



# Master's degree thesis

**IDR950 Sport Management**

**What characterizes the Sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's Incentives Towards Entering a Sponsor Relationship?**

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## **Preface**

This master thesis is the final work of my 2 years as a Sport Management student at Molde University College and has been composed in the time period of January 2018 to May 2018.

In the process of writing this thesis, I have been guided by my supervisor Hallgeir Gammelsæter. He has given me honest feedback and guidance and I want to thank him for his contributions. I would also especially like to thank the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country for meeting with me and answering all of my questions. Åselinn Krane Heimdal marketing and sponsor coordinator in the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country also deserves all honor for supporting me, answering questions and helping me with choosing the topic.

Finally, I hope this thesis will bring new information to Åselinn and the Norwegian Ski Federation, and I hope that the research will bring new reflections and contributions both for the Ski Federation and the sponsors who will read the research results.

Liv Kathrine Berg Olsen

Molde, 2018

## Summary

Sponsorships has had an increase of development the last decades, and now commercialization of sports has taken sponsorships in a new direction where economic benefit is more important than ever. In addition to economic benefits sponsors has a lot of other expectations when it comes to sponsor relationships such as exposure, image transfer, brand awareness, motivating employees and increase of sales and market share.

Cross-country skiing is the most popular sport in Norway (SponsorInsight 2018), which makes sponsorships in the Norwegian Ski Federation interesting to investigate. Even though the sport has had some recent incidents with unintentional doping the sponsors are still present, which can indicate that there are valuable aspects of the sponsorship that the sponsors cannot afford to lose.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify the sponsors of The Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's (NSFCC) incentives towards the sponsor relationship with the Norwegian Ski Federation. Implicit this includes understanding what characterizes sponsors mind-set related to their objectives when entering a sponsor relationship. That is the background for the research question:

*What characterizes the Sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's Incentives Towards Entering a Sponsor Relationship?*

The empirical part of the thesis is based on five in-depth interviews conducted with the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country. The respondents are responsible for sponsorship agreements in their organization and for the agreement with the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country.

The research findings indicate that the sponsors are unanimous in their response when they say the most important factor for entering a sponsorship is congruence between the sponsor and the sponsor object additional to similar values. The sponsors further identify different market-centered objectives that are important for them in order to reach their organizational goals. At last the findings indicate that the sponsors are influenced by a commercial logic which generates that their incentives are based on a mind-set that seeks to achieve economic value.

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# 1.0 Introduction

## *1.1 Actualizing of the Topic and Research Question*

Sponsorships has been a part of the modern world for a long time and has been one of the fastest growing marketing activities (Meenaghan 2005). Sponsorship is defined by Smith and Stewart (2015) as a business agreement between two parties where one party provide financial or in-kind assistance to the other party in exchange for the right to be associated with the organization. Sponsorships was previously seen as philanthropic actions such as gifts and donations, but now organizations enter sponsorships for commercial reasons such as increasing sales and market share (Beech and Chadwick 2007).

A new report from SponsorInsight (2018) shows that cross-country skiing is the most popular sport in Norway. Cross-country skiing is loved by the Norwegian people and is known as Norway's national sport. These are factors that can generate valuable associations for sponsors to be identified with (Keller 1993). Sponsor organizations' have different motives, objectives and incentives for entering sponsorships. Why do sponsors choose the national cross-country team as a sponsor object, and what objectives are important for them to achieve in order to reach their own organizational goals? These questions are the foundation of my research question:

*What Characterizes the Sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's Incentives Towards Entering a Sponsor Relationship?*

## *1.2 Personal Reasoning for the Choice of Research*

Winter sports has always been a passion of mine, especially cross-country skiing. Because the sport of cross-country is so popular in Norway the exposure reaches a wide amount of people. When having my internship in the Norwegian Ski Federation I got to see the sport



from a different perspective. I got to see the influence the national cross-country team has and how people engage in the sport.

During my internship I started to wonder about the commercialization of sports. What are really the incentives for sponsoring such an influential brand as the national cross-country team, and why do they choose the national cross-country team as a sponsor object? There are certain risks with sponsoring sports, and when I was an intern at the NSF there was a lot of attention regarding Therese Johaug's unintentional doping incident. This also made me wonder why sponsors take the risk of sponsoring sports. In my own reasoning I assumed that the risk of being a sponsor maybe are justified by the amount of money they make out from these sponsorships. Without knowing the answer, I really wanted to find out what characterizes the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's incentives towards going into sponsor relationships.

### ***1.3 Thesis Structure***

The remaining chapters are organized as follows: In chapter two information about the Norwegian Ski Federation will be presented together with information about their sponsor structure and their sponsor activities. Chapter three provides an overview over previous research and existing literature regarding sponsorships. I have divided the chapter in three parts that help answering the different parts of the research question. In chapter four the methodical approaches will be defined and explained with the process of gathering- and analyzing the data. In chapter five the research findings are outlined, followed by a discussion in chapter six. Lastly the study will reach a conclusion in chapter seven, and areas of possible future research are suggested.

## **2.0 Background**

In this chapter I will present the information that is necessary to understand the topic. First, it is important with history to see the development of the sport of cross-country. I will then outline the national cross-country team, their popularity and merits. Furthermore, I will present the Norwegian Ski Federation's sponsorship structure and form, and their social media policy.

### ***2.1 The History of Cross-Country Skiing***

Skiing has been a part of Norwegian culture for over 4000 years, and in the northern parts of Norway there has been found old petroglyphs of people using skis (The Norwegian Ski Federation 2017). Because of snow and the cold climate people were dependent on skis to get around. Skiing was also an important transportation tool for the military in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century and were used during the war against Sweden (Bø 1968).

The very first cross-country skiing competition were held in Norway in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. These competitions were exclusive for the Norwegian military (SNL 2018). The first public competition was held in Tromsø in 1843, and since then, cross-country competitions have been held on a yearly basis across the country. The first known Norwegian ski club was founded in 1861 on the Norwegian countryside, and in 1877, Christiania Ski Club in Oslo (then named Christiania) was founded (SNL 2018).

The modern skiing practice evolved in Scandinavia, and from the 19<sup>th</sup> century the sport became more and more popular. The sport of cross-country developed from being a means for transportation, to becoming a competitive discipline, and in the first winter Olympics in 1924, two cross-country disciplines were on the Olympic program (SNL 2018).

#### **2.1.1 The Norwegian National Cross-Country Team**

The Norwegian's skiing traditions has over the years developed some of the world's greatest skiers. There is no secret that the Norwegians know how to win with skis on their

feet. The Norwegian Ski Federation and the national cross-country team can be proud of presenting skiers and legends over the years like Oddvar Brå, Vegard Ulvang, Bjørn Dæhlie, Frode Estil, Thomas Aalsgaard, Bente Skari, Marit Bjørgen, Martin J. Sundby, Petter Northug Jr, Therese Johaug, and so on! These skiers and many more contributed to Norway being the most winning nation through the history of the winter Olympics, with a total of 368 medals (NBC Universal 2018).

Today, the national cross-country team comprises 10 women and 14 men. The athletes are qualified to the national team by a numerous of excellent performances and are divided into different elite categories according to their skills, hence the men's elite all-round team and the men's elite sprint team. The women are all in the same elite all-round team. The performance requirements for being a part of the team is extremely high, and therefore NSF keeps a recruit national team for those who are not yet "good enough" for the national team, and also a national team on the junior level (The Norwegian Ski Federation 2018).

### **2.1.2 Popularity**

In addition to the long tradition of skiing, Norway has been dominating the sport of cross-country skiing for several years and the success is an important factor for its popularity. The Norwegian population loves cross-country skiing, and a recent report from Sponsor Insight shows that 48 percent of the population says they like cross-country skiing. This makes cross-country skiing the most popular sport in the country (Sponsor Insight 2018). In the same survey, several of the athletes from the national cross-country team are listed as the Norwegian population's favorite athletes. Marit Bjørgen is the most popular cross-country skier with a 41 percentage, and is the second most popular athlete, right behind the alpine skier Aksel Lund Svindal who received 44 percent. Additionally, Therese Johaug and Petter Northug Jr, shares the title as the third most popular athletes in Norway, together with the biathlete Ole Einar Bjørndalen. (Sponsor Insight 2018).

The high level of popularity among the Norwegian population is further supported by the TV viewership. In 2016 the Tour de Ski pursuit competition for men and for women made it to two out of the ten most viewed programs in Norway. The pursuit competition for men had 1,326 million viewers, while the pursuit competition for women had 1,270 million

viewers. Furthermore, two out of the ten most viewed programs on Eurosport Norway in 2016 was cross-country skiing (TNS GALLUP 2016).

### **2.1.3 Doping Incidents and Controversial Behavior**

In the season of 2014/2015 one of the athletes, Martin Johnsrud Sundby, tested positive for doping (VG 2016). The positive test was a result of using too large doses of asthma medicine, subscribed by the national team doctor. The Norwegian Ski Federation took the blame and described the incident as a misunderstanding between them and the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) (VG 2016). Martin Johnsrud Sundby lost all his merits because of the incident. Just a few months after Sundby got his sentence, it was publicly known that another athlete had conducted a positive doping test. This time it was Therese Johaug. She had used a lip salve containing the illegal drug clostebol (Langrenn.com 2016). She was sentenced to exclusion from the national team for 18 months (VG 2017a). Both of the incidents were outlined by The International Ski Federation (FIS) as unintentional doping.

Regarding controversial behavior, Petter Northug Jr. has been posting content on social media where he criticizes the leaders of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country (VG 2017b). His social media post was his reaction to not being selected to represent the national team on different competitions (VG 2017b).

## ***2.2 The Norwegian Ski Federation***

The Norwegian Ski Federation (NSF) was founded in 1908 and is counted as the second largest sport federation in Norway, right behind the Norwegian Football Federation. With over 180.000 members in approximately 1150 different clubs, the Ski Federation has made skiing one of the most popular sports in Norway. Further, the Federation is divided into 16 regional associations more or less corresponding to the 19 counties of Norway.

The Norwegian Ski Federation is the organizer of the six different disciplines: Cross-Country skiing, Alpine skiing, Ski jumping, Nordic combined, Freeski and Telemark, where alpine skiing, ski jumping, and cross-country are counted as the three biggest and most popular sports.

The Norwegian Ski Federation are working to give all Norwegian inhabitants the opportunity to practice sport based on their own needs and wishes. Their vision is “many happy and capable skiers”. The NSF’s values are built from the same fundamental structure as the Norwegian National Sports Federation and the Paralympic committee (NIF) and are:

- The organization is supposed to be characterized by volunteers, democracy, loyalty, openness and equality.
- All skiing activities should be based on fundamental values such as happiness, community, health and honesty.

Furthermore, The Norwegian Ski Federation aims to be the head of skiing activities in Norway, and at the same time focus to develop the organization, economy and employees to meet the demands and challenges that the members of NSF, together with members of Norwegian sport and international sport, proclaims. Moreover, the NSF has a purpose to represent the sport of skiing internationally according to the law of NSF §1 (The Norwegian Ski Federation 2017).

### **2.2.1 Sponsorship Structure and Form**

The Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country (NSFCC) have a four-piece hierarchical sponsorship structure which provides an overlook over the different sponsors connected to the different national teams. On top is the main sponsor that cover the women’s team and both men’s teams (all-round and sprint). The next level of sponsors comprises the different team sponsors, where the different teams either can have the same sponsor, or different sponsors. The sponsors on this level are called “part-sponsors”. At the third level we find the sponsors that the NSFCC calls their strategic partners. These are sponsors that provide beneficial products or services for the cross-country team such as ski wax, hotels, transportation and food. The fourth and last sponsorship level is the athletes’ gear suppliers. All athletes have individual gear suppliers, but these have to be a part of Skipool Norway.

The concept of Skipool Norway is to be the business network of the Norwegian Ski Federation. The network embraces all sponsors and suppliers. The concept adds to the sponsorship structure of the single branches of the NSF. The sponsorship structure of Skipool Norway is divided into three categories: main kit supplier, racing and support. The *main kit suppliers* are linked directly to the different sports providing them with clothing, for example Bjørn Dæhlie, who is the main kit supplier for the cross-country team. The *racing* category embraces the gear suppliers, like Fischer for example, who are providing skies and poles to some of the cross-country athletes. *Support* is the third category and is what the NSFCC call their strategic partners. These sponsors provide hotel accommodation, transportation, food etc.

