Overcoming Gender Bias Through Marketing

How to enhance the public perception of female ice hockey through marketing to generate more popularity?

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1. Abstract

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Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the effect gender bias has in sports and how marketing can be used to challenge gender bias.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper will use data collected from 188 surveys from registered fans of the Linköping Hockey Club.

Findings – This paper targets why female ice hockey is not as popular as male ice hockey. Theories such as marketing mix are used to identify the differences and similarities between the two teams as if they were products.

Practical implications – Sports leagues and clubs with male and female teams could use the results to limit gender bias against women in sports.

Originality/value – This will help limit gender bias through a marketing perspective, by specifically addressing gender bias in sports marketing.

Key Words: Gender Bias, Marketing, Sports Marketing, Ice Hockey
2. Acknowledgements

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3. Introduction

3.1 Background

In 1869 when the Olympics were revived in Greece to what is now known as the Modern Olympics, there were zero female events (International Olympic Committee, 2016). Four years later in Paris, the International Olympic Committee added two female events, tennis and golf, the next three Olympics sequentially added archery in 1904, tennis, figure skating in 1908 and swimming in 1912 (International Olympic Committee, 2016), then it would be twelve years till another female event was added which was fencing in 1924. Since then new additions of female events are still being added today. Female hockey got added to the Olympics in 1998. As of 2016 there are 145 women events and 306 total events in the summer Olympics (International Olympic Committee, 2016). This shows that even today more than half of the Olympic events are only including males.

Nowadays there are still a lot of inequalities between men and women in sports, for instance in the Canadian women’s hockey league CWHL, female players are not paid and need to have a day job to support themselves while playing in the league (Longman, 2013). A salary for male players in ice hockey is usually around $6,500,000. The funding of the women’s league costs $700,000 (University of New Brunswick, 2014), this means that male players earn more than the actual funding of the whole female league.

All around the world women’s sports teams typically do not draw as much popularity and thus not as much profitability as male sports teams. The general pay gap in Sweden during 2011 was at 15.8% between men and women in the Swedish workforce (European Commission, 2013). Understanding the problem, a solution through marketing could be proposed and applied to different sports and countries around the world.

On the topic of how women are perceived in sports Hanson argues that women are seen as “an object pleasurable for the eye” (2012, p.15). The author cites as an example the famous tennis player Serena Williams, though she won many prizes and is listed as one of the greatest tennis players (regardless gender) of all times, news reporters choose to focus more on her outfit than her results in her matches. The media coverage tends to favor male players on airtime compared to women because women’s athletic abilities are considered to be inferior to men’s abilities (Hansen,
Gender bias is unequal treatment, expectations and opportunities due to the sex of an employee (Hill et al, 1983). Gender bias is not special to the work place and has a presence in everyday life.

Previous research on female sports marketing in Media Sport showed that women are not marketed as much as men, because men were present before in sports (Wenner, 1998). Advertisers in sports marketing only market teams that have big audiences but with time, the female audience will continue to grow. Bush et al uses word-of-mouth as a marketing tool to promote females in sports (Bush et al 2005). Showing the effect of word-of-mouth with teenage girls in the sport market, which is that the susceptibility of teenagers to impersonal influence and self-esteem, are related to word-of-mouth behavior distributed by athletes.

In this thesis, we will explore marketing of female sports, using the Linköping Hockey Club’s female team for research. Marketing methods such as marketing mix and word-of-mouth can play an important role in bringing a bigger audience to the Linköping Hockey Club, in turn generating loyal fans. We will look at how female ice hockey is marketed today and what is the current gender issue found in marketing. First we will research for theories about gender roles in sports as well as female representation in the media. Then we will investigate if social networks can help the Linköping Hockey club generate more popularity.

3.2 Why Do People Like Ice Hockey?

In the Case of the National Hockey League one of the biggest draws and drawbacks to hockey could be the violent nature of the sport. In the National Hockey league players are not ejected from the game for fighting, fighting is tolerated to a certain extent (National Hockey league Official Rules, 2016-2017). Attempts have been made to ban fighting from the national hockey league. Reasons include that fighting is “non-sportsmen” like conduct and has no place in a professional setting. Others claim that serious injuries have resulted from fights and that fighting should be banned for it is in the best interest of the players. Gary Bettman a NHL commissioner said at a 2007 press conference

“fighting has always had a role in the game ... from a player safety standpoint, what happens in fighting is something we need to look at just as we need to look at
hits to the head. But we're not looking to have a debate on whether fighting is good or bad or should be part of the game." (CBC Sports, 2007)

Although the National Hockey League is a male league, ice hockey is one of the few sports where fighting occurs on a consistent basis excluding fighting sports such as boxing.

3.3 Problem Statement

Organized sports has a long tradition of gender bias. People tend to not follow female sports as much as they follow male sports. Both male and female sports leagues should aim to be equal in the audience's eye. The issue lies within marketing. Marketing can help overcome gender bias on sports but also create a more substantial future for organized female sports. Females sports are either not marketed as much as male sports or they are marketed the exact same way.

Through the use of marketing it is possible to challenge the lack of attention given to female sports. Generating more attention to female leagues would not only help combat the gender bias but also increase the target audience of Hockey clubs managing both a men's and women's league.

3.4 Study Purpose and Aim

The Aim of this paper is to understand gender bias in female sports and to research solutions to overcome gender bias through marketing. This study will examine marketing theories as well as qualitative and quantitative elements to formulate a solution to limit gender bias against women in sports. Clubs that wish to limit gender bias against women in sports could use our results.

3.5 Research Questions

The following questions are formulated to help solve and define answers relating to the thesis. They are also designed to create a better understand of the topic and help complete the analysis.

- What are the views on female ice hockey among ice hockey fans?
- How is female ice hockey marketed today?
- In what way can marketing strategies challenge gender bias in female ice hockey?
• How can younger generations be targeted specifically, to form a future audience based for female ice hockey?

4. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter we will concentrate on the marketing theories applicable to overcome the gender inequalities in sport and more specifically in ice hockey. Starting with marketing mix, as it is fundamental for an organization to use the variables of this theory to have a stronger proposition for its targeted audience. Then, the use of Word-of-mouth to control the organization’s image will be examined, wisdom of crowds to get innovative strategies and now better what the customer wants and social networks to better target new audiences. We will then describe how genders are represented in society and in sports.

4.1 Marketing of Sport

This section will present the theories applicable to the marketing aspect of sport, we will first introduce briefly how sports are marketed, then the importance of marketing mix and how it can be implemented in sport marketing. We will talk about the power of word-of-mouth compared to advertising and how to use it, then the help of wisdom of crowd. Finally, how to target the audience through social networks.

4.1.1 Brief Introduction of Sport Marketing

Sport marketing is traditional marketing that focuses on products and services relating to sports. The marketing method used for sports evolved exceedingly the last decades (Milne et al, 1999, p.1) with the quick adoption of new technologies in strategies, the appearance of social networks, and the development of modern sport facilities, sports marketing is constantly evolving.

Sports marketing includes all activities that satisfy the needs of customers, focusing on two major topics marketing of sports and marketing of industrial products or services and other customers in sport marketing itself (Mullin et al, 1993, p.6). While sport customers can be split into two different markets: the spectators and the participants (Milne et al, 1999, p.2). The sport spectators attend events, watch them on television or listen to them on radio (Brooks, 1994) and
now follow their teams on social networks and official websites. And sport participants are the people who play the sport. Those two markets are very different and distinct in the fact that the need of the first one is satisfied by spectatorship and the need of the other one is satisfied through participation (Milne et al, 1999, p.3). Satisfying those needs with different delivery systems makes the exchange process easier. The sports marketing organization should focus the most on its spectators market. In order to satisfy their needs they must provide them with entertainment, acceptance and sociability needs, ultimately allowing opportunities for fans to interact freely without any engagement (Melnick, 1993). The option to follow sports events by attendance, television, social networks, radio and newspapers lead to various delivery systems to market sports (Milne et al, 1999, p.3).

