



Master's degree thesis

IDR950 Sport Management

**Match Attendance and “Sportainment”:
The Case of Vålerenga Fotball Damer**

Elmis Eduardo Sierra Salgado

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«I have failed over and over and over again in my life and that is why I succeed. » - Michael Jordan.

The road has been not easy, but I am proud to say that after two challenging years I am presenting my master's thesis to obtain the 'Master of Science in Sport Management' degree. These pages are dedicated to Elka and Luca whom were by my side since the beginning of this endeavor, helping me in any imaginable way.

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To Harald Dolles, my supervisor, for believing in me and my potential in this road.

To Pablo and Tomasa, the ones whom gave me everything...

This is just the beginning!

Abstract

The purpose of this research relies on shedding some light on what could influence the level of attendance for Vålerenga Football Damer in the Toppserien during the 2019 season taking into consideration key elements within the sports & event marketing area such as customer-based brand equity, team identification and *sportainment*. A case study research method was considered as the best way to effectively address the elements previously underscored and an online survey was the preferred technique to gather the data. From 146 valid responses it was found that Vålerenga Damer Vålerenga Fotball Damer as a brand is well positioned among Vålerenga Fotball supporters according to Aaker's (1991) theoretical framework, considering the brand is in the top-of-mind of 64% of the respondents when asked about football teams worldwide and 90.4% when asked for female football teams in Norway. Nonetheless, it has room for improvement in terms of merchandising considering 80.8% showcased their intention of buying club's merchandise but there is not a clear differentiation between the value of the merchandise offered by the male squad versus the offered by the female team, an element that diminishes the purchase intention from the supporters. The results show an overall high level of team identification from the respondents being self-identification with the team, the need to remain up to date on the club's news and the exhibit of satisfaction due to sportive performance the most important elements considered by the respondents. Respondents were less engaged in terms of attending to the stadium, relevance placed in rivalry with other squads and exhibiting symbolic elements. Sportainment has an impact on fan's intention of attending to Vålerenga Fotball Damer matches, however, respondents do not associate the concept as related with the stadium atmosphere and the overall fan experience.

Keywords: Sport marketing, Sports consumer behavior, Stadium attendance

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1.0 Introduction

Vålerenga Fotball Damer (Vålerenga Football Ladies in English) is the women's venture for Vålerenga Football, one of the oldest sport clubs from the Norwegian football located in Oslo. The female football squad has been competing on the top of the women's Norwegian football over the last 12 years (Vålerenga Fotball, 2019). Since 2017, the team has been playing at Intility Arena, one of the newest and biggest stadiums on the league, with a total capacity of 16.500 spectators.

Since its promotion to second division in 1998, the team have had a good sportive performance. In fact, immediately after obtaining the promotion to the Toppserien made their first appearance in the cup in 2000 (Vålerenga Fotball, 2019). In 2019, the elite squad was able to reach the second spot finish at the Toppserien and a maiden UEFA Women's Champions League qualification, also its minor divisions (the Under 16th and Under 19th) had a good sportive performance reaching their respective cup finals during the 2019 season. However, the good sportive performance showed by the club is not being followed by a massive stadium attendance.

In Norway, the average attendance for the women's elite division (Toppserien) in the last three seasons (2017, 2018 and 2019) was 267 fans per match, which reflects a moderate growth of 8% year on year (FBref.com). Even though teams like Vålerenga and Sandviken were able to attract more than 500 fans to their home matches in 2019, mostly as a consequence to their marketing initiatives as well as their on-field performance (Toppfotball Kvinner, 2019), those numbers are not enough to position female's football as a first option in the Norwegian consumer's mind. Norwegians have access to a variety of TV broadcasters and OTT platforms that provide a wide range of sportive events, that could minimize the media impact of the Toppserien. Among those sports products, the male's English Premier League it is positions as the most popular football tournament within football fans in Norway (Mitten, 2019).

It is important to recall that the relevance of stadium attendance relies not only as a direct source of revenue from match day operations, but also in its influence on the club's brand equity which have a direct impact on the overall finances of the organization. From a marketing perspective, the

quality of a sport event is measured through its capacity to attract larger audiences that co-create a festive atmosphere into the sport venue. Hence, a high-capacity stadium makes a sport event much more attractive and profitable to broadcast due to its mass appeal; this automatically increases the market value of the product (and the brand) for broadcasters and sponsors, whom through the reach of the event are able to promote their own brands to a much wider audience.

