COMMUNICATION BETWEEN A SPORTS ORGANIZATION AND ITS BRAND COMMUNITY: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

Tero Tyynelä
Master's Thesis
Intercultural Management and Communication
Department of Language and Communication Studies
University of Jyväskylä
Spring 2021

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta **Humanistis-yhteiskuntatieteellinen tiedekunta**	Laitos **Kieli- ja viestintätieteiden laitos**
Tekijä **Tero Tyynelä**	
Työn nimi **Communication between a sports organization and its brand community: An action research study**	
Oppiaine **Viestintä/markkinointi**	Työn laji **Pro gradu -tutkielma**
Päivämäärä **Kesäkuu 2021**	Sivumäärä **41 + liitteet**

Tiivistelmä

Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää, onko urheiluorganisaation sosiaalisessa mediassa toteutetulla markkinointiviestinnällä mahdollista saada aikaan merkittävää muutosta, liittyen sen brändiyhteisöön kuulumattomien seuraajien käsitykseen organisaation ja heidän välisestä suhteestaan. Tutkielma toteutettiin toimintatutkimuksena JymyJusseille, joka on pesäpallo-organisaatio Seinäjoella. Tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa organisaation lähtötilanne sosiaalisen median markkinointiviestinnän ja brändiyhteisön suhteen, suunnitella ja toteuttaa viestintään tehtävät muutokset, sekä tarkastella lopputulemaa. Toimintatutkimukset toteutetaan usein koulutus- ja yritysmaailman konteksteissa, joten tämä tutkimus pyrki tuomaan uutta näkökulmaa toimintatutkimusten toteuttamiseen urheiluorganisaation kontekstissa.

Aineisto kerättiin hyödyntämällä kahta verkkokyselyä, jotka julkaistiin seuran Facebook-sivulla. Ensimmäisen verkkokyselyn vastauksia hyödynnettiin lähtötilanteen kartoittamisessa ja markkinointiviestinnän suunnittelussa. Toisen verkkokyselyn vastauksia hyödynnettiin toteutetun markkinointiviestinnän onnistumisen määrittelyssä.

Tutkimuksen tulokset esittävät, että JymyJusseilla on lojaali ja aktiivinen brändiyhteisö. Myös mahdollisesti aktiivisempaan vuorovaikutukseen alttiita seuraajia brändiyhteisön ulkopuolelta tunnistettiin. Positiivista muutosta seuraajien käsityksestä heidän suhteestaan seuraan havaittiin. Tutkimus ei kuitenkaan voi todeta suunnitellun markkinointiviestinnän olleen merkittävin tekijä muutoksen takana, koska toisen verkkokyselyn vastaukset olivat hyvin moninaisia.

Tutkimustulosten perusteella voidaan todeta, että tutkimusta voidaan pitää johdantona toimintatutkimuksen toteuttamiseen ja hyödyntämiseen urheiluorganisaatiossa, markkinointiviestinnän näkökulmasta. Näin ollen tulisi toteuttaa useampi toimintatutkimusprosessi JymyJussien sosiaalisen median markkinointiviestintään liittyen, jotta seuran toimintaa voitaisiin kehittää vielä pidemmälle.

Avainsanat

viestintä, markkinointi, toimintatutkimus, brändiyhteisö, urheilu, pesäpallo

Säilytyspaikka

JYX

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

Faculty **Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**	Department **Department of Language and Communication Studies**
Author **Tero Tyynelä**	
Title **Communication between a sports organization and its brand community: An action research study**	
Subject **Communication/Marketing**	Level **Master's Thesis**
Month and year **June 2021**	Number of pages **41 + appendices**

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to inspect if marketing communication conveyed in the social media channels of a sports organization can significantly change the perceptions the followers outside of the brand community have regarding the organization. This thesis was conducted as an action research study for JymyJussit, a Finnish baseball organization operating in Seinäjoki, Finland. The purpose of this study was to find out the premise in the organization regarding the social media marketing communication and its brand community, plan and implement the changes to the communication strategy, and reflect on the outcomes. Action research studies usually focus on the context of education and business thus this study strived to answer the research gap of action research conducted in a sports organization context.

The data was gathered by conducting two online questionnaires, published on the Facebook page of the club. The first online questionnaire acted as the starting point for the study, as its results were analyzed to utilize in the plan for the marketing communication. The second online questionnaire was utilized to evaluate if any significant change had occurred in the perceived relationships of the followers.

The research results suggest that JymyJussit has a loyal and active brand community. Also, followers who are prone to marketing communication encouraging more active engagement with the club, were also identified. Furthermore, a positive impact on the perceived relationships of followers were identified. However, the study cannot state that the planned marketing communication was the main factor in the change, as the answers to the second online questionnaire were rather varied.

Based on the results of the research, it is suggested that this study is seen as an introduction to conducting research in the sports organization context, utilizing action research methods in relation to communication and marketing. Therefore, multiple action research cycles regarding JymyJussit and its marketing communication in the social media should be conducted to further develop their operations.

Keywords

Communication, marketing, action research, brand community, sports, Finnish baseball

Depository

JYX

FIGURES

Figure 1 Original action research circle by Kurt Lewin (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 13) 4
Figure 2 Characteristics of the three paradigms (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 24) 5
Figure 3 15 types of action research organized based on the emphasis (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 86) 6
Figure 4 Answer percentages to question number 10..... 23
Figure 5 Social media marketing plan mind map 24
Figure 6 Facebook statistics from October 12th to March 27th..... 34

TABLES

Table 1 Number of participants according to their age and gender ... 20

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 2

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND 3
1.1 Action research 3
1.2 Action research in practice 6
1.2.1 Supporting student literacy learning through action research 8
1.2.2 Organizational change and action research 9
1.3 Action research in the field of marketing 11
1.4 The concept of a brand 13
1.5 Brand community 15

2 THE PRESENT STUDY 18
2.1 Setting 18
2.2 The problem 18
2.3 Research questions 19
2.4 Data 20
2.5 Research methods 21
2.5.1 Action research in this study 21
2.5.2 The social media marketing plan 22
2.6 Research ethics 25

3 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS 26
3.1 The second online questionnaire 26
3.2 Analysis 32
3.3 Results 34

4 DISCUSSION 36

5 CONCLUSION 38

REFERENCES 40

APPENDICES 42

INTRODUCTION

Sports have been one of the most popular ways for people to spend their free time. After a long day of working or studying, people pickup their favourite rackets or other sports equipment and enjoy the escape from everyday routines. For some people it does not end there and they consume their favourite sports as spectators and fans. Nowadays, sports have drawn a very stong link to commercial enterprises all over the world, as there are few businesses and even fewer sports leagues, teams or events which do not have a commercial aspect to their operations. (Slack, 2004)

Therefore, it can be said that sports have a major impact towards people, culture, and economics all over the world and thus should be the focus of academic research from multiple point-of-views, not just from the point-of-view of for example physiology or biomechanics. This thesis focuses on the business side of sports and how cultural aspects can be utilized in the planning and executing of communication and marketing of a Finnish baseball organization. Furthermore, this study is important regarding the future of Finnish baseball marketing, as there are not many or even any public studies made about the marketing communications of Finnish baseball organizations. Thus, this study will provide useful insights for future studies regarding the matter, contributing to the further development of the Finnish national sport.

This thesis is conducted from the perspective of changing and developing the marketing communication of a sports organization through its social media channels, utlizing action research methods in the process. Through history, action research has focused mainly to the fields of pedagogy and education, in addition to organizational change, in the world of business (Kates & Robertson, 2004). Thus, this thesis will present insights to answer the research niche of action research conducted in a context of sports organization, associating communication and cultural aspects regarding the consumers and fans of the said sports organization.

First, the theoretical background of this thesis is presented which is necessary to understand the instruments behind the conducted research. Information concerning general action research is provided, in addition to specific marketing action research. Also, the concepts surrounding brands and branding are made more evident.

Second, the design of the present study are presented including the setting, the problem to be solved utilizing the research methods in the said setting, the data and more. Furthermore, the social media marketing plan is presented which showcases the core functions of the present study.

Third, the results of the research are presented and analysed and finally, the results are discussed in cooperation with previous relevant studies and the background information provided.

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter introduces the necessary background information concerning the present study, presenting the theories and models utilized when conducting the present study. A closer look is taken into action research which is the main frame of research methodology and philosophy guiding the present study. The approach towards the marketing communication of JymyJussit needed change, as their approach had been rather ambiguous regarding their fanbase, concentrating for example on making a quick profit through season ticket sales and not trying to build a lasting connection between the club and the fans. Thus, action research as a research method was suitable for this thesis.

Although action research is the research method for this thesis and thus could be introduced in chapter 2 The present study, the diverse nature of it and its significant role in guiding the present study is important to acknowledge. Thus, action research is presented this early into the thesis. Furthermore, the many concepts affiliated with the present study are also made clearer in this chapter.

1.1 Action research

Action research is a research method and, in addition, a rather complex and diverse one. Willis and Edwards (2014, 3) state that action research is a diverse family of applied research methods, ideologies, paradigms, and procedures. More precisely, action research is a family of research methods conducted in the field rather than in a laboratorial setting. Furthermore, the reasons behind conducting research in the framework of action research are usually more practical than theoretical, aiming for change in a specific context or setting. Ballantyne (2004, 323) states that action research differs from other methodologies affiliated with strategic change, by recognizing critical reflection and participative action in its procedures. Stringer (2014, 10–11) adds that if an action research project does not, in a specific way, make a difference for practitioners or their clients, it has failed to accomplish its goal.

Action research has been present in the field of scientific research for almost 80 years. Kurt Lewin, the founder of social psychology, coined the term action research in the late 1940s to describe work in the field in the means of solving a problem or answering an important question about professional practice, as stated by Willis and Edwards (2014, 10–19). Lewin developed the method as a more democratic way of enhancing professional practice than conventional research methods.

Lewin (1948, as cited in Willis & Edwards, 2014, 11) described his idea of action research in a following way:

> The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice. (Lewin, 1948, 202–203, as cited in Willis & Edwards, 2014, 11)

Willis and Edwards (2014, 11) suggest that the quote highlights two basic assumptions about action research by Lewin. Firstly, changing social practice is a sociocultural process instead of an individual process. Secondly, the focus must be on the action which Lewin emphasizes by saying that research producing "nothing but books" is not enough (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 11). It must be noted that the nature of action research focusing more clearly on the change does not devalue the connection other research methods have towards practical applications and issues.

Furthermore, Lewin wanted to form a research model which emphasizes making an instant difference and change in the real world. Thus, action research would consist of either:

- Developing and applying an action that would be studied to see if it made a significant distinction, or
- Studying a particular context or setting to develop understanding that leads directly to action.

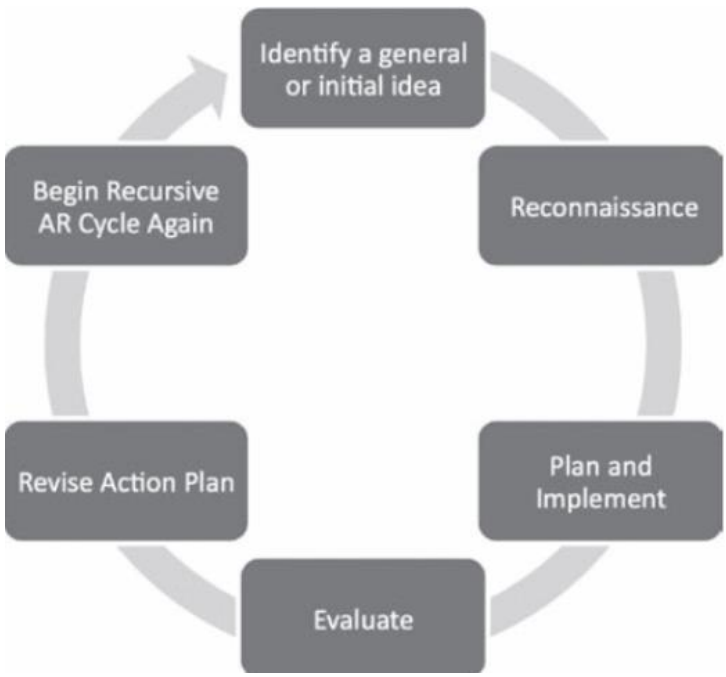


Figure 1 Original action research circle by Kurt Lewin (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 13)

Figure 1 presents the general model of action research suggested by Lewin. It portrays one full circle, but a complete action research project can include several

circles which are the outcome of results and reflections of previous circles, as stated by Willis and Edwards (2014, 13). Furthermore, Willis and Edwards (2014, 13) present that by developing an idea or plan, the research circle begins. After beginning the research circle, it progresses through several phases that include studying the problem and figuring out solutions for the problem, creating, and conducting an action plan for the particular context, assessing the outcomes of the implementation of the action plan, conducting the future action plan based on the outcomes, and finally conducting another research circle based on the revision. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 13)

A prominent characteristic of action research by Lewin is that it tends to alienate people from accepting an existing solution to a problem. Furthermore, Willis and Edwards (2014, 13–14) state that it is a process which helps a group in a particular setting or context identify a problem and then try to find a provisional solution to it. Although a universal solution to a said problem might already exist, its success may depend on major adaptation to make it work with the local context. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 13–14)

According to Willis and Edwards (2014, 24) action research can be conducted from the perspective of three different paradigms: positivist, interpretive and critical. Figure 2 describes the characteristics of the three paradigms, so it is possible to compare them and pinpoint the major differences.

