



# Consumer Behavior Development During the Covid19 Pandemic

**JYP-fans**

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## **Kulutuskäyttötymisen muutos pandemian aikana, JYP**

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### **Tiivistelmä**

Koronavirus pandemia ravisutti koko maailmaa ja aiheutti taloudellisia haasteita monelle eri teollisuuden alalle. Urheiluteollisuus oli eräs näistä aloista, mihin pandemia vaikutti suuresti. Viranomaiset joko sulki kokonaan urheilukatsomot tai päästivät vain rajallisen määrän katsojia katsomoihin. Suomalaisen pääsarjatason jääkiekkoseura JYPille lipputulot ovat tärkeä tulonlähde, mutta heidän katsojalukunsa ovat pudonneet dramaattisesti koronaa edeltävästä 2018–2019 kaudesta ennestään päättyneeseen kauteen 2021–2022. Tutkimus tutki oliko pandemia vastuussa muutoksesta vai vaikuttiko kyseiseen trendiin muitakin muuttujia. Niinpä tutkimus pyrki selvittämään mitkä muuttujat vaikuttavat haluun osallistua JYPin kotiotteluihin ja miten nämä muuttujat ovat muuttuneet viime vuosien aikana. Dataa kerättiin kyselytutkimuksen avulla ja kyselyyn vastaajat valikoitiin pääosin sattumalta. JYPin kausikorttilaiset saivat kyselyn sähköpostinsa, mutta muut vastaajat pystyivät osallistumaan kyselyyn JYPin somen kautta. Tulokset analysoitiin riskiintaulukoinnilla ja yksittäisten muuttujien tarkastelulla. Tutkimus kävi läpi useita muuttujia, jotka vaikuttivat haluun osallistua urheilutapahtumiin ja JYPin kotiotteluihin. Kuitenkin silmiinpistävimät tulokset kyselyssä osoittivat, että pandemia, huono urheilullinen menestys, ottelutapahtuma, ja sosiaalinen kanssakäyminen olivat tärkeimpiä muuttujia, mitkä vaikuttivat osallistumiseen. Nämä muuttujat ovat joko helpottuneet tai pysyneet samoina. Esimerkiksi pandemia on siirtymässä ohi, mutta huonoon urheilulliseen menestykseen ei ole tullut muutosta. Tutkimus myös sai selville, että urheiluseuraajien digitaalinen kulutus oli lisääntynyt pandemian aikana sekä että pandemia kiihdytti urheiluteollisuuden verkkosisällön kehittymistä. Työn johtopäätös oli, että JYP pystyy parantamaan katsojalukujansa pärjäämällä paremmin kaukalossa ja kehittämällä heidän ottelutapahtumaansa. Lisäksi pandemian väistymisen myötä, tulevilla kausilla ei pitäisi tulla koronan aiheuttamia rajoituksia ja siten sotkea urheilutapahtumien järjestämistä.

### **Avainsanat (asiasanat)**

Kuluttajakäyttötymisen muutos, kuluttaja-asenteet, pandemia, kyselytutkimus, urheiluteollisuus, urheilun kulutus, jääkiekko, JYP

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### **Abstract**

The coronavirus pandemic shook the whole world and created economic hardship for many industries because governments imposed strict restrictions and people were advised to socially distance. The sports industry was one of the industries that the pandemic impacted a lot. Restrictions either completely prohibited fans of entering sporting venues or enabled entrance to only a limited number of spectators. Finnish elite ice hockey league club JYP relies on matchday spectators as an important source of income. However, JYP's home game attendance rates have dropped dramatically from the pre-pandemic 2018-2019 season to the previously finished 2021-2022 season. It was studied whether the pandemic was responsible for this shift or were there other variables which also influenced consumer behavior. Research questions on what variables affect the desire to attend JYP home games and how these variables have changed during the past years were investigated. Data of the study was gathered by administering a survey on JYP's social media which was completed by a primarily random sample, JYP season ticket owners received the survey via email. The results were analyzed with univariate analysis and cross tabulation. The study covered a multitude of variables which influence attendance; however, the most important variables according to the survey were the pandemic, poor athletic performance, the live event itself, and the socializing at events. Furthermore, some of these variables have gotten better and some have stayed the same. For example, the pandemic was passing but poor athletic performance has been continuous. It was also discovered that digital consumption of consumers has increased during the pandemic and that the pandemic accelerated the development of online content in the sports industry. The conclusion was that JYP can improve attendance rates by getting better athletic results and innovating on its live event. In addition, the pandemic should ease and not interfere with participation or organization of events during future following seasons.

### **Keywords/tags (subjects)**

Consumer behavior development, consumer attitudes, pandemic, survey, sports industry, sports consumption, ice hockey, JYP

### **Miscellaneous (Confidential information)**

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# 1 Introduction

The Covid19 pandemic has strained the world for over two years. There is no doubt that the event and sport industries have been major sufferers, with events being cancelled and matches being played to empty stadiums. Needless to say, the economic challenges these industries have faced are substantial due to the lockdowns and restrictions that the pandemic has brought along with it. Top tier sports organizations can generally manage without live audiences to a certain extent due to other revenue streams such as prominent media revenues and more significant sponsorship deals. However, for most commercial sports, ticket sales are increasingly essential the closer we reach the grassroots level of sports. Without customers in stands, businesses miss out on revenue from tickets, concessions, and merchandise. Additionally, the atmosphere of sporting events is dulled down when playing in empty arenas. A remarkable decrease in potential revenues may have also forced some companies to result to lay-offs.

However, the autumn of 2021 looked better for Finnish professional ice hockey, Liiga, organizations. They were permitted to fill their arenas with maximum capacity, yet attendance has been underwhelming (Loukkola, 2021). The same applies to the case organization and assignor of this study, JYP. During the 2018-2019 season before the pandemic, JYP's home game attendance average was 3748 spectators per game (Joukkue tilastot: Runkosarja 2018-2019: Tilastot, n.d.). Following to the 2021-2022 season, their home game average was only a measly 2285 spectators per game (Joukkue tilastot: Runkosarja 2021-2022: Tilastot, n.d.). The aim of this study was to ascertain the possible consumer behavior changes that might have caused the significant decrease in attendance and propose possible solutions to improve the imminent situation in order to get fans to return to JYP's home arena. Additionally, to the repercussions caused by the pandemic, we must also consider other variables which contribute for not attending live events for example, changes in consumer's life situation and attitudes, costs, sporting performance, the live event itself, and digitalization, to mention a few. By turning data into knowledge, we can identify these different factors that affect consumer behavior and its changes and deduce what operations JYP needs to improve or do differently, so they can increase their attendance rates and conduct more stable and profitable business as a sports organization.

In an American study, conducted during around October 2021, approximately 2400 adults were surveyed about attending live events. According to the study, 38% of respondents claimed they will not attend sporting events because of Covid19 worries. Furthermore, 51% of respondents said that they had attended a live event during the first nine months of 2021, while only 14% of respondents had attended a sporting event during the same period (Segal, 2021). From this we can notice that Covid19 has made an effect on consumer behavior in the form of reluctance to participate in sporting events due to health concerns. However, it is important to note the fact that half of the respondents had attended live events, yet only 14% of them had attended sporting events. Reasons for this could be the consumer's more skeptical attitudes towards sporting events regarding Covid safety compared to other events or simply just the larger interest towards other live events.

According to Ahonen and Swart (2021), the consumption of spectator sports needs to be re-evaluated particularly in live events in stadiums and online, through implementation of immersive technologies, and the increasing popularity of E-sports. Ahonen and Swart continue to claim that digitalization will be a central factor, and additionally flexibility and persistence are necessary for sports organization to manage during Covid-19. Thus, due to restrictions caused by the pandemic, sports fans have been forced to consume sports primarily through digital platforms and as a result broadcasts and streams of traditional sports have innovatively developed.

## **1.1 About JYP**

JYP is a professional ice hockey organization that was founded almost a hundred years ago in Jyväskylä, Finland in 1923. They have played ice hockey in the Finnish Elite League, Liiga, since 1985. They have won the Finnish championship in 2009 and 2012 and they also won the Champions Hockey League in 2018, which is a top European Club competition. Their home games are played at Hippos in the LähiTapiola Areena, which has the capacity of 4437 spectators (In English, 2021). JYP was a consistent powerhouse in the Finnish league during the 2010's, finishing consistently in the top four, but recently they have been struggling both inside and outside of the rink with poor athletic results and economic issues. They finished last for the first time in club history during the 2020-2021 season and they did not make the playoffs during the 2021-2022 season either.

JYP's market area is primarily the Jyväskylä district, which consists of approximately 140 thousand inhabitants. However, JYP can be considered as a Central Finland flagship as JYP is the only Liiga-organization in the region. The population of the entire Central Finland is around 270 thousand (Väestörakenteen ENNAKKOTIEDOT, 2022). JYP has contracts with approximately 30 ice hockey players from multiple nationalities along with coaching and other sports staff and they employ office staff for regular business operations as well, for example sales and marketing. JYP is active on multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube and their games are broadcasted on Cmore's services. They have lots of sponsors and partners which mainly consist of other local businesses with their most known and associated sponsor being a tractor company called Valtra. JYP's contestants are primarily the other 14 Liiga-organizations scattered around Finland. However, other European clubs can be seen as athletic competitors as well due to potential Champions Hockey League games and the endeavor for players in the player markets. Outside of athletic success, JYP competes for consumers' free time, which means that competition is fierce when it comes from potentially all other forms of entertainment from for example, Netflix, music concerts, fairs, and even other sports.

## **1.2 Objectives and structure of research**

The objective of this study was to gain deeper knowledge of the consumer behavior of JYP customers, from season ticket holders to occasional single ticket purchasers, regarding participation in JYP's home games. In other words, the study attempted to pinpoint the different variables that may explain the lack of audience in JYP's home games. Some of these variables might have been for example, the aftermath of the Covid19 pandemic, previously mentioned poor performance, cost, or a more long-term result of digitalization. Moreover, the findings of this study would potentially reveal consumer attitudes, which are vital in analyzing the required procedures needed to increase the number of spectators.

The paper will firstly explain the research methodology used in this report and the reasoning behind them. Then it will move on to elaborate on consumer behavior shifts in sports during the pandemic and the overall effects of Covid19 in sports. Afterwards, the results of the researcher's own study will be examined in detail, followed by analysis. The report will conclude in discussion of the findings and possible solutions to the research problem.

### **1.3 Motivation**

The motivation for this research stems from the large role ice hockey has played in the researcher's life. The researcher has followed Liiga and JYP from a young age and has also played ice hockey as a junior. Therefore, the opportunity of having JYP as an assignor is a privilege and was made possible through the connections of the researcher's study advisor. The idea of the research problem came from the researcher noticing the low attendance numbers in JYP home games and throughout Liiga and seeing conversation about the issue in various media outlets.

The motivation of the assignor, JYP, is related to business activity. As a professional sports organization, a substantial portion of their revenue come from people attending live events, which consists of consumers buying tickets to home games and possibly spending more on concessions and merchandise during events. For that reason, underwhelming attendance rates in home games are a risk and it is important for JYP to find ways to again attract customers back to the stands night after night ensuring financial success. Therefore, there is a clear demand for this research by JYP and possibly other sports organizations as well.

## **2 Research Methodology**

The following chapter will explain the research design, problem, and methods of this paper. Afterwards, the reader should be enlightened on the purpose of the study, why its beneficial, what questions will be answered, and how the research is conducted and why.

### **2.1 Research Design**

The assignor of this research, as previously mentioned, is JYP. According to them, they have not conducted a similar study in recent years, so this is also a good opportunity for them.

This paper will be implementing a cross-sectional research design utilizing surveys. Cross-sectional research gathers data primarily through questionnaires or structured interviews to generate quantitative or numerical data in a single point in time (Bryman et al., 2019, p.58-59). Generally, the surveys and interviews also contain more than two variables. The gained quantitative data may

provide similarities or patterns that can be linked between variables. Usually in cross-sectional research there is more than one case, however, in this research we want collect data for a statistical analysis by reaching as many respondents as possible solely concerning JYP's consumer behavior.

This research focuses on JYP, its consumer base and their attitudes during the near conclusion of the pandemic. A body of data will be created by administering a questionnaire to consumers regarding variables which may influence participation of JYP home games and consumer behavior.

