The Untold Story of the Sponsee

A Study of the Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy in Swedish Elite Football

by

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Abstract

Title: The Untold Story of the Sponsee – A Study of the Sponsorship Strategy of Swedish Elite Football Clubs

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Keywords: Sponsorship, Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy, Brand Image Strategy, Relationship Strategy

Thesis purpose: This study aims to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, with the purpose of expanding on the academic understanding and narrowing the identified research gap.

Methodology: A qualitative study through semi-structured interviews with Swedish elite football clubs was conducted to answer how the sponsee strategically engage in sponsorships. A qualitative research strategy with an abductive approach was chosen, due to the exploratory nature of the study as it aims to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy.

Theoretical perspective: Sponsorship, sport sponsorship, brand management

Empirical data: Qualitative semi-structured interviews with seven Swedish men's elite football clubs

Conclusion: The study is establishing an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy and is expanding on the academic understanding within the field of sponsorship. The research question of this study is answered by an establishment of three main strategies that explain how the sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships. Firstly, the study found that the sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships by building relationships with the sponsors. Secondly, the sponsee strategically consider the impact of a sponsorship on their brand image when engaging in sponsorships. Lastly, the sponsees utilize the sponsorships by the strategy of citizenship. Aside from the research question being answered, the results of the study contribute with a comprehensive understanding of the sponsee perspective in a sponsorship relationship and, more specifically, the sponsee sponsorship strategy. As presented in a conceptual framework.

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"One of the most bittersweet feelings has to be when you realize how much you're going to miss a moment while you're still living it" - Khalid

Måns Claeson & Jakob Ivarsson

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

With its estimated follower base of 4 billion people worldwide, football is certainly the world's biggest sport (Sawe, 2018). The sport is often associated with excitement, passion and joy, which all seems to be reasons engaging people all over the world to be a part of the game. The attraction of the sport is undoubtedly enormous and people are getting involved in it either by playing, by supporting or even by making business. This has amongst other things lead to an increasing commercialisation of the sport during recent years and businesses are more commonly getting commercially involved. Notably, there have always been a commercial dimension to the sport to some extent. However, its impact on the football industry have increased at a rapid rate recently and the professional football clubs seem to be experiencing its effects the most. Their mindset seems to have changed from expressing themselves as solely a football club to being more business-like (Shah, 2017; Söderman, 2013). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the possibility for fans to follow their favourite team from anywhere across the globe has increased. The commercial value of the sport has grown simultaneously, with broadcasting and sponsorship deals rising for each year. Consequently, European club football has improved its financial condition dramatically, and since 2012 every year has triumphed the previous one (UEFA, 2019). The improved financial condition is certainly due to many factors, with complex explanations. However, the growth of broadcasting revenue and rights value, such as sponsorships, cannot be overlooked as impactful sources (Deloitte, 2018).

The commercialisation of the football industry in Europe has its effects on the Swedish elite football as well. Evidence of this, is the soon to be introduced commercial deal made by Swedish Elite Football (SEF); a central supporting organisation in place to support the Swedish elite football clubs (EY, 2019a; SEF interview 15 april). The deal will extend over 6 years and include the new TV-broadcaster 'Discovery' and the new official betting sponsor 'Unibet', that together will increase the value of the current deal substantially (EY, 2019a; Zetterman, 2018). The previous TV-broadcasting deal with the TV4-group had an annual worth of 250 million SEK, but the new deal will provide 550 million SEK annually to the clubs. Moreover, the Unibet deal as the official sponsor will grant the clubs 150 million SEK annually, compared to

the previous 70 million SEK deal from 'Svenska Spel'. An increase in total revenue for the top tier leagues could enable the clubs to focus on organisational development, which is recommended by SEF as important future investments (SEF interview 15 April, 2019; Zetterman, 2018). It could further be of importance for the clubs to strengthen their long-term financial situation and to enhance their ability to increase revenue on a local scale, such as sponsorship revenue. Moreover, a long-term financial stability is not only beneficial for the clubs to achieve success on the football pitch. It is also a prerequisite to get an approved elite license from The Swedish Football Association (SvFF), since a club cannot present a negative equity as per the 31st of December each year (EY, 2019a).

To generate sponsorship revenue and establish commercial partnerships is of great value for all football clubs and is considered to be equally as important as player fees and prize money (UEFA, 2019). The commercialisation of the football industry and the overall increasing commercial revenue could suggest that the individual football clubs, to a greater extent, are more willing to invest in securing long term financial stability. A way to do this could be to strategically invest in actions linked to the commercial revenue, such as sponsorships. Furthermore, sponsorship is increasingly becoming a more important source of revenue and plays a significant role for both financing and promoting professional sport organisations and sport events (Morgan, Adair, Taylor & Hermens, 2014). Simultaneously, companies' sponsorship involvement is becoming more apparent in various sports in Sweden and sponsoring has become central in many companies' marketing budgets (Fyrberg & Söderman, 2009). Sponsorship investments are increasing in Sweden, where sports represent a clear majority of the total spending (Idrottens Affärer, 2019), and football being one of the leading individual sports (EY, 2019a; EY, 2019b). It has become increasingly attractive from a marketing perspective since it can represent values that the sponsor wants to be associated with, which has led to sponsorship today being as important as traditional marketing strategies (Fyrberg & Söderman, 2009). The increase in and the development of sponsorship further implies that sports organisations need to adapt a more strategic approach to sponsorship and to a greater extent consider their values and the stakes involved (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006; Fyrberg & Söderman, 2009). But a strategic approach to sponsorship and the "business side" of a sports organisation have historically not been prioritized by the Swedish clubs (SEF interview 15 April 2019). Fyrberg and Söderman (2009) argue that this might be due to the fact that many sports organisations often are characterized by a lack of resources such as

competence, time and monetary funds. Another explanation is that sports organisations rests upon other sets of values than of commercial businesses. This have led to the sports organisations prioritizing other, more primary objectives (Fyrberg and Söderman, 2009); such as striving to achieve good sporting results.

To the Swedish football clubs, sponsorship revenue is inevitably identified as a vital part of their ability to operate. During the 2018 season in Allsvenskan, sponsorship represented 24% of the clubs' revenue (EY, 2019a). For the clubs in the second highest league, Superettan, the sponsorship revenue was equivalent to 33% of the total revenue in 2017 (SVFF, 2018). Undoubtedly, the revenue generated from sponsorship deals have a big impact on the clubs' financial capabilities. Moreover, sponsorships might embody a more accountable revenue stream than revenue generated from selling players or prize money. Partly, due to sponsorships being bound to yearly contracts, but also that it might be directly affected by strategic decisions and organisational investments. Lastly, since the Swedish football industry is experiencing an increasing commercialisation that seems to be affecting how the clubs run their organisations, they certainly have entered an interesting phase that makes for an intriguing context to study the subject of sponsorship.

1.2   Previous research

Previous research regarding sponsorship have historically been lacking a solid and strong theoretical base, and much of the literature is relying on a great deal of managerial "cause-and-effect explanations" and loose interpretations (Demir & Söderman, 2015; Roper & Fill, 2012. The subject of sponsorship has become an increasingly popular field of study and has for example been studied as a medium of corporate communications, an effective strategic marketing tool and as relationships or strategic alliances (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013; Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Meenaghan, 1983; Meenaghan, 1991; Olkkonen, Tikkanen & Alajoutsijärvi, 2000; Vance, Raciti & Lawley, 2016). Sponsorships is further considered to be more commonly representing a large proportion of an organisation's marketing budget, and Farrelly, Quester & Burton (2006) argue that the stakes involved with sponsorships have been growing recently, regarding both the financial and strategic terms.

The majority of the previous research of sponsorship have been studying the subject of sponsorship from the sponsor's perspective. Although previous research has been focusing on exploring and discussing the sponsor's perspective, some scholars have been studying the sponsorship subject as relationships and strategic partnerships or alliances (Morgan et al., 2014; Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006). Moreover, sponsorship has often been studied within the context of sports, and research within the field of sports management and sports marketing have simultaneously gained significant momentum (Demir & Söderman, 2015). Fairly little research has however been studying sponsorship from the perspective of the sponsored entity, also called the 'sponsee' (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). The theoretical understanding of the sponsee and how it manages sponsorships is still quite unexplored and is suggested to be studied further (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). Toscani and Prendergast (2018) argue that the sponsee needs to realize and understand how it can optimize the benefits in a sponsorship. Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) further find that the sponsor's perception of the sport entity counterpart, the sponsee, has evolved. They argue that the sponsor have higher expectations of the sponsee in terms of investments and active participation, which calls for the need of sponsees to adapt a more proactive and strategic approach to sponsorship. This sheds light on the importance for the sponsee's efforts to be contributing to the performance of the sponsorship relationship. This could imply that the activities and objectives of the sponsee are becoming more important for a successful sponsorship. Hence, the sponsee will have to be willing to adapt and move away from the more traditional transactional approach into a more strategic approach (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006).

The constantly developing and evolving theories of sponsorship, especially within sports, makes it an interesting subject to study further. The commercialisation of the football industry, higher stakes and investments in sponsorship as well as a need for the sponsee to adopt a more strategic and proactive approach further creates an interesting and complex context to study the subject of sponsorship. Moreover, Swedish football act as an intriguing environment as they are seemingly undergoing a rather substantial commercial transformation. Lastly, in this study, Swedish men's elite football clubs will serve as the objects of study.

1.3   Problematization

Since sport is accounting for the largest amount of sponsorship revenue in Sweden, with football as one of the leading sports, we believe that it is an interesting context to study the subject of sponsorship. In addition to this, the current development and commercialisation within the Swedish football industry could imply that the football clubs will need to adapt and develop a more strategic and business-oriented approach, to be able to meet the increasing expectations from the business sector. Since sponsors have increased their involvement and investments in sponsorships, they have consequently increased the expectations on the sponsee. In turn, the sponsee depend a great deal on its sponsorship relations and need to further develop its strategic approach in sponsorships to meet the increasing expectations. Hence, we believe it to be of importance to gain an understanding of how the sponsee works strategically to be able to understand how to further develop its strategic approach of managing sponsorships successfully. Moreover, researchers and practitioners have identified the benefits of sponsorships to be manifold for the sponsor but have rarely touched upon the perspective of the sponsee. The increasing involvement and investments of the sponsors seem to have led to higher stakes, as well as increasing expectations on the sponsee's contribution to the performance of the sponsorship, which calls for further research on the sponsee's strategic approach to sponsorships (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006; Fyrberg & Söderman, 2009; Toscani & Prendergast, 2018).

1.4   Aim & Purpose

This study aims to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, with the purpose of expanding on the academic understanding within the field of sponsorship, to narrow the identified research gap. This study sets out to achieve the aim by establishing a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing practiced sponsee sponsorship strategies and the effect of the related goals and motives. Furthermore, the purpose of the study is to contribute with practical and theoretical implications relevant to researchers, sponsees and sponsors. In order to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, we have formulated the following research question:

1.5   Research Question

- How do sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships?

2   Literature Review

The following chapter introduces the theoretical perspective of sponsorship in general, as well as in sports. The chapter is based on relevant and selectively reviewed previous literature by which the key concepts and definitions will be presented in regards to theory. Firstly, the subject of sponsorship is introduced. Secondly, previous research in regards to sponsorship in sports is presented, followed by a review regarding the concept of the sponsee. The chapter ends with presenting and explaining our conceptual framework, as constructed in regards to the previous literature.

2.1   Sponsorship

The subject of sponsorship is considered by scholars to be quite complex in nature and has historically been lacking a solid and strong theoretical base, relying much on managerial 'cause-and-effect explanations' and loose interpretations of for example the marketing communications mix (Demir & Söderman, 2015; Roper & Fill, 2012). Sponsorship was starting to gain interest by scholars during the 1980's and 1990's, such as Meenaghan (1983), Meenaghan (1991) and Cornwell and Maignan (1998). They initially set out to define the concept of sponsorship by for example studying its origin and objectives as a marketing tool, with the aim of legitimising the medium. It was argued by Meenaghan (1983) to be an element of a company's marketing mix, as a method of marketing communications used by commercial organisations. Furthermore, as Cornwell (1995) argue that sponsorship has moved from a philanthropic orientation to a market-driven orientation, it is now considered by scholars to be a common marketing communications practice (Dolphin, 2003; Cornwell, 2008) and an effective strategic marketing tool (Cornwell & Humphreys, 2013; Vance, Raciti & Lawley, 2016). Roper and Fill (2012) further discuss that an organisation take advantage of using sponsorship primarily to generate brand awareness and brand associations as well as to surpass the "clutter" of commercial messages, while building various kinds of relationships. Additionally, Roper and Fill (2012) define the key opportunities with sponsorship as building brand awareness, image transfer, indirect communication and integration. They further argue, in line with the previous authors findings, that sponsorship is a part of an organisation's communications mix. They further add that it should be considered as secondary communications, emerging through the use of planned communications as an attempt to influence particular, often external, stakeholders (Roper & Fill, 2012). It is however important

to note that sponsorship, as a form of marketing communications, varies from e.g. advertising, since it attempts to influence stakeholders indirectly. This could lead to a more relaxed reception and experience by the external stakeholders when consuming sponsorship messages, in comparison to consuming advertising. This further implies that sponsorship present opportunities for an organisation to more effectively reach its stakeholders, in comparison to advertising (Roper & Fill, 2012). Moreover, Junghagen (2018) argues that the sponsorship objectives are manifold, but that the objective most often is to raise brand awareness among the consumers of the sponsor. He further discusses the fact that even the non-consumers of the sponsor are to be seen as targets, such as "employees, channel members, community and even competitors, with the aim to block the opportunity for a competitor to sponsor" (Junghagen, 2018. p. 615).

2.1.1 Sponsorship as Relationships

Furthermore, scholars such as Morgan et al. (2014), Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) and Fyrberg and Söderman (2009) discuss sponsorships as relationships, consisting of two or more organisations. Morgan et al. (2014) and Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi (2000) further discuss that commitment and trust are crucial factors within a sponsorship relationship, for the success of a sponsorship. Roper and Fill (2012) also discuss sponsorship from a relational perspective, arguing that it is being concentrated to generate mutual value rather than supplying goods and services from one partner to another. It is further found that since sponsorship usually represents a form of collaborative communications, with the aim of one party being enabled to reach the other's audience, issues regarding the relationship between the parties concerned will have impact on the success of a sponsorship arrangement (Roper & Fill, 2012). The definition of sponsorship by Jiffer and Roos (1995, p. 25), presented and used by Demir and Söderman (2015), sheds light on some of the most critical factors mentioned in previous research, but seems to overlook the importance of the relational aspect of a sponsorship:

> *"Sponsorship is a business method for communication and marketing which,*
> *in the short- and long-term, has the aim of contributing to the sponsor ́s brand*
> *awareness and image, as well as increasing the sponsor ́s sales. Sponsorship*
> *should benefit all those involved, and lead to a result that can be measured*
> *against pre-defined objectives".*

Previous research of sponsorship further seems to have focused on a financial and transactional aspect, often as a mutually beneficial investment. The research has further put emphasis on the sponsors perspective, such as the recurring definition by Meenaghan (1991), as presented in, for example, Brochado, Dionísio and Leal (2018) which constitutes that sponsorship involves investment in return for access to commercial potential by exposure, associated with that property. Furthermore, Demir and Söderman (2015) argue that the aim of generating brand awareness for the sponsor is driven by a consumer-oriented approach, that is expressed by means of influencing the purchasing behaviour of the consumers to generate an increase in sales for the sponsor. However, the measurability has been raised as problematic when assessing the financial impact on a sponsorship investment and previous research seem to lack a credible method in doing so (Meenaghan & O'Sullivan, 2013). In addition, sponsorship has also been criticized to often be a financially wasteful investment, not aligned with the organisations core business. Some argue that it is driven by personal interests and emotions, as bias and subjectivity of an organisation's managers can lead to irrational decisions (Vance, Raciti & Lawley 2016; Fyrberg & Söderman, 2009). Therefore, it is argued to have emerged an increased pressure from external stakeholders, both community and corporate, of greater transparency and professionalism in regards to the sponsors' sponsorship selections (Vance, Raciti & Lawley, 2016; Meenaghan, 2013).