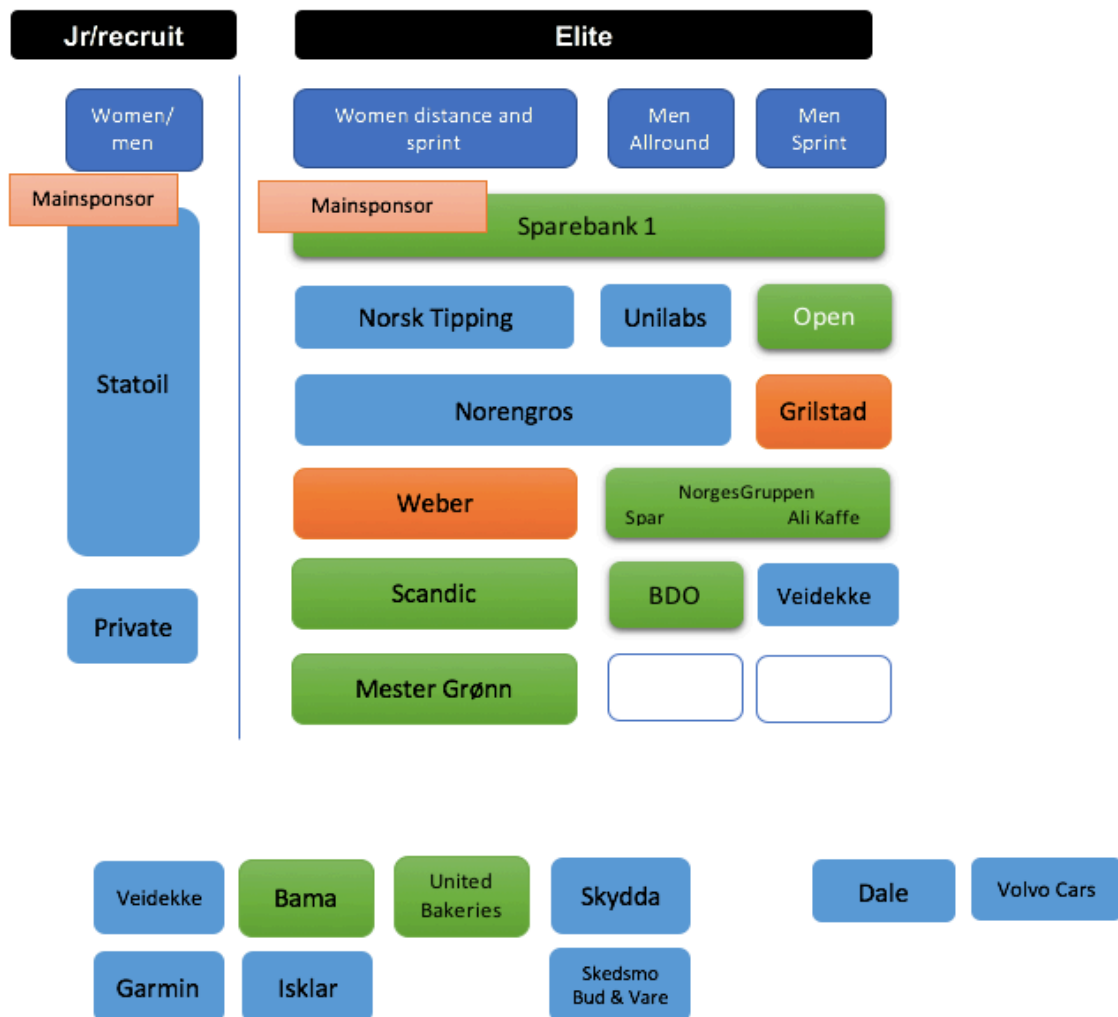


Figure 2.1: Sponsorship structure season 17/18 (Information from the marketing and sponsor coordinator 09.02.2018).

### **2.2.2. Sponsor Activities**

The main- and part sponsors for all teams are given the rights to have their logo on the national team apparel. Additionally, the NSFCC say that they focus on internal activation and business to business opportunities (B2B) for their sponsors. To ensure the sponsors' internal activation the NSFCC provides activities such as roller skiing/skiing/running classes for the sponsors' employees. They also arrange lectures held by athletes, coaches, leaders or people in the support team. The sponsors are also able to travel with the NSFCC to Tour de Ski or to the World Championship. Furthermore, the NSFCC attempt to create and assure valuable cooperation possibilities for the sponsors with arranging workshops and gatherings where they can learn from each other. The NSFCC has also arranged for the sponsors to offer discounts of products or services to the other sponsors in the pool.

Regarding exposure, the NSFCC say that some of the sponsors get exposure on events like World Cup in Lillehammer for example. That weekend some of the sponsors are there with their products to be visible. They also ensure that the athletes that reach the podium receive gift cards or products from the sponsors as prizes. Other type of exposure is for example participation from the athletes on different sponsors activities. Some of the sponsors arrange CSR activities where some of the athletes need to be present. The NSFCC also say that the athletes can post pictures on social media when using the sponsors' products or services. The sponsors can also associate with the national team in commercials or on their social media channels to create exposure.

The use of social media has increased dramatically in the past years, and social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and Twitter have become important tools in order to communicate with friends, family and fans. Professional athletes use social media in the same way the rest of us do, but they face the expectations and perceptions of fans, media and others of what is appropriate to post. Posting controversial content attracts the attention of fans, media or others more than for the rest of us. According to the marketing and sponsorship coordinator for NSFCC (from e-mail correspondence, 20.02.2018), there is no specific policy that regulates the usage of social media for the athletes. The cross-country athletes are free to choose what they want to post and when. However, they are encouraged by the NSFCC to publish content that will benefit the sponsors, by for example showing products from the sponsors. The NSFCC have their own social media accounts

that goes by the name “langrennslandslaget” (The cross-country skiing team), where they make sure to post sponsorship related content. These accounts are common for the whole team. Additionally, every athlete has individual sponsors, hence the question about promotion in social media is regulated between the athlete and the individual sponsor.

Because of the increase of promotion in social media, the Norwegian consumer authority has made new rules for promoting and advertising online. These rules announce that all posts that contain any kind of promotion must be marked distinctly (Forbrukertilsynet 2018). This means that if the NSFCC wants to post a picture on Instagram, they cannot mention their sponsors in text or with captions without marking the picture as promotion. Because of these rules the NSFCC has decided not to tag their sponsors in pictures unless there is a picture for promoting that particular sponsor. Åselinn Krane Heimdal further says they have chosen to do so in order to not draw the focus away from the content in the post, when for example posting a picture of a great Olympic performance, etc.



### 3.0 Theoretical Framework

The research in this thesis seeks to characterize the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's thoughts and perceptions in regards of their sponsorship agreement. This chapter will therefore present a literature review of relevant research and theory to contribute to answer the research question. Furthermore, this chapter will be the foundation for making the interview guide and the data analysis. I have chosen to divide the chapter in three parts that describes the aspects of the sponsorship that I think is necessary in order to answer the research question.

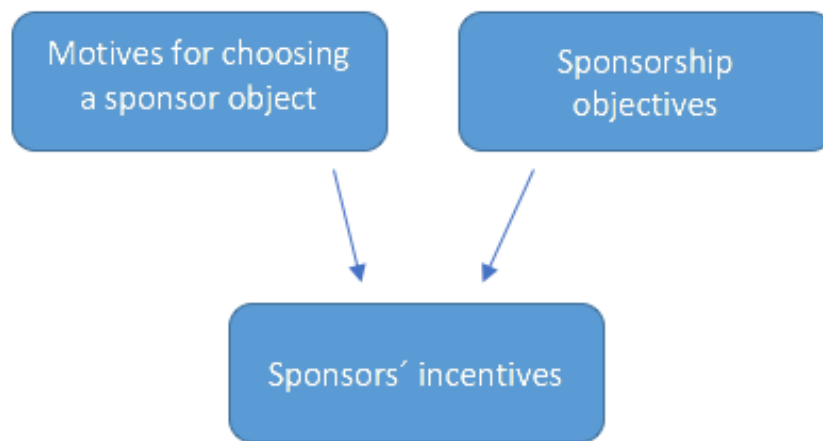


Figure 3.1: Description of aspects needed to answer the research question.

#### Motives:

The sponsors' motives says something about their reasoning for choosing a sponsor object, and what factors is important when entering a sponsorship.

#### Sponsorship objectives:

The objectives the sponsors have when entering a sponsorship can be different for each sponsor. I will present the sponsorship objectives that are most common based on the results of previous research.

### Incentives:

Incentives are defined as something that motivates someone to do something<sup>1</sup>. In this thesis incentives say something about the mind-set of the sponsors in regards of the sponsorship, and what approach they can identify with. Ryan and Fahy (2012) and Cornwell (2014) shed light on five approaches that describes the sponsors' priorities towards a sponsor relationship.

### ***3.1 The What and Why of Sponsoring***

The phenomenon of sponsorships is one of the most visible marketing activities, and already in the ancient Greece, athletes of the Olympic Games had sponsorship agreements with the government of Greece (Beech and Chadwick 2007). A more recent phenomenon that appeared throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is the supporting of activities for commercial reasons. Today, it is common for professional athletes, sport teams, events, etc., to have one or several sponsorship agreements.

*“Sponsorship can be regarded as the provision of assistance either financial or in-kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives.”*

(Meenaghan 1983, 9)

Sponsorship has over the last decades developed to be a common way for a business to do promotions. Sponsorship can be described as a business agreement between two parties where one party provides financial or in-kind assistance to the other party in exchange for the right to be associated with the business (Smith and Stewart 2015). The sponsor does this to pursue corporate objectives, or marketing objectives. Examples of goals pursued is improving of brand image or increasing brand awareness (Smith and Stewart 2015). Another definition of sponsorship made by the International Chamber of Commerce (1992) mentioned in Beech and Chadwick (2007, 270) is:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/incentive>

*“Every communication action where a sponsor engages contractually to support financially (or other) in order to associate in a positive way its image, identity, brands, products or services to the event, activity, organization or person it supports.”*

Sport sponsorships has had a significantly increase the past decades (Cornwell 2014). Accordingly, with the growth in sponsorship the money sponsor organization spend in sponsorship show to increase in the same speed. ESP has made a report showing that in 2017 there was a global spending of 62,7 billion dollars on sponsorships, and they project an increase of 4,5 percent for 2018 (ESP 2018). In the same report ESP projects that in North America a total of 70 percent of the capital spent on sponsorships in 2018, will be in the sport section.

Chadwick, Chanavat and Desbordes (2016) explains the high increase of sport sponsorship in four points:

- More sport related programs on television
- Technological development that made information regarding sports easy to gather (through phone, tablet etc.)
- Development of new sports contributions, for example new combinations of sports and e-sports
- Globalization of sports

### **3.1.1 The Purpose of Sponsorship**

Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004) claims that most companies invest in sponsorships with the aim to gain brand awareness and improve the company image, increase market share and sales, reach out to a specific segment, improve employee relations, become involved in the community and obtain hospitality opportunities. Another incentive for sponsoring sports events or organizations is as mentioned the media coverage (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt 1987). Big sporting events often receive wide coverage by media, and businesses are attracted by the possibility of gaining new customers out of the sports spectator or fans as well as increasing brand awareness (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt 1987). By having clear sponsorship motives and objectives, companies are more likely to select the right fit for a sponsorship agreement (Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou 2004). Dolphin

(2003) emphasizes the importance of understanding a brand and increasing the knowledge of a company and their products. By building a good brand image the company are given the opportunity to associate themselves with the image of different sport events, organizations, teams and athletes.

Cornwell and Maignan (1998) presents the purpose of sponsorship by classifying the sponsorship objectives into three categories:

- Broad corporate objectives (improving corporate image).
- Marketing objectives (brand promotion and increase of sales).
- Media objectives (reduce advertising costs, reach target markets and increase brand awareness).

With this in mind, sponsorships are investments that can help the brand to differentiate from its competitors by gaining a competitive advantage (Amis, Slack and Berrett 1999). However, Amis, Slack and Berrett (1999) states that sponsorships are seen as advantageous if the sponsorship contract offers resources that the competitors do not possess. Competitive advantages can for example be the rights to associate with a sport organization or event.