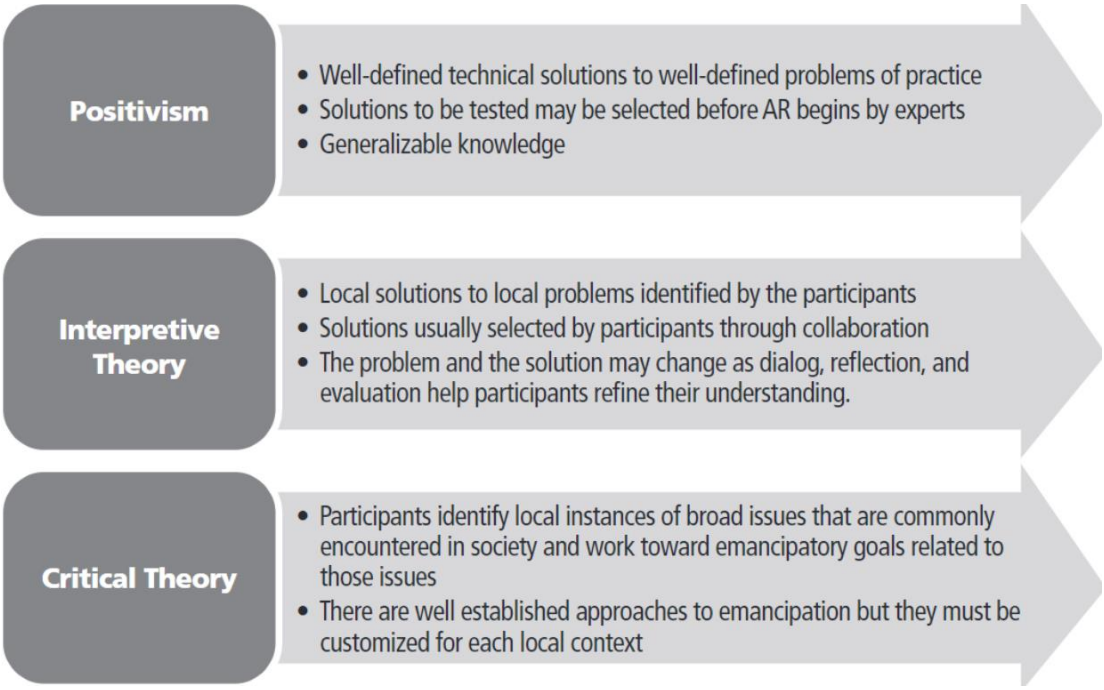


Figure 2 Characteristics of the three paradigms (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 24)

Positivist action research is considered as a minority in the field because action research tends to violate the principals of positivist research, such as objectivity, separation of practice from research and discovering generalizable, universal knowledge.

However, there are models of action research which focus on the positivist paradigm. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 24)

1.2 Action research in practice

Some action research books depict a rather abstract and theoretical description of what action research should be and how it should be done. However, what action research should be according to theory can differ substantially from what happens in practice. Action research has been utilized extensively in the field of research, especially in the field of education and organizational change (Kates & Robertson, 2004). Willis and Edwards (2014, 85–94) present 15 different types of action research, divided into three groups: those that emphasize the level of focus, those that emphasize on a specific purpose and finally, those that emphasize a specific process. Figure 3 showcases the groups and the types of action research in them.

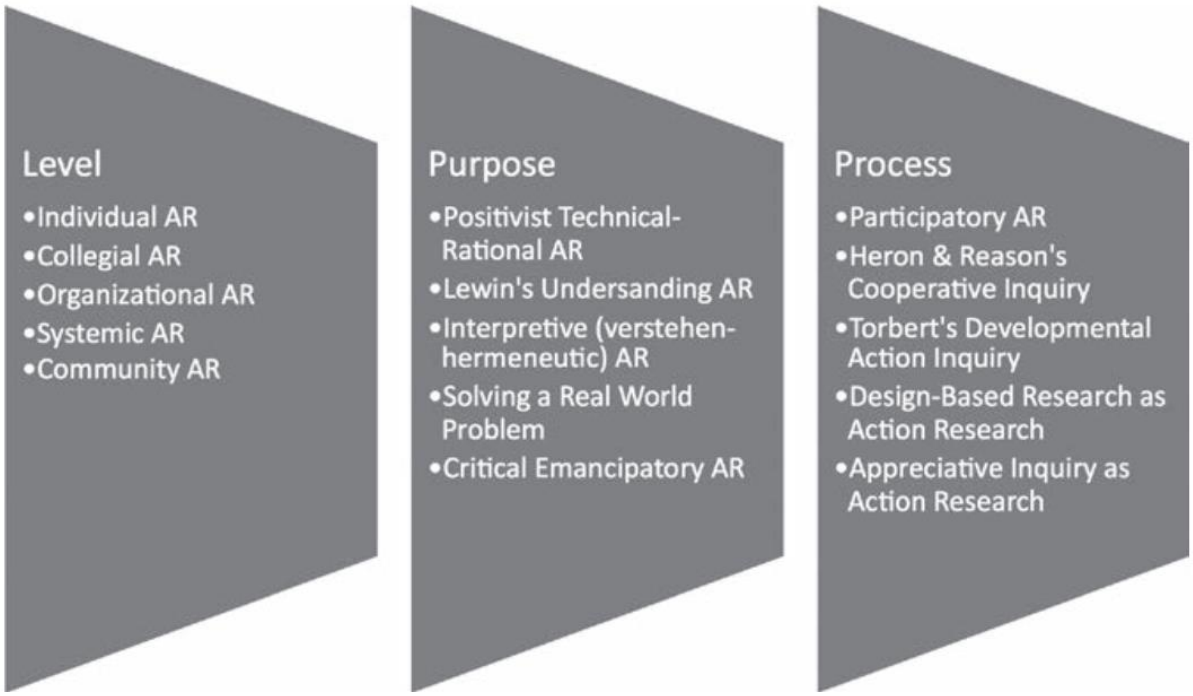


Figure 3 15 types of action research organized based on the emphasis (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 86)

Furthermore, Willis and Edwards (2014, 86–87) state that these groups are not by any means absolute. For example, action research can be conducted with a small, collegial level of focus but still be an example of interpretive action research as means of purpose. Thus, the point mentioned earlier in this chapter about action research being a complex family of research methods is further established.

Action research projects vary according to the amount of people that are involved in the project. Willis and Edwards (2014, 87) mention that the amount can be

just one individual and can be as large as a complex geopolitical system. Moreover, action research types focusing on community level requires some additional describing. Stringer (2014, 14–15) mentions four core social values that guide the action research process in a community-focus level: it is democratic, equitable, liberating and life enhancing. The research tackles specific problems in specific situations within a community. In the present study, the focus is more on the purpose and process although it involves a certain community, brand community which is described more in depth in the later sections of this chapter.

When action research type is focusing on the purpose, it is often associated with the foundational paradigm of the research. Willis and Edwards (2014, 87–89) express that interpretive action research frequently emphasizes the need to develop a shared understanding of the local context among participants more than the other paradigms. In turn, positivist approach tends to focus on the careful and exact definition of the problem at hand, detailed description of a possible solution to the problem, and analysis of the impact of the solution using empirical, unbiased data. It is common that in action research based on a positivist paradigm, the solution for the problem which is selected is one that already exists and is applicable. Thus, the task of the action research group is to execute it correctly in a specific context. Critical approach to action research focuses on the emancipatory purposes, eliminating oppression and bettering the conditions of human life. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 87–89)

The final group of action research types are distinguished by the processes they practice. As mentioned earlier in the section 1.1 Action research, the general characteristics of action research are more a family of different research methods rather than absolute criteria for judging if a study is conducted as an action research or not. Willis and Edwards (2014, 89–93) add that action research studies have a tendency to share certain characteristics, but few studies have all the characteristics listed in a particular way. One type of action research emphasizing the process it practices is Participatory Action Research, or PAR, which is characterized by the involvement and contribution of local stakeholders in all stages of the action research project. In PAR the local stakeholders decide what to study, the data to be collected, and the solution to be tried on the problem. They also decide and conduct the revision process and what changes should be made in the next cycle of action research. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 89–93)

Several other types of action research that are recognized by the processes they emphasize were developed by groups working more independently and less in the mainstream of developing action research methods. Willis and Edwards (2014, 90-93) state that this results in three types of action research that differ significantly from most of the other action research models. These three types of action research models are Cooperative inquiry, Developmental Action Inquiry (DAI) and appreciative inquiry method (AIM). Cooperative inquiry is an approach to action research that focuses on groups of professionals working on significant issues with the support of a

researcher who uses the means of cooperative inquiry which include considering the professionals as co-researchers. DAI focuses in combining actions with focused research. It includes processes to help individuals focus their awareness on their insights and experiences as well as steps for building "mini-communities of inquiry" which consists of friends, family, or colleagues. The last type of action research that emphasizes a particular process is AIM. Its emphasis is on focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses. For example, a corporation interested in improving itself could start with an analysis on its different processes to look for weaknesses or discrepancies considering the mission of the organization. In contrast, AIM has a different approach as it looks for strengths that can be the foundation for improvement. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 90–93)

In the next sections, two studies conducted with action research methods are presented. Willis and Edwards (2014) present in total of 10 action research studies, each having their own chapter devoted to the study. However, in this thesis, those studies are presented which are relevant to the present study or they utilize certain methods relevant to the present study, for example focusing on organizational change utilizing action research methods and influencing a community through research.

1.2.1 Supporting student literacy learning through action research

Carol St. George, an assistant professor in the University of Rochester, conducted an action research study about the teacher-parent collaboration in a Collegial Circle, a type of professional development, and how it can support the literacy learning of students. The study is presented by Willis and Edwards (2014, 111–130).

The study, along with its data collection and analysis, was designed to address the following research questions: Firstly, what are the alleged challenges regarding the building of effective collaborations between parents and teachers in the district? Secondly, how can the challenges thus recognized be overcome? Thirdly and finally, how has involvement in the Collegial Circle altered the parents and teachers and the process behind their thinking, concerning the ideas of parent–teacher collaborations and literacy? Common to action research, teachers and parents involved in the Collegial Circle did not showcase passive participation. Instead, they participated in constant reflection about the Collegial Circle activities, providing to the alteration of some original research plans and activities. Furthermore, in cooperation with the researcher, they constructed a list of recommendations for improvement, establishing the finalized Collegial Circle. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 111–130)

The study required utilizing participatory action research as the approach. Participatory action research is especially applicable for research done by practitioners using their own field as the focus of their study, as St. George did in her dual role as a

teacher and a professional development provider in her district. What separates participatory action research from other methodologies, is that it is research done with the participants. Furthermore, Anderson, Herr and Nihlen (2007, 4) emphasize the role of "insider" as the main purpose of action research is to create knowledge. Action research is different from academic research in that it represents local knowledge about a setting or context. An outsider, for example an ethnographer who spends years as an outside observer, cannot possibly develop the knowledge of a setting than those who must daily act within the context. (Anderson, Herr & Nihlen, 2007, 4)

St. George expected that there would be many revisions, modifications and adaptations of the initial plan. This was consistent with action research methods which resonates with the present study as well:

> "Typically, we do not get a plan absolutely 'right,' and in fact, as we implement a plan; the very implementation raises new issues or things we hadn't expected or anticipated" (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 2007, 146).