Morgan et al. (2014) and Roper and Fill (2012) argue that sponsorship represents a form of relationship aiming at satisfying common objectives and reaching mutual value. This is further discussed by Olkkonen (2001), who similarly describes sponsorships as being interactional relationships. However, Olkkonen (2001) argues that a network approach could be applied to describe sponsorships as a network of relationships, hence going beyond the traditional view of dyadic relationships. The relations between organisations within a network is often considered of great value, why organisations within a network often strive to develop a positive 'network identity', to be perceived as an attractive exchange partner with valuable resources and unique connections (Olkkonen, 2001). Sponsors strive to develop an attractiveness to other sponsors within a sponsorship network, in order to access valuable resources or other networks (Roper & Fill, 2012; Olkkonen, 2001). Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi (2000) further argue that interpersonal relationships and communications between the sponsorship parties is important to develop trust and mutuality in sponsorship relations and networks. Thus, interpersonal relationships should be taken into consideration when conducting research of

sponsorship interactions, to understand issues such as long-term bonding (Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi, 2000).

2.2   Sponsorship in Sports

The sponsorship literature is often found to be studied within the context of sports, such as the outcomes of a sponsorship arrangement between a sponsor and a sport entity. For the sponsor, a previously discussed objective in sponsorships is to influence the perceptions and purchase behaviour of the target consumers through exposure with sport entities (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006; Prendergast, Paliwal & Mazodier, 2016). Sports sponsorships have gained much attention from companies that hope to capitalize on the image of the sport entity, although the understanding of its actual effect is limited (Kwon, Ratneshwar & Kim, 2016). On the other side of the sponsorship relationship, the sport entities mainly strive for the financial benefits of selling the legal right to sponsors to associate themselves with the sport entity (Farrelly, Quester and Burton, 2006). Furthermore, a strategic approach to sponsoring within sports has become an attractive field of study and has in regards to research of sports management and sports marketing gained significant momentum (Demir & Söderman, 2015). The perception of sport sponsorship does however vary to some extent for researchers and scholars. For example, Fahy, Farrelly and Quester (2004) choose to consider it as a "value-creating resource", whilst Amis, Slack and Berrett (1999) consider it as a "distinctive strategic competence", by which an organisation acting as a sponsor is enabled to enhance and strengthen its intangible assets, like the brand image and reputation.

Previous research regarding both sponsorship and sports sponsorships have often been studying the subject from the sponsor's perspective, in contrary to the sponsor's counterpart: the sponsee. Hence, it could be argued that much of the research of sponsorship has been viewing the sponsorship relationship as vertical, with the sponsor as the more dominant party. This, in turn, could explain why the sponsor perspective has attracted more attention by scholars (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). However, some argue that the relationship sponsor-sponsee should rather be studied as more horizontal, where the sponsee have as much questions to ask when entering a sponsorship relation (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). They further argue that it is advantageous for the sponsee to understand the sponsor's perspective to be in a better bargaining position when negotiating terms, as well as to understand the reciprocal effects on the sponsee's brand

when associated with the sponsor's brand. This further implies that there are reasons to consider the brand of the sponsee as crucial for a successful sponsorship and that the sponsee could benefit from a coherent approach when strategically considering its partners (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). Furthermore, the sponsee in sports could face difficulties in managing a coherent long-term approach to sponsorships, as decisions will derive from other factors, such as striving to achieve successful sporting result (Carlsson-Wall, Kraus & Messner, 2016). However, Toscani and Prendergast (2018) argue that an inappropriate sponsorship partner can result in negative outcomes on the brand and might prove costlier in the long-term (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). Thus, it seems like a strategic approach to sponsorship is necessary for a sponsee to enable a successful, long term relationship.

2.2.1 The Sponsee

In an extensive literature review, Toscani and Prendergast (2018) call for researchers to develop a better understanding of the sponsee. In their findings, they suggest that a holistic and systematic approach should be developed by sponsees to optimise their outcomes when entering a sponsorship arrangement. Furthermore, Prendergast, Paliwal and Mazodier (2016) imply that the sponsees as well need to consider their strategy to reach their desired outcomes in a sponsorship arrangement. Dietl and Schwerzer (2015) identify the main goal for a sponsee in a sponsorship arrangement to be maximising sponsorship income. Additionally, they highlight two secondary goals as sponsor satisfaction and creation of positive brand image, which they argue both to be directly contributory to the primary goal. Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) underline that sponsors certainly view sponsorship as a strategic tool along with asking for the sponsees to invest more in the relationship. They further state that the sponsees are increasingly expected to deliver genuine value, beyond mere exposure and access to intellectual property. The change in expectations from the sponsor have increased the sponsees' need for a strategic focus on value creating relationships (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006). Moreover, as sponsors invest more in sponsorships, it is essential for the sponsees to develop a shared understanding of value and their respective obligations (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006).
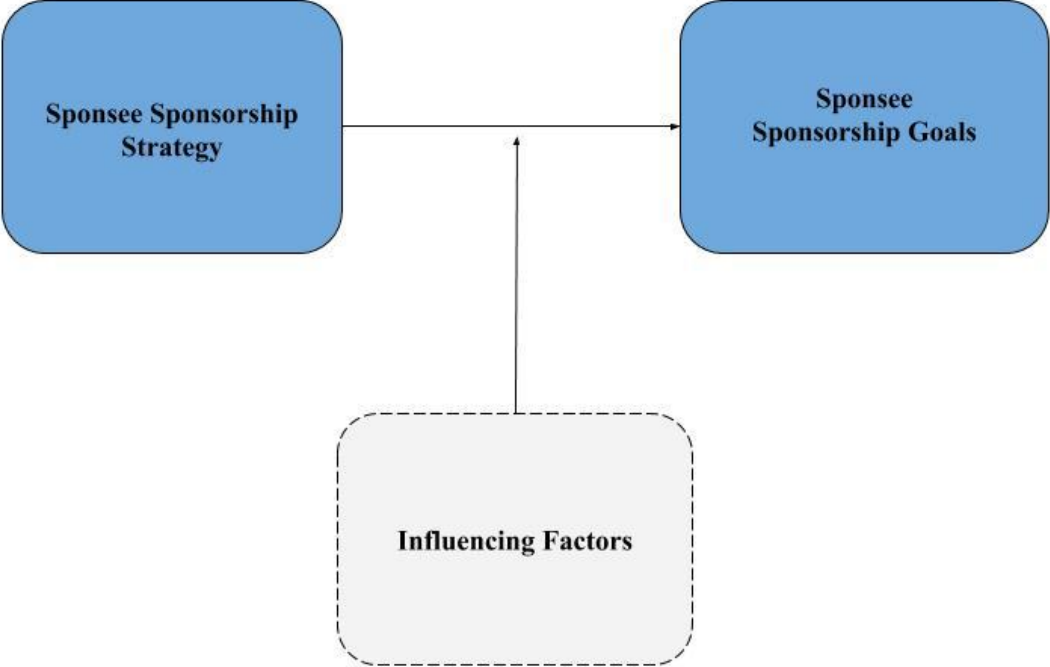
Furthermore, Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) found that, in a sponsorship relation, the sponsor's perception of the sponsee has evolved. They argue that the sponsor has higher expectations of the sponsee in terms of investments and active participation in value creation

within the relationship, which calls for the need of sponsees to adapt a more proactive and strategic approach to sponsorship. The findings presented by Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) further sheds light on the importance of an active, reciprocal collaboration within sponsorship relationships and that it is particularly contingent for the sponsee's efforts to be contributing to the performance of the relationship. This implies that the activities and objectives of the sponsee is becoming more important for a successful sponsorship relation. Hence, sponsees will have to be willing to adapt and move away from the more transactional relationship into a more strategic approach, considering their own brand image and endeavours as central to a successful sponsorship relation (Farrelly, Quester and Burton, 2006).

2.3   Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework have been constructed based on previous findings as accounted for in section 2.1 and 2.2. Previous literature about sponsorship is argued to be quite complex in nature and scholars have been calling for a better understanding of the perspective of the sponsee. Due to the fact that previous research generally seems to have overlooked the perspective of the sponsee, the conceptual framework is constructed to be rather abstract and "higher-level", with focus on the strategic approach. The conceptual framework will be guiding the collection and analysis of the empirical data in this study, with the purpose to explore and gain an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. The framework is accounting for the linkages between the main elements of *Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy* the *Sponsee Sponsorship Goals* and *Influencing Factors*. We believe the sponsee sponsorship strategy to be designed in order to achieve the sponsee sponsorship goals, with potential influencing factors affecting the execution of the strategy. Hence, these linkages will be investigated during the collection and analysis of the empirical data, in order to establish a coherent understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. In addition, by considering the linkages between the three main elements of the conceptual framework, we aim to be able to answer the research question of   this   study: *How   do   sponsees   strategically   engage   in   sponsorships?*

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy

3   Methodology

This chapter will present and argue for the chosen methodological approach and strategy of the study. Initially, we will introduce the research philosophy that accounts for our ontological and epistemological point of departure. The chapter goes on to introduce the research strategy and the process of our literature review. Further, the details of the conducted study is presented in selection and proceedings, presentations of the clubs and respondents, how the data was practically collected as well as the process of the analysis. Lastly, we reflect on the research quality of the study.

3.1   Research Philosophy

It is useful to be able to understand the philosophical issues of research in order for us as researchers to approach the study with a reflexive stance (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The awareness of how our ontological and epistemological stances will shape the study will ultimately contribute to the quality of the research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). As the study aims to establish an understand of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, the study set out to collect empirical data from sponsees in Sweden. The objects of study for the study at hand were seven men's football clubs from the two top tier leagues in Sweden. To be able to collect relevant data it was of relevance to understand the reasoning and perceptions of the individual respondents. The respondents represent their respective club throughout the interviews but are also sharing their perceptions and individual truths in their answers. Us as researchers recognise that multiple possible truths exist and are constructed by the observer. With this approach throughout the conducted research, we were mostly guided by what Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) describe as a relativist ontological stance. As we focused on and interpreted how the respondents described the sponsorship activities and their descriptions of their strategies, it was the observers' viewpoints that were central for the study.

The epistemology is linked closely to ontology and is described as the study of knowledge and the philosophy of how we know what we know (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). The epistemological view of social constructionism implies that the researchers believe in a 'societal reality', which is determined by the individual rather than external factors (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We believe that the epistemological stance of social

constructionism was the best fit for this study, based on the aim and research question to investigate *how* the sponsee strategically engage in sponsorships, to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). Constructionism is argued to be grounded in looking at reality as non-objective, exterior and socially constructed by people and their daily interactions with their surroundings (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). The core of the study revolves around establishing an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, by collecting data through interviews with respondents from football clubs who work with sponsorship on a daily basis. All participating respondents are managers in their respective club and therefore have the main influence and power in shaping their sponsorship strategies and goals, why the study is based on their individual perceptions and truths. Although, the answers are based on their constructed reality, they have a role in the club that let us recognise them as representants for the clubs' respective strategy. The club sponsorship strategy is not viewed as a constant variable in this study, but as a continuously developing and changeable process shaped by individuals. Accordingly, we have analysed the interviews by interpreting their individual perception of their club's strategy.

3.2   Research Strategy

Whether the research approach is qualitative or quantitative should be a natural reflection of the aim, purpose and research question of the study (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). The aim and purpose of the study at hand is to understand how sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships, in order to narrow the identified research gap and to develop an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. Both the aim and purpose and the research question of this study put emphasis on the *how,* and the associated underpinnings that is needed to explain the *how*, which is best found through a qualitative research strategy (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). This since a qualitative study is a strategy that usually emphasizes words and meanings in both the collection and analysis of the data, in comparison to quantitative research that emphasizes quantification (Bryman, 2018). Since the aim was to provide an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy that is, as earlier stated, a concept quite unexplored in previous research, the study was rather exploratory in nature. With a more exploratory stance, a qualitative approach preferably serves the needs of the research (Bryman, 2018). This assures the fact that a qualitative study was the most suitable

research strategy for this particular study. Furthermore, the collection of qualitative data is characterised by its interpretive and interactive process, most commonly based upon what the research participants say or do (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). In resemblance, this research was set out to collect the spoken words of the respondents through semi-structured interviews.

The research process started off by scrutinizing previous research of sponsorship and sport sponsorship, thus creating a preunderstanding of the field of research and the context of this study. The process of the literature review is further elaborated on in section 3.3. It covers how the relevant previous research was assessed and evaluated, in order to be used as a point of departure and a basis for establishing the conceptual framework (2.3). However, the scrutinization of the previous literature on the subject of sponsorship made us realize that the perspective of the sponsee is currently quite unexplored, why a conceptual framework was constructed. The conceptual framework further illustrates our understanding of how the perspective of the sponsee could be explored and understood, in relation to our interpretation of how the previous research seem to be linked. It is further used in our study as a basis for constructing the interview guides and themes of analysis. Even though the interviews were guided by the conceptual framework, we did not intend to confirm or falsify the findings found in the previous research. Rather, we set out to ask open questions during the interviews, within the boundaries of the predetermined themes. Moreover, in the analysis we approached the data gathered by our interviews with a relatively open mind to be able to draw conclusions not to be found in previous research.

The principal orientation to the role of generation of theory in relation to research in a qualitative study, is usually inductive (Bryman, 2018). Although a qualitative study predominantly emphasizes an inductive approach, our study is based on an abductive approach, meaning that the strategy has mixed characteristics of both a deductive and an inductive strategy (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Bryman, 2018; Bryman & Bell, 2013; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). An abductive approach is based on the researchers initially acquiring some theoretical and empirical understanding as a starting point, to facilitate the process of achieving an extended understanding and generate new knowledge within the field of study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). The abductive approach allowed us to explain the research problem through a dialog between theory and the collected empirical data (Alvesson

& Sköldberg, 2009, Bryman & Bell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). This further enabled us to build on the previous theories to combine them with the new perspectives as presented in the discussion (4.4) and conclusion (chapter 5). Moreover, the abductive approach made it possible for us to, with some deduction, construct and use a conceptual framework based on the existing literature on the subject of sponsorship. Simultaneously, we were deductive in the sense that we adjusted and revised the initial conceptual framework (see section 4.4.4) based on the empirical findings. Ultimately, our data collection was conducted with the conceptual framework as guidance as we simultaneously adapted new insights with the aim of establishing an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy.

3.3   Process of Literature Review

Initially, we conducted a preparatory review of existing literature to get a just overview of previous progress within the research field of sponsorship. Bryman (2018) discuss it to be crucial to create awareness of existing research, relevant theories and concepts as well as previously used methods. He further suggests that it is a process that creates an understanding of the connection between the studied problem and previous literature which might enable identification of contradicting results or unanswered questions. He concludes by saying that if the review is done thoroughly, the study will possess enough base to validate the connection between the study's intended contribution and previous literature (Bryman, 2018). A thorough preparatory literature review enabled us to identify the unanswered questions and the lack of research on the perspective of the sponsee.

We spent a considerable amount of time in the initial part of the study to get an adequate picture of the research field we chose to enter, as well as closely related fields. The previous research considered most relevant for this study is presented in chapter 2, and have been used as the basis of the analysis. The reviewed existing literature were extracted from a number of scientific search engines that were containing academic journals in their register, such as 'Web of Science', 'LUBsearch', 'Emerald' and 'Google Scholar'. Moreover, articles and books that were inaccessible online were accessed in the Lund University libraries. The covered literature mainly dealt with research within Sponsorship, Strategic Sponsorship management, Sport sponsorship, Brand management as well as Swedish sport sponsorship. Eventually, we came to the conclusion that the sponsorship literature seems to have a limited understanding of the

sponsee perspective, as the sponsor usually is main object of study. It was apparent that the perspective was in need of an understanding, which Toscani and Prendergast (2018) acknowledge in a comprehensive literature review as well.

3.4   Selection and Proceedings

With the formulated problem and identified research gap, we progressed to establish the relevant object of study to answer the research question of how sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships. Prior to the decision of which respondents to include in the study, we studied reports concerning the state of the football industry as well as the development of sponsorships within the sport (Deloitte, 2018; EY, 2019a; UEFA, 2019). Additionally, we conducted a pilot study of a Swedish football team and found it of interest to continue on a similar path for the study at hand. The pilot study was conducted in a course as part of the Master's program in International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund University School of Economics and Management, with a single club as the object of study. The pilot study and the prior research made us realize that the Swedish football industry is an interesting context to study the subject of sponsorship, due to the industry experiencing a significant development and transformation process (Deloitte, 2018; UEFA, 2019). Simultaneously, we found that the Swedish football industry has gained increasing interest from sponsors during the last decade (Deloitte, 2018; UEFA, 2019). This was further acknowledged and elaborated on in an initial expert interview with a representative of Swedish Elite Football, discussing the challenges and opportunities that the Swedish football industry is experiencing (Respondent 12, see section 3.5).

