Service Quality in Swedish Ice-Hockey
Case Study on HV71

Bachelor Thesis
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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to investigate and identify service quality gaps for live ice-hockey games in professional Swedish ice-hockey teams. Professional Swedish ice-hockey teams has seen a negative trend in terms of attendance figures at their live ice-hockey games in recent years. In this thesis, it was investigated whether service quality gaps is the reason to this decline. To identify the service quality gaps, generation Y was selected as the targeted segment. To investigate the problem, HV71 was used as a case study. In order to collect empirical data, a qualitative approach was used. The data was collected from focus groups with samples of generation Y and interviews with representatives from HV71. The empirical findings were compared and analyzed using service quality theories in order to identify service quality gaps. The results showed that service quality gaps are most prominent in the reliability and tangible dimensions. The thesis concludes that professional Swedish ice-hockey teams has service quality gaps which presumably exists because of inadequate marketing research and inadequate management implementation of service quality solutions.
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1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the reader to the background, problem discussion and purpose followed by the research questions. The chapter serves as a foundation on what will be processed throughout the thesis, with the objective to give the reader a clear understanding on why this topic is of importance.

1.1 Background

In Swedish professional ice-hockey organizations today, numerous organizations have problems with declining attendance figures for their live ice-hockey games (Grefve, 2014; Hägglund, 2014; Lindborn, 2013; SportExpressen, 2012; Wennerholm, 2013; Öhrlin, 2014). The highest ranked league – the Swedish Hockey League (SHL) has marginally increased their attendance figures for the season 2013/2014 (Statistikbloggen, 2014). However, this marginal increase in attendance figures has partially been caused by more popular teams qualifying for the league, while less popular teams has been relegated from the league. Visitors at the games is not only vital for image and atmosphere, but it is also one of the most important sources of income for the clubs (A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26). Ice-hockey, as with any other professional sport in Sweden is constantly under renewal. In order to compete with growing competition, not only from other sorts of entertainment and venues, there is also an increase in alternative ways of consuming sport today. If we go back 40 years in time, ice-hockey could only be consumed live or in some cases via radio and TV. In the modern society today, alternatives in consuming sports seems endless. Technology and ingenuity has enabled new and alternative services to seriously compete with the live experience. Not only has new technologies increased the different ways of consuming sport (Cellphones, tablets, computers), but also, the alternatives have added different features of value that the “in-arena” live experience cannot provide. For example, if you look at an ice-hockey game on TV, you have commentators and experts, in addition TV also enables replays of different scenarios of the game. As a result of this, ice-hockey organizations are discussing on how to cope with the growing competition from the alternative sources of consuming live ice-hockey games and they are constantly finding new ways to increase the value of the “in-arena” live ice-hockey experience (Grefve, 2014; A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26; Öhrlin, 2014)

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the most important aspect when filling an ice-hockey arena with spectators is the level of service quality delivered by the ice-hockey organization (A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26). As stated previously in the background, ice-hockey organizations could not simply rely on the quality and entertainment of the
game itself. Consumers now demand more than just an ice-hockey game, they demand a total ice-hockey experience. A total ice-hockey experience includes the game itself and everything around the game that contributes to the total perceived service quality (Grefve, 2014; A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26; Öhrlin, 2014). Ice-hockey organizations are today actors in a competitive and complex environment, which affects the entire sporting industry. As new alternatives of consuming ice-hockey arise, the whole industry recognize a decline in attendance figures which has a direct effect on the profitability (SportExpressen, 2012).

A limitation in this study will be made on the ice-hockey spectators, the segment that will be investigated is generation Y (1980-1994) (Bednall, Valos, Adam, McLeod, 2012). Generation Y is interesting to investigate because it is a group that have a good financial and logistical freedom, and will in the near future represent an age-span with significant purchasing power (Bednall et al., 2012).

This study will investigate professional ice-hockey organizations service quality for their live ice-hockey games. To investigate this, a qualitative approach will be used to get an understanding on what generation Y perceives as good service quality for live ice-hockey games. Service quality gaps can occur between how consumers expects and perceives the level of service quality. Gaps in services has negative effects on the consumers total service experience, which in a long term perspective is a contributing factor to the declining attendance figures (Buzzell and Gale, 1987). In order to close the potential gaps it is essential to identify where the gaps exist. Therefore the main objective of this thesis will be to identify service quality gaps.

1.3 Purpose
The purpose of this thesis is to investigate where service quality gaps exists in professional Swedish ice-hockey organizations in terms of live ice-hockey games.

1.4 Research Question
R1: What are the demands of generation Y in terms of service quality in terms of live ice-hockey games?

R2: Does HV71 understand the demands of generation Y in terms of service quality?

R3: What service quality gaps can be identified in HV71s live ice-hockey games?
2 Frame of Reference

This chapter includes theory on service and service quality, furthermore it presents the models that will be applied in the study. The chapter will serve as the frame on which the theoretical structure of the thesis will be built upon. The objective of the theoretical framework is to give the reader an understanding of the theories and models that will be used, and their relevance to the thesis.

2.1 Sports Marketing

Marketing has several definitions and meanings but it is basically concerned with consumer needs and the functions to satisfy those needs through organizational/company processes (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010) marketing is defined as:

“The science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines measures and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential. It pinpoints which segments the company is capable of serving best and it designs and promotes the appropriate products and services”.

The definition of sports, as defined by Schwarz and Hunter (2008): “Activities, experiences, or business enterprises that center on athletics, health and wellness, recreation, and leisure time opportunities”. Marketing is an essential part of every company that wishes to reach its customers and be profitable, this also applies to sport service providers. Sports marketing is derived from the previous definitions and can be summed up as the process of developing and implementing activities related to the production, pricing, distribution, promotion, and publicizing of a sport product (Schwarz & Hunter, 2008). Sport marketing is as understood by the description a complex and multifaceted subject which comprises a wide range of elements that change according to the prevailing conditions of the individual company.

Even if marketing is concerned with the same building blocks regardless of what markets or industries applied, there are some differences that can be distinguished between sports marketing and the marketing for traditional goods and services. One of the biggest differences is that sport is not only affected by the experience of the service but also by the emotional ties that creates a sense of belonging to a sport-team (Laverie & Arnett 2000). A simple explanation of the phenomena is not easily expressed, but according to earlier research, the emotional ties can be derived from tribalism which is a physiological and social phenomenon that will make people associate themselves to a
group or context (Laverie & Arnett 2000). This explanation helps us understand why sports have such an impact on people's life and their spending on the sport and merchandise. This explanation also makes sport marketing stand out from the marketing of more traditional goods and services (Sutton, McDonald, Milne & Cimperman, 1997). Even if these suggested theories distinguish some differences between sport marketing and marketing for more traditional goods/services, the consumption of sports is nonetheless a service that is fighting for people's scarce resources and experience competition from a variety of different sport service providers. One factor that can be derived from the suggested theories and that has actual impact on sport service providers, is that people are often loyal to the “home team” and are reluctant to switch team even if the team exhibits poor performance (Sutton et al., 1997). This assumption suggests that sport service providers can lose customers and revenue on foregone spectators but is unlikely to lose a customer to a competing club within the same sport. The implication of this emotional linkage between consumer and team is a factor that must be taken into consideration when addressing marketing for all sports that can be categorized into this segment.

With the basic understanding of the underlying assumptions that distinguish sports marketing from marketing with traditional goods/services, it is logical to address these emotional attributes when forming/designing the service.

In sport marketing the brand image is an important factor because it is the perceived image of the organization in the minds of the consumer. Brand image consists of the associations customers have of the company, and it is created in all parts where the company communicates with the customer (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989). It is of interest because the preset image of the service affects how consumers perceive the service itself. A good overall image of a service can make the consumer overlook an inferior aspect of the perceived service, just as a consumer with a perceived negative brand image can reinforce a bad experience of the service (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1989).

### 2.2 Characteristics of a Service

It is important to clarify the characteristics of a service in comparison with a good. A service holds four distinctive characteristics that separates a service from a product in terms of how it is consumed, produced and evaluated. A service is perishable, heterogeneous, inseparable and intangible (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2012; Khan, 2003; Ladhari, 2009).

- **Perishability:** Services are perishable in the sense that services cannot be saved, stored, resold or returned in comparison with a good (Wilson et al. 2012).
- **Heterogeneity:** Services are heterogeneous, most frequently people produce services, and people may differ in their performance from day-to-day. Furthermore, customers are not alike and they will experience the service delivered differently (Wilson et al. 2012).
• Inseparability: Services are inseparable because they are often sold, produced and consumed at the same time (Wilson et al. 2012).

• Intangibility: Services are intangible, they are performances and actions, and therefore they cannot be seen, felt and tasted. This is the most distinguishing feature of a service in comparison with a good (Wilson et al. 2012).

These characteristics result in both challenges and advantages for both the service marketer and the customer. For example, consider the service characteristics, it is more difficult for customers to assess the actual service quality in comparison with a good, and as a result of that, the service marketers job becomes more difficult (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1990). Furthermore, the assessment by a customer of the service quality is not only based on the outcome of the service, customers also judge the process of service delivery.