The school district in which the action research study was conducted is located in New York and entails approximately 1 200 educators and thirteen thousand students. There are 13 elementary schools in the district. An assessment of past programs revealed that many parents were hesitant to involve themselves in literacy projects designed to support literacy learning for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, teachers often did not acknowledge the value of including parents or ways to promote involvement. Thus, they underused parents as a resource and did not appreciate them as a powerful asset in improving the achievements of students. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 111–130)

In conclusion, responses reflected both parent and teacher participants intention to change their practices. The teacher participants showed intentions to alter their practices of how they communicate, involve, and how they deliver literacy teaching. The intention of encouraging their child to spend increased time reading at home was the core reflection gathered from the parent participant responses. Furthermore, utilizing new strategies and focus while reading with their child, and communicating more information to the teacher of their child was also noted. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 111–130)

1.2.2 Organizational change and action research

Shankar Sankaran, a doctoral student in the University of Technology Sydney, Australia, conducted an action research study in an organizational setting, which is presented by Willis and Edwards (2014, 131–152). Aspects of the study by Sankaran, such as the format of the chapter concerning the present study, mentioning the setting and

the problem of the study, are a source of inspiration for the thesis. Furthermore, the focus on the organizational change is relevant for the present study as well.

The study was conducted in a large engineering center of a Japanese multinational company in Singapore which wanted to decrease its cost of operations tremendously for the organization to remain profitable, furthermore survive, while at the same time not losing the quality of its products and services. Sankaran was appointed as the leader of this center and wanted to utilize innovative methods, for instance action learning, to achieve the goals of the organization with the help of young managers who were reporting to him. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 131–152)

Upon beginning this action research journey, Sankaran did not precisely know what to achieve and how to achieve it. Furthermore, delaying beginning the research process was not an option, as operational difficulties needed immediate consideration. Despite not being sure how his actions would affect the company, Sankaran felt necessary to continue with the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle used by quality control circles in Japanese companies, as the cycle shares resemblance to the research cycle utilized in action research. However, while this model was suitable for ensuring constant improvement in the organization, it lacked the reflection that would support innovative methods such as action learning. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 131–152)

The role of action learning had a major role in the action research study by Sankaran. Even though the approach differs a lot from the present study, the systematic approach to utilizing action research cycle remains the same in both studies. Thus, the study by Sankaran can be viewed as a relevant predecessor for the present study.

The study contributed to both managerial and research outcomes. The organization expected managerial results regarding its businesses and in turn, the university wanted to see development in the context of research outcomes. The managerial outcome of the action research was the successful formation of the new work model in the engineering center. An opinion survey on the success of the new, action learning driven work model confirmed that the representatives of the work model committee rated the success of the model as being nearly 60 percent and decided to continue using it with improvements, making action learning a prominent feature of their workplace. The new head of the engineering center also confirmed the impressive business results attained by the operation since the implementation of the new model. The research outcome of the study was the formation of a management learning model at the workplace. Furthermore, utilizing the said managerial learning model demonstrated that managerial learning results in management development on a personal level and on a team level, answering the primary research question of the study in the process. The management outcomes accomplished by utilizing action learning and action research further increased the credibility to the argumentations of Sankaran. (Willis & Edwards, 2014, 131-152)

He also learned through the thesis experience that there are both advantages and disadvantages in doing research in the context of own working setting. One advantage being that as *an insider* researcher you have much more information and knowledge about the history and context of the organization than *an outsider* researcher usually would have. There were, however, disadvantages regarding the issue of being an insider researcher as well. Coghlan and Brannick (2001, 48–57) state that there are some critical issues that managers need to pay attention to when conducting action researcher in their own organizations. The issues include the role ambiguity when you are an agent of change that affects you as well. The role within the organization may expect complete dedication from you while the adopted research role may expect you to be neutral and objective (Coghlan and Brannick, 2001, 48–57).

This is important to keep in mind when conducting action research in the present study, as the context is doing research in a familiar setting of sports organization. Thus, the advantages and disadvantages presented by Sankaran and the example provided by St. George in utilizing participatory action research are relevant for the present study.

Nevertheless, the main relevance the studies by Sankaran and St. George (Willis & Edwards, 2014) have towards the present study is the emphasis they present towards communities and changes within communities. Furthermore, they showcase the importance and possibilities researchers have when utilizing action research methods when studying the said phenomenon. Thus, as the present study is conducted to examine and perpetrate organizational change within a sports organization, it also contributes to the same field of research, and in turn is involved with the emphasis towards communities and the changes within them, in the context of marketing.

1.3 Action research in the field of marketing

In this section, marketing and marketing research are introduced into the context of action research by presenting two studies related to the field. By presenting these studies, the research conducted in the present study is made more evident and the selection of action research as the main research method for the present study is justified.

Perry and Gummesson (2004, 318) present a definition of action research precisely in the marketing context. It is based on the more traditional approach introduced by Lewin (1948, as cited in Willis & Edwards 2014), in cooperation with the articles presented in the same special issue of European Journal of Marketing:

> …action research in marketing should be called marketing action research or interactive marketing research or marketing action science to reflect its greater breadth than

> traditional action research, for action research in marketing can cover action learning and case research. (Perry & Gummesson, 2004, 318)

According to Perry and Gummesson (2004, 318), the greater breadth reflected by the definition is essential to research conducted in the context of marketing, as customers and competitors present importance to marketing management through their eternal reality, as well as the importance of the analytic generalization utilized in marketing research. Furthermore, marketing action research promotes the involvement of a person or a group in past actions related to a market, which can be utilized to develop the present understanding and knowledge, and thus benefit the actions in the future. However, the focus of the action research applications in this instance, within the marketing context is mainly on the marketing managers rather than consumers (Perry & Gummesson, 2004, 318). Thus, the present study introduces the context of consumers into the mix, further justifying the action research methods chosen for the present study. Ballantyne (2004, 335) states that customer research inputs are the basis for participative action and reflective learning. Furthermore, the said process of reflective learning is a result of taking planned action and then reflecting on the outcomes of the said action (Ballantyne, 2004, 335). Therefore, the justification of action research methods contributes towards the identification of the research niche regarding the present study.

In addition, Frisby (2005) points out, from the point-of-view of critical social sciences, that the increased usage of action-oriented research within the context of sports management manifests the transfer of meaningful knowledge, for example in this instance how managerial activities reflect power relations and how that contributes to discrimination in the world. This resonates well with the definition of *marketing action research* by Perry and Gummesson (2004) as presented earlier, as the past actions are utilized in the development of the present understanding and knowledge. Even though approaching the issue more from the critical theory paradigm, Frisby (2005) suggests that it is not sufficient to inspect sport organizations only from a critical perspective. Instead, critical reflection should also be applied to the knowledge claims of critical theory paradigm scholars. Thus, Frisby (2005) hopes that the critical paradigm would be integrated more frequently to research across different fields. In the case of the present study, although it is not explicitly utilizing the critical theory paradigm, critical reflection to its processes and results are applied.

It can be said that action research methods have been utilized in a variety of contexts and perspectives regarding brands and marketing communications. From the perspective of non-to-profit organizations, Miller and Merrilees (2013) discuss branding and especially rebranding in a context affiliated with communities, while utilizing action research methods. The research question of the study is:

> Is it possible to rebuild community values-based corporate brands with total stakeholder buy-in? (Miller & Merrilees, 2013, 174)

Miller and Merrilees (2013, 174) state that action research as an approach is suitable for their study concerning the nature of the research question presented earlier. The arguments supporting this statement are related to the processes action researchers utilize when being affiliated with multiple stakeholder groups, the multiple phases of research involving the stakeholders, and the consensus in capturing those insights and voices the multiple stakeholders have concerning the brand (Miller & Merrilees, 2013, 174–175). These arguments are similar to the points made in the studies by Sankaran and St. George (Willis & Edwards, 2014), as the multiple phases and stakeholder groups are present in them also. Furthermore, the voices and insights the multiple stakeholders have concerning the brand is something that resonates with the present study as well, as the perceptions and attitudes of JymyJussit followers regarding the club are explored.

1.4 The concept of a brand

Brand is a complex concept, according to Mucundorfeanu (2018, 43). It changes and evolves to match the needs of the business markets it is affiliated with. Fanning (1999, 3) states that the classic definition to a brand was published in 1955 by Gardner and Levy in the Harvard Business Review:

> A brand name is more than a label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes. It tells the consumer many things - not only by the way it sounds (and its literal meaning if it has one), but more important by the body of associations it has built up and acquired as a public object over a period of time. The net result is the public image, the character or personality that may be more important for the overall status (and sales) of the brand than many technical facts about the product. (Fanning, 1999, 3)

Furthermore, Mucundorfeanu (2018, 44) adds that a brand is a channel which an organization can utilize to present itself internally and externally. It has a major influence on every aspect regarding the elements of an organization, as well as its stakeholders. Based on the definition above, Mucundorfeanu (2018, 44) states that everything is a brand, not just popular products or companies like Apple, Nike or Adidas. Therefore, a country like Romania can also be seen as a brand or at least experts in the field of marketing and branding have been appointed to plan and execute several branding campaigns to promote the country and its culture. Fanning (1999, 4) asserts that the said entities are all considered brands because the thoughts of people consist of facts, impressions, and emotions, when hearing the four names mentioned above. The more positive impression people have about the brand, the more likely they are to buy the products or services the organization behind the brand offers.

In addition, Ramsaran-Fowdar and Fowdar (2013, 76–77) state that nowadays consumers more actively participate in the branding process in the social media by posting their personal experiences and opinions about a brand. Depending on the nature of the comments published about a brand, the outcomes on the brand reputation can be positive or negative. Furthermore, word-of-mouth is essential when a company desires to enlarge its customer base, as its effects have more longevity than traditional marketing tools. (Ramsaran-Fowdar & Fowdar, 2013, 76-77)

In this thesis, JymyJussit is a brand which has been developed from the foundations of two other Finnish baseball organizations located Seinäjoki which do not have teams on the highest league anymore. Thus, JymyJussit is or in this case should be the manifestation of Finnish baseball in Seinäjoki. A more in-depth description on this issue is presented in the sections 2.1 Setting and 2.2 The problem.

According to Olins (2009, as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018 43–44), branding is management activity, a complex and multidisciplinary process. It is described by several essential specifications such as

- a marketing, design, communication and human resources instrument
- an activity which should always have an impact on every part of the organization and on each audience of the organization
- a coordination resource, because it makes the organizations' activities more coherent
- above all, Olins considers that branding makes the strategy of the organization more visible and clearer for each of the audiences (Olins, 2009, as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018, 43–44)

According to Mucundorfeanu (2018, 46–47), storytelling can be viewed as a significant difference between responsible and irresponsible brand management and branding. Brands that are managed well have a story at their core which is corresponding to the values of the organization behind the brand. However, Mucundorfeanu (2018, 46–47) states that telling a story does not guarantee success for the brand. It is also important to identify the nature of the story to tell and how it is presented to the stakeholders. Wala (2015, as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018, 46) recommends multiple situations which almost every company has faced in their lifespan and which can be utilized as starting points for a successful story to tell for the consumers:

- the founding history of the company
- pioneering inventions
- crises and how they were overcome
- unusual successes

- unusual or surprising facts about their products (how they were created, the origin of their name, what contributed to their success)
- employees one can be proud of
- top managers who support the values of companies even in delicate situations
- endearing weaknesses or mistakes of well-known decision-makers
- customers who can rely on the product in critical situations
- unusual or particularly prominent customers (Wala, 2015, as cited in Mucundorfeanu, 2018, 46).

It can be added that stories offer experiences and identification possibilities, resulting in interestingness and attractiveness for the customers of a brand. Mucundorfeanu (2018, 47) pinpoints that the specific element existing in the heart of a brand is usually utilized in the storytelling process. The said element of the brand is emphasized and converted into the central point of focus in the story which helps promote the brand at hand. The shape of the product, family tradition and reference to historical events regarding the lifespan of a brand are the characteristics which usually are present in the most common stories around brands. (Mucundorfeanu, 2018, 47)

As mentioned, utilizing storytelling in the branding process can result in positive outcomes concerning the consumers and their relationship towards the brand. Lundqvist et al. (2013) studied consumer responses to a firm-originated story by exposing one group of consumers to the said story while another group was not exposed to the same story. The study states that a well-constructed story can indeed influence consumers positively, resulting in the group of consumers exposed to the story willing to pay more for the products affiliated with the brand than the consumer not exposed to the story. Furthermore, positive associations towards the brand were achieved through the story exposure which is in par with the arguments provided by Mucundorfeanu (2018). Thus, storytelling is included as an important aspect in the present study.

