LAPPEENRANTA UNIVERSITY OF TECNOLOGY
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WHAT DO SPORTS SPONSORS REALLY WANT?
The effects of service quality, service value and customer satisfaction on behavioral intentions in sports sponsorship context

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this Master's thesis was to study the antecedents of customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions and their relative relationships in the sports sponsorship context. The possible antecedents under investigation in the current research are service value and service quality. As the academic background in the sports sponsorship literature is still rather modest there was a need for further empirical testing.

The theoretical part of the research builds on the existing services marketing literature with sports sponsorship and business-to-business contexts in mind. The empirical study focused on the case company Liiga-SaiPa Oy. The data for the empirical analysis was collected via quantitative online survey. The total sample consisted of 357 the case company's business customers and a total of 80 usable responses were collected. The data was analyzed by using statistical analysis software, SPSS.

According to the results of the empirical analysis the most important antecedent of behavioral intentions in the underlying context is customer satisfaction. Also service value was found to have a direct and positive relationship with behavioral intentions. Moreover no indirect relationships through satisfaction were found between service quality and service value and behavioral intentions. However both constructs of service value and service quality were diagnosed to have a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction. Service quality was also found to be a direct antecedent of service value with other service value benefits. However a contradicting finding with the current literature was, that service value sacrifices were not found to have a significant relationship with overall service value perceptions.

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Tämän Pro gradu –tutkielman tavoitteena oli tutkia mitkä tekijät selittävät asiakastyytyväisyyttä ja asiakkaiden käyttäytymisaikomuksia sekä tekijöiden välisiä suhteita urheilusponsoroinnin kontekstissa. Mahdolliset selittävät tekijät jotka ovat tutkinnan alaisena tässä työssä ovat palvelun arvo sekä palvelun laatu. Aiempi akateeminen tutkimus koskien urheilusponsorointia on varsin vaatimatonta, joten tarve empiiriselle lisätutkimukselle oli olemassa.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen osa pohjautuu olemassa olevaan palveluiden markkinointikirjallisuuteen unohtamatta urheilusponsoroinnin sekä B-to-B:n kontekstia. Työn empiirinen osuus keskittyi case yritys Liiga-SaiPa Oy:hyn. Empiirisen osan data kerättiin Internet-pohjaisen kyselyn avulla. Tutkimuksen kokonaisotos sisälsi yhteensä 357 case yrityksen yritysasiakasta ja otos tuotti yhteensä 80 vastausta. Data analysoitiin käyttäen apuna tilastollisen analyysin ohjelmistoa SPSS:ää.

Empiiristen tulosten perusteella tärkein käyttäytymisaikomuksia selittävä tekijä urheilusponsoroinnin ympäristössä on asiakastyytyväisyys. Myös palvelun arvolla on suora ja positiivinen suhde käyttäytymisaikomuksiin. Epäsuoria yhteyksiä asiakastyytyväisyyden kautta ei havaittu olevan palvelun arvon ja palvelun laadun ja käyttäytymisaikomusten välillä. Kuitenkin molemmat näistä muuttujista omaavat suoran ja positiivisen yhteyden asiakastyytyväisyyteen. Palvelun laadun diagnosoitiin olevan myös suora palvelun arvon edeltäjä, yhdessä muiden koettujen hyötyjen kanssa. Eroava löydös olemassa olevaan kirjallisuuteen verrattuna oli se, että asiakkaan tekemillä uhrauksilla ei ole merkittävää roolia kokonaisvaltaisen palvelun arvon käsityksen muodostumisessa.

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Espoo, 18 August 2014

Eero Väre

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the purpose and the objectives of this research are introduced. The background of the study, research questions and objectives, review of the existing literature and the theoretical framework are presented. The chapter also describes the definitions of the key concepts and the limitations concerning this research. The chapter ends with a look to the used research methods and the overall structure of the research.

1.1 Background of the research

Since commercial sponsorship really took off in the 1970s, the revenues spent in sponsorship have increased drastically. In particular the sports industry witnessed a sharp rise in its sponsorship revenues in the 1980s (Meenaghan, 1991; Meenaghan, 2001). Meenaghan (1991) suggests that the primary reason for the growth of popularity in sports sponsorship was “the increased cost of media advertising compared to potentially greater coverage of various sports”. Many researches such as Tripodi (2001) and Shannon (1999) have highlighted the importance of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games as the engine for the growth. It has been mentioned that the 1984 Olympics offered many new sponsorship opportunities for companies in the form of different sports and at least partly due to this, sports sponsorship developed into a marketing practice that required research, large investments and strategic planning. (Hartland et al., 2005)

The numbers sum it all up: on the worldwide scale the yearly spending on sponsorship has grown from $2 billion spent in 1984 (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999) to a projected $53,3b in 2013 (IEG, 2013). Among individual sponsorship markets comprising of sports, entertainment, causes, arts, events, associations and membership organizations the sports industry has gathered by far the largest portion of revenues (Mintel, 2000; IEG, 2013). From the annual share of all sponsorship spending from 1995-2012, the portion of sports industry has varied from 65 to 75 percent depending on year and source. The latest research by IEG (2013) projected that 69 per cent of all sponsorship spending in the U.S markets was allocated in the sports industry in 2013, which indicates that the trend shows no signs of slowing down.

Today sponsorship may account for over 50 per cent of total revenue generated by some major international sports organizations, which makes it fundamental to their viability (Burton, 2003; Chadwick, 2005; Farrelly et al. 2008). High-price, long-term sponsorship deals are now commonplace, which also often play a key part of the sponsoring company's marketing strategy (Hartland et al., 2005; Farrelly et al. 2008). One of the most recent examples of these so called mega sponsorship deals took place in January of 2014 when German sports clothing firm Puma and the English Premier League football club Arsenal announced their new long-term partnership. The exact value of the five-year deal was not revealed but it is expected to be over £30m a year (BBC, 2014). Hence it can be said that sport sponsorships have moved quite far away from the days of philanthropy.

In Finland it has been evaluated by Mainostajien Liitto (2013) that Finnish based companies spent around €166m in sponsorship in 2012. The amount is approximately 3 per cent less than in the previous year. From the overall sponsorship spending the share invested in sports sponsorship alone came to €96m which is around 56 per cent. It can be said that the percentage is relatively low compared to global sports sponsorship statistics. Based on the same research it is revealed that ice-hockey gathers 10 per cent (€16m) of all revenues spent in sponsorship. Recently bad publicity and especially violence in Finnish ice-hockey has created a lot of public debate, which can be seen from the results of the research: one third of the respondents said that the negative publicity has no effect on their sponsorship behavior, 37 per cent responded that they will continue to sponsor sports but will concentrate more on the youth side of it in the future while around 18 per cent plan to decrease their sports sponsorship investments. (Mainostajien Liitto, 2013)

Due to the challenging nature of financial environment in Finland, it has become imperative for sport properties to understand what in particular their sponsors and supporters value. However as Olkkonen et al. (2000) have stated that the sponsorship literature is lagging academic evidence and support, which hinders the understanding of the concept. The current research aims to tackle the issue by studying the context from the perspective of a Finnish professional ice-hockey club Liiga-SaiPa Oy and more importantly through some of the most studied concepts in services marketing literature. These focal concepts of the study are customer satisfaction, perceived service value, perceived service quality and behavioral intentions. Besides being widely studied individual concepts also the relationships between the mentioned constructs are well documented. This in turn proves their mutual compatibility and therefore justifies their suitability in order to fulfill the objectives of the current research.

Delivering customer satisfaction has evolved as one of the most prominent constructs in the modern services marketing literature. This is based on the potential influence that customer satisfaction has on positive customer behavioral intentions (Oliver, 1980; Oliver & Swan, 1989; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fornell, 1992; Andersson & Sullivan, 1993; Bolton & Drew, 1994). Naturally the general perspective indicates that when things are done right, the customers will become satisfied and may share the positive aspects of their experiences to other people and henceforth attract interest of new customers to the organization (Heskett et al., 1990). Additionally the satisfied customers will more likely to return to the organization for subsequent purchases or services (Heskett et al., 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Rust et al., 1995).

However research on customer satisfaction in business-to-business environment is still modest and lagging far behind consumer services marketing studies (Homburg & Rudolph, 2001). B-to-B business environment can be considered to differ fundamentally compared to the consumer setting so further research concerning the context is required (Molinari et al., 2008) The subject of customer satisfaction lacks research in the sports sponsorship setting as well. One possible reason for this could be the difficulty of trying to evaluate sponsorship effects and outcomes (Farrelly & Quester, 2004). The current research aims to make its own modest contribution to the work of filling this gap.

The mentioned interest towards services has also made the quality of services a major area of attention. Hence today the importance of quality in service industries is well known (Lewis & Booms, 1983; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Saleh & Ryan, 1991). Due to the nature of service, it cannot be considered as an object but rather a series of activities or processes, which moreover are produced and consumed at the same time. At least in some extent it is difficult to manage quality control and execute marketing in the traditional sense (Grönroos, 1988). From a customer's point of view evidence of service quality is found in each of these "moments of truth" which take place whenever a customer interacts with a firm (Bitner et al., 1994). Hence the overall impression of the quality of the service is developed from a series of individual encounters (Sweeney et al., 1997). In the sports sponsorship context, the quality is even more challenging to control, as there are factors that cannot be controlled such as the actual sports performance. However the current research aims to be among the pioneers in the aspect of studying the service quality of a sports sponsorship service.

Academics and practitioners are keen on accurately measuring service quality in order to better understand its essential antecedents and consequences. By doing so methods that will help to improve the overall quality can be accomplished. This should moreover help to build competitive advantage in the business markets. (Zahorik & Rust, 1992; Palmer & Cole, 1995) Service quality is commonly noted as a critical construct for establishing and sustaining satisfying and profitable relationships with valued customers (Lasser et al., 2000). Consequently the association between service quality and customer satisfaction has emerged as a topic of significance and strategic concern (e.g Bolton & Drew, 1991a; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Taylor & Baker, 1994). The general view suggests that service quality is an important antecedent of customer satisfaction and this is the reason why it has also been selected under research in the underlying study (Bolton & Drew, 1991b; Dodds et al., 1991; Sheth et al., 1991).

What differentiates value drastically from the previously mentioned concepts is that it also includes the sacrifice or the give component, which is compared to the attributes that are benefitted. Consequently service value aims to provide answers to the dilemma of why customers do not always buy the product/service of the highest quality or standards (Olshavsky, 1985). Value can be understood also as a more personal construct than quality and therefore it can be regarded as a higher level concept (Zeithaml, 1988). By simplifying value could be generated by either improving the benefit attributes or lowering the amount of sacrifices that are included in the consumption/purchase of the product/service. In the context of sports sponsorship this means that the sponsors would value the sponsorship service more should they perceive an increased benefit from the service or if they would get the same service with less the amount of sacrifices. Moreover it has been suggested by many researchers that service value is a strong antecedent of customer satisfaction (e.g. Fornell et al., 1996; Hallowell, 1996; Athanassopoulos, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000). Indeed in the present competitive environment offering value-added products or services has become a key ingredient of success (Barich & Kotler, 1991; Rust & Oliver, 1994).

The study on behavioral intentions has started to gain increased attention because of its positive impact on the company’s business performance (Molinari et al., 2008). Behavioral intentions can be roughly divided into two main associations: repurchase actions and positive word-of-mouth. Moreover the concept can be understood as what the customer intends to do after service encounter or product consumption. (Andreassen, 1998; Oliver, 1993) The basic assumption is that positive experiences with a service provider or in other words a satisfied customer is more likely to patronize the provider again and recommend the service to other possible customers as well (Lam et al., 2004). So in this case behavioral intentions are not a probable antecedent of customer satisfaction but a consequence of it. Through this relationship, the construct is possibly linked with service quality and service value as well.

So besides just studying the individual service encounter constructs, developing an understanding of the conceptual relationships between the mentioned concepts has preoccupied services researchers over the past two decades (Cronin et al., 2000). Even though the argued strong linkages between service quality, service value, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions exist, these constructs are still not well understood in B-to-B services setting not to mention the sports sponsorship context (Molinari et al., 2008). So the aim of this Master's Thesis is to provide relevant and multifaceted information on some of the most studied constructs in services marketing literature as well as to understand the relationships between them considering the sports sponsorship context. However besides just trying to help a single professional sports team to understand their customers better the study also ambitiously aims to provide support and encouragement for the overall academic research on sports and especially sports sponsorships.

1.2 Research questions and objectives of the research

The main objective of the research is to build an understanding of the main motives behind positive behavior intentions and customer satisfaction among sports sponsors. This has been tried to be accomplished by studying some of the most important and recognized variables in the services marketing literature and their relationships.

Based on the previous discussion the main research problem of the research is:

- What do sponsors really want – which factors lead to favorable behavioral intentions in sport sponsorship context from the viewpoint of a sponsor?

In order to answer the main research problem, the relationships between the possible antecedents of behavioral intentions need to be studied. The possible antecedents of behavioral intentions under investigation in the underlying study are customer satisfaction, service value and service quality. Hence the role of these variables as the antecedent of behavioral intentions will be focused on. Moreover the following supportive questions have been constructed so that it would be possible to answer the main question:

- How (overall) service value affects customer satisfaction in sports sponsorship context?

- How (overall) service quality affects customer satisfaction in sports sponsorship context?

- How (overall) service quality affects (overall) service value in sports sponsorship context?

- How service value benefits and service value sacrifices affect (overall) service value in sports sponsorship context?

So in order to answer properly to the main research question the supportive questions need to be studied first. First of all it is important to study the concept of customer satisfaction more precisely as it is the most focal construct of the thesis. It has been also estimated that customer satisfaction is generally the main driver of behavioral intentions (e.g. Oliver, 1980; Oliver & Swan, 1989; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Fornell, 1992; Andersson & Sullivan, 1993; Bolton & Drew, 1994). Next the relationships between customer satisfaction and its assumed antecedents, service value and service quality, are under investigation as it helps to understand the whole process of creating positive behavioral intentions. This means that the indirect relationships between the assumed antecedents of satisfaction and behavioral intentions need to be studied as well. Additionally the relationship between service value and service quality has been investigated. Understanding and studying these relationships is particularly important when considering the underlying context as the existing sponsorship literature provides little data or support for the manner.

1.3 Literature review

All the focal theoretical concepts of the study customer satisfaction, service value, service quality and behavioral intentions have created a great deal of interest among researchers. In the current research, the relationships and the effects between the constructs are investigated in the sports sponsorship context. The theoretical base of the research has been built using primarily academic articles but also few course books have provided important back-up when needed. A comprehensive theoretical review of the concepts has been conducted so that relevant hypotheses could have been constructed and the research questions could be covered.

According to Cronin et al. (2000) the study of service quality, service value and satisfaction issues have dominated the services literature. In addition to the issues themselves, the development of an understanding of the conceptual relationships between the parties in exchange processes have preoccupied researchers over the past couple of decades. Cronin et al. (2000) furthermore state that the results or the interrelationships found in these studies are highly dependable on the object, timing and the context of the research. For that reason the literature of services marketing understand several competing models of direct and indirect effects between the constructs.

During the last decades customer satisfaction has created massive interest among researchers. A key motivation for the growing popularity of the subject is the assumption that highly satisfied customers can lead to a stronger competitive position of a company and moreover to positive customer behavior (Fornell, 1992). As a result academics and practitioners have started to value customer satisfaction in the marketing literature as an important corporate objective (e.g. Bolton & Drew, 1991b; Crosby, 1991; Oliva et al., 1992). Even though the concept is highly studied, most of the studies concentrate on satisfaction with consumer goods or services leaving business-to-business context lagging far behind (Oliver, 1996; Homburg & Rudolph, 2001).

As well as satisfaction also service quality is a widely studied but also debated construct and commonly accepted as a critical measure of organizational performance (Parasuraman et al. 1988; Carman, 1990; Babakus & Boller, 1992; Cronin & Taylor, 1992, 1994; Brown et al., 1993; Peter et al., 1993, Teas, 1993; Lasser et al., 2000). The construct remains at the forefront of both marketing literature in general and in the services marketing specifically (Jensen & Markland, 1996). The emphasis on service quality literature has been on the conceptualization of the concept through various conceptualization models and the measurement methods of the quality of the service. The work of Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, 1991a, 1994), Grönroos (1982, 1984) and Cronin and Taylor (1992, 1994) have provided the theoretical and conceptual foundations for service quality literature. While acknowledging the important role of service quality in services marketing the viewpoints between the mentioned researchers differ drastically. The major debate has been the measurement process of the construct. Whereas the studies of Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988, 1991a, 1994) and Grönroos (1982, 1984) were the spokesmen of the suggestion that service quality is a result of comparing prior expectations to the experienced performance, Cronin and Taylor (1992, 1994) claim that the construct is best measured by using only the performance evaluations. Even though the subject has divided the whole field of service quality research, recently the performance only measurement method has created more support among the academics and this research also applies the conduct.

Comparing to customer satisfaction and service quality, service value is a more recent construct. However since around the 1990's value has started to emerge as one of the most successful competitive strategies and thus created a vast amount of interest among practitioners and academics. The importance of value is based on the claim that it is a unifying construct between service quality and satisfaction and moreover an antecedent of customer behavior. Actually many authors suggests that providing customers with superior value should be considered as the most fundamental challenge for marketing strategies of organizations. Moreover value-added products and services have become a key ingredient of success (e.g. Deshpande et al., 1993; Jaworski & Kohli, 1993; Day, 1994; LeBlanc & Nguyen, 1999; Slater & Narver, 2000). Despite the importance of service value as a pivotal form of customers' assessment of services, the services marketing literature reveals that there has been limited work undertaken on understanding the precise nature of the construct and its impact on customer behavior (Holbrook, 1994)

Studies concerning behavioral intentions consist of mainly studies that also consider at least some of the earlier discussed concepts. As behavioral intentions is a construct that understands many individual concepts such as loyalty and word-of-mouth, the literature may study the construct partially through one of these determinants. The motivation for researchers to study behavioral intentions is the fact that the construct has the ability to create concrete improvements to companies' revenues. This obviously makes behavioral intentions highly interesting and important for practitioners to understand as well. It has been documented that in the 1980's whereas some companies were willing to trust their intuitions that better service quality and furthermore improved customer satisfaction would lead to a more positive financial outcome, some companies were not eager to invest in such improvement operations without the evidence of positive outcome (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Clearly some evidence of the causal relationships needed to be examined. Even though the existing literature has later identified many relationships between service quality, service value and customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions the exact nature of these relationships remains unresolved.

The decade which saw sport sponsorship to develop into a marketing practice that required sophisticated research, was the 1980's when the Los Angeles Olympics acted as the triggering event (Tripodi, 2001). Nowadays the money spent in sports sponsorship by companies has drastically increased and it is treated in many occasions as a key element of integrated marketing communications strategy. Even though this growth of popularity among corporations has also created interest among academics, the scope of sports sponsorship remains relatively narrow. (Olkkonen et al., 2000) According to Olkkonen et al. (2000) the existing sponsorship literature is very managerially oriented, with a strong emphasis on the sponsoring company's viewpoint. The authors furthermore note that the literature is characteristically normative including practical details while at the same time lacking theoretical development. The current study aims to tackle these issues by studying sponsorship from the perspective of the sponsored property and through some of the most studied theoretical concepts of services marketing.

1.4 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework (Figure 1) is constructed around the focal concepts and the hypotheses of the current study. Firstly the antecedents of customer satisfaction and service value are under investigation. Secondly the impact and the relationships of the previously mentioned concepts are studied from the viewpoint of how they influence on customer's behavioral intentions.

Customer satisfaction, service value, service quality and behavioral intentions are the focal concepts of the current research and their expected relationships are described in the framework based on prior literature. It is important to notice that the concepts are applied from the viewpoint of sports sponsorship relationships meaning that customer satisfaction is considered as cumulative form of satisfaction or as a global evaluation of an emotion rather as a just transactional evaluation of a specific occasion of the relationship. Service quality on the other hand is categorized as an attitude and moreover measured only through perceptions of the quality of the service. Service value is seen as a comprehensive concept that consists of the overall value of the service through not only the positive benefits but also the more negative minded sacrifices that the customer perceives when consuming or investing in the service. Especially the sacrifices component makes the concept of value highly interesting as it challenges the respondents to evaluate the total value they perceive through additional process. It is good to note that in the current study service value and service quality are comprehended as synonyms to perceived service value and perceived service quality. Behavioral intentions are referred to as the customer's post-purchase evaluation of future behavior and are categorized in two main functions of loyalty and word-of-mouth.

The decision to examine particularly the chosen concepts was based on the view that they could bring added value for the case company and for their business processes. Also the fact that the constructs of customer satisfaction, service value, service quality and behavioral intentions are among the most studied concepts in the services marketing research appeared to be a reasonable starting point in a sponsorship context. Additionally the already diagnosed relationships between the concepts prove that they complement each other in such a manner that a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon could be achieved.

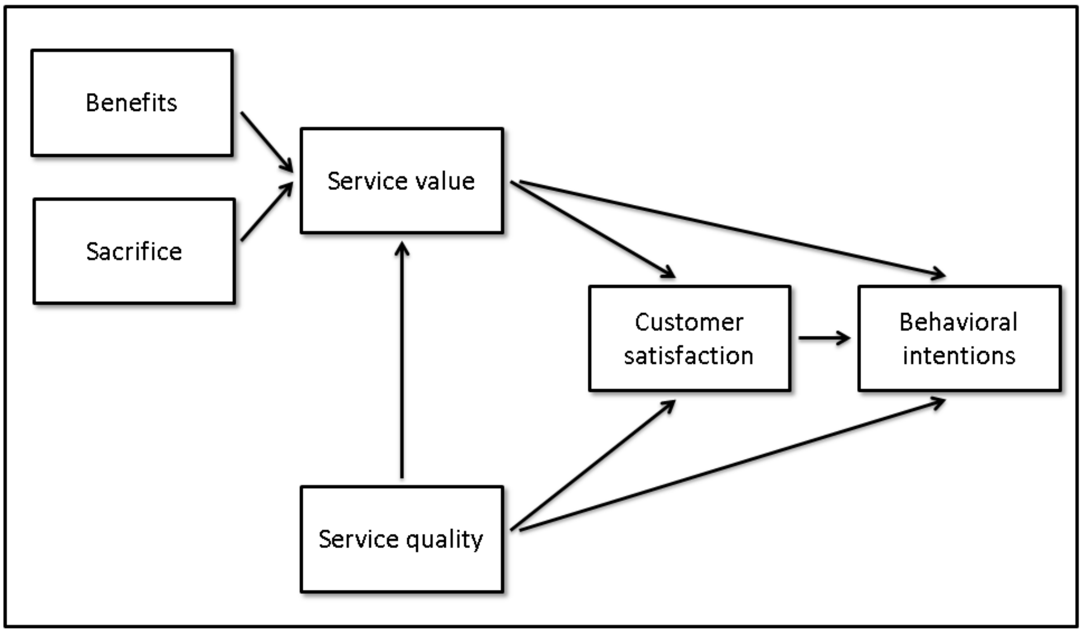

Figure 1. Theoretical framework

1.5 Definitions of the key concepts

In this chapter the definitions of the key concepts will be presented. It is suitable to point out that in every case there is not one commonly accepted definition as in the existing literature the concepts have been presented in various different ways. The definitions have taken influences from the context, nature, and the viewpoint of each individual study and based on these reasons the concepts can be understood in different ways. Nevertheless this study will apply the most suitable definitions for business-to-business environment and taking the sports sponsorship context into consideration whenever it is possible. The explicit definitions selected for the purpose of the current study are underlined and italicized in the following subchapter. In the theoretical part of the study the conceptualization of each key concept is studied and presented more comprehensively.

