



Karelia University of Applied Sciences
Degree Programme in International Business


Social Media Sports Marketing in Flag Football

National Teams in Finland and the United
States

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<p>Title Social Media Sports Marketing in Flag Football, National Teams in Finland and the United States</p>		
<p>This thesis was made to research flag football marketing in social media by comparing social media platforms of Finnish and American national flag football teams. This subject was selected to evaluate the Finnish national flag football team's social media marketing, potentially finding development points from it. Flag football is a growing sport in Finland that has not reached the potential it might with the right marketing. This thesis concentrates on social media marketing on Instagram and Facebook.</p> <p>In this thesis, an interview and a survey were used to research the current situation on the subject besides researching online. This decision of research methods was made to get information directly from the source. The research showed a lack of social media marketing team on Finland's national flag football team's behalf, which can be seen on these platforms. Differences in follower rates can be explained by the fact that the United States is the home country of flag football and different rates of users on each country. The Finnish national flag football team concentrates at the time mostly on followers inside their sport community. This explains the lack of reaching out to people outside of this group.</p> <p>This research found improvement points regarding the content and activity of the Finnish national flag football team's social media marketing. Widening its target group, and a social media manager for flag football could help improve matters.</p>		
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1 Introduction

This thesis was made study the social media marketing of Finnish national flag football teams. The social media platforms researched were Instagram and Facebook. The purpose of comparing it to the American national flag football team's social media platforms is to get improvement ideas for its own social media marketing.

The sport is on a much bigger scale in the United States, and there is a lot of good which Finland's social media team could use. The themes of this thesis include marketing, social media marketing, sports marketing, social media sports marketing, and flag football history in Finland and the United States. The process is to better understand these themes and find out the opportunities these themes hold. Sports marketing and social media marketing are both new fields in marketing and are still reaching their full potential.

Social media marketing brings a whole new level in sports marketing with partnerships and fan influences. In social media marketing, players and teams can advertise themselves without including professional advertisers in their campaigns. Social media marketing decreases the advertising fees when advertising is done with free platforms. In social media, the players and teams can use platforms to advertise themselves or for example sponsorships. Social media also connects players and fans together and real time commenting becomes available in various situations.

Flag football is still a small sport in Finland, but the flag football community in Finland has a good reputation all over the world. There is a great opportunity to grow, and the Finnish flag community had an amazing opportunity for this when the world championship games were held at Pajulahti Center in the fall of 2024. Flag football originating in the United States gives a good comparison to Finland's small flag community.

2 Knowledge base

2.1 Marketing

Marketing is one business function that relies on customer behaviour. Marketing has a most important function and two-fold goal, which is to attract new customers to a marketed product or service, and to keep current customers satisfied and loyal. Marketing comes in any form, the traditional ads via TV screen, flyers, magazines, billboards in malls. Nowadays, media marketing is found in ads on websites, mobile apps, online videos and continuously growing social media. Purpose of marketing is to become a part of one's every day life and market the way one can live through their brands. Marketers have ways to reach people directly, personally and in a way they can interact. (Armstrong, Harris, He & Kotler 2020, 5-6.)

The marketing process starts with understanding what consumers need, and the marketplace which the company is about to dive into. The second step is to work on a marketing strategy which driven by potential consumers. The third step is for the company to create a marketing programme that delivers the consumer a promise of value of the company's marketed product or service. After this marketers have to create relationships that are profitable and build their consumers' trust in them. After these four steps the marketer has to capture value from consumers, increase profits and create customer equity. (Armstrong et al. 2020, 6-7.)

The easiest way to explain marketing is that the company has to meet its consumers' wants, needs and demands. Marketing is not limited to physical products; it can include services that include activities or benefits. As a part of the understanding of their market place and consumers, marketers have to find a way to create value for their consumers. (Armstrong et al. 2020, 7.)

2.2 Sports Marketing Introduction

Sports marketing started as an opportunity to grow revenue and broadcast sport events. Revenue growth included ticket sales to events and merchandise sales. However, when sport marketing started to grow, it brought new elements in the game. Sports marketing opened doors to sponsorships, partnerships, advertising and everything commercial. Sport marketing can be divided into three different categories: promoting for fan interest as ticket sales, promoting products through sports and promoting sport participation. (Manoli 2018, 1-5.)

Sport marketing is quite a new innovation. Before sports marketing, sports came from traditions and other influences and was not heavily influenced by marketing. People just did sports, and there was no need for heavy marketing strategies, and things were completely different than they are today. For example, in the 1940s and 1950s, tennis grew huge in popularity, attracting The two genders. If we are to take tennis as an example, today things are completely different than they were then. The majority of nations are fighting to get young people interested in sports and offering support all around. For example, partnerships and sponsorships are used to keep people interested and driven towards sports. Marketing does not stop there to get people interested in playing, but there are huge marketing strategies towards volunteers, events, broadcasting and keeping people interested longer. (Smith & Steward 2015, 1-5.)

Sport marketing is multidimensional and keeps two different angles. Sport marketing markets the products and services used in sports, but also other products that are marketed through sports. Both are meant to fill the needs of customers, as any form of marketing does. Sports marketing just differs from traditional marketing because through sports companies can market products and services that are not related to the sport itself. (Manoli 2018, 1-5.)

One of the well-known and biggest sport marketing events is the Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is the championship game of the NFL season. Yearly,

businesses pay up to seven figures for approximately 30 second advertisements. In this case, marketers use the sport as a way to market their products even the product is not specifically sport related. Super Bowl ads have included almost everything from food commercials to car commercials. In 2023, the game was watched by over 115 million people. For advertisers this type of audience for their ads is well worth the seven-figure price. (The New York Times Company 2024; NFL Enterprises LLC 2024.)

2.3 Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing is not defined by the size of the company. It is nowadays easily accessible to all. In social media marketing, companies use social media platforms to connect with potential customers and raise awareness of their product and services. Finding the right platform is crucial to get the most out of social media marketing and connecting with the right consumers. Even though social media marketing is easily accessible, it involves a lot of strategy and planning behind the posts. In addition to a company's regular posts, in social media a company can connect with potential customers and partners by commenting on other posts, liking other posts and posting short stories. (Forbes Advisor 2024.)

As social media has made people more known to get information with just a click of a button, consumer-generated content via social media is a new way to market a company's products and services. Social media has opened a way to different type of brand partnerships, and it has overtaken the traditional ways of marketing. Social media has a way for consumers to modify targeted marketing, and in this way social media marketers can easily affect their target groups with the help of algorithms. (Moriuchi 2019, 3.)

There are seven main platforms in social media where companies can choose the ones they benefit from the most. These seven platforms are Instagram,

TikTok, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook and Pinterest. These platforms target different audiences, so it is important to choose the right one where the product and company can get the most benefit. LinkedIn works mostly in business-to-business promotion where the others can better target individuals. (Forbes Advisor 2024.)

Facebook is generally the most popular social media platform, but it can be hard to reach audiences with all the competition that comes with it. It is still a safe choice for every marketer. Besides posts, it can come with targeted ads. Instagram's basic idea was from the start to be a platform to share images, but it has evolved to be a platform where one can share feed images, stories, reels, live streams and shops to provide a lot of diversity. TikTok targets mostly young people from all the platforms. In TikTok the company can use short videos to attract potential customers. Pinterest on the other hand is really visual, and people like to collect their ideas for renovations or party planning. Twitter posts are short texts called 'tweets', which can include different GIFs or pictures, and usually these texts are filled with valuable information. YouTube is a platform where companies can post video content about their products and services. (Forbes Advisor 2024.)

