



Sponsorship Deals Within Women's Football in Finland

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Abstract

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The purpose of this thesis was to research the level that Finnish sponsorship is at with women's football in Finland, and how to improve the situation. It was also important for the author to be able to help women's football with the conclusions made from the research. Women's football is in a rise all over the world and Finland is no exception to that. It is a current topic that the author wanted to address.

The theoretical framework was based on literature about sports sponsorship, sports marketing, marketing, women's football, athlete sponsorship and sport sponsorships in Finland. The theoretical framework was done to further understand the topics that are covered in this thesis.

The study was done with the use of interviews, more specifically semi-structured interviews, as the author came to the conclusion that this would serve the purpose of this thesis the best. The interviewees were chosen due to their status when regarding the thesis topic. Both of the interviewees have a successful career around the topic and thus the author felt that no more interviewees were needed to conduct this research. The thesis interviews were also thoroughly analyzed after transcription in comparative and thematic analysis.

Based on the data from the interviews and the analysis of them and the conclusions of the theoretical framework, the key findings were composed. The findings revealed that to grow the amount of sponsorship deals in women's football, the deals need to be based on solid value and ethical base. There also is unlimited potential when it comes to women's football in Finland excluding financial barriers. Finland is behind in sponsorship deals when it comes to comparing with other countries. However this is the result of starting the process later than others, having smaller resources available and having a more men's sports driven audience for now.

Keywords

Equal playing field, Player Brand, Sponsee, Sponsorship, Sponsor, Athlete branding

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1 Introduction

This is a research-based bachelor's thesis for the Degree Program in International business in the major specialization of marketing. The aim of this thesis is to study and understand the possibilities that women's football has regarding sponsorship deals in Finland. This particular research is done to help Finnish women's football teams to generate more money through sponsorship deals and to stabilize their spot as an employee for female footballers all around the world. Now what types of methods are used to accomplish this particular research? Firstly, the author will do tremendous amount of research on earlier publications regarding the topic. Secondly, the author will conduct at least one, if not more, interviews with people that work with this topic every day and have the best knowledge to offer towards this thesis. All in all this thesis aims for a solution to better the position of female footballers in Finland.

In the following chapter, the writer will talk about the background of this thesis topic. This will give the reader of this thesis a solid foundation and a base level knowledge about the topic so it will be easier to follow along the research that the author shows. After the background portion is explained, the author explains the actual research question and how it is divided into further investigative questions. The author then explains the demarcation of the thesis. This is followed then by international aspect of the thesis followed by the benefits, risk management and finally opening the key concepts to the reader.

1.1 Background

This thesis is about women's football in Finland, and how the sponsorship deals are done within this sport in this country and comparing the ways to do them with other countries that have had better success in regards to having generated more money from them or having generated a bigger following through them.

With this thesis the author aims to find out the potential of women's football in Finland and how teams in Finland can pursue to fulfill that potential and financially benefit more than at this moment. With women's football gaining a lot of attention over the recent years this topic is very relevant and helpful due to the fact that in Finland the potential is somewhat un-touched.

Women's football has lifted its head in the eyes of sponsors. As Meenaghan (1991b, 43) mentions, the level of coverage of the target audience as one of the main criteria why certain sports attract sponsors. This is exactly the reason the author is writing this thesis. To find out the reasoning behind such "lagging" and finding ways to fix this. FIFA has also

made women's football one of their targets to grow. (FIFA 2022, 2). This emphasises the fact that this thesis is very important at this current time, so the Finnish clubs don't get overlooked and left behind as the other countries' clubs thrive.

1.2 Research question

As this thesis is focusing on women's football in Finland and especially on the sponsorship side of it, the research question (**RQ**) of the thesis is asking: How to fulfil sponsorship deal's potential in women's football in Finland?

The research question needs to be further investigated, thus creating the following investigative questions (**IQ**).

1. How to grow women's football in Finland from the sponsorships point of view?
2. How much potential does Finland have in sponsoring women's football?
3. How far is Finland behind in sponsorship deals compared to other European countries?

Table 1. Investigative methods and the research methods for them.

Investigative questions	Method of research
<p>1. How to grow women's football in Finland from the sponsorships point of view?</p>	<p>Interviews, Literature, Desktop research</p>
<p>2. How much potential does Finland have in sponsoring women's football?</p>	<p>Interviews, Desktop research</p>
<p>3. How far is Finland behind in sponsorship deals compared to other European countries?</p>	<p>Interviews, Literature, Desktop research</p>

1.3 Demarcation

In this thesis the author will only be focusing on women's football in Finland due to the fact that if they were to take all football including men's situation, it would be too big of a topic

to talk about as a bachelors thesis. The author also will not go too in dept in some of the topics that are not as relevant to the thesis but that are still worth mentioning due to the fact that the author does not feel like it is relevant for the reader. The author aims to make this thesis as enjoyable and interesting for the reader as possible whilst still maintaining it informative and helpful. This means that there will not be pointless jargon within the thesis and it will be very much fact based text only with interviews that help the case. This thesis will provide good information to both athletes and teams as well as companies that are or might want to be involved in the future of women's football in Finland.

1.4 International aspect

As the Degree Programme of International Business requires the bachelor thesis to have a clear international aspect implemented in it, it will be implemented through comparing foreign women's football teams and their sponsorship deals to Finnish counter parts.

1.5 Benefits

The benefits of this thesis are clear. This thesis will offer beneficial information for Finnish footballers, football teams, the Finnish football association and for companies that are looking in to sponsoring football in Finland and especially women's football. With concrete and factual numbers and information, it is easier to explain how to move forwards in sponsorship deals regarding women's football in Finland. This is very good for the possible companies/teams as it is free for them and possibly can generate money and if not that, then more visibility within the market. The employees will have a clear vision on how they can move forward and implement the results into everyday work.

As for the author, the thesis topic offers a possibility of showing their interest towards the growing market and having prior material to offer to possible future employees. The author has a very big interest towards that field of work, so it is positive for them to do this sort of a thesis. It also helps the author to see how things are done now and how they maybe should be done in the future as women's football has a lot of possibilities to grow within Finland. Also, the author will gain knowledge about sponsorship in sports.

1.6 Risk management

There are several risks with this thesis but luckily none of them are massive. Possible risks include time management, Covid-19 situation, getting the needed information from the interview/interviews. These risks will be managed by planning everything well and possibly using zoom or a similar tool for conducting the interviews.

1.7 Key concepts

Athlete branding is a type of branding that is focused on an individual athlete. It can be used to bring out a certain individual's characteristics more thus making them stand out more. (Auvinen & Kuuluvainen 2017, 56.)

Athlete sponsorship happens when a company is the acting sponsor for a set athlete. With athlete sponsorship, it is often expected from the athlete to advertise the sponsor's product/products to create more visibility for the company. (Irwin, Sutton & McCarthy 2008, 151.)

Sponsor is a company or an organization that is paying for the rights to market themselves and their services/products with the use of a sponsored property that is the owner of the rights. (Sponsorointi & Tapahtumat ry 2021).

Sponsorship refers to "Investing in a sports entity to support overall organizational objectives, marketing goals, and promotional strategies" (Shank 2009, 445).

Property is referring to a sponsored individual, organization, activity or an event that is being sponsored. (Cornwell 2014, 7).

Sponsee is referring to a sponsored individual, organization, activity or an event that is being sponsored. (Cornwell 2014, 7).

Player Brand is a concept where a player within a league and a team in that league is notable and generally more known than others and who can use the status of themselves in to creating a brand out of themselves which is marketable and profitable. A good example of a player brand is Cristiano Ronaldo, who has not only been one of the most influential people in the game of football due to his skills, but also has been one of the most influential people in the world with him being the most followed Instagram account in the world. (Chadwick & Burton 2008, p310)

Kansallinen Liiga, is the Finnish national league for women's football. Earlier known as the women's Finnish championship – league, Kansallinen Liiga aims for equality, bravery and the will to succeed. (Kansallinenliiga.fi 2021)

Equal playing field is one of the aims for women's sport all around the world. We aim to have a situation where women can compete in a high manner and receive a pay where they no longer must for example have a day job to go along. "Equal Playing Field (EPF) is

a grassroots, non-profit initiative to challenge gender inequality in sport and to promote sports development for girls and women globally". (equalplayingfield.com 2021)

2 Sponsorships in women's football in Finland

In the following chapter the author explains the thesis's theories, key concepts and more in the theoretical framework section of the thesis. The reader shall expect the theoretical framework portion of this thesis to be mostly about sponsorship and things surrounding that as well as delving deeper in to football sponsorship and women's football sponsorship. The following concepts will be addressed in this chapter: Sport sponsorship, Women's football, Finnish football sponsoring, Finnish women's football sponsorship & athlete sponsorship.

