Does Social Media Play Sports?
A Case Study on Finnish Sport Team Social Media Usage: Motivations, Expectations and Measurements

Master’s thesis within Business Administration

Author: Pentti Nieminen
Tutor: Erik Hunter
Jönköping May 2012
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the organizations and their representatives who participated in the study for their time and effort to make this research successful.

Thank you professor Hunter for your support and help throughout the whole thesis writing process.

Also, thank you all the people who attended the same thesis-writing course for your valuable comments and feedback.

Last, but not least, I want to thank myself for taking the chance and making the best of the past two years studying in JIBS.

Pentti Nieminen

Jönköping International Business School

May, 2012

“For when the One Great Scorer comes
To mark against your name,
He writes – not that you won or lost –
But how you played the game”

Grantland Rice, American sportswriter.
Abstract

Introduction
The use of social media has been increasing enormously during the past years. Businesses have realized the importance of being present in social media, like Facebook, but purposes for utilizing it vary widely among academics as well as among the practitioners. Also, quantifying and measuring success in social media activities can be challenging without proper definitions of success factors and relevant metrics to measure them. Sports organizations are understudied in social media since the previous research and academic literature have focused only on businesses in general. Sports industry and sports fans, however, have some special characteristics to be considered when studying business in social media, such as an intangible, experiential, and subjective nature of sport events and strong personal and emotional identification sports fans have towards their favorite team.

Purpose
This study aims to find out the reasons and understand why companies act in social media, like Facebook; for what purposes they use social media, what do they expect to gain from it, and how do they evaluate success of their social media activities. The empirical study focuses on sports teams, in particular, and the case companies are Finnish professional hockey teams.

Method
This study takes a qualitative approach to fulfill the purpose of the study and to understand and interpret the phenomenon in hand. A case study with four semi-structured open interviews was conducted to collect empirical data. The data was reflected and analyzed against the frame of reference in order to reach conclusions.

Conclusion
Fan engagement and community building seem to be the most essential reasons for sports organizations’ presence in social media. These aspects were argued to emerge in a large extent especially in sports business. Also, communicating and informing was seen to be important. Advertising and sales promotion were identified to be less important. When it comes to quantifying and measuring success there is a lack of clear definitions and metrics, but also a lack of resources and consistent planning, to effectively monitor the influence and results of social media activities. Implications for better practices are identified and discussed in this paper. Additionally, some future expectations for social media, like mobile integration, were identified.
# Table of Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Background .............................................................................................................. 1
  1.2 Problem discussion ................................................................................................. 4
  1.3 Purpose of the study ............................................................................................... 5
  1.4 Research questions ................................................................................................. 6
  1.5 Methodology ........................................................................................................... 6
  1.6 Structure of the study ............................................................................................. 6

2 Frame of reference ....................................................................................................... 8
  2.1 Definition and classification of social media ............................................................. 8
  2.2 The 4 C’s of social media ......................................................................................... 9
  2.3 Social media – a new way of marketing communications .................................... 10
  2.4 Social media for business purposes ........................................................................ 12
    2.4.1 Customer engagement and community building ............................................... 13
    2.4.2 Speak, listen and learn – research the audience .............................................. 15
  2.5 Facebook as a social media channel ........................................................................ 17
  2.6 Quantifying and evaluating business success in social media activities ................ 18
  2.7 What to measure – and how? .................................................................................. 20
    2.7.1 Measuring engagement .................................................................................... 20
    2.7.2 Facebook metrics and other web analytics ...................................................... 21
    2.7.3 ROI – return on investment ............................................................................ 23
  2.8 Summarizing the frame of reference .................................................................... 24

3 Methodology .................................................................................................................. 26
  3.1 Research design and method ................................................................................... 26
  3.2 Data collection ......................................................................................................... 27
    3.2.1 Structure and themes of interviews ................................................................. 27
  3.3 Assessing the quality of the study .......................................................................... 30
  3.4 Summarizing the methodology ............................................................................. 31

4 Findings .......................................................................................................................... 33
  4.1 First part of the interviews: general discussion on social media ............................. 33
    4.1.1 Social media channels ..................................................................................... 33
    4.1.2 Strategies and resources ................................................................................ 34
  4.2 Second part of the interviews: purposes of utilizing social media ......................... 35
    4.2.1 Customer engagement and community building .......................................... 35
    4.2.2 Speak, listen and learn – research the audience .......................................... 37
    4.2.3 To communicate and inform ......................................................................... 38
    4.2.4 Marketing and promotion ............................................................................. 40
    4.2.5 Sales ............................................................................................................. 42
    4.2.6 Advertising ................................................................................................... 43
    4.2.7 Benchmarking .............................................................................................. 43
  4.3 Third part of the interviews: quantifying and measuring success ......................... 44
    4.3.1 Defining and measuring success .................................................................... 44
    4.3.2 Fan engagement and activity ...................................................................... 44
    4.3.3 Sales ........................................................................................................... 45
    4.3.4 Measuring tools – Facebook Insights and web analytics .............................. 46
  4.4 Fourth part of the interviews: sports business vs. other businesses ...................... 47
  4.5 Fifth part of the interviews: future expectations of social media ............................ 48
    4.5.1 Why compete – why not co-operate? .............................................................. 50

5 Analysis and discussion ............................................................................................... 51
  5.1 Overview of the first part of the interviews ............................................................ 51
  5.2 Overview of the second part of the interviews ....................................................... 52
  5.3 Overview of the third part of the interviews ........................................................... 55
  5.4 Overview of the fourth part of the interviews ........................................................ 56
  5.5 Overview of the fifth part of the interviews ............................................................ 56
6 Conclusion ..................................................................................................................58
   6.1 Limitations and future research suggestions ..............................................58
   6.2 Conclusions and summary of the main findings ......................................59

List of references ....................................................................................................63
Figures
Figure 1 The Four C’s of Social Media (Pick, 2009)................................. 10
Figure 2 The New Communications Paradigm (Faulds & Mangold, 2009)............................. 12
Figure 3 Complete Social Media Measurement Framework (Owyang, 2010; Altimeter Group, 2010) 20
Figure 4 Facebook Insights........................................................................ 22

Tables
Table 1 Classification of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)................................. 9
Table 2 Social Media Metrics (Vassinen, 2011) .................................................................. 19
Table 3 Social Media in the Case Companies................................................................ 51

Appendix
Appendix A – Interview guide........................................................................ 69
Chapter 1

Introduction

In this chapter the background of the study is first discussed. Then the research problem and research questions will be introduced, as well as the objectives for the study. After that the research methods will be discussed and finally the structure of the study will be presented briefly.

This study focuses on investigating the reasons why companies establish social media presence, and use their own Facebook pages, for example, and to find out what do these companies believe to gain by doing so. The empirical part of the study takes a deeper look into the sports industry, specifically into team sports and teams’ actions on Facebook, by using Finnish hockey teams as case companies. The literature and previous research in the field of study have mainly focused on the purposes and measurement of social media actions in any business, but not particularly in sports, thus there’s not much literature nor empirical research concerning sports industry.

1.1 Background

Using Internet and social media has exploded to touch almost everyone these days. Social media is one of the new media channels. People are able to use social media for variety of things they do every day. It is still quite new tool for companies to be used in business activities, and also it is more difficult to control social media than other media channels. This is because of the fact that social media allows consumers to interact with hundreds or even thousands of other consumers in real time and without the possibility of companies to fully control this interaction (Faulds & Mangold, 2009). According to Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith (2011, p. 12), social media refers to “a set of online tools that supports social interaction between users”. These tools – for example social networking services, like Facebook or Twitter - make it possible for users all over the world to “collaboratively create, find, share, evaluate, and make sense of the mass of information available online”. They also make it very easy to find people with similar interests and to connect with them (Hansen et. al, 2011). Especially young people interact through Facebook, and other social networking services, and this provides marketers a huge opportunity to reach those people.

Facebook reported to have 845 million users worldwide in the end of 2011 (Facebook, 2012). SocialBakers.com (2012) website has statistics for world Facebook users and accord-
ing to them over 2 million (2.08) people in Finland are registered users of Facebook. Using social media is popular especially among young people. In 2011, 75% of 16-24 years old Finns followed some social media channel, like Facebook or Twitter, daily. For 25-34 years old Finnish population the number is 62% (Tilastokeskus, 2012).

Even though Facebook is used by millions of people it is still not used that well in a sense that it could help companies to really benefit from it in their business since many companies do not feel comfortable in the new social media environment (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Also, Facebook, like other social media channels, is a rather open venue for people to share their opinions, comments and to interact with other people, and it can be difficult to control it by the owner of the page (Levy, 2010). A lot of companies have their own Facebook pages but do those pages really work in advantage to the company?

Acknowledging the possibilities social media offers and being able to take advantage of it is not an easy task but it is becoming more and more important. Facebook can be used by companies for several reasons, e.g. for the brand building, collecting information, communication, etc. Through social media companies and brands have access to consumers’ personal lives, and if accepted there, they become part of an individual’s social networking sphere, just like family, friends and colleagues (Briggs, 2010). Branding and brand building is widely recognized as an important tool for marketing in today’s business life. Anything – products, services, people, or even cities and countries – can be branded. Building a brand is challenging job since the brand needs to create emotional attachment between the product or service and the consumer, it needs to add value and give something more than other products and services competing in the same market (Knapp, 2008). Along with the convergence of media channels – especially through the Internet and social media – marketers have found new ways to branding. Social media channels, like Facebook and Twitter, have made it possible to reach consumers faster, more efficiently, and easily than ever before. Taking advantage of these chances can provide brands good opportunities to become better known, more favored among consumers and eventually more profitable. Some brands have already succeeded in engaging consumers and have built up huge communities on Facebook. The biggest brand measured in fans on Facebook is Coca Cola with over 31 million fans (Simply Zesty, 2011).

Mullin, Hardy & Sutton (2007) define an intangible, experiential, and subjective nature as one of the special characteristics typical for a sporting event. This means that everyone has his or
her individual, subjective meaning and interpretation for the product, the event. Sport also elicits *strong personal and emotional identification*. Sports itself as a form of entertainment is spontaneous and evokes emotions. Passion, commitment and identification with team members are typical for sports fans. People attach certain attributes, characteristics and feelings to their favorite (or even least favorite) teams and athletes (Mullin et. al., 2007). Fan loyalty is an important aspect for sports organizations as it makes it possible to attract audience even when the core product, the team, fails its expectations, for example, being on a losing streak (Kaynak, Salman & Tatoglu, 2008). Sports fans stand behind their team forever whereas switching a car brand may be fairly easy for someone. Another difference between sports fans and ordinary consumers is irrationality in consumer behavior. Even if the ticket prices went up and the rival team could offer better deals financially sports fans would rarely change to another club (Bühler & Nufer, 2010).

Some sports teams have taken the way of effectively using social media in their marketing activities. A North American lacrosse team Philadelphia Wings took the social media utilization in marketing to a whole new level when they became the first professional sports team in North America to wear the players’ Twitter names on the back of their jerseys (Olenski, 2012). The NHL hockey team Anaheim Ducks has integrated the Ducks’ players Twitter accounts to the team official Facebook fan page. This way fans can easily follow the team and the players using the same service platform. The team also has a lot of other applications, like ticket selling and 3D seat viewer application with which fans can spot their seats in arena, and even a playful fan ranking based on fans’ activity on the team Facebook page (The Official Facebook Page of the Anaheim Ducks, 2012). The most popular sports team measured in the amount of fans on Facebook is football club FC Barcelona with over 26 million fans (Sporting Intelligence, 2012).

Sports and Social Media Survey published in February 2012 by GMR Marketing surveyed 350 sports fans about their behavior in social media. The results show that 81% of the respondents prefer the Internet for their sports news. That percentage divides between national news websites (40%) and Facebook/Twitter (41%). When there is a game on TV 83% will still check sports social media. And what is more, even when attending the actual game event on stadium 63% will keep checking social media for updates. This shows a great deal of fan engagement involved in sports. The survey also showed result that might be in controversy with the common thought of irritating nature of advertisements in social media. 68% of the surveyed sports fans stated that they love, like or are indifferent to mar-
Marketing messages posted by sports personalities. This might give second thoughts for marketers who do not want to put sponsored ads on their Facebook page (GMR Marketing, 2012).