In social media, algorithms do a lot of work with deciding which ads and posts are shown in one's feed. Algorithms decide the relevancy and order of the pages one is following. Social media algorithms are not permanent and they are changing constantly. Algorithms are mathematical rules that decide how specific data behaves. Algorithms have been made to determine the validity of placements in social media due to the massive number of social media users. It is estimated that 60 percent of the world's population are users on social media. Besides showing the user relevant content, another purpose of social media algorithms is to filter out content which is not relevant or that high in quality. (O'Brien 2023.)

Algorithms also do a great deal with paid advertising. Paid advertising helps a company to reach out to its target audience. Algorithms in different social media

platforms decide which audience reaches their ads. Paid advertising can come in many different forms, and each company can decide which types of paid advertising help it purposes the most. (Oviond, Inc. 2024.)

The most popular paid advertising types are search ads, display ads, shopping ads, social ads and remarketing ads. Search and display ads are similar but slightly differ. Search ads are ads that are text-only and appear on the search engine with specific search terms. Display ads can also appear on search engines but can also be placed on partner websites. Display ads have a visual approach, and they contain images and videos. Remarketing ads target users that have previously visited the page but did not make a purchase. This makes the users re-engage and rethink their products. Shopping adds appear in search results with information and images to help the consumers find their product. Social ads work well with large audiences in social media platforms. Social ads promote brand interaction and can find the target audience in diverse audiences in social media platforms. (Oviond Inc. 2024.)

Paid advertising can be used in different sized companies to achieve marketing purposes. It can be used in different sized companies and with different budgets. When done right, paid advertising can bring brand awareness and help the company to reach potential consumers. Paid advertisements usually rank the company higher in web searches than just original search engines. (Oviond Inc. 2024.)

2.4 Sports Marketing in Social media

Social media allows fans to engage in sports, and social media marketing in sports is advancing fast. Teams that produce content for fans are making themselves strong competitors towards other teams and organizations. Evolution in social media marketing is advancing faster than TV broadcasting did when it became available. Social media is a great platform, especially for fans who do not have the ability to attend sport events. In social media they can still interact with other fans and sport organizations. (Greenfly 2024.)

The popularity of social media is seen in the following rates of some of the sport accounts (Greenfly 2024). For example, NFL Flag Football has 132,000 followers on Instagram. (NFL Flag Football 2024.) The International Federation of American Football has 27,500 followers. (Intl Fed of American Football 2024.)

Social media allows fans of all ages to interact with their favourite teams. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube have all stepped into the sport marketing game. Different types of platforms allow for diverse fans and diversity in the posts the teams make. Social media allows fans to interact with their favourite teams and players better than traditional broadcasts. Social media has taken their own footsteps in sports and are becoming more popular. It allows fans to interact instead of just watch. Social media allows fans all over the world to catch up with their favourite teams. (Greenfly 2024.)

Social media marketing in sports allows teams to update their fans at low cost and further gain trust in their community. Teams and organizations that use social media as a part of their marketing are gaining more than their competitors. (Greenfly 2024.)

2.5 History of Flag Football

Originally called 'Touch and Tail', flag football is a variation of American football. The biggest difference from football is that flag football is a non-contact sport. Contact is replaced with flags which hang on the players' waists. The basic idea is still the same: the offence tries to get to the opposite team's endzone. There are ten players on the field at the same time: five on offence and five on defence. The game was created in World War 2, and soldiers brought it back home with them. On a league level, flag football was recognized in the 1960s when The National Touch Football league was founded in Missouri. Flag football has come a long way, and will be a part of the Olympics in 2028 in Los Angeles. (International Olympic Committee 2024.)

2.5.1 Flag Football in Finland

Flag Football as an organized sport started in the mid-1980s in Finland. The sport was popular specifically with younger players who did not have the opportunity to play tackle football. When tackle football rules were changed to allow women and children the opportunity to play, the popularity of flag football started decreasing. For many years the focus was on tackle football, but lately flag has been getting more focus. (Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024d.)

Reviving flag football has been going on since the mid 2010s to get the league going again and revive the national teams. In 2024, there were 200 licensed flag football players in Finland which includes men, women and junior players (Halttunen 2024). The majority of athletes playing in women and men flag leagues are still tackle football players. Most of the players are still playing American football as their main sport, and there are not a lot of players that are only involved in flag football. (Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024d.)

Flag Football in Finland has a good reputation, and reviving the sport in Finland has gone so well that the world championship games were held in Finland. The International Federation of American Football named Finland as the host country of the championship games in 2024. Finland's reputation with flag football is considered innovative and youthful, and the reputation in the women's sports is also well known. (Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024d.)

The 2024 World Championship games were held at Pajulahti Olympic and Paraolympic training centre 25-30 August. Finland had been the host country to World Championship game already before. In 2022, Finland hosted the Women's World Championship game in tackle football. The game took place in Myyrmäki, Vantaa. This game was held with in a partnership with the American Football Association of Finland. (Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon liitto Ry 2024; National Football League 2024.)

Finland has a GP-series for flag football. Teams must be registered to Finland's Football Association. It is a licenced sport, so the players have to be registered and licenced as well as belonging to the team. Teams are divided into men's, youth's or women's teams. Besides the GP-series, there are smaller tournaments held by different organizers. These tournaments rarely include youth teams but there are usually also mixed teams in addition to women's and men's teams. The teams in the Women's GP-series are Trojans Doris, Trojans Doris Jr., Kouvola Indians and Tampere Saints. The Men's GP-series has Trojans Fredrik, Flaguars, FlagLions, Roadmen and Helsinki Flag Football. (American Football in Finland 2024; Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024a; Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024b.)

The most recent Finnish Championship games were held in March 2024. The Men's series was won by Helsinki FlagLions for the third time in row, and The Women's series was won by the Turku Trojans Doris. The teams in the Women's GP-series were Trojans Doris, Trojans Doris Jr., Kouvola Indians and Tampere

Saints. (Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024a; Suomen Amerikkalaisen Jalkapallon Liitto Ry 2024b.)

2.5.2 Flag Football in the United States

NFL FLAG is the largest flag football organization of the United States, and it is the official flag football league of the NFL. The organization has over 1600 teams under its name. NFL FLAG started in the 1990s, when the NFL launched a global health and wellness initiative which was called Play Football. This project intended to make football accessible for all children. NFL FLAG currently has over half a million youth athletes in its organization, where the youth athletes have an opportunity to compete in all 50 states. (USA RCX Sports 2022.)

NFL FLAG has a number of partnerships which have given the opportunity to bringing flag football to thousands of schools and communities. NFL FLAG has also focused on expanding women's sports with flag football. NFL FLAG is made to be a pathway for female athletes to play flag football in college. (USA RCX Sports 2022.)

The United States men's flag football team has won the last four World Championships. The United States women's team is a two-time world champion. (National Football League 2024.)

3 Methodological choices of the thesis

At the start of my thesis project, I got a good knowledge base of the key concepts in this thesis. These are marketing, sports marketing, social media marketing, sports marketing in social media and the current situation of flag football in the United States and in Finland. After this I searched the social media user volume in both countries. The social media platforms under evaluation were Facebook and Instagram. I also included a search of Instagram and Facebook users in both countries to see the differences there.

I used a semi-structured interview as a part of this thesis. The main reason to use semi-structured interview as a part of this thesis was to get information on the social media activity on Finland's national teams' social media platforms. I interviewed the Head of Communications of American Football Association of Finland, Janne Vainio.