1.5 Brand community

Now that the concepts of brand and branding are more familiar, the issue of brand community can be discussed, regarding its function and formation. In the present study, the brand community of JymyJussit can be viewed as the fans of the team. Although, people outside the brand community are also important for the organization as there are a lot of *casual* followers of the team, as shown in the present study section of this thesis.

Kilambi et al. (2013) describe brand community as a particular, non-geographical bound community which is centered on a structured set of social relationships among brand followers or admirers. It is important for the value and legacy of the brand and, much like any other community, is not everlasting or equal across brand barriers. Furthermore, brands that are public and have a strong image, history and competition are more likely to develop brand communities around them. Furthermore, Kilambi et al. (2013) focus on how brand communities are formed and established. The study presents Nike, Apple and Harley-Davidson and their respective brand communities as examples.

Algesheimer et al. (2005, 19–20) present the Harley-Davidson as well as a prime example of a company interacting with its brand community, Harley Owners Group or HOG for short. Harley-Davidson actively supports the said brand community. Furthermore, customers are encouraged by the company to become members of the local HOG chapter after buying a motorcycle. Also, meetings and other events are presented to the members of the chapters. Generally, local dealerships oversee the said chapters, and they receive financial support from Harley-Davidson. Participation in activities by HOG has been found to increase brand affection regarding Harley-Davidson, making them dedicated and dependable consumers. (Algesheimer et al. 2005, 19–20)

Furthermore, Algesheimer et al. (2005) add that the HOG example, in addition to other success stories in the field, have reinforced the positive characteristics of brand communities in the thought processes of marketing managers and leaders. Thus, substantial investments in forming and managing brand communities have become more common for the said managers. However, to accomplish great results with brand communities, the different ways the influence can be increased regarding the customers must be recognized with great importance. Thus, Algesheimer et al. (2005) studied 282 European car clubs which function as social organizations. Regarding most of the clubs, face-to-face meetings is usual for members, often monthly in events organized for them. Online communication is also significantly present, for example through e-mail lists and bulletin boards, in addition to engaging in various social activities and events such as boat trips, parties, and concerts throughout the year.

Algesheimer et al. (2005) consider identification as the strength of the relationship between the consumer and the brand community. Moreover, the person interprets himself or herself to be a member and thus *belonging* to the brand community in question. Therefore, when brand community identification has been reached, engagement and participation towards the brand community can occur which in turn generates managerial value for the organization associated with the brand community.

In this thesis, the fans of JymyJussit are considered as the brand community of the club, as their involvement with the club in its Facebook page is presumably more active than the people outside of the said brand community. However, the club does

not have evidence about its followers, whether they consider themselves fans or not. The sections 2.1 Setting and 2.2 The problem describes this in greater detail.

2 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, the present study is introduced in greater depth, in cooperation with the theoretical background presented in the previous chapter. The structure of presenting the study is influenced by the action research studies presented in the previous chapter.

2.1 Setting

The present study is set to develop the social media marketing communication of Jymy-Jussit Oy, an organization behind the operations of a Finnish baseball team JymyJussit, located in Seinäjoki, Finland. The organization is a result of a fusion between two local and traditional Finnish baseball teams, Seinäjoen Maila-Jussit and Nurmon Jymy, in 2012. Since the establishment of JymyJussit, it has struggled to attract loyal consumers, or "fans" as they are called in the world of sports, or that is the typical belief about the team.

The overall assumptions around the organization are that the majority of Maila-Jussit and especially Jymy fans, as the team operates under the name of Seinäjoki rather than Nurmo, have not accepted JymyJussit as their new favourite team because of the history between the two teams being rivals in the past. However, this is all just unfounded information as the new organization has never studied this. Thus, this thesis was established to find out what kind of relationship the organization has with its followers, from the perspective of the followers themselves. This knowledge is then utilized to develop the marketing conveyed in the social media of the club.

2.2 The problem

As mentioned, the main problem faced in this study is that the organization does not have any evidence or data regarding its brand community. The only data the organization has is the number of followers in its social media platforms and of course the attendance rates in the home matches. So firstly, some sort of demographical data considering the brand community of JymyJussit is provided for the organization through an online questionnaire, published in the Facebook page of the team, so that the organization can have some kind of idea about the members of the brand community. Although, it must be noted that the demographical data can be limited because it is impossible to reach every single member of the brand community through Facebook,

as for example elder or in some cases younger people might not have Facebook accounts in use. Thus, the number of Facebook followers should be viewed as a directional presentation of the real amount of people who interact with JymyJussit.

Secondly, because of the missing demographical information, the marketing communication conducted in the past has not been based on any scientific proof about the brand community of JymyJussit. Therefore, this action research study is conducted as a qualitative study so that the marketing communication could be utilized in the most effective way possible. However, as mentioned before, the Facebook followers are a representation of the actual number of followers so this study does not claim to be the absolute truth when it comes to understanding the followers of JymyJussit. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) state that the size of data in a thesis, utilizing qualitative research methods, is usually small when compared to a quantitative study. The focus is more on the description of a phenomena or action, rather than on statistical generalization. Thus, even though quantitative aspects are utilized in the present study, such as collecting the demographical data and utilizing questionnaire statistics, the main focus is on the qualitative information identified with qualitative content analysis from the answers to the open-ended questions.

2.3 Research questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1) If there are Facebook followers of JymyJussit that consider themselves as fans of the team, what are the reasons for their fandom?

As mentioned earlier, the organization behind the operations of JymyJussit do not have any evidence to prove the number of loyal supporters. By answering this research question, the number of fans can be realized and the motivations and reasons for their fandom comes clearer which helps to coordinate the marketing communications to match their preferences.

2) What is the reasoning of the followers who do not consider themselves as fans and are they open for more active interaction with the club through the planned marketing communication?

Like the first research question, the data gathered through the online questionnaires, especially the open-ended questions, is inspected from a particular perspective. The reasons and motivations for not being a fan of JymyJussit are explored. With this

information, it could be possible to identify followers who could be persuaded into more active participation and interaction with the club, possibly to become fans in the future.

3) Utilizing action research methods, how large of an influence can be achieved regarding the fans and the *almost fans* followers?

After exposing the followers to the planned marketing communication in social media, another online questionnaire is conducted to find out if any remarkable influence has been achieved. Thus, following along the action research circle presented earlier in this thesis. Furthermore, the analytics considering the Facebook page are inspected also to see if there has been an increase considering the number of followers, views, clicks and so on to further justify the possible influence.

2.4 Data

The data was gathered using an online questionnaire which was posted to the Facebook page of JymyJussit which had 6 108 followers at the time of making the questionnaire public. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, three questions to find out the demographic information about the participant, such as name, age and where the participant resides. The remainder of the questions focused on the possible perceptions and opinions the participant has about JymyJussit, its identity, does the club promote characteristics that showcase Seinäjoki and many more. The questionnaire form can be found in the Appendices section of this thesis. It was conducted in Finnish.

The data consists of 296 participants who answered the online questionnaire. 293 participants answered the question about their gender and 284 answered the question about their age. Also, 293 participants stated where they are living. Table 1 depicts what the number of participants is considering the gender and age.

Table 1 Number of participants according to their age and gender

	under 30y	30-39y	40-49y	50-59y	60-69y	70years+
man	55 people	28	39	27	9	5
woman	51 people	20	21	14	4	4
other	1					

Thus, it can be stated that most of participants are male. However, the number of female participants is not by any means minor, as 40 percent of participants are

female. The most dominant age group is the under 30-year-olds which forms the 37 percent of the participants who answered the question about their age.

Majority of participants live in Seinäjoki, as only 29 percent of participants answered that they live outside Etelä-Pohjanmaa, the regional area of Finland where Seinäjoki is located. 18 percent stated that they live in Etelä-Pohjanmaa but not in Seinäjoki. 53 percent of participants stated that they live in Seinjäoki. Thus, it can be assumed that marketing communication designed to utilize cultural elements of Seinäjoki is effective.

2.5 Research methods

In this section, the research methods are presented in the context of this thesis. The utilization of action research is presented based on the theoretical background presented in the beginning of the thesis. Furthermore, the practical plan regarding the marketing communication produced in the social media channels of JymyJussit is also presented.

2.5.1 Action research in this study

As presented in the previous chapter 1 Theoretical background, this thesis is conducted as an action research study. The research circle model by Lewin (1948, as cited in Willis & Edwards, 2014, 13) is the basis for the systematic approach to this study as different stages of conducting research commence during the process. Also, the definition of action research in marketing context by Perry and Gummesson (2004, 318) is also applied.

The approach of the present study is from the interpretive theory paradigm, as the research problem can be seen as a local problem and the questionnaire participants are involved in the identification and solution processes. As for the emphasis of the action research, it focuses on the organizational level as JymyJussit is the subject of the study. However, local stakeholders are involved in the study as participants so to an extent, the study follows the characteristics of a Participatory Action Research. Regarding the participatory form of research, Frisby et al. (2005, 368) suggest that the active involvement of participants in the process of knowledge construction improves the reliability and significance of the data. However, in PAR, the local stakeholders have a lot of influence on the study, in all of its stages, as mentioned in the section 1.2 Action research in practice. Thus, this present study cannot be viewed as a definite PAR study, as the participants are not involved for example in the research question forming phase of this study.

Following along the research circle model, a plan for conducting marketing communication in the social media of JymyJussit was executed, drawing influence from the answers to the first online questionnaire. Furthermore, a specific sample of participants was chosen as the target group for the social media marketing communication conducted in this thesis. The sample was chosen utilizing the question number seven: *Do you consider yourself as a supporter/fan of JymyJussit?* A total of 105 participants chose the answer *No* or *Do not know*.

Out of the 105 participant sample, 53 participants answered the open-ended question to elaborate why they answered the way they did. From the answers to the open-ended question, similarities were discovered. Thus, it was possible to form typification, which Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2018) present as a generalization, a result of a content analysis, summarized from a group of similar views. These views are identified into patterns, types of *example participants*, which are then utilized to guide the planned marketing communication. These example participants are:

- Type 1: I do not consider myself a fan of JymyJussit because I support or represent another team. (24 participants)
- Type 2: because I generally follow the sport and all of the teams. (21 participants)
- Type 3: because the team does not interest me and/or some other reason pointing out features about the team or organization. (14 participants)
- Type 4: because I follow JymyJussit to some extent but do not consider myself a fan. (5 participants)
- Type 5: because I do not attend games live or live too far away from Seinäjoki. (9 participants)

In addition, two participants answered that they do not consider themselves as fans because they act as referees in the games and thus should practice unbiased attitudes towards the teams. Furthermore, four participants stated that they do not follow JymyJussit or consider themselves as fans without giving any reason for it, wishing nothing but the best for the Finnish baseball culture of Seinäjoki. Thus, participants who manifested characteristics typical for Type 1 and the six participants mentioned above are not taken into consideration when planning and executing the marketing communication because their showcased attitude towards JymyJussit is somewhat candid and does not present a promising starting point for receiving effective marketing communication.

2.5.2 The social media marketing plan

As mentioned, the basis for the social media marketing plan was founded from the answers to the first online questionnaire. The demographical data was taken into account to have a better understanding about the stakeholders which would be

receiving the marketing communication. Furthermore, the answers to the open-ended questions provided the most crucial information regarding the planning process. Wilson (2004, 379) states that in order to achieve research results that are rigorous in nature while contributing knowledge and problem solving in the chosen context, action research should coexist alongside other research methods. Thus, the present study utilizes qualitative content analysis in cooperation with the action research methods.

Firstly, the social media channels to utilize when executing marketing communication was chosen from the answers to question number 10: *If I want to receive information regarding JymyJussit my primary source of information is…* 295 participants answered the question. 50 percent preferred the Facebook page of JymyJussit, 39 percent preferred the Instagram feed. Only eight percent preferred the official website of JymyJussit and the rest of the participants mentioned Twitter or some other source to information regarding the team. Ramsaran-Fowdar and Fowdar (2013, 76) state that Facebook, for marketing research purposes, can be a very useful asset. Utilizing communication with the customers through Facebook, organizations can receive valuable information regarding its customers and future products or services. Thus, the main channels to use when conveying the desired marketing communication are the Facebook page of JymyJussit and the Instagram feed, the Facebook page being the main channel and the Instagram feed acting as an assurance for message exposure. Fortunately, it is possible to create posts and maintain both channels simultaneously through the Creator Studio tool in Facebook. Furthermore, the statistics affiliated with the posts, such as the amount of clicks and views for example, can be monitored through the Creator Studio tool also.

