (Hollenbeek & Macky, 2019).

Compared to other forms of marketing, one of the most significant benefits of digital media and marketing is its measurability (Chaffey & Patron, 2012). This ability of collecting specific data has significantly influenced companies' marketing strategies (Langan et al., 2019). The emergence of new channels, shopping environments and interactions with customers require updated understanding about customer and brand management processes and marketing metrics (Kannan & Li, 2017).

3.2 Social media

The emergence of the social media network has been one of the most significant changes in human interaction (Tiago et al., 2014) and it has greatly affected the way companies are interacting with their customers (Parganas, Anagnostopoulos & Chadwick, 2015). The dramatic growth of social media has brought it to the forefront of marketing and made it an essential element of marketing communications for businesses of all sizes and industries (Hanna et al., 2011). Social media is increasingly important part of many people's daily lives and a platform of social interaction (Alalwan, Rana, Dwivedi, & Algharabat, 2017).

Social media can be defined as: "new media technologies facilitating interactivity and co-creation that allow for the development and sharing of user-generated content among organizations e.g., teams, governing bodies, agencies, media groups and individuals e.g., consumers, athletes, journalists" (Filo, Lock, & Karg, 2015, p. 167). Social media offers several marketing communications opportunities for brands, from paid advertising and brand to customer research, lead generation and customer relationship management (Ashley & Tuten, 2014).

One of the possible ways for brands and sport organizations to leverage social media is relationship marketing (RM). The purpose of RM is to retain customers through improving customer satisfaction and relationships (Abeza, O'Reilly & Reid, 2013). Relationship marketing has particular relevance in the sponsorship context due to the multiple stakeholders, varying objectives and perceptions of value (Farrelly & Quester, 2005). Social media can help building and fostering the relationship between the sport organization and their fans. It allows organizations to communicate, engage and interact with customers and understanding and responding to their needs, thus creating added value and enhancing the relationship. (Abeza, O'Reilly & Seguin, 2017). Social media provides an ideal platform for relationship marketing, because it allows two-way dialogue between organizations and their customers (Abeza et al., 2013). In addition, the speed and easy accessibility makes social media ideal platform for relationship marketing purposes (Abeza et al., 2017). Strategic RM activities can foster facilitate desired customer activities and help organizations gain competitive edge (Williams & Chinn, 2010).

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized the marketing landscape by transforming internet “from a platform for information, to a platform of influence” (Hanna et al., 2011). Brands across industries are utilizing social media to drive awareness and visibility and to build relationships with consumers (Parganas et al., 2015). Social relationships have become virtual and today’s online communities connect people globally (Tiago et al., 2014). In fact, social media brand communities have become important brand management mediums for companies (Popp & Woratschek, 2016).

From the corporate perspective, social media provides variety of ways to engage customers (Hanna et al., 2011) such as interactive communication, relationship development and promotion of brand activities (Filo et al., 2015). The social media content that brands publish, can be divided in four categories; interaction, behind the scenes access, provision of news and information and personalisation (Filo et al., 2015). Social media appears to be a less expensive medium of communication for interaction with targeted customers, thus it can provide increased communication efficiency (Alalwan et al., 2017). Most businesses aim to leverage social media for reaching new customers and improving customer experience of current customers (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Social media can also be utilized to provide information and connect with stakeholders (Tiago & Verissimo, 2014). According to Meng, Stavros, & Westberg (2015) social media can also be utilized for personalizing communications and develop relationships through interpersonal conversations. A key factor in corporate social media communication seems to be the ability to communicate with a sense of genuinity and realness. Organizations that have successfully leveraged social media, are focusing less on acquiring direct results, and more on fostering relationships with their customers by communicating in a truthful, trustworthy and relatable manner. (Armstrong et al., 2014.) A less explicit focus on business objectives might be more effective in engaging with the fans and customers (Filo et al., 2015). According to Hanna et al. (2011) social media ecosystem revolves around consumer experience, and thus it provides marketers the opportunity to bring experience to the center of companies’ marketing communications.

3.3 Digital marketing and social media in sports

The emergence of social media has impacted both media and the sport culture (Armstrong et al., 2014). The opportunities as well as the challenges presented by social media in sport have sparked interest in the academic world (Filo et al., 2015). Especially the evolution in the marketing aspect of sponsorship that has provided new research openings for academics (Cornwell & Kwak, 2015). For example, online sports marketing is the most efficient way of creating fan communities around sports leagues and teams (Ioakimidis, 2010).

Developments in technology and emergence of new media have also changed the way sport is consumed and marketed (Santomier, 2008). The development of digital media has also led to the emergence of a new active con-

sumer (Armstrong, Delia, & Giardina, 2014). The nature of communications has thus shifted to a more interactive two-way communication.

The popularity of social media has neither went unnoticed by the sporting world and the growing ubiquity of digital media in many fields of life, sports included, depicts its importance for sport marketers (Pfahl, Kreutzer, Maleski, Lillibridge, & Ryznar, 2012). According to Meng et al. (2015) social media provides a valuable medium for sport organizations' marketing. The high level of awareness in social media increases the appeal of sponsorship for companies who aim to utilise them as a marketing platform (Parganas, Liasko, & Anagnostopoulos, 2017).

Sport organizations as well as brands, events and athletes are investing significant amounts of resources in social media to drive engagement and build relationships (Filo et al., 2015). Key benefits of online sports marketing are its interactive and multimedia capabilities (Iokiamidis, 2010) and the high level of awareness through social media (Parganas et al., 2016). Increasingly powerful digital media outlets enable growing interaction and empowerment of consumers (Iokiamidis, 2010).

Meng et al. (2015) categorized sport organizations' use of social media to four categories; personalizing, activating, informing and marketing. Common objectives for social media usage in sporting world are engagement, branding, relationship development and communication (Filo et al., 2015). Consumers' motives for engaging with sport entities are various, such as the ability to express opinions, fandom, gain insights and information, entertainment and camaraderie (Filo et al., 2015).

Social media can be a powerful way to build brands and engage with fans. The ability to use visual images in combination with the ability to interact by commenting can help bringing the brand 'to life' while simultaneously increasing engagement. (Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick & Fenton, 2018.) Engagement has been found to be a significant factor in creating brand loyalty and purchase behavior (Tsordia et al., 2018).

Since the early 2000's, online marketing has become the most important medium in building fan communities for sport organizations and leagues (Iokiamidis, 2010.) The use of social media to achieve relationship marketing objectives has been researched in the context of sports teams (Williams & Chinn, 2010). Abeza, O'Reilly, & Reid (2013) conclude that social media can provide several benefits for sport marketers. Such benefits include better and more in-depth knowledge of customers, advanced interaction between organizations and customers and effective engagement. In addition, social media platforms are efficient mediums for communicating with target audiences. (Abeza et al., 2013.) Thus they can provide a medium for sport organizations' relationship marketing activities (Armstrong et al., 2014). Bopp (et al., 2016) concluded, that operating a sport related branded community significantly increases loyalty towards the operating brand (Bopp et al., 2016).

Sport marketers are increasingly leveraging the opportunities provided by social media. For example, Los Angeles Kings, an ice-hockey team in the NHL has successfully leveraged their social media communities for relationship marketing (RM). RM allows organizations to interact and have unique conversa-

tions directly with customers and thus build customer relationships (Armstrong et al., 2014). By communicating directly and actively with their fans the LA Kings have been able to build relationships with their fans and position their brand as trustworthy and “real” (Armstrong et al., 2014). In fact, a literature review regarding the operational use of social media revealed that sport brands are utilizing a personal and human approach in social media interaction (Filo et al., 2015). Abeza et al. (2017) found that brand humanizations were perceived very important by managers of professional sport organizations. Thus sport organizations are encouraged to take a personal approach and utilize humor and wittiness in their social media communications (Abeza et al., 2017).

