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# **Heartful partnership or just business?**

Investigating corporations' reasoning and expected outcomes of sponsoring Swedish elite football teams.

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## **Bachelor Thesis in Business Administration**

**Title:** Heartful partnership or just business? - Investigating corporations' reasoning and expected outcomes of sponsoring Swedish elite football teams.

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Marketing in the current era is more complex than before, companies need to be creative and utilize more marketing mediums in order to stand out and reach a greater audience. Many companies thus implement sponsoring activities connected to sports to reach a greater and more specific audience. Football is the world's most popular sport, it attracts billions of people and by sponsoring a football team, companies can access the attention of these people.

**Problem:** Despite sponsorships popularity, there are difficulties in measuring the results and the long-term business purpose. Yet companies spend millions of dollars each year on sponsorships of elite football teams, even though the return on investment appears to be seemingly low.

**Purpose:** This research aims to gain further understanding of the reasons why and what makes companies decide to sponsor Swedish elite football teams. On a further note, companies' expectations and what they value in a sponsorship will be presented. The research will also examine possible business benefits correlated to the sponsorship. Lastly, the companies' eventual measurements of the sponsorships are examined.

**Method:** The research has been conducted through a qualitative approach of nine semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviewees hold managerial positions in corporations who sponsor Swedish elite football teams. The data was analysed and further compared to existing literature within the field.

**Results:** The results from this research indicates that the expectations and what companies' value in a sponsorship often coincide. On a further note, these companies prioritize gaining access to the

brand and network of the sponsored team to use within marketing as well as building relationships. Companies also see sponsorships as part of their CSR-projects to contribute to society. All the companies considered either had a local connection or heartfelt relation to the sponsored club. Regarding measuring the sponsorships, few companies have any sort of measurement in place but rather evaluates the sponsorship on more than just numbers.

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## 1. Introduction

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*In this chapter, the authors introduce the reader to the topic by presenting the background to their research. Problem discussion, research purpose and research questions are also presented. Lastly, the authors end this section with providing delimitations and definitions related to the topic of the paper.*

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### 1.1 Background

Sports creates emotions, moments and memories that can last a lifetime. Emotions are one of the hardest and yet, most powerful and effective elements of marketing (Cho et al., 2020). It is thus logical for corporations to associate themselves with these emotions related to sports in one way or another. This is where a sponsorship provides an opportunity.

In 2014 were jersey sponsorships the second most important income source for teams in the Bundesliga, (first league of German football) after broadcasting rights. Over the years, the popularity of implementing sponsorships among companies has increased and is now a common occurring part of companies marketing communication mix. This is despite research that has criticized sponsorships to be insufficient and lacking in tangible measurements (Lucas, 2015). It may thus seem surprising that German tech company TeamViewer on March 19, 2021, announced their new shirt sponsorship with Manchester United (one of the largest football clubs in the world). The deal was signed over a five-year period and will cost the company €275 million (Jackson, 2021). The deal will expose TeamViewer on the shirts and introduce the company to Manchester United's 1,1 billion fan base around the world, meanwhile serving as a tech partner to the club. TeamViewer will implement their tech- and AR (augmented reality)-solutions for fans to get a integrated virtual experience and remote access to the stadium (Communications Department, 2021).

The emergence of new media leverages has also brought other challenges to future marketing within the professional sports industry. A couple of years back, "traditional" TV-broadcasting was the most popular and seemingly efficient advertising element in media, as this was the only time and way to watch the game (Mason & Zheng, 2018). Now however, the emergence of streaming

services has facilitated a more flexible media consumption (IEG, 2016). Streaming services offer the possibility to watch games afterwards, thus enabling fast forwarding/skipping of ads, which has decreased the value of advertisement in TV-broadcasting. In addition, the overall price increase of TV-advertisement has led to companies reconsidering their choices of sports associated marketing (IEG, 2016).

Sponsorships of football teams seem to come with an overwhelming positive reception from the public. This is according to IEG (2016), due to sponsorships being viewed as more favorable since it is perceived as a marketing tool which gives back to the given team. Higher value marketing can thus be achieved by sponsoring teams/events/athletes. This by being exposed on jerseys, stadiums or likewise articles related to the actual game (Mason & Zheng, 2018).

## **1.2 Problem discussion**

Football is a constantly growing commercial industry in which salaries and costs are rapidly increasing. In order for Swedish clubs to keep up financially, sponsorships play a valuable role. The reasons for a sports team to take on sponsors is quite clear. However, what are the incentives a corporation might have to sponsor an elite football team? In this report, the authors will discuss what objectives and expectations corporations have on the clubs when deciding to sponsor a Swedish elite football club. The general idea of a sponsorship entails a corporation investing a certain amount of money in order to get their brand associated with the club. However nowadays, sponsoring a club can take many different shapes and forms.

Corporations are becoming increasingly modern and so the clubs need to modernize the way they pursue sponsorships. Even though exposure and affiliation usually are important parts of getting a return on investment, there are many other things a club can offer in order to attract corporations. Modern sponsorship-deals can be explained as a partnership that is built upon collaboration and a win-win mindset. Previous research has analyzed the impact of sponsorship as a marketing tool. These however, are either on a higher level (bigger corporations and clubs) or focusing on another area than (football teams), as this research will examine.



### **1.3 Research purpose**

The purpose of this research is to provide a narrower answer on the use of sponsorship of Swedish elite football clubs for corporations primarily operating in Sweden. It further aims to find common ground and connect what companies are attracted by when entering sponsorship agreements with Swedish elite football clubs, as well as what they wish to accomplish as partners. In addition, the authors present similarities in how Swedish corporations evaluate their sponsorship deals and what outcomes are desired.

The research aims to contribute to clubs' understanding of what sponsoring corporations' value and expect from their sponsorships. On the other side of the spectrum, this research will help answer corporations' considerations before entering a sponsorship deal with a football club and what benefits that can be achieved in a sponsorship. Further can this research help building more fruitful and long-lasting relations both parties benefit from connected to a sponsorship.

### **1.4 Research questions**

To contribute to the already existing research on sponsorships by corporations, the aim is to identify what reasons there are behind a corporation sponsoring a Swedish football team, what they expect from it and what they value in the sponsorship. Therefore, this research aims to answer the following research questions:

*RQ1: What do Swedish corporations consider before sponsoring a professional football club in Sweden?*

*RQ2: What are the expected outcomes and value-based expectations by Swedish corporations when entering a sponsorship deal with a professional football club in Sweden?*

*RQ3: What do Swedish corporations' value in a sponsorship deal and how do they evaluate the outcome?*

## 1.5 Delimitations

Interviewees were delimited to representatives of companies the authors knew through connections or got in contact with through the teams directly. This was helpful as it became easier to reach people at higher positions at these companies that were of value for the research and could give relevant answers and explanations. This made the sampling selection not entirely random. During the interviews a questionnaire was followed. At times, follow-up questions were necessary to further increase understanding. This opens up for differentiation and some inconsistency in the data-gathering process.

Participating corporations were only chosen if they were high-level sponsors to the teams, meaning they contribute with larger amounts of money, thus excluding low-level sponsors. This was done as expectations and ambitions of a sponsorship deal differs a lot depending on how much money the corporations invest. The reason behind choosing the higher-level sponsors over the lower ones, was that the larger sponsors are perceived to more thoroughly consider the reasons behind the sponsorship over smaller sponsors.

As the clubs included have different levels of sponsor accreditations and different costs for these, all participating sponsors in this research are not on the same sponsor level as each other. This can cause some differences between the sponsors as not all may access the same amount or type of exposure, rights or other benefits from being associated with the club.

On a further note, this research only includes representatives of companies who sponsor Swedish elite football clubs. The reason is that there is a big difference between European top leagues regarding size, market and revenue which would make it difficult to compare it to the Swedish top leagues. By instead only focusing on sponsors of Swedish football teams, it was easier to identify concrete differences and similarities between the corporations as they basically operate on the same level.

This research was conducted through nine semi-structured interviews as part of a qualitative study. The interviews were conducted in Swedish and thereafter translated into English for transcription.

This may cause some unintentional mistakes and misinterpretation of empirical data, either due to language differences or lack of exact “word for word”-translation.

Lastly, interviewees were representatives of companies from different fields and businesses. This can generate differences in answers and thoughts on the topic of sponsorships depending on the company’s business. As there are also only one company per sector, the answers from the given company are general answers that cannot be accounted for by all else in the same sector to make solid assumptions for.

## **1.6 Definitions**

**Sponsorship** - Marketing form corporations pay to promote a brand by being associated with an event, project, person or team. Commonly entails the corporation’s logo and name being visible in the material associated with the cause. Often gives the corporation the right to promote the collaboration on their website, “official sponsor of the NFL”, for example. Sponsorship can also be addressed as corporate sponsorship (Kenton, 2020a).

**Philanthropy** - Act of altruism by an individual or organization with the general purpose of improving human welfare and society as a whole. Different from sponsorship, philanthropy is supposed to be pure good-will, rather than an investment in your own brand to exploit for exposure for the firm (Hayes, 2020).

**Sponsor** - The entity that pays for being associated with the event, project, person or team (Sponsor, n.d.).

**Sponsee** - The entity who is sponsored by another individual or organization (Chanavat, 2010).

**Partnership** - Formal arrangement where two or more parties manage and operate a business/activity together (Kopp, 2021).

**Value** - The measured amount of monetary impact received from a certain activity. It refers to the magnitude of an asset, product or knowledge in the workforce. However, the term value can also be used to explain the monetary and CSR-related return of sponsorships. Exploring different opportunities of creating value is crucial when making business decisions in order to stay efficient and profitable Kenton, 2020b).

**Allsvenskan** - The highest division of Swedish football. Consists of 16 teams (Om oss, n.d.a.).

**Superettan** - Second highest division of Swedish football. Consists of 16 teams (Om oss, n.d.c).

## 2. Literature review

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*This chapter presents the theoretical background to the topic and the central concepts. Theories are presented to give the reader a deeper understanding of the definition, categories and different structures of sponsorships. Further will the usage and fundamentals of sponsorships and its attributes be covered, as well as how to evaluate a sponsorship. Lastly, general expected returns and criticism of sponsorships will be presented.*

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### 2.1 Defining sponsorship

The term sponsorship means that one entity provides support (often financial but can also be of other value) to another in exchange for commercial exposure and association rights. In the case of sport sponsorships, the two entities are referred to as the corporation and a sport organization/team that are participating in this process (Cornwell, 2020).

The concept of sponsorship includes different levels and aspects attached to it. The fee/value brought in by the sponsor and the leverage from the sponsee may vary. A sponsorship aims to establish a more unique advertising leverage and thus should it be unique in the way corporations implement sponsoring as part of their business strategy. The reason is to stand out and be noticed (Sponsorship, n.d.). Thus, there is not just one general course for how sponsorships are implemented and performed today. However, what most have in common, is the trade of the fee/value in exchange for advertisement (Cornwell, 2020).

Sponsoring should not be confused with donations or philanthropy, although there are similarities between these activities. The main similarity is that both include a corporation providing money to a team or organization (Masterman, 2007). The main difference, however, is the expected outcome. A sponsorship deal is an exchange between a sponsor and a sponsee where the latter receives a fee/value, and the former obtains the right to associate itself with the sponsored entity. Thus, with a clear commercial purpose of the sponsoring (Dolphin, 2003). Philanthropy on the other hand only does these activities for goodwill, without any intention of commercial gain (Masterman, 2007).

