

BRAND IMAGE OF INTERNATIONAL ICE HOCKEY

Case: IIHF World Championships 2012 & 2013

Oskari Käyhkö
Taneli Maasalo

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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön aiheena oli selvittää kansainvälisen jääkiekon brändi-imagoa. Tutkimus toteutettiin jääkiekon MM-kilpailuissa vuosina 2012 ja 2013 Helsingissä sekä Tukholmassa. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, mitä ominaisuuksia katsojat pitävät ominaisina jääkiekolle lajina ja sitä kautta myös pohtia, mitkä ominaisuudet mahdollisesti lisäävät katsojien kiinnostusta lajia kohtaan. Lisäksi vertailtiin eri kansallisuuksien eroja vastauksissa. Tulosten avulla myös pohdittiin, kuinka jääkiekkoa brändinä olisi mahdollista kehittää ja vahvistaa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa käytettiin kyselylomaketta, jossa vastaajat vastasivat monivalintakysymyksiin. Kyselyt toteutettiin Helsingissä ja Tukholmassa kilpailupaikkojen välittömään läheisyyteen rakennetuilla fanialueilla. Yhteensä haastatteluja molemmissa toteutetuissa kyselyissä tehtiin 745 kappaletta. Tutkimustyyppinä oli kvantitatiivinen tutkimus. Tutkimuksen analysoinnissa käytettiin Thomas Gadin 4-D bränditeoriaa.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen perusteella keskeisimpiä ominaisuuksia, joita vastaajat liittivät jääkiekkoon, olivat hauskuus, jännittävyys, voimakkuus sekä kansainvälisyys. Tarkasteltaessa vastauksia sosiaalinen ulottuvuus nousi esille vahvasti fanien mielipiteisiin vaikuttavana tekijänä. Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että suomalaisten ja ruotsalaisten fanien näkemykset jääkiekosta vastasivat melko paljon toisiaan. Huomionarvoista on kuitenkin se, että suomalaisten fanien näkemykset jääkiekosta vakavana, empaattisena ja hauskana lajina poikkesivat selkeimmin muiden maiden vastaajien näkemyksistä. Selkein ero kaikkien vastaajaryhmien välillä oli näkemys jääkiekosta muodollisena lajina.</p> <p>Tulevaisuudessa tutkimusta pystytään hyödyntämään esimerkiksi urheilu- ja tapahtumamarkkinoinnissa, tulevaisuuden tutkimuksissa, markkinointiyhteistyössä sekä jääkiekon brändin kehittämisessä. Tutkimuksessa kerättyä aineistoa voidaan käyttää myös oppimateriaalina liiketalouden ja hallinnon opinnoissa. Tutkimus tarjoaa tietoa jääkiekkofanien suhtautumisesta lajiin sekä tekijöistä, joita he pitävät lajissa tärkeinä.</p>		
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Abstract <p>The subject for the thesis was to find out the brand image of international ice hockey. The study was conducted in IIHF World Championships in 2012 and 2013 in Helsinki and Stockholm. The objective of the study was to sort out the characteristics the fans think are specific to ice hockey and also consider what features possibly increase the attractiveness of the sport. The differences in answers between different nationalities were also considered. By way of the results it was also considered how the brand image of ice hockey could be developed and strengthened.</p> <p>A questionnaire in which the respondents answered multiple choice questions was used in the study. The interviews were conducted in Helsinki and Stockholm in the fan areas near by the championship venues. The total number of interviews done in both years was 745. The type of study was quantitative study. Thomas Gad's 4-D brand theory was used in analyzing the results.</p> <p>On the basis of the results of the study the most essential attributes that the fans linked to ice hockey were fun, exciting, strong and international. When observing the results, the social dimension came up as a factor that highly affected the fans' opinions. The study pointed out that the answers of Finnish and Swedish fans were quite equivalent. It is notable that the Finnish fans' perceptions of ice hockey as a serious, emphatic and fun sport differed most clearly from the perceptions of fans from other nationalities. The clearest difference between all respondent groups was the perception of ice hockey as a formal sport.</p> <p>In the future the study can be used in for example sport and event marketing, in upcoming studies, in marketing cooperation and in developing the brand image of ice hockey. The data collected in the study can also be used as study material for business administration students. The study provides information on the ice hockey fans' attitudes towards the sport and on the factors they feel are important in the sport.</p>		
Keywords Brand image, brand, fan, ice hockey, international, sport marketing		
Miscellaneous		

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reasons behind the thesis

A group of JAMK students specializing in sport marketing took part in two international research projects in 2012 and 2013. These research projects were conducted in IIHF Ice Hockey World Championship events in Helsinki and Stockholm. The students took part in the researches as a part of their project studies. The researches were done in Helsinki and Stockholm during the World Championships, mainly by students from JAMK University of Applied Sciences. The surveys consisted of a questionnaire and an interview and the goal was to find out what ice hockey fans thought ice hockey's brand is like and what kind of a personal value profile an international ice hockey fan has. The data collected has been used for several academic studies and publications.

This thesis concentrates on the brand image of ice hockey in the context of an international ice hockey tournament. The data was gathered in the fan areas next to main arenas in Helsinki and Stockholm. The thesis is based on the data that focuses on respondent's perceptions of the brand image of ice hockey. The core idea is to find out the relevance of certain descriptive adjectives related to international ice hockey. Thomas Gad's 4-D Brand Model was used to analyze the results further. The brand elements of ice hockey were found out from the fans' point of view to finally get the current brand image of international ice hockey.

The background and the basic idea of the thesis are explained thoroughly later in the introduction chapter. The second chapter tells about ice hockey and International Ice Hockey Federation in general to give an idea about the sport and the World Championships as an event. The theoretical framework of the thesis is explained in the third chapter, concentrating on brand theory and different types of branding, including branding with sport. After introducing the theory part, research implementation is presented and reliability and validity of the research are evaluated in chapter four. In the fifth chapter the results of the study are shown concretely and the brand image of international ice

hockey is found. The sixth chapter concludes the results and possible development suggestions are given.

1.2 Purpose and goal of the thesis

Ice hockey is a popular sport internationally, but not many researches have been done concerning the fans' thoughts on attributes related to ice hockey and what the brand image of ice hockey consists of. Although ice hockey is played in various countries it cannot be considered a global sport, such as football, for example. The reason behind a research like this is to try to find the factors that influence the thoughts that people have in mind about the sport. These factors can further explain the popularity of this sport and give insights to event organizers, sponsors and ice hockey organizations for the future marketing of this discipline and international ice hockey events.

The material for the study was gathered in IIHF World Championships 2012 in Helsinki and 2013 in Stockholm. The research method used was quantitative study. The respondents were given a list of attributes which they rated based on how well they thought each of the attributes described ice hockey as a sport. The method is explained thoroughly in the research implementation chapter. The target group was international ice hockey fans; the respondents were interviewed without distinction of age, gender and nationality. For the research and this thesis to be credible and useful in the future, it was vital that the respondents were ice hockey fans that actually already had a clear picture of the sport in their mind. This way the study can be better help for planning sport marketing and sport events in the future. The thesis can be useful in studying marketing and it can provide information for sport marketing professionals.

The goal of the research was to find out and explain the brand image of international ice hockey from the fans' perspective. The brand image the fans have consists of features that make ice hockey interesting as a sport and make fans motivated to attend an international ice hockey event. One goal was also to find out how the image profile of international ice hockey possibly varies depending on the nationality, age and gender of the fans. After discovering the overall image profile of ice hockey the objective was to point out the similarities and differences between fan respondents from different

countries. In the end the last goal was to find out new perspectives for making ice hockey a better brand and sport events more interesting for the fans.

The research problem of the thesis was: "What do the fans think international ice hockey's brand image is like?"

The study questions for unveiling the research problem were:

1. What brand characteristics do the respondents link strongly to ice hockey in the context of an international ice hockey event?
2. What kind of similarities and differences do ice hockey fans have in their brand perceptions?
3. Can the differences and similarities be explained by nationality, age and gender?

2 INTERNATIONAL ICE HOCKEY FEDERATION

The international Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) was established in 1908 in Paris, France. IIHF is the governing organization of international ice hockey and inline hockey, which has 72 member associations. The member associations have their own national organizations. (The world governing body, The IIHF n.d.)

There are three levels of the IIHF membership. The first category is Full Membership which means that the members have their own, independent national hockey federation. These members are required to participate in the World Championship tournaments every year. The second category is Associate Membership, which means that the members are allowed to participate only in to limited World Championship tournaments. It is possible that these nations do not have fully independent national hockey associations at all. The third category is Affiliate Membership. The members of this category only participates IIHF Inline (roller hockey) Championships. (IIHF Member National Associations, The IIHF n.d.)

Every year, the IIHF arranges with these national organizations about 25 different World Championship tournaments in five different categories. There are levels for men, women, juniors under-20, juniors under-18 and women under-18 years of age played in divisions I, II and III. The IIHF is also responsible for organizing the Olympic Games in ice hockey. (The world governing body, The IIHF n.d.)

2.1 World Championship history

The ice hockey World Championship was played for the first time in 1920. Before that year, the only international ice hockey tournaments played were the European Championships. It was not until 1950s that the world championship started to be more recognized, mostly because of the Soviet Union starting to take part in the competition. Earlier, Canada had dominated the world championships. (Raevuori 1997, 5,11.)

The 1920 World Championship tournament was arranged as a part of the Olympic summer games held in Antwerp, Belgium. It was the first time that

North American countries took part in an international ice hockey tournament. The first IIHF World Championship, as an independent event, was held in 1930 in Chamonix, Berlin and Vienna. It took 17 years until a country outside the North America to win the IIHF World Championship, when Czechoslovakia won in 1947. Through years 1939–1947 the tournament was not played because of World War II. After the war World Championship was played every year, except for the Olympic winter game years (every four years). After the Calgary Olympic winter games in 1998 the IIHF World Championship has been arranged every year. (International hockey timeline n.d.)

2.2 THE IIHF World Championships Helsinki 2012 and Stockholm 2013

The 2012 and 2013 World Championships were both held in Helsinki and Stockholm. In 2012, Helsinki was the main host city meaning that the preliminary rounds of the tournament were played in Helsinki and Stockholm and the final rounds (quarter finals to finals) in Helsinki only. For the 2013 World Championships, the concept was changed so that the final rounds were played in Stockholm, it being the main host city. (Format and rules, IIHF Championships n.d.)

Both, the 2012 and 2013 World Championships saw 16 countries participating with their national teams. The teams were divided into two groups of eight so that in the preliminary round each team played seven games within its group against an opponent known beforehand. After the preliminary round, the top four teams of each group advanced to the quarter finals. In the quarter finals each group's number one played the number four of the same group and number two played the number three. The winner teams of the quarterfinals advanced to the semi-finals, in which the other group's winner of the 1st – 4nd matchup faced the other group's winner of the 2nd – 3rd matchup. The winners of the semi-final games advanced to the gold medal game, and the losers played for the bronze medal. (Format and rules, IIHF Championships n.d.)

The countries participating in the 2012 World Championships, group Helsinki were: Finland, Canada, the United States, Switzerland, Slovakia, Belarus, France, and Kazakhstan. Group Stockholm: Russia, Sweden, Czech Republic, Germany, Norway, Latvia, Denmark and Italy. The countries

participating in the 2013 World Championships, group Stockholm were: Belarus, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Norway, Slovenia, Switzerland and Sweden. Group Helsinki: Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Russia, Slovakia and the United States. (Format and rules, IIHF Championships n.d.)

In the 2012 Championships, Russia defeated Slovakia in the gold medal game. The Czech Republic won bronze, beating Finland. Italy and Kazakhstan relegated and moved to Division I for the next season being the two last-place teams of the tournament. (Power ranking, IIHF Championships n.d.)

In the 2013, Championships home team Sweden won the gold medal by defeating Switzerland in the final. The United States won bronze against Finland. Austria and Slovenia relegated from the next year's tournament. (Power ranking, IIHF Championships n.d.)

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study consists of four parts. The elements of the framework include firstly the definition and elements of branding in general, secondly the more specific ideas of branding with the inclusion of sport and sport events and thirdly, the concept of co-branding. The fourth part of the theoretical framework is the brand model by Thomas Gad. This four dimensional brand model is presented as the platform for application of collected data to branding process for international ice hockey. Through analyzing the results of the survey and applying them to different ways of branding and Gad's theory, the brand image of international ice hockey became clear. Figure 1 illustrates the elements of the theoretical framework of this study.