Firstly, it made sense to study sponsorship strategies in Swedish elite football clubs since football is accounting for one of the largest amounts of sponsorship revenue in Sweden (EY, 2019a; EY 2019b). Furthermore, there are indications of a need for the football clubs to keep up with the commercialisation by adapting to a more business-oriented approach (SEF interview 15 April, 2019; Shah, 2017; Söderman, 2013). Lastly, the clubs depend on the sponsorship generated revenue in order to meet the financial requirements needed to maintain their elite license. Without it, the clubs are not allowed to participate in the top tier leagues, which consequently would restrict the clubs' development (EY, 2019a). Hereof, the study included seven different clubs, that currently play and have consistently played in the two top tier football leagues in Sweden, 'Allsvenskan' and 'Superettan', during the last decade. The

seven clubs differ from each other in terms of financial capabilities, sporting success, resources allocated to sponsorship related operations and management.

When examining the possibility of reaching relevant respondents for the study, we had to consider several factors when ultimately deciding on the sampling technique. Firstly, a longer time frame could have enabled us to include more clubs in the study. Secondly, due to budget constraints, the travelling opportunities were limited. Lastly, the limited availability of the desired respondents had to be considered as most of them are in power positions with a tight schedule. As Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) points out, the selected sampling technique should be able to facilitate the research objective in a practical, feasible and effective way. Therefore, we used an approach which Bryman and Bell (2013) describes as a purposive sampling in the selection of the individual respondents. We aimed to include respondents from the clubs that would have a good chance of possessing information in order to answer how they strategically engage in sponsorships. Hence, the selection was purposely guided by the research question. We reached out to the clubs' Marketing Manager, Sales Manager, CEO or equivalent positions. The initial contact was made through an email which was either sent to the general club account or directly to the people that we identified as the best potential respondents for the purpose of the study. Although we made assumptions and suggestions of who would be the most suitable respondents, the clubs themselves usually made the final decision on who they felt were best suited. This was made possible since we included an extensive description of the background and the purpose of the study in the initial email. In the email we asked for up to three participants per club, with the aim to make sure we got a fair and comprehensive understanding. The study includes two clubs that had three participants each and five clubs with one respondent each. Consequently, it could be argued that there was a bigger challenge in getting comprehensive insights of the clubs with one respondent, compared to the clubs with several participating respondents. However, we found the overall data insightful and representative for all participating clubs in order to answer the research question. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) points out the challenge of gaining access to subjects of research are often underestimated by the researchers. They further suggest the benefit of using personal contacts that can work as gatekeepers in establishing the initial contact with a company, or in this study, football club. We approached the challenge with patience and managed to reach most of the respondents through direct email contact. However, some of the respondents, including two clubs and the expert interview, were accessed thanks to a personal

contact. Throughout this study, all of the respondents and clubs have been anonymized, which is further elaborated on in section 3.6.

In total, we reached out to nineteen clubs whereas seven agreed on participating, one declined and the remaining left us unanswered. With reason to keep the study within the given timeframe and limited budget, we did a continuous evaluation of the number of participating clubs that was needed to reach the desired amount of collected data and achieve saturation. When the interviews with the seven clubs were completed, we came to the conclusion of having a sufficient amount of data in order to answer our research question, which is further elaborated on in section 3.6. Moreover, we managed to get a nuanced picture due to the wide range between the clubs; such as financial capabilities, sporting success and resources allocated to sponsorship related operations. With a nuanced picture and data saturation, we could confidently answer the research questions and draw conclusions that would contribute to an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy.

3.5   Presentation of the Clubs and respondents

Table 1. Participating Football Clubs

Organisation	League
Club 1	Allsvenskan
Club 2	Superettan
Club 3	Allsvenskan
Club 4	Superettan
Club 5	Superettan
Club 6	Superettan
Club 7	Allsvenskan

Table 2. *Participating Respondents*

Respondent	Position	Organisation	Date & Time	Setting & Location	Duration (recording)	Consent (by email)
Respondent 1	CEO/Club Director	Club 1	23/4 - 19 08.30-10.15	Face-to-Face, Office/Stadium	43:20	YES
Respondent 2	Head of Sales B2B	Club 1	23/4 - 19 09.30-10.15	Face-to-Face, Office/Stadium	58:21	YES
Respondent 3	Head of Communications & Marketing	Club 1	23/4 - 19 10.30-11.15	Face-to-Face, Office/Stadium	43:38	YES
Respondent 4	CEO/Club Director	Club 2	7/5 - 19 14.00-15.00	Face-to-Face, Office/Stadium	49:01	YES
Respondent 5	Head of Sales B2B	Club 2	7/5 - 19 15.00-16.00	Face-to-Face, Office/Stadium	47:08	YES
Respondent 6	Head of Communications	Club 2	7/5 - 19 16.00-17.00	Face-to-Face, Office/Stadium	42:39	YES
Respondent 7	Head of Marketing	Club 3	8/5 - 19 14.00-15.00	Telephone, --	37:32	YES
Respondent 8	Head of Sales	Club 4	9/5 - 19 09.00-10.00	Telephone, --	51:20	YES
Respondent 9	CEO/Club Director	Club 5	9/5 - 19 13.00-14.00	Face-to-Face, O'Learys, Malmö	48:07	YES
Respondent 10	CEO/Club Director	Club 6	10/5 - 19 08.00-09.00	Telephone, --	42:45	YES
Respondent 11	Head of Business Relations & Partnerships	Club 7	10/5 - 19 13.30-14.40	Telephone, --	54:15	YES
Respondent 12	Undefined	SEF (Expert)	15/4 - 19 12.45-14.15	Face-to-Face, Grand Hotel, Lund	1:09:51	YES

The average duration of the interviews is 49 minutes and 23 seconds (49:23)

3.6   Collection of Data

As concluded in previous sections, we decided that qualitative data was both needed and most suitable in relation to our aim and purpose, as well as to be able to answer the research question of this study. Furthermore, to be able to answer our research question and achieve the aim, we concluded that qualitative interviews was the best strategy to collect the empirical data needed. Qualitative interviews are often preferred when aiming to get an in depth understanding of a certain subject (Easterby-Smith et al. 2015), and is helpful for research that aims at collecting more contextual data and insights (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Moreover, qualitative interviews tend to be more open-ended and flexible in nature, with focus on what the respondent find most important and relevant (Bryman & Bell, 2013), which we considered important aspects in order to gain an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. On the basis of this, we decided to conduct semi-structured interviews. The choice of using semi-structured interviews allowed us to ask questions based on an interview guide with predetermined themes and subjects that we wanted to cover (Bryman & Bell, 2013), guided by the conceptual framework. Furthermore, since semi-structured interviews are flexible in nature, it provided us the ability to ask questions in relation to the constructed conceptual framework (Section. 2.3), based on previous literature, while giving room for the respondents to discuss additional aspects (Bryman & Bell, 2015). To establish a consistency and coherency for all eleven interviews with the clubs, we used the same interview guide for all interviews (see appendix 1). However, we did not ask all the questions included in the interview guide in every interview, but rather they were used as guidance. The expert interview with Swedish Elite Football could however be described as unstructured in character, since it was more of an informal conversation based on a couple of predetermined topics (see appendix 2), as an *aide-mémoire*, that we wanted to cover (Bryman, 2018).

We were as previously stated able to conduct twelve semi-structured interviews; eleven interviews with seven different clubs, and one expert interview. Eight of the interviews were conducted face-to-face; three with Club 1, three with Club 2, one with Club 5 and one expert interview (see Table 2 in section 3.5). The face-to-face interviews were made possible because of the expert occasionally working in the Lund-Malmö area and the fact that Club 1 and Club 2 are both from cities within a decent travel distance from Lund. The face-to-face interview with Club 5 was made possible due to the respondent attending a conference in the Malmö area. The interview with Club 6 was further scheduled as a face-to-face interview, but due to

unpredictable circumstances the respondent had to postpone the meeting in the last minute and reschedule it as a phone interview. The remaining three interviews were also conducted over the phone, mainly due to the limited travel budget and time frame. As stated by Bryman (2018), telephone interviews have certain limitations in comparison to face-to-face interviews, such as the possibility to interpret the body language of the respondent. However, Bryman (2018) argues that the method is still highly efficient and that it does not seem to significantly differ from face-to-face interviews, thus generating detailed replies sought by qualitative researchers. Furthermore, in relation to the purpose of the study at hand, we believed that a diversity of the clubs was triumphing the aspect of access to face-to-face interviews.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2015) argue that the location and the setting of the interviews are important factors influencing the process of the interview. Hence, we let the respondents decide both the time and place of the interviews, based on a handful of suggested dates. Moreover, the importance of location and setting was especially apparent during the phone interviews, as the place needed to be completely quiet and undisturbed for best possible quality. The phone interview with Club 6 was, for example, conducted by phone as the respondent was in the car on his/her way to work. This affected the quality of the interview somewhat negatively, as a couple of interruptions disturbed the flow of the conversation. However, we believe that it did not affect the quality of the data significantly. In regards to the duration of the interviews, the aim was to reach at least 45 minutes. The duration varied to some extent (see table 2 in 3.5), but we believe that the average duration of the interviews is in line with our expectations in relation to the aim and research question of this study, as well as to what is suggested for a qualitative interview (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

To ensure the best possible output from the interviews, we sent out an email prior to the interviews with a presentation of the researchers, a description of the aim and purpose of the study, as well as example questions based on the predetermined themes (see appendix 3). This made sure that the respondents had the opportunity to familiarize with the subject and to feel well prepared and comfortable during the interviews, thus enhancing the quality of the insights gathered. Additionally, when describing the process and purpose of our research, we asked for consent from the respondents to use and publicise the collected data used in this specific study. The respondents were also informed and ensured that the clubs and the respondents were going

to be anonymized throughout the report. This was done partly because we could enhance the possibility of getting good and honest answers (Bryman, 2018), but also to ensure the respondents of a safe participation. Furthermore, we informed the respondents beforehand that the interviews were going to be recorded, for us to transcribe and use in our process of analysing the data. All respondents were presented with the opportunity to go through the transcribed versions of their respective interview, to edit any errors. Moreover, Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) suggest that sensitive questions can compromise the trust towards us as researchers and influence the outcome of the interview. Hence, we kept this in mind when we formulated our questions. For example, we consciously avoided to ask questions of for example specific details or pricing of a sponsorship contract or agreement. Nor did we ask them to name or discuss certain sponsors, clubs or individuals.

In line with our abductive approach, we were, as previously stated, guided by the conceptual framework (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Although we let the interview guide somewhat emanate from the conceptual framework and the previous literature, we kept the interview questions open, for the respondents to answer freely. This enabled the respondents to steer the focus, with the ability for us to ask relevant follow-up questions on the topics we found the most important.

When the respondents' answers became too descriptive and fact based, we benefited from using the laddering up technique, by asking questions of *why* and *how*, thus enabling us to get a deeper understanding of the respondent's values and standpoints (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015). We further benefited by using the laddering down technique when the respondents' answers were too vague, asking the respondent to exemplify or elaborate on certain aspects and occurrences (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, 2015).

To conclude, our semi-structured interviews have provided us with sufficient data and valuable insights, thus we managed to achieve theoretical saturation. To reach theoretical saturation, the main idea is that no new or relevant data is emerging into new category dimensions in the analysis and the categories are well developed as well as having established relations between them (Bryman & Bell, 2013). We set out to collect data within our broad established categories and further found developments within them where new dimensions and variations appeared.

Eventually we found the patterns to repeat and validate themselves in a way that made us confident of having reached theoretical saturation, by a sufficient number of interviews.

3.7   Process of Analysis

Bryman and Bell (2013) emphasize that the analysis of qualitative data is a big challenge, by reason of its rich nature and lack of established set of rules to follow. What is available, however, are broad guidelines and suggestions to break down the process of analysis in a structured way (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015; Saldaña, 2013).

Throughout the process of analysing the empirical data collected, of how the clubs strategically engage in sponsorships, we focused on establishing an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. During the interviews, we simultaneously audio-recorded and took summarising notes of the answers. The recordings enabled us to re-listen and transcribe the interviews, which laid the foundation for the analysis of the collected data. The 'data corpus' of this study consist of transcriptions of 134 pages and 71 312 words. This empirical raw data provided a detailed overview of the interviews and allowed us to go through them systematically to further organise and structure the data. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) highlight 'the chaos problem'; the problem of facing a large amount of data that is seemingly unstructured and ungraspable. They also direct attention to the 'problem of representation' that occur when a researcher has to decide what data to include and exclude in the process of analysis, the data that the result is based on. To manage these challenges, they recommend a structured approach of coding, categorising and sorting the transcribed data into themes (Rennstam & Wästerfors, 2015), similar to what was conducted in this study. Saldaña (2013) propose to start by breaking down the gathered data through coding. He describes a code to be a phrase or even a single word that symbolizes the researcher's interpretation of the respondent's answer in the raw data. The codes are further supposed to represent the essence of the data from the transcriptions and is used further to detect patterns. He continues to point out that the coding method will look different depending on the research design, such as with a more or less deliberately open or structured approach (Saldaña, 2013). In this study, we approached the data with the previously presented conceptual framework (section 2.3) as a basis for the analysis. The framework was constructed with a relatively wide scope which enabled us to keep an open mind to what type of codes that emerged within the predetermined elements; Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy, Sponsee Sponsorship Goals, Influencing Factors. The coding

method is inspired by what Saldaña (2013) describes as 'Structural Coding', which is a method that simultaneously codes and categorizes the data. He suggests structural coding to be an appropriate method when managing data generated from semi-structured data-gathering, such as semi-structured interviews, to explore larger categories or themes. We believe that it is a proper method for the study at hand since we have been focusing on the rather unexplored sponsee perspective. The coding was practically done by utilizing a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) called 'Nvivo'. Nvivo allowed us to go through the transcriptions in an organised manner while continuously interpreting, coding and categorising the empirical data, based on our predetermined themes (see appendix 4). Saldaña (2013) further recommends processing the code more than once, in cycles, to organize the data with shared characteristics into categories and sub-categories. By adopting a structural coding process, as presented above, we managed to construct relevant codes based on the empirical data. The codes were constructed in the first cycle based on phrases and sentences identified in the transcriptions (see appendix 5). In the second cycle, we strategically reassembled the data that we considered to be "split" or "fractured" during the first cycle of the coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124, in Saldaña, 2013), by adopting a method similar to 'Axial Coding' (Saldaña, 2013). By using a method similar to the axial coding, we managed to group similarly coded data into sub-categories, based on the identified relationships and linkages between the constructed codes. Thus, the established sub-categories were representative of the codes and the empirical data that it emerged from. These are presented and analysed in section 4. In table 3, we present an extract of how we organised the main categories, the identified sub-categories and their correlated codes, which can be found in its full version in Appendix 6.

Lastly, when evaluating the process of the analysis it had to be taken into consideration that the research was conducted by two researchers with two similar, yet different perspectives. To be coding collaboratively can in worst cases result in ambiguous analysis, why Saldaña (2013) raise the importance of coordination and continuous alignment between the separate coding. We recognised that it was a subjective interpretative process that could have negatively affected the outcome of the analysis, if we had not had a continuous dialog during the coding process.