Considering, in modern sports the main source of income is the revenue from the sales of media rights, representing in some cases 45% of the total income (Deloitte, 2019), the attractiveness of a football club as a commercial venture is linked to its capability to attract and engage with the masses. Therefore, stadium attendance it is not only a source of revenue from ticket sales, but it is also a driver for other revenue (Kringstad et al. 2018), and undoubtedly a cornerstone in sport marketing strategies. However, there is a lack on scientific research addressing the topic of stadium attendance in Norwegian female football matches even though there has been an increase in filling this gap from club's marketing departments as it happens with Vålerenga Fotball Damer.

1.1 Research Questions

This said, and taking into consideration 1., The low levels of attendance to football matches of Vålerenga Football Damer; 2., The interest presented by the marketing department of Vålerenga Fotball and 3., The gap of scientific research in addressing stadium turnout in Norwegian female football matches, the purpose of this research relies on shedding some light on what could influence the level of attendance for Vålerenga Football Damer in the Toppserien. Hence, the main research question is:

“What are the key elements that influence the level of attendance for Vålerenga Football Damer in competitive matches from the Toppserien during the 2019 season?”

According to the literature there are several factors that have an influence in stadium attendance which can be grouped into four main categories: 1., *Economic*, 2., *Sociodemographic*, 3., *Attractiveness of the game* and the 4., *Residual preferences* (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989). Within game attractiveness and residual preferences, the concept of *sportainment* arises in the literature

as a crucial feature in modern sports because it merges the dimensions of sport and entertainment by emphasizing the characteristics of the auxiliary features of a sport product, providing a set of unique experiences and emotions that helps to sell a sporting event (Richelieu, 2016; John et al., 2007; Hall et al., 2010). As such, a special attention will be placed in this topic within the development of this research.

The level of *team identification* that fans might have with the club has been depicted as another conditioning factor for fan attendance. Using the definition provided by Wann & Branscombe (1993, pp. 2) team identification could be described as “the extent to which a fan feels psychologically attached to a team” and this psychological connection can be linked to different elements such as: 1., *Emotional achievement* and 2., *Self-connection and intimate commitment*.

This being said and considering team identification, sportainment and brand equity might have some influence over the creation of the atmosphere at the stadium, the sub-research questions are as follow:

1. What is the current customer-based brand equity status of Vålerenga Fotball?
2. What is the level of team identification of Vålerenga’s fans with the female team?
3. What is the relationship between *sportainment* and attendance within Vålerenga’s fans?

1.2 Structure

This research project is organized as follows: The socio-historical context in which Vålerenga Damer is immersed will be provided in the next chapter. Next, a literature review covering the existing research on *sport marketing*, *branding* and *stadium attendance* take into account the possible factors that might impact on the level of attendance on sport venues in different scenarios around the world. Chapter 4 depicts the methodology used to fulfill the research purpose, while chapter 5 outline the data collected and research findings. Finally, an analysis of the results linked to the research questions, followed by a conclusion and some recommendations can be found on chapter 6 and 7.

2.0 Setting The Context For Research

2.1 Oslo – A multicultural city

Oslo is the institutional epicenter of Norway. With a population of 690,335 inhabitants, the city is recognized for its trade, banking, and shipping industry although in the last decade has been making a transition as an innovation hub across Europe. It was also ranked number one in terms of quality of life among European large cities in the *European Cities of the Future 2012* report by fDi magazine (Craig, 2012).

In terms of population, the city has been growing in record rates in the last decades, making it the fastest growing city in Europe during the early 2000's. According to Statistics Norway (*Statistik sentralbyrå* in Norwegian and SSB from now on) this growth experienced in Oslo, as well as in the rest of the country, is a direct consequence of the high birth rate, however and since 2004, net immigration has had a major impact on population growth than fertility surplus (Modig, 2019). In fact, in Oslo one in every three inhabitants is an immigrant him-/herself or born in Norway to immigrant's parents.

As we can see in the pie chart (Fig. 1), people from Africa, Asia, Turkey and South & Central America represent almost 22 percent of Oslo's entire population, being followed by nationals from Eastern Europe by 8.1 percent representing the largest groups living in the capital city, while immigrants from other Nordic countries as well as Western Europe, North America and Oceania represents altogether a 6 per cent of the city cultural diversity (Modig, 2019, pp. 3-5). As expected, this cultural flow has been reshaping the city from its grounds, presenting challenges for the integration of immigrants, job competition between migrant and native workers, and fiscal costs associated with provision of social services to the migrants which includes the salary gap between native workers versus immigrants. According to the SSB (Modig, 2019, pp. 5) the average income for Norwegian workers was around NOK 372,000 (around EUR 36,600) per year, while immigrants earns a median of NOK 289,100 per year (around EUR 28,300 per year).

