



THE INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING CONSUMER TRUST IN THE FIELD OF ICE HOCKEY

Bachelor's thesis
Degree Program in International Business
Autumn 2024
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Degree Programme in International Business

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Subject The Influence of Customer Engagement in Developing Consumer Trust in the Field of Ice Hockey

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Abstract

Year 2024

In any industry, customers are important for the success of the businesses. It is necessary for business to understand the importance of engaging with customers to establish trust and loyalty. The aim of this study is to identify and evaluate the influence of customer/fan engagement in building trust to JYP Jyväskylä Oy. The author analysed how JYP fans show their support and engage with the team and assessed customers' perception of JYP Jyväskylä Oy to identify the factors that develop consumer/fan trust.

Before the research period, the author gathered literatures about customer engagement in different industries. In addition, a variety of research about sports, ice hockey and fan engagement has been studied to evaluate if customers' engagement in different industries and fan engagement in ice hockey are different, or do they express similar behaviours in demonstrating loyalty to the company and contributing factors in building trust.

This thesis was completed in an inductive qualitative approach where the author used a combination of one-to-one interviews and a survey in the form of a questionnaire as the research method. The interviews were conducted with two JYP fans from one of their fanclubs (Rumpuryhmä) to get insight on their experiences as a fan and learn more about their perspectives on JYP players, the team, and the organisation. The data from the survey was collected in a period of seven days, with 39 respondents from non-JYP fans and 61 respondents from JYP fans. The survey helped the author to gather more participants and study the results in real time.

Based on the result of this study, the ice hockey team must communicate effectively with the fans to establish a good relationship with them. Fans are looking for honesty and transparency and they appreciate if the organisation will listen to them and let them be part of the resolution. The result also show that the team's performance is a big factor for fans in order to be satisfied. They lose interest if the team is constantly underperforming. Fans' satisfaction leads them to engage more, and when they are always involved it develops loyalty to the team and builds trust in the long run.

Keywords Engagement, Satisfaction, Loyalty, Trust

Pages 66 pages and appendices 5 pages

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1 Introduction

Customer engagement has been proven to be a very important part of a brand. It does not only provide a good customer experience, but brands with a great customer engagement strategy have a higher chance of keeping their customers loyal for the success of the business. Customers might be satisfied with the products or services a brand offers but without interaction, it can still lead to a not so good customer experience. (Miller, 2023)

There is an abundance of research done by both academic and professionals regarding customer engagement, how it positively affects the organization and how it develops trust in consumers. These studies can be related and used in the field of sports, specifically ice hockey. According to Yoshida et al. (2014, pp. 399-400), researchers made significant contributions to the study of customer engagement and trust and how they can be developed and maintained in the sports industry. Fan engagement, as the term used to define customer engagement in sports, has become a favorite topic for as long as sports have been popular. The sports industry relies on a strong, solid, and loyal fan base. Having this kind of fan base is very critical and not easy to achieve as it takes a lot of aspects before a team can gain the trust of consumers (fans), that will lead them to loyalty, giving their full support, and engaging with the organization, team, and athletes (Yoshida et al., 2014, pp. 399-400).

Ice hockey is an exciting team sport. In Finland, this is one of the major sports in the country, in which Liiga is the top hockey league founded in 1975 (Play Hockey in Europe, 2024). As of today, there are 66,687 players including seniors, youth and female. This survey shows how people in Finland are so attracted to hockey. (IIHF, n.d.). It is interesting to know that children at a very young age are already enthusiastic about the sport. They join ice hockey clubs to learn, train, enhance their skills, or just to simply enjoy the sport. The start of the season is the much-awaited event for sports fans. All fans are excited and thrilled to see their favorite teams and players on ice and back in action. There is a new hope that their favorite team will start and end strong and will bring home the gold at the end of the season game. Not only the players, but fans are also preparing how they will show their support to the team and players. Cheers and chants to motivate the team, wearing the team's color and jersey, bringing flags/banners, buying game tickets/seasonal tickets are one of the many ways for fans to support their team. Although fans are passionate about ice hockey, it is quite challenging for the team to have their audience engaged. Are the fans loyal enough to

commit and support them throughout the season game, win or lose? Does the target audience attend the game because of their love of hockey? Because of the team and players? Because they trust the organization as a whole? The factors that will encourage audiences to attend each game and be consistent in showing their support is just one of the challenges every season (Fans Capital, 2024).

While there is much research done related to customer engagement and trust in an organization, in general, there are conflicting views and lack of research on how customer engagement can build trust in the sports field, particularly in ice hockey. And the long-term effect of fan engagement is also lacking. It is important to address these gaps to help the team in developing strategies to create a solid loyal fan base and maintain trust with their fans.

JYP Jyväskylä Oy is the commissioning company for this thesis. It is one of the professional ice hockey teams in Liiga with two national championships and two European championships won. Between 2008-2018 is considered to be the golden era of the team. They had a couple of challenging seasons and are now rebuilding to regain its place on top (JYP Liiga, n.d.). Through the study being conducted by the author, JYP Jyväskylä OY is hoping to know how JYP fans and non-JYP fans perceive the organization. Currently, they have two fanbase groups - Hurrikaanisydän with 120 solid fans and Rumpuryhmä with 20 fans. Because of the challenging seasons, it is important to understand what the relationship between the organization and their fans is. How far their fanbase can go to show their support and loyalty to the team? And do consumers still trust the organization?

1.1 Research Aims, Objectives, and Questions

Given the lack of research regarding customer engagement in building trust in the field of ice hockey, this study will aim to identify and evaluate the influence of customer/fan engagement in building trust to JYP Jyväskylä Oy using a qualitative analysis. Interviews and survey with JYP fans and non-JYP fans will be organized to determine how they recognize the organization. In order to analyse how JYP fans show their support and engage with the team, it is important to determine the factors that make them a loyal fan, how and why they trust the team, and how satisfied they are as a fan. The result will then help the author to distinguish the reasons why people do not show interest in the team, are not consistent in watching the games, or not trusting the organization.

The objective of this study is to assess customers' perception of JYP Jyväskylä Oy and identify the factors that develop consumer/fan trust. The author will also observe the customer engagement throughout the brand community.

The main research question of this study is: How does customer interaction and engagement with brand promotes consumer trust in the ice hockey industry?

In addition to the main research question, the sub-questions are necessary for the author to attain the answer and important outcomes: What are the factors that make the customer engage in ice hockey? What are the effects of fan engagement? What are the factors affecting trust in a brand? How does an organization engage to establish trust?

This study will contribute to the effectiveness of consumer/fan engagement in building trust by analysing the factors that make the fans engage, stay loyal, and committed that will be beneficial for brands. This will help address the current lack of research in sports field, specifically in ice hockey, and provide real-world value to brands operating in powerful fields.

Due to the limitation of time and author's own research experience, the author will only investigate the idea of fan engagement from professional sports teams' perspectives. Furthermore, the author will only study the fan engagement of one ice hockey team in Liiga, and so the result may vary from different Liiga teams.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

In Chapter One, the background of the study has been presented together with the commissioning company. Followed by aims, objectives, and research questions. The value of research argued has been discussed and ended with limitations.

In Chapter Two, the existing literature review and theories will be reviewed to identify the concept of customer/fan engagement and trust and their benefits in sports industry.

In Chapter Three, the research methodology will be introduced. The use of qualitative, inductive research approach will be justified. The description on how data will be collected and analysed. And the comprehensive research design will be discussed, including the limitations.

In Chapter Four, the main findings and results of the data collection and analysis will be presented.

In Chapter Five, the data collected, and findings will be interpreted to support the results in chapter four.

In Chapter Six, the key takeaways will be highlighted, and how the findings helped the research questions. The limitations, improvement opportunities, and implications for industry will be discussed.

2 Literature Review

In this chapter, the author will discuss the existing research theory that is related to the topic of customer engagement and trust by analyzing and comparing professional and academic theories. It will provide an extensive definition to justify the complex, multifaceted concept of customer engagement and consumer trust, leading to the foundation and justification of an understandable and comprehensive definition.

Subsequently, the literature review guides to the foundation of theoretical framework to better understand the concept, definition, and antecedent of customer engagement and trust.

There is a lot of research done on customer engagement and consumer trust in general, however there was extremely little study made related to the effect of customer engagement in developing consumer trust in the field of sports, specifically in ice hockey. The author will attempt to identify if the customer engagement theoretical framework done by researchers can also apply in sports, or ice hockey to be specific.

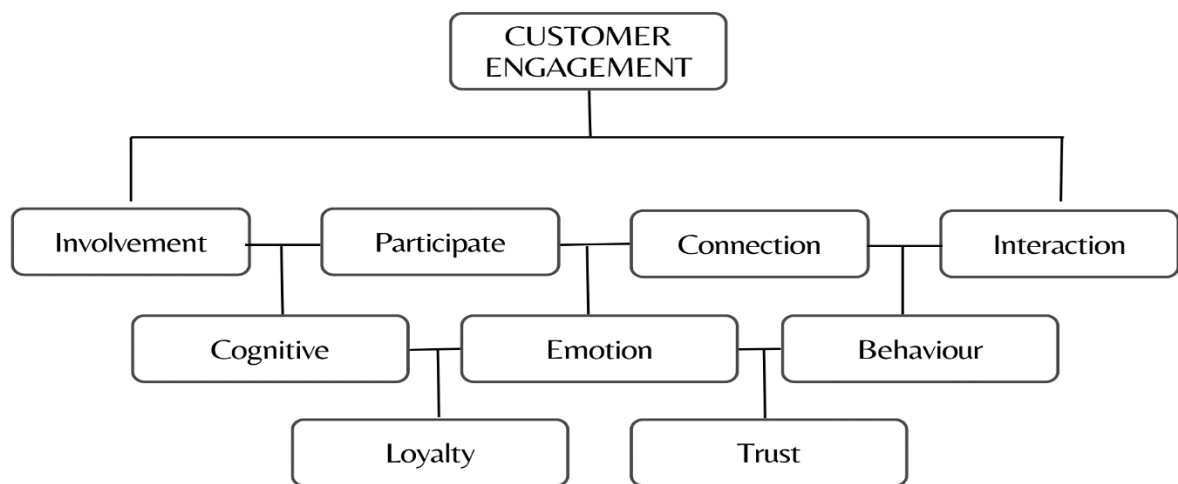
The chapter begins by deconstructing the multi-dimensional concept and complex definition of customer engagement. This is followed by the definition of trust and distrust. Next is identification and analysis of potential antecedents of customer engagement, trust and fan engagement.

2.1 Customer Engagement

Customer engagement has become a central focus in customer management research and has various definitions when one searches it from the internet. But one thing that is agreed

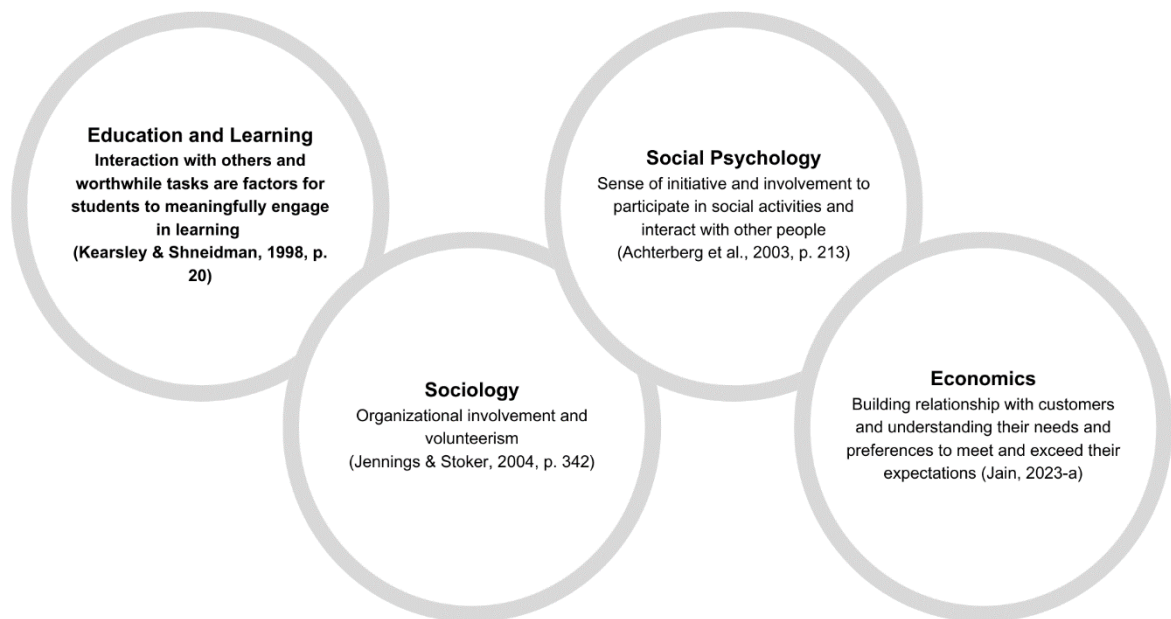
on customer engagement: it is the relation between the customers and the brand (Ebisan, 2024). However, this definition has changed over time (See Figure 1) due to innovation, behavioral factors, and different kinds of marketing strategies. Customer engagement is crucial in determining the success of a business, which requires continuous building of a strong and solid foundation with the customers and encourages them to be actively involved with an organization. According to Gambetti & Graffigna (2010, pp. 801-803), brands can maintain positive feedback from consumers and keep their loyalty and trust if they constantly input new techniques and innovative marketing strategies.

Figure 1. Customer engagement terms, dimensions and effects in brand (Adapted from Brodie, et al., 2011)



Over the years, customers have shown different ways on how they can invest their time and effort in brands, these investments are defined as customer engagement (CE) (Srivastava & Sivaramakrishnan, 2022). Study shows several definitions of customer engagement, and several researchers contribute to the meaning associated with it. Theories and concepts were made to define the term engagement, and a lot of researchers significantly contribute to this field to better understand the conceptualization of Customer Engagement (CE) (Vivek et al., 2012, p. 127). According to Bilro & Loureiro (2020, p. 284), the term “engagement” has been used in different academic disciplines including economics, social psychology, social psychology, sociology, and education and learning, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Multidisciplinary Views of Customer Engagement (Adapted from Bilro & Loureiro, 2020)



Brodie et al. (2011, pp. 7-9) laid out five fundamental propositions (FP) that define the theory of CE.

FP1: “CE is a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships”. Many businesses focus on “brand” as the central element of CE. For instance, Hollebeek (2011) states that CE occurs between a customer, a focal object, (e.g., brand), and/or other stakeholders.

FP2: “CE states occur within a dynamic, iterative process of service relationships that cocreates value”. Two-way interactions between brands and consumers create a meaningful and valuable experience.

FP3: “CE plays a central role within a nomological network of service relationships”. The investigation of the social science/management literatures has disagreement regarding the CE antecedents, coexisting factors and consequences. In the antecedents of CE, “participation” and “involvement” were found to be included. “Flow” and “rapport” were not really required, but only potential. Further, Brodie et al. (2011) states that CE may also relate to “commitment”, “trust”, “self-brand connection” and consumers’ “emotional brand attachment” and “loyalty”. While the concept of “trust” and “commitment” are seen as

antecedent of CE for existing customers, these are seen as consequences of CE for new customers.

FP4: “*CE is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/ or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions*”. The majority of CE definition in social science/management literature agreed that engagement is a union of cognitive (knowledge, belief, intelligence), emotional (feeling, mood, sentiment), and behavioural (performance, participation, action) generate CE complexity levels.

FP5: “*CE occurs within a specific set of situational conditions generating differing CE levels*”. Interaction between a customer and a focal object/agent, as well as other participants within specific relationships, can lead to different levels of cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural CE intensity. The variations depend on specific stakeholders (e.g., customer, brand) and the factors influencing CE levels.

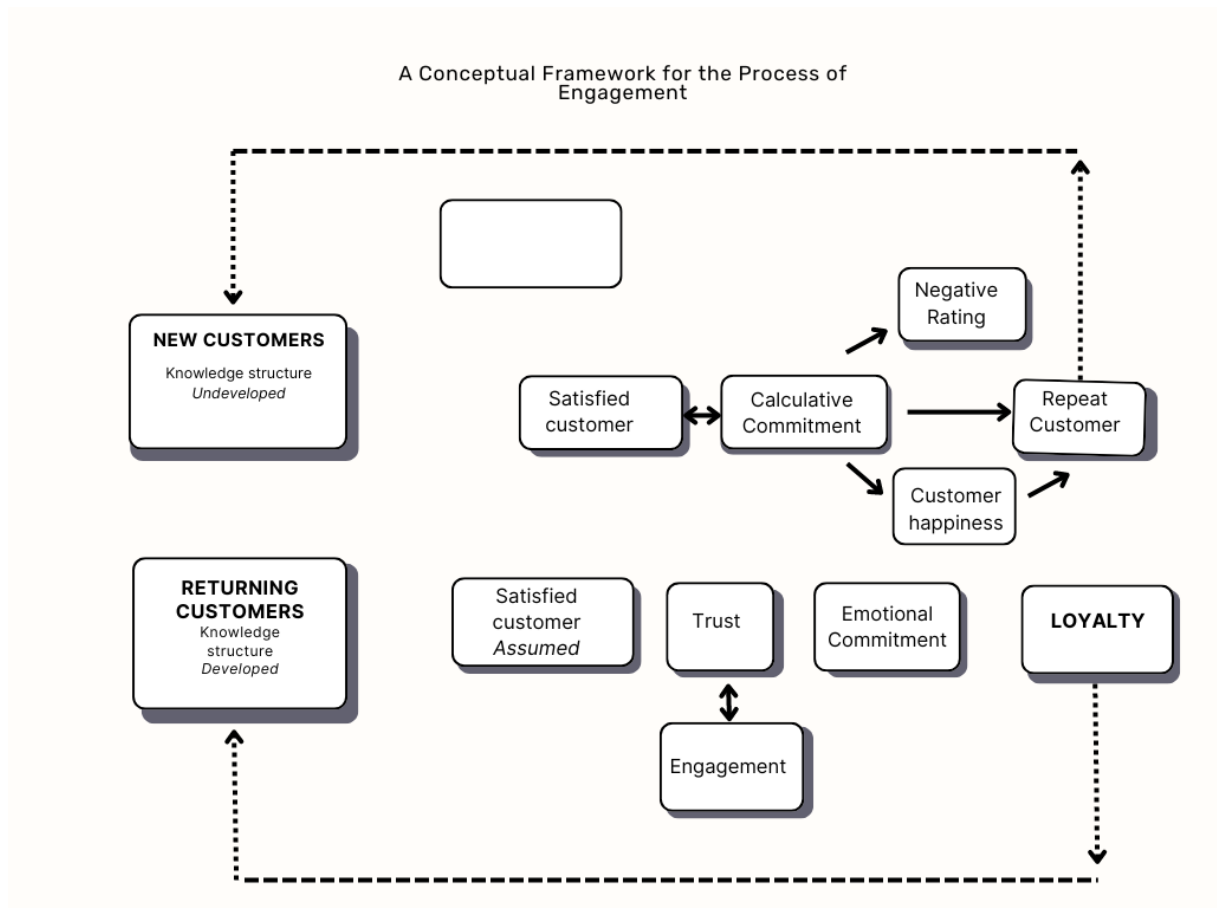
Bowden (2009, p. 65) expanded the definition of McEwen’s (2004) engagement as relating to a composition of rational and emotional bonds, and by exploring how the connections between the two has the possibility of developing a bond for a new and returning customers of a specific service brand. The model proposes a process of customer engagement in achieving brand loyalty and suggests that individuals go through a series of psychological stages. It is argued that first-time users of a service brand follow a distinct chronological pathway compared to a returning customer. The customer engagement process can include:

- For new customers, developing a continuance commitment is often based on cognitive process, leading to a purchase decision after careful evaluation.
- For repeat customers, their trust in brand grows as they become more engaged, and
- Engagement can result to affective commitment toward the service brand, which is seen to be a more emotive basis for purchase, and which can lead to solidification into lasting brand loyalty.

The model created by Bowden (2009, pp. 65-66) shown in Figure 3, focuses on how loyalty may increase among new versus repeat customers of a service brand. The term engagement has become an idea in the process of psychological aspect. It explains how loyalty develops for new customers of a service brand and is maintained for returning customers. The model of engagement purpose is to provide management with an idea that shows the importance of doing an extra mile to satisfy the customer and enable them to engage on a deeper level. The model of engagement has been developed in the industry of

hospitality, particularly the restaurant dining section and proposes a generalized stages of engagement and, therefore, is argued to have a relevance for different kind of service industries and the individual brands within those categories. For example, in the restaurant category, first time customers will have an experience in a specific restaurant and these customers are considered new customers to the brand. In the same manner that many customers will repeat their purchase by returning to a specific restaurant brand (Bowden 2009, pp. 65-66).

Figure 3. A Conceptual Framework for the Process of Engagement (Bowden 2009, pp. 65-66)



Van Doorn et al. (2010, pp. 253-258) study the concept of customer engagement behaviour (CEB). They define it as customers' attitude toward a brand, beyond just making a simple purchase, resulting from motivational drivers. The authors propose five dimensions of CEB:

- Valence - can be classified as positive or negative from a firm's perspective of CE

- Form of modality – in-role behaviours (e.g., complaint), extra-role behaviours (e.g., offering suggestion to other customers/informing the staff about incorrect price of products displayed), and elective behaviours (feedback)
- Scope – temporal and geographic
- Nature of its impact – immediacy (how fast CEB affects its target audience), intensity (level of change affected), breadth (number of people affected), and longevity (e.g., if someone posts an online review, it will have more longevity compared to in-person which may be likely forgotten)
- Customer goals – customer's purpose

Along with the five dimensions, authors also created a conceptual model of CEB to better understand the factors affecting engagement: customer based (customer satisfaction, brand commitment, trust, brand attachment, and brand performance), firm based (brand), and context based (P.E.S.T. - political/legal, economic/environmental, social and technological aspect) (Van Doorn et al., 2010, pp. 253-258).