In the figure 1 below the structure of this thesis's theoretical framework is explained to the reader.

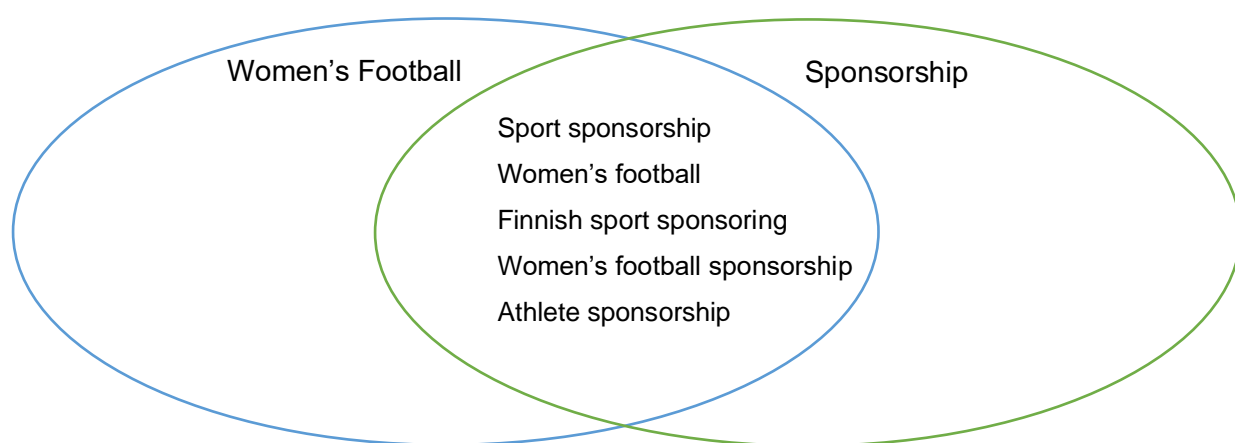


Figure 1. Sponsorship in women's football

2.1 Sport sponsorship

In the book written by Erkki Alaja and Christina Forssell called "Tarinapeliä" Alaja and Forssell explain that the history of sponsor community is rather short. According to official sources, sports were sponsored for the first time in the late 1800's. In 1861, an Australian catering company "Spiers&Pound" paid for an English cricket team's Australian tour's expenses. One of the first football sponsorship deals happened in 1898, when Bovril sponsored Nottingham Forest's football team (Alaja & Forssell 2004, 11). In the figure 2 below, you can see a model that divides the practical work of sports marketing in to four main topics. These topics are, sensing, tailoring, pillaring and earning. (Alaja 2001, 21).

In the sensing phase, the facts are gathered about the product, a perception is formed about the customer's needs, the future is sketched, information is analysed, conclusions are made, goals are set and the product is targeted carefully to the correct and chosen target groups. (Alaja 2001, 21).

In the tailoring phase, a sports product is created to match the customer's needs, a sensible price point is created and the best possible availability arrangements are created. A sponsoring collaboration and the search for one is often part of the tailoring phase, however it is not essential by no means. One should only strive for sponsorship collaboration if it seems like a good fit with the organisation's actions. (Alaja 2001, 21).

In the pillaring phase the customer's interest are to be awakened towards the sports product and clear sales results are sought after. To get the best possible outcome, different marketing communications methods are used in the pillaring phase. (Alaja 2001, 21).

Lastly, in the earning phase, results are measured, results are analysed by comparing them to the earlier expectations, a relevant marketing report is done and a thank you is said to those who were involved. (Alaja 2001, 21).

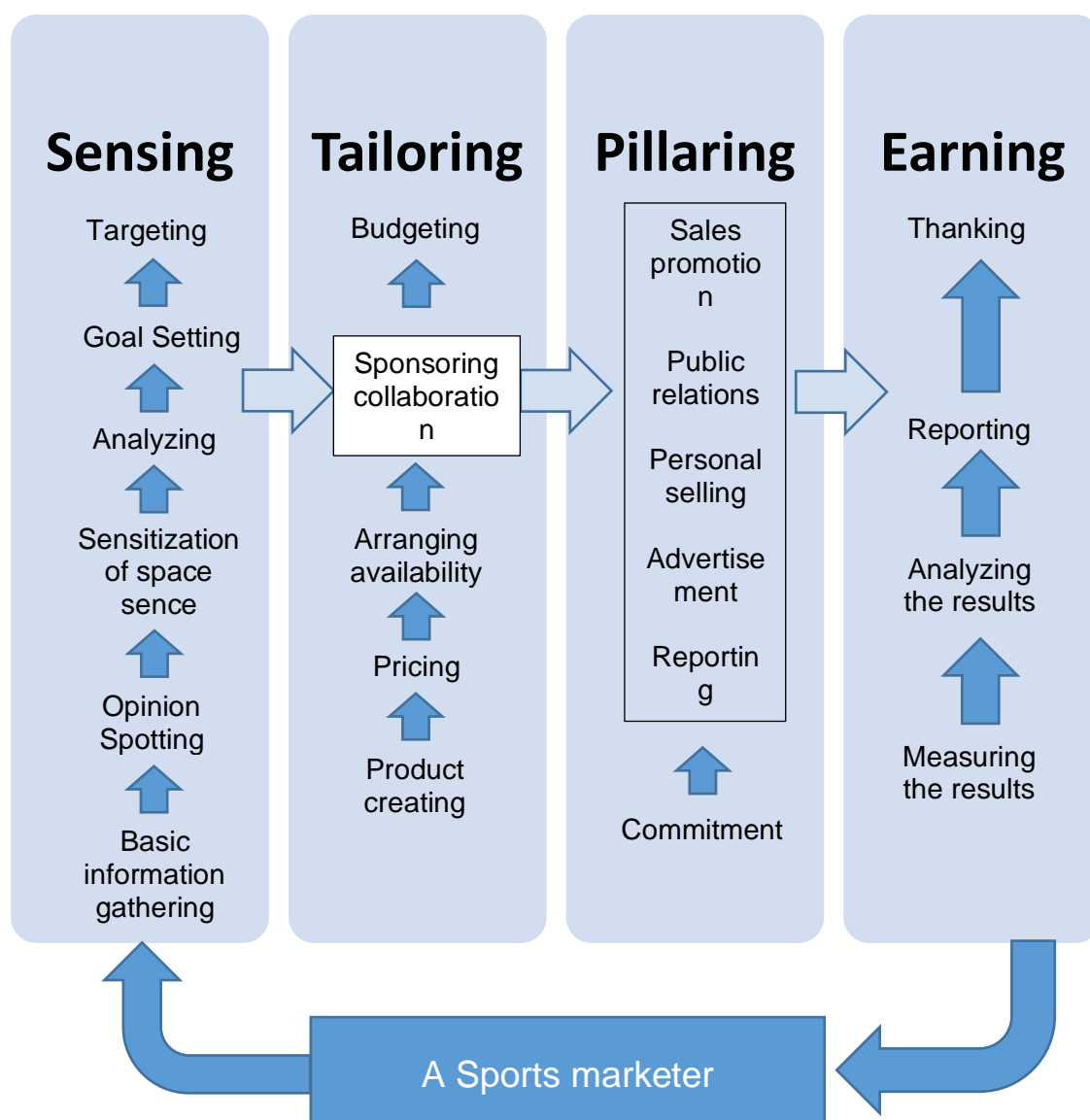


Figure 2. Sponsoring community as a part of sports marketing (adapted from Alaja 2001, 21)

A well-established brand management employee Jim Kelly explains the following regarding sport sponsorship and its relevancy. A golden rule for sport sponsorship is to bring a compelling added-value component to the audience that is being targeted. This audience also has to give credit to the sponsor for bringing and/or enhancing the actual experience. Another golden rule known in sport sponsorship is that both, the property owner and the sponsor must agree that they must agree equal responsibility for providing those relevant and enhanced consumer experiences and making sure the sponsor gets the credit. (Kelly, 7 & 8)

Sponsorships can increase sales, change attitudes towards companies and sponsees, build up awareness, and maintain relationships with the consumers. When taking these facts in to consideration it only makes sense to apply more and more sponsorship deals in to the sports world as with everything else in the world, sports too are more and more commercialised nowadays. In the figure below is explained the sponsorship process. (Shank & Lyberger 2015, 433.)