## 2.2 Research Problem

The research problem was the lack of spectators and insufficient knowledge of customer stances. The need for this research has risen specifically because of the lockdowns and restrictions caused by the pandemic and their potential influence on the willingness of consumers to return back to JYP's arena. To gain higher attendance figures, we must know the motivation behind consumers attending or not attending JYP's home games, what kind of obstacles are there regarding participation, and what would make the consumers more engaged to home games. Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. *What variables affect the desire to attend JYP's home games?*
2. *How have these variables changed during the past two years?*

Spectators are an important source of income for all professional sports clubs. Playing for empty arenas during the 2020/2021 season caused all Liiga organizations a deficit and CEOs reported that continuing to play without audience will cause severe economic problems (Valta, 2021). Even though JYP and other teams have been allowed to fill their arenas during the 2021/2022 season, it is still economically concerning that JYP is not attracting as many viewers as before. Therefore, it is beneficial for JYP to understand the reasons why, so they can find ways to lure more consumers to the stands and furthermore, conduct more profitable and economically stable business. However, the findings of this research might also help other sports organizations because sports fans and consumers may have similar mindsets, ideas, and behavior.

## 2.3 Research Method

According to Bryman et al. (2019, p.73), the difference between research design and research method is that a research design is a framework for creating research evidence aligned with specific quality criteria, such as reliability, replicability and validity, while a research method is a technique for gathering data. Research methods differ whether they are quantitative or qualitative. Basically, quantitative research deals with numerical data, while qualitative research is more concerned with words and sentences, for example descriptive experiences. Bryman et al. (2019, pp.591-592) claim that quantitative research tends to be more deductive, which means that it is trying to prove or elaborate on an established hypothesis. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is inductive, which means that the hypothesis is usually formed after the actual research.

Since this study was about consumer behavior, there was a need for reaching plenty of consumers. By implementing a self-completion questionnaire online, we can reach lots of consumers easily and quickly. Other advantages to self-completion questionnaires are that they are cheap and more convenient for responders (Bryman et al., 2019, p.233-235). However, respondents might have trouble with answering questions without help and researchers may receive stub answers. Therefore, it is important to make the questionnaire clear to understand and include open questions. With a mixture of closed and open questions in the survey we can receive versatile information on variables we want to learn more about but also leave room for the respondents to reveal new insights. The risk of low response rates should be mitigated by providing an incentive to complete the survey; thus, the survey contained a raffle with a chance to win a 40€ voucher to the JYP fan shop.

The survey had around 20 questions in total, and it was composed of primarily closed multiple choice questions along with a few open-ended ones. It begins by asking the respondents age, gender, and professional status, while moving on to questions related to the relationship they have with JYP, activity of participation in live events, and variables that affect participation and their changes during the past couple of years. Season ticket owners were selected as a part of the sample however, the rest of the sample was a simple random sample, which means respondents participated in the survey by chance during the time it was online (Bryman et al. 2019, p.596). When the survey was published, season ticket owners personally received a link to the web-based survey via email, while others had the opportunity to answer the survey through JYP's Facebook pages.

The survey was live for approximately a week, and it gained 403 replies. Before publication, the survey was approved by both JYP and the researcher's study advisor.

Even though this study does not have a specific hypothesis, it will be using a quantitative research method. According to the University of Jyväskylä (2021), quantitative studies are used to research causation and connection between variables or phenomena as well as frequency with the help of numbers and statistics. By quantifying the data, we can pinpoint the major factors contributing to consumer behavior and the lack of audience in JYP's home games. Measuring the data enables us to also specify the fine differences between consumer attitudes, which is important as various moderate stances are more difficult to recognize than extreme views. Measurement also helps us to estimate the level of correlation more accurately between concepts and variables. (Bryman et al., 2019, p.168). Moreover, qualitative data from open-ended questions will elaborate more on collected quantitative data.

This report will mainly be using univariate analysis, which is the analysis of a single variable at a time (Bryman et al., 2019, pp.318-321). The results of the survey are presented using with the help of diagrams and charts. Relationships between variables are analyzed through cross-tabulation, which enable two or more variables to be analyzed at the same time, so that their possible relationship can be also examined (Bryman et al., 2019, p.322). Cross-tabulation will be useful for example, when comparing demographic results. Interpretation of data in the conclusion is made based on the results of the survey and the support of the literature review.

## **2.4 Ethics in Conducting Research**

According to Britannica, ethics deals with issues of what is morally good, bad, right, and wrong regardless of the level of severity. Ethics is heavily related to the act of decision making and the concept of value. (Ethics, n.d.). When conducting research, ethical concerns are primarily divided into four areas: potential physical or mental harm caused to participants, insufficient informed consent, invasion of privacy, and deceit. (Diener and Crandall, 1978, as cited in Bryman et al. 2019, p.114). Therefore, it crucial as the researcher to conduct research as safely as possible, be transparent and provide enough information to participants, ask necessary permissions, and to be critical and honest with others and oneself. In this research, it is important to explain to participants the true purpose of the research in detail, ask relevant and appropriate questions in the survey,

provide anonymity, and carefully handle collected personal data. Respondents optionally had the chance to participate in a raffle by giving their contact information. After the raffle winner was decided, all received contact information were deleted. Furthermore, it is essential to avoid plagiarism and give credit to cited sources.

### **3 Literature Review**

In this chapter, it will be discussed how the Covid 19 pandemic has affected sports in general and possibly changed consumer behavior. However, before we examine these issues, it is important to understand what sport is, what sports consumption means and what influences sports consumption.

#### **3.1 Sports and Sports Consumption**

According to Thompson et al. (2021), from Britannica Encyclopedia, sports is essentially a form of play. In principle, sports is play which is organized, competitive and usually includes physical traits. However, the physical aspect of sports is debatable for example in the case of electronic sports or Esports, which is organized and competitive playing of video games. Sports is regulated and has sets of rules in which athletes and teams attempt to outperform other contestants and win. Therefore, sports necessarily have an objective or goal whereas regular play can simply be aimless leisure. Furthermore, Thompson et al. (2021) add self-motivation in the definition of sports, so that athletes partake in sports due to their own interests.

Sports are ingrained in human culture and have long traditions as sports have been played for thousands of years with different cultures having their own games. For example, the first known Olympic games were held in ancient Greece in 776 BCE (Thompson et al., 2021), while the first modern day Olympics were organized in 1896 in Athens. Moreover, globalization, from the sports perspective, resulted in the Olympics and other modern sports becoming popular worldwide. For example, the British Empire spread football, which is the world's most popular sport, cricket, and rugby around the world, while its former colonies the U.S. and Canada gave basketball, volleyball, baseball, and ice hockey to the world. Therefore, one might say that major global sports have been highly influenced by western cultures. Furthermore, Thompson and colleagues elaborate

how globalization caused the formation of international sporting federations and organizations, such as the International Olympic Committee and FIFA.

Sports started to massively commercialize during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thompson et al. (2021) state how in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sports fans were limited to sports journalism and radio to follow results, had they not been able to go see a match live. Soon after the outset of television broadcasts of sports in the 1950's, sports organizations started the sale of broadcasting rights, creating completely new possibilities and stream of revenue. Television broadcasts also had a larger potential of generating new fans. Thompson and colleagues (2021) continue how due to the growth of cultural economy and the development of technologies during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, sports had become vastly commercialized with broadcast media, sponsorships, and merchandising. Nowadays the sports industry is a multi-billion-dollar industry where sports is heavily tied with mass media. During the pandemic, the sport industry immensely relied on broadcasts and live streams to fulfil rights contracts and maintain revenue streams, which resulted in the innovation and development of broadcasts and live streams as is elaborated in chapter 3.4.

There are multiple ways one can consume sports. Smith and Stewart (2015, pp.37-38), divide sports consumption into four different categories: goods consumption, service consumption, participants and volunteers, and fans and spectators. Sports goods consumers buy physical sports-related products, such as equipment, clothing, merchandise, and licensed products, and practically anything else that is linked with sports and fitness. On the other hand, examples of sports related services that may be consumed include for example, gyms and other sporting facilities, education, and betting but not spectating or participating in sports as they are their own categories. The third category of sports consumption was engaging in voluntary work for example, at a sporting event, or participating directly in sports in sports clubs or organizations on all levels. Finally, Smith and Stewart (2015, pp. 37-38) define the last category of sports consumers as fans and spectators, who keenly follow sports performances primarily in the professional level but also possibly in lower sporting levels as well, by attending live events and watch games from broadcasts and streams. According to Chan-Olmsted (2017), digital media is used by fans to deepen, improve, and supplement sports consumption with statistics, analysis, connecting with athletes and teams, and socializing with friends and other members of the community. Furthermore, along with broadcasts, mobile applications, websites, and podcasts are among the most popular platforms of sports fans as

well as the most utilized social media platforms being predictably Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube. Chan-Olmsted (2017) explains how sports media is consumed bit by bit throughout the day through social media and sports apps, instead of during a reserved time frame. However, Smith and Stewart (2015, pp. 37-38) elaborate how spectators and fans are very multi-faceted as some are fanatical fans for example, ultras, and others are more casual spectators, which causes their consumer behavior to greatly differ. For example, more committed fans may engage in fan clubs, fantasy sports, sports forums, other excess media.

Furthermore, to express the variety of different types of spectators, Smith, and Stewart (2015, pp. 45-46) categorize spectators in five different groups, which have different motives and behavior. Passionate and reclusive enthusiasts greatly identify with their favorite clubs and want to see their team win; however, the difference between these two is the frequency of attendance. Passionate enthusiasts attend games often while the support of reclusive enthusiasts is dormant and rarely attend games live. The third category of fans is the so called "glory hunter", who cheers for highly successful teams that win a lot. However, their loyalty to a club is weak as they may switch preferred teams if their current team starts frequently losing. The remaining two categories are more interested in other factors than seeing a specific team win. Smith and Stewart (2015, pp. 45-46) explain how casual spectators are predominantly keen about entertainment value, comfort, and a tight game instead of purely winning. On the other hand, constant losing will cause even the casual spectator to lose interest. Casual spectators attend occasionally when there is an upcoming interesting and upscale opponent against their team, but they also might attend other even match ups as well. The final group of spectators are aficionados who interest themselves with the tactics, skills, and aesthetics of a sport. Aficionados participate in live events more frequently than casual spectators; however, they are also unconcerned of the final outcome of the game. Instead, they want to see exquisite individual and team performances in quality venues as they are more fascinated in the game itself rather than any one club even though they may still have a team they favor. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, pp.45-46.)

## Sports fan motives

Considering from the perspective of sports consumers, in this case spectators and fans of a sport, they want to fill their social needs and gain the feeling of belonging while participating in gameday events and interacting with other fans. Furthermore, socializing in the community may increase self-esteem through things like mutual respect and recognition amongst peers. According to Jason Simmons et al (2020, p.80), consuming sports satisfies a multitude of natural human needs and there is a relevant correlation between positive mental wellbeing and club identification. Other needs to engage in sports consumption may be related to for example, needs to achieve, joy of entertainment, personal growth, family bonding and esthetics. Indeed, according to Smith and Stewart (2015, p. 39), researchers have divided the motivations behind sports fans into three rubrics: psychological, socio-cultural, and self-concept.

Sports events provide a social setting where family, friends and other supporters may gather and spend time. However, if socializing and filling social needs is a priority, the sporting event may be easily replaced by other activities which fill those needs as well (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.41). The need of social interaction via sports is well shown in Alex Gang's (2020, p.220) study of fandom in Germany. They found out that the football fans inability of socializing around the stadium premise due to Covid restrictions caused fans to interact more with each other online. Every football club's fan club in the study reported elevated rates of website visits and use of social media. Furthermore, there was a significant rise in activity in instant messenger group chats such as WhatsApp. This shows how regardless of the restrictions and breaks in football, the fans still find ways to fill their social needs and sense of belonging by resorting to online communication.

Sports may help people connect and identify with their nationality, race, or culture, through athletes and national teams, and therefore motivate them to attend based on tradition (Smith & Stewart 2015, p. 41). For example, ice hockey is the most popular sport in Finland and there is a lot of cultural phenomena related to the national ice hockey team Leijonat. One example is the huge popularity of 4<sup>th</sup> line player Marko Anttila, who surprisingly led Finland to a World Championship in 2019 and basically became a domestic icon.

Psychological motives include the stimulation of emotions and sensations, which sports create. For example, fans can feel enjoyment and excitement when winning (Smith & Stewart 2015, pp. 39-40), but on the other hand anxiety and disappointment when losing, both of which are adrenaline inducing. Moreover, sports events are socially acceptable places to shout and cheer in order to blow off steam. Therefore, sports provide a platform for escapism, to take a break from the everyday mundane life and reduce stress. Drama and entertainment are the essence of sports, where the audience is a major part of the act, gasping at skillful plays and roaring when a goal is scored. Smith and Stewart elaborate how the sight of large crowds, engaging intermission entertainment, and aesthetics add to the dramatic aspect of sports. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, pp.39-40.)