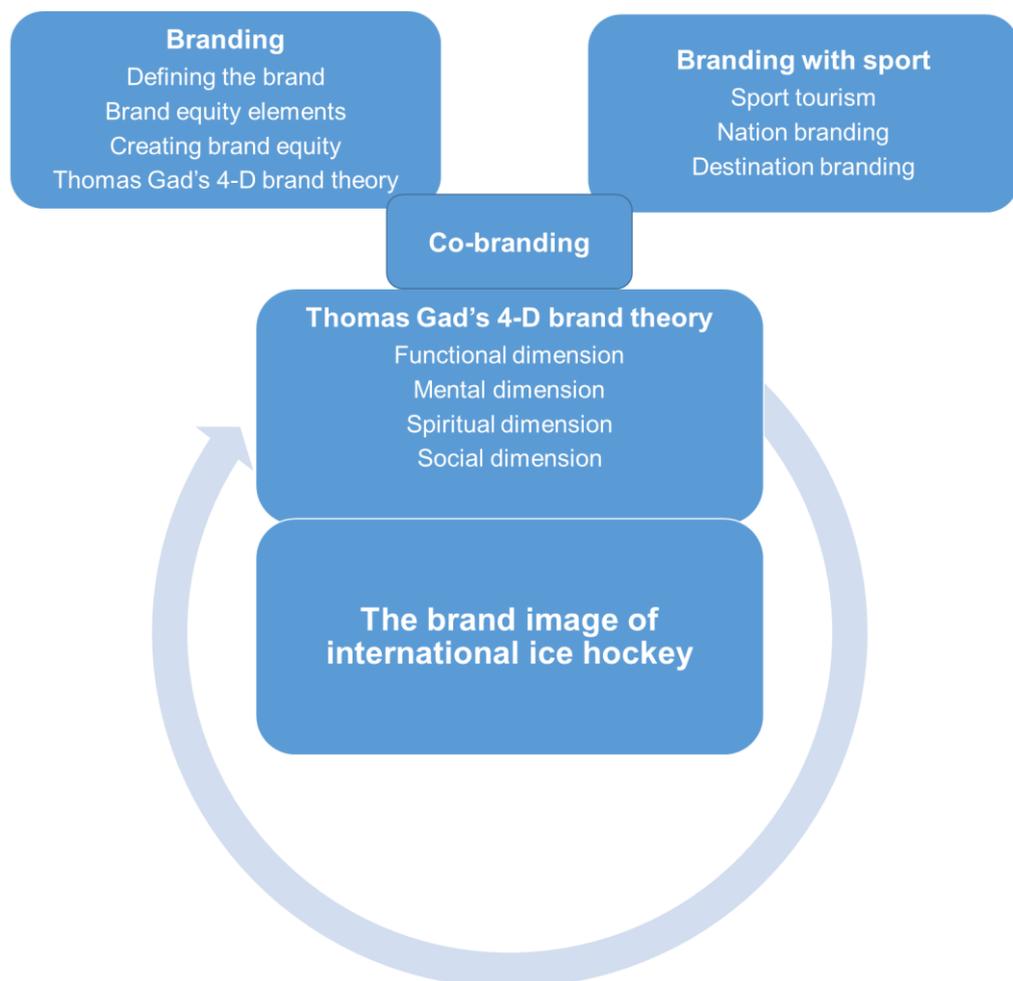


Figure 1. Theoretical framework

3.1 Branding

This section includes the definition of a brand and brand equity and the importance of brand building. The end of this chapter deals with Thomas Gad's 4-D Branding theory, which was also the main analysis theory for the thesis. The purpose is to explain branding in general and to create a picture of how spectators create the brand image of international ice hockey. It also explains how Thomas Gad's theory has been applied to the creation of a brand image.

3.1.1 Defining the brand

A brand is created by customers' perceptions of a company's product or service. The brand is not just a symbol which distinguishes a specific product from all other products. It is everything that the consumer thinks about the product and the related material and immaterial properties including psychological and sociological properties. A number of science and business professionals define a brand to be a promise of something. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008, 14.)

A brand task means separating a product or service from its competitors. A brand has its own way to convey the promise of the seller to the consumer by a product or service with certain features or benefits. The core of a brand forms its culture, values and personality. When a brand is well known, it may be a sign of good customer service and a guarantee of good quality. (Kotler 2000, 404–405.)

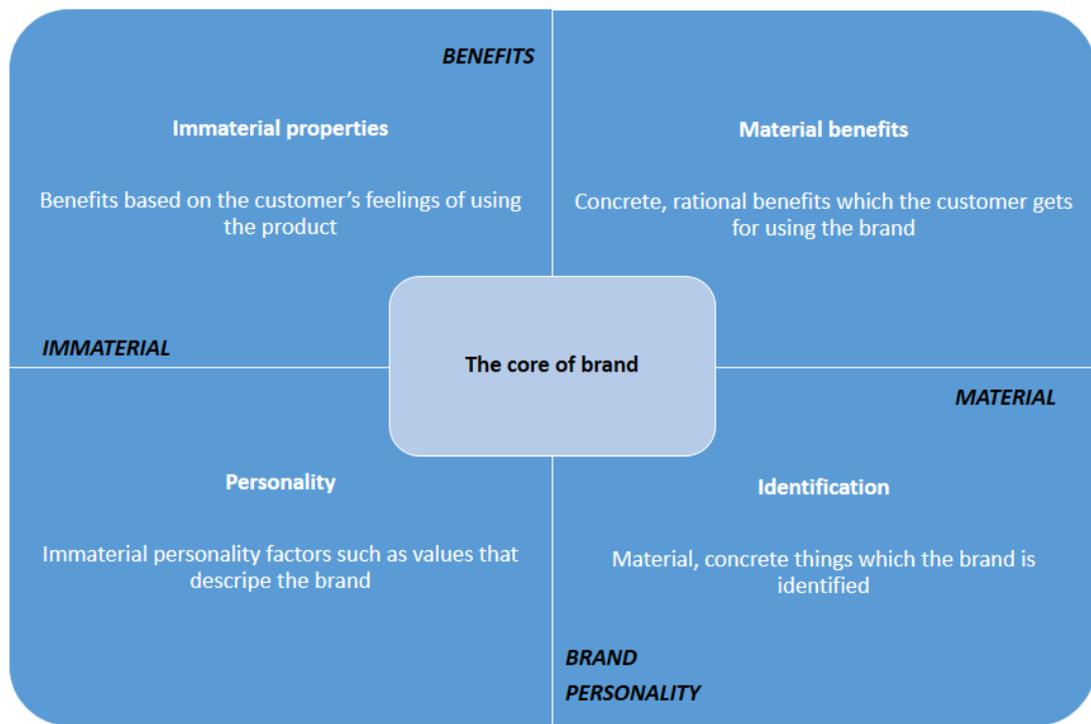


Figure 2. The core of the brand (Mäkinen, Kahri & Kahri 2010, 131)

If a company's brand is coherent, it will bring more customers than a more coherent brand of its competitor even if the competitor's product or service is better. There are studies which show that consumers don't always choose the best product or service. If a brand is coherent and well known, the price of a product or service can be higher. The traditional reason for creating a brand is the fact that it can be used to achieve a better price margin. In the marketing language this is called an additional price. (Gad 2001, 33.)

Thomas Gad has compared a good brand to the protection provided vaccination. All that is invested in the brand and what the brand stands for gives the same protection as vaccination. A strong brand also has a better chance to survive an economic downturn. When the brand is strong and stable, the leading brand always survives the recession better than other weaker brands. (Gad 2001, 48–49.)

Recently, many companies have invested money in a brand, particularly because the brand has a direct influence on the company's value. Brand value is based on the brand equity, the calculated result which is different from a sales profit. This brand equity has an added value, which makes it possible for

products to be priced higher than competing, less known products. All well-known brands have their own brand equity. (Gad 2001, 49.)

From a business point of view, a brand is designed to help a company to achieve its strategic goals and strengthen its profitability and continuity. It can be said that brands are a company's most valuable assets. Markets are changing all the time so it is also possible that these planned goals can be changed or new benefits can be added. (Lindberg-Repo 2005, 57–58.)

According to Lindberg-Repo, Peter Drucker has created questions that companies can utilize to determine the purpose of a brand. Answering the following questions, the purpose of the brand will become clear: (Lindberg-Repo 2005, 58):

- What is the purpose of the company?
- Who are our customers?
- What is the value of a customer?
- Where is our business going to?
- What should our business be like?

3.1.2 Brand equity elements and creating brand equity

A brand equity means the assets that a brand has and that brings added value to the company and its customers. According to David Aaker these assets can be divided in to four categories: brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. For example brand loyalty may able the reducing of marketing costs but still attract new customers at the same time. This way the brand equity creates value to the company. (Aaker 1996, 45.)

One key element of building brands and creating brand equity is the company's ability to make the brand connective. The brand actions should be united with the brand promise; it builds trust and credibility in the customers. Also holding on to the brand's principles such as values and taking care of long customer relationships is vital in building emotional connections.

Customers feel that they are getting more value using the product if the company puts effort in taking care of the authenticity of the brand. Another thing that Fisher-Buttinger and Vallaster point out as an important factor is the company's willingness for social responsibility (corporate social responsibility) creating a credible, appealing promise that benefits not only the company itself but also the society. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 124.)

Companies have begun to take the brand towards the company itself instead of branding just the product. That is mainly because of the difficulty of trying to keep the product and its brand different from the competition's product. Competitive corporations quickly copy the features of each other's products and it is better for a single company to focus the branding more on the whole company than just the product. Corporate branding is a way of coping and differentiating from the competition. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 32–33.)

Value based branding is also a way to stand out from the masses. The advantage values have as a branding tool is that all different quarters can be reached by them. On the other hand, one particular feature of a product, to give an example, is not enough to resonate with all the audiences linked to the company. Values also enable more meaningful relationships when dealing with stakeholders and help in keeping a good public image. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 33–34.)

It is important for the company to keep their employees and stakeholders satisfied by talking to them and not only making decisions on its own (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 124). Employees being the center of the brand not only make them feel trusted and important but also tells about the values of the company. It is also important that there is interaction between the customers and the employees. With some products this is difficult to do because the actual product the customers use is sold by third parties. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 35.)

The most important thing in creating brand equity is to make the experience for the customers like they are expecting it to be. This means, as mentioned before, keeping the brand actions united with the brand promise. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 124.) Brand promise is something that becomes

before the brand experience. Customers get a certain image of the brand via the brand promise. Once customers then actually use the product they get the experience of the brand. From the brand promise come the expectations for the brand experience. If the company successfully fulfills those expectations the customers engage to the brand. Engaging of course demands that the experiences are constantly positive. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 214.)

The using of internet can bring significant benefits to a company. The internet not only is a great source for providing information but also today one of the major ways for people to communicate with each other. Companies have started to explore the possibilities of social media as a way of getting feedback from customers. There are its difficulties too when marketing online. Some companies have taken their offline marketing straight to the online world not realizing that not quite the same rules and restrictions apply there. Online branding actions can be divided into two categories: interaction with individual customers and interaction with communities. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 95–96.)

To sum it up, creating of brand equity consists of consistently developing alignment of brand promise and brand experience and also engaging the key stakeholders. Way to them both are by bringing the corporation to the brand, taking care of corporate social responsibility, keeping the brand authentic and interact with the customers online. (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster 2008, 125.)

3.1.3 Thomas Gad's 4-D brand theory

Successful companies live with the brand because they are the brand itself. It is important that company creates its own Brand Code which makes it easier to understand and use the brand. Thomas Gad has explained that Brand Code defines the nature of the business. It helps to understand what the business looks like, feels like and how it behaves. Brand Code does not only tell what the business is, but it also gives the business a personality, makes it a unique. Creating and utilizing the Brand Code is one of the most important tasks of business management. (Gad 2001, 22.)

In the field of international ice hockey like this study concerns, it is vital to create own Brand Code to understand the brand fully. So that the fans can

understand and live with the brand, Thomas Gad's four dimension model can be used to utilize the understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the target brand. Gad has divided dimension model in four different categories: functional, social, mental and spiritual. The functional dimension means understanding the benefits of product or service related to the brand. The social dimension is the ability to create identification with the group. The spiritual dimension is about understanding the global or local responsibility. The last one is the mental dimension which concerns ability to support individual mentally. Gad's four dimension model can be used to create a new brand or to analyze the strategic alternatives of the created brand. (Gad 2001, 22–23.)