### ***3.2 Motives for Choosing a Sponsor Object***

According to Meenaghan (1991) there is a certain number of criteria to consider when looking for a sponsor object. In general, it is important that the sponsor object has the ability to achieve the organization's vision and goals. Furthermore, Meenaghan (1991) mentions the importance of transferring associations between the sponsor and the sponsor object. The consumers perceived understanding of the associations has to make sense in order for the consumer to see the fit (Cornwell 2014). Accordingly, the sponsor object should have a demographically and geographically fit with the sponsor. In that way the target market is easier to reach (Meenaghan 1991). Meenaghan (1991) also emphasizes the objective of receiving a high level of media coverage. It is important for the organization to investigate what channels to use in order to reach the target markets and in order to spread their message.

When choosing a sponsor object there is several evaluations that has to be done. I will now clarify the importance of the factors personal attributes, the congruence/fit between sponsor and sponsor object and how the relation between them should be.

### **3.2.1 Personal Attributes**

The sponsor object's personality and characteristics are something to consider in order to get the image that the brand is looking for. Athletes or sport teams with personalities that stands out are often chosen as sponsor objects. Consumers will have a better understanding and attitude towards a brand if they see the congruence between the brand and the sponsor object's personality (Cornwell 2014). To illustrate, Red Bull signed a sponsorship contract with the Norwegian handball player Nora Mørk. Their statement for the sponsorship was that she is talented handball player that has plenty of backbone and she is a good fit for the brand (Nettavisen 2018). Red Bull has previously justified their choice of athletes to sponsor with the same statement "players that have plenty of backbone" (Dagbladet 2012). As a brand Red Bull obviously have a specific type of personalities they look for in order to strengthen their brand.

### **3.2.2 Sport Sponsorship Congruence**

Professional athletes and sport organizations are often associated with health, strength and success, and they also have a lot of fans. Sport generates feelings of passion, commitment and sacrifice. Sport also stands for values like health, community, happiness and respect (The Norwegian Ski Federation 2017). Furthermore, successful athletes receive a lot of media coverage and benefit from having a worldwide public image recognition (Conway 2011). These factors mentioned above are attributes that makes sponsoring sport so attractive, and what also makes professional athletes the ultimate influencer object for sponsors.

As mentioned, sponsors usually desire to be associated with the values of sport organizations (O'Reilly and Horning, 2013). This also shed light on the importance of the *fit* or *congruence* between the sponsor and the sponsor object. It makes sense that "when things go together they are naturally easier to remember" (Cornwell 2014, 48). This means

that sponsors that share similar values and have a similar image are recalled more often than sponsors that are totally different from the sport property. Sponsorships can create goodwill and a positive attitude among consumers when the sponsor and the sport property have a congruence. People tend to perceive that companies are as they act (Gilbert and Malone 1995 mentioned in Cornwell 2014). By sponsoring a sports organization, the perceived image of the sponsor will correspond with the image of the sport property. According to Cornwell (2014) the sponsorship will be viewed positively and with a sense of clear brand meaning if the relationship between the sponsor and the sport property have similarities or if they fit.

### **3.2.3 Relations**

When looking for a sponsor object the organizations should find objects that has strong and reliable relations with their fans (Kim, Ko and James 2011). Accordingly, Kim, Ko and James (2011) states that by showing that the sponsor really care about the sponsor object they are more likely to maximize the wanted sponsorship outcome. Furthermore, the sponsor object should also communicate to the fans how important the sponsorship is. By doing that, their fans will most likely be more open towards the sponsor's communication.

Regarding the relationship between the sponsor and the sponsor object it is essential that they work together in order to achieve the goals for the sponsorship agreement. The sponsor object needs to know how the sponsor think and vice versa in order to help each other achieving their goals. It is important that the two parties cooperate and communicate. It is also essential that both sponsor and sponsor object are solution minded and positive regards the other part (Pearsall 2010).

### **3.2.4 Potential Sponsorship Outcome**

Organizations chooses to enter sponsorship agreements to fulfil a variety of objectives, therefore the best potential outcomes of sponsorships depend on the vision of the sponsor. Nevertheless, an organization should never consider going into a sponsorship relationship unless they have specified the outcomes they hope to achieve from the agreement (Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou 2004). Even though the potential goals for the sponsorship relationship are specified, the outcome of a sponsorship deal can turn out to be

a negative impact of the company's brand image. Beech and Chadwick (2007) states that many sponsors often are disappointed with the outcome of the sponsorship. There are many risks linked to the sponsorship of sport properties, especially when sponsoring a team or an individual athlete.

When choosing athletes to sponsor, it is important for the company to choose an individual that share the same values and image of the company. The difficulties with sponsoring a sport organization or team, is the many individuals that is included in the sponsorship agreement. When sponsoring an organization or team, the sponsor need to identify with the organization or the team values. A conflict might occur if some of the individuals do not share the same values as the sponsor. How the individuals act in their professional or personal life can affect the sponsor in a negative way because of destructive media attention (De Pelsmacker, Geuens and Van den Bergh 2010). Some athletes have such a strong personality that they can overshadow the image of the company they have a sponsorship deal with (Beech and Chadwick 2007).

The worst potential matter is when an athlete is involved in a criminal affair or implicated with drugs or doping. Situations like this can create negative effects for the sponsors. When such negative behavior occurs, the sponsorship contract can be threatened (Cornwell 2014). In other cases, the sponsors can receive negative effects, if the athlete has a controversial extent of behavior. Cornwell (2014, 125) states that the outcome of negative behavior among athletes depends on *“the attribution of blame to particular parties, the severity of the incident, and the extent of media attention”*.

### ***3.3 Sponsorship Objectives***

In order to find out what sponsors motivations and objectives are, Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004) studied the objectives of the grand national Olympic sponsors in Athens 2004. In their studies they found that companies felt motivated to sponsor the Olympic Games to 1) help the country, 2) be a part of the most important sporting event in the country, and develop associations with the Olympics, 3) fulfil an obligation fitting the history, size and strength of the company, and 4) support a major development in the

company. Furthermore, they found that the five most common objectives the sponsors were:

- Increase sales and market share
- Enhance the image of the company
- Increase brand awareness/recognition
- Be involved in the community
- Improve employee relations.

Abratt, Clayton and Pitt (1987) found that companies desire to go into sponsorships in order to receive media coverage, promote the brand image, increase brand awareness and the possibility to gain new consumers. Irwin and Sutton (1994, in Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou 2004) examined North American sport sponsors and found that position and status improvement were important for the sponsors. They also found out that the sponsors were motivated by commercial objectives such as return on investment. In a more recent study Lough and Irwin (2001, in Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou 2004) compared traditional sport sponsorship and women's' sport sponsorship. The results showed that sponsors were driven by increase of sales and market share.

### **3.3.1 External Activation**

Organizations may have objectives that involves external activation which is concerned to improve their competitiveness and increase interest for people outside the organization. These objectives can be concerned about the organization's marketing such as increase brand knowledge and brand awareness and increase the brand exposure. The sponsorship objectives may also be motivated by social motives such as taking corporate social responsibility and create involvement (Alexandris et al. 2008). Below I will present different external objectives that organizations may have when they are entering a sponsorship relationship.



## Brand Awareness

*«Brand awareness is defined as the extent and ease to which customers recall and recognize the brand can identify the products and services with which is associated».*

(Cornwell 2014, 79)

As the citation explains, brand awareness is reflected by the consumers ability to identify a brand in different situations (Keller 1993). As one of the sponsorship objectives mentioned by Cornwell and Maignan (1998), the increase of brand awareness is a way of reaching other objectives such as image building and increasing sales. By associating with sports organizations, events or athletes the consumers will start associating the brand with the sport property (Cornwell 2014). Furthermore, Cornwell (2014, 69) states that *“how the sponsorship information is remembered depends on the exposure and the receiver”*.

In the decision-making process, brand awareness plays an essential role. It is important that when consumers think about the product category, they think about the brand as well (Keller 1993). When a consumer is asked about a product category, he or she will automatically think about different brands in that category. The brands that the consumer recalls are the “evoked set”. Businesses always compete to be in consumers evoked set, but most of all to be top of mind which indicates that the brand is top of consumers mind in its product category. The elaboration likelihood model by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) mentioned in Keller (1993) explains that consumers also will base their choices on brand awareness when they feel a lack of motivation or do not care about the product or service. This occurs when the consumer feels a low degree of involvement (Keller 1993).

## Brand image and image transfer

Brand image is defined by Keller (1993, 3) as *“perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory”* and is everything connected to a brand in memory (Cornwell 2014).

How different types of information is remembered and later retrieved depends on the degree of exposure and the degree of receiver involvement (Cornwell 2008 mentioned in Cornwell 2014). Research has also shown that the information consumers holds about the sport sponsor influences the perception of the congruence between the sponsor and the

sport property and vice versa (Cornwell 2014). In research done by Gwinner, Larson and Swanson (2009) on image transfer in event sponsorship they found out that image matters, meaning that brand managers need to be concerned about more than just the exposure to TV-audiences, attendants etc. According to Gwinner, Larson and Swanson (2009) brand managers have to be concerned with how the image of the event is perceived because this image will be transferred to the sponsors. When entering a sponsor relationship, the organizations should make an effort to understand the image that the event perceives by the market segment that the brand is trying to reach. Furthermore Gwinner, Larson and Swanson (2009) states that if image transfer is a goal for the sponsorship agreement, there needs to be a logical connection between sponsor and sponsor object. They also found that the “level of image transfer can be increased if the brand actively encourages fans to see the fit” between the sponsor and the sponsor object (Gwinner, Larson and Swanson 2009, 9). Some events have an obvious connection, but for those events where the congruence is not as clear, the sponsor should try to activate its sponsorship. In order to do so Gwinner, Larson and Swanson (2009) suggest that the sponsor should create promotional material. This can help the consumers understanding the connection/fit.

Improving brand image can sometimes be the main goal when an organization chose to enter a sponsorship relationship (Lambkin and Meenaghan 1994). A certain perceived brand image can be hard to change, but a sponsorship relationship can be a fragment in order to change the image of the brand and lead to positive exposure (Lambkin and Meenaghan 1994). Sponsorships is anticipated to have a positive effect for the organization that are the sponsor due to the process of image transfer (Cornwell 2014). The image of the sponsor object will be transferred onto the sponsor brand. This is a process where a set of associations is transferred between the sponsor object and the sponsor (and vice versa), as described in the example above.

### Brand associations

Sponsorships can often be measured by the ability to change, improve or develop the brand image. According to Keller (1993) the different types of brand associations (favorable, strong and unique) is what defines the essences of a developed brand image. Sponsorships can help building brand associations, and the associations between a sponsor and a sport property could either develop naturally over time or actively managed (Cornwell 2014). For the sponsorship agreement to make sense for consumers it is important that they can

see and understand the set of associations. It is up to the sponsor and the sponsor object to decide and to choose those associations that are most beneficial for the sponsorship agreement (Cornwell 2014).

Meenaghan (2001) also talks about transfer of image through associations, and his research has shown that different categories of sponsorship transfer different associations of value to the sponsor, for example, sponsors that sponsor extreme sports, will be viewed as tough and extreme, while sponsors of more traditional arts like ballet will be looked at as sophisticated and serious etc., (Meenaghan 2001). He also found that every sponsored activity has different personalities where values transfer from the sponsored activity to the sponsor.

### Exposure

According to Henseler, Wilson and Westberg (2011) the most important factor in a sponsorship relationship is exposure and visibility. Through a sponsorship the sponsor will receive either logo- or product exposure, or both.

Popular sport organizations, athletes and teams are familiar with receiving a lot of attention from the media. Abratt, Clayton and Pitt (1987) found in their research that the most important incentive for wanting to sponsor a sport property is the potential for media coverage. By having a certain amount of media coverage, the sponsors will have the opportunity to promote the corporation image and increase awareness. There is also a possibility for turning event spectators into customers, and opportunity for public relations with potential- and existing customers (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt 1987).

### Increase of sales/market share

According to Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013) sales and/or market share are the ultimate objective for almost all sponsors. Increasing sales and market share can be accomplished in different ways through sponsoring a sport property. Studies have shown that fans of different sports or teams are more motivated to buy products of the brands that belongs to the sponsors of the sporting activities that they value (Fullerton 2010 mentioned in Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013). Most of all purchase decisions are made impulsively and in-store. To influence the consumers in the decision-making process, *“brands have used sport featured point-of-purchase displays to draw attention to their products”* (Irwin

et al., 2008 mentioned in Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013, 103). Furthermore, sponsorship agreements in sport organizations often include exclusive rights for a given category which gives the sponsor the advantage of being the only one in that specific category to associate with the sport property, or for instance serve food or drinks at a sporting event (Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013).