On the other hand, Vivek et al. (2012, p. 127) argue that CE is the intensity of individuals participation and how they connect with organization's offerings and/or activities. It is composed of cognitive, behavioural, and social elements. They offer a model of CE that highlights that the antecedents of CE are participation and involvement of current or potential customers. The study reveals that the potential consequences of both involvement and participation are value, trust, word of mouth, loyalty, affective commitment, and involvement of brand community.

On contrary, Maslowska et al. (2015, pp. 10-15) argue that scholars use the word "engagement" to mean different things, and it has no strong definition established. They propose a customer engagement ecosystem which consists of: brand actions, other actors, customer brand experience, brand dialogue behaviours (BDBs), brand consumption, and shopping behaviours. Brand actions include product development, including the price, distribution, promo, and advertisement. Other actors is defined as all actions done by a brand is also directed to other consumers or media, stakeholders, competitors, influencers, etc. Customer brand experience is the thoughts and feelings that individuals have towards an object and their interaction with the product to achieve their personal goals. Brand dialogue behaviours (BDBs) is an action which can be positive, negative, or neutral; can be done online or offline; can be conducted with the use of devices or none: and targeted different audiences (self, existing customers, potential customers, etc.). Brand consumption is the customers ways on how to use and consume of brand's products or services. And the

shopping behaviours is defined as shopping to buy, and experiential shopping appear in both online and offline transactions. The model emphasizes that all actions cause a reaction to the whole ecosystem, and not only limited to the intended recipient of the message.

Harmeling et al. (2016, pp. 312-328) define customer engagement marketing as an effort of a business to inspire, empower, and evaluate the contribution of customer to business. They provide empirical evidence to support tenets by using case illustrations and a quasi-experimental field test – Tenet 1: CE marketing strengthen the effect of the product experience by enhancing cognitive bonds (task-based engagement initiatives) and making a new cognitive bond (experiential engagement initiatives); Tenet 2: CE marketing is beneficial to the firm by increasing CE through psychological ownership (task-based) and self-transformation (experiential).

Hollebeek et al. (2019) agree with the five fundamental propositions of Brodie et al. (2011), however they develop a set of revised. They believe that CE is not clearly united with service-dominant (S-D) logic in a conceptual framework, despite of the authors (Brodie et al., 2011) attempt to link the two. Therefore, they develop an integrative S-D logic framework of CE that consists of three processes of CE foundation: Customer resource integration which represents customer's incorporation, assimilation, and application of focal operant in the process of brand-related utility optimization. Customer knowledge sharing is the customers communication of perceived brand knowledge to others to interactively create value. And Customer learning which is the cycle of customer's development of mental rules and guidelines to process brand-related information. This process includes acquisition of new brand knowledge, and ensuring behavioral adjustments with the new brand knowledge acquired. The revised FPs of CE and proposed S-D logic framework are applied to customer relationship management (CRM).

2.1.1 Importance of Customer Engagement

The process of interaction between the customers and brands is critical. It is important for the managers to know and understand the benefits of engaging customers if it is implemented effectively (Raeisi & Lingjie, 2017, p. 775). Consistent customer interaction leads them to find brand value that will eventually result in customer loyalty (Briglia, 2020). A study shows that brand's experience has a big contribution in the process of consumer's decision-making (Danao & Aditham, 2024). So, et al. (2014, p. 312) present a conceptual model of customer engagement stating that the potential customer engagement consequences are: co-created value, brand experience, customer satisfaction, trust, commitment, customer value, brand

loyalty, customer equity, firm reputation, brand recognition, and financial outcomes. So et al. (2016, p. 72) suggest that CE is important in building customer-brand relationship. While Pansari & Kumar (2016) argue that CE can have tangible and intangible benefits, stating that tangible (direct) benefits can be seen in the form of firm performance (higher profits, revenue, or market share), while intangible (indirect) can be in the form of permission marketing, privacy sharing, and relevant marketing. In addition, Nirpaz (2012), states that keeping customers engaged will make them continue their business with the brand (retention); customers will go out their way to do business with the brand (effort); will talk about the brand and recommend the service (advocacy/referrals); and will be passionate about the brand. In some other industry (e.g., hotel management, hospitality), CE also improve employee satisfaction and retention, enhance customer relationships, more opportunities for professional growth and development (The Insider, 2023).

2.1.2 Customer/Fan Engagement in Sports

Sport has always been popular globally. This industry continuously expands, including the ice hockey clubs. Sports business can attain sustainable revenue, for example in ice hockey, people and fans can watch live games in arena or can use Pay Per View (PPV). Many clubs nowadays also provide ice-related services including ice hockey lessons, skating lessons, figure skating, which can give additional profits to the club. In addition to that, professional clubs also put up a fan shop where their customers can purchase products (merch) of their favorite hockey club with the logo, color, and design that represents the identity of the hockey club (Vachová et al., 2023, p.124). Customers who are engaged in sports follow their favorite teams, watch games, attend events, purchasing seasonal cards and team products, and spread the news about the team to others (Yoshida et al., 2014, p. 399).

Sport has its own unique aspect, and it has been seemingly examined the adaptability of CE work to it. Although, it has been long regarded as being “different” from other fields, some unique aspects of the sport context can influence CE. These aspects can include a) uncertain outcomes of sport competition or events, b) multiple focal points especially with team sport fandom where fans may direct their loyalty to coaches, athletes, or whole team and even allegiance to one sport over another compete for fan connection, c) sporting contests often involve the consumption of competing brands compared to other contexts, and d) one must also watch the opponent when watching professional sport team or athlete (McDonald et al., 2022, pp. 2-3). The complication of sport has been agreed upon by Smith & Stewart (2010, pp. 1-4) and stated that it is a unique institution that has distinct and special features. They specified 10 distinctive features of sport which later is consolidated to four

interrelated dimensions. First, sport is a diverse experience mired in the unjustifiable passions of fans, leading to high levels of product and brand loyalty, optimism and identification. Second, sport favours on-field winning over profit. Third, sport is subject to variable quality, in turn has implications for the management of competitive balance and anti-competitive behaviour. Fourth, sport has to manage a fixed supply schedule (Smith & Stewart, 2010, pp. 1-4).

In sport context, customer engagement is defined as fan engagement (Yoshida et al., 2014, p. 399), and the customers/individuals who show interest and follow a sport, team, or athlete are defined as “sports fan” (Johnson, et al., 2020). Reysen & Branscombe (2010, p. 176) make a comparison between fanship (fan interest) and fandom (identification with other fans) and found that the two are positively correlated yet distinct constructs. Trkulja et al. (2023, p. 37) state that a high level of trust, satisfaction, and loyalty are found from the consumers (fans) who possess strong identification with the club and are motivated to engage. Researchers attempt to have a better understanding about the characteristics of “fanship”, but it remains inconsistent (Funk & James, 2001, p. 120). The term to describe the connection between the fans and sport or team become known. The term identification is used (Lintumäki & Koll, 2022); attachment (Zhao, et al., 2024); involvement (Hyatt et al., 2013); commitment (Samra & Wos, 2014); attraction (Bang & O’Connor, 2022); association (Gladden et al., 1998); connection (Winell et al., 2022).

Several researchers contribute to the definition of fan engagement in sports. Some state that it is a sport consumer’s behaviour in non-transactional exchanges that benefit their favorite team, the team’s management and other fans (Yoshida et al., 2014, p. 403), while Rotko (2023) states that fan engagement is the process of interacting with fans before, during, and after the game to establish their active participation. Huettermann et al. (2019, p. 1) define fan engagement as a central construct of customer relationship management in professional sports.

National Hockey League (NHL) teams have several ways on how they give their fans a different kind of experience during the game. These ways are proven effective for their fans to participate more, be engaged, and attend/watch the game. NHL has a total of 32 teams: 7 in Canada and the rest in the USA. The team’s popularity depends on three factors – Legacy, Success, and Geography. The data reveals the most popular NHL team, number one on the list is Chicago Blackhawks with 2,500,000 number of fans. Followed by Boston Bruins with 2,100,000 number of fans. And the top three is Pittsburgh Penguins with 1,900,000 number of fans. (Stadium maps, n.d.). For 2023/24 season, Montreal Canadiens

has the most average fans attendance (21,099), next is Edmonton Oilers (19,173), and Tampa Bay Lightning on the third spot (19,092) (HockeyDB, n.d.).

Looking at the data collected by Betway Insider (2024), the author gathered information about the top 3 teams' strategies on how they can engage with the fans before, during, and after the game, what factors affecting the great attendance of the teams that make their fan base loyal, satisfied and feel a great experience in game and how the teams give back to their fans and community to build trust and value. Out of 32 NHL teams, only teams from the US are on top 3 for both loyal NHL fanbases (Boston Bruins, New York Rangers, Chicago Blackhawks) and teams with the highest stadium attendance (Vegas Golden Knights, Nashville Predators, Minnesota Wild), and none from Canada team.

Boston Bruins:

- Bruins Academy - is a youth fan club where members receive a subscription, monthly e-newsletter, access to exclusive Kids Club events, in-game special promotion, 10% online purchase
- Last minute ticket alerts - email alert is sent the day of a home game when last minute tickets are released
- Behind the B - fans will be given a behind-the-scenes look at the inner working of the organization, access into the team's locker room, executive boardroom, and players' homes
- Community All-Star - dedicated members will receive the Community All-Star recognition during each home game. Winners will receive four home game tickets and a shout-out on Bruins official Twitter and Facebook channels during the game
- License Plate - fans who live in Massachusetts or Rhode Island are eligible to register their own Boston Bruins license plate to support local youth hockey
- Boston Bruins Foundation - the foundation donates cash and additional prizes to local, non-profit youth hockey players, teams, and organizations
- Blades & Promo Team Request - all proceeds from variety of appearances like birthdays, corporate events, charity function, etc., benefit to Boston Bruins Foundation (Boston Bruins official website, n.d.).

New York Rangers:

- Official App of the New York Rangers – it gives 24/7 coverage, unique content, highlights and ways to engage with the team

- Rangers Text – free text messages from the Rangers about news, ticket offers, promotion, contests, etc. (New York Rangers official website, n.d.).

Chicago Blackhawks:

- Blackhawks 50/50 – 50% of the total pot benefit the Chicago Blackhawks Foundation and the other 50% goes to one lucky participating fan that will be announced in arena during the third period of the game
- Nominate Someone for Rocky's Seat – a bronze seat has been unveiled to honor the late Blackhawks Chairman W. Rockwell "Rocky" Wirt. This seat is used to recognize others who carry forward Roky's spirit of community involvement, positive impact, and growing the game of ice hockey
- Zamboni Rides – fans can ride Zamboni which is available during pregame to give fans the opportunity to watch the team's warmup, and both intermissions.
- Tommy Hawk Visits – fans can request an appearance at an upcoming game with a special visit from Tommy Hawk
- Game-Used Warmup Pucks – pucks will go on sale after warmups at each home game with the team logos and the date of the game
- National Anthem Request – fans can participate on the ice during the national anthem
- Birthday Messages – fans can wish close friend happy birthday during the first intermission
- Welcome Messages – fans have the opportunity to display welcome messages on the Blackhawks Scoreboard at the beginning of the second period (Chicago Blackhawks official website, n.d.).

Vegas Golden Knights:

- VGK-9 Club – is a free community created for fans who are united by their love of dogs and Golden Knights. Exclusive newsletter, content, information, meet-ups, and more benefits are given to the members
- Youth Hockey – program for all skills level that provides players an environment where they can develop into good teammates and community member on and off the ice
- Vegas Golden Knights Foundation – supports the Las Vegas community and non-profit organizations

- Community Support – community outreach events such as Ball Hockey Clinics, 12 Knight of Giving, Cure 4 the Kids, Teacher Appreciation, October 1 visit, Gas Up Events, Reading Week, First Responder Appreciation, and Everfi Field Trip
- Los VGK - represent and celebrate the Hispanic and Latin American community throughout the Kingdom, strengthening community partnerships, and genuinely engage with the Golden Knights' Hispanic fan base (Vegas Golden Knights official website, n.d.).

Nashville Predators:

- Take a Ride on the Zamboni! – fans can purchase a ride, and the proceeds go to the Nashville Predators Foundation
- Send a Message on FangVision! – fans may put a birthday greeting or anniversaries on arena scoreboard during the first intermission
- Annual Events – Nashville Predators Fishing Tournament, Filip Forsberg Hockey Clinic, Petey's Party, Brent Peterson Golf Classic, Nashville Predators Alumni Clay Shoot, Bruno & Friends' Preds & Pins Bowling Tournament, GnashVegas Casino Night & Auction, Hockey for Her, Nashville Predators Wine Festival & Tasting presented by Signature Transportation, and Craft Beer Festival
- Nashville Predators Player Initiatives – players developed a program to support charities and organizations around the city of Nashville. These programs include: 365 Pediatric Cancer Fund Presented By Twice Daily, 90's Mighty RO'R, Blueline Buddies, Best Buddies, Youth Hockey Clinic, Holiday Outreach, Preds Pet Club, and Ford Military Salute
- Giving Back to SMASHVILLE – Nashville Predators Foundation donates to local charities for programs and projects in Nashville and Tennessee that will benefit youth and their families
- Supergrants – this will cover the salary costs and work equipment for a new coach to help students navigate enrolment and persistence in college
- Request a Donation – apart from giving funds, they also donate Predators merchandise or tickets (Nashville Predators official website, n.d.).

Minnesota Wild:

- Wild Fest – street hockey tournament
- Zamboni Rides – fans can ride the Zamboni to help get the ice game ready

- Cub Fan Cart – friends hang out on the ice while riding the ice cruiser during intermission
- On-ice Photo – fans can have an experience to take a group photo on the ice
- Bench Buddies – fans can sit on the Wild's bench during warm-ups for an up-close view of the team
- Community Initiatives – such as Adopt-a-Dog Program, AuSM Sensory Kits, Charity of the Month, Hockey Fights Cancer
- Hockey Programs - such as Hockey Day Minnesota, Girls Hockey Weekend, Girls Hockey Weekend, Hockey Is For Me, Little Wild Learn To Play, Mite Holiday Jamboree, Walz Hockey School, Wild For A Day, Youth Hockey Spotlight Games, Youth Referee Seminars, Youth Hockey Referee Spotlight Program, and Zebras Care
- Education Programs – such as Faceoff For Fitness, Hockey Captain Spotlight, Leadership Summit, STEM Day, Teacher of the Month/Year, Wild About Education, Wild About Reading, and Wild University
- In-Game Messages – personal messages that will display during the first intermission of the game
- Nordy – fans can invite Nordy on their event
- Photo Requests – photos are free to request for you or someone you know participated in at a Wild game
- Ink Rock – local artist or band will be featured at each Saturday home game for fans to enjoy music during each intermission (Minnesota Wild official website, n.d.).

2.1.3 Fan Engagement Marketing Strategies

Fan engagement shows importance on sport consumer behaviour. Sport managers should begin to closely monitor and measure the level of fan engagement among their target fan bases. The information collected can be used as marketing strategies. For example, sport managers can keep track of fan engagement to assess the impact of operational changes on fans' engagement level. These changes can include facilities, merchandise, fan loyalty programs, fan communities, and social media (Yoshida et al., 2014, p. 412).

The sports industry is highly competitive, and fan engagement is the main foundation of sports marketing, playing a crucial role in shaping the continuous success of sports teams and brands (Donen, 2024). Marketing has become an important tool for any ice hockey team in building a loyal fan base. It has become a multifaceted approach, that it is no longer just about selling tickets or merchandise, but it is now including everything (e.g., digital

advertising, social media, sponsorships, etc.) (Strauss, 2023-a). Marketing strategies are one of the things that sports managers need to supervise from time to time for the sports teams or brands to achieve their goals.

Branding: Branding is both a sign and symbol (Bastos & Levy, 2012, p. 349). It is more than just a name; it is a combination of images, association, meanings, and experiences in people's mind (Fan, n.d., p. 3). Gladden et al. (1998, pp. 5-15) created a conceptual framework to help the sport manager to understand the positive effect of brand equity, such as loyalty and increase revenue. The authors suggest that three antecedents should be considered to achieve brand equity: the team (success, head coach, star player), the organization (reputation and tradition, conference and schedule, entertainment package/product delivery), and the market (local/regional media, geographic location, competitive forces, support). And because brand gives your organization an identity, it is indeed an important asset. Establishing a strong and solid brand influences purchasing decision of customers (fans), helps them remember the company/team, and will boost advertising and marketing (Decker, n.d.).

Online Strategies: Brands can promote their products or services, or the brand itself via internet. It is one of the marketing strategies that is cost effective, flexible, allows the company to target the audience (demographics, interest, behaviour, location), and can track and measure fans' performance with data and insights. There are several online strategies launched by brands, these can include: Search Engine Optimization (SEO) that improves website's visibility in search engines (e.g., Google) to display your site on their result pages. Email Marketing can personally connect brands with customers by sending emails to fans or potential fans and share information, build a foundation, and encourage them to get involved. Content Marketing can include blogs, eBooks, podcasts, videos to share valuable and useful content that is relevant to fans and attract potential customers. Social Media Marketing includes social media platforms to promote a brand, including products and services. This is one of the easiest ways to engage with fans and can increase brand recognition. Social media platforms are one way to provide customer service efficiently, gather their feedback and monitor brand reputation online. Paid Marketing such as pay-per-click (PPC) offers more immediate results compared to SEO as it appears on search engines, social media, apps, or websites. It helps to boost brand awareness and attract more visitors. Influencer Marketing is collaborating with influencers which is also a smart marketing strategy. Followers already trust the influencers they follow. And when they promote a brand, their followers get more interested and see it as genuine and trustworthy. It is a great strategy to boost brand awareness and engagement. And affiliate marketing in which this strategy can make money.

Brands can sell more without spending too much on advertising. Brands can extend their reach beyond their immediate as affiliates promote their brand (Silva, 2024).

Official team website: Sports website can serve as effective tool for the organisations to connect with their sport fans. Sports organisations consistently rely on websites to reach marketing goals and improve customer satisfaction. Scholars in the sports management field become interested to dig deeper the marketing opportunities through sports websites and how the behaviour that fans show on websites (Hur et al., 2012, p. 171). Hur et al. (2011, p. 458) propose a structural model of website quality, where sports fans can develop loyalty to a sport team's website, if they develop positive perception and satisfaction with the website. Tarafdar & Zhang (2006, p. 22) discuss and analyse the characteristics of website and identify the importance of it. In addition to the characteristics of website, Seckler et al. (2015, pp. 47-48) identify how these characteristics influence trust and/or distrust. They suggest that a website should provide good usability and security to achieve trust and avoid distrust by focusing on graphic improvement and structure design. While these studies provide the importance of sports website, several researchers also examined the behaviour of consumers towards sports website. For example, Sinha & Fukey (2020) study about the influence of colour, usability and aesthetics on consumer behaviour and web experience; Lorenzo et al. (2007), Vila & Kuster (2011), and Al-Qeisi et al. (2016) study about how web design affect consumer behaviour; Prashar et al. (2017, pp. 1-4) propose a structural model that emphasizes why and how satisfaction with website matters; Gao & Bai (2014, p. 656) are the first one to investigate the influence of website atmospheric cues (informativeness, effectiveness and entertainment) and its impact on purchase intention and satisfaction. The proposed model examines whether the flow state of consumer (organism) will result from the three website atmospheric cues (stimuli) that will influence consumer's intention to purchase and satisfaction (responses).

Event Strategies: Hosting an event has economic benefits as it attracts visitors and provide an opportunity for sports team. Research has identified some positive impact of hosting an event (Wood et al., 2018, pp. 1-2). Examples of benefit of a successful event hosting are: growth of existing business, increase business confidence, establishing and maintaining business and professional contacts, increased community interest in sport that can lead to greater participation (Dwyer et al., 2000); increase collaboration; build stronger ties between organizations and participants (Schüßler & Sydow, 2012, p. 11); collaboration and building strong partnerships (Bergsgard & Jøsendal, 2010, p. 353). Previous research related into event marketing focused on analyzing the benefit and effectiveness of event marketing, little attention was given to motivations of consumers to participate in an event marketing.

Voluntary participation is a huge factor to achieve successful event marketing. Sports manager must understand first the needs and motivations of consumers or fans before implementing their marketing events (Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2006, p. 644). For the sake of understanding participant's motivations, S-O-R (stimulus, organism, response) model was created by Wohlfeil & Whelan (2006) which highlights the reason of why participants want to voluntarily involve in an event marketing. Arturs & Agita (2024, pp. 26-28) study about improving event marketing (e.g., social media channels, use of technology, team merchandise etc.) in ice hockey league to improve satisfaction, increasing match attendance, and develop the league's overall interest to fans and sponsors. They mentioned that sports must proactively use social media so audiences can engage to boost satisfaction. In this way, it can also help to address marketing and cooperation issues with the league.

In-Game Experience: Ice hockey becomes more and more exciting as technology continues to evolve. It makes the fans engage more, and experience game on a different level and perspective. Creating an in-game experience in sports, including ice hockey offers several benefits for players (real-time data analytics, provide insights into player performance), for fans (apps provide real-time statistics, replays, and they feel more connected to the game), and for the whole team (improve player's performance, strategies, can build more loyal fan base, attract sponsors and partnerships) (Morreale, 2022).