Anagnostopoulos, Parganas, Chadwick, & Fenton (2018) concluded that sport marketers can promote positive attitude and behavior through Instagram. Anagnostopoulos (et al., 2018) proposed that Instagram can provide advertising opportunities for professional sport teams and their sponsors. Sponsors gain visibility when pictures of players are uploaded (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2018).

Twitter allows communicating both product related and non-product related brand attributes (Parganas et al., 2015) Most tweets were product related (match itself), but also several non-product related tweets, including fans and sponsors were tweeted. It is crucial for sport organizations to identify what sort of content increases engagement and try to deliver a balance of both. There are two ways sport organizations can leverage social media for revenue; first, through building long-term relationships by facilitating interactive communication with their fans. The second way is by providing a venue for sponsors’ promotional communication to the fans online. (Parganas et al., 2015.)

3.4 Sponsorship and digital media

Digital media has made sponsorships more powerful tools for brands to engage with their customers. The capabilities of new media in social interaction, viral and relationship marketing have secured its role in the marketing process. (Santomier, 2008.) Sponsors are leveraging the opportunities provided by new media for developing brand awareness, engaging customers and providing a medium for exclusive content (Dees, 2011). The developments of digital technology and the emergence of new marketing venues provide companies and marketers new ways of reaching and communicating with customers globally (Santomier, 2008; Ratten & Ratten, 2011) and to integrate strategic marketing activities with sponsorships (Santomier 2008). For example, mobile marketing provides sports marketers with new opportunities to communicate with customers (Baena, 2016).

The fragmentation of media, increased marketing clutter and the need to engage with consumers are significant factors in the growth of global sponsorship industry, combined with the developments in broadcasting technology and the emergence of new media outlets was a significant factor contributing to the growth of the industry (Santomier, 2008). According to Currie (2000) the increasing amount of media options, such as digital television and internet criti-

cally influenced the growth of sponsorship industry by presenting totally new opportunities. Current digital communications platforms provide sponsors with a growing arsenal of communication tools and opportunities to leverage sponsorships (Meenaghan, 2013). Smartphones, for example, have become powerful and valuable mediums for marketing communications (Baena, 2016).

The increased amount of digital sports content has provided companies with the opportunity to utilize sponsorship to deliver their messages effectively (Santomier, 2008). The adoption of digital technologies, developments in marketing opportunities and integration strategies, such as corporate partnerships, have been significant contributors to the globalisation of sport and growth of the sponsorship industry (Santomier, 2008).

Research on the connection of sponsorship and digital environments has been relatively scarce. In the early 2000s, Cornwell & Drennan (2004) provided early perspectives regarding sponsorship on the internet. They proposed that internet is an attractive sponsoring medium due to its interactive nature and rich media technologies (Cornwell et al., 2004), which allows sponsors to leverage and activate sponsorships for mass-audiences (Weeks et al., 2008). Weeks et al. (2008) also concluded, that internet can work as an effective medium for engaging mass audiences through sponsorships and may be utilized to enhance consumer attitudes through activation. Shen (2002) had previously commented that internet is an accountable and effective marketing medium with tracking and personalization technologies.

The fast development in the media sector and adoption of new technologies by businesses and consumers has changed the dynamics of how companies today communicate with consumers. In today's interconnected world, sponsorship can provide tools for companies and marketers attempting to achieve corporate objectives and build corporate image globally (Fahy, 2004; Tsiotsou, 2011). Digital media enables sponsors to connect and engage with individuals or groups and allows targeting and measuring the communication in real time (Meenaghan 2010). Developments in technology and the emergence of new media provide sponsors with new opportunities to communicate worldwide with consumers through multiple digital platforms, which has increased the value of sport sponsorships (Santomier, 2008).

Digital media allows sponsors to connect and interact with different stakeholder groups from individual consumers to desired communities. The ability to provide better customer experiences by communicating in real-time with different stakeholders makes new media platforms highly appealing for sponsors. (Meenaghan, 2013.) Media platforms also allow communicating to specified and targeted audiences (Santomier, 2008).

Online and mobile media can help teams to facilitate customer engagement by attracting the attention of the supporters (Baena, 2016). Digital media has enabled the creation of virtual communities, where consumers share common interests (Armstrong et al., 2014). Digital environment can provide a virtual home for fans, that can increase their feeling of connection the team and other fans (Baena, 2016; Ioakimidis, 2010). Social media, for example has become a significant subject of sponsorship investment and provides a valuable activation channel for sponsors. Social media, for example enables real-time interactions

and engagement with customers. (Meenaghan, 2013). Accordingly, sport sponsors are shifting their focus from less activation way of communicating to a more activation approach by engaging and interacting with customers (Dees, 2011).

3.5 Measuring digital marketing

The expansion and increased consumption of digital media has facilitated the increasing use of web analytics (Järvinen & Karjaluoto, 2015). Web analytics can provide information of the performance of specific digital marketing activities. Web analytics can provide both quantitative and qualitative data depending on the measured variable, which can be utilized in optimizing a company's digital marketing strategy. (Saura et al., 2017.) Web analytics tools collect and track various data and can help marketer's to understand customers' behavior in digital environments. This information can then be utilized in designing strategies to encourage desired actions. (Nakatani & Chuang, 2011.)

The difficulty is often identifying the relevant measures and interpreting them correctly. Identifying appropriate key performance indicators (KPI's) for digital marketing and analytics can help marketers measuring the desired aspects of the digital marketing tactics and activities. Tracking relevant KPI's can help marketers improve their digital marketing performance and all companies should identify the KPI's most relevant to them (Saura et al., 2017). According to Järvinen & Karjaluoto (2015) companies should utilize a metrics system that aligns with their main marketing objectives. This requires identifying and prioritizing main KPI's that support the company's main marketing objectives.

The most commonly utilized quantitative indicators include for example traffic, impressions, unique users, leads and conversions. The purpose of quantitative indicators is to help quantifying the results, whereas qualitative indicators aim to evaluate how the visitor views the website. Popular qualitative indicators include A/B testing, user experience and surveys and forms among others. (Saura et al., 2017). However, there are no universal KPI's and there is in fact only little consensus, which metrics businesses should measure. Effective metrics are dependent on the company (Järvinen & Karjaluoto, 2015).

In addition to websites, consumer interactions in social media are important qualitative indicators for companies and should also be analyzed (Saura et al., 2017). The revolution in digital commerce requires traditional marketing perspectives and practices to adapt to marketing in digital environments. (Saura et al., 2017).

Traditional marketing has had to adapt and evolve in the changing demands of the digital environment (Saura et al., 2017). According to Saura et al. (2017) due to the quickly changing nature of digital marketing, continuous academic research is required and digital marketing holds tremendous potential for academics to make significant contributions. To be able to properly leverage the digital environment, marketers need appropriate training and understanding of the environment.

3.6 Research model

Figure 3 depicts the research model of this study based on the literature review. The purpose of the research model (Figure 3) is to illustrate the nature of contemporary sponsorships. As previously stated, sponsorships have shifted towards a reciprocal relationship, where both parties have expectations and demands for the relationship and sponsors increasingly perceive the sponsorship relationship as an alliance. (Farrelly 2006; 2010.) For the sponsors, sponsorship offers a medium for achieving several marketing communications objectives and in return the sponsored organization receives financial resources (Meenaghan, 1991b) as depicted by Figure 3. Clearly planning and expressing the expectations and objectives is important for the success of the relationship (Farrelly, 2010) but also it enables sponsor's to evaluate the outcomes of their sponsorship investment (Meenaghan, 2013). Sponsorship is essentially a relationship between two organizations, where both parties have their own expectations and objectives (Copeland et al., 1996; Tsiotsou, 2011).