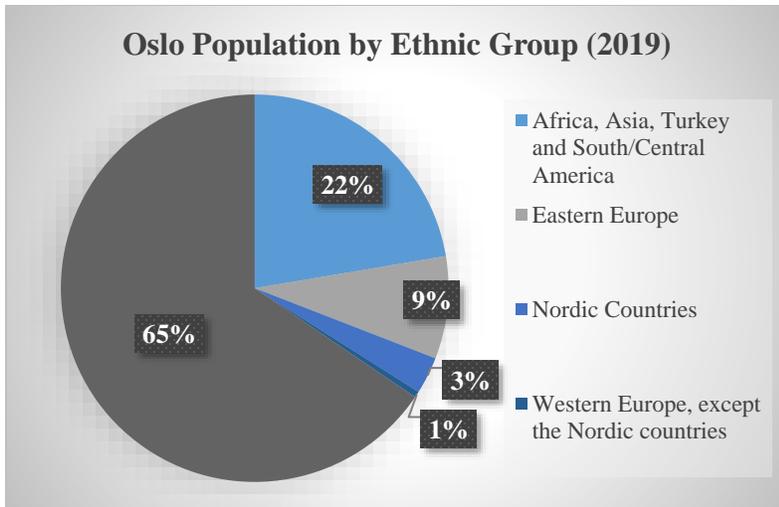


Figure 1. Ethnic Distribution in Oslo. Source: Modig, 2019

These considerable differences regarding income can be also reflected in the patterns of habitation across the city. As Viggo Vestel (2004) depicted in his book about the central aspects of social interactions in a multicultural low-class suburb outside Oslo, the city has traditionally been geographically divided in two halves by the Aker River: the East side on one hand and the West side on the other (See Fig. 2). The West side of Oslo has been historically linked to wealthiness and the abundance of the bourgeoisie dominated by larger private residences as well as semi-detached houses (Vestel, 2004, pp. 16), while the East side is depicted as the working-class area of the city where a mix of old and more recent suburbs with large blocks run by different cooperatives defined the landscape of the area.



Figure 2. Geographical Distribution of Oslo. Based on Google Maps (2020), amended

Is precisely in the East side of Oslo that *Vålerenga Idrettsforening* (Sports Association) has its roots. Since its establishment, back in 1913, the organization has been identified as a working-class sport organization where in the beginning aimed for different sport activities such as football, skiing, athletics and wrestling. Its “headquarters” are currently located at Intility Arena, a medium size venue with a capacity of 16,556 spectators placed in the eastern neighborhood of Valle-Hovin in Oslo. In the next segment the focus will be placed into the history of Vålerenga Fotball and its connection with the East side of the city.

2.2 Vålerenga Fotball: The pride of Oslo

Vålerengens Sports Association was founded on July 29, 1913 in the backyard of Vålerenggata 29 at the East side of Oslo. Since its foundation, Vålerenga has aimed for creating an identity of a fiercely organization strongly attached to the socio-cultural patterns of the capital city and its working-class background.

In its early beginnings the club was able to assemble a pretty competitive team, attracting a decent number of supporters to their games. However, it is important to say that the sportive performance was not a constant, and early ups and downs across the league became a trademark of the club that still remains. In fact, it wasn't until the end of World War II that Vålerenga was capable to position among Norway's best football teams.

The “golden era” of Vålerenga Fotball could be placed in the first half of the 1980's where the team won its first cup title (back in 1980), and the league championship in 1983 and 1984 respectively. After that, the club has been once again in a rollercoaster in terms of sportive performance. Since 2004 until 2012 the team missed several league titles and faced uneasy losses from different European competitions including the 2nd qualifying rounds to the UEFA Champions League. Nonetheless, in 2017 and despite several years of financial struggles, Vålerenga managed to move, in September 2017, into their new built stadium, Intility Arena (Fig. 3). This was an historic moment for the club if considering the club spent 104 years without owning a home stadium (Wikipedia, 2019). Intility Arena is the newest stadium built in Norway so far, and with its 216 floodlights is the first new stadium in Norway to qualify for a UEFA's new floodlights

regulations (UEFA, 2016), it also possess a high standard in sound system with BOSE PA system with 72 speakers as well as a 5G Wi-Fi internet connectivity provided by Telenor Inpli through CISCO® equipment all around the facilities (Vålerenga Fotball, 2019).



Figure 3. Intility Arena 3D model. Retrieved from: Intility.no

In terms of organizational values, Vålerenga aims on making Oslo a better city to live by creating commitment and motivation for everyone, defining themselves as “offensive and optimistic” whom put a hard emphasis on the pride in representing the city of Oslo, its diversity and its history as a “*bohemian*” (working-class) club (Vålerenga Fotball, 2019). Having these values in mind, in the early 1990’s the organization vouched for the creation of a female’s squad: Vålerenga Fotball Damer.