Social media enables companies to listen to their customers and interact with them better than ever, instead of the more traditional marketing communication channels, which usually are thought to be company’s voice directed to the customers (Crawford, 2009). The challenge for marketers is how to be able to do this in effective ways. Even after successfully launching a Facebook page problems may arise when thinking about how to evaluate and measure the success of the page. How to get relevant figures and how to link those figures into business success and even profitability? Also, is numbers the only factor to define success or could there be other measurable factors? When visiting a company’s website people are often looking for different kind of information and for different reasons than when visiting a Facebook page. On Facebook people want to interact and build a relationship with the brand, which makes the metrics and dimensions for evaluating the success different (Speyer, 2011). Whatever the dimensions and the metrics used, measuring the results should always be done in a consistent manner and compared against clearly predefined goals (Delahaye Paine, 2010).

1.2 Problem discussion

Different academic researchers have proposed variety of reasons for companies to be in social media, like Facebook. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), for example, suggest four purposes for companies to utilize social networking sites: creation of brand communities, marketing research, promotion, and using social networking sites as a distribution channel. Facebook is a social networking site, which is one type of social media. It can be distinguished from other types of social media, like Twitter, blogs, or wikis (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). More detailed definitions of different types of social media will be given in the next chapter.

This study focuses specifically on Facebook. Levy (2010) proposes that the three main reasons for companies to utilize Facebook for business reasons are community building, marketing and promotion, and advertising. Facebook, on the other hand, have their own guidelines for businesses to utilize the service. But clearly, the purposes for being on Facebook vary from academic to academic and from business to business.
Facebook provides businesses a set of metrics with which to evaluate the success of their presence on the site. The service provider offers figures like how many people visit the company Facebook page, or how many people comment posts on the page, and many more figures. But still there seems to be confusion among the businesses about how to quantify the success and justify the reasons for being on Facebook. When asked about the future social media goals (for year 2011) in a survey conducted by Altimeter Group social media strategists stated the number one internal objective to be creating ROI (Return on Investment) measurements. Number one measurement to evaluate social media success was, according to the survey, engagement data (comments, fans, likes, etc.) (Altimeter group, 2010). So, even though there are tools for measuring the success in social media it is still unclear how the reasons for being on Facebook, for example, are quantified by companies in the literature and in practice.

Although being quite new subject in academic research there has been some previous research of how companies can benefit from acting in social media, and specifically on Facebook, but very little of how sports teams, in particular, can take advantage of Facebook. Also, there has not been a lot of research done in this field in Finland so it will be interesting to see the results. With this research the author is aiming to provide more empirical evidence and understanding on the subject in hand.

1.3 Purpose of the study

Based on the background and the problem discussion the purpose of this study is to find out the reasons and understand why companies are in social media, like Facebook; for what purposes they use it, what do they expect to gain from it, and how do they evaluate success of their activities in social media. The empirical study will focus on sports teams, in particular, and the case companies are Finnish professional hockey teams. The main social medium that this study focuses on is Facebook.

The audience for the thesis will be the academics in marketing and social media research. Previous research and existing literature will be used to establish a frame of reference for the study, and that combined with doing empirical research, try to contribute to the field of study by providing knowledge specifically focused on the sports industry. Creating more understanding of this understudied subject will contribute to the empirical knowledge of the studied area and build a basis for further research. Also, businesswise, by using case companies in the study the author will be able to provide them useful information about
the subject and about their business by providing guidelines and a red thread to follow when determining better practices for utilizing social media.

1.4 Research questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study the following research questions are stated and investigated:

1. What are the reasons for companies, specifically in sports industry, to be in social networks, like Facebook, and are the reasons different from other businesses?

2. How do companies, especially sports organizations, quantify and measure the effectiveness of their social media activities?

3. What are the expectations these companies have towards social media in the future?

The research questions introduced above take the approach to utilizing social media, like Facebook, from a company’s perspective. To answer the questions this study aims to provide understanding for academics and practitioners, especially in team sports, to be able to effectively use Facebook in their business and to be able to measure success of these activities.

1.5 Methodology

The study will be conducted as a qualitative research. Method for the study will be a case study. Based on previous research, related literature and articles, a frame of reference will be constructed. This will be followed by an empirical research where the case companies will be studied and their representatives will be interviewed. Interviews will be semi-structured allowing preparation of the basic line of themes and supporting questions but also enabling interviewees to express their opinions openly based on their own knowledge and experience. The results of the empirical research will be analyzed and the findings will be reflected upon the theoretical framework in order to gain better understanding of the subject in hand.

1.6 Structure of the study

The next chapter will present the frame of reference for this study. Following that, the research methodology and design will be discussed in more detailed. After methodology the
findings will be presented and analyzed. In the final chapter conclusions are stated and future research suggestions proposed.
2 Frame of reference

This chapter will present a frame of reference for the study. First, definitions and characteristics of social media will be discussed with an explanation of how social media is considered in marketing communications. This will be followed by discussion about the purposes that companies have utilizing social media in their business. Then the ways of quantifying and measuring success in social media activities will be presented. The chapter will end with the summary of the frame of reference.

2.1 Definition and classification of social media

There is not only one definition for social media among the academics but instead there are many that are closely related to each other. According to Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith (2011, p. 12), social media refers to “a set of online tools that supports social interaction between users”. These tools – for example social networking services, like Facebook or Twitter - make it possible for users all over the world to “collaboratively create, find, share, evaluate, and make sense of the mass of information available online”. Solis (2010a, p. 37) gives social media the following definition: “Social media is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers.” Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content.” The common theme for all these definitions is interaction, and creation and sharing of content between many people instead of just few people. Like Olin (2011) simplifies, social media means all the user-created and shared content in the Internet.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) present a classification of social media based on dimensions of social presence and media richness, and self-presentation and self-disclosure possibility. According to them the higher the degree of social presence the larger the social influence communication partners have on each other. Media richness, then again, is defined by the effectiveness the medium has for transmitting information. On the other hand, the degree of self-presentation and self-disclosure depends on how well the medium enables users to express themselves and to control the impressions other people form of them. Classification of social media by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) is presented in the following table:
Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and LinkedIn allow users to discover and connect with influencers and peers. Through these sites users are able to post comments and receive comments from other users, join groups and fan pages, create events, use customized applications, play games, and much more (Solis, 2010a). Boyd and Ellison (2008) define social networking sites (SNS) as Internet based services that allow individuals to establish a public or semi-public profile within the given site, to maintain a list of users who they are connected with, and to make those connections available for others to see as well as to see other people’s connections by themselves. Boyd and Ellison argue that it is not allowing users to meet with strangers that makes social networking sites unique, but rather that they allow people to make their social networks visible to others. They continue arguing that being a part of someone’s social network usually means that the two people already know each other from some other context instead of just being connected on the SNS and being totally strangers otherwise (Boyd & Ellison, 2008).

### 2.2 The 4 C’s of social media

There are several definitions of social media, its characteristics and the purposes social media can be used for in business. Pick (2009) illustrates “the four C’s of social media” with the following definition and the table: “online tools that permit users to create content, within a given context, to help establish connections and engage in conversations.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-presentation/ Self-disclosure</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)</td>
<td>Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)</td>
<td>Content communities (e.g., YouTube)</td>
<td>Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Classification of social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010)
Pick uses a circle to illustrate how social media works. Users are able to create their own content in a given context, be it Facebook for example, and share it with other users they have established connections with. This leads to conversations between users and conversations result in new content, and the social media circle goes around again (Pick, 2009).

While Pick’s illustration is useful and very descriptive, Brenner (2010) modifies “The 4 C’s of Social Media” slightly different and resulting in the fifth C in the end. Brenner’s 4 C’s are:

- Customers
- Content
- Context, and
- Channel

Brenner proposes that when these four C’s are done correctly and made to work together they create the fifth C, which is community. Community serves all its members and information is shared openly across it. Brenner sums it up: “Community uses customer-generated content in a customer-aligned context for a customer-serving purpose.”

### 2.3 Social media – a new way of marketing communications

Faulds and Mangold (2009) argue that social media has brought a new dimension to marketing communications. Traditionally integrated marketing communications (IMC) has been seen as a way for companies to talk to their customers. It has been more or less a one-
way road, from business-to-customer. Through social media customers now have better than ever chances to talk to each other. Social media can be seen as an extension of traditional word-of-mouth communication (Faulds & Mangold, 2009).

The uniqueness of social media, and the difficulty for the marketers, however, is the fact that customers now can reach hundreds or even thousands of other people with just a few clicks. This means that the magnitude of communication is rising to a whole new level. Social media has strong influence in several consumer behavior aspects like information acquisition, awareness, attitudes and opinions, purchase behavior, and post-purchase communication and evaluation. Instead of being only a one-way communication channel from business-to-consumer, social media is also from consumer-to-business and consumer-to-consumer channel of communication and should therefore be carefully considered by the companies when they are planning and formulating their IMC strategies (Faulds & Mangold, 2009).

However, results of the social media survey conducted by The Mercadien Group in the USA in 2010 showed that almost 62% of the surveyed organizations did not have a social media policy. Also, the results from a survey, which studied 1383 marketing professionals from 30 different European countries, by the European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and the Institute of Media and Communications Management at the University of St. Gallen (2011), revealed that only 34% of the surveyed professionals stated that their organization had a communication plan specifically for social media. More interestingly, 41% of the respondents said that their organization reacts in an ad hoc fashion to social media issues. These results show that there is room for improvement when it comes to companies’ long-term social media planning and its integration to marketing communications strategies.

Based on the before mentioned statements Faulds and Mangold (2009) propose the new communications paradigm, where social media is included, to be used as a framework for developing IMC strategies. The new communications paradigm is illustrated in the figure below:
Figure 2 The New Communications Paradigm (Faulds & Mangold, 2009)

As it can be seen from the figure social media is included in the promotional mix. This means that it is taken into consideration already within the company’s actions. Consumers use social media in the marketplace and in the processes of making buying decisions. And as social media facilitates not only from business-to-consumer actions but also from consumer-to-business and from consumer-to-consumer actions it is important that the company has a plan for maintaining these actions and an ability to react when necessary.

2.4 Social media for business purposes

Social media is utilized for business purposes in many different ways. This has been shown in previous research as academics have proposed variety of objectives for companies’ social media presence. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) suggest four purposes for companies to utilize social networking sites: creation of brand communities, market research, promotion, and using social networking sites as a distribution channel. This statement is supported by The Web Success Team (2012) who propose that utilizing social media helps companies to reach customers, create more awareness of their brand and promote their products, and drive more traffic to their website. When considering Facebook in specific, Levy (2010) defines three main ways of using Facebook for business purposes and those are community building, marketing and promotion, and advertising.

Besides the academics, marketing practitioners have also expressed variety of purposes for having social media presence. “2011 Social Media Survey Report” conducted among 200
US based business owners by The Mercadien Group found out that 60.4% of respondents use social media for branding purposes and 52.1% for advertising (Figures add to more than 100% because respondents may utilize social media for more than one purpose). EACD and the Institute of Media and Communications Management at the University of St. Gallen’s (2011) survey showed that the main reason (72% of responses) for marketing professionals to use social media is listening to and monitoring what is happening in the social media sphere. Other important reasons are building relationships with stakeholders (53%) and gathering information on clients and competitors (50%). Stelzner’s (2011) survey, on the other hand, reported the main benefits of social media marketing to be generating exposure for the business (88%), increasing traffic/subscribers (72%), and improved search rankings (62%).

When it comes to the question of how many different social media channels a company should use a survey conducted by Wetpaint and Altimeter Group (2009) found out that businesses that are both deeply and widely engaged in social media outperform their peers financially in terms of revenue and profit performance by significant difference. According to the survey social media engagement and financial success work together to form a business cycle:

“A customer-oriented mindset stemming from deep social interaction allows a company to identify and meet customer needs in the marketplace, generating superior profits. The financial success of the company, in turn, allows further investment in engagement to build even better customer knowledge, thereby creating even more profits – and the cycle continues.”

The two best practices in the study were Starbucks and Dell brands.

2.4.1 Customer engagement and community building

Delahaye Paine (2011) defines three reasons why customer engagement is essential for companies. Engagement is the corner stone in building a relationship with a company and its customers. Engagement in social media is a way to determine whether the company is able to create a dialogue between itself and its customers, or just having from business-to-customer monologue with no response from consumers. Another reason why customer engagement is important is that it helps to promote and protect the brand. Engaged customers turn into brand advocates who will be the best references to the company and the
brand. They recommend the brand to their friends and come to defense if there’s a bad word about the brand. The third reason why customer engagement is so important is that engaged customers help make the product and service better. Engaged customers will participate in conversations and give feedback about the strengths and the weaknesses of the product and service (Delahaye Paine, 2011).