As the competition for sponsorship investments is constantly tightening, sponsored organizations need to improve their sponsorship offering and increase the value of sponsorship for the sponsors (Biscaia, 2014). Sponsoring companies, in turn, have been subjected to increasing accountability requirements and need to be able to demonstrate the return created from the investment (Delaney et al., 2016). The development of digital media and marketing technologies allows sponsors and sponsored organizations to leverage the sponsorship in various ways to improve the value and effectiveness of it (Santomier, 2008). Digital media also provides increasing measurability and thus can help to improve the accountability of sponsorships (Chaffey & Patron, 2012) as depicted in Figure 3.

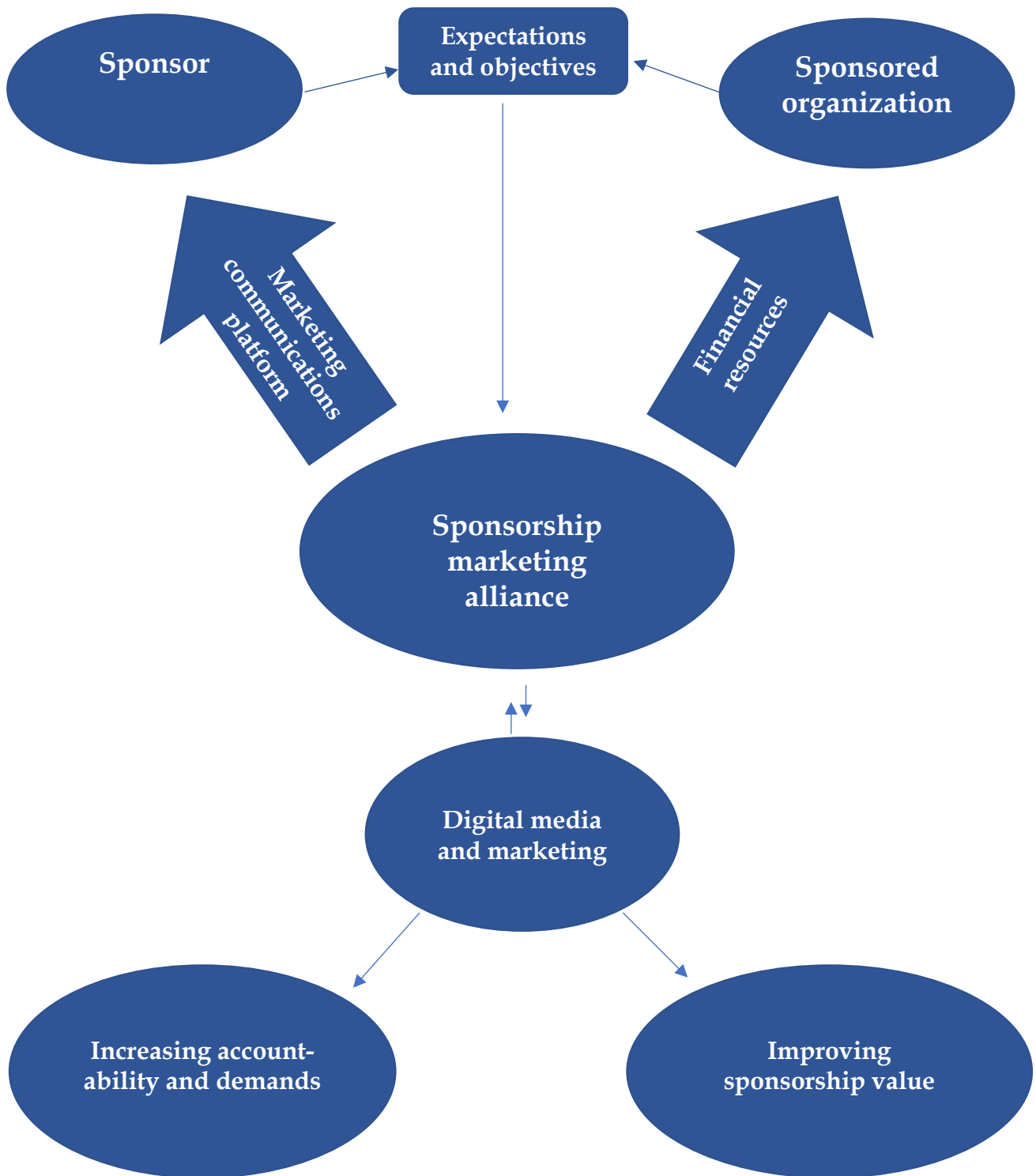


FIGURE 3 Research model

4 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This section presents the methods used in this study. It starts with introducing the research method, followed by the data collection process and finally presenting how the data was analysed.

The purpose of this study is to provide information that would help sponsored organizations to improve their sponsorship offering and increase the value of sponsorships. Thus the main objective of this study is to acquire information about the expectations and objectives of the sponsoring companies. Further this study is set out to explore how sponsors are currently leveraging their sponsorships and especially what kind of a role digital media and marketing plays in today's sponsorship.

The subject of the study is Liiga Oy and its sponsors. Liiga is the main professional ice-hockey league in Finland. Liiga and its sponsors are selected as the research subject, because Liiga is the most followed sports league in Finland and thus expected to have the most commercial characteristics, including commercial sponsorships.

4.1 Research methodology and process

This research is conducted by utilising a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is the other of the two most common research methods; qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative method is utilised when the aim of the research is to study a phenomenon, portray an event or to understand particular behaviour or actions (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

In this study, the data is collected through interviews, which is one of the most common ways to collect qualitative data. Another common data collection methods are for example questionnaires, observation and or documents (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The purpose of an interview is to convey the thoughts, perceptions and experiences of the interviewed subject (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008) which is why it suits the purpose of this study.

The actual research process was initiated by contacting Liiga through an e-mail, inquiring their interest for participating in a study regarding the development of sponsorship relationships. After discussing with the representative of Liiga Oy about the details of the study and their role and requirements in the research, Liiga agreed to participate in the study.

Liiga provided the contact information of their sponsorship partners via e-mail and all of the partners were contacted by telephone by the author. Eleven out of fifteen partners were reached after several attempts. Out of the reached sponsors, two politely declined to participate due to various reasons or perceived incompatibility for the studied subject. Two partners initially agreed to the interview but when trying to reach them, they were not to be reached anymore despite numerous efforts. Thus the final number of interviewed sponsorship partners was six. Table 1 presents the respondents' area of work, position in the firm and duration of each interview. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 30 minutes.

TABLE 1 Study respondents

Respondent	Area of work / Position	Interview durations
P1	Partnerships & Sponsoring / Manager	35 min 19 sec
P2	Marketing / Manager	32 min 57 sec
P3	Sales / Manager	26 min 32 sec
P4	Marketing / Manager	29 min 6 sec
P5	Marketing / Manager	29 min 3 sec
P6	Communications / Manager	31 min 37 sec

4.2 Data collection and analysis

The actual study was conducted by using semi-structured interviews through a telephone call. Semi-structured interviews have a predetermined theme and prepared questions, but the questions can be elaborated during the interview and specified depending on the respondents' answers (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018). The flexible nature of an interview as a data collection method makes it suitable for several different research purposes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2008). The respondents were provided with the interview questions beforehand by e-mail after they had agreed to participate in the study. According to Tuomi & Sarajärvi (2018) it is justifiable to provide respondents with questions beforehand, because the aim of the study is to acquire as much information as possible. Finally, the analysis of the data was conducted by using a content analysis method, which is one of the basic methods in qualitative research (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018).