As previously mentioned, Vålerenga Damer kept a low profile on women’s football until the late 1990’s when, in 1998, the team moved up to 2nd division and immediately after obtaining the promotion to the Toppserien made their first appearance in the cup in 2000 (Vålerenga Fotball Damer, 2019). Nowadays, the team is well positioned in the Toppserien and its minor divisions: the Under 16th and Under 19th have had exceptional sportive performance, reaching their respective cup finals during the 2019 season while the elite squad has made its path to the UEFA Women’s

Champions League qualification. However, the good sportive performance showed by the club is not being followed by a massive stadium attendance. By the 2019 season a median of 507 supporters visited Intility Arena. Therefore, in the following chapter the possible causes that might affect the level of attendance at Intility Arena will be prompted through the scope of anthropological, sociological and marketing literature.

3.0 Developing The Theoretical Framework For Research

As Machi & McEvoy (2012) explain, the literature review of a dissertation “presents a logically argued case founded on a compressive understanding of the current state of knowledge about a topic of study”. Therefore, it should be representative of the historical and contemporary status of the topic, population, and related constructs (Machi & McEvoy, 2012, pp. 3).

In this chapter will be presented a literature review that will aim to examine the existing body of research addressing the topics on branding sport products and the elements that condition stadium attendance stressing on team identification, facility atmospherics and sportainment as crucial fields to understand stadium attendance within the context of female football.

3.1 Branding - Vålerenga Fotball Damer

“A brand is what people think of you when they are thinking of you” (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019, pp. 29), is perhaps a very simple, however, accurate definition of what a brand is.

In sports, an outstanding organization is the one which identity can provide direction and meaning through its brand, establishing a relationship with its fans while becoming a cultural symbol of the community they represent. This relationship is established mainly through the *branding* process and more specifically by the management of the sport product as a strategic leverage that can help the organization to create value while providing unique experiences to their fans (Leach & Szymanski, 2015).

In that regard, Vålerenga is a well-known brand in Norway due to its history, awareness and previous sportive success. Nonetheless, when thinking about the female squad a doubt might arise whether this squad as a brand is strong enough to become a cultural symbol in the Oslo community, if only considering the low levels of attendance in the stadium that do not relates to the good performance that the team have had in the recent years.

It must be said that this is not an exclusive concern from the Norwegian female's football. In fact, full stadiums in female football matches are not precisely the case within the European context. Due to a change on the schedule and a congested market, where there is plenty of football already available to watch, the development of a competitive and attractive women's football league could be depicted as quite of a challenge for sport managers. Even emblematic organizations such as Atletico Madrid, Juventus or Chelsea are struggling to attract more than a thousand fans to their venues during their regular seasons (The British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).

But why people are not coming to the stadium to watch female football? Especially in a long-standing football and sportive culture as the Norwegian one, that has been globally recognized for gender equality? One of the reasons could be that consumers are immersed in a crowded market where the internet has provided a pool of entertainment options that dimes the appeal of women's football in Norway. Additionally, women's football is perceived, according to UEFA's *Growing your Club* report (Bradley, 2019), as a "boring" spectacle by Norwegians, leading the analysis once again towards brand management.

As Bauer et al., (2005) sustained, the value of a brand is measured according to its capability of creating unique experiences to the consumer and for its capacity to provide direction and meaning to a community through its identity. Despite its growth during the last 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France, and the outstanding performance of the Portland Thorn's from the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) in the United States (The British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019), the perceived value of female football as an entertainment option is, perhaps, not attractive enough to bring the Norwegian consumer to the stadium as the UEFA report sustained. In the last three seasons (2017, 2018 and 2019) the Toppserien as the elite tournament of women's football in Norway has been able to allure an average of only 267 supporters to the venues, presenting a shy growth of 8% year-on-year.

This situation raises the question if the construction of the brand for female football leagues, as well the administration of certain female football squads, are being effectively managed by the Norwegian football organizations. Indeed, when fans identify themselves with their team as a brand, and they are proud enough to share their engagement with the organization it could be

reflected, among other things, by having full stadiums and consuming team's merchandising whenever is possible (Desbordes, 2019).

However, this symbolism and sense of belonging is not casual. The connection between the organization and its fans is built through the branding process by providing attributes to the supporters that transcend the results on the pitch; in other words the branding process develops a psychological connection between the organization and the fans that goes beyond what happen on the field (Leach & Szymanski, 2015). In that regard, successful organizations are those whom effectively manage its brand by the understanding of the close relationship between the two dimensions of its own brand equity: the *customer-based brand equity* and the *financial-based brand equity*. Nonetheless, and before going into these two dimensions it is important to define what is first, the branding process, and second the concept of brand equity as it is being the main topic to be addressed in this segment.