Another important aspect of sport marketing is not to confuse marketing of sport with marketing through sport. Marketing of sport “refers to producing and marketing goods and services directly to end-users - sport spectators” (Milne et al, 1999, p.3). When marketing through sports “involves corporations affiliating with spectator and participant sport to reach their own consumer” (Mullin, 1985). This aspect involves advertising, sponsorship, athlete endorsement, and the use of luxury seating to entertain clients. “The sport product can either be classified as a consumer good (marketing of sport) or an industrial good (marketing through sport).” (Milne et al, 1999, p.3).

4.1.2 Marketing Mix

Sports marketing, markets both tangible and intangible services. Tangible products could include a team's jersey or other merchandise with a team's name and image on it (Mihai, 2013, p.299). And intangible services include the experience of going to a game or watching a game on television.

Although sports marketing is a specific form of marketing many of the core concepts of marketing still applies to sports marketing, such as Kotler’s Marketing Mix (1967). Before developing a Marketing mix strategy the sport organization has to divide its market into sub-groups called segments, and choose a positioning strategy for each segment (Mihai, 2013, p.299). Also called four “P”s standing for Product, Price, Promotion and Place, which was first an idea by Jerome McCarthy in his book from 1960 Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach, and then further developed by Philip Kotler in 1967 in his textbook Marketing Management. This became the main reference for marketing mix (Mahajan, 2013). “(The) Marketing Mix is a set of
controllable variables that the firm can use to influence the buyer’s response” (Kotler, 1967). Marketing mix can be used by companies to develop a unique selling point and a brand image (Mahajan, 2013). Those four elements are grouped together because it is important that they are coordinated together in an integrated fashion (Mihai, 2013, p.299).

Marketing mix is at the heart of the decision-making process of the organization (Borden, 1964). While developing the mix it is important to research and gain knowledge about the consumer, the competition, the company, and the climate (Mihai, 2013, p.299). Those factors must be treated with careful attention. If the sport marketer ignores one of these factors, the chances of making wrong decisions are largely increased (Mihai, 2013, p.299).

**Product:**

The product is the centerpiece of the company’s marketing mix, it is the product or service a company is selling to satisfy the customers’ need and/or desires (Kotler, 1967). In the case of ice hockey this would include merchandise or game tickets. In the marketing of any kind of sports two important concepts have a big implication. The first being the core product, which is defined as the actual game, that the marketer has no control over (Mihai, 2013, p.300). It is important not to promise facts that the marketer cannot ensure, such as over-promising how good the athletes may perform or how exciting the game is going to be. The second aspect being the significance of
product extensions, this is where the marketer has to achieve an acceptable level of quality (Mihai, 2013, p.300).

Usually sport organization offer to the customers a service, in the form of physical activity realized by the athletes, entertainment or experience. Most of the time there is no physical product that the audience can take home, but some intangible benefits can be offered by the organization as a lifestyle, being part of a social group or even a belief system (Mihai, 2013, p.300). The product proposed also includes the packaging and the design. The targeted audience from different segments forces marketers to introduce the product in different ways (Kotler, 1967) as an example the game can be packaged by marketers as a family event and offer family tickets (Mihai, 2013, p.300). Packaging the products consists in introducing the product in the best manner possible to attract the targeted audience in the selected segments in the purchase of the product (Kotler, 1967). To package the core product (the game itself), requires to communicate the expectations of the game and to supply information before the point of purchase. The physical part of the product can be the merchandise.

**Price:**

The product’s price represents what the customer agrees to spend to obtain a good or service (Kotler, 1967). The organization has to find the right price for its audience, it can be determined with the following factors: the customers (with the psychological pricing), with the competition and to cover the cost of goods sold plus a profit margin to be made selling the goods (Mihai, 2013, p.301).

Sport pricing is complex and has a major impact on the success of the marketing plan (Mihai, 2013). The price of a product can be manipulated and readily changed in different ways. (i.e. using student price, proposing two for one tickets, downing the price during crisis periods etc.). Furthermore, marketers choose the price accordingly so that the customer’s satisfaction from the experience surpasses the financial and personal costs.

**Promotion:**

Promoting means creating awareness on the organization (Borden, 1964). Promoting might requires using a variety of methods to get the attention of the potential customers targeted.
It is not just sufficient to gain the customer’s attention, the marketer has to keep it long enough to give his message (Kotler, 1967).

Promotion in sport marketing involves a variety of complementary activities. These activities have for main goal to get the attention, create interest and awareness and at the end to encourage the customer to purchase the product. Promotion does not only consist of communicating with the audience, but also educating them (Mihai, 2013, p.302). The organization has to speak to the customer about the product, remind them the benefits of this product and try to persuade them to purchase.

Promotion is not specific to just advertising, but can rather span across many mediums of communication (Mihai, 2013, p.302). Concerning sports marketing this could not be truer. Advertising corresponds to paid or non-personal communications concerning a sport product or service, it is usually spread through prints, broadcasts, electronic and other forms of media that are created and formed to draw the attention and encourage purchase (Mihai, 2013, p.302). Advertising in sports marketing can involve broadcast commercials, direct mailing, facility signage, manufactured media (Mihai, 2013, p.302)

Another method are applicable to promotion such as sponsorship; sponsorship “refers to the relationship between a corporation and a sport organization as a tool to develop brand image and customer loyalty as a result of the association” (Mihai, 2013, p.302). Public relations is a method of promotion that “is the collection of activities, communications, and media coverage that convey who the sport organization is and what they have to offer, all in the effort to enhance their image and prestige.” (Mihai, 2013, p.302). Licensing is one of the quickest growing methods of sport promotion that includes the building of a strategic alliance, where the manufacturer of the sports products allows a second party to manufacture that product in exchange of specific royalties or payments (Mihai, 2013, p.302).

Finally, the last method could be personal contacts, which consists in involving direct communication between the sport organization representative and a sports customer that would end in exchanging information (Mihai, 2013, p.302). Another goal of the promotion process is to create a favorable opinion about sport products in the consumer’s mind and then to concentrate on selling the product to the customer.
Place:

Place or distribution is the actions used to get the product to the consumer (Kotler, 1967). The marketer has to analyze the types of distribution available and choose the ones that will deliver the product to the right place, meaning where the customer is and where he usually shops (Mihai, 2013, p.301). The physical location of the sport may have factors contributing favorably or unfavorably on the marketing plan chosen by the organization. Marketers have to make sure the place is easily accessible (ramps, parking etc.), has an appealing physical appearance, that the environment is convenient and functional and finally that the surroundings are safe and pleasant.

Figure 2: Sportscape model

Studies demonstrated that layout accessibility, facility aesthetics, electronic equipment and displays, seating comfort and facility cleanliness can hugely influence the way sport followers see the quality of the stadium (Wakefield et al, 1996). Sport followers’ satisfaction is highly linked with the perception of the quality of sportscape, which means the higher this perception, is the higher their satisfaction will be (Wakefield et al, 1996). When the attendants are satisfied with the sportscape, they are more likely to stay longer in the infrastructure (and may spend more money), they will also be more likely to return (Mihai, 2013, p.301). This linkage between the followers’ satisfaction and the perception of sportscape is represented on the previous page in figure 2.
4.1.3 Word-Of-Mouth

Word-of-Mouth refers to “person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, a product or a service” (Arndt, 1967, p.5). Studies have shown that word-of-mouth has a significant impact on consumers’ buying behavior and contentment with products (Mangold et al., 1999; Murray, 1991; Richins, 1983). Consumer marketers consider Word-of-mouth, recently renamed “Buzz marketing” as an important component of marketing strategies. Customers have a tendency to trust and prefer, information from word-of-mouth (Bush et al., 2005). In this manner sports companies recognize that creating a “buzz”, either via Internet or celebrity endorsement is an integral part of their strategy in marketing communication (Rosen, 2000).