Self-concept motivations are related to identification with a team or sport (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p. 42). Obviously, the extent of identification and fandom vary from person to person. Nonetheless, fans may feel the need to partake in a community with similar interests, feel the sense of belonging, to be a part of something more significant than a single individual. Additionally, team colors, badges, other insignia, mottos, and chants enhance tribal unity and connection with athletes and rival other contesting teams and fans. Furthermore, the success of a supported team may cause a feeling of achievement and confidence in fans, on the other hand, fans become frustrated and letdown when the preferred team's performance is lackluster. Therefore, fans empathize with the experience of joy from winning and the disappointment of defeat with the team and the community as an entity. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.42.)

According to Dwyer & Drayer (2010, as cited in Tamir, 2020 p.227) fandom in sports is one of the most remarkable and major social phenomena today. Millions of people consider sports being an essential part of their lives and its importance is deeper than solely the game. Tamir (2020, p.227) claims that being a sports fan can be thought of as a lifestyle which contains ceremonies and rituals along with a strong commitment to the club and its community.

### **3.2 What influences sports consumption**

Since people are individuals, consumers have different reasons for consuming sports. For example, as mentioned in the previous section, one may appreciate the skillful side of sports more while another values the social and communal side of sports. Smith and Stewart (2015, p.44), claim that research shows how demographic factors such as age, gender, education, income, and race might

influence consumption of sports. A few examples of this are for instance younger fans generally having more of a drive for belonging in a group than older fans, as well as females being more inclined on attending for social and family reasons than males. Moreover, males tend to be more motivated to consume sports because of for example, psychological stimulation, diversion, and self-esteem. On the other hand, consumers with higher education put less value on belonging in a group, stimulation, and self-esteem while consuming sports. However, Smith and Stewart (2015, p.44) note that there is insufficient evidence that demographic factors affect reasons to attend in a predictable or uniform manner. Instead, research can provide helpful information on the researched set of sports fans but different studies on different sports fans may result in different outcomes due to for example cultural reasons.

Other factors that influence consumption and fan behavior are primarily external from the consumers and therefore are not traits of the consumer. According to Smith and Stewart (2015, pp. 47-50), examples of these external factors may be an uneven competition where one side is almost certainly going to win, the venue, prices, level of income, special experience, promotional efforts, and other possible activities the consumer can choose instead. The sports marketer can have an impact on only some of these variables. Next, these variables will be elaborated on with more detail.

First, tight match ups with quality and skillful opposing sides will usually attract more spectators because the outcome of the game is uncertain, which creates more excitement and anticipation. The unpredictability of the result is what influences some consumers to attend and maybe even cause keener involvement and thus a more powerful experience. Nevertheless, if a team constantly loses, they will become more unappealing in the consumers' eyes and potentially lose patrons. On the other hand, some consumers may find enough pleasure in their preferred team winning that they are likely to attend even though the outcome of the match is apparent. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.48.)

Second, the quality of the venue is an essential factor which may influence attendance. The venue itself should add value to the experience of the customer through convenience, comfortability, accessibility, quality audiovisual media, tempting concessions, and amusing excess entertainment. Also, cleanliness and safety are appreciated by spectators. These aspects comprise a sports event,

so organizing a superior experience will be more attractive to consumers. Furthermore, if the event is organized in an outdoor stadium, bad weather conditions may decrease the desirability of attending. However, good weather may cause consumers to choose other activities instead thus the weather can influence participation even though the sports event would be held in an inside arena. Nonetheless, the presumption of a large forthcoming audience might inspire some consumers to attend as well. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.48.)

Regarding the organization of the sporting event, special experiences and occasions may bring more recognition and better value to the event and attract more spectators. Examples of special occasions may be for example, retiring the number of a cult player, record-breaking opportunities, unusual star athlete participation or a particularly dramatic setting to a competition, for example, a final. A special experience can also be for example, an all-inclusive private loge. However, promotional marketing such as, discounts, sales, and various ticket and concession packages, along with advertising upcoming games through for example, social media, direct marketing, and incentives like giveaways are common practices sports marketers can utilize to increase attendance and influence consumers. (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.50.)

Furthermore, ticket pricing may influence attendance to some degree, as more expensive tickets usually cause spectator rates to decrease. However, according to Smith and Stewart (2015, pp. 49-50), due to the notable loyalty of sports fans, the increase of ticket prices only causes a small effect on attendance. This loyalty explains the fact that sports fans are improbable of changing their preference by switching to another sport, league, or team even though expenses to follow the preferred sport increase. On the other hand, the income levels of consumers affect the consumption of sports. Consumers with higher incomes attend sports events less as they have more alternatives to spend their free time and money on, which brings us to our final point regarding the option of other activities. (Smith and Stewart, 2015, pp. 49-50.)

Smith and Stewart (2015, p.50.) mention, how other alternative activities are more likely to explain long-term reductions in attendance rates rather than short-term spectator fluctuations. The availability of other possible entertainment and recreation has never been as comprehensive as it is today since digitalization has brought a tremendous amount of entertainment to people's

homes as well, with streaming services, virtual reality, videogames, computers, and other technology.

### **3.3 Promotion of Sports Consumption**

Sports consumption can be enhanced through sports marketing and promotion. Sports marketing is simply any kind of marketing that is linked to sports (Masterclass, 2022). Therefore, there are different types of sports marketing regarding the relation to sports for example, marketing offerings through sports, like sponsorships, marketing sports organizations, and marketing of a sport or sports in general. The purpose of promotion is to create awareness and interest in a product, service, or event and therefore, grow sales by convincing existing customers to repurchase while attracting new customers (Kaser & Oelkers, 2020, p.240). However, Kaser and Oelkers (2020, p.5) state that before any marketing efforts can be initiated, the target market must be identified, and consumer behavior analyzed to ensure effectiveness of operations. A great example of promoting and marketing through sports is the Broadway play based on the New York Yankees called Bronx Bombers. The marketers targeted new customers, in this case sports fans, by having advertisements on ESPN and MLB Network, offering discounts for baseball juniors, free tickets for journalists and professional baseball players, and arranging traditional marketing near playing fields and promotional coasters in sports bars (Kaser & Oelkers, 2020, p.241). The campaign was reported of being a home run as first-time Broadway viewers claimed to be interested in attending future shows as well.

The four fundamental parts of the promotional mix includes advertising, sales promotion, publicity, and personal selling, Kaser and Oelkers (2020, p.241) continue. The proper use of a combination of these elements can increase sales. Next, we will go through these elements more thoroughly.

The purpose of advertising is to create awareness of the product and persuade consumers to make a purchase. Advertising helps consumers to compare different products, which generates tougher competition and drives innovation by forcing businesses to continuously improve their products to be better than other alternatives (Kaser & Oelkers, 2020, pp.244-245). Advertising is used to appeal to certain target markets and is good for introducing new products; however, pop-

ular brands use enormous amounts of resources to advertise their products. Platforms to advertise on include online media, social media, direct mail, TV, print media such as newspapers, and other traditional media like billboards and signs. Effective advertising is inventive and creates a connection with the target market. One way to do this is by using the AIDA-model, which is an abbreviation for attraction, interest, desire, and action. Attraction means the advertisement gains the targeted consumer's attention, interest strives to engage the consumer long enough to comprehend the ads message, desire persuades the consumer's want for the product, and action encourages consumers to make the purchase. To evaluate the success of advertising, businesses must know the reach and frequency of ads, in other words, the amount of the target market that received the message through a selected platform and the quantity of times which the target market was exposed to the message. (Kaser & Oelker, 2020, p.247.).

A perfect example of advertising and promoting a sports league and targeting new markets is the F1 Drive to Survive series on Netflix. Formula 1 was bought by an American company called Liberty Media in 2017, who wanted to increase the popularity of the sport in the United States and especially in the younger demographic to gain a new generation of fans. Drive to Survive is a documentary series about F1 with behind-the-scenes footage and a drama filled narrative. Producer of the show, Paul Martin gave recognition to their storytelling, Formula 1 as a sport, and specifically Netflix for giving them a visible platform. The launch of the TV-show has undoubtedly increased interest to the sport and significantly raised viewership (Richards, 2022). The first season of the series was released in 2018 and is currently running on its fourth season, which has attracted the biggest audience to date by reaching Netflix's top 10 lists in 56 countries. Following the release of the series, ESPN has increased the average F1 broadcast viewership in the U.S. from 550 000 in 2018 to 930 000 in 2021. Additionally, the 2022 season opener had 400 000 more viewers than the 2021 season opener. Furthermore, the United States gained two new Gran Prixes alongside the already existing Austin GP, when Miami was added in 2022 and Las Vegas will be added in 2023. F1 is continuously gaining new followers in the U.S. and is reaching younger audiences as Liberty Media had intended. (Richards, 2022.)

Moving on, sales promotions are a useful marketing tool to persuade customers into making a purchase by offering an extra incentive such as a limited time discount. According to Kaser and Oelkers (2020, p.250), sales promotions may cause a quick increase in sales by turning disinclined

consumers to buyers. Promotions targeted to final consumers may include provisional discounts for example for tickets, combo deals which contain multiple tickets and concessions, vouchers which offer a special price or add-ons, competitions where consumers can win prizes, gifts for example a free bucket for the first 100 fans entering arena, and joint promotions with business partners for example, buying a season ticket and gaining free access to Cmore.

Publicity is free visibility, but the message is presented and controlled by news and other media. Good publicity may be valuable for promotional efforts; however, bad publicity can have a negative impact on business. The role of public relations is to build a positive public image for organizations, individuals such as athletes, and the game itself (Kaser & Oelker, 2020, pp.252-256). PR strives to proactively make a strong and genuine relationship with media representatives for example, journalists by contributing engaging press releases and reliable newsworthy information. To ensure effectiveness, PR must be familiar with the appropriate media outlets which would be most eager to address the story. Creating a PR strategy initiates by determining the image the representative party wants to present. Professional athletes may donate to charity to boost their positive PR, for example Shaquille O'Neal, NBA icon, has donated for years back to the same charity he used to benefit from when he was younger. On the other hand, sports facilities also have a reputation to uphold, so that fans know that they will have a safe and enjoyable experience and thus, are more likely to return to the stands.

Personal selling is face-to-face communication between a seller and a potential buyer. Usually cheaper and simple products are sold online, but more complicated and expensive purchases may need in-person negotiations. This is beneficial for both parties as questions and concerns can be addressed immediately. In sports, personal selling commonly occurs between a sports organization or an athlete and a potential sponsorship from another company. The negotiation process begins when either the company is interested in sponsoring, or the sports organization or athlete is surveying possible sponsors. (Kaser & Oelker, 2020, p.257.)

The success of a promotional plan can be evaluated by comparing sales data from before promotional operations with sales data from during and after promotional efforts (Kaser & Oelker, 2020, p.281). There one might notice a shift in sales rates which may give indication of the effectiveness

of promotion. Quantitative and qualitative measurements help to give a more in-depth analysis of success.

### **3.4 Covid 19 effects on sports in general**

The Covid-19 outbreak caused multiple major sporting events to be postponed or canceled (*The impact of the Covid Crisis on the sport industry*, 2020). For example, the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and the UEFA Euro 2020 football tournament were postponed to 2021. The famous Boston Marathon was cancelled for the first time ever in its long over 120-year history. Also, the legendary Monaco F1 Grand Prix was cancelled for the first time since 1954. The International Tennis Federation reported of postponing or cancelling over 900 tournaments along with major events such as the likes of Wimbledon. The NBA paused the 19/20 season in March 2020 and continued it during August where 22-teams played in isolated “bubble” conditions in Orlando, Florida.

In ice hockey, the IIHF World Championship games were canceled in 2020 but the 2021 tournament was played at first without spectators. Later in the tournament, a very limited number of fans were let in the stands, had they been vaccinated for covid or were otherwise immune from already having the disease previously (Englism, 2021). The NHL suspended the 19/20 season just like the NBA did and finished the season in bubble conditions during August and September 2020 (NHL.com & Relations, 2021). The 20/21 season was a stub season with only 56 regular season games instead of the usual 82. The divisions were realigned, and teams played only against each other inside divisions. Limited number of fans were allowed under strict covid restrictions. The 19/20 season of the Finnish elite league, Liiga, was cancelled. The 20/21 season was played to partially or completely empty stands. League table point averages were implemented to help with game cancellations.