The interviews were conducted as telephone interviews due to scheduling reasons. All interviews were carried out between May 13 and May 22, 2019. The interviews recorded with an audio recording device. After recording, all interviews were transcribed as separate text files on a computer. In the transcription process, some notes were already made when common topics were identified.

After the initial transcription, all transcriptions were read through another time and notes were made in the text by utilizing colours and commenting features to highlight common themes. The interview form was designed so that the themes were divided into four main themes, which made the classification of information easier. After the first round of coding, the transcriptions were read yet another time, this time copying and pasting parts of the texts and thematically arranging and classifying the text. At this point, important themes started to emerge. After classifying the text snippets thematically, results were derived based on the classifications. To provide additional descriptive information about the results and help understanding the results, quotations were utilised extensively in the final report.

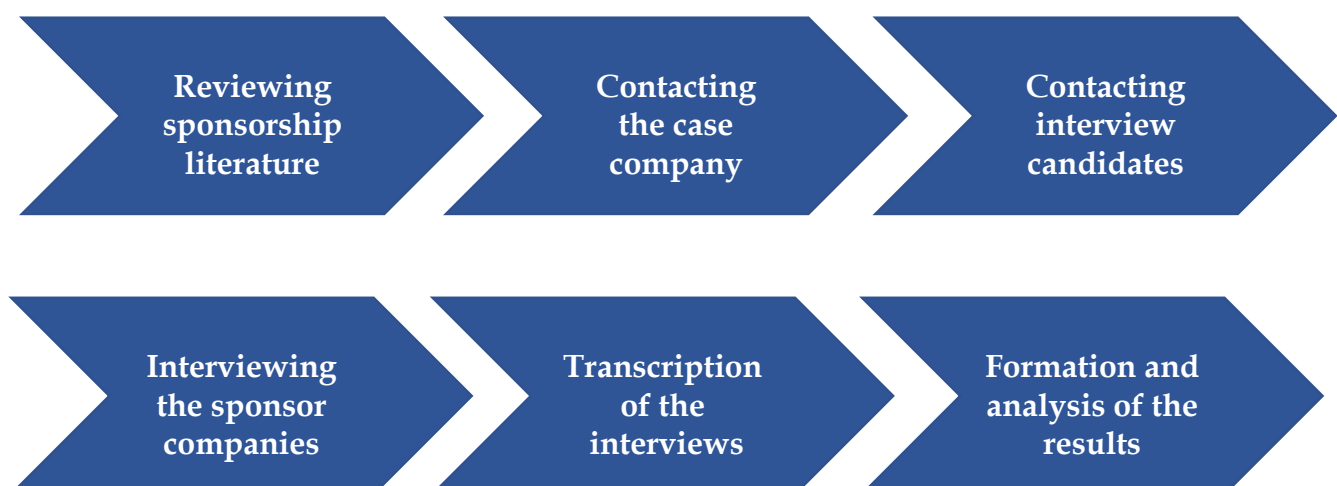


FIGURE 4 Research process

5 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 General results

This chapter presents the results of the research interviews, conducted during May 2019. As stated in the methods section, six interviews in total were conducted and all of them were utilized in the final research. Six sponsorship and marketing decision makers were interviewed from the sponsoring organizations of Liiga Oy. The aim of this study was to provide information regarding the expectations, objectives and perceptions of sponsoring companies, which could be utilized in developing the collaboration and sponsorship relationship between Liiga Oy and its partners.

The rationale for this study is derived from the increasing accountability requirements and increasing expectations of return on investment in sponsoring companies, which are both well established in scientific literature and were also discussed in the literature review of this study. Expectations and objectives play an important role in the success of a sponsorship relationship, which also makes this research necessary and important. This study approached sponsorship from a marketing communications perspective. Thus, the use of digital marketing and perceptions regarding digital marketing were also studied.

Sponsors were generally very satisfied with what they are getting out of their sponsorship relationship. However, many respondents struggled to state their actual expectations for the sponsorship. Expectations were often equalled with what had been written in the contract and many respondents implied that they were not willing to discuss the contents of the contract in depth. In general, sponsors expected to gain exposure and visibility. Only a few companies reported specific expectations, such as expectations regarding the production of digital content that would support their marketing objectives. In terms of objectives, most sponsors expressed exposure and awareness related brand objectives to be their main reason for sponsorship. Many companies also wanted to enhance either their brand image or image about their industry. In general, sponsorship was viewed as a marketing communications tool by most companies. Two companies mentioned sponsorships also being a strategic resource.

Evaluation processes demonstrated significant variance between sponsor companies. All companies reported having some form of metrics for tracking the performance of the sponsorship. However, there were remarkable differences in the depth and sophistication of measurement methods. Sponsor's evaluation processes can be divided in brand-level evaluation and campaign level marketing evaluation based on the results. Brand level evaluation was outsourced by almost every sponsor company, while most companies reported having some form of in-house digital metrics or analytics to measure campaign effectiveness, for example tracking traffic and click-percentages. Some respondents reported having much more 'straight-forward' and subjective evaluation processes.

Digital media and digital channels were perceived to be very important by all respondents. Most sponsors also implied that digital properties influence the selection of sponsorship targets. However, this differed between companies and some companies did not see digital properties as an influencing factor. When discussing the digital channels, Liiga's website was mentioned by almost all respondents as the most important digital channel.

Social media channels, especially Facebook was also perceived to be an important channel by many sponsors. When discussing the ways companies are utilising and leveraging digital and social media, most sponsors reported having organized competitions or lotteries on their social media. Sponsor's put significant weight on their visibility on Liiga's website and many did not have other types of digital marketing.

Many sponsors saw insufficient resources as the major challenge in their sponsorship and expressed shortage in both human and financial resources. The lack of resources also stood out when discussing the ability of the sponsor to fully leverage the sponsorship, which was another challenge reported by many respondents. In addition to lacking resources, many organizations seemed to have challenges with how to maximally leverage the relationship and get more out of it.

Respondents saw that the importance of digital media increasing further in the future. Improved audience targeting and production of relevant content in digital channels were mentioned by respondents as desired improvements in the future. Overall, respondents were satisfied with their relationship with Liiga and did not provide any actual criticism towards the collaboration. Sponsors felt that relationship is reciprocal and that their expectations are met. The collaboration was seen to be working well and Liiga is delivering what it is expected to. Respondents reported that if there has been problems, they have been solved together.

In the future, sponsors saw that 'sponsorship' as a pure visibility element will decrease and that relationships become even more collaborative. Sponsorship in the form of buying passive logo visibility was thought to decrease and ultimately fade away altogether. Respondents expressed a wish that sponsorship would become increasingly integrated into the 'core' of the sponsoring company's business and values. Improving the utilisation of digital media, targeting and local marketing communications were also brought up by respond-

ents as desired future developments. The rise of e-sports and its implications for sponsorship were also brought also speculated by some respondents.

5.2 Results by theme

This chapter represents the results in more detail and provides citations to give the reader better insights and more context to the results. Results are represented under the main themes, which are based on the themes in the interview form. Citations are utilized to demonstrate important points made by respondents. The names and organizations of the respondents were not utilized due to some respondent's wishes.

5.2.1 Reasons for sponsoring Liiga

All of the interviewed sponsor's reported that the primary reason for sponsoring Liiga was the high-level of interest in the surrounding ice hockey and Liiga in Finland. Ice hockey and Liiga were perceived as the 'number-one' sport in Finland by sponsors and thus it was viewed as the best sponsorship target available. Sponsors felt that Liiga provides an effective medium for reaching target audiences.

The popularity of ice hockey, volume of followers and Liiga's ability to reach a broad audience were highlighted by respondents. Many sponsors also felt that Liiga provided a desired target audience and thus they could reach their target audience through sponsoring Liiga. High level of public interest towards ice hockey and Liiga were continuously highlighted as crucial factors for sponsoring.