National Hockey League (NHL) is one of the best examples of professional league that provide fans a different level of experience during game. David Lehanski, NHL executive vice president of business development and innovation, said that NHL fans are so avid, and so they are planning on how they can leverage 5G and cloud to create new fan experiences. NHL gave an idea on how they will enhance live-game streaming and future in-arena experiences during the New Jersey Devils-Buffalo Sabres game (Morreale, 2022). The applications used to express in-arena experiences are as follows:

- Verizon develops an app where fans can view from their Apple device multiple camera feeds and angles of a game in real time
- Using a mobile device, fans can now see what's going on behind the net at the other end, especially if you are sitting in front row
- The NHL and WSC Sports collaborated to provide fans an instant access to ongoing stream of replays and highlights of the action
- (Systems, Applications & Products in Data Processing) SAP-NHL Coaching Insights App for iPad was used to display real-time information like time on ice, player speed, face-off percentage, players speed, puck zone time, virtual replay

- Vizrt showcased a cloud-based game production model that allows user to produce live games in the cloud as many versions of the game they want
- Beyond Sports and Sportradar introduced a concept that allows fans to fully engage themselves in a virtual live-game experience
- Source Digital showed examples of how fans can customize their NHL streaming experience to distinguish what fans do or do not want to see and hear (e.g., stats, live social networking, multiple audio feeds)
- Puck and player tracking technology was installed where 14-16 infrared cameras track sensors in pucks and jerseys from the beginning up to the end of the game. This generates data for teams, media, and fans (Morreale, 2022).

Sponsorship and Partnership: Endorsement deals and partnerships are more likely to be obtained by teams and athletes with high fan engagement (Donen, 2024). Sponsorship can improve sport and fan engagement in many ways. The products or services that sponsors offer can support events and teams to bring fans closer to the team they follow. For example, gamification can increase the enjoyment of fan experience on-site pre-match or post-match. Esports have become an extension of sponsorship that allows younger fans to connect and engage with the sports or athletes (Johan Cruyff Institute, 2020). The unwavering support of fans boosts the team's popularity and visibility that attracts sponsors and partners. Sport managers must pay close attention to sponsorship as part of their marketing strategy. There are lots of good reason why sponsorship is a good strategy, these can include: increasing brand exposure and reach, captivates audience engagement strategies, creating positive brand association, it leverages the power of influencers for growth, and creates unbreakable bonds with loyal fans (Speidel, 2023). Major corporations are willing to invest millions of dollars to sponsor professional ice hockey teams. Trust and commitment are very important factor of successful partnership. Another aspect is strategic compatibility in which partners work together on plans and have goals that complement one another (Cornwell, 2016, p. 177). Although there are several studies connecting sponsorship and partnership as part of marketing strategy in sports, there are times that fan engagement has a negative impact with the sponsors. Fans do not always follow sponsors; they have the potential to damage the image of sponsors. One of the best examples is the endorsement of Michael Jordan and Gatorade. The slogan "**Be like Mike**" became very popular, so it has an impact to the fans that when you drink Gatorade, you will be like Mike. Another example was when Cristiano Ronaldo removed the Coca-Cola bottles during his press conference and encourage people to drink water, fans adopt same attitude and Coca-Cola company market value dropped billions of dollars (Johan Cruyff Institute, 2021).

2.1.4 Importance of Fan Engagement in Sports

Several studies contribute to the general meaning of fan engagement and its possible outcome. Lachowetz et al. (2001) use the National Basketball Association in North America to determine the value that fans provide in a team. They suggest that failure to give importance to customer lifetime value and weak relationship-marketing practices into the strategy will result in lower customer retention rates and inability to grow the core business. Brown & Billings (2013, p. 80) argue that fans can be the unofficial arm of their favorite team. They will actively engage in crisis communication to defend the reputation of the organization and team. More engaged fans are likely to invite friends to watch future games and events of the team (Yoshida et al., 2014, p. 408) and has impact on other fans by amplifying brand awareness and reach (e.g., word-of-mouth in social media) (Loureiro & Kaufmann, 2018, p. 3). In addition, fan engagement can increase fan loyalty and advocacy. Because of the deep emotional bond, loyal fans continue to support their favorite team – win or lose. They become an influential brand ambassador by actively promoting the team both online and offline. It also enhances the overall fan experience (Wakefield & Bennett, 2017). Fan engagement directly impacts revenue because fans will invest in merchandise and purchase tickets to watch games. And another important benefit is the strengthening of community connections as it brings people together to create shared experiences even after the game (Seen, 2024). Ice hockey is a very intense sport to watch and having strong fan support is a great motivating factor for home teams. Teams with passionate and engage fan base can provide a competitive advantage; they can create an intimidating atmosphere for opposing teams. And when the crowd is loud and lively, players become inspired and boost the team performance (Laylo, 2023).

2.2 Trust

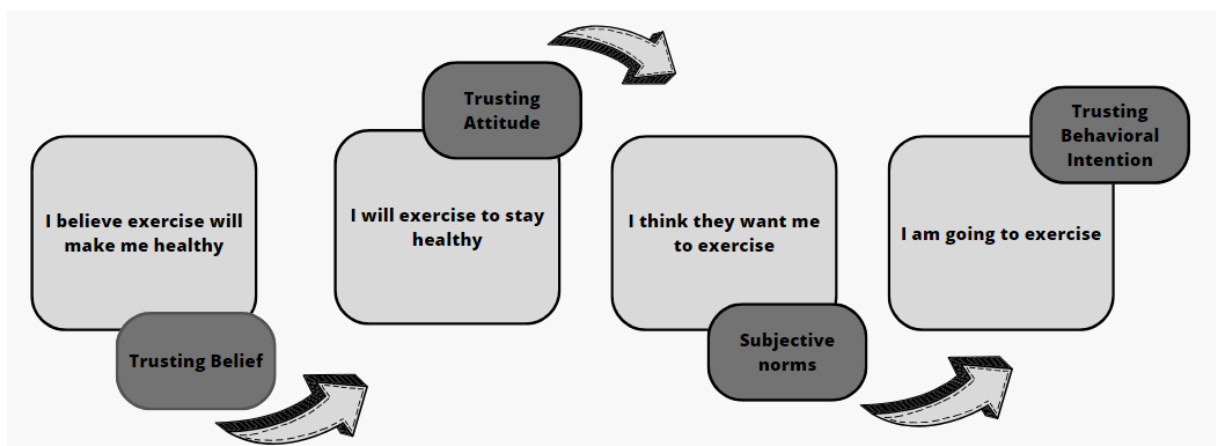
Over the years, trust has been studied from several disciplinary perspectives by different scholars (Bhattacharya et al., 1998, p. 459). In psychological perspective, trust involves risk and is defined as positive expectation about other person's intentions and behaviours (Uttenthal, 2024, p. 398). In sociological perspective, trust is the basic element of social capital that is vitally important for society to function. It involves interpersonal trust (family, friends, or neighbours) and institutional trust (government, member of parliament, or political parties) (Uttenthal, 2024, p. 408; Robbins, 2016). In political science perspective, trust is rational; it involves an individual exposing herself to potential harm by other person, group, or institution. Trust is unconditional; it is given to specific individuals or institutions within

particular domain. For instance, citizens may entrust their lives to their government for protection during war but do not trust bureaucracies that spend funds during peacetime. Trust is a judgment; one either trusts or distrusts (Levi & Stoker, 2000, p. 476). In economic perspective, trust is the spinal cord of economics as it promotes economic efficiency (Tonkiss, 2009, p. 196). In organizational perspective, Mayer et al. (1995, p. 712) propose that “*trust is the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party*”.

2.2.1 Attitudes, Subjective Norms, Intentions, Belief

Trust is multidimensional construct, and its levels appear in different forms and can examine at several levels of analysis (Li, et al., n.d., p. 104). In general definition of trust, it is a psychological state where an individual is willing to be vulnerable involving positive expectations of another’s intentions or behaviour (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). It is viewed as virtue (Baron, n.d., p. 5); belief (Falcone & Castelfranchi, 2004, p. 324); reliance (Railton, 2013, p.2); attitude (Jones, 1996, p. 6); intention (Gill, et al., 2005, p. 289); behaviour (Blomqvist, 1997, p. 274); expectation (Barr, 2003, p. 614). These complexity and differences can, somehow, be reunited by The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) model Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) according to Nickersen (2023). While TRA do not focus on trust, the theory’s components (attitudes, subjective norms, and intentions) can be used to understand that trust is one of the aspects that influence someone’s behaviour. The theory proposed that that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavior are contributing factor to intention. And this will lead to behaviour (Figure 4) (Nickersen 2023).

Figure 4. TRA Application to Trust (Adapted from Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)



To explain further how the model works, belief is defined as the probability that an object has some attribute and will lead to a specific consequence. Attitude is an assessment of a particular behaviour in a positive or negative way. Subjective norms is a perceived pressure of important people in someone's life (family, friends, or colleagues) and whether they think those people want them to perform or not perform a specific behaviour. There are two types of subjective norms according to psychologists: injunctive norms – what someone thinks other people think they should do; descriptive norms – perception of what other people think they should do. And behavioural intention is the readiness to take a risk in performing a behaviour (Nickersen, 2023). It is important to understand that trust will not exist if someone will believe but no intention to take a risk, otherwise it is a limited trust (Moorman et al., 1993, p. 82). Therefore, a complete definition for this research must include both belief (trustworthiness), and willingness (attitude) to perform the intention (behaviour) of taking a risk to trust the said partner.

2.2.2 Cognitive and Affective Bases of Trust

Given the fact that trust can be implied as an attitude, it is argued that trust consists of two types – cognitive base and affective base (McAllister, 1995, p. 25). Cognitive subfactor of trust reflects as attitude to believe and judgements about another's trustworthiness. And emotional subfactor of trust reflects as an attitude of emotional bonds and feelings (Lewicki, et al., 2006, p. 997). Castelfranchi & Falcone (2011) propose a cognitive model of trust and suggest that trust requires BDI-like agents (belief, desire, intention) where trust involves evaluations and expectations by trustor that believe in trustee's behaviour (e.g., competence, willingness, reliability) (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2011, p. 87).

And since cognitive trust is considered "trust from the head" and affective is "coming from the heart", there is disagreement whether the one is better than the other. The trust you feel for important person in your life (parent, spouse, children) is likely to be an affective trust, regardless of the culture. But when in the business world, cultural differences matter. It may not be sufficient to build deep relationship that fosters loyalty and long-term commitment if it lacks emotional connection. In countries where culture is more on task-based, businesspeople are more likely to develop work relationship on cognitive trust. It is challenging to achieve goals and maintaining standards and might overlook competence and reliability if someone will rely purely on emotions (Meyer, 2015). Arguments about trust include that trust is not behavioural, if it is cognitive. Someone may trust another person, and can act to give evidence of the trust, but the given action is not itself the trust (Hardin, 2002, p. 10). Other scholars, especially with economic perspective, argue that trust is a choice,

action, or behaviour. Hassell (2005, p. 132) argue for the behavioural view, state that trust is an act, not a judgment. Someone trusts when he/she performs an act of trust. Li, (2015, p. 1) state argues about trust as choice. Someone cannot give his/her trust if he/she will not take a leap of hope/faith. On contrary, some other say that trust is more affective base in nature. It is an attitude of optimism about the goodwill and competence of another person trusted (Jones, 1996, p. 4). Emotional states influence trust, the happier the person are, the more likely they trust other people (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005, p. 740). However, in business, marketing campaigns that use affective appeal has higher response, but cognitive trust is stronger to a future interaction of customers to a business (Bilisbekova, et al., 2020, p. 1089). In economics, Johnson & Grayson (2005, p. 505) state that affective trust is a contributing factor for customers willingness to do business with a brand in the future, but it has a low impact on financial service relationships.

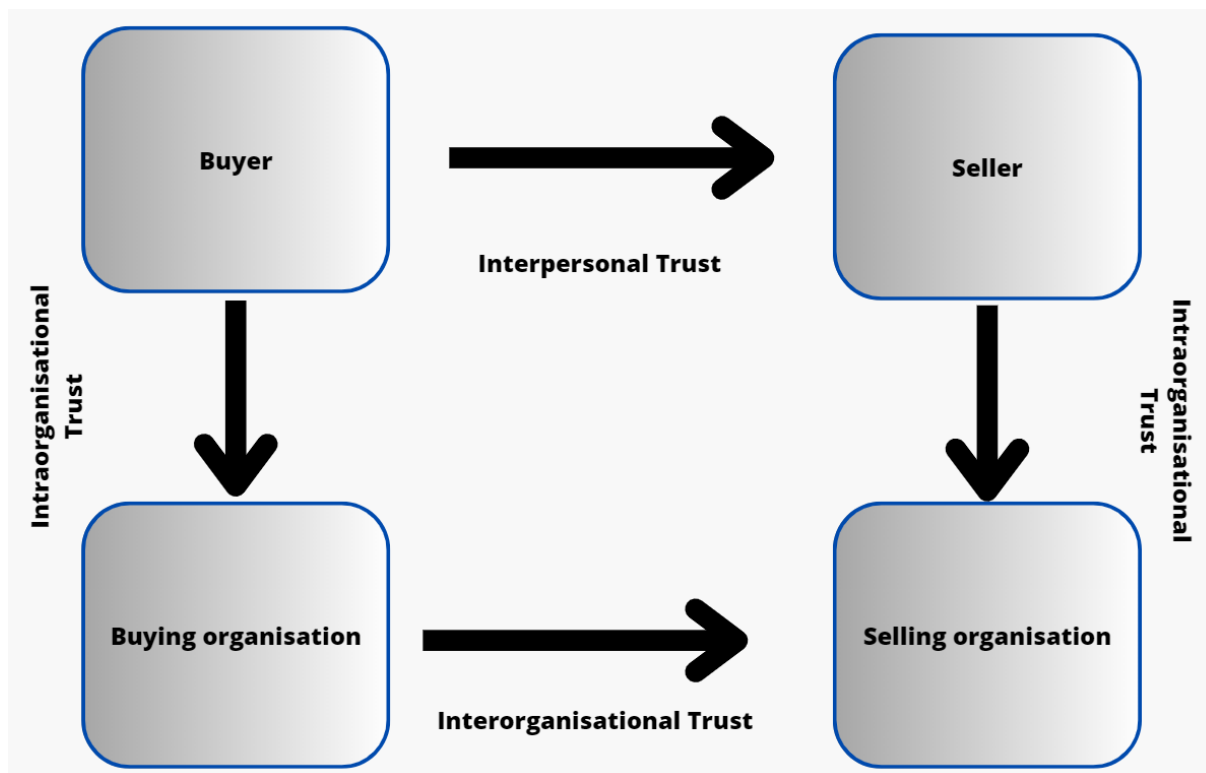
While both affective and cognitive trust have their own limitations and weaknesses, they are both needed to achieve the success in a business. There is little disagreement among scholars about the negative effect of trust (Frankema & Costa, 2005, p. 263). Several researchers argue that trust involves risk effect. In natural nature of trust, it includes any advantage. The act itself of trusting and relying on to someone expose to risks. Trust is not always good; it can be dangerous for individual and organisations (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2011, pp. 60-86). Giving someone our trust makes us vulnerable to the possibility that it does not matter to that person to respect trust (Baghrmian et al., 2020, p. 576). And this vulnerability is connected to dependence. If we trust that a co-worker will keep his/her promise to help us with a project, we depend on that co-worker, which can be risky if they are unreliable (Psychology Today, n.d.).

2.2.3 Trustor and Trustee

Attitude always have an object (Zanna & Fazio, 1982, p. 287), so we need to understand who is giving trust, and who to trust? Basically, who is the trustor, and who is the trustee? Trustor is the term used to identify a person or individual who creates a trust. This individual can also be called as Grantor or Settlor. It can be a single person, married couple or even an organisation who is responsible in choosing who will manage the trust (trustee). And because trustee (person or organisation) will manage and administer the trust, they are known as fiduciary responsibility to act in the best interest of the trust and beneficiaries named in it (Hicks, n.d.).

Dietz & Hartog (2006, p. 2) study focuses on trust within organisations, such as between co-worker, employees and supervisors/managers (intra-organisational trust). They also discuss the trust between organisations (interorganisational trust) and trust between organisations and their customers (interpersonal trust).

Figure 5. Organisational Trust (Adapted from Dietz & Hartog, 2006)



For this study, fans will represent the buyer. JYP ice hockey team/players will represent the seller and their interpersonal trust with each other must develop to bring a solid fanbase. The JYP Jyväskylä Oy will represent the buying organisation, and the sponsors/partnerships will represent the selling organisation. These two must create an interorganisational trust for the success of cooperation and collaboration with each other. For intraorganisational trust, the coach/players are the seller and the JYP organisation is the seller organisation, and they need to unite and develop a good relationship to reach their goal. Because trust is vital for all individuals/organisations involve in it, lots of research made about trust in every sector. However, research about trust in sports field is challenging. Given that trust can and/or should be given between sports team, athletes, sponsors, and fans, trust and respect between players to players is sometimes understated. In sports, trust is not just between the fans and teams. It must be present between players-sponsors-fans-coaches, and even between players and its opponents. Colburn (1985, p. 167) states that without trust among

competitors for the process of the game, play becomes risky and dangerous. Lack of trust makes it difficult for opponent the willingness to serve. Wadeson & Wirtz (2005, p. 156) formed the Hockey/Art Alliance (The Wirthz Three Level System) to promote teamwork, to solve conflicts without combat, and to develop interpersonal relationship/trust. The first level focuses on building trust; the second level is about facilitating expression in art and words; and third level is connecting art and feelings and to apply group learning to life.

Trust is one of the foundations of teamwork in hockey (Strauss, 2023-b). Building trust within a hockey team is important for an excellent performance. Players feel supported and valued if trust among teammates is present (Athletic Insight, 2024). Trust is stronger when working with familiar partners. It makes the performance better because the trust is already built. (Hancock, et al., 2017, p. 11). Teammates can rely on each other, work together more efficiently that will lead into winning games. They are not afraid to take risks and try new strategies because they trust that they have each other's back (Strauss, 2023-b). The Detroit Red Wings is an example of a team with strong team dynamics through trust-building activities outside the rink. Players maintain consistent communication among teammates. Any conflicts are resolved effectively that maintains the harmony within the team. It allows them to remain focus on their objectives and goals and give their excellent performance on the ice (Athletic Insight, 2024).

2.2.4 Distrust

There are lots of scholar study about trust, but did not pay much attention to distrust. Distrust is defined as the degree to which someone believes and is certain or confident that the other person lacks traits beneficial to one (McKnight & Chervany, n.d., p. 44). Specifically, it is a belief that others will not act in one's best interest, and the expectation that the specific individual will not be capable and demonstrates irresponsible behaviour that will be harmful (Cho, 2006, p. 26). Trust issue is what people often say when someone shows habitual behaviours of distrust. The relationship can be challenging if it is associated with some of the behaviours associated with a difficulty trusting others, whether it is a relationship with spouse, children, family, friends or even in the organisations (Gillette, 2022). In 2005, Frankema & Costa investigate the close connection between trust and the need for control. They found out that when someone lacks a sense of control, he/she is less likely to develop positive expectations of others, a key feature of trust. Low level of trust is a threat to representative democracy. If the citizen will not trust in the competence of its elected representative and their commitment, the implementation of policies will not be effective (Carstens, 2023, pp. 2- 20). Cho (2006, p. 33) examines consumer's behavioural intentions

as outcomes of consumers trust and distrust. The author finds out that reducing distrust does not necessarily direct to high trust. Also, negative consequences of distrust may not be restored by attempting to improve trust.

In ice hockey, sometimes distrust can be seen if fans are dissatisfied with the referee and judgements in the matches. Distrust is being expressed with noise and shouts if fans feel unfair in connection to penalties (Granström, 2011, p. 11). Coaches and referees are often involved with negative incidents that can lead to distrust of fans and audience. Sometimes, an individual's scandal has a bad impact to the whole organization of sport. For example, fans made question the integrity of NBA games because of the scandal of NBA referee, Tim Donaghy. This scandal led to distrust of the entire NBA organization (Lee et al., 2013, p. 235). Distrust in ice hockey affects not only the entire team and players, but the hockey community as well. In an instance, a study from a group of University of British Columbia researchers found the professional men's hockey players feel pressure to stay silent despite having a serious personal problem. Players are being afraid of losing position on a team, judgment from teammate and coaches, and judgment from fans. The distrust to the institutions governing the sport contributes to a broader distrust in hockey organization. And distrust among teammates and coaches has high impact to the performance of the players and team dynamics (Britten, 2022).

2.2.5 Benefit of Trust in a Brand

Many organizations' goals are to build a strong brand as it provides a host of benefits to a firm. Customers satisfaction with the brand establishes brand trust (Cuong, 2020, p. 99; Ercis, et al., 2012, p. 1402). The consumer's trust in a brand lead to brand loyalty (Ballester & Aleman, 2005, pp. 187-189; Lau & Lee, 1999; Shin et al., 2019). And the consumer's loyalty to a brand has a positive impact on brand equity (Alhaddad, 2014, p.31; Zia et al., 2021, p. 1091). Reast (2005, p. 9) extended this study of correlation between brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand loyalty, and brand equity. The author suggests that brand trust will benefit to brand extension. This has several benefits to companies looking to extend their products and services. It leverages brand equity and makes it easier for the company to introduce new products. It enhances brand image and facilitates strategic growth. One of the successful brand extensions is Ikea (furniture to food products), Colgate (toothpaste to oral care products), Pampers (diaper to baby care products), Nike (footwear to sports equipment and apparel), Apple (computers to iPod, mobile phones, and tech accessories like Apple watch) (All Time Design, 2024). While Becerra & Badrinarayanan (2013, p. 371) study about

influence of brand trust and found out that purchase intentions and positive referrals of customers are influenced by trusting a brand.