Thomas Gad's 4-Dimension brand model was applied in the thesis to analyze the results of the research and define the brand image of international ice hockey. The attributes used in the questionnaire to describe international ice hockey were divided into the four dimensions of Gad's model. As mentioned before, the four dimensions are functional, social, mental and spiritual. After dividing the attributes to the four dimensions and looking at the answers of the respondents it could be pointed out which of the dimensions stood out the strongest related to ice hockey. This was helpful in finding out what kind of aspects are important in the minds of ice hockey fans when they think about the sport. The applying of the model is thoroughly explained in the conclusions chapter.

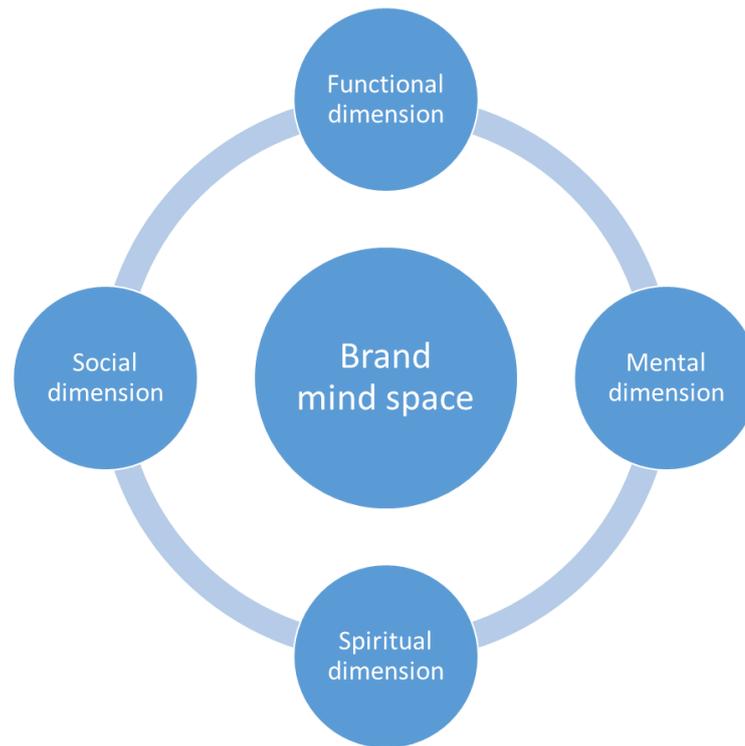


Figure 3. Brand mind space (Brandflight – Brand mind space n.d.)

Functional dimension

The need to build the brand almost always begins with building more or less unique product or service and the brand is based on the benefit the customer receives. The functional dimension describes the perceived benefit of product or service related to brand. In a number of business areas, the functional dimension is an important part of marketing. It was a big step forward in advertising when people started to bring out the benefits experienced by the customer instead of the real benefits. All the things related to the physical quality, taste, style and efficiency belong to the class of functional dimension. The functional dimension also depends on where in the lifecycle the brand is. If the brand is in the early stage of lifecycle, the importance of the functional dimension highlights when determining the brand's justification, role and sometimes the physical benefits. (Gad 2001, 132–133.) Ice hockey is quite a traditional sport and a very physical sport as well. Functional dimension of ice hockey is at a good level.

Social dimension

The next step when building the brand is the social dimension. The social life and the social acceptance are important things when talking about the social dimension of the brand. The buyers make their purchasing decision in all markets subjectively on the basis of what they feel is the most stable and reflective of their social identity. When it comes to the social dimension, the brand often creates a cult around itself, and it becomes a social mark or a pillar of a person's lifestyle game. It means that the trademark or a logo will be the symbol of the cultural society which the brand ideally creates in the same way as for example the flag of a country. The purpose of the social dimension is to create an attempt to feel the strong connection between the friends, the consumers and the business customers. The social dimension plays an important role for example in selecting the management consultants. This point of view it is much more important than the functional dimension where number of competitors providing better or equivalent products or solutions. The social dimension reflects the relationships between the customers and group of people where the customers want to belong. (Gad 2001, 134–135.)

Ice hockey has its fans but cannot really be considered a global sport. Ice hockey is mainly played only in North America and Europe and the top events, such as IIHF World Championships, are not able to compete with some of the sport mega events like Olympics or Fifa World Cup. International ice hockey fans are loyal and support their countries passionately.

Mental dimension

The brand is valuable tool to use when the company wants to create an identity in front of others. The mental dimension is a part which is needed in order to create a successful brand identity. The best brands encompass the mental dimension. This dimension is by its nature much more profound than the other dimensions because it penetrates deep into the personality. The mental dimension relates to the personal transformation. It is all about the transformation and the acquisition of new insights. Every people need role model who helps individual to form own life and behavior. The brand and particularly the mental dimension serve this purpose. The experiences which people have had from early to their childhood to this day, define their personal

identity, reaction and behavior. On the other hand these experiences may also affect the low self-esteem in certain areas of life. Mental images affect to the redefinition of the mental picture which provides enormous potential to build the brand and that is why it is so important. Of course there may be some problems and personal thoughts which affect the individual's mental image so it can be problem to generalize it. The majority of redefinition is common to the several people. Good examples of this are the excuses which allow people to avoid the unpleasant and demanding activities. (Gad 2001, 135–136.)

Ice hockey, among other sports, also has a responsibility of setting an example for the younger fans. With hockey being a very physical, sometimes violent sport it is important that the fans do not get wrong kind of image of ice hockey. By concentrating more on the example ice hockey is seen to set, the sport's brand could perhaps be developed stronger.

Spiritual dimension

When people understand the issues related to the spiritual dimension, it is easier to understand the connection between the brand, the product, the company and the bigger system. The word spiritual refers to the larger system where we are all a part. The new perspective is the fact that the spiritual dimension (also known as ethical dimension) is purposely used to build the brand. The problem is the fact that a company cannot be bit of an ethical. Those brands that set themselves up as paragons in this area are exposing themselves to criticism if they themselves do not allow the high ideals that they preach. (Gad 2001, 139–140.)

Many ice hockey teams and organizations do charity and cooperate with charity organizations. That builds the brand stronger but on the other hand, if some major mistake is made with for example ethical issues it might ruin the brand completely.

3.2 Branding with sport

The importance of building brands highlights specific in sport business. In this chapter the idea is to go through the importance of different branding types for creating popular sport events like in this study ice hockey World Championships. Sport tourists are an important part of successful sports

events so it is vital to try to influence and modify their brand image in a right way. In the end the spectator creates its own brand image but there are many different ways to influence this image.

Sport tourism

Words sport and tourism have different meanings but in the same context these words are the confluence of the two social activities. Sport tourism is an area where tourism and leisure are closely linked (Taylor 2011, 171).

According to Weed and Bull, both sport and tourism are reasons which might help to bring different peoples and cultures closer together (Weed & Bull 2009, 3–4).

People have travelled to watch sport events decades ago but in those times there wasn't talk about sport tourism. Sport tourism as a term has developed since 2000. Both the area and the product were studied more thoroughly which increased awareness of sport tourism. There are also other factors which defined the term of sport tourism such as satellite TV, the use of sport to signify prestige and status and sport's health effects. (Taylor 2011, 171.)

When individuals are travelling temporarily abroad in their free time it is defined tourism. Travelling outside from the place of domicile or abroad, specifically to watch sporting events, it refers sport tourism. If individuals will participate in physical activities it is called Active Sport tourism. Only watching physical activities it can talk about Event Sport tourism. Then there is Nostalgia Sport Tourism which means that individual will respect the attractions associated with physical activities. (Knott n.d.)

According to Weed and Bull, there are particular two types of sport tourism: Outdoor pursuits which are linked to a range of motives and values relating to health, fitness, image, excitement and even fashion. Then there is international sporting events which are associated with experience and spectacle. (Weed & Bull 2009, 14.)

Sport tourists are consumers who have decided to spend money in sport industry. Sport tourists goal is to go to different destination for the purpose of participating in, viewing or celebrating sport (Ahonen & Rasku 2012, 21). It has led the situation that sport tourism has developed a multi-billion euro

business. It has an important role in the global travel and tourism industry because it is the fastest growing sector and for example in 2008, sport tourism was accounted for approximately 10 % of the whole international tourism market (World Sport Tourism Expo n.d.).

Sport tourism is attractive in many perspectives. Business point of view sport tourism is attractive economically. Sport tourism mega events such as World championship and Olympic Games are gathering lots of potentially customers from outside the local area. It is obvious that mega events are attracting more higher-spending visitors to existing tourist locations which affects the local economy. These events are an effective way to promote products to offer. (Weed & Bull 2009, 19–20.)

Sport event field consist of three different categories: hallmark events, special events and mega events. Hallmark events are national sport events which affects to the local tourism. It is characteristic to Hallmark events to get awareness of the destination. Special events are usually international events such as F1 Grand Prix. Main purpose is to promote and to get the added value to the city or nation. The economic impact is characteristic. Mega events such as the Olympic Games are probably the best-known products in the field of sport tourism (Nurmi 2008). Mega events can be identified by the volume of visitors it attracts, its psychological impact on attendees and significant economic and social impacts to the city or nation (Knott n.d.). The developments of mega events have a clear link to an increase of sport tourism (Weed & Bull 2009, 14).

Nation branding

Every nation has its own brand image which has been affected by many factors such as images, symbols, history, perceptions, media, experiences, stereotypes and observations. When countries are competing for the attention, respect, and trust of investors, tourists, consumers, donors, immigrants, media and governments, nation branding has become increasingly significant (Knott n.d.). In general, a nation brand can be said to result human vision, experiences, perceptions, feelings and impressions of the country. Goal-oriented activity is essential to the creation of a nation brand. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008b, 15.)

Most of the nations are pursuing a powerful and positive brand image because it gives a strong competitive advantage to the nation. It is vital to create a decent brand image because a country image can be long lasting and difficult to change. If the image is wrong and not desired it may require a significant event or experience to change it. (Knott n.d.) A professionally managed nation brand attracts companies, investments, skilled labor force, residents and visitors to the target area (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008b, 19).

In nation branding, it means that countries have to apply corporate branding techniques to their own brand strategy. Nations have become more aware of the value of their brand, which helps them to better understand the investments they make in their image. Countries even hire public firms to develop and create their branding campaigns and to apply brand management. (Hudson Teslik 2007.) Creating a nation brand requires integration, cooperation and coordination because it is essential to form a comprehensive analysis and image of a national product (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008b, 19).

It is necessary for a nation to be able to market itself with as advanced methods as companies do. Brands have been for a long time one of the most important factors for success the business field. It is also possible for a nation to develop its brand in the right way so that it becomes an important competitive factors. A nation can be productized if it selects the correct operating procedures in order to make its identity out from the competition. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008b, 11.)

Moilanen and Rainisto have summarized the effects of a strong nation brand on the target nation. According to Moilanen and Rainisto (2008b, 19):

- A strong nation brand increases the attractiveness of business and investments.
- A strong nation brand attracts a skilled workforce.
- A strong nation brand promotes the goals of the tourism industry.
- A strong nation brand promotes international diplomacy.
- A strong nation brand supports the interest of the export industry.
- A strong nation brand strengthens citizens' identity and raises their self-esteem.

It is common that a nation brand and image are interconnected even though they are two distinct concepts. The difference is in that a nation brand includes, besides the image, an element of identity. This element of identity includes features of the orderliness and ambition. It also forms the image of the marketer's measures for the customer. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008b, 15.)

A nation brand consists of many areas. These areas include questions like how do the nation perceive both products and quality of service, how interesting its culture is considered to be, how interesting a travel destination or a place to live it is considered to be, what kind of business opportunities it is associated with and what kind of an operator it is perceived as in political, economic or diplomatic fields. All of these questions can be dovetails with the nation brand. A strong nation brand produces benefits in all of these areas. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008b, 19.)

Destination branding

The rules of different branding models do not apply when branding as complicated entities as nations, cities and destinations are. Building a place brand differs from the operations needed to be done when building a more traditional brand. A certain destination may be wanted to be branded in one direction by creating images but there are usually several fields, such as tourism, technology, investment and business that already carry out and effect the image of the place. Long term professional branding benefits a destination. With the branding done professionally, the message sent from a

place gives positive images to the rest of the world. Besides attracting tourists, destination branding can have a positive effect on business life, exporting and identity and self-esteem of the citizens. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 1.)