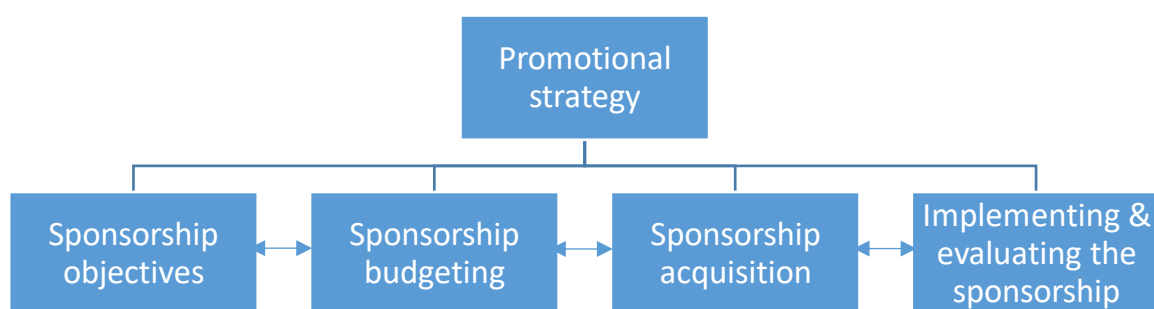


Figure 3. The sponsorship process (adapted from Shank & Lyberger, 2015, 442.)

2.2 Women's football

Women's football is the top priority of FIFA as it is the single biggest growth opportunity in football today. It has a lot of untapped potential even though it has grown a huge amount in the last decade. (FIFA 2022) In England, the first women's football match was played as early as 1895 when North beat south 7-1. It was not until 1969 when The Women's

Football Association or the WFA was formed. (The FA 2022) In Finland, the women's league was originally formed in 1970 and last year, in 2021 they celebrated the leagues 50th anniversary. (Kansallinen Liiga 2022).

The author decided that it was best to compare a little bit of spectator numbers between women's football in Finland versus other European countries to give the readers a better point of view of the situation. In the table below the author has picked top two teams from the Finnish, French and the Swedish league as well as the general league average of these leagues. The attendance numbers are from worldfootball.net and from a Finnish blog site ainoamittari.

Team/League & Country	Average attendance
KuPS, Finland	303
Åland United, Finland	232
Hammarby IF, Sweden	2911
Eskilstuna United, Sweden	895
Olympique Lyon, France	3518
Paris Saint-Germain	3443
Kansallinen Liiga, Finland	151
DAMALLSVENSKAN, Sweden	713
Division 1 Féminine, France	1088

Table 2. Average attendance of women's league games (adapted from ainoamittari & worldfootball.net)

2.3 Finnish sport sponsoring

The first steps of sponsoring in Finland took place in the 1960's when companies would use the coverage from sports to lift the conspicuousness of themselves. Football teams such as RU-38 and Upon Pallo were one of the first sports teams to be sponsored by companies in Finland and pioneers of the movement. (Alaja 2001, 20).

In the figure 3, the stages of the development in Finnish sponsorship community's development can be seen throughout the years of 1960 until the early 2000's.

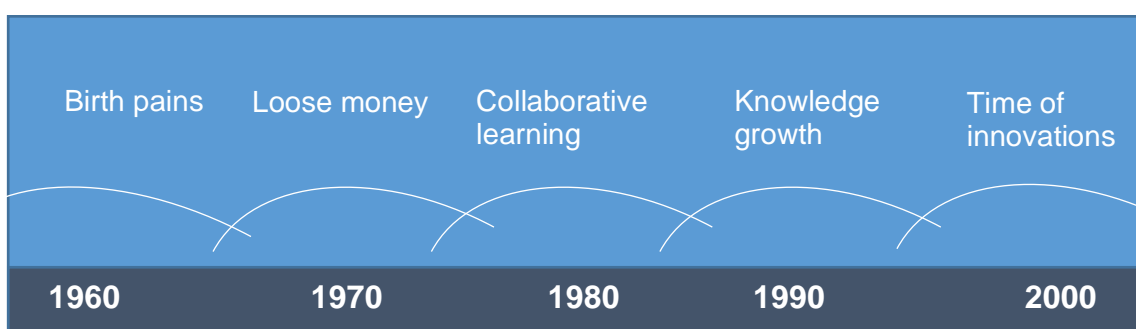


Figure 4. Sponsorship community's development phase in Finland (Adapted from Alaja 2001, 20)

According to research done by Sponsor Insight, in 2020 a total amount of 203 million euros was spent on sponsoring in Finland. Out of this, culture received 23 million, others received 51 million and sports received 129 million euros. Even if this sum of 129 million might sound generally large, it actually dipped a whopping 20.4 percent in regard to 2019. This of course is due to the pandemic of Covid-19. (Sponsor Insight 2020, 6).

In figure 4 & table 1 you can see the sponsorship spending in Finland in 2020 and how the numbers have changed in regard to 2019. (Sponsor Insight 2020, 6.)

Table 3. Sponsorship Spending change in % in Finland 2020 (adapted from Sponsor Insight 2020, 6)

<u>Total spent:</u>		203 MEUR
<u>Total change in % to 2019:</u>		-21.9%
		Change in % to 2019
Sports		-20.4%
Culture		-48.9%
Other		-3.8%

Sponsorship spending in Finland in 2020 (MEUR)

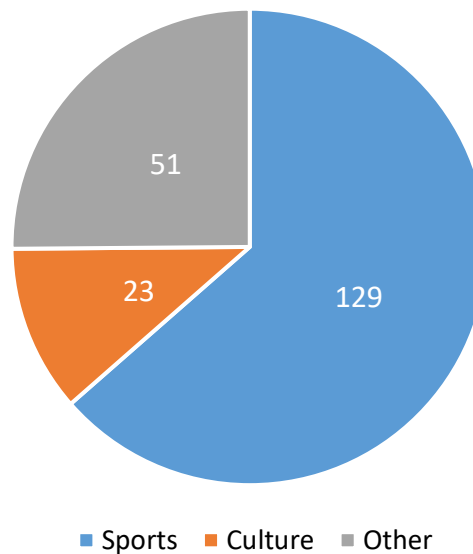


Figure 5. Sponsorship spending in Finland (adapted from Sponsor Insight 2020, 6)

2.4 Women's football sponsorship

In 2021, FIFA released a report with surveys explaining that identifying exclusive sponsorship and broadcasting deals are the key for growth of the sport. (Insider Sport 2021) Women's football teams should not be sponsored just because the men's teams are sponsored but rather because the growth potential in women's football compared to the men's game is enormous. A general consensus is that sponsoring women's sports is about equality or gender, however it is actually mostly about market economy. (Hakala 14 October 2020). Hakala mentions in her interview with Helsingin Sanomat that companies can receive a big advantage in competition due to the fact that women's football is a growing sport and that currently the sponsoring companies are looking for a certain kind of value. Generally, values linked to women's football are equality, responsibility, and sustainability as well as longevity. (Hakala 14 October 2020.) Even if the consumer of women's football is very different to the men's game, it should not be seen as a negative. The consumer are usually women and families so the marketing should also be different thus the sponsor can gain in a different way. Hakala adds that the sponsoring of women's football is also very cost efficient. It is much cheaper to be a sponsor of women's football than it is to be a sponsor of men's football. (Hakala 14 October 2020.)