Trust for Leadership: The coach-athlete relationship is considered an interpersonal relationship. The stability of this relationship can be maintained through connection between coach and athletes, if trust is present. The overall strength of the whole team is highly depending on the strength of the leader. According to study, trust is one of the most important qualities of a successful leader. No matter how good and competitive a coach is, without trust from athletes, effective coaching will be difficult (Lee, et al., 2023, pp. 2-6). A leader motivates the members of the team, gives guidance, and leads them in accordance with the principles of ethics. A leader who is confident impacts the attitudes and behaviours of the team members and affects their performance. During a game, sometimes the coach must make a quick decision between fans and team decision due to limited time. And trust plays an important role in this kind of situation (Lipka, 2016, pp. 42-43). When a leader manages the team effectively, it can maximize the team performance and improve abilities of players (Kyung-Hoon et al., 2015, p. 598). Athlete's trust in coach positively influences athlete's commitment and willingness to cooperate with the coach. These will positively affect player's performance (Zhang & Chelladurai, 2013, pp. 116-117).

Trust among Teammates: The success in a business is highly influenced by team building, where trust is one of the essential factors of teamwork. High-performing teams consist of talented and skilled people but also constant trust-based cooperation (Hakanen et al., 2015, p. 43). According to Tseng & Ku (n.d., p. 4), trust serves as the glue that keeps the harmony and peace of the team. It helps the team to break the ice and creates a productive working relationship. When team members trust each other, they depend and rely on each member, and this is the foundation for excellent teamwork. When teammates already establish trust, it is easy for them to communicate openly and honestly. This can lead to a better decision-making process and will help them be efficient on the ice. Trust also creates a positive team culture because it increases accountability. Therefore, every team member holds themselves and each other accountable for their actions. In addition, it develops a great support system especially during difficult times. This can help to create higher team morale, which can absolutely lead to more victories on the ice (Strauss, 2023-b).

Fan Trust: As mentioned before, when fans are highly engaged with the team it develops trust. When trust is obtained, it adds value to the team both directly and indirectly. They purchase products and attend games which add to the sales of the team organisation. They indirectly add value to the team such as volunteering, recommendation, and helping the club

in many other ways. In addition, fans will follow their favourite team in social media, volunteering for sports events, and giving their all-out support before, during, and after the game (Johann Cruyff Institute, 2021). Trust also impacts fan loyalty. And when fans become loyal, they will not just invest their time, emotion, and effort. They will create a strong fan base that will enhance team's reputation and brand image. This strong fan base generates energy and enthusiasm in arena which is advantage for home team. It intimidates opponents and boost team morale that gives higher chance of victory. When top athletes choose their teams, they are more likely attracted to teams with solid and loyal fanbase (Yellowbrick, 2023).

Sponsorship/Partnership Trust. Trust between the principal property (sports) and the agent (sponsor) drives commitment that result to intention to renew (Farrelly & Quester, 2003, p. 359). It is also one of the fundamental conditions for value creation in sponsorship (Hessling et al., 2018, p. 155).

2.3 Customer Engagement Antecedents

Pansari & Kumar (2016) and Hargyatni et al. (2022, p. 24) propose that satisfaction and emotion are two tenets of CE theory, and engagement only happens after building a relationship. This relationship is formed based on trust and commitment. Barari et al. (n.d., p.15) agree that satisfaction is positively related to both trust and commitment. Abror et al. (2019, pp. 2-13) highlight that customer satisfaction positively influences customer engagement by using better service quality. They argue that customers satisfaction is the level of pleasurable fulfilment of consumption compared to their expected and perceived service quality. In addition to trust and commitment, Barari et al. (n.d., pp. 14-38) included perceived value as CE antecedent. They believe that perceived value increases engagement through customer satisfaction.

Other researchers like Vivek et al. (2012, p. 134); Brodie et al. (2013, p.107); Youseff et al. (2018) argue and see trust and commitment as one of the consequences of CE, rather than an antecedent. Their study focuses on participation and involvement as antecedents of CE. They suggest that individual's level of participation and involvement will be positively associated with the intensity of his/her focus of engagement. Therefore, it can be concluded that satisfaction is necessary for CE, but not sufficient. For the context of this thesis, the author presumes that fans can be satisfied with the outcome of the game and team's performance but do not attend games regularly due to lack of involvement.

Hollebeek et al. (2019) bridge the gap between CE and service-dominant (S-D) logic. They comprise three CE foundational process and suggest that customer resource integration, customer knowledge sharing, and customer learning are part of CE antecedent. These processes are being applied to Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to enhance CE. The proposed theory is agreed upon Benham et al. (2021, pp. 9-20) and highlight that customer knowledge/sharing and customer learning are positively related to CE in the context of service and tangible goods. They advise sports managers to actively implement both in related to their services.

Attachment involves feelings and reflects the bond that connects a consumer with a specific brand (Malär, et al., 2011, p. 36). This is also investigated as possible antecedent of CE. It must be nurtured to facilitate CE's development. Customers who are highly attached in a brand are more likely to engage (Rather et al., 2019, pp. 1-22). Attachment to brand drives customer to engage with the brand on social media per se Facebook (Hinson, 2019, p. 204).

On contrary with Hinson's (2019) research, Vale & Fernandes (2017, p. 1393) study about CE with sports club on social media. They find out that interaction highly influence CE with a sports club on Facebook. According to Qaiser et al. (2021, p. 24), a customer can easily be satisfied after a single transaction in a particular brand. But it needs numerous interactions before emotional attachment develops.

In addition to the study of CE in the field of sports, Behnam et al. (2021, pp. 2-20) suggest that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a key antecedent of CE. They recommend that sports manager should focus on making an engaging process for CSR to capture the value co-creation.

2.4 Trust Antecedents

Despite the importance of trust in an organisations, there is lack of integration and scholar's different orientation to the study of trust (Bhattacharya & Devinney, 1998, p. 459). According to Schoorman et al. (2007, pp. 344-346), they wrote a paper about trust in 1995, and several researchers raised some issues. This made them revisit some issues and discuss new concerns and opportunities related to trust. They propose ability, benevolence, and integrity as antecedent of trust. These three factors can contribute to organizational trust (e.g., supplier-buyer relationship). For example, the buyer may believe that the supplier has the ability to provide the product on time. This does not guarantee that it will perform, but only assures that the supplier can perform. The perception that the supplier has integrity suggests

that it will keep the promised agreement. But if the supplier's ability to perform is questionable, it will not be trusted even if there is an agreement. The supplier will have a strong desire to serve the buyer's needs if it is perceived benevolent. These trust antecedents (ability, integrity, and benevolence) have been identified by Söllner & Leimester (2013, p. 147). They find out that they are related to the trust relationship between organizations and human beings. Khamitov et al. (n.d.) study integrity-based and reliability-based trust as antecedents. Integrity-based trust antecedent (IBTA) includes attachment, ethicality and SR, and reputation. While reliability-based trust antecedent (RBTA) includes marketing investment, perceived value, competence, perceived risk, and perceived quality. Although both have become stronger drivers of consumer trust in the past years, their finding suggests that integrity-based antecedent is more effective in driving trust. This is agreed upon by Hsiao et al. (2010, p. 939) and find out that these three antecedents will increase trust of consumers in product recommendations which can influence consumer's intention to purchase.

The importance of satisfaction should be acknowledged as this is seen as another antecedent of trust. When customers are satisfied with the brand, the higher chance they will trust the brand (Cuong, 2020, pp. 96-99). Same antecedent is seen when it comes to buyer-seller relationship (interpersonal trust). Selnes (1996, pp. 307-309) mentions that buyers are more motivated to continue their relationship with the seller if they have high satisfaction. If satisfaction is high, the more the buyer will trust the seller.

When it comes to interorganisational trust, the history of interaction between organizations contributes to the formation of trust between firms. As firms continue to interact over time, they create more effective system of rewards. The ongoing relationship can develop stronger identification with their partners and foster trust in their integrity (Gulati & Sytch, 2008, p. 168).

In sports, perceived characteristics of a trustee (justice, benevolence, integrity, competence) are important antecedents. These four characteristics will develop athlete's commitment to the coach and willingness to cooperate that affects their performance (Zhang & Chelladurai, 2013, pp. 116-117). In addition to trust between athletes and coach, competency is also antecedent of trust. If coach is competent, it gives a signal to athletes that the coach is reliable, respectable, and trustworthy (Kao, et al., 2017, p. 324).

2.5 Fan Engagement Antecedents

Yoshida et al. (2014, pp. 407-408) examine team identification, positive affect, and BIRGing (basking in reflected glory) as three antecedents of CE. According to their study, higher level of team identification and greater affective to a sport team are more likely have engaged customers. They define team identification as fans connectedness to a sport team and the chance to experience team's success and failure as one's own. Positive affect is defined as a state of pleasure feeling that reflects emotions (e.g., joy, happiness, and contentment while watching game events). And BIRGing refers to spectators publicly displaying of association with successful sport team. These three have positive effect on management cooperation, prosocial behaviour, and performance tolerance that impacts purchase and referral intention (Yoshida et al., 2014, pp. 407-408).

Psychological commitment to team (PCT) scale is used by Mahony et al. (2000, pp.15-21) to measure loyalty as antecedent of fan engagement. They suggest two dimensions of loyalty which are behavioural (attending games, watching games on TV) and attitudinal (commitment and attachment). They suggest that measuring behavioural loyalty is not enough because some fans do not attend games but shows their loyalty in a different way (e.g., buying merchandise, watching game on TV). Therefore, it is important to increase the psychological commitment to the team they are supporting behaviourally. Surprisingly, fans that show attitudinal loyalty are generally the fans who will stop supporting the team if for example, team is not performing well, or popular player traded.

When looking for more research in the field, the author found that there is very little study about "fan engagement" in sports. As mentioned before, fan engagement is used to define customer engagement in sports (Yoshida et al., 2014, p.399). Most researchers focus on customer engagement, in general. There is some research found related to sports, but contextual gap is found from that research. For example, Benham et al. (2021) study about the impact of perceived corporate social responsibility but does not clearly specify the effect in building trust. Huetterman et al. (2019) study about components and outcomes of fan engagement in team sports but it focuses more on positive and negative outcome of fan engagement. While this study is important to determine how fan engagement can positively and negatively impact sports teams, it lacks valuable insight on how the positive outcome of fan engagement can build trust in sports. McDonald, et al. (2022) also study customer engagement in sports and emphasizes the role of CE in building trust, but since it is about sports in general, it may not guarantee that the author's findings will also be applicable for ice hockey. Behnam et al. (2023) study highlights the importance of fan engagement on social

media; thus, it is not relevant for the purpose of this thesis. The author found one study that is close to the context of this thesis. Ihalainen (2022) study about strategizing for better fan engagement and use three Finnish sports organizations (one is JYP ice hockey). However, the findings and results are made through JYP Customer Service and Development Manager as one of the respondents. All respondents are managers of three different sports teams and so, the result may vary from JYP fans/ice hockey fans respondents.

3 Methodology

This chapter will begin by reviewing the research aims, objectives and associated research questions. Research design and strategy will be explained, and the chapter will end with limitation.

3.1 Research Approach

Research is important in both business and academic activities; however, it means different things to different people. Therefore, there is no general agreement in the literature on how it should be defined (Amaratunga et al., 2002, p. 17). According to Jain (2023-b), research is a meticulous and organized process designed to investigate and understand specific topics or issues in detail. This methodological approach involves thorough collection, precise analysis and thoughtful interpretation of information, aiming to delve deep into the degree of a chosen field to study. Every research starts with a specific research question that the researcher seeks to address that guide and direct to the entire research process (Jain, 2023-b).

Research is categorised into two types: qualitative approach and quantitative approach (Amaratunga et al., 2002, p. 19). Quantitative research explains phenomena according to numbers which are analysed by mathematically based method (e.g., statistics) (Yilmaz, 2013). The data collection method can be in a form of secondary data, survey, analytic data (Mohajan, 2020, pp. 7-17). Qualitative research systematically explores social phenomena in natural settings. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument in collecting data that examines what event occur and why it happened (Teherani et al., 2015, p. 669). This method utilizes experimental materials such as case study, real life experience, stories of an individual (Taherdoost, 2022, p. 54). The data collection method can be in a form of document study, observation, interviews, focus groups (Busetto et al., 2020, p. 3).

For the purpose of this research, the author will use an inductive qualitative approach to dig deeper into what is happening in the data and have a better understanding in the data presented to discover new insights and produce findings to answer the research questions. The research aims to answer the main question: How does customer interaction and engagement with brand promotes consumer trust in ice hockey industry? The sub-questions are necessary to answer to attain important outcomes: What are the factors that make the customer engage in ice hockey? What are the effects of fan engagement? What are the factors affecting trust in a brand? How does an organization engage to establish trust?

3.2 Research Strategy

For this research, the author uses a combination of one-to-one interviews and survey in a form of a questionnaire. A one-to-one interview is a research method in which the interviewer meets with one respondent to ask questions and gather their opinions, beliefs, or experiences (Hassan, 2024). In a one-on-one interview, the interviewer prepares questions to discuss with the interviewee. This is valuable to deeply understand the interviewee and when researcher wants to see actual emotion, explore nuances, and personal experiences (QuestionPro, n.d-a). The author conducted one-to one interviews in person with two JYP solid fans (Rumpuryhmä) on 11 of July 2024 and the interviews lasted for half an hour each. The interviews are useful as the author gets insight based on individuals' experiences as a fan and stories shared about events of JYP they participated. Using unstructured interview, it allows the interviewer to ask open-ended questions, this is more flexible as the interviewer can make follow-up questions on the interviewee's responses (Hassan, 2024). This helps the interviewer to learn more about JYP fans experiences and their perspective on JYP player, team, and organisation.

The author attempts to interview as many participants as possible, but due to language limitations there are not many participants willing to participate. Therefore, the author attempts to do online survey in form of a questionnaire to gather more data. An online survey is a questionnaire that can complete over the internet by the target audience. It is usually designed as web forms with a database where the answers will be stored and has statistical software for analytics (Rouse, 2013). Researchers can obtain the result in real time and collect responses to make decision making better. (QuestionPro, n.d.-b). The online survey is done via google form to easily access participants. The link where JYP and non-JYP fans can access the survey is posted on Facebook on 19 September 2024. The questions are translated in Finnish language to encourage many participants to answer the survey. The

survey is open for 7 days and there are 39 respondents from non-JYP fans and 61 JYP fans respondents.

In every research, the researchers need a group of individuals to participate in the research, it is called sample. To draw a valid conclusion from your result, a sampling method is needed to carefully decide how to collect a sample that is representative of a group. The two primary types of sampling methods – probability sampling and non-probability sampling. The author selects random people to answer the survey, therefore a probability sampling is used for this research to make statistical reasoning about the whole group (McCombes, 2023).

While the research approach and strategy mentioned above are the best option for the author to use to address the research questions, numerous limitations were recognised. The personal involvement in collecting the data in qualitative research can also be a negative component of the procedure. Since this method relies heavily on individual's perspective, it is more challenging to prove the consistency of the collected data (Gaille, 2017). The author has a limited amount of time, and since qualitative research can be time consuming (Anderson, 2010, p. 3), findings can be more difficult. In addition, since this method aims to understand human behaviour and the underlying reasons for it, researchers have the tendency to become deeply involved in the subject matter that will result to subjective interpretation (Explorable, n.d.).

4 Results and Findings

In this chapter, the author analyses the data gathered from respondents and presents the outcome of the research. The analysis of the data is carried out in comparison between JYP and non-JYP fans, with dedicated sub-chapters to get more detailed information. This research concentrated more on typical consumers of ice hockey Liiga, and for this reason the topics that were not related to ice hockey, such as hobbies or interests in other sports were excluded from the sample to maintain focus and clarity.

This study aims to identify and evaluate the influence of customer/fan engagement in building trust to JYP Jyväskylä Oy. The research questions to guide this study are: 1) How does customer interaction and engagement with brand promotes consumer trust in ice hockey industry? 2) What are the factors that make the customer engage in ice hockey sports? 3) What are the effects of fan engagement? 4) What are the factors affecting trust in a brand? 5) How does an organization engage to establish trust?

4.1 Respondents

The Table 6 below shows the demographics of respondents for both JYP fans and non-JYP fans.

Table 6. Demographics of Respondents

JYP Fans		Non-JYP Fans	
Age	Count	Age	Count
Under 18	3	Under 18	1
18-30	7	18-30	4
31-40	7	31-40	4
41-50	30	41-50	18
51-60	8	51-60	9
61-70	6	61-70	3
Gender	Count	Gender	Count
Male	35	Male	24
Female	25	Female	15
Occupation	Count	Occupation	Count
Student	3	Student	3
Employed	48	Employed	28
Unemployed	1	Unemployed	3
Pensioner	6	Pensioner	3
Something else	3	Something else	2

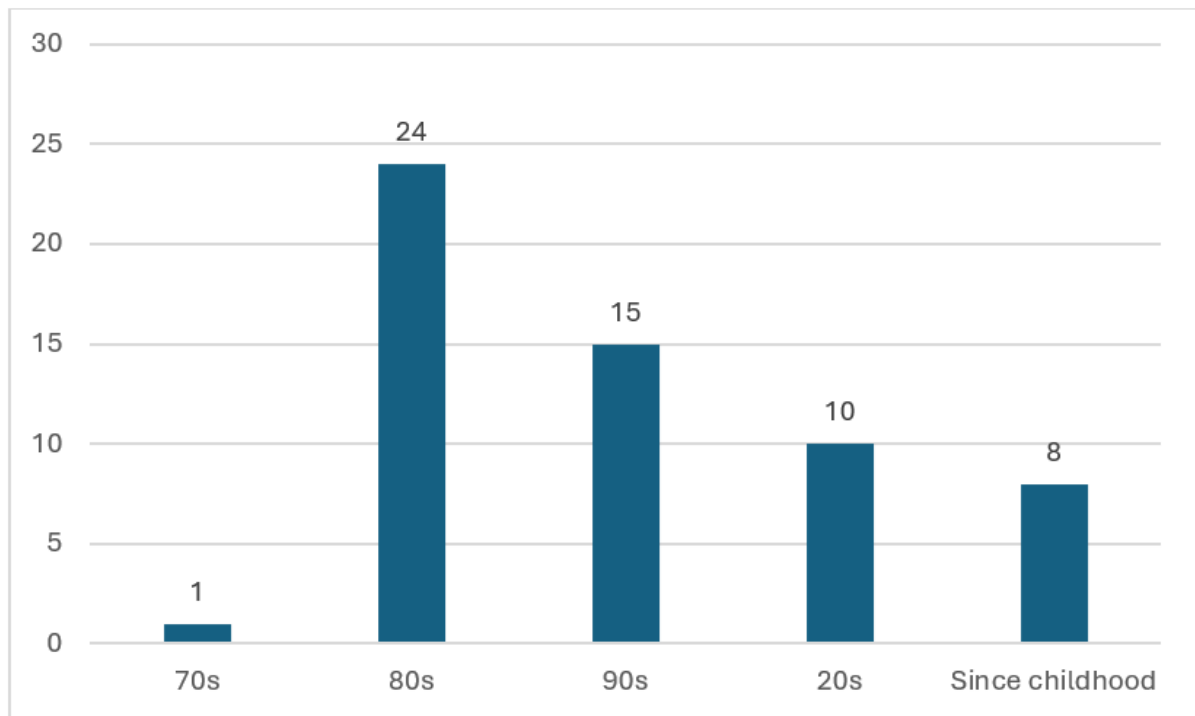
4.2 Data Analysis (JYP Fans)

As shown in Table 6, 58% of JYP fans were men and 42% were women. Most of the fans were age 41-50, followed by 51-60 years old, same count for age between 18-30 and 31-40, next was age between 61-70, and three respondents were under 18.

As shown in Figure 7, most of the respondents became a JYP fan for a very long time now. One respondent was a fan since 1970, twenty four respondents were a loyal fan since

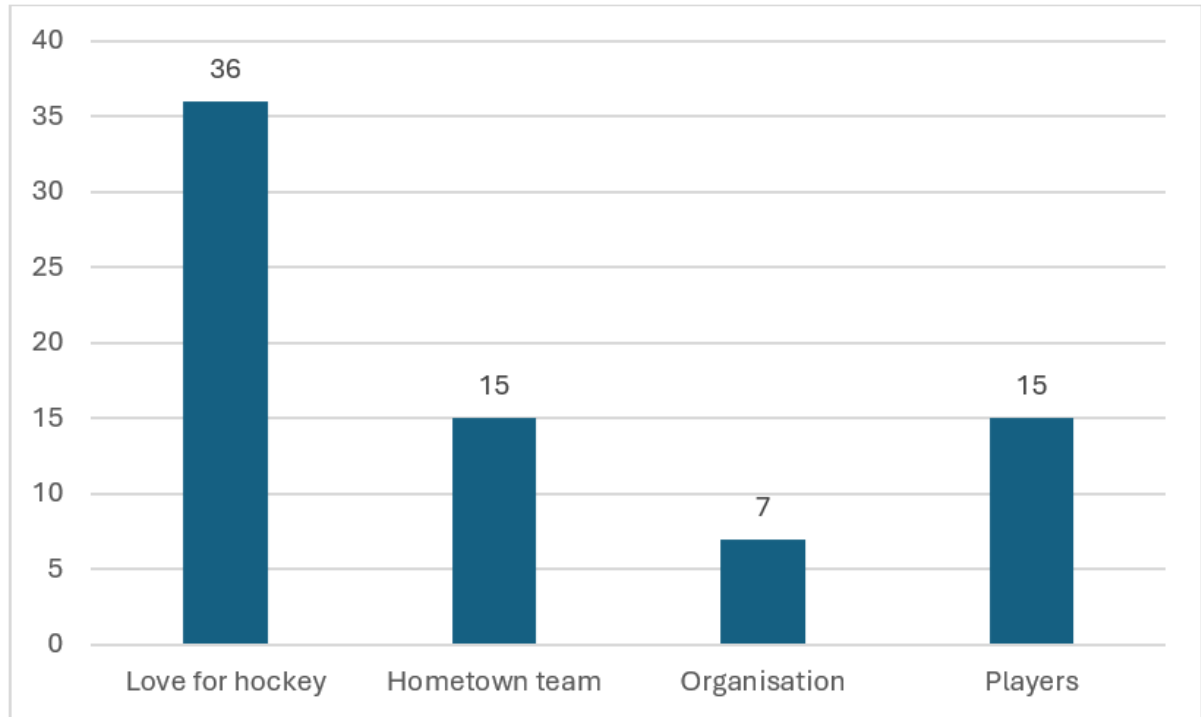
1980s, fifteen respondents started to support the team in 1990s, ten respondents started at early 20s, and eight said that they already like JYP hockey team since their childhood.