2.2.1 Service Quality

Over the past decades, research on service quality has gained increased attention by practitioners, academics, and managers because of its importance for a successful business. There is a consensus among practitioners and academics today, that delivering service quality and customer satisfaction is an effective tool to differentiate itself from competition (Lassar, Manolis & Winsor, 2000; Sureshchandar, Rajendran & Anantharaman, 2002; Seth, Deshmukh & Vrat, 2005; Ladhari, 2009). Delivering service quality offers advantages, early research by Buzzel and Gale (1987) points out the positive relationship between perceived service quality and profitability. Their study (the PIMS principles) clearly points out that when a company does service improvements, which in turn leads to a heightened perceived service quality from a customers point of view it will lead to an increased return on sales (Buzzell and Gale, 1987). Other research also states the importance of service quality, besides an increased profitability, service quality also leads to an enhanced corporate image, a positive spread of word-of-mouth, enhanced corporate image, and retention of existing customers and attraction of new ones (Ladhari, 2009; Wilson et al. 2012).
2.3 Service Dimensions

Service quality focuses on the dimensions of service, these dimensions of service quality is the base of which individuals form their judgments upon (Wilson et al. 2012). The dimensions were developed by the pioneering service quality researchers Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml and Leonard Berry (Zeithaml et al. 1990). The dimensions are the drivers of service quality, and they are applicable to a variety of service contexts according to Wilson et al. 2012. The five dimensions are the building blocks of how customers expect and perceive a service (Zeithaml et al. 1990).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>The ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
<td>The knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles</td>
<td>The appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>The provision of caring, individualized attention to customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
<td>The willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Zeithaml et al. 1990)

2.3.1 SERVQUAL Scale

The service quality dimensions can be operationalized and measured via an instrument called the SERVQUAL scale. The scale was developed in the same time as the development of the dimensions to have an instrument for actually measure customers perceptions of service quality (Zeithaml et al. 1990). The SERVQUAL scale measures service quality through a survey, were 21 service attributes is grouped into the five dimensions (Wilson et al. 2012). The service attributes function are made to describe the five dimensions, and people taking the survey are asked to first decide what they expect from the service, and secondly, how they actually perceived the service (Grönroos, 2000). A sample expectation statement could be “when these firms promise to do something by a certain time, they should do so”, and the corresponding perception statement could be “when XYZ company promises to do something by a certain time, it does so” (Zeithaml et al. 1990). Each of the 21 service attributes (21 for expectations and 21 for perceptions) can be graded on a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (strongly disagree to strongly agree). When all the service attributes are graded, an overall service quality score can be computed. A successful result of the survey means that the perceived service is close to the expected service. Whereas an unsuccessful result shows that the perceived service score
is below the expected service score (Grönroos, 2000; Zeithaml et al. 1990). The overall service quality score can broken down to show the mean score by dimension. The SERVQUAL instrument can then assist a company to analyze on which dimension they need to put extra effort on, or if one dimension perhaps exceeds expectations, a company may reevaluate the specific dimension importance and put extra effort on others (Grönroos, 2000; Wilson et al., 2012). In order to improve and reduce SERVQUAL gaps, an organization needs to understand their internal shortcomings. The internal shortcomings affects the results of the external shortcomings (expected versus perceived service quality) from the customers point of view (Zeithaml et al. 1990). The internal shortcomings can be determined and analyzed in the GAP Analysis Model which is developed by the same researchers who developed the service dimensions and the SERVQUAL scale, namely Parsu Parasuraman, Valarie Zeithaml and Leonard Berry (Zeithaml et al. 1990). The gaps model identifies the sources of quality problems and thereby assists managers in their understanding on how service quality can be improved (Grönroos, 2000). The gaps model have five different gaps, the fifth gap is the external customer gap, which denotes the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of a service. Gaps 1-4 are the internal company shortcomings, which affect the fifth, and final external gap.

### 2.3.2 Critics SERVQUAL Scale

The SERVQUAL instrument has been applied in a variety of contexts, cultures and countries all over the world to measure service quality. Despite its wide application, the instrument has been a target for some criticism. The main criticism towards the SERVQUAL instrument lies in the comparison between expectations and perceptions (Grönroos, 2000; Wilson et al., 2012). This is because it occurs some validity problems regarding the measurement of expectations (Grönroos, 2000). Three problems are suggested to arise when doing comparisons between expectations and perceptions (Grönroos, 2000).

First, if expectations are measured after the service experience, or in the same time as the experience take place, then what is measured is not the actual expectation but instead something that has been shaped and affected by the service experience (Grönroos, 2000; Wilson et al, 2012).

Second, measuring expectations prior to the service experience may not make sense either, because the expectations customers have before the service is delivered may not be the expectations with which they will compare their experiences (Grönroos, 2000). A customers experience of a service process perhaps change the expectations, and the new expectations are the ones which the perceptions should be compared to determine the new quality perceptions by a customer (Grönroos, 2000).
Third, to measure expectations may not be the proper way to proceed no matter what case. Experiences are perceptions of reality, and rooted in these perceptions are earlier expectations (Grönroos, 2000). As a result of that, if the expectations are measured first and then experiences measured, then expectations are actually measured twice (Grönroos, 2000).

2.4 SERVPERF

Issues related to the measurement of expectations have led researchers to find alternative ways of measuring service quality. An alternative instrument for measuring service quality is the SERVPERF instrument. It has not reached the same levels of popularity in comparison with the SERVQUAL instrument but researchers propose advantages of using the SERVPERF instrument (Grönroos, 2000; Wilson et al, 2012). Cronin and Taylor developed the SERVPERF instrument, and instead of measuring both expectations and perceptions as in the SERVQUAL instrument, SERVPERF only measures perceptions of service quality (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). The SERVPERF instrument utilizes the five dimensions from the SERVQUAL instrument and the perceptions of a service are measured by a range of different attributes that describes the service as detailed as possible, the different attributes are then measured on a scale by customers who has experienced the service only (Grönroos, 2000; Wilson et al, 2012). SERVPERF assumes that measuring performance expectations are unnecessary; the instrument takes for granted that people participating in a study automatically compare performance perceptions with performance expectations (Carrillat, Jaramillo and Mulki, 2007). When measuring perceived service quality only, it becomes easier to administer and analyze the all data gathered.

2.5 GAP Analysis Model
**Gap 1: Customer Expectations – Management Perception Gap**

The first gap is the difference between customer expectations of a service and managers or an organization’s understanding of the expectations. There are several causes to why managers do not understand what the customers expect of a service. Are the managers interested in knowing the expectations from the customers, and if so, are managers ready to address the expectations from the customers (Wilson et al. 2012). There are some key factors responsible for gap 1.

- **Inadequate marketing research orientation**
  This is a result of management’s inability to collect accurate information about customers’ expectations. To get a picture of customers’ expectations of a service, information needs to be collected via marketing research (Wilson et al. 2012).

- **Inadequate use of marketing research**
  This factor covers the inefficiencies in communication and interaction. Employees know most about the customer, if this information is not passed up the ladder to management, or if management do not talk to frontline employees a gap will arise (Wilson et al. 2012).

- **Insufficient relationship focus**
  What relationship do a company have with their customers? Is it a transactional approach to customers or is it relationship-based? If a company have a relationship-based approach to their customers, gap 1 is less likely to occur (Wilson et al. 2012).


Gap 2 describes the possible gap in having the right service designs and standards that reflects customers’ expectations. The key is to translate customers’ expectations into service quality specifications that the frontline employees can understand and accomplish (Wilson et al. 2012). Some key factors are responsible for gap 2’s existence.

- **Poor service designs**
  The people in charge for setting standards need to make sure the planning procedures are sufficient. The service designs and standards need to be clear and concise (Wilson et al. 2012).

- **Absence of customer driven standards**
  The service designs and standards that are in place need to be in line with the customers’ expectations (Wilson et al. 2012).
• *Inappropriate physical evidence and servicescape*

This factor deals with all the physical evidences associated with a service, for example; facilities, business cards and equipment. The servicescape serves as a communicator for the service and it helps customers to understand what company stands for. Therefore it is crucial for a company to have tangibles that reflects customers expectations (Wilson et al. 2012).

**Gap 3: Service Quality Specifications – Service Delivery Gap**

Having the right service designs and standards is not sufficient for delivering service quality, people and processes needs to be in place to make sure that the actual service delivery by frontline employees matches the service designs and standards (Wilson et al. 2012). There are some key factors that need to be considered to close gap 3.

• *Deficiencies in human resource policies*

Employees must have knowledge about their specific role in the company and how they are supposed to act. Companies need to have the right recruitment processes to make sure that they recruit people who are suitable for the job (Wilson et al. 2012). Furthermore, there needs to be a structure where empowerment and teamwork is apparent for employees.

• *Customers who do not fulfill roles*

Customers may also affect gap 3 even if frontline employees deliver service quality. A gap can occur if the customers do not perform their roles correct, they do not follow instructions, or they do not manage to provide the right information to the service employee (Wilson et al. 2012). To get an understanding of customer roles and their influence on service delivery and outcome is of greatest importance.

• *Problems with service intermediaries*

Challenges occur when services are delivered through intermediaries. Franchisees, agents, retailers are some intermediaries that may represent a service company, and to have them execute the specific service quality specifications as planned is a challenging task for the franchiser (Wilson et al. 2012).