The pandemic caused a major economic disaster, which also significantly affected the sports industry as lockdowns prevented spectators from coming to live-events. Skinner and Smith (2021) explain how there was a sudden loss of income from ticket, concessions and merchandise revenues while also causing issues with sponsorships and broadcasts due to general economic instability created by Covid-19, the lack of visibility from cancelled matches and events, and prominent investments in broadcasting rights. US sporting leagues lost \$13 billion in revenue and around \$29

billion in salary and earnings, while 1.5 million Americans lost their jobs in the sports industry. During the 2020/2021 football season in Europe, attendance plummeted an overwhelming 91%, (see figure 1), and top league net losses accumulated over seven billion euros during the fiscal years of

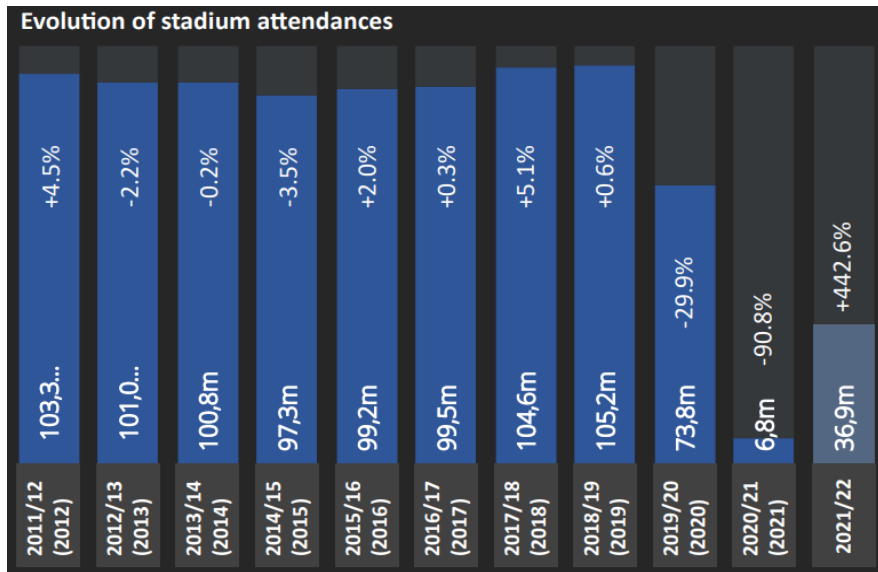


Figure 1. UEFA Stadium attendances (UEFA, 2022)

2020 and 2021 (UEFA, 2022). Gate receipt revenues decreased dramatically from 16% to 2% of total revenues, however domestic tv revenues grew 8% to 36% of total revenues. According to the European commission (2020), the total economic impact of Covid-19 in the EU-28 sports industry is approximately a decrease of between 79-99 billion euros, and around 1.3 to 1.6 million jobs were lost. The EU-28 includes all the EU-member states in addition with the UK and the EU-28's sports-related GDP is about 360 billion euros. In Finland, the sports-related GDP dropped by over 400 million and an estimated 10-12 thousand people lost their jobs in sports.

JYP made a deficit of 89 thousand euros during the 2019-2020 season (JYP, 2020) and a 70-thousand-euro deficit during the 2020-2021 season (JYP, 2021). JYP's revenue dropped 43% from 7.5 million to approximately 4.3 million and they also had to result to lay-offs. However, the club received a subsidy of 485 thousand euros from the Finnish state treasury (*Tilastoja: Sulkemiskorvaus 2022*).

Initially during the outbreak when there was a vacuum of upcoming sporting events, sports broadcasters had to be creative to fill the void of cancelled matches. Multiple broadcasters decided to air historical games from the past, for example the MLB showed previous exceptional opening day

matches and CBS Sports presented memorable NCAA basketball games (Hull & Romney, 2020). Moreover, ESPN released the super successful documentary series “The Last Dance” featuring Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls NBA dynasty in the 1990’s during the period of no ongoing sports events. Simmons et al (2020, p.81) explain how esports leagues of traditional sports invigorated when live-events ceased. For example, NBA 2k’s League which was broadcasted on ESPN and featured NBA stars had 400,000 viewers per television broadcast. Also, NASCAR announced their new eNASCAR iRacing Pro International Series, which gathered an audience of over a million viewers during April and May 2020.

Later, sports organizations had to adapt to a completely new environment where fans were prohibited from entering venues when sports made a return. Organizations did not only face economic challenges from ceased sources of income from tickets and other live-event revenues, but also challenges on reinforcing fan engagement, interaction, and atmosphere as stadiums were empty. Skinner and Smith (2021) claim that the pandemic enhanced the advancement and intensified the significance of technology and media in sports. Sports organizations were motivated on discovering new dynamics related to fan engagement, interaction, and entertainment. Major leagues in the US made deals with enormous technology corporations to improve fan experience and data analytics for example, the NHL partnered with Amazon Web Services, the NBA cooperated with Microsoft, the NFL worked with Cisco, and the MLB partnered with Google. According to Skinner and Smith (2021), “Player tracking, bespoke insights, super-connectivity, mobile enhancement, platform interaction, social media, at-home experiences, AI and learning algorithms, and immersive technology have become keywords in the new jargon of the pandemic era”.

Empty stadiums revealed the importance of the crowd and how fans create the emotion and atmosphere at a sporting event. Sports organization were creative by filling stadiums by cardboard cutouts of fans or some even had screens in the stands where fans were displayed on live zoom calls. This a very intelligent way of having the fans involved and “present” in the stadium even though they are remote. Additionally, organizations for example, Germany’s football league Bundesliga, decided to add artificial crowd sounds in stadiums to compensate for the silence (Schamisso, 2020). In Japan they innovated an app where fans could make noise at the stadium through their mobile devices by clicking on different noise buttons. Each fan had a limited amount of noise that they could produce, so the more spectators clicking the same noise button would accumulate

into a louder sound. According to Draper (2020) from the New York Times, sports broadcasts have always been artificial to a slight extent, with sophisticated audio technology via diverse microphone placements and exaggerated crowd noises, so without fans, the latent artificial nature of broadcasts had to be revamped. The head of production at Fox Sports, Brad Zager, finds that the pandemic accelerated the development of broadcasts and technology. For example, Fox implemented virtual computer-generated fans in the stands and Electronic Arts, a major producer of sports video games, provided organizations access to their audio library. Furthermore, Draper explains how sports broadcasts' video adapted by minimizing shots of the stands and fixating on the players instead, while implementing new camera angles like the drone camera.

Sharpe and colleagues (2020, as cited in Skinner & Smith 2021) elaborate how social media has been a remarkable tool for sports organizations and athletes to engage fans by branding themselves via posts and implementing co-creation and monetization of content, personal interaction, and everyday influential engagement of fans. For example, during quarantine Bryson DeChambeu, a professional golfer, took advantage of social media by presenting the technology he used to practice at home, FlightScope's HD golf simulator, which according to Bryson, helped him give more than sufficient data about his golf swings (Skinner & Smith, 2021). At the same time, Bryson exhibited his endorsements and sponsors as well as raised \$25,000 for charity while streaming him playing popular videogame Fortnite. This is a prime example of adapting to an unprecedented situation but simultaneously with innovation exploiting it beneficially. Other examples are tennis superstars Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal using social media to discuss various topic like performing in front of challenging crowds and mental and physical health (Simmons et al., pp.81-82, 2020). Moreover, top NBA player Stephen Curry held a real time interview with Dr. Anthony Fauci, who was the director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, on Instagram covering questions on Covid-19. The University of Cincinnati was clever in its engagement of fans and sponsors by organizing a competition where fans could win prizes by posting a picture on social media of a meal, they had bought from a restaurant partner.

### **3.5 Changes in consumer behavior**

Considering the significant number of events being cancelled or postponed, the consumption of sports was limited primarily to digital platforms. Even outside of sports in general, with restrictions, social distancing, quarantines, and isolation, Covid19 had a major impact on people's

social lives. Sports usually brings people together, however, during the pandemic this was not advisable due to the health concerns that it imposes. The common routines of sports fans were challenged when there were no games being played. Tamir, (2020, p.229) elaborates how fans spend notable time anticipate upcoming matches, keeping an eye on results, and watching sports broadcasts but suddenly this was not possible anymore. This may suggest, according to Nielsen (2020, as cited in Tamir, 2020, p.229), the initial 40% decrease in sports related mobile application use during the start of the pandemic.

When sports leagues and broadcasts slowly restarted, Alex Gang (2020, pp.220-221) explains one of the consequences of empty stadiums with the increased use of social media and online communication and the wider extent of dialog between different sports fan clubs and organizations close to the supported team. This goes in line with what was discussed in the previous section of how sports organizations and athletes also invested more in their digital interaction and engagement of fans along with the development of broadcasts and technology. In Glebova and colleagues' (2022) study of the transformation of sports during the pandemic, one interviewee, sports media writer Zushan Hashmi claims how the focus of sports consumers has broadened to a wider selection of content due to the pandemic on the ground of digital development, enhanced fan engagement, and the trending of cinematic sports content. Glebova et al. continue by stating how Covid19 truly did expedite digitalization in sports business.

Recent research shows that the pandemic permanently changed how fans engage with sports media ("Consumer Behavior Shifts", 2022). Consumption of over-the-top or OTT media, which are basically online streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon prime, have grown significantly during the pandemic. The OTT media rights value of the UEFA Champions League increased 18% between 2018 and 2021 in the top five European markets and also grew 19% in the top five European domestic football leagues between 2020 to 2022. Furthermore, there has been a rise in supplementary spectator sports consumption of all kinds of non-live sports whether it is affiliated with a live sport event or not. Non-live sports content affiliated with live sports events are for example, highlights and game recaps. Content not affiliated with live sports are for example, behind the scenes footage, documentaries, or virtual events. Especially younger fans from ages 16-29 enjoy this kind of content as 40-44% of global fans from this age group would watch it compared to the 34-39% of

all global fans who are willing to consume such material. This kind of diverse content has the potential of attracting new followers as well. Lastly, it is essential to realize that people, particularly Gen Z, are engaged with multiple screens at once, even during an important game. For example, consumers have the game on their TV-screen, while they use their mobiles to communicate with others via messaging or calling, follow social media, use applications, order food, or even play games. This means that consumers are evermore constantly online on multiple different platforms ready to engage with a variety of content. Therefore, Covid-19 has accelerated digitalization in sports and the consumption of online sports media. (“Consumer Behavior Shifts”, 2022.)

Apart from the apparent transition to increased digital consumption, there is a lack of previous research on the topic of consumer behavior shifts, specifically in sports. Thus, there is a need for more studies to be conducted to further understand the development of sports consumer behavior during and after the evanescence of Covid19.

## **4 Results**

This chapter will first describe the sampling, which participated in the survey, and then will continue to present the results of the questions relating to changes in activity, attendance and the variables which influence attending. The survey was published in JYP’s Facebook pages during the end of April 2022 and consumers had the opportunity to participate in it for one week. Season ticket holders also received the survey directly in their emails. The survey was created in the Webropol software program, and it gained 403 replies during the time it was online.

### **4.1 Demographics of Sample**

Out of the total of 403 respondents, 73% of respondents were men and 26% were women while the rest of the respondents identified their gender as other. In the figure below we can examine the different ages of the respondents of both men and women on the X axis and the number of respondents on the line chart. The Y axis presents the percentage of total respondents of both men and women, respectively. We can notice how the number of respondents peak between ages 35 to 49 for both genders, moreover, the peak is more significant amongst women. This may suggest that people between 35 and 49 match closest to JYP’s customer profile. On the other hand, there is a reasonably consistent number of respondents on both sides of the peaks (younger than

35 or older than 49) for both genders. Therefore, dividing all respondents into three age categories: under 35, 35 to 49, and 50 and over, created three somewhat even groups regarding response rates with each group having around 120 to 160 replies. To simplify future reference, we will call these age groups young group (under 35), middle age group (34-49) and old group (50+).