In general, sponsors viewed sponsorship as a marketing communications tool. Liiga was viewed as a marketing communications tool to reach a desired audience and achieve several marketing and brand objectives. A central factor importance for many sponsors seemed to be sponsorship seemed to be the popularity and reach of Liiga.

"On the general level, Finnish people are interested in ice hockey and it's the most popular sport in almost any age-group" (P6)

"First of all, Liiga is Finland's number one sports product and of course we want to be a part of something that can help us increase brand awareness." (P1)

Sponsors also expressed that Liiga's audience represents well their own target group:

"Liiga provides quite a unique representation of our target group, which consist of consumers but also retailers and retailer staff." (P2)

In addition to reaching consumers, Liiga was also seen as a way to reach important decision makers;

“There are those decision makers in Liiga’s target group that we primarily want to reach.” (P4)

In general, sponsorship was perceived to be one marketing tool among others.

“Well, we sponsor to keep our brand visible – it’s part of our marketing to keep our brand in the mind of the consumer. As an importer we do this kind of corporate level brand marketing to keep our brand and of course some particular products in the mind of the consumer and communicate what we do, what kind of products and solutions we have.” (P2)

However, even though reach was mentioned as an important factor in sponsorship selection by all respondents, it was also mentioned that the volume of following is not necessarily the definitive factor, rather it is the suitability of the target group for the sponsor:

“When we talk about Liiga, the volume there of course is huge, but if we talk about sponsorship targets, it does not necessarily mean that there has to be a million followers or so. It can be less if they have the desired target group. We work with many smaller partners, if they have just the right target group.” (P6)

5.2.2 Sponsorship objectives

All of the interviewed companies expressed some sort of predetermined objectives for sponsorship. Objectives, such as increased brand visibility, brand knowledge, brand awareness and altering brand image were the most commonly cited objectives. Many sponsors also reported them as the main rationale for sponsoring. Only a few companies expressed that the ultimate objective is increasing sales. One sponsor also expressed gaining competitive advantage as an objective for their sponsorship.

Majority of the companies expressed some form of brand objective as their main objective;

“The main objective is that people know (the brand) and particularly in the those target-groups mentioned.” (P2)

Some companies also reported commercial objectives as sponsorship objectives;

“There is ... a purely commercial, numeral objective of revenue we expect but also a marketing objective, that we want to reach our target group through Liiga.” (P1)

All respondents reported that their company’s sponsorship objectives were complementary to the broader corporate objectives;

“It is increasing the brand knowledge, which is the main objective of our other marketing activities, so it is basically synchronized with that.” (P5)

“Yes, naturally they complement each other, like I said, we have diverse marketing activities and of course we try to make all actions complementary to each other.” (P2)

Objectives were also dependent on the type and industry of the company;

“The core objective comes from the brand building elements, not from tactical-level efforts to increase sales like consumer brands.” (P4)

“We aim for positive awareness for our industry, because we are not a typical consumer service ... it is more the awareness and positive image.” (P4)

5.2.3 Sponsor expectations

One of the less researched topics in sponsorship literature are sponsorship expectations. In other words, what do sponsors actually expect in return for their investment. In this study, when discussing expectations, many sponsors referred to the existing contract and elements that are mentioned in the contract and would not want to discuss the details of their contracts. The general expectation was to gain more visibility and exposure, however most did not mention any expectations regarding leveraging methods to achieve this expectation. Thus, many companies could not specifically elaborate their expectations. However, those who could reported that they expect some form of content in Liiga’s channels, which communicates the sponsorship to their audience and supports the objectives of the sponsor.

“We don’t have other marketing expectations in addition to what we have agreed upon, because naturally these things are in the contract, what they have to do and what we can do. Of course we expect, that what is agreed in the contract will be done.” (P2)

Two sponsors reported clear expectations, when asked about marketing expectations;

“We have noticed that when Liiga raises their partners in their own channels, it works significantly better than if we start communicating in our own channels and we hope that Liiga would be active in communicating ... and we would get that earned media from there and that is what we hope from Liiga and what could be done even more.” (P1)

“Various types of content, such content that supports our objectives that we have set for that collaboration. It can be directing traffic ... or leveraging the Liiga brand or a

team's brand or it can be videos or social media content ... it is a very broad spectrum." (P6)

5.2.4 The role of digital media and marketing

Digital media was seen as very important by all respondents, especially the visibility that the digital channels are able to provide. Sponsors also implied that as their customers are increasingly in the online environments, they also need to be where their customer are doing business.

"Very important. We want to make sure that we are present where our target group is ... and where they do their business, meaning which digital channels they use." (P1)

"... these days digital and social media are used a lot and large masses are spending time there, so of course it must be leveraged." (P2)

Most respondents also implied that digital media qualities play a role when selecting sponsorship targets.

"Naturally they do. At first we examine, whether we can reach our target group through it ... there are different items we examine and these social media channels and digital media qualities are part of it." (P6)

"Well of course it plays a role and the key indicators reveal, that if you compare it to any other sport in Finland, they are in a league of their own if you want to maximize exposure through sponsorship or collaboration." (P3)

However, not every respondent gave as much value for digital media properties in the selection process;

"It does not affect, no. Naturally it's a good addition, these liiga.fi visitors ... but if we didn't have that we would probably just modify our contract ... but the website presence is not decisive..." (P4)

"I don't think that these digital media qualities are the most important factor, but in general, what is the - how many followers the sport - or whether it is an athlete or whatever - but the total amount of followers, how many contacts we can have ... it is the total, which counts more." (P2)

The single most important digital channel was perceived to be Liiga's own website, which was mentioned by all respondents and for most of the respondents it was the main digital marketing channel in their sponsorship.

“Liiga.fi has quite a central role because of the amount of traffic there, through which we can reach many customers, so maybe that is the most relevant place, but of course we activate it through our social channels also.” (P5)

“Well, social media exposure is valued highly and the huge number of visitors in liiga.fi, it is important that we have these elements...” (P4)

Social media channels were also reported as important by many sponsors. Especially Facebook was reported as an important social media.

“Well, definitely Liiga’s website and also social media channels, take Facebook and Instagram for example.” (P1)

“Liiga’s website is important but equally social media, Facebook especially seems to have a lot of our target group there.” (P2)

However, there was variance in the most important channels depending on the type of the company.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have a Facebook channel in our social media network, so for us it is Twitter and LinkedIn.” (P3)

One respondent also considered the possible negative aspect of digital channels, such as social media;

“Of course, there is the possibility of negative things spreading – if there was something negative – it can spread quickly and one critical comment can lead to a bigger surprise than in other channels.” (P2)

5.2.5 Utilization of digital channels

Utilization and level of leveraging of digital channels varied between the sponsor organizations. Most organizations were relatively passive in leveraging digital media and counted on visibility elements in Liiga’s website. Periodic campaigns, such as lotteries were a common form of an activation campaign. Only few of the companies were more active and had clearly stated objectives about how they want to leverage digital media.

“We want to produce relevant content for our target groups in relevant channels ... tell about our products and services and put forward positive customer experiences and in the end we want to make the purchase decision easier. For example references and videos are very good means for these purposes.” (P1)

“In every possible way. Digital is the main channel for our collaboration ... and we don’t do it just for the fun of it, there is always an objective behind what we do either brand related or like in this case we direct traffic to our own website.” (P6)

Many sponsors had some form of activational elements in their digital channels. The most utilized form of a digital media campaign was either competition or a lottery with sponsorship related prizes, such as tickets to the games.