2.5 Athlete sponsorship

For athletes to grow in terms of following and for them to be able to train their sport in peace and to be able to focus whole heartedly on their profession they more often than

not need sponsoring. A general thought is that only elite athletes receive sponsoring, but this is incorrect. (Robillard s.a.)

Depending on the sport, just the participation can cost a lot, however, it is not easy to get sponsored as an athlete. So why do companies sponsor athletes then? Well, brands improve their own image through sponsoring an athlete who they see as a good addition to their team. Brands often see the athletes as a sales booster to them and usually receive good PR and a good buzz around their sponsored athletes. Depending on the company, they can use their athletes as product testers. (Baylis 2021c.) For example, it is very common for football shoe brands to test their prototype shoes with professional players and tweak the product from the feedback they receive from the athletes.

What benefits do athletes receive when sponsored by a brand then? With sponsorship deals, the athletes often receive enough money to be able to focus fully on their athlete life and do not have to worry about anything else. The athletes receive better tools to succeed and often it is a huge weight of the athlete's shoulders not to worry about other things than the actual performance. (Baylis 2021c.)

3 Research Methodology

This chapter explains the different processes of the research as well as the research design. Also, the different data gathering methods are explained in a subchapter followed by data analysis methods and the use of the data gathered. In the end of set chapter, the reliability will be established with the validity.

3.1 Research Design

When doing research, there are multiple ways to conduct it. One way to do research is to conduct surveys and another one is to conduct interviews. All of the ways to conduct research have their plusses and minuses. It is also possible that a research question needs more than one way to conduct it. This is why research design is very important, so that it is done in an effective way. (Burns, Veeck & Bush 2017, 92.)

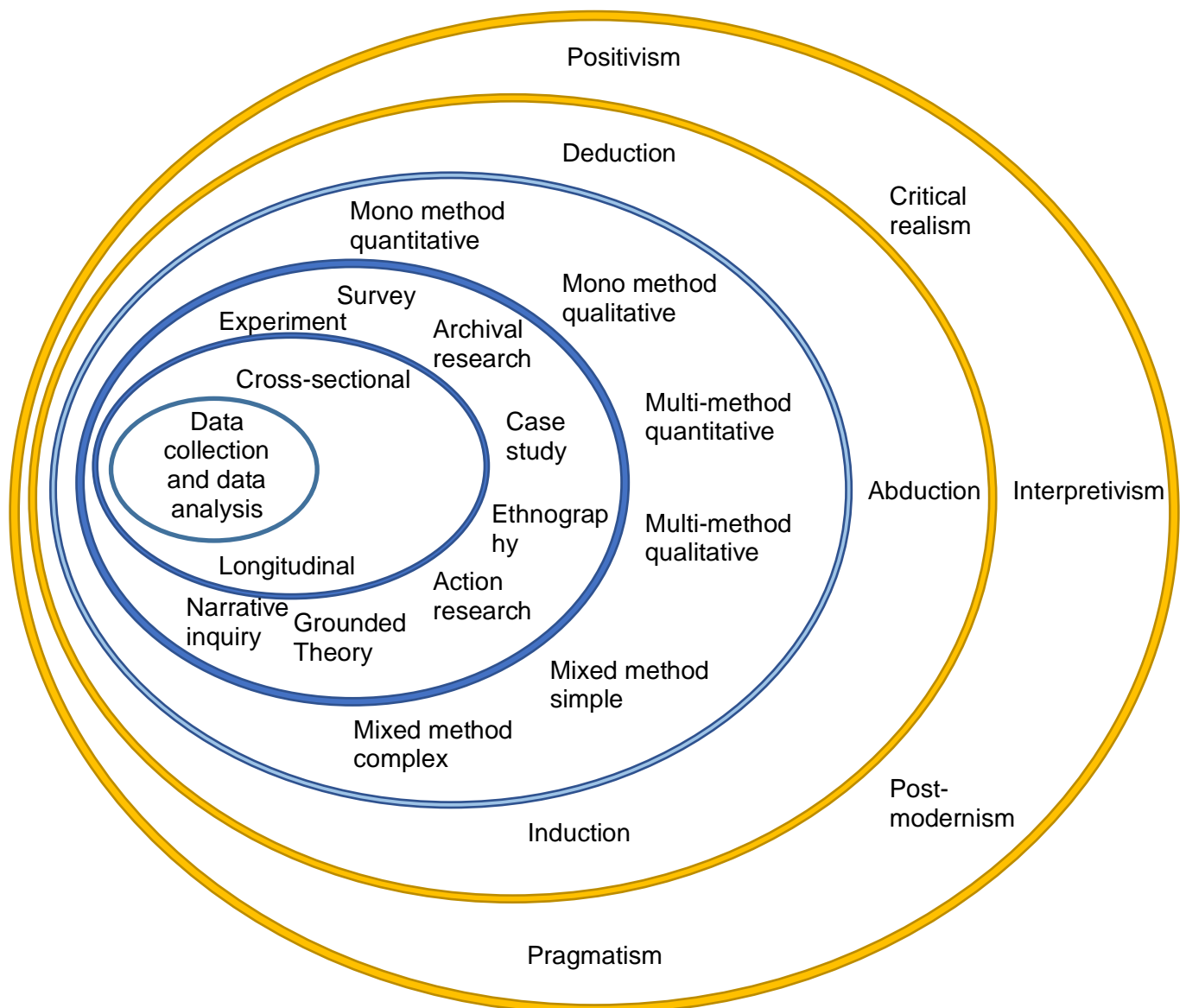


Figure 6. The research onion (adapted from Saunders & al. 2016, 164)

A research onion as seen in the figure 5, underlays the issues regarding the choice of data collection method or methods.

A way to distinguish and to differentiate quantitative research from qualitative research is to understand the facts between numeric data and non-numeric data. Numeric data includes numbers and non-numerical data includes things such as images, words, video clips and other same type of material. (Saunders & al. 2016, 165-168.)

In this thesis the author felt that a mixed method would be a good fit, but one that would be heavier on the qualitative side of the mixed methods since the author interviewed people that are familiar with the topic and drew conclusions mainly based on these. The author also took numeric data into consideration when concluding the thesis.

This thesis's research was done in three phases. In phase one, the author interviewed Erkki Alaja, in phase two they interviewed Heidi Pihlaja and in phase three the author focused on literature. After the interviews were conducted and the reading of the literature material was finished, a comparative analysis of the two interviews was done. The results of the analysis were used to find answers to the research question and the investigative questions of the thesis. The phases of this thesis have been shown in the figure 6 below.

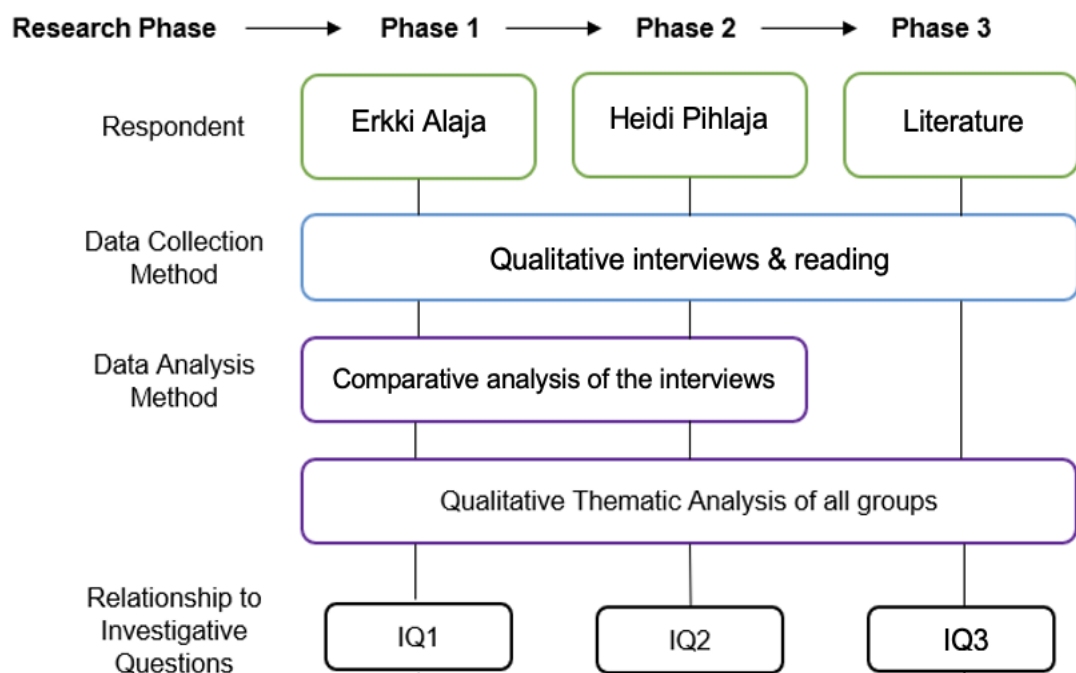


Figure 7. Research design

To be able to find answers for the RQ and the IQs of this thesis the author chose to hold qualitative interviews. The author felt that these were the best options for this thesis as the knowledge that the interviewees hold is very helpful.