Table 3. *Extract of Coding Scheme after second cycle*

Main Themes/Categories (elements from the conceptual framework)	Sub Categories (emerged through axial coding)	Codes	Empirical Data
Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy	**Relationship**	Interpersonal contact	"you do business with people, not with businesses"; "I need to know the people"
		Network	"We meet continuously a couple of times every month.. we have inspirational lectures, speed dating between the companies, and then we have some so called social events. like a banquet, golf, a cruise. But ten times a year we have activities with the main purpose of creating as good business environment as possible."
		Committment & trust	"It's all about how active you are. If you create that yourself, then it will be good"; "We need to have proof of content" ; "It builds on trust"
		Activities and events	"On May twentysecond, we have a big business fair here.."; "We travel, play padel, golf, you name it"
		Exchange of resources	"Except for the money, we want to benefit from their competencies"; "They can help us in our Advisory Board"; "Our philosophy is that, if we need anything, we go to our partners first"
		Understanding sponsor needs	"Our responsibility is to make use of **club 3** in offering a partnership that is tailored for our partners as much as possible."
		Sponsorship evaluation and feedback	"So its partly been... measured... the network. What your networkparnters thought about the network."
		Exclusivity	"They participate in exclusive gatherings"; "The group is supposed to be tight, an exclusivity"
		Gate opener	"We support and bring companies together, that we believe can benefit from each others products and services and it could be ales but also to cut costs and make cheaper purchases."
		Sponsor fit	"It is very important that there is a match between us", "You can't just take any partner"
	Brand image	Club brand effect on the sponsor's brand	"We can put **Company AB*** on ours and see that we help them to become, maybe a bit more 'sexy', more attractive to a broader audience because **club 3** attracts a broad audience... and a little more 'competetive' maybe."
		Sponsor's brand effect on club brand	"We won't lend our players or our brand to partners that we do not believe will contribute with anything" ; "We don't collaborate with political parties or controversial businesses"; "We are very restrictive with who we allow to use our brand"
		Evaluation & policies	"...To implement policies and our core values and such, for example we do not cooperate with companies or organisations with political messages, alcohol, drugs, sexism etc. They can't become partners here" ; "We evaluate every customer and potential partner"
		Marketing activities & campaigns	"It depends what the customer wants to do, for example the partners that are in the consumer goods industry often want to use our players for campaigns and similar"; "some companies do targeted campaigns, using us to attract e.g. girls"; "We are often involved in some way or another. We want to ensure quality, so the message sent out resonates with what we stand for"
		Brand associations	"The challenge is.. and the hard part.. is that we almost always are selling association rights with our brand. And that grounds itself on the brand being associated with something positive, I presume."
		Brand reputation	"... It is all good as long as we have a good reputation"; "We have a very good reputation in the Swedish football industry" ; "We are a well known brand and we always end up in the top 3 in rankings of the most well known sports brand"
Sponsee Sponsorship Goals	**Revenue**	Revenue	"Yes but I have called that contact then and really unconditionally, had a conversation and seen what it has led to. And then if it gives 5.000 kronor to the club or if it gives 50.000 doesn't matter much. Money has to come in, that is how it is."
		Fund organisational development	"The better we sell, the more we can invest in the future and in the organisation. E.g. to hire new people"; "It is the most secure revenue, because you know how much money it is and how long the contracts [deal] are"
		Fund sport development	"It is business. We are supposed to generate a surplus, to invest in the sport"
	Sponsor Satisfaction	Build relationship between club sponsors	"We give very much businesses to our partners, between each other"; "We need to know what they do to be able to match them with other partners"; "They share the experience and become friends"
		Flexibility & Adaptability	"If you are part of the network you should have focus on doing business, if you want to watch football there are other products"
		Sponsor's Return on Investment	"The price of being part of the network is ***Amount***. But they get back far more in the form of business"
		Service	"We are supposed to deliver as good as possible towards our partners"; "We always try to promise a bit less than what we can deliver"
		Develop the sponsorship offering	"Then it is, I mean it is information [sponsorship evaluations] that enables us to become even stronger. And to create a good product for our sponsors for example."
		Fulfill sponsorship contract	"... a delivery all the time. If we have said that this and that is included,.. then that is what should be included."
	Societal Contributions	Support municipality	"...to some extent also the municipality. As **Club 2**, after all, it is an important part of all the associations, but we are also the ones who now has the best prerequisites of being able to run certain things, which means that we become the spokesperson of certain issues."
		Football in Society	"It is important for the municipality that we activate a lot of youths. It is fantastic for them because then they are not out making trouble"; "If we can raise a 'Good Citizen' and a future leader it is a great win for us. It is incredibly important for us and the municipality"; "I believe that the business sector and the sports associations can accomplish things that authorities, the government, municipalities or counties can not"

3.8 Research Quality

It is of great importance for a qualitative research paper to make sure that the results are trustworthy. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Bryman, 2018), the level of trustworthiness in qualitative research is based on a couple of criteria, that serves the purpose to secure the quality of the study; 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability' and 'confirmability'. Throughout the study we have purposely been guided by these criteria, as well as to be transparent of how the findings were reached, in order to provide all information to external subjective judgements for the research to be considered trustworthy.

The credibility criterion is aiming to answer how believable the findings are. A suggested method to use is respondent validation, where the researchers invite the respondents to take part of the study to ensure correspondence between the findings and the perspectives of the research respondents (Bryman, 2018). We ensured the respondents validation firstly by sending out the transcribed version of the interview to each respondent respectively. After approval of usage of direct quotations, we also made sure to get the final findings and last version of the study approved before publication. In that sense we got the respondent validation in two steps to ensure to meet the credibility criterion.

The transferability criterion aims to answer the question if the findings is applicable in other contexts (Bryman, 2018). As the findings in qualitative studies tend to be focused on the contextual uniqueness being studied, the direct transferability to other contexts is best judged on the basis of a rich and thick description of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Bryman, 2018). The research aimed to provide as comprehensive presentation of the empirical data and analysis that was made possible, in order to facilitate the transferability criterion to be met. This was specifically preferred as the aim of this study is to provide an initial understanding for the sponee sponsorship strategy in the chosen context with the intention to be used in further studies when developing research within the field.

The dependability criterion asks: are the findings in this study likely to be repeated in a similar context? This presumes that records of collected data is accessible, for peers to be able to review the study and its findings (Bryman, 2018). In our study, e.g. the interview guide, transcripts and discussion notes have been systematically organised and kept throughout the course of the conducted research. Ultimately, it is needed to reflect upon the changeability of the studied context (Bryman, 2018), meaning that we as researcher recognise that the studied sponee strategies could be shifted in time.

The confirmability criterion answers to the question of the degree to which the researcher allowed his own values and perceptions to intrude and shape the interpretation of the data and the findings (Bryman, 2018). It should be taken into consideration that us as individual researchers are to some extent influencing the outcome of the study. However, by a collaborative and thorough coding process we believe that we have managed to mitigate our preconceived understandings to rather be beneficial in the interpretation of the data.

4 Analysis

The following chapter will present and discuss the empirical findings of this study whilst, simultaneously, analysing the results. The presentation of the empirical data and analysis will be structured according to the conceptual framework (2.3), starting with the Sponsee Sponsorship Goals, followed by the Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy and finally the Influencing Factors. Lastly, a discussion of the main findings is presented, in relation to the previous research and the aim and purpose of this study.

4.1 Goals

As presented in the conceptual framework (2.4), the sponsorship goals are closely linked to the sponsorship strategy and to get a comprehensive and just understanding of the clubs' sponsorship strategy it was of relevance to understand their sponsorship goals. During the coding process of the empirical data we identified three main goals: *Revenue*, *Sponsor satisfaction* and *Societal contributions*. The three goals are further based on the identified codes, as presented in appendix 6 that all seem to be linked to the design of the clubs' sponsorship strategies. The findings and analysis of the sponsorship goals will be presented below.

4.1.1 Revenue

Dietl and Schwerzer (2015) declare that the main goal for the sponsee is to maximize revenue in the sponsorship arrangement. For the clubs it is surely one of the main goals, not only as it is a necessity in order to keep their operations running, but also to be able to invest in the development of both the team and the organisation. Respondent 1 from Club 1 stated that: *"It is business. We are supposed to generate a surplus, to invest in the sport.".* The respondent further argued that the sponsorship goal of generating revenue is important because of it being an accountable income: *"...sponsorship, which is the foundation and fundamental [revenue stream] of the business, as it is the more secure income…".* The respondent implied that the sponsorship goal of generating revenue is considered a key factor to be able to plan for and realize future investments in the development of the organisation, as well as the team. Moreover, Respondent 4 believes that there is a clear connection between the generated revenue and the sporting success:

"...if you look at our turnover, as well as that we want to be able to compete where we want us to be involved and compete [on the top level]. So, unfortunately, we have to become even more business-like and get more money in motion, it's that simple."

All clubs seem to be acknowledging the revenue as a fundamental goal of a sponsorship, and the respondent of Club 5 described it as follows: *"Yes, that revenue [sponsorship revenue] is.. there the money talks, for us. That revenue is so important for us."* The respondent of Club 4 agreed:

"...I've contacted that contact purely unconditionally, had a conversation and waited to see what it would lead to. Then.. if it would generate 5.000 kronor [SEK] to the club or if it would generate 50.000 doesn't really matter. The money has to come, that's how it is really."

Furthermore, as emphasised by several of the respondents, an important and strategic investment seems to be in the development of the clubs' sponsorship strategy and offering. In turn, such investments purposefully assure that the clubs, in length, can generate even more sponsorship revenue. Club 7 explained it as: *"The better we sell, the more we can invest in the future and in the organisation. E.g. to hire new people for the delivery".* By 'delivery', the respondent is referring to delivering what is agreed upon in the sponsorship agreement to the sponsor. The goal of generating sponsorship revenue could seemingly have a connection to the goal of sponsor satisfaction. Through investments in the organisation the club seem to enable a successful delivery of the sponsorship offering, thus making the sponsors satisfied.

4.1.2   Sponsor satisfaction

Dietl and Schwerzer (2015) identified sponsorship satisfaction as a secondary goal for the sponsee in a sponsorship arrangement, in addition to the goal of maximizing revenue. On basic terms, all the clubs seem to find it important, if not crucial, to make the sponsors satisfied. Sponsor satisfaction is most commonly measured on the ability to deliver what is stated in the sponsorship agreement, as stated by Respondent 1:

"The agreement is clear. And you have to deliver. If it says that they should

have a box at the stadium then they should have access to a box, for instance.

And on all the games that are agreed. It is not that difficult."

All of the clubs seem to consider the goal of customer satisfaction as the basis for a successful sponsorship and, additionally, the majority of the clubs seem to be eager to deliver even more than what is stated in the agreement to achieve this. For example, Respondent 11 mentioned that they usually promise a bit less than what they can deliver, to make sure of as good sponsor satisfaction rates as possible. Some of the respondents further expressed the concern of losing a sponsor when failing to deliver, referring to occasions when sponsors have decided not to extend or terminate a contract due to poor satisfaction. This could explain why many of the clubs seem to be very thorough in providing good service, while making sure that the sponsors get as much return on their investment as possible. Respondent 5 of club 2 considered the sponsor satisfaction as an achievement:

"If our network works well and the member companies [sponsors] are

satisfied, they invest their money and get back considerably more and they

establish business contacts etc... Whether we are in Allsvenskan or Superettan

.. If so, we have done well."

This sheds light on the club's desire to achieve sponsor satisfaction by delivering according to the agreement, but also by providing good service as additional value. Furthermore, the clubs emphasise that sponsor satisfaction is a rather complex goal to achieve as it is characterized by constantly changing and evolving demands and criteria from the sponsors. To deal with this, a lot of the clubs emphasise the importance of being flexible and to be able to adapt the offering accordingly. Respondent 11 mentioned that: *"...we do not lock ourselves to a solution, but we are flexible to be able to adjust if there is anything they want to change. We always try to solve it."*. The goal further seems to be considered by the clubs when engaging in sponsorships, which will be elaborated on further in section 4.2.

4.1.3 Societal contributions

All of the clubs take an active role in society and are often considered to be important actors and driving forces for good. Common for all the participating clubs is that they believe that they have a competitive advantage in attracting and maintaining sponsors if they manage to engage and involve sponsors in activities or projects related to CSR, equality or the youth in their respective region. This implies that an important sponsee sponsorship goal is, in fact, societal contributions. In contrast to what Dietl and Schwerzer (2015) discuss as the third and last sponsorship goal for a sponsee, the creation of a positive brand image, the findings in this study implies that this does not seem to be the case for the participating clubs. Respondent 5 discussed their goals of societal contributions as important not only for the club, but to the municipality and the region as well: *"if we can raise a good citizen and a future leader it is a great win for us. It is incredibly important for us and the municipality"*. He/she further argued that: *"I believe that, especially the large companies, appreciate it. Because it is a great thing and they get an added value; that they can stand behind it"*. One of the main goals with a sponsorship, from the club perspective, inevitably seems to be to contribute to society. The major reason seems to be that they can make an impact together with the sponsors, as an opportunity to do good. Respondent 1 says that: *"I believe that the business sector and the sports associations can accomplish things that authorities, the government, municipalities or counties cannot"*. However, the empirical data implies that it could also be a commercial opportunity, to attract potential sponsors.

Furthermore, it seems to be important for the majority of the clubs to separate the societal contributions and the sponsorship activities as much as possible from the sports results. Respondent 11 mentioned that: *"We try to separate our other business as much as possible from the sport, in terms of sports results and so on."*. This interesting finding could imply that the goal of societal contributions further gives the clubs a lot better bargaining power in times when the team does not deliver as good as expected. This is emphasised by Respondent 1 that mentioned that:

> *"You need to have an organisation that is not solely built on sports success, because if you have a [sponsorship] relationship that is built on the team succeeding at the football pitch, you will have a difficult time to attract sponsors when you do not succeed."*

The clubs further seem to aim at presenting themselves as more than just a football club and argue that the societal contributions is an important factor to be able to do that. The majority of the clubs mention that they actively communicate and talk a lot more about themselves as 'the football club as a whole', or the 'totality of the club', where the societal contributions seem to be a crucial factor to ensure a long-term competitive advantage, in terms of bargaining power and attraction from sponsors. This is further emphasised by respondent 11 that mentioned that: *"There is a lot more talk about our business and not that much about the results on the football pitch, more of the things we do around".*

4.2   Sponsee Sponsorship Strategies

The following section will present and discuss the main findings of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, based on the three sub-categories identified during the coding process of the empirical data: *Relationships, Branding* and *Citizenship*. The three sub-categories are identified as strategies that are central to achieving the previously discussed sponsee sponsorship goals. The empirical data is discussed and analysed in relation to the previous research, to be able to provide an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy.

4.2.1   Relationship as a Strategy

To treat the sponsorships as relationships, or 'partnerships', as discussed by scholars such as Morgan et al. (2014), Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006), is often mentioned by the respondents and seems to be a certainty for the participating clubs. Many of the clubs rely on the sponsors remaining long-term partners, thus the maintenance of the relationships is highly valued. The importance of building relationships with the sponsors was expressed by respondent 11 in club 7:

> "*Generally speaking, we are in a relationship industry. You do business with*
> *people, not with companies primarily. However the companies and the*
> *functions used might change .. But the larger the larger the companies are,*
> *and the more business-driven they are, the more they focus on values and the*
> *more important it is with relationships. A smaller partner, who is a Club 7-*

sponsor and who is a 'heart-sponsor', may seek a relationship to get close to the club. But they are there as well. "

No matter the size of the sponsor, relationships seem to be a beneficial way to approach the sponsorships from a club perspective. As stated in the quote, it is also important to realise that it is, first and foremost, people that they are dealing with. In the interviews, the clubs mentioned that it is important to focus on establishing a personal contact with the sponsor and argued that a strong personal relationship is fundamental to be able to maintain long-term relationships. It further seems to be an important factor in achieving the goal of sponsor satisfaction, much like Morgan et al. (2014) and Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi (2000) describe the commitment and trust as successful factors in reaching both the individual and common objectives. Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) highlights the need for a sponsee to understand the sponsors' needs in order to be able to alter their own strategic approach and, thus, establish a successful sponsorship relation. The clubs do take the sponsors' needs into consideration, and many of the respondents point out the importance of understanding that the individual sponsor have different requests and goals with their involvement with the club. The respondent of Club 3 said: *"Our responsibility is to make use of club 3 in offering a partnership that is tailored for our partners as much as possible.".* The respondent is implying that there should be a flexibility in the sponsorship offering to meet the needs of the sponsors. However, the respondent of Club 5 stress that they need to realise their limits of flexibility, to not let the tailored solutions get out of hand:

"We notice that there are more and more requests for, such as event-based layouts. /.../ It comes more and more. And of course we can do that, but would we always have it like that? Partly it could very easily become .. if we have many companies that want to do so, then it is likely that they want to choose the same game [to organise their events]."