#### Buying intention

With a stronger intention of buying the outcome could be increased sales which is as mentioned the ultimate objective for all sponsors (Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013). A study done by Irwin et al. (2003) shows that consumers are more willing to buy a product when the sponsor is sponsoring sports. The research also shows that the chance of re-buying increases if the consumer knows the sponsor brand.

### **3.3.2 Internal Activation**

Through internal activation of the sponsorship relationship the organization can use the sponsorship in order to achieve different goals internally. Typical goals for internal activation can be increase of motivation and involvement in the organization, and identification for the employees. Sponsorships can also be used to lower the degree of absence regarding illness, or it can be used to change the culture within the organization.

#### Motivating employees

As well as utilizing sport sponsorships as reaching marketing objectives like gaining brand awareness and building brand image, sport sponsorship can also be used as entertainment for employees in order to motivate them (Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013). According to Irwin et al (2008) mentioned in Greenhalgh and Greenwell (2013, 103) “*sport sponsorship has the capability of increasing staff motivation and corporate pride*”. Apostolopoulou, Papadimitriou (2004) states that sponsorships can be used to gather the employees under one vision and a common effort. Furthermore, they claim that the importance of motivating employees depends on the circumstances within the organization. In their research they found that companies that has recently changed (for instance merged) may have more interest in motivating their employees than other organizations. According to Khan and Stanton (2010) the employees will feel motivation and involvement towards their work-related responsibilities when they have the opportunity to experience

sponsorship activities. There is also a possibility for the employees to feel pride linked to the sponsorship activities that will increase organizational involvement.

### **3.3.3 Activation Through Social Media**

The way of communication has developed over the years from being mainly TV and newspapers, to now include social media, e-mail and business to business communication (B2B). The same scenario has also appeared in sponsorships, where especially social media has helped increasing the value of sponsorships (Santomier 2008). Social media can be defined as an online community, and a platform for people to communicate, share information, develop ideas and gather information in new ways (Sander 2016). Social media is different from traditional media by being less controllable, and more informal. Social media gives the opportunity to communicate with millions of people on different platforms that are open for all. Platforms used are often social networking sites, for example Facebook, personal and official blogs, internet forums, question and answer sites and other platforms that gives the opportunity to communicate (Taprial and Kanwar 2012).

By giving individuals and organizations the opportunity to socially interact by sharing content, social media has grown into a new platform for doing marketing. Using viral campaigns and creating social media content are a cost-effective way of doing marketing and reach new consumers. Because of universal availability, there is no barrier for reaching a worldwide audience (Santomier 2008), and according to Regan (2015) there were in 2015 more than 2,2 billion people that actively used social media worldwide. It is important for sport sponsorships to activate through several new media marketing channels in order to reach their full potential (Santomier 2008).

#### Commercialization of Sport via Sponsorship

Commercial enterprises have learned how to benefit from the new technology and sponsoring sports through internet have become an effective way for brands to reach new consumers and provide valuable components (Santomier 2008). We can also see a trend for sport sponsors to use athletes as influencers in social media. Through the association with sport, sponsors are capable of gaining trust and confidence of consumers (Santomier 2008).

The frequent use of sponsorship for business related purposes has become more and more accepted, and most people tend to think that without sponsors there would be no sport events (Cornwell and Amis 2005). This is also the case for contemporary sport organizations and federations, due to the extreme costs of practicing professional sports. The use of athletes as a marketing tool is a method for achieving contact with the consumers.

Another way of doing sponsorships is influence marketing. The trend with using influencers began with the development of social media. Influence marketing is defined by the capacity of an individual or a group to have a certain influence on somebody's behavior (Brown and Hayes 2008, 49). Companies often use individuals that has a certain influence on other people, (for example bloggers and TV-personalities) to promote their products.

With the ability to influence comes great responsibility, and for the sponsors it is important that the athletes are behaving properly on social media. It is important for the athletes to think things through, especially when posting content on their social media channels or else there can be consequences if the content is misinterpreted by the audience (NISO 2012). If things go wrong, the athlete is not the only one that gets a poor reputation. Negative publicity can reflect upon the sponsor and in worst case scenario damage the sponsor's reputation. It is therefore important that sponsored athletes have a sense of mind when publishing content in social media. Nevertheless, it is important that all Norwegian athletes have the opportunity to express themselves freely. Social media is mostly a positive thing for professional athletes, where they get to meet their fans and communicate with them (NISO 2012).

### ***3.4 Sponsors' Incentives***

Ryan and Fahy (2012) and Cornwell (2014) has described how the practice of sponsorship has changed over time. They have identified the changing priorities and thinking in sponsorship and outlined five approaches:

*The philanthropic approach:* According to Ryan and Fahy (2012) commercial sponsorship has emerged from the practice of philanthropy. Sponsorship was up to the 1980's seen as a gift and it often had a strategic focus on broad corporate objectives such as enhancing corporate image and developing goodwill among consumers and other stakeholders (Cornwell 2014). Gwinner and Swanson (2003) argues that philanthropic activities do not focus on gaining profit but are concerned to maintain the social responsibility of being a sponsor. The sponsor managers in the philanthropic approach were criticized for choosing sponsor object for personal reasons (Ryan and Fahy 2012). An example mentioned in Ryan and Fahy (2012) is that the director of Ryanair is interested in horseracing. Ryan air now sponsor a horseracing event. The management in this approach is in general recognized as being "*ad hoc in approach, without formalized policies for property selection or evaluation of sponsorship effectiveness*". (Ryan and Fahy, 1140).

*The market-centered approach:* Ryan and Fahy (2012) argues that sponsorship emerged from the philanthropic approach to a more market-centered approach. This approach looks at sponsorship as an investment and focus on brand awareness and image. This focused on brand awareness and the idea of return of investment (Ryan and Fahy 2012). This approach brought an increase of professionalism and the expectations of the sponsor object's behavior was higher than before. Evans, O'Malley and Patterson (2004, in Ryan and Fahy 2012) claims that consumers started to become tired of traditional advertising and that advertising was limited in regards of cost-effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, "*sponsorships were positioned as an alternative tool, alongside more traditional media such as advertising and personal selling*" (Ryan and Fahy 2012, 1141).

*The consumer-centered approach:* Criticism of the market-centered approach lead to the emerge of the consumer-centered approach, which looked at the importance of understanding of consumer behavior in sponsorships (Cornwell 2014). The level of consumer involvement is according to Ryan and Fahy (2012) affected by level of awareness and image transfer, therefore the congruence/fit between the sponsor and the sponsor object are essential in this approach.

*The strategic resource approach:* This approach sees sponsorship as a competitive advantage and investments in sponsorship were seen as insufficient for sustainable success (Ryan and Fahy 2012). Cliffe and Motion (2005 in Ryan and Fahy 2012) claims that "*a*

key driving force behind the emerge of the strategic role of sponsorship has been the increased attention given to the role of consumer experience in developing and enhancing consumer brand perceptions”. Furthermore, this approach recognizes that sponsorships are moving away from the philanthropic approach where sponsorships are seen as a gift, towards a more relationship-oriented position, where the importance of mutual sharing and resources is the norm (Thompson 2003, in Ryan and Fahy 2012).

*The relationships and network approach:* The emerge of the relationships and networks approach is according to Ryan and Fahy (2012) a progression of the strategic resources approach. the relationships and networks approach views “*sponsorship as interaction*” (Cornwell 2014, 30). Ryan and Fahy (2012) argues that both parties are dependent on each other, and that unique opportunities arise in the interaction between the sponsor and the sponsor object. They also emphasize that the sponsor and the sponsor object can generate new resources through interaction (Ryan and Fahy 2012).

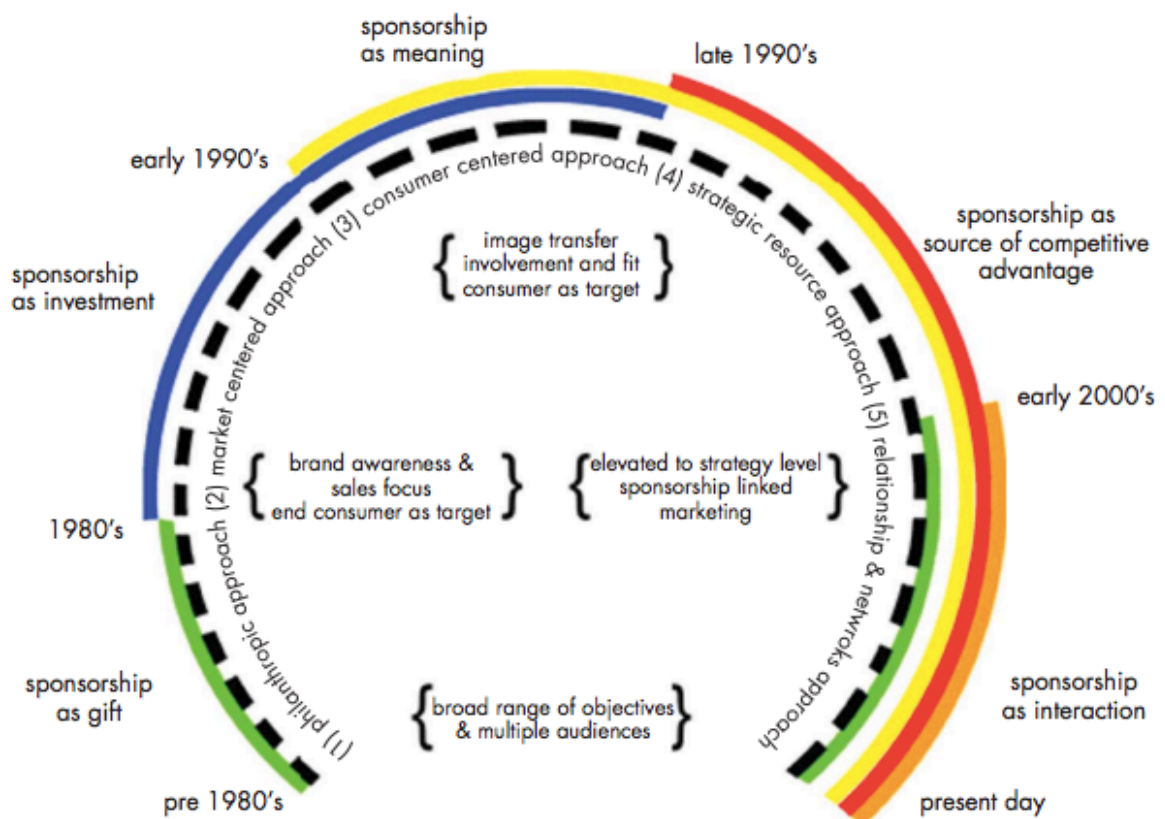


Figure 3.2: Graphical representation of the evolution of sponsorship thinking and changing priorities over time (Ryan and Fahy 2012).



### **3.4.1 Commercial Logic**

Gammelsæter (2011) discuss different logical mind-sets called institutional logics that influences stakeholders and their activities. He further discusses if sports have become a commercial entertainment industry.

According to Gerrard (2004, in Gammelsæter 2011) commercialization of sport are linked to the development of the professional sports. Further he argues that the “owners” aim for increased share value are to blame for the development of commercialization.

Traditionally, sports are owned by the members of the sports team, but now professional sport teams have made agreements with corporations or individuals that has invested in the club- or team brand. Sponsors and media corporations also invest in sports and even though they are not formally the owners, they have a set of expectations and demands for return on investment.

According to Gammelsæter (2011) the commercial logical thinking is based on economical motives, where the goal is increase of profit. Furthermore, he argues that in order to say sports are commercial there has to be certain factors present: 1) stakeholders has to have commercial motives and 2) They need to have resources that ensure their capability of making profit. In order to say that a particular sport is commercialized the stakeholders has to be involved to develop, sell and deliver a product that provide profit. This has also contributed to commodification, where a non-profitable “product” such as sport is changed into a product that can be sold with profit. This commercial mind-set can according to Gammelsæter (2011) be defined as an institutional logic and it influences how the different stakeholders think about their investments. Friedland and Alford (1991, in Gammelsæter 2011) claims that society is based on a number of different logics that describe patterns of behavior and the mind-sets that are linked to this behavior and different situations it occurs in. Gammelsæter (2011) further emphasize that stakeholders can be influenced by several logics at the same time. Ryan and Fahy (2012) also argue that sponsors can be influenced by several of the different sponsorship approaches mentioned above. This research will further try to identify the mind-set and approach for the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country.