3.2 Data collection

Data collection portion of this thesis was collected via interviews that followed a structure to a certain point, meaning that the interviews followed the lines of a semi-structured interview. The author felt that this was the best way to find the data that they needed for this thesis, as it is a matter that the interviewees have a good amount of knowledge of. The author decided on the semi-structured interviews rather than structured ones due to the fact that the thesis needed more of a qualitative approach rather than quantitative. As the author conducted their first ever interviews, a semi-structured interview was also a smart choice as they often have room for more errors.

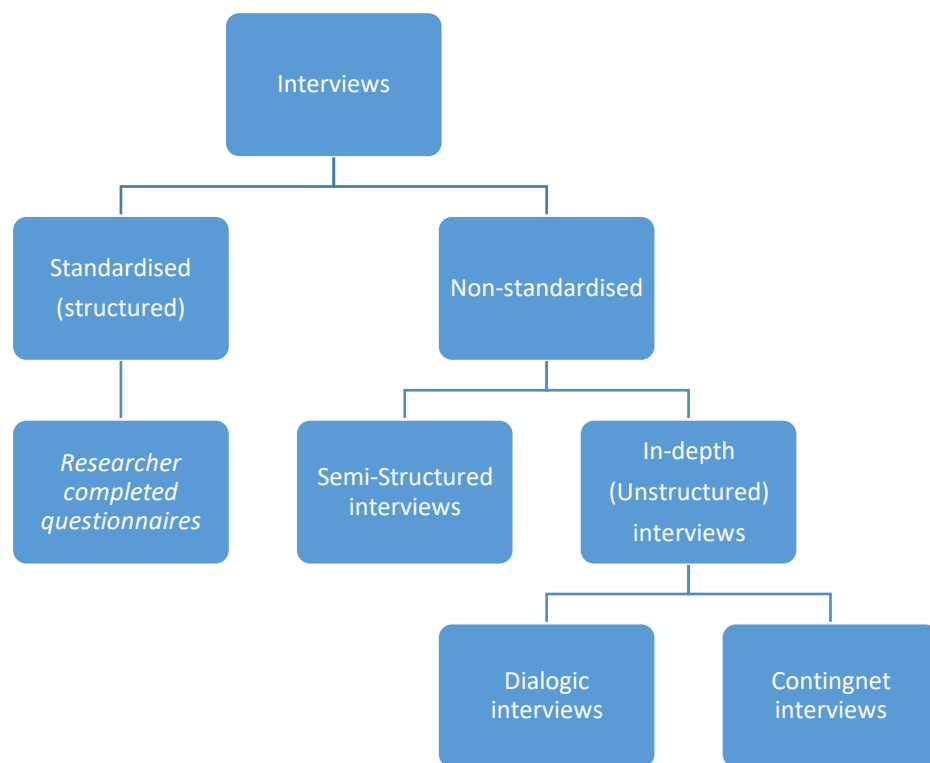


Figure 8. Interview structures (adapted from Saunders & al. 2019, 437)

The figure 7 above demonstrates the different types of interviews one can conduct for their respected research. When using structured interviews, the interviewer is not left with much room to play with as the questions shall be read exactly as the question says. You may not indicate any bias either when reading the question or anything to sway the interviewees answer. (Saunders & al. 2019, 437.)

When conducting a semi-structured interview, or a “non-standardised” interview, the interviewee starts with asking thematic key questions and predetermined list of themes. A semi-structured interview leaves the interviewer to have more freedom when conducting the interview and it can be more like a chat with the interviewee and they can have more freedom in their answers. This is the reason the author of this thesis chose the non-standardised interview type and went with the semi-structured interview. (Saunders & al. 2019, 437.)

3.3 Choosing interviewees

When the author started thinking about who to interview for this thesis one name was there from the very beginning. It was made clear to the author in the build-up to the thesis process that one should always pick an interviewee who has knowledge of the topic and who can share the knowledge to the thesis in a way that is perceived helpful for the author and the readers of the thesis. As this particular thesis is somewhat of a narrow topic, the interviewees that were capable of answering and giving quality answers to this thesis were also numbered. As the author has mentioned earlier in this thesis, to be able to answer the thesis’s RQ and IQs, professionals of the topic were needed.

The author decided that a well-known figure in the sponsorship and management department of sports was needed in this thesis as an interviewee to be able to share knowledge and thoughts about the topic. This however would not be enough as the author realized that the thesis would also need someone who has knowledge of women’s football from the point of view of today as well as before. In total of two interviews were held to gather information towards the topic of this thesis that would then be analysed by the author to gather information and conclude it.

First interviewee is a well-known Finnish spokesperson for sports management and sponsorships, Erkki Alaja.

Second interviewee is a former footballer, current Head of Women’s Football Development for the Finnish football association, Heidi Pihlaja.

3.4 Data analysis

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019, 637) compare qualitative data analysis to completing a jigsaw puzzle. The authors use the puzzles as data and how the puzzle maker is the researcher who pieces the data all together completing a bigger picture.

The nature of qualitative analysis includes two types of approaches. One of them is a deductive approach that basically means that the person who analyses the data bases their analysis on predetermined theory. There is a debate regarding the deductive approach as this theoretical framework can be found to be too restrictive in relation to the issues revealed in the data. (Saunders & al. 2016, 569-570.)

In qualitative researched the interviews are more often than not audio-recorded and then transcribed. It is also in the interviewer's interest to not only focus on what is being said but also how it is said. This then often contributes to the fact that the transcribing of the interviews can be very time consuming for the author. (Saunders & al. 2019, 644-645.)

Table 4. Alternative ways of reducing the time needed to transcribe audio-recordings (adapted from Saunders & al. 2016, 573.)

Alternative	Potential problems
Pay a touch-typist to transcribe your audio-recordings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expense of paying someone else • Important data such as pauses, coughs, sighs and the like may not be included • You will not be familiarising yourself with the data as you are not doing the transcription • The transcribing will still require careful checking as errors can creep in
Borrow a transcription machine with a foot-operated play-pause-rewind-fast forward mechanism and software to control the audio speed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although this will allow you to control the audio-recorder more easily, the speed of transcription will still be dependent upon your typing ability • The transcription will still require careful checking • You may not be able to gain access to a transcription machine
'Dictate' your audio-recordings to your computer using voice recognition software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will need to discover which voice-recognition software works best with your voice • You will also need to discover which voice-recognition software is

	<p>suiting to the needs of your research project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will need to 'teach' the voice-recognition software to understand your voice • You will need to listen to and dictate the entire audio-recording • The transcription will still require careful checking as the software is not entirely accurate
<p>Only transcribe those sections of each audio-recording that are pertinent to your research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will need to listen to the entire recording first at least twice • You may miss certain things, meaning you will have to go back to the audio-recording again • Those sections you transcribe will still require careful checking

In the table above the author has shown different ways to reduce the time used to transcribe the audio-recordings. This comes very handy when considering the time sensitiveness of this thesis.

In this thesis the author analysed the two interviews in a comparative way yet in a way that does not make the interviews battle one another. These interviews were then analysed in a qualitative thematic way. When transcribing the interviews, the author focused on the important parts of the interviews that were pertinent to the research.