A semi-structured interview is good for getting information about a subject that allows many interesting areas and discussion about the questions. The questions for a semi-structured interview are not as formal as in a structured interview, and questions just lead the conversation. Questions still have to be about the topics that an interviewee wants to get information out of. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method. (SkillsYouNeed.com 2024a.)

The number of flag players in Finland is nowhere to find on the internet, so I reached out to the flag coordinator of the American Football Association of Finland to get information on how many licensed players there are. I reached out to the American Football Association of Finland and to a person responsible for its marketing. I then interviewed him to help get a better image of the purposes of their social media platforms. An interview was selected as a part of this thesis to get information straight out of the people responsible for their social media platforms. In this way it is easier to get the entire picture of the strategies and purposes of social media marketing.

Another data collection method used, was a survey. A questionnaire was made to collect information from the people who follow their social media platforms. The participants were people involved in flag football and American football. Surveys were shared via social media to reach out to this group of people following the Finnish national flag team. The idea behind this was to get data from users to see if they are pleased with the content and if there were errors that only followers of the platforms could see. There were a mix of open and closed questions to get variety in the answers.

Questionnaires are used in quantitative research. The purpose of questionnaires is to ask the same questions from a large number of people and then analyze their responses. Questionnaires provide a large amount of information which then can be analyzed to get more familiar with the subject, and how people feel about it. (SkillsYouNeed.com 2024b.) The questionnaire for this thesis is web-based, and was made with Webropol.

A questionnaire's length should be kept reasonable and simple for the respondents, and later on for the person analyzing it. If the questionnaire is too long, people are not that keen to answer compared to shorter questionnaires. A low answer rate can be harmful for the research, so it is more beneficial to keep the questionnaire shorter. When making a questionnaire, it should be kept in mind that respondents might not have the same amount of information about the subject. Questions have to be simple enough for the respondents to understand and answer them. Questions also should not be too long. Questionnaires should be made understandable, and respondents should have enough information to answer the questions. The language used in the questionnaires should be precise. (Tietoarkisto 2024.)

4 Research of Social Media usage

4.1 Social Media Platforms used by country

On Instagram, Finland's national flag football profile (@flagteamfinland) has 775 followers. The US national football team's profile (@usnft) has over 79,000 followers. The US national team profile includes all of the tackle and flag football teams, while Finland's is strictly for national flag football teams. The posts of both of these profiles have some similarities, even though social media users can see the difference. The American Instagram profile has more frequent post rhythm, higher quality posts, and more pictures from games and players. There are also over three thousand posts under the American Instagram profile, and only 40 under Finland's. Finland's profile includes mainly roster updates, game end results and camp updates. (Flag Team Finland 2024b; U.S. National Football Team 2024b.)

The share of Instagram followers obviously also correlates with the Instagram audience size of the country. In January 2024 the United States was ranked as the second leading country of Instagram audience with 169.65 million users. In January 2024 Finland had only 2.2 million Instagram users. This data is also seen in Table 1. (Statista 2024a; Statista 2024d.)

Instagram users per country	(millions)
The United States	169.65
Finland	2.2

Table 1. Instagram users per country.

U.S. National Football Team page on Facebook has 31,000 likes, and 40,000 followers. On Facebook, the Flag Team Finland page has 409 likes and 493 followers. In the Flag Team Finland page, one can find information on upcoming games and games that have already happened. There is news about the players and final results of the games. Some of the news has been shared from the American Football Association of Finland's official site, Jenkkifutis.fi. As

Finland's page is more of an information channel, the American one has more motivational posts besides these. As on Instagram, the Facebook pages also have a lot of similarities in the posts, but the American teams' page has more besides just being an information channel. (Flag Team Finland 2024a; U.S. National Football Team 2024a.)

Facebook users can be also searched by country. The United States also makes the list of leading countries by Facebook users. In April 2024, there were 193.8 million Facebook users in the United States. However in Finland, there were estimated 3.72 million Facebook users in 2024. This information can be also found in Table 2. (Statista 2024b; Statista 2024c.)

Facebook users per country	(millions)
The United States	193.8
Finland	3.72

Table 2. Facebook users per country.

4.2 Interview

For this thesis, I interviewed Janne Vainio, the Head of Communications from the American Football Association of Finland. The plan for this interview was to get a better picture of the situation of the Instagram and Facebook platforms for the Finnish national teams' profiles. The discussion was based on the Facebook profile 'Flag Team Finland' and Instagram profile @flagteamfinland. The base of the semi-structured interview can be seen in Appendix 1 in English and Finnish.

In the interview, I wanted to get information on if there was any type of planning behind the social media activity and posts. Besides planning, I was intrigued about the context behind posting on social media: if it was strictly intended to be during events and games. The content is around news of their teams, and part of the interview was to find out if this was the purpose and plan behind their social media. The content of the social media is also mostly for the people included in this sport community of flag and American football, which raised the

question if this is intentional or if there is a plan to reach outside of this community. One subject of the interview was also about the social media team. This basically meant looking at if there is a team behind the posts and profiles or just one person. The interview was planned to get a good overall view of the plans and purposes behind the social media marketing.

At the start of the interview, Vainio was clear on the fact that these profiles were first created for mostly the American football community to get a better image of the opportunities flag football holds. At the start, these channels were for the players in the American football to see opportunity for another sport and national team. There is a plan to grow outside players in these sports, to get more coverage and possibly reach out to new people outside this sport community. In the beginning communication happened with other profiles under association until these channels were created strictly for Finland's national flag teams. (Vainio 2024.)

Activity under these profiles are related to a yearly calendar. National teams post in these platforms during camps, games or when rosters are selected. More official communication still happens under other association channels. Posts under national flag teams' Facebook and Instagram accounts are directed at the sports community. There is not a certain plan behind these posts, and low resources affect how much activity is on these pages. (Vainio 2024.)

The plan of the Association is to have someone in charge of every national teams' communication in flag and in American football, but low resources with volunteers have left these profiles without anyone in charge. In the end, Vainio is the one in charge with national flag teams' profiles, but teams can update these during camps and games. The plan of association is to eventually find a person who would be in charge in flag teams national social media profiles. Now these profiles hold posts from camps and games posted by the teams and posts created by Vainio and the association. (Vainio 2024.)

4.3 Survey for Finnish Flag Football players

The survey was made to be answered by Finnish flag football players and by people who are influenced by this sport via American football. Generally flag football players have a past with American football or are playing both sports. The survey was shared with people somehow related to the subject and follow the sports on social media. The survey was made to get information of the present situation of satisfaction of current followers, and potentially get ideas how to reach outside them. Followers have been limited to people in this sport community, but the American Football Association's plan is to eventually try to grow its social media outside this group. The survey can be seen in Appendix 2.

The survey included questions regarding which social media platform respondents use to follow Finland's national flag football team, and which social media platforms they favor otherwise. In the questionnaire, respondents had a chance of choosing a platform they would like to use for following the teams on social media. The purpose of this was to get a better idea if the chosen social media platforms are the ones people generally tend to use. If a platform would stand out as not being actively used by a national team, it would give potential ideas for upgrading or moving posts to a more popular platform.

In the questionnaire, respondents also had a chance of commenting on the current situation of national teams' platforms. The first question about the current situation regarded if people feel that they get the information they are seeking via their social media pages. Respondents choose between 1-5, 1 being not at all interesting and 5 being very informative. The second question asked if followers think their content is interesting. Respondents got to choose between 1-5, 1 being not at all interesting and 5 being very interesting. These questions were to see how followers feel about the content Finnish national team provide at the moment. This should give potential ideas if followers are getting what they seek for from the platforms or if there is something missing.