### **2.1.1Categorizing sponsorships**

Cornwell (2020) divides sports sponsorship into 4 different categories. Sponsoring of either:

1. Equipment, venues and things.
  - Adidas sponsors the Swedish national team with shirts, jackets, balls et cetera (Sveriges herrlandslags sponsorer, n.d.)
  - Mercedes Benz owns the rights to the name of the home stadium (Mercedes Benz stadium) to Atlanta Falcons (NFL) and Atlanta United (MLS) (Wilson, 2017).
  - Coaches of NFL teams wear Bose headsets (Cornwell, 2020).
2. Events, activities and programming.
  - Intel sponsors the Olympic games to create E-sport events around the Olympics (Cornwell, 2020).
  - VISA sponsors the FIFA world cup with their credit card services (VISA, n.d).
  - The Coca-Cola company owns the rights to supply the athletes with drinks during the olympics. Thus, they always have beverages such as Powerade available at the events (IOC Media Relations Team, 2019).
3. Individuals and groups.
  - Adidas sponsoring footballer Lionel Messi for him to wear their gear (Sportkez, 2020).
  - Mission Winnow sponsoring the Ferrari Formula 1 team for their logo to be featured on the car (Collantine, 2021).
4. Organizations, leagues and associations.
  - Audi is the title sponsor of the international ski federation (FIS) (Audi - FIS title sponsor Alpine, 2018).
  - Barclays sponsoring the English football premier league as in “Barclays premier league” (Impey, 2019).
  - Microsoft is a corporate partner/sponsor to UNICEF (UNICEF corporate partners, n.d.).

### 2.1.2 Sponsorship structures

Within the literature regarding sponsorships, the four sponsorship categories can take on one of the three structures presented below:

***Solo structure*** is when there is one single and exclusive sponsor in the programme (Masterman, 2007). This type of sponsorship is rare as most teams' budgets rely on sums too big for only one corporation to finance. Solo structure sponsorship can be achieved for particular sponsorship properties such as a stadium, jersey and similar (Kim et al., 2012). An example of this is Fly Emirates, who until 2017 were solo jersey sponsors of Arsenal FC. Fly Emirates also owned the naming rights for Arsenal's stadium, Emirates Stadium, thus being in a solo structure sponsorship deal for those "sponsor properties" (Wilson, 2018). In 2017, English football clubs were allowed to have more than one jersey sponsor which led to Fly Emirates losing their solo structure sponsorship on the jerseys with the team (Squire Patton Boggs, 2016). The rights for the stadium name however, remain (Wilson, 2018).

***Flat structure*** gives all the sponsors the same rights and same status towards each other. It doesn't apply any hierarchy to their sponsorship structure. This type of sponsorship structure is rare as it is difficult to give all sponsors the same rights and status disregarding the amount of money the company's pay for entering the deals (Masterman, 2007).

***Tiered structure*** is the most common sponsorship level (Kim et al., 2012). It refers to the existence of different levels of acknowledgement of status and involvement among sponsors. It is often represented in a hierarchical structure of a pyramid shape where all sponsors do not have access to the same rights. The levels are named to highlight the sponsor's status e.g., bronze, silver and gold. Being higher up the hierarchy indicates that an organization has spent more money and thus gained more rights to be associated with the team. The strategy often allows for more than one sponsor per sponsor level (Masterman, 2007). As teams can look for many different sponsors, this is the most efficient strategy to gather money by. However, having too many sponsors on a team's jersey, stadium or other channels has proven to be harmful to the team's image among the public as it can be perceived as wasteful and not legit. This effect can also affect the sponsoring

companies. More sponsors also lead to less exposure per sponsor which decreases the incentives for a sponsor to enter a sponsorship deal. It is thus important for the teams to consider and compare the money earned by all sponsorships compared to what that does to the team's image (Kim et al., 2012). Zak Brown, (CEO of McLaren Racing) said this on the topic of tiered sponsorship structure for McLaren F1 team: *"We are pursuing the high level of branding in an elegant way where it should be exclusive for sponsors to be part of the McLaren F1 team. If we add on too many sponsors, we will lose the exclusiveness which may harm long term relations we have with some sponsors."* (Clarkson, 2020). In conclusion, many sponsors are good for the sponsee as it generates more money, but one must be careful with how many to be sponsored by as too many sponsors rather harms the reputation of both parties (Kim et al., 2012).

## **2.2 Sponsorship Fundamentals**

To understand what to expect from a sponsorship investment, one must be aware of the effects that can be achieved by a sponsorship. Meenaghan (2001) has proposed a comprehensive model to increase knowledge and understanding on the effect's sponsorship has on consumers. He claims that the primary motivation to invest in a sponsorship is to achieve consumer influence and response. His research further claims that a sponsorship creates a sense of goodwill which in turn will influence the behaviour and attitude among the public toward the sponsor's brand. The response connected to the sponsorship is affected by the level of sponsorship and also the involvement intensity the consumer has with the sponsored activity. A high involvement in the activity will generate greater knowledge and awareness of the company. High levels of knowledge lead to consumers being more likely to recognize sponsors and the services provided. Marketing objectives such as brand image and awareness creation can thus be achieved as the consumers associate the image values of the activity onto the sponsor's brands. On a further note, Meenaghan (2001) concludes how the goodwill-factors trigger an effective and/or positive consumer response which include brand preference, favourability and purchases in some cases. Furthermore, the goodwill element is somewhat lacking in "regular" marketing and advertising. This makes the sponsorship marketing rather unique as it creates emotional bonds and consumer engagements.

Research from the Australian football league (AFL) shows that sponsors found trust and commitment to be central elements of a healthy sponsor relationship. Here, a long-term ambition



and goal for the sponsorship to last over time is preferable. Particularly was that commitment, measured on additional spending on sponsorship investments or leverage, is a key determination of economic satisfaction and trust (Farrelly & Quester, 2005b). A study made by Ferro et al. (2016) on Spanish enterprises further confirms the hypothesis of the importance that commitment and trust play in economic and non-economic satisfaction related to the sponsorship. Additional work conducted with sponsors of Swedish hockey teams confirmed the importance of commitment in deriving value creation in sponsorship. The same study also stated that an emotional relationship between the sponsor and the sponsee is a prerequisite for value-based commitment. The research further claims that it is the development of relationships that makes sponsoring different compared to standard marketing and thus enables longer lasting relationships (Hessling et al., 2018).

Sponsorships have also become a popular CSR initiative that can increase the company's sales and awareness while simultaneously connecting the company to the values and morals of the related community. Incorporating sponsorships in a firm's CSR-policy has become more popular with many possibilities on what, why and how to execute it. It is thus a simple way to contribute to society, achieve internal CSR ambitions and develop business benefits all in one (Batty et al., 2016).

### **2.2.1 Sponsorship attributes**

The increasing cynicism towards traditional promotion tools such as billboards and TV-advertising, has led to an increase in the trustworthiness of other tools. As a comparison to traditional promotion tools, a sponsorship is perceived to provide social benefits despite the obvious commercial activity. Additionally, the increase in media outlets, which provides larger exposure possibilities within a sponsorship, has led to increased attractiveness for corporations to enter sponsorship deals. The boost in the live streaming of sports for example, has brought more viewers to the games. The incentives for corporations to be visible during said activities has increased alongside the development (Allen et al., 2011).

Considering the other side of the sponsorship spectrum. Sponsorships can play a different role for a corporation rather than only increased sales and promotion. Sponsorship deals often entails the opportunity for corporations to show gratitude and recognition towards their employees (Kotler &

Armstrong, 2013). This is possible by providing access to tickets or corporate boxes in the arena of the given event as part of the sponsorship deal. This action by a corporation can be used as a reward and motivation for employees and raise workforce spirit and as an advantage for recruiting new employees (Cornwell, 2020). The corporate boxes can additionally be used to treat and maintain corporate relations, by inviting clients and potential clients to games. Giving key clients this opportunity allows them to intensify their relations in a more relaxed form. This is especially effective for business-to-business clients to create social bonds and break down barriers (Allen et al., 2011).

Another use of a sponsorship is to create networks and develop relations through a club or team. There is difficulty in gaining access to certain business customers. Through a collaboration the sponsored team may act as a relationship broker to overcome that difficulty (Lefton, 2006). Business networks can be defined as “a set of two or more connected business relationships in which each exchange relation is between business firms that are conceptualized as collective actors” (Anderson et al., 1994). Networks can form around a club through the relationship created between a club and the sponsoring corporations. In such a network, corporations can forge primary relationships among each other which can become part of a promotional resource exchange between the entities. It also opens up the possibility to reach other organisations through the primary connection onto secondary connections (Boyd & Spekman, 2008). Although two corporations have no previous direct contact with one another, the shared affiliation with a club gives the companies a network position that holds relational resources. This may add incremental value in promotion as resources are exchanged between network partners. Sponsoring firms interested in developing business relationships with other firms therefore finds such relational resources desirable. The more primary connections a club attains, the greater relational resources it possesses (Cobbs, 2011).

### **2.3 Sponsorship in the promotional mix**

The marketing mix (also known as the 4 P's) consists of price, place, product and promotion. The 4 Ps are constrained by external and internal factors in a business environment and interact significantly with one another. They are used to identify key factors for a business. This includes what consumers want from them, how the company stands out from its competitors, how the

company interacts with its customers, and how the service or product meets or fails to meet those needs (Ray & Yin, 2020).

When looking at the 4 P's, all reviewed sources agree that sponsorship is considered relevant in the promotional mix of the marketing mix. However, what type of promotion sponsorship is defined as, seems to be under dissonance between the authors.

Kotler & Armstrong (2013) classifies sponsorship as part of public relations marketing. This is a way firms can engage, persuade them and communicate with consumers by being exposed with the team. It aims for long-term relations, public support and a positive opinion about the company. The long-term contribution is also supported by Seitanidi & Crane (2009) as well as Fahy et al. (2000) who emphasize the importance of developing shared mental models to support the process of a long-term sponsorship.

Shank & Lyberg (2015), has another view regarding where sponsorship belongs. They claim that sponsorship programs should not take on public relations and instead focus on other elements of the promotional mix along with advertising, personal selling and sales promotion.

Cornwell (2008) on the other hand, claims that sponsorship is more of an “indirect marketing” as a promotional tool. Indirect marketing is a way for a corporation to market themselves without using advertising and marketing. Examples of indirect marketing are news articles, word-of-mouth, online reviews and sponsorships (Justin, 2013). According to Cornwell (2008), there is a purpose of separating indirect marketing apart from advertising, sales promotion, and public relations as the approach of indirect marketing differs so widely. The idea of a sponsorship is thus to be seen and noted by the public but not in a persuasive way.

## **2.4 Evaluation of sponsorships**

A clear distinction for the analysis of a sponsorship is the usage of “evaluation” of a sponsorship, rather than “measurement”, that is often used in “regular” marketing. As there are not that many distinguished tangible elements to measure in a sponsorship, terms such as “marketing

measurement” or “measurement of effectiveness” are difficult to examine. The reason behind rather using “evaluation” is to distinguish a clear line between the overall performance of the program and the assessment of the outcomes. These are related to the sponsorship in terms of attitude, purchase behaviour, loyalty for example. Similar to a sports team’s periodical success, it cannot always be fully decided on numerical results, nor can one determine the success of a sponsorship only based on numbers (Cornwell, 2020).

## 2.5 Expected returns from sponsorship

Cornwell (2020), further claims that the different types of return one can achieve from a sponsorship, can be boiled down to 6 different categories.

*Table 1 Summary of types of return*

<b>Return type</b>	<b>Description</b>
Return on investment (ROI)	A financial measure calculated as gains of an investment minus the cost of the investment, divided by the cost of the investment.
Return on engagement (ROE)	A measurable change in psychological and emotional bonds between a brand and the customer that supports movement towards long term-engagement goals.
Return on experience (ROX)	A multifaceted recursive measure based on both consumer touchpoints and employees as integral contributors to a culture of experience.
Return on relationships (ROR)	The long-term financial outcome related to the establishment and maintenance of an organization's relations and network.
Return on objectives (ROO)	A measurable movement toward goals that are non-financial (in the near term).
Return on purpose (ROP)	A subset of ROO regarding societal value.

Each sponsorship of significance should be measured according to the return goals and objectives set for the property. These return objectives should be chosen based on the guiding marketing strategy of the corporation which should be part of the overall organizational strategy (Cornwell, 2020).