According to Shank & Lyberger (2014, pp. 276) the branding process could be defined as the systematic operation of building a brand to allow an organization to distinguish and differentiate itself from all others in the marketplace. Once again, a brand is what people think of you when they are thinking of you (Richelieu, 2019). This process follows a path that starts with making consumers in the desired marketplace to recognize and remember the brand name (*brand awareness*) and then help them to interact to the brand by creating a set of beliefs which in turns will shape their attitude towards the brand (*brand image*).

Once the interaction between the brand and the consumer is established, it develops what is called *brand equity*, or the value that a branded product has in the marketplace if compared with its generic equivalent (Shank & Lyberger, 2014, pp. 277). However, it must be said that this is the econometric and purely financial approach. Other authors (Kotler, 2002; Hakala et al., 2012; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991) sustain that brand equity goes beyond the financial benefits and it also involve the psychological advantages that brands provide to its consumer. Hence brand equity could be interpreted as a dyad for both customers and companies that, if worked correctly, present a unique selling proposition (USP) within the sport industry. Therefore, the *customer-based brand equity* is presented in the literature (Kotler, 2002; Hakala et al., 2012; Keller, 1993; Aaker, 1991)

as the benefits that a consumer associates with the consumption of the brand in terms of symbolic utilities. On the other hand, the *financial-based brand equity*, as previously mentioned, refers to the economic value that brand own such as return on investment and profits (Richelieu & Desbordes, 2013). Once again, both dimensions are logically interlinked and even if modern sports seek profit and financial stability, the financial-based brand equity shall not exist without a strong customer-based brand equity, as the customers decide if endorse or not the team by engaging with what the organization is selling.

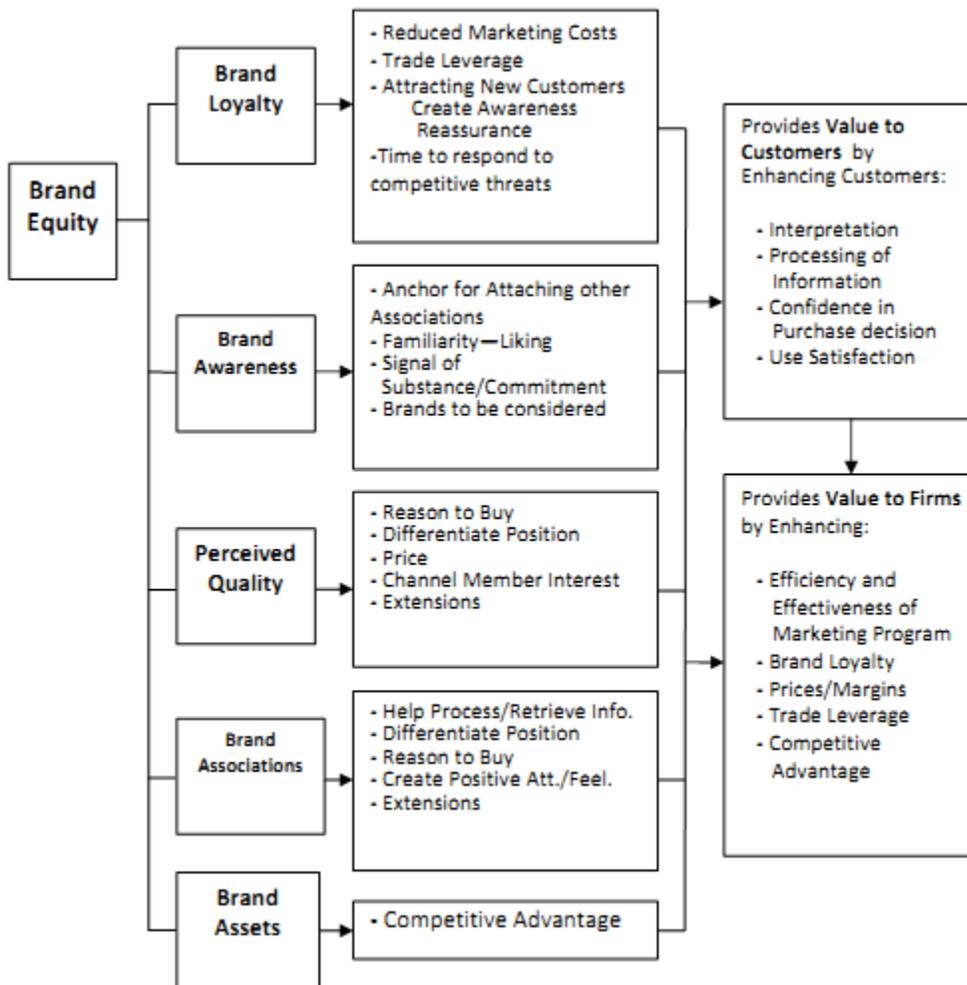
3.1.1 Estimating Customer-Based Brand Equity

Authors such as de Chernatony & Cottam (2006) propose that rather than one comprehensive methodology to evaluate brand equity, there are a variety of *financial* and *non-financial* measures that collectively provide the necessary insight. Some authors (Agarwal et al., 1996) sustain that there are two different approaches to assess brand equity: direct approach and indirect approach.