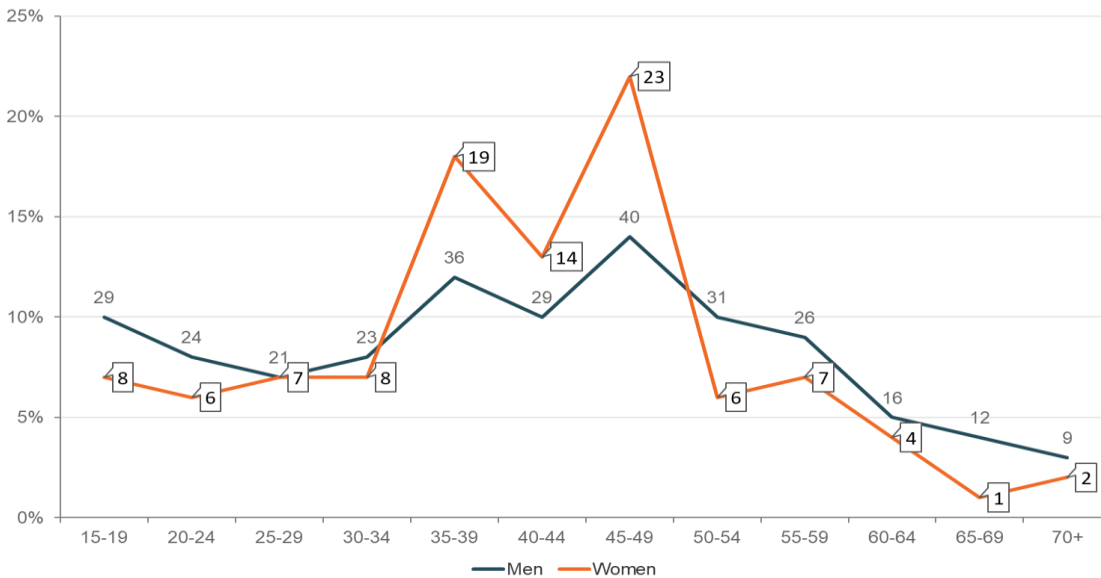


Figure 2. Ages of Men and Women respondents

### Professional status of respondents:

The majority of respondents were employees with 44% of total answerers. The other three most common replies were officials, students, and pensioners which accumulated to 38% of total respondents. The remaining approximately fifth of respondents were either entrepreneurs, in leading positions, unemployed, or conscripts.

Following the three different age categories established previously, interesting results arise. A third of the over 50-year-old respondents, or old group respondents, were still employees, while another third had already retired. Around 20% of this group were also officials.

In the middle age group, from ages 35 to 49, over 54% were employees and over 21% were officials. This group had the most people in leading positions as well with 8% respondents claiming the status. The youngest group were under 35-year-olds, and they consisted primarily of employees (42%) and students (38%).

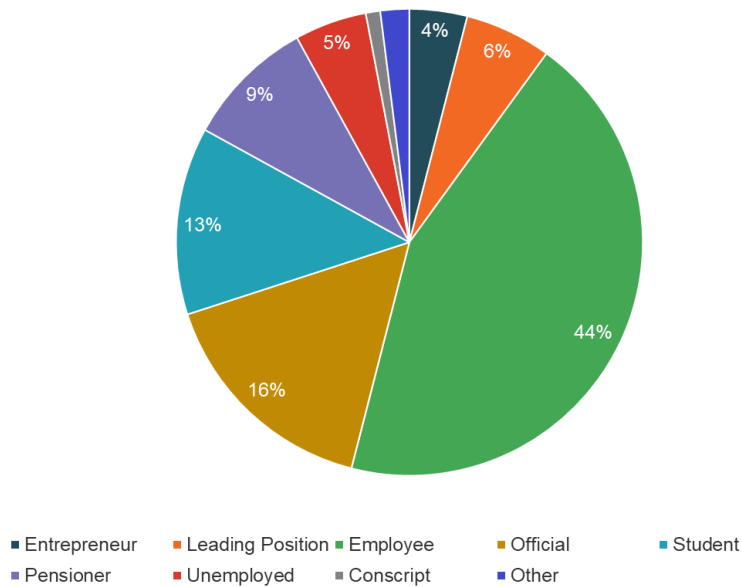


Figure 3. Professional status of respondents

## 4.2 Relationship to JYP and duration of attendance

When having to describe their personal relationship with JYP, 38% of total respondents identified themselves as passionate followers and 52% of total respondents were active followers, while the remaining minority of respondents were either casual or infrequent followers with 9% and 1% of replies respectively.

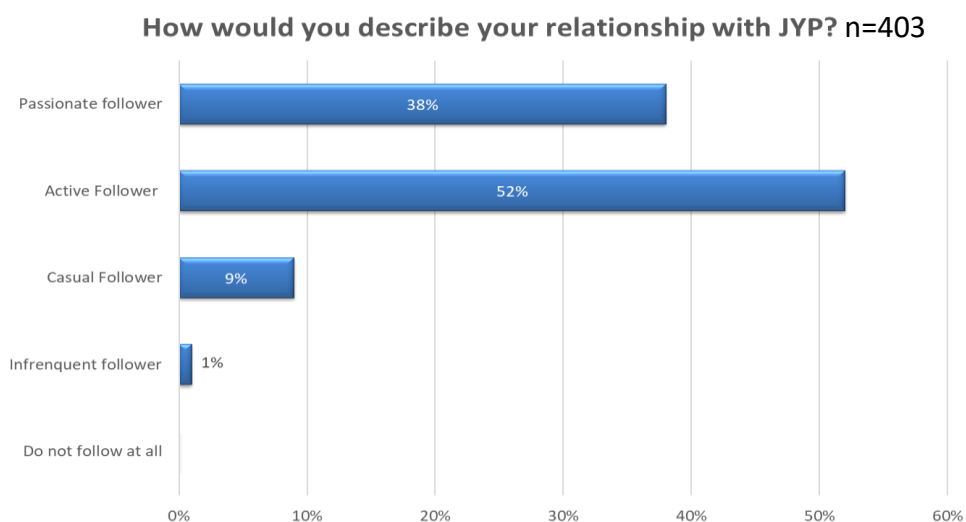


Figure 4. Respondents relationship with JYP

Passionate followers consisted of 42% male respondents and around 27% of female respondents. Furthermore, 49% of the young age group stated to be passionate followers while a third of both the middle age group and old group were passionate followers. Furthermore, more than half of both men and women claimed to be active followers of the club as well as well as exceedingly over 50% of the middle age and old groups. On the other hand, only 42% of the young group were active followers.

Moving on, it is noteworthy how 18% of women respondents were casual followers, when only 5% of men selected this option. In addition, approximately 12% of the middle age group were casual followers but well under 10% of the young group and old group respondents were casual followers. None of the respondents chose the "Do not follow at all" alternative.

### **Duration of attendance**

When asked about how many years respondents have visited JYP home games, 70% had visited JYP games for 11 years or more, while 3% of respondents claimed to have not visited JYP home games at all. The remaining 27% of respondents were evenly distributed between one to ten years of attendance.

The old age group stands out with 49% stating that they have visited JYP home games for over 30 years. Another 40% of the old age group had visited JYP games in Jyväskylä for atleast 11 years. Furthermore, an overwhelming 75% of the middle age group had been going to JYP home games for over 11 years with more than half of these claiming to have visited JYP home games for over 25 years.

Naturally, the young age group has not attended JYP home games as long the older groups, however, there is more dispersion compared to other age groups. Accumulating over 42% of young respondents have been attending JYP home games between 1-8 years, while another 47% had visited LähiTapiola Areena during JYP games between 9 to 20 years.

## **Season ticket ownership**

Over 40% of respondents currently own or have previously owned a season ticket. 87 respondents (22% of total participants) were current season ticket holders and 71% of these were men and 29% women. Approximately half of the current season ticket holders belonged to the old age group and around 25% were young respondents and another 25% were a part of the middle age group.

83 respondents (21% of total participants) had owned a season ticket before but not anymore. 81% of previous season ticket owners were men and 19% women. The division between age groups regarding having owned a season ticket is relatively even as 40% of previous season ticket holders were from the middle age group, a third from the young age group and another third from the old age group. The remaining 231 respondents had never owned a season ticket.

### **4.3 Activity in attendance**

In the following part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to evaluate how many games they had attended on each season for the previous three seasons before the most recently concluded 2021/2022 season. Afterwards, they had to reflect if and how they felt like their activity had changed.

As can be seen from these figures, consumers attended games significantly less during the pandemic than before it. The 18/19 season was the last pre-pandemic season and the number of consumers not attending at all rose by 20% by the following two seasons. Also, consumers increasingly only attended fewer games and the attendance of the most enthusiastic spectators decreased as well. During the 18/19 season, 68% of spectators visited ten games or less, while during the 20/21 season, approximately 83% of spectators visited ten games or less. Moreover, the number of participants not attending at all almost doubled from the 19/20 season to the 20/21 season.

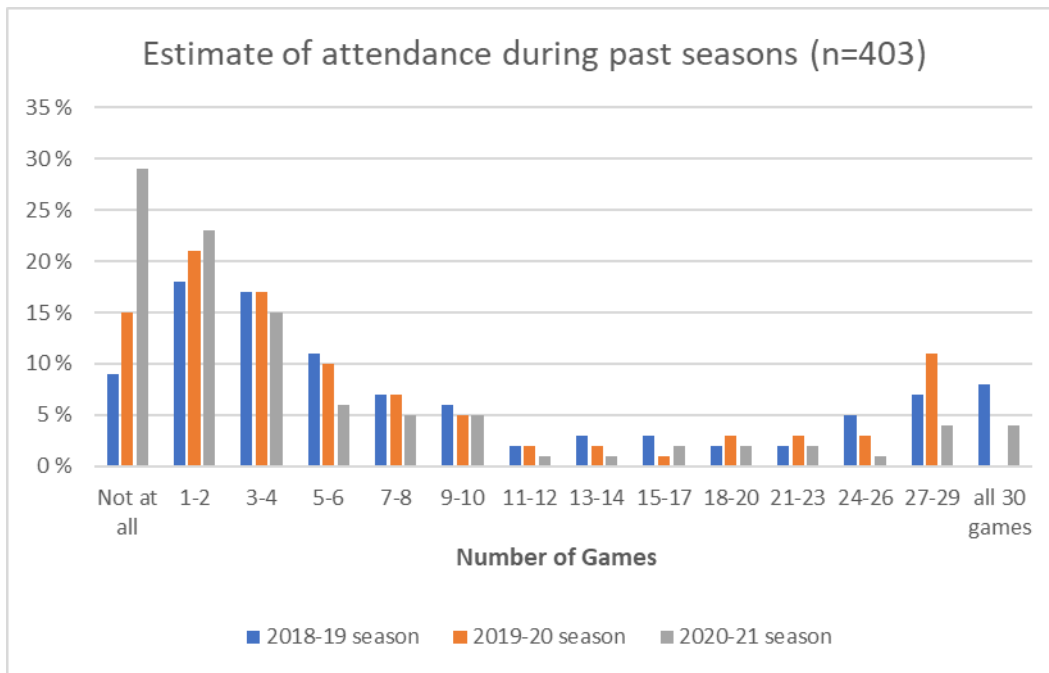


Figure 5. Participant attendance rate during past seasons

However, a part of the decrease can be explained by some games being played to empty stands, for example, it is important to note that the 19/20 season was cancelled and therefore JYP played only 29 home games during that season. In the charts, there is a clear pattern how most spectators only attend in a few games but also a notable group of spectators go watch almost every game. These are most likely the season ticket holders. There is also a similar pattern when examining responses from the different demographic groups.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked if they felt like they had attended JYP home games more actively, less actively or if the level of attendance had stayed the same during the previous three seasons. 43% of total respondents attended less actively and another 43% said that their rate of attendance had stayed the same. Only 14% of replies claimed to have increased activeness in attendance.

The same pattern is seen in the different age groups as well as men and women, where over 80% of respondents replied on either attending less or the same amount as before. However, 19% of young respondents stated on attending more actively, which was clearly the highest number of the age groups as only 10-12% of the middle age group and old group respondents claimed to have attended more actively.

In addition, an optional open-ended question enabled participants to elaborate on the changes in activity. An overwhelming number of replies mentioned Covid19 as a major reason of the decrease of activity to visit JYP games. Moreover, other common responses were that consumers had moved away or lived far from Jyväskylä, the athletic success has been weak and sloppy, the atmosphere has dulled, and the event is boring, and some replies mentioned the expensiveness of tickets.

After evaluating their own activity and attendance of the previous three seasons, the respondents were ushered to reflect on the then recently concluded 21/22 season. The replies are very similar to the relatively poor level of attendance of the previous 20/21 season with 28% of respondents not attending at all. On the other hand, there is a slight sign of recovery of enthusiastic spectators when over 19% of participants attended 18 home games or more during 21/22 season while only 13% did so during the 20/21 season.

However, more casual visitors are still lacking from pre-covid statistics. 23% of respondents visited 5 to 10 home games during the 18/19 season when only 12% visited the same number of games during the 21/22 season. Therefore, JYP requires effort to lure occasional spectators to return to the arena more often to reach pre-pandemic levels.