Research has provided evidence which shows that marketing performance assessment systems are contextual in nature. This means that the most efficient system is most likely going to be the one that best fits the firm and the environment (Masterman, 2007). Based on a survey of more than 1000 managers, the researchers noted nine marketing performance dimensions: sales process, channel activity, brand equity, customer equity, customer feedback, innovation, long-term firm value, financial position and market position. The combination of the metrics varies between companies depending on different industries and the different stages they're in (Frösén et al., 2013).

To strengthen this, does research based on consumer behaviour theories suggest an additional number of benefits in corporate sponsorship concerning events such as football games. The access to a specific target market when being associated with a specific club can be very beneficial in the productiveness of a sponsorship. If the club and the corporation's products or services match with their target audience, the marketing effort will be more effective (Allen et al., 2011).

Thus, must the measurement instrument be guided by the return objective, but the context will shape the thinking behind it (Frösén et al., 2013). For fast-moving consumer goods, ROI might be sales. For a technology product, ROE might be the number of individuals participating in an on-site activation demonstrating the sponsor's product. It can also be name recognition which will help strengthen the brand and public awareness (Dolphin, 2003). For a sponsor with the concern on image, ROP might be the number of individuals helped by a social program supported by the sponsor (Cornwell, 2020).

Another important consideration for sponsors is whether the metrics will be comparable across all properties. This means that an ROI objective for instance might overlap with an ROR objective and in a sense complete two objectives at once which is common to happen. It is often also not that easy to simply separate two returns as they can overlap each other (Cornwell, 2020).

Each sponsorship may, however, generate some sort of unique value, such as employee engagement which might not be available or developed across the portfolio. Thus, the extent to which unique sponsor measures are used in the evaluation are dependent on the overarching goals and portfolio evaluation approach taken (Allen et al., 2011).

## **2.6 Criticism to sponsorships**

One of the largest criticisms of sponsorships connected to sports is the lack of tangible measurements that sponsorships as a marketing tool comes with (Lucas, 2015). Digital marketing for instance, is much easier to deliver tangible and concrete numbers on awareness, exposure, sales figures, et cetera. These are often connected to a given marketing campaign (Brennan & Parker, 2020). Sponsorships on the other hand, are much harder to evaluate. As it is hard to measure actual exposure and sales connected, it is also hard to evaluate the success of the sponsorship (Lucas, 2015). With little to no way of tangibly measuring and evaluating the sponsorship, it makes it difficult to compare it to other marketing campaigns/strategies, branding mediums and activities a corporation might use. It can thus create a problem in the future when potentially having to decide what activities to continue implementing and what to stop using (Delaney et al., 2016).

Further on, the term (and the usage of the term) sponsorship has been widely criticized by both sponsors and sponsees for being inaccurate. The reason is due to the commonality of power asymmetries in sponsorship relationships. These asymmetries come from the fact that sponsees often are dependent on the sponsor for financial viability. In other words, the sponsee relies more on the sponsor than vice versa (Cornwell, 2020). A common criticism of sponsorships is that it by many can be considered that the sponsor pays a large fee to the sponsee with very little return other than having their logo featured with the sponsee. If that's the case, the sponsorship may be considered to be wasteful without any intended business connection to it and the sponsee would be considered to be the only "real winner" in the relationship (Lucas, 2015). This "stamp" of sponsee's being the only real winner in the relationship leads to both parties avoiding the usage of the word "sponsors" as it has a negative vibe connected to it (O'Sullivan, 2010).

It is therefore common by sponsors and sponsees to instead use the term “partners” when talking about a sponsorship. Many argue that a sponsorship can be compared to a “cross-sector partnership” (Seitandi & Crane, 2009), “marketing partnership” (Meenaghan, 2002) or “co-marketing alliance” (Farrelly & Quester, 2005a). It is notable that both sides refer to each other as “partners”. Under this thinking, the relationship is mutually beneficial and not a relationship where one group exploits another (Cornwell, 2020).

However, there are some problems with using the term “partnership” rather than “sponsorship”. First of all, there are many different levels of partnerships in business and society. Thus, can the term “sponsorship” add more clarity to the discussion of what type of relationship it actually is (Seitandi & Crane, 2009). Secondly, “partnerships” are in many countries, a legally recognized relationship. Here, two entities come together and contribute to the partnership. Each party is also expected to share both gains and losses connected to the partnership. In contrast to this, the vast majority of sponsorship relationships are negotiated contracts or agreements of support given by one entity to another. For these agreements, the term “sponsorship agreement” serves well (O’Sullivan, 2010).

### 3. Methodology and method

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*This section presents the Methodology including research philosophy, research approach and strategy of the study. This is followed by the method section covering data collection, secondary and primary data, sampling method, and data analysis. The final section presents data quality on ethical issues.*

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#### 3.1 Methodology

##### 3.1.1 Research philosophy

When conducting research, positivism and interpretivism are two research philosophical ways of examining data. Positivism focuses on scientific quantitative methods, larger samples and greater quantity of data. This whereas interpretivism prefers more humanistic and qualitative methods with a smaller number of participants. The interpretivism method is used in order to achieve a deeper understanding of the people's thoughts, feelings and reasons behind why they do certain things (in this case, why they sponsor the given elite football team) (Irshaidat, 2019). This research aims to analyse how corporations use sponsorship of elite football teams as a complementary marketing tool and the potential business benefits it might generate in addition to "regular" marketing. Thus, was a qualitative research approach more suitable than a quantitative as a quantitative research only would present statistical data and not give the authors the deeper and more developed answers that this study requires (Saunders et al., 2012).

##### 3.1.2 Research approach

There are three forms of reasoning to connect theory to research approach. These are inductive, deductive, and abductive (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Inductive reasoning starts with an observation and thereafter the rule followed by an explanation. This makes the reasoning more open and exploratory. Deductive reasoning is narrower and limiting where one takes a rule and explanation to derive the observation (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013; Saunders et al., 2012). Abductive approach starts with multiple understandings of the phenomena searching for the most suitable option to explain an observation (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). This research has an inductive approach as it moves from a specific observation to a broad generalisation of the use of sponsorship of Swedish elite football clubs for corporations mainly operating in Sweden.



### **3.1.3 Research strategy**

The research strategy of choice was decided to be a case study. This was conducted with the purpose of achieving an in-depth understanding of the topic and its context through various techniques. The single case study also consists of in-depth observation of the phenomenon, which is applicable for this research. A case can be a particular group, workers or businesses (Collis & Hussey, 2014). This study's case consists of representatives of companies who sponsor Swedish elite football clubs. A case study strategy consists of a triangulation shown through multiple data collection techniques within one study (Saunders et al., 2012).

## **3.2 Method**

### **3.2.1 Data collection**

The collection of data was split into primary and secondary data. Primary data is represented by an empirical study which is followed by an inductive research approach. Research questions will be answered through conducted interviews (Gill & Johnson, 2010). The research uses an inductive approach and a qualitative research method where individual cases are studied. Prior to the interviews, a mixture of structured and semi-structured questions was planned. This leaves space for developed in-depth answers.

### **3.2.2 Secondary data**

Secondary data was gathered for the literature review to provide an overview of existing research within the given topic of study. An implementation of this facilitates identification of potential research gaps (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Usage of keywords, databases and publication dates can be found in *Table 2* below. Recently published articles and theories were used over dated ones and multiple cited publications were chosen over those cited fewer times. In addition to this, official websites from the football clubs as well as companies interviewed were used when collecting data regarding these. Due to the topic being rather niched, there was no vast amount of narrow research found. This led to articles with less citations being used, also, original data and dated articles had to be used to identify gaps and potential future research topics. Collected secondary data is part of the triangulation in this research. This in order to use independent data to complete an

understanding of the phenomena. The author's previous research of secondary data shows a gap in the research field of this topic which has been of importance to form the outline of this study.

*Table 2 Search parameters*

<b>Search parameters</b>	
Databases and search engines	Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Primo, Jönköping University's library
Search keywords	Sports sponsorships, sports marketing, branding in sports, sports management, business of sports, branding, marketing, partnerships, football marketing, value creation, event marketing, sponsor marketing
Literature types	Academic articles, news articles, books and internet
Publication period	1994-2021
Language of publication	English, Swedish

### **3.2.3 Primary data**

Primary data was gathered through nine individual semi-structured interviews. The selected interviewees were people working for, or owning, companies who sponsor Swedish professional football organizations. The representatives are all either CEO, marketing manager, office manager, owner or likewise in charge of the sponsoring. This was important in order for the authors to leader's direct personal thoughts and opinions on the sponsorships without middle hands. In-depth interviews were conducted to avoid framing the study. In order to retrieve an understanding of participants' take on the social phenomena, in-depth interviews were considered the most suitable technique. Implementing in-depth interviews to a research may reveal different and more

antecedents compared to other qualitative methods. In-depth interviews were facilitated for gathering useful and rich data which was of use in order to create reliability and validity in the information. Research design of choice contributed to holistic and rich insights which also offered comprehensive knowledge of value when answering the research questions.

### **3.2.4 Population and sampling**

Sampling can be divided into two sub-categories, probability and non-probability samples. Probability sampling can be cluster sampling or stratified sampling, whereas examples of non-probability sampling include quota and judgemental sampling. Non-probability samples that are purposeful are often applied in qualitative research (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010). The included sample units were chosen based on theoretical reasons.

The authors will use theoretical sampling in this study. Theoretical sampling is based on companies in a variety of sectors and industries to include different perspectives in order to fully cover the subject. The companies involved were from multiple different sectors and businesses. These were electronics, coffee retailers, men's fashion, accounting, construction work, car retailer, IT, sports gear and Company X who operates in an additional industry. This was important in order to get a broader perception and identify different goals and perspectives to draw conclusions from later on.

The companies included within the research are sponsoring professional football clubs, mainly within the southern/middle parts of Sweden. A summary of each company is presented in Appendix 1. The sponsored clubs are teams participating in Allsvenskan or Superettan, these summaries are presented in Appendix 2.

### **3.2.5 Question design and formulation**

When conducting a semi-structured interview, there are three types of questions one may use. These are (1) open, (2) probing, (3) specific and closed questions (Saunders et al., 2012). The interviews consisted of mostly probing questions, as these are more direct with the aim of giving more information and greater insights. These questions were used with the aim to retrieve personal thoughts, experiences and beliefs in an in-depth manner. This was needed as all sponsor cases are different depending on what company it is, who they sponsor and the level of the sponsorship. If

the authors would have used more open questions as question type of choice, it might get too broad in order to develop a deeper understanding. Open questions were thus seldom used but were used when the authors aimed for more general information of interest (such as company introduction and information). When short answers were needed, specific questions were used. These types of questions were used when the authors wanted to reach further understanding or knowledge about the topic/answer.

#### **3.2.5.1 Pilot test**

Prior to the interviews, a pilot test interview was conducted. The interview was made with a representative of a company sponsoring a Swedish hockey club. The purpose of this pilot test was to practice asking questions, generate feedback of formulation and to estimate duration of interviews. The given feedback was an important aspect for the quality of the questions in addition to how the questions responded to secondary data.

#### **3.2.5.2 The interviews**

The study was conducted through qualitative research interviews of a selection of representatives from companies sponsoring professional football teams. The first step in gathering primary data was to research who and why chosen participants would be interviewed. Participants were all located in Sweden and the interviews were conducted during March, ongoing until April. The next step of the interviews was to send invitations via email and arrange a meeting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all conducted interviews were held digitally through Microsoft teams, for the safety of all participants. Interviews lasted on average 34 minutes, however there was a distinct variation, mainly depending on the participants' answers.