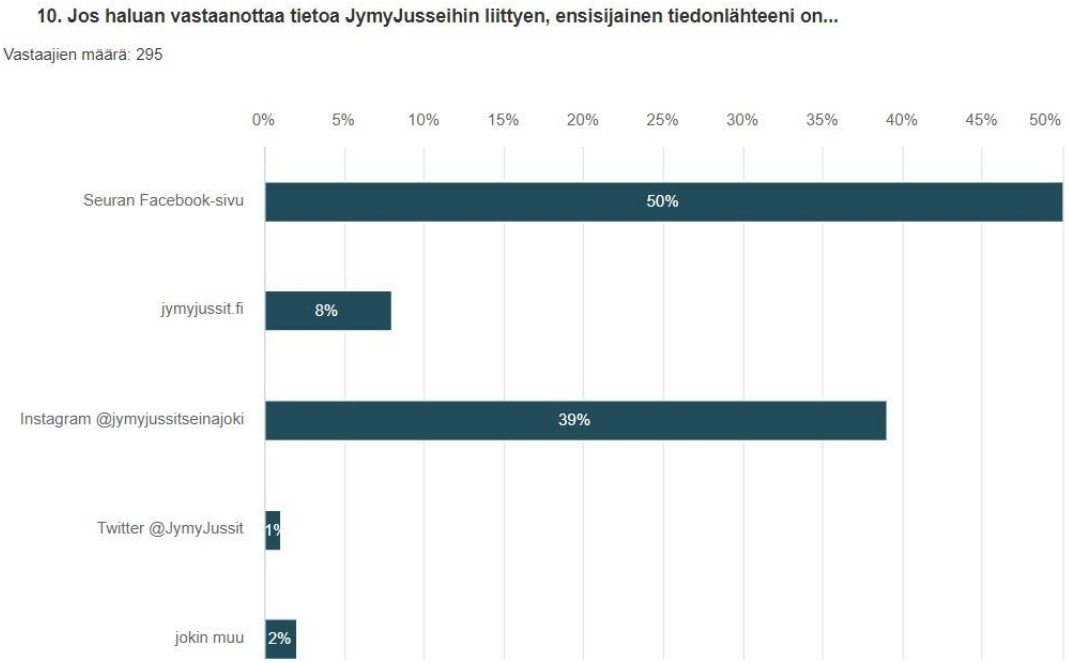


Figure 4 Answer percentages to question number 10

Secondly, answers to the last question in the questionnaire, 20. *Lastly, in a general level, what kind of content would you like to see from the content creators of JymyJussit? (for example, more pictures or videos, maybe longer texts etc.)*, were utilized to see what kind of social media posts the followers would want to see in the social media channels. The most frequent answers were to post more pictures and videos, especially the kind which bring out the players and the character of the players to the public. Also, content related to the history of JymyJussit and strong brand communication related to the core messages of the team and organization were common themes that the followers would like to see more. Thus, the main format of posts are pictures and videos to fully match the desires of the participants. Furthermore, the content which is included in the posts was chosen based on the factors mentioned earlier, in addition to the answers to the questions 12 and 13:

- 12. In your opinion, is Seinäjoki and the characteristics of being from Seinäjoki and/or Etelä-Pohjanmaa present in the social media marketing communication of JymyJussit?
- 13. If you answered Yes, how do the said things come across? Describe briefly. /13. If you answered No, what is missing and do you think there should be more of the said things in the communication of JymyJussit? Describe briefly.

In total of 74 percent of participants answered *Yes* to the question number 12, indicating that the communication before the research process has been fairly successful in terms of promoting cultural aspects of Seinäjoki. For examples about the posts, see Appendix 3 in the Appendices section in the end of this thesis.

Therefore, in the present study, the marketing communication conducted in the social media channels of JymyJussit is planned and executed in a way that supports the mentality of branding and storytelling, emphasizing the local context and community which Seinäjoki and its Finnish baseball team represent.

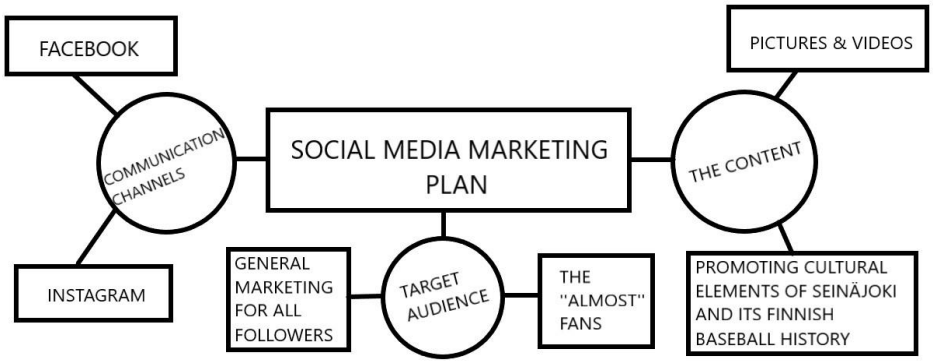


Figure 5 Social media marketing plan mind map

2.6 Research ethics

Since the present study was conducted studying people and their perceptions about themselves and about a sports organization they are following, the issue about research ethics is an important one to address. The research process followed the guidelines on ethical principles of research with human participants, provided by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2019).

In the beginning of the questionnaires, the participants were informed that the questionnaire is a part of a scientific research in a thesis format and the participation is completely voluntary and confidential, adding that the participants can cancel the answering process at any time which would result in disregarding their answers . The age limit of 15 was set for the participation in the study, as in research conducted in Finland, the own consent of a minor aged 15 or older is sufficient for participation in a scientific study according to the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2019).

Furthermore, it was stated to the participants that the data collected from the questionnaires would be retained anonymously, only for the purpose and duration of the study and research process. Also, just before participants would begin to answer either one of the questionnaires, it was made clear to the participants that by pressing *Next*, the participants understand the conditions mentioned earlier and that they will participate in the study by doing so.

3 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, the results to the second online questionnaire are presented and analyzed in cooperation with the first online questionnaire, to evaluate the successfulness of the development regarding the marketing communication of JymyJussit, based on the social media marketing plan. Furthermore, results of the present study and the answers to the research questions are presented.

3.1 The second online questionnaire

The second online questionnaire, which was conducted over five months after the first one, was fairly similar to the first online questionnaire so the effect of successful or unsuccessful marketing communication could be identified. The demographic questions were the same with only minor changes made to them. For example, a question about whether the participant had answered the prior online questionnaire or not was added, in addition to modifying the question about the age of the participant from an open-ended question to a multiple-choice question. These modifications were done as a part of the action research process which emphasizes constant learning and development during the research process. A lot of time was spared because of the change to the age question as with the multiple-choice question, the manual labor of connecting the age of the participant to his or her other answers of the questionnaire was reduced significantly. Furthermore, all the questions were marked with an asterisk to inform the participant that it is mandatory to answer the questions before proceeding further with the questionnaire. This prevented the situation which happened in the first online questionnaire where for example many under 30-year-old participants did not state their gender. The complete questionnaire form can be found in the Appendices section of this thesis.

139 followers answered the second online questionnaire and 79 answered that they had participated in the first online questionnaire in the autumn. Thus, the amount of questionnaire participants was substantially lower this time around. However, the answer percentages to the demographic questions are the same to a great extent in the latter online questionnaire when compared to the first. For example, the distribution by gender is the same as 40 percent of participants are female and 60 percent are male. Furthermore, majority of the participants are under 30-years-old like in the first questionnaire, as 35 percent stated that they are between 18 and 29-years-old and 2 percent stated that they are under 18-years-old. Also, 56 percent of participants stated that they live in Seinäjoki, 28 percent live outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa and 16 percent live in Etelä-Pohjanmaa but not in Seinäjoki which is in par with the percentages of the

first online questionnaire. This suggests that the participants have remained the same, to some extent at least.

The participants of the second online questionnaire are compared to the sample chosen in the first questionnaire. Furthermore, from the basis of the first questionnaire answers, it was possible to state in the second questionnaire if the participant considers himself or herself as an active or occasional follower, in contrast to the first questionnaire asking if the participant considers himself or herself as a fan of JymyJussit or not. Thus, the percent of fan participants declined to 36 percent. However, 42 percent of participants considered themselves as active followers of JymyJussit. 21 percent stated themselves as occasional followers and just two participants stated that they have no connection to the team whatsoever, the other even stating that he hates the team and the organization. A more in-depth look is provided in the section 3.2 Analysis.

The participants who considered themselves as fans of JymyJussit shared similarities in their answers to the open-ended question which inquired their opinion on what makes them a fan. The following excerpts of participant answers are translated from Finnish to English. Out of 50 participants, 11 mentioned Seinäjoki related reason for their fandom, for example:

> *I have always supported Finnish baseball originating from Seinäjoki.* Male, 50-59 years old, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa but not in Seinäjoki
>
> *Seinäjoki, home village (smiley with sunglasses).* Male, 18-29y, living outside Etelä-Pohjanmaa
>
> *My relationship has not changed. Finnish baseball is close to my heart and jussit are the team of the home village.* Female, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki
>
> *I have followed the team closely since the establishment of the organization. Finnish baseball originating from Seinäjoki is close to my heart.* Male, 60-69y, living in Seinäjoki
>
> *Born and raised in Seinäjoki. Supporting since the era of Maila-Jussit.* Female 60-69y, living in Seinäjoki
>
> *I support the team of my hometown even though I'm living elsewhere now*. Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa
>
> *Finnish baseball is an important part of sports fandom. JymyJussit are important as a team from Seinäjoki and they are fun to follow*. Male, 40-49y, living in Seinäjoki
>
> *The team of my own municipality and Finnish baseball is a part of my life.* Female, 18-29y, living in Seinäjoki
>
> *I have followed Finnish baseball since childhood and the team of nearby municipality is a natural subject of support.* Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa
>
> *Home village boys are playing*. Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

I have watched the matches of JymyJussit for many years. Hometown team. Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

10 fan participants stated that history, for example mentioning Seinäjoen Maila-Jussit or Nurmon Jymy or mentioning time related to the longevity of being a fan, was the main reason for their fan relationship towards JymyJussit:

I have supported the club and its predecessor SMJ for 30 years and I'm a fanatic supporter. Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I have been a fan since the beginning. Male, 60-69y, living in Seinäjoki

I like Finnish baseball. I have always been a fan of Jussit. The team's game gives me great experiences. Male, 70 years or older, living in Seinäjoki

Since -82 attended the games of Mailajussit. Male, 40-49y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I actively follow JymyJussit and have been interested about the club since its establishment. Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

I have played for SMJ as a child and have always supported Jussit. Male, 50-59y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Since the beginning. It's an inheritance since Nurmon Jymy played in Superpesis. Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

Of course! I have been a supporter since the golden years of SMJ and it has carried on to JymyJussit as SMJ was merged with Jymy. Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

In the stands since 1977. Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

Supporter since 1980 SMJ/JJ. Male, 50-59y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

The rest of participants who considered themselves as fans had a variety of reasons for their fandom such as their voluntary work for JymyJussit, knowing the players personally, attending the away games, watching the games live from television, being a season ticket holder, having family ties to the sport or club and so on. Some examples include:

Every home game in the stands. I buy JymyJussit merch and own two season tickets even though one would be enough. Female, 50-59y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Hotakainen came back to the team. Male, 30-39y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I support JymyJussit because my father is an active member of the club. Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Finnish baseball is close to my heart and my acquaintances are playing. Female, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

I'm an active voluntary worker. Involved in every home match. Female, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

Many of the participants, 58 participants in total, who stated that they consider themselves as active followers rather than fans, expressed similar reasons as the fan participants for their choice. Thus, it is interesting to see that some participants who chose active follower as their answer, share the exact same reason for their selection as a fan follower, for example:

Team of my home village and Finnish baseball. Male, 18-29y, living in Seinäjoki

I have actively followed Jymy since 1969 and now continuing it with Jymy_Jussit. Male, 70y or older, living in Seinäjoki