In the end of the questionnaire, there were two open questions to give respondents space to mention if there were something not included in the

previous questions or if there was something they wanted to include besides them. The first open question was about what type of content they seek from the pages. This should give an idea if they are just using the pages to get information about the team or if they are seeking something else. The second question was meant to end the questionnaire and give a final chance of giving their opinions. The last question asked if respondents had anything they wanted to mention about these Finnish national flag teams' social media platforms.

The questionnaire was shared via email to some of the American football teams which have active flag football activity. Besides these emails, the survey was shared with people currently playing flag football. The survey was made in Finnish, as most followers are from Finland. This should lower the verge of people responding to it. The survey had 37 responses.

First question showed that 59.5 percent of the respondents are playing flag football. The second most answered part was that they play American football but follow flag football. In third place came following flag football, and a couple respondents answered something else. Respondents who answered something else mentioned that they used to either follow or play flag football besides playing American football but do not play anymore. Responses can be seen in Figure 1.

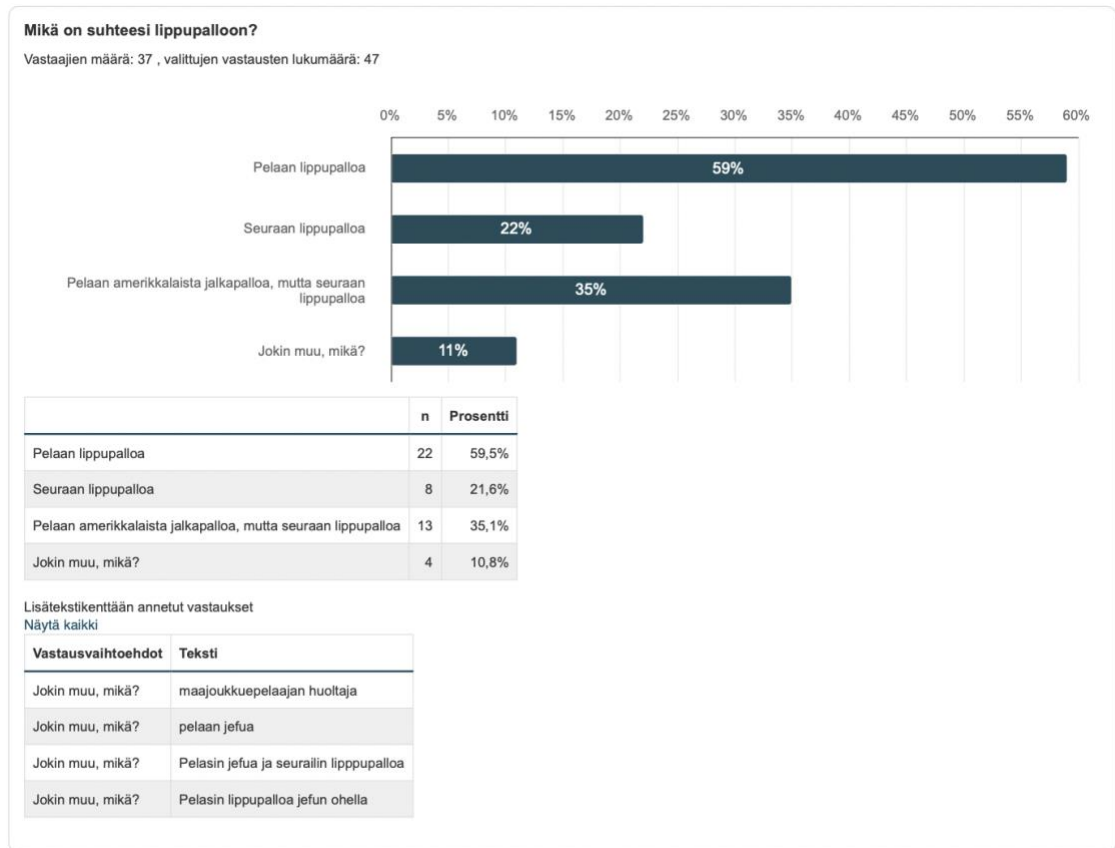


Figure 1. What is your relationship to flag football? N=37

Most of the respondents follow the Finnish national flag football team on Instagram (91.7 percent), and TikTok came in second with 22 percent. Facebook was the third most answered choice with 19 percent. One of the respondents picked something else, and wrote that they do not follow the Finnish national flag team on social media. These responses can be seen in Figure 2.

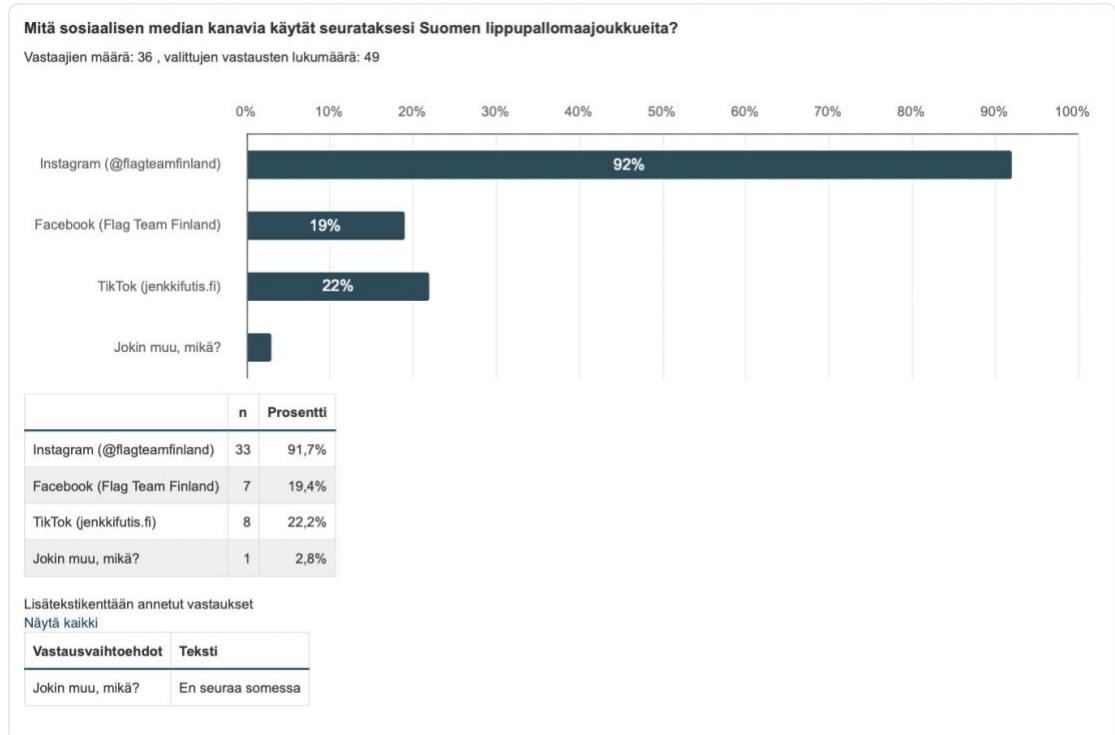


Figure 2. What social media platforms are you using to follow Finland's national flag football teams? N=36

Instagram was the most picked option when asking about which social media accounts followers use on their personal life (91.7 percent). These responses can be seen in Figure 3. Facebook, and Snapchat had the same rate: both had 66.7 percent. TikTok had 63.9 percent and was the least picked out of these four. One response was something else and did not specify any social media channel.