Another strong effect of the word-of-mouth is the independence of the communicator (Bansal et al, 2000 and Swanson et al, 2003, p.152), a customer has no gain in giving this information to the receiver. Furthermore, because the information comes from a person the consumer knows, word-of-mouth tends to be more reliable and trustworthy (Solomon, 2015, p.523). In addition, contrary to advertising, the recommendations made through word-of-mouth come with a social pressure, the receiver wants to conform what the communicator says (Arndt, 1967). Though marketers spend a lot of money in advertising, word-of-mouth remains more powerful, it persuades two-third of all consumer goods sales (Gaffney, 2001).

Concerning word-of-mouth in sports marketing “Word-of-mouth is far and away the most powerful force in the marketplace” (Silverman, 1997, p.32), because “information received in a face-to-face manner is more accessible than information presented in a less vivid manner” (Herr et al. 1991). Word-of-mouth has a bigger impact on customers than direct advertising, and with this increase of accessibility the customer is more likely to refer to it during their decision making process before purchasing (Biehal et al. 1986 and Wyer et al. 1986).

Sports core products are intangible and more difficult to evaluate before purchase (Parasuraman et al, 1985), customers tend to rely more on personal information about intangible products before purchasing (Lessig et al, 1991). Word-of-mouth related to sports seems particularly more important today, as information spreads more rapidly via social networks, e-mail, fan-initiated websites and radio (Swanson et al, 2003, p.152).
Word-of-mouth could then create more awareness with the people that don’t know anything about female sports, or people that have a bad opinion about female sports. Unsure customers would trust the messenger and would want to know more about it.

**Negative Word-of-mouth:**

Word-of-mouth has to be considered carefully, because bad rumors can be as powerful as good recommendations (Solomon, 2015, p.527). In addition, customers give more importance to the negative word-of-mouth they receive than positive comments. Particularly when the customer is considering a new product, they are likely to pay more attention to negative feedbacks and spread them to other receivers (Lutz, 1975). Research demonstrated that negative word-of-mouth decreases the believability of a company’s advertising but also affects the customer’s behavior towards a product and its intention to buy it (Smith et al, 1995 and Bone, 1995).

It is also important to remember as people transmit messages from one to another, miscommunication may occur. When people transmit information distortions inevitably happens (Bartlett, 1920). Negative word-of-mouth can then become worse with people spreading it and changing the original information.

**Market to target with Word-of-mouth:**

While word of mouth is important for all age segments, research suggests that it is especially important for younger generations and females. The teen market is one of the quickest growing markets for the word-of-mouth behavior (Bush et al., 2005). Studies indicated that teens and young adults spend nearly $170 billion annually (Solomon, 2015, p.454) of their own and their parents’ money. Sports, Internet and movies are big influencing tools in this market. Using “Buzz Marketing” in sports is of crucial importance because of the interactivity of teens with media.

The groups of people in this market are also called Gen Yers, millennials or Echo Boomers, born between 1984 and 2002. This group, unlike their parents or older siblings, tends to have relatively traditional values and want to fit in rather than being rebels (Solomon, 2015, p.455). They are the first generation to grow up with computers at home, where they live in a “thumb culture” (Solomon, 2015, p.455). They communicate easily with their phones, online and conduct several tasks at the same time to share information.
The female portion of the teen market is considered by consumer marketers as more important. Due to their gender roles women are more likely to engage in Word-of-mouth (Bakan, 1966). Teenage girls are more able than teenage boys to recommend services to their friends, especially if their preferred athlete endorses it. Thus young girls are quite adept at spreading Word-of-mouth (Bush et al., 2005).

The flourishing group of young girls in the market tend to rely on their friends and the media to purchase services and products related to sports as they grow and develop their self-esteem (Bush et al., 2005).

4.1.4 Wisdom of Crowds

With social media organizations do not market to consumers, but market with customers. This theory states that groups are smarter than the smartest people in them, in other words a group of people may succeed easier than an individual on its own (Surowiecki, 2004).

People’s first impressions about other people are inaccurate. Recruiter’s first impressions during job interviews do not tend to equate with subsequent performance. But when the first impressions of many recruiters are aggregated, it tends to correlate strongly with the performance the interviewee will give (Eisenkraft, 2013). When people give estimations on the success of a product or not, alone their estimations might not be accurate. When regrouped with others the average of estimations becomes more accurate.

It implies that a large number of customers could predict a successful marketing campaign or how we could get more audience for a product. A group may be more influential because people share their ideas but three characteristics should be respected: first people must have their own ideas and opinions without being influenced by the rest of the group, Secondly the members of the groups should come from different backgrounds so that they will have different visions and thirdly each person in the group has to share their ideas, and there must be no leader who takes control of the group. Wisdom of crowd can even be used inside the organization itself to find new ideas. This method could help the club finding new creative methods to attract more audience to the female team’s matches.
4.1.5 Social network

This theory is not supported from an academic article but is written by a journalist who specialized in promoting sports through social networks. Social media’s constant engagement makes it possible for sports teams to conceive enthusiasm and emotion by emphasizing the personal elements of the victories (Clapp, 2017). Spreading new and original content like: a showcase with a high-profile player, promote rivalries between teams or put the spotlight on fans and interviewing the most devoted fans (Clapp, 2017).

The media that the audience uses the most today are social media and television (Smith, 2013). Advertising the matches through the television could be costly for both male and female Ice Hockey Leagues, however social media pages can be created for free and it is cheaper to promote advertisements with social media. Furthermore it would be beneficial for Hockey clubs to target a younger audience to maintain a loyal fan base. Fans use social media to connect with their favorite sport teams and become more loyal (Clapp, 2017).

With the apparition of social network, though many sport organization still lack in understanding the need of social media, and does not see it as a marketing tool. A lot of new strategies were invented by sport organizations to create a new community that is active by following the teams on social media platforms (Clapp, 2017). One effective strategy is to capture the enthusiasm of sports fans and allow them to amplify this passion for their favorite team; it created a big amount of brand advocates that can become more valuable than advertisements (Clapp, 2017).

From a financial point of view, social media is a wise investment for the future of any organization (Clapp, 2017). A sport team’s fan-base can be increased with an effective and powerful social media strategy and some other community based efforts (Clapp, 2017). This increase in fan-base would inherently increase the market of potential ticket and merchandise buyers.

Clapp analyzed how sport organizations can use social networks and suggest some new methods to successfully improve your organization’s reach to fans through social media:

Find and prioritize the best social network to communicate with the audience: It may seem attractive to try to reach the audience with all social networks together, however it can become a waste of time (Clapp, 2017). Demographics studies showed that the categories of people that use social medias (like Facebook, Snapchat or Pinterest) vary broadly, this variance must be accounted
when creating the overall strategy (Clapp, 2017). Choosing one predominant social media when its demographics are not the desired target audience will be a poor allocation of resources; it would consist of receiving a little value in exchange for all the effort given (Clapp, 2017). An interesting social media platform to reach women could be Pinterest, this social network has a user base composed predominantly of women (Clapp, 2017). This platform could provide an excellent platform to catch the attention of women to create a female fan-base and engage with it.

Influence of the players: compared to any other industry, sport organizations have an advantage to create a powerful strategy, which is their players (Clapp, 2017). With their own name and set of followers, athletes are great brand advocates to any business. Sport organizations can use media as a stage to promote exciting content, which can help enhance their brand’s profile without significant monetary or time investment (Clapp, 2017). Moreover, it is mandatory that the players keep a good image on social networks, they have to know the do's and do not's of social media use, so that they represent the team with a positive image at all times (Clapp, 2017). Facebook posts and other public messages posted with poor taste, even to a personal contact, can badly alter the organization’s image.

Collect and use feedback: Through Social networks a close and intimate connection with the fans is created. Meaning that Facebook, Twitter and other social media platforms can be used as tools to gather feedbacks from their followers (Clapp, 2017). Instantaneity can become tremendously valuable when it is used with a creative way. As an example, the Boston Red Sox, used the immediacy of social networks through twitter polls to allow fans in the stadium to request music during rain delays (Clapp, 2017). This action made the fans feel more engaged and ultimately feel like they were part of the team (Clapp, 2017).