Customer satisfaction conceptualization and research is mainly influenced by the disconfirmation paradigm (Parasuraman et al. 1988). The paradigm states that customer’s feeling of satisfaction is a result of an evaluation process between expected and perceived performance (Eggert & Ulaga, 2002). If the perceived performance equals or overcomes the expected performance it can be assumed that the customer sense the feeling of positive satisfaction and vice versa. More precisely in business-to-business sports sponsorships customer satisfaction has been defined as the *sponsor’s global evaluation of the relationship binding them to the properties they sponsor* (Farrelly et al. 2008). This definition is also used in the underlying research to determine customer satisfaction. In the sports sponsorship context, customer satisfaction is seen as a more comprehensive and cumulative construct of an emotion rather than a transaction-specific concept which can be more connected to consumer goods/service sector. This definition of customer satisfaction in B-to-B sports sponsorships goes hand in hand with the definitions of satisfaction among durable goods, which can be considered reasonable, as sponsorship relationships also tend to be more long lasting.

Service quality definitions and measurement practices have created debates among academics as the construct is an elusive and indistinct (Parasuraman et al., 1985). Most commonly and broadly stated service quality is understood as the customers’ evaluation of the service outcome and processes, which is a result of the comparison of how well the service level matches customer expectations (Lewis & Booms, 1983; Parasurman et al., 1985; Zeithaml et al., 2009). However the recent trend in measuring service quality has been to ignore the expectation function and to concentrate on the perceived service quality functions only (e.g. Babakus & Boller, 1992; Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Cronin et al., 2000). Furthermore it is important to note that cognitively-oriented service quality perceptions are multilevel and multidimensional and the concept should be additionally measured as an attitude rather than as an emotion (e.g. Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Rust & Oliver, 1994; Cronin, et al., 2000; Brady & Cronin, 2001). In other words, customers form their service quality perceptions on the basis of an evaluation of performance at multiple levels and ultimately combine these evaluations to form an overall service quality perception. The current research applies the former service quality method, which understands service quality as a form of an attitude that is formed by only the performance perceptions of quality. Consequently the definition of service quality in the current study follows the pattern of Cronin and Taylor (1992) and could be determined to sound *as an attitude which is a result of customer's perception of quality of the performed service*.

Service value is most commonly considered as the *tradeoff between the perceived benefits and the perceived sacrifices that the customer experiences when evaluating the perceived value of the individual service offering* (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 133). Perceived benefits are a combination of physical attributes, service attributes and technical support whereas perceived sacrifices can be understood as the overall cost that the buyer faces when making a purchase (Monroe, 1990; Ravald & Grönroos, 1996). Compared to service quality, service value is a more comprehensive construct as it involves a subtraction between give and get components (Zeithaml, 1988). Service value can also be understood as a more subjectively perceived construct as different customers have different perceptions and opinions of value considering the same product or service (Kortge & Okonkwo, 1993; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002).

Behavioral intentions *are customers' post purchase evaluations of future behavior which include different indicators*. These indicators can be briefly categorized as customer loyalty and word-of-mouth activities. (Zeithaml et al., 1996) Companies are eager to create positive behavior among current and possible customers as it may have a direct and favorable consequence on the company’s bottom line. Loyalty behaviors such as repurchasing and higher volume purchases are direct outcomes of positive customer behavior whereas recommendations or other forms of positive word-of-mouth create favorable outcomes through indirect paths.

Sponsorship definitions have evolved as the concept itself has developed to become an important strategic marketing communications tool. From its philanthropic roots sponsorship is seen nowadays as a promotional opportunity that can help companies to reach their strategic goals. The increased importance of sponsorship can be seen from the various definitions. Valanko’s (2009, 62) “idealistic” view of sponsorship is comprehensive and captures the current trends around the concept: “*sponsorship is a juridical co-operation agreements on renting associations based on tangible and intangible transactions between the sponsor and the sponsored party. Sponsorship is also a strategic solution and a commercial investment which will be planned creatively and will be exploited both together and individually using different elements of marketing communication. The relationship creates measurable added value for both parties’ operational processes”.*

1.6 Delimitations

First of all the sponsorship context in the current research is limited to the sponsorship environment of one Finnish professional sports league (Liiga) and one professional sports franchise (case company Liiga-SaiPa Oy). Based on the overwhelming status of ice-hockey among professional sports in Finland it can be suggested that the results of this study are almost solely comparable with just the other teams participating in the Liiga. Actually there are many differences concerning the market environments and conditions between the Liiga franchises so even the comparisons between them might be challenging or misleading.

Consequently the results of the research are neither suitable for global comparison.

The context of sports is to be taken into consideration as delimitation based on its special features. The results in sports are first of all unpredictable, which makes the industry uncertain when observing it from business perspective. Sports have also the ability to create emotional bonds with its followers, which may affect positively or negatively on the financial performance of a sports organization. In other words the athletic success of a particular team is many times followed by financial success. Though it is hard to predict or to research the impact of athletic success to persons' motives to praise, patronize or otherwise support a sports team.

Furthermore it is also recognized that behavioral intentions (and customer satisfaction) has been identified to possess other possible antecedents than just the ones presented in this study. For example trust and commitment could have been proper alternatives for closer investigation as these concepts are widely recognized in the relationship and service marketing literature. However because of the objectives and the extent of the research only the constructs of service value and service quality (and satisfaction) have been taken into consideration as possible explanatory variables.

In the case of measuring service quality the method of perceptions only has been applied. This supports the most recent view of service quality which appreciates the construct as a form of attitude. The method additionally overlooks the existence of pre-use expectations of service quality when measuring the construct. Customer satisfaction on the other hand is determined in the research as cumulative form. It has been suggested that cumulative form of satisfaction would be the most suitable construct to measure the overall level of emotions or satisfaction in relationship settings.

As the academic literature concerning sports sponsorship is quite narrow the theoretical background of the research has been constructed mainly considering the literature of general B-t-B service setting. However in many cases even this has been quite challenging as the existing services literature mainly concern research studies on consumer contexts.

Another delimitation concerning the current research is that the data for the empirical analysis was collected at a single point of time. This removes the possibility of including the possible changes that are inherent in sponsorship relationships.

1.7 Research methods

For the purpose of the current research a wide literature review consisting mainly of academic articles was conducted. Additionally to academic studies, few course books were exploited, in a lesser extent, when building the theoretical base of the research. Hypotheses of the study were formed upon the theory and the prior studies of the focal concepts of the research.

The formed hypotheses are subsequently tested by using quantitative research method. A questionnaire, which was built with the support of the existing literature, was formed for the purpose of finding out the relationships between customer satisfaction, service value, service quality and behavioral intentions in sports sponsorship context. To be able to gather an extensive amount of data, a questionnaire was decided to be the best solution. Also the most used method in the past studies has been quantitative hence it was clear to favor a similar approach.

The questionnaire was sent via e-mail to the customers of the case company. The contact information was provided by the case company so the data of the research was collected from key informants. The received data was furthermore analyzed by using SPSS statistics and Excel software. Moreover measures were formed through factor analyses in order to test the created hypotheses with regression analyses.

Malhotra and Birks (2007) note that there are four main types of research designs: a cross-sectional study, a longitudinal study, an experiment study and a case study. The underlying research follows a pattern of a cross-sectional study. A cross-sectional study provides a “snapshot” of a certain population who share some common characteristics. The term “snapshot” refers to the fact that the data collection occurs at one specific period of time. Cross-sectional studies can also be determined as observational by nature and are moreover known as descriptive researches. This type of research is suitable for describing characteristics that exist in the population under observation. (Malhotra & Birks, 2007)

To prove the relations more comprehensively this study is also a survey research, where the data is collected by using quantitative survey. The data is aimed to provide explanations, comparisons and depictions of the underlying phenomenon. The research also applies the methods of a case study as the data of the study is collected and analyzed only from the viewpoint of the particular case company and environment, which in this case are Liiga-SaiPa Oy and Finnish professional ice-hockey sponsorship context.

1.8 Structure of the research

This part of the study takes a look at the structure of the research. The first chapter presents the motivations behind the research by first introducing the background and describing the main objects of the study. The introduction chapter also involves a brief theoretical glance in the form of literature review which furthermore aims to provide tools for the development of theoretical framework concerning the research. Also brief definitions of the key concepts, delimitations, research methods and the structure of the research are discussed.

After providing introduction in the first chapter the research presents its first theoretical chapter in the second. The first of the two theory chapters involves the concept of customer satisfaction and its antecedents. The chosen antecedents of satisfaction for closer examination in this study were selected to be service value and service quality as they are recognized throughout the marketing literature. The chapter analyzes the constructs through definitions, research backgrounds, antecedents and outcomes. Additionally the relationships between the concepts are studied and hypotheses are constructed.

The latter of the two theoretical chapters concentrates on the construct of behavioral intentions and its relationship with the concepts studied in the previous chapter. The construct of behavioral intentions is studied profoundly by not only just defining and categorizing it, but also by its importance and final outcomes. Also the hypotheses concerning behavioral intentions and its relation to customer satisfaction, service value and service quality are formed.

The fourth chapter of the research introduces the methodological aspect of the study. The chapter involves discussion about the measures of the study and also why and how these current measures were chosen and developed. All of the items that were used in the final questionnaire are also revealed. The final part of the chapter discusses pretesting procedures, data collection methods and sampling.

Chapter five concerns the findings of the study. However before presenting the actual results, the case company Liiga-Saipa Oy is briefly presented. Then a descriptive analysis concerning the respondents is made, factor analyses are presented, reliability and validity of the research is discussed and the hypotheses are tested.

The last chapter is dedicated to conclusions. In the final chapter the most important findings of the research are presented from the theoretical and the managerial viewpoints. The study ends with a description of the limitations and implications for future research.

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2. UNDERSTANDING THE FACTORS BEHIND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN SPORTS SPONSORSHIP RELATIONSHIPS

In this chapter the focal concept of customer satisfaction is firstly introduced. The construct is studied from a theoretical perspective which is followed by a more comprehensive review to the customer satisfaction research. After the concept of customer satisfaction the antecedents of the construct have been taken into account. In the current research the constructs of service quality and service value have been taken under closer consideration and they have been introduced in this chapter. Theoretical research has been made concerning service value whereas the concept of service quality has been explored through both theoretical analysis and conceptualization models. The chapter also includes the building of the related hypotheses between the three constructs.

2.1 Customer satisfaction

The concept of customer satisfaction has fascinated academics and practitioners during the last decades because of its possible positive influence on a firm's competitive position. It has been widely accepted that satisfied customers have the ability to be determinants of various positive outcomes for a company (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Fornell et al., 1996; Homburg & Rudolph, 2001). Consequently customer satisfaction has become a critical measurement for companies in developing, monitoring and evaluating product and service offerings as well as for evaluating, motivating and compensating employees (Anderson et al., 1994). Hence it can be said that the construct is a vital factor for the firm's survival, growth and success (Guo et al., 2004).

2.1.1 Customer satisfaction in theory

The definition of customer satisfaction has been divergent ever since Cardozo (1965) first introduced the concept into the field of marketing. The construct is well-known and established in several sciences: marketing (e.g. Fornell & Werneldt, 1987; Fornell & Wernefelt, 1988; Kotler, 1991), consumer research (e.g. Yi, 1990; Fornell, 1992; Anderson et al, 1994), economic psychology (e.g. Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Bagozzi, 1992), welfare economics (e.g. Simon, 1974) and economics (e.g. Van Raaij, 1981; Wärneryd, 1988). As having taken a great deal of influences from many different contexts, an absence of consensus remains as to what constitutes satisfaction (Caruana, 2002), which moreover hinders the development of a commonly accepted definition for the construct.

Customer satisfaction in marketing science can be conceptualized in two different ways, them being transaction-specific and cumulative (e.g. Boulding et al., 1993; Bitner & Hubbert, 1994). Transaction-specific satisfaction is understood to be a post-choice evaluative judgment of a specific purchase occasion whereas cumulative customer satisfaction refers to an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience (Hunt, 1977; Oliver, 1977, 1980, 1993; Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Fornell, 1992). In their study concerning industrial customer satisfaction Homburg and Rudolph (2001) point out that researches in the consumer goods area typically relate satisfaction to a single discrete transaction (e.g. Cardozo, 1965; Churchill & Surpenant, 1982) whereas relationship marketing understand the construct as a cumulative form (e.g. Cronin et al. 2000; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002). It can be concluded that though transaction-specific satisfaction offers diagnostic information about a particular product or service encounter, cumulative satisfaction is understood to be a comprehensive indicator of the overall performance of the firm (Anderson et al., 1994). Anderson et al. (1994) furthermore claim that it is the cumulative satisfaction that motivates firms to invest in improving their customers' satisfaction. Their view is that customer satisfaction is not only based on current experience but rather all past and future experiences as well.

Most research on customer satisfaction has focused on satisfaction with consumer goods and services whereas study on B-to-B environment is still modest (Homburg & Rudolph, 2001). However based on the previous discussion it is justified to note that B-to-B surroundings follow the pattern of cumulative satisfaction. More support to the claim can be found from the definition of consumer durable goods, which are thought to create customer satisfaction throughout the production performance rather than just depending on some specific point of time (Churchill & Surpenant, 1982). As with durable goods also in B-to-B relationships, the exchange process tends to be more long-lasting thus it is reasonable that the two definitions follow the same pattern.

In services setting the concept of satisfaction has also been the subject of investigation in many studies (e.g Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Fornell, 1992; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; de Ruyter et al., 1997). Cronin et al. (2000) suggest that satisfaction should be understood in services context as a comprehensive construct that is an evaluation of an emotion and which furthermore reflects the degree to which the customer believes that the possession and/or usage of service evokes positive feelings (Hunt, 1977; Rust & Oliver, 1994). Oliver (1993) shares the view of comprehensive nature of satisfaction in service context by stating in his research that satisfaction is customer's post purchase evaluation and affective response to the overall service.

Whether dealing with transaction-specific or cumulative form of satisfaction the expectancy/disconfirmation paradigm in process theory provides the grounding for the vast majority of satisfaction studies (e.g. Howard & Seth, 1969; Oliver, 1981; Churchill & Surpenant, 1982; Caruana, et al. 2000). The paradigm is based on the view that the level of satisfaction is evaluated through a comparison process between prior expectations and the actual performance of the product/service. Moreover any discrepancy between the expectation and the actual performance of the product leads to disconfirmation. (Oliver, 1980) The paradigm encompasses four constructs (Oliver, 1981):

1) Expectations

2) Performance
3) Disconfirmation
4) Satisfaction/Dissatisfaction

As mentioned any disconfirmation between expectations and the actual performance occurs when prior expectations and the actual performance diverge. This assumption leads to the point where there are three disconfirmation possibilities: zero disconfirmation is a result of product/service performing as expected, positive disconfirmation meaning that satisfaction can occur when the performance exceeds prior expectations, and negative disconfirmation and furthermore dissatisfaction exists when the product/service performs below expectations (Oliver, 1980, 1981; Churchill & Surpenant, 1982; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Tse & Wilton, 1988; Yi, 1990). According to Andreassen and Lindestad (1998) positive and negative disconfirmations should weigh very differently as negative disconfirmations seem to have more impact on the levels of satisfaction than the positive ones at the micro level. Also for example Kahneman and Tversky (1979) share the view by claiming that negative evaluations are perceptually greater than their positive counterparts of equal amount.

As most satisfaction models have roots in the disconfirmation paradigm it increasingly underlines that satisfaction must be understood as a post-purchase construct (e.g. Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994). It is evident that a consumer is unable to evaluate or perceive the performance of a specific product/service without experiencing/consuming it first. This is important to understand as it is the most stable and prominent factor, which differentiates the construct from service quality and service value. The differentiation might in some cases appear confusing as the definitions and measurement methods of each of the three variables are in many ways similar.

Even though in some cases satisfaction could be understood as a cognitive construct based on the fact that it clearly emerges from a cognitive comparison process its nature of being a post-purchase construct refer to it being more of an emotional response (e.g. Bagozzi, 1992; Oliver, 1992; ; Gotlieb et al., 1994; Rust

& Oliver, 1994; Oliver, 1996). This in turn supports the earlier mentioned theories and the conceptualization of satisfaction as a cumulative specific construct and an affective evaluative response of and emotion especially in the context of the underlying study.

2.1.2 Background of customer satisfaction research

Customer satisfaction has been a popular object of studies during the last three decades in services marketing literature (Oliver, 1999; Perkins, 1993). The key motivation for the growing interest on the concept is based on the findings that highly satisfied customers can lead a company to a stronger competitive position (Homburg & Rudolph, 2001). At least the following outcomes of positive customer satisfaction have been proven in marketing studies: increased profits (e.g. Reicheld & Sasser, 1990; Fornell, 1992; Rust & Zahorik, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994), improved customer loyalty (e.g. Bearden & Teel, 1983; Labarbera & Mazursky, 1983; Oliver & Swan, 1989; Fornell, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Boulding et al., 1993), positive word-of-mouth (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Fornell et al., 1996), lower vulnerability to competition (Fornell, 1992; Anderson et al., 1994), higher cross-margins (Fornell, 1992), willingness to pay higher prices (Reicheld & Sasser, 1990; Finkelman, 1993; Homburg et al., 2005), lower costs of attracting new customers (Fornell, 1992; Anderson et al., 1994), and higher customer retention or repurchase activity (Rust & Zahorik, 1991; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994; Hallowell, 1996). As a result of these various possible positive outcomes an increasing attention exists among academics and practitioners towards customer satisfaction as a corporate goal (Bolton & Drew, 1991a; Crosby, 1991; Oliva et al., 1992; Homburg & Rudolph, 2001).

As well as focusing on the positive outcomes of customer satisfaction, academics have been also interested in researching the possible antecedents of the construct. It is logical as if satisfaction is expected to lead to a favorable customer behavior it is also important to recognize the ingredients which precede customer satisfaction. As can be seen in the table 1 customer satisfaction has been studied with many different variables but probably the most common ones in services literature are service quality and service value. Numerous studies have specified the relationships between quality, value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions but there seems to be no uniformity of how these variables effect on each other. The relationship structures appear to be highly dependable on different factors such as the nature and the objective of the research as well as the time period of when the certain study has been conducted (Cronin et al., 2000). For example although the majority of the studies indicate that service quality and service value are antecedents of satisfaction and moreover influence behavioral intentions mainly indirectly through satisfaction (e.g. Ostrom & Iagobucci, 1995; Fornell et al., 1996; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Andreassen, 1998; Chenet et al., 1999; Caruana et al., 2000) argumentations for a direct effect from value and quality to behavioral intentions also exist (Zeithaml, 1988; Bolton & Drew, 1991b; ; Taylor & Baker, 1994; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Cronin et al., 1997; Sweeney et al., 1999; Athanassopoulos, 2000).

Table 1 takes a look at some important studies done in the field of customer satisfaction. However it is noteworthy to mention that a more comprehensive meta-analysis on customer satisfaction has been provided by Szymanski and Henard (2001) whose study includes 50 empirical studies concerning the subject. Their research has been divided into three main points of focus, which are antecedents, consequences and potential moderators of customer satisfaction. Also the study of Cronin et al. (2000) provides a wide review on the literature concerning customer satisfaction. Their work on the other hand concentrates more on the links between customer satisfaction and quality, value and possible service encounter outcomes.

Consequently in the following table 1 it is shown whether satisfaction occurs as an antecedent or as an outcome in the particular article. The other major concepts beside satisfaction are also shown. Major concepts category aims to build an overall image of the field of studies concerning customer satisfaction in different contexts. Some of these concepts act as antecedents for satisfaction some of them involve satisfaction as their antecedent. Also the context of the study has been categorized so that further conclusions can be made. In the comments section a brief summary of the most important results of each study has been concluded from the viewpoint of customer satisfaction. The table is aimed to provide further proof of the diverse field of study around the construct.

Table 1. Background of customer satisfaction research

Author	**Antecedent**	**Outcome**	**Major concepts**	**Context**	**Comments**
Cadotte et al. (1987)	-	x	Expectations, experience based norms	B-to-c, product & service (restaurant)	Expectations not the only standard. Satisfaction differ among products
Fornell (1992)	x	-	Quality, customer complaints	B-to-b & b-to-c, product & service	Satisfaction an antecedent to loyalty.
Oliver (1993)	-	x	Product attributes, affects, disconfirmation	B-to-c, product (automobiles) & service (education)	Confirms the existence of affect as an antecedent of satisfaction. Attribute experiences have direct and indirect effects on satisfaction
Anderson et al. (1994)	x	-	Market share, profitability	B-to-b & b-to-c, product & service	Satisfaction affects profitability but not market share
Patterson & Spreng (1997)	x	-	Perceived value, repurchase intentions	B-to-b, service (consultancy)	Value has an indirect effect on repurchase intentions through satisfaction
Andreassen & Liljestrand (1998)	x	-	Value, perceived quality, corporate image, loyalty	B-to-b, service (package tours)	Quality has a strong while value has no significant influence on satisfaction.
Caruana et al. (2000)	-	x	Service quality, value	B-to-b, service (auditing)	Value has a moderating role between service quality and satisfaction
Cronin et al. (2000)	x	-	Quality, value, behavioral intentions	B-to-b & b-to-c, products & service	Direct links between quality, value and satisfaction to behavioral intentions. Satisfaction also a moderator to behavioral intentions.