“We have had one tactical campaign during my two years ... a questionnaire in liiga.fi, where people could win tickets to the regular-season games.” (P4)

“We have handed out tickets and such, and we have had quite good experiences with it.” (P3)

Only a few companies reported having conducted different kind of marketing activities in digital media, such as producing some form of content;

“This season, we had one content-case ... which was then put into different channels and it worked very well.” (P1)

Some companies directly admitted that they have room for improvements and that more could be done in terms of leveraging digital media in their sponsorship.

“...we have arranged some competitions, that are related to Liiga, ticket lotteries and such and we have promoted the fact that we are supporting Finnish ice-hockey. But sure, more could be done - and it would be even reasonable to do more.” (P2)

“There is - like in everything - room for improvement here... For example what is the level of exposure in liiga.fi and how well it stands out from all the other noise... That is something that needs working on in the future.” (P5)

5.2.6 Sponsorship evaluation

On a general level, companies evaluated that sponsorship as a whole reaches set expectations and objectives. Measuring the outcomes and effectiveness is a well-known challenge in the sponsorship industry and most organizations had in fact outsourced their evaluation processes. Most sponsors mentioned Sponsor Insight as their main source for evaluating outcomes. Sponsor Insight is a company specialized in designing and measuring sponsorships. Beyond Sponsor Insight there was a significant variance in the evaluation processes between sponsor companies. A few sponsors provided concrete information about their evaluation processes in addition to using Sponsor Insight.

“We track the amount of media hits and estimated media value through Sponsor Insight’s research and then there are these indicators provided by Sponsor Insight.” (P4)

“The only measurable thing here that we can attribute to this particular action is the research information that we get from Sponsor Insight ... how people have noticed

this collaboration and how it has influenced their attitudes towards us as a brand or possible intention to purchase.” (P5)

Most sponsors were tracking similar metrics, such as visibility, media exposure and media hits to evaluate the outcomes of sponsorship.

“Yes, we track and measure exposure through Sponsor Insight, meaning we buy a service, which tracks our brand exposure.” (P2)

“...we have tracked the value of the achieved media exposure – how much we have gained it through these exposure elements that belong to this collaboration...” (P5)

On campaign level all sponsors reported using metrics to evaluate marketing campaign outcomes. Most companies reported using some form of digital analytics methods to measure marketing effectiveness.

“We have separate commercial metrics that we see from our own systems – how the commercial aspect has progressed. That’s purely a numbers thing ... e-commerce, like I said is our own resource, so from there we see how the indicators change.” (P1)

“On a general level, we track and measure the progression of our brand image and brand preferences ... and if there is a campaign in Liiga’s channels or that we do together with Liiga, there are specific metrics that we track.” (P6)

“If we do tactical, then specifically through digital methods we can better measure clicks, click-through-rates and in the end the possible closing of the sale.” (P4)

However, there were significant differences in the level and specificity in measurement methods.

“It is kind of whether we have we got people on the move or not.” (P3)

“Then these shorter campaign objectives, such as sales, reach, conversion rate and so on.. Nearly every ... action is measured somehow.” (P6)

All respondents reported that their collaboration with Liiga achieves desired objectives. However, the rationale behind this estimation was often the fact that the sponsorship must have achieved its objectives, because they are continuing the collaboration. Overall, evaluation methods and processes were left somewhat vague by most respondents. Only one of the sponsors brought up the challenge of measuring the impact of sponsorship.

“...it is very difficult to measure – like in general – if the sale comes because of the ... We have many types of marketing communications, but through which does the customer come in the end – or is it all of them together, it is very hard to measure.” (P3)

One respondent reported that part of their sponsorship fee is tied to the performance of Liiga in terms of expected activities, which both parties evaluate yearly.

5.2.7 Sponsorship challenges

Overall, sponsors were very satisfied with their relationships with Liiga and many of them gave positive feedback regarding the collaboration. None of the interviewed sponsors reported difficulties or significant challenges in the relationship. Outside of the relationship, two challenges regarding sponsorships were brought to surface by several respondents. A common challenge, reported by many sponsors was the lack of resources, both human and financial resources in most sponsoring companies.

“Also, there would have probably been much more to extract if we had more resources to invest – both human and financial resources – to invest to the practical marketing activation of this collaboration.” (P5)

“Very few companies leverage maximally and I have to say, that probably we too have room to improve, but that is purely a question of finances ... Those are maybe the major challenges; inability to leverage fully and the size of the Finnish market.” (P1)

One respondent also mentioned the size of the Finnish marketplace as a challenge for the sponsorship industry, because only a few companies have the resources to maximally leverage sponsorships.

“Finland is very fragmented, there are only few companies in Finland who can afford to leverage sponsorships.” (P1)

Another challenge was leveraging the sponsorship and extracting its full potential. Many sponsors contemplated on how they could better leverage the sponsorship.

“Maybe the major challenges are notably those that how to leverage all those opportunities that this collaboration provides. Maybe this relates mostly to our limited resources.” (P2)

“...how we could leverage the collaboration in our own marketing has been our own challenge. (P5)”

5.2.8 Development ideas and future of direction

As mentioned earlier, sponsors were generally very satisfied with their sponsorship relationships and did not necessarily feel the need for acute improvements or developing.

“In my opinion, our collaboration has worked fairly well. If there has been some needs, we have found solutions to them. I don’t see any such drawbacks that would require major improvements.” (P3)

However, many sponsors had some – though not necessarily very specific ideas – of what might be developed to make the relationship even more valuable to them. A reoccurring theme was developing marketing communications in digital environments.

“Digital media exposure, maybe if they could provide something readily thought that we could do – ...and readily thought things for us.” (P2)

Some respondents saw that increasingly leveraging local teams in communications would be beneficial for sponsors in getting through to the customers.

“One thing – that is already appreciated very much is this sort of development of locality. If I’m from Pori and if Porin Ässät talks to their own followers, it is naturally much more efficient than if we or Liiga talk to them.” (P6)

“...that they could push this ... also in the marketing and social media of the team to get more out of it and activate those local fans... and increase awareness.” (P5)

Some saw that improving the targeting of their marketing communications and synchronizing marketing channels and activities could make their marketing communications more effective. Digital channels were also believed/estimated to continue growing in importance.

“In the future targeting and production of good and appropriate content for right target groups – which is already important – but will be even more in the future.” (P6)

“And maybe the benefit of these digital channels is that today’s marketing is so multi-channelled and when sponsorship takes advantage of that, there’s a lot that can be done.” (P4)

Respondents also implied that they would hope that sponsorships would become increasingly integrated to the sponsor’s core business.

“I would hope that it would be even more tightly knit in the core of the business, marketing, customer relationships and the whole line of service or that process.” (P6)

“...it should be some broader concept or something more related to the core-business, that ties the activity between the sponsor and sponsee – how the collaboration is leveraged more broadly.” (P5)

One of the respondents commented that innovating and planning together with Liiga could provide increased value for them. Another respondent implied that they would be interested in case examples of other sponsors, where they can see what other sponsors are doing and learn what can be done.

“...innovation sessions together or such ... often the way it goes is that we think and innovate here and then inform that we have this thing and it gets done, but it could benefit both parties if we would innovate together also.” (P6)

“Events are good, but in detail what could make them more attractive is maybe opening these cases about sponsors and their cases ... It is always interesting to see how others have done.” (P4)

In the future, respondents saw that the nature of sponsorship will shift even more towards a collaborative marketing based approach, and that ‘sponsorship’ as buying logo visibility will come to its end.

“It will be increasingly active in both ways ... if there is such sponsorship that is not reciprocal - I believe that it will totally disappear – just passively putting the logo somewhere, I believe it will decrease and disappear.” (P2)

“Maybe it will increasingly go to that ‘sponsorship’ as such will.” (P3)

One interesting theme that was mentioned was the rise of e-sports and its possible future implications for sponsorship.