4.2 Gender Roles in Society and in Sports

This section will present the effects of gender roles and stereotypes in sports. We will first introduce gender roles today, how they carry into sports and the issues that come with gender roles in sports marketing. Then explore why people like ice hockey and how it is related to gender.

4.2.1 Gender Roles

Gender-Role identity according to Customer Behavior: buying having and being states, ones biological gender is not the ultimate factor that determines if he or she will express “sex-
typed traits” (Solomon, 2015). Sex-typed traits are characteristics associated with either males or female, thus masculinity and femininity. The characteristics of sex-typed traits depend on factors such as culture and environment (Solomon, 2015). In one culture what may be socially acceptable for one who identifies as masculine maybe completely taboo in another culture (Solomon, 2015). Psychologists defined gender “as a principal of social organization that structures relation between men and women” (Crawford et al, 1989, p.147)

Both masculine and feminine gender roles start at young age in western society. Necessities such as diapers come in pink colors for girls and blue for girls (Solomon, 2015). Although the media plays a huge role in perpetuating the stereotype of how masculine and feminine sex roles should act (Wood, 1997).

Gender studies suggest that by destabilizing traditional gender categories, we can get more inclusive sport participation for everyone. Males and females engaging in what was seen as “gender inappropriate” sports are incredibly important (Heywood et al, 2003).

4.2.2 Gender Roles in Sport

The idea of gender is passed down from generation to generation. As opposed to sex, which is strictly female or male (Solomon, 2015). Therefore what one knows about gender is relative to one's surroundings and culture. Media representation is distributing information that represents an exaggerated image (Firoz, 2009). Through technology and the Internet, the world is the most it has ever been connected. Information is not just unique to one area or culture, but has the potential to be available all over the world (Williams, 1991). Furthermore media does not only represent the world but can also make the world look more desirable to the eye of the public and make it merchandisable (Williams, 1991). What the media spreads and reproduces is not chosen randomly, nothing is neutral and everything has consequences (Williams, 1991).

As previously mentioned, women are mostly represented as “an object pleasurable for the eye” (Hanson, 2012, p.15). In sport media comments often sexually objectifies female athletes and also female fans in the audience (Messner et al, 2003). Evidence implies a trend incrementing the sexualization of female athletes comparable to the increase of their visibility (APA, 2007, p.8). Between 1997 and 1999 only ten percent of the photographs in Sports Illustrated were of female athletes and five percent of these pictures were “pornographic/ sexually suggestive”, from the pictures taken of men during this period only two percent fell into this category (Fink et al, 2002).
Only thirty-four percent of the photographs showed women actively engaged in sports against sixty-six percent for men.

When examining the media depicting women in sports, one must ask themselves: who produces these clips? Whom do the clips target? What is missing? Why? And, how does it relate to sports (Fisher et al, 2013). To answer those questions in sport studies it is important to remember that: market conditions can be oppressive to some, empowering to others, and offer the potential to do progressive and regressive cultural work, sometimes simultaneously. Marketing conditions could lead to sell a strong female athlete icon to a more financially powerful female demographic (Heywood et al, 2003, p.11).

Customer’s perception of female sports:

Customers have a different perception of female sports in relation to male sports because society has perpetuated different perceptions of masculine and feminine characteristics, often linked to males and females (Bem, 1981). Gender schema theory is categorizing sex-based traits (Bem, 1981, p.355). Gender schema is passed down knowledge from one generation to the next. It teaches from a young age the association between males with masculinity and females with femininity.

A study by Amy Jones and Jennifer Greer consisted of placing an image of an individual female athlete with a short text following. Images consisted of either a masculine or feminine female athlete playing a masculine or feminine sport. In the experiment Jones and Greer discovered that males have a higher interest in a feminine women playing a feminine sport (volleyball), rather than a masculine women playing the same sport. Females on the other hand expressed higher interest when a masculine woman was photographed playing either a masculine or a feminine sport. Given that sports typically have a target audience of males (Demographic Partitions, 2016), therefore males are more interested in female sports if both the sport and its players are regarded as feminine.

The female ice hockey players in the U.S. are not all earning salaries and if they are it is way less than what the male team earns, because they are not earning salaries they are not perceived as real athletes by the audience (University of New Brunswick, 2014). For example the U.S. Women’s Ice Hockey team struck during the International Ice Hockey Federation World Championship in Michigan, because they demanded the same treatment as men (Garcia, 2017).
Vast amounts of information can be shared all over the world; information around sports perpetuates a specific gender representation. Creedon states, “around the globe, sport is a gendered cultural institution. Equally so, the media system that spans the globe is a gendered cultural institution” (Creedon, 1998, p.90). Journals tend to publish articles that will interest a vast amount of people. Men are more present in sports media than women, due to the fact they have a deeper history with sports and have cumulated a larger following over the years. Journals consider that there are not enough desired demographics to publish females yet. The Wall Street Journal stated about female basketball players “They don’t dunk. They don’t talk trash. There isn’t a 7-footer among them. So why on earth has women’s basketball been ordained as the Next Hot Sport?” (Fastis, 1996), with this quote the reporter states the concept of men’s “superiority” and women’s “inferiority”. Female basketball players do not look like professional male basketball players, and this would be the reason why female sports should not be as present as male sports in media. The reporter later states “Could it be because, well, they don’t dunk, talk trash or stand 7-feet tall?” (Fastis, 1996). Fastis depicts the female players as innocent, team-orientated, and implies that women’s sports give to the audience a throwback to how sports used to be played before. Athletes would enjoy the game and it was fun for the fans to watch. Female sports can then be attractive to audience as they have nostalgic feelings and give sportsmanship values back to the public.

4.2.3 Gender Issues in Sports Marketing

The most important difference between the male and female Ice Hockey leagues would be their history, hockey dates as far back as London in 1776 (Master Michel Angelo, 1776). The earliest professional Men's Ice hockey leagues date back to 1904 (Mason, 1998) with many prior years of amateur leagues.

Attempts have been made to differentiate the women’s ice hockey from men’s ice hockey, thus through a marketing perspective changed the product of women’s ice hockey. The Ottawa Lassies a Canadian team notoriously dressed up as “school girls” for their games, this was an attempt to attract more popularity and sponsorship (University of New Brunswick, 2014). Olympian Cassie Campbell claims that the Canadian women’s ice hockey team would spend up to thirty minutes preparing before the game, the reason for this was for the hopes that a possible close up lasting up to two seconds could attract more sponsorships (University of New Brunswick, 2014).
Mordecai Richler a Canadian writer wrote an article in 1981 titled what *Hockey needs is more violence*. Suggesting that knowing how to fight is a skill set just as valuable as knowing how to skate or shooting the puck. Violence is a masculine trait (Furtuna, 2014); therefore attempting to feminize ice hockey may be counterproductive if the goal is to increase tickets sales. However masculinizing or over masculinizing female ice hockey could lead to an increase in ticket sales. Perhaps encouraging and marketing women’s ice hockey as more violent may increase the popularity of female ice hockey.

4.3 Limitations of Theoretical Framework

The social network theory is not supported by an academic article. This theory remains relevant to the subject because it discusses commonly used social media platforms that are frequently used today by sport organizations to reach their target and correspond with the audience. Furthermore, it will be tested through our empirical findings.

Due to time limitations, we will not be able to test the wisdom of crowds theory. However, wisdom of crowds is an effective theory to know what the customers both need and desire. Wisdom of crowds also helps finding creative strategies therefore, this theory was kept in our theoretical framework. Additionally, as the ideas come directly from the customers it is one of the most accurate way to know how to prepare the product for the audience.
5. Methodology

The following will explain the methodology chosen to conduct research. Reasons for each theory will be determined accordingly. The section will cover how data was collected and analyzed. As well as elaborate which method was used to collect different mediums of data along with explaining why each medium was chosen.

5.1 Research Approach

This thesis uses a combination of both deductive and inductive theory but focusing more on inductive theory. Deductive theory builds on concepts and theoretical framework that logically formulate a hypothesis (Bryman et al, 2011). Inductive theory uses the data collected then uses theories and concepts that inspired the research to draw inferences, “theory is outcome of research” (Bryman et al, 2011, p.13). We chose to start with some inductive theories allowing us the freedom to conduct research then using that data to connect with those theories. However, we still used the deductive method to choose theories and push our research in the proper direction.