**Gap 4: The Market Communication Gap**

The fourth, and last internal gap is the difference between the actual service delivery and the service company’s external communication to customers. Advertising, the sales force and other communications medium are examples of companies external communication to customers. The external communication to customers may raise customers expectations for a service, the expectations are then measured against the actual service delivery and it is here a gap can occur (Wilson et al. 2012). This may emerge because the marketing communications is not integrated with the actual service operations. Furthermore, over-promising is major issue regarding gap 4, are the promises made in the external communications to customers met or do they fail to meet the customers expectations (Wilson et al. 2012).
Gap 5: The Perceived Service Quality Gap

The fifth, and last gap of the gap model is the external customer gap, which denotes the gap between customer expectations and perceptions of a service. Closing the gap between customers expectation of a service and what they finally perceive is crucial for delivering service quality (Wilson et al. 2012). The key to close the customer gap, is to close the internal gaps (1-4).

2.5.1 Service Expectations

Expectations can be divided into two different categories; will- and should expectations (Boulding, Kalra, Staelin & Zeithaml, 1993). Will expectations are expectations by consumers on what they think will happen in the service. Should expectations, or normative expectations, are what the consumer think they deserve from the service. In academic research, should expectations is more commonly used. Should expectations firstly consist of what the consumers has been told about the competitors- and the firms service. Secondly, and most prominently, it consists of what the consumer has experienced in the competitors or firms past services (Boulding et al., 1993).

2.6 The Grönroos Service Quality Model and Image

Services are intangible activities that are produced and consumed simultaneously while the customer participates in the production of the service (Boksberger & Melsen, 2011). These are the four basic characteristics of services that Grönroos built his service quality model on. Grönroos argues that quality improvement are more often internal goals, rather than goals based on what the customer perceives quality as. Improved quality should mean a higher value for the customer. The customers perception of the service gives the service its value, it is therefore vital to understand exactly what the customer wants (Grönroos, 1988). Grönroos also argues that it is difficult for a customer to evaluate services; it is for example extremely difficult to give an intangible factor such as trust or a feeling a distinct value. Because of these factors along with lack of previous research Grönroos designed his model (Grönroos, 1988).

2.6.1 What and How

Customers perceives the quality of a service in different dimensions: Firstly, Technical Quality, What? This is what the customer is left with after the interaction and service is over. It is relatively easy to measure and is often what the company wants to improve. Secondly, Functional Quality, How? These factors are less tangible and are for example the way that a customer is approached, how the personnel is dressed or what is music played in the elevator. Since a service consists of many interactions between the provider and the customer, these kind of factors will play a role in the customers experienced quality. (Grönroos, 1988)
2.6.2 Image

Image is another factor that will affect the customers perceptions. If a company for example has an extremely good image minor mistakes in the service might be overseen while the same mistakes for a more unknown company might have devastating impacts on the experienced quality. The image is of significant importance for any company since it can impact the perceived service quality greatly (Grönroos, 1982; Grönroos 1988).

2.6.3 Expected Quality

The expected quality of a service is the external communication of the firm. Good perceived quality can only be reached if the expected quality is met or exceeded by the expected quality. Marketing communication is controlled by the firm, while image and word of mouth is indirectly controlled by the firm. Customer needs are also factors that can affect the perceived service quality (Grönroos, 1988).

2.6.4 “The Six Criteria of Good Perceived Service Quality”

Grönroos provides a list of factors of good quality called the “Six Criteria of Good Perceived Service Quality”. The first factor is outcome related, the last factor is image related and the remaining factors are processes related criterias (Grönroos, 1988):

1. Professionalism and Skill - A criteria were the customer acknowledge the competence of the service provider.
2. Attitudes and Behavior - The customer feels that the service provider is interested in solving the task at hand.
3. Accessibility and Flexibility - Factors such as opening hours, employees and location are convenient to the customer.
4. Reliability and Trustworthiness - Reliability to deliver the promised service.
5. Recovery - If something goes wrong the customer feel assured that the service provider will correct the errors.
6. Reputation and Credibility - The customer trusts that the service provider has good performance and values.

Grönroos recommends these six criterias to be used as a body in empirical and conceptual research (Grönroos, 1988). The six criterias or six sigma’s are also a models that has been widely used (Woodall, 2001).
2.6.5 Critics on Grönroos Service Quality Model

Firstly, the service quality model is good, however it was created in the 80s and could therefore be conceived as old. Secondly, the Six Sigma’s does not include any room for error. It is all based upon perfect performance of the service and does take mistakes into account. (Woodall, 2001). Additionally cultural values has been proven to affect the personal perception of a service, uncertainty avoidance and power distance both have significant effects on the perceptions (Ladhari, Pons, Bressolles, & Zins, 2011). This is disregarded in the model.
3 Method

This chapter introduce the overall methodology and method used to construct the thesis. The chapter will serves as a blueprint on how the thesis is theoretically and empirically conducted. The objective of the method chapter is to guide the reader on how and why the theoretical and empirical material used in the study was generated.

3.1 HV71

HV71 was founded 1971 through a merger between Husqvarna IF and Vätterstads IF (HV71a, no date). HV71 is a group, which comprises the non-profit HV71 with its wholly owned subsidiary HV71 Elit Ishockey AB, and its wholly owned subsidiary HV71 Fastighets AB (HV71c, no date). HV71 has evolved over the years in terms of personnel and turnover, and in fiscal year 2014, the organization had a total turnover of SEK 148 million and had 108 employees (HV71c, no date).

HV71 has played in SHL since 1985 and has won the Swedish Championship on four occasions, with the first championship title won in 1995 and the latest title in 2010. Another prominent milestone in HV71’s history was when Kinnarps Arena was built in the year of 2000 (HV71b, no date). Kinnarps Arena was then the starting point of an “arena boom” in SHL where other clubs followed HV71’s initiative and new ice-hockey arenas was built in for example; Karlstad (Färjestads BK), Linköping (Cloetta Center), Gävle (Gavlerinken Arena), Örnsköldsvik (Fjällräven Center) (Steffensen, 2014; A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26). The year Kinnarps Arena was built, and the years that followed were for HV71 a successful era in terms economical- and sporting results. In the beginning, and during the 21th century HV71 saw a major development of their turnover and during that time they built up a solid base of own capital (A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26). This was a direct consequence of the new arena and in the first years it was sold-out every night the team played. With the economic development, HV71 had the opportunity to direct more money to the team-budget, and therefore attract better players to the team (A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26). As a result of this, the organization experienced successful sporting results and they won their second championship title in 2004, a third title in 2008 and the fourth in 2010.

After their last title in 2010, the organization has been as successful in terms of sporting results, from 2010 up till today, HV71 has not qualified further than the quarter finals in the play-offs. This was not caused by any decrease in the player budget since the money directed to the team only went through minor changes during this period (HV71c, no date). The interesting phenomenon is that HV71, despite their poor sporting results, still have succeeded to maintain good attendance figures in the arena. The last season (2014-2015), HV71 had a 97 percent attendance rate (A. Karlsson HV71, personal communication, 2015-02-26). This makes HV71 unique in comparison with the other SHL clubs. As mentioned in the background the SHL as an ice-hockey league has seen

HV71 will be used as a case study in this thesis since they have successfully managed the negative trend of declining attendance figures. The reason why it is interesting to study one of the most successful ice-hockey organizations in terms of attendance figures is because the gaps in their level of service quality has a greater potential to reflect upon other less successful organizations. If for example a relatively unsuccessful ice-hockey organization was to be studied, those gaps would likely already have been closed by the more successful organizations. Hence, it is more interesting to study the gaps that has the potential to exist in as many organizations as possible. In addition limited time and resources will be more easily managed thanks to HV71s close geographical location to the authors.

3.1.1 SHL

HV71 plays in the Swedish Hockey League (SHL) which was formed in 1955 under the name Svenska Serieförening. In 1975 the leagues name was changed to Elitserien and the number of teams were reduced from 16 to 10 (SHL AB, no date). In 1988 the league was expanded to 12 teams. The SHL AB is a limited company and it is owned by the teams that are currently in it, as of the season 2015/2016 there will be 14 owners of the company (SHL AB, no date). The main task of the company is to handle all common interests in terms of commerce, fair play, media and main sponsors (SHL AB, no date). The more strategic goal is to preserve the long term interest of Swedish ice-hockey on all levels.

3.2 Methodology

Methodology is concerned with setting up a set of rules or broad principles of which the research should be conducted within. These principles/rules are supposed to guide and lead the research so that the research question can be answered to the fullest extent (Williamson, 2002). The chosen methodology also influences the choice of methods that are then applied to collect and evaluate the research data. In modern research there are two main principles of methodology that are being used widely, interpretivism and positivism. Positivism is a branch of methodology that is based on the assumptions that accurate data is only acquired through scientific methods such as observations and measurements (Williamson, 2002). Research constructed with a positivism approach is therefore fact based and views the world as objective and external (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997). A positivism approach is often constructed through testing hypothesis. Interpretivism is in contrast to positivism an approach where the underlying assumption is that the world is subjective and is constructed on social structures. It is an approach that is based on understanding and investigating new areas of research rather than proving already set hypotheses (Williamson, 2002). The purpose of this thesis is to investigate where service quality gaps exists in professional Swedish ice-hockey organizations in
terms of live ice-hockey games, with such starting point the purpose suggests that the research should be conducted according to an Interpretivistic approach. An Interpretivistic framework is based on an inductive reasoning that is based on general principles instead of hypothesis testing in the case of deductive reasoning (Williamson, 2002). An inductive reasoning is also something that is aligned with the purpose and therefore strengthens the choice of an Interpretivistic framework.