The majority of the studies concerning customer satisfaction have focused on satisfaction with consumer goods or services (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Homburg & Rudolph, 2001). Even though the research on the concept in business-to-business environment is still modest compared to B-to-C setting it has started to gain more attention during the last two decades (Hombur & Rudolph, 2001). The few studies that concern customer satisfaction in B-to-B sport sponsorship context follow mainly the theoretical fundaments of “normal” B-to-B relationships (Farrelly & Quester, 2004).

Overall customer satisfaction research is mainly influenced by the disconfirmation paradigm which was studied in greater detail and more theoretically in the previous chapter (2.1.1) (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This has been also documented in the mentioned meta-analysis of Szymanski and Henard (2001). The paradigm was firstly introduced in satisfaction literature by Oliver (1981) concerning the retail and service industry and since it has been heavily used by academics when trying to define, measure and conceptualize customer satisfaction. Although most scholars agree the existence of the disconfirmation paradigm the nature of satisfaction still remains equivocal (Eggert & Ulaga, 2002).

2.2 Service quality

The search for quality has been arguably one of the most important consumer trends since the 1980s as customers are constantly demanding higher quality products and services (Rabin, 1983, Parasuraman et al., 1985). The recent massive growth of services has ensured that also the quality of services or service quality has created a lot of interest among academics and practitioners during these decades making the concept one of the most studied constructs in services marketing. Perhaps one of the most important reasons for the popularity and attention towards service quality is the fact that it has a strong impact on business performance, lower costs, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, profitability and many other drivers of organizational performance (e.g Leonard & Sasser, 1982; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Gammie, 1992; Hallowell 1996; Chang & Chen, 1998; Gummesson, 1998; Lasser et al., 2000)

2.2.1 Theory of service quality

Before analyzing the definition of service quality it is important to understand what the terms service and quality stand for. First of all the early definitions and measurements of quality have come largely from the goods sector (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Crosby's definition of quality from the year 1979 states it as "conformance to requirements". When considering the measurement of quality in the context of goods Garvin (1983) suggests that it can be done by counting the incidents of internal failures, those being observed before they reach the markets, and external failures, the ones that incurred in the field after a unit has been installed.

However the knowledge about goods' quality differs drastically from understanding service quality because of the complicated nature of services. Unlike goods' quality which can be measured objectively, service quality is an abstract and elusive construct because of at least five different features (Parasurman et al. 1985; Grönroos, 1988):

1) Services are intangible
2) Services are heterogeneous by nature
3) Services are more activities than things
4) Services are at least some point produced and consumed at the same time
5) The customer participates in the production process

The feature of intangibility refers to the fact that services can be categorized more as performances rather than objects. Most services can't be counted, measured, inventoried, tested or verified before the purchase or consumption. (Parasuraman et al., 1985) This can be problematic for companies when trying to understand how customers perceive their services and evaluate their service quality (Zeithaml, 1981). As well as for companies the evaluation of the service might also be difficult for the customers as services are many times perceived in a subjective manner (Grönroos, 1988).

The heterogeneous nature of services also makes it problematic to measure their quality. Service performance often varies in the sense of producers, customers or time. Consistency of the delivery of the service is difficult to assure as it is dependable on service personnel for instance. (Booms & Bitner, 1981) There might also be radical differences on the firm’s intentions of service delivery and the actual performance of the service that the customer receives (Parasuraman et al. 1985)

The feature of simultaneous production and consumption of services creates challenges in the sense of quality measurement as quality control can’t be managed beforehand (Grönroos, 1988). Grönroos (1988) furthermore notes that besides quality control also marketing must take place during service production and consumption. If supposing that the firm relies only on traditional quality control and marketing approaches, the part of the production where the customer is involved may go uncontrolled and include negative marketing experiences. (Grönroos, 1988) Also Parasuraman et al. (1985) share the view of problematic nature of control process considering services by stating that because of the customer participation in the process, the service firm might have less managerial control over the quality of their offering.

Besides in product quality the theoretical roots of service quality are also founded in the customer satisfaction literature (Brady & Cronin, 2001). It can be seen from the fact that the early conceptualizations and definitions of service quality include influences from the disconfirmation paradigm which is also considered in the customer satisfaction literature. For example Grönroos (1988) defines total perceived service quality as the gap between the expected and experienced quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985) share Grönroos’ view of the disconfirmation paradigm in their study and furthermore in their conceptualization model called SERVQUAL.

However Cronin and Taylor (1992) have argued with the view that service quality would be an outcome of comparing expectations and performance and see the construct as an outcome of a rather comprehensive judgment. Their view has also roots in the early product quality conceptualization though as it has taken influences from the definition of Olshavsky (1985) for instance which sees quality as a form of overall evaluation of a product. Holbrook and Corfman (1985) also suggest that quality acts as a relatively global value of judgment.

Cronin and Taylor's (1992) argumentation also takes place to the problematic differentiation of satisfaction and service quality which has been stated as "related but not equivalent" (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The early differentiations of the two constructs are understood such as service quality is an overall long-run evaluation or a form of attitude, whereas satisfaction is more of a transaction specific measure (Parasurman et al. 1988; Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991a). However Cronin and Taylor (1992) see the relationship between service quality and disconfirmation paradigm incoherent. They furthermore argue that as both existing literature and empirical findings (e.g. Babakus & Boller, 1992; Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Peter et al., 1992) suggest that service quality should be understood definitely as an attitude. Thus the "adequacy – importance" model would be the most effective "attitude-based" operationalization of service quality where current performance adequately captures consumers' perceptions of the offered service's quality.

Zeithaml (1987) describes perceived quality as the consumer's judgment about an entity's overall excellence or superiority. What makes this view interesting is the fact that perceived quality could be understood as a synonym or at least closely related to service quality. And as according to literature (Garwin, 1983; Hjort-Anderson, 1984) it also differs from objective quality it should be also seen as a form of attitude. This in turn supports the view of a more radical differentiation of service quality (attitude) and satisfaction (emotion).

As a conclusion it can be said that service quality is a complex phenomenon. The confusing relation with customer satisfaction and the unique features of services have led to the point where researchers have claimed service quality to be elusive (Ulaga & Chacour, 2001) and considered the concept to be unresolved (Caruana et al. 2000) and far from conclusive (Athanassopoulos, 2000). Researchers have faced difficulties finding a common definition for the theme and some discrepancies can be seen in the overall conceptualizations and conceptualization models as well. The next subchapter provides a brief outlook to the conceptualization models of service quality as well as aims to construct a more comprehensive understanding to the literature that concerns the subject.

2.2.2 Background of service quality conceptualization

Generally there are two “schools” of conceptualizations that support the early disconfirmation paradigm considering service quality: the “Nordic” perspective of Grönroos (1982, 1984) and the “American” perspective led by the study of Parasuraman et al. (1988). In his initial model Grönroos (1982) studied experienced quality through two dimensions: technical and functional quality. The first version of the model did not include the expected service quality function but he later (1984) enhanced the model to include also the expected service function to complete the disconfirmation paradigm.

Technical quality in the model refers to *what* customers receive in their interactions with the firm, which is often thought of being the quality of the service delivered. Grönroos (1988) furthermore notes that technical quality is what the customers are left with when the production/consumption process is over. Functional quality on the other hand refers to *how* customers receive the service and how they experience the simultaneous production/consumption process. In his study Grönroos (1988) states that functional quality is more subjective of the two dimensions. Grönroos’ later version of the “Nordic” model (1984) also includes company’s image as an antecedent of experienced quality. He suggests that if the service provider is good in the mind of the customer thus the experienced quality might be understood to be higher and vice versa.

According to the disconfirmation paradigm the model of Grönroos would not be complete without the function of expectations. He suggests that the expected quality function is a combination of a number of factors such as market communication, word-of-mouth communication, corporate image and customer needs. Grönroos (1988) highlights the meaning of control of the expectations that the customers develop as some part of these expectations can be controlled by the service provider. For example if the firm launches unrealistic marketing campaigns and for this reason fails to meet customer expectations this may have a negative effect on total perceived quality (Grönroos, 1988).

The “American” perspective led by the study of Parasuraman et al. (1988) and their SERVQUAL model has also the basis of disconfirmation paradigm. Whereas Grönroos’ model included only two dimensions of quality, the SERVQUAL model includes five, which are moreover divided into 22 items (individual questions). The early studies of Parasuraman et al. (1985), which initially resulted to the “gaps model” and ultimately led to the final version of the SERVQUAL included 10 dimensions or determinants of service quality but as being said they were later reduced to five. These mentioned dimensions in the final version of the SERVQUAL model are:

1) Tangibles (physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel)
2) Reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately)
3) Responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service)
4) Assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence)
5) Empathy (caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers)

The mentioned “gaps model” of Parasuraman et al. (1985) and the initial version of the SERVQUAL was based on five different discrepancies or gaps identified from the executive and focus group interviews. According to the authors these mentioned gaps can be major hurdles when attempting to deliver a service which consumers would perceive as being of high quality, thus the foundation of the whole model is based on these gaps. Consumers' perceived quality is based on the gap no.5, which in turn depends on the nature of the design, marketing and delivery of the services. Ultimately that means that the magnitude and the direction of each gap will have an impact on service quality. (Parasurman et al., 1985)

Four of the five gaps were found regarding executive perceptions of service quality and the task associated with service delivery to consumers. The last gap found is the gap between the customers' expected and perceived service. The five gaps are as follows:

1) Consumer expectation – management perception gap
2) Management perception – service quality specification gap
3) Service quality specifications – service delivery gap
4) Service delivery – external communications gap
5) Expected service – perceived service gap

Despite acknowledging the groundbreaking findings of Parasuraman et al. (1988), Cronin and Taylor (1992) questioned SERVQUAL model and its conceptualization of service quality. Their argument was based on the already mentioned factors behind the confusing relationship and the diverse definitions of customer satisfaction and service quality. Also the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions were put under question. Even though the existing literature has explored the subject Cronin and Taylor (1992) wanted to deepen the understanding of the relationship. The end result of their study is the conceptualization model called SERVPERF.

The SERVPERF is founded by the most parts on the SERVQUAL model with the exception of diminishing expectations function while concentrating only on the perceived service performance. The model has the same five dimensions with the included 22 items as its predecessor so it also approves the “gaps model” of SERVQUAL. In the same study Cronin and Taylor also examined the relationship of perceived quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions where their correlations and relative effects showed that service quality is an antecedent of satisfaction and that satisfaction has a significant effect on behavioral intentions. However it seemed that service quality does not have a significant direct impact on behavioral intentions.

Rust and Oliver’s (1994) three component model has its roots in Grönroos’ “Nordic” model (1982, 1984). However whereas the “Nordic” model included only two dimensions (technical and functional quality) the three component model consists of three of them. Rust and Oliver (1994) included the initial technical and functional quality functions of Grönroos (1982, 1984) in their new model with the exception of changing their names to service product and service delivery. The third and the new dimension included is the dimension of environment. Many studies admit the importance of service environment in the overall service quality perceptions, which moreover supports its existence in conceptualization models as well (e.g., Baker, 1986; Bitner, 1990; Spangenberg et al., 1996; Wakefield et al., 1996).

Like its predecessor the “Nordic” model also the three dimensional model has been used in two ways them being with and without the existence of expectations. Hence it can be said that the model has a relationship with the disconfirmation paradigm. Even though the initial developers of the model didn’t test their conceptualization, support for the three-component model has been found for example from retail banking service (McDougal & Levesque, 1994).

The first conceptualization model that addressed service quality through multiple levels was developed by Dabholkar et al. (1996). After the authors revealed that the SERVQUAL model has not been fully applied to measure service quality of retail stores they started to form their own model for such a purpose. The new multilevel model comprises five dimensions (physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving and policy) and six subdimensions under the primary dimensions of physical aspects, reliability and personal interaction. These mentioned subdimensions are: appearance, convenience (both antecedents of physical aspects), promises, doing it right (both under reliability), inspiring and courteous helpful (both under personal interaction). This new multilevel way to conceptualize service quality highlights the complex nature of human perceptions and it has created theoretical support among many researchers (e.g. Czepiel et al., 1985; Carman 1990; McDougal & Levesque, 1994; Mohr & Bitner, 1995)

The third order factor model by Brady and Cronin (2001) has been affected by all the previously mentioned service quality conceptualization models. First of all it has the same three primary dimensions as Rust and Oliver (1994) had in their three dimensional model which were moreover influenced by the studies and the conceptualization model of Grönroos (1982, 1984). The interaction quality dimension of the third order factor model refers to the “Nordic” model’s stated functional quality and to the service delivery of the three dimensional model. By the same logical outcome, the quality dimension of the third order factor model was influenced by Grönroos’ (1982) technical quality and furthermore by Rust and Oliver’s (1994) service product. As service environment was not included in the “Nordic” model as a dimension the physical environment dimension in the third order factor model was solely influenced by the three dimensional model of Rust and Oliver (1994).

Brady and Cronin’s (2001) third order factor model also adopts the form of multiple levels of Dabholkar et al.’s (1996) multilevel model. However the new conceptualization model reforms the subdimensions drastically. First of all when compared to the multilevel model, which had only six subdimensions, the third order factor model includes nine of them having been spread evenly among the primary dimensions. Interaction quality includes the subdimensions of attitude, behavior and expertise, physical environment understands ambient conditions, design and social factors as its antecedents and outcome quality consists of waiting time, tangibles and valence.

The SERVQUAL and the SERVPERF models are also presented in the third-order factor model. In their study Brady and Cronin (2001) admit the dimensionality problems of SERVQUAL/SERVPERF and for this reason three (reliability, responsiveness, empathy) of their dimensions act just as modifiers for the nine subdimensions. Tangibles-dimension on the other hand has been included as a subdimension for outcome quality and the assurance dimensions of SERVQUAL/SERVPERF has been dropped out altogether. An image of the third order factor model has been provided in the following image 1.

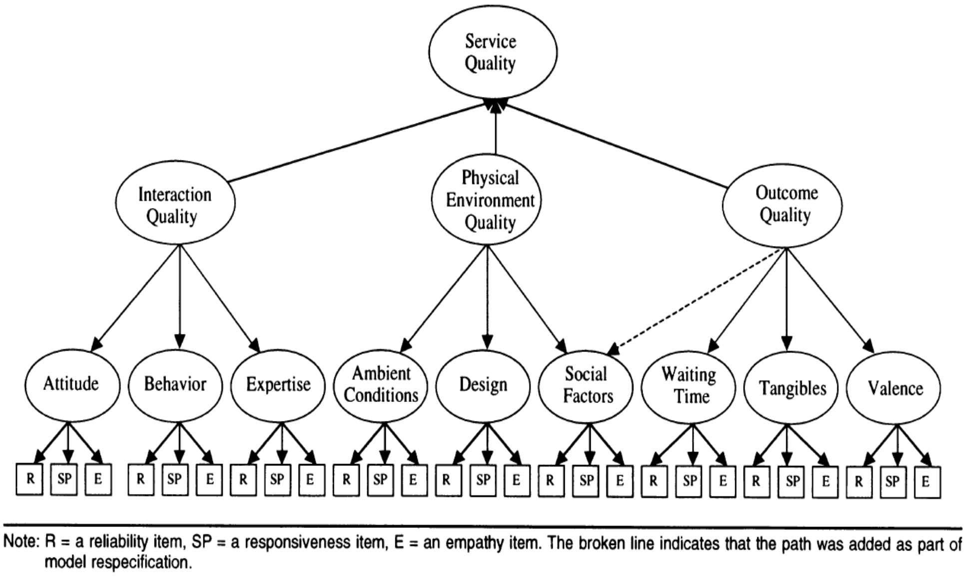

Image 1. The Third order factor model (Brady & Cronin, 2001)

2.2.3 The relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction

As discussed previously, customer satisfaction and service quality have undeniable yet complex relationship. In fact the theoretical roots of service quality lie in the customer satisfaction theory(Brady & Cronin, 2001). Where some studies have identified satisfaction being an antecedent of service quality (e.g. Bitner, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991a, b) the recent and mainly supported view is the opposite (e.g. Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Fornell et al., 1996; Hallowel, 1996; Athanassopoulos, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000). Theoretical support for such causality can be justified from Bagozzi's (1992) model where appraisal leads to emotional response (Gotlieb et al., 1994). The model is based on the view that the initial service evaluation is followed by an emotional reaction. In service context this basically means that the more cognitive-oriented service quality precedes the more emotional construct of customer satisfaction (e.g. Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994; Gotlieb et al., 1994; Kelley & Davis, 1994; Alford & Sheller, 1996; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; de Ruyter et al., 1997; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Woodruff, 1997; Chenet et al., 1999; Ennew & Binks, 1999).

In other words the mentioned phenomenon suggests that before satisfaction type of emotional response may happen, an evaluative process is required to take place. There has also been plenty of debate concerning the evaluative process in the service quality and satisfaction literature as their relationship has been seen as closely connected but still distinct (Parasuraman et al, 1988). In the existing literature the conceptualizations of both functions have included the process of disconfirmation, which makes the subject highly complex. However the common understanding of the conceptualization and measurement of service quality has shifted towards using perceptions only methods, which supports the previously mentioned procedure where service quality is seen as a form of attitude. Cronin and Taylor (1992) argue that disconfirmation paradigm in service quality measurement explains more satisfactory elements than attitudinal service quality. This conclusion works well with Bagozzi's (1992) model as it is well documented that attitude or in this case service quality comprises cognitive components (Yang & Yoo, 2004).

As satisfaction seems to comprise disconfirmation paradigm at least in some way and service quality seems to be an antecedent of satisfaction it can be concluded that service quality could be understood as a part of the performance function of the paradigm. As discussed previously there are three possible outcomes when comparing expectations and performance: positive, zero and negative disconfirmation. Positive disconfirmation or satisfaction occur whenever the performance of the product exceeds the prior expectations, zero disconfirmation happens when expectations and performance are evenly matched and negative disconfirmation or dissatisfaction is a result of underachieved performance compared to the expectations. If positive performance will lead to satisfaction and if service quality is an antecedent of such performance it can be concluded that service quality has a positive effect on satisfaction. Based on the previous discussion the following hypothesis concerning the subject can be drawn:

H1: Service quality has a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction

2.3 Service value

The concept of value has been understood as a unifying construct in consumer decision-making models among quality and satisfaction (Bolton & Drew, 1988, 1991b; Zeitthaml, 1988; Heskett et al., 1990 Dodds et al., 1991). Whereas traditionally quality and satisfaction were seen as the main antecedents of behavioral intentions the researchers noticed a grievance in the theory as consumers do not always buy the product/service with the highest quality or the one that brings the biggest amount of satisfaction (Olshavsky, 1985). Onkvist and Shaw (1987) furthermore note that similarly consumers do not always choose to buy the lowest cost product/service although cost factors have been shown to be an important factor of demand. For these reasons the concept of value was introduced and moreover today is regarded as one of the focal concepts in marketing literature.

2.3.1 Service value in theory

Value has been commonly described as being the tradeoff between the benefits and the sacrifices that the consumption or the usage of particular product/service includes. Probably the most well-known definition of value has been created by Zeithaml (1988), which describes value as “a consumer’s overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received for what is given”.

Her definition which included the “get” and the “give” attributes was affected by the study of Sawyer and Dickson (1984) and was further enhanced by Monroe (1990) to customer-perceived value concept.

Most commonly the literature understands quality as the “get” attribute and price (direct monetary amount) as the “give” attribute (Monroe, 1979, 1990; Monroe & Petroshius, 1981; Monroe & Krishnan, 1985; Albert, 1987; Buzzell & Gale, 1987; Cravens et al., 1988; DeSouza, 1989; Lichtenstein et al., 1990; Anderson & Fornell, 1991; Dodds et al., 1991). Based on this view of value Gale and Klavans (1985) concluded that in order to improve perceptions of value, companies should try to either lower the prices while at the same time at least maintaining the quality of the offering or to improve the performance of the offering while at the same time at least maintaining the price.

Concerning the price of a product/service, according to Monroe (1979), buyers generally have a set of prices, which they are willing to pay for a certain object rather than just having one. Therefore the price might have a two-way impact on perceptions: high price might lead to refraining from purchase and a lower price than estimated might lead to suspicions about the quality of the product/service (Cooper, 1969). Szybillo and Jacoby (1974) moreover suggested that the value for the money perception would have a stronger relationship to behavioral intentions than just perceived quality. Dodds et al. (1991) continue the previously mentioned example of set of prices by suggesting that hence perceptions of value would surge as the price increases from below the buyer’s lowest acceptable price limit to some acceptable price within their set price range. Moreover they state that as the price increases beyond the acceptable range, perceptions of value would decline.

However monetary price is not the only “give” or sacrificial attribute that has been argued to have an effect on the overall service value and the view of including only monetary amount of sacrifice when determining value has been criticized by many authors (e.g. Schecter, 1984; Bolton & Drew, 1991b). Time and effort for example has been mentioned by Cronin et al. (1997) as other attribute examples of sacrifice. Ravald and Grönroos (1996) furthermore leverage the view by stating that perceived sacrifice include all the costs the buyer faces when making a purchase. They mention such factors as purchase price, acquisition costs, transportation, installation, order handling, repairs and maintenance, risk of failure and poor performance to be included in the list when describing possible sacrifices.

Ravald and Grönroos (1996) also see service value as a more extensive concept. In their article which studies value in the viewpoint of relationship marketing, they highlight the subjective nature of perceived service value and furthermore argue that the phenomenon must be related to the different personal aspects of value, needs and preferences as well as the financial resources of the consumer. In order for a company to determine the benefits of their offering they need to understand their customers' needs and value chain. Christopher et al. (1991) share this view by stating that the goal has to be to identify what the customer is trying to do with the firm's offering at a particular situation. Bearing this perspective in mind, conclusions can be drawn whether some actions or factors are valued among customers or not. While accepting the role of service quality as the antecedent of benefits in value perception Ravald & Grönroos (1996) note that perceived benefits also include combinations of physical attributes, service attributes, technical support etc. which are highly dependable on the situation.

Even though a relatively common understanding of the conceptualization of service value has been set, no generalized approach to how the function should be specified exists. The dominant but an untested view is that service value should be treated as a ratio with service quality (get factor) being as the numerator and sacrifice (give factor) as the denominator (Drew & Bolton, 1987; Zeithaml, 1988; Heskett et al., 1990). However Thaler (1985) has suggested that consumer's mental accounting in choice situations involving goods or services defined by multiple attributes is based on the sum of acquisition and transactional factors rather than multiplicative processes. Support for mechanism of treating value as additive process has been found throughout the existing literature (Lynch, 1985; Onkvist & Shaw, 1987; Bolton & Drew, 1991b; Cronin et al. 1997). For example, Bolton and Drew (1991b) question the multiplicative approach by considering whether consumers' internal cognition involve such complex mathematical processes. Cronin et al. (1997) also share this view in their study by stating that value added model appears to represent a more natural cognitive decision making process than multiplication.