3.5 Reliability and validity

When talking about the quality of the research and what judges that, reliability and validity is often brought up. However, their role can be contested in terms of qualitative research. **Reliability** is referring to the research's consistency and replication. This means that if the person doing the research can replicate a research design that has been done earlier with the same findings, that research can be found reliable. Some of the threats for a research's validity are: participant error, where any factor that alters the participants performance, participant bias, where the participant induces a false response, researcher error, where the researcher's interpretation is altered, and finally researcher bias, where the researcher's views are affecting the results. (Saunders & al. 2019, 213-214.)

Validity in research is referring to the research's appropriateness of measures used, analysis accuracy and the generalisability of the research findings. Validity can be divided in to three main terms. Measurement validity, internal validity, and criterion validity. Measurement validity is associated with face validity, content validity, construct validity and predicted validity. These are designed to assess the intention. Internal validity refers to the extent that your findings go. Criterion validity measures whether your questions are good enough. (Saunders & al. 2019, 213-215.)

This thesis has a high level of reliability and validity due to the level of planning done. The author spent a good time on the planning phase of this thesis to ensure that the research and the findings would be good enough. The interview questions were a product of well spent time and good quality research. The author shows the reliability and validity of their findings in the appendix 1 where an overlay matrix can be found.

4 Qualitative interview results

This chapter holds the data and the end results of the conducted interviews. The data was collected from two interviews that were held with Erkki Alaja and Heidi Pihlaja. The interviewees are regarded as very knowledgeable within the field of sponsorships, marketing, and women's football in Finland; thus, the author finds these interviewees capable of answering the questions based on knowledge and experience of the topic. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to this thesis. Both of the interviewees were properly informed that they can choose to not answer on any of the questions and if they feel like cutting the interview short for some reason they may do so.

4.1 Interview results of Erkki Alaja

Topic questions

The interview was started with topic questions that can be found on the appendix 2. In these topic questions the author gets to know the interviewee a bit more and explains to the reader why the interviewee is indeed valid to be interviewed regarding this thesis. The topic questions for Erkki Alaja were:

- How long have you worked in football marketing/sponsorships?
- What roles have you had in football?
- How long have you practiced sponsorships?

I have been involved in pretty much all sports under the sun but in football I started my journey at my own firm from 1985. At first, I did a lot of campaigns for the national team. These included the Olympia stadions biggest ever football crowd 1989 when Finland played the Netherlands. We were able to get 46 000 people to watch that game. My main job was to campaign the national teams matches from ticketing to different campaign materials. Back then the radio was a big hit and to be able to campaign on the radio usually worked like a charm. Radio used to be kind of like what social media is today. When planning a campaign, you need to be very innovative and precise. Oh, and I was the CEO of HJK 1998-1999, the year that they went to the champions league as well!

Core questions

After the presentation of the topic and getting to know the interviewees background from the topics point of view the interview's tone was focused on the main core questions.

- What is the situation regarding sponsorship deals in Finnish football?
- What is the situation regarding sponsorship deals in women's football?

Well, it has grown exponentially especially with the men's national team's success and the Finnish footballing association has a good and positive image created. The frame of reference is and has been created by the men's national team and it has shown light to the footballing nation whether it is men's clubs, women's clubs, or the kid's game. The most important thing is to talk about football and to keep talking about it, because this then creates more talk and more knowledge around football in general.

I would say that the women's game is going forward in a good manner. When we also think about the current state of the world, it is about equality as it should be. That also pushes the agenda forward in a positive way. Around the world, women's football has gained a lot of traction in the last years and the biggest clubs in the world such as, Juventus, Lyon etc. They all invest heavily on women's football and that to me tells a lot! In a few years I am sure that as the numbers increase, they will have more resources. This also obviously affects Finland too in a positive way, perhaps not in the same scale but in a good way regardless.

Back in the late 1990's we saw the first uplift of women's football in Finland when some of the top players moved to Sweden to play. I feel like that was indeed the first uplifting moment of the game and we are currently living the second one.

- What are the main things to have successful sponsorship deals in football?
- What can women's football do differently in the future in terms of sponsorship deals?

When building a working sponsorship in football you always need to have working system of values. This provides you so many opportunities. It is important to know what you are looking for.

As I mentioned earlier, we are living a time of equality and in my opinion in the future there could be a one instead of two meaning that women's teams could merge with men's team in a way that if we for example talk about HJK, we would talk about both the women's and the men's team instead of always having to make the correction which one is being talked about. This would be the ideal situation. I think that the women's teams are tracking behind the men's game in Finland less than it is in Sweden. At least from an attendance point of view. The women's football is rather young in Finland.

I think that a more competitive league overall would be good for the whole game in Finland. That being said, it is also very important to get the leagues name to the world and have success in Europe.

- Is there a specific thing that you think that is done incorrectly regarding women's football sponsoring in Finland?
- Is there a bigger potential to fulfil with women's football in Finland in terms of sponsorship deals?
- How big can women's football grow in Finland?

I do not think that things are necessarily done wrong, but I do reckon that things should be done courageously. The thing I would tackle first would be to get the people to come and attend the games. This would bring ticket sales and it would also increase the interest in sponsors. There is definitely a lot of potential with women's football, but it needs work to fulfil that potential. Obviously there needs to be good communication between the teams and the leagues and the consumer but also an old-fashioned way of going physically to the consumer and having a chat with them could work a charm, like in political campaigns. I have always thought that this type of marketing is a very good way to broaden the consumer base. It is a now or never situation when it comes to women's football. There is good

buzz around the sport and the time to build and grow is now!

There cannot be any limits to grow. Not in women's football and not in anything. There is no right or wrong way to do for example marketing. It is just important that things are done.

- Can you name countries that are on the same level as Finland in terms of women's football sponsorships?
 - If, what?
- *Vise verca*, can you name countries that are better at women's football sponsorship deals than Finland?
 - If, what?
- How far is Finland behind in sponsorship deals in women's football sponsorship deals regarding Sweden for example?

I cannot say for certain that specifically about other countries, but I see it in a way that there are probably three categories. Top countries, middle countries and then the rest. I see Finland being in the verge of clinching a spot from the second group with a good wave that we have going on right now. It is nice to see that the media is very interested about women's football in general. This then has a snowball effect that the buzz around it grows bigger and bigger.

Of course, the success has a say in how popular something gets. Sweden has had some success in women's football, but I would not put the success of theirs solely based on that. They have longer traditions regarding women's football. When we think about Finland, women's football has only been around for fifty or so years. It is a young and growing sport. If I am not mistaken, we have around 70 female players who get compensated well enough from playing football whereas in Sweden the number is around 1000. Nordic countries in general have had better ball game culture all around and Finland is only now getting to a better football culture.

- What are the countries doing different to succeed?
- Could Finnish companies/teams take notice?
 - If, How/what?
- What things should be avoided when seeking football sponsorship deals for women?
- What things should be done more in when seeking football sponsorship deals for women?
- What sort of deals should be done to grow as a sport?

You always need to have an idea. Preferably an idea that provides for you, but also for the whole community. I often use a saying from the former CEO of Volvo, Pehr Gyllenhammar that goes: In a good sponsorship unites idealism and capitalism. Now you can make of that whatever you want but I see it in a way that when I sponsor someone of course I need to benefit from it, otherwise there is no point for me to sponsor them, but I am really happy if I can push your agenda forward as well.

Nowadays more and more of the social responsibility of a company is in the headlines. You need to be not only financially good to benefit the other part of the deal but also ethically good. You can make an absolute fool out of yourself if you are not ethically good. It is the time of ethicality. The sponsors and sponsees want that the target ethically clean.

In my opinion with sponsorship deals now, it is possible to make a huge impact even on the world. Women's football in Finland is so new and so untouched that there are huge possibilities for something new and exciting, as long as the backgrounds are checked.

With women's football in Finland, I think you should, as a sponsor, seek for the little fishes rather than go for the grand prize. Do not try and take too big of a portion of the market no matter how appealing it might seem. Be composed, and try to grow this beautiful sport as a whole rather than seek for a quick buck. Respect the game and

the roots of the clubs and respect the ideology of the league.

