

# **Customer and social media data in sports marketing – Guidebook**

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<p>The objective of this thesis was to find out how the semi-professional Finnish American football organizations are currently utilizing online digital tools, such as websites, social media and collected data, in their activities and organizational development. In addition to that, the purpose was to chart the views from the organizations about the utilization of business intelligence in sports management in the future. The research method used was a semi-structured internet questionnaire. In this research, the research method used was census study. The study was created by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The questionnaire was sent to 13 different organizations. The target group of this research is the organizations playing under the American Football Association of Finland and representing the country's highest level in the sport. The members of the target group have been chosen based on their goals towards professionalism in their sports activities.</p> <p>The research indicated, as expected, that the available tools for fanbase and website data collection and analyzing are not familiar enough for the key personnel in the organizations. One of the purposes of this thesis was to present how to collect relevant data and utilize it in semi-professional sports teams in Finland in order to improve the financial state of the organization and its functioning. Based on the research conducted, there is a clear necessity of this kind of guidebook in developing and growing sports organizations. It is desirable, that this thesis would help the organizations to fully understand the true value of website, social media and fanbase data in their everyday operations and would inspire them to make the necessary steps to utilizing data in practice.</p> <p>In other words, the organizations might be aware of the lack of sport management and marketing within their functioning, but as the research indicates, the resources or priorities are not enough for systematic utilization of business intelligence and digital marketing in order to expand the fanbase or enhance sponsor acquisition, which then again is in conflict with the situation if the organizations are struggling with economic problems and not filling the seats to their sport events.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> customer data, fan engagement, social media, digital marketing, sports business intelligence, sports marketing	

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	A previous study of the subject and findings .....	4
2	Business Intelligence and digital marketing in sports.....	7
2.1	Sport Business Intelligence .....	7
2.2	Digital sports marketing.....	8
2.2.1	Importance of strategic planning in sports marketing.....	10
3	Customer and consumer data in sports marketing .....	12
3.1	What is consumer and customer data? .....	12
3.2	What is a fanbase? .....	14
3.3	Why is customer and fanbase data needed in today's sports marketing?.....	15
4	Research.....	17
4.1	Research questions .....	18
4.2	Research method.....	18
4.3	Data collection and the questionnaire .....	19
5	Results .....	21
5.1	Information about the respondents and organizations .....	21
5.2	Development of organization based on the information available .....	22
5.3	Website analytics .....	22
5.4	Data utilization .....	23
5.5	Social media networks .....	24
5.6	Social media strategy, accounts and maintenance.....	25
5.7	Social media monitoring.....	25
5.8	Member and fanbase registers.....	25
5.9	General data protection regulation of the EU .....	27
5.10	Internal and external information used to support decision-making .....	27
5.11	Systematic data collection and exploitation of data in the organization's business operations in the future.....	28
6	Collecting customer data.....	31
6.1	Fanbase and customer registers.....	32
6.2	Websites and analytics tools .....	33
6.3	Facebook & other social media networks.....	34
6.4	Market research and surveys .....	35
6.5	GDPR .....	36
6.6	How to prepare? .....	37
7	How to get more customer data from website and social media in a sports organization	39
7.1	Increasing traffic to a sports organization's website .....	39

7.1.1	Search Engine Optimization (SEO)	39
7.1.2	Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Display Advertising	41
7.1.3	Social Media and Social Media Marketing	41
7.1.4	Referral Traffic	42
7.1.5	Email marketing	43
7.2	Making the most of an organization's social media	43
7.2.1	Importance of images	44
7.2.2	Videos in social media	44
7.2.3	Creating appealing content to active fans	45
7.2.4	Making organization's social media profiles easy to find	46
7.2.5	Tagging and hashtags	46
8	Fan engagement	48
8.1	Increasing fan engagement	49
8.2	Measuring fan engagement	51
9	Sponsor acquisition and data	53
9.1	Collecting and segmenting quality data	53
9.2	Proving the benefit to a sponsor	54
10	Discussion	56
	Concepts and data vocabulary	60
	Definitions of data protection regulation	61
	References	63
	Appendix 1. Questionnaire	74

# 1 Introduction

How to benefit from social media in sponsor acquisition and how to increase digital fan engagement in a sports organization? What are SEO and SEM? This thesis will, among other things, explain these digital marketing terms and introduce sports organizations to using customer and consumer data and possibility to create a solid and viable sports brand within the digital platforms.

The inspiration for this thesis originates from the self-made observations while running an American football organization in Finland. Following and learning from American sports media, I had noticed that in the United States, the home of American football, even the smaller university teams are collecting and exploiting data about their fans systematically and successfully. Of course, the concept of “small” isn’t quite the same as in Finland, but the Finnish sports organizations still have a lot to learn from the practice of collecting and using data, even within the organizations of just below the National Championship level.

The thesis gets its motivation from the observation that still too many organizations are leaning on traditional marketing and on the noble kindness of the sponsors. However, the spectators are not finding their way to the games, and the organization might be struggling with the financing of its functions. The aim of this thesis is to help sports organizations gain more spectators and fans, and to support the financing of the organization by taking advantage of the modern means brought by the digitalization. The organizations might be aware that they need to do marketing and to be present on social media, but do they know for sure, how to do it in the most efficient way, what real benefits it provides, and how can they turn the collected customer and consumer data to their advantage?

The objective of this thesis was to first survey the current situation in Finnish American football organizations and provide with them practical information how to collect customer data and how to utilize it, especially in order to increase online fan engagement and to improve sponsor acquisition, since these actions can be carried out with rather limited financial recourses. Fan engagement and gained sponsorships, again, support the financial state and development of the organization and help the organization to grow and develop its operations.

The most important contribution of this thesis is its guidebook part after the research part of the thesis. I begin the thesis by explaining some basic concepts of sports marketing and sport business intelligence, and after that I present the research made to exhibit the current state of data collection and using online platforms, such as websites and social

media, in Finnish American football organizations at the highest level in Finland. The research indicates a clear need for practical guidance in data collection, efficient social media usage and utilizing the collected data in a sports organization. The guidebook of this thesis serves the needs of sports organizations in explaining basic concepts regarding digital marketing, data collection and data utilization, and by giving practical advice how to use the online platforms available for the organization.

This thesis starts by presenting the concepts of sport business intelligence and sports digital marketing. From there, it progresses to presenting what is a consumer data, especially fanbase/customer data and web analytics data, and why it should be collected and exploited. In chapter 4, I am presenting with more detail the research conducted; its research methods, hypothesis and research questions. The results of the research and responses received from the questionnaire are displayed in chapter 5. After the theoretical part, the focus moves to the more practical part of the thesis by presenting how fanbase data can be collected, in chapter 6. Chapter 7 presents how to drive more traffic to an organization's website, how to ensure a high number of social media followers and how to improve fan engagement and sponsorship acquisition with social media and fanbase data. To conclude the research, chapter 10 presents the discussion about research results.

There are many researches conducted about the definition of sports marketing. In this thesis, the idea is only to provide the reader with an overall look at the differences between traditional digital marketing and sports digital marketing. The same applies to business intelligence: in this thesis the focus is on sport business intelligence.

In traditional goods/services marketing, data is used for several purposes, such as marketing, building consumer loyalty and enhancing brand recognition and awareness. In Finland and in sport management, data is not being used yet to such an extent as it would be possible. Why the information which is reviewed through web analytics is not been utilized in sports marketing since data through analytics can be used to estimate real behavior and to anticipate the future? By understanding what the advantage of business intelligence is, and understanding the value of it, in the future, an organization's management does not need to establish decision-making on past decisions and old models but rather on analyses that have been derived from the collected up-to-date information. (Pyyhtiä et al. 2017, 9.)

The reason for not utilizing sport business intelligence in sport management is probably due to the general unawareness and lack of knowledge towards it. Since statistics and

key numbers are widely used to analyze the game in several different sports, why statistics is not being used for fan engagement?

The practical part of this thesis, starting from chapter 6, has been written from the point of view of the semiprofessional sports teams which operate mainly on the Finnish ground. The research supporting the practical part was conducted as a survey to American football teams in the Maple league (Vaahteraliiga) and to the teams in first division of the Finnish American Football Association. Within chapter 6, you can find practical solutions how to create digital marketing campaigns based on data available and how to enrich customer data and utilize it for adding value for sponsors and fans. Data collecting and analyzes are extremely important in applying information in today's sports marketing functions, it helps organizations and teams to utilize the most important information for their benefit. (Sport and Citizenship 2017.)

As studying closely Laitila's (2016) thesis on business intelligence in Finnish sports clubs and organizations, it was obvious that business intelligence and digitalization in sport management were merely new concepts for the majority of sports organizations in Finland. In this thesis, the purpose is to take a step back and to explain what opportunities organizations can easily and cost-freely adapt to their social media strategies and daily operations.

In May 2018 in Finland, EU's new data protection regulation is taking its place. This also means changes in handling sport organizations' registers and data collection. Organizations need to pay attention to privacy and data protection, become accustomed to new concepts in data storing, and to get permissions from the data subjects. When organizations handle and use the data in a professional and secure way gaining and maintaining the confidence of fans and customers, the organizations can customize their brand message and provide better service to customers. Doing this, the organizations are on the right track with the data management. (Ruokonen 2016, 31.) GDPR doesn't mean that the data collection needs to end, vice versa, while it creates some challenges, but it also creates new opportunities.

Thus, in this thesis, I don't want to go into too technical details because it requires a deeper expertise and it is also impossible to include all of the information in this work. Different service providers can help with the more technical side of data analysis and settings. But for the organizations that are operating with lower resources, the internet is the main source to find technical guidance material that is easily exploitable, e.g. how to take

advantage of collected customer data in order to create personalized social media campaigns.

## **1.1 A previous study of the subject and findings**

In this thesis, I have thoroughly examined Osmo Laitila's thesis *Business intelligence in Finnish sports clubs and organizations* (Laitila 2016.) and used the results as a guideline in my own study.

The purpose of Laitila's study was to find out how Finnish sports clubs and organizations are utilizing business intelligence in development and decision-making of the organizations. The study examined the Finnish top league and professional sports clubs' experiences of using business intelligence in the club's operations. Laitila's study also included 11 American football teams. The survey was conducted in spring 2016 by interviewing the operational management of the organizations. Management was also enquired about the usefulness and expectations of business intelligence in the future.

The purpose of my study is to take a step back and introduce sports organizations the basic elements of data collecting and analysis, especially customer data, where to collect data and how to utilize it. The survey is directed to the organizations which are operating as registered associations but are willing to develop their organization towards a more professional direction in sports management.

The following parts were collected from Laitila's study. In the survey, the respondents were asked what are the most important sources for business intelligence and how it is being used in the organization:

When asking about the most important sources of information for the development of the organization, the data providing sources come long behind the top three. The fourth most important source of information for the organizations was the media. Customer registers were ranked in the fifth place, and the internet was in the sixth place when assessing the importance of sources of information. The survey did not specify traditional media and social media as different types of media. Less than a half of the respondents were using some sort of analyzing tool for the data collection. But, for instance, Google Analytics got no mentions.

It was founded in the study that only 34% of respondents are using a customer-/membership register very actively in the decision-making. The survey in my own study will contain



separate categories and questions how the data collected from the organization's member register and fanbase has been utilized. Laitila's study also showed that the respondents' organizations were not applying the information from the market surveys and competitor analysis at all in decision-making. Only three percent was using marketing surveys and competitor analysis very actively.

Collection of answers from the open-ended questions from the study indicate a general mindset that utilizing and collecting data would take too much time and the benefits are seen negligible. Since the majority of the organizations do not have employee/employees who have enough knowledge of the business intelligence and experience of data analysis, business intelligence is not been used systematically.

The study showed that the majority of the respondents are aware that the future holds a place for business intelligence in sports management and it will play a major part in decision-making. Also, it is recognized that the data will be in a key role in new fan and sponsor acquisitions. But only a few respondents see the value of business intelligence as a success factor in leading the organization and predicting the future. Laitila's study showed that business intelligence in sports was a completely new topic in 2016 for the majority of the respondents. This means that experience and knowledge had not yet developed around business intelligence.

As an introduction to my own thesis, I feel it's necessary to clarify and break the concept of business intelligence into smaller fragments and to give more focus to data analysis and how the organizations can utilize their own information sources for sports marketing. As one can see from Laitila's study. The majority of the organizations were not aware of the possibilities of business intelligence in 2016. Now in this thesis, I want to go into more detail and deeper in issues of what is currently being done in Finnish sports organizations in terms of using data in sports marketing. Also, I want to find out what are the things that are not being done, and more importantly, why not?

**PART I**

**INTRODUCTION TO A GUIDEBOOK**

## **2 Business Intelligence and digital marketing in sports**

We start this thesis by introducing the two core concepts regarding also data collection and data utilizing in sports organizations: sport business intelligence and sports marketing. These two concepts can be seen as umbrella concepts for the more practical measures presented in the practical part of the thesis. In short, collecting and utilizing data can be seen as ways of implementing sports business intelligence in action and as means of digital sports marketing.