Faulds and Mangold (2009) state that customers will become more engaged when they feel like being part of a community, being able to participate and give feedback. Providing exclusivity makes people feel special. Social media offers a good platform for delivering exclusivity. For example special deals or other exclusive product offerings can be directed to consumers who use social media. Shankman (2011) agrees by stating that social media should be used as a platform to give customers and fans something extra, something special that they cannot get from anywhere else, and which will make them feel different from the norm and tell their friends about it.

Facebook (2012) advises companies in engaging their customers in a genuine dialogue, where transparency is very important. They remind that it is all about conversation, so listening, responding, and addressing negative feedback honestly and openly is important. By doing that the company is able to deliver customer service and to demonstrate their ability to handle constructive criticism or feedback graciously. Speyer (2011) adds that fan engagement is the ultimate goal for effective Facebook marketing. Turning fans to brand evangelists who will help viral marketing the brand and recommend it to their networks guarantees success. Customers rely and trust on each other so a satisfied customer is the brand’s best sales person.

Muniz & O’Guinn (2001, p. 412) define brand community as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand”. Brand community shares the common characteristics with any other community as its members have the same, shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Online social networks can offer a valuable platform for establishing and maintaining brand communities, and through these networks people are able to communicate, get information, and find solutions to their problems. However, this does not mean that companies should aim to total control over these communities. Instead companies should strive to understand the individual and social needs of the community
members and do everything possible to support and engage them on their own terms (Fournier & Lee, 2009).

For true brand loyalty to exist, it takes more than just a habit of buying or consuming a certain brand. A positive attitude towards the brand, emotional attachment of some sort, suitability to one’s self image and good prior experiences can lead to loyalty for a brand (Solomon et al., 2010). Aaker (1996) considers loyalty as a core dimension of brand equity. Brand equity on the other hand is defined as “a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand’s name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm’s customers” (Aaker, 1996, p. 7-8). He further argues the main brand equity asset categories to be brand name awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand associations. Understanding and successfully utilizing those assets will give a company competitive advantage.

Delahaye Paine (2011) argues that fostering good relationships leads to profits. Establishing and maintaining good relationships will enable prospects to become customers as well as customers to become loyal advocates for the company and its products and services. Poor relationships, on the other hand, will result in poor sales, lower customer loyalty, more expensive operations like marketing, etc. Companies with good relationships will be forgiven even when doing mistakes while companies with poor relationships may lose customers for good after one slip.

Given the discussion above, it appears as though customer engagement is an essential aspect in a road to establishing and maintaining successful social media presence. Offering fans exclusivity, encouraging them to participate and be active, and nurturing the relationship between the company and its fans will have a good chance to result in a strong community with engaged fans. And engaged fans become valuable advocates for the company, as they are loyal to the brand, recommend it to other people, and even come to defense if there’s a negative word about the brand or if the brand fails some of its expectations.

2.4.2 Speak, listen and learn – research the audience

These days, when searching for information about companies and products customers rely on other customers more than they do companies. Recommendations, experiences, comments and other information from fellow customers are trusted and appreciated when making decisions of how to spend time and money. That is why companies should listen to
their customers and find out what they are discussing about. Reacting and responding to those discussions may make the difference for businesses between success and failure (De-laheaye Paine, 2011).

Crawford (2009) proposes that instead of focusing on their own voice, and ‘speaking up’, companies should focus on listening in social media. Reciprocal listening, according to Crawford is defined as actively participating in discussion, meaning that comments and direct messages are noted and responded. Individuals and companies who outsource their social media presence can be seen as active listeners but yet this listening, defined as delegated listening, is not very effective since it is not as if they were actually participating and listening by themselves. For companies, outsourcing their social media presence can often lead to a situation where their activities in social media may be seen as an impersonal and unidirectional marketing broadcast. Delegated listening also reduces the company’s ability to interact with their customers and to react to what happens in their social networking space (Crawford, 2009).

Solis (2010a) agrees with Crawford’s statement of delegated listening. Giving the act of listening, for example in the form of outsourced customer service or social media service, to someone who does not necessarily understand the business environment or the customers in the market may cause dissatisfaction among customers and give an impression that even the representatives of the company are not engaged to what they are doing. According to Solis there is a difference between hearing the customers and actually listening to them. As the saying goes: “A happy customer tells several friends and an unhappy customer tells many more.”

One important thing to consider with Facebook presence, especially when using a public Facebook page, is negative comments. Since the page is public and open for anyone to see and comment there will be negative comments made about the company or the brand. These comments can be made by people who are dissatisfied with the product or service, or by people who prefer competitors better. If the comment is not too disrupting, violent, or other way offensive it should be left there for everyone to see because deleting a negative comment could lead to a situation where people may think that the company is hiding something or simply ignoring them. If the comment of dissatisfied customer is answered properly it can result the customer to accept the situation or at least provide the company an opportunity apologize or other way reply to that negative comment (Levy, 2010).
Shankman (2011) sums it up adding that there should be good recordkeeping on complaints and negative comments, good analysis of them, and good customer service to handle them and resolve any problems.

Crawford (2009) proposes that the value of listening can be considered in three ways from a company perspective: participation in the community and hearing the public opinion, being able to benefit quick and lower-cost form of customer support compared to for example telephone, and monitoring how the company is discussed among the consumers. In fact, services like Facebook can be seen as huge focus groups where companies are able to monitor the patterns of consumer use and satisfaction.

The discussion above shows the importance of monitoring the audience. Instead of using social media as a one-way communication channel it should be used to hear the customer’s voice and to react whenever there’s a reason for it. This way a company can get valuable feedback about their business as well as consumer opinions and attitudes. Reacting to the feedback and comments of consumers will help the company to maintain better customer service, customer satisfaction and also to get help with the product and service development.

2.5 Facebook as a social media channel

Facebook is a social networking service founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and his college friends. The site was originally launched to be a platform for Harvard college students where they could connect with each other. Facebook soon expanded to support hundreds of school networks in the USA and also international school networks in 2005. In 2006 Facebook was made available for anyone to register to and join in. In the end of 2011 Facebook reported to have approximately 845 million users all over the world (Facebook, 2012).

Businesses have also noticed the popularity of Facebook. Stelzner’s (2011) report revealed that 92% of the marketers participating in the survey considered Facebook as their top social media tool. However, 70% of the respondents were seeking to learn more about Facebook.

When establishing a presence on Facebook a company or a brand can choose whether to put up a page or a group. Both page and group have similar features but the main difference is that a page is public, meaning that anyone can visit or join it, while a group requires
people to join it, request to join or an invitation to join. Also, since Facebook pages are public they are visible to search engines and all the features on the page can be seen without becoming a fan. Facebook converted Pages to look like personal profiles in 2009 and this allows brands to be exposed in more human context, and like friends, than if establishing a group (Levy, 2010).

Levy (2010) proposes several different actions that can be done on Facebook once the page is set up. These are running contests, creating and sharing specific content, and simply engaging. Contests and polls with possible reward for the people who participate are a good way to engage and get feedback. Creating and sharing unique content with the Facebook community encourages people to come back to the page because they cannot find that special content elsewhere. Facebook provides good opportunities to share comments, pictures, videos, etc. and not only created by the owner of the page but also consumer-created content. Staying in touch with the community by posting comments, asking questions, answering other’s comments and sharing opinions also helps to engage people and encourages them to return to the page. Keeping the page up and dated is essential to its success (Levy, 2010).

There should always be a link to the official company website on Facebook page. Posting links on Facebook page to updates and other content on official webpage and then monitoring how many people clicked through the links to arrive to the official webpage can help to indicate how engaged the consumers are and how effective Facebook content is (Le-Compte, 2009).

2.6 Quantifying and evaluating business success in social media activities

According to Vassinen (2011) the biggest challenge for effective social media measurement is not the tools or the metrics available but defining goals in social media and choosing the right metrics for measurement. Determining right key performance indicators (KPIs) is important. Money is of course one important indicator but it is not the only one. Vassinen divides metrics for measurement to the following categories based on whether they are qualitative or quantitative and based on business or exposure (see the table below):
Delahaye Paine (2011) states that whatever the dimensions and the metrics used, measuring the results should always be done in a consistent manner and compared against clearly pre-defined goals. She argues that to be able to successfully measure desired social media outcome company’s social media strategy should include, besides clearly defined objectives and goals, also a date by which the outcome should happen, and if possible, also a budget and the target audience it is planned to influence. Owyang (2010) adds key performance indicators (KPIs) to the measurement process. KPIs are metrics defined and developed to measure success. Typical social media KPIs could be, for example, engagement of audience or share of voice. The whole social media measurement process is illustrated by Owyang (2010) in the following figure:

Table 2 Social Media Metrics (Vassinen, 2011)
2.7 What to measure – and how?

This section will introduce different social media measuring metrics in more detailed and propose some tools with which these metrics can be measured.

2.7.1 Measuring engagement

When there is a need to measure customers’ awareness, preferences, or perceptions it is necessary to actually ask people for their opinion. This can be done via surveys that are conducted to find out what people think about the company and the brand. Surveys should be conducted before and after the actions that want to be measured in order to find out the effects of those actions. Continuous and consistent measuring is a big help in order to stay tuned with customers and to react to possible changes (Delahaye Paine, 2011). Especially metrics concerning brand equity can be measured this way (Aaker, 1996).
Measuring engagement on Facebook can also be done based on pure numbers and statistics that Facebook Insights provide. The service provides metrics for, for example, fan activity, which can be seen as one form of engagement (Facebook, 2012; Levy, 2010). Measurement of Facebook activities does not have to be limited to only Facebook. It might be a good idea to ask people if they know about company’s Facebook presence whenever and wherever customer surveys are conducted. And if the customers do not know about the company’s social media presence there probably is a reason for that. Asking them why will provide valuable insights (LeCompte, 2009).

2.7.2 Facebook metrics and other web analytics

Ingram (2010) refers to a research report by Syncapse where the value of an average Facebook fan was determined to be $136.38. The survey interviewed fans of the top brands and researched their motives for being fans and also their purchasing behavior over time. The findings were that a fan spends an extra $71.84 he would not otherwise spend on products he describes to be a fan of, compared to those who are not fans. Fans are 28% more likely to continue using the brand than people who are not fans. Also, fans are 41% more likely to recommend the brand to other people than those who are not fans. This is, according to Ingram, an interesting approach to Facebook fans as Syncapse is trying “to put an actual dollar figure on the value of a Facebook friend”.

Facebook Insights is a Facebook functionality that helps to determine what kind of content is suitable for a Page, how well different types of content perform, and how actively people participate in the community (Levy, 2010). Besides this, there is a service called Facebook Connect, which allows users to sign in and share content from other websites by using their Facebook login. So, logging into other websites, commenting posts, and sharing content is very easy with just one username and password (Qualman, 2009).

Facebook Insights provide Page owner with such numbers as:

- Total likes, as the number of unique people who like the Page
- Friends of fans, as the number of people who are friends with the fans of the Page and who are exposed to anything the fans post about the company/brand
- “Talking about” figure, as the number of people who have created a story about the Page. A story is created, for example, when someone likes the Page, comments or shares a post
on the Page, answers a question asked on the Page, responds to an event on the page, mentions the Page, etc.

- The amount of fans gained / lost during the selected time period
- The breakout between male/female, age groups, country and language
- Total reach of the Page, as how many unique people have seen any content related to the Page (including ads pointing to the Page)

(Facebook, 2012; Levy, 2010)

Figure 4 Facebook Insights

O’Neill (2011) reminds that the total number of fans is not the greatest metric of success on Facebook. The amount of active users is much more important and can be measured on daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Using metrics provided by Facebook the owner of the Page is able to determine which content interests fans and makes them react. These reactions and activity should be enhanced to keep people interested and engaged. O’Neill argues that posting questions and polls, and creating response from fans, on a Page is one of the best ways for engagement. And the more engaged people the more reach for the content on a Page.
Besides monitoring company’s own Page, Allfacebookstats (2012) offers a tool for monitoring and benchmarking Facebook pages maintained by other people and companies. This way it is possible to compare Facebook activities with competitors and best practices (Allfacebookstats.com, 2012).

There are also other web analytics to monitor social media than just Facebook related tools. Google Alerts, for example, is an easy to use and practical tool for tracking what people are talking about. Google Alerts enables users to specify keywords, for example a company or a brand name, that are tracked and then Google sends notifications in real-time to a given email address (Shankman, 2011). Google themselves describe the service as a possibility to “monitor the web for interesting new content”, including tracking news stories, benchmarking competitors, or keeping up and dated with the industry (Google, 2012). Google Alerts, and many of other web analytics tools are free to use and a great help for monitoring social media (Shankman, 2011).