## 4.0 Methodology

This thesis seeks to explore the incentives the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country (NSFCC) have regarding their sponsors relationship with the NSFCC. To answer the research question interviews with some central sponsors were conducted. The interview objects were the sponsor managers from each chosen sponsor organization, and the interviews were planned in order to fit the sponsor's preferences in time, location and method. I will now present the process of the data gathering, from the chosen design to the data analysis.

### 4.1 Research Design

After the process of establishing the desired research field and identifying the research question it is necessary to find the most appropriate and the best possible research design (Veal and Darcy 2014). According to Gripsrud, Olsson and Silkoset (2011) the purpose of using a research design is to better understand and describe how to solve the specific research and it also determines how to collect the data, and how to analyze it. It is common to separate three different research designs: Explanatory-, descriptive- or causal research design. Because this thesis seeks to find out and describe the expectations the sponsors have for the sponsorship the most appropriate design according to Veal and Darcy (2014) would be descriptive design. Veal and Darcy (2014) argues that this type of research approach also can be named as exploratory in some studies.

#### 4.1.1 Descriptive Research Design

Descriptive research is described as research that:

*“seeks to discover, describe or map patterns of behavior in areas or activities which have not previously been studied in the field or for which information needs to be updated on a regular basis”.*

(Veal and Darcy 2014, 6)

Veal and Darcy (2014) argue that with a descriptive research design the researcher is supposed to “finding out and describing what it is”. Gripsrud, Olsson and Silkoset (2011) describe descriptive research design as the appropriate method when the researcher has slight of understanding within the field of research. The aim is to describe the situation in a particular area. Veal and Darcy (2014) emphasize that descriptive research design is suitable for investigating aspects of sport because of the constant change that the sport industry is a part of, for example: the popularity of different sport changes, new technologies are introduced, and new policy initiatives are taken, etc.

## ***4.2 The Qualitative Approach***

The qualitative research method is used in social science research and to do practical analyzes of markets. Gripsrud, Olsson and Silkoset (2011) argues that it is the research question that defines which method (qualitative or quantitative) to use, but that there can also be beneficial to use both methods in the same research (Gripsrud, Olsson and Silkoset 2011). To answer my research question, I have chosen to use the qualitative approach. Qualitative data is “*information in the form of words, images and sounds rather than numbers*” (Veal and Darcy 2014, 251). The qualitative approach gives the researcher the opportunity to collect a large amount of detailed information. Veal and Darcy (2014) recognizes qualitative data as “rich” or “thick” information about fewer cases than more limited information about a larger number of cases. Additionally, qualitative research is based on the assumption that people with a personal involvement in particular situations are best suited to explain and describe their experiences, motivations and world-view in their own words (Veal and Darcy 2014).

To study the thoughts and perceptions of the NSFCC’s sponsors I found it more helpful to use the qualitative approach, than the quantitative because I wanted to receive “rich” information (Veal and Darcy 2014). I also wanted to go deep into every sponsor relationship, so I understood their background and their objectives explained in their own words as Veal and Darcy (2014) emphasizes. Additionally, I wanted the opportunity to speak directly with the sponsors of the NSFCC, and to ensure that I got responses that could answers the questions. Kelly (1980 in Veal and Darcy 2014) emphasizes that qualitative research is well suited to investigate sport because sport involves a lot of face-

to-face interaction including the use of symbols, gestures etc. They also argue that the qualitative approach provides a better understanding of people's needs and aspirations (Veal and Darcy 2014).

#### **4.2.1 In-Depth Interviews**

Gripsrud, Olsson and Silkoset (2011) mention three different methods of doing qualitative data collection, which include document analysis, observation and interviews. An in-depth interview can be explained when interviewing one person at a time where the interview object gets to speak freely and are able to express himself/herself on the topic of research. When conducting in-depth interviews the researcher seeks to dig deeper than what is possible with a questionnaire-based interview (Veal and Darcy 2014). Instead of just asking a question and go with a simple answer, the in-depth interview provide opportunity for further explanation from the respondent and the opportunity for asking supplementary questions. The in-depth interview is less structured than a questionnaire-based interview and can be seen as semi-structured where the interview guide can be seen as a guideline for the interview (Veal and Darcy 2014).

#### **4.2.2 Sample**

The population of this research is all the sponsors and strategic partners of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country (NSFCC). There are in total 29 sponsors and strategic partners by the beginning of May 2018, where 15 are main- and part sponsors and 14 are strategic partners (The Norwegian Ski Federation 2018). An interview with all of their sponsors and partners would demand too much time and resources. I chose together with the NSFCC eight central and important sponsors at the sponsor level 1 and 2 (main sponsors and part-sponsors). The main- and part sponsors provide money, and some provide products and services as well and get a set of favors in return. According to the information I got from the NSFCC the main- and part-sponsors are those who the NSFCC are most involved with regarding internal and external activities. Additionally, these sponsors also get exposure from their logo on the team apparel, and they are given certain rights to use the NSFCC's brand and the athletes for marketing activities. The strategic partners are not given any direct exposure, and do not have the same rights for using the NSFCC's brand and athletes

in their marketing. Because of the difference in involvement, I chose to only interview main- and part sponsors.

The selection is as follows: Eight of the Norwegian Ski Federation's (NSFCC) main- and part sponsors. Because of the lack of response from three sponsors, I ended up with five of the Norwegian Ski Federation's (NSFCC) main- and part sponsors.

Interview number	Name/Alias	Date of interview	Interview approach
1	Sponsor 1	20.03.18	Phone
2	Sponsor 2	21.03.18	Phone
3	Sponsor 3	23.03.18	Phone
4	Sponsor 4	23.03.18	Face-to-face
5	Sponsor 5	23.03.18	Face-to-face

Table 4.1: sample

### 4.2.3 The Interview Guide

Because I wanted to conduct in-depth and semi structured interviews, I chose to use an interview guide as the foundation. The interview guide can be seen as a checklist (Veal and Darcy 2014) where relevant topics are written down. The interview guide was inspired by the theory I have studied about sponsorship. Furthermore, I chose to follow the “*standardized approach*” emphasized by Veal and Darcy (2014, 259) which are based on

the semi structured interview process. In semi-structured interviews the conversation between the researcher and the respondent should, as far as possible, be similar for all interviews (Veal and Darcy 2014). I made four different topics I wanted to research and then I made three to four questions on all four topics<sup>2</sup>. I followed the interview guide during all interviews, and I asked supplementary questions when I felt the need for more information or further explanation (Veal and Darcy 2014).

Veal and Darcy (2014) emphasizes the difficulties that can occur during interviews, for example the dilemma when the researcher is torn between maintaining a friendly conversation and the desire not to influence the answers. Further, Veal and Darcy (2014) argues that the interviewer must be careful when asking supplementary questions in order not to lead the questions. Appropriate supplementary questions should be open, for example “Why do you sponsor?” and not leading such as “Do you sponsor with the aim of achieving more exposure?”. These questions are only examples, but illustrate the difference between an open question and a leading one (Veal and Darcy 2014). Even though it was difficult, I tried to ask my questions as open and neutral as possible in order to avoid questions that take one or the other’s part, or is angled in a positive or negative direction. Additionally, I tried to make the questions to be as neutral as possible to emphasize that I wanted to be neutral in my role as a researcher.

#### **4.2.4 The Interview Process**

When conducting interviews with the sponsors of the NSFCC, it was desirable to conduct the interviews face-to-face, but because to the different sponsors’ busy schedule some of the interviews had to be done by phone. In total, three of the interviews were done by phone, and two were done face-to-face in their own locations. The difficulties with doing phone interviews is that there is not any opportunity to observe how the interview object is behaving and how he or she reacts to the different questions. On the other hand, it can be seen as positive to organize the interviews on the sponsor’s premises so that the he or she will feel comfortable and that the interview does not take too much time.

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<sup>2</sup> See interview guide in appendix 1

To begin with, I contacted the sponsors through e-mail. Most of the sponsors agreed and were happy to be a part of the project. Three of them had a busy schedule and wanted to proceed with a telephone interview. Two of the sponsors made time in their schedule for me to interview them face to face. Two of the three remaining sponsors did not respond at all to the e-mails, and one replied that they simply have no time for it right now.

When I reached out to the sponsors I wanted to offer them full confidentiality and told them that the data would be exposed anonymously. I wanted the sponsors to feel comfortable and safe, and I wanted them to be open towards me and the questions I had prepared. That is why I offered full confidentiality. The sponsors never demanded to be anonymous, but it seemed like they appreciated it, and I also felt like they trusted me and wanted to be open. Regardless of my suggestion for confidentiality, I expected the sponsors to ask for it anyhow, and I wanted to offer anonymity to them first, so they felt that their needs were taken care of and that I had good intentions. There are several aspects of the organization that can be sensitive to share together with the company name. They were for example, asked about their perceptions of the NSFCC and the athletes' behavior regarding social media, and therefore it was important for me to ensure anonymity in order for them to open up and speak truthfully. It was also important to anonymize to make the respondent feel safe and feel that he or she could speak freely about the topic.

The interviews were conducted with the sponsor manager in each organization. The telephone interviews were held in quiet conditions so that the sound from the telephone was easily interpreted. The face to face interviews were conducted at the sponsor's preferred location, which was at their own offices. In all five interviews audio was recorded with approval of the interview object. The audio recording was necessary in order to further analyze the information. All interviews were conducted in the time period of 20<sup>th</sup> of March to the 23<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. The time perspective was decided to be between 20 – 45 minutes, and all interviews were held inside the time frame.

### ***4.3 Validity and Reliability***

Reliability is about the extent to which we can trust the findings of research. This means that if we do the same collection of data and the same analysis again - would the findings be the same? If the answer is yes, the data collection is most likely reliable because random mistakes would be minor.

Validity says something about the relevancy and the consistency of the collected data, meaning that the researcher manages to measure what he or she aims to measure (Gripsrud, et al. 2011). According to Gripsrud et. al (2011) we can divide validity into *internal*- and *external* validity. Internal validity says something about the connection between the data and the conclusion. If a conclusion is made upon a specific variable, it is necessary to be sure that this variable is the cause of the conclusion, and that it doesn't come from other variables we already have left out. On the other hand, external validity says something about the possibility of generalizing the results. Meaning, that we can use the findings of one study to describes what happens in similar circumstances.

According to the previous research and theoretical framework sponsors of sports organization often have the same objectives when entering a sponsorship (Cornwell 2014). If I were to do the same analysis again in a short period of time, I would probably get the same or similar results. On the other hand, if I had done the same research again in five years, the results would maybe be different. Sport is as mentioned always in change regarding popularity, new technologies and new policies etc., which can make this type of research time limited (Veal and Darcy 2014).

This research seeks to find out and describe the sponsors of the NSFCC's incentives. Even though a research is valid in a particular context, it is not necessarily valid in other contexts. According to Veal and Darcy (2014) qualitative research do not have the purpose of generalize the findings from the sample onto the population. Instead, qualitative research seeks to understand different phenomena and confirm that the findings reflect what the researcher intend to investigate.



## 4.4 Analysis of the Data

Veal and Darcy (2014) argues that searching for emergent themes are a typical approach when analyzing qualitative data. Already during the interviews, topics of interest started to emerge, and I chose to categorize my findings from the topics that emerged. After conducting the five interviews, I started with the process of analyzing the data. First, I listened to the recordings while I wrote down the interviews in Norwegian. Secondly, I had to translate the interviews from Norwegian to English (I chose to do the interviews in Norwegian because it is the mother tongue of the respondents and myself and therefore I expected the conversation to be more fluently than it would with an English dialogue).

After translating the interviews, I printed them out and read them while I wrote down the different categories that emerged in the hand margin (Veal and Darcy 2014). The categories that emerged were: Brand awareness, exposure, increase of sales and motivating employees.

Furthermore, I started transcribing the interviews where I used different color markers to code the text, so I recognized the text that belonged to each category. After the process of transcribing all interviews, I began with outlining the citations that I wanted to use in order to underline my findings. The findings will be presented in the next chapter.