### **2.1 Sport Business Intelligence**

Business intelligence includes the operations of data mining, processing and analysis of information and utilizing the information systematically. The main object of business intelligence is to utilize processed data to support continuous decision-making in order to make the strategic tactical and business decisions based on knowledge, in other words, to receive intelligence. (Pyyhtiä et al. 2017, 210.) Derived from business intelligent, the sports organization can utilize sport business intelligence to support decision-making and development of the organization. Sport business intelligence refers to rational and continuous development of sports organizations and sport events by using advanced data collection and sophisticated analyses. Sport business intelligence doesn't see the fans as only customers but also as service or experience contributors, athletes as performers, sport organizations as service providers and sport events as experiences. (Dodds et al. 2018, 18.)

According to Rasku, Rasku & Ahonen (2015, 30), data and information management has been relevant to today's business operations. In the same way, the sports industry could benefit from the business intelligence management. In addition to gaining a competitive edge to competition, sport business intelligence plays a significant role in analyzing and developing an organization and its own operations (Thierauf 2001, 5.)

When talking about sport business analytics process, it generally involves data collection, management, visualization, implementation and evaluation. The starting point for data collection and analyze for a sports organization is to focus first on defining business strategies, goals and objectives. The next step is to identify the data systems that will be used to collect and capture data. According to Keith Harrison and Bukstein (2016) "An effective and efficient data management system (i.e., "data warehouse") will enable a company to organize, standardize, centralize, integrate, interconnect and streamline the collected data. An organization will then be able to quickly mine the data and create an analytic model that transforms the raw data into practical, actionable insight. -- Data presentation and visualization will then empower analytics team members to communicate results so

that data is accessible, understandable and usable with respect to developing operational strategies.” After implementing the data-driven decisions, the effects of the decisions should be monitored and evaluated for future business operations and analytics processes.

In the world of business, the power of data has been acknowledged and taken in use. For example, many well-known brands are utilizing data to improve their content marketing strategy and customer conversations. The customer information that they gather can help them to improve their level of service and their content marketing in their online channels. (Karczewski 30 June 2014.) According to Rasku, Rasku & Ahonen (Rasku, Rasku & Ahonen 2015, 32.) “the more data you have available the more new ideas it can produce and rise its profitability when accumulated and analyzed”.

Harrison and Bukstein (2016) have presented a practical example of how a sports organization can collect and utilize data about their season ticket holders. They also emphasize the importance of finding the right systems for data collection and on the usage of the right data based on the organization’s business strategy. According to them “a sports team could leverage ticketing and point-of-sale software systems to monitor season ticket holder accounts (e.g., the frequency of ticket utilization and most recent game attendance) and concessions sales (e.g., track food and beverage inventory along with corresponding revenue at each sales area)”. Harrison and Bukstein also present intercept surveys as a mean to collect data about the season ticket holders and to determine which season ticket holders are likely or not to renew their season ticket. According to them, this can be determined based on the information: “1) amount spent on season ticket(s) and personal seat license (if applicable); 2) years of season ticket membership; 3) number of games attended during the current season; 4) whether season ticket holder is an individual or business; 5) distance of season ticket holder commute to each home game; 6) number of times season ticket holder attempted to resell tickets; 7) success rate with respect to season ticket holder attempts to resell tickets; and 8) attendance/engagement at ancillary team events with exclusive access to season ticket holders”. (Harrison & Bukstein 2016.) When a sports organization is able to define a group of season ticket holders likely not to renew their season ticket, the sports organization can target them with customized marketing measures in order to prevent the loss of an engaged and paying fan.

## **2.2 Digital sports marketing**

In this thesis, the main focus is to describe practical means for sports organizations to increase their fan engagement and enhance their sponsor acquisition with the help of

fanbase data. Since fan engagement is one of the possible objectives of sports marketing, and acquiring and maintaining sponsorships are closely linked to sports marketing with the promotion of non-sports products associated with sports, it is relevant to present shortly the basic definitions of sports marketing and digital sports marketing, since the thesis is focusing on the online data utilization. According to Mullin, Hardy and Sutton (2007, 11):

Sport marketing consists of all activities designed to meet the needs and wants of sport consumers through exchange process. Sport marketing has developed two major thrusts: the marketing of sport products and services directly to consumers of sport, and the marketing of other consumer and industrial products or services through the use of sport promotions.

The definition of Shank (2014, 5) reproduces the idea of sport marketing presented above by stating: "Sport marketing is 'the specific application of marketing principles and processes to sport products and to the marketing of non-sports products through association with sport.'"

When comparing traditional marketing and sports marketing, the main difference lies in the focus of the marketing. Wakefield (2007, 3) explains the difference using the following example: "in the consumer market, the quality of a product or service is in interest to the customer, but also and mainly the price. If the sports organization is focusing on marketing only on pricing, they are focusing on the wrong part of the area." He also adds that the price of the tickets is rarely the source of motivation to participate a sports event. The price might have an influence on the level of participation, but it is not the main reason for fans and supporters to attend a sports event.

In other words, sports marketing is a way to build a strong bond with the audience, sponsors, media, and even with the city. All these stakeholders have a role in financing and supporting the sports organization's activities. In exchange, the sports organization provides the spirit of togetherness, visibility, positive reputation, and both social and personal capital for the people. (Wakefield 2007, 12.)

As for digital marketing, it is the concept that includes modern marketing techniques used online, such as social media, blogging, search engine optimization (SEO), pay per click marketing (PPC), branding, content marketing, video marketing and app creation. Applied to sports marketing it could be used in marketing of a sports event, an athlete, an organization or a team. (Perrin 23 July 2012.) In short, digital sports marketing refers to sports marketing utilizing the techniques and platforms of traditional digital marketing.

It has been studied that 60% of smart phones and tablet owners consume sports-related content on their mobile devices at least once a day. This is a high proportion of mobile device owners, and in practice it means that most sports fans are using social media or another online channel to find information about their favorite sports teams, athletes or events. Sports fans use social media also for sharing their in-game reactions and analysis of the game, and look up the scores on the Internet. Since sports fans are using a considerable amount of time on the online platforms, digital sports marketing is an ideal marketing channel for any brand. (Graig 2018.)

### **2.2.1 Importance of strategic planning in sports marketing**

In order to succeed in sports marketing, the marketer should have a plan. It has been studied, that the organizations that have a documented plan, are more likely to see themselves successful in marketing. (Dawe 8 December 2014)

A strategic marketing plan can be seen as a comprehensive and integrated plan that takes into consideration the long-term projections of a business. According to Schwarz, Hunter & LaFleur (Schwarz, Hunter & LaFleur 2013, 18.) “the strategic sports marketing plan is a synergistic, all-inclusive, forward-looking process in terms where the sports business is at the starting point, where the sports business wants to go, and how the sports business is going the reach the vision”. They also state, that before an organization can begin with the creation of a strategic plan, they need to have an extensive understanding of the current situation of the sports business, and how that information has an effect on the overall strategic planning.

When letting data to direct an organization’s content marketing, it helps to create a stronger strategy, and also to identify new opportunities based on the organization’s competitors’ activity and its audiences’ preferences. (Harper 20 March 2014.)

According to Graig (2018), possible goals for a digital sports marketing campaign would be, for example, raising brand awareness or engaging the existing audience more with the brand in question. The decided goal will determine then the nature of the campaign: if trying to reach brand awareness, the campaign should appeal to a broad audience, and if trying to engage an audience, the campaign should find more personal and specific ways to address the audience, and this should be taken in consideration in the marketing strategy. (Graig 2018.)

In addition to a broader digital sports marketing strategy, a sports organization should also define their social media strategy. According to Perrin (23 July 2012) any sports person, team, organization or retailer should make sure that their social media strategy is aimed to increase and support user engagement. This is possible, among other things, by asking questions, sharing information, running competitions and promoting awareness of events. It is a way to enhance brand awareness and to create a platform for promoting any products or services. (Perrin 23 July 2012.)

### **3 Customer and consumer data in sports marketing**

Different industries, services, and distribution channels are facing digitalization, which results in a rapid increase of data. Customer and consumer data can be defined especially in this context, among other things, information that the fans and followers of a sports organization have provided themselves online, for example by logging in to online services, filling online forms responding to a questionnaire or browsing on the organization's website and social media channels. In the context of business, the companies can use this type self-collected data to, for example, forecasting who is going to buy online and what they are most likely going to buy. In other words, companies can direct their own strategy and customer's service experience by using the digital data. As stated in chapter 2, the objectives or sports marketing is different from traditional marketing, but the benefits and opportunities of data are similar in sports marketing. Data provides sports organization the opportunity to learn more about their fans and supporters and use this data to, for example, increase fan engagement or boost sponsor acquisition. However, this chapter is designated to define what is customer and consumer data, especially in the context of sports marketing and why it should be utilized.

#### **3.1 What is consumer and customer data?**

When talking about customers and consumers, these terms can be seen sometimes being used as synonyms. However, a consumer is defined as a person who consumes the goods whereas a customer refers to a person who buys the goods or commodity and pays for it (Surbhi 16 June 2015.)

For this reason, when marketing a product or a service, a company or an organization has to identify the needs of both the customer (buyer) and the consumer. And sometimes the requirements of a buyer may be different from the consumer, if they are two separate people. However, in many cases the buyer's decision is strongly influenced by the consumer's needs. (Balle 26 September 2017.)

Data focusing on customer's consumer behavior is commonly called consumer data. Consumer data can be collected from channels such as social media networks, online browsing data, mobile applications, purchasing history and preferences, marketing campaigns, customer service requests, call center communications and more. (Rouse 2014.) In the context of sports marketing, consumer behavior and consumer data equal with fan behavior and fanbase data.



From here on we will merge these two terms and talk only about customer data.

Every person browsing online leaves a digital footprint, and their footprint can be transformed into data. The data can be transformed again into consumer knowledge, new products and eventually into a profitable business. Data enables creating user targeted and customized services that have never been seen before. (Ruokonen 2016, 29.)

The best data-driven services and algorithms learn from every registered click and choice made by the user, and next time the user logs online, they target the user with even more customized communication (Ruokonen 2016, 29.). Such communication includes targeted relevant advertisement, offers, other products and services and generally a personalized experience according to the user's individual preferences. The main purpose of collecting and analyzing customer data is to attract, engage and retain the company's most profitable customers. Data collection often is a part of the company's broader customer relationship management strategy. (Rouse 2014.) Same way as in business, sports organizations want to attract, engage and retain their most relevant fans and supporters in the long term.

Another commonly used term in discussions about data is big data. Big data is nowadays used in marketing as well as originally in computing science, and its definition varies considerably among its users. (MIT Technology review 2013.) Microsoft has defined the term in the following words "The term 'big data' is being used to describe an increasing range of technologies and techniques. -- Big data typically refers to collections of datasets that, due to size and complexity, are difficult to store, query, and manage using existing data management tools or data processing applications. -- The quintessential aspect of big data is not the data itself; it's the ability to discover useful information hidden in the data. Big data is not just Hadoop [Hadoop is a set of open source programs and procedures] — solutions may use traditional data management systems such as relational databases and other types of data store. It's really all about the analytics that a big data solution can empower." (Microsoft 2018.)

In this thesis, the usage of big data is being excluded and the focus is on collecting and utilizing behavioral data about sports organization's fans and followers. Using big data in an organization's marketing and operations requires more in-depth know-how and resources that presumably the target audience of this thesis don't have.

### 3.2 What is a fanbase?

Sport consumers represent a vast diversity of ways to watch, engage and consume sports. Their motivation and level of commitment varies from loyal, regularly visiting followers to occasional viewers. They all also experience the sport in different ways. (Samra & Wos 2014, 263) When talking about people watching sports and following a certain sport or a sports organization, the terms used are commonly “fan” or “spectator” in an interchangeable way. However, in the sport research, these terms have two separate definitions. The term “spectator” rather refers to a person who is involved in sports by just observing a sporting event whereas a “fan” is identified as an enthusiast of a particular sport, team or athlete. (Wann 1995, 377) Fans are described to have a strong and intense emotional attachment with the consumption objects. This is also what differentiates fans from general consumers. In addition to the definition, fans behave as loyal consumers and present informal membership behaviors, that include active participation. (Samra & Wos 2014, 265) So when talking about fanbase, this thesis is referring to the committed group of followers of a particular sports organization. However, since the web and social media analytics tools do not and can not differentiate the users by their motivation, at least without any further analysis of the data, when talking about fanbase data in this thesis, in addition to the data about truly engaged fan, it includes also data about the spectators that have engaged occasionally with the sports organization.

Sport fans can be divided into different types of fans based on, for example, their motivation. Understanding how the motivation is generated, it can help a sport marketer to increase the fanbase and to create loyal consumers. (Samra & Wos 2014, 264) Still, there are other researches made describing the modern fan behavioral in the technology-driven world. The evolution of social media has given the fans their own voice and made them more empowered than ever before requiring authentic experiences as participants. An extensive study made by Repucom (2015) divided global sport fans into seven different behavioral segments that help the marketers to understand the new global fan landscape:

- **Connection fan** – Main motivation to engage with sports is sharing an experience with friends and family. They enjoy other social activities and always like to have the latest products and to stand out from the crowd by buying brands that others don't.
- **Armchair fan** – Gets their motivation from being able to connect with the wider world from the comfort and safety of their own home. Armchair fans are interested in sports, but they are not die-hard fans. Sport is just one part of their entertainment landscape.