4.2 Interview results of Heidi Pihlaja

Topic questions

The interview was started with topic questions that can be found on the appendix 2. In these topic questions the author gets to know the interviewee a bit more and explains to the reader why the interviewee is indeed valid to be interviewed regarding this thesis. The topic questions for Heidi Pihlaja were:

- What is your current role in Finnish football?
- What type of different roles have you had in football?
- How long have you worked with women's football after retiring?

My current role in Finnish football is that I am in charge of developing football as a hobby for women and girls, the official title is head of women's football development in the Finnish footballing association. Prior to this I have had my own playing career, a coaching career with HJK's league team and I have also been a part of the board of HJK ry before my current role in the Finnish FA. I retired in 2015 and have worked in the Finnish FA from 2019.

Core questions

After the presentation of the topic and getting to know the interviewees background from the topics point of view the interview's tone was focused on the main core questions.

- How do you see the state of women's football in Finland right now?

I see the current situation regarding women's football in Finland as positive and that there is a lot of potential to be redeemed. For the last two or three years the systematic work towards Kansallinen Liiga, the women's national team, Helmarit, and the player numbers has shown positive growth. If we look at the numbers of girls that play football, it is the highest ever and despite of Covid-19 the rise has been 16% in terms of football players/hobbyists within girls and women.

YLE foretells that in the upcoming European championships, over a million Finns will be watching each

of the women's national teams' games. These numbers are something that we have been used to see in the men's games so that is remarkable. In terms of Kansallinen Liiga, the media coverage has doubled in the last two years and partnership values have grown over 220% in the last few years. In terms of the amount of professional player deals, the percent has grown 37% in the last two years as well, making the total 70 players. Now, bear in mind the minimum for a professional deal is 2000€ annually, which is not a wage one can live with, but it does tell us that we are moving towards the right way.

The biggest challenges are to do with the possibilities of investing more towards the growth. A few of the league teams have already the capabilities of investing more and more into women's football but we are constantly working towards making the number of teams bigger that are able to invest and make it a business that could grow further.

- What is the sponsorship situation like with women's football in Finland?
- Are there things that are done in an old-fashioned way regarding sponsorships and marketing in Finland's footballing channels?

Rather than just women's football but with all women's sport in Finland, we have a good opportunity to capitalize from their different qualities and the commitment level that they create, which comes from different target groups. There are a few individual athletes that have been successful in branding themselves in Finland for example via Instagram and social media, but when we come to team sports, we begun the process from basically zero and are yet to fully utilize the fact that the target groups are different, and the attributes are totally different which ultimately make the partnership buying decision. Generally speaking, we have not been able to provide the stories in a commercial way to the fullest yet.

If we speak about our communicating methods and the way we do that, I see us as frontrunners. I do not think that we

are behind in that regard or doing things in an old-fashioned way. However, we could always be quicker to hop on to new platforms such as TikTok, one that we are working on at the moment and especially working on how to hop on to that platform. That being said, on the club level there is still work to do in terms of bringing up football as a girls and women's sport. There is aspiration to do it but then in actuality the last post on Instagram about women or girls' football is from last November. This is something that we want to help with and to go along the journey with them. The fact is that these teams have the resources to provide material of women's football but then different things such as paradigms and objectives come to play.

- What changes have been made in the past five years regarding marketing women's football in Finland?
- How can women's football acquire bigger sponsorship deals in Finland?
- Are we behind other countries regarding sponsorship deals and the amount of them, both, money wise and numerical wise?
- What about countries that are on the same level as Finland in that regard?

It all begins from the strategy level. It is important that the Finnish FA has a chairperson who speaks from the behalf of women's football and that it is important that women's involvement in the sport matter. It is a great thing that the change starts from the top of the branch and that it is not just equality-washing from the marketing standpoint. Another big thing that has happened is that both the women's and the men's national teams are equally paid. This provides the fundamentals and the core to the conversation in general. Budgeting wise the women's league Kansallinen Liiga has not had the biggest budgets in terms of marketing thus making the marketing approach sort of brave in terms of what to do and what to say. We have succeeded in getting Kansallinen Liiga and the message of it to a worldwide audience. We sort of have felt that if no one bats an eye, nothing changes.

Money wise we are definitely behind regarding sponsorship deals especially when compared to our neighbouring countries due to them having a different approach when talked about sponsorships in sports. For example, in Sweden and Norway the general values are much higher in terms of football sponsorships with both men and women. The same effect is seen with tv-deals. Kansallinen Liiga has good reach, but Damallsvenskan has more Instagram followers for instance. Personally, I have a mindset that we are ten years behind Sweden in some things and this is directly proportional to the size of the community, reach and spectators. The most well-known footballer in Sweden is Zlatan Ibrahimović and after him the second and third most well-known footballers are women so in that regard, we are behind.

On countries that are on the same level as Finland I cannot say much due to not having specific enough data on it but in May, UEFA will publish a research called 'Business Case of Women's Football' that will provide us more data on that regard so we will keep an eye on that for sure.

- What are countries such as Sweden and France doing differently to succeed in women's football marketing/sponsoring?
- Is it all to do with the heritage of the game or is there concrete marketing strategies that Finland is yet to adapt?
- How to get the bigger companies to be more financially involved?

As I stated before, Sweden has begun their systematic evolution around ten years before Finland which the correlates to the success directly. Also in Sweden, the status of all women's sports is bigger than in Finland so that adds to it as well. For example, in the Swedish women's hockey league finals there were 8000 spectators and in Finland people have no idea about women's hockey league's schedule not to mention the finals.

In France the market and the economy are so much bigger and closer to the bigger brands such as Nike and Adidas

and others, so I feel like there are more possibilities to build collaborations with these operators. Of course, if we look at the likes of PSG, which is a well-known organization and a huge club which then makes it easier to build companionships with these big providers. The western countries such as England, Spain, France and Italy and their clubs are moving fast towards making women's football bigger, and whilst that is great, it makes us work in a kind of overdrive to catch up. The big clubs are so big that their women's teams are operating with bigger budgets than the top men's teams in the Nordic countries so that also polarizes the field quite a bit.

I believe in systematic work when it comes to sales so there are no fancy tricks done in that. It is about the sales process and about the leads you have etc. We have succeeded in Kansallinen Liiga for example with Subway, Continental and Lumo Energia to pull big companies who operate on a big scale even on a global scale, and they are really invested in the cause and want to be involved. With Helmarit we have for example Euronics, a big European small machinery company who are starting to do commercials where the women's national teams' players are involved. We tailor the sales for the customer case by case so that it suits both parties well.

- What kind of things should be avoided when seeking sponsorship deals for women's football?
- What things should be done more frequently when seeking sponsorship deals for women's football?
- What type of deals should be targeted to grow the sport in Finland?

A general rule of thumb is that rather than selling individual social media posts, we sell a whole product set so to speak. Of course, the deal can and often is different to other deals and of different value. For example, if you offer a deal of 100 to a customer that only wants a deal worth of 20, we are never selling the deal worth 100 for that 20, but rather take some of the content away. We are very proud of

the product we have, and we are not now and not ever going to just give it away for free. It is a product that has value, and we believe in it whether it was Kansallinen Liiga or Helmarit.

In terms of deals, we always aim to have a clear visual on what our target group is, what the other company's target group is and how can we build a match based on that. We aim to strive through companionships that really push the message of ours to the world and it always wonderful if we can find a company who then pushes the message to their customer like for example Euronics. A shared value base and shared goals are always in a big role as is of course the economic benefit.

5 Conclusions and results

This chapter presents the findings of the qualitative research conducted with this thesis. After the key findings section, the author gives their suggestions for further research. Reliability and validity of the results and the research is touched on as well, followed by the authors personal learning process.