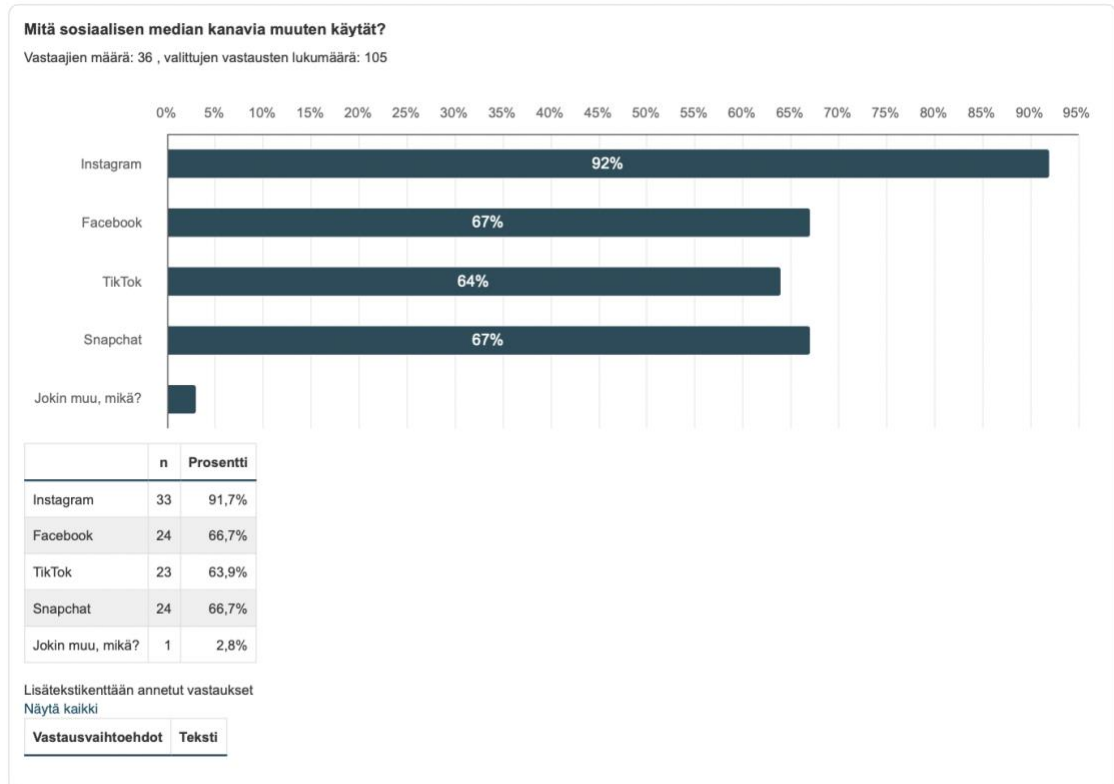


Figure 3. What social media platforms are you using in your personal life? N=36

Most of the respondents chose that they want to follow Finnish national flag team on Instagram for 89.2 percent, as can be seen in Figure 4. TikTok was in the second place with 54.1 percent, and Facebook third with 16.2 percent. Two respondents picked the something else option, and wrote that they would like to follow their social media on Snapchat or YouTube.

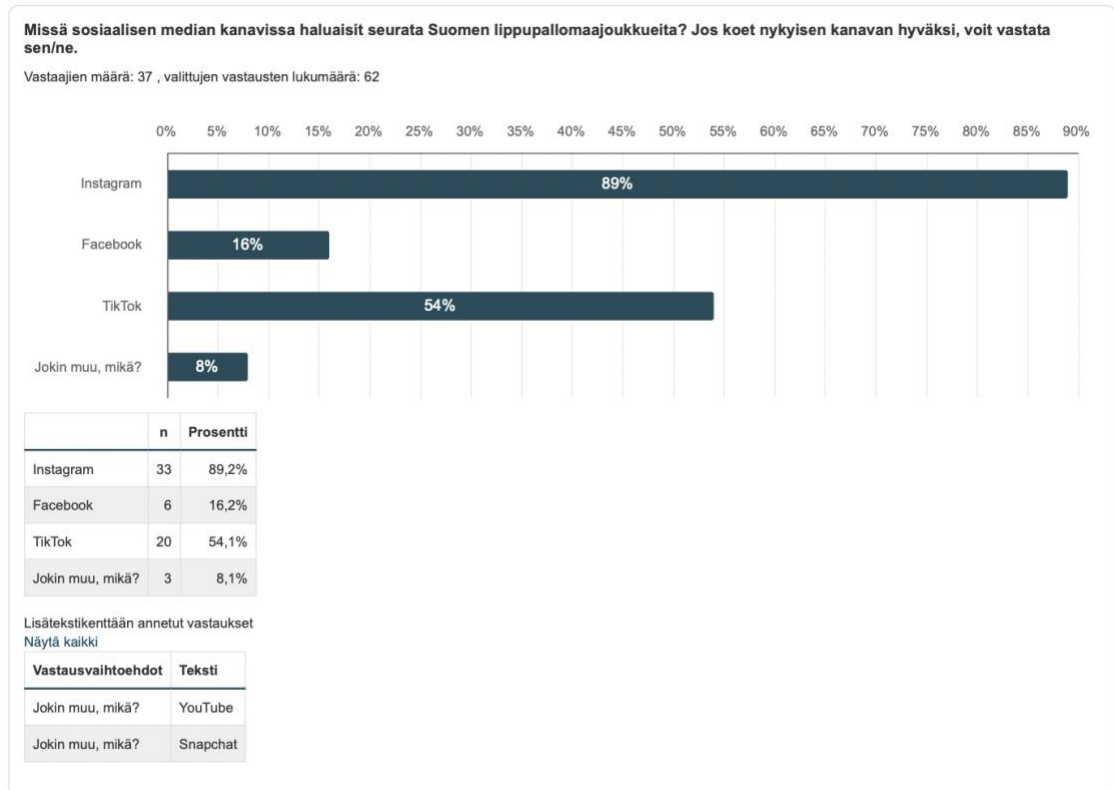


Figure 4. In which social media platforms would you like to follow Finland's national flag football teams? N=37

The median for the question asking if respondents feel if they get enough information on the Finnish national flag team through social media was 3. These responses can be seen in Figure 5. Even 16.2 percent answered that they do not get information at all, and only 8.1 percent felt that they get all the information they seek. Most of the other answers divided between option 2 and 3.

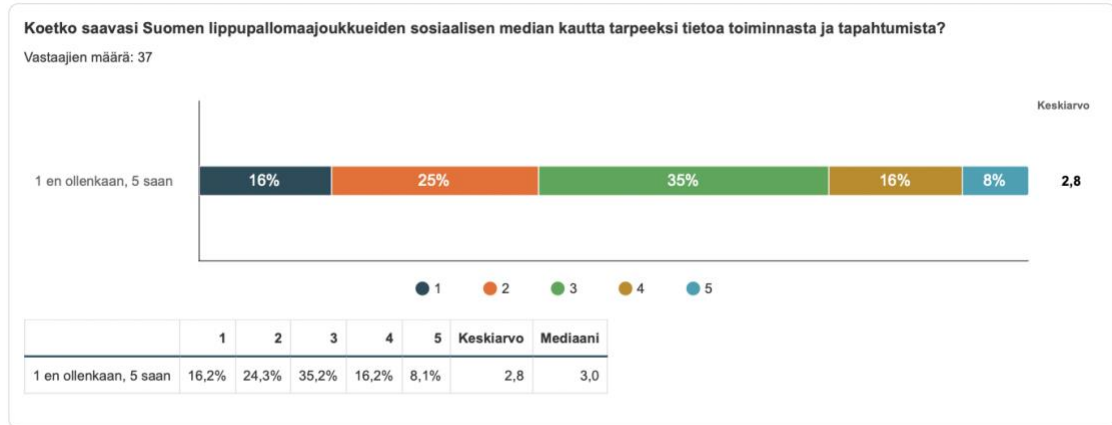


Figure 5. Do you feel that you are getting enough information through their social media about the operation and events? N=37

When asking if respondents find the content interesting, the median was 3. Options 1 and 5 were both picked the least. Option 1 got 5.4 percent of the responses and option 5 got 10.8 percent. This data can be seen in Figure 6.