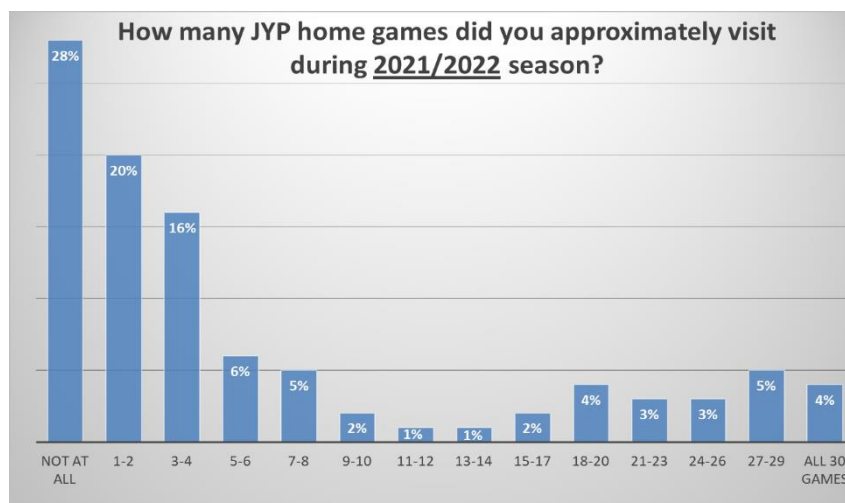


Figure 6. Participant attendance rate 21/22 season

#### 4.4 Variables influencing participation

Next, after going through the level of activity and attendance of live events, the survey turned its focus on the reasons behind participation. A multiple-choice question presented different reasons that may affect consumers attending and participants had the ability to choose multiple options. From the figures below, one can see the diverse answer options and how respondents replied from different ages and both genders. The three most popular answers regarding participation were “athletic success”, “the event itself”, and “spending time with family and friends”, with “day of the week” and “opponent” closely following behind. Interesting differences between answers arise amongst the demographics of respondents. For example, men and older respondents found athletic success on being an important reason to participate, while women gave it significantly less importance. On the other hand, women and younger spectators found spending time with family and friend as a substantially more important reason to participate than men and older spectators did. Another interesting point is how younger spectators value specific players as a reason to participate more than the other respondent groups. This may be explained by younger people, especially junior players, generally looking up to successful players or figures.

Surprisingly, concerns about Covid19 did not stand out as a popular reply but was coherent among other answer alternatives. Unsurprisingly however, the oldest age group was most concerned about Covid19 out of all the respondent groups.

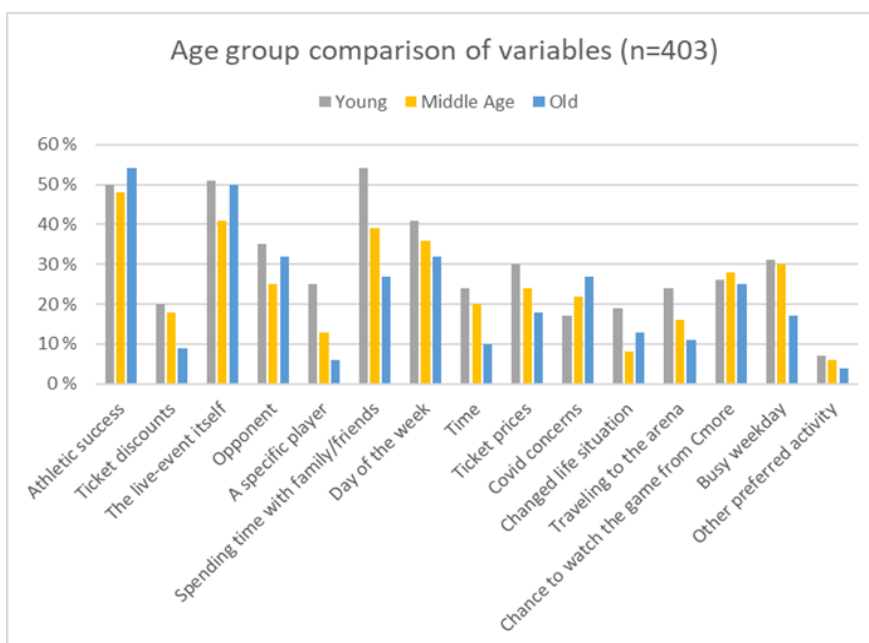


Figure 7. Factors influencing participation

An optional open-ended question enabled respondents to give more details about how their chosen variables have evolved during the previous seasons. Most of the responses were similar to the previous elaborative open-ended question where many consumers mentioned the obstacles created by the pandemic and the poor athletic performance as major reasons of decreased attendance. However, a new observation was how some respondents mentioned the improvement of Cmore streaming service and its simplicity. A few mentioned how poor athletic performances motivated them to watch JYP games at home through Cmore because of the possibility to stop watching and do something else if JYP's performance is weak. On the other hand, some respondents mentioned how the live event has not changed much and/or is inadequate and could be more exciting and engaging. As a final mention, the busy lives of consumers cause attendance to be emphasized towards the weekends, which is understandable.

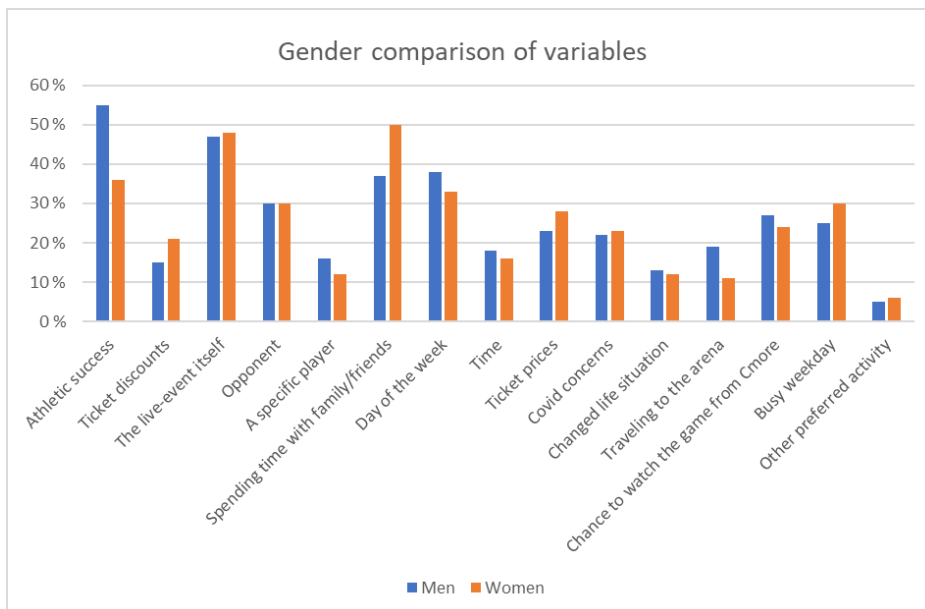


Figure 8. Variable influence between genders

### Why do you attend JYP-games?

Furthermore, an open-ended question inquired why consumers go to JYP ice hockey matches nowadays. An overwhelming number of replies stated the reason being the love of the sport and of the club. Loyalty and enthusiasm for JYP was apparent and locality and community were a large part of the reason as well. Coming to JYP games had become a habit for many respondents and many claim to enjoy the social setting of the arena, spending time with their family, friends, and

other acquaintances during JYP games. Also, cheering for the local club brought a sense of community and therefore several mentioned that the atmosphere of the arena is an important reason to go watch games live.

#### 4.5 Statements about variables

The next part of the survey contained nine several statements which respondents had to answer on a scale of one to five, where one was completely disagree, three was neutral, and five was completely agree. The numbers two and four in between were “somewhat disagree” and “somewhat agree”. The figure below shows the different statements and the average results of all respondents. As can be seen in the figure, the responses were quite evenly distributed between agreeing and disagreeing since the averages fluctuate around three. However, a few statements did receive conspicuous results.

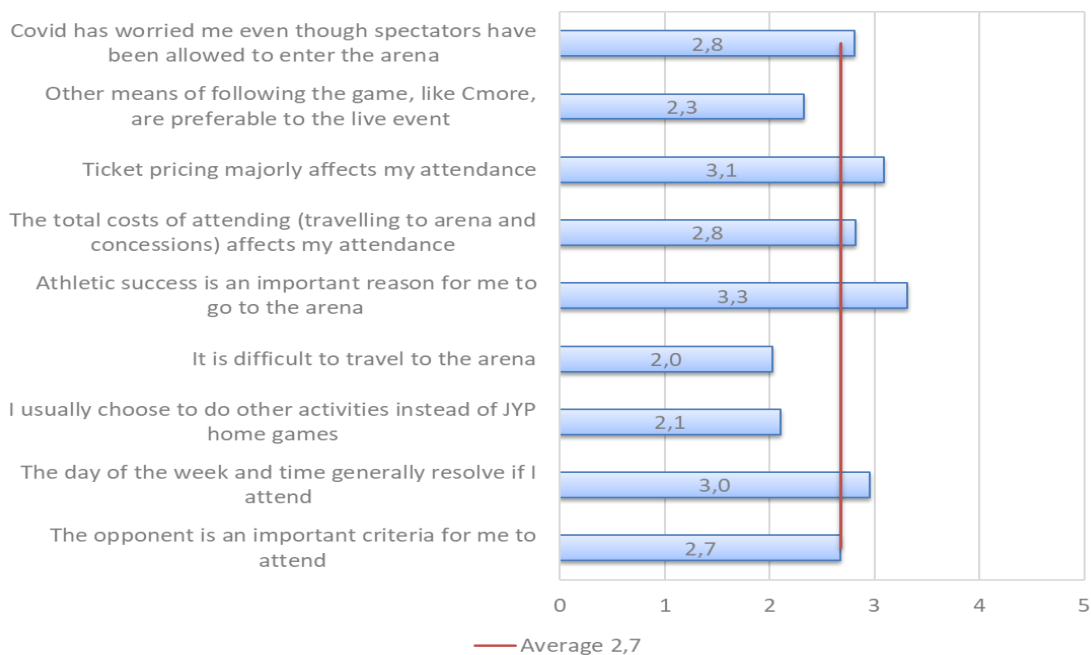


Figure 9. Averages of respondent replies

Covid concerns split consumers in to two, over 40% either completely or somewhat disagreed and another over 40% either completely or somewhat agreed. Old group respondents were more concerned about the disease while young group respondents were indifferent about it. This is understandable as elderly people were a part of the risk group. Nonetheless, the slight majority overall were less bothered by Covid when attending JYP home games.

Secondly, approximately 60% of the respondents did not find Cmore or other means of following JYP games preferable to the live event. On the other hand, 21% of people agreed or somewhat agreed that Cmore or other means were preferable to the live event. Interestingly, the young age group were keenest in preferring the live event and therefore completely disagreeing even though their generation is more familiar with digitalization and the possibilities it brings via for example, streaming.

Moving on, ticket pricing seems to affect most consumers' attendance. 45% of respondents felt that ticket pricing significantly affected their own attendance, while 35% of respondents disagreed that ticket prices majorly affected their participation. The results were quite even between the different groups of the report; however, ticket pricing seem to affect women's participation remarkably more compared to other groups as 59% of women agreed or somewhat agreed to it having a significant influence on attending. Some respondents mentioned that tickets are too expensive and few suggested cooperation with public transport were matchday tickets would provide free transportation.

Regarding total cost of participation, which additionally to the ticket includes traveling, concessions, and merchandise, many respondents slightly leaned towards extra costs not having an effect in attendance. However, answers were quite evenly divided on this statement as well and over a third of all respondents agreed that total costs affect their attendance.

Elaborating more on travelling to the arena, a vast majority of consumers, 71%, disagreed or somewhat with the statement that traveling to the arena was difficult. Only around 16% of respondents agreed or somewhat agreed. However, some of these respondents lived further away from Jyväskylä in other municipalities or cities, which emphasizes the local opinion that it is easy to travel to LähiTapiola Arena. No single demography stood out from this question.

Athletic success seems to be an essential reason to visit JYP games. A whopping 40% of respondents somewhat agreed with the importance of athletic success and a further 14% completely agreed. Around 19% were neutral to the statement and 27% either disagreed or somewhat disa-

greed. Out of all the groups only women had under half of respondents either agreeing or somewhat agreeing, so athletic success does not seem to influence women as much. However, athletic success was most important for the old age group.