3.3 Method

The research started with a problem statement of the intended research field and thereafter a comprehensive literature search started. The underlying problem that serves as the basis for the thesis was discovered through a search on problems in professional Swedish hockey. From that starting point a literature search started that helped to develop and reconfigure the formulation of the research question (Williamson, 2002). The simultaneous process of question formulation and literature review continued until a desired quality of the research question had been achieved. The literature review was conducted through the use of several databases that can be studied in the Search Parameter Table (see next page). Key words for the literature search and comprising literature types can also be further studied in the same table. Simultaneously as the processing of the literature review and the construction of the research question was created, a theoretical framework was also constructed. The theoretical framework serves as the structure for the literature review, the methods and analysis. After the process of establishing the research question a target group for the intended research was selected and thereafter also the sample requirements. A Quota sampling method will be used for the reason that some criteria must be met by the participants to be able to contribute to the research. A Quota sampling is an approach to design the study by deciding upon what participants to include in the study based on preset criteria such as age, experience and background (Lavrakas, 2008). The procedure can preferably be studied by looking at the process diagram in Figure 1.

Based on the research problem that underlies this thesis it has been determined that an interpretivistic framework should be applied. An interpretivistic framework is by nature often followed by qualitative methods for acquiring research data (Arnbor & Bjerke, 1997). A qualitative method is used when a deeper and better understanding of the subject is most important (Williamson, 2002). Conclusions from a qualitative data research
are based upon collected data such as values, perceptions and attitudes in contrast to well-defined variables acquired through a quantitative research method (Williamson, 2002). In the subject of understanding what factors that are important for live ice-hockey consumers a method will have to be used in order to investigate and withdraw correct data from the target group without on pre-hand knowing the different factors. To be able to meet these requirements a qualitative method will be used just as given by the interpretivist framework (Williamson, 2002). Three of the most used qualitative methods for acquiring data are Participant observation, In-depth interviews and Focus groups, of these methods focus groups and in-depth interviews will be used in this thesis. Focus groups were conducted to obtain data from the target group (Generation Y) while in-depth interviews were held to acquire data from HV71 representatives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SEARCH PARAMETERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Databases and search engines</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Search words</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Literature types</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Period</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Languages of publication</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Generation Y and the Focus Groups

The definition of Generation Y varies between different sources but the most established definition of the age span consist of those born between 1980 and 1994 (Bednall, Valos, Adam, McLeod, 2012). The decision to pick generation Y as the target group derives from that this generation represents individuals that are starting to get good financial and logistic freedom in addition gerenation Y is a target group that will have significant purchase power in the near future (Bednall et al., 2012). Another factor that makes Generation Y an interesting age group to base the research on is the fact that this generation has been growing up with a broad repertoire of leisure choices, and therefore it makes them a difficult group to pursue and attract in the entertainment market (Bednall et al., 2012). To attract a generation that has high requirements on entertainment and is overwhelmed by alternatives to choose from in the market, it is highly relevant to understand these generations needs and wants (Bednall et al., 2012). Some characteristics that are prominent in the Generation Y are; they are ambitious, they are family oriented, they are communicators and they are Tech/Web Savvy (Gibson, 2013). Generation Y is a generation interested in technology and sport and is considered to be one of
the generations that are the most independent decision makers. In summary generation Y is a “on the go” generation that is known to evaluate different choices and to pursue opportunities.

The qualitative data to be acquired in order to answer the research questions in this thesis needs to address Generation Y service quality demands and experiences in regards to live ice-hockey games. This will be done through conducting focus groups as a data collective method. The advantage with focus groups is according to Krueger and Casey (2000) that “focus groups tap into the human tendency to develop attitudes and perceptions relating to concepts, products, services, or programs in part by interaction with other people”. The use of focus groups will in this thesis be used as a self-contained technique and therefore be the only set of method to acquire research data from generation Y. The advantages of conducting focus groups in order to obtain data is that focus groups are quick to set up, produces large and concentrated amount of data and there is opportunity for direct clarification about questions (Williamson, 2002) (See questioner in appendix).

The focus groups included 5 participants in each group which assures a good communication climate and makes the groups easier to handle for an inexperienced interviewer. A basic requirement of all participants was that they had experienced at least one ice-hockey game in Kinnarps Arena in the last two years. In order for the participants to feel a certain affinity and therefore be able to relax and talk more freely we divided the groups into different age spans ranging from 1982-1995. Besides the age criteria for the participants a good mix of backgrounds and occupations were sought, as well a 50/50 distribution between men and women.

3.5 Interviews

Interviews with HV71 were conducted to acquire knowledge about what factors the organization thought was important for generation Y. Two Interviews were held with HV71s Marketing Director Johan Skogeryd and HV71s Key Account Manager Andreas Karlsson. The interviews were constructed as semi-structured interviews in order to be able to acquire as much qualitative data as possible from the interviews. A semi-structured interview technique is based on a preset set of questions that will be covered but also allows deviating from the list of questions when he or she feels this is appropriate (Williamson, 2002). The advantage of using a semi-structured interview technique is that the interviewer can help the interviewee to develop their answers in order to get the most out of a question by using follow-up questions and clarifications (Williamson, 2002). The decision to not proceed with another interview technique is based on the factors that only one interview with each person was held and that the nature of the issues might require clarification and development conditions. The same questioner was used during both the focus groups and the HV71 interviews (see appendix).
3.6 Limitations of Method

Due to limitations in terms of both time and resources, this study has been forced to constraints in terms of both methodology and data collection. The implementation of a larger study equipped with more time and resources could advantageously have been using both qualitative and quantitative data collection, so called triangulation (Williamson, 2002). A study with more resources could also have included more focus groups and longer interviews in order to collect qualitative data for greater validity.
4  Empirical Findings

This chapter includes the interviews conducted, firstly with the focus groups, and secondly, the interviews made with HV71. The chapter will serve as the main body of the thesis. The objective of the empirical chapter is to present the reader with the qualitative data collected throughout the interviews.

4.1  Focus Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tangibles</strong></td>
<td>How do you perceive HV71’s servicescape?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reliability</strong></td>
<td>Did HV71’s service performed as promised?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assurance</strong></td>
<td>Did you feel safe during the service?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empathy</strong></td>
<td>Do you think HV71’s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsiveness</strong></td>
<td>If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Image</strong></td>
<td>How do you perceive HV71’s image? / How do you think the public perceives HV71’s image?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions were asked to the focus groups. The questions were based upon the service dimensions derived from the frame of reference and each individual question is correlated with one service dimension aspect. Each dimension has a weighted role in the total service experience and is therefore valid to use. The dimensions were studied and interpreted in order to form relevant questions to the topic but still have validity.

In addition, the image factor found in Grönroos model on service quality was included. The service quality dimensions lack any aspect of image therefore it is included. In any organization, image plays an important role in overseeing minor mistakes from a customer point of view (Grönroos, 1988; Grönroos 1982). Since loyalty in sport organizations can contribute to a more general positive image it is highly relevant to include this. The image aspect was divided into two sections to assure that the focus groups discussed the image from their own perspective and the public’s perspective. It is only the personal perspective that is relevant for this thesis but to make sure that these two perspectives are not mixed up by the focus groups they were asked as two different questions.
The focus groups were asked to answer the question from their own perspective, hence in the aspect of generation Y. Each group member was giving the chance to answer each question, and the interviews with the focus groups lasted for approximately one hour each. During this time, two different observers took notes and a third person was asking the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1993-1996</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>High school students &amp; worker without university degrees</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15/04/15</td>
<td>19:30-20:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1990-1993</td>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>University students</td>
<td>Male &amp; Female</td>
<td>16/04/15</td>
<td>17:00-18:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1985-1988</td>
<td>27-30</td>
<td>University students &amp; workers with university degree</td>
<td>Male &amp; Female</td>
<td>16/04/15</td>
<td>18:15-19:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1982-1986</td>
<td>29-32</td>
<td>Workers without university degree</td>
<td>Male &amp; Female</td>
<td>16/04/15</td>
<td>19:30-20:30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following table displays the focus groups that were used in order to collect empirical data. These focus groups are a sample of generation Y, and were selected based upon the following criteria:

- They had been to at least one ice-hockey game over the last two years
- They were within the age span of generation Y

The groups were designed to represent different segments of generation Y in terms of gender, occupation and age. Some of the focus group members had personal connections to the authors, either as direct friends or a friends friend.
4.1.1 **Focus Group (1993-1996)**

**Service Dimensions**

1. **Tangibles: How do you perceive HV71s servicescape?**

The focus group experienced the aisles of the arena narrow when the arena reached its maximum capacity. The queues to the kiosks often blocked sections of the already narrow aisles. They mentioned that it was more or less impossible to walk one lap on the inside of the dome shaped arena during a period break due to the heavy crowds of spectators. However, the overall feeling of the arenas servicescape was perceived to be positive.