My own son is part of the team. Female, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

I have followed JymyJussit since its establishment. Female, under 18y, living in Seinäjoki

I'm from Seinäjoki and my parents still live there. Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Furthermore, couple of answers by the active followers showed qualities which could be considered typical for a fan rather than an active follower, implying stronger investment towards JymyJussit:

JymyJussit will hoist the cup in the summer (thumbs up emoji). Male, 18-29y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I tend to follow the team quite closely. Male, under 18y, living in Seinäjoki

However, there were 14 participants who clearly stated a reason for choosing the active follower choice instead of the fan choice. Thus, depicting characteristics similar to the Type 2, Type 4 and Type 5 participants of the sample gathered from the first online questionnaire:

I follow the social media and games of the team actively. I don't go to see the games live though (Type 5). Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow the games of Jymy-Jussit as much as I can but I can't call myself a fan (Type 4). Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

The success of the team is inspiring but I follow because of the sport and the players, not so much because of the JymyJussit logo (Type 4). Male, 18-29y, living in Seinäjoki

I follow the social media of jymyjussit actively and go to their games. However they are not my number one team, sorry Tero (Type 4). Male, 18-29y, living in Seinäjoki

I generally support Finnish baseball and thus follow JymyJussit also (Type 4). Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Regarding Finnish baseball, my team has always been Nurmon Jymy or SMJ and nowadays then Jymyjussit. Not so often I can see a game in the stands because I live further away but I always check the results and sometimes watch from the television (Type 5). Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow women's Finnish baseball more and then JymyJussit home games (Type 2). Male, 60-69y, living in Seinäjoki

I follow Finnish baseball because I like the sport (Type 2). Male, 40-49y, living in Seinäjoki

Finnish baseball has always interested me (Type 2). Female, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

I follow many teams (Type 2). Female, 18-29y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow equally all Superpesis teams (Type 2). Male, 40-49y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow almost every team playing in Superpesis (Type 2). Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow Finnish baseball regularly including the results of Jussit games (Type 2). Male, 40-49y, living in Seinäjoki

I moved away because of my studies 3 years ago so I don't visit the games so often. I follow the social media though and visit couple of games every summer (Type 5). Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

The 29 participants who stated themselves as occasional followers provided answers which were similar to the answers by the sample participants in the first online questionnaire. Six participants manifested Type 2 characteristics:

Generally Finnish baseball interests me and JJ is a nice club. Male, 30-39y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Finnish baseball interests me all around Finland. Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow Finnish baseball and JymyJussit is the home team. Female, 40-49y, living in Seinäjoki

It's nice to follow Finnish baseball. Female, 18-29y, living in Seinäjoki

I neutrally follow all Superpesis clubs. Male, 40-49y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I follow Superpesis closely. Seinäjoki is not the most important team for me. Male, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

The characteristics which manifest Type 5 were identified from the answers of four participants:

The stands and the atmosphere are great in Seinäjoki. The location is under an hour away so I gladly drive down to watch games. Female, 18-29y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I'm not a local but I have interest towards the sport. Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Nowadays I live on the other side of Finland but follow through social media. Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I rarely visit the games. I read the paper though about them. Female, 50-59y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

In addition, four more participants indicated that they consider themselves as occasional followers because they support another club, displaying characteristics typical for Type 1 which was the group of participants not targeted by this study:

I follow Superpesis and all of the teams more or less. My favourite team is however the other Jymy (smiley face). Male, 40-49y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

As a supporter of a neighbouring club, I'm interested in the social media of the competitor. Male, 40-49y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa

I don't feel like JymyJussit is my team. SMJ forever. Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

I follow JymyJussit as much as the other Superpesis teams. I'm from Kitee and support Kiteen Pallo and I'm also involved with the club. Male, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Furthermore, answers sharing characteristics with the Type 3 participants were also identified from the answers of two occasional follower participants:

I sometimes follow the team if they do something interesting. Female, 18-29y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa

Depends on what kind of fighting spirit and winning mentality the team has. Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

The rest of occasional follower participants, much like their fan and active follower counterparts, showcased reasons for their selection which did not stand out. For example, watching couple of matches per summer, sometimes watching games from Ruutu which is a Finnish streaming service that broadcasts every Superpesis match, and mentioning the social media of JymyJussit and how sometimes they come across the content when surfing the Internet.

3.2 Analysis

Regarding the analysis, it is important to acknowledge the starting point of this study. As shown in the section 2.4 Data, the first online questionnaire provided information regarding the brand community of JymyJussit. From there, those Facebook followers of JymyJussit who could be influenced to join the brand community or to engage in more active interaction with the club were identified and used as a sample for this study.

The 105 participant sample, that stated in the first online questionnaire that they do not consider themselves as fans of JymyJussit, was typified based on the open-ended question answers which depicted the reasons the sample participants had for not calling themselves as fans. The outcome of the typification supported the idea of followers, who do not consider themselves as fans, that could be influenced to more active interaction and involvement with JymyJussit, at least on the level of social media.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, in total of 79 participants stated in the second online questionnaire that they have answered the previous online questionnaire. However, the participants who only answered the second online questionnaire are not excluded since they have also been exposed to the marketing communication. The major difference between the results of these questionnaires is the decline of participants answering *Do not know* to the question about if a participant considers to be a fan or something else, regarding JymyJussit.

However, the answers regarding if the social media content of JymyJussit has met the expectations of a participant were varied. 37 percent answered *Yes*, 32 percent answered *No* and 31 percent answered *Do not know*. Furthermore, the answers to the open-ended question regarding the choice further adds to the variation, as the participants who answered *Yes*, state that versatility, activity and frequency has been the factors to successful communication:

> *Has kept me up to date.* Female, 18-29y, living in Seinäjoki.
>
> *There has been enough information for the winter*. Female, 18-29y, living in Etelä-Pohjanmaa
>
> *Posts come often enough and they provide current information*. Female, 30-39y, living outside of Etelä-Pohjanmaa
>
> *Activity. Storytelling. Stories are interesting.* Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki
>
> *Versatility, multiple channels*. Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki.

In contrast, the participants who answered *No*, stated that there has not been any communication to begin with and the versatility has been non-existent. For example:

It's been quiet. Male, 40-49y, living in Seinäjoki

Little material, can't tell what is up with the team. Other clubs have better communication. The communication was good in the summer. Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

What communication? Has there been any?! Female, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki

One-sided content. Male, 30-39y, living in Seinäjoki

Started off well, but then quiet during winter. Haven't heard anything. Male, 50-59y, living in Seinäjoki.

Thus, it can be stated that it is difficult to develop the communication as people have such different opinions on the frequency and quality of the communication. Although it is worth mentioning that the official content creator for JymyJussit quit her job in the middle of the offseason and this study so that must have had an impact on the frequency and quality of the communication. The general communication, which did not concern the present study to a great extent, of JymyJussit was managed by the CEO of the organization and seldom by the author of this thesis until a new content creator was hired in late spring.

The changes to the percentages about the relationship between a participant and the club implies that although participants have become more conscious about their relationship towards JymyJussit, the marketing communication conducted in the social media of the club might not be the reason for it. Furthermore, when inspecting the answers to the question number nine, *Has the communication during the offseason represented the city of Seinäjoki and/or characteristics related to Seinäjoki,* the results show that the promotion of cultural aspects of Seinäjoki did not successfully reach the targeted participants, as 59 percent answered *Do not know*, 13 percent answered *No* and 28 percent answered *Yes*. Furthermore, as mentioned in the section 2.5.2 The social media marketing plan, cultural aspects were identified more successfully in the first online questionnaire. The main reasons for choosing the answer Yes were the promotion of local entrepreneurs, dialect used by the players and in the posts, mentioning the city and by the characteristics typical for people from *Pohojammaa,* a dialect term for the region where Seinäjoki is located. Alternatively, participants who chose *No* stated that the lack of communication was a key factor for their selection, as well as not identifying anything Seinäjoki related from the marketing communication.

Additionally, when inspecting the answers to question number 12, *When JymyJussit post on social media I interact (like, share, comment etc.) with the post…*, it can be argued that followers of JymyJussit are quite active with their interaction. 25 percent answered *Almost every time*, 30 percent *Often*, 26 percent *Sometimes*, 16 percent *Rarely* and only three percent *Never*. This information is in par with the statistics provided by Facebook about the timeframe of this study, from the day the first online

questionnaire was made public to the day the second online questionnaire was closed. The said statistics are presented in Figure 5.

People Reached	Engagement	Link Clicks	Comments	Shares	Reactions	Photo Views	New Followers	Net Followers
55,218	36,889	2,922	312	228	6,834	1,957	112	50

Figure 6 Facebook statistics from October 12th to March 27th

As shown in Figure 5, the Facebook page of JymyJussit reached over 55 thousand people during the research time. Furthermore, almost 37 thousand engagements were achieved, meaning the times people interacted with the Facebook posts through reactions, comments, shares and clicks. During the research process, 112 new Facebook followers were gained. The 50 net followers present the number of new followers gained deducted by the number of followers lost during the research process.

3.3 Results

This study strived to answer three research questions, as presented in the section 2.3 Research questions. Regarding the first research question, a fair amount of Facebook followers of JymyJussit identified themselves as fans of the club. Out of 296 participants in the first online questionnaire, 191 participants considered themselves as fans. Therefore, JymyJussit received valuable information regarding its brand community which can be utilized in the future. Furthermore, the present study showcased how the fan identification can alter depending on the marketing communication the stakeholders are exposed to.

The second research question regarded the followers outside the brand community. As presented in the section 2.5.1 Action research in this study, 49 participants showcased characteristics which were identified being favourable towards more active participation and interaction regarding JymyJussit. Thus, it was possible to convey marketing communication in the social media channels of JymyJussit, striving to influence the said followers.

The third research question is not so straightforward to answer directly. On one hand, the results of the second online questionnaire depict positive results concerning the successful influence on the brand community and the followers who were targeted by the marketing communication. As mentioned in the section 3.2 Analysis, the number of participants stating that they do not know how to describe their relationship

towards JymyJussit had declined when comparing the answers between the two online questionnaires, suggesting that the followers outside of the brand community could have increased their activity regarding interaction with JymyJussit. In addition, the second online questionnaire answers regarding the active interaction participants showcase towards the social media posts of JymyJussit, further support this argument.

On the other hand, the varied answers to the question about the social media content meeting the expectations of followers, and the significant decline in the identification of Seinäjoki characteristics in the marketing communication by the participants, suggest that no significant influence was successfully achieved. Therefore, this study should be perceived as a good starting point for future research or, as it is common in action research studies, a baseline for another research circle to commence.

4 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the present study are discussed in cooperation with previous studies regarding similar themes such as connecting social media communication and marketing and how it has been utilized to affect possible consumers. It must be stated that there are not many, if any, studies conducting research on marketing communication in social media, utilizing action research methods in a sports organization context. Thus, a more applied approach is conducted in this discussion.

Alalwan et al. (2017) review approximately 144 articles related to social media in marketing context, providing an overview on the main themes and trends of the field. These themes and trends include the role of social media in advertising, customer relationship management and brand related issues, which is a relevant theme considering the present study. However, none of the articles are affiliated with action research methods which was expected, considering the information provided in the first chapter of this thesis. Thus, as mentioned, the following articles take on a more applied approach to the themes of social media marketing and communication when related to the present study.

Kim and Ko (2012) empirically studied the influence of marketing activities, conveyed in social media, on the loyalty of customers. Although the study was conducted in a context of a luxury brands, it is possible to draw comparisons between it and the present study, as both are studying branding and marketing communication. Kim and Ko (2012) state that through social media marketing, brands and customers are communicating with each other, without restraint in time or place, changing the old one-way communication into interactive two-way communication. Therefore, customers and brands work together to develop the business, while brands are able to achieve publicity and improve the relationships with customers.

Utilizing quantitative research methods, Kim and Ko (2012, 1483–1486) conducted research on Louis Vuitton and its social media channels in Facebook and Twitter. 362 survey questionnaires, which were conducted as mall intercept surveys containing Likert scale questions, were analyzed. Results show that social media marketing activities are effective towards customer loyalty by providing value to customers that traditional marketing does not usually provide. Furthermore, the social media platforms offer possibilities for customers to engage in communication with the brand and other consumers, thus the planned marketing communication activities of the brand were able to affect the customer relationships positively.