Cities around the world are putting effort and using different methods to stand out and strengthen their uniqueness. From tourism's point of view, a certain tourist destination consists of different companies in the field of tourism. The companies have different target groups and different products but they still together form a unit that defines the tourism as a product for that area. Place marketing was first seen in North America where immigrants started moving from the East Coast and Europe to the West Coast in hope for better financial life. The interest for developing a brand for a place has risen in the 21st century but since the difficulty of it no destination has been very successful. Some of the countries successful in destination branding are Spain, Ireland and Croatia. Spain evolved to a modern nation, Ireland became known for its IT knowing and Croatia is now an interesting tourist destination. Countries are globally competing for employees, tourists and foreign business. Factors that influence countries' attractiveness are culture, environment, social development, atmosphere and images that people relate to a country. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 3–8, 10.)

Countries have learned lesson from unsuccessful destination branding. Some of the successful branding cases have had same kind of cornerstones that have led to success: highest management's commitment in both political and business life, clear organizational structures, definite roles, decision making and risk-involvement, using own resources, differentiating positioning, product delivery and development of products within the brand promise to mention some. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 73–76.)

Like any other brand, a place must also be different from its competitors to be interesting. The things that bring out the difference have to be positive for the branding to be successful. To brand update information about the customers is vital for the correct operations to be done. By researching a country can find out the needs and perceptions of the local people and also the foreign. Good communication between different factors, for example tourism industry, public diplomacy and culture is important for having good results. Every field has to

have the same main idea and understand the demands of consistent building of a unified brand and what it can do to a country's competitiveness. When the whole nation is working for the same goal the success is possible, citizens, too are ought to participate in the branding process. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 30, 73–76.)

City and tourism destination branding can in some situations be viewed as the same thing. Often, though, city branding has more dimensions to it, such as target groups and strategic objectives. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008, 77.)

Tourism destinations are branding themselves to attract not only tourists, but also business and investment. What is a great challenge for tourism destination marketers is how to stand out from all the competitors. Almost all tourism destinations have the same kinds of facilities for example beaches or ski slopes. There are large amount of different types of tourism destinations. Some are smaller like theme parks or spas and others may be entire continents. Consumers might make a one day trip to a spa or in the other end take a month to explore for example Australia (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 111–117).

The World Tourism Organization's (WTO) definition of tourism destination: "A physical space in which a visitor spends at least one overnight. It includes tourism products such as support services and attractions, and tourism resources within one day's return travel time. It has physical and administrative boundaries defining its management, and images and perceptions defining its market competitiveness. Local destinations incorporate various stakeholders often including a host community, and can nest and network to form larger destinations." (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 111–117.)

The process model of destination brand development (DEBRA) is based on the corporate culture pointing out core values of the brand (destination). Since a tourism destination usually has many companies operating within it, it also has lots of different values and corporate cultures. The destination brand in question should be analyzed and managed like any other brand but the companies within the destination should also be analyzed and taken into account. Just like in nation branding, destination should also be unified as one

all organization within it working independently but for the same goal. (Moilanen & Rainisto 2008a, 111–117.)

3.3 Co-branding

As this study points out branding is vital part of creating successful business. This section includes the definition of Co-branding and an explanation of how companies can create a successful brand by utilizing of cooperation. In sport business field Co-branding can be utilized to arrange a large sport events and to get the desired brand image.

3.3.1 A definition of Co-branding

Co-branding differentiates products and services from those of the competitors and makes them unique. It also makes it easier for employees to attach themselves to companies' internal culture if the branding process has shaped it. Branding enhances business efficiency and profitability, and improves the intellectual advantages of the business (Ellwood 2002, 1). To understand what makes marketing cooperation efficient, it is necessary to explore the components of the branding process, the image profiles brands have created, and the cooperation process with sport organizations (Blackett & Boad 2000, 1).

World trade has significantly grown over the last few decades. Growth has been fast especially in Europe, Asia and Latin America but also in the older market areas. Along with the quick growth of trade, companies have started to unite their forces in order to succeed. Co-branding requires two like-minded companies that both see the benefits of working together. (Blackett & Boad 2000, 1.)

"Co-branding is a form of cooperation between two or more brands with significant, in which all the participants' brand names are retained" (Laws, Moscardo & Prideaux 2006, 73). When two brands work together, the goal is to market a new product. (Solomon, Marshall & Stuart 2008, 292). This is only possible when two or more companies help each other to reach their aims. In the field of sport business, cooperation between an organization and sports (co-branding) is an effective way to get recognition for the product (Co-branding meaning, types and advantages and disadvantages 2013).

3.3.2 Use of Co-branding

There are different types of Co-branding. First, there is value endorsement the goal of which is to endorse the value and positioning of either both or one of the brands in question. The second type is called ingredient co-branding where a company uses a product of a smaller company as part of their final product. This can be beneficial to both the brands as the bigger company gets added value to their product and the smaller company gets visibility. The third type, complementary competence, is used by two significant companies and benefits both parties. (Laws et al. 2006, 73.)

There are quite many advantages to co-branding. To introduce some of them, co-branding can bring a company a new source of income, it can help a company to penetrate into new market areas with the help from another brand and it can enable companies to offer consumers products at lower prices. Used the right way co-branding is a useful tool but it also has its disadvantages. It does not start to work automatically and should be given time like any other investment. Also, the culture, values and attitude of both the brands should be similar. Another danger that lies in co-branding is the possibility that a company accidentally slides in an area it does not particularly belong. (Laws et al. 2006, 77–78.)

According to Robert Wallace, there are four things needed to be taken care of in order to put two brands together. First the companies involved need to make rules and boundaries for their relationship. Those boundaries are set to guide both parties to the wanted direction and goals. Some key elements to look at when making the rules are: the companies' current relationship, emerging of future relationship, processes of a certain company, procedures, interface with customer, decision making, conflict resolution and culture. The processes and procedures of a company might change when starting an alliance with another company. (Wallace 2004, 139–143.)

The second task is to determine the initial project. This means that it must be clear for both companies what they are aiming for together. Nothing should be done just to get something done and all the actions should have a purpose. Both companies must be fully committed to the partnership which should be something that the customers find valuable. Commitment comes with setting

goals together and making the project profitable for both parties. Also to avoid any pointless problems a strict and followed schedule helps in getting things done. No project should be started before both companies are ready and able to put their whole focus on the project. (Wallace 2004, 143–145.)

Depending on how well the joint venture of the two companies works out, it is possible that they continue working in alliance after the initial project. The other company may even buy the other company so that the cooperation really continues. On the other hand, it is possible that both or one of the companies is not satisfied with the cooperation. In that case the company must have a plan on how to keep on being productive after the joint venture with another company is over and the resources and advantages of the former partner no longer exist. (Wallace 2004, 145–146.)

Building a business relationship does not happen over a day. It has been researched that smaller companies find it harder to work in a joint venture with another company. That is because small companies are often run informally and business partnership requires formal actions and procedures. In order to maintain the good business relationship conflicts cannot be let to get in the way of aiming for the set goals. When both of the companies have respect for each other and treat each other equally the relationship between them is able to stay healthy. Also those people responsible for making decisions about the joint venture should be rewarded and shown that their work is highly appreciated and necessary. (Wallace 2004, 147–150.)

4 RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the methods used in the research and how the study was conducted. The chapter for example explains how the interviews were conducted and how the quantitative research method is applied for this study. The chapter is also an introduction to the results and analysis which are presented later.

4.1 Quantitative research

In this thesis the quantitative research is used to generalize the phenomena and to get information that is general in nature. It is characterized by the quantitative research to know the factors that influence on the phenomenon because it is not possible to measure the phenomenon if it is unknown. It is also essential to find out how much these factors influence on the phenomenon and is there any differences between the values of the factors. Simply this means that a small group of people belonging to the phenomenon is gathered data with questionnaire. This small group of respondents is required to represent the entire set which is called population. (Kananen 2011, 15–16.)

The result of the research can be considered as a representative of the whole population which is affected by phenomenon. The quantitative research requires a sufficient number of respondents so that the result can be considered reliable and it can be transferred to concern the whole population. The quantitative research based on positivism that highlights the arguments of data, reliability, objectively and unambiguity of information. The goal is to provide objective, reliable and generalize information which is based on the measurement. The basic purpose of the quantitative research is to find out the features and frequencies related to the phenomenon. (Kananen 2011, 15–18.) The quantitative research was chosen to this research method because of large number of respondents. The research was conducted by using a structured questionnaire which made it easier to analyze the large number of collected data.

The quantitative research is based on research problem which purpose is to get a solution or answer by using the collected data. When the necessary data

is defined to solve the problem, the next step is to consider where and how the data will be collected. After this stage the research questions is defined and a method for collecting the data is chosen. These actions allow structuring the questionnaire which has to be tested so that it is possible to collect, record and check the data. (Kananen 2011, 20–21.)

4.2 The data collection

The research was executed in the hockey garden area in Helsinki World Championships 2012 and in fan zone in Stockholm World Championship 2013. Both fan areas were located next to the ice halls where the most fans moved during the Championships. The research was conducted on May 8th-10th 2012 and on May 10th-13th 2013. The purpose of the research was to collect data for creating and explaining the brand image of international ice hockey from the fans' perspective. The data collectors mainly consist of students and supervisors of JAMK University of Applied Sciences. There was a group of twelve students in Helsinki and a group of sixteen students in Stockholm collecting the data. There was also a one student from HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences in Stockholm.

The respondents were given a questionnaire (see appendix 1) in which they were first asked their age, gender and nationality. After that begun the actual interview part: the respondents were supposed to rate 39 attributes on a scale of 1-7, according to how well they thought each attribute described international ice hockey. The respondents' ratings on the attributes helped to find out the brand image of international ice hockey. The interviews were mainly done with iPads.

Only people of age 18 and over were allowed to participate in the survey. Each respondent had the right to end the survey at any point. Also the survey was interrupted if the respondent could not answer the questions because of linguistic problems or other possible incapability. Each respondent was allowed to participate in the survey only once, so before interviewing they were asked whether they had already taken part in the survey. The interviews were collected by the supervisors of the research and only capable ones were approved as results to analyze. All of the interviews were conducted communicating face-to-face with the respondents.

4.3 Samplings

A sample means a certain group of people that represent the population the survey is about (Kananen 2011, 65). In this study the population are international ice hockey fans who visited the fan areas in 2012 and 2013 IIHF World Championships in Helsinki and Stockholm.

Random sampling method was used in this study because of its quickness and low expenses. Random sampling is a non-probability technique where the subjects are proximate and accessible to the researchers. (Kananen 2008, 75.) The idea in the research was to interview every tenth passer-by in the fan areas, but that was not always possible because of small amount of fans visiting the areas. To get the answers needed for the research, more than every tenth passer-by was interviewed at times.

In Stockholm 2013 the plan was not to interview Finnish ice hockey fans. After the first days of interviewing the gathered results were already analyzed so that it could be seen what kind of respondents had been interviewed mostly. For example if there seemed to be a lot of respondents interviewed from a certain nationality, the aim was not to interview people of that nationality any more. There were more male respondents in the study because the events clearly attracted more

4.4 Reliability and validity of the study

The purpose of the research is to get as reliable and truthful information as possible. It is not self-evident mission because there are many variables in the research such as researched phenomenon, target of the research, researcher and research methods. Used concepts, methods, research frame and methodological know-how varies between researchers so there are no objective discoveries in the research. It is important to estimate the reliability of a research because the chosen methods always influence the results. This fact should be taken into account when planning a research and choosing the methods. (Kananen 2008, 78.)

In order to evaluate the reliability of the research the basic term is to use the concepts of validity and reliability. Validity means focusing and measuring on the

right things in terms of the research problem. Reliability in turn means the stability of the research result. (Kananen 2011, 118–119.)

Reliability consist of the stability of the research result which means that when repeating the research the result is always same. These results are not due to a coincidence because the used measure always produces the same result. Reliability can be distinguished by two factors: stability and consistency. The stability measures the stability of the barometer in time. The measured phenomenon can change in time so that the reliability is low which mean that the change is not caused by instability of the barometer. It is possible to affirm the stability by repeating the research in the future. The same questionnaire and interview methods were used in both ice hockey World Championships, in Finland and in Sweden so it can say that the stability and reliability were taken into account. Both the World Championships gathered people from all over the world so the results between different nationalities can be compared in this study. (Kananen 2011, 118–119.)

The consistency means the components of barometer measuring the same thing. In practice this means measuring the same phenomenon by two barometers which means that the measurement should be the same. In this study, a survey has been carried out by measuring the same thing in two different questions by using the opposite attributes. It was easy to make a conclusion that the respondent has not concentrated to the questions properly if the same respondent answered that the attribute strong is strongly (5–7) related to ice hockey and also answered that the attribute weak is strongly related to ice hockey. The consistency of the barometer has been confirmed in researches which were implemented at the FIFA World Cup 2010 and at the Neste Oil Rally event 2013. The same questionnaire has also been used in this study so the consistency of this research can be estimate. (Kananen 2011, 118–120.)