2. **Reliability: Did HV71s service performed as promised?**

The group stated that there was two different atmospheres during the season, one with superior service performance, and one with inferior service performance. The difference in service performance depended on what time of the season the game was played. During the later games of the season (playoffs), the crowd and the atmosphere were filled with energy and passion. On the contrary, the regular season games did not contain the same levels of energy and was thereby perceived to be less exciting. They wanted HV71 to force the same amount of energy into the regular season games in order to establish the hype and excitement for every game. Furthermore, they continued to discuss the importance of the show around the game, despite if the team won or lost, a good intro with music, fireworks, lightshows and period break entertainment could still make a bad game a good experience. Additionally, they wanted HV71 to alter the show from game to game.

“No matter if you lose or win, a good spirit will always make me leave the arena and feel satisfied”

- Focus group member age 20

3. **Assurance: Did you feel safe during the service?**

Hooliganism was according to the group, not a problem amongst HV71s fans. However, if the visiting team was known to have high-risk supporters, the focus group could sometimes feel threatened. They only felt threatened if their seats were close to the visiting teams fans section. On the positive side, they always knew that there were guards who could intervene if there would be turbulence.

4. **Empathy: Do you think HV71s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?**

The group had never reflected on whether HV71s service was adapted to their age group. They did not see this positive, nor negative, instead they called ice-hockey a sport for all age groups. The only place in the arena were they felt misplaced was in the
bars. They found the average age to be a lot higher than their own, and they were thereby discouraged to enter the bars. What they would have liked to see was a bar adapted for younger people.

5. **Responsiveness: If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?**

If a puck finds its way in to the audience, the focus group felt that there were always medical personnel on stand-by that could assist immediately. If they for some reasons would have any questions, they knew exactly where to go, since security/information personnel was placed on strategic spots throughout the arena. They found the number of kiosks to be sufficient, and they always walked to the kiosk closest to their seats. The group knew the problem with long queues, and therefore they often bought their snacks and drinks in the “walk-through” kiosks because the queue times were shorter than in the regular kiosks. However, they stated that hot-food was unavailable in these kiosks.

“Since the queues are so long I usually buy my snacks before the game”

- Focus group member age 19

To overcome the queuing problem they either bought what they needed before the game started, or they left their seats/stands before the period ended. The group however, mentioned that if you are a standing spectator it was almost impossible to leave the stands before the period ended.

**Image**

*How do you perceive HV71’s image? / How do you think the public perceives HV71’s image?*

The focus group perceives HV71 as an organization that always strives to be the number one team. This was important to the focus group since they always felt that when HV71 enter a season they have a good chance to compete for the gold medal.

“HV71 is the team in my heart”

- Focus group member age 19

According to the group HV71 is an organization with strong bond to Jonkoping and thereby was perceived as a local team. Furthermore, the atmosphere and energy of Kinnarps Arena is portrayed in HV71’s image.
4.1.2 Focus Group (1990-1993)

Service Dimensions

1. Tangibles: How do you perceive HV71s servicescape?

The focus group first points out that HV71s servicescape is perceived to be modern, clean and fresh, this adds to an overall positive feeling when visiting Kinnarps Arena. Furthermore, the aisles and the seating were discussed, the overall feeling of the seats was positive whereas the aisles according to some focus group members were hard to navigate in, while other stated the opposite. Another detail in the arena was the clappers, which are placed on each seat in the arena, they described the clappers to be informative since you can see the lineups for each team, and they found them amusing to fold and clap with. This, according to the focus group members, added a premium touch to the live experience.

2. Reliability: Did HV71s service performed as promised?

This was by far the most discussed dimension, and it had significant importance to the live experience. There was a consensus among all members in the focus group that HV71s service exceeded the communicated promises. One major contributing factor was the energy and excitement created by the introduction. The introduction includes a light- and firework show in the same time as HV71s players take the ice to modern and up-tempo music, and most importantly the cheering and clapping from the thousands of spectators. They described the introduction to be an important part of the service, because it set the tone for the rest of the game. They stressed the importance of the introduction repeatedly throughout the whole interview.

3. Assurance: Did you feel safe during the service?

The focus group had not reflected a lot on the safety issues during the service before we asked the question. The safety personnel were according to the group, visible and accessible which contributed to an overall feeling of security. Another contributing factor was the placement of the youth section, which is placed right next to the home fans standing area. Having youngsters close to the stands, made older supporters behave in a more mature way according to the group. There were only two concerns in terms of safety. Firstly, the group mentioned the potential trouble when home and visiting fans enter and exit the arena, but this was only a minor safety concern. Secondly, the group discussed the risk of being hit by a puck. This was, by some group members an important safety issue, they stated that they have noticed that on some spots in the seated stand, the puck has a tendency to find its way over the plexi-glass and potentially hit spectators.
4. **Empathy**: Do you think HV71’s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?

Once again, the group referred to the reliability dimension, were the show (introduction, music, fireworks, energy etcetera) was appealing to a younger audience. However, what they miss was a place to sit down and socialize and enjoy a proper meal and beverage.

“*I think that the music is good and modern, it is really focused to our age group*”

- **Focus group member age 23**

Furthermore, the pricing on food, beverages and tickets was considered to be slightly high. However, student price tickets were appreciated. Finally, they would like to have the possibility to consume alcohol while seated in the arena during the game.

5. **Responsiveness**: If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?

The focus group found this dimension to be unimportant. They considered the amounts of security and information personnel to be sufficient. However, they seldom needed any help, hence, the dimensions was more or less disregarded. Long queues to the kiosks discouraged purchases, what the group members would have liked to see is kiosk personnel selling snacks and beverages directly in the stands. This is a concept that is common at American sport events.

“*I don’t buy snacks at the games simply because the queues are to long, I rather wait until I get home to eat*”

- **Focus group member age 24**

**Image**

*How do you perceive HV71’s image? / How do you think the public perceives HV71’s image?*

The group found HV71 to be a synonym with Jonkoping. The overall feeling of HV71 was good, it was associated with a good experience, positive reputation and it is a well-known brand. They stated, that the public opinion of HV71 was the same as their own personal opinion.
4.1.3 Focus Group (1985-1988)

Service Dimensions

1. **Tangibles: How do you perceive HV71’s servicescape?**

   The focus group perceived the condition of Kinnarps Arena to be neutral. They considered the arena to be clean but boring, since it is mainly built out of concrete. Adding colors and different materials, would according to the focus group give Kinnarps Arena a more inviting atmosphere. However, they stated that this was not unusual for an arena today, therefore they did not see it as something directly negative, rather something that HV71 as an organization could improve upon. Additionally, the group mentioned that Kinnarps Arena had improved their servicescape after a renovation conducted in 2012.

2. **Reliability: Did HV71’s service performed as promised?**

   The group considered the performance of the service to be good, but they thought that HV71 could do more in terms of the show around the game. They stated that the show was of great significance for the overall service experience. To be more precise, ice-projections and an alteration of music each game would enhance the overall service value. They stated that Kinnarps Arena is almost always full, and to keep it that way an enhancement of the show is necessary, the actual hockey game may not be as important.

   “If HV71 wants to keep the audience they have today, they really need to step it up with the introduction, it’s the same every time”
   - Focus group member age 26

3. **Assurance: Did you feel safe during the service?**

   Safety was not a deciding factor according to the focus group. They rarely felt unsafe, but when they did, it was mainly during high-risk games. However, they also felt that the number of security guards increased during these games. Furthermore, they preferred ice-hockey compared to for example football, were hooliganism is much more common.

4. **Empathy: Do you think HV71’s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?**

   The restaurant and the arena activities were more or less directed to the focus group age span. However, there was room for improvement in those areas. But an ice-hockey experience according to the group is not directed a single age group, rather it is a mass culture that in theory could suit anyone.
5. **Responsiveness:** If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?

The group considered the information/security personnel to be sufficient. However, some group members considered them to be rude. The aisles contained a lot of personnel that you can ask questions to, however the aisles were also packed with people during the breaks. The queue system was considered to be bad, because it blocked the aisles and made it almost impossible to walk one lap around the arena.

**Image**

*How do you perceive HV71’s image? / How do you think the public perceives HV71’s image?*

HV71’s image was according to the group friendly, with a good arena and fans. But they also considered HV71 to be former top-class team. Poor results in recent years have had negative effects on the overall image. One reason for this could be the lack of local profiles in the team. Nowadays, there are a lot of good players in the team but few to none of them have any local connections.

### 4.1.4 Focus Group (1982-1986)

**Service Dimensions**

1. **Tangibles: How do you perceive HV71’s servicescape?**

The group found Kinnarps Arena to be boring, the interior mainly consisted of concrete and plastic. They found the aisles to be narrow, crowded and blocked. This was mainly because of the queues from the kiosks, and visitors socializing in aisles. Because of the crowds, it was also hard to navigate in the arena.

   “I really don’t like to walk around in the arena since it’s always so crowded, it’s just annoying”

   - Focus group member age 30

2. **Reliability: Did HV71’s service performed as promised?**

The overall impression of the experience was good. The music and intro created an atmosphere, which made the arena full of energy and excitement. This had a positive effect on the group, it made them join in, and it gave them a feeling of it being almost like a cult. The only negative aspect was again the queues.
3. Assurance: Did you feel safe during the service?