Most of the sponsor's key objectives, similar to what is presented by for example Roper and Fill (2012), Jungahagen (2018) and Demir and Söderman (2015) seem to be taken into account in the sponsorship offerings by the clubs. All the clubs further seem to have identified the need to divide the various sponsorship offerings into different 'packages', to make sure of a clear overview. The different packages generally seem to contain offerings such as exposure at the stadium, exposure on the shirts, collaborative marketing campaigns, hospitality, boxes at the

stadium, access to VIP-facilities, match tickets, activities, a 'business-network', naming rights etc. However, it is often argued to be an advantage to be able to tailor it according to the sponsors' needs, in order to maintain a good, long-term relationship. Some of the clubs have further established a very close relationship with some of their sponsors, where the exchange of resources, an open dialog and an active involvement seems to be central. In some cases, the sponsors even take an active role in the development of the sponsorship offering together with the club. Club 2 described such sponsorship relationships as primarily being based on an exchange of resources, where an advisory board is established amongst the top paying sponsors, where a high degree of involvement and utilization of each other's competences seems to be central:

> *"It's a bit like an advisory board. So it is not just that there is a collaboration but when we set our target document from [20]19 to [20]22, we have presented it for judgment and they have, based on their expertise from their companies, large companies have been able to comment on it. If we need to make it sharper, or remove something or whatever. And then we use their competence precisely in that matter and we have done so with other issues as well. So it's not a just.. a sponsor .. but we also make use of their competence and skills."*

In some sponsorship relations, the exchange of resources rather seems to be through products and services, as club 5 described: *"Then we have a brand new company [as a sponsor] this year which has its own telephony solution and stuff. /.../ then we choose to buy all telephony from them."*. As stated by Roper and Fill (2012), sponsorship as a relationship is more than just supplying goods and services from one part to another, but rather a process of creating mutual value. This is well in line with how the majority of the respondents describe their sponsorship relationships. During the interviews the respondents expressed that the traditional and more transactional relationship is a lot more uncommon nowadays and, rather than for example selling tickets and exposure to the sponsors, all the clubs seem to have realised the importance of building relationships with their sponsors, regardless of size, while creating mutual value. This could imply that the clubs are in fact, as stated by Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006), willing to move away from a more transactional approach into a more strategic approach. All of the clubs have developed more or less extensive offerings of for example sponsorship

activities as a way to strengthen the relationships. No matter how developed the relationship building strategy seems to be, it is evident for all of the clubs that there has been a shift towards thinking a lot more strategically about engaging in and maintaining the sponsorship relationships. In the more advanced cases, the clubs have developed so called 'sponsor networks' for the top paying sponsors to be a part of. Club 3 describes how their sponsor network is based on a couple of joint activities:

"We meet continuously a couple of times every month.. we have inspirational lectures, speed dating between the companies, and then we have some so called social events. Like a banquet, golf, a cruise. But ten times a year we have activities with the main purpose of creating as good of a business environment as possible."

Several of the other clubs' sponsor networks have similar characteristics as the one described above, and the main purpose often boils down to enabling the network sponsors to do business with each other within the sponsor network. Olkkonen (2001) highlights the sponsors desire to obtain benefits through networking with other organisations, which the clubs seemingly is acknowledging and enhancing through the established networks. The sponsor networks are often very business oriented and the majority of the respondents mentioned that it is a forum often quite separated from the sport itself. The main purpose with the network is to make sure to please the sponsors' needs of combining social activities with business, in order to maintain strong relationships between both club-to-sponsor as well as sponsor-to-sponsor. The networks are often characterized by a high degree of involvement and service from the clubs, to ensure sponsor satisfaction. Club 7 emphasised the strength of the sponsor network in terms of it being both a source for revenue to the sponsors, but also as an attractive strategy for the club to create new sponsorship relationships, as companies not part of the network might feel reluctant to miss out on the benefits:

"...we give a lot of business to our partners, between each other. Looking at .. Their input just to be participants cost 100.000 SEK. But they often get back many times more, in the form of business. That's a lot how we work. If we can give them business then we will not have to sell it that much. On the contrary, it is rather stupid of them if they do not want to be a part of it. So we work a lot

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with building relationships. For them to create a network, because then our
sales will be much easier. If a middle manager [at the sponsor] should
motivate a senior manager that, "I want 100.000-120.000 to put on club 7 and
I get back business for SEK 1 million" . There is no way to say no."

The findings imply that all of the clubs strategically approach and engage in sponsorships as long-term relationships. The Relationship strategy seems to be central to the overall sponsee sponsorship strategy and the benefits seem to be manifold.

4.2.2   Brand Image as a Strategy

One of the most fundamental objectives of sponsorship is to offer some kind of exposure to the sponsor and that the sponsor and the sponsee are visually connected by association, as stated by for example Meenaghan (1991), Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) and Toscani & Prendergast (2018). All of the participating clubs offer various forms of exposure for the sponsors to be associated with the club, but the empirical data shows a much more nuanced picture than what is presented as some of the main viewpoints in the literature review, such as sponsorship being a way for companies to capitalize on the brand image of the sponsee (Kwon, Ratneshwar & Kim, 2016). The majority of the respondents mentioned during the interviews that they believe that it is important to be aware of the effects that sponsorship can have on the club's own brand image. Since sponsorship often implies being associated with the sponsor's brand, the clubs often evaluate every potential sponsor or partner before entering a sponsorship relationship. Respondent 2 explained that the evaluation process of Club 1 is guided by an internal policy document that stipulates that they cannot cooperate with for example: *"companies or organisations with political messages, [companies dealing with] alcohol, drugs, sexism etc. They can't become partners here"*. Moreover, to actively not engage in sponsorship relations with political parties or organisations with political messages is a standpoint shared amongst all of the participating clubs. This is well in line with what is described by Toscani and Prendergast (2018) as reciprocal effects on the sponsee's brand. This could explain why the majority of clubs seem to have such a coherent and strategic approach to evaluating and considering potential sponsors and their potential effect on the clubs' own brand image.

The importance of carefully and strategically considering the clubs own brand image when in a sponsorship relation further seem to be twofold for the participating clubs. On the one hand, it seems to be important not to be associated with for example political parties or controversial businesses, because it does not represent the values and beliefs of a football club and can have a negative effect on the brand image and its reputation. On the other hand, the clubs seem to be aware of the benefits and the positive effects of being associated with a partner. This is expressed in the empirical data as for example having a well-known brand in the 'partner portfolio' can strengthen the club's own brand image. Furthermore, the strategic approach to maintain a positive brand image becomes especially evident in a response from Respondent 11, who argued that: *"We won't lend our players or our brand to partners that we do not believe will contribute with anything"*. This further implies that it seems to be an important strategy for the clubs is to build a strong brand by leveraging their sponsorship partners' image, so called image transfer (Roper & Fill, 2012). However, it seems to vary to some extent between the participating clubs, often depending on the club's financial situation. The findings imply that the goal of generating revenue oftentimes seem to triumph the importance of nurturing and maintaining a strong brand image for the smaller clubs. It is simply too important for the less fortunate clubs to generate a maximum amount of revenue. Nonetheless, the smaller clubs also have their reasons to consider their brand image, which is emphasised by Respondent 6 stating that: *"We can't just take any sponsor"*.

As previously stated, the clubs seem to be aware of how they are perceived as a brand together with their partners. In light of this, Respondent 1 emphasised the importance of "being a role model" and that the club must "live the brand", since they sell the right to associate the sponsor's brand with their own, often positively charged, brand. Moreover, Respondent 3 emphasised that it is important to be aware of the effects of being associated with the sponsor's brand and that it is important that there is a 'match', always in line with the core values and beliefs of the club. Furthermore, the values that the club represent is usually something that the sponsors strive to benefit from when being associated with the clubs. The fact that the sponsors can benefit from being associated with the brand of the club is something that the participating clubs are well aware of. It is especially evident for some of the larger clubs in this study, that capitalize on the fact that they are very well-known brands in Sweden. The larger clubs take advantage of often being the stronger brand in their sponsorship relations and seem to work very strategically with for example yearly evaluations and measuring tools such as rankings

and surveys, to be able to present to the sponsors as evidence. One of the participating clubs even use a rigorous digital matchmaking tool, that determine how strong the match is between the club and the sponsor, based on 36 criteria. Respondent 7 managed to frame the essence of the clubs' strategic approach to branding as part of the sponsee sponsorship strategy:

"We can put *__Company AB__* on ours and see that we help them to become, maybe a bit more 'sexy', more attractive to a broader audience because __club 3__ attracts a broad audience... and a little more 'competitive' maybe.".

However, some of the respondents argue that it could also be considered a risk to be a well-known brand, when associated with sponsors. It is especially apparent in an argument by Respondent 1, that emphasise that in times of a crisis, such as players attracting negative medial publicity, it can hurt both the brand of the club and the sponsor. The clubs do, nonetheless, agree that there are seemingly more advantages than disadvantages to have a strong, positive brand image.

To conclude, the empirical data implies that the majority of the clubs seem to have a strategic approach to maintaining a positive brand image, which seems central to the sponsee sponsorship strategy. The clubs further seem to be well aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of the reciprocal brand effect, when being associated with a sponsor. Furthermore, some of the clubs have come to the understanding that their strong and well-known brands often are considered to be a valuable asset for the sponsor, that hope to capitalize on the brand image of the respective clubs (Kwon, Ratneshwar & Kim, 2016). This in turn seems to be a strategy well in line with both the goal of generating revenue as well as achieving sponsor satisfaction, since a strategic approach to the clubs' brand image seems to both attract sponsorship revenue and please some of the sponsors' key objectives.

4.2.3   Citizenship as a Strategy

An interesting finding, that was deliberately discussed and emphasised by most of the respondents and that seemed to be somewhat central to the sponsee sponsorship strategy during the coding process, is the clubs' various activities and contributions in society. All the clubs are considered to be important actors in society and do for example engage hundreds or even

thousands of kids and youths in their respective region. For example, Respondent 5 mentioned that: *"...it is important for the municipality to have a lot of active youths."*, and a lot of the clubs seem to play an important role for the youths by for example being present at the schools in their respective region and by taking an active role in being as inclusive as possible. The clubs' various activities in the society have become a much larger part of the overall business of the participating clubs and it is common that the clubs involve the sponsors in such activities, seemingly with reason to achieve the sponsee sponsorship goal of societal contributions. For example, Respondent 5 explained that Club 2 carried out 80 activities last year, excluding football activities. Respondent 10 further stated that: *"Our citizenship is a considerably larger part today. Which of course affects how we work with sponsorship."*, implying that the club have incorporated the aspect of citizenship in the way that they strategically engage in sponsorships. Furthermore, several respondents mentioned that they are engaged in various CSR-projects and that there is an increasing interest and demand from the sponsors to be involved in such projects. As mentioned by Respondent 11, the clubs have during the last couple of years experienced that: *"There is a lot more talk about our [CSR] business and not that much from the football pitch, more of the things we do around."* he/she later added: *"Our CSR-Projects have got a lot of attention and that is very good for us."*. This was further strengthened by Respondent 5, who mentioned that some of their sponsors are not as interested in the sport results but rather that the club should contribute with good citizenship. He further explained that their main sponsor has very high demands in this regard:

*"If we look at ***Company AB***, who cares about the 'totality', maybe the most important factor is not that we win Allsvenskan, but it is rather that 'You will make sure that the youth in the city have a good leisure-activity and we would appreciate to stand behind that. You should be out in the schools and raise them, how you are supposed to act in society etc'"*

It seems like it is an ongoing trend that citizenship have become an integral part of the clubs' overall business. It is further apparent in all the interviews that CSR activities is a lot more prioritized within the organisation and that it is becoming well integrated in the sponsee sponsorship strategy. The clubs often involve the larger sponsors, that seem to more commonly have a well-developed CSR strategy. But the clubs also seem to benefit from the fact that the smaller sponsors often have less capabilities to develop CSR strategies of their own.

Respondent 3 mentions that smaller companies "might have difficulties in establishing a CSR strategy on their own. So it gives them an added value to be seen with us".

Lastly, a lot of the clubs are taking an active role in society when it comes to equality. For example, several of the clubs mentioned that it is considered a competitive advantage to have teams for both men and women when negotiating potential sponsorship deals. Respondent 5 argue that they actively use the women's team as an added value for the sponsor. Moreover, Respondent 11 argued that: *"With everything going on right now in terms of equality etc., you must, as a 'hygiene factor', have a diverse organisation."*.

4.3   Influencing Factors

In the previous sections of the analysis we have focused on the clubs' main sponsorship goals as well as their main sponsorship strategies that are practiced in order to reach those same goals. However, how the clubs strategically engage with sponsorships has certainly appeared to be a complex topic of investigation. During the interviews and the coding process of the data, we identified several influencing factors that adds to the complexity, guided by our conceptual framework. The factors seem to be influencing the strategy and goals of the sponsees to some extent. We identified the following four influencing factors: *Resource*s, *Performance*, *External demands* and *Business environment, which* will all be further elaborated on in the following section.

4.3.1   Resources

Quite unsurprisingly, the various resources the clubs possess have proven to be prominent influencing factors to the respective club's sponsorship strategy. The clubs participating in the study have differed quite a lot in financial terms, whereas some clubs are among the wealthiest clubs in Allsvenskan and some clubs are among the Superettan clubs with the most restrained budgets and resources. In the coding process we identified several types of resources that all had a suggested effect on the clubs' ability to plan and their sponsorship strategies and deliver accordingly. The coding process revealed the determinant resources as financials, organisational structure, sport investments and arena & hospitality which all seem to be

interconnected. As respondent 11 described, the arena seems to be a resource that, in itself, could facilitate further financial resources by adding more rights to sell to the sponsors:

> *"For us, it would have been impossible to sell much at the previous stadium because there was nothing to sell. There was no VIP facilities, there was no restaurant... There was nothing left to sell. So for us, it was an absolute prerequisite to be able to grow, develop our partnerships and to be able to generate income. /.../ So for us it was crucial to be able to develop the sales and sponsorship business clearly."*

The clubs that have gone through a transition of investing in a new arena have experienced increasing opportunities of making their sponsorship partnerships successful. Evidently, it is an investment that requires extensive financial capabilities, but has proven to be a beneficial investment in the long-term. The financials have been the most eminent resource discussed by the respondents, which inevitably influences how the clubs strategically engage in sponsorships. Respondent 8 of Club 4 speculated about the possibility to add people to the department working with sponsorships, if they would have more monetary funds available:

> *"Now it will be more, if we stay in Superettan or advance to Allsvenskan next year, then it will be more, more money through TV agreements and stuff like that. And then we have had discussions about that we must expand in the office, with at least one full-time position [working with sponsorships]..."*

The new broadcasting deal as mentioned in section 1.1, is discussed by several of the clubs as a source of income that would enable further investments in organisational development, and it seems like this in turn could enable the clubs to develop how they work with sponsorships. Club 2 commented the lack of people in the organisation to be something that is restraining the organisational development: *"Now we are at least five and a half [full time employees] and it has done quite a lot. But we don't do everything we want. We have more ideas than we are able to do right now.".* Although all respondents agree that it is a factor that determines the ability to plan and deliver the sponsorship strategy, some argue that it is more or less a matter of attitude. Respondent 2 in Club 1 express this: *"...in many clubs the financials is quite bad, which results in that.. you know what you have, but you do not dare to take a chance on what you*

might get if you change the concept.". Moreover, an interesting finding is that even when there are financial resources available to the clubs, there seems to be a conflicting logic between investing in the sport or the organisation, as discussed by Carlsson-Wall, Kraus and Messner (2016). This could affect the investments in sponsorship operations negatively, in favour of the sport investments. The respondent of Club 5 discussed it as follows:

> "*So you can't compromise on the sporting side too much. Because we can't go around and say that we are great business people and that we have a really great organisation... and then we get relegated from Superettan...*"

Club 4 agrees that there should be a continuous balance between investing in the sport and in the organisation. Others see it as completely separate functions that should not be that dependent on each other. Club 7 believes that keeping the commercial department of the organisation separated from the department of sport is beneficial for their sponsorship strategy. Respondent 5 further argued that the sponsorship strategy and the delivery, for example of the network, should be able to be successful no matter the results of the team:

> "*Yes it really wouldn't matter if we are in div. 2. If we work right in the network and give value to our sponsors.. What we can financially lose is the exposure value in that case. But it's less worth playing in a lower division. But if we play in Div. 2 [league] and* ***LargeCompany AB**** are there as well as* ***BigCompany AB****, and a staffing company and they can do business, then the league does not matter.*"

In turn, this implies that the club should benefit from maintaining a good performance in terms of their sponsorship activities, even during times when the club does not deliver as good as expected.

4.3.2   Performance on and off the pitch

One of the most prominent influencing factors affecting the sponsee sponsorship strategy seems to be the performance of the team, since the sponsors often wants to be associated with a winning team. All respondents further mentioned that being part of Allsvenskan is a lot more

beneficial than Superettan in terms of sponsorship, which could be explained by the fact that Allsvenskan offer greater opportunities for exposure and medial publicity. Respondent 5 emphasised the influence of the sport results and mentioned that: *"When it went bad and the team was losing, people did not want to be associated with us."*. Furthermore, the clubs that quite often move up and down between Allsvenskan and Superettan stress that it is negatively affecting the ability to sign long-term agreements, often resulting in a rather unstable and insecure financial situation for the club. It does seem, however, that the performance of the team has been a lot more important historically, as stated by Respondent 11: *"There were no other values and everything was connected to the performance of the team, but nothing was connected to the value that you really get [as a sponsor]"*. This does not necessarily imply that the team's results are less valued, but rather that the clubs have managed to deliver more value to the sponsor, not only connected to the sport.