Since according to the definition of Zeithaml (1988) and the previous discussion service value can be understood to be a tradeoff between the perceived benefits and the perceived sacrifices, these constructs moreover have to be the antecedents of service value. Basically this means that the more benefits the customers get and the less sacrifices they have to make, the more value they perceive (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996; Cronin et al., 1997; Ulaga & Chacour, 2001; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002). This leads to the next hypotheses presented in this study:

H2: High amount of perceived benefits have a positive and direct effect on service value

H3: Low amount of sacrifices have a positive and direct effect on service value

2.3.2 The relationship between service value and customer satisfaction

Before discussing the relationship between service value and customer satisfaction it is important to understand the differences between the two concepts as they can be easily confused (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). One possible issue, which could generate confusion, is the dimensionality of the two concepts. It is commonly accepted through various studies that service value is a multidimensional construct (e.g. Palmroth, 1991; Sheth et al., 1991; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). However the dimensionality of satisfaction seems to be more complex to define. Most of the satisfaction studies concentrate on B-to-C situations and because of this, the construct is often defined as one-dimensional and transaction-specific. However according to Homburg and Rudolph (2001) in industrial B-to-B surroundings the concept should be understood as multidimensional and relationship-specific based on the long-term nature of the business relationship. Their view of satisfaction is cumulative, which was discussed previously being as more comprehensive indicator of overall performance. This in turn brings the conceptualizations of service value and satisfaction closer to each other.

One way to separate the constructs of service value and customer satisfaction is through the timing of the evaluation. Whereas the evaluation process in service value include just the comparison of possible sacrifices and benefits in the case of customer satisfaction the customer needs to experience the performance of the product/service and compare it to the prior expectations. Because of such characteristic, customer satisfaction has been labeled often as post-use or post-purchase evaluation of an emotion (e.g. Hunt, 1977; Oliver 1981). In the evaluation process it doesn't matter whether satisfaction is being treated as transactional or cumulative because in both cases the usage experience needs to occur.

The relationship between service value and customer satisfaction can also be studied through social sciences. Like service quality also service value is seen as a cognitive based construct which captures discrepancies from benefit-sacrifice evaluation. However satisfaction is understood to be more of an affective evaluative response (Oliver, 1992; Hunt, 1993) which is triggered by these mentioned cognitive thought processes (Ellis, 1962; Weiner, 1986). This in turn supports the aforementioned Bagozzi's (1992) model where appraisal leads to an emotional response.

A lot of empirical studies also exist which have studied the relationship between the two variables. Although the results have not been congruent the prevalent view supports the causality that understands service value as an antecedent of customer satisfaction (e.g. Fornell et al., 1996; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Andreassen, 1998; Chenet et al., 1999). So according to previous discussion the following hypothesis can be concluded:

H4: Service value has a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction.

2.3.3 The relationship between service quality and service value

According to the service marketing studies the constructs of service quality and service value are undeniably connected. This can be derived all the way from the definition of perceived service value, which can be understood to be the trade-off between the perceived benefits and the perceived sacrifices. Moreover the conceptualization is many times simplified to cover the benefits only through quality and the sacrifices only through objective monetary price. These functions can also be presented as the get and the give factors according to Zeithaml's (1988) definition.

However this kind of conceptualization, which is more or less commonly accepted by various authors (e.g. Zeithaml, 1988; Tellis & Gaeth, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991b; Babin et al., 1994) has not survived without criticism. The criticism is mostly based on the view that such conceptualization is too simplistic (e.g. Schecter, 1984). For example Sweeney and Soutar (2001) argue that even though quality is an important determinant of value it is not the only one. The authors furthermore highlight the multidimensional nature of service value that is supported by other authors as well (e.g. Holbrook & Corfman, 1985; Zeithaml, 1988; Rust & Oliver, 1994). This moreover supports just the partial role of service quality among the perceived benefits in service value perceptions. Bolton and Drew (1991b) endorse the relationship between quality and value in services although differentiating the constructs by noting that service value is the more comprehensive one of the two.

Although the role or the amount of service quality in service value evaluations is someway questionable, the existence is not. The inclusion of quality in service value evaluations has been justified also by Parasuraman et al. (1988) as they state that service quality can be seen as a benefit based on its positive nature. This is valuable information to service providers and moreover underlines the importance of understanding the value chain of a customer. As stated in the earlier part of the study value improvements can be done by two ways: by improving the benefits which include in this case the construct of quality as the amount of sacrifices decreases or stays constant or decreasing the amount of sacrifices while the benefits where quality is an antecedent stay constant or improve (Gale & Klavans, 1985). This relationship is also supported by Rust and Oliver (1994) who note that service value should increase as quality increases and price decreases or stays constant. According to such view, a conclusion can be constructed that by providing higher quality services in the customer's value chain a company can improve the customer's perceived service value. The discussion on the relationship between service quality and service value leads to the next hypothesis of the study:

H5: Service quality has a direct and positive effect on service value

2.4 Sports sponsorship as a service context

In this subchapter a brief review to the context of sports sponsorship is made. It has been acknowledged that even though sports sponsorship has started to gain attention in the past few decades only a few researchers have recognized that the overall sponsorship relationship is fundamentally a business to business one (Farrelly & Quester, 2004). In the next two subchapters the definition and the objectives of sports sponsorship services have been presented with the mentioned B-to-B relationship in mind.

2.4.1 Definition of sponsorship

Despite the radical growth of popularity and the investments in sports sponsorships no enduring rigorous theoretical definition of the concept has been agreed upon (Dolphin, 2003). Some authors have gone even as far as suggesting that an attempt to define sponsorship is like trying to harpoon a butterfly in a gale (Head, 1981; Thwaites, 1994). Also many of the existing studies and textbooks see sponsorships simply just as one form of promotion (McCarthy, 1960; Olkkonen et al, 2000). However this sort of adoption or definition treats sponsorship in a rather narrow and a superficial manner.

Some recurrently occurring themes among the existing definitions of sports sponsorship can be identified though. One and probably the most prominent example of these themes is the existence of the function of exchange between the parties in the sponsorship relationship. The sponsor is seen mostly as a party that provides funds and other forms of resources for the exchange for the possibility to associate with the sponsored party. On the other hand the sponsored party can use the gathered resources to strengthen its competitive position. (McCarville & Copeland, 1994; Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004)

Olkkonen et al. (2000) state that especially during the earlier stages of the sponsorship literature defining the concept was the main point of focus. However as the money spent in the phenomenon has increased and for this reason the sponsors have become more strategic in their approaches to seek value from sponsorships, the early definitions can be considered as obsolete. Farrelly and Quester (2005) have stated that the modern sponsorships are relationships where numerous objects can be exchanged and where both parties seek to achieve their strategic goals. Furthermore it can be said that some of the recent large scale sponsorship agreements can be even seen as strategic alliances or as co-branding partnerships.

Valanko's (2009, 62) interpretation of sponsorship captures the attributes of the modern trends involved around the concept. It also treats sponsorship as a strategic alliance which includes juridical aspects. In the following an interpretation of the definition is provided: *Sponsorships are juridical co-operation agreements on renting associations based on tangible and intangible transactions between the sponsor and the sponsored party. Sponsorship is a strategic solution and a commercial investment which will be planned creatively and will be exploited both* *together and individually using different elements of marketing communication. The relationship creates measurable added value for both parties' operational processes.*

2.4.2 Sponsorship objectives in sport context

It is not unusual that the objectives and motives behind corporate sponsorship activity tend to be vague (Javalgi et al., 1994). Sponsorships can undoubtedly bring great benefits to a sponsoring organization but these might not always be in the area targeted by the sponsor as its key objective. Therefore evaluations of the gained benefits may not always be positive. This could be a result of sponsors not setting, and consequently evaluating, the right objectives. (Hartland et al., 2005) On the other hand one of the reasons that might complicate the evaluation and the sponsor's objective recognition could be the sponsorship's ability to contribute to a wide range of objectives at both corporate and brand level (Thaiwates, 1995).

Tripodi (2001) suggests that the absence of clearly defined objectives is the first sign of sponsorship investment lacking proper articulation. By providing a synergy between the sponsored and the sponsoring party should lead to the situation where both of them benefit from the relationship. A research concerning sponsorship in Finland done by Mainostajien Liitto (2013) reveals that 62 per cent of the respondent companies have accomplished the targets they have set for sponsorship, but on the other hand every fourth respondent says that they have not set any objectives for their sponsorship deals. Perhaps one of the factors behind the lack of aims is that many of the especially smaller sponsors do not have the resources or the knowhow to measure the effects of sponsorship relationships. Also the overall cost of sponsorship might be difficult to determine in some cases (Hoek et al., 1997).

The past studies have categorized sports sponsorship objectives in many ways. For instance Abratt et al. (1987) described sponsorship objectives as corporate marketing, communications, public relations and/or promotional objectives. Irwin and Asimakopoulos (1992) furthermore leveraged the objective categorization as they presented the Sport Sponsorship Proposal Evaluation Model (SSPEM). The model provided potential sponsors with an extensive checklist of objectives and selection criteria, which can be used when evaluating a sponsorship opportunity. The list divided the sponsorship objectives in the following categories: increasing public corporate awareness, enhancing corporate image, altering public perception, getting involved in the community, building business/trade goodwill, enhancing employee relations/motivation, increasing target market awareness, identifying/building image within a target market and increasing sales/market share (Dolphin, 2003).

To simplify the categorization process Sandler and Shani (1993) summarized the mentioned SSPEM objectives to corporate-, marketing-, media- and personal objectives. Lee et al. (1997) state that the priority of the mentioned objectives has varied over time, as historically they were in exact reverse order. Early academic studies show that personal and media objectives were prioritized in the early sponsorship activity, but as the phenomenon evolved and got more professional the emphasis shifted more towards the marketing and especially corporate objectives. (Ukman, 1984; Shanklin & Kuzma, 1992; Carrigan & Carrigan, 1997; Lee et al., 1997)

Corporate objectives

Corporate objectives are largely based around image, awareness and reputation of the sponsoring brand. Other forms of corporate objectives that organizations could try to accomplish through sponsorship relationships are public perception, community involvement and corporate exclusivity. (Hartland et al., 2005; Dolphin, 2003) Corporate hospitality is often stated as a corporate objective but in this study it has been viewed as a marketing objective as it tries to build meaningful relationships with the company’s stakeholders.

Corporate image has been defined by Johnson and Zinkhan (1990) as the impressions of a particular company held by some segment of the public. The basic assumption when companies try to enhance their corporate image via sports sponsorship is that through the relationship with a sport property they hope that the positive image the fans associate with the sport property is transferred to the sponsor (Shank, 2005; Mullin et al., 2007). McDonald (1991) emphasizes furthermore the meaning of longevity in the sponsorship relationship when enhancing corporate image.

A great deal of research exists considering the fit between the sponsor and the sponsored party. To be able to build an association with the sponsored property is an essential factor when attempting to enhance corporate image. Martin (1994) argues that if there is a fit between the images of the parties then the sponsor's image can be enhanced through the transfer of the whole entity's image to the sponsoring party. Blythe (2000) furthermore states that the most can be achieved in a sponsorship relationship through some existing links between the sponsor and the sponsored. Crimmins and Horn (1996) support the view but also highlight the importance of the uniqueness and effective communication of the possible link.

Increasing public awareness is arguably the most commonly cited objective within the sports sponsorship literature (e.g. Greenwald & Fernandez-Balboa, 1998; Lough & Irwin, 2001; Apostolopoulou & Papadimitriou, 2004; Chadwick & Thwaites, 2004; Lamont & Dowell, 2007) One form of increasing public awareness is to build brand awareness, which refers to the strength of a brand's presence in the consumer's mind and which is measured through different methods such as brand recognition, brand recall, top of mind and dominant brand (Henseler et al., 2011). Cornwell et al. (2001) suggest that generating brand awareness follow naturally from sponsorships. The sponsor might want to achieve name recognition, educate the public regarding the capabilities of the company as well as raise the profile of the brand or just to inform where and how to obtain the brand (Mullin et al., 2007). Even though studies (e.g. Nelms, 1996; Brassington & Pettitt, 2000) show that while sponsorships indeed create awareness, they are more likely to reinforce past demeanor than prompt new purchase behavior (Fill, 1999).

Similar to enhancing corporate image, altering public perception is quite contingent upon the view of the sponsor and sponsored sport property by the consumer (Greenhalgh & Greenwell, 2013). The main factor of altering this perception is finding sponsored properties, which are part of the consumer’s lifestyle (Irwin & Asimakopuolos, 1992; Irwin et al., 2008). Hence altering public perception objective can also be seen as a way to differentiate the sponsor from its competitors through sponsorship.

Mack (1999) and Till and Novak (2000) state that recently companies have been looking towards community involvement and cause-related marketing as means to improve their brand image, building trust, give back to the surrounding community and asserting an air of social responsibility. Mullin et al. (2007) furthermore highlight that especially sports sponsorships have more potential than any other promotional tool to have direct impact on the community. According to McManus (2002) through community involvement companies can create stability in a constantly developing society. He continues to state that “if the brand is tied up with emotional experience it makes its disposal more difficult” leading to a closer relationship with a customer and higher customer loyalty.

One form of differentiation is the corporate exclusivity where sponsorship can be regarded as a very usable method. It is a corporate objective that is often overlooked when searching for competitive advantage (Hartland et al., 2005). According to Copeland (1991) corporate exclusivity was the most important factor for sponsors and that sponsorship would be significant for those who wish to be the first in their industry. Verow et al. (1999) suggests that the success of the sponsorship relationship in the eyes of the sponsor is often dependent upon the degree of exclusivity gained by the sponsor.

Marketing objectives

The ultimate objective for most sponsors is to increase sales and/or market share (Irwin & Asimakopoulos, 1992; Shank, 2005; Mullin et al. 2007; Fullerton, 2010). It can be done through sponsorships in many ways including direct and indirect ones. First of all, the studies have demonstrated that sports fans are more prone to purchase products of brands, which sponsor activities or properties that they value (Irwin et al., 2008; Fullerton, 2010). In theory this, behavior is called self-congruity which refers to the process where consumers often purchase goods to express their identity (e.g. Malhotra, 1981, 1988; Aaker, 1996; Aaker, 1997) and furthermore may evaluate brands according to the match between their symbolic attributes and the consumers' own self-concept. According to Johar and Sirgy (1991) self-congruity plays an important role in both pre- and post-purchase behavior.

However researchers do not share a common view that sponsorship is to generate sales increase. Sandler and Shani (1993) suggest that even though consumers favor sponsors it may not lead into immediate purchase behavior. According to Kitchen (1999) sponsorship as well as overall brand advertising is unlikely to generate sales increases. In fact as stated in the previous chapter sponsoring is more likely to prompt past purchase behavior than create new one.

Hartland et al. (2005) suggest that while companies state broad corporate aims of enhancing corporate image, in practice many organizations use sports sponsorship to entertain key stakeholders and for other relationship marketing objectives. The research furthermore notes that corporate hospitality's primary objective is to help developing meaningful and long-term relationships with key clients and other stakeholders such as employees, suppliers and government. Meeting relevant parties in an informal setting is more likely to create goodwill and allow the development of stakeholder relations beyond of just host and client (Mullin et al., 2007). Corporate hospitality facilities can be utilized also for internal marketing purposes. Irwin et al. (2008) support this view by stating that sports sponsorship has the capability of increasing staff motivation and corporate pride. Yet companies acknowledge the meaning of sports sponsorship as a valuable tool in developing stakeholder relationships, few companies actually set relationship marketing objectives when sponsoring sports (Hartland et al., 2005).

To reach target markets effectively is one aspect which can be accomplished by using sponsorship relationships. As well as enabling accurate targeting of the promotional message sponsorships can also reach a number of corporate publics in a single campaign (Meenaghan, 1994). Major global corporations utilize sports sponsorships as mass marketing tools by cooperating with globally recognized sport properties or events. On the other hand also more accurately targeted customer groups can be reached using national or local sport entities. Greenwald and Fernandez-Balboa (1998) and Tripoldi (2001) suggest that even though these smaller players often lack mass media appeal of mainstream sports, they offer sponsors the opportunity to be more targeted with their message. Javalgi et al. (1994) share this view by stating that sports sponsorships are used to reach specific audiences and are therefore valuable and potentially powerful tools for setting strategic communication links. Irwin et al. (2008) note that companies are increasingly interested in targeting specific message to small segments and furthermore continue that sport sponsorship has been found as a proper tool for such action.

Sponsorship can also be used as a means to position a brand (Turner, 1987). Position strategy could be reinforced for example by using sports properties to add desirable associations to the sponsoring brand. According to Turner (1987) positioning strategy that uses sponsorship is especially usable in situations in which a brand has encountered trouble, has a new industry sector or entered a new market.

Media objectives

Many marketers use sports sponsorships to gather media coverage for their organizations. (Cornwell et al., 2000). Most sponsorships especially in sports context will create some sort of media visibility whether in local or in international level and this has been often perceived as adding real value to the sponsorship deal (Verow et al., 1999). Hartland et al. (2005) underline that in general the higher the sponsorship fee or the more high-profile the sponsored sports property the higher the media visibility.

According to Erdogan and Kitchen (1998) the benefits of media visibility through sponsorship offers a clutter free-medium. Crowley (1991) supports this view as he suggests that perhaps sponsorship can enhance the promotional message by cutting through the clutter that widely affects mass media advertising. It is relevant to point out that new media channels have been developed in the past few years which can be utilized in gaining media visibility. Different social media platforms and the increased usage of mobile devices have created new marketing opportunities for sponsors and sports marketers. Besides generating just general media visibility these new marketing channels allow marketers to target their message in a proactive and an efficient way.

Personal objectives

Sports sponsorship has developed in dynamic market place from its philanthropic background and is now used by communication professionals to reach different (sometimes clearly defined and sometimes not) objectives (Dolphin, 2003). Although corporate and marketing objectives are now seen as the dominant reasons behind corporations' willingness to sponsor sport properties, many sponsorship deals are still a result of personal interest of the management, whether it is ideal or not (Sandler & Shani, 1993). Meenaghan (1991) shares the view by stating that the capacity of sponsorship to fulfill personal objectives is largely unmatched by other marketing communication methods. It can be viewed as ironic that some corporations use sponsorship as an intermediate to serve consumers' self-congruity needs while others use it to fulfill their own.

3. THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, SERVICE VALUE, SERVICE QUALITY AND BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS

This chapter focuses mainly on discussing the previous literature on behavioral intentions and its connectedness to the other previously mentioned focal constructs of the study. First a detailed introduction will be provided to the concept of behavioral intentions. Secondly the relationships with behavioral intentions and customer satisfaction, service value and service quality will be assessed and the final hypotheses will be presented. The chapter ends with a subchapter that summarizes all the constructed hypotheses.

3.1 Behavioral intentions

Even though some authors (e.g. Mittal & Kamakura, 2001) argue whether behavioral intentions indicate accurate predictions of consumer behavior, it is an important construct for service providers (Olorunniwo et al., 2006). The reason for this is the fact that if positive experiences with a company lead to favorable behavior through behavior intentions this has multiple possible positive influences to the financial performance of the company. In their study Zeithaml et al. (1996) compiled previous studies concerning the subject and recognized four indicators of favorable behavioral intentions:

1) Saying positive things about the company
2) Recommending the company to others
3) Paying price premiums
4) Remaining loyal to the company

Cronin et al. (2000) accepted the view of Zeithaml et al. (1996) but added a fifth indicator to complete the list:

5) Spend more with the company

The list can be categorized into two groups of indicators: loyalty or repurchase action and positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM). First of all when thinking about the loyalty aspect, a satisfied or a happy customer creates direct incomes through repeat purchases or in other words through loyal behavior. The second important aspect of loyalty, according to various authors, is the fact that it has been proven that acquiring new customers is considerably more expensive than retaining the existing ones (e.g. Fornell & Wernerfelt, 1987, 1988; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Olorunniwo et al., 2006). This view is based on the expenditures of new customer acquisition such as advertising, promotion, sales costs, start-up activities and so on (Zeithaml, et al., 1996). In fact some studies have shown that it can cost up to six times more to acquire new customers than to retain the existing ones (Rosenberg & Czepiel, 1983)

As being said the other important revenue creating customer behavior besides repurchase action is positive Word-of-Mouth (Molinari et al., 2008). Besides direct repurchases or loyalty, a customer that has had positive experiences with a company is also more likely to a spread positive message about the company to other consumers or possible customers. Hence favorable behavioral intentions have also the possibility to create indirect revenues or positive brand publicity for a company. Companies understand the power of WOM as a valuable marketing tool as consumers tend to trust more on their close relatives, friends or fellow consumers than traditional marketing channels when considering their purchase decisions. Especially for small businesses WOM has been seen as an effective tool to create more personal relationships with their customers. (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 568)

The other clear benefit of positive WOM besides the trust factor is its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional marketing tools. It is important to understand that although WOM usually happens organically for example Godes and Mayzlin (2009) and Kozinets et al. (2010) argue that the process can also be managed and facilitated by companies. Especially the growth of popularity of social media has created a new tool for marketers to establish cost-effective public voice and presence on the web. The so called electronic Word-of-Mouth (eWOM) provides a marketing channel from companies to consumers but also from consumers to consumers as they can share their experiences and opinions on the web about products and services. Kotler and Keller (2012, 568) have categorized social media into three main alternatives which are online communities and forums, blogs and social networks.

The previously mentioned indicators were the outcomes of a positive customer experience leading to favorable behavior through positive behavioral intentions. However according to the existing literature (e.g. Hirschman, 1970; Singh, 1988; Solnick & Hemenway, 1992; Maute & Forrester, 1993; Zeitham et al., 1996) also the opposite process may occur when negative experiences lead to dissatisfaction or unfavorable behavior. Hirschman's (1970) study has identified three indicators of such defection:

1) Exit
2) Voice
3) Loyalty

The exit indicator refers to consumers' decisions to stop purchasing the products or services provided by the company completely or to reduce the amount of consumption. According to Singh (1988) the voice factor includes three forms of complaining behavior. The first of the three is the basic voice responses where the customer may for example seek for a redress from the selling company. The second of the three complaining indicators is the private response, which understands the negative WOM, which might be as harmful for a company as positive WOM is profitable. The third form of voice refers to third party responses such as legal actions. Loyalty indicator of dissatisfaction on the other hand indicates that the customer remains with the company although being dissatisfied. Such dissatisfaction is possible to lead to future defection or switching to a competitor.