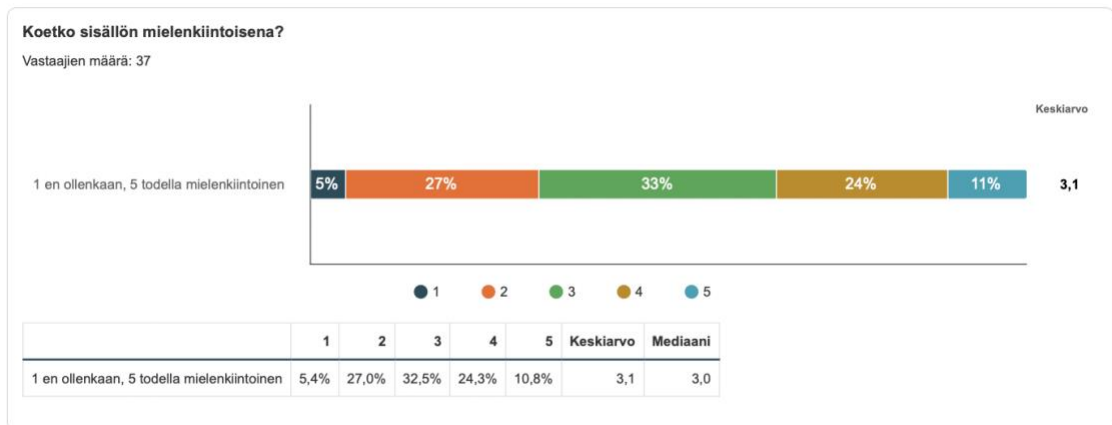


Figure 6. Do you think that their content is interesting? N=37

The first open question which asked about the content followers would like to see on the platforms showed that people are interested in content not related to national games. Respondents were interested in the players, practice and stories behind the account. Respondents also saw that it might be practical to show more about the sport than just about the national games. Responses showed that the account could be a part of a growing interest in the sport, posts about flag football practices including practice ideas. Followers are interested in see fun content on flag football and felt that this might be important to show to

get more people interested in the sport. Figure 7 shows the responses for this question.

Millaista sisältöä haluaisit itse nähdä kyseisiltä alustoilta?	
Vastaukset	
Vastaajien määrä: 17	
Pelaajaesittelyt, pelivideot, tulokset ym.	
Minimissään se mitä muut aktiiviset maajoukkueet tekevät.	
Tietoa ajankohtaisista tapahtumista ja ilmiöistä lajin parissa Valmentajien ja pelaajien haastatteluja	
Ehkien enemmän myös muuna aikana kun lähestyvien pelien / meneillään olevien pelien aikana. Ns. Offseason materiaalia. Koko joukkueesta jotain, pelaajista, valmentajista, taustahenkilöistä. Avaisi joukkueeseen kuuluvien henkilöiden tarvetta/osaamista ja panosta.	
Lisää juttuja maajoukkueleireiltä, sellaiseen behind the scenes -tyyliin	
Olis kiva nähdään enemmän pelaajista esim, kuka he ovat ja mitä joukkue tekee yhdessä vapaa ajalla. Olis myös kiva nähdä enemmän game highlights jne.	
Paljon päivitystä esim. treenileireiltä, videoita sekä kuvia Haastatteluja pelaajista	
Treenistä, valmistautumisista kilpailuihin, haku-/valintaprosessit, jos haluaa harrastaa lajia, missä sitä voi tehdä.	
Videoita	
Treeniä, pelejä, klippejä, filmejä. Henkilökuvia, haastatteluja, persoonallisempaa sisältöä.	
Videoita Drillejä Skills Pelaajat tutummiksi Lajin säännöt	
Henkilökuvia ja tarinoita. Treenivinkkejä lajitreeneihin ja eri pelipaikoille.	
Behind the scenes meininkiä	
Mitä on meneillään, miten flägiä kasvatetaan ja rakennetaan.	
Kyselyn pohjustana olikin verrattuna yhdysvallat, usnft tili on hyvä esimerkki hyvästä sisällöstä varsinkin kun halutaan kasvattaa lajitietoisuutta.	
Pelaajista lisää tietoa ja lajin parista videoita tms	
Jotain behind the scenes kontenttia ja hauskoja "random" postauksia.	

Figure 7. What type of content would you like to see on these platforms? N=17

The second open-ended question and the last question of the questionnaire asked if respondents had anything else they would like to mention about the teams' social media, and there were a lot of answers to say it is not professional. Followers would like to see a more professional grip on the social media marketing. Answers showed that people would like the posts to be made more around the year, and evenly distributed. The answers showed that only activating during competitions is not wanted, and respondents felt that their social media pages got crowded full of flag football during this time. These answers can be seen in Figure 8.

Tuleeko mieleen jotain mitä haluaisit mainita koskien Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueen sosiaalisia medioita?

Vastaajien määrä: 11

Vastaukset
Ainakaan nuorten EM-kisojen osalta viestintää ei ihan kauheasti ollut, jonkun verran toki.
Koen sisällön hyvin sekalaisena, sisällöissä ei ole yhtenäisyyttä ja aina ei edes mainita mistä joukkueesta on kyse (miehet, naiset, jotkut junnut - mitkä...?). Kaipaisin itse ammatillisempaa otetta ja yhtenäisyyttä tai selviä sääntöjä, jos päivittäjiä on useampi.
Aika huonosti hoidettu, tai siis erittäin huonosti.
Ei
Tuntuu, että some aktivoituu ainoastaan arvokisojen aikaan. Kun muuten julkaisu- ja viestintä on hiljaisempi, tulee aika äkkiä ähky kaikkeen lippupallohommaan arvokisojen aikana, kun some on ihan pullollaan tavaraa. Voisi ehkä siis jakaa sitä somettelua vähän tasaisemmin?
Aktiivisempaa päivittelyä
Laadukkaammat kuvat/videot
Kaipaisi ammatillisempaa otetta.
.
Se on epäohjonmukaista ja huonolaatuista. Siihen ei selkeästi ole resursoitu yhtään järkevästi työtä mikä olisi ollut esim mmkisojen aikaan tärkeää, joka todellakin missattiin kaikin mahdollisin tavoin
Lisääää mainostusta että lajin saadua lisää tekijöitä

Figure 8. Is there something you would like to mention about Finland's national flag football team's social media platforms? N=11

The responses show that the social media platforms used are the same people use in their personal lives. TikTok and Snapchat are platforms which people use in social life but where the national team is not active. Facebook was not popular when respondents got to choose on which social media platform they would like to follow national team, and other choices got more answers. Snapchat and Youtube were also pointed out to be platforms where respondents would be interested in following. Questions about the content both had a median of 3. Open question answers showed a lot of points of improvement for the team's social media behavior. One of the most mentioned was that respondents felt that accounts needed more professional touches and improvement in activity on social media. Respondents also mentioned wanting more content on the team than just posts about events and games.