The performance *off* the pitch seems to be an influencing factor that some of the clubs argue to have an effect on the clubs' sponsee sponsorship strategy. The majority of the clubs express a need to invest in development of the organisation and to become more professionalized and business-like, to be able to deal efficiently and structurally with sponsorships. As Carlsson-Wall, Kraus and Messner (2016) pointed out, being too reliant on the sporting result could complicate the adoption of a long-term strategic approach, why the clubs' business-like adaptation would be beneficial. Respondent 7 argued that if their organisation were to become more professionalized and business-like, they would become a lot better in regards to how they engage in and attract sponsors, as well as the ability to deliver proper value to the sponsor; thus achieving sponsor satisfaction. Respondent 11 also believes that the performance of the organisation has been crucial for the successful sponsee sponsorship strategy of Club 7 and argued that:

"I do not want to brag, but we are probably the most business-like and professionalized club in Allsvenskan /... / We have managed to build this [sponsorship structure] because we work very professionally, determined and industrious."

Furthermore, it seems like the clubs are well aware of the organisational challenges and opportunities they face. For example, several of the respondents expressed that the digitalisation

most certainly will affect how they run their businesses and how they manage their sponsorship strategies. The clubs argued that they need to develop a plan for how they can benefit from the digitalisation, to be able to stay relevant to existing and potential sponsors. They mentioned a need to develop a proper strategy in regards to, for example, more digital exposure and the use of statistics and metrics. Club 7 explained how they have managed to benefit from the digitalisation and mentioned that they have developed a custom made 'app' together with one of their main sponsors. The app is implemented in their business network as a tool to measure all the transactions made within the network. The app is enabling the club, as well as the companies, to continuously measure how much money that is generated within the business network and in the end of the season a winner is announced, based on which sponsor that managed to make the most transactions within the business network. Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (2013) raised the difficulty of measuring the return on the sponsorship investment to be problematic for a sponsor. This example by Club 7 is a great case of how one could take advantage of the digitalisation, by for example overcoming the difficulty to measure and assess the financial impact of a sponsorship. The transparency of this solution could further strengthen existing relationships and enable potential sponsors to enter a sponsorship relation more confidently. The app is further developed as a communication channel between the club and the sponsors that are part of the business network, where they have the opportunity to book tickets to the games, add requirements such as food and sign up for the organised business trips. This in turn could be an important service, to achieve the goal of sponsor satisfaction. It could further be argued that the transparency of the app gives the club a lot more bargaining power when negotiating terms since, while establishing a much more horizontal relationship (Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). Since it clearly states the return on investment for the sponsors it is also a tool that shifts the focus from the sport results to the purpose of the network: to do business. This could benefit the club during times when the team does not deliver as good as expected, thus mitigating the risk of sponsor dissatisfaction.

Lastly, as important as it is for the football clubs to be progressive and to always strive for development of the organisation, it is worth noticing that some sponsors seem to be somewhat more conservative. It is especially noticeable in a sponsorship context as a few of the smaller, local sponsors seem to be very resistant to change, relying on the history and tradition of the relationship. The few conservative sponsors are often smaller sponsors that have been sponsoring the club for a lot of years and do so because of the love and passion for the team.

They are often very eager to see their team perform well, while for example having rights to exposure on the stadium. Tradition thus seems to add a complexity to the sponsee sponsorship strategy, since the clubs often have to be very flexible and adaptive to be able to deal with the dynamic context to reach the goals.

4.3.3 External demands

As presented in the literature review, Toscani and Prendergast (2018) argue that the sponsorship relationship can be viewed as either vertical or horizontal. According to most of the clubs in this study, it seems as a vertical relation, dominated by the sponsor demands, is most common. However, the data shows that for some of the larger clubs, the relation seems to be a lot more horizontal as they argue to have as much to demand from the sponsors in return. Nevertheless, when asked about if the clubs listen to what the sponsors have to say, the clubs were quite united. The opinions and demands of the sponsors are highly valued, and thus seem to have influence on their sponsorship strategy. As discussed in 4.2.1, the success of the sponsorship relationships often depends upon on the clubs ability to be flexible and adaptive to sponsor needs. The demands from the sponsors have, however, not always been that apparent, according to club 7:

"I have worked for a while in the industry now and I can say that there has been a tremendous development in recent years in how the clubs work and how the demands of the partners are. Just compared to a few years ago."

The type of requirements from the sponsors further seem to differ a lot, from smaller things such as adjustments in the delivery of a sponsorship agreement to demands of how the club should engage in the society. The latter is argued by the clubs to have increased in later years and could be an influencing factor of how the clubs feel obligated to answer to these demands. The sponsors are seemingly using the exposure with the clubs to associate themselves with the societal contributions of the clubs as a CSR-strategy. Respondent 5 from Club 2 discussed an example: *"If we take *Company AB*, then in some projects we become their 'extended arm'. Out in the 'association life' ...".* As previously presented in 4.2.3, Respondent 1 discussed the interesting point that companies with less resources to make desired contributions in society seem to take advantage of the opportunity to get involved with the clubs for that reason. In other

cases, the sponsors might want to access the brand associations of the clubs' social commitments. Respondent 6 in club 2 have noticed the demand from the sponsors:

"...Instead, moving from the exposure to wanting another value, you hear our partners talk more and more about it. Especially the larger ones, but also the smaller ones. Actually, it's about something else. If your logo is to be visible with us, you [the sponsor] also want it to be visible in the right way and in the right context."

Most of the clubs speak about sponsors' eagerness to contribute to society and how this enables the clubs to take advantage of making collaborative societal contributions as a part of their sponsorship agreement. Although, when asked about the sponsors' demands, Club 6 argue that the societal contributions is not as decisive for the sponsors as it might appear:

"There is such a trend, yes. But it is also quite complicated, because you talk a lot about it. Very much. But in reality, when you are sitting at the negotiating table, there are very few companies that drive those questions .. It is not that you say that, 'no but I sponsor Club 6 for your social commitment and all the benefits you do.' But rather, you add it as an add-on, on top of that the team should win."

Despite the difference of how much influence it might have when the club and sponsor are sitting at the negotiating table, the demand seem to exist and have an influence. A specific sponsor demand that the clubs experience is to invest in and take an active role in working with equality. Several clubs have mentioned that they have invested and started a women's team with sporting ambitions of reaching the top tier leagues. Respondent 6 argued that: *"A football club today must have a team for women and men, and the sponsors are starting to demand it in another way"*. Although it has been a prominent demand from some sponsors, it is not discussed as the reason for the clubs' investment. Instead, we could identify the source of being more closely related to an internal or societal demand, or aspiration. Repondent 1 from Club 1 told us:

"But with regard to community involvement, there must be a need to fill. Finding something just because you think it's 'cool' is just... It is about

identifying what the need is and then grow from it. /.../ So it is completely

needs-driven, the other [sporting results] is solely result-oriented."

Several clubs are showing the same tendencies as Club 1 accounted for above. Meaning, that a lot of the social commitments are not commercially driven from the perspective of the club. But rather by an obligation to the society which their role as a sport association entitles. At the same time, the clubs seem aware of their sponsor responding positively on the clubs' social commitments. Club 7 believe that it should be a certainty to have invested in a women's team, however recognises that it is something that relates to their brand and sponsors willingness to be exposed with the club:

"...with the attention that is on the women's football today, and it is not going

to decrease, we probably sit in a pretty good seat in this region by having both

men and women. Having teams in both top tier leagues. And with that

exposure and with the attention which I think will increase on the women's

side, then we are probably a good alternative to those who wish to expose their

brand."

The societal demands surely have an effect on how the clubs set their goals of societal contribution as well as sponsor satisfaction. Although the societal contribution seems to be the primary goal in for example actions of engaging youth in schools and investing in teams of all ages and genders, it simultaneously addresses the sponsor demands of social commitment and ultimately achieves the goal of sponsor satisfaction.

4.3.4   Business environment

During the coding of the empirical data we identified that the business environment of the respective clubs seems to be an influencing factor affecting the sponsee sponsorship strategy. We identified that the business environment is affecting how the clubs engage in sponsorships based the geographical location of the club and the ability to benefit by benchmarking, namely that the clubs are open to adapt their strategy by influences from other clubs and industry best practice. In relation to the geographical location of the club, several of the participating clubs mentioned that the majority of their sponsors either operate in or have some connection to the

city or region of the club. This could imply that the geographical location thus, to some extent, determines which companies that choose to sponsor the clubs. As Respondent 5 mentioned: *"If we want to reach the big companies in *City name*.. There is not that many here.. Maybe if we look further to other cities. And they may have a larger amount to spend".* However, Respondent 5 adds that they do not compete with many other elite sports in the city, which could be one of the reasons why they have managed to attract most of the large companies nearby as sponsors. In the larger cities however, the competition seems to be a lot more important to bear in mind. Respondent 11 mentioned that: *"Competition is a big challenge. Some companies choose not to enter a club because there is a risk is that they lose other clients [that are supporting another team]".* The empirical data further implies that even though the geographical location seems to be affecting the opportunity to access potential sponsors, the competition between the clubs seem to be perceived as more of an opportunity than a challenge. The majority of the clubs argue that they do not see each other as competitors in terms of sponsorship, but rather as sources of inspiration. Most of the clubs express that they actively benefit from benchmarking and that they can learn from each other by being open to adapt their strategy to what seems to be industry best practice. Thus, the development of the sponsee sponsorship strategy amongst the respective clubs, and the football industry as a whole, seems to be an important part of the business environment as an influencing factor. Respondent 2 even mentioned that a large part of their sponsorship strategy is based on inspiration and knowledge from a few 'study tours' in Europe, visiting large clubs in for example The Netherlands and Germany. He/she further mentioned that: *"You need to dare and 'Steal with pride', nobody cares /... / Our concept rests upon a humility and that you need to listen to what others do".* The essence of Respondent 2's arguments strengthen the fact that the clubs' sponsorship strategies, in fact, seems to be influenced by the business environment. Lastly, several of the respondents underlined that the entire Swedish football industry would be able to take a giant leap forward if the clubs in Sweden make sure to learn from each other to further strengthen their sponsorship concepts and strategies.

4.4   Discussion

The aim of this study was to expand on the academic understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategies, in order to narrow the identified research gap presented in the Problematization (1.3). To be able to achieve the aim of this study, the analysis of the empirical data was set out to

create an understanding of the clubs' sponsorship strategy, with the guidance of the research question and the conceptual framework presented in 2.3. The conceptual framework was intended to give us as researchers a lens to guide us through this rather unexplored perspective of the sponsee. The following discussion presents our established understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. This is achieved based on the findings of the identified sponsee sponsorship goals, the identified sponsee sponsorship strategies and the influencing factors as well as how they relate to each other. Lastly, a framework for assessing the sponsee sponsorship strategy will be presented in a revised conceptual framework to illustrate the established understanding.

4.4.1 Sponsee Sponsorship Goals

Dietl and Schwerzer (2015) established 'maximizing revenue' as the primary goal for a sponsee in a sponsorship relationship, with sponsor satisfaction and creation of a positive brand image as secondary goals. We have been able to identify tendencies of all of the authors' discussed goals, albeit with some distinctions. Unsurprisingly, generating revenue has proven to be the most prominent goal for the sponsees as the sponsorship revenue accounts for a large part of their total income and is seen as a determinant for the clubs' ability to operate and reach the organisations' main goals. Furthermore, the findings show that the goal of generating revenue enables investments in the development of the sponsorship strategies to further develop and optimize the sponsees ability to generate sponsorship revenue. Thus, it seems to be a strategy itself to view the goal as a never ending achievement, but rather as a cyclical process that fosters the development of the sponsee sponsorship strategy and its delivery.

The findings further showed that one of the most important goals for the sponsees is to achieve sponsor satisfaction, which seems to be closely linked to the goal of generating revenue. We found the linkage similar to how Dietl and Schwerzer (2015) presents sponsor satisfaction, as a goal directly supporting the goal of generating revenue. By achieving sponsor satisfaction, the relationship between the sponsor and sponsee is strengthened and a degree of trust and commitment is established (Morgan et al., 2014; Olkkonen, Tikkanen & Alajoutsijärvi, 2000). This further increases the probability of maintaining the sponsor as a long-term partner, which in turn accounts for a continuous revenue stream. Moreover, the sponsees' ability to achieve sponsor satisfaction is influenced by the constantly changing and evolving demands from the sponsor. This is dealt with through a continuous development of the sponsorship offering, such

as expanding the selling rights, in the same rate as the sponsors expectations evolve. Ultimately, sponsor satisfaction enables higher revenue and the revenue in turn enables the sponsee to design the strategy accordingly to achieve sponsor satisfaction. In this sense, we would argue that the goals are in fact dependent on each other, in contrast to what is presented by Dietl and Schwerzer (2015).

The third main goal that emerged throughout the coding process was the goal of societal contributions. The sponsees seem to realise their role as an important actor in society, which in turn entitles them to take more societal responsibility. In order to exercise the responsibility, the sponsees use sponsorships as a tool in achieving the best possible outcome when making contributions to society. Sponsors have also recognised the sponsees' ability to pursue the goal of societal contributions, why some sponsors choose to realize their CSR-strategies through various collaborations with the sponsee. In this sense, the goal of societal contribution affects the goal of sponsor satisfaction when the sponsor for example demands to be involved in various CSR projects together with the club. We believe this to be an interesting finding, since it is contrary to what is presented by Dietl and Schwerzer (2015). They argue that creating a positive brand image is one of the defining goals of the sponsee's sponsorship strategy. However, we would like to argue that the creation of a positive brand image is rather considered to be an effect of the sponsee sponsorship goal of societal contributions. Furthermore, as presented in the analysis, we argue that the creation of a positive brand image is considered to be a fundamental part of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, thus enabling the sponsee to achieve all of the three identified sponsee sponsorship goals.

4.4.2 Sponsee Sponsorship Strategies

As we found and established the sponsee's sponsorship goals as well as how they relate to and affect each other, we could facilitate the understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategies. The findings show that the sponsees use strategies of relationship building, brand management and citizenship. These strategies were designed and practiced by the clubs in order to achieve the sponsorship goals. Some of the previous literature have discussed the sponsorship as a relationship with mutual benefits (Morgan et al., 2014; Olkkonen, Tikkanen & Alajoutsijärvi, 2000), although with limited reports on what the benefits are and how the sponsees seem to optimize these benefits. The strategy of treating sponsorships as relationships was found to be

central in the sponsees' strategic approach. The strategy seems to be successful when aiming to generate revenue, reaching sponsor satisfaction and societal contributions. They connect in the sense that the strategy of building sponsorships as relationships often seeks to please the sponsors' needs. Eventually, a satisfied sponsor is found more likely to remain in the relationship and thus enabling the revenue goal to be achieved. The strategy of building relationships is also expressed as a way to achieve the societal contributions, since the sponsees often involve sponsors in various social projects and activities, creating mutual value. The fact that the building relationships strategy is contributing to all the main goals makes it essential to constitute throughout the entire sponsee's strategic approach.

In addition to the strategy of building relationships, the sponsees are considering effects on their brand when being exposed with a sponsor. Toscani & Prendergast (2018) have discussed the possible reciprocal effects that the sponsee can experience when exposed with a sponsor. The effect on the brand image is certainly acknowledged by the sponsees and put in to strategy. The strategy mainly revolves around avoiding being associated with sponsors that could have negative impact on the sponsee's brand image. To maintain a positive brand image could further be beneficial when recruiting new sponsors as well as maintaining existing sponsors (Farrelly, Quester & Burton, 2006; Meenaghan, 1991; Toscani & Prendergast, 2018). In this sense, a positive brand image of the sponsee could further be argued to be a strategy for achieving the goal of sponsor satisfaction. Furthermore, the study found that the clubs seem to strategically benefit from the sponsors brand image, to enhance its own. This could be argued to add an interesting perspective to the sponsorship theories of brand associations and image transfer (Vance, Raciti & Lawley, 2016; Roper & Fill, 2012), which is currently only accounted for from the perspective of the sponsor, to for example reach a specific target group or increase sales. Thus, the sponsorship theories of brand associations and image transfer seem to be a two-edged sword, since the findings states that the sponsee also seem to benefit both in terms of a positive brand image and a potential increase in revenue.