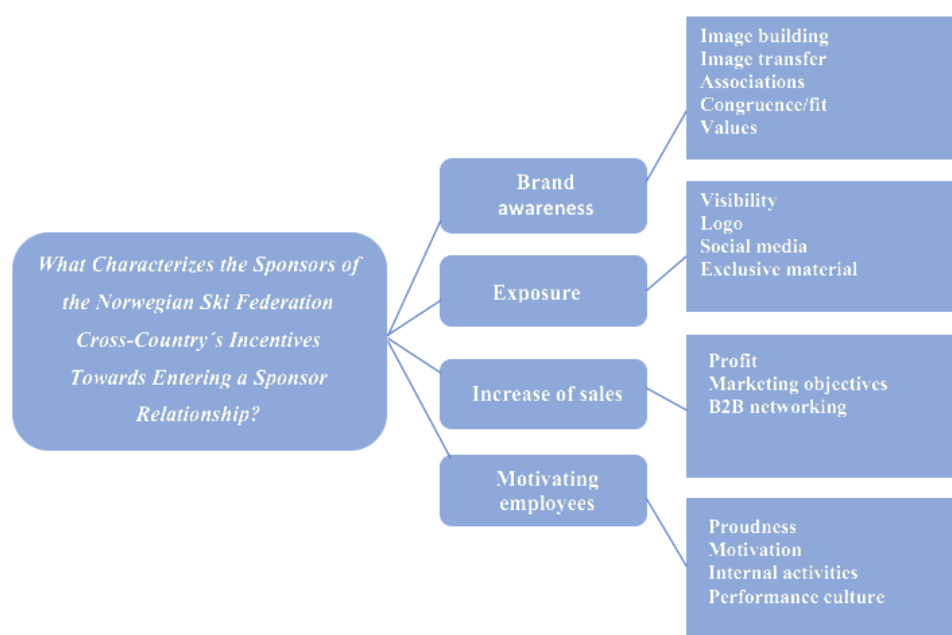


Figure 4.1: Coding of the data material.

## ***4.5 Ethics***

When collecting data, there are several ethical aspects to consider, especially when conducting interviews and dealing with other humans. Veal and Darcy (2014, 107) emphasizes six ethical principles:

- The research should be beneficial to society
- Researchers should be suitably qualified and/or supervised to conduct the research;
- Subjects should take part freely
- Subjects should take part only on the basis of informed consent
- No harm should befall the research subjects
- Data should be honestly and rigorously analyzed, interpreted and reported

When contacting the sponsor managers, I chose to give them a short presentation of who I am, what this research is about and the purpose of the research. They were informed that this research is voluntary, and that they are in a position where they can choose if they want to participate or not (Veal and Darcy 2014). In the e-mail I also explained that I wanted to make the research confidential. These considerations were again repeated ahead of each interview while I at the same time asked for their permission to record the interview.

The researcher competence is explained by Veal and Darcy (2014) as the ability of the researcher to avoid wasting the time of the respondents, abusing the goodwill of the respondents, misleading the users of the research result and damage the reputation of the research organization. Some of the sponsors had as mentioned a very busy schedule. To make sure that I did not waste their time, I let the sponsors decide when they had the time for being interviewed. It was also important for me to show the sponsors my appreciation for helping me with this research. Because the research is confidential, and the results will be presented anonymously there is no risk of damaging the reputation of the sponsors.

Veal and Darcy (2014) argue that there are risks of harm to the respondent in the collection of data for example anxiety during the interviews can occur if the respondent is not sure of how the data is being used. As mentioned I tried my best to ensure that the data would be

used only in this research, and that the recordings would be deleted after translating the interviews. Additionally, the recordings were named by numbers and not any names of individuals or organizations. Hopefully, this made the respondents more secure of me not abusing the data in any way.

According to Veal and Darcy (2014) it is important to be as accurate as possible when analyzing the data and presenting the research result. The respondents' answers has the right should be reported accurately. To achieve precision, I tried my best to be careful when translating and interpreting the audio from the interviews so that the message came out as it was tended to. It can be difficult when translating a fluent conversation from one language to another, but I tried my best to find appropriate words that described the sponsors' thought properly. I have also chosen to use citations when presenting the results in order to portray the sponsors' perceptions as correctly as possible.

## 5.0 Findings

In this section, I will present the findings from the conducted interviews. In the process of analyzing and transcribing the interviews it has been important to present the information in a trustworthy manner, and therefore I have used citations throughout the whole chapter.

The research question is:

*What Characterizes the Sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country's Incentives Towards Entering a Sponsor Relationship?*

### 5.1 Brand Awareness, Brand Image and Congruence

*“We want to increase brand awareness, and we want to be peoples’ “ top of mind” in our category.”*

(Interview 2)

The citation above is an example of what all five sponsors mentioned at some point during the interviews. Image building, brand awareness, exposure and the congruence is extremely important for the sponsors, and are mentioned by the sponsors as one of the main reasons for wanting to sponsor the national cross-country team.

*“We know that the national cross-country team is loved by the Norwegian people, and that creates great long-term values for us. We wish to create a set of associations where the Norwegian people will love our organization just as they love the national cross-country team. We also want to reach out to the grassroots, so that they can use our organization, and so that we can be top of mind in our category.”*

(Interview 5)

This illustrates the fact that the sponsors have a certain expectation of image transfer when sponsoring the national cross-country team. The popularity of the national team is extremely high, and as mentioned earlier in the thesis cross-country skiing is the most popular- and the most liked sport in Norway (SponsorInsight 2018). By associating

themselves with the brand image that the national cross-country team represents, they wish for people to think about their brand in the same way. Top of mind is mentioned in three out of the five interviews when I asked the question “Which effects or inputs do you wish/expect for a successful sponsorship agreement to apply to your organization?”

All five sponsors consider the national cross-country team a valuable brand to be associated with. Despite the doping incidents the sport has seen lately, the sponsors still consider the image valuable. In order to further identify their opinion regarding image building, I asked the question “What matter the most to you: The image/characteristics/attributes of the sponsor object or the performances?”. Four out of the five sponsor managers said that the image was the most important, but the performances contributes to a certain image. One out of the five managers answered that the performances are most important for their philosophy because of their aim to learn from the performance culture that the national cross-country team possesses, and all mentioned the importance that the image of the national cross-country needs to correspond with their values and that the team must represent these values. It seems that all sponsors have a common understanding of the importance of the fit between sponsor and sponsor object.

*“We want the values of the sponsor object to correspond with our organizational values. It is also important that the object represents the broadness of our company. Meaning that it embraces geographic origin, age and gender. It must be possible for everyone to relate to it.”*

(Interview 4)

*“It is important for us that the values of the sponsor object are relevant for our values, and it is important that we can identify with the team we have chosen to sponsor (...). The team is what’s important. We are in a way a national team, meaning that we are local companies from all over Norway that is gathered by the name of the organization. That is why we choose the national team, and not just a local football team or so.”*

(Interview 2)

With the foundation of similar values there is expected that the NSFCC maintain these values in a way so that people will have positive associations with the sponsors. The

sponsors have certain perceptions of what makes a national team. One sponsor mentioned their characteristics with being a local company but with offices all over Norway and by that they feel related to the national cross-country team. This feeling of belonging to a “national team” is so strong that sponsoring a local sports club is not an option. The sponsors want to communicate that their organization also in a way are a national team. Another sponsor emphasizes that they feel connected to the national cross-country team because of the diversity in gender, age and geographical origin. They seem to appreciate that the national cross-country team are based on performances and that all athletes represent different parts of Norway and the Norwegian culture. The sponsor can relate to the national cross-country team because their organization is represented by people with different age, gender and geographic origin.

When I asked, “What is the deal breaker for you in order to back out of a sponsorship agreement?”, the sponsors answered that violation of the contract such as criminal behavior and intentional doping are things that not correspond with their values, and would make them consider backing out of an agreement.

*“Things that are seen as criminal acts, unethical behavior and behavior that contradicts our values would be a reason for backing out.”*

(Interview 5)

*“It is regulated in the contract what we get in return, and what behavior should be accepted. We will not be happy if someone is for example “deadly drunk” with our logo on the jacket.”*

(Interview 2)

These citations say something about the sponsors’ thoughts regarding what is appropriate and what is not. The association of values are the number one reason for why these sponsors have chosen to sponsor the national cross-country team, and all five sponsors have answered that the fit and the values are the most important characteristics when choosing a sponsor object. What they seem to be saying here is if those values are being violated, they would consider backing out.

## 5.2 Exposure and Social Media

Visibility and logo exposure were mentioned by all five sponsors when I asked, “Which effects or inputs do you wish/expect for a successful sponsorship agreement to apply to your organization?”. Furthermore, on the question “Which aim, and goals do you have for the sponsorship agreement?/What do you wish to accomplish?” two of the sponsors answered:

*“We have four main objectives: First one is exposure and visibility. It is important for us to create knowledge and visibility for our brand. (...)”*

(Interview 3)

*“We want to sell our product, by associating with NSFCC, and we want to receive exclusive content that we can use for our channels. Building a good reputation is important for us, and building a good image on a long-term basis for young and old consumers.”*

(Interview 1)

Because of the increase of commercialization of social media, the sponsors said that they expect the NSFCC to be present on social media, and to include them in their promotion. Regardless of what is regulated in the contract related to social media, the sponsors have a certain expectation to be promoted more. Furthermore, the sponsors said that they wish to be mentioned in a natural context when the NSFCC are posting content on social media. By a “natural context” the sponsors mean that they wish for exposure when there is a natural situation to show the product or service, for example drinking a sports drink when thirsty and not just to put the product in front of the camera.<sup>3</sup> The sponsors don’t want typical advertising or product placement, because they think that is a little bit old fashioned.

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<sup>3</sup> This example has nothing to do with the products provided by the sponsor interviewed, but is often seen in many sports when the athletes are being interviewed after a competition.

*“Exposure in social media is one hundred percent crucial for our agreement. Visibility in social media is the most important and most valuable tool for us. We want social media to be an extended effect from TV visibility.”*

(Interview 2)

*“We think it is important for us to use social media and we use our own channels a lot, but it has been difficult for the NSF posting commercial content after the new regulation of marketing in Norway. We don’t push them to post commercial content, but we post content associated with them in our own channels. We are happy to be mentioned by the NSFCC, but we want it to be in a natural context, so the associations are a right fit.”*

(Interview 1)

Due to the new regulation regarding marketing and advertising, the NSFCC are imposed to mark all commercial content, so that the reader easily can tell if it is advertising or not (Forbrukertilsynet 2018). Because of these new rules the sponsors really appreciate the natural context in a social media post. Several sponsors said that it is important for them to be mentioned when it is a natural setting, and in that way the message to the consumers will appear more “real”. By giving the sponsors visibility in a natural context, they also will feel that their values are being upheld and protected.

*“We don’t have a clause that regulates how much attention we should get in social media, but we expect that when we run our CSR community event they would use it for what it’s worth, which they unfortunately have not done. The project is so similar to the values of the NSF and it is sad that they do not give it more attention in their social media. It is very important that they are out there on their social media platforms and act professionally, which I think they do. There has been a good level of quality from the beginning. I think that the context of social media posts needs to be natural, and it is important that they show the different aspects of the whole team, not just the best athletes but that they build the individuals as well. It is also important that they have the ability to see what the market demands when being a sponsor object.”*

(Interview 4)

This particular sponsor is not happy with the way that their CSR project is not included in the NSFCC’s social media content. When I asked the same sponsor manager “Do you get



the visibility that you expect?”, the sponsor manager said that they in general receive the visibility that they need, except for this particular CSR event. The other sponsor managers are in doubt. Some told me that they are happy with the visibility given to them, while others said that it is sometimes hard to measure visibility through a ten second video clip or so. It is also mentioned by several sponsors that the NSFCC can be more creative and offensive in the way they choose to give the sponsors visibility.

Another incentive that is brought up by some of the sponsors is the amount of visibility divided between the sponsors. One of the sponsors said that they think that the NSFCC has too many sponsors and too many logos on the team clothes, and that it is difficult to give all sponsors the visibility that they want. Another sponsor said that there are situations where one sponsor receives more visibility than the other, both in social media and when regarding feedback and communication.

*“I think the sponsors have a mutual vision that we all want the same amount of visibility. We are not interested in being that small sponsor that doesn’t get the same visibility as the big one.”*

(Interview 4)

Furthermore, all five sponsors said something about the importance of exclusive material, but for three of the sponsors it seems more important than the others. It is necessary for the sponsors to have exclusive material both for internal and external use. One of the sponsors said that there has to be a difference for the content posted officially, and the content given to the sponsors.