These positive and negative indicators refer to the fact that behavioral intentions are a post-purchase evaluation of future behavior. In fact in many occasions behavioral intentions and its characteristics are entitled as post-purchase behavior. (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Hence it has become vital for marketers to understand that their job doesn't end with the purchase, as they should supply beliefs and evaluations via marketing communications that reinforce the consumers' choice and help them to feel good about the brand. Furthermore it is imperative that a company understands the importance of behavioral intentions and monitors post-purchase satisfaction, actions and product uses as well as disposals. (Kotler & Keller, 2012, 194)

Academics have studied the relationship between service quality, service value, satisfaction and behavioral intentions intensively in the near past as they have been noticed to be closely connected. Behavioral intentions have gained a lot more attention lately as clearly all the other mentioned factors remain more or less useless for a company if they don't lead to a favorable customer behavior. However according to existing studies the relationships are not completely straight forward and the connections between the mentioned variables are being discussed more in the following chapters.

3.1.1 The relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions

It has been evidenced in various studies that customer satisfaction is an important and direct antecedent of behavioral intentions (e.g. Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Lee, 1998; Caruana et al., 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; McDougall & Levesque, 2000). Even though the existing literature presents behavioral intentions many times through individual indicators such as customer loyalty, repurchase and positive Word-of-Mouth they more or less refer and measure the same thing: customers' positive post purchase evaluations of future behavior where moreover customer satisfaction has been shown to predict every one of these indicators.

The basic premise behind the causality is that if the service providers perform favorable, or in other words the disconfirmation of expectations and perceived performance is positive the customer is satisfied. This in turn leads to the notion that a satisfied customer's affect towards a service provider could motivate the customer to endorse the provider again, recommend the provider to other customers or act otherwise favorably (Lam et al., 2004). The relationship between satisfaction and behavioral intentions has created much attention among companies because positive behavioral intentions are shown to improve a company's profitability. In fact in their study Anderson et al. (1994) empirically evidenced that firms that achieve high customer satisfaction also enjoy superior economic returns. So it is appropriate to propose that these two constructs have a close relationship with each other. Based on the discussion and the various researches on the subject the following hypothesis can be concluded:

H6: Customer satisfaction has a direct and positive impact on behavioral intentions

3.1.2 The relationship between service value and behavioral intentions

The relationship between service value and behavioral intentions has seemingly divided academics into two schools. The first view among researchers is that the relationship is effective through satisfaction meaning that the cognitive variable of service value is mediated by the affective customer satisfaction which will result conative returns of behavioral intentions (Eggert & Ulaga, 2002). This argument is supported by the previously mentioned view of Bagozzi (1992) which also proposes that the more cognitive oriented constructs of service quality and service value are antecedents of a more emotional construct of satisfaction. Furthermore, if satisfaction supposedly is a direct antecedent of behavioral intentions (eg. Cronin et al., 2000) and if moreover service value is an antecedent of customer satisfaction as hypothesized earlier (e.g. Fornell et al., 1996; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Andreassen, 1998; Chenet et al., 1999) the constructs of service value and behavioral intentions could be expected to have at least an indirect relationship

The second school of thought posits a view of a direct impact of service value on behavioral intentions neglecting the mediating role of satisfaction (e.g. Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991). This viewpoint is argued by the fact that especially in business markets the decision making is mainly seen to be guided by cognitive factors alone (Gross, 1997). Furthermore customers are most likely to stay loyal to a company if they feel that they are receiving higher value than they would from competitors (Molinari et al., 2008). Some authors has even argued that the role of value should be understood as a substitute to the construct of customer satisfaction but the view of Woodruff (1997) which sees the two concepts as more complementary rather than substitutes has gained a lot of support recently (e.g. Cronin et al., 2000; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002). Based on this the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: Service value has an indirect and positive relationship with behavioral intentions through satisfaction

H8: Service value has a direct and positive impact on behavioral intentions.

3.1.3 The relationship between service quality and behavioral intentions

As hypothesized previously, service quality has been found to correlate with customer satisfaction. Moreover the assumption that satisfied customers tend to behave favorably leads to the suggestion that service quality has an indirect relationship with behavioral intentions (Cronin et al., 2000). The indirect relationship has been approved throughout the marketing literature based on the fact that consumers do not always buy the product or service with highest quality but because of also many subjective reasons (e.g. Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Gotlieb et al., 1994). One of these reasons is the offering's ability to create satisfaction to its user and this seems to have a stronger impact on behavioral intentions than just the mere construct of quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Cronin et al., 2000). The claim is reasonable when considering the fact that the concept of satisfaction is understood to be a more comprehensive of the two constructs. The mediating role of satisfaction between service quality and behavioral intentions add weight to the previously mentioned Bagozzi's (1992) suggestion that cognitive evaluation (service quality) precede emotional responses (customer satisfaction) (Cronin et al., 2000).

Although the previous discussion suggested that service quality has an effect on behavioral intentions through satisfaction the existing literature clearly argues that the effect can also take place in a direct nature (e.g. Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991b; Cronin & Morris, 1989; Dawkins & Reicheld, 1990; Boulding et al., 1993; Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993; Kordupleski et al., 1993; Spreng et al., 1996; Zeithaml et al., 1996). This can be also seen in the study of Cronin et al (2000) where indirect effect between service quality and behavioral intentions through satisfaction was found in all of the six studied industries but also direct relationship between the constructs was identified in four of the six industries. Service quality is particularly important antecedent of positive behavior in B-to-B environment because of its impact on the organizational customers' own service to their customers (Gounaris, 2005). In other words many times service providers in B-to-B setting have a significant impact to their customers' customers. It thus follows that the quality of the service has a highlighted influence on the service providers' customers' behavior. Based on the previous discussion the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9: Service quality has an indirect effect on behavioral intentions through customer satisfaction

H10: Service quality has a direct and positive relationship on behavioral intentions

3.2 Summary of the hypotheses

This subchapter concludes the drawn hypotheses of the thesis. Also the supportive studies behind the hypotheses are summarized. Firstly in table 2 the mentioned supportive studies are presented once again to give further validation for the drawn hypotheses. After this in figure 2 the hypotheses are presented in the theoretical framework of the thesis which was presented earlier in the study. The latent variables of this study are (service value) benefits, (service value) sacrifices, service value, service quality, customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The only independent variables of the study which are not affected by any other constructs are (service value) benefits, (service value) sacrifices and service quality.

Table 2. Supportive studies of the hypothesized relationships

Hypothesis	Supporting studies
H1: Service quality – Customer satisfaction	Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994; Gotlieb et al., 1994; Kelley & Davis, 1994; Alford & Sheller, 1996; Fornell et al., 1996; Hallowel, 1996; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; de Ruyter et al., 1997; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Woodruff, 1997; Chenet et al., 1999; Ennew & Binks, 1999; Athanassopoulos, 2000; Cronin et al., 2000
H2: Perceived benefits – Service value	Raval & Grönroos, 1996; Cronin et al., 1997; Ulaga & Chacour, 2001; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002
H3: Perceived sacrifices – Service value	Raval & Grönroos, 1996; Cronin et al., 1997; Ulaga & Chacour, 2001; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002
H4: Service value – Customer satisfaction	Fornell et al., 1996; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Andreassen, 1998; Chenet et al., 1999
H5: Service quality – Service value	Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml, 1988; Tellis & Gaeth, 1990; Bolton & Drew, 1991b; Babin et al., 1994; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001
H6: Customer satisfaction - Behavioral intentions	Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson et al., 1994; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Lee, 1998; Caruana et al., 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; McDougall & Levesque, 2000; Lam et al., 2004
H7: Service value – Customer satisfaction – Behavioral intentions	Cronin et al., 2000; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002
H8: Service value – Behavioral intentions	Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991; Cronin et al., 2000; Eggert & Ulaga, 2002; Molinari et al., 2008
H9: Service quality – Customer satisfaction – Behavioral intentions	Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Gotlieb et al., 1994; Cronin et al., 2000
H10: Service quality – Behavioral intentions	Parasuraman et al., 1988, 1991b; Cronin & Morris, 1989; Dawkins & Reicheld, 1990; Boulding et al., 1993; Frenzen & Nakamoto, 1993; Kordupleski et al., 1993; Spreng et al., 1996; Zeithaml et al., 1996

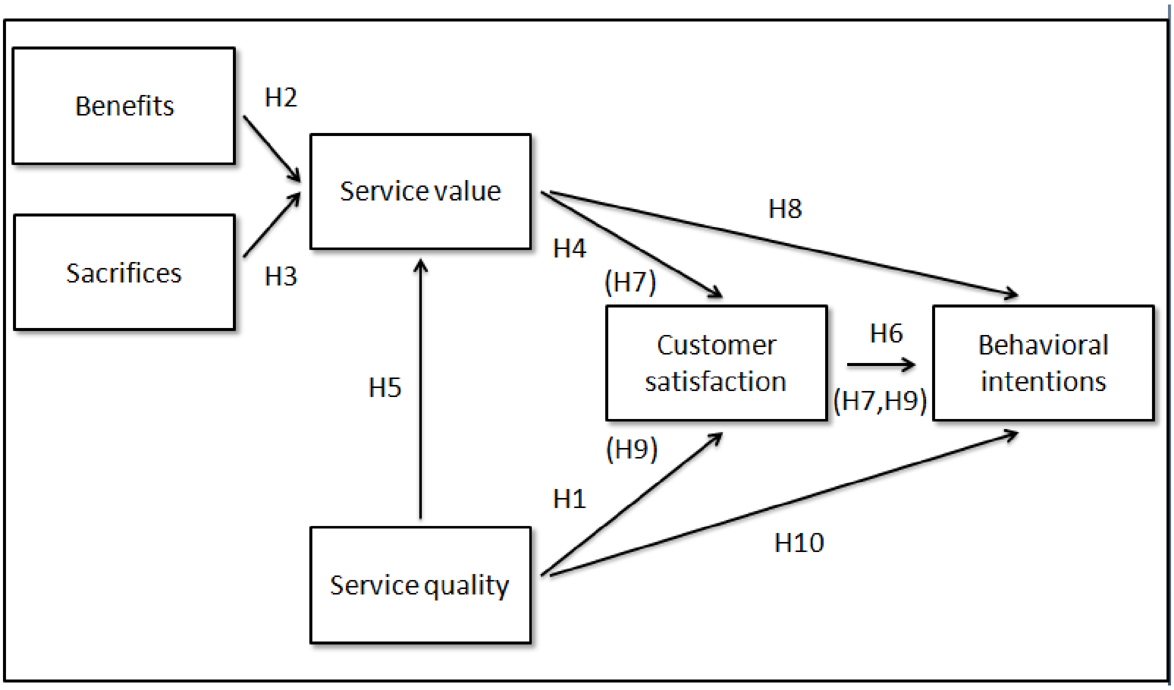

Figure 2. Summary of the hypotheses in the theoretical framework of the study

4. METHDOLOGY

Before analyzing the empirical part and presenting the results the following chapter introduces the research methodology used in the current study. The basic idea of the chapter is to provide information on how the empirical part has been conducted. Firstly the development process of the questionnaire will be explained and all the items of the focal constructs included in the final questionnaire will be presented. This subchapter also includes the presentation of additional questions which were included in the survey. Secondly information about the pretesting process will be provided and moreover sampling and response rate presented. In the last subchapter the data collection methods used in the current study are discussed.

4.1 Questionnaire development

The questionnaire used in the current research was built by exploiting existing literature concerning the key concepts of the study. In all of the constructs except service value benefits items that have been already proved to be valid and reliable were used. Suggestions that urge researchers to use already proven measurement items have been identified by various researchers (e.g. Metsämuuronen, 2005, 49; Karjaluoto & Juntunen, 2007, 12). However as already mentioned, service value benefits items were developed for the use of the current research only as it was revealed during the research process that service value has not been identified or studied in the sports sponsorship context at all. The items used to measure service value benefits in the current research were built by researching existing sponsorship literature. Hence it would be possible to identify the most significant and general probable benefits considering sports sponsorship context from the viewpoint of the sponsor.

The respondents were asked to answer to the questionnaire by evaluating their opinions about the sponsorship services of the case company. The questionnaire contained all the key concepts of the research as well as some additional background question, which were constructed in cooperation with the case company. Moreover all the questions of the survey were utilized by using multi-item measurement scales (except service value sacrifices). According to various authors (Churchill 1979; Spector 1992; De Vellis 2003; Netemeyer et al. 2003) researchers are advised to follow the “conventional wisdom” and use multi-item scales as it assists in averaging out errors and specificities that are inherent with single items scales. The usage of multi-item scales also leads to an increased reliability and construct validity (De Vellis, 2003).

Eventually the final version of the questionnaire came to include 53 questions. These items that deal with the core concepts of the study were measured by using Likert-scales. Around half of the items examined the respondents’ disagreements and agreements or their evaluation of the object considering the particular statement through seven-point Likert-scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree) and the rest of the half through nine-point Likert-scale (1= very low, 9= very high). The scales were selected due to their existence and form in the previous studies. All the items and statements were also translated into Finnish language.

4.1.1 Customer satisfaction

According to the conceptualization of the concept of customer satisfaction in B-to-B sports sponsorship context, a measurement method adopted by Homburg and Stock (2004) was selected for the purpose of the current research. As stated previously, customer satisfaction in sports sponsorship context is argued to be a global evaluation of the sponsor-sponsored relationship (Farrelly et al., 2008). Firstly the five item customer satisfaction measure by Homburg and Stock (2004) aims to measure the overall satisfaction rather than any specific facet of it. Secondly the measure handles customer satisfaction as a cumulative construct, which supports the theoretical implications around the current research’s context. Understanding and measuring satisfaction as a cumulative construct is also supported by Anderson et al. (1994) who state that it is specifically cumulative satisfaction that indicates the overall and global performance of the firm. Besides being approved in sponsorship context, the usage of cumulative measure of satisfaction is also advisable from the viewpoint of relationship marketing, as cumulative satisfaction refers to the satisfaction level that has developed over time rather than just considering a specific transaction (Johnson & Fornell, 1991; Fornell, 1992; Anderson et al., 1994).

The measure used in the current study has been slightly modified from the one by Homburg and Stock (2004) as the case company's name has been included in the statements. Also the nature of the offering wanted to be highlighted and for this reason the mention of the sponsorship service was included in some of the statements. The respondents were asked to evaluate their disagreement or agreement by using a seven-point Likert-scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). All the customer satisfaction items and statements are presented below.

Table 3. Customer satisfaction items and statements

ITEM	STATEMENT
CS1	We are very pleased with the sponsorship service that SaiPa offers
CS2	We enjoy collaborating with SaiPa
CS3	On an overall basis we are satisfied with SaiPa
CS4	SaiPa is the first choice for us for the purchase of the sponsorship services
CS5	On an overall basis, our experience with SaiPa has been positive

4.1.2 Service value

As the concept of value is most commonly defined as being the tradeoff between sacrifices and benefits also the method that measures the concept must include both "get" and "give" components. Although monetary price has been argued to be only one of the many sacrifice elements of service value it is the only one used in the current research. Because of the heterogeneous nature and the objectives of the sponsoring parties of the case company it was viewed that the most uniform and reliable attribute of sacrifice would be the perceived monetary price. For example time and effort were not viewed to be reliable sacrifice components as many sponsors invest in the sponsorship services with a moderately “unambitious” reasons and the process might not include other significant investments than money. The sacrifice measure of monetary price has been adopted from the study of Cronin et al. (2000). The respondents were asked to estimate how they evaluate the direct monetary price of the sponsorship services by using a nine-point Likert-scale (1= very low, 9= very high).

Table 4. Service value sacrifices item

ITEM	STATEMENT
SVSC1	The price charge to use the sponsorship services of SaiPa for my company to apply the sponsorship objectives is

Besides the “give” factor the other element included in value perceptions are the perceived benefits or the “get” factor. As stated previously in the current research the benefits attributes were built by using existing sponsorship literature. However there were no validated service value benefits items lists in the existing literature, as there is not much theoretical discussion in sports sponsorship context considering service value benefits. Probably most important study that has enabled the categorization of the sponsorship benefits from the viewpoint of the sponsor has been the research done by Hartland et al. (2000). In the study the authors have divided sponsorship objectives into four different categories (corporate, marketing, media and marketing objectives), which also act as the foundation for the measure of perceived benefits in the current research.

In the construction process the study of Ravald and Grönroos (1996) has also been exploited as they see service value as an extensive concept, which is highly dependable on the situation. The opinions of how the respondents value the perceived benefits of the objectives they seek from the service were measured by using a nine-point Likert-scale (1= very low, 9= very high). It is also good to note that the respondents were not supposed to answer to every statement but to recognize the most important sponsorship objectives for their company and evaluate the success of the partnership or the performance of the case company trying to fulfill them.

Table 5. Service value benefits items

ITEM	STATEMENT
SVB1	Improving corporate image
SVB2	Increasing public awareness
SVB3	Altering public perception
SVB4	Community involvement and creating a communal image of the corporation
SVB5	Corporate exclusivity
SVB6	Increase sales and/or market share
SVB7	Entertaining key stakeholders and relationship building
SVB8	Reaching target markets
SVB9	Brand positioning
SVB10	National media visibility through traditional media channels (e.g. TV, radio, print magazines, web-pages)
SVB11	Local media visibility through traditional media channels
SVB12	Visibility through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and so on)
SVB13	Personal objectives (e.g. personal interest towards ice-hockey or supporting ice-hockey/sports overall)

In addition to just concentrating on the sacrifices and benefits of the service also the overall service value has been measured by using two items. It was viewed that by doing so, more reliable results might be possible to accomplish. Also as the benefits attributes have not been proven to be reliable and have not been tested before, the overall service value statements act as in a manner of a back-up. The overall service value items were constructed by exploiting the study of Cronin et al. (2000). However slight modifications have been made to the original statements as the name of the case company has been included in them. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to evaluate how they perceive the overall value of the sponsorship service for their company by using a nine-point Likert-scale (1= very low, 9= very high).

Table 6. Overall service value items

ITEM	STATEMENT
SV1	Overall the value of the services SaiPa offers for my company is
SV2	Compared to what we had to give up (e.g. monetary price of the sponsorship service) the overall ability of SaiPa to satisfy my wants and need is

4.1.3 Service quality

Service quality was measured in the current research by using Brady and Cronin's (2001) third order factor model which has been already presented in the theoretical chapter of the concept (2.1.4). The model can be understood as comprehensive as it includes features from various previous service quality conceptualization models. The third order factor model can furthermore be seen as evolutionary as it has been influenced by researches from throughout the history of service quality research. The evolution of the conceptualization models and the researches that has influenced the third order factor model the most, have also been discussed in the background of service quality conceptualization chapter (2.1.4).

The model of Brady and Cronin (2001) originally consists of three primary and nine subdimensions, which include total of 35 service quality statements. However the original model was slightly modified for the purpose of the current research as two sub dimensions, design and waiting time, were excluded, as they can be considered not suitable for the context of sports sponsorship. The process reduced the amount of total items to 29. Some of the statements were modified in the translation process as in some cases it turned out to be challenging to capture the original meaning of the statement in Finnish language with direct translations.

In line with the original research, it is good to note that the questionnaire included only current performance measurement, ignoring the existence of previous expectations. This view is in line with many previous studies (e.g. Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Brady & Cronin, 2001). A seven-point scale, where the other extremity being strongly disagree and the other being strongly agree, was used to measure the respondents' evaluation of the quality of the case company's sponsorship services.

Table 7. Service quality items

ITEM	STATEMENT
SQ1	Overall I'd say the quality of my interaction with SaiPa's employees is excellent
SQ2	I would say that the quality of my interaction with SaiPa's employees is high
SQ3	I can count on the employees at SaiPa being friendly
SQ4	The attitude of SaiPa's employees demonstrates their willingness to help my company
SQ5	The attitude of SaiPa's employees shows me that they understand my company's needs
SQ6	I can count on SaiPa's employees taking actions to address my company's needs
SQ7	SaiPa's employees respond quickly to my company's needs
SQ8	The behavior of SaiPa's employees indicates to me that they understand my company's needs
SQ9	I can count on SaiPa's employees knowing their jobs
SQ10	SaiPa's employees are able to answer my questions quickly
SQ11	SaiPa's employees understand that my company rely on their knowledge to meet our objectives for sponsorship
SQ12	I would say that SaiPa's physical environment is one of the best in its industry
SQ13	I would rate SaiPa's physical environment highly
SQ14	At SaiPa, you can rely on there being a good atmosphere
SQ15	SaiPa's ambience is what my company is looking for in

	sponsorship services
SQ16	SaiPa understands that its atmosphere is important to my company
SQ17	I find that SaiPa's other customers consistently leave me with a good impressions of its service
SQ18	SaiPa's other customers do not affect its ability to provide my company with good services
SQ19	SaiPa understands that other patrons affect my perception of its service
SQ20	My company always has an excellent experience when utilizing SaiPa's sponsorship services
SQ21	I feel good about what SaiPa provides to its customers
SQ22	My company is consistently pleased with the sponsorship services SaiPa offers
SQ23	I like SaiPa because it offers the sponsorship services that my company wants
SQ24	SaiPa knows the kind of sponsorship services its customers are looking for
SQ25	My company gets usually positive experiences when doing business with SaiPa
SQ26	I believe SaiPa tries to give my company a good experience
SQ27	I believe SaiPa knows the type of experience its customers want
SQ28	I would say that SaiPa provides superior service
SQ29	I believe SaiPa offers excellent service

4.1.4 Behavioral intentions

The items, that were constructed for the purpose of measuring the sponsors' post purchase evaluation of future behavior or behavioral intentions were adopted from the study of Zeithaml et al. (1996). The authors suggest that positive behavioral intentions are associated with a services provider's ability to get its customers to say positive things about the company, to recommend the company to others, remain loyal and spend more with the company. The four behavioral intentions statements were constructed based on the mentioned possible positive outcomes. The respondent sponsors were asked to estimate the probability of their future behavior by nine-point Likert-scale (1= very low, 9=very high).

Table 8. Behavioral intentions item

ITEM	STATEMENT
BI1	The probability that you will renew your sponsorship contract to concern also the following seasons
BI2	Based on your experiences the possibility for that you would recommend SaiPa's sponsorship services to other companies
BI3	Based on your experiences the likelihood that you could speak positively about SaiPa
BI4	The possibility for that you could increase the volume of your sponsorship services investment in the future

4.1.5 Additional background questions

The overall questionnaire included also a section of background questions, which was constructed in cooperation with the case company. The section includes questions of, which sponsorship services the sponsor has exploited, by which magnitude the sponsor has invested in the service and in which customer segment the sponsor does its business (B-to-C or B-to-B). The sponsors were asked to answer the mentioned questions through selecting a proper alternative among given options. However the section also consisted of an open question where the respondents were asked to mention the three most focal objectives for the sponsorship relationship. The purpose of the background questions was to improve the ability to categorize the data more comprehensively and to get more information considering the respondents.