- **Busy** – Busy fans are rather disengaged from sport because other priorities in their busy lives, not because they don't enjoy it. They have an average approach to everything, not seeing the sponsorship as neither good or bad, and they have a low usage of media in general.
- **Trend positive** – Principal underlying reason for being a fan is to identify as a member of a group. They consider themselves as early-adopters, trendsetters and brand-loyal, and buy the organization's merchandise.
- **Game expert** – Main motivation for being a fan is a deep interest in the intrinsic detail of the game. They want to know every detail and understand the strategy and nuances of the sport. As consumers they are more practical buyers.
- **Disengaged** – Disengaged group is not generally interested in sports and considers a sport event as just another TV show. They are pragmatic consumers.
- **Cynic** – Cynic fans are fans, but they feel the sport industry is being over-commercialized. Sports and athletes are considered spoiled by money and business. They prefer staying away from the sponsorship.

All of these groups included both men and women and people from all age groups and income brackets. By analyzing and segmenting a certain fanbase, the organization can gain vital information to understand their fans and their behavioral in a deeper level.

### 3.3 Why is customer and fanbase data needed in today's sports marketing?

Just like in any business, collected data is enabling the teams and leagues to get to know their fans and their preferences. Sports teams, just like any company, can use data and detailed analytics to offer their fans very personal, customized, and engaging experiences that are based on their previous interactions and behavior with the team. When visiting the team's website or social media account, the fans can be engaged to the content, such as video clips, special offers, and personalized content, that are designed and targeted to them according to their preferences. (Adelphi University 2015.)

According to Chaffey (3 January 2018), data and content marketing are the biggest trends in digital marketing in the year 2018. However, in 2017, the advertisers' know-how was seen as an obstacle for the optimal development of the digital advertising. In many organizations, the traditional marketing has been suddenly changed to digital form, and the talking about the conversions and cost per click (CPC) or click through rate (CTR) may feel challenging. The digital know-how has often been accumulated to only certain individuals when it should be a matter of the whole organization and especially of the management (Arpikari 2017, 15.) As the amount of data constantly increases, it is important to promote

rapid learning and implementation of the chosen digital strategy in the organization (Ruokonen 2016, 4.)

In brief, the utilization of customer, or in this context, fanbase data can support and help a sports organization to improve

- the economic state and funding of the organization
- strategic planning of the organization
- success and continuity of the organization
- organization's brand value.

## 4 Research

The objective of this research was to find out how the Finnish semi-professional American football organizations are currently utilizing digital online tools, such as websites, social media and collected data, in their activities and development. In addition to that, the purpose was to chart the views and attitudes of the people working at leading positions in the organizations, whether they think it's important to integrate business intelligence in the sports management in the future. The research method used was a semi-structured internet questionnaire.

The questionnaire was sent to American football organizations in the Maple League (Vaahteraliiga) and men's first division that are eager also to develop their off-field activities in the organization. The survey was sent to people in the organization's management who, by their status, were considered able to respond to the survey as accurately as possible. As a base for the survey, was Osmo Laitila's previously used survey so that the results obtained from this survey could be compared to the old results. The aim was to see the change that had presumably happened in the attitudes and the usage of business intelligence. In total, eleven American football teams had been interviewed in Laitila's study. However, Laitila's survey does not indicate which teams had submitted their responses. Consequently, direct comparisons cannot be done, but this survey covers most off the American football teams and organizations that responded to Laitila's questionnaire.

This research is using mixed research methods, in other words, both quantitative and qualitative, complementing one another. The questionnaire includes close-ended questions, but the number of responses does not meet the requirements for a quantitative research. However, the requirements for a qualitative research are met since the questionnaire includes open-ended questions. The purpose of the open-ended questions was to determine respondents' more specific opinions on matters relating to the research.

The advantage of using mixed methods is when one wants to elaborate, clarify, or build on findings from other methods. For example, according to FoodRisc Resource Centre (2006), "if a causal relationship has been established through experimental research but one wants to understand and explain the causal processes involved through qualitative research. Design can be based on either or both perspectives." In summary, the same research can apply both quantitative and qualitative research methods completing one another (Heikkilä 2014.)

## 4.1 Research questions

According to Biddix (16 July 2009) the research question begins with an issue someone would like to know more about or a situation that needs to be changed or addressed, such as:

- Areas of concern
- Conditions that could be improved
- Difficulties that need to be eliminated
- Questions seeking answers.

Research questions should in some way

- Be worth investigating
- Contribute knowledge & value to the field (Biddix 16 July 2009.)

The first hypothesis as a guideline for this thesis is that after two years of Laitila's research, business intelligence isn't yet applied in the management of sports organizations. As my second hypothesis, I presume that the Finnish sports organizations are not currently utilizing even close to all of the potential that social media, websites and collected data of their supporters and fans provide.

According to the hypothesis, the research questions of this research are:

- Do the management of American football organizations in Finland utilize information for their benefit to increase fan engagement and to seize opportunities in sponsor acquisition?
- What is the data collected by the organizations?
- Do organizations utilize social media?

## 4.2 Research method

In this research, the research method used was census study. In a census study, every member of a population is being researched. It is especially recommended to apply it in researches, where the population is small, to avoid sampling error (Heikkilä 2014.)

This study was created by using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Quantitative research gives an answer to questions, such as “How many” or “How often”. Quantitative research includes close-ended information that can be used to measure attitudes (e.g., rating scales), behaviors (e.g., observation checklists), and performance instruments. The analysis of quantitative research data consists of statistically analyzing scores collected on instruments, such as questionnaires, to answer research questions or to test hypotheses. (Survey Sampling International 2017.)

Qualitative research methods provide the answers to questions “how” or “why”. Qualitative data consists of open-ended information that the researcher usually gathers through interviews, focus groups and observations. The analysis of the qualitative data (words, text or behaviors) is typically conducted by aggregating it into categories of information and presenting the diversity of ideas gathered during data collection. In brief, with qualitative research, organizations can discover how people feel about something very generally and why. (Survey Sampling International 2017.)

These research methods are chosen because their fundamentals supported the main purposes of the research. Mixed method research combines different study methods and is used to give a better understanding of specific questions or phenomenon. By using the mixed method, the research could aim for better validity and reliability. Mixed methods research takes advantage of using various ways to explore a research problem.

Mixed methods research is a methodology for conducting research that involves collecting, analyzing and integrating quantitative (e.g., experiments, surveys) and qualitative (e.g., focus groups, interviews) research. This approach to research is used when this integration provides a better understanding of the research problem than either of each alone. Example of an advantage from the mixed method: by comparing the two types of data, the researcher can see if there is a match between what management think they are doing and what they are actually doing in terms of business intelligence. Or the researcher collects data to assess people’s knowledge and data utilization using a survey instrument that mixes qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) questions, and both forms of data are integrated and analyzed. (FoodRisc Resource Centre 2016.)

### **4.3 Data collection and the questionnaire**

The target group of this research is the organizations playing under the American Football Association of Finland and representing the country’s highest level in the sport, including the organizations in the Finnish National Championship League, the Maple League, and in the second highest league in Finland, the first division. Since the main purpose of using

business intelligence is to improve the financial state and the business activities of the organization, the members of the target group have been chosen based on their goals towards professionalism in their sport activities.

The recipients of the questionnaire were people in charge of the operative functions of the organization, working as executive managers or in a managerial capacity in marketing or administration. The aim of the selection was to target the questionnaire to those people who most likely have the highest level of expert knowledge of the organization's business activities and who has an influence on the development of the organization's business activities.

The questionnaire was sent to 13 different organizations as a weblink on 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2018. A reminder was sent a couple of weeks later on 15 March. Since the target group was small and some of the recipients were familiar with the author, some of the recipients were approached also by telephone and email in order to remind them about the questionnaire. The findings became completed for processing on 18 March 2018.

The questionnaire was made using Webropol 2.0 and it was written in Finnish. The author wanted to write it in Finnish and allowed the responses to be given in Finnish since the chance of misinterpretation of the questions and terms used in the questionnaire would have been higher if responded in English. In addition, another risk of demanding responses in English was that the number of responses might have been lower.

The response rate of the questionnaire was 83%. Ten out of twelve organizations responded to the questionnaire. One organization could not be reached, and one of the chosen organizations decided not to respond to the questionnaire, because they felt that they didn't have anyone in the organization capable of responding to the questions in the questionnaire.



## 5 Results

Altogether ten organizations out of twelve responded to the questionnaire. All the questions were not answered by all the respondents, but all questions had at least some responses.

### 5.1 Information about the respondents and organizations

Six of the respondents were in the role of a chairman of the board in their organization, and two of the respondents were executive managers. In addition, one of the respondents was working as the head of IT and media relations of the organization. Five organizations represented the Maple League (Vaahteraliiga) and five of the organizations came from the first division level. Two of the organizations have a full-time employee on their staff, and the rest of the organizations don't have any full-time employees in their organizations. From the respondents, 50% notified that they have no part-time employees working in their organizations. Three of the organizations have a single part-time employee working for them. One of the organizations has three part-time employees, and one of the organizations employs five part-time employees.

Table 1. Paid employees and correlation to data collection

	All	Full-time and part time employees working in the organization											
		No full-time employees		1 person		No part-time employees		1 person		3 persons		5 persons or	
<b>Organization has a designated person or people who are responsible for updating social media</b>	N=10	N=8		N=2		N=5		N=3		N=1		N=1	
: Yes	90	100	8	50	1	100	5	66,67	2	100	1	100	1
: No	10	0	0	50	1	0	0	33,33	1	0	0	0	0
<b>Organization is keeping track on social media insights</b>	N=10	N=8		N=2		N=5		N=3		N=1		N=1	
: Yes	90	100	8	50	1	100	5	100	3	0	0	100	1
: No	10	0	0	50	1	0	0	0	0	100	1	0	0
<b>Organization collects information about its members to a member register</b>	N=10	N=8		N=2		N=5		N=3		N=1		N=1	
: Yes	100	100	8	100	2	100	5	100	3	100	1	100	1
: No	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Organization collects information about its fans to a fanbase register</b>	N=10	N=8		N=2		N=5		N=3		N=1		N=1	
: Yes	10	12,5	1	0	0	0	0	33,33	1	0	0	0	0
: No	90	87,5	7	100	2	100	5	66,67	2	100	1	100	1

It seems that there is no difference between organizations which have a full-time employee or non-paid workers when it comes to social media or digital marketing activities. Full-time employment doesn't inevitably mean that the organizations would use the resource for digital marketing and data collecting. Although, organizations that only have one part-time employee seem to be the most active in data collecting.

## **5.2 Development of organization based on the information available**

The first question on the questionnaire surveyed the sources of information used in the decision-making of the organization. This question was chosen to be the first one so that the respondents could not choose from given options. The reason for the open question was to make the respondents reflect and go over with their own words, which are the sources of information that are being used in the organizations currently. Nine out of ten respondents gave their answer to this question.

The most popular source of information was to observe what the other organizations were doing and finding information on the internet. Four respondents named the internet and following others as a source of information. The joint second most popular source of information was stated to be the own personal experience, based on the past experiences, and the American Football Association of Finland. Three respondents named these as a source of information in their organization. Other sources mentioned were different universities and sport institutions, public authorities, Finlex, social media, magazines and trainings.

## **5.3 Website analytics**

It was found in the research, that all of the organizations had their own website.

Respondents were asked if their organization is using any website analytics tool. Six of the organizations were using analytics tools on their website (Figure 1.) Four organizations were using none. In the follow-up question, the organizations were able to define which analytics tools they are using. The responses included Google Analytics and Facebook Insights. One of the respondents stated that their organization had outsourced the web analytics to a third-party service provider, one respondent told that they had their own analytics tool in use, and one of the respondents wasn't able to name the analytics tool being used.

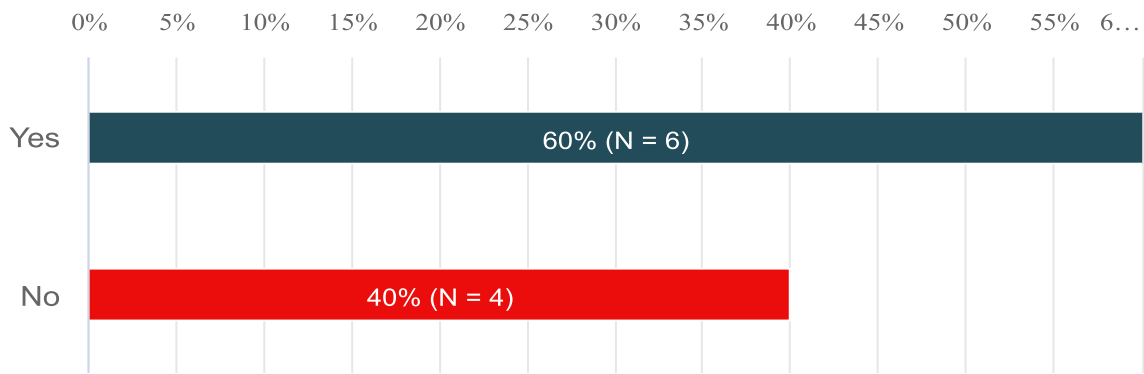


Figure 1. Organizations using website analytics tools on their websites.

#### 5.4 Data utilization

Seven of the organizations feel that the use of data in decision-making is very important. Three of the respondents feel that data usage is not important at all. Six out of ten respondents (n=10) stated that their organization is utilizing data, and one organization representative responded that they are not utilizing data in their operations. Four organizations did not answer the question. If the respondent selected the option where it was stated that the organization is not utilizing the data, the follow-up question asked the respondent to explain their answers.