The direct approach aims to assess the added value of the brand, while the indirect approach tries to identify the potential sources of brand equity (Farjam & Hongyi, 2015). In this research, the focus will be placed in the indirect approach following a variation of Aaker (1991) theoretical framework. This model suggests that correct top-of-mind recall, free associations, ratings of evaluations, and beliefs of associations are one of the crucial measurements when understanding the dimensions of brand equity. When these factors are properly assessed, brand managers are in the capacity to invest in growing these intangible assets which raises competitive advantages and drives brand wealth (Yoo et al., 2000).

Aaker (1991) provided the most comprehensive brand equity models by taking into account five decisive determinants for brand equity: 1., Brand loyalty; 2., Name awareness; 3., Perceived quality; 4., Brand associations (Brand Image) and 5., Other proprietary brand assets (i.e. patents and brand rights). This said, the characteristics of the determinants for brand equity will be briefly explained in the following page.

Figure 4. Aaker's Customer-Based Brand Equity Framework (Aaker, 1991, pp. 270)



- **Brand Loyalty:** generates value by reducing marketing costs and leveraging trade.
- **Brand Awareness:** is defined as ‘the ability of a potential buyer to recognize or recall that a brand is a member of a certain product category’ (Aaker, 1991). It further affects choice by influencing purchase decision
- **Perceived Brand Quality:** provides value by providing a reason to buy, differentiating the brand, attracting channel member interest, becoming the basis for line extensions, and supporting higher prices

- **Brand Associations:** also known as brand image, it is anything linked in customer's memory to a brand. Associations are key to help customers process or retrieve information and it is closely linked to the psychological attachment with a brand as well as with the purchase decision process
- **Brand assets:** refers to patents and other legal resources, such as patent and trademarks, which can provide strong competitive advantage in case competitors may want to confuse the customer by using similar brand image elements than our brand. It also refers to channel relationships that can be indirectly controlled by the brand

In the context of this research a variation of Aaker's model will be used to assess customer-based brand equity, in which its logic will be discussed in the methodological chapter. It is important to mention that Aaker's approach is often criticized as it does not offer an established method, but a theoretical framework. This makes it hard to reconstruct and interpret results (Ströbel & Woratschek, 2013). This said, in the next segment, the concept of the *sport product* will be assessed as a key constituent of branding, serving as a prelude to the elements that influence stadium attendance.

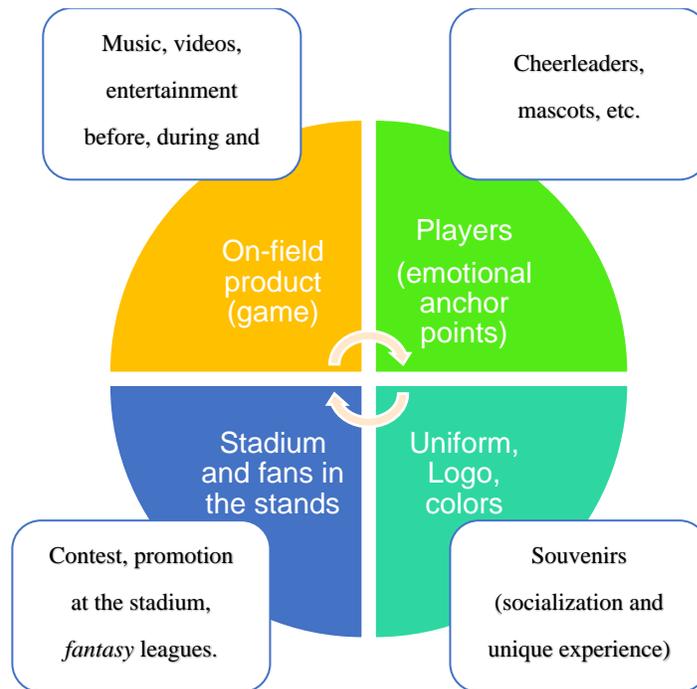
3.1.2 The Sport Product

Considering Vålerenga Fotball Damer has been under the shadow of a hundred-years-old organization, it could be inquired if the female team as a brand remains under the scope of amateurism in the eyes of fans and that may diminish the value of the sport product reducing its value towards Vålerenga's supporters. In that regard, an essential concept to understand the dynamics of the branding process and its effects on stadium attendance is undoubtedly the *sport product*. The sport product comprises two components: 1., the core and 2., auxiliary features (Fig. 5) that provides tangible and intangible benefits to the customer which helps them to differentiate themselves from their competitors within the marketplace.