5 Results

As stated, the lack of activity in Flag Team Finland's profiles on Instagram and Facebook are related to the lack of resources. The national teams' profiles work mostly with volunteers in games and camps. Besides volunteers, there is a certain number of posts which come from American Football Association of Finland. The Head of Communications of the association handles all the official channels, which do not leave much time for flag teams' pages. This correlates with the posts being mostly informative, and lacking teams' own perspectives.

At the start, these pages were created to be for the football community, which also correlates with the form of these posts. If the plan is to get more audience for these channels, it would be in its favor to upgrade from an information channel to something that would create interest in the sport. The American Football Association of Finland is planning to get a person in charge of the national teams' communications. This could mean better activity and more variety behind these posts.

The lack of resources for the national teams' social media can be seen in the answers of the questionnaire. Followers would like to see more professional control of the accounts, and different types of posts not allowed with the current resources. Followers feel that although the national flag football platforms could be a great way to influence people to join flag football, the content is not inviting at the moment.

One respondent mentioned the United States flag football teams @usnft Instagram page has the type of content that gets people interested in the sport. The US national flag team's Instagram page was mentioned in Section 4.1, where these social media platforms were compared. This Instagram page holds a lot of content that people in the survey wanted to see also in Finland's national flag team pages. Followers seek content with more even pace and more professional touch for these social media pages. Besides professional touch, followers seek fun content besides just informational content. Based on

the questionnaire, followers are interested in content that shows the players and staff behind the team.

Social media platforms used by the Finnish national flag football team are the same as what people use in their personal lives. Instagram was the most popular of them. People are still using TikTok, and Snapchat a lot in their personal lives, which could be a good way to connect with new people.

The plan of Finland's national flag football team social media builds around its yearly calendar of events and games. Followers would like to see content besides just for these events and feel like their social media pages get crowded by flag football content during these times. Besides being crowded, respondents also feel that even though there is a lot of content during events, the point and purpose of posting social media during those times is not relevant. One of the respondents felt that a big national competition was completely missed by the social media team.

The results of the questionnaire and interview correlate with each other. The lack of resources for the social media accounts can be seen with followers feeling there is not enough activity and professional touch. Followers feel that they do not get enough information through these accounts when there is not a specific social media manager managing them. Followers would like to see more activity and different types of posts than what is currently being provided. The lack of a social media manager explains the lack of activity on the pages and why activity work around the most important turns and news on the team.

6 Recommendations for the Finnish flag national teams' social media behavior

The US is the leading country for flag football, which also explains the follower rates on Instagram and Facebook. When Finland's national flag team's followers are mainly from the sport community inside the country, the American team's followers come from all over the world. Both countries still compete in the same World Championship games, which could bring about interest in the flag football community in Finland with the right type of content. The content is now mainly created for the Finnish flag community, which rules out people from outside of Finland potentially interested in this community.

As stated in the interview, the Finnish national teams' Instagram and Facebook profiles suffer from low resources and do not have any certain person in charge. The head of communication of the association is in charge of these in the end, but handling the official channels of communication of the association does not leave much time for social media profiles.

If the plan is to try to get in contact with potentially new people interested in the sport, it might be wise to show footage from other points of view than just being a part of a national team. The target audience at the start was people from American football becoming interested in playing on a national team and creating national flag teams for Finland, which correlates with the content. This is in stark contrast to the American national team, where more is shown about the sense of community in team sports and the joy of sport. Finnish teams' social media behavior lacks this.

The content is now made to be more informational, and this might be explained by two reasons. Finland's flag team lacks a social media manager, and content is created mainly with the American Football Associations Head of Communities. If the team had its own social media manager, there might be more time and planning behind the content and the message via its contents would improve. The content might be now beneficial for people wanting to get

information on the new turns of the national teams but it is not beneficial for gaining the interest of people new to the sport.

Current followers have TikTok and Snapchat as one of their most used social media platforms, and these might be potential platforms for Finnish national flag teams to post to. Respondents of the questionnaire felt that teams' social media could be more interesting if there were added more footage of the players and staff, and potentially training content. These platforms could have potential for this type of content, and followers could see behind the scenes type of content besides informational content released on their Facebook and Instagram pages.

The American Football Association of Finland has its own TikTok account where users can find posts about flag football. Its own account for national flag football could potentially reach the people interested specifically in flag football in Finland (Jenkkifutis 2024). The American national teams, which also include flag football, uses Instagram Reels as part of their content on Instagram. Reels are similar to TikTok videos, and if TikTok as a new platform is not possible, including reels as a part of Instagram content could be a potential way get users to reach this type of content. Finnish national American football teams also use this as a part of their Instagram content (Blue Lions National Team 2024).

Instagram Reels on the American National Football Teams' include content that respondents of the questionnaire felt that was missing on the Finnish national flag team's Instagram page. Their reels include content from the games to players' personal videos where followers can see content about their personal lives (U.S. National Football Team 2024b). This type of content could be a potential way of raising interest in flag football outside of Finland's sport community of flag football and American football.

Finland's national flag football teams' social media would benefit from a social media manager. If growth in social media to reach outside this sport community is sought after, content should be more reachable and increase interest in people. Current followers would like to see more content about the team and what is happening behind it. Current followers are also interested in seeing

content from flag football as a sport, and at the moment the social media is more about the games and events. One person in charge of the account with a plan for their social media purposes could raise the professional feeling of the accounts. If there were a specific person handling these platforms, there could be more time behind managing content. This could mean the content of the team and adding different type of content to the account. If TikTok is not seen as a possible platform, Instagram Reels can be used the same way as the US national team does. Adding a TikTok account could be still beneficial, as at least the current followers use it a lot in their personal lives. Content from TikTok can be also shared in Instagram, which would mean activity on both platforms.

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Semi-structured interview base in English