5.2 Data Collection

Data was collected through two mediums. The first being an interview that would help develop and solidify our theory, the second medium being surveys. Once our theories were put together we started to send out surveys to ice hockey fans in Linköping Sweden.

When deciding on our topic we tried to reach out to a few other employees within the Linköping Hockey Club such as Magnis Haveliv. Once we purposed an interview about How to enhance public perception on female in ice hockey through marketing to generate more popularity? He politely declined our offer because he did not feel he was knowledgeable in our specific topic. He put us in contact with Kim Martin General Manager of the Linköping Hockey Club and responsible of the marketing team. She would then accept our proposal and gave up her time to share her personal experiences dealing with our topic as well as helped us distribute our surveys.
5.2.1 Interview Method

Interviewing people gives a unique look as to what is really happening. Researchers use this method to allocate unique information or interpretation in which the interviewees contain (Stake, 2010). When writing our interview for the Linköping Ice Hockey staff, we choose to use a semi-structured method of interview. We did this because it would allow flexibility for the interviewee and adjust emphases in the results of the interview (Bryman et al, 2011). Due to the fact that the correspondent is extremely knowledgeable combined with their experience inside the sports marketing industry and her experience as a female ice hockey player, a semi-structured interview ensured that relevant data would be collected.

5.2.2 Survey Method

Surveys allow one to get a tremendous amount of information form the researchers desired community in a short amount of time and have a minimal cost (Wright, 2005). Our survey primarily consists of qualitative data, however the survey did contain quantitative questions. Using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data is the best way to find contradictions between qualitative findings and quantitative results (Wisdom et al, 2013). Factors such as limited resources and target audience that suits an electronic survey lead us to take advantage of a web survey (Bryman et al, 2011).

To test the theories, present in the theoretical framework and the research questions surveys covered a variety of topics were including in our survey such as hockey preferences and why, also a range of marketing questions to determine how effective marketing is now and how it can be improved (see in appendix, 8.1 survey). We asked questions with multiple choice answers and questions where the respondent could answer with a short text or a long text, this will allow respondents to better express themselves and to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data. The survey was shared till a level of saturation occurred. To obtain information our survey was sent to the Linköping Hockey Club then distributed to their membership newsletter via email. We chose this sample because they have interest and knowledge about the Linköping Hockey Club focus of our study.

We will separate the answers we get from our respondents by gender, to analyze the perception and opinion about female in sports, and what the fan-base thinks about the female and male team. Also by age to analyze how the different generations get information provided by
Linköping Hockey Club, to understand how the organization can differ its communication to reach each age category.

5.3 Data Analysis

Data from the surveys will be analyzed from a univariate analysis approach. Univariate analysis occurs when focusing on one variable at a time (Bryman et al., 2011). According to Bryman and Bell “Frequency tables provides the number of people and the percent belonging to each of the categories for the variable in question.” (Bryman et al., 2011, p.342). Our survey divides up the participants into many categories that will be used for analysis. Tables will be made using the data, since tables make understanding and interpreting data relatively easy. (Bryman et al., 2011).

When analyzing qualitative data the analytic induction was used. Analytic induction takes a rough definition of a research question then formulates it into an explanation of the research question, examination of cases occurs through the perspective of research questions, if there are deviant cases the research must be altered to fit all of the cases or there can be no deviant cases which ultimately leads to end the examination of cases as well as data collection (Bryman et al., 2011). This excludes data collected from our interview since it was used to formulate our research question. However the qualitative data from the surveys will be analyzed in this fashion.

5.4 Validity and Reliability

The reliability issues are usually intimately associated with the subjectivity of the researcher (Wilson, 2010). To have the best level of reliability possible we tried not to adopt a subjective approach and remain as objective as possible. The validity of research depends on the extent at which requirements of scientific research method the researchers followed, while generating research findings (Dudovskiy, 2010).

The sample used to collect data was 188 respondents, as well as a digitally recorded interview; the larger the sample results in high probability that the data is trustworthy and reliable. While creating our survey we realized rather redundant questions were asked (e.g. what is the aspect the respondents likes about ice hockey? or what difference the respondent sees between the male and the female team?). However we gathered all the data we needed for our conclusion and
analysis despite the redundancies. The data we got from our respondents was relevant to answer the questions we asked ourselves, and to link our theories with our data. It is also important to remember that research reliability and validity face threats that can never be fully eliminated (Dudovskiy, 2010), however we did our best to reduce these threats as much as we could.

6. Empirical Findings

The Following section contains the results of the data collection process. First we will detail the results of an interview with a staff member of the Linköping Hockey Club whom is the general manger and directs the marketing of both the male and female teams. Following will be the results of surveys sent to the Linköping Hockey Club Official email list. Consent was given from the interviewee to record the interview.

6.1 Interview Findings

The following interview starts with a general introduction of the interview subject Kim Martin of the Linköping Hockey Club. Following will be data obtained from Kim Martin explaining how the male and female teams are marketed. Then the differences between the teams will be identified followed by Kim Martins thoughts on the gender bias in ice hockey.

6.1.1 Kim Martin

Kim Martin has worked at the Linköping Hockey club for three years as the general manager and works with marketing as well. Kim Martin started her career at the Linköping Hockey Club as a player, she has also played in The United States, Russia and the Swedish Olympic team winning a bronze medal in 2002 and a silver medal in 2006. Therefore Kim Martin has experienced Female ice hockey as both a player and in the administration.

6.1.2 Marketing

On marketing Kim said “both the male and female teams are marketed the exact same on newspaper and radio”. Kim Martin exclaimed “both the male and female teams send their best players to schools to play with kids and also teach children to lead healthy lifestyles”.
6.1.3 Differences

Despite conducting the same marketing for both teams, Kim Martin described the differences, as “the average male game will attract 2000 audience members while the female team draws an average of 600 audience members”. She went on further saying “the men's team will have every game aired on television while the female team only airs one to five games a season”. When asked about compensation Kim Martin remarked “the salary for the men's team is sufficient to live off allowing them to be full time players. Only about half of the female players earn a salary, this causes many female players to either have part times jobs or attend school”, this causes practices to “take place during the night, while the men practice around eleven”.

6.1.4 Gender Bias

Kim Martin still believes that the female team could have just as many fans as the male team, just not active fans. Noting the “deeper history of men's hockey” as opposed to female hockey, Kim Martin stated “people still care about the female team, they read about us in the paper but people do not want to see the women's team play right after they saw the men's team, people just naturally go to see the men’s games”. One reason why people may gravitate towards male games could be fighting, “Fighting is big in hockey and just because it is illegal to hit in the women's league people think that it is not fun to watch but the women can still be very aggressive”. When asked do you think women's ice hockey will ever be at the same level as men’s ice hockey? Kim Martin said, “I don’t think that it will ever be at the exact same level but every year the sport gets better and better, one day I do believe that players will be paid enough to make a living”.
6.2 Surveys Results

In this section we will present the results we got from our surveys. The surveys were sent via Linköping Hockey Club to subscribers of their email newsletters. The surveys were written in English then translated to Swedish. The results were then translated again from Swedish back to English.

6.2.1 Quantitative Results

The sample size of the survey ended up being 188 answers.

Table 1: Gender and age distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 15 to 18 years old</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 19 to 25 years old</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 26 to 30 years old</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 31 to 40 years old</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 41 to 49 years old</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 years old or more</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In our respondents 45% were men (84) and 55% were women (103). For the age distribution see table 1 above. The age categories the more represented in our respondents are between 19 years old and 50 years or more, but we can see that each age category is represented at least more than ten percent. We decided to split the respondents by these categories of ages because it is better to see the differences of opinion between the different generations. Though the Millennials are born from 1982 till 2002, we decided to split them into three categories, because between 15 years old and 35 years the customers don’t have the same habits. In the respondents 37% stated liking both male and female team, 30% prefer the female team, 22% prefer the male
team and 7% said they don’t have a preference. We then split the answers of our respondents by gender to analyze how each gender perceives the club and female in sports.