The questions and structure of the interview was inspired and created from previous research on similar topics. This was helpful so that the authors knew the structure and questioning worked and would lead to valid outcomes from the respondents. The questions (Appendix 3) were sent to the interviewees in advance in order for them to be prepared and fully understand what was expected from the interview. This procedure was followed in order to achieve more developed and thought through answers. As Swedish is the mother tongue of all respondents, this was the chosen language to conduct the interviews in. Primarily due to the convenience of the respondents and to achieve

educated and precise answers. All respondents were offered to be anonymous before the interview. This was important for the authors to make the respondents feel comfortable to discuss potentially sensitive information or topics. The subjects were also informed that their answers would be translated into English and that there could occur some interpretation of the answers in order to be grammatically correct. There was no compensation given for participating in the study. However, the empirical findings will be presented to participants and associated companies for them to take part of and analyse.

One of the participants asked to be anonymous. Because of that, this participant will be cited as “Manager X” representing “Company X”, whereas the rest of the interviewees will be referred to by their surname or by company. In order for Company X to remain anonymous, the authors decided to name Company X’s sponsee Club X. This was in order for the company to be certain that they would not be linked to the study through Club X’s homepage, where partners are listed.

*Table 3 Interviews with representatives of sponsoring companies*

<b><u>Company</u></b>	<b><u>Employee</u></b>	<b><u>Role</u></b>	<b><u>Date*</u></b>	<b><u>Duration**</u></b>
Atea	Malin Nordström	Marketing project leader	19.03.21	46:12
Atteviks	Mattias Gustavsson	Brand manager	18.03.21	31.30
Café Bar	Jonas Brändström	Key account manager	04.03.21	40:06
Cavaliere	Jan Frick	Owner, former CEO	12.03.21	26:07
Company X	Manager X	Office manager	13.04.21	32.56

NetOnNet	Carola Tiberg	Marketing manager	02.03.21	41:15
SALDO	Mattias Segeberbrand	Creative leader, owner	15.03.21	30:21
SEFAB	Anders Arrelid	Business developer, owner	17.03.21	30:36
Stadium	Daniel Johansson	Sponsorship manager	22.03.21	21:59

*\* xx.xx.xx describes the date when the interview was held (dd.mm.yy).*

*\*\*00:00 express the number of minutes and seconds of how long the interview lasted (mm:ss).*

### **3.2.6 Data analysis**

A common challenge many researchers face when using interviews as the method for data collection is the large amount of data that needs to be handled. To make it more manageable, all interviews were recorded, transcribed, read through and written into summaries of the most important information. Summaries were translated from Swedish to English to facilitate an easier analysis of the data. This could lead to differences due to the translation. However, considering the way of collecting data, this was the most suitable approach (Saunders et al., 2012). Throughout the process of analysis, theories from secondary data have been compared to the primary data in order to find similarities and differences.

Content analysis was implemented to find useful data and important information in the transcripts. This analysis style includes the procedure of identifying differences and similarities through categorization of data for purposes of summarisation and classification. The purpose of analysis like this is to identify data that is informative for the study. It is also needed to sort out important messages that can be hidden in the mass within each interview that later potentially can facilitate

answering the research question. In order to maintain flow of information coherent, these categories were used throughout the study. By implementing the list from Hancock (2002), all steps for qualitative content were met (Appendix 4).

### **3.2.7 Data quality**

Throughout the preparation and process of data collection, certain issues may arise that need to be avoided (Saunders et al., 2012). When conducting qualitative research, reliability, bias, triangulation, validity, generalisability, and ethical issues are important to consider.

#### **3.2.7.1 Reliability**

Reliability describes how consistently a method measures something and manages to provide the same result (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Reliability is substantially harder to achieve in a qualitative study compared to a quantitative. In an attempt to reach reliability within the research, the researchers have implemented the same analytical procedure during interviews. This has been done by using the same questionnaire for all participants in addition to the same method and methodology.

#### **3.2.7.2 Bias**

As a measure to prevent bias by both participant and interviewer, preparation was needed. This included research of the issue of biases and how this may affect the process throughout an interview. Providing the questionnaires in advance to the interviewees may be seen as a way for them to give biased answers. This as it leaves the interviewees with time to prepare their answers in advance and not just say whatever first comes to mind. However, handing out the questionnaire in advance will contribute to more reflective and in-depth information, which is what the research aims for. All questions were asked in the same order in addition to some back-up questions. The questions were checked and approved by the interviewees and the tutor in advance.

To prevent biased answers, the interviewer avoided the asking of leading questions and all three authors were present throughout all interviews. In order to show attentive listening, the interviewer made sure not to interrupt the respondent.

### **3.2.7.3 Triangulation**

Triangulation refers to the implementation of different sources of data to achieve a greater understanding of a phenomena. In order to test validity by different perspectives, the triangulation method may be used (Patton, 1999). Interviews with nine respondents were made to get insight from companies' point of view when it comes to sponsorships as a marketing tool.

The interviews are seen as individual cases but can together be boiled down into one larger case. Each interview is thus compared to the others to identify both similarities and differences. Triangulation was also created when the nine cases were set in relation to secondary data from the research. By implementing this strategy, multiple perspectives have been sought to achieve the most accurate view possible to create a valid and reliable study.

### **3.2.7.4 Validity**

In qualitative research, validity means “appropriateness” of data, tools and processes. It examines all parts of the research as in methodology, research design, sampling and data analysis, and finally that the results and conclusions are valid for answering the research question of choice (Leung, 2015). By reviewing the gathered secondary data, the authors could develop a suitable framework for interviews and future analysis. In order to ensure the answers were connected to the question, follow up questions were asked as well (Creswell, 2009). Validity is achieved once the given research question is valid for the desired methodology, design, sampling, data analysis and outcome that all are valid for the research. Furthermore, does conclusion and result have to be valid for the context (Leung, 2015). This has been attempted to be met throughout the entire thesis. This is also included in the methodology section.

### **3.2.7.5 Generalisability**

An issue that often arises when implementing a qualitative research approach is generalisability. This is the case when larger samples are implemented. As this is a qualitative research, a smaller sample will be implemented, unlike a quantitative research where a larger one is used. Generalisability concerns whether findings are applicable for larger samples or not. This is unlike qualitative studies that are less generalisable than quantitative studies (Collis & Hussey, 2014).



Although the interviewees represent companies from different industries, they all have in common that they sponsor elite football teams. This gives it a narrower scope which prevents the risk of generalisability.

#### **3.2.7.6 Ethical issues**

Truthfulness and honesty are important when conducting research (Collis & Hussey, 2014). Guidelines were set-up in advance to ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical way (Adams et al., 2000). This included offering the participants anonymity and agreeing upon recording of the interviews.

In line with the regulations of GDPR, The General Data Protection Regulation (Datainspektionen, n.d), other measures had to be taken as well to secure privacy of participants. All interviews had a minimum of two audio recordings. Notes were also taken to maintain accurate data collection (Saunders et al., 2012). All the recordings were stored on a shared cloud service in order to be easily accessible for the authors and yet, not for the public. As soon as finalised, the recordings were deleted.

## 4. Data presentation

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*In this section, the authors present the results of the semi-structured interviews with managerial representatives of companies that sponsor Swedish elite football clubs. The collected data from the interviews is presented for each company under the categories “reasoning”, “expectations”, and “evaluation” of the sponsorships.*

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### 4.1 Case 1 - Atea

#### 4.1.1 What was the reason behind Atea's decision to sponsor IFK Göteborg?

The reason Atea sponsors IFK Göteborg is that they found common ground in their passion for the local social work done in Gothenburg, which they contribute to in their sponsorship. The social work mainly consists of improving the conditions for youths in the suburbs, to give them a better upbringing by playing football and keep them away from getting stuck in crime at a young age. Apart from the CSR perspective, Atea also have IFK Göteborg as a client. Atea is the official IT supplier of the club, where they take care of all their needs when it comes to IT solutions. They wanted a true partnership rather than a sponsorship, where both parties have clear benefits outside of the pure monetary and marketing objectives of the collaboration and share each other's values.

#### 4.1.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

The main expectations with the partnership were for it to be a partnership rather than stereotypical sponsorship. A partnership could be that Atea provides IT-solutions for the partner in exchange for exposure together with the given partner. Atea also put a lot of emphasis on the importance of the partner-network provided by IFK Göteborg and their other partners. The network has regular gatherings where they exchange knowledge and the opportunity to network with partners to find potential common ground and future customers or suppliers. Atea focuses on B2B sales, therefore, the networking opportunities were part of the expectations of the partnership. Sustainability and responsibility are key elements for the company, and they expected IFK Göteborg to work with the same mindset in the collaboration.

#### 4.1.3 How does Atea evaluate the sponsorship with IFK Göteborg?

Atea looks at different parts when evaluating the partnership. One part is how much they have gained from the partner network and the sales it has generated. Moreover, they also look at money

saved by purchasing goods or services through the network at a discount they would not have attained without the network. In addition, they examine the sales generated from the network where they sell to other partners, which would not have happened without the network. Atea also evaluates the value of the exposure through the partnership (logos on the jerseys, arena and player bus etc.), although this is not the main focus. When it comes to evaluation of the social work that has been done, everything positive that comes out of that is a great bonus, but it is hard to evaluate in numbers. In conclusion, Atea is very satisfied with the partnership and it has been beneficial in many ways, they see a great financial motivation for the partnership, as well as contributing to society to a large extent.

## **4.2 Case 2 - Atteviks**

### **4.2.1 What was the reason behind Atteviks' decision to sponsor Jönköpings Södra?**

Atteviks wanted to contribute to the integration projects that Jönköpings Södra is running. The CSR perspective played an important role in why they became sponsors and is something they generally consider to be the most important factor in all their sponsorships. They wished to concentrate mainly on the youths in the organization, yet they sponsor the elite team. Atteviks believes that in order for the younger players to remain motivated to play, they need clear role models as an inspiration to what can be achieved through football. Having a functioning elite team is what keeps the younger players going. Which in extent helps the organization integrate younger people more easily in order to get them to play football from the beginning and continuing to do so. They believe the football community is excellent in integration and looked at this as something they wanted to contribute to. Working towards these shared goals is more of a partnership than a sponsorship for Atteviks. Atteviks also saw this as a good investment, even though that was not the main reason and something the company would not lose money on in the long run.

### **4.2.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?**

Atteviks entered the sponsorship with the expectation of achieving a partnership rather than a sponsorship. They wanted it to be a long-lasting relationship where Atteviks were incorporated into the culture of Jönköping Södra. They were clear towards the club that they would stay on as partners both through good and bad times. Atteviks wanted all the fans, players, and staff to know

who they are, gain exposure and be associated with the club. A partnership in Atteviks eyes is where both parties collaborate to make the relationship successful. They wish that J-Södra are ambassadors for Atteviks and that Atteviks are the first choice for players and their families and friends when looking for a new car. They also valued gaining the “rights” and access to players and the youth organization for events and campaigns for marketing purposes. Apart from that mindset being incorporated, Atteviks also wanted to contribute to the different CSR projects that Jönköping Södra has, in addition to the younger teams as well as the elite team. Atteviks was also very clear in that they wanted to be the exclusive car dealership sponsor of Jönköpings Södra. They were sceptical towards a partnership where they would not be exclusive, as that had been the case if they chose to sponsor the local ice hockey team, HV71 instead. In addition to the exclusiveness of the sponsorship in Jönköpings Södra, their biggest brand Volkswagen, which is a part of the sponsorship deal, is a company that focuses their partnerships a lot towards football.

#### 4.2.3 How does Atteviks evaluate the sponsorship with Jönköpings Södra?

Atteviks evaluate their partnership on different factors. The company has seen a great return on their objective (ROO) considering marketing and exposure. The value is provided from being seen on jerseys and on the arena, which is estimated to be worth more than what they invest each year. Apart from that, they have a gut-feeling rather than numbers that their sales are larger than if they wouldn't be in the partnership. They can also see that the goal of being incorporated into the Jönköpings Södra culture has been attained. The players are natural ambassadors for Atteviks. They buy and drive their cars, as well as bringing their friends and family to Atteviks. Atteviks have also been able to bring players along to their events and to their store, both from the elite team and from the younger teams. The long-lasting goals with the partnership are working well. Atteviks stayed on as partners even when Jönköpings Södra was relegated to Superettan after two years in Allsvenskan in 2017. They are well known by everyone in the organization, and they have lots of collaborations throughout the year that both parties are very pleased with.