4.2 Questionnaire pretesting

When conducting an academic questionnaire or a survey it has been suggested that including a pretesting process is a necessity. By doing so many possible obstacles or unpleasant surprises can be avoided. Pretesting can also provide some valuable tools for modifying or improving the content of the questionnaire before the actual launch. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 204) Due to these mentioned reasons a pretesting was conducted also in the current research process.

The pretesting was done for the purpose of getting feedback from the respondents concerning the aptitude, structure, format and understandability of the questionnaire as well as to ensure the content validity. Also the duration of the reply process was asked for an evaluation. One important object of pretesting in the current research was to test the understandability of the translations of the statements as in some cases some modifications had to be made.

The pilot survey was sent to six selected sponsors of the case company. The respondent selection was done by the case company and these sponsors supposed to be among those who the case company has the closest relationships with. However it turned out to be a challenging task to accomplish a decent response rate as only one out of the six partners responded. Hence in order to gain proper feedback besides sending the pilot study to the sponsors also opinions of some student colleagues and the supervising professor were enquired. The most challenging task in the questionnaire turned out to be the already mentioned translation process especially concerning the section of service quality. Hence based on the feedback of the respondent(s), fellow students and the advice of the supervising professor the needed adjustments were made to the final version of the survey.

4.3 Data collection procedure and sample

The web-based questionnaire for the underlying research was implemented through the Webropol software. Online survey format was used because of its speed, ability to get easy access to the data, cheapness, and usability. The feature of sending reminder mails was seen as a positive factor as well when deciding in favor of the web-based Webropol program. The survey followed through the months of April and May 2014 and the process consisted of one pretesting round and three actual survey rounds for the final sample. The definite collected data was coded and analyzed using SPSS software.

The sample for the underlying study was collected by using a questionnaire which was sent to the business customers of the case company Liiga-SaiPa Oy. The companies were exclusively selected from the case company's database that included all the significant business customers of Liiga-SaiPa Oy. Moreover the final sample turned out to consist of the customers who actually answered to the questionnaire.

The respondents were contacted via e-mail and the response process didn't include any kind of advance notice. The contact information of the respondents was provided by the case company and the respondents were selected based on their status of being the contact persons concerning the sponsorship relationship. Hence it can be said that the selected respondents were key informants in this particular manner. The procedure of using key informants to respond on the behalf of the whole company is an advisable approach especially in business-to-business environment as they commonly hold the first hand information and experience on the particular case (Campbell, 1955; Seidler, 1974; Phillips, 1981; Rossomme, 2003).

Besides just including the link to the actual online questionnaire the sent e-mails consisted of also a cover letter. The purpose of the cover letter was to inform the respondents of the meaning, importance and purpose of the survey for the researcher, the case company and the respondent and also to courage to take part in the survey (Vehkalahti, 2008, 47-48; Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 204). Assurance of complete anonymity should one take part in the survey was guaranteed in the cover letter as well as in the opening paragraph of the actual questionnaire with a statement that the results would only be used for the purpose of this research and for the development of the case company's sponsorship services. This was thought to increase the response rate and to improve the common reliability of the survey. Contact information of the researcher was also provided in the case if any questions, comments or feedback would emerge concerning the survey.

The questionnaire included a possibility for the respondents to take part in a lottery which would take place in the end of the research process. The lottery was supposed to act as an incentive with a role to improve the overall response rate and create interest towards answering the survey. The grand prizes of the lottery were three two-person VIP-packages for a pre-indefinite home match of the case company for the upcoming ice-hockey season. The grand prizes were provided by Liiga-SaiPa Oy. Interest towards the lottery was at a high level as approximately 94 percent of the respondents who answered the questionnaire also took part in the lottery.

The first e-mails consisting of the survey and the lottery were sent to the customers 25th of April 2014. The first reminder e-mails were furthermore sent to the respondents who had not yet answered 7th of May and the third and the final round of mailing was done five days later on the 12th of May. The common practice of reminder e-mails is that two remainder mails is seen as proper amount (Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 196).

The total pool of possible respondents or the basic set of respondents was 357 customers from which a total of 80 customers responded. Each of the received replies was proven usable. This signifies that the final response rate of the questionnaire ended up being at 22.4 percent. In his study Baruch (1999) suggested that a study, which is directed mostly toward top management (CEO/MD etc.) or representatives of organizations, a norm of response rate would be somewhere around 23-49 percent. Thus it can be concluded that the underlying research undercuts this norm but with a minimal margin. On the other hand according to some authors a nonresponse bias in similar questionnaires can reach up all the way to 90 percent and the underlying research clearly exceeds this boundary (Vilkka, 2007, 59; Vehkalahti, 2008, 44).

In retrospect it would be easy to say that sending an advance notice of the upcoming survey might have been an advisable thing to do. This could have possibly had a positive impact on the response rate but at the time, it was thought that a total of possibly three e-mails per a respondent would be enough. An aspect worth noting is that a total of 117 customers opened the survey but “only” 80 finished it. To conclude, it can be deduced that around 32 percent of the customers who opened the questionnaire saw some kind of inconvenience with it and decided to discontinue the process.

5. ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

As the theoretical foundation for the focal concepts of the study has been provided and the research methodology used has been presented, the results of the actual statistical analyzes can be discussed in the following chapter. However in the first subchapter a brief introduction to the case company will be provided. This is followed by a descriptive analysis which, aims to analyze the customer companies and the attributes considering the sponsorship relationships. Next the results of the factor analyses are discussed and moreover the final measurement scales constructed. The factor analyses will be followed by analysis of reliability and validity of the current research. The chapter ends with hypotheses testing procedure which includes the presentation of Pearson correlation matrixes and the results of the regression analyses.

5.1 Liiga-SaiPa Oy

Liiga-SaiPa Oy or more familiarly just SaiPa is a professional ice-hockey team from Lappeenranta Finland founded in 1948. It furthermore became Liiga-SaiPa Oy (Limited company) in 2000. SaiPa has played ice-hockey on the highest competitive level in Finland in three different periods during its lifetime for 39 years altogether, achieving one bronze medal during the spell. The current stretch in the now called Liiga started in 1996. SaiPa plays its home matches in Kisapuisto arena which has the capacity of 4825 spectators and is moreover one of the smallest arenas among the teams in the Liiga. (Liiga, 2014; Liiga-Saipa Oy, 2014)

Besides having one of the smallest arenas, SaiPa also operates annually with one of the smallest cost budgets in the Liiga. For the season 2013-2014 SaiPa’s budget was set around 4,5me surpassing only Ilves Tampere among the Liiga teams. Nevertheless, as seen many times before, money does not automatically correlate to prosperity in sports and SaiPa has recently been a prime example of this. Already in the season of 2012-2013 the Lappeenranta bound team enjoyed at least decent success sporting wise and tremendous financial results but the current season was a smash hit for SaiPa in all fronts. The team reached the semi-finals in the 2014 Liiga playoffs and was knockout only by the upcoming champions Kärpät Oulu. The season is expected to be a success in financial terms as well. (Liiga, 2014)

Currently SaiPa has around 400 B-to-B partners who utilize the sponsorship services that the sports organization offers. Moreover Riku Kallioniemi (2012) the managing director of Liiga-SaiPa Oy has suggested that SaiPa is probably the most well-known brand of the whole province of South Karelia. The three most definite forms of sponsorship services that SaiPa offers are corporate season tickets, press-box- and VIP-services and different marketing elements including, for instance, advertisement services.

5.2 Descriptive analysis

The following subchapter will have a look to the profiles of the respondent companies as well as to their response behavior and the features of their sponsorship relationship with the case company. The analysis has been made based on the responses to the background questions of the online questionnaire. Besides SPSS software, also Excel program was used in the descriptive analysis process.

The analysis has been made based on the total number of responses (80). The questions were formed by the instructions of the case company and they consist of enquires only on company and relationship background information. The respondents were asked to answer to the following questions: which sponsorship services your company has exploited, by which magnitude has your company invested in the service and in which customer segment your company does business in (B-to-B or B-to-C). Also the three most focal objectives for the relationship were asked to be mentioned. The first three questions were asked in the form of choosing the correct option among the given alternatives and the final one was an open question.

Services exploited in the sponsorship relationship

As can be seen from the figure 3, the total amount of responses (130) overcome the total amount of respondents 79 (one of the 80 respondents didn't answer to the question), which means that many of the respondents have exploited more than one form of service in their sponsorship relationship. However before going into the details with the possible combos including more than one form of service it can be concluded that the most popular form of sponsorship service among the respondents is marketing and advertising elements which hold 48 percent of the total amount of responses. The respondents seem to favor season cards (31 percent) as the second most and VIP boxes and conditions come as the third most popular service with the share of 21 percent of the total responses.

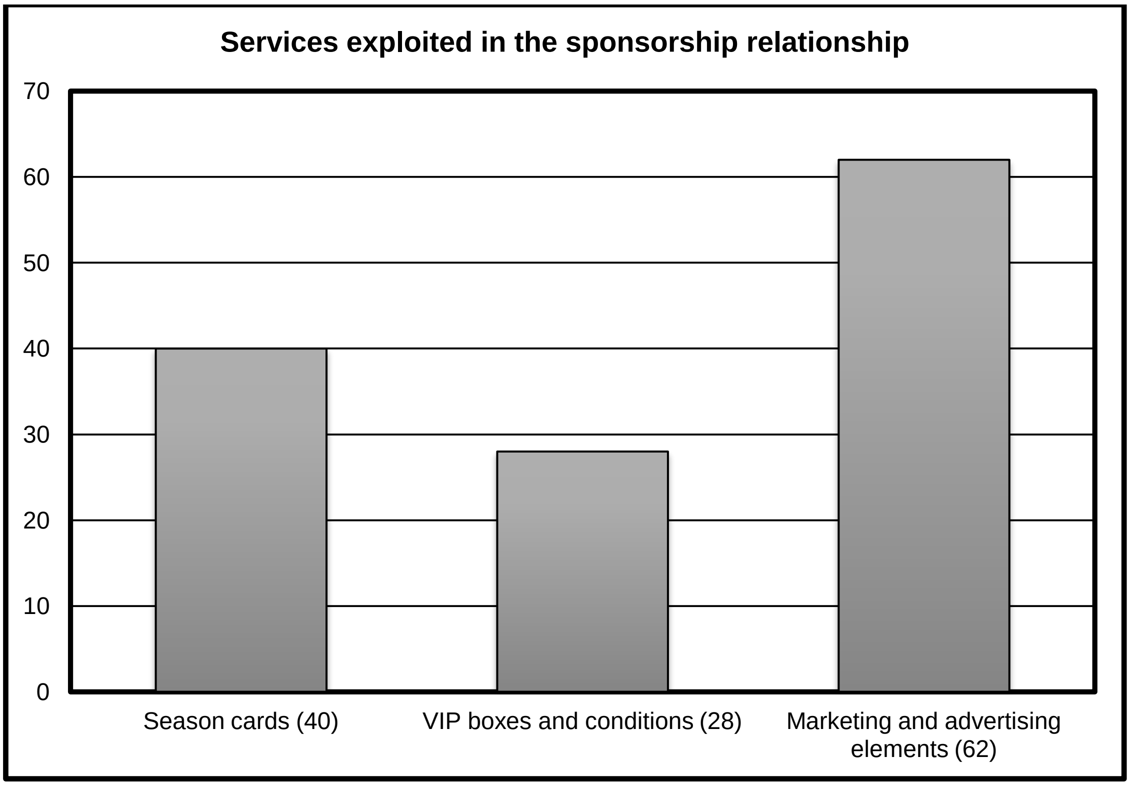

Figure 3. Services exploited in the sponsorship relationship

When studying the responses more specifically further observations can be concluded on the manner. The amount of respondents who have utilized only one form of sponsorship service is 41 (52%) due to this 38 (48%) of the 79 respondents who answered the question must have exploited a combo of more than one form of service. The data demonstrates that among the respondent companies that utilize only one form of service the most popular is marketing and advertising elements with the amount of 29 (37%) among the total amount of respondents, while season cards and VIP-boxes and conditions serve the amount 10 (13%) and 2 (3%) respondents respectively.

The most common combo including two forms of services is season cards and marketing and advertising elements which is utilized by 12 (15%) companies. Furthermore the combination of VIP-boxes and conditions and marketing and advertising elements has been used by 8 (10%) companies while season cards and VIP-boxes and conditions are exploited by 5 (6%) respondents. Additionally 13 (16%) respondent companies have utilized all three forms of sponsorship services.

The magnitude of the investment in the sponsorship services

Secondly the respondents were asked to answer how much they invest in the case company's sponsorship services during one ice-hockey season. The respondents were provided by three alternative response possibilities and how the responses divided can be seen from the figure 4.

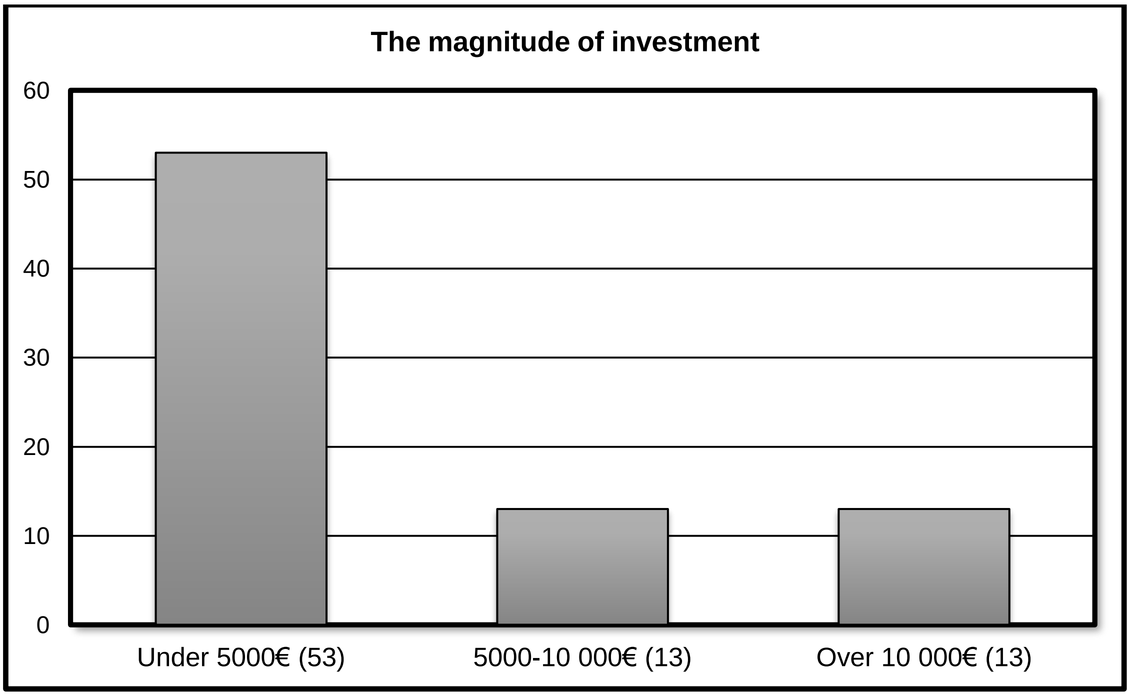

Figure 4. The magnitude of the investment in the sponsorship relationship

The majority (67%) of the respondents reportedly invest under 5000€ per a season to the underlying sponsorship service. The other two categories, between 5000€ and 10 000€ and over 10 000 moreover reflect the total level of investment of 33 percent of the respondent companies or 16.5% (13 answers each) respectively. This works well with the findings from the previous figure (3) as supposedly the most expensive form of service, VIP-boxes and conditions, seem to gather the least numeral amount of popularity.

Customer segment

Figure 5 compiles the responses of the respondent companies, in which customer segment they do their business in. As can be seen the responses divided quite evenly, as 28 companies (47% of the responses) operate in B-to-C environment and 31 companies (53% of the responses) in B-to-B context. Moreover two of the respondents do business in both customer segments. It is important to note that surprisingly as much as 23 (29%) respondents chose not to answer the question. Reason for the low response rate to the question is unknown.

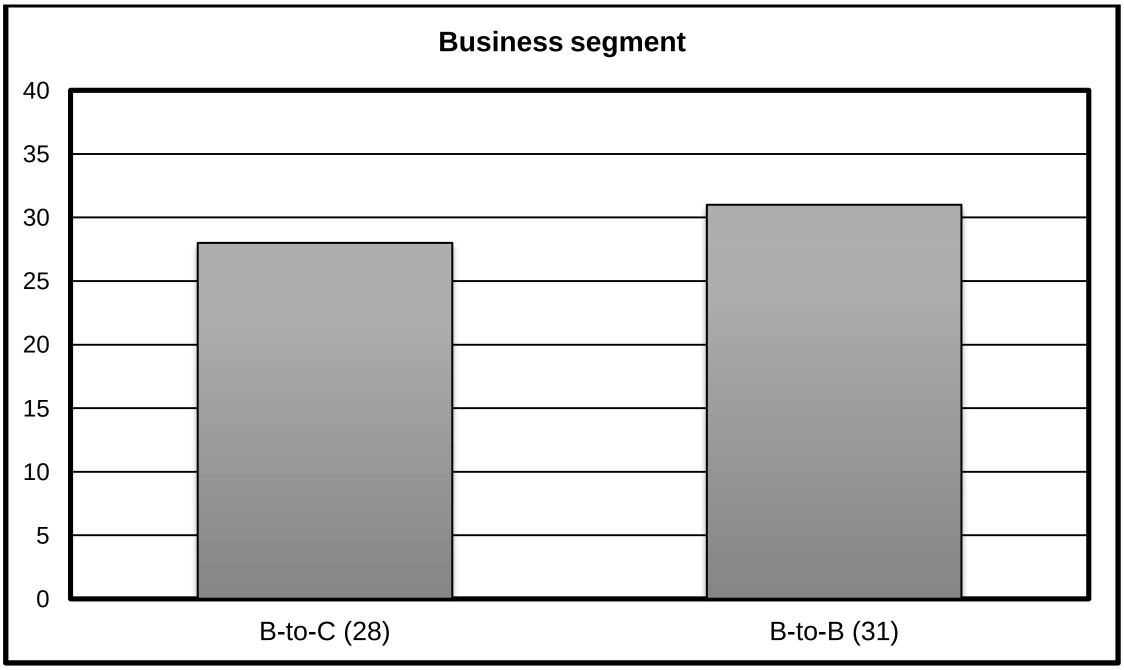

Figure 5. Business segments of the respondents

Sponsorship objectives

Additionally the three most focal objectives for the sponsorship relationship were enquired from the respondent companies. It must be noted that as the question was expressed as an open question the categorization of the responses was not a simple task. The answers included several different expressions and forms of sponsorship objectives, which were categorized using the same sponsorship objectives categorization model as used previously in the underlying study. This method has been constructed from the basis of the studies of Hartland et al. (2005) and Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013).

The total amount of responses for the question was 214. This indicates that not every one of the 80 respondents filled in all the items that they were supposed to. In fact, five respondents didn't answer at all, four companies filled only one spot and three respondents named two sponsorship objectives. In the following figure (6) the fragmentation of the responses can be seen.

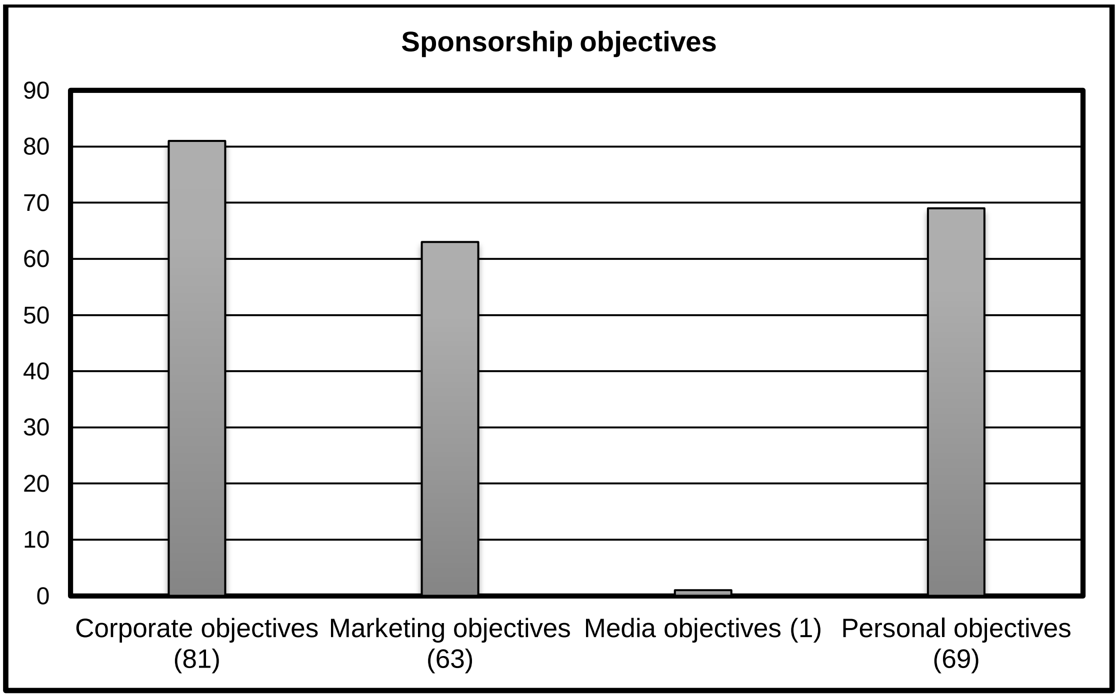

Figure 6. Sponsorship objectives of the respondent companies

As the responses demonstrate corporate objectives are the largest objective category among the sponsors of the case company by its 81 (38%) marks. This supports the theoretical pattern of the phenomenon as commonly corporate objectives has been stated as the most important objective of sports sponsors (Sandler & Shani, 1997). Among the respondents of the underlying study personal objectives (32%) are seen as the second most sought objective for sponsorship by a minimal margin compared to marketing objectives (29%). This is slightly contrary compared to the theory of the concept as lately marketing objectives have been suggested to be the second most important objectives for sports sponsors (Hartland et al. 2005; Shank, 2005; Mullin et al., 2007; Fullerton, 2010). Media objectives (1%) seem to gather the least amount of interest among the mentioned objectives categories.