The group had never reflected upon the safety in the arena, however the group complained about the steep stands. Since some of the members were afraid of heights, this was a real negative issue. Furthermore, on some games they experienced HV71s fans to use bad language, which could be conceived as threatening.

4. Empathy: Do you think HV71’s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?

According to the group, ice-hockey is not specifically made for one age group since there are several different seating options with different pricing.

5. Responsiveness: If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?

The group explained that an ice-hockey game is designed in a way so that there is no need for customer interaction. You go the game, if you want to buy something you buy it, you watch the game and then you go home.

Image

How do you perceive HV71’s image? / How do you think the public perceives HV71’s image?

They perceived the image of HV71 to be “our team”, the local team with a strong bond to Jonkoping. Furthermore, they stressed the importance of cultural bearers in the team. In the past, HV71 had a lot of local star players, but now most of them are bought and have no personal connection to Jonkoping.
### 4.2 HV71 Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andreas Karlsson</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Key Account Manager HV71</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16/04/15</td>
<td>14:00-15:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johan Skogeryd</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Marketing Director HV71</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20/04/15</td>
<td>12:00-13:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table contains the HV71 representatives that were interviewed. They were selected internally by HV71 to represent the club from a marketing point of view based on the criteria that they had a managerial position within the marketing field. The same questions that were asked to the focus groups were asked to the HV71 representatives. However, Karlsson and Skogeryd were asked to answer the following questions from what they perceived to be a generation Y perspective. By doing this, the answers would be easier to compare and align with the purpose of the thesis.

#### 4.2.1 Andreas Karlsson Key Account Manager HV71

**Service Dimensions**

1. **Tangibles: How do you perceive HV71s servicescape?**

   According to Andreas Karlsson, Kinnarps Arena was the starting point of the 21st century “SHL arena boom”. It has throughout the years been refurbished and is today an example on how a modern hockey arena should be built.

   "We have had architects visiting and inspecting the arena since it is consider to be unique because of the “kettle effect”"

   - Andreas Karlsson

   The steep stands allow visitors in the arena to have a good view of the game. The arena could be compared to a “kettle”. When it is full, it almost “boils over” and no matter where you are seated in the arena you feel the synergy between the fans and the arena.

2. **Reliability: Did HV71s service performed as promised?**

   Karlsson considered the service arrangement efforts to be good. However, poor results in recent years have negatively influenced the overall performance of the service.
“I believe that people are disappointed with the poor results we’ve had over the years, this probably has had a negative effect on how they perceive the service experience”
- Andreas Karlsson

3. Assurance: Did you feel safe during the service?

“High-risk” games were according to Karlsson the biggest safety concern every season. The family section, which is poorly placed right next to the visiting teams fans has at occasions felt threatened because of bad language and a vicious atmosphere. Additionally, this season contained more incidents with pucks flying over the plexi-glass and hitting spectators. But only two of these incidents resulted in that the spectator having to seek further medical attention. Given that there are 7000 people in the arena and at least 27 home games being played every season, this number could be considered to be low. HV71 are following SHLs recommendations regarding the size of the safety net and plexi-glass. Karlsson stated that if they were to increase the size of the safety net people would complain on reduced visibility.

4. Empathy: Do you think HV71s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?

Karlsson admitted that generation Y lacked a specific food and drink package. However, after-work events have previously been successful and he told that these events was a great tool of capturing generation Y. Karlsson would have liked to see specific sections in the arena where you could consume food and alcohol in the stands. However, regulations restrict alcohol consumption to take place in the stands. Karlsson believes that this could be a way to better attract generation Y and that he seeks ways to alter the regulations.

5. Responsiveness: If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?

Karlsson believes that the personnel in the arena is well educated and does a good job to keep the experience flow smoothly. He was aware of the problems of the queues and stated that HV71 is constantly trying to come up with new solutions in order to overcome this problem. Express checkouts and application-based ordering were some of the solutions that HV71 are trying to implement.

Image

How do you perceive HV71s image? How do you think the public perceives HV71s image?

Good hockey and a good atmosphere. Failure in terms of results, disappointment and lack of success in the play-offs.
4.2.2 Johan Skogeryd Marketing Director HV71

Service Dimensions

1. Tangibles: How do you perceive HV71’s servicescape?

Skogeryd did not have a lot of feedback to give on the servicescape. He thought that the arena holds a good SHL standard. The only negative aspect was the aisles that can be conceived to be a bit dull.

2. Reliability: Did HV71’s service performed as promised?

According to Skogeryd the service HV71 provides holds a high standard. However, the results in recent years have dragged down the perceived service performance. As a marketing director he finds this frustrating since it is a variable he cannot control. The high standard is generated by Kinnarps Arenas energetic environment. Queues in the arena, is according to Skogeryd a variable that has a negative effect on the overall service performance. But making aisles and corridors larger, it would make the arena to big, and thereby it would decrease the energetic atmosphere.

“If we were to make the corridors larger we would lose some of the kettle effect”
- Johan Skogeryd

3. Assurance: Did you feel safe during the service?

In the aspect of generation Y, Skogeryd stated that this age group most likely has few, if any, implications on the security. During high-risk games extra security precautions are taken in forms of extra barricades and security personnel.

4. Empathy: Do you think HV71’s service is adapted to stimulate you, and your age group?

Skogeryd stated that the activities around the game are increasing in numbers and size and this is a way to stimulate generation Y. “After-work Fridays” and live music on weekend games are just a few examples on how HV71 are trying to attract Generation Y. However, HV71s focus is according to Skogeryd not specifically set on a certain age span. Since ice-hockey is a sport for everyone the focus of satisfying cannot be directed to one specific age group.

5. Responsiveness: If you need assistance or help during the game, do you feel that you can get the help that you need?
Skogeryd states that the security and information personnel in Kinnarps Arena are more than sufficient. There are always security and medical personnel on stand-by, and all the personnel uses walkie-talkies to communicate with each other.

**Image**

*How do you perceive HV71s image? / How do you think the public perceives HV71s image?*

HV71 has a strong brand and it is closely connected to the Jonkoping region. Organizations and companies take pride in being associated with the brand. Keywords such as “passion” and “joy” are good descriptions of HV71 according to Skogeryd.
5 Analysis

This chapter includes the analysis of the empirical data together with theoretical framework. The chapter will serve as the fusion between the theoretical framework and the empirical body. The objective of the analysis is to highlight the relevant parts, which will be used to draw conclusions for the thesis.

In section 5.6, HV71’s image will be divided into positive- and negative aspects. With help of keywords collected from the focus groups and interviews with HV71, it will be established, firstly what the focus groups associations with HV71 are, and how good HV71’s self-awareness is in terms of the organizational associations.

5.1 TANGIBLES

5.1.1 Focus Group Answers

The focus groups found some aspects of the servicescape to be positive, some to be negative and some areas that could be improved upon. Kinnarps Arena was conceived to be clean and fresh. It was perceived to be fairly modern and the overall impression was rather neutral in regard to the arena servicescape. Details such as clappers added a premium touch, and contributed to a good atmosphere. The most negative variable was the narrow aisles, in combination with the kiosks queues, which created blockades. Every group mentioned the queues, and overall it was conceived to be one of the most negative factors in the whole service experience. According to the groups, there was little to no space to socialize in, so people simply stood in the aisles, which made them even more crowded. The crowded aisles also made them hard and slow to navigate in. Making one lap around the arena was conceived to be almost impossible. The aisles had according to the groups some great potential for improvement. Currently, the most commonly used material is unpainted concrete, this was conceived to be boring. Some groups suggested that by adding colours and other materials, the servicescape would be conceived as much more welcoming. However, they did not experience the current servicescape as bad, since they conceived it be the norm for a modern hockey arena. The suggestions were simply made so that HV71 can reach beyond the norm.

5.1.2 HV71 Answers

According to HV71, Kinnarps Arena holds a good SHL standard, there are some better arenas, but also a few that are worse in terms of the overall servicescape. They also pointed out that the arena had been used as an example on how to build a modern ice-hockey arena. In 2012 the arena went through a renovation were the aisles and kiosks were modernized. This was a step in the right direction to increase the artistic aspect of Kinnarps Arenas interior. Furthermore, the steep stands of the arena create a “kettle effect” which makes the arena “boil” of energy when sold-out. Furthermore, HV71 pointed out that the aisles were narrow and somewhat boring, and they recognized the problems with queues.
5.1.3 Comparison of Answers
In comparison with the focus groups, HV71 had some differences and some similarities in their reasoning in terms of the tangible dimension. The tangible dimension describes the appearance of physical facilities and equipment (Zeithaml et al. 1990). Both parties agreed on that Kinnarps Arena held a fairly good and modern standard, but, without really standing out in the crowd. They both agreed on that the aisles and the kiosks queues generated a problem, however, the focus groups emphasized this problem to a much greater extent in comparison with HV71. Since the groups emphasized the problems of the aisles to such great extent, a recommendation is made that the problem should be investigated yet again. It is clear that it brings a major negative influence on the entire experience. Additionally, it prevents the potential of more sales in the kiosks since visitors can be discouraged to leave their seats because of the crowded aisles. While investigating the aisles, additional paint jobs and graphical material with pictures on for example profiles in the team should be added to further increase the satisfaction of the focus groups. Details in the servicescape, such as clappers, could potentially also increase the overall satisfaction.