The reasons for not utilizing the collected data were divided among not knowing how to do it, not having the resources to do it, and not having the time to do it. One of the respondents stated that they are having an ongoing website renewal process and for that reason they are not able to utilize the website data yet.

The follow-up question for the respondents who were utilizing data, was an open question that asked them to define for what reason data is being used. According to the respondents, data from analytics tools are utilized generally for sales and marketing or just marketing purposes. Two of the organizations did not specify the final usage of the data but only stated that they are using data to see clicks and shares, or to see the number of page visitors.

## 5.5 Social media networks

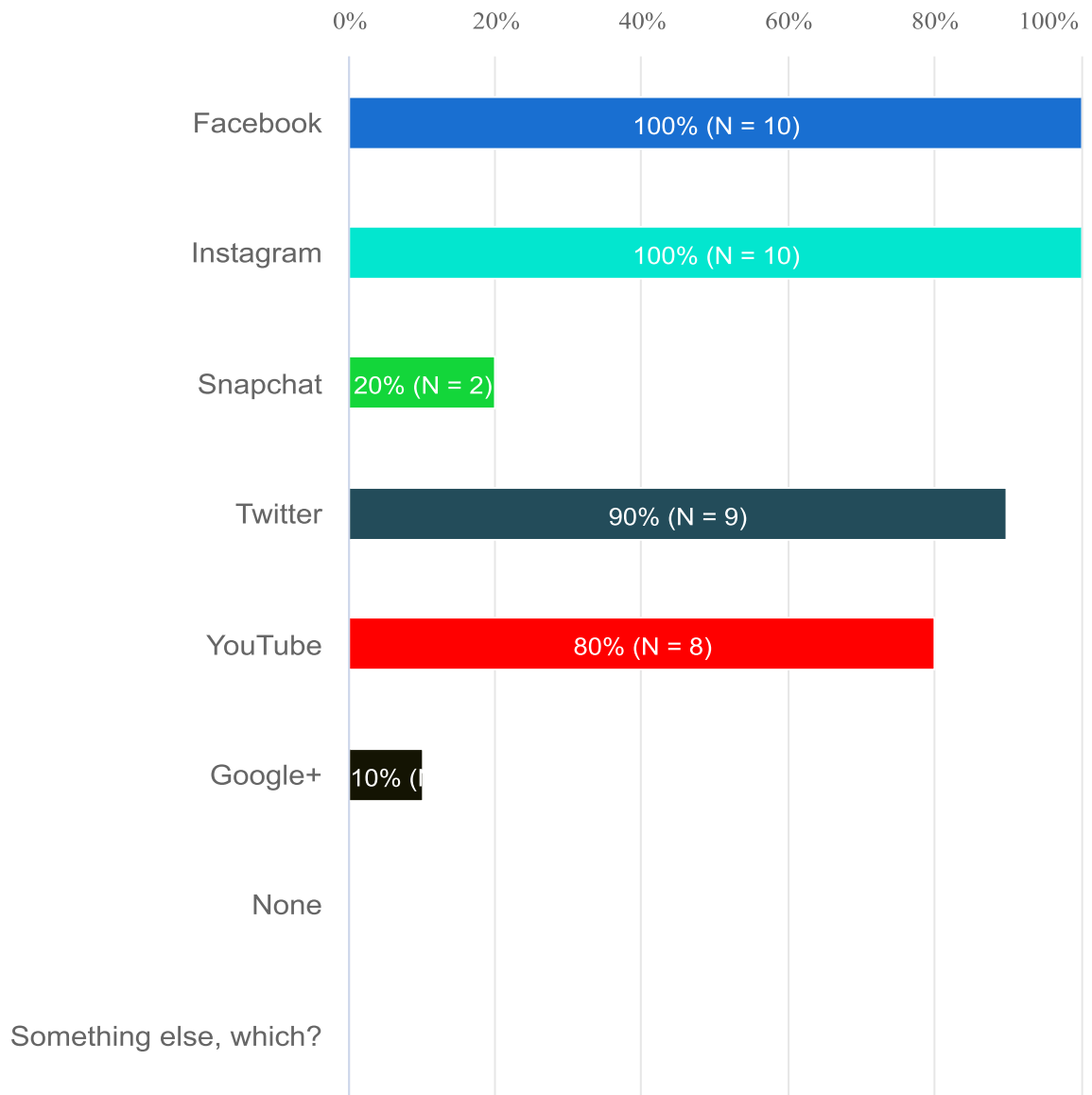


Figure 2. Social media networks used in the organizations.

All of the organizations surveyed are using social media. It is notable that all of the organizations are using more than one social media network. All of the organizations had profiles on Facebook and Instagram, and nine out of ten were using also Twitter. Eight organizations out of ten had a user account on YouTube and two organizations had a SnapChat profile. Only one organization was using Google+.

## **5.6 Social media strategy, accounts and maintenance**

90% (n=10) of the respondents' organizations have named a person or have hired personnel who are in charge of the organization's social media content and maintenance. When asked about having a social media strategy in the organization, the responses were divided into two different camps among the respondents(n=10). Half of the organizations had a social media strategy and the other half did not.

If the respondents stated that their organization doesn't have a social media strategy, they were asked to give a reason for it. According to the responses, two of the organizations are considering of having a social media strategy, one has scheduled the creation of one for the ongoing year, and one organization could not give a reason for not having a social media strategy.

## **5.7 Social media monitoring**

Only one of the organizations does not monitor the social media insights. Nine of the respondents filled the open question about in what way the organization is keeping track of social media insights and what tools are being used for that. Two respondents mentioned that they are using Facebook's own analytics tools, but they didn't specify for what type of data collection. One of the respondents stated generally using a social media insights tools and didn't give any further information about the type of information monitored. One other tool mentioned was a third-party's own statistics tool, but not for what purposes. Other respondents didn't name the tools used for social media monitoring, and they just listed the type of information that they were following. Three of the organizations are monitoring at least the number of likes and shares of their posts. Two of these organizations are, in addition, monitoring the page visits and post views. One of the respondents stated that they are monitoring the number of visitors to utilize this information with the stakeholders. One respondent wasn't able to name any tool used for their social media monitoring.

## **5.8 Member and fanbase registers**

All of the respondents (n=10) are collecting information about their members. Organizations were asked what type of information they are collecting. Eight out of ten respondents specified the nature of collected information and two left the question blank.

Three of the responses specified that they are collecting the name, address and contact information. Three other respondents just stated that they are collecting the basic information, so it is presumed that this includes the name and some type of contact information. One respondent stated that they collect the phone number, address and player roster information, so it is assumed that this information also includes the name of the member. Only one respondent notified that they are collecting in addition to the name, address and contact information, gender, birth year, information about the national player license and other important information, such as courses taken by the person. Two of the respondents didn't specify at all, what type of information they are gathering about their members.

After asking about information collected about the members of an organization, the next question was about information collected about their fans. Nine out of ten organizations are not collecting any data from their fans. Respondents who were not collecting data about their fans were asked to explain their reasons for it. Two of the respondents named the lack of resources and one the lack of time. One respondents stated that their organization hasn't got any supportive members whose information could be collected whereas two respondents couldn't name a reason.

The organization which is collecting data from their fanbase informed that the data collected includes names and e-mail addresses. The collected information is being used for marketing and to serve benefits for those fans who are season ticket holders.

Table 2. Importance of member and fanbase data for the organizations in decision-making.

<b>Organization sees the use of data in decision making</b>		
Organization collects information about its members to a member register:		
Yes.		
(N=10)		
Not important at all (30%)	30 %	N=3
Very important (70%)	70 %	N=7
average	1.7	
Organization collects information about its fans to a fanbase register:		
No.		
(N=9)		
Not important at all (30%)	33 %	N=3
Very important (70%)	67 %	N=6
average	1.67	

Although all of the respondents do collect information about their members, 30% of the organizations don't see the value of data in decision-making. Only one organization does

collect information about their fans but 67% of the organizations recognize the importance of data collection from the fanbase.

## 5.9 General data protection regulation of the EU

According to the survey, only one organization was not aware of the upcoming EU data regulation and of the changes it will bring. Nine other respondents were asked to specify how the organization is prepared for the changes in legislation, and seven of these responded to the question.

Three of these seven responses named a web application called MyClub, designed especially for sports organizations. Three other organizations have taken measures for the changes, such as updating their member register, naming a responsible person for the data handling and asking permissions for utilizing the data. Two of these organizations have sought help outside their organization, one from the American Football Association of Finland. One of the seven respondents stated that their organization haven't taken any measures yet for the GDPR.

## 5.10 Internal and external information used to support decision-making

All the correspondents (n=10) responded to the question which internal and external information sources are utilized in the process of decision-making in the organization.

Table 3. Organizations using the following internal and external sources of information to support decision-making.

	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Personnel surveys	6	60%
Fan surveys	4	40%
Customer relationship management systems	1	10%
Sponsor surveys	5	50%
Market survey	2	20%
Competitor analysis	0	0%
Event feedback surveys	1	10%
Exeternal consulting	3	30%
Public reports	1	10%
Other sources, which?	0	0%
None of above. Why is that?	2	20%

Two of the organizations explained why any of the given options were not being used in the organizations' decision-making. The reason for not using any sources of information mentioned in Table 3. was told to be the lack of time and uselessness of the sources since the activities in the organization are based on volunteering.

The organizations that were using internal or external sources of information were asked why they had chosen the particular sources. One of the main motivations was the easiness of the certain source, according to three respondents out of six. Two of these respondents mentioned the lack of resources, and for this reason it is important to have a tool or source of information that is easy and fast to use. Other reasons mentioned were previous positive experiences, and the extra value that their organization is gaining from the usage of the certain source of information.

#### **5.11 Systematic data collection and exploitation of data in the organization's business operations in the future**

All of the respondents feel that the systematic data collection and utilizing will be an essential support while making financial and business-related decisions.

Respondents were also asked to describe their opinions about collection and utilizing data, and all of the answers reflected positive outlook towards the data collection and utilizing in order to develop the organization. The respondents expressed that they feel that data could help them to support sales, get more fans and players and possibly coaches and staff members for the organization, create continuity within the organizations functioning, and to create targeted marketing. Four out of the nine respondents mentioned that they feel that collecting and utilizing data could help them to develop the organization.

Nine out of ten respondents state that they are not utilizing the website, social media or fanbase data that they have access to. This is a clear indication, that the organizations are aware of the possible benefits of collecting data but do not possess either the knowledge or know-how to utilize it or the financial resources to outsource the work to the third party for gathering, analyzing and presenting the data.



Table 4. Data in decision-making now and the future.

<b>Organization sees the use of data in decision making</b>		
In the future, will systematic data collection and exploitation of data be an essential way to support organization's decision making in business operations, Yes. (N=10)		
Not important at all (30%)	30 %	N=3
Very important (70%)	70 %	N=7
average	1.7	

30% of the respondents feel that the use of data in decision-making is currently not important at all but the respondents still sees the opportunities in the future for utilizing data to help the organization's business operations.

**PART II**  
**GUIDEBOOK**

## 6 Collecting customer data

As stated in chapter 3, there are various methods to data collection. Stark (22 September 2015) summons that “Anywhere you have a customer touch-point, you have a data stream”. She lists examples of those touch-points: track visits and interactions across the organization’s social media accounts, mobile apps, websites, measure sharing and engagement on the organization’s content marketing efforts, solicit customer participation and feedback.

The influence of social media, especially Facebook, cannot be emphasized enough. In 2016, at the Q1 Sports Fan Engagement Conference, it was announced by the researchers that nearly 1.6 billion people engage monthly with content on Facebook. It was stated in the same presentation that 25% of all digital referral traffic comes from Facebook. (Dawe 8 December 2017.)

The concern about customer or fanbase data utilization is also a current issue that the organizations must take into consideration. Customer data will be a source of competitive advantage also in the field of sports in the future, but so will gaining fans’ confidence be equally important. Organizations that act in a transparent way in data collecting, give their fans control of their personal data, and offer value in return of the data utilization will be trusted by their fans and receive an even wider access to fanbase data. If the organization fails to be transparent about the utilization of data and offers no value for the fans, there’s a high risk of losing those fans. (Morey, Forbath & Schoop May 2015 May 2015)

In addition to the organization’s internally collected data, there are possibilities to buy and exploit purchased data for marketing and analyzing purposes. In Finland, public institutions, such as Population Register Centre and Finnish Transport Safety Agency, offer companies and organizations the possibility to target advertisement to a target group via a third-party marketing agency based on their public data.

The public institutions offer vast possibilities for target groups and in some cases, the target group data can be enriched with the marketing agency’s own data. However, the channels and means of marketing are more limited when using public data in targeted marketing. (Fonecta 2018d.)

In the following, this thesis presents some of the most common ways to collect customer data, or in this case fanbase data, from the organization’s own sources.

## 6.1 Fanbase and customer registers

Especially in marketing, the most important data source is the customer register of the organization (Fonecta 2018d.) In sports, an equivalent source of data is the fanbase. Collecting a customer register or a fanbase is free and it doesn't hide any data privacy issues, since the customers, or in the sports context, fans, have initially consented to giving their information to the organization collecting the data (Talvensaaari 26 May 2016.) In addition, the data collected to the organization's customer register is owned completely by the organization that collected it (Stark 22 September 2014.)