Figure 7. Year when respondents became a fan



When asked if they were a fan because they like ice hockey, or because of the players, or they are a fan of the whole organisation, Figure 8 shows that thirty six of the respondents said that they became a fan because of their love for ice hockey. Fifteen became a fan not only because of the sport but because they want to support their home town team. One of the fans said, *“It’s nice to follow the success of your hometown hockey club”*. Seven respondents wanted to become a fan because of JYP organisation. One of the respondents stated that *“The organisation is the main reason why I’m a fan. I just love the colors and the logo since I was 3yo and after that, I always loved the players in the team. But I get attached to the players because they play in JYP, so JYP is the main reason.”* Other respondent remained a fan of the organisation even though he/she already moved to a different city, the respondent said, *“Jyp is a team that feels like my own even though I’ve moved away from Jyväskylä, i.e. a Jyp fan for the whole organization”*. Fifteen respondents started their interest of the club because of the players, too. One of them said, *“Players and fast play are to your liking”*.

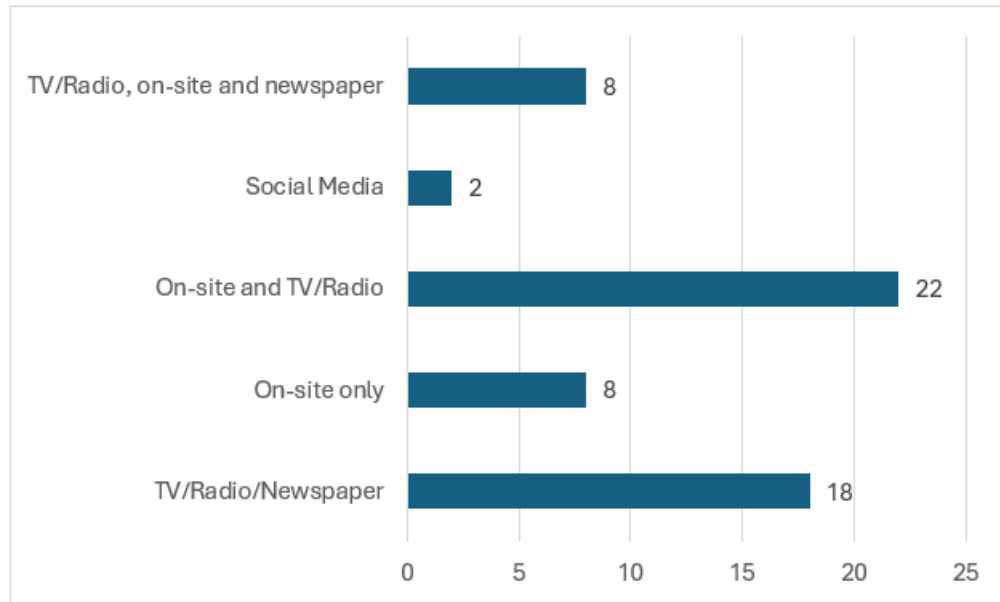
Figure 8. Reasons why they wanted to become a fan



4.2.1 Fan Engagement

The Figure 9 below shows that most of the fans were watching matches both in arena or on TV if they cannot make it on-site. Eighteen fans do not watch live games but they either listen to the radio or watch the game on TV and reading newspaper about JYP. Eight fans preferred to watch live games only. Also eight fans engaged with the team through on-site, TV/radio, and even reading newspaper about the team. And only two fans engaged through social media only. The fans mentioned that they usually cheer, clapping and shouting, wearing the jersey to recognize the team's color during live games. They also showed support to the organization by buying team merchandise, eating at the restaurant or stall.

Figure 9. Ways of fans to engage with the team



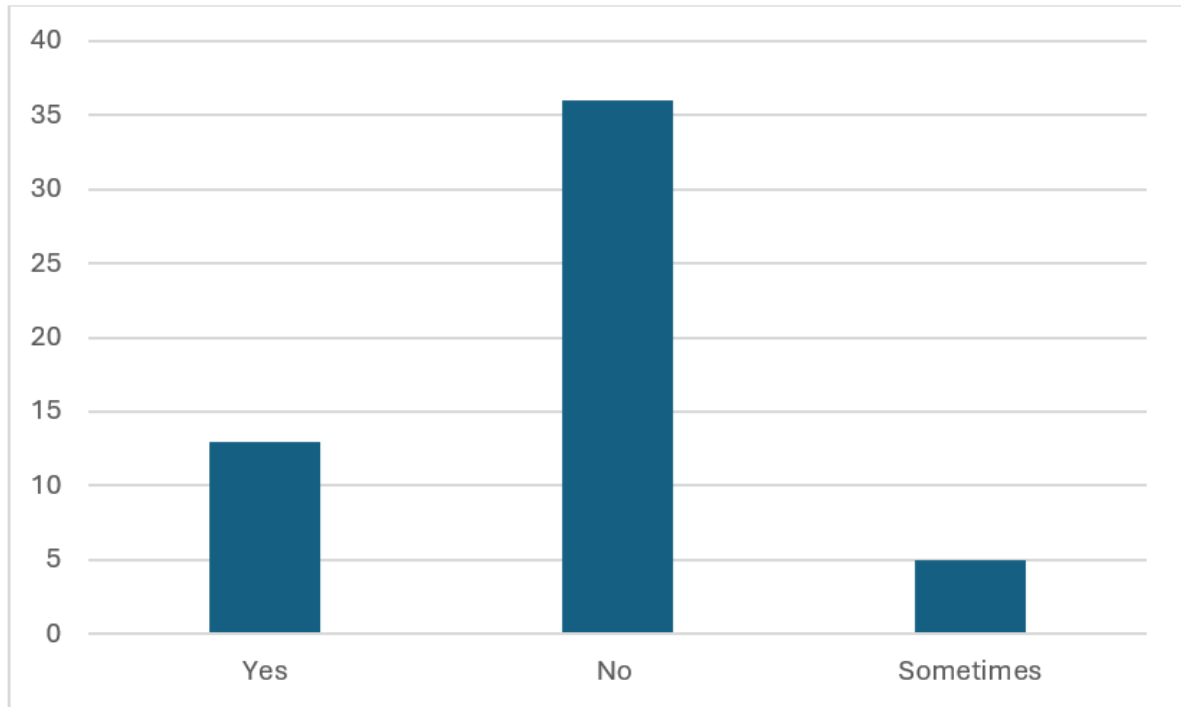
Most of the fans were watching JYP matches on-site if it was a home games and on TV during away games. Six fans watched games few times only out of 60 matches in a season, three of the fans watched more than 10 times, two fans were watching 20-40 games per season, and five fans were watching over 40 games, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Number of times fans watch game in arena or TV

All Games	Few games	More than 10	20-40 games	Over 40 games
34	6	3	2	5

When asked what made them attracted to follow JYP and what they enjoyed most being a fan, the reasons were because of their love of ice hockey, JYP is Jyväskylä's team, locality and community spirit, players, and success of the team. One of the fans said, "*Jyppiness... A lower-budget team that fights against bigger ones*". The other fan mentioned about identity and said, "*JYP has a strong Jyväskylä identity*".

Figure 11. Number of Fans participating in Fan Events



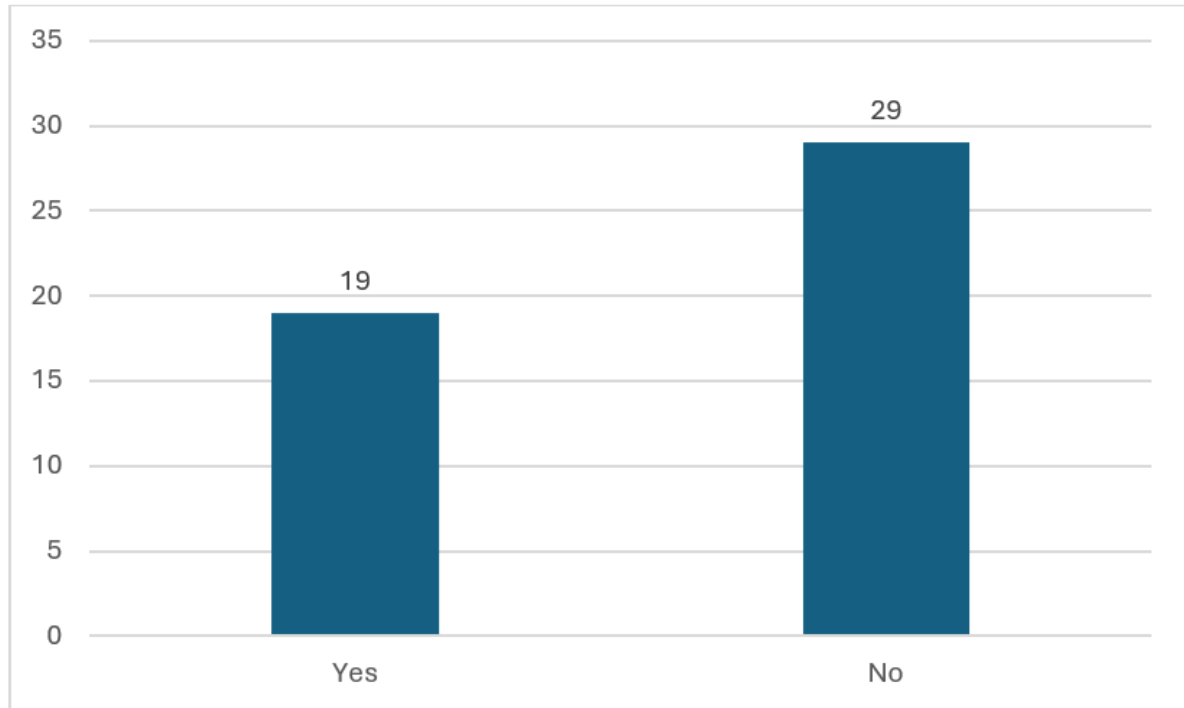
As shown in Figure 11, only thirteen fans were participating in fan events. Meeting new people, love for hockey and JYP, and meeting team players motivated them to participate. Some of the comments were:

“Yes, e.g. for a porridge party every year. I’m motivated by that community”.

“I am a member of Hurrikaanisydän. I participate in all the fan trips they organize. We are one big family with the same passion, love for hockey and Jyppi”.

Thirty-six fans were not joining fan events because of the distance, lack of time, cost, and one fan was not even aware of it. One of the fans commented, *“I do not know that such events exist, where are they reported?”* And five fans were participating sometimes because they were interested to meet the players.

Figure 12. Interaction of the organisation with the fans



The Figure 12 shows that twenty-nine fans felt that the organisation lacks of engagement or communication with them. Reasons were:

“In recent years, communication have been substandard. We need more commitment to honesty and transparency”.

“No, and communication has been substandard in recent seasons”.

“There's really no communication”.

“Communication with the fans was poor, except in late spring”.

Nineteen fans were still satisfied with the communication between them and the organisation.

Some of the comments were:

“Yes, interaction has improved”.

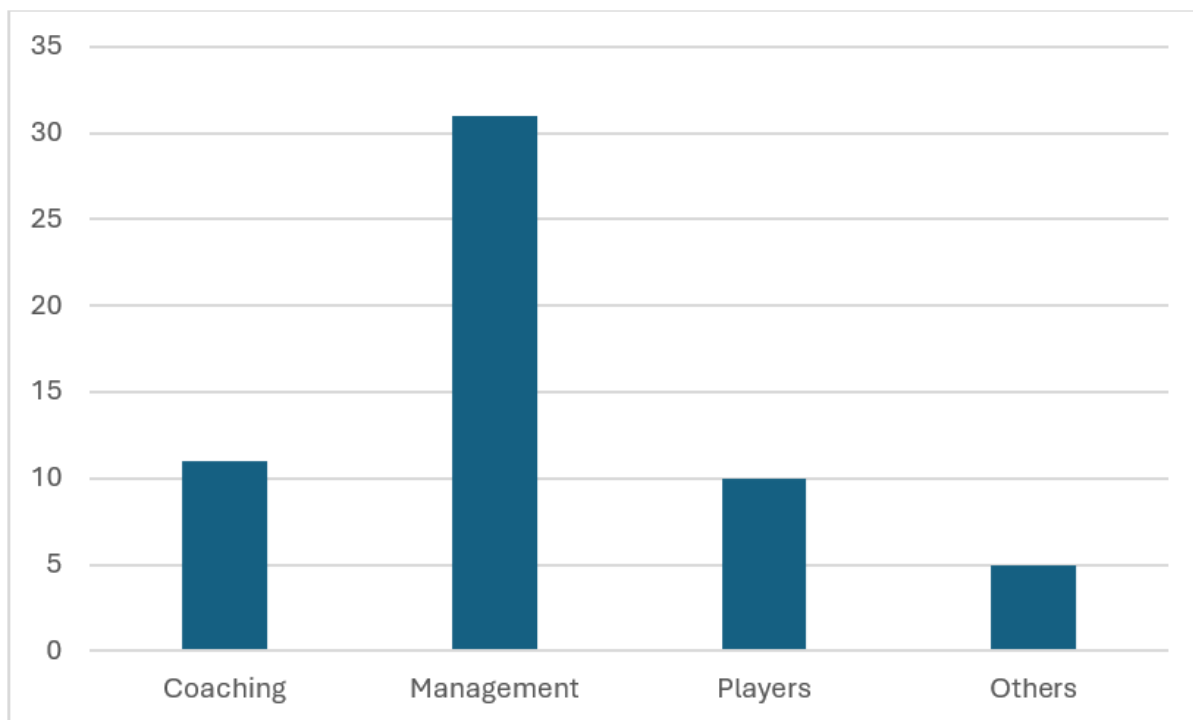
“Good marketing and info through social media”.

4.2.2 Team Performance

Most of the fans felt good when the team won the game and disappointed when they lose.

One of the fans said, *“Watching the games is very emotional and the result of the game and what happened in the game will affect your mood for several days”.* Some of the fans did not feel anything regardless if the team wins or lose and stated that it is a part of sport.

Figure 13. Challenges of the team



The Figure 13 shows that thirty-one among fans believed that the management was the reason why the team was not doing well for the past years. Some of the comments were: *“A high-quality series, the previous few choices of responsible persons / conflict between them and, based on this, the functioning of the organization as a whole”*. *“Lousy solutions at the organizational level, more visible than locality. The hall is lousy”*. *“As an organization, it has failed. Wrong purchases, poor communication with the public. Also a certain short-termism. Coaches have been fired than all other teams combined. The big teams have also become stronger, for example. Tampere teams with Nokia Arena”*. *“Poor management of the team management, board of directors and ownership. The confusing communication was also terrible to follow. An unnecessarily erratic and inconsistent reaction to things. Also, the fans, in my opinion, were underestimated in terms of the aforementioned things”*. *“Team owners’ confusion and distrust of top coaches, coaches must have peace of mind”*. *“Too much general freak out and bad leadership at every level”*.

Eleven fans said that coaching was the challenge for the past seasons. One of the fans mentioned about leadership and said, *“Changing coaching, ambiguities in leadership”*. Ten fans believed that the players were the reason why the organisation was having challenges. One of them noted that there were not enough quality players in the team. And five fans gave other reasons such as economy and scoring, one observation was *“Scoring challenges and easy mistakes on the defensive end. Background crew fuss”*.

Most of the fans said that the team's performance affects their overall perception of the team and only two said that they were not affected by it. Some of the reasons were:

"Of course, winning is important and raises the overall picture".

"Result sports, i.e. games, is a measure of success".

"Of course, it makes a difference, an energetic, cheerful and resilient team also succeeds".

"If you perform as expected or better, of course the feeling and faith in the team will grow.

But I won't stop being a fan, no matter how badly the team plows. Instead, the confusion between the team owners and management can end it".

When asked how the fans were 10 years ago when the team was playing well, they said there was more noise in arena and fans were more visible both home games and away games. The fans were united and active in visiting the hall and the fan base was massive. Some of the highlighted comments were:

"At the moment, there are still the most tenacious ones left. Those who do not leave the team even at a bad moment. It's a given that if you succeed, more fans will pop up. 10 years ago there was a more massive fan base".

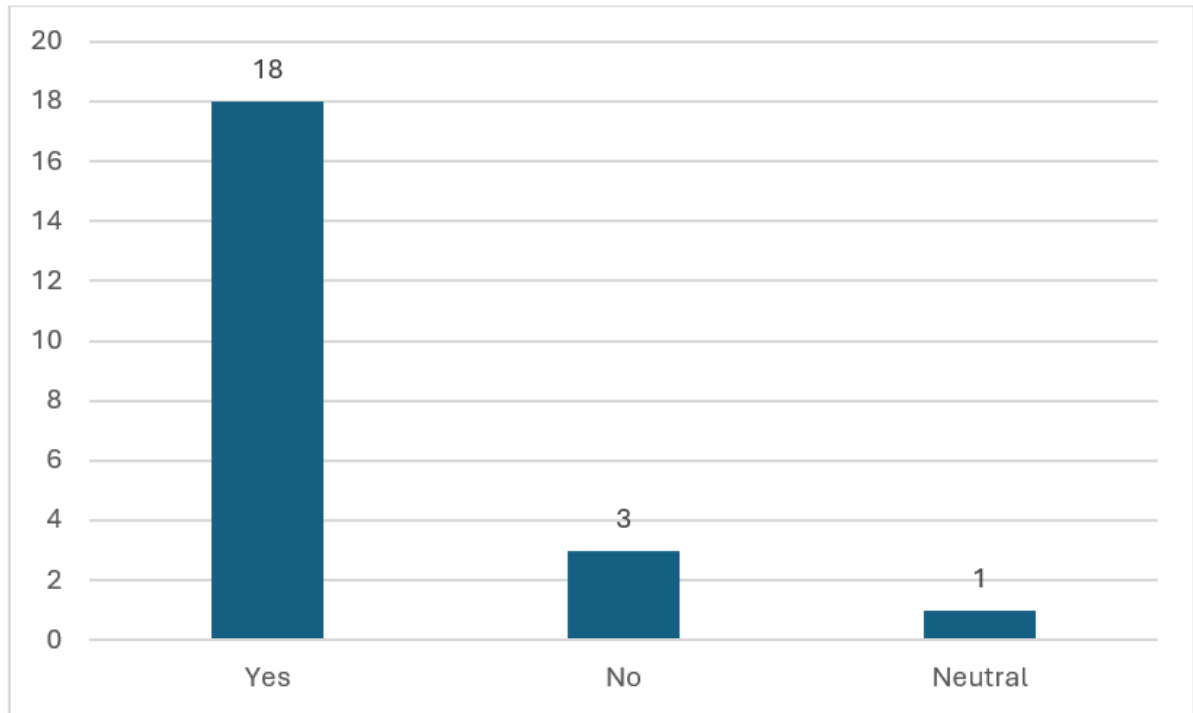
"The whole hall used to be there to cheer. Now it feels like the seats are silent during the games and the encouragement only comes from the end of the fan groups, which is why I always go to the end of the fan groups to watch the games. And the success can also be seen in the number of people in attendance, the viewership figures have dropped today".

"Personally, I've been in the arena for those times when there was an old drum group and the atmosphere was maybe a bit better and the fans were more united".

4.2.3 Team Marketing Strategy

The Figure 14 below shows the answer of the fans when asked if the current marketing of the team was effective for them. Eighteen of the fans agreed it was effective and has been improved this season. Seven fans do not know yet if it was going to be effective, three disagree about the effectiveness of the team's marketing strategy, and one had a neutral reaction.

Figure 14. Effectiveness of current marketing strategy



Most of the fans were either satisfied with the marketing strategy or they have seen improvement since the season started. Some of the reason were:

“At an adequate or satisfactory level. I would include more local social media influencers, bands and content produced by the players themselves in marketing”.