Furthermore, amongst respondents JYP home games are generally chosen more often than other alternative activities. Over 38% of respondents claim they would not choose other activities instead of the live event and another 25% said they somewhat disagreed with the statement of choosing other activities instead. Only approximately ten percent of respondent admitted on preferring to choose other activities over JYP home games. The old age group stood out on being the most enthusiastic of choosing to attend matches with 75% of responses. Interestingly, the young age group was keener on choosing JYP games instead of other activities than the middle age group. However, this may be explained by younger respondents having generally more free time and therefore have time to do other things later.

The weekday and time of events leaned slightly more towards of them either not influencing attendance or respondent being neutral about them. 18-20% of people replied on each “disagree”, “somewhat agree”, and “neutral”, respectively. However, 44% of respondents somewhat agreed or agreed to it making a difference regarding attending. Therefore, the respondents were rather split. Nothing significantly stood out when comparing the different demographic groups, however, the time and date of matches were less concerning to the old age group.

Moreover, the opponent does not have major significance in attending as 21-25% of respondents voted for disagreeing, somewhat disagreeing or neutral each respectively, similarly to the previous section. 27% somewhat agreed that the opponent is a considerable variable. The responses of different consumer groups were very similar, so there were no differences other than maybe women and young spectators not caring about the opponent as much as other groups.

## 4.6 Digital Consumption

In the final question of the survey, participants were asked to evaluate their changes in activity on different digital platforms during the past three years. As seen in the table below, most respondents were rather neutral since the “stayed the same” option was most popular on all six sections. However, it is good to note how more participants felt that their consumption of various digital platforms had increased instead of decreased. Especially consumption of JYP social media and JYP games via streaming had increased remarkably. Additionally, consumption of Liiga social media and webpages has also grown considerably.

Table 1. Consumption of digital platforms

	-2 Decreased significantly	-1 Somewhat decreased	0 Stayed the same	1 Somewhat increased	2 Increased significantly
Following JYP Social Media	3,0%	9,9%	44,4%	26,8%	15,9%
Watching JYP games from TV/Cmore streams	4,7%	6,7%	41,7%	27,3%	19,6%
Visiting JYP fan shop website	7,4%	12,4%	56,3%	17,4%	6,5%
Using JYP App	16,1%	10,9%	50,6%	14,7%	7,7%
Visiting Liiga webpages	7,9%	10,2%	45,2%	28,0%	8,7%
Following Liiga Social Media	5,2%	8,2%	52,4%	22,3%	11,9%

On the other hand, the JYP app was the only section that had more stated decreased usage than increased. Over half of respondents claimed their usage of the app had stayed the same but the level of initial usage remains unknown as with all the sections.

### Comparison of demographic groups regarding digital consumption:

The young age group had substantially more participants stating increased usage of JYP social media as 28% said that it had increased significantly while other age groups had only 8-12% choosing the same reply.

Over half of the young age group and women claimed that their consumption of JYP game through TV or streams had either somewhat increased or significantly increased, when under half of the other groups claimed an increase in consumption through these platforms.

Visiting the online JYP fan shop was less popular among the older age group as it was the only group that had more decreased use than increased use.

The JYP app divided respondents since 24% of the young age group had significantly decreased its use while 25% of the old group had somewhat increased usage. There was divide inside groups as well, since 17% of the middle age group had decreased use significantly while 14% had somewhat increased use. Overall, more consumers had decreased the use of the JYP app than increased in the past three years.

The activity of visits in Liiga webpages had primarily increased, however interestingly, the young age group was most divided as many had stated decreased activity. 12% claimed a significant decrease and 15% a claimed a slight decrease but on the other hand, 13% of young group respondents claimed a significant increase of visits to the Liiga webpages.

The young age group was also most enthusiastic in following Liiga social media. 24% of young respondents had significant increase of consumption while only 3-8% of middle aged or old respondents answered likewise. Otherwise, there was nothing remarkable about the differences between demographics in the answers. Overall, approximately a third of respondents had either somewhat or significantly increased activity in Liiga social media channels.

#### **4.7 Free comments about JYP**

Finally, participants were given the chance to say whatever they like about JYP and their home events. 162 respondents out of 403 replied to this section. The most common mention was the need to update the venue, LähiTapiola Arena. The venue is becoming outdated and is one of the smallest arenas in Liiga. The hallways are congested and line to kiosks and bathrooms are long, which brings us to the next most frequent response. The service and restaurants at the venue need to be developed. Participants mentioned that food and concession options should be more diverse and include more healthy and vegetarian alternatives. The service of customers should be organized smoother so the lines would unravel faster. Some suggested being able to pre-order concessions from the JYP app. Furthermore, restaurants in the arena should attract spectators to come to the venue early before the game and stay longer post-game.

Another common concern was the event program itself. Participants said that the event would require more diverse entertainment especially during intermissions because currently they are quite

monotonous. Participants suggested developing light shows, audio volume and quality, and having engaging activities and contests during intermissions. Some desired for more family and “theme” events. Many also called for unity between the two separated fan groups in JYP games and hoped that they could come together as one in order to create a better atmosphere. A single uniform fan group is less likely to confuse the arbitrary spectator and might even encourage them to chant along.

## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Variables that influence JYP fans attendance

This paper set out to find answers to the following questions:

1. *What variables affect the desire to attend JYP's home games?*
2. *How have these variables changed during the past two years?*

As has been discussed throughout this report, there are multiple different aspects that may affect attendance and consumption starting from demographic reasons to external reasons. The key factor that shook the sporting world and the entire globe was the corona pandemic. Events around the world were cancelled, postponed, or played in front of empty stands. The restrictions caused by Covid19 are the initial reason JYP's attendance figures began to plummet. This can be noticed in survey results where participation gradually decreased between the 2018/19 season to 2021/2022 season. Official Liiga-statistics also show the huge drop in attendance when JYP's home game attendance average was 3748 spectators per game in the 2018/19 season (Joukkueutilastot: Runkosarja 2018-2019: Tilastot, n.d.) and just 2285 spectators per game during the 2021/22 season (Joukkueutilastot: Runkosarja 2021-2022: Tilastot, n.d.). However, in the survey, approximately 40% of respondents claimed that Covid had worried them even though spectators were allowed in the arena but only 21% said that Covid concerns affected negatively to their attendance in JYP home games. Furthermore, in open-ended questions, many respondents explained how the consequences of the pandemic have reduced their activity for example, because of games played in empty arenas. Thus, corona has considerably affected activity in attendance; however, it does not solely explain the 61% fall in average attendance from the 2018/19 season to the 2021/22 season. Nonetheless, corona has definitely been an important variable among others that has either made attending impossible or at the very least, diminished the desire to attend to a certain extent. Fortunately, the world is now able to tolerate the disease due to vaccinations and has opened for the

most part. Older respondents were more concerned about covid, but the current situation may cause them to be more inclined participate in the future. The 2022/23 season will probably be the first season since the 2018/19 season to be completely unaffected by restrictions, which will hopefully show in JYP's attendance figures.

JYP has not made the playoffs for two seasons in a row. The last time they played in Liiga-quarter-finals was during the spring of 2018. Therefore, their athletic success has been poor for multiple seasons. In the survey, athletic success was an outstandingly frequent response because half of survey participants claimed it influenced attendance. Furthermore, 54% of respondents claimed that athletic success was an important reason to go watch JYP home games. However, demographic variables also influence attitudes since men gave athletic success greater value than women. In the literature, Smith, and Stewart (2015, p.44) explain how motivation to consuming sports for men more often come from psychological stimulation such as winning, and self-esteem. This can be also noticed in the survey results when 20% more men than women claimed athletic success affected attendance. However, it is important to keep Smith and Stewarts' insight in mind that demographic variables should be used for finding useful information on set of fans instead of interpreting them in a predictable and uniform fashion. Though in the case of athletic success regarding JYP fans, it seems to be following the general pattern.

Table 2. Contingency table of Athletic Success

	Men		Women		Total
	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	
Athletic Success	164	55,4%	38	36,2%	202
Total	164		38		202

Furthermore, the literature states (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.48) that tight games and uncertain outcomes are what create excitement to the spectators. Therefore, being able to compete with others is important because a continuously losing team will lose attraction and thus followers. JYP's poor athletic performance already began during the last pre-pandemic season in 2018/19 when the previously regular top four team failed to even finish in the top eight and ultimately was tenth. On the other hand, that season JYP had a strong attendance average of 3748. During the next 2019/20 season JYP's success remained underwhelming and the Covid-19 pandemic began. Amid the pandemic, JYP's performance in the following 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons were even

worse as they did not even qualify for playoff qualifiers and attendance levels dropped season by season. There is probably a connection between JYP's poor results and the consequences of covid, which require more research; however, it is reasonable to believe that these two variables together are primarily responsible for most of the major decrease in attendance during the past two to three years.

The matchday event itself seems to be an important factor amongst JYP fans as 47% of survey respondents mentioned it affected the appeal to come to the arena, which made it one of the most popular responses. In addition, the majority of respondents found it more enjoyable to spectate games live in the stands instead of from Cmore broadcasts. However, plenty of feedback was given about the live event in the survey's open-ended questions. According to participants, the event itself has not significantly changed during the past few years, is bland, and could be more exciting and engaging by having more diverse content, entertainment, and interaction. Additionally, the atmosphere of the events has become lackluster, partly due to the scarcity of spectators. Some survey participants mentioned how the event combined with unsatisfactory performances on-ice does not give enough value for one's money. In the literature, Smith and Stewart (2015, p.48) mention how the quality of the venue affects the consumers' overall experience of the event. Besides basics such as safety and cleanliness, customers want convenience, accessibility, comfortability, and compelling concessions. The survey did not inquire participants about venue quality although, in the free comments section, many said that the venue needs an update because it is old, small, and congested. Moreover, better organized, and faster service was called for and a greater variety of concessions and attracting restaurants in the arena were desired. The bottom line is that a superiorly organized and executed, entertaining and enjoyable event will attract more spectators and will convince them to return for future events but JYP's event has not been able to persuade enough spectators back to the arena despite poor athletic performances.

Socializing with friends and family was one of the top reasons to attend JYP home games for 40% of survey participants. Especially young participants and women appreciated socializing at the event since half of both groups claimed it influenced attendance. This coincides with the literature where Smith and Stewart (2015, p.44) explain how in general, young fans have a stronger desire to be affiliated with a group and that women usually appreciate spending time with family and friends more than men.

Table 3. Social reasons to attend

	Men		Women		Young		Middle Aged		Old	
	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage	n	Percentage
Spending time with family and friends	110	37,2%	52	49,5%	69	54,8%	63	39,1%	31	27,2%

Nonetheless, social distancing was the norm during the pandemic, which complicated gatherings by either cancelling events or limiting capacity along with other safety guidelines. On the other hand, it is important to keep in mind that sports events can be simply replaced by any other group activity if socializing is the priority (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.41). Many respondents however mentioned that a common interest in ice hockey tempts fans to come spend time together at JYP games with their children, spouses, and friends. Fortunately, restrictions should be in the past and should not be the reason preventing consumers from choosing JYP home games as a place to gather.

To summarize, the main takeaways of variables which affect the desire to attend JYP games were the pandemic and the circumstances associated with covid, athletic success, the quality of the event, and socializing with peers. A combination of variables is more likely to have affected the decrease in attendance instead of any single variable; however, the pandemic seems to have been a crucial factor which initiated the trend. During the past two years, these variables have either gotten better or remained the same. First, pandemic has eased, restriction have been lifted, and things have returned to normal, at least in Finland. Therefore, covid should not interfere with JYP hosting events anymore but JYP still must attract fans back to the arena. Secondly, the athletic performance of JYP has been poor for many years since the season before the pandemic, which has alienated spectators from the previous success they were used to. However, JYP has made some major moves in the player markets and changed their coaching staff in a credible manner. Therefore, there is a small-scale buzz around the team and an expectation of better results. It is interesting to see the influence in attendance rates if JYP starts winning more. Thirdly, according to survey participants, the event has not changed significantly in the past couple of years and could use more innovation and excitement. Furthermore, the arena is becoming outdated and needs upgrading. Finally, socializing at events is important for a large portion of fans and luckily due to corona passing for the most part, spectators can again carefreely get together at the arena.

To conclude, covid-19 combined with simultaneous poor performance seem to be the most significant reasons for attendance rates to drop because negative attendance trends situate around the same time as the start of the pandemic. These two variables also received overwhelming mentions in the survey and support from the literature regarding influence. Since corona should not be an influencing factor anymore, the development of spectator numbers next season is intriguing to follow provided that JYP succeeds on-ice. A winning-JYP would likely increase attendance to a certain extent. More spectators should mean a better atmosphere, which survey participants hoped for, and improve the overall experience of the event. However, JYP needs to focus and improve the live event, so it would give more value for consumers and give them more reasons to attend JYP home games.