The validity of the research is divided external and internal validity. The external validity is generalizing the results, the sample used in the research has to be equivalent in relation to the population. (Kananen 2008, 80.) Identification of the target populations' demographics was not possible in this study. Because of that the results from the sample cannot be generalized in

relation to the whole target population quite properly. Random sampling was difficult to do at times because of the small amount of fans visiting the fan areas. Despite these problems conclusions can still be made of the collected and analyzed data from Helsinki and Stockholm, because of the similarity and extensiveness of the results.

Internal validity means measuring the reliability of research process. The barometer needs to be formed specifically for the needs of the research with components and structure clearly defined. The reliability of the research process is impossible to show in practice but clarification and documentation of the research process and the methods used strengthens the internal validity of the study. (Kananen 2008, 81–84.) In this study the results were based on theories which confirm the validity.

5 THE RESULTS

5.1 Background variables

Citizens of fifteen different nationalities were interviewed during the 2012 IIHF World Championships in Helsinki. Most European respondents interviewed were from Finland but there were also ice hockey fans interviewed from Switzerland, Slovakia, Belarus, Czech Republic, Ireland, Denmark, Netherlands, Russia and Sweden. Switzerland and Slovakia clearly had the most respondents outside of the host country, Finland. Of countries outside Europe, Canada, Australia, Iraq, New Zealand and USA had the fewest respondents.

At the 2013 IIHF World Championships in Stockholm, 23 nationalities were represented by fans taking part in the survey. Most European respondents came from the host country Sweden. Other European countries with quite many respondents were Switzerland, Denmark, Norway, Czech Republic, Germany and Slovenia. There were also some fans interviewed from France, Belarus, Russia, Great-Britain, Hungary, Italy Finland, Belgium, Austria, Latvia, Netherlands, Serbia and Spain. Canada had the most respondents of the outside Europe, Japan and USA had one respondent each. Since Finnish ice hockey fans were not supposed to be interviewed in Stockholm, the three Finnish respondents were not taken into account in the results. Table 1 shows the nationalities involved.

Table 1. Nationality

Nationalities Helsinki 2012		Nationalities Stockholm 2013	
Nationality	n	Nationality	n
Belarus	2	Belgium	2
Canada	3	Belarus	7
Czech Republic	2	British	5
Finland	239	Canada	12
Ireland	2	Czech Republic	18
Slovakia	12	Denmark	40
Switzerland	43	Finland	3
		France	8
		Germany	15
		Hungary	4
		Italy	4
		Norway	40
		Russia	6
		Slovenia	11
		Sweden	180
		Switzerland	85

The respondents were divided into four groups: Finnish, Swedish, and other respondents and Finnish and Swedish respondents together. The results of the Finnish respondents consist of the data collected in Helsinki in 2012, and results concerning the Swedish respondents consist of the data collected in Stockholm 2013. The results concerning other respondents consist of the data on both the 2012 and 2013 World Championships. In the fourth group of Finnish and Swedish respondents the data was also collected in both Championships by interviewing Finnish fans in Finland and Swedish fans in Sweden. The results were then summarized to illustrate the answers of the respondents from both of the host countries together.

Table 2. Age

Finnish respondents 2012 (Host country)			Swedish respondents 2013 (Host country)		
Age	n	%	Age	n	%
18 - 29	92	39,3	18 - 29	81	45,5
30 - 39	44	18,8	30 - 39	38	21,3
40 - 49	50	21,4	40 - 49	43	24,2
50 +	48	20,5	50 +	16	9,0
Total	234	100	Total	178	100

Other respondents 2012 & 2013			Respondents of host countries 2012 & 2013		
Age	n	%	Age	n	%
18 - 29	165	59,5	18 - 29	173	42,0
30 - 39	100	30,0	30 - 39	82	19,9
40 - 49	50	15,0	40 - 49	93	22,6
50 +	18	5,4	50 +	64	15,5
Total	333	100	Total	412	100

As seen in Table 2, most of the respondents in both surveys, Helsinki and Stockholm, were 18-49 years old. In Helsinki there were also quite a large amount of people older than that (50+). Of the respondents from other countries, not many were fifty years or older. Reason for it may be that older people are not interested in traveling to attend an event. In all three groups the 18-29 -year-olds were quite clearly the largest age group.

Table 3. Gender

Finns in Helsinki 2012		Swedes in Stockholm 2013	
Gender	n	Gender	n
male	149	male	131
female	88	female	40
Total	237	Total	171

Other respondents 2012 & 2013		Host cities' respondents 2012 & 2013	
Gender	n	Gender	n
male	233	male	280
female	81	female	128
Total	314	Total	408

In both IIHF World Championships, 2012 and 2013, most of the respondents were male (Table 3). When taking into account all respondents from both World Championships, it can be seen that over 70 percent of them were male. Just under 30 percent of the respondents being female, a conclusion can be made that ice hockey in general interests men more than female. Of all female respondents (both events) over 60 percent came from the host countries Finland and Sweden. It can be predicted that some female attended the event as a result of their husbands' interest in ice hockey. There were percentually more Finnish female respondents in Helsinki 2012, than there were Swedish female respondents in Stockholm 2013. When looking at the respondents from outside the host countries the number of male respondents was percentually slightly larger (74.2 %) than when taking into account all of the respondents.

5.2 Finnish fans' perception of image profile of international ice hockey

Table 4 shows the attributes that Finnish respondents in Helsinki 2012 thought were most related to ice hockey as a sport. The attributes were rated by respondents on a scale of 1–7. Attribute *ambitious* was what the respondents thought best described ice hockey with an average rate of 6.24. Other attributes that Finnish respondents highly rated as describing ice hockey were *strong*, *exciting*, *international* and *successful*. Also by going through the standard deviation of the responses it could be seen that the average numbers were truthful.

Table 4. Strong characteristics

Finnish respondents 2012

No.	Attribute	n	Mean
1.	Ambitious	237	6,24
2.	Strong	237	6,08
3.	Exciting	239	6,05
4.	International	236	6,01
5.	Successful	239	5,91

As seen in Table 5, the attribute that Finnish respondents least related to ice hockey was *boring* (average rate 2.13). Other attributes that were least related to ice hockey according to Finns were *weak*, *cheap*, *routine* and *formal*.

Neither one of the five least important attributes reached an average of three in the answers. There was a total of 39 attributes that the respondents rated in the questionnaire. The number of respondents for each attribute varied between 236 and 239 respondents. The letter n in the tables describes the number of respondents that have rated each attribute. The standard deviation numbers show that the averages of the attributes' averages were accountable.

Table 5. Weak characteristics

Finnish respondents 2012

No.	Attribute	n	Mean
35.	Formal	236	2,78
36.	Routine	237	2,7
37.	Cheap	239	2,4
38.	Weak	239	2,21
39.	Boring	238	2,13

Figure 4 illustrates how the respondents of host country Finland thought the attributes given described ice hockey. The figure shows how gender of the respondents effects the results. As seen in Figure 4 the results are very similar when comparing Finnish respondents' thoughts by gender on the attributes given. The figure classifies the respondents to Finnish male and female respondents in Helsinki World Championships 2012. Although it seems that Finnish male and female were very unanimous in their answers, there were some attributes in which the answers varied. The attributes were rated 1-7 by the respondents and the figure shows average answers on each attribute. The attributes that Finnish male and female thought most differently about were *creative*, *polite*, *individual*, *international* and *inefficient*. On these attributes the difference in answers between male and female was from 0.5 up to 0.8. For example, the attribute *polite* got an average rate of 4.1 from male respondents and 3.3 from female respondents.

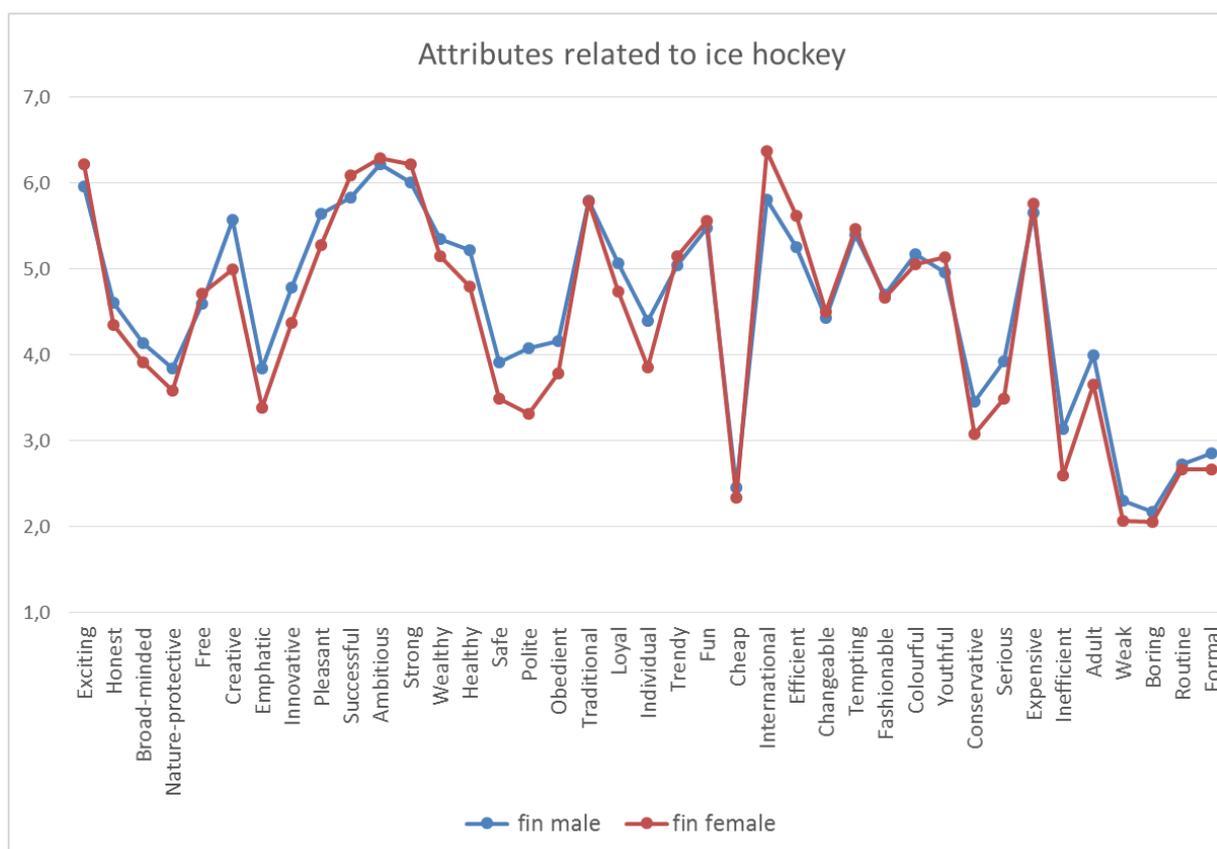


Figure 4. Attributes related to ice hockey between Finnish male and female respondents

5.3 Swedish fans' perception of image profile of international ice hockey

Table 6 shows the attributes that the Swedish respondents in Stockholm 2013 thought were most related to ice hockey as a sport. In the 2013 survey the attributes were also rated on a scale of 1–7. *Fun* was the attribute that the Swedes thought best described ice hockey, and it got an average rate of 6.28. Other attributes that were in the top 5 according to the Swedish respondents were *exciting*, *strong*, *international* and *ambitious*. The average rating of all the five most related attributes had an average rating of more than 5.7. Again, the attributes with the highest averages were reliable also when taking the standard deviation into consideration.

Table 6. Strong characteristics**Swedish respondents 2013**

No.	Attribute	n	Mean
1.	Fun	176	6,28
2.	Exciting	178	6,02
3.	Strong	178	5,84
4.	International	175	5,83
5.	Ambitious	175	5,73

Table 7 shows the attributes that the Swedish respondents thought were not very important and did not sufficiently describe ice hockey as a sport. The attribute that had the lowest average rate for describing ice hockey was *boring* with the rate of 2.0. Other attributes that the Swedish respondents did not think were very related to ice hockey were *weak*, *cheap*, *formal* and *routine*. The average rate of all the least important attributes stayed under 3.8. There were a total of 39 attributes rated by the respondents in the survey. The number of Swedish respondents rating each attribute varied between 168 and 178. When looking at the standard deviation numbers the average numbers were still reliable, but it could be seen that these weak characteristic attributes split the opinions more than the strong ones.