It is recommended that the information gathered to the fanbase contains at least the basic information, such as

- name
- address
- phone number
- email.

In addition to the contact information, it is recommended to ask the fans their year of birth and sex, since this information helps the organization to target their marketing. However, there shouldn't be too many questions in the registration form, since too many questions can make the fan change his or her mind about the registration. When gathering information to a fanbase, one should always ask the person's permission to receive information about the organization's offers, products, and events.

What it comes to collecting email addresses, a good policy is to confirm the email address separately with a double-opt-in process, where the fan receives a confirmation message after registration or subscription and agrees to receive marketing material from the organization by clicking the link in the confirmation email. The double-opt-in is easy to take in use with the modern automatized marketing solutions.

After saving the information in the fanbase, the organization must make sure that the data stays up-to-date. A good policy is to always mark up the date when the information was last checked together with the contact information of the fan. If the fanbase contains a confirmed email address, it could be sent every year a confirmation message where the person is asked to confirm that his or her contact information is up-to-date. (Fonecta 2018d.)

## 6.2 Websites and analytics tools

When talking about data collection from websites, it is commonly described as a function called web analytics. According to the definition of U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services 2018) “Web analytics is the collection, reporting, and analysis of website data. The focus is on identifying measures based on your organizational and user goals and using the website data to determine the success or failure of those goals and to drive strategy and improve the user’s experience.” In other words, web analytics provide information about how the website (and digital marketing campaigns) of an organization functions and succeeds in fulfilling its goals and creating conversions. Web analytics can enable an organization, in this context, a sports organization, to attract more visitors to its website, retain old fans and attract new ones, or increase the revenue from online-store sales. (Rouse 2005.)

One of the most commonly used web analytics tool is Google Analytics. Google Analytics is easy to get, install, and it is cost-free. Google Analytics provides accurate information in real time, which is an important feature when web analytics is used to make decisions concerning, for example, the organization’s marketing. (Oleg 6 October 2016) In this guide, it is highly recommendable for every organization to install Google Analytics on their website and determine specific goals for their website.

In these days, it is essential to have web analytics attached to one’s website. Without web analytics, it’s not possible to improve the digital marketing and one is not able to determine, whether the digital marketing or content marketing is profitable. Web analytics give the organization the tools how to develop its digital marketing and which channels should be used in marketing. It tells, for example, which pages the users visit and in which order, how much time they spend on the site, where they come from to your site, which are the most common exit pages and most popular pages of your site. This gives the sports organization information to determine, where their site succeeds and where it fails in serving the fans. (Suomen Digimarkkinointi 2018.)

Traditionally web analytics and customer register have been separate systems, but nowadays it is increasingly more common to feed information from web analytics tools to customer relation management (CRM) systems. However, the online behavioral data can be included in the customer register only if the user is identified. The identification of a user can be resolved by having the user logging in on a website, fulfilling his or her contact information to an online form or clicking on the link in an email sent by the organization. The

marketing automation tools normally take care of identifying a user automatically. (Fonecta 2018d.)

### **6.3 Facebook & other social media networks**

Different social media networks have gained vast popularity among people and have engaged people to spend a great proportion of their time awake on social media. People have also consented to give their personal information to the service providers and letting third-party actors take advantage of the information given, for example, to targeted marketing. (Fonecta 2018d.)

In the world of sports, especially the big actors have also woken up to the fact that the majority of their fans are living in the social media. If the organizations wish to reach and engage their fans, they also must be present in social media. The social media has also provided a straightforward and cost-free way to direct their message to the fans without any intermediaries. (Force 26 August 2016.)

In Finland, in the year 2017, 61% of the population had been using at least one social media network. At the age group of 16 to 24 years, the proportion was 96%, at 25 to 34 years, 92%, at 35 to 44 years, 81% and from 45 to 54 years, 64%. (Statistics Finland 2017.) According to another research conducted by mobile operator DNA (DNA 2017.) in 2017, 82% of Finnish people of the age of 15 to 74 years use Facebook at least occasionally. 61% of these people use Facebook daily. YouTube gathers 88% of the population to watch its videos, and 66% of them use YouTube at least on weekly basis. Instagram has 46% of Finnish people registered as its users and 36% say that they use it weekly. Twitter has 35% of the Finnish population registered and 20% of the users follow it at least weekly. As the last presented social media network, there is Snapchat with 22% of Finnish people as its users, 16% of them using it weekly. From the statistics made, it is clear that Facebook is the most popular social media service in Finland throughout all age groups. However, the popularity of especially Instagram and Snapchat is greater in the youngest age groups.

When talking about social media data, also known as social data, one is referring to all of the raw information collected from individuals' social media activity, for example, the organizations' prospects and customers. Social media data provides also information how people engage with the social media content of the organization. All this data is presented in form of numbers, percentages, and statistics that are comparable to the organization's

social media strategy goals. The raw data from social media includes the following metrics: shares, likes, conversions, comments, mentions, impressions, and clicks. (Segal 2018.)

For example, Facebook offers various types of information for a business page owner. On the page, Facebook Insights provides, among other things, data about the performance of different post types, best performing posts, post reach and engagement rates. All this information allows the page owner to see how their content is being received. In addition to the posts' performance statistics and analytics, social media data gives remarkable insights about the audience interacting with the page or account. (Harper 20 March 2014.)

A further step in collecting and analyzing data from Facebook was taken, when Facebook Analytics, Facebook's own equivalent to Google Analytics, was launched (Halsas 10 July 2017.) Facebook Analytics offers a Facebook page owner the chance to "understand and optimize your complete customer journey across mobile, web, bots and more". The Facebook Analytics features enable the page owner to

- See rich demographics – In order to understand the customers and potential customers at a deeper level with rich demographics and audience insights.
- Measure across channels - Facebook Analytics unifies data across channels, including Facebook Pages and bots on Messenger, to get the complete picture.
- Optimize for growth – To easily build a funnel, revenue, and retention reports to analyze performance and go into specific audiences with precise segmentation tools.
- Get insights faster – By using advanced machine learning and expertise in growth, Facebook Analytics surfaces valuable insights and trends automatically. (Facebook 2018.)

The more Facebook users have visited an organizations website, the more it is possible to get information about the Facebook users. For example, if one sees that a certain demographic group has the best conversion rates, this information can help to target marketing to this specific group and to its look-a-like groups. (Kinanen 2017b.)

#### **6.4 Market research and surveys**

Market researches provide information about, among other things, consumer attitudes. A market research can benefit a sports organization when it wants to get reliable information about their market share and/or insights about their fans' attitudes and opinions about the organization itself and its competitors. Market researches have also a crucial role when

evaluating the effectiveness of traditional offline marketing channels. Digital marketing, on the contrary, can be measured directly for the data it provides.

A marketing research is also needed very often when an organization is in need of a customized segmentation model that divides the market into most profitable and important segments and non-interesting segments for the organization. (Fonecta 2018d.)

Sports organizations profit from analyzed and segmented data about their fans. High-quality fan data is an important advantage for an organization in sponsorship acquisition. If an organization hasn't got yet usable data about their fans, a quick and cost-effective way to get it is to create a survey. A customized survey will collect specific and relevant data that will profit the sponsor and help it to reach its marketing objectives. With the ability to create customized surveys, the organization has an advantage over retaining old sponsorship and landing new ones. In order to define the content of a fan survey, the organization needs to cooperate with its sponsor and listen to its needs. (Baylis 2017) More about sponsor acquisition with the help of data can be found in chapter 9.

## **6.5 GDPR**

The objective of the new data protection regulation is to improve the protection of personal data and the rights of the registered users. This alteration is driven by rapid technological progress and globalization. The amount and scope of data acquisitions have increased, as well as the amount of information to be used by companies and public authorities. Security threats and violations cause challenges to data protection. Data is defined by all the information that applies to a person or persons. The main purpose of the change in the new data protection regulation is the registered access to personal data and information management without expenses. Registered has the right to see the information gathered and to know how data is being exploited. Registered has the right to be forgotten, i.e. if required, registered data must be removed from the register. (Oikeusministeriö 2017, 9.)

All customer, marketing, and personnel registers are counted as registers, regardless of the form of the registers. Also, in sports organizations, all the membership information collected in hard copies or Excel charts count as registers that should be revised before May 25th, 2018 when the regulation will be implemented in Finland.

Data processing should be transparent regarding the collection, use and exploit of information. The data subject should easily understand what information is used and why the information is collected. To collect data, clear consent is required for the processing and



collection of data. Consent may be written, electronic or oral consent. In electronic form, this should mean that the permission is given on a website by ticking a box, for example, web pages cannot override the issue anymore by the mere "OK" or the pre-approved clause, but the data subject must clearly indicate consent. If the use of data has several purposes, the given consent should cover all uses. (Regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC, article 21.) The data controller is obliged to demonstrate the existence of consent. (Oikeusministeriö 2017, 20.) The data subject must know what risks, rules, and rights are related to the processing of data. The collected data must be up-to-date, accurate and the data should be used only for the purposes for which it has been collected. Data retention should be minimized, for example, personal information should only be kept for the required purposes. Information should be always processed with the necessary data security. (Regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC.)

## **6.6 How to prepare?**

The first step is to clarify the current state of data processing and take data privacy into consideration when planning new registers. Next should be determined on what basis the organization handles personal information. The processing of personal data must always be justified by the law. In the future, the data subject must give consent to the collection of personal data and organizations should collect and use the information only for the approved usage. (Regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC, article 7.)

One of the most important tasks is to identify and list all available personal registers. Registers should also be reviewed and updated. If the information in the register is no longer needed for the purposes for which it was collected, it is necessary to take care of the destruction or archiving the data. It is also compulsory to review and update the privacy policy and to name a data protection officer. The data protection officer shall be aware of data protection laws and regulations to act as required by the data protection law. (Regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC, article 37.)

One of the tasks required is to assess the risks associated with the processing of personal data in the organization and determining how to minimize the risks. Breaches of the privacy regulation may include fines or a ban on the processing of personal data. In case of security breaches, they should be notified without any delay to the parties involved so that the necessary precautions can be taken. (Regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC, article 33.)

In conclusion, every organization should make sure that they update their privacy statement and nominate a data protection officer and the responsible persons accessing data files. The next task includes assembling all the collected data and registers in electronic format, so if necessary, the organization can quickly present the authorities what information is collected and for what reason. The re-organizing of the data includes also removing unnecessary data and, if necessary, providing data anonymization. Team and organization members must also be asked to give a permission to collect, store and use their information.

## **7 How to get more customer data from website and social media in a sports organization**

In this part of the thesis, the main focus is to present practical tools for semi-professional sports organizations how to make the most of their websites, social media and data collected from these sources. All these tools can be used in improving the organization's fan engagement and sponsor acquisition with relatively small expenses. This chapter starts by presenting different ways to increase traffic to an organization's website. The more traffic the organization has on its website and social media, the more data it gets from its fanbase. The second part presents how to make the most of social media that allows the organization to get more social media followers and more data about them. After this chapter, the following two chapters present how to improve fan engagement and sponsor acquisition with data and social media.

As for sports organization's marketing efforts, it makes more sense investing in digital channels like social media and digital advertising, rather than spending the money on TV ads, billboards and radio ads. Digital channels provide more value for money and are more relevant to today's market. (Ansley 2017.)

### **7.1 Increasing traffic to a sports organization's website**

When a sports organization's website is in order and has a healthy number of regular visitors, it sets a good starting point for improving fan engagement and sponsor acquisition that are treated in the following chapters. The objective of this part is to provide sports organizations with practical and simple tools how to increase the traffic to their website which doesn't necessarily require a high level of expertise.

#### **7.1.1 Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**

Since the World Wide Web is full of websites from different sports and organizations, it can be quite a challenge to stand out from the mass. Finns are Google-loving nation and it has been studied that 78% of Finnish consumers start their search for a company, product or a service on Google. (Kinanen 12 July 2017a.) For this reason, it is important also for the sports organizations to have good search engine visibility and to be found on Google. Consequently, the sports industry has woken up to the importance of search engine

optimization, also known as SEO (Perrin 23 July 2012.). When talking about search engine visibility and search engine optimization, in this case, the main focus is on Google and not for example, on Bing or Yahoo, since they don't have a significant role as a search engine used in Finland.

In order to make a website to be found on Google, it must be visible for the Googlebots, in other words to the Google's own robots that crawls to websites. After the Googlebot has crawled to the site, it will be added to the Google index. The bots go through, among other things, the words it sees, their location on each page and the information included in key content tags and attributes, such as title tags and ALT attributes. When a Google user types a keyword to search field and hits enter, the Googlebots compare the content of all the indexed pages to the search query. Based on the comparison, Google ranks all the pages and shows the most relevant pages at the highest search results. (Google 2018a.)

Thus, if an organization wants that their website has high online visibility or search engine visibility, the site must meet Google's requirements for a search engine friendly website which is in Google's eyes a synonym for a user-friendly website. Google (Google 2018b.) provides an extensive best practice search engine optimization (SEO) guide for everybody who wants to improve their search engine rank. Google lists different kinds of actions, varying from the content of the page to more technical details and actions.