*“I wish we could get more relevant content and exclusive material for internal use. It sometimes feels like there is a lack of capacity in the NSFCC. (...) As a sponsor we really wish for our employees to see the inside of the team, and we want things to be made exclusively for us.”*

(Interview 4)

*“We really like the exclusive material given to us, but it could be more of it! It is important that we feel exclusivity around some of the material we are given.”*

(Interview 5)

*“It would be nice to have interviews with the athletes in a setting where they have used/using our product, but in a natural setting. Now, we get videos and picture, which is really nice, but they haven’t made something with just us in mind, so that would be great to have. It can easily be done, and it is very cost efficient.”*

(Interview 5)

The sponsors are of a common understanding that making material for social media is cost-efficient and easy to do. Because of that they would like to receive more exclusive material, meaning small video clips of the athletes sending their greetings for internal use, and/or video clips where the athletes use the product or service. The sponsors mentioned that the NSFCC previously made video clips from inside the waxing trailer and from the athletes on their training camp etc., which they said they want more of. They wish to see what goes on behind the scenes.

Furthermore, the sponsors also had something to say about social media behavior. One of the sponsors said:

*“We use social media a lot in our organization, and we feel that the NSF has been a little slow. The challenge for us is that they are not offensive enough. The news that is proper for social media are so fresh, that if you post something a little too late you are just not updated. The NSF need to be better at capturing the right content at the right time.”*

(Interview 3)

The quote above seems to represent all of the sponsors experience with the NSFCC. Even though some sponsors are happy with the visibility and think that the NSF act professional, they have at some point during the interview expressed the need for the NSFCC to be updated and offensive. Regarding the athletes’ behavior the sponsors mutually expect them to be good ambassadors for their organization and their brand. It is also mentioned that the athletes are expected to use their own social media to promote the NSFCC’s sponsors, not just their private sponsors.

*“We want and expect the athletes to use their own channels. Many of them have a large number of followers, so we expect them to be good ambassadors for us, and that they act in a reasonable way on their social media channels. We also expect them to take initiative when there are possibilities for being ambassadors, without the need to be «forced» by us.”*

(Interview 1)

To look at the expectations regarding behavior in social media from a different perspective, I asked the sponsors “What do you think about the saying «All PR is good PR»?”. All five sponsors said that they disagree with the saying, and that their philosophy is slightly different.

*“I think that is wrong. All PR will give visibility, awareness and effect, but for us it is important to be visible for the right reasons. We would rather be unknown than known for things like bad quality, unhappy costumers or doping scandals.”*

(Interview 2)

This question and the answer from the sponsors illustrate that not all behavior in social media is to prefer. Bad behavior will reflect on them as sponsors. One of the sponsors said that good PR is essential for them in order to succeed as a top of mind organization. Another sponsor says that PR should be positive in order to be valuable.

### ***5.3 Increase of Sales***

All sponsors mentioned economical profits at some point during the interviews. Some of them were a little careful to say that increase of sales is an objective for the sponsorship agreement, while some are more straight forward when telling that increase of sales are one of the most important things when going into a collaboration.

*“We wish for the sponsorship to create economic value, and we also wish to see value from logo exposure. (...). On a long-term basis, we wish to see an increase in reputation and brand image, as well as economic profit.”*

(Interview 5)

In interview number 5 the importance of economical increase is highly emphasized and are mentioned as one out of five incentives for wanting to sponsor the national cross-country team. By hoping that the sponsorship will help them becoming top-of-mind in their business category they also hope to see an increase of profit on a long-term basis.

Furthermore, another factor that can create economic value and may increase profit is networking and establish new business partners. Several sponsors mention that they are interested in creating new business partners through the sponsor pool, called Skipool Norway, that the NSF has to offer. In interview number 5 the sponsor pool is also mentioned as on out of five reasons for choosing the national cross-country team as a sponsor object.

*“When we started the sponsorship agreement with NSF we became a part of a big “sponsor family”. That gives us the possibility to make new friends, and we can exchange experience, knowledge and information with the other sponsors. We are also given the opportunity to make new business partners from the B2B network that NSF provides. We are looking forwards to use this network more in the future.”*

(Interview 2)

#### ***5.4 Motivation and Activation of Employees***

It seems that happy, proud and motivated employees is extremely important for the sponsors in order for them to reach success. All five sponsors emphasize the importance of keeping the employees motivated, and another factor important for the sponsors in order to ensure motivation is proudness. When going into a sponsorship agreement the sponsors say that they are looking for sponsor objects that the employees will be proud sponsoring.

*“We want happy employees, and we also want them to be proud of working in our organization (...). We want the employees to feel proud and we want them to perform well and get to know the performance culture that the cross-country team shows. We wish to use some of the elements that they use: Why are they so good, and what can we learn from them? We really want to learn from their performance culture in order to be better at what we do.”*

(Interview 4)

The citation above mentions the performance culture that the national cross-country team shows. By teaching their employees how to give each other positive and negative feedback, they hope to create the same kind of openness in their organization that they experience with the national cross-country team. The sponsors spoke about the success of the national cross-country team as amazing and by adapting their internal performances culture, this particular sponsor hope to learn how to achieve the same success in their field. The other sponsors mentioned factors like motivating their employees and that they want their employees to feel proud of working in the organization. Another sponsor mentioned that their organizational structure is similar to the structure of the cross-country team. Meaning that for them the workers are like athletes and their suppliers are like the supporting system etc.

*“Everyone in the team is important, not just the medalist but also those that waxes the skies and makes food. It wouldn’t work without the support system.”*

(Interview 2)

*“We also want to show that we appreciate every aspect of the organization. It is easy to give the sales representatives the credit for a successful sale, but we have so many employees behind each successful sale we achieve. We want everyone to feel that they are significant for the organization, and we believe that we can learn that from the national cross-country team. We want to adapt that team perspective. Everyone has something to learn from each other. Even the best can learn from those who are not that good, and vice versa.”*

(Interview 4)

The citations above illustrates that the sponsors wish for their employees to feel that everyone is equally meaningful. They want their employees to feel important for the organization in order to maintain the motivation. Some of the sponsors said that they hope to achieve internal motivation by sponsoring the national cross-country team, while two of the sponsors emphasize in particular the importance of all employees to feel equally meaningful.

## **6.0 Discussion**

In this part of the thesis I will discuss my findings and compare it to the previous research and the chosen theoretical framework. To answer the research question, I will discuss three perspectives of the sponsor relationship between the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country (NSFCC) and their sponsors.

### ***6.1 Motives for Choosing a Sponsor Object***

#### **6.1.1 Similarities and Congruence**

Meenaghan (1991) emphasize that sponsor organizations have to look for a sponsor object that has the ability to achieve the organization's goals. In my findings I saw a pattern where all the sponsors found similar values between themselves and the national cross-country team. Cornwell (2014) argue that when things go together they are easier to remember, and it seems like the sponsors are of the same understanding. The sponsors of the NSFCC said that age, gender and geographic origin was important for them in order to associate with the national cross-country team. The sponsors' main reason for sponsoring the NSFCC are in fact the fit between them as sponsor and sponsor object. As Meenaghan (1991) claims, the sponsor and the sponsor object should have a demographically and geographically fit, for easier reaching the target market. As a national team the athletes represent different genders, age and geographic origin. That can in a way relate to the sponsors because they have employees from all over Norway with different age and gender. Some of the sponsors also have a known organizational brand with local offices all over Norway in which they are gathered by the brand. In order for the sponsors of the NSFCC to receive the value of the congruence between the sponsor and the sponsor object (Cornwell 2014) it is important that the organizational values are maintained by the NSFCC. One of the sponsors said that they would not consider sponsoring a local football team or so, because they see themselves as national. On the other hand, the sponsors of the NSFCC are not closely related to sport other than being a sponsor, and in that way the congruence might not be as clear as if they would have product related to sports. The sponsors further said that they hope to receive image transfer from the brand the national team possess. The sponsors also recognize that the national cross-country team is loved by

the Norwegian people and that by being a sponsor they hope to achieve the same associations for their brand. According to Keller (1993) sponsorships can help building brand associations for the sponsors. However, Keller (1993) also emphasize that how the sponsors are remembered in a sporting context depends on the amount of exposure and the degree of receiver involvement. This indicates that if the sponsors get enough exposure they will be associated with the national cross-country team.

### **6.1.2 Maintenance of Contract and Values**

The sponsors also said that a violation of the contract and their values, they would consider backing out of the agreement. However, there has been recent doping incidents were the sponsors has not chosen to back out of their agreements if that is because the incidents happened unintentionally is to be further researched in future studies. There is to consider that the sponsors have chosen to stand by the NSFCC for other reasons as well. As mentioned in chapter 2.1.2 the popularity of the national cross-country team is remarkably high despite recent incidents. The sport is in fact the most popular sport in Norway at the moment (SponsorInsight 2018). One should consider that the sponsors cannot afford to lose the amount of exposure and visibility they get from the NSFCC, which might be a reason for why the sponsors are not backing out of the sponsor agreement. This despite violations have been made to the expectations of what is considered an appropriate sponsorship with values corresponding with the brands values. From the growth in popularity it can be understood that the Norwegian people are unconditionally supporting the national cross-country team and the athletes. If the sponsors were to back out of the agreement when the popularity is so high, they may be less popular in the eyes of the Norwegian population.

## ***6.2 Sponsorship Objectives***

When looking at the objectives for sponsoring the NSFCC the sponsors were also here almost unanimous. Some of the objectives that came up during the interviews were similar to the previous research by Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004), especially increase of sales, increase brand awareness/recognition and motivating employees. A factor also mentioned by Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004) is being involved in the

community. In the interviews with the sponsors the topic of corporate social responsibility (CSR) never came up when talking about objectives, goals and aims. The findings in my research might relate more to the research done by Abratt, Clayton and Pitt (1987) where they found that companies sponsor in order to receive media coverage, promote the brand image, increase brand awareness and gaining new customers.

### **6.2.1 Brand Awareness and Top-of-Mind**

One thing that really stood out in the findings was that the sponsors have a strong aim of being top-of-mind in each of their product category. Keller (1993) emphasize the importance of being top-of-mind and that the consumers tends to choose whoever is in their top-of-mind when feeling confused or having a lack of motivating in the decision-making process. By using image transfer it looks like the sponsors of the NSFCC hope to improve their brand awareness and they seek to influence consumers to recognize and remember their brand. Additionally, four out of the five sponsors said that the image of the team is more important than the athletes' performances. The image of a sport team includes their of course their performances but it also includes the team spirit which is an important component for the sponsors. This shows how important the image is for the sponsors. Lambkin and Meenaghan (1994) also argue that sponsors can be motivated to enter sponsor relationships in order to strengthen or change their brand image.

### **6.2.2 Exposure and Social Media**

Exposure is another objective that stood out from the findings. Henseler, Wilson and Westberg (2011) argue that exposure is the most important factor in a sponsor relationship. The sponsors seem to be of similar understanding where they emphasize the importance of visibility. One of the sponsors even said that exposure in social media is 100 percent crucial for the sponsorship agreement. This is also supported by Abratt, Clayton and Pitt (1987) that found in their research that the most important objective for being a sponsor is the potential of media coverage. Because of the development of social media platforms, there is understandable that the sponsors values exposure highly. It is important for the sponsor that the athletes promote the team sponsors in addition to their private sponsor. Even though the NSFCC say that is one of their activities for providing exposure, the sponsors do not seem happy about the competition they get from private sponsors. It is



also important for the sponsors that the athletes perform as good ambassadors in social media. Accordingly, fans will try to adapt the behavior of their favorite athletes, thus it is important with right kind of exposure (Brown and Hayes 2008).

According to Keller (1993) sponsorships can through exposure contribute to a higher recognition and recall for the sponsor in the sponsor object's market segment. Furthermore, exposure can contribute to entering new markets (Keller 1993). Because the national cross-country team is so popular they receive a lot of media coverage both in a positive and negative manner. All of the five sponsors agreed that not all PR is good PR, and they said that the PR needs to be positive in order to be valuable. The negative part of being a sponsor of an object that receives that much media attention is the negative publicity that sometimes appear. On the other hand, they also receive a lot of good media attention, and that is probably the reason why the sponsors are still present.