5.1 Key findings

Starting with the first investigative question of **How to grow women's football in Finland from the sponsorships point of view?** To be able to answer the first question the author conducted qualitative interviews with Erkki Alaja and Heidi Pihlaja. After analysing the interview results thoroughly, the author noticed a pattern of similarities, but also different aspects towards the topic. Both interviews showed that it is important to when doing sponsorship deals and building business relationships in this regard, it is important to have a good value base and be ethically a good match with one another. This creates a good base for the relationship and eliminates possible damage that could come across in the future. Also, it was shown that women's football is thriving at the moment in Finland and that the possibilities to grow are endless. When the interviewees were asked about the types of deals that should be done to grow the sport the answers were similar yet had their differences. The general consensus however is that the amount of money that the deal holds is important, but not the most important thing. With the sponsorship deals, the league, league teams, national team etc. should aim for ones that push their agenda to more people through good values. It could also be helpful for the league teams to aim for more deals numerically rather than fewer deals with more money. This would then give the teams more visual presence among the rest of the world. Another thing found was that the product sold, women's football, should not be sold for less than the value it has. It is a rising market and a rising product with lots of possibilities and thus should not be given put for free.

The second investigative question that the author was set to resolve was **How much potential does Finland have in sponsoring women's football?** As was the case with investigative question one, investigative question two's answer was also obtained through investigative questions via the interviews. Again, the two interviewees shared the same ideology. Women's football in Finland has a lot, if not, endless potential. The sponsoring is not limited due to the fact that it has no limits anywhere else either. However, Things such as financial capabilities etc. could cause the growth to be slower when compared to other countries, but it still has no limits on how big it can grow. When we take a look at the spectator numbers for instance, Sweden and France are both ahead of Finland. However,

in Sweden, the culture around women's sports in general has been present for ten years longer than in Finland, thus giving Sweden a ten-year head start. Sweden also has about double the amount of people living there which of course affects as well. Now with France, the location plays a big part. It is centralised in terms of being near bigger brands and bigger companies so it is easier for French clubs to prosper with those. Also, France has huge clubs on the men's footballing scene such as Paris Saint Germain, and with the men's success they can then allocate more funds towards the women's game, making the women's budgets bigger than men's budget in Finland. So, whilst the potential is rather endless, there are factors that affect the trajectory of the success.

As with the IQ 1 & 2, the investigative question three, **how far is Finland behind in sponsorship deals compared to other European countries?** follows the same protocol of finding the results via the interviews. The interviewees were clear on their answers, and it was made clear that financially we are behind of the top countries regarding women's football. This however is no surprise when we take a look at the market size of Finland. Also, other Nordic countries have a very different approach to women's football and women's sports in general. It is more popular in those countries making the sponsorship deals and tv-deals bigger financially. Sweden for example have two female footballers in the country's top three most known footballers list. In Finland the case is not quite yet this. This affects the possible sponsorship deals as well, due to the coverage being smaller. However, the marketing and communications part of Finland is on a good level when compared to other countries. This gives a relief towards the sponsorships due to the sponsoring companies knowing that they are getting the positive image that they are striving for. On that level Finland is doing good.

5.2 Suggestions for further research

The author suggests that further research should be conducted with a slightly different approach. As football is a team sport, a thorough sponsorship questionnaire and research should be done with the teams in mind to find out more accurate numerical data. Also, research should be conducted in the future, so we receive more data from example the UEFA research 'Business Case of Women's Football'. Also, it could be good to take individual female players and seek to search more information about individual sponsorship deals. Possibly quantitative research could be done in the future as well.

5.3 Reliability and validity

As stated in the subchapter 3.5 reliability and validity, reliability is referring to the research's consistency and replication, and validity in research is referring to the

research's appropriateness of measures used, analysis accuracy and the generalisability of the research findings. (Saunders & al. 2019, 213-215.)

With thorough planning the author was able to find relevant and reliable sources both online and in paper form. These were used for help as seen on chapter two's presentation of theoretical framework regarding this thesis.

The interviewees were, as stated before, chosen carefully and with the relevancy in mind. The author did thorough research on who to interview, why to interview them and how reliable are the interviewees as a source. The author had thought out the interview questions with care and were shaped from the base of the theoretical framework. Both, the interview questions, and the interviewees were/are topical and thus reliable and valid for this thesis.

The interviewees were made sure that the interviews are recorder and transcribed and that they can whenever they feel like it, stop the interview or skip a question. Both interviews were conducted in Finnish and then transcribed in to English thus having a margin for error in terms of reliability, but the author made sure that there would not be any reliability issues on that regard.

5.4 Personal learning

The author found the thesis process quite educating. It is a topic that has somewhat of a more limited resource material to go through, but the author found it to be really well written and informative. It was also a very pleasant realisation for the author that more and more people in Finland are happy to share thoughts about women's sports and women's football. The author had no previous background in interviewing people for anything and the author also did transcriptions for the first time in this thesis. It was a learning curve that the author is very pleased with.

The biggest issues regarding the progress of this thesis were time management and finding enough decent material. The author did not have a precise timeline but rather wrote the thesis every week when they felt like writing it. Luckily the author's other courses were not too demanding, and they got the thesis done well and in time. The research of literature turned out to be rather challenging due to the topic being fairly new as to actual research literature been written about it. Despite there not being too much literature, the author was happy with the material they found for the research of this thesis, and they are sure that if such research were to be done in five to ten years of time, there would be loads more to research from.

As the author stated in the beginning of this subchapter, they learned a lot during the thesis process. The author is convinced that they can take the skills, knowledge and information learned to their future endeavours in the future working career ahead of them.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Overlay Matrix

Investigative questions	Theoretical framework	Research methods	Interview questions
IQ 1 How to grow women's football in Finland from the sponsorships point of view?	Sports sponsorships, sponsorships, athlete branding, objectives for sponsorships, state of women's football in Finland.	Qualitative interviews of well-regarded professionals of the topic.	Core questions for both of the conducted interviews.
IQ 2 How much potential does Finland have in sponsoring women's football?	See IQ 1 above.	See IQ 1 above.	See IQ 1 above.
IQ 3 How far is Finland behind in sponsorship deals compared to other European countries?	See IQs 1 & 2 above.	See IQs 1 & 2 above.	See IQs 1 & 2 above.

Appendix 2. Interview questions for interviewee Erkki Alaja

General questions:

- How long have you worked in football marketing/sponsorships?
- What roles have you had in football?
- How long have you practiced sponsorships?

Core questions

- What is the situation regarding sponsorship deals in Finnish football?
- What is the situation regarding sponsorship deals in women's football?
- What are the main things to have successful sponsorship deals in football?
- What can women's football do differently in the future in terms of sponsorship deals?
- Is there a specific thing that you think that is done incorrectly regarding women's football sponsoring in Finland?
- Is there a bigger potential to fulfil with women's football in Finland in terms of sponsorship deals?
- How big can women's football grow in Finland?
- Can you name countries that are on the same level as Finland in terms of women's football sponsorships?
 - If, what?
- Vice versa, can you name countries that are better at women's football sponsorship deals than Finland?
 - If, what?
- How far is Finland behind in sponsorship deals in women's football sponsorship deals regarding Sweden for example?
- What are the countries doing different to succeed?
- Could Finnish companies/teams take notice?
 - If, How/what?
- What things should be avoided when seeking football sponsorship deals for women?
- What things should be done more in when seeking football sponsorship deals for women?
- What sort of deals should be done to grow as a sport?

Appendix 3. Interview questions for interviewee Heidi Pihlaja

General questions:

- What is your current role in Finnish football?
- What type of different roles have you had in football?
- How long have you worked with women's football after retiring?

Core questions:

- How do you see the state of women's football in Finland right now?
- What is the sponsorship situation like with women's football in Finland?
- Are there things that are done in an old-fashioned way regarding sponsorships and marketing in Finland's footballing channels?
- What changes have been made in the past five years regarding marketing women's football in Finland?
 - Has it worked?
 - How?
- How can women's football acquire bigger sponsorship deals in Finland?
- Are we behind other countries regarding sponsorship deals and the amount of them, both, money wise and numerical wise?
 - If, how far behind?
 - Why?
- What about countries that are on the same level as Finland in that regard?
- What are countries such as Sweden and France doing differently to succeed in women's football marketing/sponsoring?
- Is it all to do with the heritage of the game or is there concrete marketing strategies that Finland is yet to adapt?
- How to get the bigger companies to be more financially involved?
- What kind of things should be avoided when seeking sponsorship deals for women's football?
- What things should be done more frequently when seeking sponsorship deals for women's football?
- What type of deals should be targeted to grow the sport in Finland?