As for the sports industry, social media and blogging have been seen as a way to engage with fans on a more personal level, but SEO is being used to raise exposure and to generate more traffic to a website. Within the sports organizations, SEO is also being used in brand management. By ensuring that only positive and high-quality contents are listed in the top of the search results and the negative ones are pushed to lower ranks, an organization or a brand can manage their brand and influence on the image of people searching for the organization or brand. (Perrin 23 July 2012.)

Since this thesis is not concentrating on shedding light on the technical side of search engine optimization for sports organizations, it is not treated in more detail. It is only stated, that in order to attract more visitors to a website from Google, the site must meet certain requirements for good online visibility. Search engine optimization can be done, depending on the internal know-how within the organization, without any external help or it can be outsourced to a third-party SEO agency.

### **7.1.2 Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Display Advertising**

Another way to increase traffic to an organization's website from Google is paid Google visibility or search engine marketing (SEM). Google has a specific tool for SEM, Google AdWords, which is used to create and manage SEM campaigns. With AdWords, an organization can create search engine advertisements that resemble the organic search results, aka the natural and not paid results on Google. Every time someone searches for a term that is included in the keywords of an AdWords campaign, the ad can appear either above or below the natural Google search results. The positioning of an ad depends on various factors, including the bid on your ad, the quality score of the ad and landing page and search context. In search engine marketing, the advertiser pays only for the clicks on their ad. (Google 2018c.)

Like in the case of search engine optimizing (SEO), it is possible to do search engine marketing independently as self-service, or it is possible to buy it as a service from a third-party digital marketing agency.

In addition to search engine advertising, one reasonably affordable form of digital marketing is display advertising. In display advertising, image or rich media ads are shown on different websites, either targeted or not. One of the largest display networks is Google Display Network (GDN). Display ads can be shown also in other sites managed by other publishers. When a person clicks on the display ad, he/she is directed to the advertiser's website. (Fonecta 2018.)

### **7.1.3 Social Media and Social Media Marketing**

One source of traffic to websites is social media. In addition to the non-paid, organic traffic from social media, various social media platforms also provide businesses and organizations with the possibility to buy visibility to their content. There are different options for social media marketing goals, and one of these is to drive more traffic to the advertiser's web page. When the objective is to get more social media users to click themselves on the advertiser's webpage, the content of the posts should support the objective and encourage the user to click the link leading to the site. Social media marketing can also be bought from a third-party service provider or it can be done by someone working or volunteering in the organization.

In addition to paid social media marketing, there are some tactics, free off cost, that can help an organization to get more clicks on their website through social media (Krasinski 2018):

- Visible URL – the website URL should be seen in the organization’s profile. Usually entered in the right place, it generates an automated link.
- Sharing posts – when an organization posts something on their website, for example a blog post or statistics, it is recommended to share it also on social media. And possibly more than just once. This way the organization gets coverage for their posts and potentially more visitors to their website.
- Referring people to visit the organization’s site – whenever somebody asks something on the organization's social media account, it is a good opportunity to share the website’s link and refer the person asking the question to a page answering to his/her question.
- Call to actions (CTA) – call to actions guide the visitors to do what wanted. For example, if the objective of the post is to get people to visit the website, a suitable CTA would be “Visit Now” or “Learn More”. Some social media networks have own buttons for CTAs, and in some, one must place the CTA within the post.
- Optimizing social media profile – in order to be found, a social media profile, especially About Pages and Biographies, should contain relevant keywords and information in each section.

#### **7.1.4 Referral Traffic**

Referral traffic is a term used to describe visitors to a website from external sources, other than search engine. In Google Analytics, referral traffic represents website traffic that comes from external sources, other than a search engine, paid advertisement or social media. Due to some technical settings, social media traffic can also be seen in referral traffic in Google Analytics in some cases. (Bashara 2018.) Since social media traffic has been studied in the previous part, in this part, the main focus is on traffic originating from other websites and not from social media.

Basically, a website can have referral traffic from any other website that has a link to the other website. For this reason, for example, sponsors display their logos with a direct link to their own site on their sponsored parties’ website and social media to drive more traffic to their own website. Possible sources of referral traffic for a sports organization, where the organization can share a link to their website, are, for example

- Guest blog posts
- Articles in online newspapers

- Blog or online forum's comment sections
- Sponsors' websites and social media
- Collaborating parties' websites and social media
- Online event calendars

The external links to a website most likely have a positive impact on the SEO of the website that the link directs to (Moz 2018.) For this reason, also, it is recommended to gain referral traffic and external links to an organization's website.

### **7.1.5 Email marketing**

Organizations can send their members and fans emails also for marketing purposes. There are many automated email marketing tools, such as MailChimp, that enable sending scheduled email messages to all of the people in the register or just to a specific targeted audience (MailChimp 2018). The emails can include a link to the website and a call to action (CTA) to click on the link and finding more about the topic on the organization's website.

## **7.2 Making the most of an organization's social media**

The topic in part 7.1 was how to drive more traffic to an organization's website using social media. In this part, the objective is to present a larger scale of tools how to use social media in a sports organization. Nowadays, social media has an important role in communications and fan engagement as well as in sponsorship acquisition of a sports organization. Social media provides various options for a sports organization to benefit it financially by getting more exposure and helping the organization develop its functions.

Social media is also a great tool for sports organizations that don't have huge resources for traditional media campaigns. With social media, an individual athlete and a smaller, less well-known organization or even entire sport is able to connect with their fans and transmit their message. Smaller sports organizations might have been overlooked by traditional sports media, but with social media, they now have the opportunity to be heard and build a public profile all by themselves. (Force 26 August 2016.)

As for a sports organization content creating, social media is an unparalleled means to creating and distributing unique written, pictorial or video content that can be optimized for even greater online visibility. The right type of content of a sports organization helps to

keep fans, followers and potential customers interested and engaged. From a technical perspective, posting right type of content on social media can build brand awareness, create additional links and traffic to the organization's or a stakeholder's website. (Perrin 23 July 2012.)

In order to make the most of the potential that social media offers for sports organizations, it is important to work systematically and persistently towards higher social media exposure and engagement. It is also important to choose the most relevant social media networks for the organization and concentrate on those that reach the most relevant target audience the best (Kaplan & Haenlein 2009, 65).

### **7.2.1 Importance of images**

An image is an effective way to get user's attention on social media. It is easier to spot out of a stream of posts, and people also have a natural tendency to be drawn to images. Social media networks also prefer image posts by giving them better visibility compared to just text posts. (Pindoriya 24 June 2014.)

It has been studied that social media posts with images can get up to 650% more engagement than text posts (York 14 June 2016.)

For example, Facebook posts tend to get 150% more likes on average, if they contain an image (Pindoriya 24 June 2014.) Some social media networks are focusing on visuals, such as Instagram, but the images in posts work better in other social media networks as well. According to York (14 June 2016), the visually best social media posts tend to include:

- “Vibrant colors and well-designed layouts
- High-level photography
- Visuals telling stories
- Visuals showing products or services in a new light
- Consistently on point and well-planned”.

### **7.2.2 Videos in social media**

A rival to images, videos on social media, are nowadays the way to get users' attention. Especially mobile users are watching videos on social media increasingly and also sharing them exponentially more than text or image posts. In order to retain the audience's in-



terest, it is recommended to post rather short videos. It has been studied that videos lasting maximum 90 seconds have an average retention rate of 53% whereas videos lasting over 30 minutes retain only 10% of the viewers. (Mason 30 May 2017.)

Another trend relating to videos on social media is the live streaming of sports events. Especially the younger viewers have started to demonstrate new ways of watching live sports events. The stereotypical way, gathered together around a TV, has started to lose its popularity, and people are streaming more and more live sporting events from their own mobile and other digital devices. Social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, have noticed it and started to invest in their live functionality and have struck major deals with big American sports organizations, including NFL and UEFA Champions League. (Bashford 6 March 2017.)

### **7.2.3 Creating appealing content to active fans**

Social media has enabled sports organizations of all sizes to communicate directly with their fans. Social media helps to engage the fans and keep them talking about the organization, also during the off-season. (Force 26 August 2016.) Also, the mobile technology has brought many new opportunities how to interact with fans (Other Media 2018.) Consequently, sports fans are no longer considered as passive and only-receiving spectators but active and participating followers. They want to see the action, the athletes and the game statistics from closer standpoints. For this reason, the sports marketers are bound to provide constant, captivating and exclusive content for the fans on social media. Especially the younger audience, that has grown up on social media, want real and unadulterated interactions with the athletes without the formal and filtered communications channels. (Bashford 6 March 2017.)

The latest change in Facebook's algorithm in 2018 pushes companies, brands and organization to focus on content that stirs up conversation and interactions along the users. The new algorithm ranks higher the user's friends' posts and shows less public content from businesses, brands and media. In order to get the public content visible in a user's Newsfeed, it should "encourage meaningful interactions between people". (Zuckerberg 11 January 2018.) In other words, to encourage people into interaction on Facebook, the sports organizations also must review their social media strategies to support the new policy of Facebook.

To create a great sports brand, the organization needs to have a compelling story. The attraction of sports comes from the narrative behind every game and series. Fascinating

stories and different emotions in sports arise from rivalries, success stories and narratives of underdogs. In addition, representing organization's hometown gives their fans a sense of pride and connection towards the organization and their hometown. This level of engagement can lead to life lasting fan-hood. (Clapp 31 January 2017.)

Some ideas for a compelling personal story can include, for example, a showcase on a high-profile player. Another idea is to shed light on the history of rivalry between the storyteller organization and its competitor. Third, and a participatory, way to tell a sports organization's story is to bring the attention to fans and let one committed fan tell his or her story why they are a fan. (Clapp 31 January 2017.)

#### **7.2.4 Making organization's social media profiles easy to find**

Most likely, fans aren't actively looking for the organization on social media, so the organization has to remind its social media presence and encourage people to visit their profiles. It is recommended to integrate the social media profiles to the organization's website or at least add social media icons to the website, so clicking them the visitor can click themselves straight to the social media networks. The same rule applies to all marketing and communications material of the organization; by using the icons, for instance, the organization communicates that it can be found also on the social media. (viaSport 2016.)

One proven and an effective way to get more interactions on social media is to post the same content more than one time. The following two times, the post gets always fewer interactions than the previous time, but the combined number of interactions for the three posting times is over two times than what the first post gained. So, in total, the three postings of the same content, but not with an identical message, brought over double the amount of interactions than just one posting. (Moon 2014.)

#### **7.2.5 Tagging and hashtags**

Reciprocal tagging can help sports organization's own content to spread in social media via different partners' social media channels. Other sports organizations, sports facilitators, tournament venues and other partners benefit also the reciprocity when the organization itself tags or mentions them in it's on posts, tweets, pictures or for example videos. On Twitter, sports organizations should try to tag at least one relevant account per tweet in order to increase the chance to be re-tweeted. Clapp gives an example: "Congrats to @TeamBC for winning its first game at the @RichmondOval' not 'Congrats to our team for winning the first game of the tournament.'" (viaSport 2016.)

When fans are using a certain sports organization's hashtags, they are identifying themselves as being part of a group, the sports organization's group. At the same time, they are showing favoritism towards the specific organization and finding other people who feel the same and share the same interests. (Onwumechili 2017.)

Thus, hashtags are the most important parts of a tweet on Twitter or additions to a picture on Instagram that help the organization's social media content to be found on a larger scale within a targeted audience. In addition to the organization's own unique hashtags, it is a recommended strategy to use some of the most popular hashtags that are appropriate for the context. (Schäferhoff 12 May 2016.)

Like in written social media posts, sports organization's call to actions, or CTAs, can be used in hashtags as well to encourage fans and followers to keep up and pass on the conversation. They most commonly start with a verb, such as "share" or "talk". For example, Coca-Cola uses a hashtag "#ShareACoke". CTA hashtags give the followers a clearer sense of purpose and direction in tweeting or sharing photos related to the sports organization in question. (Keyhole 19 April 2016.)

## 8 Fan engagement

Fan engagement can be defined as a specific form of customer engagement in the sport context. According to Yoshida (2014), a sport fan's engagement is seen in actions such as attending sporting events, watching games on television, purchasing team products, reading sport magazines and newspapers, and talking with others about sport. In addition to self-interested tasks of a sport fan, including attending, watching, reading, and purchasing, highly engaged fans are likely to focus also on tasks that benefit their favorite sport teams. These kinds of actions include supportive displays of sport fandom, positive word-of-mouth, and collaborative event attendance and other fans, for example sharing knowledge about a team with other fans, cooperative communications in the stands, and consumer-to-consumer helping behavior in fan communities. (Yoshida et al. 2014.)

Nowadays, social media enabled businesses and sports organizations to have direct communication with their customers and fans, and as a consequent of this, to create a truly unparalleled level of audience engagement. Sports organizations and teams have also woken up to the use of this effective marketing tool, working towards creating a passionate, invested fanbase. (Clap 31 January 2017.) Especially sports brands are great at engaging people thanks to the loyalty and enthusiasm of the fans (White 2017.)

Creating appealing content to active fans is in many cases a key to success in generating higher engagement rates. Traditional channels for delivering content to fans are becoming less effective. In many cases the direct communication means, that the athletes play a significant role in creating and distributing authentic content to fans through social media and this way engaging the fans. Distributing content through athletes has become a very effective method to engage today's digital sports fans and the sponsors have also noticed this. Brands who activate the right athlete, at the right time, with the right content, generate usually a higher engagement rate. (Opendorse 2018.)