### 4.3 Case 3 - Café Bar

#### 4.3.1 What was the reason behind Café Bar's decision to sponsor Jönköpings Södra?

Café Bar saw an opportunity to use sponsorship as a tool to expose their brand more and at the same time support J-Södra. Another large reason was that they wanted a collaboration with the youth academy where J-Södra would sell their coffee and then receive a kickback from Café Bar, called “Klubbkaffe”. That would bring revenue for both Café Bar and the club, but also increase brand awareness and recognition among supporters and players in Jönköpings Södra, a win-win situation. Café Bar also wanted to expand their network through the sponsorship and being able to sign on new clients as a result.

#### 4.3.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

The main expectations were generally the same as the reasons for becoming sponsors. They wanted to expand their network and increase clients, and therefore increase sales and brand exposure. Café Bar put a lot of emphasis on the concept “Klubbkaffe”. During the last season they were slightly disappointed regarding that particular part of the collaboration and wished for improvement over the coming seasons. Another expectation was for Jönköpings Södra to sell their coffee at the arena and through the youth teams. They hoped that it would increase visibility whilst attracting new clients in the long run.

#### 4.3.3 How does Café Bar evaluate the sponsorship with J-Södra?

Café Bar has not measured the financial part of the sponsorship entirely, but they have a general feeling that it hasn't brought in new business to a great extent yet. Much as a result of the “Klubbkaffe” concept not working out so far. However, Brändström claims that he sees great potential with the concept, given that they get a better structure of it in the future. On the brand side of the sponsorship, they can see that it has had somewhat of a positive effect. However, it has developed a sense of pride within the company, being able to bring customers to games and “show off” Café Bar machines and signs at the arena.

### 4.4 Case 4 - Cavaliere

#### 4.4.1 What was the reason behind Cavaliere's decision to sponsor SvFF?

The reason is to reach out to young people or anybody who is about to purchase a suit, for example students about to purchase their first suit. The idea is for people to see their idols wear Cavaliere's

suits and thereafter purchase one for themselves. It is a way for the company to show their brand to the broader mass and strengthen the brand's reputation as well. Brand awareness and brand recognition are important aspects for the company. The company wanted to be associated with a strong brand that people look up to.

#### 4.4.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

Cavaliere's goal was to be seen which would eventually lead to sales and increased revenue. There is often a notable increased number of suits purchased during tournaments such as the European Championship and the World Cup as the company designs a particular suit for events on that scale. One hope is for the brand to become a topic of discussion among people when a football player is wearing one of the company's suits. This increases brand awareness as well as recognition. Football is a sport which is discussed to a high degree among people and the company aspires to be part of that discussion.

#### 4.4.3 How does Cavaliere evaluate the sponsorship with SvFF?

The company has noticed improved brand recognition during the 30 yearlong partnership. As the owner himself, Frick, is interested in football, it creates enjoyment and pride for him and for the whole company. Especially during large tournaments and events, Cavaliere has been able to notice increased sales as SVFF gains more exposure during those periods. The exposure connected to SvFF has also generated new customers as in football clubs from Allsvenskan and the Swedish hockey league (SHL) which Frick claims to be directly correlated to the sponsorship of SvFF.

### **4.5 Case 5 - Company X**

#### 4.5.1 What was the reason behind Company X's decision to sponsor Club X?

The decision to pursue a sponsorship with Club X was made by previous managers when marketing was handled more locally than today. However, the partnership has continued due to the high regard people have of the team in the region and that it is favourable to be connected to them. It is also a way to contribute to the whole municipality and the organization as a whole. Company X also considers it to be a solid platform for reaching out to people within the region as well as building relations.

#### 4.5.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

The company's main goal is to strengthen the brand in the region and enhance business, both among private and corporate clients. Being visible in relation to the team is another important aspect considered by the company, as well as the relations built through the network available through the sponsorship. Company X has sponsored Club X for a long time and feels incorporated in the culture of the organisation. Similar to a client relationship, Company X's loyalty to the team means being there both during challenging times and in times of success.

#### 4.5.3 How does Company X evaluate the sponsorship with Club X?

Most marketing tools measurements are conducted at a central level, as this is a local sponsorship, it is mainly evaluated in soft values such as relations and trust. Company X wants to be involved with the city through the club rather than having a clear monetary sponsorship, although one thing often leads to another as Manager X stated. One example is a project with the aim to integrate young people, both boys and girls, where football potentially could provide a solution for troubled and vulnerable children, hence the company evaluates the potential philanthropic value given as well.

### 4.6 Case 6 - NetOnNet

#### 4.6.1 What was the reason behind NetOnNet's decision to sponsor IF Elfsborg?

The primary reason for NetOnNet to sponsor a local football team was because they wanted to establish themselves more in their hometown. It was also part of a measure to use as many channels as possible to reach a larger customer-base. There was a sense of a win-win situation as both the club benefited financially, and the company gained a general "feelgood"-vibe within the company. NetOnNet attained a richer work environment as the sponsorship was appreciated by the co-workers. It also created activities for employees who are able to attend games together.

#### 4.6.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

From the beginning, NetOnNet chose to Sponsor Elfsborg as they wanted to gain a larger audience in Borås (the city in which IF Elfsborg is located). Tiberg described an expectation in the sponsorship, *"We wanted to make people feel that they would rather buy from NetOnNet than any other competitor as they sponsor my team"*. At times they have been able to use players from IF

Elfsborg to be representatives for NetOnNet in their stores as a tool to increase attraction. The company wanted to make a thing of it in Borås, making their presence known. It was also a way to increase internal employee pride, create a sense of comradery and have employee activities connected to sponsoring the local team.

#### 4.6.3 How does NetOnNet evaluate the sponsorship with IF Elfsborg?

There is no close evaluation of the outcome of the sponsorship. IF Elfsborg provides NetOnNet with information regarding how much exposure the company gains in different media. Whether that results in actual monetary benefits or not is hard to measure. Tiberg considers the sponsorship to be a marketing expense and believes that the company has not made a direct profit related to the sponsorship.

### 4.7 Case 7 - Saldo Redovisning

#### 4.7.1 What was the reason behind Saldo's decision to sponsor GAIS?

It's mainly a question of heart for the company and Creative leader Segerbrand. Saldo began handling GAIS' economy and then decided to become their sponsor as well. Saldo enjoys being slightly disruptive in their strategy and doing things that stand out and differ themselves from other companies in the industry. It is not common that an accounting firm sponsors a football club, nor is it common for a company located in Stockholm to sponsor a club deeply connected to Gothenburg. All this in addition to GAIS being a rather unorthodox club, is a way for Saldo to segment their disruptive brand. Also, Saldo is trying to change the format of sponsorships to create a more professional benefit as well.

#### 4.7.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

Segerbrand is a member of the board at GAIS and has a plan to develop a more fruitful partnership, both for Saldo and other interested companies. As Segerbrand stated himself *"Why would you place money somewhere if you can't get it back? We need to create a stronger network within the club where we can gain from each other"*. The networking opportunities which arise from sponsoring a football club is however one of the largest benefits from the sponsorship. Although being located in another city, it gives Saldo connections in Gothenburg. GAIS has a large supporter-base and there are those in Stockholm who believe in the same values as Saldo.



#### 4.7.3 How does Saldo evaluate the sponsorship with GAIS?

Saldo measures it as money in, money out. At the moment there has been no money in, but as mentioned, Segerbrand plans to change that from within. The company also realizes the long-term effect and the fact that it may take years before the sponsorship generates actual profits. At the moment however, it has been difficult to see the actual results in exposure or business gained through the sponsorship.

### 4.8 Case 8 - SEFAB

#### 4.8.1 What was the reason behind SEFAB's decision to sponsor IFK Norrköping?

SEFAB has been sponsors to IFK Norrköping since 1997 and in the beginning, it was a matter of heart and appreciation to the team. It was also as a gesture to give back to society and the city in which the company operates. Arrelid, Part-owner and founder, mentioned different sports he enjoys and the belief that sports are a good outlet for people in a city to gather around. The company also wants to be seen, connected and associated with “good” clubs with a strong brand and consider IFK Norrköping to be one.

#### 4.8.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?

The aim for SEFAB is to be connected to a solid brand which shares the same values and morals and to feel as part of that brand. It also elevates the togetherness at the company. Employees have a logo and a team which has a symbolic meaning for them and can allow them to feel proud of the company they work for. IFK Norrköping has also offered lectures on e.g., leadership and psychology within a team which was highly appreciated and informative that has been of great use afterwards for staff and managers. It has given the employees of the company something else to gather around (besides the match day experience) and skills/knowledge to implement in their work which has shown great results. This is something the company expects to continue also in the future.

#### 4.8.3 How does SEFAB evaluate the sponsorship with IFK Norrköping?

It is difficult for SEFAB to measure the effects of the sponsorship and the exposure that comes with it, as Arrelid put it himself “*We’re not selling candy you know*”. Since the company oversees large projects where the decision to employ SEFAB most likely will not be affected by a sign at a

football stadium. As the company has been a sponsor for a long time now, they have noticed changes and results. Arrelid remembers the time where the team was not regarded as highly. The team had, as he perceived, an upswing of good results and improved brand recognition which affected the company positively as well.

#### **4.9 Case 9 - Stadium.**

##### **4.9.1 What was the reason behind Stadium's decision to sponsor AIK?**

Stadium chose to sponsor AIK because it is one of Sweden's largest football clubs with one of the largest and most loyal fan bases. Sponsoring AIK gives Stadium the rights to be associated with the club and to use them in their marketing channels and sales of merchandise. It is also a way to gain exposure and a way to align the company mission statement, to *"activate the world"*.

##### **4.9.2 What were the main expectations of the sponsorship?**

The main expectations by the company were to increase exposure and to find like-minded companies within the network connected to the club. There is also a commercial purpose in selling game jerseys, training outfits and other merchandise to AIK's supporters. The sponsorship enables Stadium to pursue these goals/objectives.

##### **4.9.3 How does Stadium evaluate the sponsorship with AIK?**

Stadium use different institutes which measure the exposure gained as well as increased loyalty from club members and many different aspects of the partnership. AIK is one of several clubs the company sponsors in Sweden and has a similar evaluation method for all of the sponsorships. One aspect with the AIK-partnership, however, is a CSR project called "AIK Stilen". It is a project for young children in AIK's youth academy which involves a true way of being and developing proper behaviour. It is in a sense a description of how people within AIK are expected to behave. AIK also aims to provide football fields and areas for children in Solna, Stockholm. These are places where youths can play football and feel safe, even during late evenings.

#### **4.10 Summary of Data Presentation**

Below follows a summary of all answers, presented in a table format.