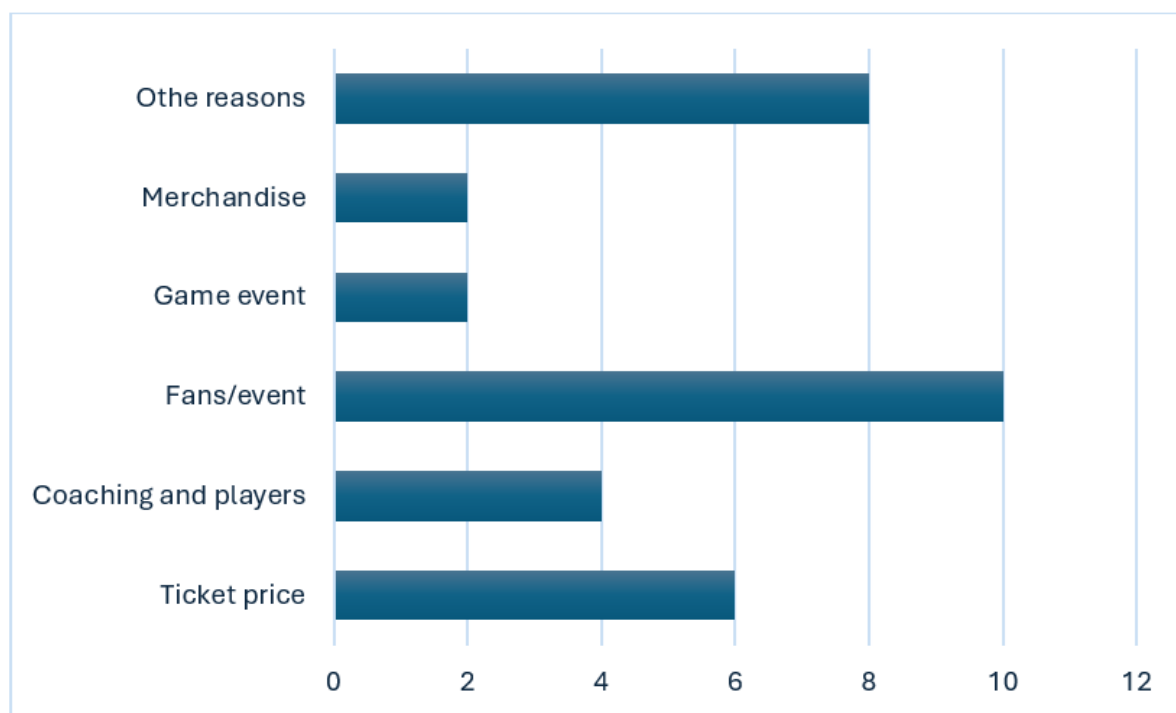
“Seems pretty good already. I wonder if there is expertise in this area if and when the strategy takes this area into account”.

“A clear improvement has taken place this season. For match events, more crowd-friendly programming, kiss cam, look a like cam, for example”.

“Has already improved considerably from last season, I would like even more social media material about the team”.

The reason of the two fans who did not agree with the marketing strategy because of the price ticket. One suggested, *“Better ticket sales to fill the hall, something more often than campaigns”.* One of the fans who had a neutral reaction said, *“Content production and communication are good in terms of quantity and technical quality. During the previous period, strategic mistakes were made in crisis communication (it pays to have a crisis communication plan), now communication has seemed better. The humor content etc. of the new marketing partner for the 2024-2025 season doesn't appeal to me and feels childish/embarrassing, but this hockey isn't serious and there will definitely be an audience for them as well”.*

Figure 15. Fans suggestions to help increase the fan engagement



Fans wanted to see new initiatives from the organisation to help increase the fan engagement (Figure 15). Six fans wanted the ticket price to be more affordable. Some of the suggestions about the ticket were:

“Empty seats half an hour before the game for sale at a lower price. There would be new fans/season ticket payers as they learned about the culture and money for the coffers as well as the atmosphere in the hall”.

“More flag campaigns. It would be worth thinking about cheaper tickets, for example. bottom row”.

“Sometimes it would be nice to have tickets for 2 for the price of one, etc”.

Four fans wanted the coaching and players to improve. They said:

“Joint events for coaching and players”.

“Professionals can choose a strategy, but there must be one. So, this involves the way of playing, finances, player and coach acquisitions, etc.”

Ten fans wanted to increase fan events or other kind of strategy related to fans. Highlighted comments were:

“E.g. Ticket prices are expensive. In return, the organization could offer free coffee to in-game fans at some point. It's about hey we're appreciated and we're offered a gaming coffee. A fan can buy a coffee and pay for it, as always in games, but by offering coffee, it has a psychological effect on the fan and carries many games forward. Jyppi will incur costs, but the fan will still bring the money to ice hockey”.

“Some significant benefits for loyal supporters. For example, lunch in a hurricane, etc. It doesn't have to be a big advantage financially, but it would get fans even more engaged”.

“The organization needs to show that it's also interested in that ordinary fan”.

“Listen to the fans, their opinions and thoughts”.

There was even one fan who felt like JYP fans were not united, the fan's opinion was, *“In my opinion, there should only be one big fan end in an ice rink. As was once the case in Jyväskylä. Today, the situation is divided”.*

Two fans wanted to improve game events, one of them noted that, *“At least the game event needs to be taken to a whole new level. At the moment, it's not tempting to go into the game, because it feels like you're pulling everything other than the actual game at the very minimum level. Proper crunches, light show and introduction well before the game starts. Season-long stories about different players and battle pairs could also be featured on the media cube. In general, a lot of all the spice that adds a little added value to a little bit of every area.*

Also, two fans thought that the merchandise should be added in the marketing strategy. One of them suggested that, *“At least I would expect fan merchandise to be sold elsewhere than in the arena. Or is in Prisma, but small. In Rauma, for example. Right after the entrance to Prisma, there is an ISO department exclusively for Lukko's fan products. I admired it when I visited Rauma in the summer and wondered why JYP doesn't have this. Is it better to have few products in each Prisma, or would it be better to concentrate everything in one place and make it bigger and more spectacular? Sometimes someone from outside the city asked where you can buy JYP fan products and the answer was from Prisma, but I can't say what's there. I don't think he went to Prisma to wonder about it”.*

Eight fans gave other things they wanted the management to include in their marketing strategy, such as:

“Openness”.

“Cooperation”.

“Marketing thinking from the perspective of non-“traditional hockey fans” as well”.

“The organization needs to show that it's also interested in that ordinary fan”.

“If by team we mean JYP's marketing, then I would like professional use of social media, humor, not repetition”.

4.2.4 Fan Loyalty and Trust

Figure 16 shows the number of fans that would recommend JYP to their friends and family. Forty one said they would recommend, reasons were:

“Yes because JYP is the best!!”

“Yes, because JYP hasn’t given up”.

“I praise JYP. I always support the hometown team”.

“Of course I would recommend it - a hurricane will take you away when you give it a chance!”

Three among the fans would maybe recommend the team. One of them said, *“If JYP plays well, then I can recommend it”.*

And only one would not recommend the team and said, *“No team worse than mid-table can be recommended”.*

Figure 16. Would you recommend JYP to friends or family?

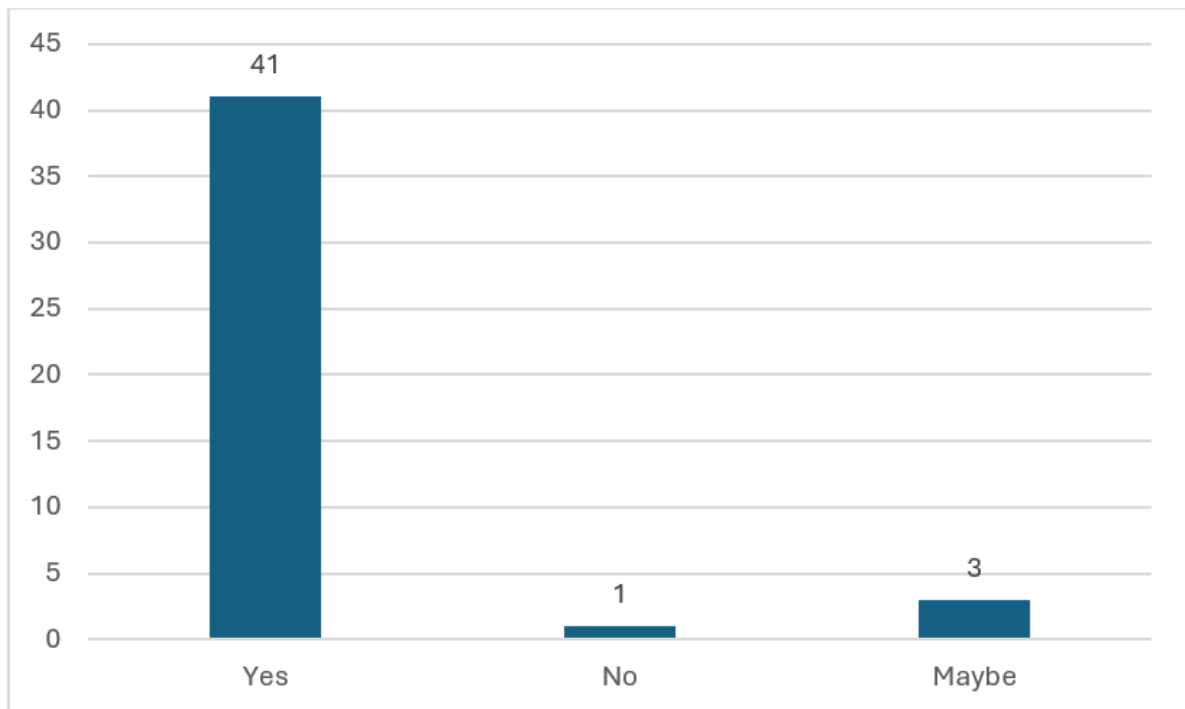


Figure 17. How does the team can strengthen the fans' trust and loyalty?

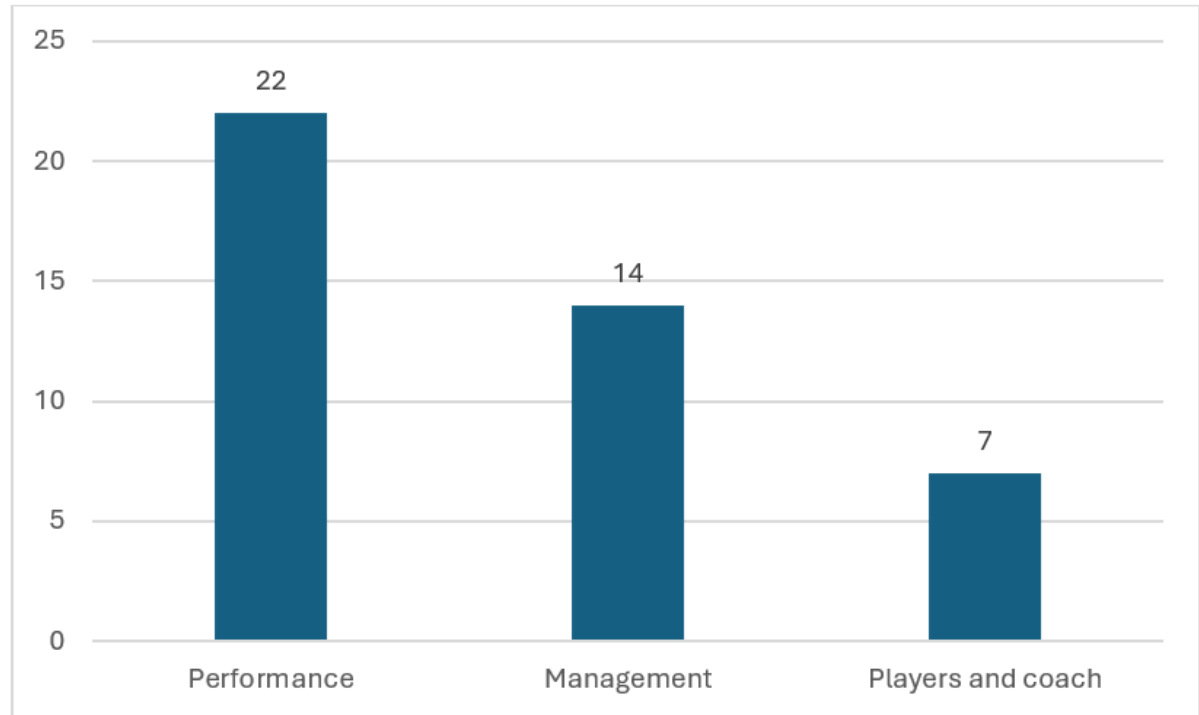


Figure 17 shows the factors that can strengthen the fans' trust and loyalty. Twenty-two among the fans believed that performance would strengthen their trust and loyalty because they wanted to see winning games and results. Some of the comments were:

"All you have to do is win games".

"It is enough to win games, confidence will grow along with it."

"Do your best in every game".

Fourteen fans said that management was a factor for fans to be loyal and remain the trust.

They suggested that:

"Get back to basics, hire a proper coaching team and stop freaking out in public!!"

"This changes for this season. Try every night and communicate openly".

"By making operations more transparent".

"By being truly open, honest and self-critical. No magic tricks are needed for that".

"A long-term plan that is trusted and adhered to. No hasty decisions".

"Win matches. Make necessary player acquisitions despite tight finances. Sticks to the chosen strategy for more than 1 year at a time."

"Commit to long-term development work that invests in modern coaching methods and the well-being of the entire organization. Continuing to support the club's own youth player paths".

"By changing the club management".

Seven fans thought that the top players and good coaching skills will boost fans loyalty.

Comments were:

“Every player puts 100% on the line in every game and that’s enough”.

“Get the top players and get rid of Seppälä”.

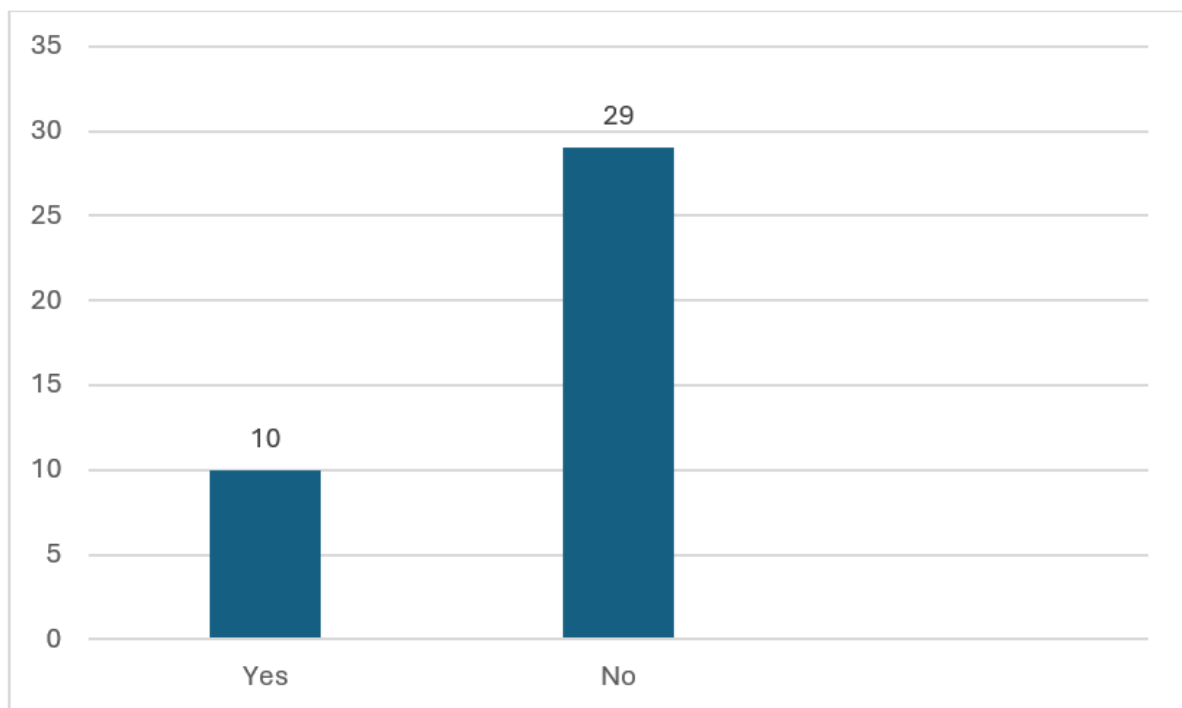
“Let’s take Reid Gardiner back”.

“Co-operation on the pitch and in the locker room”.

4.3 Data Analysis (Non-JYP Fans)

As shown in Table 6, 61.5% of non-JYP fans were men and 38.5% were women. Most of the people who do not support JYP were age between 41-50 years old, followed by 51-60 years old, next was 31-40 years old, then 61-70 years old, then 18-30 years old, and one person under 18 years of age. The Figure 18 below shows that twenty-nine from the respondents do not follow JYP social media accounts and only ten followed the team in social media.

Figure 18. Number of people who follow JYP social media accounts



4.3.1 Number of non-JYP fans who have watched JYP game

Despite of not being a JYP fan, twenty-nine respondents watched JYP game, four watched some years ago, and three were not interested to watch the game, as shown in Figure 19. When asked what their experience during the match was, seven of them had a good experience. One of the respondents said, *“I’ve watched many, the experience has always been good”*; thirteen had a neutral feeling about the game, and nine had a not-so-good experience. Some of the respondents who were not happy about his/her game experience stated that:

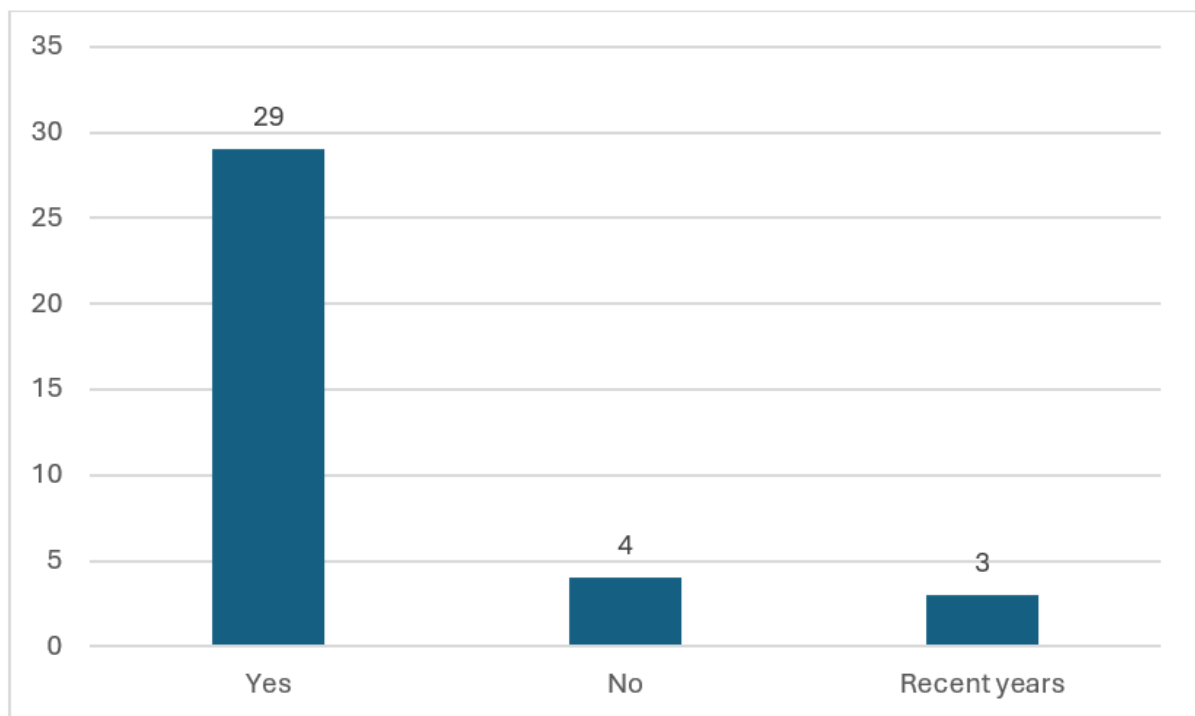
“The whole series is sick”.

“As a child/adolescent, I got a lot of follow-up. After moving away from the town and due to JYP’s poor success in recent years, the following has been left behind”.

“It’s pretty quiet on site. The home audience doesn’t live along. But it’s a nice place”.

One of the respondents who watched the game some years ago also made a comment about the team’s poor performance in the game. The respondent said *“Last time maybe 5 years ago. As such, a nice atmosphere on site. Unfortunate performances have taken away interest”*.

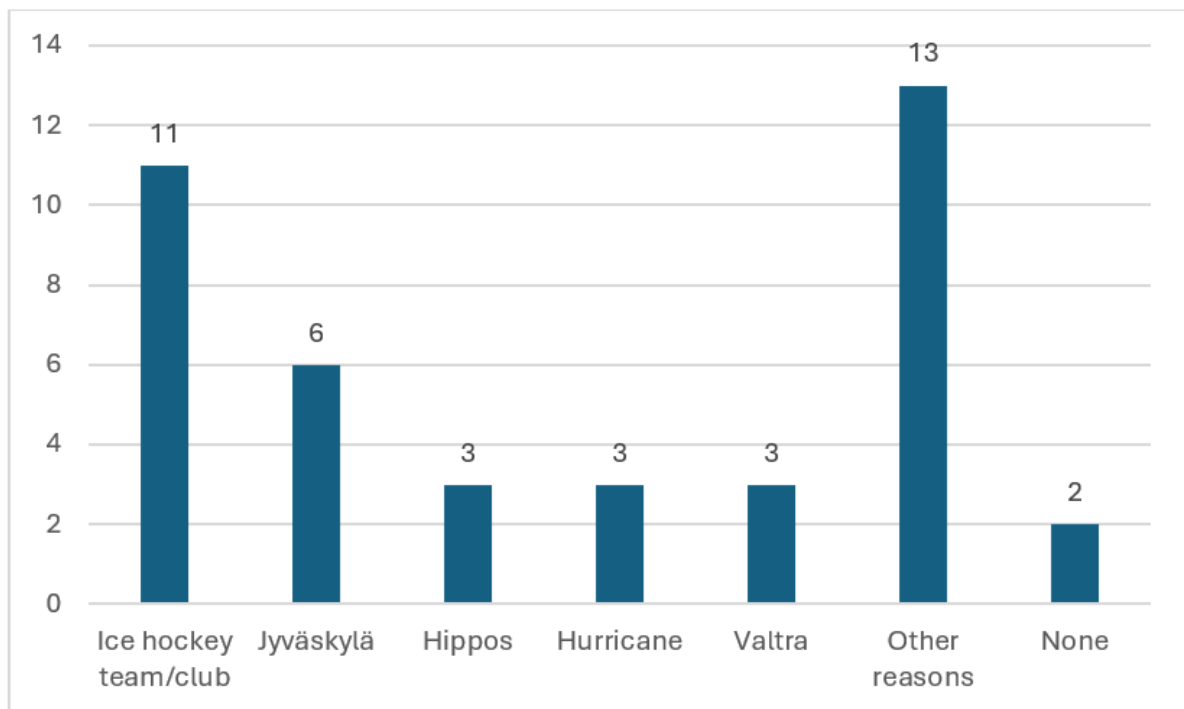
Figure 19. Number of non-JYP fans who have watched JYP game



4.3.2 JYP Logo

The Figure 20 shows the answers of people when asked what was the first thing that came in their mind when they saw JYP logo. Still a lot of people recognized JYP as an ice hockey team or club. One even thought about JYP's brand color and said, "*practice arena in Jyväskylä and LähiTapiola Areena colors red and black*". Six respondents thought about Jyväskylä, the city/hometown of JYP ice hockey team. Hippos was the first thing that came in three respondents' mind when they hear JYP or see their logo.