The third main strategy, Citizenship, was an especially interesting finding as it seemingly has not appeared in any previous research within the field of study. The strategy was found to utilize the sponsorship in order to primarily reach the goal of societal contributions. Although the primary goal of citizenship is to optimize the societal contributions, it does have a spill over-effect on the two other identified main strategies; Relationship strategy and Brand strategy.

Firstly, it is affecting the brand image positively and could further attract sponsors wanting to be associated with the sponsee. Secondly, it is affecting the existing sponsorship relations positively for the same reason. Although the primary goal is not to attract sponsors, it is an effect that sponsees are aware of and have the opportunity to further communicate. As it is an increasing demand from sponsors, utilization of the strategy would have a positive effect on both the sponsee sponsorship goal of societal contributions as well as sponsor satisfaction.

4.4.3   Influencing factors

While identifying the sponsee sponsorship goals and how they relate to the sponsees' sponsorship strategies, we could find several influencing factors that emerged from the data. The influencing factors contribute to a more coherent understanding of the context in which the sponsee is situated in and how that is affecting the sponsee sponsorship strategy. During the coding process we identified eleven influencing factors that were categorised into four main groups; Resources, Performance, External demands and Business environment. All factors have an influencing effect on the sponsorship strategy, either direct or indirect through the sponsee sponsorship goals. In some cases, they influence both the strategy and the goals. We believe that the understanding of the influencing factors' existence and their effect on the sponsee sponsorship strategy adds an interesting and relevant dimension to the existing literature as well as the overall findings of this study. We further believe that it is crucial to be able to, on the one hand, be able to identify the influencing factors and, on the other hand, establish an understanding of the linkages between them and the other two main elements in the conceptual framework. To conclude, we would like to argue that it enables a holistic and coherent understanding of the Sponsee sponsorship strategy.

4.4.4   Summary of discussion and Illustration of the Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy

The findings have made it possible for us as researchers to answer the research question of how sponsees strategically engage in sponsorship, which in turn have made it possible for us to achieve the aim of the study. This was made possible by first establishing an understanding of the sponsees' sponsorship goals, followed by identifying how they relate to each other, and lastly how they relate to the sponsees' sponsorship strategies. Furthermore, during the analysis

of the empirical data it has been found important to identify the influencing factors of the sponsees' sponsorship goals and strategy. By this comprehensive picture of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, the study is contributing with an understanding for the sponsee regardless of situational conditions or dominant influencing factors. With the established understanding, it is possible to identify, assess and understand how change in different elements, actors and factors could lead to implications.

Since the previous sponsorship literature often view sponsorship as a relation consisting of two or more entities, the existing literature could be argued to be accounting for the sponsor's counterpart indirectly. Hence, the literature regarding the sponsors perspective was able to somewhat guide our analysis of creating an understanding of the previously quite unexplored perspective of the sponsee. This became especially evident since some of the literature regarding the sponsor's perspective to some extent was applicable to establish an understanding of the sponsor's counterpart, the sponsee. The analysis further accounts for the fact that some of the most relevant findings of the sponsor, such as Morgan et al. (2014), Kwon, Ratneschwar and Kim (2016), Meenaghan (1991), Meenaghan and O'Sullivan (2013), Olkkonen (2001), Olkkonen, Tikkanen and Alajoutsijärvi (2000) and Roper and Fill (2012) to be directly applicable to the perspective of the sponsee. Furthermore, the limited previous research on the sponsee perspective have been central to the establishment of the aim of this study. As called upon by authors such as Dietl and Schwerzer (2015), Farrelly, Quester and Burton (2006) and Toscani and Prendergast (2018), our analysis was set out to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. The findings of the study at hand could be argued to have achieved the aim of establishing an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy and the purpose of expanding on the academic understanding, to narrow the identified research gap. Furthermore, a conceptual framework was established as a tool for analysis of the empirical data gathered, which has been developed and revised as presented below (Figure 2). The conceptual framework enhances the understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy and is established to be able to assess the relevant elements central to the sponsee sponsorship strategy and its linkages.
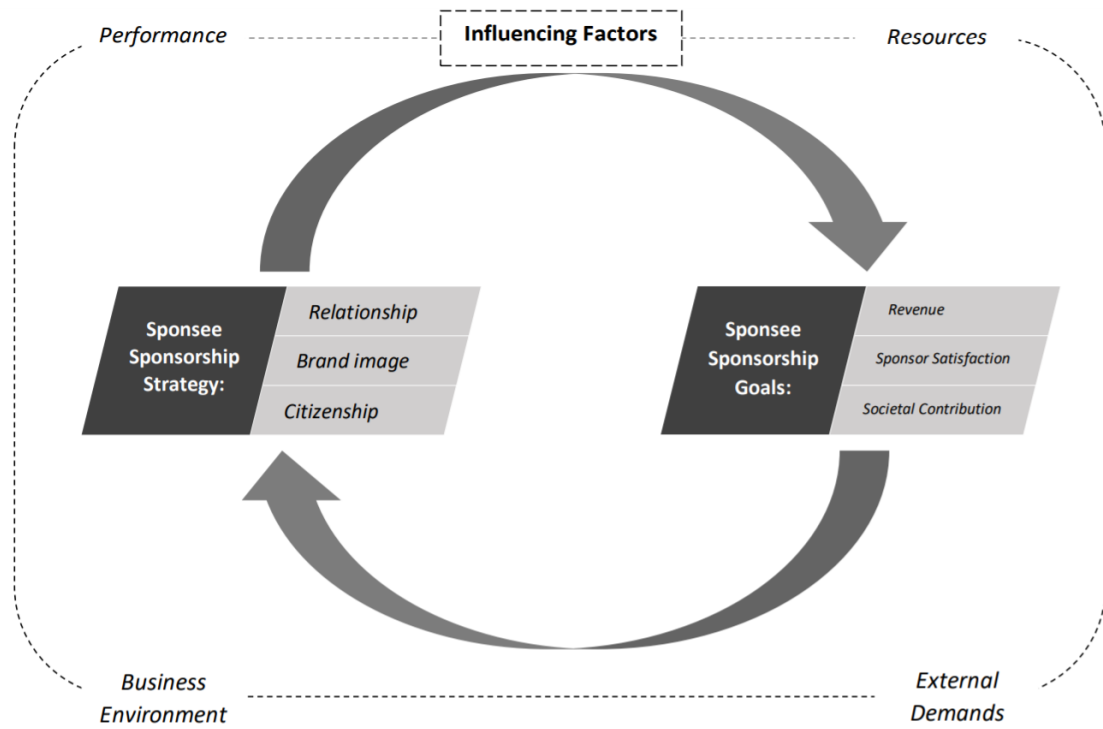
Figure 2: *Revised conceptual framework of the sponsee sponsorship strategy*

5 Conclusion

The following chapter presents a summary of the main findings of this study and presents the main conclusions as based on the empirical findings. Furthermore, it presents and discusses both the theoretical and practical contributions, followed by a section accounting for the limitations of the study and further suggested future research within this field of study.

To answer the research question and to achieve the aim and the purpose of this study, the empirical data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with respondents from seven Swedish men's elite football clubs. This in turn enabled an extensive analysis of the empirical data, in order to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. The analysis was guided with support of an established conceptual framework. However, as the study was rather exploratory in nature, the initial framework was revised and adjusted accordingly, on the basis of the findings of the study. Essentially, we have studied the subject of sponsorship with the perspective of the sponsee in regards to the research question:

How do sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships?

The question is answered by an establishment of the three main strategies that explain how the sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships. Firstly, the study found that the sponsees strategically engage in sponsorships by building relationships with the sponsors. Secondly, the sponsee strategically consider the impact of a sponsorship on their brand image when engaging in sponsorships. Lastly, the sponsees utilize the sponsorships by the strategy of citizenship. Aside from the research question being answered, the results of the study contribute with a comprehensive understanding of the sponsee perspective in a sponsorship relationship and, more specifically, the sponsee sponsorship strategy.

5.1 Theoretical contribution

As called upon by previous researchers and as identified in the problematization of this study, there seems to be a research gap within the given field of study, due to a limited research and understanding of the sponsor's counterpart; the sponsee. By achieving the aim of this study, to establish an understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, we believe that this study has

contributed with relevant findings that expands on the academic understanding within the field, thus narrowing the identified research gap. Within the subject of sponsorship, the findings of this study primarily contribute with an understanding of the previously quite unexplored perspective of the sponsee. We believe it to be important for researchers studying the subject of sponsorship to understand the perspective of the sponsee, since they are, in fact, crucial to the success of a sponsorship relationship. Furthermore, the study accounts for a coherent understanding of sponsee sponsorship strategy, the sponsee sponsorship goals and the main influencing factors that seem to be affecting the other elements and the context of which a sponsee is situated in. This is further illustrated in the conceptual framework, which is established to enable the assessment of a sponsee's sponsorship strategy based on the, previously mentioned, main elements. The conceptual framework is intentionally created as somewhat abstract and "higher-level", with a wide scope, to be able to assess the many dimensions and variables that constitutes a sponsee sponsorship strategy within this rather unexplored and complex field of study. Lastly, a better understanding of the sponsee perspective can further contribute to the sponsorship theories in general, as well as to better understand the sponsorship strategies, goals and motives of a sponsor. This since a sponsorship, as earlier stated, is a relationship consisting of many interdependent factors that together enables a successful sponsorship.

5.2   Practical implications

The practical implications of this study could be argued to be manifold. First and foremost, the understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy, the sponsee sponsorship goals and the influencing factors could be argued to be a helpful tool for a sponsor to be able to understand its counterpart in a sponsorship relationship, the sponsee. Furthermore, the findings could be helpful for a sponsee to either establish a sponsorship strategy or improve an existing one. The conceptual framework could further facilitate an understanding of the complexity of the sponsee sponsorship strategy and the relationship and linkages to the sponsee sponsorship goals and the influencing factors. Lastly, the conceptual framework could be used to assess the current situation of a sponsee, to be able to identify potential points of improvement in the existing sponsee sponsorship strategy or as a tool to plan out how to proactively and strategically engage in a sponsorship.

The findings are primarily relevant for the people responsible of an organization's strategic decisions, such as a CEO or manager that are responsible of for example sponsorship and sales, branding, marketing and communications. But the findings could further be of relevance for the sales staff and people within for example business-to-business customer relations, as the delivery and execution of the sponsee sponsorship strategies have showed to be of great importance to achieve successful sponsorships.

5.3   Limitations and future research

The findings of this study have made it possible to establish an understanding of the previously rather unexplored and silent side of the sponsee and the sponsee sponsorship strategy. We do however believe that there is potential to further explore the perspective of the sponsee to develop an even more coherent understanding. The subject of sponsorship is still experiencing an increasing attention and we do realize that, even with the results of the study at hand, that the perspective of the sponsee is still rather unexplored in the academic spheres. The researchers are further aware of the limitations of this study and realize that the context of Swedish men's elite football and the participating respondents directly affects the findings in the study. Therefore, we believe that it would be of interest for academics to further investigate the perspective of the sponsee in other contexts, sports and events, to further enrich the academic understanding of sponsorship and, in particular, the perspective of the sponsee. We further believe that the breadth and rather wide scope of our research question and aim was necessary to establish an understanding of the sponsee perspective but realize that it might have limited the ability to identify richer findings or underlying factors which would have contributed to a deeper and more detailed understanding of the sponsee sponsorship strategy. Therefore, we encourage academics to further study the perspective of the sponsee, to in be able to establish more of an in-depth understanding.

Furthermore, we would like to encourage academics to utilize the revised conceptual framework, to be able to develop the framework even further. In further research it could be of interest to get a deeper understanding of the different elements (in figure 2). As an example, the sponsee sponsorship strategy of Citizenship was found to be rather new in the context of sponsorships and could be an element that calls for further understanding within the same or other contexts. Moreover, we have previously stated that the subject of sport sponsorships

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mainly has focused on the sponsor, the sponsorship relation and now the sponsee. It could therefore be of interest to investigate further stakeholders in a sponsorship, for example the impact of the supporters.

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7   Appendix

7.1   Appendix 1 - Interview guide Club interviews

Translated from Swedish:

Introduction

We will conduct an interview with a semi-structured character, which means that we have predetermined themes and questions, but where we are happy to see that you can talk freely beyond the questions asked. The interview is expected to last between 45 and 60 minutes. In the essay, you and you as a club will be presented with anonymized names. The club will be named in the thesis based on a future established categorization, for example according to size. You also have the right to choose to have the transcribed version sent to you in order to read through and approve for usage of direct quotes in the thesis before publication. If desired, the final version of the thesis will also be sent to you.

Presentations

- Presentation of us and the essay.

- Presentation of respondents.

Club sponsorship strategy and offering

- How do you currently work with sponsorship?

- Do you treat your sponsorships as relationships? If yes, how??

- What do you offer to the sponsors?

- How do you work with your sponsors?

- How do you decide if it is a good sponsor (match / fit)?

- How do you evaluate whether a sponsorship is successful?

Club sponsorship goals

- Do you think you reach your strategic goals with your sponsorships?

- What is the biggest challenge in achieving the goals? And how do you meet it?

Sponsors as Relations (Investment in sponsorship relations)

- Is it important for you to treat the sponsors as relationships? Why / Why not?

- What are your demands/requirements on the sponsors?

The brand's impact on sponsorship agreements

- How do you think your brand affects potential sponsorships?

- How can the sponsors influence your brand?

- Are there situations where you compromise the impact on your brand for financial benefits?

Investing in the Sponsor offering

- How important do you think sponsorship revenue is to finally reach your sporting goals?

- Are there situations where you compromise on investments in your offer to sponsors for investments in the sporting?

7.2　Appendix 2 - Interview guide Expert interview

Translated from Swedish:

Introduction

We present our study, the layout of the interview and how the respondent's participation will be presented in the study (anonymized name, but is referred to as expert and representative of Swedish Elite football.) Also that the respondent can choose to have the transcribed version sent to him/her to read through . If usage of direct quotes in the essay, these may, at the respondent's request, have to be approved before publication.

Structure: How does the Swedish football industry look like?

- SEF's role

- The work and responsibility of the clubs

- Sponsorship in the clubs

- Sponsorship in SEF

- Economy

- Income and demands for adequate finances

- Sponsorship as revenue

- TV/media deal?

- Commercialization of football in Sweden → Development & an industry in change?

- SEF's work to make Allsvenskan and Superettan attractive? - Branding and marketing?

7.3 Appendix 3 - Interview Information Received by the club respondents

Translated from Swedish:

Interview Guide Master Thesis

The interview guide is divided according to a few main themes and has some predetermined questions. Examples of these are presented below. The interview is semi-structured to its character, after which the interview may play a little differently than just the predetermined questions. The interview is expected to last 45-60 minutes.

The respondent and the club will be anonymized in the published version of the thesis. The respondent can also choose to have the transcribed version sent to him/her to read the interview in writing. If usage of direct quotes, these, at the respondent's request, may need to be approved before publication.

If you have any questions, just contact us by e-mail.
We look forward to meeting you!
//
Måns & Jakob

Introduction

- Introduction and description from the essay group

- Presentation of essay group & respondent

Club sponsorship offer

- How do you work with sponsorship today?

- How do your sponsor relationships look?

- What do you offer to the sponsors?

- How do you work with your sponsors?

- How do you decide if it is a good / less good sponsor (match / fit)?

Sponsorship as relationships

- How do you work to develop your sponsorship relationships?

- Do you work strategically with any form of resource exchange within your sponsor relations?

- What is the biggest challenge for your current sponsorship?

The brand's impact on sponsorship agreements

- How do you think your brand affects potential and existing sponsor relationships?

- How can the sponsors influence your brand, and how do you affect the sponsor?

Investment in the Sponsor offering

- How important do you think sponsorship revenue is to finally reach your sporting goals?

- Do you think that decisions regarding the sporting can affect your long-term business decisions? E.g. investment in the sporting vs. Investing in developing your sponsorship. If so, how?