Base of the semi-structured interview

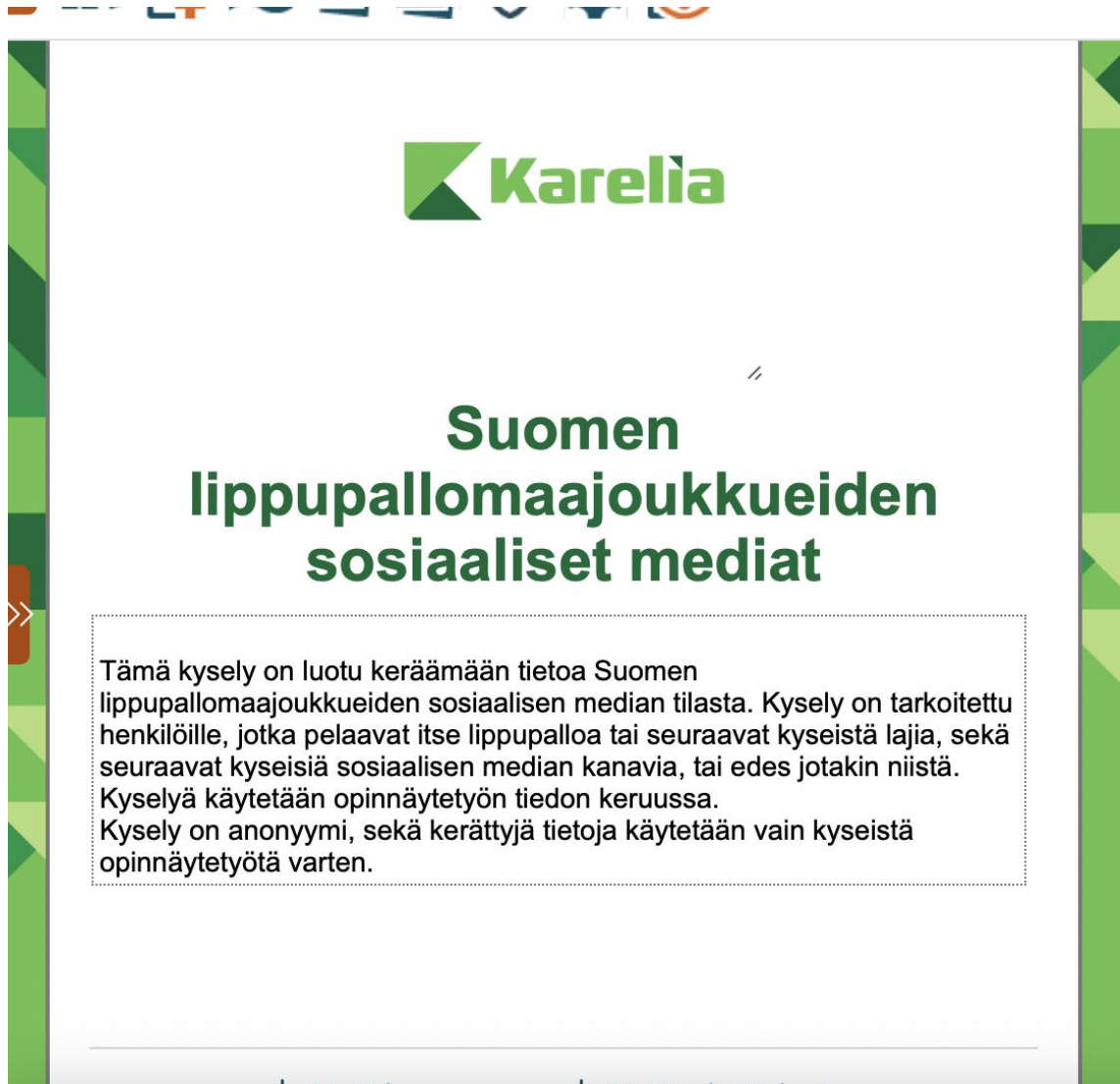
- What is the goal behind using social media platforms?
- What is the context related to posting on the platforms? For example, are posts related to events
- Who are you trying to reach out to with these posts? Who are the main audience?
- Are these posts for people involved in flag football and national teams or is the plan to connect with people possibly interested in flag football?
- Is there a plan behind these social media channels? Or is it strictly just posting news?
- Is there a team or one person behind these channels? Are there multiple people with access to these channels?

Semi-structured interview base in Finnish

Haastattelupohja

- Mikä tavoite sosiaalisen median sisällöntuotolla on?
- Missä yhteyksissä alustoja päivitetään? Esimerkiksi ennen ja jälkeen tapahtumien? Missä muissa tilanteissa alustojen päivityksiä on tarkoitus tehdä?
- Kenelle tuotettu sisältöä suunnataan, ja keitä halutaan saavuttaa kyseisillä postauksilla?
- Onko sisältö suunnattu harrastajille vai onko sillä tarkoitus saada kiinni uusia ihmisiä kiinnostumaan lajista?
- Onko tarkoitus pitää sosiaalisia medioita enemmänkin sisäpiirin viestintäkanavina vai saada ihmisiä lajin ulkopuolelta kiinnostumaan sisällöstä?
- Onko sisällöntuottamisessa jokin kaava, ja mihin sisältöä halutaan viedä?
- Millainen suunnitelma sosiaalisen median päivityksen taustalla on, vai onko se enemmänkin vain maajoukkueen uutisten päivitystä?
- Onko postauksien takana useampia ihmisiä, vai päivittääkö sitä vain tietyt henkilöt, sekä kuinka monella on oikeudet päivittää kyseisiä alustoja?

The questionnaire



The image shows a questionnaire cover page for Karelia. At the top center is the Karelia logo, which consists of a green square with a white triangle pointing to the right, followed by the word "Karelia" in a green, sans-serif font. Below the logo is a small double-slash symbol. The main title is "Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueiden sosiaaliset mediat" in a large, bold, green, sans-serif font. Below the title is a dashed-line box containing the following text: "Tämä kysely on luotu keräämään tietoa Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueiden sosiaalisen median tilasta. Kysely on tarkoitettu henkilöille, jotka pelaavat itse lippupalloa tai seuraavat kyseistä lajia, sekä seuraavat kyseisiä sosiaalisen median kanavia, tai edes jotakin niistä. Kyselyä käytetään opinnäytetyön tiedon keruussa. Kysely on anonymi, sekä kerättyjä tietoja käytetään vain kyseistä opinnäytetyötä varten." The page is framed by a decorative border of green and brown geometric shapes.

Karelia

//

Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueiden sosiaaliset mediat

Tämä kysely on luotu keräämään tietoa Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueiden sosiaalisen median tilasta. Kysely on tarkoitettu henkilöille, jotka pelaavat itse lippupalloa tai seuraavat kyseistä lajia, sekä seuraavat kyseisiä sosiaalisen median kanavia, tai edes jotakin niistä. Kyselyä käytetään opinnäytetyön tiedon keruussa. Kysely on anonymi, sekä kerättyjä tietoja käytetään vain kyseistä opinnäytetyötä varten.

1. Mikä on suhteesi lippupalloon?

- Pelaan lippupalloa
- Seuraan lippupalloa
- Pelaan amerikkalaista jalkapalloa, mutta seuraan lippupalloa
- Jokin muu, mikä?

+ Lisää kysymys

+ Lisää tekstiä/kuvia

 Lisää sivunvaihto

2. Mitä sosiaalisen median kanavia käytät seurataksesi Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueita?


- Instagram (@flagteamfinland)
- Facebook (Flag Team Finland)
- TikTok (jenkkifutis.fi)
- Jokin muu, mikä?

3. Mitä sosiaalisen median kanavia muuten käytät?

- Instagram
- Facebook
- TikTok
- Snapchat
- Jokin muu, mikä?

+ Lisää kysymys

+ Lisää tekstiä/kuvia

 Lisää sivunvaihto

4. Missä sosiaalisen median kanavissa haluaisit seurata Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueita? Jos koet nykyisen kanavan hyväksi, voit vastata sen/ne.

- Instagram
- Facebook
- TikTok
- Jokin muu, mikä?

5. Koetko saavasi Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueiden sosiaalisen median kautta tarpeeksi tietoa toiminnasta ja tapahtumista?

	1	2	3	4	5
1 en ollenkaan, 5 saan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[+ Lisää kysymys](#)[+ Lisää tekstiä/kuvia](#)[+ Lisää sivunvaihto](#)**6. Koetko sisällön mielenkiintoisena?**

	1	2	3	4	5
1 en ollenkaan, 5 todella mielenkiintoinen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

[+ Lisää kysymys](#)[+ Lisää tekstiä/kuvia](#)[+ Lisää sivunvaihto](#)**7. Millaista sisältöä haluaisit itse nähdä kyseisiltä alustoilta?**[+ Lisää kysymys](#)[+ Lisää tekstiä/kuvia](#)[+ Lisää sivunvaihto](#)**8. Tuleeko mieleen jotain mitä haluaisit mainita koskien Suomen lippupallomaajoukkueen sosiaalisia medioita?**