*Table 4 Data presentation*

Company	Reasoning	Expectation	Outcome and Evaluation
Atea	Social work, youth. Partnership. Supplier. Shared values.	Partnership. Network. Find like-minded companies.	Very satisfied. Financial benefits. Exposure. Challenge to measure social benefits.
Atteviks	Integration, youth, CSR. Partnership. Long-term investment. Team success.	Long Partnership. Part of culture. Exposure. Social work, youth. Ambassadors. Industry exclusive sponsors	Great ROO for exposure. Increased sales. Incorporated in culture.
Café Bar	Exposure to fans and players. Local connection, team success. Kick-back, "Klubbkaffe". Network building.	Network Increase sales. Exposure. Selling through the club.	Inadequate selling. Good exposure. Pride.
Cavaliere	Exposure. Brand reputation. Increase sales. Enjoyment.	Increased sales. Exposure. Discussed.	Improved brand recognition. Long-term partnership. Pride and enjoyment. Increased sales.
Company X	Local connections. Associated with a strong brand. Local contribution. Exposure. Relations.	Strengthen brand. Relations. Network. Enhance business. Exposure. Social work, youth.	Challenge to measure social benefits. Incorporated in the local community. Increased business.
NetOnNet	Local connection, large customer base. Exposure. Employee activities, corporate pride.	Exposure. Brand loyalty. Employee pride and togetherness. Ambassadors.	Uncertain financial outcome. Expense to gain benefits. "Feel-Good"
Saldo	Supplier. Heart. Differentiate brand. Bring change. Professional benefit.	Partnership. Supplier. Create a strong network. Team success. Exposure. Like-minded companies.	Financial cost. Change sponsorship structure. Long-term goals.
SEFAB	Heart. Local contribution, Enjoyment. Associated with a strong brand. Long-term partnership.	Shared values. Togetherness and pride. Learning opportunities. Exposure.	Positively affected brand recognition. Difficult to see direct results from exposure. Appreciate lectures.
Stadium	Exposure. Company mission, activate the world. Associated with the club.	Exposure. Network, like-minded companies. Commercial purpose. Local contribution. Partnership.	Gained exposure. Increased product sales. Philanthropic aspects

## 5. Analysis

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*In this chapter, the analysis from the data presentation will be conducted as a thematic analysis. It is structured by the themes, Sponsorship Reasoning, Sponsorship Outcome and Sponsorship Evaluation. The analysis is based upon the theories from the literature review to explain and examine differences and similarities of the cases included.*

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### 5.1 Sponsorship Reasoning

When analysing the findings from the interviews on the reasoning behind entering a sponsorship deal, several objectives have been presented. The reasoning goes beyond solely financial objectives. Atea, Atteviks, Café Bar, Company X, NetOnNet and SEFAB mentioned the local societal benefits in supporting a football club as a main objective for sponsoring, which is also brought up by Allen et al. (2011). Exploring that area further, passion and heart for the local club is a factor. The local connection is an apparent factor for every company approached with the exception of Saldo who are not active in the same region as their sponsee. Even though Saldo is not located in the area of their sponsee GAIS, there is still a strong emotional connection between the firm and the club. Their creative leader Segerbrand is a long-time supporter of GAIS and an active member in the club's executive board, which is one of the reasons behind the sponsorship. The importance of an emotional relationship built on value-based commitment is in line with the findings of Hessling et al. (2018) and their studies concerning sponsors of Swedish hockey teams. Apart from the overall societal benefit, Atea, Atteviks and SEFAB especially name projects regarding youth integration conducted by their sponsees as a large factor for their reason to contribute. Shared values between the firm and the club are crucial for a sponsorship to be possible.

Meenaghan (2001) claims that consumer influence and response is the primary motivation to invest in a sponsorship. In addition, being involved in a sponsorship is generally perceived as an act of goodwill by consumers, which influences their behaviour and attitude towards the brand in a positive direction. Cavaliere mentions the possibility to reach young people through their sponsorship. An objective for them to enter the sponsorship deal with SvFF was for the players

and staff to wear their suits. They hoped to reach young people by having them seeing their idols wearing Cavaliere suits, leading to increased sales among that audience. Atteviks saw an opportunity to increase consumer influence through their sponsorship deal as well. They wanted leaders and players of the club to be ambassadors for the company, and to bring friends and family to their store when they needed to purchase a car. Atteviks saw the sponsorship as an opportunity to increase their brand value and attract new business. Café Bar had similar objectives when entering their sponsorship deal. They wanted, through their concept “Klubbkaffe”, to supply the younger teams in Jönköping Södra with their products, which they would sell and receive a kickback for the effort. Through that concept, the company wished for the club and their surroundings to gain knowledge about their brand and influence consumer behaviour in the local area. NetOnNet viewed the sponsorship as an opportunity to connect with a larger customer base than before in their local area and hence, increase sales. Further on, Stadium also mentions the exposure value of the sponsorship as a large contributor to their decision to enter the deal.

Saldo, SEFAB, Stadium and Company X all saw the opportunity to be associated with a strong brand, this was an especially important factor in the sponsorship. Allen et al. (2011) mentioned this as a potential objective for companies to enter sponsorships. Stadium additionally names the access to a large and loyal fanbase as a compelling reason as to why being associated with their sponsee’s brand is important.

Allen et al, (2011) argues that a sponsorship can be beneficial for a corporation internally in many ways as well. NetOnNet and Company X named game-day benefits as an important factor in their sponsorship deals. Corporate boxes and game tickets are a common part of sponsorship deals, where the given company has the ability to invite guests to the sponsee’s games. NetOnNet mainly saw the opportunity of accessing game tickets to arrange HR-related activities for their employees. The company invited employees in order to show appreciation and reward them collectively. Company X viewed this as an opportunity to invite current and potential key clients, often in combination with lectures arranged by the sponsee, as a method to build better relations.

Farrelly & Quester (2005b) show in their research from the Australian Football League (AFL), that commitment and trust is a main component to healthy and successful sponsorships. The ambition to commit to a long-term agreement and collaboration is key for both parties in order to get as much out as possible from the sponsorship. Atea, Atteviks, and SEFAB expressed the importance of long-term ambitions as an objective when considering the sponsorship. Explained by Gustavsson at Atteviks: *"We don't only sponsor when things are going great, if we decide to sponsor a team, we will stick by them in the bad times as well, when it's especially needed."*

Batty et al. (2016) argues that sponsorships have become a popular ingredient to corporations' CSR initiatives. Further on, it's viewed as a simple way to contribute to society, achieve internal CSR ambitions and develop business benefits all in one. Atea, Atteviks, Company X, SEFAB, and Stadium describe the sponsee's CSR initiatives as an important part of why they wanted to enter the sponsorship. Atea named IFK Göteborg's CSR initiative "IFK I Samhället", where the club offers children in Gothenburg opportunities to play football, as an important part to why they wanted to contribute. Gustavsson at Atteviks discusses the importance of a CSR aspect in their sponsorship, *"Yes, it is very important to us. Almost all of our partnerships have this as the most important factor why we are contributing."*

Seitandi & Crane (2009) argues that it's common for sponsors and sponsees to address each other as partners. With this in mind, it is more apparent that a partnership can benefit both parties, whereas a sponsorship could be viewed as an arrangement where one party exploits the other (Cornwell, 2020). Atea, Atteviks, SEFAB, Saldo, and Café Bar put extra emphasis on the importance of the sponsorship being a partnership, where both parties are equally responsible for the success of the collaboration. Segerbrand at Saldo discusses his view of partnerships: *"The sponsorship shouldn't only be for GAIS benefit but also for a professional benefit, otherwise, why would you place money somewhere if you can't get that money back?"*

## 5.2 Sponsorship Expectations

Awareness is the first of many steps towards a purchase (Kotler & Armstrong, 2013) and name recognition can help improve the brand and strengthen public awareness (Dolphin, 2003). Atteviks, Café Bar, Cavaliere, Company X, NetOnNet, Saldo, SEFAB and Stadium all mentioned awareness and the importance of it. This provides an insight in the importance of brand awareness and recognition and can be summarized by a quote from Frick at Cavaliere *“If you don’t tell people that you exist, then they won’t know that you exist”*. Only Atea did not mention exposure or brand awareness as part of their expectations from the sponsorship. As Atea is a Business-to-Business company it may be one explanation that their target audience of the sponsorship are the companies within IFK Göteborg’s network. Although the company did mention exposure as part of the outcome and evaluation.

Meenaghan (2001) states that marketing objectives such as brand image and awareness can be achieved when consumers associate the image values, in this case the club’s values, onto the sponsor’s brand. Therefore, a company should attempt to be in correlation to the club’s values and vice versa. Shared values were discussed as an expectation by SEFAB. Atteviks expected to be incorporated with the culture of Jönköpings Södra, which can be seen as a similar mindset. Atea mentioned shared values as a reason to sponsor. Café Bar, Cavaliere, Company X, NetOnNet, Saldo and Stadium did not mention shared values with the club in regard to expectation of the sponsorship.

Being part of a network can help companies with promotion and a sponsorship can bring access to fruitful connections with great relational resources (Cobbs, 2011). Atea, Atteviks, Café Bar, Company X and Stadium had this in their mind when contemplating the expectation of the sponsorship. Saldo had too but also considered the ability to strengthen the network in order to get additional professional advantages. As Segerbrand has a seat on GAIS executive board, he believes that it can be developed from within. Cavaliere and SEFAB did not expect the network to be of high regard in their respective sponsorship. Atea, Saldo and Stadium additionally considered the opportunity to find like-minded companies for which they could create primary connections to (Boyd & Spekman, 2008).

A common expectation among the interviewed corporations was to have a partnership and a long-term commitment with their sponsee. Atteviks clearly mentioned a long-term partnership, Atea expected a partnership, as did Saldo and Stadium. Atea, Cavaliere and Saldo are also suppliers to their sponsored clubs which exemplifies the partnership. Another sign of a partnership comes from Atteviks, Café Bar and NetOnNet who had players from the sponsored club represent the brand as ambassadors. Only Company X and SEFAB did not mention a form of long-term partnership in their expectations during their respective interview. However, both companies have sponsored their respective club for more than two decades, a sign of a long-term commitment. It is very important to choose the right partner and it has indeed been a relevant subject within sponsorship research (Seitanidi & Crane, 2009).

Café Bar, Cavaliere, Company X and Stadium expect the sponsorship to result in increased sales or enhanced business. Atea, Atteviks, NetOnNet, Saldo and SEFAB did not mention increased sales as an expectation. Although, Atea and Atteviks saw positive results from the collaboration. Hessling et al. (2018) concluded that an emotional relationship with shared values is a prerequisite for commitment within a sponsorship. The research further claims development of these relationships enables for sponsorships to stand out from regular marketing and thus allows for long-lasting partnerships. Fahy et al. (2000) reminds us that there is a great need to ensure and consider the long-term contribution for both partners in such a partnership discussed. Fahy et al. (2000) also stress the importance of developing mutual mental models to support the inter-organisational processes involved in a sponsorship, which correlates to the shared values discussed in the beginning of the chapter.

Zak Brown, CEO of McLaren Racing, discussed the tiered structure of a sponsorship and that in order to be successful, exclusivity and long-term relations were two crucial components (Clarkson, 2020). Atteviks touched upon this as they expect to be the sole sponsor within their industry and to be treated with exclusivity by J-Södra as their sole local head sponsor. Gustavsson further continued that it was important for them to be clearly visible on J-Södra's jerseys and at the stadium. They do not have a solo structured sponsorship level on the jerseys, although they are by far the most visible sponsor, which is highly valued. Gustavsson expressed: *"If we enter a partnership with this much money, we want it to be exclusive. We are in it for the long run and*



*want that to be seen*” which confirms Brown’s theory of exclusiveness and long-term relations of successful sponsorships. This was not explicitly expected by any of the other interviewed companies.

Some companies discussed the expectation of improving the local communities through different CSR-projects or overall societal benefits through the sponsorship. Stadium aimed to contribute socially and provide children, and those who want to play football, locations where it would be safe. Atea, Atteviks and Company X also wanted to include young people through the sponsorship and be a beneficiary for the city. As stated by Meenaghan (2001), this is one of the reasons why sponsorship marketing is unique, it creates emotional bonds and consumer engagements. Sponsorships has become a popular CSR initiative that connects the sponsor’s values and morals onto the related community, whilst potentially increasing sales and brand awareness (Batty et al., 2016). Café Bar, Cavaliere, NetOnNet, Saldo and SEFAB did not mention societal benefits as part of their expectations from the sponsorship. However, the companies should perhaps consider the option to include a CSR-project to the sponsorship. Cornwell (2020) claims corporations should measure the ROP: s for adding to societal value and that it should be part of their overall organizational strategy. This is somewhat supported by Allen et al. (2011) who suggests that a sponsorship is a tool that provides more social benefits than regular marketing.