Table 7. Weak characteristics**Swedish respondents 2013**

No.	Attribute	n	Mean
35.	Routine	176	3,78
36.	Formal	176	3,69
37.	Cheap	176	3,36
38.	Weak	177	2,92
39.	Boring	177	2

As shown in Figure 5, the answers of the Swedish male and female respondents were similar. The figure splits the respondents to Swedish male and female respondents attending the IIHF World Championships 2013 in Stockholm, Sweden. The attributes were rated 1–7 by the respondents and

the figure illustrates the average ratings of each attribute. The attributes that Swedish men and women thought most differently about were *polite*, *loyal*, *free* and *individual*. For these attributes the average ratings between men and women varied from 0.5 to 0.6. For example, the attribute *loyal* got an average rating of 5.6 from Swedish men and 5.0 from women.

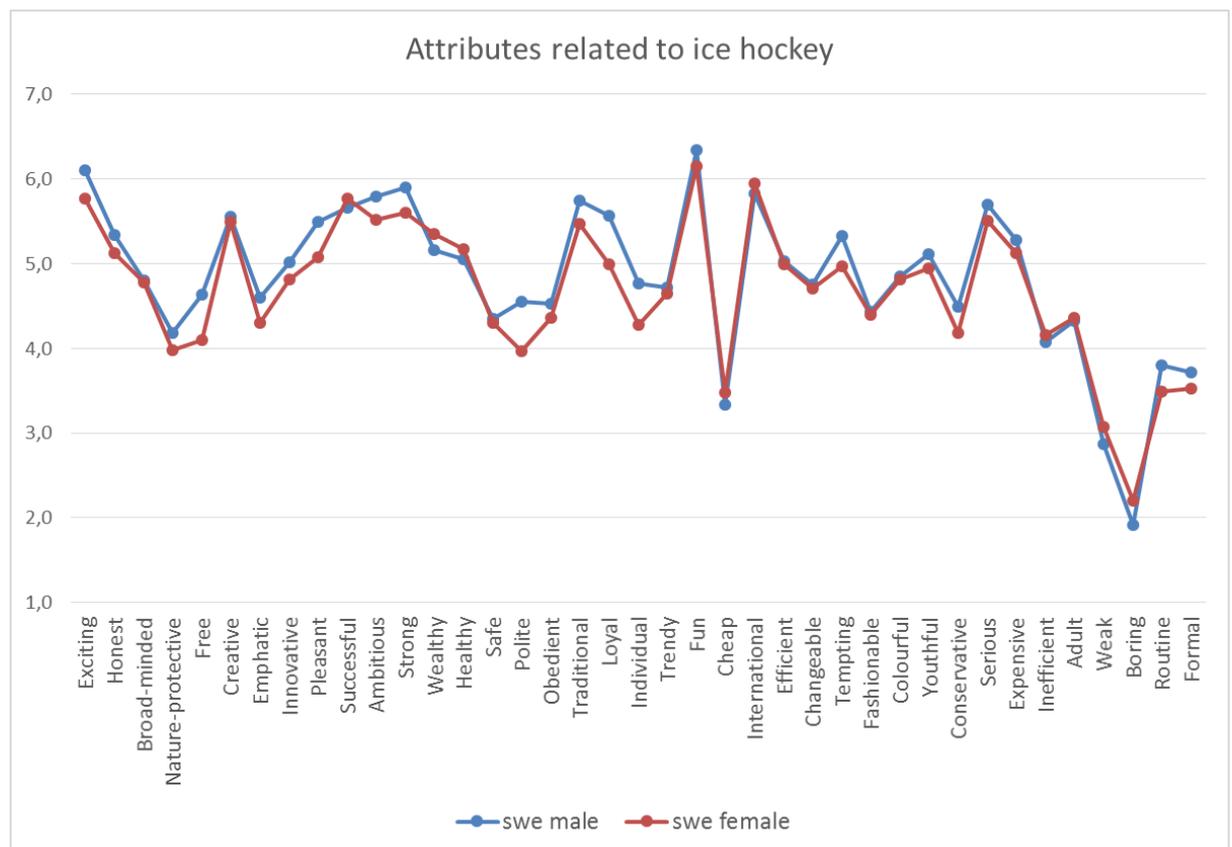


Figure 5. Attributes related to ice hockey between Swedish male and female respondents

5.4 Comparison of international ice hockey brand image between the host countries

When comparing the research results of respondents from both of the host countries, some slight differences can be seen. Figure 6 shows how Finnish hockey fans in Helsinki 2012 and Swedish hockey fans in Stockholm 2013 rated the 39 attributes given to describe ice hockey. In the figure there are both male and female respondents' answers taken into account.

As could have been predicted, the people of two neighbor countries thought quite similarly about international ice hockey as a sport. Respondents of both countries highly rated attributes *ambitious*, *strong*, *exciting* and *international* in describing ice hockey. On the other hand, the five least rated attributes were exactly the same in both countries: *formal*, *routine*, *weak*, *cheap* and *boring*.

The attributes the two nationalities thought most differently about in describing international ice hockey were *serious*, *inefficient*, *conservative*, *routine* and *cheap*. Rated 1–7, the average rates on these attributes varied from 1.0 up to 1.9. The Swedish respondents rated all of these attributes higher than the Finnish respondents.

The attributes both nationalities thought most similarly about were *exciting*, *wealthy*, *healthy* and *traditional* in which the differences in rating were minimal.

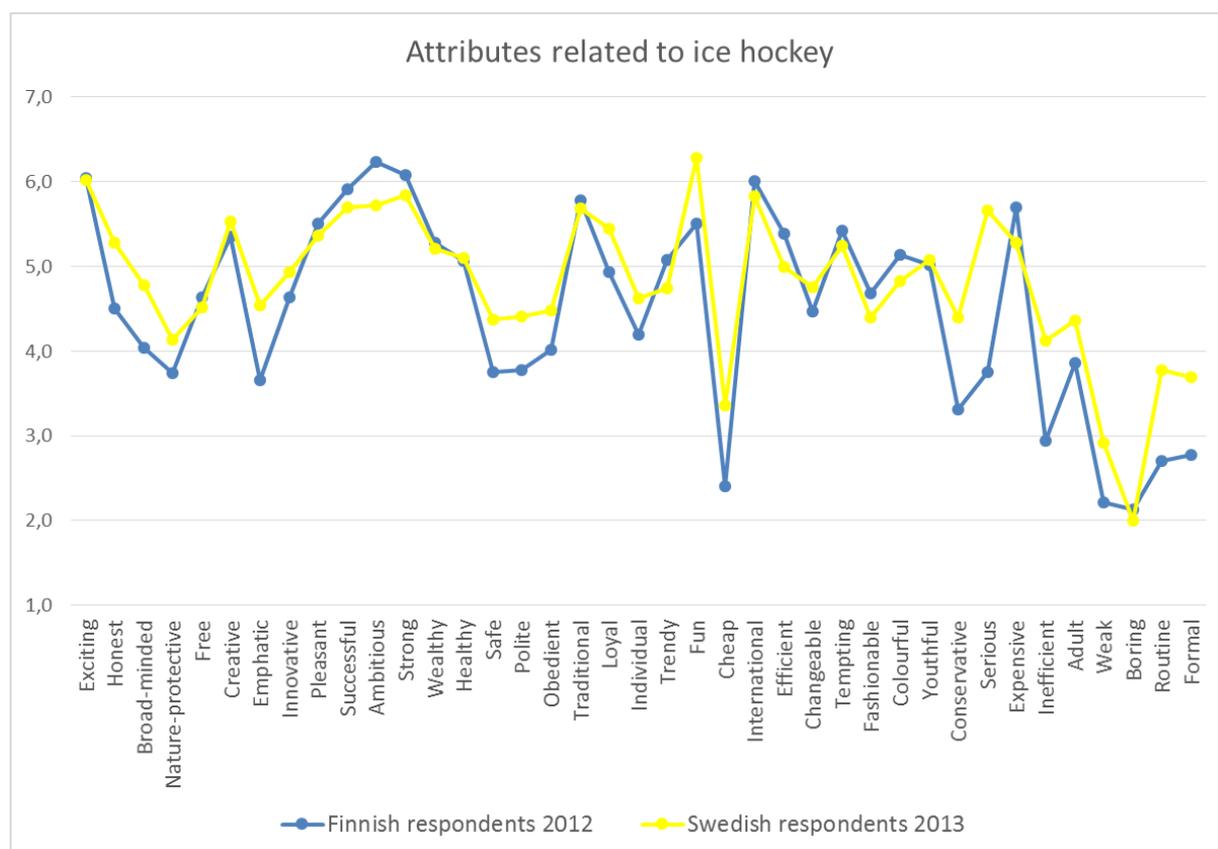


Figure 6. Attributes related to ice hockey between the hosting countries

5.5 Perception of image profile of international ice hockey – fans outside the host countries

Table 8 shows the attributes that the respondents from outside Finland and Sweden thought were the most related to international ice hockey. The table takes into account the results from both the 2012 and 2013 the IIHF World Championships. The attributes were rated 1–7. The attribute that got the highest rating as describing ice hockey was *fun* (average rate 6.42). The other four attributes that were in the top 5 of the respondents from outside the host countries were *exciting*, *strong*, *international* and *traditional*. All of these attributes had an average rating of over 5.8. The number of respondents from outside the host countries rating the attributes varied from 324 to 332. Looking at the standard deviations did not change the results already seen from the averages.

Table 8. Strong characteristics

Other respondents 2012 & 2013

No.	Attribute	n	Mean
1.	Fun	331	6,42
2.	Exciting	331	6,19
3.	Strong	331	6,13
4.	International	330	6,08
5.	Traditional	331	5,82

As shown in Table 9, the attribute that the respondents from outside the host countries thought was the least related to international ice hockey was *boring* (average rate 1.83). Other attributes that this respondent group did not think related to ice hockey well were *weak*, *routine*, *cheap* and *formal*. None of these attributes had an average rating over 3.4. Attributes *formal*, *cheap* and *routine* clearly divided the respondents' opinions and had ratings from 1–7 quite evenly.

Table 9. Weak characteristics**Other respondents 2012 & 2013**

No.	Attribute	n	Mean
35.	Formal	324	3,36
36.	cheap	327	3,25
37.	Routine	328	3,25
38.	Weak	325	2,7
39.	Boring	330	1,83

Figure 7 displays the image profile of international ice hockey according to the fans from outside the host countries. The figure shows the results from Helsinki 2012 covering the answers of fans other than Finnish or Swedish. In Helsinki 2012 there were 70 fans from outside Finland and Sweden taking part in the survey of these participants 48 were male and 22 were female. Figure 7 shows the gender differences in the opinions of international ice hockey.

It seems that male and female respondents from outside the host countries think more differently about ice hockey than for example Swedish male and female do. The attributes that male and female from outside the host countries thought most differently about were *creative*, *emphatic*, *safe*, *traditional*, *loyal*, *individual* and *weak*. Again, the attributes were rated 1–7 and the differences in the average rates of the seven attributes mentioned ranged from 0.6 to 0.8.

The attributes that male and female from outside the host countries thought most similarly about were *strong*, *healthy*, *efficient* and *routine*. These four attributes had almost the same average rates with very small differences.