2.7.3 ROI – return on investment

According to Delahaye Paine (2011, p.14) return on investment is an accounting term, which can be calculated for any project by taking “the total amount of money saved or brought in and subtracting from it the total budget amount invested, then dividing it by the cost of investment”. ROI is typically used for measuring the money saved, costs avoided, or revenue brought in. However, measuring ROI for social media does not seem to be an easy task but instead it has been a subject for heated debate whether or not it can be measured at all (Pick, 2010). There is a school of academics and professionals (e.g. Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2010; Solis, 2010b) who think measuring social media ROI is possible based on metrics like traffic or unique visitors on the site, or based purely on the “I” (investment) included, or then based on the “R” (return) as for it can be assigned to mean something else than pure financial revenue.

But there is also a school of non-believers for social media ROI (e.g. Golden, 2010; Cathers, 2010). Their main argument for why social media ROI could not be calculated accurately is that there are no widely accepted measures to do it yet. So, companies have to create or find other metrics to get guidance towards defining ROI.

Pick (2009) positions himself somewhere between these two opposite schools. He argues that even though calculating ROI for social media is challenging – social media is, accord-
ing to him, more about influence than direct action – and it may not be possible to be precisely calculated, it should not be thought as impossible and therefore not be bothered at all. All in all, there seems to be an urge among academics and professionals to make measuring social media ROI more clear and generalized. This is supported with the findings of Stelzner’s (2011) “2011 Social Media Marketing Industry Report” where one third of all social media marketers (n=3342) revealed their will to know how to monitor and measure social media ROI. Also, Owyang (2010b) refers to Altimeter Group’s “Survey of Corporate Social Strategists” that showed that almost half (48,3%) of the surveyed specialists stated creating ROI measurements was their number one internal social media strategy objective for year 2011.

2.8 Summarying the frame of reference

Social media is an Internet based environment that enables interaction, and creation and sharing of content between many people instead of just few people. Social media means all the user-created and shared content in the Internet. Social networking sites, like Facebook, allow users to maintain networks of people and gather information about anything with just a few clicks. From the company perspective, social media is an opportunity but also a challenge. Embracing successful social media presence will allow company to benefit business-wise. However, rushing into social media without planning and strategizing can prove to result more harm than benefit.

Research question one was stated in order to find out what are the reasons for companies to be in social media, like Facebook. Based on the literature and previous studies there are several different reasons for companies to establish and maintain social media presence. Among the reasons are engaging customers and building communities, market research, promotion, sales, etc. The reasons vary depending on the academic, business owner, and practitioner. The empirical research that is introduced later in this thesis will take a deeper look into the sports industry specifically and investigate the first research question from sports organization’s perspective.

The second research question was stated in order to investigate how companies quantify and measure success of their social media presence. Quantifying and measuring success of social media activities seem to be a difficult task. How to define goals and objectives, how to choose appropriate metrics, and how to actually do the measuring? Here, again, there are many ways of doing it, including monitoring the traffic and interaction in social media
channels with specific tools and by just seeing and listening what happens in there, surveying customers to find out their insights, and so on. If the company has clear predefined goals, has determined the key performance indicators and suitable metrics, and uses the suitable tools, it is possible to effectively utilize social media in business activities. The empirical research will take a look into the second research question from the sports organization’s perspective.

Based on, and with the help of, the frame of reference introduced in this chapter an empirical research will be conducted. Knowledge gained from the literature review will be used in preparation of the interviews with case companies. Although being open interviews there will be certain themes, like the purposes of social media use and the ways of measuring the success in social media, which will be discussed with the respondents. Some supporting themes and questions will be formed on the basis of this chapter to be brought up in interviews. Also, the literature review will be reflected upon, reviewed, and modified if necessary, during the empirical research process and during the whole thesis process.
3  Methodology

This chapter will introduce the research methodology of the study. First, the design and chosen methods of the research will be presented and explained. Second, the data collection process and analyzing of the data will be discussed in detailed. Third, there will be a discussion about assessing the quality of the study. Finally, in the end of this chapter the methodology of the study will be summarized.

3.1  Research design and method

This study focuses on investigating the reasons why companies are in social media, like Facebook; for what purposes they use it, what do they expect to gain from it, and how do they evaluate success of their activities in social media.

The literature and previous research in the field of study have mainly focused on the purposes and measurement of social media actions in business in general, but not particularly in sports, thus there is not much literature nor empirical research concerning sports industry.

In order to fulfill the purpose of the study the following research questions were assigned:

1. What are the reasons for companies, specifically in sports industry, to be in social networks, like Facebook, and are the reasons different from other businesses?
2. How do companies, especially sports organizations, quantify and measure the effectiveness of their social media activities?
3. What are the expectations these companies have towards social media in the future?

After conducting the literature review the frame of reference for the study was formed. The research was conducted as a qualitative study. The chosen research method is a case study. Case companies’ perspectives were brought in by interviewing company representatives. The interviews were semi-structured open interviews.

Qualitative research approaches phenomena from a naturalistic perspective and tries to understand those phenomena in real world settings where “the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Creswell (2002) states that qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. The researcher collects and analyzes the
data and makes his interpretation of it and draws conclusions. It is the personal interpretation that can be stated to be a weakness of qualitative research but it is just something that cannot be totally excluded. However, with these interpretations, qualitative research has the ability to reveal insights into complex social processes, which quantitative research cannot easily do (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Considering the subject and the aim of the study, which is to gain understanding of a certain phenomenon, and to get insights from practitioners’ perspectives, the qualitative research method was appropriate choice for the study.

The research approach for this study is a case study. “The case study is an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community” (Merriam, 2002, p. 8). In general, case studies are often conducted to find out answers to questions “how” or “why”. Case studies focus on contemporary phenomena within a real-life context and the researcher has little control over events (Yin, 2003). The aim of this study is to investigate the reasons of “why” companies use social media and “how” they quantify and measure the success of those activities. Merriam (2002) adds that the case study method is useful for less explored investigations as it allows investigating complicated social units and understanding interaction of individuals with their social environment (Merriam, 2002). The empirical part of this research focuses specifically on sports teams, and there are no previous studies conducted in that field, thus the case study method was chosen. Also, case study method with open interviews makes it possible to get insights and deeper understanding of the case companies.

### 3.2 Data collection

The data collection was conducted in April 2012 by interviewing four case companies and their representatives. Total amount of interviewees was four, one from each case company. The companies were chosen based on their geographical location. Due to financial and time constraints the author chose case companies within or close to the city he is living in. First contacts were made via email or telephone. Originally, there were seven teams contacted of which four teams responded, were interested in co-operation and ended up being interviewed. The case companies are all professional hockey teams playing in the Finnish elite league.

The interviews were semi-structured open interviews meaning that general themes and some supporting questions were pre-determined based on the literature review. However, the respondents were encouraged to speak freely and openly from their own knowledge
and experience, thus no strictly structured question patterns or questions with pre-determined answering options were formed. The advantage of qualitative interviews is that they use open questions, which gives interviewees a chance to answer in their own words and to better express themselves. In result, better understanding of interviewees’ experiences and their point of view will be reached (Merriam, 2002). Patton (2002) adds that the purpose of open-ended responses is to enable researcher better understand the respondent’s points of view without predetermining or forcing certain answers. The researcher is only supposed to provide a framework within which the respondents can reflect their own knowledge and experience.

All the interviews of this study were conducted face-to-face. This way it was possible to better interact with the respondents and also observe their gestures and body language. On the other hand, face-to-face interviews may sometimes make respondents feel pressure because the interviewer is present all the time (Desai, 2002). This pressure was diminished by conducting the interviews at the offices of the respondents’ with the aim of making them feel comfortable by letting them stay in familiar environment. The interviews were voice-recorded to allow easier access to empirical data whenever needed during the process of analyzing the data. Also, hand-written notes were created during the interviews to pinpoint important statements and to mark possible new themes that were brought up by the respondents during the interviews. The interviews lasted approximately from one to two hours each.

The organizations studied are all professional hockey organizations in Finland. The people who were interviewed are on the management level of their respective organizations. Every one of them works in marketing and/or communications department of the company and that way can provide relevant answers and information. Also, all of the interviewees are managing social media in operational level in their organization. One of the interviewees is not personally maintaining social media activities in the organization but is in charge of it. The interviews were anonymous to secure truth answers and to enable interviewees to give more detailed information about their organizations without endangering the business in any way. Interview questions were asked in Finnish and the answers were then translated into English by the author of this paper. The translation could not be avoided, which can affect the results of the research through possible mistranslations. However, all the responses and quotations used in the study were sent for approval to the respondents after translation to ensure their correctness.
Creswell (2002) argues that the goal of a qualitative data analysis is to understand and make an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. This larger meaning can be reached by carefully preparing the data analysis, gaining deeper understanding of the data through the process, and finally representing the data. By continuously reviewing and reflecting the research process and letting other people to give feedback the researcher was able to reach the goal proposed by Creswell.

3.2.1 Structure and themes of interviews

Based on the purpose of this study, previous studies and related literature two main themes for interviews were formed. The first theme is the purposes for organizations to be in social media, specifically on Facebook. The aim of the interviews was to let the interviewees speak freely from their own experience and not give them any pre-determined examples in the first place. However, based on the previous studies and literature review the author had listed some proposed purposes for companies to be on Facebook and these propositions were presented if the interviewees did not mention them. Reason for this was to probe respondents and to give them some thoughts that they may have had forgotten to mention. These proposed purposes were then discussed with the interviewees in order to find out if some of them were relevant to the interviewees’ organizations.

The second main theme is how to quantify and measure success of social media activities. Again, the interviewees were not given any examples in the first place but were encouraged to speak from their own organization’s perspective. Later, some examples of quantifying and measuring the success were proposed and discussed with the interviewees to find out if there are any relevant examples they had forgotten to mention before.

Besides the two main themes some more general questions about social media were asked in the beginning of each interview to get the interviewees started and into the subject. In the end each interviewee was asked about the differences for being in social media between their organizations, namely sports organizations, and organizations in other industries. This question was asked in order to find out if the reasons for being in social media are different for sports teams than what they are proposed to be in business in general. Also, during the first interviews one additional topic, the future of social media was added to the interview guide since the interviewees talked quite a lot about the future possibilities and expectations in social media. The complete interview guide can be found as an appendix of this thesis.
3.3 Assessing the quality of the study

According to Stenbacka (2001) there are four generally accepted concepts to evaluate quality in research. These are validity, reliability, generalizability, and carefulness. However, evaluating these concepts depends on whether the research is quantitative or qualitative. If qualitative research is evaluated using the same metrics than quantitative the result will most likely be that the research is evaluated to be no good.

A question of validity in qualitative research can be answered, according to Stenbacka (2001), simply by stating the understanding of the studied phenomenon. The purpose of qualitative research is to generate understanding on a specified problem area and carefully choosing proper informants for the study, and giving them an opportunity to speak freely from their own knowledge and experience of the problem area, will help to achieve validity. This study was conducted using open interviews to emphasize respondents to be able to speak openly from their own perspective and to avoid researcher to influence their answers. The informants were chosen carefully based on their position in the organization and based on their knowledge of the subject in hand.

Reliability is usually evaluated based on research method’s ability to produce the same result again and again. However, in qualitative research repetitiveness as such is not a judgment criterion. Instead it is a question of visibility throughout the whole research process, and the descriptiveness of the process, that makes qualitative research reliable (Stenbacka, 2001). Golafshani (2003) argues that in quantitative research validity and reliability usually refer to credibility of the research. On the other hand, in qualitative research credibility refers to the ability and effort of the researcher. Patton (2002) adds that skills, competence, and rigor of the researcher influence the credibility of qualitative research. In this study the researcher aimed to see the process as a whole, in a big picture, and to ensure his understanding of the subject by continuously reviewing the process. Evaluation and modifications were made throughout the research process as new information was gathered and knowledge gained.