### **6.2.3 Objectives Leading to Increase of Sales**

In addition to gaining more brand awareness and more exposure, another objective of importance is increasing sales. As the theory emphasizes increase of sales are the ultimate objective for almost all sponsors (Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013). Because of the valuable brand that the national team possess, there is a possibility that the fans feel motivated to buy services or products from the sponsors of the NSFCC. The sponsors of the NSFCC has the advantage of being the only sponsors of the national team in their product category. This gives the sponsor not just a competitive advantage but also an exclusivity in order to reach new segments for their category (Keller 1993). One of the sponsors said that they would back out of the sponsorship agreement if the NSFCC were to choose another sponsor in the same product category. This illustrates the importance for the sponsors of having the opportunity to becoming top-of-mind in their product category and increasing sales by being the only sponsor in its product category (Cornwell 2014). Even though I experienced that the sponsors were a little more careful to say that they are motivated by increase of sales, they mentioned specific marketing activities that can lead to increase of sales such as brand awareness, visibility and exposure in social media. Those components are highly important in order to achieve increase of sales (Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013), and it can be argued that the sponsors ultimately wish to increase profit.

Additionally, brand awareness and exposure can lead to reaching new markets and consumers (Abratt, Clayton and Pitt 1987). This is also crucial for the increase of sales. The sponsors also mentioned that they are bored with traditional product placement, and rather would see the athletes promote their product or service in a natural setting. By promoting products and services in a natural context the associations will be much clearer and the consumers will see that there is a relation between the product and the setting, which can lead to purchase (Cornwell 2014). This goes along with theories regarding buying intentions where the research supports that consumers are more likely to buy when the sponsor is sponsoring sports (Irwin et al. 2003) The congruence between sponsor and sponsor object can create goodwill and positive associations for the sponsor's brand which also will strengthen the willingness to buy (Cornwell 2014). All of these factors that they wish for the sponsorship to apply to their organization strengthens the belief that the sponsors are motivated by profits.

#### **6.2.4 Motivating Employees**

As a fourth objective the sponsors mentioned was motivating employees. Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004) points out that sponsorships can contribute increasing staff motivation and corporate pride (Irwin et al. 2008, in Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013). It is important for the employees to feel a type of identification and pride in order for them to do a good job. It is though not all organizations that focus their sponsorship in that direction. As Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou (2004) found in their research, organizations that had merged or done other internal changes had more objectives for increasing staff motivation than organizations that hadn't done any internal changes. In this research there are particularly one sponsor that are highly concerned about motivating employees. The sponsor also has a perception that different activities linked to the sponsorship for example skiing classes with professional skiing instructors, can contribute to making the employees feel closer to the sport that their organization sponsor. According to Khan and Stanton (2010) the employees will feel motivation and involvement towards their work-related responsibilities when they have the opportunity to experience sponsorship activities. The theory supports that sponsorships can increase staff relations, but it is important to ask why this aspect is important for sponsors. The sponsor that are highly concerned about motivating employees also say that their organization wish to adapt the performance culture of the national cross-country team which can indicate that

they want to be successful in regards of business purposes. This again can indicate a higher aim of maximizing profits.

### ***6.3 Sponsors' Incentives***

Cornwell (2014), and Ryan and Fahy (2012) explains the evolution of sponsorship with five approaches from pre 1980's until today. The philanthropic approach looked at sponsorship as a gift and the organizations were concerned with enhancing corporate image and gaining goodwill (Cornwell 2014). In this research sponsors have seemed less concerned about corporate social responsibility activities and enhancing corporate image and goodwill, but more concerned with marketing objectives. Irwin and Sutton (1994, mentioned in Apostolopoulou and Papadimitriou, 2004) found in their research that the sponsors were motivated by commercial objectives. In these findings it can be supported that the sponsors are motivated by commercial objectives, but at the same time it can be discussed that sponsoring sport is a way of taking corporate social responsibility.

According to Gammelsæter (2011) it depends on the mind-set that underlines the sponsors behavior. Gammelsæter (2011) discuss if sports have become commercialized. Because of the involvement of stakeholders such as sponsors, investors and media it can be argued that certain sports are more commercial than others. The findings in this research show that the sponsors have a lot of expectations regarding objectives that are based on commercial aims, for example will increase of exposure and brand awareness may be lead to increase of profits. Ryan and Fahy (2012) emphasize that a sponsor can be motivated by more than one sponsorship approach. In this research it looks like the sponsors of the NSFCC have similar priorities as the marked-centered approach. The sponsors of the NSFCC are highly concerned about brand awareness, brand image and activities that give exposure, but not like traditional advertising. These are similar to the aims described in the marked-centered approach by Ryan and Fahy (2012). However, the sponsors are also concerned with the interaction between them and the NSFCC. The interaction is a central part of relationships and networks approach where both parties are dependent on each other. These sponsor relationships can be characterized as dependent on each other because of the perceived value of both parties. Cross-country is expensive to perform on a professional level, and the NSFCC are dependent on sponsors' financial contributions. At the same time the

sponsors are dependent on the national cross-country team in order to achieve their objectives such as brand awareness, exposure, increase of sales and motivating employees.

What surprised me in the process of collecting data was that the sponsors have very similar motives, objectives and incentives. I had expected for them to talk more about corporate social responsibility. It seems that the sponsors of the NSFCC are influenced by a commercial logic (Gammelsæter 2011), where their mind-sets are influenced by incentives of increasing profit. In order to say that a sport is commercial, the stakeholders need to have commercial incentives and they need to have resources that make them capable of making profit (Gammelsæter 2011). In this study we have seen that the sponsors have commercial objectives and they also seem to be influenced by a commercial mind-set and a market-centered approach, and by sponsoring the national cross-country team they are given certain resources in order to increase profit through a set of marketing activities. Whether the sport of cross-country skiing is commercial is to be researched further in future studies, but we can say that the sponsors are influenced by a commercial logic and therefore motivated by commercial objectives and incentives, meaning that they enter sponsorship to achieve objectives that can lead to increase of sales and market share.

## 7.0 Conclusion

Based on the research question “What characterizes the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country’s Incentives Towards Entering a Sponsor Relationship?”, I have in this thesis interviewed five of the most central sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country.

Organizations chooses to enter sponsorship for variety of reasons but in this research the sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country (NSFCC) were almost unanimous in their response. The findings showed that when looking for a sponsor object the sponsors of the NSFCC seek a congruence between them as a sponsor and the sponsor object. Further it was important for the sponsors to identify with the sponsor object. The sponsors value that the national cross-country team represent diversity in age, gender and geographic origin, which generates identification. Additionally, the sponsors wish to adapt a set of associations in order for them to receive the same love and support from the Norwegian people as the national team does.

The sponsors’ objectives stood out as four main objectives: Brand awareness, exposure, increase of sales and motivating employees. The theory supports the findings and indicates that with market-centered objectives as such, the ultimate objective for the sponsors are increase of sales and market share (Greenhalgh and Greenwell 2013). Regarding exposure the sponsors think that social media is crucial in their sponsor relationship. Even though they strongly disagree that all PR is good PR they still wish for more exposure.

Furthermore, I compared the findings of the sponsors’ objectives with the five sponsorship approaches identified by Ryan and Fahy (2012) and found that the sponsors of the NSFCC are in between the marked-centered approach and the relationship and networks approach. The sponsors of the NSFCC also seem influenced by a commercial logic, as they engage in this sponsor relationship in order to see increase of profits. The findings showed a lack of engagement in philanthropic activities, and therefore the sponsors’ incentives indicates that they have a commercial mind-set in this particular sponsor relationship.

## ***7.1 Suggestion for Future Studies***

As mentioned, the sport of cross-country skiing has had some recent incidents with doping and controversial behavior. The sponsors said in the interviews that they would back out of the sponsorship agreement if the athletes would be involved in criminal affairs and doping. Even though they say that these are conditions that would make them back out, they have chosen to continue with being a sponsor despite two doping incidents. In the discussion I emphasize that the sponsors might have a desire to continue being a sponsor because they cannot afford to lose the amount of exposure and media coverage they receive when being a sponsor of the national cross-country team. This topic should be research further in order to say whether this is accurate or not. It would be interesting to investigate if the benefits of being a sponsor is high that incidents of doping are accepted. Another factor to this future research is to which extent the sponsors listen to the Norwegian population and the cross-country supporters. Would the sponsors continued to be sponsors if the national cross-country team were not supported by the Norwegian people? These questions are interesting and would definitely be a topic worth to investigate further.

## ***7.2 Reflections and Criticism***

In the beginning of this research I considered who would be interesting to interview in order to get the information I needed to answer the research question. I received a list from the NSFCC with the contact information to the sponsor managers, and I only contacted the sponsor manager in each organization. In order to get higher validity, I could have reached out to more people in the same organization, for example the marketing managers in addition to the sponsor managers. On the other hand, I wanted to focus on the difference between the sponsors' responses, rather than the variety within each organization. Additionally, I learned that the process with interviewing, analyzing and transcribing the data is a time demanding process. If I had started earlier with the interviews I might would have considered to interview more people from each organization.

In this research I have only studied the relationship between the sponsors and the Norwegian Ski Federation. Even though this study indicates that the sponsors of the NSFCC are motivated by commercial incentives in this particular relationship it is not

necessarily the case in their relationships with other sponsor objects. As mentioned the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country are the most popular sport in Norway right now, and sponsors might have other incentives for sponsoring a sport of such popularity than for sponsoring an object with lower popularity and recognition. Additionally, this research is based on the sponsors' perspective and the research results may be different from the NSFCC's perspective.

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# 9.0 Appendix

## 9.1 Appendix 1, Interview guide for the sponsor interviews in English

### Interview guide for Sponsors of the Norwegian Ski Federation Cross-Country

#### **About the sponsorship agreement in general**

1. What characteristics/attributes are important for a potential sponsorship object to possess when you are to agree upon a sponsorship deal?
2. Why have you chosen to sponsor the national cross-country team?
3. Which aim and goals do you have for the sponsorship agreement?/What do you wish to accomplish?

#### **Outcome of the sponsorship agreement**

1. Which effects or inputs do you wish/expect for a successful sponsorship agreement to contribute with to your organization?
2. In which way can the sponsorship agreement contribute to reaching the organizational goals?
3. What input/effects do you feel that you get in return from the agreement? – And do you have a way to measure the outcome?

#### **The sponsor perspective**

1. What matter the most to you? The image/characteristics/attributes of the sponsor object or the performances?
2. What do you think about the saying «All PR is good PR»?
3. What is the deal breaker for you in order to back out of a sponsorship agreement?
4. What do you think is the most important factor(s) for the experience of good customer care?

#### **Wishes and expectations**

1. What do you think about social media as a tool for exposure in sponsorship agreements?
2. What do you expect regarding athlete's- and the federation's behavior in social media?
3. Do you get the visibility that you expect? (In general and in social media)
4. Do you have any wishes/expectations for the visibility/exposure and the usage of social media?

Do you have any other comments or thoughts?

## 9.2 Appendix 2, Interview guide for the sponsor interviews in Norwegian

### Intervjuguide Sponsorer NSF Langrenn

#### Generelt om sponsoravtalen

1. Hvilke egenskaper/kvaliteter er viktig for dere ved sponsorobjektet når dere skal inngå et sponsorsamarbeid?
2. Hvorfor har dere valgt å sponse langrennslandslaget?
3. Hvilke mål har dere for sponsoravtalen? / Hva ønsker dere å oppnå ved sponsoravtalen?

#### Effekter av sponsoravtalen

1. Hvilke effekter ønsker/forventer dere at en vellykket sponsoravtale skal tilføre bedriften?
2. På hvilken måte kan sponsoratet bidra til at dere når deres mål?
3. Hva slags objektiver/effekter føler dere at dere får igjen fra sponsoravtalen? (eks. Sterkere bilde av merkevaren, økt brand awareness, økt salg etc.)

#### Sponsorens perspektiv

1. Hva betyr mest for dere? Image/personlighet/attributter til objektet dere sponser, eller prestasjoner?
2. Hva tenker dere om utsagnet «All PR er god PR»?
3. Hva skal til for at dere velger å trekke dere ut av en sponsoravtale?
4. Hva synes dere er det viktigste for opplevelsen av god kundepleie?

#### Ønsker for videre samarbeid med NSF

1. Hva tenker dere om bruken av sosiale medier som eksponeringsverktøy i sponsorater?
2. Hva forventer dere rundt utøvere- og forbundets opptreden i sosiale medier?
3. Får dere den synligheten dere ønsker? (generelt- og med tanke på eksponering i sosiale medier)
4. Har dere noen ønsker for synlighet/bruken av sosiale medier?

Andre tanker/kommentarer?