### **5.3 Sponsorship Evaluation and outcome**

As there are not too many ways to tangibly measure a sponsorship (Lucas, 2015) and Cornwell (2020) states that the usage of “evaluation” over “measurement” is more legitimate when analysing a sponsorship. All interviewees agreed upon the difficulty to tangibly measure sponsorships. However, Stadium stands out in this case, the company conducts tangible measurement through several institutes to find direct effects of the sponsorship. Saldo also measures the effectiveness of their sponsorship, according to Segerbrand, it is a measure of “money in” minus the cost of the sponsorship. Segerbrand confirms that he sees a potential long-term effect of the sponsorship which should generate profits in a few years. The remaining participants do not measure the sponsorship internally. NetOnNet and Atteviks mentioned that they receive data from the sponsees, data which indicates how much exposure their brand gains through the sponsorship. In the case of Atteviks, they experience a higher ROO from the exposure gained by the sponsorship

compared to the cost of other marketing mediums. Atteviks and Company X also highly value the trust and long-term commitment relationship built with J-Södra and Club X. These, according to Farrelly & Quester (2005b), are central elements for a healthy sponsorship relationship. Ferro et al. (2016) further claims that trust and commitment also are important for the non-economic and soft values that cannot always be measured in numbers, this is confirmed by Gustavsson. For Atteviks, it is important to be incorporated with the club's culture and to contribute to their way of operating. Company X confirms this and additionally considers the importance of contributing to society. Atteviks further perceive that they are familiar with the people within J-Södra and have created a long-lasting relationship which Gustavsson is very pleased with.

Atea, Atteviks, Café Bar, Cavaliere and Stadium all saw how different aspects of the sponsorship directly led to increased sales. For Atea, the sales increase was mainly generated from the network provided by IFK Göteborg and by being the club's IT partner. Atea uses the sponsorship network to reach new customers, this benefit is mentioned by both Lefton (2006) and Boyd & Spekman (2008). Atteviks have noticed that the close relationship between J-Södra and their organisation has led to them being the first choice for players, staff and relatives when contemplating the purchase of a new car. In both these cases, they have achieved the approach made by Kotler & Armstrong (2013) that sponsorships should aim for long-term relations, public support and a positive opinion about the company, which in the long run increase sales. Looking at Cornwell's (2020) expected returns, these two examples have achieved high ROR-scores where they have achieved positive long-term financial outcomes related to the establishment and maintenance of relations with the club and within the network.

Café Bar, Cavaliere and Stadium also confirm that they have increased sales to some degree with regard to their sponsorships with J-Södra, SvFF and AIK. This has been achieved by taking on the view of sponsorships that Shank & Lyberg (2015) proposed, sponsorships should aim for advertising, personal selling and sales promotion. The interviewees of these companies further describe that these sales would not have occurred if they had not been associated with those corporations. This is one of the purposes of a sponsorship according to Cornwell (2020).

Café Bar's sponsorship of J-Södra has given them the "rights" to collaborate with the youth academy, allowed for the "Klubbkaffe"-concept and being the coffee-provider at the stadium. By doing this, they have used their sponsorship as a "broker" to access these collaborations as mentioned by Lefton (2006). The tactic has also taken on the Kotler & Armstrong (2013) approach to achieve long-term relations, public support and a positive opinion about the company. This will as mentioned previously lead to an increase in sales, similar to the case of Atea and Atteviks. Although the collaboration so far hasn't been fruitful enough to be satisfactory, Brändström believes there is potential to achieve great ROI in the future (Cornwell, 2020).

Cavaliere can connect new B2B deals with clubs in Allsvenskan to the sponsorship of SvFF and being their supplier. Frick claims that those deals would not have happened if Cavaliere's suits had not been exposed together with SvFF at press conferences, games and players wearing their suits in public. This is a direct example of great and concrete ROI (Cornwell, 2020).

Stadium claims that accessing the rights to be associated with AIK has led to increased sales directly by selling merchandise to the loyal fanbase. In addition to this, there are sales indirectly connected to the sponsorship as people visit Stadium, either digitally or physically, in order to purchase AIK merchandise and end up buying other products as well. Looking at Cornwell's (2020) different returns, the case of Stadium and AIK is an example of a combination of the ROE and ROR. By being associated with AIK, Stadium accesses the emotional and psychological bond to the club.

Company X, NetOnNet, Saldo and SEFAB fall into the category of sponsorships as "indirect marketing" with an expected ROE following Cornwell's (2008) theory. All these aims to be noted as sponsors in a rather discrete and non-persuasive manner. The answers in their respective interviews indicate that the sponsorship is considered to be a marketing expense. However, all the companies still aim for some parts of the Kotler & Armstrong (2013) approach in achieving public support and a positive opinion about the company related to the sponsorship.

Atea, Atteviks, Company X, SEFAB, Stadium specifically mentioned the sponsorships to be a way to contribute to society, the sponsee and individual CSR-projects. This confirms the theory of Batty et al. (2016) who further claims that the way a corporation executes these actions can differ widely, this can be confirmed by the following cases:

Atteviks and SEFAB both had a general approach in contributing to the local society and the clubs as a whole. Atea, Company X, and Stadium on the other hand mentioned involvement in more specific projects.

IFK Göteborg's CSR project, "IFK i samhället" works with integration within the community to keep younger people out of criminality and enhance better values. A way to do this is by encouraging kids to play football, basketball, music and other activities. IFK Göteborg and Atea are synchronized in their view of how they want to shape the future of Gothenburg for the better. Nordström claimed that the shared ambition legitimises Atea's decision to sponsor IFK Göteborg and *"pay to be part of their CSR-project"*.

Stadium's mission statement is to "activate the world" which they contribute to by selling the necessary equipment and being part of AIK's operations. By sponsoring the club, Stadium also becomes a part of AIK's CSR project "AIK Stilen" which works to cultivate proper behaviour within the club. Hence, they contribute to AIK's operations, meet their mission statement to activate more people and increase the demand for sports gear which will lead to more sales in the long run. This case further strengthens the argument from Batty et al. (2016) claiming CSR related sponsorships can increase sales.

Company X wanted to be involved in the municipality and sponsoring Club X was a way for them to contribute to the integration of young boys and girls through football. It was also a measure to provide help for troubled and vulnerable children. The company worked with the club to develop the girl teams of the club to facilitate the notion that girls should continue to play football. This was a way for Company X to increase integration and inclusion for everyone in the municipality.

## 6. Conclusion

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*This section will note the most prominent reasons for a sponsorship, the expectations of it and the evaluated outcome, as experienced by the interviewee subjects.*

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The purpose of this paper is to gain understanding in the reasoning, expectations and outcomes from sponsoring an elite football team in Sweden. From the data analysis collected through the semi-structured interviews with leaders/managers in the corporations, the authors were able to understand the objectives and thoughts of the subjects regarding a sponsorship. This is further backed by secondary research relevant for the perceived knowledge gap in the topic. The research questions were as follows:

*RQ1: What do Swedish corporations consider before sponsoring a professional football club in Sweden?*

It is apparent that the reasons for the sponsorships go further than financial targets. Companies interviewed gladly discussed objectives such as social work, CSR and local contribution. One recurring sentence was, to give back to the city. Heart played a part in some sponsorships as well, three of the leaders/managers were fans and felt proud to represent the team.

Another clear reason for the sponsorships was to gain a positive reputation and exposure through the clubs' channels. By being associated with the club, the companies could increase their outreach and strengthen the local connection, especially in the teams with a large and loyal fanbase.

*RQ2: What are the expected outcomes and value-based expectations by Swedish corporations when entering a sponsorship deal with a professional football club in Sweden?*

The primary expectation among the corporations was to gain exposure. Brand awareness and recognition was discussed in every interview with variation of the importance, but nonetheless,

mentioned by all. It also varied where the exposure was aimed, most companies target individuals whereas some aim for the network connected to the club which include B2B opportunities. Networking and building relations were another common theme in the expectations. In a network with a club as a relationship-broker, companies can find other like-minded companies who share the values of both the club and company itself. Through the connection the entities can create favourable business together thanks to the sponsorship.

The companies expected to be more than “just” a sponsor. Partnerships with active collaboration in the long-term was more appreciated and anticipated. Finding the right long-term partner will in the long run be more beneficial both for the club and the corporation.

One key element of the corporation's expectations was access to benefits from the given sponsee. To gain the rights in using the club's brand as well as the use of players as ambassadors. This could be valuable for marketing and branding purposes and an expectation by some. Access to tickets, boxes and events for employees and business partners was also highly expected. Here the corporations wanted to use the game day experience to show appreciation for employees and a potential tool for building relations with new partners.

Most corporations also expected the sponsee to act ethically and include some version of social work or CSR-project to improve the local area. This was often aimed towards youths with an interest in football. Giving back to society and improving the local area was important in some regard for most of the corporations interviewed.

*RQ3: What do Swedish corporations' value in a sponsorship deal and how do they evaluate the outcome?*

The difficulties in measuring value creation and not only the exact financial outcome from a sponsorship is indeed a challenging task. With large resources and a will to evaluate the details of a sponsorship, it is possible. However, most of the companies interviewed did not make an attempt but rather choose to listen to the “gut-feeling” or simply write it off as an expense and have a belief in long-term value-creation. The value created is largely exposure and brand improvement. With

exposure and a strong brand, most companies evaluated that sales would increase or had increased without being completely certain.

Including the employees also leads to stronger togetherness and a sensation of pride for the sponsorship of the team within the company. This was valued highly by some companies and not considered by others.

In the end of it all, revenue is necessary for a company to function. The companies interviewed would not solely sponsor a team for the philanthropic achievements. However, the goodwill factor indeed is part of it and can be seen as a morale booster which creates valuable relations and local connection. The sponsorship/partnership is in many ways a satisfying and wholesome approach to marketing which can be viewed as a more favourable and discrete marketing tool by consumers. Swedish corporations' value the social benefits to different degrees but have monetary goals or ambitions for the brand in regard as well.

## 7. Discussion

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*In this section, the authors will discuss contributions, practical implications, limitations and future research.*

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### 7.1 Contributions

This research contributes within the field of corporate sponsorships in Swedish elite football clubs and investigates the corporations' reasoning, expectations and outcomes of their sponsorship deals. More specifically, the authors conducted nine interviews with corporations who all have in common that they are currently in a sponsorship agreement with a Swedish elite football club to draw conclusions from their reasoning. The research contributes to a more fundamental understanding for clubs on how they can further develop their attractiveness as a sponsee and can be used to increase the efficiency in their organizations. Further on, this thesis can be used by corporations in order to find inspiration in how a sponsorship can be conducted. Some of the interviewed companies have been more satisfied with their partnership, clubs can use this research to gain understanding in the expectation of clubs and the desired outcome. On the other side, corporations can see the reasoning and expectations which may have led to a more fruitful collaboration.

As perceived by the authors, there was no similar previous research specifically for the Swedish market. This paper shrinks the existing knowledge gap and provides the reader with new information regarding the chosen topic. Information containing an understanding of the relation between a sponsoring corporation and sponsored team in Sweden.

### 7.2 Practical Implications

Current research suggests a number of factors to what makes sponsorship agreements successful. Farrelly & Quester (2005b) implicates the main components to be commitment and trust for a long and healthy collaboration. This proves that companies who enter a sponsorship deal with a clear



commitment and are trustworthy will not only be sponsors for a long period of time, it will also lead to a more healthy and beneficial agreement for both parties.

Meenaghan (2001) displays an implication that entering a sponsorship deal creates a sense of goodwill, which in turn improves consumers' attitudes towards the brand. An implication can therefore be made that entering a sponsorship will successfully boost a company's image and improve their general likability. Sponsorships can therefore be seen as, and used as, a method to repair low trustworthiness among consumers by improving the way they are perceived, which naturally leads to increasing sales figures.