Table 2: How genders feel influenced by word-of-mouth, posts on social network and advertising.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts on social</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For this question, the respondents had to scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not influenced at all and 5 being very influenced) how they felt influenced by word-of-mouth about Linköping Hockey Club, their posts on social networks and Linköping Hockey Club’s advertising, we then made an average of the answers by the respondents. In average men said the influence by word-of-mouth was about 3.43 so they are mostly influenced. Women said it was at 3.15 which is less than men but they are also mostly influenced by word-of-mouth. Both women and men said that the influence of Linköping Hockey Club’s posts on social networks influenced them at 3.36, so they feel mostly influenced by the posts. Finally women said that the influence of Linköping Hockey Club’s advertisement was at 2.98 and men said it was at 2.79, both of those average are less than average so the gender feel slightly influenced by advertising.
Table 3: Age distribution by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From 15 to 18 years old</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 19 to 25 years old</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 26 to 30 years old</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 31 to 40 years old</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 41 to 49 years old</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 years old or more</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each age category was also well represented between men and women expect 15-18 years old and 26-30 years old for men (See table 5).

Table 4: The frequency that genders watch female sports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5: how often do the respondents watch the male matches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: How often do the respondents watch the female team’s matches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

92% of the women respondents said they watch female sports often or sometimes (see table 4), against 8% saying they rarely or never watch female sports. 71% of the men respondents said they watch female sports often or sometimes, against 24% saying they rarely or never watch female sports. The men category watches more the male team than the women (see table 5), 79% of the men are watching often or sometimes the male team against 61% for the women. The women watches more the female team’s matches, 71% (see table 6) of the women admitted watching often or sometimes the female team against 55% for the men.
Table 7: The Linköping Hockey Club’s team preferred by genders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female team</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male team</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

34% of the men respondents prefer the male team and 33% prefer both male and female teams. 43% of the women respondents prefer both male and female team and 37% prefer the female team. Only 8% for men and 7% for women stated not preferring any team.

Table 8: Have the respondents seen advertisement about the Linköping Hockey Club and the female team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have they seen advertisement from the Linköping Hockey Club on newspaper or radio?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have they seen advertisement for the female team?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

73% of the men and 71% of the women said they saw advertisement for the Linköping Hockey Club on newspaper or radio (see table 8). And 69% of the men and 63% of the women said they saw advertisement for the female team. It is also important to notice that the men portion
of the respondents has been more exposed, by 6%, to advertisement for the female team than the women part.

After splitting our respondents between genders, we split them between age categories to see the habits of each age category.

Table 9: How the age categories feel influenced by word-of-mouth, posts on social network and advertising by Linköping Hockey Club

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>From 15 to 25</th>
<th>From 26 to 40</th>
<th>41 years old and more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posts on social networks</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In average the category between 15 and 25 years old said the influence by word-of-mouth was about 3.17 so they are mostly influenced. The 26 to 40 years old said it was at 3.20 which is slightly more than previous category so they are also mostly influenced by word-of-mouth. And finally, the 41 years old and more said the influence was at 3.39. The 15 to 25 years old feel influenced in an average of 3.31 by posts on social networks, the 26 to 40 years old feel influence in average of 3.25 and the more than 41 years old feel influenced in an average of 3.46. For advertising the 15 to 25 years old feel influenced in an average of 2.97, the 26 to 40 in an average of 2.73 and the more than 41 in an average of 2.93, they are all under the average so they feel slightly influenced by advertising.

Each age category except the ones between 26 and 30 years get information about Linköping Hockey Club through social media mainly on Facebook and secondly on Twitter and Instagram (65% for the 15-18 years old, 60% for the 19-25 years old, 67% for the 31-40 years old, 64% for the 41-49% and 56 for the 50 years old and more compared to only 32% for the 26-30 years old).
6.2.2 Qualitative Results

From our 188 respondents not all of them answered our qualitative questions. Only 159 respondents answered them, with a substantial amount of answers that were non-taken seriously (e.g. answered in emojis).

The first qualitative question we asked to our respondents, is why they have a preference for a team, we will present here the answers they submitted ordered by preferences. We will first introduce the answers of the people who prefer the female team, then the ones who prefer the male team, then the ones who prefer both and finally the ones who don’t have any preference. In our respondents, 30% stated preferring the female team, 63% of them were women and 37% were men. Here are the reasons why some of the respondents prefer the female team that appeared the most are because it is “more fun and more technical than the men’s hockey” said by a woman between 15 and 18 years old. Another respondent between 31 and 40 years old said “Overall I think that the women’s side presents a “fun” hockey with a lot of focus and finesse … and I think the female team shows more heart for the sport”. Other respondents said they prefer the female team because they have a family members playing in the team or they know somebody in the team. A man over 40 said “there are more exciting games than with the male team”. Other reasons were that the female team deserves more to be watched than male (stated by men and women), that male hockey becomes boring (stated by a man over 50) and because the females are more skilled and talented (stated by men and women). Furthermore, because they don’t like seeing players being violent (when they do tackles). Finally three respondents prefers this teams because they were former players in the team.

In our respondents 26% stated preferring the male team, in this portion 33% were women and 65% were men. For the respondents that prefer the male team the reasons appearing the most in the answers are because the male team’s game is more physical, harder and stronger, because there is a better quality to their game, because male hockey is faster than female hockey, because the male team gets more media coverage and it is easier to follow them as it requires almost no effort, because they followed the team for a long time, and because they never thought about going to see the female team. One man between 19 and 25 years old said that there is “better framing, more atmosphere, better quality of game”, another man over 50 said “because the game is faster and because there are tackles”, some said that there is more intensity, a man between 31 and 40
years said that because he leaves far away (11 miles) from Linköping he can only follow the male team on television, another man between 31 and 40 years old said because the male team has more funding which gives a better product. Other respondents said because it is a tradition for them to follow the male team, because they have a bigger audience and finally because the rules are not the same, the male ice hockey rules are more interesting for them.

In our respondents 37% stated preferring both, 62% were women and 38% were men, they stated prefering both team because they enjoy the sport, people also prefer both teams because they think that both teams are great teams and see them as equal. It is important to mention also that a big part of this category didn’t give any reason to why they prefer both.

Finally, in our respondents 7% stated not preferring any team, 54% were women and 46% were men. They either didn’t give any reason why, or they said they prefer other clubs than the Linköping Hockey Club and finally because they consider that the organization of the events from Linköping Hockey Club is poor.

The second qualitative question asked to our respondents, was what difference they see between the female and male team of Linköping Hockey Club. Most people said that the main difference is that the male team gets a bigger funding and thus more resources and publicity. People also thought that the speed and fighting is more enhanced in male ice hockey than female ice hockey. Few people said that compared to the male team, the female team shows more heart and sport value in the game.

We then asked our respondents how they thought the female team could get more attention. From the qualitative answers the respondents did not address the product aspect of the marketing mix. For the promotional, aspect many respondents stated that there is a lack of marketing for the female team. The majority of the respondents clearly stated that they think the female team does not sell as many tickets as the male team because they are not present at all on the social media accounts of the Linköping Hockey Club. Here are some quotes from the survey respondents “promote more the matches” (stated by a man between 31 and 40 years old), “The media is Increasing its coverage, show games on television” (stated by a woman between 19 and 25 years old), “more advertising might help” (stated by a man between 26 and 30 years old). Furthermore they also said more interactions between the male and the female team (matches together or
making mixed teams) would make it more exciting for them to go see the female team. Finally some mentioned that broadcasting some of the matches on television or streaming on the internet would first get the attention of people on television or on internet but then make them attend the matches. For the price aspect, a substantial portion of the respondents said that if the Linköping Hockey Club would lower the price of the tickets they would be more tempted to go the matches, other suggested to give prizes with competitions on the Facebook page. Finally for the place, some of the respondents stated that if Linköping would stream some of the female team’s matched on their social network accounts, it would encourage them and new audience to come see the matches in the arena.
7. Analysis

This chapter will illustrate the connection between empirical data as well as theory. A deeper understanding of the data will be identified. The results from our empirical data will prove or disprove our theories, this will draw conclusions.