Generazability is usually measured in the means of whether the results and conclusions of research are general for a population. However, in qualitative research the results intend to be general in respect to theory instead of a population. Stenbacka (2001) refers to Yin’s argument of making a distinction between analytical generalization and statistical generalization. While statistical generalization is essential to quantitative research analytical generalization
is relevant in qualitative research. Analytical generalization can be achieved by choosing informants relevant to the study, by understanding their motivations, and therefore lifting the empirical material to a general level. Patton and Appelbaum (2003) agree by stating that the important thing in qualitative research is not to create something that can be easily replicated over and over again but instead to build an appropriate case with analytic sophistication. Patton (2002) furthermore states that qualitative research is usually context sensitive, meaning that instead of trying to generalize it often emphasizes careful comparative case analyses in order to find patterns possibly transferrable and adaptable into new settings. In this study the aim was to investigate the sports industry in specific so the chosen respondents were all from professional sports organizations and working with or in charge of social media activities. The results of the study are carefully analyzed and tried to form in patterns, which could possibly be transferred and adapted into further studies.

Working systematically and carefully is essential regardless the type of research (Stenbacka, 2001). Carefulness in qualitative research means the researcher’s ability to systematically make the whole research process conscious and understandable to him, and to be able to describe this in the presentation of the study. This will lead to quality results. Stenbacka (2001) further argues that the key insight to qualitative research is accepting the fact that researcher is always part of the study. The researcher brings his own understanding to the process and also continuously reflects upon the studied phenomenon during the research process and by doing this he can proceed in the process of generating understanding. In this study the researcher had pre-understanding of some extent for both social media and sports industry. By reflecting this pre-understanding upon the new knowledge gained the researcher was able to evaluate and develop the whole process of the study. However, the researcher aimed to stay, regardless his pre-understanding, own perspectives, and attitudes, as objective as possible. This was managed with letting other people to review the study, including the respondents and people not involved in the study at all.

3.4 Summarizing the methodology

In order to answer the research questions and to fulfill the purpose of the study a qualitative method was chosen. Qualitative research method allows getting insights and gaining deeper understanding of the subject in hand through its descriptive and interpretative nature. The typical questions qualitative research usually aims to answer are “how”, “what” and “why”. The specific research approach chosen is case study with semi-structured open
interviews. Case study approach makes it possible to dig into specific phenomenon in its real-life context. By studying case companies it is possible to reflect existing academic literature and knowledge upon practitioners’ experience and knowledge. Semi-structured open interviews allow the respondents freely express their perspectives and aims for not putting any words in their mouth. Keeping in mind the quality concepts of research – validity, reliability, generazability, and carefulness – and continuously analyzing and reflecting the collected qualitative data will make it possible to evaluate existing knowledge in a specific context and to build new knowledge that is useful, and moreover, can be studied and further developed by other researchers.
4 Findings

The findings of the interviews are presented in this chapter. The findings are divided into five parts based on the different parts of the interviews: the general discussion on social media, the purposes of utilizing social media, the ways of quantifying and measuring social media activities, the differences between sports teams and other businesses on acting in social media, and the future of social media. The findings will be discussed and analyzed in more detailed in the following chapter.

Due to the anonymity reasons the organizations and interviewees are not presented with their real names. Instead, they have been given fictional names in order to make it easier for the reader to follow the text. The names used in the report are The Bullets, The Hawks, The Jets, and The Kings.

4.1 First part of the interviews: general discussion on social media

The first part of the interviews consisted of some more general questions about social media in the case companies. These open questions were asked to get the interviewees started and into the subject, and also in order to gain background information on how the case companies see social media in general and what kind of resources they have assigned to it.

4.1.1 Social media channels

Three of the interviewed organizations are on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. One organization is present only on Facebook. The reasons for choosing these channels were stated to be that they are the most common and popular social media channels and also easy to get started with. The one organization, The Kings, who was only on Facebook explained that this is due to lack of resources but that they are considering to join Twitter in the future.

All of the studied organizations realize and consider the importance of their presence in social media. As The Bullets stated:

“None of the teams in the Finnish hockey league has any other option…or possibility to stay away from social media. It is a must these days.” (The Bullets)
4.1.2 Strategies and resources

When asked whether social media was part of the strategic planning process, The Bullets mentioned:

“We do not have any official, written-down strategy for it but I do see it as an important part of our marketing.” (The Bullets)

The Jets representative added:

“Well…we have some kind of plan for it but it is not like an official strategy…we meet from time to time to discuss about it but that it would be part of our corporate strategy…no, not yet.” (The Jets)

Even though not having official strategy for social media all of the studied organizations have strong views and un-written guidelines on how they are acting in social media. However, so far the organizations are acting in social media more in an ad hoc way than based on planned strategies. As the results from previous studies show, in general, this seems to be the case with a lot of organizations in any business.

Resources for maintaining social media and keeping it updated vary among the four organizations. The Hawks and The Kings representatives stated that they alone are responsible for social media activities in their respective organizations. The Bullets interviewee said that they maintain Facebook in co-operation with fans, meaning that they have a couple of fans helping the organization representative to maintain the team Facebook page. Also, The Jets organization utilizes the help of fans in their Facebook activities. The representative of this organization also pointed out that they employed a spokesman last year and one important reason for this was that the organization could better serve public in social media.

The Hawks stated a very straight forward reason for establishing Facebook presence in their organization:

”A couple of years ago we conducted few surveys in order to find out the profile of our season ticket holders. The main finding was that we were lacking young people under 20 years old quite severely among our spectators…We saw Facebook as a great channel to reach those young people we are missing since youngsters are the first ones to use these kind of channels.” (The Hawks)

When asked about the success of this action The Hawks representative replied:
“I think it was the right choice and that we have reached the young people on Facebook.” (The Hawks)

Looking at the Facebook statistics show that the organization really has reached the audience since they now have around 49,000 fans on Facebook. That is among the biggest numbers of fans for a hockey team’s page in Finland. Also, looking at the statistics shows that the largest group of people talking about the page is 13-17 years old.

### 4.2 Second part of the interviews: purposes of utilizing social media

In the second part of the interviews the purposes of utilizing social media were discussed with the interviewees. This was the first main theme of the study. The aim was to let the interviewees speak out freely only keeping in mind the topic of the discussion. Later, a list of proposed purposes for social media utilization was presented to them and asked whether or not they see those purposes relevant to their organization.

#### 4.2.1 Customer engagement and community building

Customer engagement and community building was mentioned as one of the main reasons for being present in social media by every interviewee. All four case companies let their fans post freely on their Facebook page and that way try to spark the discussion and enhance activity of people. This is not the case for every Finnish hockey league team as some of them let fans only comment on posts by the organization and not to post individual user-created content at all.

“It [Facebook] is a place for fans to get together and the discussion is there…we see the ongoing discussion as an essential aspect.” (The Jets)

“A big reason for being on Facebook is to share feelings, thoughts and experiences…and to read contents posted by others” (The Hawks)

The ways of enhancing engagement and community building vary among the organizations. All of the interviewees agreed that posting interesting content, encouraging fans to participate and to be active are important factors in the process of establishing and maintaining a lively and organic community.
“...Posting content concerning not just our men’s league team but also concerning our junior teams, for example. Like if our juniors win a championship or something. It will inspire people and grow the community feeling.” (The Kings)

“...The fans are one of our content producers and we want to make sure the user-generated content will show on our [Facebook] page and that the fans really see their content to be part of it.” (The Jets)

The Hawks interviewee highlighted the creation of close relationship between the organization and its customers, or the team and its fans. According to this interviewee all the interaction has to be two-way interaction, as he compared the situation with any human relationship:

“In my opinion, Facebook is a fantastic channel for engaging people because it goes two-ways. It is the same than in any human relationship. If the communication is only one way and the other person is not allowed to participate, to comment, to discuss…it will lose its meaning. But when it is two-ways it gets interesting and the relationship gets deeper. And this is what we are aiming to on Facebook...we do not want to block user comments but just the opposite…to enhance it and encourage people to produce content. Because that is authentic, interesting and allows fans to interact not only with us but with other fans as well. And that leads to engagement” (The Hawks)

It can be seen from the previous quotation that bringing fans close to the company is important. Another interviewee pointed out that the team fan base is rather young people and that engaging them will benefit the organization for years to come:

“We have so young team and young fans that we are still maybe trying to find our real identity. Our fans are young and they use Facebook a lot so engaging them and building a community around the team, I think, will bear fruit in the future.” (The Kings)

Although none of the studied organizations have an actual strategy for social media they stated that social media is still more or less linked to the company strategies. Three of the interviewees brought up team slogans or some of the core values and stated that these are related to their company strategies. Enhancing strong community feeling and bringing slo-
gans and values into it on Facebook link the whole package also to the company strategies. If not directly, at least indirectly.

“We have this slogan which we have utilized in campaigns…and we aim to bring the fans closer to team and to build and strengthen the community. At the moment Facebook is the best channel for this.” (The Bullets)

“Community. And it relates pretty well to our strategy of this kind of membership thinking, or model…our slogan highlights the symbiosis of an individual, the community, and the team.” (The Jets)

The interviewees also clearly see the benefits of engaged fans and strong community. When fans are engaged they will be active, participate to content production, and live close to the team. It gives the organization room to breath even when the actual product, the team fails to meet its expectations by, for example losing an important game. Fans might feel disappointment but they will still stand behind the team and will not abandon it.

“With engaged fans and supporters…it is not the end of the world if the team loses but they will feel that the team is their own and stand behind it at the bad times as well.” (The Bullets)

And as The Hawks representative stated about engaged fans:

“…The more engaged [they are] the more [they are] willing to do for it, both financially and by intangible assets, meaning recommendation.” (The Hawks)

4.2.2 Speak, listen and learn – research the audience

It became clear that hockey organizations want to be present on Facebook to interact with their audience, the fans. Speaking to audiences is not, however, the only thing to consider since Facebook is two, or actually three way channel, facilitating not only communication between the company and the fans but also allowing the fans to communicate with each other. So, one of the essential purposes of being on Facebook according to the interviewees is to monitor the discussion, feelings, and opinions of people. That being said Facebook page can be seen as a huge focus group.

“I think it is really smart that it [Facebook] is an open venue and we get a lot of good tips from there…of course, we have a feedback section on our official web-
page but I think that the step to give feedback on there [on Facebook] is easier to take.” (The Kings)

The case companies utilize Facebook in different ways. The Bullets brought up an excellent example of the organization listening to their customers and even making some business decision based on feedback gathered on Facebook. The organization was planning to change the team logo in order to establish younger and modern look. They put up a poll on a separate webpage and linked it to Facebook among other communication channels. Fans were allowed to vote for one of the three logos and the logo with most votes would be the new official team logo. However, the fans disagreed:

“We wanted to activate people and let them choose the new logo. The amount of feedback both on Facebook and direct emails, it exploded…We got hundreds, if not even thousand, comments on our Facebook wall…Facebook was the channel through which they [fans] were able to express their opinion and give feedback…and very soon the decision of changing the logo was called off.” (The Bullets)

The statement above is a very strong proof of the influence social media can have on business. In this case the fans, the ones who finance major part of the business, were listened to and also their opinion was appreciated. There was also another case later where one of the Finnish league hockey teams decided to bring back their old, traditional team logo because fans demanded it.

The Jets representative said that they sometimes use Facebook for testing the market in order to launch a new product or a service. According to him they inform people on the Facebook page that there might be this kind of change coming, or that they are launching a new product, and then monitor the reception and reactions of people to see whether or not it is accepted. The Hawks proposed that the focus group thinking could be taken one step further by establishing a separate Facebook group:

"Fans are our best consultants when we want to develop things…I have been thinking of establishing a separate closed group for fans who really want to be involved…maybe around 5,000 people or so…the group would be for testing new ideas, products, services, and the fans would give feedback and participate in innovating. This way we would get valuable insights from fans but yet we would
not need to post questions, polls and surveys on our Facebook page that often…because they might irritate people.” (The Hawks)

Despite some encouraging results in the past the case companies still do not use Facebook constantly for market research. Monitoring the discussion is more like unofficial, daily basis task and actual surveys to find out customer opinions are not conducted as often as could be. One reason for this is lack of resources to analyze the results. No matter how good the focus group is it is only worthwhile if the company manages to make use of the data gathered there.

"Last time we conducted a fan survey I thought a long time about posting it on our Facebook page…of course we would get a lot of responses from there…but then I thought that I simply do not have resources to analyze the results all by myself.” (The Kings)

“Many people say that we should ask more questions there [on Facebook] but with our resources…I do not want to ask questions and put up surveys just for the sake of asking…if I cannot make a good use of the results.” (The Hawks)

4.2.3 To communicate and inform

One clear reason for organizations to be on Facebook is to be able to inform their audiences and to communicate quickly, effectively and to a relatively large amount of people. The Bullets stated that although printed media still is a large part of their marketing communications the role of Facebook is growing all the time and that on Facebook it is possible to add a little more personal and casual approach into communication. The same factor distinguishes Facebook from the organization official webpage where the way of informing and communicating is more formal.