The *core* relates to the product on the field (players, uniform, fans and stadium) while the *auxiliary features* refers to the elements that enhance the sport experience without taking over of the on-

field product (Richelieu, 2019). Getting back to the auxiliary features that enhance the sport experience and the perception of a sport brand, attendance appears as a fundamental component not only as a catalyst in creating emotional bond but also as a key financial tool to drive revenues.

Figure 5. The components of the sport product. Source: Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019:31



In that sense, Hansen & Gauthier (1989) summarize attendance drivers into four general categories: 1., *Economic*, 2., *Sociodemographic*, 3., *Attractiveness of the game* and what they called 4., *Residual preferences* which includes scheduling of the games, fan accommodation and so forth. In the following section this four categories will be thoroughly examined, defining as well the notion of *Sportainment* through the lenses of Richelieu’s (2016) theoretical framework, considering the relevance of the concept as a driver for stadium attendance.

3.2 Elements Conditioning Stadium Attendance

Professional sport organizations have different sources of revenue to cover its costs and generate profit aiming to maintain at a high level of competitiveness. According to Shropshire & Rosner

(2004), match day; broadcasting rights; and commercial activities are listed as the main sources of revenue for sport clubs/franchises. Hence, understanding the forces that drive fans to attend to a sport venue is a fundamental task for both sport managers and sport marketers if considered the relevance of attendance as one of the primary revenue sources for many professional sport organizations.

In that sense, Desbordes explained through “The virtuous circle of professional sport financing” (Desbordes, 2019, pp. 175), that the commercial value of a sport event relies in its capacity to portrait itself as a high-quality product through the exhibit of a full venue and its subsequent festive atmosphere. A full stadium has a psychological impact in stakeholder’s viewpoint and make the event much more profitable to broadcast which, at the same time, increase its market value due to its proven potential to reach larger audiences. And by reaching big audiences the sport product rises the interest of sponsors whom perceive the sporting event as a good occasion to boost its brand awareness and capitalize on the value of the event itself (Desbordes & Tribou, 2007).

As mentioned, an interesting fact about sport stadium attendance is its close relationship to its perceived brand value, that is mostly boost by media coverage, but also how its brand value is conditioned by how many people attend to the games. Coming back to the sport product definition and by having a closer look to match-day experiences, it can be assumed that stadium attendance, as an auxiliary feature, is heavily influenced by branding but it also affects the way the sport product is perceived by the consumer (Kyu-soo & Harshaw, 2018; Mykletun & Rumba, 2014; Keller, 1993).

But why a full stadium is so engaging in stakeholder’s eyes? The answer relies on what is called the *sport atmosphere*, a concept defined by Uhrich & Benkenstein (2010, pp. 216) as the “preferential affective state that spectators attribute to the idiosyncratic environmental features of a sport stadium”. In other words, is the psychological impact that human crowding has on spectators’ mind.

In this regard, some researchers (Shannon & Turley, 1997; Elias & Dunning, 1986; Palmero & Price, 2015; Ballouli & Bennet, 2014; Ballouli & Heere, 2015) have emphasized human crowding

and human interaction as essential items to spectator enjoyment, and therefore, to the brand value of a sport club/team. Among those authors, Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning (1986) through the sociological approach, explain how and why the human interaction happens within the sport landscape and what are the benefits that individuals get from it on what they called the *three basic elements of leisure*: 1) sociability, 2) motility and 3) imagination/emotional arousal. It is important to acknowledge that the authors analyzed not only the supporter's perspective but also the whole sportive ecosystem including practitioners, fans and related institutions in order to explain how leisure and modern sports, after the Industrial Revolution, influenced the structure of our modern society. However, the focus in this study is set on explaining how socialization and human interaction impact in spectator enjoyment and matchday attendance.

Having said that, Elias & Dunning (1986, pp. 292) argue that sport, as a leisure activity, produces pleasurable emotional arousal to individuals through the company of others without any obligations apart from those which are taken on voluntarily, unveiling the sociability element of sports (Elias & Dunning, 1986; Dunning, 2013).

By *motility* Dunning (2013, pp. 26) reflect on certain activities, called by Csikszentmihalyi (1975) as *flow activities*, that provides immediate sources of satisfaction by the movement *per se*, such as dancing or jumping while signing altogether with the crowd in the context of, for example, a football match. Last but not least, the imagination & emotional arousal element, refers to the mimesis of a set of different emotional state that people might experience in serious critical situations such as fear, horror, hatred or extreme excitement, that are institutionalized and controlled in sports in a way that blended “with a kind of delight” (Elias & Dunning, 1986, pp. 121). This mimesis combined with the sense of belonging developed by the sport organization and nurtured by human interaction, place the experience in the stadium as a unique stage for social catharsis. In this respect, scientists from University College London (UCL) measured heart rates and sweat glands of audience members as they watched both theatre productions and films, finding that heart rates go up and down with the narrative arc of a story and that the emotional stimuli are more intense during live shows (Alberge, 2020).