### **7.3 Limitations**

The authors could have increased the number of in-depth interviews with several companies in order to gain an even wider understanding. Alternatively, the interviews could have been followed up by another interview or proceeded further with additional questions. This would clarify and potentially suit the paper better as the research questions were developed over time. It might have been preferable to have had the research questions set from the beginning in order to ask more direct questions regarding the topic. Although, this might have affected biases and tilted the paper in the author's favour.

The interviews could also have been conducted solely with marketing managers/experts. Not all companies interviewed had such a position implemented which would have altered the selection as well. However, experts might have been able to answer the questions asked with better developed knowledge in the topic.

The paper investigates Swedish companies, and the interviews were conducted with Swedish people, hence the authors decided to conduct the interviews in Swedish. The subjects were informed that their answers would be transcribed and translated into English and that the authors would have to interpret citations. In this action, there might occur limitations in how the translation was conducted.

## **7.4 Future Research**

Firstly, this paper was delimited to a qualitative study about the reasoning, expectation and evaluation of the outcome regarding Swedish corporations' sponsorship of Swedish elite football teams. Taking the limitations and findings into account there is possible research which could be pursued further. A suggestion to future research would be to conduct a quantitative study which investigates the shared key reasons, expectations and outcomes of a sponsorship.

Another suggestion would be to divide the companies in their specific industry to examine if it is a dependable variable. There were some differences between B2B and B2C companies which, if taken into account, could be investigated as well.

Lastly, as this research focused on Swedish corporations and football teams. Future research could focus on another country or another sport i.e., ice hockey, to see if the results are the same or not. It may also be international research involving larger corporations and clubs known globally. With greater resources in the corporation, more thorough measuring and evaluation will most likely take place which could provide more conclusive answers.

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## **9. Appendices**

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Company introduction**

##### **Atea**

Revenue 2019: 15,836 MSEK (Atea Sverige AB, n.d).

Atea Group is a concern which exists in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia. They have approximately 6,800 employees with headquarters in Oslo, Norway. The company operates within the field of IT infrastructure and IT solutions. Atea Sweden is part of the Atea Group, they exist and operate in 30 different locations in Sweden with 2,000 employees. They provide products and services that simplify the handling, operation, and development of their customers' IT environments in the Swedish market (About Atea, n.d).

Atea is a main partner (highest sponsor accreditation) of the Swedish top division football club IFK Göteborg, located on the Swedish west coast (Våra Partners, n.d.b).

##### **Atteviks Personvagnar AB (Atteviks)**

Revenue 2019: 2,188 MSEK (Atteviks Personvagnar Aktiebolag, n.d).

Atteviks is a car retailer founded in 1945. They sell cars, trucks, and vans from manufacturers such as Skoda, Volkswagen, Audi, Seat and Scania trucks. In addition to this they also have service centers for cars. Atteviks operate at 9 different venues in the Småland region. The company's business idea is to maintain a close relationship with their customers and to offer a high service level at their venues and authorized service centers (Om Atteviks, n.d). Atteviks are head partners (highest sponsorship accreditation) to Jönköpings Södra (Partner, n.d).

##### **Café Bar**

Revenue 2019: 357 MSEK (Café Bar Sverige AB, n.d)

Cafe Bar was founded in 1987. The company is a Business-to-Business company who provides coffee related workplace solutions. Café Bar rents machinery to the customer which includes

maintenance and sells coffee beans and other products according to customer needs. Their goal is to always be able to fully satisfy their clients coffee needs by providing high class service, machinery and ingredients (Om oss, n.d.b).

Café Bar are “Gröna klubben”-partners (green club) to Jönköpings Södra, which is a partnership focused on the youth academy and the organization as a whole. Café Bar’s is located in Jönköping which is the reason they chose to sponsor Jönköpings Södra according to Jonas Brändström, Key Account Manager at Café Bar.

### **Cavaliere**

Revenue 2020: 52 MSEK (Cavaliere Aktiebolag, n.d)

Cavaliere is a family-owned business founded in 1973 in Borås. The company’s business idea is to offer high quality suits for a reasonable price, for everyone. Cavaliere offers a wide assortment of sizes with a unique production technique made in the Czech Republic. They utilize both retailers and sales directly to customers. The company values superior quality in both garment and production in order to produce suits that will last longer (Om Cavaliere, n.d).

Cavaliere are official partners to SvFF (Swedish football association) as their official “suit supplier” for all players, coaches and staff (Om Cavaliere, n.d).

### **Company X**

Revenue 2020: >10,000 MSEK

Company X is a large entity in Sweden. It was founded over 100 years ago in Sweden and now operates in several countries. It operates in an industry where trust and strong relations are important aspects for success.

### **NetOnNet**

Revenue 2019: 5,566 MSEK (NetOnNet AB, n.d).



NetOnNet is an electronics retailer founded in 1999. The company's mission statement is to be the cheapest alternative on the market when it comes to electronics. Initially the company only sold their products online but soon also expanded to "warehouse stores". NetOnNet has 30 stores and operates in both Sweden and Norway with 27 stores in Sweden and 3 stores in Norway (Vilka är vi? n.d).

NetOnNet are "gold-sponsors" (second highest sponsor accreditation) of IF Elfsborg (Våra partners, n.d.a). The connection and reason behind the sponsor deal between the two parties is the local connection with both situated in Borås as stated by Carola Tiberg, Marketing Manager at NetOnNet.

### **Saldo Redovisning (Saldo)**

Revenue 2020: 19 MSEK (Saldoredo AB, n.d)

Saldo is an audit firm founded in 2000 in Stockholm. The company consists of 20 employees and they have more than 400 clients in their portfolio. Saldo is a recognized audit firm and has been nominated to the "accounting firm of the year"-award twice. In 2017 they also won the award (About wonderful Saldo, n.d).

Saldo are head partners (highest sponsor accreditation) to GAIS as one of the owners and board members (Mattias Segerbrand) supports the club.

### **Stadium AB**

Revenue 2019: 6,205 MSEK (Stadium Aktiebolag, n.d).

The company was founded in 1974 by the two brothers and owners, Ulf and Bo Eklöf. Together they hold 100% through their holding company, Stadium holding AB. The company's mission statement is to provide sport-equipment and sport-clothing at great prices and to inspire people to pursue an active lifestyle. By the end of 2019, the company had 122 Stadium stores, 54 Stadium outlets and five Sneakers Point stores, which is a shoe-store within the concern (Hur allt började, n.d). Stadium are head partners (highest sponsor accreditation) to AIK (AIK sponsor n.d).

### **Svenska Entreprenad & Förvaltningsaktiebolag (SEFAB)**

Revenue 2020: 895 MSEK (Svenska Entreprenad & Förvaltningsaktiebolag, 2020)

SEFAB was founded in 1997 and is mainly a construction company who focuses on larger project enterprises. The company also trades with security checks. The company is owned by Furuheim & Arrelid Förvaltning AB (Om SEFAB, n.d).

The company is a clubpartner to IFK Norrköping which is the third level out of six possible partnerships (IFK Norrköping partners, n.d).

## **Appendix 2**

### **Club introduction**

#### **Allmänna Idrottsklubben (AIK)**

AIK is one of Sweden's most developed football clubs with a large and devoted fan base located in Stockholm. Since the foundation in 1897, the team has won Allsvenskan 12 times, the latest gold was won in 2018. The team has also won the Swedish Cup 8 times. The club's ambition is to remain as a top contender consecutively in Sweden and to occasionally qualify for European competitions (Om AIK Fotboll, n.d).

#### **Club X**

Club X is a well-known football club in Allsvenskan. They have a notable history with several league titles and overall successful performances during recent years as well.

#### **Göteborgs Atlet & Idrottssällskap (GAIS)**

GAIS has a rich history since it was founded in 1894 in Gothenburg. Despite their last championship being in 1954 and inconsistent results (at times playing in the 2nd or 3rd division), the club is known for a loyal, yet unconventional fanbase. Today GAIS is an established mid-Superettan team with long term ambitions of reaching Allsvenskan (Klubb fakta, n.d).

#### **Idrottsförening Elfsborg (IF Elfsborg)**

The club was founded in 1904 in Borås and has since then won six league trophies, the latest in 2012. In addition to this the club has also won three cup titles, all during the 2000s. The club is also known for a strong youth academy who has fostered many Swedish national team players. Long term goal for the team is to establish themselves as a competitor for the top spots in Swedish football (Häggström, n.d).

#### **Idrottsföreningen Kamraterna Göteborg (IFK Göteborg)**

The club is one of the most pristine and notorious football clubs in Sweden. Founded in 1904, the club won its first league trophy in 1908. In total the club has won the league 18 times and the

Swedish cup 8 times, the most recent victory was in 2020. The club is also the only Swedish club who has won a European title, which they did in 1982 and 1987. Long term ambition of the club is to establish themselves as a top team in the Allsvenskan. (IFK Göteborg vår historia, n.d)

### **Idrottsföreningen Kamraterna Norrköping (IFK Norrköping)**

One of Sweden's older and more successful clubs throughout history. Founded in 1897 the club has since won 13 league trophies and six cup titles. Their latest league trophy came in 2015. The club has a prominent youth academy and has lately put efforts in developing the city's women's team. The long-term goal for the team is to establish themselves as a competitor for the top spots in Swedish football. (IFK Norrköpings historia, n.d).

### **Jönköpings Södra IF (J-Södra)**

Jönköpings Södra was founded in 1922 and qualified to Allsvenskan for the first time in 1945. J-Södra has then played a total of 12 seasons in Allsvenskan, most recently when they qualified for Allsvenskan in 2016 for the first time since 1969. J-södra is currently playing in Superettan and is today an elite club with clear intentions of reaching Allsvenskan again. (Om Jönköpings Södra IF, n.d)

### **The Swedish football association (SvFF)**

The Swedish football association was founded in 1904 and is Sweden's largest sports association. SvFF aims to promote and administrate football in and outside of Sweden. Besides representing all teams in Sweden, SvFF also hosts the Swedish national teams from age 15 all the way up to the first teams for both men and women. The association's ambition for the men's team is to qualify for the championship playoffs (Euros and World cup) and for women to win medals in their playoffs (Fotbollen i Sverige, n.d).

### **Appendix 3**

What is your position in the corporation?

Can you give us some background information about the corporation?

1. Can you mention what other marketing activities that the corporation are using in addition to sponsorships?
2. What are the corporation's objectives of these marketing activities?
3. How do you divide these activities between each other?
4. How do you measure/evaluate these marketing activities?
5. What's the background behind the corporation sponsoring the elite football club?
6. Where/how are you visible with the team? (Features on jerseys and stadium for example)
7. What are the expectations/objectives of sponsoring the club?
8. Have you noticed any effect of the sponsorship?
9. Can you see any positive financial results related to the sponsorship?
10. How do you measure/evaluate the business benefit of this?
11. Do you have any tools to measure the result of the sponsorship? E.g., image, brand loyalty, brand commitment.
12. Does your evaluation of sponsorship differ compared to "regular" marketing?

#### **Appendix 4**

1. Read through the transcripts and make notes in the margin when interesting and relevant information is found.
2. Read through the margin notes and list the different types of information that was found.
3. Categorise the information in a way that describes what it is about. Some items might refer to the same topic, thus some categories can be used multiple times.
4. Try to link the categories with each other. List the categories that can be linked as major and minor categories.
5. Compare and contrast the different categories and switch places if needed, since the categories might fit better under another category and some information might fit within two categories.
6. Repeat the steps 1-5 with the rest of the transcripts. Relevant and interesting information can be accommodated in existing categories or new categories can be created if needed
7. Review all the categories and information again to check that the data is in the right category. If two or more categories seem to fit together it is possible to form a major theme out of these in the research.
8. Return to the original transcripts and the primary notes in the margins. Read through the text that did not appear relevant the first time. Reconsider if information that was previously excluded is relevant and should be included under created themes, major categories or minor categories.