The present study, as a result of a more qualitative approach than quantitative, can be seen as a more in-depth exploration into the relationship between a brand and its consumers, as the consumers themselves expressed their perceptions about the brand through answering open-ended questions. Furthermore, the scale and context

of the present study was more minor when comparing to a study about an international luxury brand and its customers.

Gummerus et al. (2012) studied customer engagement behaviors with quantitative methods, in a context of a Facebook brand community, affiliated with an online gaming company. The study conducted a questionnaire to the members of the Facebook brand community which was answered by 289 participants. A mediation analysis was conducted to the results of the questionnaire. Gummerus et al. (2012, 868–869) state that the customer engagement behaviors, such as liking, commenting, and reading messages in the Facebook page affiliated with the brand community, have a positive influence on the relationships brand community members have towards the online gaming company. Furthermore, the study asserts that only a minor proportion of customers interact actively with the content and other brand community members, while most utilize the brand community as a source of information, for example reading messages rather than commenting. Thus, manifesting interest more towards the brand rather than to the other brand community members.

Regarding the present study, the approach by Gummerus et al. (2012) is similar, as a Facebook brand community is the focus for the research. In addition, both studies strived to conduct research from the perspective of the brand community members and how it affects the brand. However, the present study was conducted in a qualitative manner opposed to the quantitative method utilized by Gummerus et al. (2012). Moreover, the present study focused more on the reasons and perceptions the followers or customers themselves have, rather than quantifying the actual practical actions.

5 CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to utilize action research methods in a more uncommon context how they have been usually used in research, to answer the research niche of an action research study conducted in a sports organization. Furthermore, no known studies, at least to my knowledge, have conducted action research in a Finnish baseball organization, in this case JymyJussit, focusing on developing and changing the way the club identifies and conveys its marketing communication. The possibility to help the organization, by doing something more than just playing in the team, while simultaneously conducting the thesis work was intriguing. Thus, the idea of combining Finnish baseball, action research and communication was born, and this study is the result of that process.

The aim of the study was to, firstly, collect demographic information about the followers for the organization which it lacked in the past. Furthermore, the aim was also to find out if JymyJussit have followers who consider themselves as fans and if there are followers who do not consider themselves as ones but could be activated towards more frequent engagement with the club. Secondly, the qualitative information behind the demographics, concerning the perception of the followers about the club and their relationship towards the club, was also collected through the open-ended questions in the online questionnaires and then analyzed. Thirdly, a social media marketing plan was designed and conducted based on the information gathered and analyzed, to investigate if a significant, positive development could be achieved. Finally, the impact of the planned marketing communication in the social media channels of JymyJussit was inspected.

The major finding of this study was that JymyJussit in fact have followers who consider themselves as fans, with strong reasoning behind their fandom. In addition, followers prone to more frequent engagement with the club were also identified. Furthermore, a positive impact and change on the perceptions of JymyJussit followers regarding the club was achieved to an extent.

However, the successfulness of the planned marketing communication was incoherent. Although positive change was distinguished, it cannot be stated that the marketing communication alone was the main factor for the development, as events such as new player signings and positive news regarding the financial situation of the club occurred during the research process which probably had some impact on the results. Thus, the results of this study should be viewed as directional. However, the study itself should be viewed as an introduction to action research conducted in the context of sports organizations, and their marketing communications, in the future, therefore creating scientific value in the field of research.

There are of course limitations regarding this study, as it was conducted as a master's thesis. Thus, the amount of time spent in the research process is ultimately more minor when compared to studies conducted in a larger scale for example to scientific journals. Furthermore, the focus on just the Facebook followers of JymyJussit excludes possible participants who do not use Facebook, such as elder people who are not familiar with using social media platforms, and younger people who prefer other social media platforms more suited for their preferences. In the case of Finnish baseball, it would be beneficial to identify and include the elder people, who do not use Facebook, in the research process as they presumably form a significant portion of spectators in the home matches of JymyJussit, in many cases being season ticket holders and thus forming a significant income source for the club.

In future research covering marketing communications of a sports organization, a more extensive approach should be utilized. For example, the data could be gathered live at the matches of a Finnish baseball team, ensuring that people who do not have Facebook could also participate in the study, as mentioned earlier. This would increase the participatory action research aspect of the study. However, PAR has its limits. David (2002, 13) states that participatory action research can be a problematic approach towards research if the interests of the researcher and the participants are not the same and the participants could disagree on certain matters. In this case, David (2002, 13) suggests adopting less participatory methods to solve the problems faced in the research process. This is something that is not unfamiliar to action research by any means, as mentioned in chapter 1 Theoretical background, action research is a diverse family of different research methods which can be applied in many ways.

In addition, anonymous interviews could offer a more in-depth view on the perceptions of participants regarding the club, as possible online trolling could be avoided by conducting face-to-face interviews. Also, utilizing thematic content analysis with the transcriptions of the interviews would give useful and more in-depth information which could be useful in the marketing planning process.

Furthermore, regarding the time spent on the research, an action research study would benefit substantially from a longer time period, as multiple action research cycles would likely produce a more thorough study in the future.

REFERENCES

Alalwan, A. A., Rana, N. P., Dwivedi, Y. K. & Algharabat, R. 2017. Social media in marketing: A review and analysis of the existing literature. *Telematics & Informatics* [online], *34*(7), 1177–1190. doi:10.1016/j.tele.2017.05.008

Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M. & Hermann, A. 2005. The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence from European Car Clubs. *Journal of Marketing* [online], *69*(3), 19–34. doi:10.1509/jmkg.69.3.19.66363

Anderson, G., Herr, K. & Nihlen, A. S. 2007. *Studying your own school: An educator's guide to practitioner action research* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press

Ballantyne, D. 2004. Action research reviewed: A market-oriented approach. *European Journal of Marketing* [online], *38*(3), 321–337. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.jyu.fi/10.1108/03090560410518576

Coghlan, D. & Brannick, T. 2001. *Doing action research in your own organization*. Sage

David, M. 2002. Problems of participation: the limits of action research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* [online], *5*(1), 11–17. doi: 10.1080/13645570110098037

Fanning, J. 1999. Tell me a story: The future of branding. *Irish Marketing Review* [online], *12*(2), 3-15. https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.jyu.fi/scholarly-journals/tell-me-story-future-branding/docview/204522193/se-2?accountid=11774

Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity. 2019. *The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland*. [online] https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-01/Ethical_review_in_human_sciences_2020.pdf

Frisby, W. 2005. The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Critical Sport Management Research. *Journal of Sport Management* [online], *19*(1), 1–12. doi: https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.19.1.1

Frisby, W., Reid, C. J., Millar, S. & Hoeber, L. 2005. Putting "Participatory" into Participatory Forms of Action Research. *Journal of Sport Management* [online], *19*(4), 367–386. doi: https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.19.4.367

Gummerus, J., Liljander, V. & Weman, E. 2012. Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community. *Management Research Review* [online], *35*(9), 857–877. doi:10.1108/01409171211256578

Kates, S. M. & Robertson , J. 2004. Adapting action research to marketing: A dialogic argument between theory and practice. *European Journal of Marketing* [online], *38*(3), 418–432. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.jyu.fi/10.1108/03090560410518620

Kilambi, A., Laroche, M. & Richard, M. 2013. Constitutive Marketing. *International Journal of Advertising* [online], *32*(1), 45–64. doi: 10.2501/IJA-32-1-045-064

Kim, A. & Ko, E. 2012. Do social media marketing activities enhance customer equity? An empirical study of luxury fashion brand. *Journal of Business Research* [online], *65*(10), 1480. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.10.014

Lundqvist, A., Liljander, V., Gummerus, J. & Van Riel, A. 2013. The impact of storytelling on the consumer brand experience: The case of a firm-originated story. *Journal of Brand Management* [online], *20*(4), 283–297. doi:10.1057/bm.2012.15

Miller, D. & Merrilees, B. 2013. Rebuilding community corporate brands: A total stakeholder involvement approach. Journal of Business Research [online], 66(2), 172–179. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2012.07.010

Mucundorfeanu, M. 2018. The Key Role of Storytelling in the Branding Process. *Journal of Media Research* [online], *11*(1), 42–54. doi:10.24193/jmr.30.3

Perry, C. & Gummesson, E. 2004. Action research in marketing. *European Journal of Marketing* [online], *38*(3), 310–320. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.jyu.fi/10.1108/03090560410518567

Ramsaran-Fowdar, R. & Fowdar, S. 2013. The Implications of Facebook Marketing for Organizations. *Contemporary Management Research* [online], *9*(1). doi: https://doi.org/10.7903/cmr.9710

Slack, T. 2004. *The Commercialisation of Sport*. Routledge

Stringer, E. T. 2014. *Action research* (4th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Tuomi, J. & Sarajärvi, A. 2018. *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi.* Tammi

Willis, J. & Edwards, C. 2014. *Action research: Models, methods and examples*. Information Age Publishing

Wilson, H. N. 2004. Towards rigour in action research: A case study in marketing planning. *European Journal of Marketing* [online], *38*(3), 378–400. doi: http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.jyu.fi/10.1108/03090560410518602

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

First online questionnaire

Kysely JymyJussien seuraajille (Syksy 2020)

Tämä kysely on osa pro gradu -tutkielmaa, jossa pyritään selvittämään urheiluseuran tilannetta seuraajien näkökulmasta: millainen suhde seuraajilla on joukkuetta ja seuraa kohtaan. Kyselyn perusteella laaditaan toimintasuunnitelma, jonka pohjalta seuran sosiaalisen median markkinointia/viestintää pyritään kehittämään ja kohdentamaan.

Tietoa tutkimuksesta

Tutustuthan alla oleviin tietoihin, ennen kuin vastaat. Jos kyselyä tai tutkimusta kohden herää kysymyksiä, olettehan yhteydessä Tero Tyynelään: tero.j.tyynela@student.jyu.fi

Mikä kysely ja kuka sen toteuttaa?

Tämän kyselyn toteuttaa Tero Tyynelä, osana maisterin tutkintoaan Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Tutkimuksessa kartoitetaan JymyJussien sosiaalisen median seuraajien suhdetta seuraa kohtaan, yhteisön ja kulttuurin näkökulmasta. Tutkimus teetetään yhteistyössä Jymy-Jussit Oy:n kanssa. Tutkimuksessa käytettävät menetelmät noudattavat Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan (TENK) laatimia periaatteita ihmisiin kohdistuvista tutkimuksista. Lisätietoja: https://tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/Ihmistieteiden_eettisen_ennakkoarvioinnin_ohje_2019.pdf

Sovinko osallistujaksi ja mitä tutkimus sisältää?

Jos olet **vähintään 15-vuotias**, voit osallistua tutkimukseen. Tutkimus sisältää kyselyn, jossa kysymykset liittyvät seuraaviin aihealueisiin: perustiedot vastaajasta sekä vastaajan suhde/osallistuneisuus JymyJussien seuraamiseen ja kannattamiseen. Kyselyyn vastaaminen vie aikaa noin 10min.

Tietosuoja

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen tämän kyselyn myötä on täysin vapaaehtoista ja luottamuksellista. Kaikki kyselystä saatava data säilytetään nimettömänä ja vain tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitusta varten. Tutkimuksen tulokset tulevat julkisiksi Jyväskylän yliopiston JYX-alustalle, josta tutkielmat löytyvät. Takaan, että sinua on mahdotonta tunnistaa tutkimuksen tuloksista. Kyselyn voi missä vaiheessa tahansa jättää kesken, jos niin haluaa. Täten siihen asti annetut vastaukset eivät tallennu. Lisätietoja: https://www.jyu.fi/fi/yliopisto/tietosuoja/tietosuoja-jyvaskylan-yliopistossa

Tutkimuksen viralliset dokumentit

Tiedote tutkimuksesta tutkimukseen osallistuvalle

HUOM! Etenethän kyselyssä kysymys kerrallaan, sillä osassa kysymyksistä ponnahtaa tarkentava kysymys esiin vastausvalinnan jälkeen. Kysymykset on numeroitu ja asetettu numerojärjestykseen. Jos välistä puuttuu kysymys, se johtuu siitä ettei vastausta ole annettu edelliseen kysymykseen.

Klikkaamalla Seuraava, ymmärrät osallistuvasi tutkimukseen ja kysely alkaa.