However as stated previously the categorization of the responses was somewhat challenging as they were not always definite. For example the most prominent mentioned concepts included in the corporate objectives category were awareness/visibility (45), recognition (14), image (13) and community involvement (9). Still for example awareness/visibility could also mean some kind of media visibility but as it was not mentioned in particular, they were all categorized under corporate objectives as they were understood to reflect to the overall state of awareness/visibility.

Among the marketing objectives the most important factors were corporate hospitality (40) and increase of sales (15). This also supports the existing sponsorship research as improving client and employee relations has been suggested as among the most important priorities for all sponsors (Jowdy & McDonald, 2003; Levin et al., 2004; Cornwell et al., 2005). Personal objectives category involved all the answers that included the word support or had the appearance of personal interest or non-commerciality. Although all the responses were categorized under one title the word support for either the case company or for the sport of ice-hockey occurred repeatedly.

As being said the category of media objectives turned out to be especially challenging. It is expected that at least some of the sponsors who declared one of their objectives of being awareness, visibility or recognition could have intended to gain the objective through some sort of media. However in the results only such answers, which had underlined the concept of media in some ways, have been taken into consideration as media objectives (1).

5.3 The measurement scales

The measurement scales have been constructed by using exploratory factor analysis method (EFA). The measurement scales or factors are based on the statements included in the questionnaire of the current research. The basic idea of the method is to find factors (latent variables) that can explain the variance of the observed variables or, in other words, to condense information to a few focal dimensions, to recognize clusters between the variables or to find a latent structure among the correlating variables. The focal objectives of the method can be summarized as following: the final factors should explain the co-variation as much as possible, the final analysis should contain minimal amount of factors, the analysis should include the maximum amount of low and high loadings (by their absolute value) and the final factors should have meaningful contents. (Niemivirta, 2011, 1) Consequently factor analyses were conducted for the scales in order to be sure that the scales measured what they were supposed to measure. To be able to maximize the loadings of the variables the so called VARIMAX rotation method with Kaiser Normalization was applied.

In some cases when some of the variables did not load as anticipated or cross-loading occurred certain reductions had to be made. Especially the factor analysis consisting service quality items turned out to be challenging and more detailed narrative has been provided in the chapter 5.5.3. After the required adjustments were made the final summated scales were formed.

The final summated factor solutions are presented in the following tables. The tables include the abbreviations of the statements which were already presented previously in the study. Customer satisfaction items are marked with the opening of CS, overall service value as SV, service value benefits as SVB, service value sacrifices as SVSC, service quality as SQ, and behavioral intentions with the opening of BI. In the tables also the eigenvalues and the variance percentages of the particular factor analysis have been presented. The Eigenvalue (also referred as latent root) represents the amount of variance accounted by a factor (Hair et al., 1998, 89). The construction process of each factor is described in a more detailed manner in the appendices section.

Customer satisfaction items were entered into the factor analysis individually without other constructs. As can be seen from the table 9, all the items loaded strongly to a single factor. Hence the solution was not rotated and no items needed to be removed.

Table 9. Factor solutions considering customer satisfaction items

Variables	**Factor**
SAT 1	,851
SAT 2	,794
SAT 3	,909
SAT 4	,610
SAT 5	,907
Eigenvalue	3,378
Percentage of variance explained	67,559
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	67,559

Service value benefits items were also included individually in the factor analysis. From the initial group of service value benefits items two needed to be dropped

(SVB 10 & SVB 13). After the reduction all the remaining items loaded to one single factor which indicated that rotation was not possible to perform.

Table 10. Factor solutions considering service value benefits items

Variables	**Factor**
SVB 1	,867
SVB 2	,881
SVB 3	,928
SVB 4	,895
SVB 5	,889
SVB 6	,727
SVB 7	,783
SVB 8	,817
SVB 9	,780
SVB 11	,666
SVB 12	,525
Eigenvalue	7,118
Percentage of variance explained	64,711
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	64,711

<u>Overall service value</u> and <u>service value sacrifices</u> measurement scales have been constructed without a factor analysis as the original measurements included only two and one items respectively. It has been suggested that so that the factor analysis would be reliable the particular construct should consists of at least three items (Niemivirta, 2011). Hence the validity of the mentioned measurement scales of overall service value and service value sacrifices have been proven only by the functionality in previous researches.

The factor analysis consisting <u>behavioral intentions</u> items was also conducted including solely the items of the concept. From the initial factor analysis one item was dropped (BI 4) as it did not load to the factor at all. After extracting the item (BI 4), the rest of the items loaded strongly to one factor, thus no rotation was required.

Table 11. Factor solutions for behavioral intentions items

Variables	Factor
BI 1	,715
BI 2	,999
BI 3	,799
Eigenvalue	2,147
Percentage of variance explained	71,575
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	71,575

Like mentioned earlier, some challenges occurred in measuring service quality items. After the required adjustments the amount of factors were narrowed to four (interaction quality, physical environment quality, outcome quality and overall service quality) from the initial amount of 13. These factors are based on the dimensions from the initial conceptualization model of Brady and Cronin (2001). More precise demonstration of the development process has been provided in the subchapter 5.5.3. Moreover the validity of the service quality factors is justified only by their previous academic usage.

5.4 Reliability and validity

This subchapter consists of studying the concepts of reliability and validity from the viewpoint of the underlying study. The chapter includes discussion of how the validity and the reliability of the current research have been ensured. Also brief definitions of the concepts have been presented.

The reliability of a research is an assessment of the degree of consistency of the used measurements. Consequently reliability refers to the ability of the research to give non-randomized results. (Hair et al., 1998, 117-118; Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 231) This means that if the measure is reliable the results would be quite similar between different measurement occasions. One of the most used reliability measure is the so called Cronbach’s alpha, which has been also utilized in the current study. (Metsämuuronen, 2005, 64-65, 511)

The basis of measuring reliability using Cronbach’s alpha is that the calculated variables are split in halves and whose high inter-correlations between each other advert to high unity. The method assumes that if all the variables measure the same phenomenon it doesn’t matter how the variables are divided into these two groups. Hence Cronbach’s alpha includes the idea of alpha being the average of the correlations between all the “split-halves”. (Metsämuuronen, 2005, 511-512) The generally agreed lowest acceptable value for Cronbach’s alpha is 0.6 (e.g. Nunnally, 1979; Peter, 1979; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Knapp & Brown, 1995). The alpha values of the measures used in the underlying research are presented in the following table (12). As can be seen all the measurements can be verified reliable as all the alphas were above the lowest acceptable value.

Table 12. Reliability statistics

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Likert-scale	N of items	Mean score	Std. dev.	N of cases
Behavioral intentions	,855	1-9	3	7,5208	1,25939	80
Customer Satisfaction	,870	1-7	5	5,635	,99047	80
Overall service value	,800	1-9	2	6,3313	1,76632	80
Service value benefits	,949	1-9	11	6,4642	1,42427	80
Service value sacrifice	-	1-9	1	5,62	1,976	80
Overall service quality	,966	1-7	2	5,5063	1,37218	80
Interaction quality	,847	1-7	2	5,3813	1,46530	80
Physical environment quality	,930	1-7	2	4,6000	1,47210	80
Outcome quality	,947	1-7	2	5,5063	1,36721	80

Beside the measures also the use of a questionnaire in the data gathering process might create uncertainty concerning the reliability of a research. From the viewpoint of reliability a survey consists of a few weaknesses. Most of all many times the data gathered by a questionnaire is regarded as superficial and researches using surveys suggested as theoretically modest. Also the following concerns are related to the reliability of questionnaires: it is not clear how seriously/truthfully the respondents have responded, are the respondents clear of the research topic and is the response rate high enough. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 195)

Moreover some confusion might emerge from the translation process of the statements included in the final questionnaire as the original meaning of the questions could have changed. However based on the facts that the questionnaire in the current study was pretested and some necessary improvements were made according to the received feedback, the aforementioned possible weaknesses are not seen as significant in the underlying research. Also the fact that the final questionnaire didn't raise any comments reflects that the questionnaire was understood among the respondents.

The second concept related to the assessment of the research is validity (Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 231). Validity is the extent to which a scale or set of measures accurately represents the interests of the particular concepts (Hair et al., 1998, 118). For example when implementing a survey some respondents might have understood some statements otherwise than supposed. This might moreover lead to errors in the interpretation process if the researcher still treats the responses according to his/her original way of thinking. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2010, 231-232) To avoid such errors the test of validity is important to conduct. In the current research the validity of the questionnaire can be considered as sufficient. First of all every measure except service value benefits have been validated many times in the existing literature. Additionally the validity of the measures has been verified through factor analyses whenever possible.

5.5 Hypotheses testing

The main objective of this subchapter is the hypotheses testing and discussion of the results of these tests. Correlation matrixes have been provided so that it would be able to study the connections of the variables of the current study. Moreover the chapter includes brief theoretical reviews to the used methods. The chapter ends with a summary of the results concerning the hypotheses testing.

5.5.1 Pearson correlation matrixes

Before the results of the regression analyses are discussed the connections and the dependence between the variables are studied through correlations. Correlation embodies linear dependency between two variables by either a positive or a negative numerical value that can vary from -1 to 1. Positive correlation refers to a growing and negative correlation to a declining regression line. In other words this means that when a positive correlation occurs, a growth of the first variable leads also to higher values for the other one. Consequently negative correlation leads to an opposite effect. Moreover the closer the value is to the value of zero the weaker is the correlation. (Hair et al., 1998, 143; Vehkalahti, 2008, 77-78)

When interpreting correlation values it is important to understand the significance levels that the method holds. The issue of significance comes into consideration especially when the correlation values are close to the value of zero. In these cases the statistical significance can be ensured by studying the minimum significance level of the particular correlation. For the purpose a researcher needs to know the utilized alpha level (in educational researches mostly set at ,05), hold a critical value table for correlation coefficients, calculate the degree of freedom (equal to n-2) and find out the current correlation coefficient. (Niemivirta, 2011) For example with an alpha value of .05 and with the number of subjects used (n) set at 80 (degree of freedom = 78) the value of minimum correlation coefficient that is still statistically significant is .232 (taken from the critical value table for Pearson's correlation coefficient). This means that if the current correlation coefficient is above the minimum level there is a statistically significant relationship between the variables.

In the following table (13) the Pearson correlation matrix of the focal variables of the current study is presented. The significance level is .05. The statistically significant correlations are marked with *.

Table 13. Correlations between behavioral intentions and its antecedents

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Behavioral intentions	1,00			
Satisfaction	,727*	1,00		
Service value	,451*	,481*	1,00	
Overall service quality	,405*	,559*	,517*	1,00

As it can be seen from the table, all the variables have positive and significant correlation coefficients with each other with the current significance level ranging from the value of .405 to .727. Especially the correlation between behavioral intentions and satisfaction seems to have a rather strong and positive connection (.727). This means that the respondents that had high emotions of satisfaction towards the sponsorship services of the case company also have strong behavioral intentions towards it.

Additionally a second Pearson correlation matrix including service value and its antecedents had to be constructed as these variables were entered into the process independently from the previous ones. The results are presented in the table 14 and the statistically significant correlations are marked again with *. The significance level is also in this case .05

Table 14. Correlations between service value and its antecedents

	1	2	3	4
Service value	1,00			
Overall service quality	,409*	1,00		
Service value sacrifice	,039	,104	1,00	
Service value benefits	,365*	,259*	-,013	1,00

Based on the results it seems that overall service value have significant positive correlations with overall service quality (.409) and service value benefits (.365). However service value sacrifice measure is either weakly or negatively correlated with all the other measures. This finding supports the assumption that service value sacrifice measure is not connected with the other variables of the matrix.

5.5.2 Regression analyses

Multiple regression analysis method was selected to be used for testing the hypotheses in the current research. The method is a statistical technique that can be used to analyze the relationships between a single dependent or “criterion” variable and multiple independent or “predictor” variables (Hair, et al., 1998, 148). In other words multiple regression analysis technique is an appropriate method in cases such as the current research where the research problems involve single dependent variables which, are supposed to be predicted by several independent variables. In the process each “predictor” is weighted by the regression analysis procedure to ensure maximal prediction from the set of independent variables. Moreover the set of weighted “predictors” forms the regression variate that most efficiently predicts the “criterion” variable. The regression variate which is also known as the regression equation or as the regression model is the most well known example of a variate among the multivariate techniques. (Hair et al., 1998, 148-149)

Before dwelling deeper into the results of the regression analyses the chosen indicators are introduced. In the following table (15) brief explanations to the chosen indicators are provided. This should help to interpret the regression analyses more comprehensively.

Table 15. Indicators and their explanations used in the regression analyses (Hair et al., 1998; Metsämuuronen, 2005)

Indicator	Explanation
R Square (Coefficient of determination)	Reflects the explanation power of the whole model. The higher the R square value the higher the significance.
Beta	Standardized regression coefficient. Allows for a direct comparison between coefficients as to their relative explanatory power of the dependent variable.
B	When used with Beta value can provide conclusions on the relative explanation force
t	Determines whether the variable differ significantly from the value of zero. The higher the value the higher the significance level
Tol. (Tolerance)	A measure of collinearity and multicollinearity. As the tolerance grows smaller the variable is more highly predicted by the other “predictors”. Value should be over ,1
VIF.	Directly related to Tol.. Also a measure of collinearity/multicollinearity. When tolerance decreases VIF grows. Value should be under 10
Sig.	Represents the significance level of the model/variable. Value should be under .05 to be significant.

Next the results of the regression analyses are discussed. In the first regression table (16) the regression results concerning the first and the fourth hypotheses are presented. In the first analysis customer satisfaction is the dependent variate and its antecedents act as the independent variables. The overall sig. value for the regression is .000 hence the results can be regarded as statistically significant. The statistically significant independent variables are italicized in every regression table. It is also good to note that clarification for service quality measure has been provided in the following chapter.

Table 16. Regression results concerning customer satisfaction (dependent variable) and its antecedents

Independent variable	**R Square**	**Beta**	**B**	**t**	**Tol.**	**VIF**	**Sig.**	**Hypot.**
Overall service quality	*,362*	*,423*	*,305*	*3,978*	*,732*	*1,366*	*,000*	*1*
Service value	*,362*	*,263*	*,147*	*2,464*	*,732*	*1,366*	*,016*	*2*

The first hypothesis proposed that service quality would have a direct and positive impact on customer satisfaction and according to the regression analysis results this relationship is supported. Also the positive correlation between the variables even more verifies the observation. In hypothesis 4 it was suggested that service value would have a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction. As it can be interpreted from the results also the hypothesis number four can be accepted. Even though it can be argued that service quality is a bigger driver of customer satisfaction (bigger t- and beta values) service value also has a significant (sig on both occasion passes the required criterion) impact on the variable.

Table 17. Regression results concerning service value (dependent variate) and its antecedents

Independent variable	R Square	Beta	B	t	Tol.	VIF	Sig.	Hypot.
Service value benefits	*,240*	*,278*	*,318*	*2,668*	*,931*	*1,074*	*,009*	*3*
Service value sacrifices	,240	,008	,006	,076	,987	1,013	,939	4
Overall service quality	*,240*	*,336*	*,444*	*3,206*	*,922*	*1,085*	*,002*	*5*

In the second regression analysis results table (17) the results consider the hypotheses 2, 3 and 5. The sig. value of the whole measure was .000 so it can be considered overall as strongly significant. In the second hypothesis service value benefits was suggested to result as increased service value. The results show this relationship to be positive (beta= .278) and significant (sig.= .009). Based on these findings hypothesis 2 can be accepted.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that a low amount of perceived sacrifices would have a positive effect on overall service value. However as can be seen from the table 17, this relationship seems to be insignificant (sig= .939). Based on this the hypothesis has to be rejected and the results moreover indicate that service value sacrifices do not have a significant effect on overall service value perceptions in sports sponsorship context.

In hypothesis 5 it was proposed that service quality would have a direct and positive impact on service value. The regression analysis results from the table 17 show that indeed the relationship can be declared as significant (sig.= .002) and positive (beta= .336). In fact it seems that service quality has the strongest relationship with service value among the independent variables as it possesses the highest t value (3,206) and significance level. Moreover it can be also suggested that in the sports sponsorship context service quality can be regarded as a strong antecedent of service value.

Table 18. Regression results concerning behavioral intentions (dependent variable) and its antecedents

Independent variable	**R Square**	**Beta**	**B**	**t**	**Tol.**	**VIF**	**Sig.**	**H**
Customer satisfaction	*,544*	*,687*	*,874*	*7,084*	*,638*	*1,568*	*,000*	*6*
Service value	*,544*	*,150*	*,107*	*1,590*	*,679*	*1,473*	*,116*	*8*
Overall service quality	,544	-,057	-,052	-,569	,607	1,646	,571	10

Last hypotheses were related to behavioral intentions and the regression results can be seen from the table 18. The overall significance level of the measure (sig.= .000) confirms the strong significance level of the results of the analysis. Hypothesis 6 suggested that customer satisfaction would have a direct and positive effect on behavioral intentions. According to the results this proposition and moreover hypothesis 6 can be accepted. Actually it seems that customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions have a quite strong relationship as the beta value (.687) and significance level (sig.= .000) between the two variables seem to possess rather significant rates. Also the strong t value (7,084) supports the focal role of customer satisfaction in building positive behavioral intentions in sports sponsorship context.

Hypothesis no. 8 predicted service value to have a direct and positive impact on behavioral intentions. Even though not having such a strong effect as customer satisfaction also the positive relationship (beta= .150, sig.= .116) between service value and behavioral intentions can be regarded as evident. However the last hypothesis (10) concerning the positive and direct impact between service quality and behavioral intentions had to be rejected because of the low significance level (sig.= .571). Contrary to the previous theoretical suggestions it seems that in the sports sponsorship context service quality does not necessarily contribute significantly to behavioral intentions.

As one could have noticed there are still results missing concerning two hypotheses (7 and 9). These hypotheses suggested the indirect links between service value and behavioral intentions (H 7) and service quality and behavioral intentions (H 9) through customer satisfaction. In the current study these relationships were studied by using the so called Sobel test. The Sobel test which has been popularized by MacKinnon and Dwyer (1993) and MacKinnon et al. (1995), is a tool that can be used to formally assess the mediating effects between variables. The test is an alternative for the informal judgment methods for mediation measurement (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2001).

To be able to perform a Sobel test two separate regressions need to be made. These regressions provide the required indicators, which are needed in the actual test. First a regression including the independent variable and the possible mediator has to be conducted. This regression will provide two indicators for the final Sobel test them being: raw (unstandardized) coefficient of the association between the independent variable and the mediator and the standard deviation of the association. The second regression includes all the three variables included in the overall test them being: the independent and the dependent variable and the possible mediator. From this regression also the same indicators are required in the final Sobel test (raw coefficient and standard deviation). However this time, the indicators must be taken from the association of the mediator and the dependent variable. After the mentioned four indicators from the two regressions have been discovered the Sobel test can be performed. The indicators should be entered into a program which calculates the needed p-value of the test, which moreover demonstrates whether a variable is a mediator or not. To put it more precisely, if the p-value of the Sobel test is under .05 the mediating effect can be regarded as significant. On the other hand if the p-value is above the mentioned .05 there is no significance in the mediation.

When studying the mediating effect of customer satisfaction in the underlying study four additional regressions were conducted. In the first set of two regressions the interest was on the meditating role of customer satisfaction between service value and behavioral intentions. The second set of regressions studied whether customer satisfaction is a mediator between service quality and behavioral intentions. Based on the results on the mentioned regressions and the consequent Sobel tests it can be concluded that the role of customer satisfaction as mediator on both occasions is insignificant. In the first occasion the resulted p-value of the Sobel test ended up being .5467. This overrules the hypothesis 7 and moreover indicates that customer satisfaction is not a mediator between service value and behavioral intentions. The second association including customer satisfaction being the mediator between service quality and behavioral intentions resulted a p-value of .7858 in the Sobel test. Consequently also the hypothesis 9 had to rejected.

5.5.3 Challenges in measuring service quality

As mentioned previously, the challenges concerning service quality measurement started in the phase of factor analyses. When all the 29 items were entered into the analysis altogether for the first time difficulties emerged as two of the items (SQ 9 & SQ 13) did not load to any factor at all and one item (SQ 12) seemed to cross-load. It became clear that some adjustments needed to be made. After this many attempts were made to load the items properly to factors without reaching proper results. A brief review of these attempts is provided in the current subchapter.

After the first failed attempt it was analyzed that perhaps too many items were included in the initial conceptualization model and the confusing results might be an outcome of this. Hence it was decided that perhaps it would be necessary to perform a factor analysis considering only the primary dimensions of the conceptualization model (interaction quality, physical environment quality, outcome quality and overall service quality) and the items included in them (SQ 1, SQ 2, SQ 12, SQ 13, SQ 20, SQ 21, SQ 28, SQ 29). Two separate factor analyses were performed consisting of only the mentioned primary dimension items. The rounds also included the feature of forcing the items to divide to exactly four factors. The idea behind the sanction was to find out whether the items would divide according to the initial conceptualization model. The first of the two analyses was performed with the extraction method of maximum likelihood and the second one with the extraction method of unweighted least squares. However both attempts turned out to be unsuccessful. First of all, the items loaded for the factors unexpectedly as two factors only considered only one item in the first attempt and one of the four factors included just one item in the second attempt (the second attempt also included cross-loading). The wanted result would have been so that the factors would have divided evenly to the four assumed factors.

The fourth analysis attempt was performed as the previous one with the exception of that the overall service quality items (SQ 28 & SQ 29) were removed from the analysis. However this method was found to be problematic as well as the analysis was unable to construct a required factor matrix. The same outcome resulted when the process was repeated with interaction quality subdimension items only (SQ 3- SQ 11). Slightly more encouraging results emerged when the interaction quality items were entered into the analysis with the sanction of forcing the items to divide into three factors. The objective of this method was to find out whether the factors of the interaction quality subdimension would divide according to the structure of the initial conceptualization model (each factor should include the items of particular primary- or subdimension). However the items resulted to divide only for two separate factors, which was against the original intention and the method had to be rejected.

After the mentioned challenges considering service quality measurement scales, it was decided that all the factors considering the construct would be formed independently. Also the decision to extract all the items outside the primary dimensions of the original conceptualization model was made. The decision was based on the fact that by doing so the amount of items under analysis could be limited and the results part of the research would be more reliable and simpler. However as all the factors considering the primary dimension items included only two items none of the factor analysis could be performed independently and the reliability of the factors had to be justified only by their Cronbach's alphas.