5.1.4 Theoretical Analysis
From the comparison of answers between the focus groups and HV71 a conclusion could be drawn that the tangible dimension can be linked to gap 1 and 2 in the Gaps Model. Gap 1, includes inadequate marketing research orientation, this is a result of managements inability to collect accurate information about customers expectations. To get a picture of customers expectations of a service, information needs to be collected via marketing research (Wilson et al. 2012). Since the focus groups emphasize the problem with the queues greatly and HV71 only sees it as a concern, the interpretation of the problem from HV71s perspective is faulty, therefore gap 1 exists (Wilson et al. 2012). Gap 2, concerns absence of customer driven standards and poor service designs (Wilson et al. 2012). HV71 stated that they are aware of the problem with the queues. Given the fact that HV71 are still actively working with a solution to the queuing problem, it can be derived that HV71 are aware of that they have not reached what they conceive to be the customers satisfaction level, therefore gap 2 exists (Wilson et al. 2012).

5.2 RELIABILITY
5.2.1 Focus Group Answers
The focus groups considered the overall service performance to be good, but there was also room for improvement. One of the most important aspects of the service experience was the show around the game, and more specifically, the intro. The intro was conceived to be the light, sound, firework and ice-projection show prior to the start of the game. According to the groups, this made the audience excited and energized, thus setting the tone for the entire experience. Every group pointed out the importance of a well-made intro. Some groups even pointed out that the intro and show around the game
even exceeded the quality of the ice-hockey game itself. Except from the intro, entertainment in the period breaks also was of importance. A good show could potentially compensate for poor results on the ice. The groups also stressed that HV71 could improve the live show by altering it for each game, in order to generate a hype. A good introduction and show, that also included the spectators created a feeling of belongingness, almost comparable to a “cult” which was perceived by the groups as a unique phenomenon of live ice-hockey games.

5.2.2 HV71 Answers
From HV71’s perspective, the service arrangement was perceived to be good, but poor results on the ice have led to a diminished satisfaction amongst the spectators. Kinnarps Arenas design creates a good energetic environment but because of the results it has not reached its full potential. In addition to this, queues have had negative effects on the total experience. HV71 discussed the option of making the aisles broader, but that would risk Kinnarps Arena to lose its “kettle effect”.

5.2.3 Comparison of Answers
Both the focus groups and HV71 considered the service performance to be good. The reliability dimension is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Zeithaml et al. 1990). Both are aware that the energetic atmosphere in Kinnarps Arena is important for the overall service performance. However, the focus groups stress the energetic environment more. HV71 seem to believe that the energetic environment to a great extent is rooted in the results on the ice, the interviews with focus groups suggests otherwise. The show is a returning key word while investigating the reliability dimension. In unison, the focus groups find the light, sound, firework and ice-projection show to be superior to the final score of the game. It cannot be overlooked that results are an important variable in the overall service performance, but HV71 seems to underestimate the value of the show around the game. By generating a marketing hype around the show HV71 could potentially attract even more spectators. These spectators would be persons who are not especially interested in the ice-hockey itself, but rather to have a good time. HV71’s marketing efforts today are largely focused on the upcoming game, rather than the upcoming show. This is something that HV71 could consider to attract new customer groups. It also important for HV71 to alter the show from game to game. The current shows are performed under a long period of time without any alteration, by allowing change and generating a hype through their marketing communicating channels HV71 could according to the findings in this study increase the overall service performance and more easily attract generation Y.

5.2.4 Theoretical Analysis
From the comparison of answers between the focus groups and HV71 a conclusion could be drawn that the tangible dimension can be linked to Gap 1 in the Gaps Model. Gap 1, includes inadequate marketing research orientation, to get a picture of customers expectations of a service, information needs to be collected via marketing research
(Wilson et al. 2012). The service performance of the live ice-hockey game is good according to both parties, however there is a differences between HV71 and the focus groups interpretations of the energetic environment. The focus groups derives the energy to come from the show to a greater extent, HV71 on the other hand, derive that most of the energy comes from the game itself. Therefore a gap exists because of HV71s inability to collect accurate information about customers expectations (Wilson et al. 2012).

5.3 ASSURANCE

5.3.1 Focus Group Answers

The assurance dimension describes the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to convey trust and confidence (Zeithaml et al. 1990). The overall reaction from the focus groups while discussing safety concerns was that they had never reflected upon it. But when discussing it, “high-risk” games were after all the biggest safety concern. However, they felt an increased presence of security personnel during these games, which made them feel safer. Bad language from HV71’s fans could at times be a minor concern for the focus groups. The second safety concern that some groups discussed was the risk of getting hit by a flying puck. They knew that some sections in the stands had a higher risk of getting hit, but they also felt that if something were to happen, medical personnel would be quick to respond.

5.3.2 HV71 Answers

HV71 was aware of the safety concerns regarding “high-risk” games, and they also felt that they did what was required and controlled these safety concerns in a good manner. Extra personnel, and barricades are implemented during these types of games in order to assure the safety of both HV71’s fans and the visiting teams fans. Flying pucks was considered to be a minor safety problem, since the amount of people actually getting hit by a puck every season was extremely low in comparison to the number of spectators and games. HV71 was aware of the problem and therefore they always have medical personnel on stand-by in order to guarantee the spectators well being.

5.3.3 Comparison of Answers

Both HV71 and the focus groups were in unison with regard to the safety concern aspect. It does not impact the total service experience, therefore both parties conceives the games to be safe. “High-risk” games calls for an increased number of security personnel and barricades. HV71 meets these requirements in a good and professional manner, which makes the focus groups feel safe, hence almost eliminating the possible safety concerns for “high-risk” games. The issue with flying pucks was acknowledged by both parties but was conceived to be a minor issue. HV71 has medical personnel nearby at all times in case of emergency, and since the number of incidents is low, both HV71 and the focus groups considered the problem to be of little concern. The only factor that
HV71 could improve upon according to the focus groups is the bad language used by home fans.

5.3.4 Theoretical Analysis

From the comparison of answers between the focus groups and HV71 a conclusion could be drawn that no Gap can be identified in the assurance dimension.

5.4 EMPATHY

5.4.1 Focus Group Answers

The focus groups in general did not consider ice-hockey to be a sport directed to a specific age group. They did not consider this to be positive nor negative since ice-hockey is what they called a “mass-culture” experience. What they foremost lacked, was drink and food packages specialized to their specific age group. In addition, they considered the pricing to be slightly high and they lacked space to consume food and socialize. They also wanted the option of consuming both food and alcohol in the stands while watching the game. But in general, the show was in a way adapted to the age group in terms of music and energy.

5.4.2 HV71 Answers

HV71 recognize that they lack a food and drink package for generation Y. They would like to see specific sections of the arena being available for food and alcoholic beverages. Moreover, HV71 discussed some of the solutions that they had come up with to meet the demands of generation Y. Two of these initiatives were “after-work Fridays” and live music during weekend games. But HV71 stated that they did not aimed at a specific age group while creating these activities, they rather targeted all age groups since they consider ice-hockey to be an activity without any specific age.

5.4.3 Comparison of Answers

Both parties are aware that ice-hockey is not directed at a specific age group. Both parties also find this to be acceptable. As stated by the focus groups, food and drink packages directed to their age group would enhance the experience. HV71 seems to have acknowledged this, but without really implementing any solutions. Both parties seems to know what the target group wants, in terms of food and beverages, but foremost locations and areas to consume the food and beverages in. The ability to socialize both in the stands and in the arenas facilities while consuming alcohol has for the focus groups been of significance, since they consider the average age in the current bars to be high, thus not appealing. One solution by both the focus groups and HV71 is the possibility of consuming alcohol in selected areas of the stands. According to HV71, local laws prohibit them from allowing spectators to consume alcohol anywhere else than in the bars. However, as pointed out by HV71 some alternative solutions such as “after-work Fridays” and live music on weekend games has been implemented, but the value of con-
suming alcohol in the stands for the focus groups seems to be significantly higher than any other solution. The focus groups also mention the pricing to be slightly high, this is not acknowledged by HV71.

5.4.4 Theoretical Analysis
From the comparison of answers between the focus groups and HV71 a conclusion could be drawn that the empathy dimension can be linked to gap 1 and 2 in the Gaps Model. The empathy dimension describes the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers (Zeithaml et al. 1990). Gap 1 includes inadequate marketing research orientation, and according to the focus groups the pricing was considered to be slightly high, HV71 did not acknowledge pricing as a concern, therefore Gap 1 exists (Wilson et al. 2012).

Gap 2, HV71 has acknowledged the lack of food and drink packages, and facilities to consume them in. They have approached this problem to some extent, but they are still working on additional solutions to approach the age group. Therefore Gap 2 exists since there is an absence of customer driven standards, the current service standards in some areas are not in line with the focus groups expectations (Wilson et al. 2012).