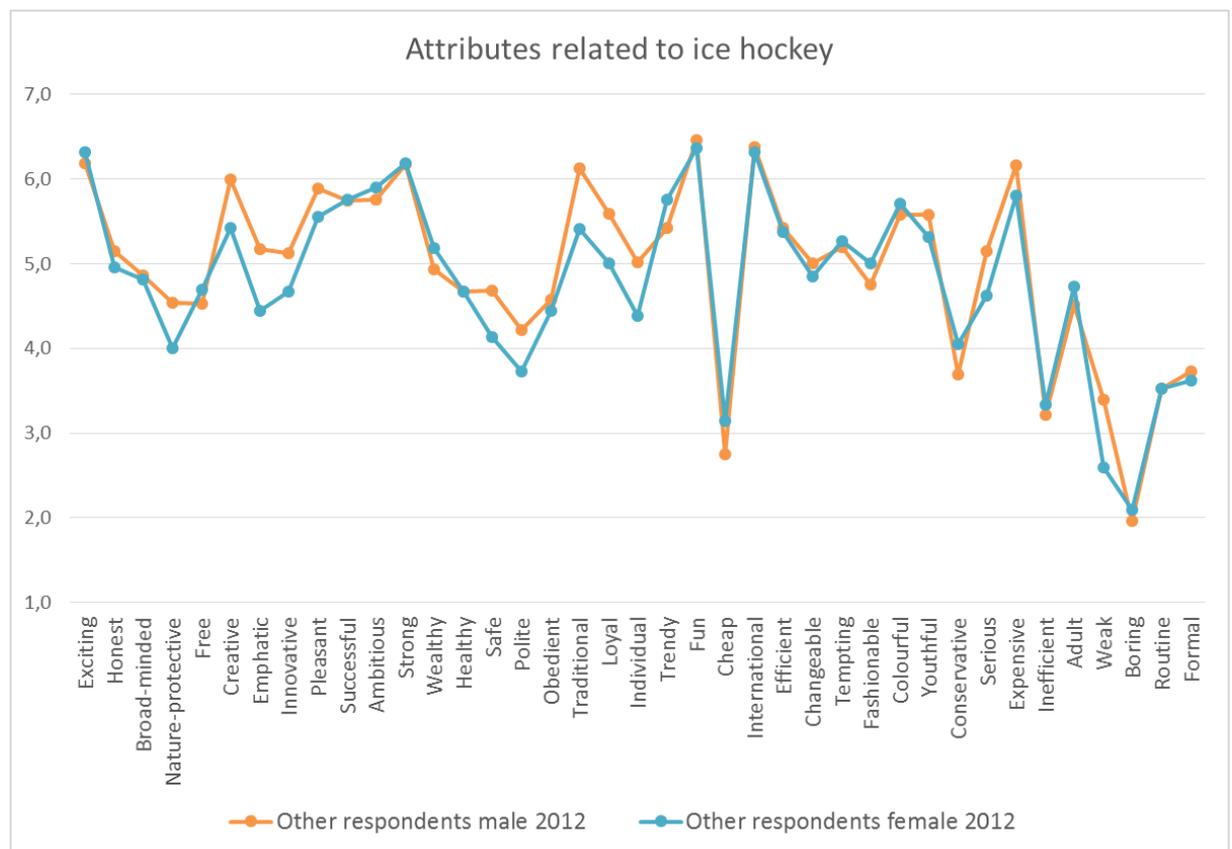


Figure 7. Attributes related to ice hockey between other male and female respondents 2012

Figure 8 shows the results from Stockholm in 2013. There were a total of 243 respondents from outside Finland and Sweden with 184 of them were male and 59 were female.

In 2013, there were not as big gender differences in the answers of the respondents from outside the host countries as there were in 2012. The attributes related to international ice hockey that male and female thought most differently about were *ambitious*, *wealthy*, *healthy*, *international* and *formal*. The average ratings of these attributes varied between 0.5 and 0.6.

The attributes that the male and female from outside the host countries in 2013 thought most similarly about were *trendy*, *efficient*, *fashionable* and *colorful* which all had very little differences in the average ratings.

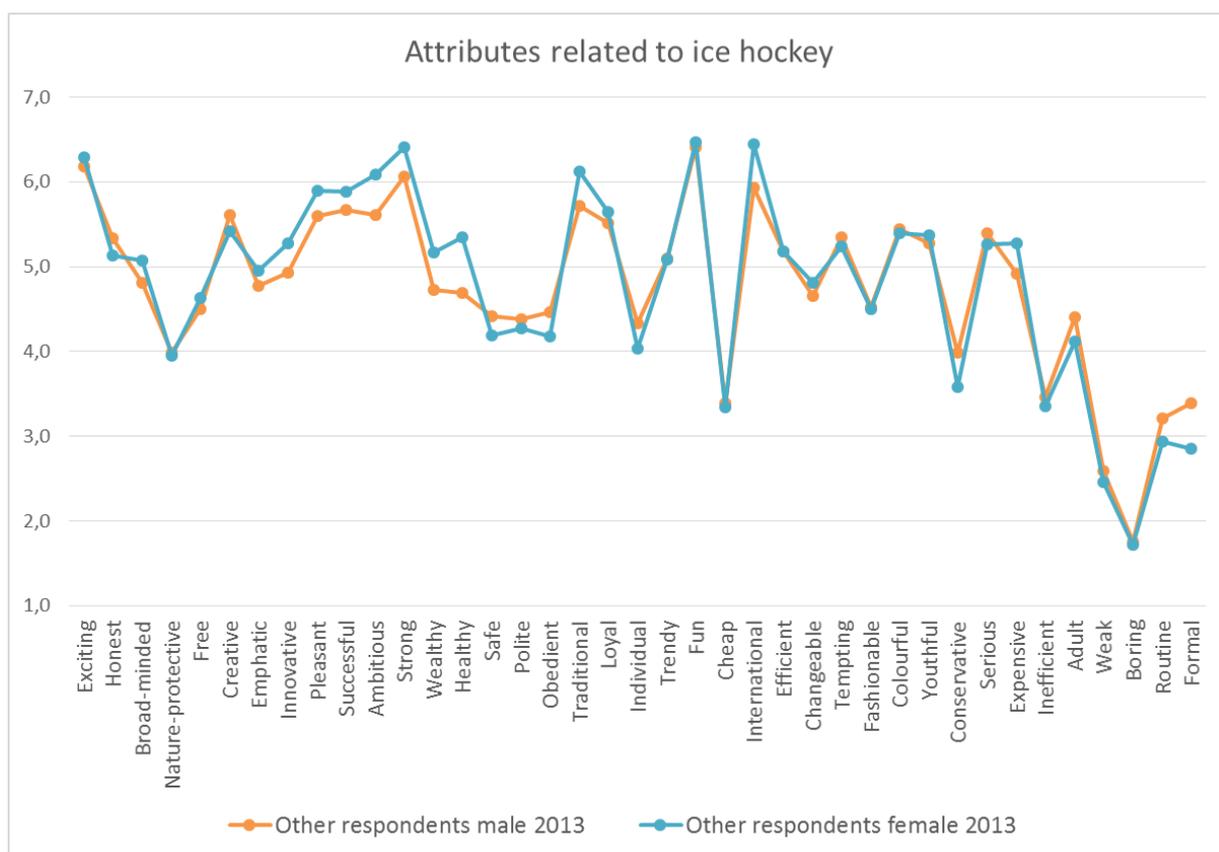


Figure 8. Attributes related to ice hockey between other male and female respondents 2013

There were some major differences between the research results regarding Finnish respondents 2012, the Swedish respondents 2013 and the respondents from other nationalities in both the years (see Figure 9). As already discovered before, the Finnish and Swedish respondents were quite unanimous with their thoughts on international ice hockey. Still, the respondents from outside Finland and Sweden had even more similar answers to those of the Swedish respondents than the Finnish respondents had.

The attributes of international ice hockey that the respondent groups disagreed about the most were clearly *formal*, *routine*, *serious*, *conservative* and *inefficient*. Rated 1–7, the average ratings on these attributes varied from 0.4 to 1.9.

The attributes that all the three respondent groups thought described ice hockey in the same way were *exciting*, *creative*, *pleasant*, *successful* and *traditional*. The average ratings of these attributes varied between 0.1 and 0.3.

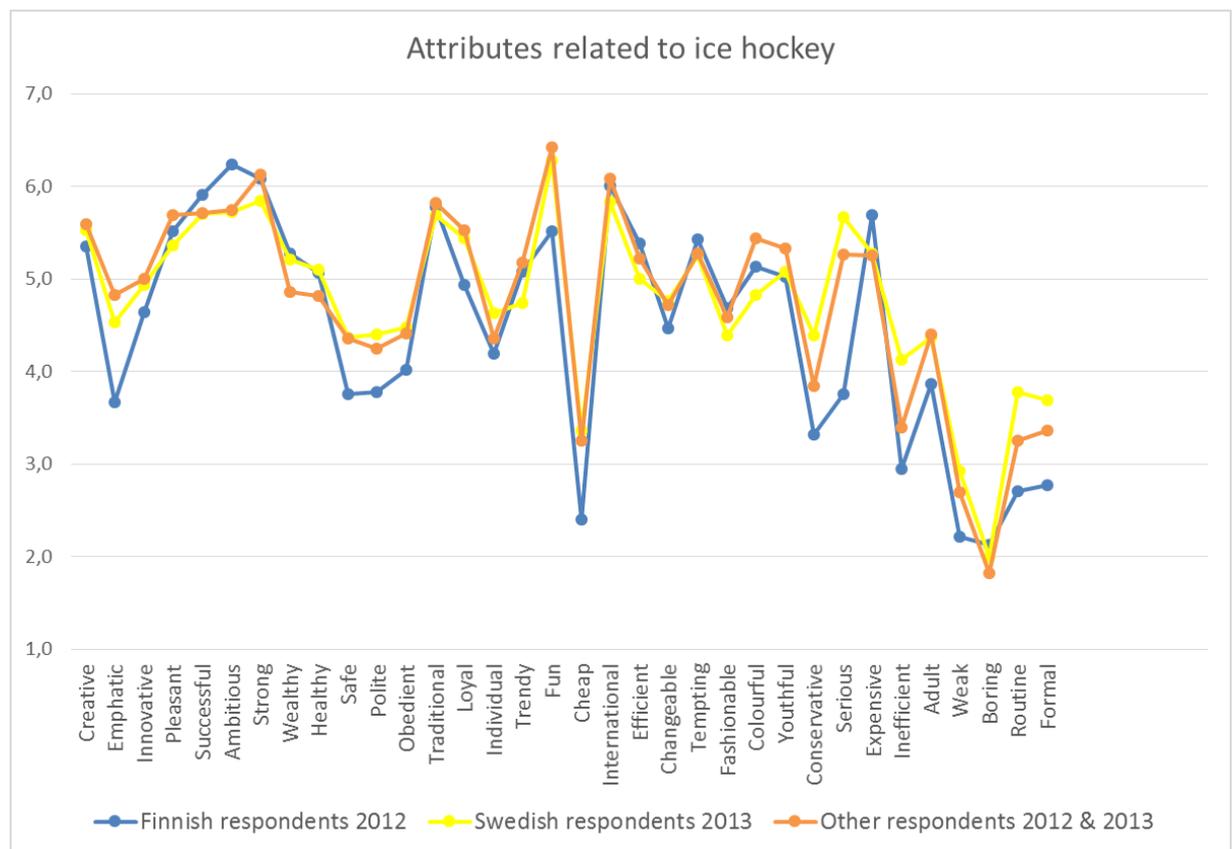


Figure 9. Attributes related to ice hockey between Finnish respondents 2012, Swedish respondents 2013 and other respondents 2012 & 2013

As the Figure 9 shows the clearest difference between all respondent groups was the perception of ice hockey as a formal sport. From all the respondents the Finnish respondents least thought of ice hockey as a formal sport. The Swedish respondents clearly saw ice hockey more formal than the other respondents. In comparison to the Finns and the Swedes, respondents from other nationalities thought of ice hockey as more formal sport than the Finnish respondents but less formal than the Swedish respondents.

6 CONCLUSION

The research for this thesis was implemented at the IIHF World Championships in 2012 and 2013 hosted by both Finland and Sweden. The target group was the ice hockey fans in the hockey garden in Helsinki 2012 and in the fan zone of Stockholm 2013. The research method used was quantitative. The goal of this thesis was to find out the brand image of international ice hockey and what it consists of. There are many aspects that affect the forming of a brand in the fans' minds. Thomas Gad's 4-Dimension brand model has been used in this study to clarify what kind of factors affect the formation of the brand image of international ice hockey. With the Gad's model it was possible to find a connection in the factors which were repeated in the answers of respondents despite the nationality of the respondent. Many factors can be utilized to create a successful brand but this study also tries to explain how co-branding can be used to build a stronger brand and more attractive brand image. This chapter also explains how the results of the research can be used in the future in organizing sport events and creating an attractive brand.

6.1 Utilizing Co-branding in building the brand image

Co-branding can be used in building and strengthening the brand image of ice hockey. International ice hockey and for example the IIHF World Championships are brands like any other. Different sponsorship deals and other cooperation with companies are ways to build the brand stronger and get visibility and create positive image.

An example of using co-branding in ice hockey is the cooperation of the Finnish lottery Veikkaus and the Finnish national team in ice hockey. Since ice hockey is very popular in Finland, Veikkaus gets great visibility as being seen as a partner of the team. On the other hand, the national team gains good reputation from the cooperation since Veikkaus is known for its charity work and donations it does for different quarters in Finland. It is a situation where both parties benefit from the alliance.