Facebook’s ability to reach large audience quickly was recognized by all the interviewees. It was seen as an important communication channel for informing about sudden changes, actions of the organization, as well as reaching people who possibly cannot be reached effectively via other communication channels.

“It is not one or two times when the official league website and scoreboard service has been down during the game time. Pretty quickly you can see the people gathering on to Facebook to get the scores.” (The Bullets)
“No one visits our official website all the time to get the latest news. On Facebook we can very quickly reach a lot of people if, for example, the starting time of the game is changed or if we have a special offer for tickets.” (The Kings)

“We see it [Facebook] as information channel to large extent…there are a lot of people in there…and we can reach people who we would have hard time reaching otherwise.” (The Jets)

The Hawks organization even said that they have their own ”operation room” on Facebook with the most active fans of the official fan club. This closed group helps to keep both the organization and the fans up and dated on each and other, makes it easier to plan and arrange operations on both sides, and also saves the effort of sending out bunch of emails, making phone calls, or making personal visits.

When it comes to generating content on Facebook the case companies have more informal approach than when putting up news and other information on their official webpage or in traditional media. The goal is to inform about important news, which can be linked from the official webpage, but also to create exclusive content that fans cannot find anywhere else:

”We create unique content and communication tailored on Facebook. It cannot be absolute value to share all the same content on Facebook that you have on your official webpage. It has to be unique...Facebook is a place where fans get to know about things, if not in advance then at least in real-time.” (The Hawks)

“We have content tailored specifically on Facebook. And sometimes we make announcements either only on Facebook or then release them first on Facebook before anywhere else. Same goes with Twitter.” (The Jets)

4.2.4 Marketing and promotion

Even though the organizations do not necessarily use Facebook for marketing and promotional purposes so much they have combined some activities in that field and advertising along with engaging the fans. In result there has been a bunch of campaigns, many of very creative, allowing fans to participate. The key thing has been recruiting fans from Facebook:
“We did a TV commercial promoting season tickets and we recruited fans from Facebook to participate. There were a lot of willing participants.” (The Bullets)

The Hawks organization used the same concept where they recruited fans from Facebook to take part in a TV commercial. The interviewee told that shooting the ad took about four or five hours and involved around 500 fans. Afterwards the ad was shown on TV and was also put on Youtube and on the team Facebook page where people could watch and comment it. The Jets interviewee told that they used writings from the fans on Facebook in their outdoor advertisements. These examples show that involving fans in not just the game event but also in other activities can be beneficial and a way to enhance engagement and community feeling.

In general, there seems to prevail an attitude towards not marketing and promoting game events too heavily on Facebook. All the case companies inform their fans about upcoming games on Facebook but do not want to push the fans too much towards buying tickets by posting direct links to purchase situation. However, The Hawks organization was exception to this as they had planned and implemented a concept for game day marketing on Facebook. The interviewee described the concept as follows:

“We are competing not only with other hockey teams but with other players in entertainment industry as well. There are a lot of printed and outdoor ads out there and we wanted to give the customer chance to close the deal all the way to purchasing the tickets to the game event right at the time when he sees the advertisement. So we created this game day concept on Facebook. We start by informing people about the game ahead two days in advance. Then on the game day we provide all the information again with the direct link to ticket operator’s webpage where the tickets can be purchased. It is important that there is always that “go to action” chance.” (The Hawks)

New technology provides increasing opportunities for companies to integrate social media into their marketing and promotional campaigns. Combining social media, game events, and outdoor billboard advertising was something that The Jets organization tried and ended up being very pleased with. And according to interviewee they were the first ones to do it in the whole world with this concept:
“We posted a picture, an ad, on Facebook… it was kind of a puzzle. Every time someone liked the picture one piece of the puzzle was revealed. And this picture was also put up on a digital billboard in a mall in the city center and also shown on the video screen during the game event. And the thing with this was that when someone liked the picture on Facebook his or her name and picture was shown on the screen to let everyone know that he or she is “one of us”. 15,000 people liked the picture the first day the campaign was launched.” (The Jets)

4.2.5 Sales

When asked about using Facebook for sales purposes the answers were somewhat conflicting among the respondents. The Hawks respondent argued that if the sales promotion is done carefully on Facebook it could be effective lead to direct sales. However, other respondents argued that too much sales promotion can be irritating and that they seldom do such. Besides marketing game events, which was discussed in the last section, marketing and selling fan accessories on Facebook was brought up in the interviews. None of the organizations has an online fan shop directly on Facebook but they do have fan shops in their official web pages. Some special offers and new products are occasionally posted on Facebook with the link to the official online fan shop.

“We have put links to our fan shop on our Facebook page sometimes when we introduce new fan accessories…but it is only occasionally and with new products.” (The Jets)

An interesting concept brought up by The Hawks representative was related to B2B sales and how it can be utilized on Facebook. The interviewee explained the concept:

“The concept is named “call my boss” and the idea is that people could let us know that they would like their company to take them to hockey game. They filled in the form on our Facebook page where they gave us their employer’s contact information. We then contacted the employer offering possibility to take their employees to our game event. And we got several leads to actual sales.” (The Hawks)

The above described concept shows that with creative ideas organizations can utilize their Facebook page not only to serve individual customers but also businesses.
4.2.6 Advertising

Utilizing Facebook for advertising purposes has already been partly discussed in the previous sections of this paper. However, the already discussed advertising was mainly focused to organizations themselves advertising their products and services. Letting partner companies to advertise on their Facebook page is something that all the interviewees agreed to be careful with. It was stated that there should always be a clear link and connection to the team when advertising on the team page. Otherwise the advertising message will have a big risk to turn against the company who is advertising and the owner of the page.

“The connection to our organization and to our team has to be very clear and rational. Otherwise it will be quickly turned down by people.” (The Jets)

“There are risks. The financial benefit may be very short-term but you may lose people who like you. We have only had one or two ads there.” (The Bullets)

4.2.7 Benchmarking

Benchmarking competitors and best practices is an activity that the organizations utilize to very different extents. All the interviewees stated that knowing what competitors do is an important aspect in their business but when it comes to social media it is not fully utilized by everyone. The Bullets interviewee said that he follows all the other Finnish hockey league teams both on Facebook and on Twitter. He also said that during the day at the office he utilizes a free software to track social media and that he thinks it is an important part of his job:

“…If someone’s got a good idea I am able to track it and think if it is possible for our organization to utilize it. There are good ideas floating around and it is good to know what the others are doing…to compare us with them.” (The Bullets)

The Hawks interviewee argued that although it is better to be in a position where others copy you than to be the one that copies others it still does not hurt to be aware of good practices and at least to follow what the rival team from the same area is doing. Only The Kings admitted not to follow other teams’ activities in social media at all. This was due to lack of time and resources.
4.3 **Third part of the interviews: quantifying and measuring success**

In the third part of the interviews the interviewees were asked to define success on Facebook and to talk about measuring success of their organization’s Facebook activities. This was the second main theme of the study. The interviewees were allowed to discuss any matter they wanted and saw relevant concerning the topic. A list of proposed ways to quantify and measure success on Facebook was then presented and discussed with each interviewee in order to probe all the possible perspectives.

4.3.1 **Defining and measuring success**

There seems to be lack of clear definitions and especially measurements of success in social media activities among the studied companies. Specifically, qualitative measurements were stated hard to define and execute. Also, the lack of resources, both human and technical, makes it challenging to monitor success of the Facebook activities.

“We do not really have any other tools to measure success than the statistics provided by Facebook” (The Bullets)

"If we talk about Facebook it is the numbers…like how many fans do we have.” (The Jets)

"Increase in the amount of fans is one…that it is increasing…and their profile of course.” (The Hawks)

Fan engagement and activity was the main factor based on which all of the respondents defined success of their respective organizations on Facebook. Other factor that was mentioned to help quantifying success was the sales. These factors will be discussed more in detailed in the following sections.

4.3.2 **Fan engagement and activity**

When asked to define success and to describe when they feel the organization’s Facebook activities have been successful fan engagement and activity was among the first things the interviewees mentioned besides the total amount of fans. It is not enough if the organization has tons of fans if the fans are not engaged and active. As The Kings interviewee stated:
"I feel we have succeeded if people have liked our posts and commented on them...say if 100 people have liked my post I get a good feeling...that I have reached the audience.” (The Kings)

Measuring engagement is not an easy task. There are numbers provided by Facebook statistics, which help to track the most popular content posted on the page. Leaning on those numbers is quite easy but it does not provide qualitative data to measure success. None of the interviewees said they have any qualitative measuring methods for success at least to the extent that measuring would be carefully planned and constantly executed resulting some concrete facts.

“[About qualitative measurements] Not really…it is more like every day monitoring and acting ad hoc…but nothing official. I monitor the discussion there and try to pick bits of feedback…it is good when we have more positive than negative messages.” (The Bullets)

4.3.3 Sales

Sales were clearly mentioned as a purpose for being on Facebook by only one organization, The Hawks. Others said that they have tried it sometimes but want to be careful with it because sales promotion and advertisements may irritate people. The Hawks representative whose organization was more positive towards direct sales, especially towards the ticket sales, stated the following:

"Our average attendance per game increased by 700 this season. I think Facebook and our gameday marketing has influenced it. We do not have tools yet to measure how many people purchased tickets based on Facebook marketing but next year we will have the tools and we will be able to show numbers.” (The Hawks)

The Kings interviewee explained that the difficulty in selling tickets on Facebook, and measuring the sales, is that they are able to give special offers and sell cheaper tickets at the arena box office.

“If we post direct links to national ticket selling operator’s online shop the tickets are more expensive compared to tickets sold here at the arena box office. And we cannot give special offers like “two for the price of one” via national operator. So we are focusing more on promoting ticket sales here at the arena and inform about it on Facebook.” (The Kings)
B2B selling, which only The Hawks organization said they had been utilizing on Facebook, is measurable by looking at the contacts created and responses received. The “call my boss” B2B campaign organized by The Hawks was even so successful that the organization could not take full financial advantage of it due to lack of resources. They got so many contacts that they did not have enough resources to get in touch with everyone in person. One reason for not fully utilizing the results was also that they already had pretty well used the capacity of the arena. However, they got several contacts that led to sales and hundreds of potential future partners.

### 4.3.4 Measuring tools – Facebook Insights and web analytics

When asked about measuring success on Facebook the interviewees mainly pointed out quantitative methods like the total number of fans on their page or the total amount of likes and comments. Three of the organizations are using Facebook Insights, the statistics application provided by Facebook itself. Again, there are differences between organizations on how consistent and accurate they are in monitoring these statistics.

“It is not that systematic…but we try to pick up good things from there…if some post got much comments and likes.” (The Jets)

“I check it at regular basis. I pick up numbers like how many people we have reached and also monitor the user profiles, demographics.” (The Hawks)

The benefits of monitoring the statistics were recognized in two of the organizations. One was using Facebook Insights and Google Analytics to monitor their Facebook page and official website. Besides these free services they had piloted chargeable software for social media monitoring, to get deeper insights, but the results were yet to be analyzed and published. Another organization utilized Facebook Insights and Tweetdec, which is free software for social media monitoring.

The reasons for not utilizing chargeable tools and services were clear. The costs of those services were seen higher compared to the benefits:

“Top management of course wants to see the economic benefits. Those benefits maybe have not been proved yet with these tools and services. But those tools would help my job and save my time.” (The Bullets)
However, as The Hawks interviewee pointed out the data provided by social media monitoring tools could be valuable and utilized in business:

“That data is valuable when negotiating with business partners…used as a supporting material when justifying why they should do business with us.” (The Hawks)

At this point the discussion with interviewees turned to measuring the return on investment (ROI). The debate of calculating ROI for social media has been going back and forth as there has not really yet been standardized metrics for doing it.

“It is hard to see the financial benefit…to calculate actual return in euro.” (The Jets)

“The starting point is good since the investment…it is not much, basically zero euro. It is the hours I put in it. But the metrics to calculate the return…we need to find proper metrics. It is not necessarily measured in euro, it can be other added value.” (The Hawks)

Only one organization, The Kings, stated that they do not follow the hard figures provided by Facebook or other social media web analytic software. This was, again, because of the lack of human resources and also partly because of the ongoing organizational change.

4.4 Fourth part of the interviews: sports business vs. other businesses

In this part of the interviews the interviewees discussed about the differences between sports business and other businesses when it comes to purposes of being on Facebook. They were asked to consider the reasons for their organization to be on Facebook and compare them to any other business to find out if one or more of the reasons are more relevant for sports organization specifically.