7.1 Survey Analysis

In this section, we will see if the theories explained from the theoretical framework chapter are confirmed by the answers from the respondents of our survey. We will also analyze the gender issues internal to the club and within the audience. Once a connection is made between data and theory a solution based on these factors will be rendered.

7.1.1 Marketing Mix

As we mentioned earlier the respondents did not specifically address the product aspect of the marketing mix, therefore we decided not to analyze it.

Price:

The product’s price represents what the customer agrees to spend for the satisfaction of their need or desire (Kotler, 1967). A big part of the respondents stated that a lower price for the tickets would be more interesting. Though the Linköping Hockey Club needs to lower the price while still making some profit, the price need to be in the psychological price range that the customer perceives. Furthermore, the price of a product can be manipulated and readily changed in different ways, some respondents said that two tickets for the price of one ticket or some winning prizes on the social media accounts of the organization would further engage the audience.

Promotion:

Promoting means creating awareness (Borden, 1964). We could see that every age category follows and obtains information about the Linköping Hockey Club from social networks, more specifically on Facebook. The majority of the fan-base has seen advertisements from the Linköping Hockey Club but they stated not feeling influenced by them. The female team is
completely absent on the club’s social networks accounts. To create awareness the Linköping Hockey Club needs to start promoting the female team on its social network accounts, specifically on Facebook as it the what respondents said they use the most to acquire information about the club.

The answers showed that the women portion of the respondents are equally interested in male and female teams (see table 7, in the section 6.2.1 Quantitative results) while the women go more often to the female team’s matches than the men. From the men portion the respondents, are clearly more interested in the male team (see table 6, in the section 6.2.1 Quantitative results). The Linköping Hockey Club needs to target the men with its promotion to create awareness to this specific audience, as they are not interested yet in the female team.

Place:

The place aspect of the marketing mix, consists in the marketing strategy used to place the product for the customer (Kotler, 1967). The marketer must choose the right place to deliver the product, meaning where the customer is and where they usually shops (Mihai, 2013, p.301). Some of the respondents said that streaming matches would encourage fans to attend matches. By streaming some of their matches and engaging with the younger generations the Linköping Hockey Club women’s team can target a wider audience. Since Echo Boomers are more “savvy” than previous generations (Solomon, 2015), they may start watching some matches online and then come to matches, as they grow older.

To attract a fan-base the key element is consistency. The Linköping Hockey Club needs to pick a day and time when they are going to stream matches be consistent. Another important aspect in the consistency is to be on time. The streaming should be working online 15 minutes before the beginning of the match so that when the fans arrive to the web page and servers do not crash causing the viewer to occupy their time with another activity. The streaming can also be used as free advertising during the break times and promotion for future matches. Teasers are great for getting your viewers excited and making them engaged well before the actual stream. Regularly streaming helps keeping a fresh image in the viewer’s minds. The club does not have to stream every match, but a long time between broadcasts is counterproductive as viewers can find other consistent activities and easily forget.
7.1.2 Word of mouth

Word-of-mouth consists in one on one communication where there is a communicator and a receiver. The communicator gives information about a brand, product or service. The communicator is perceived by the receiver as a non-commercial person (Arndt, 1967, p.5). Customers tend to trust and prefer, information coming from word-of-mouth (Bush et al., 2005). Either if they are split by gender or by age, in average the respondents stated giving less attention to traditional advertising than to word-of-mouth (see table 2 and 9, in the section 6.2.1 Quantitative results). The answers from the respondents confirmed the theory that customers trust more direct information that they get from people they know rather than advertising. As every category (split by gender or age) stated they felt more influenced by word-of-mouth than advertising. Which means that word-of-mouth is more efficient than advertising.

However, the studies we mentioned in the theoretical framework stated that the best target to spread word-of-mouth was the female teenagers (Bakan, 1966 and Solomon, 2015), but the answers we got from our survey showed that men is the gender that feels the most influenced by word-of-mouth. In average men said they felt influenced at 3.43 and women 3.15, the respondents had to scale between 1 and 5 how they feel influenced by word-of-mouth (1 being not influenced at all and 5 being very influenced), this difference is small but doesn’t confirm the studies. Secondly the age category that admitted feeling the most influenced by word-of-mouth are the people that are older than 41 years old, with an average influence of 3.39 on the scale. Compared to an average of 3.17 for the 15-25 age group. When analyzing the answers, it must be taken into consideration that the respondents are biased, and could see a weakness in admitting that they feel influenced by word-of-mouth. Contrary to what the Bakan and Solomon’s theory, our data showed the most receptive age group to word-of-mouth is the 41 and older demographic.

7.1.3 Wisdom of Crowds

Though we couldn’t test this theory directly on our respondents, their answers do give new ideas to get more audience and help understanding why the female team has such a small audience compared to the male team. we suggest to the Linköping Hockey Club to use the wisdom of crowds, as our respondents answered individually. Furthermore, the survey was answered through internet, wisdom of crowds allows to analyze the respondents’ reactions. Finally, a new
environment with people grouped together could provide new answers and strategic from the respondents, and also check if the answers we got from the survey come again and are confirmed during the wisdom of crowds.

7.1.4 Social networks

The media that the audience uses the most today are social media and television (Smith, 2013). A sport team’s fan-base can be increased with an effective and powerful social media strategy (Clapp, 2017). The Linköping Hockey Club team uses social network to convince its fans with its story as a franchise while building a unique and original way to interact with their fans, only by promoting the male team. Both genders said they felt mostly influenced by the posts on social networks (see table 2 and 9, in the section 6.2.1 Quantitative results) with an average of 3.36 on the scale, the respondents had to scale between 1 and 5 how they feel influenced by the posts on social networks (1 being not influenced at all and 5 being very influenced). Surprisingly the age category that feels the most influenced by posts on social networks are the people that are older than 41 years old, with an average of 3.46. The category between 15 and 25 years old comes second with an average of 3.31. Though the theory is focusing on a younger market to target with social networks, it is still applicable to older generations. When posting on its social media accounts the Linköping Hockey Club should target both, the markets aged between 15 and 25 years old and the market older than 41 years old. The Linköping Hockey Club should take in consideration that, whether the respondents state they feel influenced or not by posts on social networks they remain biased and the answers are not completely accurate.

Furthermore, many the respondents said the first way to get information about Linköping Hockey Club for them is through Facebook but also through twitter and Instagram. The female team is completely absent on those platforms. The Linköping Hockey Club must display more content about the female team, as the respondents to our survey suggested, they would be more interested in the team and they would feel more engaged rendering a larger market.

7.1.5 Internal Gender Issues of the Linköping Hockey Club

Compared to other hockey clubs within the Swedish hockey league, Linköping does have a female ice hockey team, let alone one of the strongest female teams in the league. The interview with Kim Martin revealed that the club does know there is a gender bias between the two teams.
The Linköping Hockey Club is very neutral about the gender bias. Meaning they are not actively promoting the gender bias but are also not challenging it either. This could be demonstrated as Kim Martin mentioned about marketing each team equally on newspaper and radio. The answers from our respondents showed that they do not obtain information about the club from newspaper or radio. Information is received on television and social networks (mainly Facebook). As it is for now the club does not promote the female team on television and neither on social networks. If the Linköping Hockey Club would like to challenge the gender bias, they would advertise more of the female team on their social networks. The reason why they don’t promote the team on television is due to the lack of findings. Social networks are free tools and this marketing strategy works for the male team, the club could use it for the female team as well.

7.1.6 Gender Issues Within the Audience

In this section, we will analyze how the genders in our respondents view male and female ice hockey, we chose not to analyze the issues in the ages categories as there is no significant preference appearing in these categories.