As it seems, sport marketing in general is going to a direction where the key to success is to get fans to interact with their favorite teams and athletes. In order to do that the fans and the athletes should somehow be brought together. Events where the fans meet the athletes in person are a way of doing this. In these types of events, when considering co-branding, it is good for the sponsoring companies to be present also. The companies are able to get visibility when they are seen in the same context with a highly popular sports team or an athlete. The sponsor company can become a part of the same community the fans and their team are. Perhaps the fans will more likely be interested in purchasing the products of that certain company.

The previous examples work the other way around, too. The companies that do sponsoring are often allowed to use the athletes in their promotional campaigns as part of the contract. For example the world famous footballer David Beckham has been seen in the commercials of the sporting goods giant Adidas. Other than commercials, the athletes may attend some events where the company is for example introducing their products.

As in any business, it is vital in order for the co-branding to be successful that both parties are clearly seeing the benefits of the cooperation. Both corporate brands are ought to be fully committed to the relationship and have the goals of the cooperation in common and sorted out.

6.2 Applying Thomas Gad's 4-D model

The research results were applied to Thomas Gad's 4-D Brand Model. The four dimensions of the model are functional, spiritual, social and mental. All of the 39 attributes rated by the respondents were divided into these four dimensions (see Table 10).

Table 10. Attributes divided in to Thomas Gad's four-dimension Brand model

Functional dimension	Spiritual dimension
Creative	Honest
Innovative	Broad-minded
Strong	Nature-protective
Cheap	Emphatic
Efficient	Pleasant
Changeable	Healthy
Expensive	Obedient
Inefficient	Loyal
Weak	
Social dimension	Mental dimension
International	Exciting
Successful	Free
Ambitious	Safe
Wealthy	Polite
Traditional	Individual
Trendy	Fun
Fashionable	Tempting
Colorful	Boring
Youthful	Routine
Conservative	Formal
Serious	
Adult	

Thomas Gad's four-dimension Brand model was applied in this thesis to find out the factors which the brand consists of. Attributes were divided in the four dimensions of Gad's model to find the strongest dimension which affects the forming of the fan's brand image of international ice hockey. Finnish fans in Helsinki 2012, Swedish fans in Stockholm 2013 and other nationalities from both the years were compared by dividing the 39 attributes in the four dimensions. After dividing the attributes (see appendix 2) the calculated averages (1–7) were compared so that the dimension related strongest to the building of the brand image of international ice hockey could be found out. All the three groups were analyzed in the same pattern (see appendix 3, 4, 5) after which it was possible to see in which of the four dimensions were the attributes that together had gotten the highest average rating from the respondents in each group. It could be clearly pointed out in all three groups that the social dimension was the one that had the highest rated attributes within it. The mental dimension was the one that had the most attributes with low averages. So a conclusion could be made that social aspects are what ice hockey fans from all over the world think are the most important in the sport in question. Internationality and traditions of ice hockey are aspects which tempt people to attend such event as ice hockey World Championships. The mental dimension was the weakest dimension related to international ice hockey because it includes aspects and experiences that fans least related to ice hockey as a sport.

6.3 Impact of the social dimension in creating the brand image of international ice hockey

As the previous chapter points out, the social dimension can be found to relate to the building of the brand image of international ice hockey. Thomas Gad has defined that the social dimension reflects relationships between the customers and a group of people where many people want to belong to. The social life and the social acceptance are important elements of the social dimension.

IIHF World Championships gather thousands of people from around the world which makes it a highly international event. This kind of events combine different nationalities and people in an effective way. All fans share a common interest which is ice hockey. Ice hockey as a sport has been described as a

physical, fast and super addictive form of sport. On many occasions ice hockey is also associated with a strong attitude and faith. This kind of strong attitude atmosphere also reflects in the fan culture. Ice hockey fans are fanatical and ambitious people who dress in their own country and team colors. It is like a cult of society as Thomas Gad has defined: "When you see the person who is wearing the same shirt as the representative of the brand that you have, you feel that there is the bond between you or the relationship between the people." Of course it is possible that fans from different countries can hate each other because of the chosen brand (jersey).

IIHF World Championships are a very social event which makes it so popular. Fans are a big part of this kind of sport because they win and lose with the team. Without the fans the brand image of ice hockey could be a lot different from what it is now. The impact of the social dimension is obvious when the brand of international ice hockey is build.

6.4 International ice hockey brand image

As the theoretical framework of this study points out the brand builds up from many different parts which effect on brand image found. The brand image of international ice hockey consists of fans' perceptions and experiences of ice hockey. People from different nationalities may have different images and experiences of ice hockey which makes the building of brand image challenging. The results of this study point out how these differences effect on the building of the brand image of international ice hockey. When comparing how strongly or weakly different attributes were related to international ice hockey, forming of the brand image of international ice hockey became clear. On the other hand there were some similarities in the perceptions of different respondent groups which also clarified the brand image of international ice hockey.

The answers of the respondents on the attributes given to describe international ice hockey were analyzed in the study. From the results it can be seen that the respondents from all over the world thought of ice hockey being *exciting*, *international* and *strong*. Besides those three attributes Finnish fans thought that attributes *ambitious* and *successful* were well related to ice hockey. Swedish fans thought attributes *fun* and *ambitious* also described ice

hockey well and fans from other than these two countries had attributes *fun* and *traditional* among the top five.

All of the respondents (every nationality) were very unanimous when considering which attributes were not very related to ice hockey. The five least related attributes according to all respondent groups were *routine*, *formal*, *weak*, *cheap* and *boring*. This, of course is a good sign and shows that ice hockey as a sport has potential of building its brand strong.

From these results a conclusion can be made that the brand image of international ice hockey is considered to be an exciting, strong and global, which connects people and has lots of traditions. Since one key element of building a brand is to make the brand connective, the international aspect of ice hockey is very important. International ice hockey events bring fans from all over the world together and strengthen the feeling of togetherness within the “ice hockey family.” As a further conclusion it could be said that according to this study the brand image of international ice hockey as a sport is what the brand image of a successful sport is often thought to be like.

6.5 Future research

A few studies similar to this study have been done before considering international ice hockey. Same kinds of studies have also been done considering football and rally. The survey used in the research gave a good view on the fans’ perceiving of ice hockey in the IIHF World Championships in Helsinki 2012 and Stockholm 2013. It also made it possible by analyzing the results to find out the brand image of international ice hockey.

Despite some disadvantages the research had, it provided a lot of valuable information about the fans’ thoughts on ice hockey and on the brand image of international ice hockey. The results of this study can be used in the future in planning and organizing of sport and other events and in planning of sport marketing. The thesis provides information on what the fans believe are the important aspects in ice hockey. It also provides information on the fan structure of the IIHF World Championships. By researching the results of the study, for example marketing professionals are able to predict the fans’

thoughts and by comparing to the public image of ice hockey they are able to develop the brand of ice hockey to a wanted direction.

As for developing the actual research in practice there are some things considered to need improving. The timing for the interviewing could be planned better in the future, so that when doing the interviews there would be a high number of possible interviewees. Also, since people often seem to be busy, the questionnaire should be developed on so that it would take as little time as possible to answer. One way to keep the respondents interested throughout the questionnaire could be some kind of a reward the respondent would get after answering properly.

In both World championships the number of respondents were wide, the questionnaires used were the same and there were lots of similarities in the responses so it can be said that the research is reliable. In a critical aspect there are few key points which should be taken into account when implementing the similar studies in the future.

First point is the language of the questionnaire. In World Championship 2012 the language of the questionnaire was Finnish and the respondents were Finnish. In World Championship 2013 the language of the questionnaire were English and the respondents were from all around the world. So the fact is that many of the respondents in World Championship 2013 were not able to answer to the questionnaire by their own native language. This may have caused misunderstanding in the interpretation of the questions which has affected the result of the answer. The questionnaire was also very wide and long-lasting so all the respondents did not focus the questionnaire for the whole time.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. The first page of the questionnaire



VALUES BEHIND ICE HOCKEY

We are conducting a survey important for future of international sport events. The aim here is to collect data related to ice hockey brand and values behind ice hockey.

Your answers are very important to us! Please note that all the answers will be kept confidential and presented anonymously and scientifically. The survey is organized and conducted by Sport Business School Finland.

Thank you for your participation!

1. Nationality:

2. Age:

3. Gender:

Male
 Female

4. In your opinion, how strongly the following characteristics relate to ice hockey as a sport?

1 = No relation to ice hockey at all.... 7 = Strong relation to ice hockey

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix 2. Attributes divided according to Thomas Gad's 4-D brand model

Functional

- Creative
- Innovative
- Strong
- Cheap
- Efficient
- Changeable
- Expensive
- Inefficient
- Weak

Mental

- Exciting
- Free
- Safe
- Polite
- Individual
- Fun
- Tempting
- Boring
- Routine
- Formal

Spiritual

- Honest
- Broad-minded
- Nature-protective
- Emphatic
- Pleasant
- Healthy
- Obedient
- Loyal

Social

- International
- Successful
- Ambitious
- Wealthy
- Traditional
- Trendy
- Fashionable
- Colorful
- Youthful
- Conservative
- Serious
- Adult

Appendix 3. Finnish fans' ratings on the attributes

Functional

- Creative **5,35**
- Innovative **4,64**
- Strong **6,08**
- Cheap **2,4**
- Efficient **5,39**
- Changeable **4,47**
- Expensive **5,69**
- Inefficient **2,95**
- Weak **2,21**

Average: **4.35**

Social

- International **6,01**
- Successful **5,91**
- Ambitious **6,24**
- Wealthy **5,28**
- Traditional **5,78**
- Trendy **5,08**
- Fashionable **4,68**
- Colorful **5,13**
- Youthful **5,02**
- Conservative **3,32**
- Serious **3,76**
- Adult **3,86**

Average: **5.01**

Spiritual

- Honest **4,51**
- Broad-minded **4,05**
- Nature-protective **3,74**
- Emphatic **3,66**
- Pleasant **5,51**
- Healthy **5,06**
- Obedient **4,42**
- Loyal **4,93**

Average: **4.49**

Mental

- Exciting **6,05**
- Free **4,64**
- Safe **3,76**
- Polite **3,78**
- Individual **4,2**
- Fun **5,51**
- Tempting **5,42**
- Boring **2,13**
- Routine **2,7**
- Formal **2,78**

Average: **4.1**

Appendix 4. Swedish fans' ratings on the attributes

Functional

- Creative **5,53**
- Innovative **4,94**
- Strong **5,84**
- Cheap **3,36**
- Efficient **5,0**
- Changeable **4,76**
- Expensive **5,28**
- Inefficient **4,12**
- Weak **2,92**

Average: **4.64**

Social

- International **5,83**
- Successful **5,7**
- Ambitious **5,73**
- Wealthy **5,21**
- Traditional **5,69**
- Trendy **4,74**
- Fashionable **4,39**
- Colorful **4,83**
- Youthful **5,08**
- Conservative **4,39**
- Serious **5,66**
- Adult **4,37**

Average: **5.14**

Spiritual

- Honest **5,28**
- Broad-minded **4,78**
- Nature-protective **4,14**
- Emphatic **4,54**
- Pleasant **5,36**
- Healthy **5,1**
- Obedient **4,48**
- Loyal **5,44**

Average: **4.89**

Mental

- Exciting **6,02**
- Free **4,51**
- Safe **4,37**
- Polite **4,41**
- Individual **4,63**
- Fun **6,28**
- Tempting **5,25**
- Boring **2,0**
- Routine **3,78**
- Formal **3,69**

Average: **4.49**

Appendix 5. Fans outside the host countries' ratings on the attributes

Functional

- Creative **5,59**
- Innovative **5,0**
- Strong **6,13**
- Cheap **3,25**
- Efficient **5,22**
- Changeable **4,72**
- Expensive **5,25**
- Inefficient **3,4**
- Weak **2,7**

Average: **4.58**

Social

- International **6,08**
- Successful **5,71**
- Ambitious **5,75**
- Wealthy **4,86**
- Traditional **5,82**
- Trendy **5,17**
- Fashionable **4,58**
- Colorful **5,44**
- Youthful **5,33**
- Conservative **3,85**
- Serious **5,27**
- Adult **4,4**

Average: **5.19**

Spiritual

- Honest **5,23**
- Broad-minded **4,87**
- Nature-protective **4,09**
- Emphatic **4,83**
- Pleasant **5,69**
- Healthy **4,82**
- Obedient **4,41**
- Loyal **5,53**

Average: **4.93**

Mental

- Exciting **6,19**
- Free **4,55**
- Safe **4,35**
- Polite **4,25**
- Individual **4,35**
- Fun **6,42**
- Tempting **5,28**
- Boring **1,83**
- Routine **3,25**
- Formal **3,36**

Average: **4.38**