There was a clear consensus among the studied companies about the differences between sports business and other businesses and acting in social media. The main difference everyone mentioned is that sports business is largely built on experiences when it comes to customers or fans. The passion and interest of fans as well as more deep and personal feelings towards the team is something that all the interviewees pointed out to be the difference maker between sports business and other businesses. The engagement level is higher.
“We are in sports business and people want to know about us, and they follow us, all the time. We need to be present at any times. The fans have emotional attachment with the team. You are not necessarily a fan of some physical product but you are a fan of a hockey team.” (The Jets)

“Our customers, the fans, are very passionate. That is the difference. It is overwhelming how passionate they can be. It is all about experiences and emotions.” (The Bullets)

“You are not a fan of Neste Oil or some office supply company. That is the difference. I see it a lot more relevant for us to be present on Facebook compared to those businesses. The relationship between the team and fans is so deep.” (The Kings)

These statements show that in sports business the fans are much more emotionally involved compared to other businesses. It is more about emotional decisions than rationale when the fans live, breathe and feel the team. However, this does not mean that any other business could not reach the same level of fan engagement. As The Hawks representative stated:

“We are in experience business. Some people are almost religious towards our team. The level of engagement is huge. But…take for example Apple…physical products…phones, laptops, and other stuff. And look at the emotional attachment they have created with their users. Our business might have an advantage in this…it is maybe easier for us to create but it is not impossible for other businesses either. Apple is much more than just a product.” (The Hawks)

### 4.5 Fifth part of the interviews: future expectations of social media

The last part of the interviews was added into the interview guide after the first interviews. This was because when discussing about social media the interviewees felt that there are a lot of things they could do to better cope with their organizations’ social media activities in the future. Besides that, the field of social media as an academic subject as well as a part of daily business is rapidly developing and changing all the time and that sets challenges but also opportunities for businesses to utilize it.
All of the interviewees stated that social media will have increasing role in their business activities in the future and that it needs more resources and attention:

“It would be great to have more people within this organization to participate more actively in social media…so that everyone would be more aware of what is happening there.” (The Bullets)

“With the new owners, and after this organizational change, I am sure we will start developing our social media activities, including monitoring and follow-up…we will take in more resources in order to maximize the benefits of social media…and in general take more professional approach on it.” (The Kings)

Timeline, the new Facebook profile, was mentioned to be something to focus on more in the future. Traditions and history are something that the organizations are proud of, especially when it comes to sports. Timeline allows presenting all the past events like big victories, championships and milestones in logical and very visual way, and this is something that the interviewees considered important:

“Now that the season has ended I will have more time to focus on it. It is a great opportunity to highlight our long and great history with pictures and videos. Our fans have asked for it and now they will get it.” (The Hawks)

Increasing use of social media combined with new technologies generate opportunities for new business concepts. One interesting thing pointed out during the interviews was the mobile use of social media and social media applications. Two of the organizations are already utilizing a mobile application tailored and integrated into social media and it seems that the other two organizations as well see it as an opportunity in the future. Also, integrating social media to the actual product, the game event, is something The Jets organization has already tested and others seem very interested in testing as well.

“Mobile use of social media will increase...you can reach people during game events and get them to participate. We have, for example, planned to pick comments from Twitter and show them on the video screen during the games.” (The Bullets)

New ideas and business concepts utilized in social media do not have to be expensive investments. Facebook provides variety of different applications and technical support for individuals and organizations to use. As The Hawks interviewee concluded:
“It is the small creative things that can make big impact. You do not have to come out with big things if your idea is good.” (The Hawks)

### 4.5.1 Why compete – why not co-operate?

When talking about future of social media an interesting idea that was pointed out by The Hawks representative was that instead of competing with each other until the bitter end the hockey organizations should co-operate more when it comes to promoting the sport. This co-operation could also include activities on Facebook.

“I am calling for a little bit of co-operation between the Finnish hockey league teams and organizations behind them. Sharing thoughts and ideas will benefit everyone and will not steal anyone’s identity. After all, every team is different. It will strengthen our league and diminish the gap between so called interesting teams and less interesting teams.” (The Hawks)

And apparently this interviewee is not alone with his thoughts as The Kings interviewee agreed:

“We all have the same tools…and we all want the sport to succeed and the fans to follow…that way everyone gets more audience. It is inside the rink where we are competing.” (The Kings)
5 Analysis and discussion

In this chapter the findings of the empirical study are analyzed and the overview of the findings is presented. The findings are discussed based on the five parts of the interviews.

5.1 Overview of the first part of the interviews

During the first part of the interviews social media was discussed in general to familiarize the interviewees with the topic and to gain some background information about the case companies’ social media activities. Also, the aim was to find out how well planned strategic decisions the case companies make concerning social media. Table 4 summarized the first part of the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social media channels</th>
<th>The Bullets</th>
<th>The Hawks</th>
<th>The Jets</th>
<th>The Kings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Youtube</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Youtube</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Youtube</td>
<td>Facebook, Twitter, Youtube</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources (persons)</td>
<td>1 + 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 + 2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official strategy</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Social Media in the Case Companies

As it can be seen from the table Facebook, Twitter and Youtube are the most common social media channels used in the case companies. These channels were also stated to be the easiest ones to get started with when establishing social media presence. Only one team is not using Twitter and Youtube but instead focus on Facebook.

Resources assigned to social media activities seem to be limited in the studied companies. All the case companies have one person from the organization assigned to take care of social media. Two of the organizations, The Bullets and The Jets, utilize external help in maintaining social media as they have assigned fans to create content and update their Facebook page. The number of external resources assigned is illustrated in the table with + 3 (The Bullets) and + 2 (The Jets). None of the organizations have official strategy for social media. This seems to be the case in many businesses as previous surveys have shown (e.g. The Mercadien Group, 2010; The European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and the Institute of Media and Communications Management at the University of...
St. Gallen, 2011). These findings are little surprising recalling the result that all of the studied organizations recognized the importance of social media and especially in sports business. The interviewees argued that it is more important for sports organizations to establish and maintain social media presence in order to serve their passionate fans and encourage fans engagement and strong community feeling, yet they still handle social media activities in a rather ad hoc manner without consistent planning and monitoring.

In order to be able to effectively utilize social media and to measure its results it is essential to have a strategy for it. With a strategy integrated to the marketing communications of the company, with pre-determined goals and metrics to define and evaluate success, and constant monitoring it is possible to effectively utilize social media in business (Faulds & Mangold, 2009; Delahaye Paine, 2011; Owyang, 2010; Vassinen, 2011). The findings of this study indicate that sports teams do not have strategic planning and utilization of social media. They recognize the importance of being present in social media and are aware of the opportunities social media provide for businesses. However, along with the lack of time and resources comes the difficulty of fully utilizing social media. Also, not having a strategy for social media makes it harder to plan, execute and consistently measure any activities.

5.2 Overview of the second part of the interviews

In the second part of the interviews the purposes for utilizing social media in sports organization were discussed. The interviewees were not given any pre-determined options for answers but they were encouraged to talk freely from their own knowledge and experience. A list of pre-determined purposes was proposed to the interviewees in the end of the second part to find out if they had forgotten to mention something and to discuss their opinions about the relevance of these purposes.

As Pick (2009) and Brenner (2010) proposed the four C’s of social media heavily involve customer-created content in an interesting and effective context and in the right channel, as well as the ability and easiness to connect with other people. This interaction results in an engaged and strong community. Fan engagement and community building was mentioned by every interviewee as a purpose for their organization to be present and act in social media. Posting interesting content and sparking the discussion by encouraging the fans to be active and co-create content on the page was seen as an essential aspect when acting on Facebook. All of the interviewees agreed that having engaged and active fans is a huge strength for the organization as the fans are the best ambassadors of the team. Sports fans
are very passionate and eager to interact with their favorite teams and athletes and a strong engaged community will facilitate this relationship. These findings are in line with the current academic literature. Delahaye Paine (2011), for example, suggests that engagement is the corner stone in building a relationship with a company and its customers. And as Levy (2010) proposed creating and sharing exclusive content with the Facebook community encourages people to come back to the page because they cannot find that special content elsewhere. And that, again, enhances activity on the page and strengthens the engagement level and community feeling.

*Monitoring the discussion* in order to find out what the fans think about any activities around the team and the organization was found out to be one major reason for utilizing social media. As social media facilitates an opportunity to reach millions of people in just a blink of an eye the studied organizations are well aware of that monitoring the discussion is important. This finding is supported by a previous study by EACD and the Institute of Media and Communications Management at the University of St. Gallen’s (2011) as their survey showed that the main reason (72% of responses) for marketing professionals to use social media is listening to and monitoring what is happening in the social media sphere. However, it seems that in the case companies of this study monitoring is done in more or less an ad hoc basis and based on the mutual feeling instead of having it done constantly and based on some pre-determined goals and measures. Facebook can be seen as a huge focus group but it is worthwhile only if the company manages to make use of the data. This is clearly proven to be difficult in the studied companies because of the limited resources.

Third purpose for being in social media was found out to be to communicate and inform the audiences. The difference between this purpose and monitoring the discussion, which was discussed above, is that communicating and informing was seen more from company to customer action while monitoring the discussion is more about finding out the feelings and opinions of customers. The news around the team and the organization is floating around all the time in all possible communication channels and Facebook was seen as a quick and effective channel to reach the audiences regarding any news or changes. This purpose for utilizing social media was not so evidently brought up in the academic literature or previous research. This could be interpreted in a way that sports business is more revolving in the means of, for example, changes in a game schedule and news around the team (injuries, changes in the team line-up, etc.). In those cases it is essential that the organization is able to reach its audience quickly and effectively.
Marketing and promotion actions are taken on Facebook or indirectly with the help of Facebook. This has resulted in different advertisement and promotional campaigns where fans have been able to participate co-producing the content of the advertisements. Fans are the best consultants and ambassadors for their respective teams so letting fans to participate in marketing and promotional activities will result in increasing fan engagement and effective and credible marketing. Speyer (2011) supports these statements by arguing that fan engagement is the ultimate goal for effective Facebook marketing. Customers rely and trust on each other so a satisfied customer is the brand’s best sales person.

Direct sales and sales promotion in itself with heavy advertising divided the opinions among the interviewees. Some saw it too pushy to promote sales or provide direct links to action leading to sales. One organization, The Hawks, had built a concept that aims to promote game day ticket sales and provides direct links to buying the tickets. B2B sales were done on Facebook only by The Hawks organization as well. This is interesting because the other organizations are focusing only to individual fans. All the interviewees, however, agreed that advertising on their Facebook page need to be carefully planned and linked to the team, if done at all. The results from Sports and Social Media Survey published in February 2012 by GMR Marketing showed results that are in controversy with the common thought of irritating nature of advertisements in social media. 68% of the surveyed sports fans stated that they love, like or are indifferent to marketing messaged posted by sports personalities. Leaning on these results it could be worth trying to do more marketing and advertising on the team Facebook pages in the case companies just keeping in mind the close link to the team and its players.

One purpose for utilizing social media that was mentioned only by The Bullets interviewee was benchmarking. All the interviewees admitted the importance of knowing what competitors and best practices do when this purpose was proposed to them but it seems that benchmarking is not on the top of their priority list when considering actions on Facebook. The Kings team representative even said that she does not have time to do it at all. Benchmarking other sports organizations and businesses’ Facebook pages could provide valuable information and tips to the studied organizations. This, however, would require more resources assigned to social media and so far these organizations have not been able, or willing, to provide the needed resources.
5.3 Overview of the third part of the interviews

The third part of the interviews consisted of discussion about defining and measuring success of Facebook activities in sports organization. The interviewees were first let talk about the topic freely and a list of proposed ways to quantify and measure success was presented to them later.

Defining success on Facebook activities was seen quite difficult among the interviewees. *Fan engagement and activity* on the page was stated as a major factor when defining success. Measuring engagement and activity is not easy and the interviewees had hard time defining sufficient metrics for measuring those factors. *Quantitative metrics* provided by Facebook in the form of Facebook page statistics (Facebook Insights) is the only measurement utilized by the case companies in order to measure success. This measurement is supported in the literature (e.g. Facebook, 2012; Levy, 2010) as, for example, fan activity, which Facebook Insights provides figures for, can be seen a form of engagement. These hard figures do not, however, necessarily provide enough information and there is a need for *qualitative metrics* and measurements. So far the lack of resources and maybe even willingness have prevented better utilization of measuring success on Facebook in the case companies. Vassinen (2011) argues that the biggest challenge for effective social media measurement is not the tools or the metrics available but defining goals in social media and choosing the right metrics for measurement. Having careful planning process for strategies, goals and right metrics for measurement could help the case companies to better utilize social media.