When asked, which team the respondents prefer, 37% answered preferring both, 30% answered preferring the female team and 26% answered preferring the male team. We must remember that a greater part of our respondents are women (55%) majority of the women preferred both teams as opposed to just the female team. While the men portion stated the team, they preferred the most was the male team (see table 7, in the section 6.2.1 Quantitative results). When asked how often they watch the male team for men and women the answer that appeared the most was “sometimes” (see table 5, in the section 6.2.1 Qualitative results). When we asked our respondents how often they watch the female team, the answer that appeared the most for women were “sometimes”, but for the men portion the answer was “never” (see table 6, in the section 6.2.1 Qualitative data). We can understand from the answers to those three questions that the female portion of our respondents are open to both the male and female team, but the men portion remains closed minded and prefers only the male team.

When asked why they prefer the male team or what are the differences between the two teams, the men portion of our respondents stated it was a tradition for the them to watch the male team and that they considered the male team faster, more technical and they preferred seeing tackles. This portion of the respondents stay closed minded about the female team, spawning
interest in the female team presents a challenge. It is crucial to take in consideration that an important part of the male respondents that stated preferring the male team, said it was because they never saw any advertisement or promotion for the female team and they never thought about going to watch the matches. However, this portion of the respondents said that if they would see more content about the female they would be inclined to view their matches. The Linköping Hockey Club should target this portion of the respondents to increase its audience.

In comparison to the gender roles in sports and society, the respondents do think that there is a difference between male and female athletes within their physical conditions. Although in many sports, women are regarded as objects (Hanson, 2012), our respondents clearly stated recognizing the females as real athletes. Though a part of the men respondents stated preferring the male team as either for tradition or because they believe the male team is more technical and more violence. It is important to mention that they do not consider female athletes as objects pleasurable for the eye, but as professional athletes. Additionally, a part of our respondents also recognized that the female team showed more heart to the game and more sportsmanship compared to the male team. Those answers are in accordance to the fact that female players give nostalgia to the audience as they show a true value and pump heart to the game (Fastsis, 1996).

7.2 Limitations of Analysis

Due to time constraints, our research was limited to just one hockey league, the Swedish Hockey League. Of the Swedish hockey league, only the Linköping Hockey club was studied. However, of all the teams in the Swedish Hockey League the Linköping Hockey Club has one of the stronger Female teams. Only the sport of Ice Hockey was researched, although Sweden’s male and female Olympic Ice Hockey teams have won Olympic medals.

Interviews were conducted completely in English. Surveys had been written in English translated to Swedish then the results translated back to English. Although a fluent Swedish speaker supervised the translation, it is possible that the meanings of the questions and answers were lost in translation. Answers were only obtained from the fan-base of the Linköping Hockey Club, further research could be done about people that never went to any match and are not part of the member’s database.
8. Conclusion

Throughout this thesis we tried to find what is the general opinion of female sports. Though discrimination is a problem that has high awareness and is constantly being combated, the inequalities are still present. Females are represented as objects and more sexualized than male in sport media.

How is female ice hockey marketed today?

We asked ourselves how female ice hockey is marketed today and realized that the main problem of the female team is that the Linköping Hockey Club only markets through radio and newspaper, which are two mediums that people use less and less nowadays. We found some theories that the Linköping Hockey Club could use to improve its popularity and then checked through our survey if the fan-base agrees with these new marketing methods.

In what way can marketing strategies challenge gender bias in female ice hockey?

We then attempted to find out how to enhance public perception of female ice hockey through marketing to generate more popularity for the Linköping Hockey Club’s female team. The Linköping Hockey Club has a Facebook page, but only promotes the male team through this tool, the majority of the respondents said they get information about the club through the page, if they start promoting the female team on this page they will get more audience. Furthermore the respondents themselves stated that the female team is completely absent from the page and would like to get some information from the page. Also adding some instant interactions (creating polls for songs with Facebook or Twitter) during the events and streaming some of the matches with the social networks will bring more attention on the team and the audience will feel more part of the club.

Many respondents of the survey said they feel influenced by the feedback they get from word-of-mouth. By having a good word-of-mouth with its fan base, the female team can get more audience.
What are the views on female ice hockey among ice hockey fans?

Female ice hockey is not as popular a male ice hockey, the gender bias is still present. Though the Linköping Hockey Club fans said they believed that the female team could be as popular as the male team. With time, and a better marketing strategy there is no reason that the female team will not be as popular as the male team.

Although we thought there was a different opinion between the two genders in the sport and that the Linköping Hockey Club would need to target the female team with a new gender aspect, we discovered that the problem is not the opinion between the genders but mainly the lack of marketing for the female team.

How can younger generations be targeted specifically, to form a future audience based for female ice hockey?

The Linköping Hockey Club marketing team has to market to the younger audience differently than the other generations. The Linköping Hockey Club needs to constantly acquire a younger loyal audience to stay in business. The Linköping Hockey Club is already including millennials every year by sending players to schools, but they need to find new methods. With the use of social networks as it is the main media this generation uses, they can reach this audience, communicate with them and create a relationship.

Recommendations to Linköping Hockey Club from our survey results

In this section we will provide some recommendations from theories confirmed by our survey.

- The answers about the influence of social networks from our respondents showed that the Linköping Hockey Club should concentrate more on the content they post on social networks and less on advertising, by posting more content about the female team they can reach all age categories and get more audience. Secondly they should target people older than 41 years old as they are the ones the most influenced by posts and also people between 15 and 25 years old.

- The organization does not have to promote more the female team with advertisements and needs to focus more on providing content on the social networks and word-of-mouth.
From the answers about the Linköping Hockey Club’s advertising methods, we can say that the Linköping Hockey Club should either leave its advertising method as it is right now or lower it, but increasing it would be a waste of money, as the audience stated not feeling influenced by it.

- The Linköping Hockey Club needs to target more the men part of the audience, to improve the audience of the female team. As for the moment men pay more attention to the male team. And also because the men part of our respondents stated feeling more influenced by word of mouth. With new methods, and as we saw the men’s portion is more exposed to advertisement for the female team than the women portion.
- The Linköping Hockey Club could lower the price of the female team’s matches as a majority of respondent said they would be more interested if the price was cheaper.
- Although the female team is less promoted because of a smaller revenue due to a shorter audience, Linköping Hockey Club could use the excess funding from the male team to support the female team.

**Contribution to existing knowledge**

Our thesis critically analyzed how marketing could be used to challenge gender bias against women in the sports industry, using theories and empirical data conclusions and recommendations. Although our conclusions and empirical data reflect Swedish culture, it could still help clubs that wish to limit gender bias against women in sports could use our results.
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10. Appendix

10.1 Survey

This survey was first redacted in English, then translated in Swedish and sent to our respondents.

1. You are a … ?
   - Male
   - Female

2. How old are you?
   - 15-18 years old
   - 19-25 years old
   - 26-30 years old
   - 31-40 years old
   - 41-49 years old
   - 50 years old or more

3. Do you follow female sports?
   - Never
   - Rarely
   - Sometimes
   - Often

4. What kind of female sports do you follow?

5. What is your favorite aspect of ice hockey? (Sportsmanship, the players, the fights, etc.)

6. Which team from Linköping Hockey Club do you prefer?
   - Male
7. Why do you prefer this one?

8. How often do you go the male team’s matches?
   - Rarely
   - Sometimes
   - Often

9. How often do you go the female team’s matches?
   - Rarely
   - Sometimes
   - Often

10. How do you get information about Linköping Hockey Club?

11. Have you seen advertisement for Linköping Hockey Club on newspaper or radio?
   - Yes
   - No

12. Have you seen advertisement for the female team?
   - Yes
   - No

13. For you what is the difference between the male and female team?

14. In your opinion how could the female team get more audience?

15. Do you feel influenced by word-of-mouth about Linköping Hockey Club?
Choose from 1 to 5, 1 being not influenced and 5 being very influenced.

16. Do you feel influenced by Linköping Hockey Club’s posts on social networks? Choose from 1 to 5, 1 being not influenced and 5 being very influenced.

17. Do you feel influenced by Linköping Hockey Club’s advertisement? Choose from 1 to 5, 1 being not influenced and 5 being very influenced.