5.5 RESPONSIVENESS
5.5.1 Focus Group Answers
The focus groups considered the information and security personnel to be sufficient. They are highly visible, but can sometimes be hard to connect with due to crowded and blocked aisles. This has throughout the study been of the most outstanding problems. Issues with walking in the arena during period breaks along with long and time consuming queues has a major impact on the total service experience. It also discourages the focus groups to make purchases since it sometimes takes the entire length of the period break to make a single purchase. The focus groups want a solution to the queuing problem. They have observed the “walk-trough kiosks” but would like to see further measures taken. The responsiveness dimension explains the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service (Zeithaml et al. 1990). But, when focusing on other factors in the responsiveness dimension the ice-hockey experience is perceived to be a non-complex service without the need for customer interaction.

5.5.2 HV71 Answers
According to HV71 the arena personnel does a good job, both the security and information personnel are always easy to access from a customer point of view. Medical and security personnel are constantly on stand-by and use walkie-talkies to have constant communication with each other. The queuing problem is apparent to HV71 and some solutions such as “walk-through kiosks” and application-based purchases have been implemented.
5.5.3 Comparison of Answers

Both the focus groups and HV71 agree upon that the number of information- and security personnel in the arena to be sufficient. However, the most prominent aspect for the responsiveness dimension is the queues. Both parties are aware of the problem but it is even more important for the focus groups. In the aspect of the focus groups, the queues have major negative impact on the total service experience, while HV71 sees it more like a logistic problem. However, the root to the problem does not lie within this dimension, rather it could be find in the tangible dimension. The focus groups did not have any implications on the kiosk-personnel regarding the queuing problem because they found the kiosk-personnel to be good, the focus groups started to discuss the queuing problem instead, therefore it is important to stress that the queuing problem has nothing to do with the responsiveness dimension.

5.5.4 Theoretical Analysis

From the comparison of answers between the focus groups and HV71 a conclusion could be drawn that no Gap can be identified in the assurance dimension.
5.6 IMAGE

Focus Groups Associations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive associations</th>
<th>Negative associations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HV71 is a top-team</td>
<td>Former top-team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bond to Jonkoping/local team</td>
<td>Negative results (recent years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere Kinnarps Arena</td>
<td>Lack of profiles</td>
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<tr>
<td>Well-known brand</td>
<td>No personal connections (profiles)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good fans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural bearers</td>
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</table>

HV71 Associations

| Good hockey                                   | Negative results (recent years)          |
| Good atmosphere                              |                                          |
| Strong brand                                 |                                          |
| Bond to Jonkoping region                     |                                          |
| Company want to associate with HV71          |                                          |
| Passion                                      |                                          |

5.6.1 Image Analysis

Positive associations with the brand as discussed in the theoretical section by Grönroos can forgive organizational flaws and mishaps (Grönroos, 1982). In this section it is apparent that the positive associations were expressed in more ways and more repeatedly than the negative associations by the focus groups. HV71 did not expressed the same amounts of associations, however, they touched upon the most important keywords. The only real negative associations were based upon poor results in recent years and the lack of profiles in the team. But clearly the positive associations out weighted this. From this we can derive that the focus groups may forgive HV71 in some of the dimensions were they found minor negative issues. If an organization has a good image, some service quality gaps have the potential to overseen by the spectators (Grönroos, 1982; Grönroos 1988).
6 HV71 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate where service quality gaps exist in professional Swedish ice-hockey organizations in terms of live ice-hockey games. In order to investigate this, three research questions were developed. The first research question was: What are the demands of generation Y in terms of service quality for live ice-hockey games? To answer this question a case study was conducted on HV71 and focus groups representing generation Y were interviewed. The empirical data collected showed that the most important positive factor for the focus groups was the show around the game. The most significant negative factor for the focus groups was the queuing problems of Kinnarps Arena. These two factors were by far the most discussed factors while conducting the focus group interviews. Hence, the most important factors for the focus groups were: the show around the game and not having to stand in line to purchase food and drinks during the game. In addition the food and drink packages and pricing was also mentioned, however these factors were not mentioned as frequently and the empathy dimension was generally ranked lower than the reliability and tangible dimensions.

The second research question was “Does HV71 understand the demands of Generation Y in terms of service quality?” To answer this question interviews with HV71 were conducted. The same questionnaire used in the focus groups, were also used for the interviews made with HV71 to enable an easy comparison of answers. The answers given by HV71 were to a large extent the same as the focus groups. However, HV71 seemed to have underestimated the importance of the show around the game and the queuing problems. The conclusions drawn from the analysis shows that HV71 has a good understanding of the demands of the focus group.

The third research question was “What service quality gaps can be identified in HV71s live ice-hockey games?” After analyzing the results, the service quality gaps found in HV71s live ice-hockey games can be traced to Gap 1 and Gap 2 in Gap Analysis Model. However, these gaps were only discovered in some of the service quality dimensions.

In this thesis HV71 has been used as a case study. The conducted research shows that HV71 has service quality gaps in terms of live ice-hockey games. In some of these aspects the organization underestimates the value of some factors in the live experience. The aspect of the experience that was underestimated according to the case study is the show around the game. From the results it can be concluded that an increased alteration and investments in the show around the game, and implementations of solutions for solving the queuing problem of Kinnarps Arena will increase the total perceived service quality for generation Y.
6.1 General Conclusion

According to this study, a conclusion can be drawn that in professional ice-hockey organizations today, there are gaps in the empathy, tangibles and reliability service quality dimensions in terms of live ice-hockey games. HV71 is one of the leading organizations in terms of attendance figures and should therefore have few if any gaps in their service quality. As proven in the study, gaps did exist.

Therefore organizations with lower attendance figures should arguably have at least the same gaps as HV71. The gaps identified did only have limited impact on the total service quality. Given the attendance figures of HV71 a conclusion could be drawn that their overall service quality is good and well planned. That is also why the remaining gaps could be difficult to close since they are either very specific or difficult to identify.

These gaps in professional ice-hockey organizations are according to the Gaps model caused by inadequate marketing research or inadequate use of marketing research (Gap 1) (Wilson et al. 2012). The gaps could also be caused by poor service designs or absence of customer driven standards (Gap 2) (Wilson et al. 2012).

Since Kinnarps Arena has been used as a model for many other modern arenas and the focus groups had negative feedback on its service scape, according to this study, generation Y could have implications on other professional hockey organizations arenas. The empathy and reliability dimensions gaps were in the case of HV71 found in the show and the drink and food packages. The focus groups valued the show around the game highly, this is likely to reflect upon the rest of Generation Y and can be generally applied to other organizations because of the demographical similarities between the teams spectators. The empathy aspect however was ranked low in the service dimension (see appendix ranking table) ranking and therefore had less significance to the focus groups than the other two. The very specific results of the empathy dimension can be hard to identify in other ice-hockey organizations, however there is a possibility that other gaps can be found within the same dimension. In regards to the assurance and responsiveness dimension it was identified that the focus groups had close to no implications on the security and staff. Since HV71 stated that they follow SHL standards the assurance and responsiveness findings should reflect on the entire league. HV71, had according to the study, a good image with many positive associations. This finding is difficult to link into a general perspective, however it should be stated that a having a positive image will make spectators more forgiving when it comes to minor mishaps.

Professional ice-hockey organizations should therefore apply the same analysis as the one conducted in this thesis to identify gaps in their organization. The results can be used as a guideline on where to start looking for gaps, however, the gaps found in the HV71 study are likely to be fewer than in organizations with lower attendance figures.
7 Implications for Future Research

As this thesis have been limited in terms of time and resources, and since the field of service quality in ice-hockey organizations is an extensive and complex area, further research can include a more extensive collection of empirical data. This can be achieved by conducting more extensive focus groups and interviews or combining quantitative and qualitative methods (triangulation).

Another interesting approach could be to include several ice-hockey clubs in the study instead of only using one. By including several ice-hockey organizations in the study, interesting conclusions could be drawn from the comparisons between the organizations in terms of customer demand and service quality gaps. An example could be to compare successful ice-hockey organizations (in terms of attendance figures) to less successful organizations, to get a better understanding of what successful teams do differently.

Furthermore sport marketing has the characteristics of tribalism as previously mentioned, and sport organizations are therefore unlikely to lose customers to rival teams in the same sport. Organizations can however lose customers to other alternative ways of consuming the sport, or other entertainments services. This characteristic makes the Swedish Hockey League which is co-owned by all the clubs in SHL a great platform for teams to help each other and share market information. This is an important factor for the growth of both individually organizations and the SHL as whole and could be an interesting subject to study in future research.
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## Appendix

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<th>Interview</th>
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<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Assurance</th>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Responsiveness</th>
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Ranking Table
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<td>Focus Group 82-86</td>
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**Interviewees:**

EmilWiklund  
VictorWakerius  
AlbinIsaksson
Did you experience that HV71’s event delivered as promised?

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Did you feel safe during the event?

__________________________________________________________

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How did you experience Kinnarps Arenas service scape?

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Do you think that HV71’s event was adapted to satisfied you and your age-group?

If you need would need help during the event, do you then believe that you can get the help you need?

How do you view HV71’s image?
How do you think the public view HV71's image?

All the questions that we have been asking (except for the last two) are based upon dimensions from a service quality model. Each question was ranked to one dimension. If you were to rank these dimensions in terms of service quality, the one you rank as 1 is the most important dimension:

- **Tangibles** – (Linked to question 3)
- **Reliability** – (Linked to question 1)
- **Assurance** – (Linked to question 2)
- **Empathy** – (Linked to question 4)
- **Responsiveness** – (Linked to question 5)