“...in the youngest age group 18-29 e-sports was the number one in interest.” (P6)

“It is a fact, that it is here to stay and we have to consider our position towards it ... there might be surprising opportunities there. You have to be open and ... active and marketing decision makers need to be aware.”(P1)

6 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to produce information that would help sponsoring organizations to develop their sponsorship offerings and increase the value of sponsorships. As stated by Biscaia (et al., 2014), the increasing competition for sponsorship investments requires sponsored organizations to improve their value for sponsors. To understand what sponsoring organizations expect and aim to achieve from sponsoring, this study was set out to explore the expectations, motivations and objectives of sponsoring companies. Additionally, this study aimed to examine sponsor's utilization and perceptions of digital media in today's sponsorships. As stated by Kannan & Li (2017) the emergence of new channels, shopping environments and interactions with customers require updated understanding about customer and brand management processes and marketing metrics. In addition, the role and objectives of sponsorship need to be clearly defined to be able to evaluate sponsorship performance (Meenaghan, 2013b). Finally, this study also set out to find out what sponsored organizations could do to provide more value for the sponsoring companies.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

According to (Tsordia et al., 2018) simply entering a sponsorship agreement is not sufficient for building brand equity or achieving sales objectives. Instead, leveraging activities are required to promote the brand and engage fans to achieve these objectives (Tsordia et al., 2018). Especially, because leveraging is connected to positive sponsorship outcomes (Weeks et al., 2008) and in fact, according to Erdogan & Kitchen (1998) some sponsorships fail because they are not sufficiently leveraged. Today's digital media and digital marketing applications provide companies with a variety of new opportunities to leverage sponsorships in their marketing communications. From the brand management perspective it is crucial to understand how the digital environment affects the creation of the brand and how it modifies and strengthens the brand (Kannan et al.,

2017). Thus it is necessary and relevant to study the use of digital marketing applications in the sponsorship context.

The shift towards collaborative and increasingly reciprocal sponsorship relationships is consistent with the results of this study. Sponsors have clearly recognized that there is much more to gain from sponsorships than simply brand or logo exposure. Sponsors also estimated that this trend will only become stronger in the future. However, despite companies implying that sponsorship contains much more than simply visibility and exposure, most sponsors reported exposure and visibility as their main objectives, while some did not report any other objectives. It seems that most sponsors have room for improvement in setting objectives for sponsorships.

According to Meenaghan (2013b) clearly defined objectives are important for the ability to evaluate the performance of sponsorships and broad objectives such as “improving brand image” are not clearly defined objectives. Sponsors’ responses also imply that many sponsors still rely heavily on exposure objectives to reach the sponsorship objectives. This finding is consistent with Kim (et al., 2015) who found that awareness remains the most utilized metric for evaluating sponsorship effectiveness. In general, based on the interviews, it could be argued that visibility has become digital, but other aspects of leveraging digital media are still underdeveloped in most sponsoring companies. Clarifying and specifying the objectives is thus an important developmental need for sponsoring organizations.

Many of the interviewed sponsors had difficulties in explicitly demonstrating what they expect from Liiga in return for the sponsorship. When asked about expectations in return of their investment most sponsors referred to their existing contract, which states the responsibilities of both parties in the relationship. Responses in general were very superficial and expectations were stated on a very general level. Sponsors in general expected to gain visibility and exposure, however most did not state expectations regarding activities to achieve this.

Farrelly (2010) found that the termination of a sponsorship relationship is often related to the lack or inability to express clear and specific expectations. In this study, the inability of most sponsors to voice their expectations was probably - at least in part - due to the lack of preparedness for the interview but can also imply that the expectations might be somewhat vague in the sponsoring companies. These responses may also imply that many sponsors have not actually thought very deeply what they expect from Liiga’s part in return for their investment. Again, it seems that the companies are struggling with resources to put effort in clarifying some fundamental aspects of sponsorships.

Companies were mostly aware that there is room for improvement in many aspects, but were satisfied in what Liiga is currently offering them. The improvements were mostly seen to originate from their own sponsorship processes, usually lack of resources. Effectively leveraging the sponsorship was brought up as a challenge by several of the interviewed sponsors. However, some sponsors demonstrated versatile methods of leveraging and activating the sponsorship. This is probably mostly due to the difference in resources that companies have allocated in sponsorship. In most of the sponsor companies, the

whole sponsorship relationship seems to be assigned on one person's responsibility, either from marketing, sales or executive level along with their other responsibilities. Many companies reported that lack of both human and financial resources are probably the main challenge in their sponsorship.

Sponsors perceived digital media as very important for sponsorships. However, the utilisation of digital media was relatively limited. Couple of companies had clearly invested in leveraging the opportunities of digital channels in their sponsorship, while most had not. There was also significant variance in the sophistication and depth in companies' sponsorship approaches. It seems that available resources significantly influence the extent of which sponsors are able to leverage sponsorships.

It also seems that many sponsors are not aware of the various ways that digital channels could be leveraged more efficiently. There is an obvious need for improving the leveraging capabilities in the sponsoring companies, which is one of the central findings in this study. Marketers should not rely on sponsorship itself to deliver results but seek to actively engage and interact with their targeted customers through the sponsorship. (O'Reilly & Horning, 2013). Despite expressing the importance of digital and social media as a communications channel in the sponsorship context, actual leveraging activities were generally underdeveloped.

The results show most sponsors using a third party evaluation service for the evaluation of the sponsorship. Some sponsors did report utilising digital analytics to measure campaign success but in general the evaluation methods were left quite vague, with only few sponsors as exceptions. This is likely be due to the lack of clearly stated objectives, but also due to the lack of resources. This is in line with the findings of O'Reilly & Madill (2012) who found that common barriers for sponsorship evaluation can be the lack of communication and planning between sponsorship partners, motivation, the lack of resources, energy or capabilities and even fear of negative results.

Finally, the research model as presented by Figure 5 was confirmed by the empirical results of the study. Respondents perceived sponsorship as a relationship, where both parties are expected to contribute to the relationship and marketing activities. Sponsors also expressed that sponsorships should be more than buying logo visibility, thus demonstrating the changing demands in sponsorship. In return for their sponsorship investment, sponsors acquired the opportunity to utilize the sponsorship to achieve marketing communications objectives, such as exposure and visibility related objectives. Digital media and digital marketing were perceived to be very important and valuable for the sponsorship. Sponsors also implied that the role of digital media will continue increasing in the future and it still offers significant opportunities that are not currently leveraged maximally.



FIGURE 5 Confirmed research model

6.2 Managerial contributions

Based on the interviews, sponsors are currently satisfied with their sponsorship. Sponsors have a feeling that their expectations are met and that their sponsorship reaches the objectives and provides the return that they are expecting. Sponsors also expressed being satisfied in Liiga's performance. Most challenges were seen to arise from the lack of the sponsor's own resources and difficulties to maximally leverage the relationship. It seems evident based on the interviews that many sponsors do not have resources to deeply consider what they expect to gain from the sponsorship relationship or how to leverage the sponsorship as well as possible.

Despite the common notion between sponsors that sponsorship should be more than brand visibility, some could actually voice other objectives than exposure related objectives. It seems that visibility has shifted to digital environments, but proper activation and leveraging methods are lacking.

It seems that many sponsors are not fully aware of the leveraging opportunities that sponsorship might offer. Some sponsors implied that they would appreciate new ideas and opportunities for innovating together with Liiga. One of the sponsors implied that they would hope that Liiga could provide something that is 'readily thought' especially for the digital channels. Naturally both parties need to participate in the marketing communications, but it seems that helping sponsors to improve leveraging Liiga's digital channels has potential to provide significant value for the relationship.