Seuraava

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

1. Ikä?

2. Sukupuoli?

- Nainen
- Mies
- Muu
- En halua vastata

3. Asuinpaikka?

- Seinäjoki
- jokin muu kunta Etelä-Pohjanmaalla
- asun Etelä-Pohjanmaan ulkopuolella

4. JymyJussit perustettiin syksyllä 2012 Nurmon Jymyn ja Seinäjoen Maila-Jussien seurafuusiona. Ennen fuusiota, koitko olevasi jommankumman perustajaseuran kannattaja?

- ◯ Kyllä, Nurmon Jymyn
- ◯ Kyllä, Seinäjoen Maila-Jussien
- ◯ En/seurasin molempia

5. Pitäisikö mielestäsi edellä mainittuja perustajaseuroja tuoda enemmän esille JymyJussien viestinnässä ja markkinoinnissa?

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ Ei

6. Jos vastasit Kyllä, minkälaista sisältöä haluaisit nähdä?

6. Jos vastasit Ei, miksi mielestäsi seuroja ei pitäisi tuoda esille osana markkinointia ja viestintää?

7. Pidätkö itseäsi JymyJussien kannattajana/fanina?

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ En
- ◯ En osaa sanoa

8. Jos vastasit Kyllä, kuvaile lyhyesti asioita, joiden perusteella pidät itseäsi kannattajana/fanina.

8. Jos vastasit En, kuvaile syitä miksi et pidä itseäsi kannattajana/fanina.

8. Jos vastasit En osaa sanoa, kuvaile lyhyesti miksi et.

9. Käyn paikan päällä katsomassa pelejä (koti-/vieraspeli)...

- ◯ Harvoin
- ◯ Joskus
- ◯ Usein
- ◯ Aina kun mahdollista

10. Jos haluan vastaanottaa tietoa JymyJusseihin liittyen, ensisijainen tiedonlähteeni on...

- ◯ Seuran Facebook-sivu
- ◯ jymyjussit.fi
- ◯ Instagram @jymyjussitseinajoki
- ◯ Twitter @JymyJussit
- ◯ jokin muu

11. Kuvaile lyhyesti, miksi valitsit tämän vaihtoehdon.

12. Onko Seinäjoki, seinäjokisuus ja/tai eteläpohjalaisuus mielestäsi läsnä JymyJussien sosiaalisen median viestinnässä ja markkinoinnissa?

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ Ei

13. Jos vastasit Kyllä, miten em. asiat mielestäsi välittyvät? Kuvaile lyhyesti.

13. Jos vastasit Ei, mitä mielestäsi uupuu ja koetko, että em. asioita pitäisi välittyä enemmän? Kuvaile lyhyesti.

14. Koetko, että sinulla on mielikuva JymyJussien identiteetistä?

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ En

15. Jos vastasit En, kuvaile lyhyesti miksi et.

15. Jos vastasit Kyllä, kuvaile lyhyesti millainen JymyJussien identiteetti mielestäsi on ja koetko pystyväsi samaistumaan siihen.

16. Onko JymyJussit mielestäsi aktiivinen vuorovaikuttaja sosiaalisessa mediassa?

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ Ei

17. Jos vastasit Kyllä, mistä aktiivisuus mielestäsi koostuu? Kuvaile lyhyesti.

17. Jos vastasit Ei, miten epäaktiivisuus mielestäsi ilmenee? Kuvaile lyhyesti.

18. Onko aktiivinen vuorovaikutus mielestäsi tärkeää seuraan/joukkueeseen samaistumisen kannalta?

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ Ei

19. Jos vastasit Kyllä, kuvaile lyhyesti miksi.

19. Jos vastasit Ei, kuvaile lyhyesti miksi ei.

20. Vielä lopuksi yleisellä tasolla: millaista sisältöä toivoisit JymyJussien mediatiimiltä jatkossa? (esim. enemmän videoita/kuvia, tekstejä)

Appendix 2

Second online questionnaire

Kysely JymyJussien seuraajille (Kevät 2021)

Tämä kysely on osa pro gradu -tutkielmaa, jossa pyritään selvittämään urheiluseuran tilannetta seuraajien näkökulmasta: millainen suhde seuraajilla on joukkuetta ja seuraa kohtaan ja miten se ilmenee vuorovaikuttamisena sosiaalisessa mediassa. Kyselyn perusteella tarkastellaan syksyllä laaditun, JymyJussien sosiaalisen median markkinointia/viestintää kehittävän toimintasuunnitelman toteutumista.

Tietoa tutkimuksesta

Tutustuthan alla oleviin tietoihin, ennen kuin vastaat. Jos kyselyä tai tutkimusta kohden herää kysymyksiä, olettehan yhteydessä Tero Tyynelään: tero.j.tyynela@student.jyu.fi

Mikä kysely ja kuka sen toteuttaa?

Tämän kyselyn toteuttaa Tero Tyynelä, osana maisterin tutkintoaan Jyväskylän yliopistossa. Tutkimuksessa kartoitetaan JymyJussien sosiaalisen median seuraajien suhdetta seuraa kohtaan, yhteisön ja kulttuurin näkökulmasta. Tutkimus teetetään yhteistyössä Jymy-Jussit Oy:n kanssa. Tutkimuksessa käytettävät menetelmät noudattavat Tutkimuseettisen neuvottelukunnan (TENK) laatimia periaatteita ihmisiin kohdistuvista tutkimuksista. Lisätietoja: https://tenk.fi/sites/tenk.fi/files/Ihmistieteiden_eettisen_ennakkoarvioinnin_ohje_2019.pdf

Sovinko osallistujaksi ja mitä tutkimus sisältää?

Jos olet **vähintään 15-vuotias,** voit osallistua tutkimukseen. Tutkimus sisältää kyselyn, jossa kysymykset liittyvät seuraaviin aihealueisiin: perustiedot vastaajasta sekä vastaajan suhde/osallistuneisuus JymyJussien seuraamiseen ja kannattamiseen. Kyselyyn vastaaminen vie aikaa noin 7 minuuttia. **HUOM! Voit vastata kyselyyn, vaikka et olisi vastannut syksyllä toteutettuun kyselyyn.**

Tietosuoja

Tutkimukseen osallistuminen tämän kyselyn myötä on täysin vapaaehtoista ja luottamuksellista. Kaikki kyselystä saatava data säilytetään nimettömänä ja vain tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitusta varten. Tutkimuksen tulokset tulevat julkisiksi Jyväskylän yliopiston JYX-alustalle, josta tutkielmat löytyvät. Takaan, että sinua on mahdotonta tunnistaa tutkimuksen

tutkimuksen tuloksista. Kyselyn voi missä vaiheessa tahansa jättää kesken, jos niin haluaa. Täten siihen asti annetut vastaukset eivät tallennu. Lisätietoja: https://www.jyu.fi/fi/yliopisto/tietosuoja/tietosuoja-jyvaskylan-yliopistossa

Tutkimuksen viralliset dokumentit
Tiedote tutkimuksesta tutkimukseen osallistuvalle

HUOM! Etenethän kyselyssä kysymys kerrallaan, sillä osassa kysymyksistä ponnahtaa tarkentava kysymys esiin vastausvalinnan jälkeen. Kysymykset on numeroitu ja asetettu numerojärjestykseen. Jos välistä puuttuu kysymys, se johtuu siitä ettei vastausta ole annettu edelliseen kysymykseen.

Klikkaamalla Seuraava, ymmärrät osallistuvasi tutkimukseen ja kysely alkaa.

Seuraava

JymyJussit

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

1. Ikä? *

- alle 18v
- 18-29v
- 30-39v
- 40-49v
- 50-59v
- 60-69v
- 70v tai yli

2. Sukupuoli? *

- Nainen
- Mies
- Muu
- En halua vastata

3. Asuinpaikka? *

- ◯ Seinäjoki
- ◯ jokin muu kunta Etelä-Pohjanmaalla
- ◯ asun Etelä-Pohjanmaan ulkopuolella

4. Vastasitko lokakuussa 2020 toteutettuun kyselyyn? *

- ◯ Kyllä
- ◯ En

5. Mikä seuraavista vaihtoehdoista kuvaa parhaiten suhdettasi JymyJusseihin? *

- ◯ Kannattaja/fani
- ◯ Aktiivinen seuraaja
- ◯ Satunnainen seuraaja
- ◯ Ei suhdetta
- ◯ En osaa sanoa

6. Kuvaile lyhyesti, miksi valitsit tämän vaihtoehdon. Mainitse myös, jos vastauksesi on muuttunut viime kyselystä.
*****

7. Onko JymyJussien sosiaalinen media vastannut odotuksiasi tämän harjoituskauden aikana?
*

- ◯ On
- ◯ Ei ole
- ◯ En osaa sanoa

8. Mikä on tehnyt viestinnästä onnistunutta mielestäsi? *

8. Mikä on mielestäsi mennyt pieleen viestinnässä? *

9. Onko harjoituskauden viestinnästä välittynyt mielestäsi Seinäjoki ja/tai seinäjokisuus?
*

- ◯ On
- ◯ Ei ole
- ◯ En osaa sanoa

10. Kuvaile lyhyesti, miten se on näkynyt. *

10. Kuvaile lyhyesti, miksi mielestäsi ei ole. *

11. Kerro halutessasi, millaista sisältöä toivot pelikaudella toteutettavan?

12. Kun JymyJussit julkaisevat sosiaalisessa mediassa, vuorovaikutan (tykkään, jaan, kommentoin jne.) julkaisua...
*

- ◯ Lähes aina
- ◯ Usein
- ◯ Joskus
- ◯ Harvoin
- ◯ En koskaan

13. Laita seuraavat julkaisutyypit numerojärjestykseen kiinnostavimmasta vähiten kiinnostavaan (1=kiinnostavin, 6=vähiten kiinnostava).
*

Kuva	Valitse
Video (lyhyt)	Valitse

Video (pitkä)	Valitse
Livestriimi (pelistä, pelireissulta)	Valitse
Otteluseuranta Twitterissä/Facebookissa	Valitse
Pidempi kirjoitus (blogi, uutinen)	Valitse

14. Onko klassinen, kirjoitettu otteluraportti mielestäsi tätä päivää? *

- ◯ Kyllä on
- ◯ Ei ole
- ◯ En osaa sanoa

15. Kuvaile lyhyesti, miksi. *

15. Kuvaile lyhyesti, miksi ei ja missä muodossa mieluiten vastaanottaisit informaation ottelun tapahtumista.
*****

16. Katsoitko Sotkamo-peleistä ja VEKSELI-turnauksesta toteutettuja lähetyksiä? *

- ◯ Kyllä, livenä
- ◯ Kyllä, jälkeenpäin tallenteesta
- ◯ En katsonut

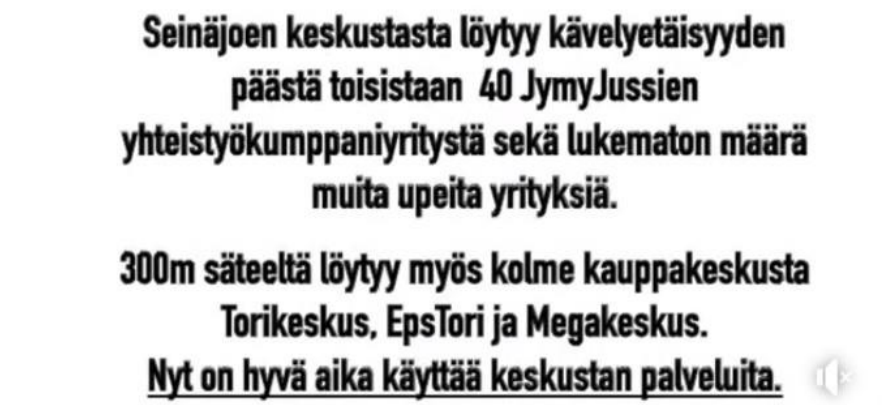
17. Anna halutessasi palautetta lähetyksistä.

Appendix 3

Examples of the social media posts

JymyJussit Seinäjoki
Published by Jukka Marttala · March 26 at 10:58 AM ·

Aurinko paistaa ja maailman mullistanut Korona pandemiakin alkaa hiljalleen hiipua.
Suomessa ja Seinäjoella on hyvä elää ja yrittää.
Seinäjoen keskusta on täynnä upeita yrityksiä, joista saa huippuhyvää palvelua.
JymyJussien yhteistyöverkostosta 40 yritystä toimii keskustassa kävelymatkan etäisyydellä toisistaan.
Käythän sinäkin asioimassa heidän liikkeissään👍... See More



3,150
People Reached

214
Engagements

Boost Post