Figure 20. What people think when they see JYP logo



They also recognized the atmosphere of Hippos as a region. Three respondents remembered Hurricane as a symbol of the team. Valtra, one of the team's sponsors has been recognized by three respondents and even mentioned "*Tractor*" which was one of Valtra's products. Thirteen of the respondents gave other reasons, such as: "*Not interested*"; "*80s*" and one even remembered "*Risto Kurkinen*" who started to become famous JYP hockey player in 80s. Two of the respondents did not feel any emotion when they saw JYP logo. They said, "*Tasteless and odorless. Doesn't evoke any big emotions. Maybe it's a match start show. Lights and field announcement*" and the other added "*Does not cause great emotions. The last few seasons have been disappointing in terms of doing well in the series.*"

4.3.3 Preferred place to watch the game

The Table 21 shows the number of people who watched game in arena and people who preferred to watch at home. When asked what makes them decide to watch in arena, some respondents wanted the atmosphere in arena. They said:

“Hockey is always better on the spot”.

Live hockey is better”.

Atmosphere in the arena”.

An interesting opponent could get you into the game”.

Some respondents went to watch game in arena for family and friends. They stated:

“There are two hockey fans in the family. I wouldn't go alone, but with my family it was a fun experience. The atmosphere is great”.

“A suitable game for the family, i.e. doing things together and seeing friends”.

“Friends in the arena and interesting game”.

“Family experience and atmosphere”.

Two of the respondents who preferred to watch the game at home mentioned about the price ticket as the reason why he/she does not want to watch the game in arena. They said:

“Ticket price in relation to seats. Really bad behavior on the part of the audience”.

“Ticket prices are too high and I want to focus on the game itself and not the hustle and bustle around”.

“Tickets cost too much”.

“Expensive ticket, relatively bad arena”.

Ten of the respondents were watching game because of the team and the rest were watching because they like ice hockey, but not particularly the team. Nineteen respondents were following other team in Liiga ice hockey. Some were born in other city that is why the team from their hometown was closer to their heart. One even said, *“Yes, Kärpät. I was born in Kainuu, so Kärpät is close to my heart”.* Two respondents followed another team because of influence by a friend and family. The respondent said, *“Ilves, because a family friend plays in it”.* Although respondents were not a fan of JYP team, eleven of them do not follow other Liiga team other than JYP. And only one respondent followed all Liiga ice hockey team.

Table 21. Number of times people watched game in arena

	1-2 times in a year	More than 2 times in a year	Sometimes/Rarely/Occasionally	Never
Arena	11	1	3	0
Home	9	1	4	5

4.3.4 Team Performance

As shown in Figure 22, twenty people had an experience where they felt happy about the performance of the team and the whole organisation. Six of the respondents remembered the first time the team got their medal and won world championship. Two respondents remembered when JYP beat the opponent. *They said, “Yes. When JYP beats Tappara”; “Sometime at the turn of the 80s and 90s semi-final game Ilves-Jyp. Jyp won and there were many of us JYP supporters in Hakametsä”.*

When asked what they feel when the team wins or loses a game, sixteen respondents felt great and had positive feeling when the team won, and defeat made them disappointed and pissed. And twelve respondents answered that they do not feel anything. Most of the respondents said that the team’s performance affects their overall perception of the team. One said, *“A unique style of fast play could inspire you to go to the rink”*; and the other, *“Being a professionalism based on competition brings with it a focus on results”*. One mentioned that bad games reduce interest.

Figure 22. Number of people who had a great experience with the team’s performance

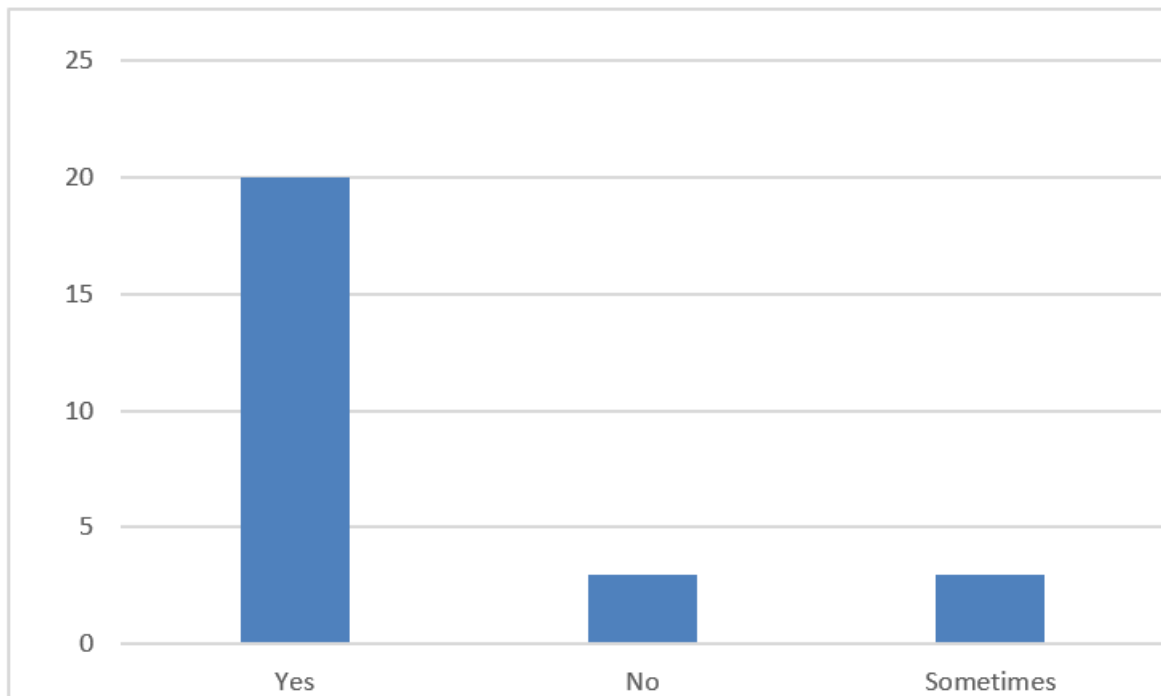
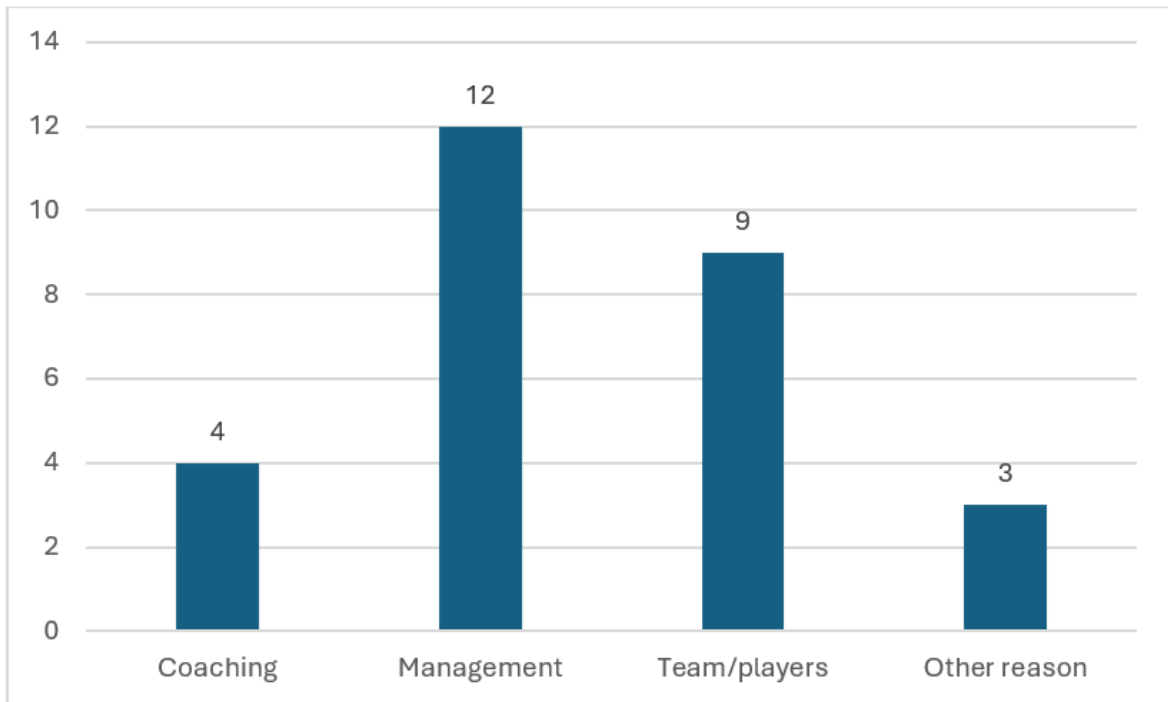


Figure 23. Challenges of the team



The respondents were asked what was the team challenges the past few years. Figure 23 shows that four respondents believed that coaching was the challenge of the team, twelve respondents said it was the management/leadership, nine said it was the team/players and three gave other reasons, such as economy and small budget. When it comes to coaching as the team's challenge, one of the respondents said, *"Wrong coach. And when the old ones leave and new ones come, it takes a while for the team to weld together. Risto Duffa the best coach"*. Some of the respondents believed that JYP team has poor management, reasons were:

"Change of coaches in the middle of everything. They have not been given peace of mind. There hasn't been a proper sports director (Holtari was)."

"Club management/coaching/owners are freaking out".

"Certainly many factors. Lack of trust between club management, owners, coaching and the team, lack of confidence from constant negative news and gameplay, wrong decisions about where the club should go, injuries to key players and the spiral that has arisen from all of these".

"Poor leadership and unsuccessful player selections that suit the style of play".

"Shit and arrogant leadership".

Other respondents thought that players/team was the challenge at this time. One of the respondents said that young talented players left for other clubs and that the team had a bad team spirit.

4.3.5 Team Management and Marketing Strategy

Only four respondents believed that JYP current marketing strategy was effective, ten believed that it was not effective at all as shown in Figure 24. When the respondents were asked what new initiatives or strategies they wanted to see the team adopt to increase fan engagement, four respondents said cheaper tickets. Four respondents said that the current marketing strategy was not effective because of the management, some of the reasons were:

“We need to create a whole new strategy for the future and clear the air from the entire organization. Organise a discussion event for supporters with club management and coaching”.

“The bosses have to stop first and look which way to go before committing the fans”.

“Would change the management”.

“A new kind of marketing strategy”.

Four respondents wanted new strategies from the players to increase fan engagement. One said, *“At least a couple of big-name players to join the team despite the financial challenge. Could bring new spectators to the hall. Today's "anonymous" players do not arouse interest”.* And the other suggested that the players should have their own identity and care for people. Two respondents wanted the organisation to have a better relationship with the fans by treating fans better and to involve fans in the organisation's activities. Two of the respondents believed that success would make fans be committed. One of them mentioned that *“Commitment can only be achieved through results”.*

Figure 24. JYP current marketing strategy

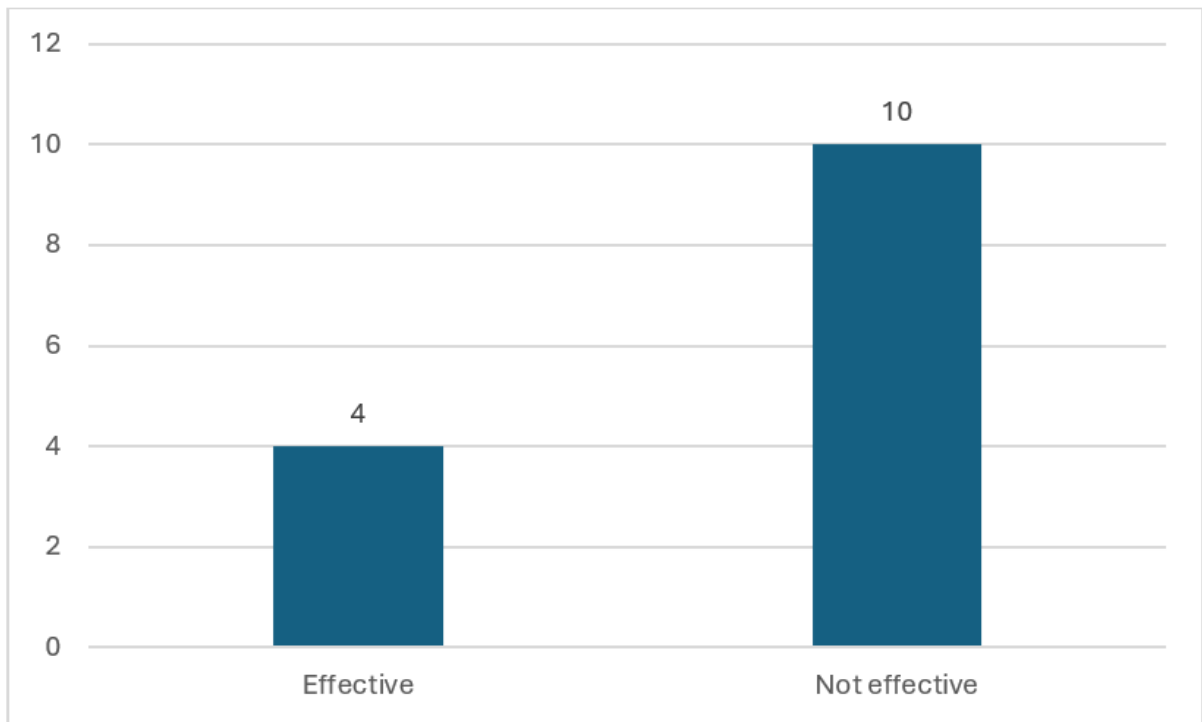
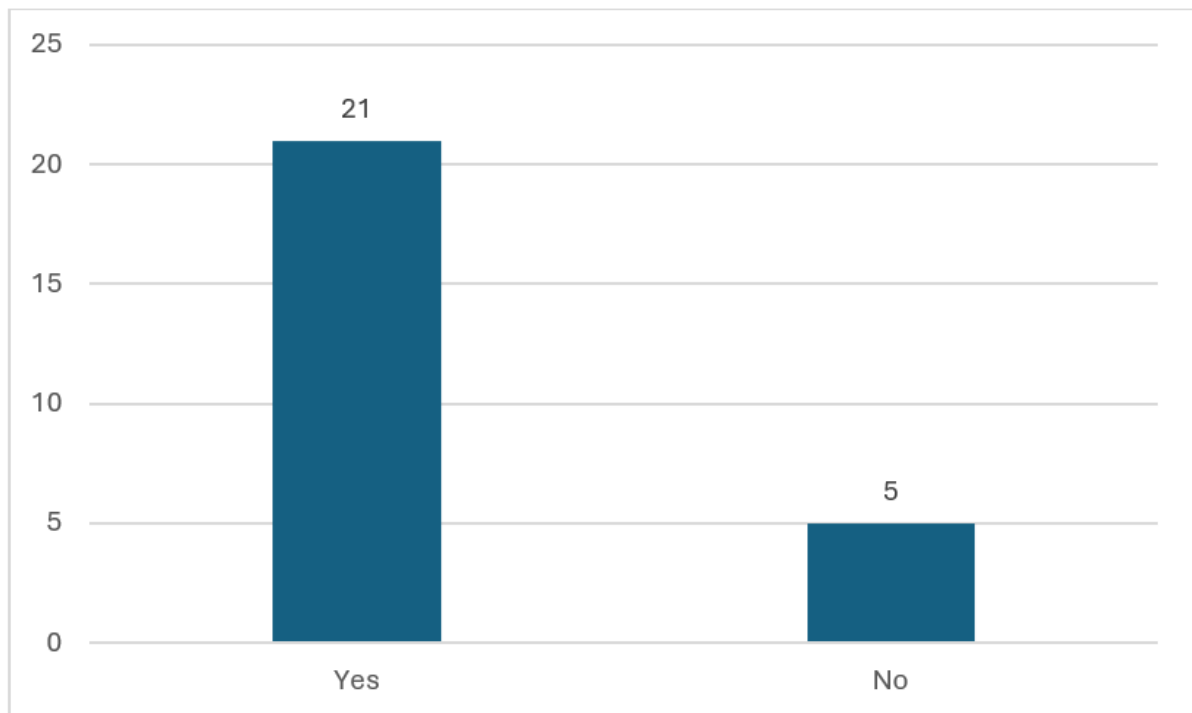


Figure 25. Does the management and players influence your perception of the team?



The Figure 25 shows that most of the respondents agreed that the management and players influence people's perception of the team and five respondents did not agree. Some of the reasons of the twelve respondents were:

“The management must give the coach peace of mind and not interfere”.

“The management seems to have too much say in relation to the tasks”.

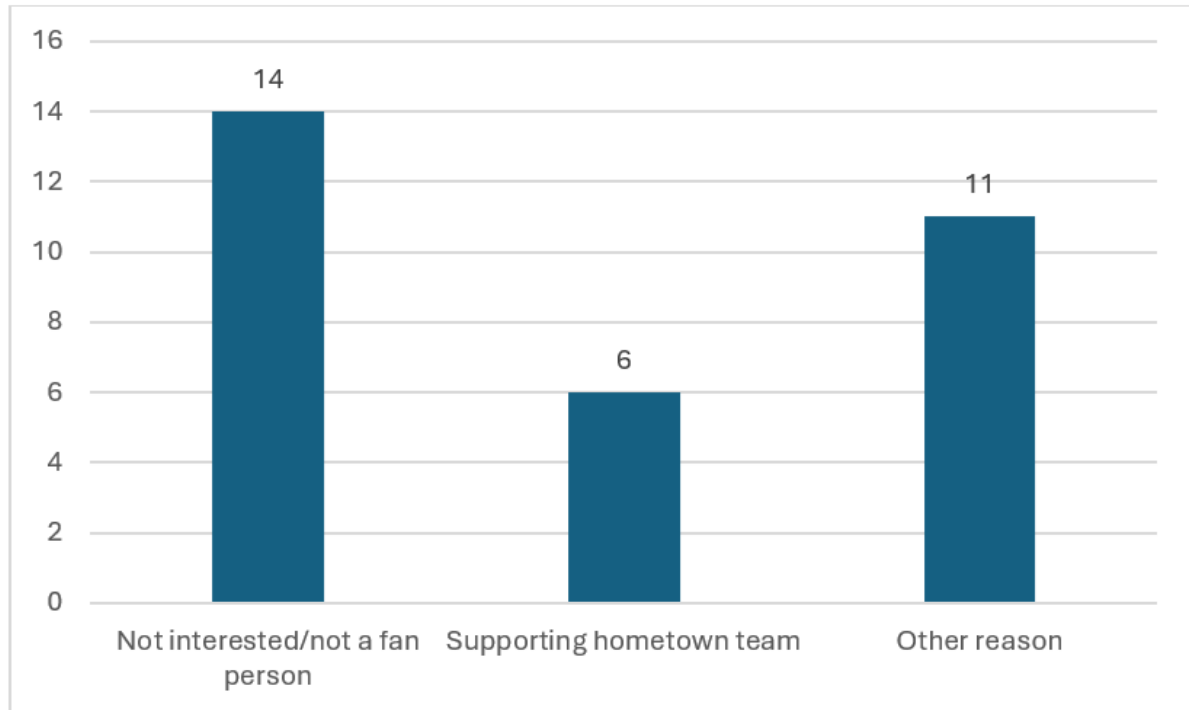
“The players make the team and the management makes it possible for it to function. Good club management does not interfere in the day-to-day operations of the team”.

“A successful team requires good players and management that is exemplary”.

4.3.6 Factors that will turn non-JYP Fan to a Fan

All respondents do not want to be a fan of JYP team, fourteen of them said they were not interested or not a fan person, six respondents were supporting their hometown team, and eleven gave other reason (Figure 26). One of the respondents do not want how the club treat people and suggested to treat fans better and should have one group of fans only that is united. Another one made a comment about how bad the facilities of the club are. And the weak performances of the team were the reasons of one respondent. When asked if there were factors that can change their mind and perception about JYP, five of the respondents were sure they were not going to be a JYP fan, in which four of them were supporting hometown team. Two of them could probably be a fan if the management will change the chairman. One of them said, *“Seppänen when he quits his work”*. Two respondents mentioned that the ticket price could be the factor to change their mind because not everyone can afford to go to every match. One noted that *“As someone who works in disability work, I would greatly appreciate it if this group (disabled and mentally handicapped) were taken into account, for example, in the field of disability. with discounted tickets and fan meetings sometimes. There are a huge number of big fans, not everyone can afford to go to matches. This target group can be reached, for example, by housing units by advertising”*. Eight of the respondents wanted the players and team to do well before they can think of becoming a fan, success was important for them. One of the comments was, *“If the team ever starts to do well in the league again. You can’t be a fan of a losing team”*.