Another metric mentioned to measure success in the case companies’ Facebook activities is *sales* figures. Whether promoting the game events or fan accessories on their Facebook page utilizing actual sales figures are pretty straightforward way to measure success. The problem here lies in that the linkage between Facebook activities and actual sales figures is missing. Looking at the total sales figures, and showing the increase in the figures, is not sufficient metric if it cannot be linked to certain activities. At the moment, there’s only mutual feeling of success but no real proof in the means of hard figures.

All in all, there is a need for more effective and constant measurement of Facebook activities and their success. At the moment, all measurement in the case companies except the hard figures provided by the Facebook Insights is based on mutuality and inconsistency. Assigning more resources, both human and technical, to social media would help the case companies to accomplish reliable and more credible overall monitoring in their social me-
dia activities. Using external resources, for example consultants or paid software, is an option worth considering if their own resources are not enough.

5.4 **Overview of the fourth part of the interviews**

In the fourth part of the interviews the discussion was turned to possible differences between sports businesses and other businesses when considering the purposes of being on Facebook. The interviewees were asked to consider if some of the before discussed purposes for being on Facebook are more relevant to sports organizations compared to businesses in other industries.

All of the interviewees stated the main difference between sports business and other businesses to be the *experiential nature* of sports events and the passion and other deep emotions that sports fans have towards their favorite team. Fans want to interact with teams and organizations. They want to participate, both in the game events and in the discussion, and facilitating these opportunities is one of the main reasons for sports teams to be on Facebook. *Nurturing the relationship* with their fans, *engaging them* and *building strong community* was seen as an essential purpose for establishing and maintaining presence in social media by all of the interviewees. Academic literature supports these findings (e.g. Mullin, Hardy & Sutton, 2007) of special characteristics of sports. It is not said that nurturing relationship with fans or having strong engaged communities would not be important for other businesses but in sports business these aspects seem to emerge in somewhat higher level.

5.5 **Overview of the fifth part of the interviews**

The last part of the interviews focused on the future expectations of social media. The interviewees discussed about the role of social media in their respective organizations, as well as the challenges and the opportunities provided by social media in the future. This part was brought into the interview guide because the interviewees were eager to talk about the future of social media and how their organizations could better utilize social media in the coming years.

The increasing use of social media and the importance of taking advantage of it has not gone unnoticed among the case companies in this study. Everyone admitted that social media would have a big role in their organizations in the future. Rapidly developing technologies enable variety of creative use of social media. Social media mobile integration has already kicked off in some organizations and other organizations will likely follow as the
benefits continue to unveil. Being able to log in to Facebook with any technical device anywhere in the world is relatively likely going to be reality in the future. In that case the game events will probably become even more interactive as the fans will be able to use social media everywhere and anytime. And if it is to happen the organizations need to be ready to serve their customers that moment.
6 Conclusion

This last chapter will first discuss some of the limitations of the study and propose future research subjects. Then, the conclusion of the study will be presented. The chapter will end with a summary of the most interesting findings of the study.

6.1 Limitations and future research suggestions

Sample size of this study was limited to four respondents, one from each case company. Having more respondents, whether more than one per case company or having more companies involved, could have helped to reach more valid and reliable results. However, due to financial and geographical constraints as well as limited time given to conduct the study the amount of respondents was relatively small. Also, all of the studied companies were professional hockey organizations meaning that no case companies from other sports were included in the study. Although sports industry has its shared special characteristics it may be that there are differences between different sports and that what was found suitable for hockey organizations in this study is not necessarily suitable for a basketball organization. Conducting a research based on this study within other sports, like basketball or football, would be interesting in order to find out whether or not the results and knowledge provided in this study can be adapted to other sports as well.

The personal interpretation of the researcher cannot be avoided when analyzing qualitative data (Creswell, 2002). This can be argued to be a limitation for this study. The interpretation of the results could have been different with another researcher. This cannot, however, be totally avoided in qualitative research. Also, taking into account the fact that there has not been previous research in this field of business there is definitely a need for more similar studies in order to gain wider perspective and deeper understanding of the subject.

This research took the approach to utilizing social media, like Facebook, from a company’s perspective. Engaging fans and building strong communities was seen as a major reason for being on Facebook. However, it was seen difficult to measure engagement because it is quite abstract factor and the right metrics are hard to find. It would be interesting to conduct a study from fans’ point of view to see how they define engagement and a strong community, and also which factors they see essential in order to create engagement. This
way it could be easier to define and put in place the right metrics for measuring engagement in the future.

The study also raised some other questions, like how would it make the business different if there was a strategy planned for social media, or what will the future of social media bring along to the sports organizations? These questions could be studied as their own thesis subjects.

Even though this study cannot necessarily be standardized or stated to be the truth for all sports businesses it will provide guidelines and a red thread for sports organizations to take a look at, and also to be used as a ground for future research to build more understanding on the subject.

### 6.2 Conclusions and summary of the main findings

The purpose of this study was to find out the reasons and understand why companies are in social media, like Facebook; for what purposes they use it, what do they expect to gain from it, and how do they evaluate success of their activities in social media. The empirical study focused on sports teams, in particular, and the case companies were Finnish professional hockey teams.

To fulfill the purpose of the study the following research questions were assigned:

1. What are the reasons for companies, specifically in sports industry, to be in social networks, like Facebook, and are the reasons different from other businesses?

2. How do companies, especially sports organizations, quantify and measure the effectiveness of their social media activities?

3. What are the expectations these companies have towards social media in the future?

The literature review and previous studies raised certain expectations about the results. The findings of the empirical study correspond quite well to those expectations. The purposes for being present in social media vary from business to business. The nature of sports business and sports fans make engaging the fans and building strong communities around the teams essential activity for sports organizations. This has been noticed among the case companies in this study since they see having engaged fans and a strong community as an essential aspect in their social media activities. Sports fans also crave for any bits of infor-
information about the team and communicating and informing was seen as an important social media activity in the case companies.

A little surprising finding was that sales promotion and effort to actually make customers act in the means of buying tickets or fan accessories was not so well planned and organized. The game event is the core product in sports business so it would be reasonable to try making it as easy as possible for customer to access the event and all the activities around it. The main reason for not having these activities was stated to be unwillingness to push the fans too hard towards buying action. An interesting topic that was brought up during one of the interviews was B2B selling. In general, the focus in social media is on the fans mostly because they are thought to be the ones to use social media and to consume the actual product, the game event, to a large extent. The thought of B2B activities on Facebook is an interesting idea and can provide business opportunities in the future. This was proven by one of the case companies who had successfully planned and implemented a B2B concept where employees could suggest their employers to take them to a hockey game via the team Facebook page. Also, B2B advertisement, in the means of partner companies advertising on the team Facebook page, could be utilized more just keeping in mind the clear connection between the ad and the team by, for example using players of the team in advertisements.

Quantifying and measuring success in social media was proven to be a difficult task. Lack of resources and sufficient measuring metrics was shown to be clear in the studied companies. Building a strategy for social media and directly including it in the strategy planning process of the company would help a lot in determining and placing the right metrics for measuring success on Facebook and other social media. At the moment, monitoring and measuring Facebook activities is relying too much on the mutual feeling of few individuals in the organizations and based on an ad hoc acting.

Future of social media is hard to predict because of the rapidly developing technology and ever-changing applications and services. In the studied companies there is a strong belief that social media will strengthen its position as a communication channel in businesses. The integration of social media to mobile and other technical devices and to game events has already begun but there is a reason to believe that it will still grow its role in the future. The fans want to be able to interact with each other and with their favorite teams in social media any time of the day and in any environment. It is interesting to see if the organiza-
tions understand the importance of these services in their business and if they are able to provide the service.

All in all, the study fulfilled its purpose very well. It provided understanding and knowledge to a phenomenon not previously studied: why sports teams are in social media, like Facebook, and how do they measure their success in there? In addition, the study was able to point out some future opportunities and expectations regarding business in social media. The fact that this field of business has not been studied before made the research process interesting and rewarding. Possibility to create new knowledge and understanding was enormous driving force for the author of this paper throughout the whole research process. The studied organizations, as well as other sports organizations, can use this thesis as a guideline when considering their presence in social media and when determining how to measure success in there. The most interesting and potentially useful findings are listed below to summarize the study:

- **Fan engagement** and **community building** are essential aspects of sports organizations’ presence in social media. Encouraging fans to actively participate in the discussion and to co-produce and share exclusive content can emphasize these aspects. Sports fans are very passionate and emotional towards their favorite teams and this makes establishing a good relationship with fans important for sports organizations.

- Being able to **inform** fans about any changes quickly and efficiently is important for sports organizations as the information about the team floats around all the time and sudden changes, for example in the game schedule, can appear. Social media channels, like Facebook, facilitate quick and effective communication and information flow from company-to-customer, as well as from customer-to-company and from customer-to-customer.

- **Sales promotion** and **direct sales** are not utilized to a very large extent in the studied organizations. Reason for this is the unwillingness to push customers towards buying decision and it also applies to advertising on the team Facebook page. However, experiences from sales promotion have shown that it can be done effectively and without too much irritation among the fans. **B2B sales** can also be done on Facebook and it should be emphasized more in the future. Even **advertising** can be utilized when there is a clear link between the product and the team, e.g. a player advertising the product.
- *Quantifying and measuring success* on Facebook is based on simple statistics provided by Facebook itself. Other than that it is based on mutual feeling and measuring is done in an ad hoc manner without consistent planning. There is a need for strategies, more careful planning and proper metrics to measure success. Besides strategies, more resources could be assigned to social media from the company side.

- *Future expectations* for social media are high. It is expected to strengthen its role in organizations. Mobile integration and different social media channels integration are expected to emerge in the future.

- *Co-operation* between the organizations should be emphasized instead of competing against each other. By sharing knowledge and best practices in social media everyone could benefit and hockey as sport would get more exposure and followers.
Appendix

List of references


Appendix


Appendix


The European Association of Communication Directors (EACD) and the Institute of Media and Communications Management at the University of St. Gallen. *Social Media and The Communication Profession.* Survey published 31 January 2011. Retrieved March
Appendix


Appendix A – Interview guide

Proposed set of themes and supporting subjects and questions to be discussed in the interviews:

Short introduction of the study (and the researcher); what, why, how?

- Which social media you utilize? Why those?
- For how long have you had a Facebook page?
- How big / what kind of resources you have for social media?
- Is social media part of your corporate strategy (marketing/communication strategy)? Why / why not?
- What is your position and responsibility in the organization regarding social media?

Theme 1: Purposes of using social media

- For what purposes do you use social media?

-Proposed purposes of utilizing social media (to be discussed with respondents if they don’t mention it by themselves – why or why not they’re using this method?):
  - Community building
  - Customer engagement
  - Market research
  - Marketing and promotion
  - To communicate (inform, listen, interact)
  - Sales
  - Advertising
  - Benchmarking competitors / best practices
  - Anything else? New themes/topics brought up during the discussion
Theme 2: Quantifying and measuring the success of social media activities

- What do you think it takes to succeed in social media – what are the important ingredients for success?

- How do you ensure success?

- How do you measure success?

- Which metrics do you use to measure success? (qualitative/quantitative)

- Proposed ways of quantifying and measuring the success (to be discussed with respondents – why or why not they’re using this method):
  - Web analytics (Google Alert/Analytics, other free/paid services)
  - Facebook insights (Facebook statistics)
  - Fan engagement (being part of community, etc.)
  - Customer satisfaction (surveys?)
  - Sales (click throughs to transactional websites, e.g. online shops)
  - ROI (Can it be measured? Does the management require it? Company or customer perspective?)
  - Anything else? New themes/topics brought up during the discussion

The final topic to discuss about

Most companies today say they use social media for the before mentioned reasons. Are all of these reasons relevant for you as a company? Are there factors or conditions that make these reasons more or less relevant for you as a hockey team or in sports industry?
Appendix

Would you say that these reasons are true in sports industry in general or specifically for your company?

How do you see the future of social media in your company?

Closing the interview

- Short summary

- Ask if anything to add to any theme/topic

- Ask the permission to publish the company and interviewee name if not brought up / agreed before

- Tell how the thesis writing process will go on from now

- Thank the interviewee for his/her time and effort

- Send a thank you email the following days