Nowadays also, using customer data to segment fans into target groups and offering them a more personalized form of fan engagement can have substantial benefits. Sports organizations and federations are seeing the huge value that partnerships with specialist data and analytics services can bring, deepening knowledge of their fanbase and bringing a remarkable spectrum of engagement possibilities. (GlobalSportsJobs 30 August 2017.)

The loyalty of fans and their commitment to the organization, however, should not be taken for granted (Other Media 2018.) The sports organizations should always invest in

fan experience creating content and communications that the fans like and find interesting. This leads eventually to higher fan engagement and builds strong brand loyalty. (Ansley 2017.) Social media can be seen as a primary channel for telling stories that enable creating stronger and more emotional connections with the fans. (Nelson 3 February 2017.)

## **8.1 Increasing fan engagement**

Increasing fans' engagement to an organization using different online channels is continuous and creative work. All of the actions that suit to one organization might not bring the same results in a different organization. Achieving the best results, the process requires testing different tactics, measuring them and listening to the fans. All experiences provided to the fans are expected to be easy to share, and all of the fans' actions should be acknowledged, thanked and rewarded (Other Media 2018.)

In this chapter, the guide brings together different ideas how to increase the fan engagement with social media, websites and data.

**Share insights and sneak-peaks.** The fans are always interested in getting exclusive and inside glimpses of the sports organization's daily life. An effective way to award the engaged fans on the organization's social media channels and websites is to share behind-the-scenes photos, videos and posts about pre-season training, pre-game feelings, highlights during the game and players spending their time off the field. (Copperman 19 September 2016.)

**Real-time engagement.** Social media enables real-time engagement which includes, for example, providing up-to-date information during a game and immediate response to questions addressed to players and coaches. Nowadays, a response is expected within few hours. Giving the fans immediate responses, the organization and athletes ensures engaged and happy fans, committed to the organization. (Evok Advertising 1 September 2017.) For instance, the Boston Red Sox have used this considerably using twitter polls and even making it possible for the fans to request music during rain delays through social media. When a fan feels being a part of a game day and that their home team is really listening to them and to their wishes, this makes him or her truly engaged. (Clapp 31 January 2017.)

**Stories about the athletes and people behind the scenes.** Fans are always interested in reading and finding out more about their favorite players. Listing the player's highlights

and stats can, besides, help the player to be scouted by talent scouts. In addition to presenting players, it is also interesting to find out more about the people behind the success of an organization. Presenting other people than players creates also a community around the organization. (Copperman 19 September 2016.) The actual presentation stories can be published with pictures on the organization's website and shared on social media.

**Ask the fans.** Fans appreciate it when they feel that their voice has been heard. On social media and in other online services, it is relatively easy to give fans a voice. For example, on Facebook and Twitter, it is possible to create polls to ask the opinion of fans. In addition, the organization can just post questions on its social media channels and stir up a conversation. This is an easy way to find out what the fans actually want and expect. And it is also valuable information for the sponsors to know, what kind of content would appeal to the fans. The noteworthy idea is also to give the fans a voice by inviting them to share their stories about positive experience and memories related to the organization. (Leavoy 20 February 2018.)

**Hold a contest.** Sports tend to be competitive and so are the fans. For this reason, holding a contest on social media is an effective way to interact with the fans and increase their engagement. A suitable prize can be for example tickets to an event, organization's merchandise or another kind of memorabilia. Usually the participation to a contest requires liking, sharing, and/or following the organization's social media page. This way the organization gets also a wider audience following them and who are exposed also later to information about e.g. future events. (Davies 31 May 2016.) In Instagram, it is easy to ask the fans to take pictures of themselves attending the organization's event and then to post them on the organization's Instagram. This way they are entered in a drawing of a prize. (Yancey 15 July 2016.)

**Turn the games into shows.** Live sporting events don't have to be just about two teams playing a game against each other, but a memorable show. In American football, cheer-leading and dance teams have a big role in turning the event into a cheerful and energetic show, that people will remember afterwards. (Copperman 19 September 2016.) These energetic and entertaining shows will get fans to visit them also later and share their experiences on social media.

**Player access.** Fans are interested what the popular players are doing off the field, so provide them with photos, posts, videos created by the players by themselves about their life. Fans appreciate also the events where they can meet the players directly, take selfies, get autographs and share their photos on social media (Leavoy 20 February

2018.) If the entire sport, team or organization is not yet at that level that the fans would line up to meet the players, a good way to get to know the organization better is to organize open events, where the fans can try for example the sport and get to know the people and how the organization works.

**Post regularly (also during the off-season).** Planning and posting regular digital content ensures that the fans keep coming back to consume always new appearing content (White 2017.) It is also important to remember the fans during off-season and off-days. The content can be different, and the engagement rates lower compared to game-day content and high-season content, but the most important thing is to offer some content to consume for the fans. Doing this, it can have most likely a positive impact on the overall engagement rate. (Raim 2017.)

**Have content ready for any situation.** Whether a team loses or wins, they have to post something on social media. For this reason, it is recommended to have content ready for every situation and deliver value to the fans to keep them motivated and interested in the next game or season. In case a team loses, they can try to turn the disappointment to boosting up the pride towards the team allowing the fans to participate also on the content creating by encouraging the fans too interact in creative ways. Another idea is to publish throwback content, such as birthday wishes for alumni, vines and video highlights of big past plays, and photo galleries of former players. (Raim 2017.) In case the team wins, it is a good time to make the most of the positive momentum, capitalizing on every opportunity. Share player reactions, highlight great performances, and emphasize an optimistic future and it will engage the fans even more and let them share in the team's excitement. (Blosat 2016.)

## **8.2 Measuring fan engagement**

When a sports organization is taking measures to improve fan engagement, it probably needs to know, if the chosen actions to improve fan engagement are working or not. In order to prove the success of chosen actions, they have to be measured and compared to the goals set by the organization.

Metrics to evaluate fan engagement on social media include comments, retweets, likes, shares and linkbacks. Metrics for website engagement include, for example, time spend on the site, returning visitors vs. new visitors and which pages they are viewing. Using these metrics help the organization to understand whether or not people are

- Returning or revisiting the website or social media channel

- Posting comments or asking questions
- Connecting with other community members
- Sharing the organization's content
- Making comments about the organization elsewhere
- Spending more and more time on the organization's website over time
- Attending events and talking about them
- Following the organization in increasing numbers.

In other words, measuring fan engagement isn't only about measuring ROI. (Linn 12 October 2010.)

The topic of data collection was treated in chapter 7 presenting how a sports organization can make the most of social media. The question of knowing organization's audience and fans are also crucial related to fan engagement. When following fan engagement metrics, an organization can determine interests and needs of their audience and create customized and personalized content to make them even more engaged to the organization (Segal 2018.)



## 9 Sponsor acquisition and data

Many sports organizations seeking a sponsorship still believe that they can find companies to sponsor them who just do it for the sake of sponsoring organizations. In fact, the majority of sponsoring companies are interested in the fanbase data that the organizations have gathered. By offering relevant data to the sponsors, the organization can differentiate itself from the competitors. (Baylis 2017) For the sponsoring companies, it is also important that the coverage they get for their brand by sponsoring an organization is measurable and comparable (Vinnik 2017.)

### 9.1 Collecting and segmenting quality data

Nowadays, when seeking a sponsorship and presenting the fanbase to a possible sponsor, it's not any longer a question of quantity but quality. Instead of broad, untargeted visibility among the general public, the companies want to get detailed data about segmented audiences whose online and real-world behavior has been analyzed and converted into measurable and exploitable data in return for the sponsorship. The important questions that the sponsor view is whether the organization is a data-driven organization that has good, connected and accessible information. The other important question is if the organization is willing and able to analyze and share data insights with the sponsoring company in order to give them value to their investment. It is considerably easier and more alluring to secure a sponsorship if the organization has access to the audience data and is able to present it to the sponsoring company. (Baylis 2017.) Different means of collecting data were described in chapter 6.

The segmentation of an organization's fanbase can be done in various ways. Some classifications are easy to make directly from the information given by the person in a registration form, for example, but some segments can be created with a help of a data analytics agency that has the possibility to compare and enrich the fanbase data against public data or their own collected data. Some easily recognizable segments are for example:

- demographic categories, such as age, sex and mother tongue
- geographical categories, such as state and hometown.

Other segments, defined by the help of a data services providing agency, are for example:

- socio-economic status
- gross income
- date of last moving
- size of household

- number of children
- phase of life
- year of construction in an apartment building
- housing type
- number of rooms in an apartment
- the surface area of an apartment
- heating type (Fonecta 2018b.)

In some cases, using predictive analytics, a segmentation can be done with categories that predict intention to buy, for example, a car or an apartment. (Fonecta 2018c.)

When the segmentation is done, it is easier to approach a potential sponsor, when the organization has factual information about their audiences and how they could benefit the sponsoring company in their marketing objectives.

## **9.2 Proving the benefit to a sponsor**

In addition to being able to provide segmented audiences to a sponsor, the organization should be able to prove the coverage that the sponsor has gained for its brand by sponsoring the organization. Social media post views and interactions, as well as website visits, video views and ad views and interactions, are easy to collect into statistics from different analytics tools.

Carefully placed logos viewed by the fans on social media drive value for the company. It has been studied that on social media, logos on traditional sponsorship inventory, such as the front of jersey or training kit, can have a more efficient impact than the more traditional on-field advertising. The logo exposure can be maximized also by placing the logo on social media content that is expected to have a high number of views, for example in the context of American football, highlight or touchdown announcements, or player or jersey unveilings. (The Nielsen Company 2017.)

However, the traditional analytics tools can't prove the complete social media engagement and exposure gained from logo exposure in social media content. The photos taken by the social media users and posted on their own profiles and groups can't be counted by the Facebook page Insights -tool or another social media platform's basic analytics tool. For this, the organization needs a social listening tool that utilizes the image recognition technology (Liesa 9 March 2016.) There are several image recognition tools available, such as

GumGum and LogoGrab (Agnew 2017.) Also, Google has its own image analysis tool Google Cloud Vision API (Google Cloud Platform 2018.)

Sponsored social media posts, in other words paid social media ads, and organic social media posts can expand beyond the original targeted audience thanks to shares, retweets and forwards. In addition, the posts can be cross-promoted between other organizations and brands of social media channels. The same message can be posted, for example, across the organization's Instagram page, the event organization's Facebook page, and a player's Twitter account. Each of these accounts will have their own audiences, and their own networks. In order to report this type of coverage to a sponsor, it is recommended to tag the content in order to make it more traceable and visible for sponsors as well. (White 2017.)

To summarize the link between sponsor acquisition and data, in order to succeed in sponsor acquisition, the organization should have their own marketing and communications strategy which works in sync with the sponsor acquisition plans (Yardley 31 March 2016.) The trend is that the sports organizations are becoming more and more digital activation agencies who understand their sponsors' marketing objectives and can create and utilize content that engages specific target groups of fans. By doing this, they create a win-win situation for all stakeholders. (The Nielsen Company 2017.)

## 10 Discussion

The research indicated, as expected, that the available tools for fanbase and website data collection and analyzing are not familiar enough for the key personnel in the sports organizations. The tools are being used, but not to the most efficient extent. One of the purposes of this thesis was to present how to collect relevant data and utilize it in semi-professional American football teams in Finland in order to improve the financial state of the organizations and their functioning. American football organizations are pioneers in customer data exploitation in their homeland of the sport, in the United States and for that reason, it was interesting to examine how is the situation in Finland. Based on the research conducted, there is a clear necessity of this kind of guidebook in developing and growing sports organizations.

The research displayed passive and even negative attitudes towards data utilization in the organization. None of the organizations indicated, regarding the website data, that it would be a high priority for them, and regarding the social media strategy, only one organization stated that it is on their things-to-do list for the current year. However, the last question of the questionnaire mapping the respondent opinions about data collection and utilization gives quite a contradictory impression of the respondents' attitudes. In the last question, every respondent showed a positive attitude towards data collection, and almost all of them was able to name at least one possible target for data utilization. So, in other words, the matter is acknowledged but it is not seen that important that resources would be directed to develop the issue.

As for fanbase register, there is quite a lot of work to do in the organizations. Only one organization stated that they are maintaining a fanbase register that contains the name and email address of a registered fan. However, the utilization of this data was very limited. Nowadays, the sports organizations cannot just rely on what they think their fans and followers want. They need to know exactly what they want and provide them with that. In order to know, the sports organizations need data. (GlobalSportJobs 27 July 2017.)

A clear challenge in conducting the survey, was the restricted size of the target group. Earlier research realized by Laitila (Laitila 2016.), and the survey conducted in this thesis, provide a reference to how the organizations in Finland are generally using social media and sport business intelligence. As the results show, utilization of data in sports management has hardly increased over a two-year period, so it can be noted that the pace of the

development of using business intelligence in sports organizations is considerably sluggish.

It is desirable, that this thesis would help the organizations to fully understand the true value of website, social media and fanbase data in their everyday operations and would inspire them to make the necessary steps to utilize data in practice. As Harper (20 March 2014) has stated, in order to keep improving, an organization or a business needs to do constant measuring and comparing of data over time and to continually seek new and more relevant sources of data. He also reminds, that is important to be in direct communication with the customers by asking their preferences, information, feedback, and expectations. The more relevant, aware, and integrated customer data an organization has, the more personalized and valuable experiences it can offer, and the more resilient the customer relationships will become. (Harper 20 March 2014.)