## **5.2 Consumer behavior development**

As mentioned in the literature, the pandemic drove consumption of sporting content primarily to digital platforms. Because of this, the focus of sports consumers has broadened to a wider selection of content (Glebova et al., 2022) through improved fan engagement, trending cinematic content and overall digital development. For example, Esports were exploited, like NBA's 2k-league and NASCAR's new series of eNASCAR (Simmons et al., 2020, p.81), when sporting events were cancelled as well as nostalgic historical sports documentary series were created for example, The Last Dance series. Furthermore, when matches were played in front of empty stadiums, some organizations enabled fans to be "present" via zoom and added artificial crowd noises in broadcasts (Schamisso, 2020). New camera angles were also implemented such as the drone camera. Additionally, one of the consequences of empty stadiums was the increased use of social media and online communication and the wider extent of dialog between different sports fan clubs and organizations close to the supported team (Alex Gang 2020, pp.220-221). On top of that, the use of social media to brand athletes, monetize content and engage with fans enhanced (Skinner & Smith, 2021). An example of this was golfer Bryson DeChambeu raising \$25,000 for charity by playing Fortnite. Moreover, Simmons et al. (2020, pp.81-82) explain how Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal discussed many topics on social media for example, mental and physical health, and NBA superstar Stephen Curry hosted a live interview on Instagram with Dr. Anthony Fauci about the Covid-19 pandemic.

All the examples above show how sports organizations, athletes, and other stakeholders such as broadcasters seriously invested in adapting their online digital representation during the pandemic to create more diverse and compelling content and to keep fans engaged even though traditional sports was facing hardships. Fortunately for them, sports fans appreciated their efforts and remained interested in following sports entertainment. The literature shows that OTT media rights values for the UEFA Champions league and top European football leagues grew almost 20% respectively during the pandemic (“Consumer Behavior Shifts”, 2022). Additionally, there has been an increase in consumption of content featuring non-live sports which are either affiliated with live sport events or not, for example game recaps or behind the scenes footage. Furthermore, according to survey results, the consumption of JYP’s and Liiga’s social media has increased between 30-40%. In addition, almost 50% of participants claimed to watch JYP games more often through Cmore, although, going to the arena was not an option at times.

Nonetheless, the material suggests that there has been some sort of transformation in online and digital sports consumption and content creation which might influence future procedures. The pandemic caused a supply of more diverse digital content, which resulted in consumers expanding their horizons by desiring excess non-live sports content. Consumers now more than before want to connect to the athletes and organizations more with behind-the-scenes footage, cinematics, nostalgia and traditions, and interaction with fans for example, via the playing of videogames. However, further research on digital consumption of sporting content is required in the future to see if increased digital consumption is either a long-term effect of the pandemic or rather a short-term consequence of it instead. Unfortunately, apart from the apparent transition to increased digital consumption, there is a lack of previous research on the topic of other consumer behavior shifts in sports. Therefore, there is also a need to conduct more studies in order to deepen our understanding of sports consumer behavior in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **5.3 How can JYP improve attendance rates**

Fortunately, corona should not affect anymore, at least as dramatically as before during the upcoming 2022/23 season. Therefore, the biggest concern to tackle for JYP is their athletic performance as it was one of the most popular types of feedback in the survey. Additionally, according to Smith and Stewart (2015, p.48), uneven matches, predictable results and repeating losses are unappealing to spectators and will influence the desire to attend negatively. JYP needs to start

making their rise up the league table by making convincing player and staff transactions to strengthen the team and give resilient and relentless performances on-ice that hopefully transpire into wins. Consequently, JYP has invested more in their team for the 2022/23 season by reacquiring former star players of the club that flourished during their previous visit and are familiar to the audience as well as obtaining a few new quality players. Moreover, they signed a new coaching staff which includes the experienced Jukka Rautakorpi as the head coach and famous ice hockey figure and Stanley Cup winner, Ville Nieminen, as their assistant coach. Hopefully for JYP, these moves will result in better athletic performances and thus raise the attendance rates also back to the years of success. New convincing player contracts and staff changes will create positive PR and free publicity for JYP through news media outlets.

Furthermore, JYP's communications needs to send a message to fans of their determination to succeed again in order for consumers to increase interest and faith in the comeback of a successful JYP. Advertising will be key when trying to regain the consumers' attention via social media, online media, and traditional media. Publications could build an assertive image by releasing ambitious statements from JYP's head about returning to triumph, teasing new player contracts, presenting the strong drive of newcomers in the team, creating motivational and hardworking training montages, releasing diverse non-live sports content, and ultimately getting results in games. Hype will help curious spectators to arrive to the first home games, where JYP has to prove themselves again on-ice and with the live-event.

Survey participants hoped for more exciting events and smoother service. For suggestion, the event could have more different kinds of contests and engage spectators by utilizing the media cube better and include interaction through for example, the JYP app. The media cube could have for example interactive polls during the games and games during intermission. This could help encourage participation and further activate the audience during games as well as improve the use of the JYP-app. The usage of the app decreased during the pandemic according to the survey, so it should be innovated to be niftier at events and elsewhere. Another example of improving the usage of the app in events could be the ability to preorder concessions through the app, so consumers could go collect their orders from a designated stand. This would also help improve the convenience and accessibility of the event. Furthermore, in the literature, Smith and Stewart (2015, p.50) elaborate that special experiences and occasions could bring more attention to the event

and therefore indicate greater value in the event and lure more spectators. Also, few survey participants mentioned that there should be games with themes more often in addition to the basic Halloween and Independence Day theme games. Therefore, JYP could try to organize more events that with different themes or targeted groups for example, “student games”, “Father’s/Mother’s Day games”, or “International Women’s Day game” as according to the survey, the high majority of spectators are men. Mid-week games should be especially prioritized because they are less popular than weekend games. This is natural since people have busy lives and have more free time during the weekend.

As mentioned in the literature, survey results and previously in the conclusion, an improved quality of the venue would attract more spectators due to the superior experience it provides with increased comfort and accessibility and reduces congestions through more service points and larger facilities. The current venue is outdated and cramped. Furthermore, a new venue may offer a larger variety of services and restaurants in the venue. In the survey some fans wanted to see a wider selection of concessions because the current concessions are primarily sausage and hotdog based. The variety of concessions could be augmented with simple products like pizza slices, hamburgers, and healthier alternatives for example, vegetable platters or sub sandwiches. The literature also states that a compelling selection of concessions make the experience of the event more enjoyable for the consumers (Smith & Stewart, 2015, p.48). Therefore, it would be beneficial for JYP to have their arena renewed. Indeed, there has been plans to update the arena along with the whole Hippos vicinity for example, the capacity of JYP arena is supposed to rise to around 6000 spectators (Business Jyväskylä, n.d.). When finished, the new arena and facilities would initially bring in more consumers because of the novelty value. However, the concessions issue is something JYP could improve upon already immediately in its current state of venue and event.

## 6 Discussion

The final chapter of this paper will cover thoughts of the research as well as the reliability and validity of the research. In addition, it will suggest areas for improvement and opportunities for further research.

## **Research success**

The research was able to find satisfactory answers to the research questions it had established. The main question was about defining variables that affect the desire to attend JYP home games. Briefly, the report managed to cover a multitude of different variables that may influence attendance of live events, however, the prominent variables with most influence were the pandemic, poor athletic performance, the live event itself, and being able to socialize at events. Additionally, venue quality and JYP's venues need for improvement seemed to be important for survey participants. Furthermore, the research attempted to examine how these variables have changed during the past two years. First, the pandemic has tamed from its worst times and the world is increasingly returning to normal and Covid-19 should not interfere with the 2022/23 season anymore. Second, JYP has made significant investments its next season's team and hopes to gain better athletic results. Third, according to survey participants the live event has not develop enough and needs more excitement and activity. Lastly, carefree socializing will be possible again as restrictions and social distancing are a thing of the past.

The research also investigated sports consumer behavior changes during the pandemic. Initially, the paper defined the various ways one may consume sports. However, spectator sports fans were focused on in this section. The conclusion was that the pandemic increased online sports consumption when over-the-top media services became more popular as well as all kinds of non-live sports related content in social media and other digital platforms. Moreover, JYP fans were also a part of this trend when survey participants claimed to have consumed more of JYP's and Liiga's social media content and also increased utilization of Cmore's OTT media.

The study disclosed sufficient and diverse information on the topics it set out to explore. Thus, the research can be considered as a success. However, determining the reliability and validity of survey results was a challenge. Nonetheless, the results of this research can provide JYP insight on how to proceed in the future. They have already focused on improving their athletic results but there other areas that could use delving into. For example, JYP can focus more on the content they release on digital platforms by having diverse cinematic, nostalgic, and engaging content of non-live sports since the literature states that this kind of content is trending at the moment. Additionally, the JYP-app could be revamped to offer something other social media and digital platforms do

not offer for example an interactive element during home games. With interactive solutions provided by the app JYP can also improve their event. Other ways to improve the event are for example, having more contests and activity, improving their light shows, as well as having more diverse concessions.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability reviews the repeatability of study results and evaluates whether measures are coherent (Bryman et al., 2019, p.46). In this research, examining the reliability with the stability of measures, which basically means retesting in the future (Bryman et al., 2019, pp. 172-173), is not appropriate because consumer attitudes are heavily related to a specific, unique, point in time and therefore, the results in future surveys may vary by emphasizing different variables because times and consumer opinions might have changed. The survey administered in this paper focuses heavily on the time of the pandemic and the consumer behavior during that time period, so questions in the survey would quickly turn obsolete regarding future administration of the same survey. Furthermore, survey participants responded anonymously, so it would be impossible to retest with exactly the same sample. Therefore, the reliability of this research is challenging to measure.

Validity questions the relationship between the measures and the concepts. In other words, it is examined whether an indicator really measures a concept or not. Face validity is a good baseline and a scratch of the surface for establishing validity. Face validity basically means that the measures seem to reflect to the concepts of the research (Bryman et al., 2019, p.174). It can be constituted by asking other experienced people and professionals of their opinions and views of the possible correlation between a measure and concept. This paper established face validity by presenting survey questions and measures or variables to the study advisor and the assignor, JYP, who gave their approval of the survey. Unfortunately, further validity cannot be determined in this research because validity requires reliability (Bryman et al. 2019, p.175) which was difficult to establish in the research due to unrepeatability. Furthermore, being unable to define the stability of measures over time means a measure cannot be claimed as valid. In addition, this study cannot be generalized outside of the context of this research since other sports and clubs' fans might respond differently. The results cannot be generalized inside of the JYP fan base either because the size of the population of JYP fans cannot be determined (Bryman et al. 2019, p.177). Therefore, the study focused on analyzing the sample it reached via the survey and perhaps this paper may

be a helpful source for future similar studies which seek for a comparison of results of consumer attitudes and behavior for their own research.

What can be said about the credibility of this research, however, is that the survey sample was primarily random apart from season ticket owners, which reduces researcher bias, and that survey participants volunteered to answer the survey, which makes their responses more genuine. The size of the sample was also quite large with over 400 participants. Moreover, results in the survey coincided with findings in the literature review. For example, results from different demographics were similar where women appreciated socializing at events more and men were more interested in psychological stimulation. Additionally, participants found JYP's poor athletic performances unappealing, which also concurred with previous research. The literature review included present research findings and information expressed in books, peer reviewed research journals, news articles for example from YLE, and websites of reliable organizations such as various universities and sports organizations. Good ethics were followed during the implementation of the research as all sources were cited, participants were informed of the purpose of the research and the survey was performed anonymously. Willing participants could leave their contact information for the raffle, but all contact information were disposed of after the contest winner was determined.

### **Continuation**

The research was able to define the digital consumption shifts among sports consumers but whether it was a permanent change or a temporary one was not resolved. This stems an opportunity for more research in the future to deeper examine the fluctuation of digital consumption during and after the pandemic and clarify if increased digital sports consumption was a long-term result of the pandemic or not.

Furthermore, the development of JYP's attendance rates during the post-pandemic season of 2022/23 should be followed while keeping their athletic success and other variables in mind. A new customer feedback survey could be administered during the following season regardless of whether attendance rates increased or not to understand post-pandemic consumer attitudes. Moreover, following research would help with confirming some of the results found in this research as this research contained only a singular survey. Better confidence in validity and reliability

would have been easier to determine in this research had the survey been administered to two different samples because of the ability to compare results.

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