7.4   Appendix 4 - Extract of the Coding Process in Nvivo

7.5   Appendix 5 - Coding Scheme 1st Cycle

Main Themes/Categories (elements from the conceptual framework)	Codes	Empirical Data
	Interpersonal contact	*"you do business with people, not with businesses"; "I need to know the people"*
	Network	*"We meet continuously a couple of times every month.. we have inspirational lectures, speed dating between the companies, and then we have some so called social events. like a banquet, golf, a cruise. But ten times a year we have activities with the main purpose of creating as good business environment as possible."*
	Committment & trust	*"It's all about how active you are. If you create that yourself, then it will be good"; "We need to have proof of content" ; "It builds on trust"*
	Activities and events	*"On May twentysecond, we have a big business fair here.."; "We travel, play padel, golf, you name it"*
	Exchange of resources	*"Except for the money, we want to benefit from their competencies"; "They can help us in our Advisory Board"; "Our philosophy is that, if we need anything, we go to our partners first"*
	Understanding sponsor needs	*"Our responsibility is to make use of **club 3** in offering a partnership that is tailored for our partners as much as possible."*
	Sponsorship evaluation and feedback	*"So its partly been... measured... the network. What your networkparnters thought about the network."*
Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy	Exclusivity	*"They participate in exclusive gatherings"; "The group is supposed to be tight, an exclusivity"*
	Gate opener	*"We support and bring companies together, that we believe can benefit from each others products and services and it could be ales but also to cut costs and make cheaper purchases."*
	Sponsor fit	*"It is very important that there is a match between us", "You can't just take any partner"*
	Club brand effect on the sponsor's brand	*"We can put *Company AB* on ours and see that we help them to become, maybe a bit more 'sexy', more attractive to a broader audience because **club 3** attracts a broad audience... and a little more 'competetive' maybe."*
	Sponsor's brand effect on club brand	*"We won't lend our players or our brand to partners that we do not believe will contribute with anything" ; "We don't collaborate with political parties or controversial businesses"; "We are very restrictive with who we allow to use our brand"*
	CSR-strategy	*"We work a lot with CSR and have changed the club content. In some way, there is a corrleation between how the club is and what we sell."*
	Equality	*"We should be an association for everyone. Four years ago we did not have any activities for girls"; "We work a lot with equality"; "A football club must have teams for both men and women. And the sponsors are starting to demand that now"*
	Evaluation & policies	*"...To implement policies and our core values and such, for example we do not cooperate with companies or organisations with political messages, alcohol, drugs, sexism etc. They can't become partners here" ; "We evaluate every customer and potential partner"*

	Engaging youths	"If we take **Bank AB** as an example, we have written in our contract that they will arrange and work with an education in ecomony for our oldest boy and girlteams, the fifteen year olds. because they, they want to feel that they are making a contribution in our world and we contribute to the youth otganisation through our sponsors."	
	Marketing activities & campaigns	"It depends what the customer wants to do, for example the partners that are in the consumer goods industry often want to use our players for campaigns and similar"; "some companies do targeted campaigns, using us to attract e.g. girls"; "We are often involved in some way or another. We want to ensure quality, so the message sent out resonates with what we stand for"	
	Brand associations	"The challenge is.. and the hard part.. is that we almost always are selling association rights with our brand. And that grounds itself on the brand being associated with something positive, I presume."	
	Brand reputation	" ... It is all good as long as we have a good reputation"; "We have a very good reputation in the Swedish football industry" ; "We are a well known brand and we always end up in the top 3 in rankings of the most well known sports brand"	
Influencing Factors	Arena & Hospitality	" When we moved to a new arena... it was moving to the future"; "For us, it would have been impossible to sell much at the previous stadium because there was nothing to sell. There was no VIP facilities, there was no restaurant... There was nothing left to sell. So for us, it was an absolute prerequisite to be able to grow, develop our partnerships and to be able to generate income"; "The arena made it possible to develop our partnerships"; "I believe we would need a new arena"	
	Financials	"If you give the conditions for them then they get used to it pretty quickly. Then it will be 'ah wait here now. now we have lost 15 to 20 million here. Now we need to cut some costs..' It also becomes difficult... both in the relationship with coaches when looking there, but also to partners. To be clear, that this is the playing field for us. So they get that understanding."	
	Organisational structure	"We are probably the most business-like and professional organisation in Allsvenskan today"; "We try to separate the business as much as we can from the sport"; "I think it is important to realize that we work in a very complex business, with different motives and ways of working"; "We voted at an annual meeting that no one could buy stock in the organisation"; "... It is very challenging nowadays... Much because we have talked about ourselves more as a business"; "There's sometimes expactations that we should operate as a multinational company"	
	Innovation & Digitalisation	"We have an app were all deals can be tracked, how much money is being made between our partners and you can see how much money it generates to the customers in our business network"; "We need more digital exposure, such as e-sports"; "The digitalization will affect us in a way I don't think we fully understand yet, because we will consume in a different way"; "... 99,9% is about the digitalization and all the statistics and facts you can get. It has become a currency"	
	Sport results & Medial publicity	"So it is, you have more who want to be seen when you are in the Allsvenskan. That's how it is. The mass medial aspect is such a big difference."; "We still have some difficulties, because we go up and down between Allsvenskan and Superettan which affect the companies ability to sign longer contracts"	
	Geography	"We do not compete with that many other elite sports organisations in **City** "; "Competition is a big challenge. Some companies choose not to enter a club because there is a risk is that you loose other clients"; "If we want to reach the big companies in **City**.. There is not that many here.. Maybe if we look further to other cities. And they may have a larger amount to spend"	
	Sport investments	So you can't comprimise on the sporting side too much. Because we can't go around and say that we are so good workers and that we have a really great organisation... and then we get relegated from Superettan...	

	Sponsor demands	*"Some of the large partners would not enter if we did not have teams for both women and men"; "They demand more CSR-projects"; "There is a shift in how you think as a sponsor"; "There is a lot of different demands to please"; "The sponsors have become more skilled in buying what they want and to make the right demands"*
	Societal demands	*"I mean we have responsibility for so many young people, and it is parents and this world is ... like us, we are exposed all the time today. It does not rest anywhere. I mean you can follow an instagram flow at night if it were so. So we have to make sure to have, to be right all the time. Both in the association, we who are active and who we partner with."*
	Tradition	*"We have a long tradition and have been successful historically" "Then I think it is the history, that it is as you say, that there is an old history that it is close cooperation with companies. Sports and companies and Swedish football, and elite football there so that, it automatically does itself."*
	Benchmarking	*"One can look at the larger clubs what they do well maybe and find some ideas from there also, what one could do. Because I believe, there are really all possibilities. You can really do just about anything. So above all to be able to develop, would be good I think."*
Sponsee Sponsorship Goals	Build relationship between club sponsors	*"We give very much businesses to our partners, between each other"; "We need to know what they do to be able to match them with other partners"; "They share the experience and become friends"*
	Flexibility & Adaptability	*"If you are part of the network you should have focus on doing business, if you want to watch football there are other products"*
	Sponsor's Return on Investment	*"The price of being part of the network is ***Amount***. But they get back far more in the form of business"*
	Service	*"We are supposed to deliver as good as possible towards our partners"; "We always try to promise a bit less than what we can deliver"*
	Develop the sponsorship offering	*"Then it is, I mean it is information [sponsorship evaluations] that enables us to become even stronger. And to create a good product for our sponsors for example."*
	Fulfill sponsorship contract	*"... a delivery all the time. If we have said that this and that is included,.. then that is what should be included."*
	Support municipality	*"...to some extent also the municipality. As **Club 2**, after all, it is an important part of all the associations, but we are also the ones who now has the best prerequisites of being able to run certain things, which means that we become the spokesperson of certain issues."*
	Football in Society	*"It is important for the municipality that we activate a lot of youths. It is fantastic for them because then they are not out making trouble"; "If we can raise a 'Good Citizen' and a future leader it is a great win for us. It is increadibly important for us and the municipality"; "I believe that the business sector and the sports associations can accomplish things that authorities, the government, municipalities or counties can not"*
	Fund organisational development	*"The better we sell, the more we can invest in the future and in the organisation. E.g. to hire new people"; "It is the most secure revenue, because you know how much money it is and how long the contracts [deal] are"*
	Fund sport development	*"It is business. We are supposed to generate a surplus, to invest in the sport"*
	Revenue	*"Yes but I have called that contact then and really unconditionally, had a conversation and seen what it has led to. And then if it gives 5.000 kronor to the club or if it gives 50.000 doesn't matter much. Money has to come in, that is how it is."*

7.6   Appendix 6 - Coding Scheme 2nd Cycle

Main Themes/Categories (elements from the conceptual framework)	Sub Categories (emerged through axial coding)	Codes	Empirical Data
Sponsee Sponsorship Strategy	**Relationship**	Interpersonal contact	"you do business with people, not with businesses"; "I need to know the people"
		Network	"We meet continuously a couple of times every month.. we have inspirational lectures, speed dating between the companies, and then we have some so called social events. like a banquet, golf, a cruise. But ten times a year we have activities with the main purpose of creating as good business environment as possible."
		Committment & trust	"It's all about how active you are. If you create that yourself, then it will be good"; "We need to have proof of content" ; "It builds on trust"
		Activities and events	"On May twentysecond, we have a big business fair here.."; "We travel, play padel, golf, you name it"
		Exchange of resources	"Except for the money, we want to benefit from their competencies"; "They can help us in our Advisory Board"; "Our philosophy is that, if we need anything, we go to our partners first"
		Understanding sponsor needs	"Our responsibility is to make use of **club 3** in offering a partnership that is tailored for our partners as much as possible."
		Sponsorship evaluation and feedback	"So its partly been... measured... the network. What your networkparnters thought about the network."
		Exclusivity	"They participate in exclusive gatherings"; "The group is supposed to be tight, an exclusivity"
		Gate opener	"We support and bring companies together, that we believe can benefit from each others products and services and it could be ales but also to cut costs and make cheaper purchases."
		Sponsor fit	"It is very important that there is a match between us", "You can't just take any partner"
	Brand image	Club brand effect on the sponsor's brand	"We can put *Company AB* on ours and see that we help them to become, maybe a bit more 'sexy', more attractive to a broader audience because **club 3** attracts a broad audience... and a little more 'competetive' maybe."
		Sponsor's brand effect on club brand	"We won't lend our players or our brand to partners that we do not believe will contribute with anything" ; "We don't collaborate with political parties or controversial businesses"; "We are very restrictive with who we allow to use our brand"
		Evaluation & policies	"...To implement policies and our core values and such, for example we do not cooperate with companies or organisations with political messages, alcohol, drugs, sexism etc. They can't become partners here" ; "We evaluate every customer and potential partner"

		Marketing activities & campaigns	*"It depends what the customer wants to do, for example the partners that are in the consumer goods industry often want to use our players for campaigns and similar"; "some companies do targeted campaigns, using us to attract e.g. girls"; "We are often involved in some way or another. We want to ensure quality, so the message sent out resonates with what we stand for"*
		Brand associations	"The challenge is.. and the hard part.. is that we almost always are selling association rights with our brand. And that grounds itself on the brand being associated with something positive, I presume."
		Brand reputation	*" ... It is all good as long as we have a good reputation"; "We have a very good reputation in the Swedish football industry" ; "We are a well known brand and we always end up in the top 3 in rankings of the most well known sports brand"*
	Citizenship	CSR-strategy	*"We work a lot with CSR and have changed the club content. In some way, there is a corrleation between how the club is and what we sell."*
		Equality	*"We should be an association for everyone. Four years ago we did not have any activities for girls"; "We work a lot with equality"; "A football club must have teams for both men and women. And the sponsors are starting to demand that now"*
		Engaging youths	*"If we take ***Bank AB*** as an example, we have written in our contract that they will arrange and work with an education in ecomony for our oldest boy and girlteams, the fifteen year olds. because they, they want to feel that they are making a contribution in our world and we contribute to the youth otganisation through our sponsors."*
Influencing Factors	**Resources**	Financials	*"If you give the conditions for them then they get used to it pretty quickly. Then it will be 'ah wait here now. now we have lost 15 to 20 million here. Now we need to cut some costs..' It also becomes difficult... both in the relationship with coaches when looking there, but also to partners. To be clear, that this is the playing field for us. So they get that understanding."; "Our business is dependent on the forces of voluntary work"; "... In many clubs the financials is quite bad, that implies that.. You know what you have but you do not dare to take a chance on what you might get if you change the concept"*
		Sport investments	*So you can't comprimise on the sporting side too much. Because we can't go around and say that we are so good workers and that we have a really great organisation... and then we get relegated from Superettan...*
		Arena & Hospitality	*" When we moved to a new arena... it was moving to the future"; "For us, it would have been impossible to sell much at the previous stadium because there was nothing to sell. There was no VIP facilities, there was no restaurant... There was nothing left to sell. So for us, it was an absolute prerequisite to be able to grow, develop our partnerships and to be able to generate income"; "The arena made it possible to develop our partnerships"; "I believe we would need a new arena"*
		Organisational structure	*"We are probably the most business-like and professional organisation in Allsvenskan today"; "We try to separate the business as much as we can from the sport"; "I think it is important to realize that we work in a very complex business, with different motives and ways of working"; "We voted at an annual meeting that no one could buy stock in the organisation"; "... It is very challenging nowadays... Much because we have talked about ourselves more as*

			a business"; "There's sometimes expactations that we should operate as a multinational company"
	Performance	Sport results & Medial publicity	"So it is, you have more who want to be seen when you are in the Allsvenskan. That's how it is. The mass medial aspect is such a big difference."; "We still have some difficulties, because we go up and down between Allsvenskan and Superettan which affect the companies ability to sign longer contracts"
		Innovation & Digitalisation	"We have an app were all deals can be tracked, how much money is being made between our partners and you can see how much money it generates to the customers in our business network"; "We need more digital exposure, such as e-sports"; "The digitalization will affect us in a way I don't think we fully understand yet, because we will consume in a different way"; "... 99,9% is about the digitalization and all the statistics and facts you can get. It has become a currency"
		Tradition	"We have a long tradition and have been successful historically" ; "Then I think it is the history, that it is as you say, that there is an old history that it is close cooperation with companies. Sports and companies and Swedish football, and elite football there so that, it automatically does itself."
	External demands	Sponsor demands	"Some of the large partners would not enter if we did not have teams for both women and men"; "They demand more CSR-projects"; "There is a shift in how you think as a sponsor"; "There is a lot of different demands to please"; "The sponsors have become more skilled in buying what they want and to make the right demands"
		Societal demands	"I mean we have responsibility for so many young people, and it is parents and this world is ... like us, we are exposed all the time today. It does not rest anywhere. I mean you can follow an instagram flow at night if it were so. So we have to make sure to have, to be right all the time. Both in the association, we who are active and who we partner with."
	Business environment	Benchmarking	"One can look at the larger clubs what they do well maybe and find some ideas from there also, what one could do. Because I believe, there are really all possibilities. You can really do just about anything. So above all to be able to develop, would be good I think."
		Geography	"We do not compete with that many other elite sports organisations in *City* "; "Competition is a big challenge. Some companies choose not to enter a club because there is a risk is that you loose other clients"; "If we want to reach the big companies in *City*.. There is not that many here.. Maybe if we look further to other cities. And they may have a larger amount to spend"
Sponsee Sponsorship Goals	**Revenue**	Revenue	"Yes but I have called that contact then and really unconditionally, had a conversation and seen what it has led to. And then if it gives 5.000 kronor to the club or if it gives 50.000 doesn't matter much. Money has to come in, that is how it is."
		Fund organisational development	"The better we sell, the more we can invest in the future and in the organisation. E.g. to hire new people"; "It is the most secure revenue, because you know how much money it is and how long the contracts [deal] are"
		Fund sport development	"It is business. We are supposed to generate a surplus, to invest in the sport"

		Build relationship between club sponsors	*"We give very much businesses to our partners, between each other"; "We need to know what they do to be able to match them with other partners"; "They share the experience and become friends"*
Sponsor Satisfaction		Flexibility & Adaptability	*"If you are part of the network you should have focus on doing business, if you want to watch football there are other products"*
		Sponsor's Return on Investment	*"The price of being part of the network is ***Amount***. But they get back far more in the form of business"*
		Service	*"We are supposed to deliver as good as possible towards our partners"; "We always try to promise a bit less than what we can deliver"*
		Develop the sponsorship offering	*"Then it is, I mean it is information [sponsorship evaluations] that enables us to become even stronger. And to create a good product for our sponsors for example."*
		Fulfill sponsorship contract	*"... a delivery all the time. If we have said that this and that is included,.. then that is what should be included."*
Societal Contributions		Support municipality	*"...to some extent also the municipality. As **Club 2**, after all, it is an important part of all the associations, but we are also the ones who now has the best prerequisites of being able to run certain things, which means that we become the spokesperson of certain issues."*
		Football in Society	*"It is important for the municipality that we activate a lot of youths. It is fantastic for them because then they are not out making trouble"; "If we can raise a 'Good Citizen' and a future leader it is a great win for us. It is incredibly important for us and the municipality"; "I believe that the business sector and the sports associations can accomplish things that authorities, the government, municipalities or counties can not"*