Figure 26. Reasons why respondents do not want to be a JYP fan



4.4 Discussion

When it comes to fan engagement, most of the fans engaged with the team by watching the games in arena or watching it on TV. There is a total of 60 games during a regular season (home and away games) and most of them are watching all games. However, thirty-six of them are not attending fan events due to several reasons. Thirty-six fans said that their love for the ice hockey motivates them to become a fan. Therefore, most of the fans are more interested into hockey games than the ice hockey team itself, this is also the result from non-JYP fans. This might be the reason as to why fans mostly engage with the team during the game only and does not stay loyal all throughout. Rotko (2023) states that to establish active participation of fans, there should be an interaction with them during, before, and after the game. The results indicate that JYP organisation needs to improve on this area to keep their fans engaged more and not only during matches. Also, twenty-nine fans believed that JYP organisations lacks communication and/or engagement with them. One of the fans says that there is no communication between the organisation and the fans, others say that communication is sub-standard and poor. One of the fans even mentioned that he/she is not aware that JYP has fan events. Communication can be seen as another reason why there is not many fans are joining the events. As stated by Dwyer et al. (2000), event strategy can increase community interest that can lead to greater participation. It can therefore conclude that despite of high numbers of fans watching JYP games (both home and away games), but

due to their love for the ice hockey sports as the main reason why they want to become a fan, they are not willing to actively participate during or after the game. This behaviour of JYP fans supports the assumption of Wohlfeil & Whelan (2006, p. 644) about the reason of why participants want to voluntarily involve in the event, which is determined by consumers' situational involvement. The results of the survey and the interview indicates that fans have a temporary interest towards JYP. They participate in such a way that they watch live games or on TV (situational involvement), but do not show interest to participate in a long-term (predispositional involvement). Despite of large number of fans not participating, fan event is the top marketing strategy that they want the management to improve on to increase fan engagement.

Both JYP and non-JYP fans seen the management as the main reason why the whole organisation is having challenges for the past years. Interviewee two (JYP fan) said that they do not do anything if, for example, they see people saying a lot of bad things on social media about the players, team's performance, coach, or management. The result of the survey and the interview do not align with the existing research of Brown & Billings (2013, p. 80) where they stated that fans can be the unofficial arm of their favorite team, and they will engage in crisis communication to defend the reputation of the organisation. In the case of JYP fans, they are not actively supporting or put an effort to protect the organisation's reputation. It could be possible that the reason is they do not want to engage in any negative discussion and fans choose to stay positive and also spread positivity, by focusing on how they can support the team and sharing the highlights of the game. Both JYP and non-JYP fans agree that lack of trust is the challenge seen in the management. JYP fans said that the team owners do not trust top coaches and that is not giving them peace of mind. Lack of trust between club management, owners, coaching and the team is also mentioned by non-JYP fans. According to Moorman et al. (1993, p. 82), it is important to understand that trust will not exist if someone will believe but has no intention to take a risk, otherwise it is a limited trust. The data and comments from both JYP and non-JYP fans indicate that the management believes in coaches but there is no intention to take a risk, that is why they keep on changing the team's coach even on the middle of the season game. One of the non-JYP fans mentioned that when the old coach leaves and new one comes, it takes a while for the team to unite. This statement supports the theory of Hancock et al. (2017, p. 11), where they mentioned that trust is stronger when working with familiar partners and it makes the performance better because the trust is already built. Therefore, it can be concluded that it takes time for the JYP players to give their full trust when new coaches come because trust cannot be imposed, it is earned. And for this reason, it affects their performances on ice. Also, the management gives cognitive trust (Meyer, 2015) in coaches and because the

culture in Finland is more on task-based and ice hockey organisation is different from any other industry, the management is more on “trust from the head” than emotional trust (Meyer, 2015).

There is a huge difference comparing the fans now and fans some years ago and performance of the team is seen as the big factor. The fans said that there were people in the arena and the atmosphere was livelier 10 years ago. One of the fans noted that if the team succeed, more fans pop up and there was more massive fan before than now. The data oppose the theory of Vivek et al. (2012, p. 134), Brodie et al. (2013, p.107), and Youseff et al. (2018), where they argue that participation and involvement are both antecedent of CE. In case of JYP fans, when they were satisfied with the performance of the team before, they tend to participate more and get involved in the team activities. This supports the theory of Pansari & Kumar (2016) and Hargyatni et al. (2022, p. 24), stating that satisfaction is one of the antecedents of CE. However, their theory about engagement which happens only after building a relationship based on trust and commitment does not align with the results of this research. In the case of JYP fans, they do not engage because of trust and commitment; that develops after the involvement. Eight of the respondents from non-JYP fans might become a fan if players and team will start winning games. Therefore, there is a possibility that these non-JYP fans can trust the JYP team when they become satisfied with the outcome of the games, which supports the study of Cuong (2020, pp. 96-99). Twenty-two from JYP fans said that performance is the main factor to strengthen their trust and loyalty. This supports the theory of Selnes (1996, pp. 307-309), that buyers are more motivated to continue their relationship with the seller if high satisfaction is met.

5 Recommendations

The goal of this research was to identify customers' perception of JYP Jyväskylä Oy and identify the factors that develop consumer/fan trust. JYP Jyväskylä Oy wants to understand people's perceptions of the organisation and how they can improve on building trust with the fans.

5.1 How does customer interaction and engagement with brand promotes consumer trust in ice hockey industry?

There are several ways on how fan engagement promotes trust in ice hockey industry. For this research, the author will only provide three ways based on the data, these are:

Building a strong relationship: Constant engagement with fans will build a strong relationship with them. They will feel that they are important and valued, making them more likely to remain happy with the team (Lewis, 2014). Emotional connection with fans is vital in building long-term loyalty with them (Camp, n.d.). Once loyalty from fans has been established, they will be more passionate and committed with the team. They are more likely to spread team's identity to other people (e.g. word-of-mouth) and they will remain active in supporting the team even everything else goes wrong.

Transparent Communication: Communicating with fans is one way to engage with them. Since most of the respondents believed that the organisation does not communicate with the fans, it is now the right time for the organisation to engage with fans openly and be honest to foster transparency. Effective communication will help the success of any organisation specially during crisis. Honesty creates trust, and trust is the main ingredient to gain customer's loyalty (The Brand Marquee, 2024). No matter how bad the news/situation is, fans deserve to know the truth. They will understand and appreciate telling them the truth than hiding things to keep the organisation's reputation.

Feedback and Improvement: Listen to your fans. When it comes to criticism, fans are the ones who will point out what works and what doesn't. They are also the ones who will stay by your side when you're struggling (Clary, 2022). It is important for JYP organisation to gather feedback from fans, spare time to know more about their experience and opinions and you will see a big difference in their overall fan experience (Droptought, 2023). JYP can organise a meeting with selected loyal fans and encourage them to provide their honest insights. This will make fans feel that they belong to the organisation, and it will give them a positive feeling that they are able to help the organisation in resolving important matters.

5.2 What are the factors that make the customer engage in ice hockey sports?

The data shows that good performance and success of the team are the main factors to strengthen fan engagement. Fans are more motivated to watch live games and see the action on ice and witness the winning games. The fans and crowd are more energetic and livelier to cheer for the team. It creates a solid massive fan base that will remain loyal even during the time that they fail to win. And because a lot of fans support JYP because this is their hometown team, it gives them so much pride and confidence when their city is being recognized in whole Finland. There is a proud feeling to know that when someone knows

they live in Jyväskylä, they will immediately recognize the city as a place with a strong ice hockey team. The success of the team is also the success of fans. They feel like they are part of the team, the community, and the organisation. And that attracts more people to be a fan and be part of that community.

Fans understand that one cannot always win in sports. There is a time that one wins and a time when one loses. But constant underperformance loses the interest of fans and gives them too much disappointment that will lead to unwillingness to attend games and get involved. When less people watch the game, the atmosphere gets quiet and boring that could affect team's performance on ice. According to Laylo (2023), players become inspired and perform well when the crowd is loud and lively. Therefore, fan engagement has domino effect in team's performance.

5.3 What are the effects of fan engagement?

Fan loyalty is one of the important effects of fan engagement. Based on the findings, the more JYP fans engage with the team, the more they give their loyalty. And once loyalty is established, they become more passionate in supporting the team in all aspects. For example, one of the fans said that they even organized a trip to watch away games which means that they will spend time and money to show their support. Although, the interviewee one mentioned that they sometimes join this kind of event where fans travel to another city to watch the match, the data shows that majority of the fans do not currently participate in JYP events due to cost, distance, and time. This is a different case from some years ago where fans do not mind the distance and cost and will find time to join in events. It only shows that fans were more loyal before compared to fans now. Another factor is the possible number of fans before, as the majority of the respondents said that JYP used to have a massive supporter base years ago. Currently, JYP has two fanbase - Hurrikaanisydän has 120 fans only and Rumpuryhmä has 20 fans. Because the number of fans before was bigger than number of fans now, they feel more excited to engage because of fun in the community and overall fan experience (Wakefield & Bennett, 2017). They invite friends to watch future games or going to arena during games is a family bonding for some. The more loyal fans the team has, the more they are likely to invest in buying team's products and purchasing tickets. And during the game, fans will also buy food and drinks or eat at the restaurant, and that will increase the revenue of the business (Seen, 2024).

5.4 What are the factors affecting trust in a brand?

While JYP fans said that performance is the factor to strengthen their trust and loyalty and non-JYP fans said that they probably become a fan if the team will perform well, the management is seen as the big factor that affects trust according to both respondents. Majority of them are commenting about how the management interfere with the coach and continue making bad decisions, such as changing the coach at the middle of season game. Respondents from JYP fans and non-JYP fans both agreed that the management must give coach a peace of mind. It has been in the news last year when the management decided to fire the head coach in December and JYP was at that time in the tenth position during the series with 44 points but has played two fewer matches than the leading team. The reason of the chairman of board of directors was the game goals of the club's strategy until 2025 where they drew up a new strategy and the head coach introduced a very new level of physical requirements to the team, but in other aspects of the game, the development was not enough to meet the goal of the club and there was no improvement despite numerous meetings (Saarela, 2023). Before the head coach got fired, JYP had won 15 games out of 29 and when the new coach arrived, the team lost 9 straight games and out of 31 games with the new coach, they only won 7 games and failed to get to the playoff (Liiga Official Website, 2023).

Therefore, the intraorganisational trust between the coach and the JYP management is not met. The management provided a limited trust towards their coach but not willing to take a risk or compromise when the coach strategy do not fully align with the management's goal. And for that reason, the interpersonal trust between the team and the fans are being affected. For fans to trust the team, the whole organisation should be united first. It will be challenging to establish a solid fan who will trust the team and stay loyal all throughout if the management itself do not trust the people working within the organisation.

5.5 How does an organization engage to establish trust?

Based on the data, communication and fan events are what fans looking for to improve from the organisation to establish trust. Majority of the fans said that there is lack of communication between the team/organisation and fans. As mentioned before, this is the big factor why fans are not interested in joining fan events. When it comes to communication, fans are looking for the management to be open, transparent, and honest. Fans feel like the management does not listen to their feedback. It is important for the management to take

fans' feedback into consideration and let them know that they are being heard. In such way, fans will feel they are being valued. It is important for fans the transparency and honesty specially during crisis time. If challenging time comes, the management can be honest and transparent to discuss the matter with the fans and be open for any feedback from them. By doing this, they will feel that they are part not only the organisation but most importantly they are part of the resolution. Because fans do not know what is going on with the organisation and team due to lack of communication, they do not know how they can defend the team and organisation's reputation. It is advisable that, there is one person from the organisation who will be designated to answer questions from the fans and take note of their feedback and relay them to the management. It is also a good strategy if there is a quarterly or yearly meeting with the fans to gather their opinions and let them know the current situation and discuss challenges, if there is any. Fans appreciate an honest communication from the organisation, and they will be open about team's decision and future plans.

Organizing fan events can give fans a feeling that they are being valued. Most of fans want to meet their favorite players and spend time with them. It is a good way to establish a good relationship between players and fans and to know more about each other. There are several respondents from both JYP fans and non-JYP fans who are giving suggestions about the game ticket because they find it expensive. They say that not all can afford to go to matches and they will appreciate if there is some discount given to fans. It is now the best time for the management to do some events strategy for the fans to let them know they are being appreciated. For example, they can organize a special event like "fan appreciation day" and can give discounts for tickets, foods, merchandise or even give a free coffee to all fans during the game. They can also give a ticket discount at least one or couple of times in all home games in a way that one fan can bring one family or friend for free. They can also give a "loyalty award" to a fan who has the highest number of attendances during the game, in an instance. And the winner will be announced before the start of the 3rd period and will be posted on the team's social media pages. The award can be monetary or at least free lunch to Hurricane restaurant. For the past years, the arena is not full of fans or audiences watching the game, it is also a good strategy if the management will give ticket discount or half price (e.g., one hour before the game starts). The company might lose some profit for the discounted price of the tickets, but they will still earn profit at some point because people will buy foods and drinks at the stall, so both will benefit from it – it is better to give discounted price, and the arena is full than to have a lot of empty seats every game. There are also some suggestions from the respondents about charity events. While JYP has been organising charity events even before, it is a good idea to constantly doing this kind of events, and fans can also contribute to this. For example, team member and their families as

well as fans can bake some goods during game and the proceeds go to chosen charity. Also, it is a good idea to give back to the community in several ways such as: visiting old people in their retirement home, or people with disabilities, teams can volunteer in helping the local government in their programs, community outreach programs specially for young children, supporting children who aspire to be a hockey player. Currently, JYP has a tactical marketing campaign, where the organisation, together with their partner Alva, donate 100€ for every home goal for local crisis centre. The crisis centre is using the money to provide mental health services for children and young adults.

By investing in fans events and community outreach programs and transparent, honest and open communication with the fans, it can all create a positive impact to the organisation and improves team's public image. By this way, it can help to gain people's trust that will help in increasing fan loyalty and fostering a strong and engaged community that will support the team through its ups and downs.

6 Conclusion

Within this research, the author examined the influence of customer engagement in developing trust in the field of ice hockey. The result of the interview and answers of respondents from the questionnaires strongly support the theories of customer engagement/fan engagement. The author highly recommends for ice hockey team to build a good and strong relationship with their fans. Most of JYP fans become a fan because of their love for ice hockey and not because of the team, these are the kind of fans who will defend and stay with the team, only if loyalty has already been established. It will not be possible to create a good relationship with the fans without an effective communication. It is necessary to be honest with them and establish an open communication to foster transparency. Do not underestimate the power of fans – their feedback matters. Let them be part of the resolution because loyal fans want to be part of the organisation as a family.

It is truly challenging for a team to succeed if trust does not involve. Coach and players will not be able to perform their duties if the management lacks trust. The organisation will not succeed if fans do not remain loyal because they cannot provide the trust. Loyalty and trust can be given if the fans are satisfied with a lot of factors such as team's performance, engagement, and communication. This thesis can be an initial step for ice hockey team to provide significant value for their fans.

The theory of Selnes (1996, pp. 307-309) applies to JYP fans wherein fans were more motivated and active to support the team and be engaged when the players were performing well some years ago. Their continuous satisfaction led them to be loyal and trust the organisation. JYP fans are also seen to have attitudinal loyalty towards JYP because many of them stopped supporting the team when they continuously lost the game (Mahony et al., 2000, pp. 15-21). And just like the theory of Li, (2015, p. 1), the management cannot provide a trust if they will not take a leap of faith/hope to their coaches. While it is important to have a clear goal between the management, coach, and players, it is also necessary to step back for a while and let the coaches do their job. Constant interfering with the coach and players can result distrust that will lead to poor performances of the team.

This research can contribute to ice hockey organisations in enhancing fan engagement to develop trust. JYP Jyväskylä Oy apply this research and obtain better understanding on how they can create a loyal and solid fan base that will stay specially during their challenging times and help them protect their brand reputation in public. The result of this research can be used for the organisation to understand the importance of trust between team and fans, between the organisation and fans, and between the team and the organisation/management. This research can help the commissioning company to acknowledge the cause and effect of lack of trust and what are the factors affecting trust.

Another contributing factor is how JYP organisation can enhance their fan engagement and community engagement based on the result of this research. This can also help not only an ice hockey team, but also all other industry because engaging with customers is proven important to all businesses and communication is vital in providing customers a great experience.

The result of this data also shows that satisfaction is the main cause why fans start building trust. In the case of JYP fans, the more they get satisfied, the more likely they get attached to the team. When they get attached, they start to involve and participate more until their loyalty starts to develop and progress.

Like any other research, this study has limitations. It will be helpful if data can be collected from other Liiga teams, or all teams in Finland if possible. Future researcher can also attempt to study other sports to gain more knowledge and see a different perspective from different sports fan. The result of this study can also be used to compare different ice hockey teams from different countries and see the variation between fans.

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Appendix 1. Data Management Plan

Before the completion of this research, a thesis agreement was signed between the author, the commissioning company and the thesis supervisor from Häme University of Applied Sciences. The materials used for this thesis have been collected through one-to-one interview and a survey in the form of questionnaire is done via google form. The questions are in Finnish language to encourage more participants to answer the survey. The answers are translated into English by a translator. All participants have the knowledge and give permission that the answers will be used for thesis purposes only. All participants are advised that the data will be saved on author's computer and USB drive for a year after the publication of the thesis and will be permanently deleted a year after. The participants in this research will be kept anonymous. The research is available to the public but only the author has the sole access to the data.

Appendix 2. Survey Questions

(JYP Fans)

1. What is your gender and age?
2. Male or female?
3. Are you a student, working, or retired?
4. When did you start becoming a fan?
5. Are you a fan because you like ice hockey, or because of the players, or you are a fan to whole JYP organization, or other reason?
6. What makes you attracted to follow JYP?
7. How do usually engage with the team? (attending games, watching online, following on social media, etc)?
8. Do you attend the game most of the time?
9. What are you doing as a fan to show support during game/social media?
10. What do you enjoy most about being a fan of this ice hockey team?
11. How do you feel when the team wins or loses a game?
12. JYP is not doing well in the game for the past 5 years, what do you think were their challenges?
13. What can the team do to strengthen your trust and loyalty as a fan?
14. Do you think the organization interact with the JYP fans more often or there is lack of engagement or communication?
15. What new initiatives or strategies would you like to see the team adopt to increase fan engagement?
16. How effective do you find the team's current marketing and outreach efforts? What improvements would you suggest?
17. Do you participate in any fan events or group activities related to the team? What motivates you to join these events?
18. How does the team's performance on the ice affect your overall perception of the team?
19. How are fans 10 years ago when players are playing well compared to JYP fans now?
20. Would you recommend JYP to your friends, why or why not?

(NON-JYP FANS)

1. What is your name and age?
2. Male or female?
3. Are you a student, working, or retired?
4. Have you watched JYP ice hockey game? If yes, what was your experience?
5. What is the first thing that comes in your mind when you hear JYP or see the logo?
6. Do you watch the game at home or arena?
7. Do you follow JYP in social media?
8. How often do you watch game in arena?
9. What makes you decide to watch in arena? Or what makes you decide not to watch?
10. Do you watch because of the team or just because you like ice hockey in general?
11. Do you have other ice hockey team in Liiga that you follow? If yes, what makes you follow them?
12. How do you feel when the team wins or loses a game?
13. How do you think the team's management and players influence your perception of the team?
14. What factors contribute to your reason as to why you don't want to be a fan of JYP?
15. JYP is not doing well in the game for the past 5 years, what do you think was their challenges?
16. What new initiatives or strategies would you like to see the team adopt to increase fan engagement?
17. How effective do you find the team's current marketing and outreach efforts? What improvements would you suggest?
18. Have you ever had an experience where you feel happy about the performance of the team and the whole organization?
19. How does the team's performance on the ice affect your overall perception of the team?
20. What are the factors that can change your mind and perception about JYP, that will make you an active fan one day?

Appendix 3. Interview Questions

1. What is your name and age?
2. Male or female?
3. When did you start becoming a fan?
4. Are you a fan because you like ice hockey, or because of the players, or you are a fan to whole JYP organization, or other reason?
5. What makes you attracted to follow JYP?
6. Do you also watch other Liiga games aside from JYP?
7. How do usually engage with the team? (attending games, watching online, following on social media, etc)?
8. Do you attend the game most of the time?
9. What are you doing as a fan to show support during game/social media?
10. Can you describe the recent experience where you felt engaged with the team?
11. What do you enjoy most about being a fan of this ice hockey team?
12. How do you feel when the team wins or loses a game?
13. What is the first thing that comes in your mind when you hear JYP or see the logo?
14. How does the management and players influence your perception of the team?
15. What factors contribute your trust with the team and management?
16. JYP is not doing well in the game for the past 5 years, what do you think were their challenges?
17. How do you see the team's effort in communicating with the fans?
18. What can the team do to strengthen your trust and loyalty as a fan?
19. Do you think the organization interact with the JYP fans more often or there is lack of engagement or communication?
20. How do you respond with negative feedback or criticism to JYP?
21. What new initiatives or strategies would you like to see the team adopt to increase fan engagement?
22. How effective do you find the team's current marketing and outreach efforts? What improvements would you suggest?
23. Do you participate in any fan events or group activities related to the team? What motivates you to join these events?
24. How important it is for you to be part of the community or fans?
25. Can you share a memorable experience you had with other fans?
26. How does the team's performance on the ice affect your overall perception of the team?

27. Do you plan on becoming a fan for as long as JYP is in the industry regardless of their standing?
28. How are fans 10 years ago when players are playing well compared to JYP fans now?