As the factors regarding service quality were formed, it was also decided that in the final regression analysis only the factor of overall service quality would be used. However also a primary regression analysis considering only the mentioned primary dimensions of service quality factors was decided to perform. This decision was based on the idea of finding some explanatory factors behind the overall service quality measure.

Before the actual regression analysis it was decided that the primary dimension items should be purified by orthogonalizing them. This procedure means that the correlation between the factors is determined to be zero (Head et al., 1998, 90). In the table 19 Pearson correlation matrix of the final service quality factors is presented.

Table 19. Correlations between service quality factors

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Overall service quality	1,00			
Interaction quality	,165	1,00		
Physical environment quality	,277*	-,647*	1,00	
Outcome quality	,164	-,095	-,486	1,00

As it can be viewed from the correlation matrix table all the proposed antecedents of overall service quality seem to correlate positively with overall service quality scale. However only one of these correlations seems to be statistically significant (physical environment quality). The other two constructs, interaction quality and outcome quality are also positively related to overall service quality but the correlations are not significant with .005 significance level.

Next the regression analysis results of the service quality factors are shown. The dependent variable in the analysis is overall service quality and the primary dimension factors act as the independent variates. The overall sig. of the analysis is .000 so the overall measure can be considered as statistically significant.

Table 20. Regression analysis results concerning overall service quality and the primary dimension factors

Independent variable	R Square	Beta	B	t	Tol.	VIF	Sig.
Interaction quality	*,890*	*1,384*	*2,151*	*21,899*	*,363*	*2,752*	*,000*
Physical environment quality	*,890*	*1,721*	*3,263*	*23,905*	*,280*	*3,569*	*,000*
Outcome quality	,890	1,131	1,527	20,506	,477	2,096	,000

The results clearly indicate that every one of the primary dimensions have a significant effect on overall service quality (sig. in every case .000). Even though the correlations were not significant the beta values indicate that there are positive relationship between service quality and each independent variate.

As a conclusion it can be stated that measuring service quality is difficult especially in sports sponsorship context as there exists no proven measure in the literature for the construct. It was a well considered gamble when it was decided that the third order factor model (Brady & Cronin, 2001) would be used in the current research for measuring service quality.The regression results support slightly the usage of third order factor model and prove that there are relationships between the dimensions of the model. However in the current study it was still decided that in the actual hypotheses tests only the overall service quality factor would be used.

5.5.4 Summary of the regression analysis results

The significant relations between the constructs of the study are summarized in the theoretical framework of the thesis in figure 7. After this, table 21 concludes once more the previously presented results of the regression analyses.

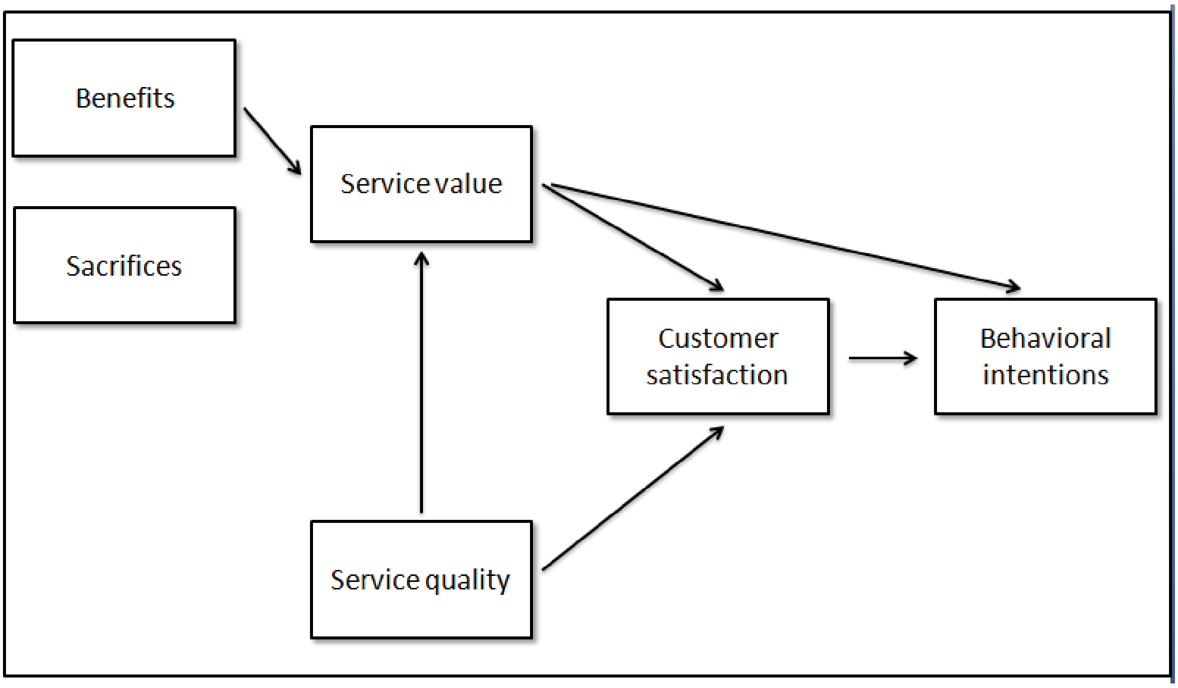

Figure 7. Supported relations between the variables of the study

Table 21. Summary of the regression analysis results

	Hypothesis	Results
1	Service quality has a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction	Accepted
2	Service value benefits have a direct and positive impact on service value	Accepted
3	Low amount of service value sacrifices have a direct and positive impact on service value	Rejected
4	Service value has a direct and positive effect on customer satisfaction	Accepted
5	Service quality has a direct and positive effect on service value	Accepted
6	Customer satisfaction has a direct and positive effect on behavioral intentions	Accepted
7	Service value has an indirect and positive impact on behavioral intentions through customer satisfaction	Rejected
8	Service value has a direct and positive effect on behavioral intentions	Accepted
9	Service quality has an indirect and positive impact on behavioral intentions through customer satisfaction	Rejected
10	Service quality has a direct and positive impact on behavioral intentions	Rejected

6. CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this thesis was to build an understanding on what do sports sponsors want from their sponsorship relationships. Also to provide more academic perspective to the overall sponsorship literature was a major target. An attempt has been made to accomplish these aforementioned ambitions by providing insights into the constructs of behavioral intentions, customer satisfaction, service value and service quality and their interrelations. Even though these concepts are among the most studied ones in the general services marketing literature business to business as well as the sports sponsorship theories still lack academic foundation. Hence there was a concrete need to study the mentioned constructs and their relationships in the underlying context.

The actual empirical research was performed by using quantitative method of study. The method was selected because the aim was to gain a comprehensive and exact understanding of the discussed phenomenon. Quantitative analysis method is also more suitable to contact bigger population, which was one of the goals for the empirical part of the study. The data for the empirical research was collected via web-based questionnaire and a total of 80 usable responses among the population of 357 business customers of the case company were collected. The data was analyzed by using the statistical analysis software, SPSS. The case company of the thesis was selected to be a Finnish professional ice-hockey club Liiga-SiaPa Oy.

This chapter concludes the findings of the empirical research of the thesis. First both empirical and managerial implications are discussed. This is followed by research limitations and proposals for future research which also has an honour to act as the last subchapter of the study.

6.1 Theoretical implications

This study provides several interesting theoretical implications concerning the relationships between the concepts of behavioral intentions, customer satisfaction, service value and service quality for the sports sponsorship environment. As there is not much academic evidence on the phenomenon considering the underlying context, the theoretical foundation and the hypotheses for the current study, has been mainly built by using general business-to-business service literature. It can be therefore concluded that the theoretical implications of the thesis consider also B-to-B business environment.

Even though the mentioned constructs and their interrelations have not been comprehensively studied in the sports sponsorship context they are among the most studied ones in the general services marketing literature. Especially in the consumer segment behavioral intentions, customer satisfaction, service value and service quality and their relative relationships have raised a great deal of attention among academics based on their possible influence on improving companies' business performance. However the documented results of the nature of these interrelations have varied among context, nature of study, time etc. Henceforth no common consensus for the phenomenon, which moreover highlights the meaning for further research, exists.

Recently the study on behavioral intentions has started to gain more popularity but it still remains rather fragmented. Many times the concept has been studied partially only through one or some of its indicators but only rarely as an entity. The empirical research on this study provided support for the existing findings (e.g Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; Lee, 1998; Caruana et al., 2000; Cronin et al., 2000; McDougal & Levesque, 2000) which indicate that customer satisfaction is a direct antecedent of behavioral intentions. Also the direct relationship between service value and behavioral intentions was found positive according to the results in the underlying research. This view has also been supported by some previous findings (e.g Zeithaml, 1988; Dodds et al., 1991). By contrary it seems that in the sports sponsorship context service quality does not have a significant positive and direct effect on behavioral intentions of a customer.

When considering the existing research on the role of service value and service quality as an antecedent of behavioral intentions the results have been inconsistent. In both occasions the field of researchers has been divided into two groups whereas the other group supports for a direct link between the variables and the other group suggests that the relationship exists only as an indirect one through customer satisfaction. Thus a clear consensus for the phenomenon is still missing. Therefore contradicting results compared to the initial hypotheses were somewhat expected. In the case of investigation whether service value would be a direct and/or indirect antecedent of behavioral intentions only the direct relationship seems to be significant in the sports sponsorship environment according to the empirical results of the underlying study. By contrast what was somewhat surprising is that service quality did not have any impact on customers' behavior intentions. Hence both direct and indirect causalities between the variables had to be rejected. This is an interesting discovery, which requires further research. Though it is important to remember that in the current study service quality was measured by general service quality conceptual model which didn't regard the aspect and nature of sports in any way.

The second major theoretical objective besides finding the antecedents of behavioral intentions was to study which variables would lead to an increased satisfaction of a customer. To investigate this was especially important when considering that customer satisfaction is probably the most prominent antecedent of behavioral intentions and that satisfied customers alone can improve a company's business performance. According to the results of the empirical research of the study, a general view suggesting that both service value and service quality precede customer satisfaction seems to take place also in the sports sponsorship context. This moreover gives support to the already presented model of Bagozzi (1992), which suggest that these more cognitive oriented constructs of service value and service quality precede the more evaluative and affective response of satisfaction. In other words the view that service value and service quality should be understood as attitudes and customer satisfaction as an emotion is also supported by the findings of the current study (e.g Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994; Gotlieb et al., 1994; Kelley & Davis, 1994; Alford & Sheller, 1996; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; de Ruyter et al., 1997; Patterson & Spreng, 1997; ; Woodruff, 1997; Chenet et al., 1999; Ennew & Binks, 1999).

This study also investigated the possible antecedents of service value. The construct is an interesting one in the sense of having a sacrifice element built in it. The value perception is therefore formed through an evaluation process, which includes the weighting of all the possible positive and negative outcomes concerning the particular situation. However according to the findings of the current research it can be understood that the effect of sacrifices in value perception is insignificant. In other words this means that the sponsors of the case company didn’t perceive the monetary amount spent in the sponsorship relationship as a significant factor when forming an overall value perception. On the other hand service quality and other service value benefits seem to lead to a higher value perception as expected also in the sports sponsorship relationship. This supports the earlier mentioned view that service quality is not the only benefit factor when value perceptions are formed (e.g Raval & Grönroos, 1996).

6.2 Managerial implications

The results of the empirical research of the current study underline the previously mentioned fact, which suggested that the interrelations between the focal concepts of the study are complex and far from conclusive. This is a particularly accurate notion in the business-to-business environment, not to mention the context of sports sponsorship, that both lack academic research base. Hence the underlying study provides some firsthand information for the sports franchise managers on what their customers appreciate and expect from their sponsorship relationships. The results also help the managers to understand what are the effects and potential outcomes of their decisions when trying to improve their service strategies.

First of all the empirical results indicate that service quality has only an insignificant effect on behavioral intentions. The constructs do not have a significant direct nor an indirect relationship through satisfaction with each other. However, as being a strong and direct antecedent of customer satisfaction and service value, some kind of informal effect can be claimed to exist. Therefore it can be furthermore concluded that even though some slight informal causality might exist, service quality is not among the main drivers of sports sponsors' behavioral intentions. However as being the strongest antecedent of customer satisfaction and customer satisfaction being the strongest driver of behavioral intentions, the importance of service quality can't be overlooked by the sports managers.

Besides the mentioned interrelation with service quality, service value is also influenced by the service value benefits that the customers perceive. This indicates contrary to many previous findings that at least in the sports sponsorship environment quality is not the only possible benefit that could have an effect on the overall value perception. This means that besides offering their customers just improved quality of services, sports managers have to concentrate on offering their customers alternative beneficial solutions as well. Based on the descriptive analysis, which was presented earlier in the research, especially offering new and enhanced ways to improve their clients' awareness/visibility building options and corporate hospitality possibilities should be beneficial in the sense of trying to increase the overall value perception of the customers. Also attempting to affect on the emotional side of a customer could lead to improved perceived service value as many of the sponsors declared that one of the main reasons behind their sponsorship activity is to support the case company for any reason.

One interesting finding when studying the antecedents of service value is that based on the results it seems that the sacrifices, or in other words the monetary price of the sponsorship, seems to be rather insignificant factor. One reason behind this finding could be the mentioned fact that many of the sponsors feel that at least some part of their objectives behind investing in the sponsorship is to support the sport franchise. This automatically makes the relationship less strategic from a business performance perspective and could also have an effect of how the sponsors consider the monetary sacrifice. This puts the case company into an interesting situation as they might have a buffer for a higher price policy as the sponsors clearly do not feel that pricing is among the crucial elements of perceived value or moreover among the antecedents of behavioral intentions.

The current study highlights the meaning of satisfied customers for a company. The beneficial effect of improving customer satisfaction has been documented throughout the services marketing literature (e.g. Bearden & Teel, 1989; Fornell et al., 1996; Homburg & Rudolph, 2001) and it seems that the same interrelation is evident also in the sports sponsorship context. This result moreover indicates that present customer satisfaction enhances customer behavior in the future. Therefore, in order to retain customers or to influence them to create positive word-of-mouth, the sports managers should pay attention to improving their customers' satisfaction levels. Moreover by having such a strong influence on behavioral intentions it could be suggested that especially in an emotional environment such as sports building an emotional response of satisfaction should be one of the manages' key point of focuses.

The direct outcomes of value seem to be rather straightforward as the concept has a significant influence on both behavioral intentions and customer satisfaction. This shows that although many sponsors admit that one of their objectives is just to support the case company they also seek some kind of strategic benefit from the relationship. Consequently it must be stated that providing customers services with just high value is not merely enough to create positive customer behavior as customer satisfaction seems to be the most prominent antecedent of behavioral intentions. On the other hand according to the results service value is also an antecedent of customer satisfaction which underlines its importance in the sponsorship context. This should provoke the sports managers to improve their offering in the form of added-value and perceived benefits for their business customers.

6.3 Limitations and future research proposals

No research exists without some limitations and the current study makes no exception in this manner. First of all the data was collected from a single sports organization's customers, a single geographical location, a single sport and a single sports league. Henceforth further generalizations from the results have to be done with extreme caution. As every sports franchise has its own unique attributes, history and business environment, it is even more evident that the presented results are constrained and represent only a small group of sports sponsors. It is also important to note that the study presents only one side of each sponsorship relationship as only one person from each company was responsible in answering the questionnaire.

A further limitation to understand when considering the data gathering is the fact that it was done at only one point of time. Therefore it was impossible to measure how the opinions or values develop over time. Also the influence of the sport performance is hard to evaluate when the measuring process occur as a single transaction. In the future it would be wise to gather the data in multiple occasions enabling the opportunity to investigate, not only how the interrelations change as the sporting performances vary, but whether the causal relationships really take place.

Lots of limitations exist concerning the measurement scales used in the thesis as there is no previous validation for the scales from sports sponsorships literature. Actually the whole service value benefits scale has never been used before as it was developed for the purpose of the underlying study only. Additionally Brady and Cronin's (2001) third order factor model for measuring service quality has been only rarely used in the services marketing research altogether. It is clear that further validation for these scales is needed in the future.

Actually based on the difficulties on measuring service quality it would be recommended to develop a totally new conceptualization model for the purpose of measuring service quality in the sports sponsorship context. The structure of the third order factor model seems to be relevant as it treats service quality as a multidimensional construct, just as it should be, but the dimensions and the subdimensions need a serious customization. For example, the sports performance attribute and the sports team characteristics just to mention but a few, need to be included in the service quality measurement for sports sponsorship in the future. This specially handcrafted conceptualization model could be a serious game changer for the interrelations and outcomes of service quality.

The hypotheses presented require further research, as the academic evidence from the context is rather modest. Especially the rejected hypotheses (H3, H7, H9, H10) need a more thorough examination as the previous business-to-business literature supports the opposite causality. Not only the rejected hypotheses, but also the accepted ones, need to be further investigated, as they require further validation. Only by doing constant research on the phenomenon the theoretical foundation of sports sponsorship context can be leveraged.

It is worthy to understand that the presented constructs are but a few of the possible antecedents of behavioral intentions or customer satisfaction in business-to-business service environment. For example, constructs such as trust and commitment, continuously occur in the relationship marketing literature and in a sense leaving them out from the current study could be seen as a limitation but at the same time it opens an opportunity for further research possibilities.

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Interview

Kallioniemi, Riku, managing director of Liiga SaiPa Oy. Interview 12.3.2012

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. First factor solutions/analyses

All the service value benefits items were entered into the analysis the first time. But as can be seen four items didn't load to any of the four factors. Also the factors that did load did not load as it had been hoped.

Table 1. First rotated factor solutions concerning service value benefits

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
SVB 1			
SVB 2	,561		
SVB 3			
SVB 4		,822	
SVB 5	,910		
SVB 6	,905		
SVB 7		,688	
SVB 8	,877		
SVB 9	,613		
SVB 10			-,537
SVB 11			-,636
SVB 12			
SVB 13			
Eigenvalue	5,553	,811	,856
Percetage of variance explained	42,715	6,239	6,583
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	42,715	48,953	55,536

After the first round of factor analysis concerning service value benefits one item decided to be removed. This removed item was selected to be SVB 13. The results after the reduction can be seen from the following table 2. Even though the results are slightly more promising the items still didn’t load to the factors as hoped. It was decided that that also SVB 10 would be removed. This turned out to be a clever choice as it led to the final factor solution and the results of the analysis were presented previously in the research

Table 2. Second rotated factor solutions concerning service value benefits

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
SVB 1	,450	
SVB 2	,620	
SVB 3	,421	
SVB 4		,712
SVB 5	,917	
SVB 6	,903	
SVB 7		,672
SVB 8	,912	
SVB 9	,666	
SVB 10	,468	
SVB 11	,507	
SVB 12	,474	
Eigenvalue	5,436	,883
Percetage of variance explained	45,302	7,359
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	45,302	52,660

The first factor analysis concerning the behavioral intentions items turned out to be problematic as one of the items didn’t load at all. The results of the initial behavioral items solutions can be seen from the table 3. To improve the results it was decided that the item which didn’t load should be removed. The results after the reduction ended up being the final ones and they can be seen from the measurement scales chapter (5.3, table 11) of the research.

Table 3. Initial factor solutions concerning Behavioral intentions

Variables	Factor
BI 1	,718
BI 2	,995
BI 3	,802
BI 4	
Eigenvalue	2,263
Percetage of variance explained	56,573
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	56,573

For the first all the service quality items were entered into the analysis together. As the table 4 indicates the items first f all divided on three factors also two of the items didn't load at all and one item cross loaded

Table 4. Initial (rotated) factor solutions concerning service quality items

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
SQ 1	,703		
SQ 2	,789		
SQ 3	,526		
SQ 4		-,475	
SQ 5		-,441	
SQ 6		-,731	
SQ 7		-,656	
SQ 8		-,876	
SQ 9			
SQ 10	,610		
SQ 11	,790		
SQ 12	,443		-,415
SQ 13			
SQ 14			-,870
SQ 15			-,843

SQ 16			-,895
SQ 17	,880		
SQ 18	,786		
SQ 19	,760		
SQ 20	,816		
SQ 21	,748		
SQ 22	,796		
SQ 23	,831		
SQ 24	,810		
SQ 25	,626		
SQ 26	,618		
SQ 27	,785		
SQ 28	,789		
SQ 29	,787		
Eigenvalue	20,531	1,070	,917
Percetage of variance explained	70,797	3,691	3,162
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	70,797	74,487	77,650

In order to correct the shortcoming of the service quality factor analysis it was decided that the next step would be to include only the primary dimension items into the analysis. However the first factor analysis that included only these primary dimensions of the initial conceptualization model was not successful as it was not possible to form a rotated factor matrix. As only one factor was extracted the solution could not be moreover rotated. Based on the mentioned problem there is no need to present the other results of this particular factor analysis.

The next attempt to construct a proper measurement scale concerning service quality included also only the primary dimension items but it was also decided that the items would be forced to form exactly four factors. The results were slightly more promising although not eligible and they can be seen from the table 4. The extraction method used in this analysis was maximum likelihood.

Table 4. Pattern matrix solutions concerning primary dimension service quality items.

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
SQ 1			-,919	
SQ 2	,781			
SQ 12		,746		
SQ 13		,985		
SQ 20				-,724
SQ 21	,467			
SQ 28	,813			
SQ 29	,832			
Eigenvalue	5,983	,625	,354	,302
Percetage of variance explained	74,782	7,812	4,419	3,773
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	74,782	82,594	87,013	90,786

The next round of service quality analysis consisted of also the primary dimension items of the initial conceptualization model but the extraction method was decided as unweighted least squares. The results were also this time not as desired. The items divided inconsistently and also one item was cross loading.

Table 5. Second pattern matrix results of primary dimension items of service quality

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
SQ 1			,916	
SQ 2	,780			
SQ 12		,739		
SQ 13		,993		
SQ 20				,802
SQ 21	,409			,405
SQ 28	,727			
SQ 29	,815			
Eigenvalue	6,131	,645	,318	,166
Percetage of variance explained	76,632	8,060	3,970	2,078
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	76,632	84,692	88,662	90,740

Next it was tried whether proper factors could be formed by using the subdimension items. The first factor analysis was performed with items concerning the interaction quality subdimensions. However the results were not too encouraging as the rotated factor matrix once again could not be formed. The results indicated that the reason for this was that only one factor was extracted. The result moreover determined that also the method of using the subdimensions had to cancelled. After the presented attempts of trying to form proper measurement scales for service quality items it was decided to construct them as narrated in the measurement scale