In addition to the research results, one practical example scenario concerning the research outcome ought to be mentioned to demonstrate the undeveloped state of using digital tools in sports organizations. Finland's leading American football organization, member of the Maple league, and the most successful team in the league's history did not answer the questionnaire unexpectedly. When the organization was inquired, I received the answer that in the management of the organization more than one person had read the questionnaire. But the board decided not to respond to the survey, because they felt that the questions were too challenging and difficult to answer to.

By not responding to the questionnaire, it tells more about the level of the sports management, especially when a European top team cannot share their opinions regarding simple questions about the present state of the organization's digital marketing operations. Of course, there has been a huge amount of success on the game field, however, the stands have been rather quiet already for several seasons and the organization has the third lowest spectator rates in the Maple league. (Jefumaster 7 September 2016.)

I managed to reach a person from the organization to comment on the situation:

Yes, I have been very puzzled about how our organization has been led during the past years and is currently being managed. On the coaching side, we have been working hard on planning and implementing all the knowledge and experience to training and to the games, but in the organization level, nothing really takes its place, or at least we do not know what is happening. In this kind of organization, the sports management should be based on target-oriented and a long-term planning, and also

on transparency, and sincerity, and on active communication. The open mind towards development is a good bonus. The management and the leadership skills are needed, and also examples of good practices and information how to implement it. A management concept where the gained knowledge and the information is kept secret and not being shared with others is not good for anyone especially when the aim is to develop sport itself and to gain visibility among other sports and fans.

This statement demonstrates the current situation in many other organizations, where the organizations might be aware of the lack of sport management and marketing within their functioning, but the resources or priorities are not enough for systematic utilization of business intelligence and digital marketing in order to expand the fanbase or enhance sponsor acquisition. This again is in conflict with the situation if the organizations are struggling with economic problems and not filling the seats in their games. In the end, efficient use of digital tools, such as the customer data, is vital in the long term in order to secure the financial state of the organization, continuity in the organization or team, and the popularity of the sport.

With regard to the marketing efforts of the sports organization, as it has been stated by Perrin (23 July 2012), it depends highly on the marketing goals of a sports organization, which digital marketing tools they should choose for their marketing. For big brands and well-known athletes, engaging with the fans and being on-brand is the most important thing, whereas for smaller sports organizations social media and search engine marketing can be the simplest measure to execute in order to enhance brand awareness and exposure within the search engines. (Perrin 23 July 2012.) The organizations of the research showed a low level of planning and implementing suitable digital marketing efforts in order to promote their goals and functioning. The lack of strategic and conscious planning was for many organizations the current situation.

Despite weaknesses in sports marketing and using sport business intelligent, it was, nevertheless, positive to see that all the organizations that responded to the questionnaire had their own websites and social media profiles. Another positive remark was that all of the respondents showed, in the end, positive attitude towards data utilization and development of the online and digital tools. This is a good starting point for developing the organizations' digital marketing and general development of the online visibility and brand. All of the marketing efforts don't require substantial financial resources, as stated above, but know-how, motivation and persistence.

In this thesis, I had to outline the treated subject and I decided to focus on the customer data used in semi-professional sports organizations. The research, however, revealed a need for even more detailed and simpler guidance about the basics of digital and online tools, such as websites, social media and other online services available to develop and support the functioning of a sports organization. In this thesis, it wasn't possible nor expedient to start telling how to build a website, social media account or how to set up a custom register or how to do search engine optimization. Consequently, an even further step back would be the creation of a technical guide to building a sports organization online presence and visibility.

I feel that a similar research could be done in two to three years with the same content in order to see whether the situation has changed and if the consumer data has been taken into usage in the sports organizations. The reference period of five years would be suitable, because in that time the technical advances might not be that dramatic and the responses could still be comparative, since the context hadn't changed considerably.

Although this thesis has concentrated highly on the technical side of developing organization and it has encouraged sports organization to utilize the data, reports and analyzes, it is still important to keep in mind the power and importance of creativity. Karczewski (30 June 2014) reminds marketers to preserve their creativity and human element in their sayings that makes content, the story, interesting. Data should support the content marketing strategy, but it shouldn't dictate the content: "let the insight inspire you rather than drive the whole plan forward". (Karczewski 30 June 2014.)

## Concepts and data vocabulary

### Traffic:

- Number of people arriving on your site page

### Organic search volume:

- Number of people arriving on your site page from a search engine (excluding visitors from paid search)

### Conversions:

- Number of people who took the desired action (subscribed, registered for an event, downloaded something, etc.) after reading your content. (Linn 21 March 2017.)

### Descriptive analytics:

- This data, gleaned from a tool like Google Analytics, gives a sense of what has happened the historical results such as cost per link, click-through rates, and so on. Looking at this kind of data is a bit like looking in the rear-view mirror of your car.

### Predictive analytics:

- This data enables people: to predict the most likely outcome based on historical and real-time data. For example, using predictive lead scoring can give your hard-earned marketing-qualified leads (MQLs) the best start with your sales teams. It's a bit like using a navigation app that predicts your car's arrival time, updating the prediction on the fly as circumstances change.

### Prescriptive analytics:

- kick things up a notch, beyond where most marketers are today. This kind of analytics tells you not only what's likely to happen but what you should do to capitalize on what's likely to happen. It's a bit like an autonomous driving car that not only predicts your arrival time but also drives you to your destination. (Riefer 16 November 2017.)

### CPA, or Cost Per Acquisition or Cost Per Action:

- Cost per action (CPA) is an online advertising marketing strategy that allows an advertiser to pay for a specified action from a prospective customer. -- CPA offers



are most commonly associated with affiliate marketing. Cost per action is also known as cost per acquisition (CPA).

CPC, or cost-per-click:

- Cost Per Click (CPC) is the amount paid by an advertiser to a search engine or other Internet publishers for every time an advertisement viewer makes a click on a link in an advertisement. This click transfers the viewer to the advertiser's web site.

CTR, or Click Through Rate:

- Click-through rate (CTR) refers to the number of times a user clicks on a Web page advertisement compared to the total numbers of visitors viewing the ad.

Conversion Rate (CVR) – CVR:

- A conversion rate is an equation that online advertisers and marketers use to compare the total number of visitors to a website to the number that become paying customers, subscribers or users. Conversion rates are extremely helpful to electronic storefront owners, who can use website traffic results to determine what other marketing methods should be enlisted to increase product sales.

KPI, or Key Performance Indicator:

- Key performance indicators (KPI) are measurements used to identify and quantify business performance. (Techopedia 2018.)

## **Definitions of data protection regulation**

Personal data:

- Any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'); an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person.

#### Register:

- Are all that information that contains personal data, and which have a common purpose and are processed in part or all by automated processing or arranged in such a way that a registered person Information can be easily found. As a personal data is assessed of all information where person to be identified by: name, identity number, address, email address, phone number, gender, ethnicity, religion, marital status or any definition of economic status or state of health. Personal data is also stored images and recorded sounds if the individuals are identifiable from it. Examples of personal registers: customer registers, fan registers, sponsor registers etc.

#### Processing:

- Any operation or set of operations which is performed on personal data or on sets of personal data, whether or not by automated means, such as collection, recording, organization, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction.

#### Processor:

- A natural or legal person, public authority, agency or other body which processes personal data on behalf of the controller

#### Controller:

- The natural or legal person, public authority, agency or other body which, alone or jointly with others, determines the purposes and means of the processing of personal data; where the purposes and means of such processing are determined by Union or Member State law, the controller or the specific criteria for its nomination may be provided for by Union or Member State law.

#### Personal data breach:

- A breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, unauthorized disclosure of, or access to, personal data transmitted, stored or otherwise processed. (Regulation on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC, article 4.)

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## Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Hei,

olen tekemässä opinnäytetyötä Master of Sport Studies, degree in Sport Development and Management -ohjelmaan. Tarkoitukseni on luoda seuratoiminnan kehittämiseksi Dataopas urheilumarkkinoitiin. Dataoppaan tarkoitus on edesauttaa seuran toiminnanjohtamisen kehittämistä ammattimaisempaan suuntaan ja olla avuksi suomenmestaruustasolla oleville tai sinne pyrkiville seuroille.

Tämän nopean kyselyn tarkoitus on kartoittaa seurojen tämänhetkistä tilannetta asiakasdatan käytöstä seuran toiminnan kehittämisessä seuran toimintaa johtavien ja hallinnoivien henkilöiden mielipiteiden kautta.

Linkki kyselyyn: <https://www.webpolsurveys.com/S/3C38B0E04985B873.par>

Kiitos avustanne.

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## Datan käyttö seuran toiminnan kehittämisessä

### 1. Vastaajan tiedot:

Seura \_\_\_\_\_

Asema seurassa \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Mitä eri tietolähteitä tällä hetkellä seurassanne käytetään seuratoiminnan kehittämisessä?

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### 3. Onko seurallanne käytössä omat nettisivut?

Kyllä

Ei

### 4. Jos seurallanne on nettisivut, onko niihin yhdistetty jokin seurantatyökalu (esim. Google Analytics)?

Kyllä

Ei

### 5. Mikä seurantatyökalu teillä on käytössä?

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### 6. Hyödynnetäänkö siitä saatavia tietoja jotenkin?

Kyllä

Ei

### 7. Miksi ei?

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**8. Jos seurantatyökalun tietoja hyödynnetään, niin miten?**

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**9. Mitä sosiaalisen median palveluja seurallanne on käytössä?**

Voitte valita useamman vaihtoehdon

Facebook

Instagram

Snapchat

Twitter

YouTube

Google+

Ei mitään

Muu, mikä?

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**10. Onko seuranne tehnyt erillisen sosiaalisen median strategian?**

Kyllä

Ei. Miksi?

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**11. Mikä on seuranne kokoaikaisessa työsuhteessa olevan hallinnon henkilöstön määrä?**

Hallinnon henkilöstömäärällä tarkoitetaan seuran hallinto-, kehitys- ja johtotehtävissä, myynnin ja markkinoinnin tehtävissä sekä toimistotehtävissä työskentelevien henkilöiden määrää.

Ei kokoaikaisessa työsuhteessa olevaa henkilöstöä

1 henkilö

2 henkilöä

3 henkilöä

4 henkilöä

5 henkilöä tai enemmän



**12.** Mikä on seuranne osa-aikaisessa työsuhteessa olevan hallinnon henkilöstön määrä?

Hallinnon henkilöstömäärällä tarkoitetaan seuran hallinto-, kehitys- ja johtotehtävissä, myynnin ja markkinoinnin tehtävissä sekä toimistotehtävissä työskentelevien henkilöiden määrää.

- Ei osa-aikaisessa työsuhteessa olevaa henkilöstöä
- 1 henkilö
- 2 henkilöä
- 3 henkilöä
- 4 henkilöä
- 5 henkilöä tai enemmän

**13.** Onko seurassanne nimetty henkilö tai henkilöitä, joiden vastuulla on sosiaalisen median päivittäminen?

- Kyllä
- Ei

**14.** Seurataanko seurassanne sosiaalisen median kävijätietoja?

- Kyllä. Miten?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Ei

**15.** Kerääkö seuranne tietoja jäsenistään jäsenrekisteriin?

- Kyllä. Mitä tietoja kerätään?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Ei

**16.** Kerääkö seuranne tietoja kannattajistaan rekisteriin?

- Kyllä.
- Ei. Miksi ei?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**17.** Mitä tietoja kerätään?

\_\_\_\_\_

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**18. Mihin tietoja käytetään?**

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**19. Kuinka merkittävänä koette datan hyödyntämisen seuranne toiminnassa?**

Datalla tässä kysymyksessä tarkoitetaan esim. nettisivujen kävijätietoja, sosiaalisen median kävijätietoja ja tutkimuskyselyjen vastauksia.

- Ei lainkaan merkittävänä  
 Erittäin merkittävänä

**20. Onko seurassanne tiedossa tuleva EU:n tietosuojauudistus?**

- Kyllä  
 Ei

**21. Miten seurassanne on varauduttu toukokuiseen tietosuojan lakimuutokseen?**

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**22. Mitä alla mainittuja sisäisiä ja ulkoisia tietolähteitä käytätte seuranne päätöksenteon tukena?**

- Henkilöstökyselyt  
 Kannattajakyselyt  
 Asiakkuuksienhallintajärjestelmät  
 Sponsorikyselyt  
 Markkinatutkimukset  
 Kilpailija-analyysit  
 Tapahtumatutkimukset  
 Ulkopuolinen konsultointi  
 Julkiset raportit

Muu tietolähde, mikä?

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Ei mikään näistä. Miksi?

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**23.** Miksi olette päätyneet käyttämään edellä mainitsemianne tietolähteitä?

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**24.** Uskotteko järjestelmällisen datan keruun ja hyödyntämisen olevan keskeinen tapa tukea seuranne taloutta ja toiminnan kehittämistä tulevaisuudessa?

Kyllä, perustelee lyhyesti:

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En, perustelee lyhyesti:

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**25.** Haluan tutkimuksen tuloksista syntyvän Dataoppaan sähköpostiini.

Kyllä, sähköposti:

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Ei