In general it appears that leveraging of sponsorships is at a relatively infant state even at the highest professional level in Finnish sport apart from a few exceptions. Therefore educating and building an understanding of the sponsorship partners on leveraging strategies and tactics could provide significant value for sponsors. This is something where Liiga could take a step forward and educate sponsors about possible ways of leveraging digital media to increase the value of the sponsorship.

To provide more value for their sponsors, Liiga could tap into the challenges expressed in the interviews. Based on the results, Liiga could focus/target on arranging workshops that focus on educating sponsors on possible ways to leverage the sponsorship more effectively. This could include introducing marketing ideas and methods, and presenting case studies of successful sponsorship relationships. Sponsors expressed that they would benefit from seeing what other sponsors have done and what they have achieved through the relationship.

As digital media was perceived very important and growing in importance, Liiga could increasingly focus on providing digital solutions for sponsors. Educating sponsors about the utilisation of digital channels in the sponsorship context seems particularly necessary. Further, it seems that innovation workshops where the sponsor and sponsored organization could together innovate new ways of leveraging the sponsorship could be highly beneficial and provide increased value for sponsors.

Finally, it seems that Liiga is able to respond to the expectations of sponsors and satisfy the needs of the sponsors. However, many sponsors have significant room for improvement in leveraging the relationship and to provide more value in the future, Liiga could be proactive in suggesting ways of leveraging the relationship, especially in the digital channels. Even though sponsors are currently satisfied with what they have, accountability demands and expectations are likely to continue increasing in the future and if the value provided by sponsorship is vague, it may become increasingly difficult to justify significant investments. Thus sponsored organizations should continuously develop their sponsorship offerings and processes

6.3 Study limitations

Despite the study achieving its objectives to produce information about the studied subject and making a contribution to an under researched but contemporary and relevant topic, it has significant limitations. Perhaps the most severe limitation of this study is the size of the studied sample. Only six of the fifteen main partners were reached for an interview. Further, there was significant variance in the quality of respondents' answers in terms of depth and preparedness, which led to some interviews being significantly more informative and might have led to some being less informative than they could have been. Based on the answers, it was obvious which of the respondents had prepared for the interview. All respondents were provided with the questions beforehand, because of the relative depth of knowledge required to answer some of the questions. In hindsight, respondents could have been pushed a little harder to think their answers more thoroughly, especially if the respondent had not prepared beforehand.

Another significant limitation of this study is the scope of this study, which is limited to only one organization and its sponsors. Thus, the generalizability of results does not extend beyond the studied organizations. All companies interviewed for this study are major sponsors in the Finnish sponsorship industry and thus these results only represent a narrow section of the sponsorship industry of Finland. It is also worth noting that most of the research literature deals with the US or European sponsorship industries. The Finnish sponsorship market is significantly different to other industries, mostly due to the size of the market and potential audience. Thus, the findings of academic research may not directly apply in the Finnish sponsorship context. This is another reason for additional research in the field of Finnish sponsorship.

6.4 Future research

As digital marketing in the sponsorship context is a relatively new topic, more research is definitely required on the topic. In the future, research could focus

more on the tactical level of digital marketing and explore the tactics that sponsoring companies are utilising. Digital marketing provides cost-effective ways for reaching targeted audiences, which gives it tremendous potential to be effectively leveraged in the sponsorship context. Thus researching the utilization of digital marketing provides a very interesting area of research in the future. Another interesting future research topic in the area of digital marketing and sponsorship is definitely sponsorship of individual athletes and utilization of athlete influencers in sponsorship marketing communications.

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162-175.

APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW FORM

1 Taustatiedot

1. Haastateltavan nimi
2. Yrityksen nimi
3. Haastateltavan rooli yrityksessä
4. Yrityksen toimiala
5. Yrityksen koko (liikevaihto)
6. Voiko yrityksen ja/tai haastateltavan nimeä käyttää tutkimuksessa vai haluatteko pysytellä nimettömänä?

Yrityksen nimeä	Kyllä/Ei
Haastateltavan nimeä	Kyllä/Ei

2 Sponsoroinnin tavoitteet ja odotukset

1. Miksi sponsoroitte? Mikä on pääasiallinen syy juuri Liigan sponsoroinnille?
2. Mihin Liigan sponsorointi sijoittuu yrityksenne strategiassa? (Mikä on urheilumarkkinoinnin rooli yrityksenne markkinointiviestinnässä?)
3. Mitkä ovat Liigan sponsoroinnille asettamanne päätavoitteet? (Mitä pyritte sponsoroinnin avulla saavuttamaan?)
4. Miten Liigan sponsoroinnille asetetut tavoitteet suhteutuvat yrityksenne yleisiin markkinointitavoitteisiin? (Eroavatko vai tukevatko toisiaan?)
5. Seuraatteko/mittaatteko Liigan sponsoroinnille asettamienne tavoitteiden toteutumista? Miten?
6. Minkälaisia markkinoinnillisia odotuksia teillä on vastineeksi Liigan sponsoroinnista? (Ts. Minkälaista markkinointia odotatte saavanne vastineeksi sponsoroinnista?)
7. Onko mahdollisesta markkinointiyhteistyöstä ja sen toteuttamisesta laadittu suunnitelma joko omassa yrityksessänne tai yhdessä Liigan kanssa?

8. Miten markkinointiyhteistyön toteuttaminen Liigan kanssa käytännössä tapahtuu? (Jos ei yhteistä suunnitelmaa, kuka suunnittelee ja toteuttaa?)
9. Seuraatteko/mittaatteko asettamienne markkinointiodotusten toteutusta? Miten? Jos ei, niin miksi ei?

3 Digitaalisen markkinoinnin rooli sponsoroinnissa

10. Minkälaisena näette digitaalisen median ja -markkinoinnin roolin sponsoroinnin näkökulmasta yleisesti? Entäs Liigan tapauksessa? (Tärkeys, mahdollisuudet, hyödyt, haitat?)
11. Minkä tai mitkä näette tärkeimmiksi ja hyödyllisimmiksi digitaalisiksi markkinointikanaviksi Liigan tapauksessa? (Verkkosivustot, sosiaalinen media (mikä), muu?)
12. Miten pyritte hyödyntämään digitaalisen median mahdollisuuksia sponsoroinnin tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi Liigan kanssa?
13. Oletteko toteuttaneet markkinointia digitaalisissa kanavissa yhdessä Liigan kanssa? Jos, minkälaista?
14. Miten sponsoroidun organisaation digitaalisen median ominaisuudet (esim. verkkosivujen kävijämäärät, sosiaalisten medioiden seuraajat, aktiivisuus tai innovatiivinen markkinointiviestintä) vaikuttavat sponsorointikohteen valintaan?

4 Sponsorointitavoitteiden saavuttaminen, haasteet ja kehittämisehdotukset

15. Koetteko sponsoriyhteistyönne Liigan kanssa saavuttavan sille asettamanne tavoitteet? (Onko sijoituksesta saatava vastike riittävä?)
16. Miten mittaatte/arvioitte Liigan sponsoroinnin onnistumista ja siitä saatavia hyötyjä kokonaisuutena?
17. Mitä toivoisitte Liigan erityisesti kehittävän tarjoomassaan? Miten Liiga voisi tehdä sponsoroinnista entistä houkuttelevampaa teille?
18. Mitkä ovat teidän näkökulmastanne sponsoriyhteistyönne suurimmat haasteet ja miten niihin voitaisiin vastata?
19. Millaisia muutoksia näette sponsoroinnissa yleisesti tapahtuvan tulevaisuudessa?
20. Vapaa sana