Joseph Devlin, professor of cognitive neuroscience at UCL, told the Guardian newspaper: ‘A big part of the live performance is that we are fundamentally a social species. Any time you go to a live performance, whether it’s a concert or a sport event, people often talk about the energy or the buzz of it’ (The Ticket Business, 2020). Thus, these perspectives are consistent with Shannon & Turley (1997), and Palmero & Price (2015) assumption that crowd and perceived crowding are crucial elements in atmospherics and have a main impact on the feelings of pleasure and desire to attend, but also to stay or leave an event.

It is nevertheless important to realize that besides human crowding and the embedded socialization characteristic of sport events there are also other factors that influence stadium attendance. Internal factors such as personality, perception, learning and attitudes need to be considered for consumer understanding. In addition to internal factors, social or external factors, such as culture, reference groups and family, also influence consumer buying decisions. Those elements will be seized in this research by following the Hansen & Gauthier (1989) theoretical framework that group those factors into four main categories: 1., *Economic*; 2., *Sociodemographic*; 3., *Attractiveness of the game* and the 4., *Residual preferences* as a way to approach the subject.

3.2.1 Economic and Sociodemographic

From this perspective, the *economic viewpoint* traditionally focuses on the relevance of economic variables in sports attendance (Lera-López & Rapun-Garate, 2011), and some of them take the standard theory of demand as their starting point. As is generally known, the standard theory of demand states that the quantity demanded of a good or service depends upon the price of the good in question, the prices of other goods, consumer income and consumer preferences (Feehan, 2006).

Moreover, Hansen & Gauthier (1989) reflects on the different studies that contemplate the economic variables that might influence attendance. Here, analysis towards the effect of ticket price (Bird, 1982; Demmert, 1973; Fillingham, 1977; Noll, 1974; Siegfried & Eisenberg, 1980, per capita income (Bird, 1982; Hart et al., 1975; Noll, 1974), substitute forms of entertainment (Demmert, 1973; Hart et al., 1975; Hill, et al., 1982) as well as the availability of alternative sport attractions in the same market (Demmert, 1973; Fillingham, 1977; Hart et al., 1974; Noll, 1974),

are summarized and explained to set the foundations on the possible factors that might influence people's intentions on attending sports events. Among the key findings displayed in the literature, the existence of alternative forms of entertainment, the availability of multiple sport attractions (media coverage) and increases in the ticket price are identified to be negatively related with spectator game attendance.

Regarding ticket price, attendance is typically assumed as a function of the ticket price, from which the supply and demand curve may vary depending on the income per capita and if it is considered as a normal or an inferior good (Breuer & Wicker, 2008; Lera-López & Rapún-Gárate, 2011). As recall, relationship between income and demand is directly proportional, therefore, if ticket prices are considered as a normal good an increase in income might result on a rise on ticket demand, whereas if ticket prices are classified as an inferior good it will be a negative relationship between consumer income and ticket demand. In other words, if ticket price is considered as an inferior good then when the salaries go up, the demand of tickets will go down, therefore, affecting the number of people attending to the matches.

If considering the average income for Norwegian workers was around NOK 372,000 (around EUR 36,600) per year, while immigrants earn a median of NOK 289,100 per year (around EUR 28,300 per year) in 2019, then understanding which is the perception of the supporters on the value of Vålerenga's women's ticket price, might help to explain their behavior and their intention to come to the games. However, it is widely recognized that (economically speaking) attendance is also linked to the prices exhibited in the venue regarding complementary goods. Therefore, making an approach on supporter's perception on complementary goods such as travel costs (to and from the stadium) and the price of participation-related goods (i.e. merchandise and refreshment) is also vital to shed some light in the subject.

On the other hand, sport television coverage has been reported to have a significant and negative impact on match attendance (Allan & Roy, 2008; Allan, 2004; Baimbridge et al, 1996; Buraimo, 2008). In fact, literature specialized on European football argue that live media coverage of football and the exposure and revenue that can generate, give broadcasters a significant amount of power to determine when and where the matches will be played (Forrest et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, Jenkins et al. (2014) found, by comparing how the average attendance at televised games versus their average attendance per day overall the entire season (within the Scottish Premiership) that, as a matter of fact, the schedule of the game and availability of the games on T.V. have a mixed impact on match attendance. Their results proved that games broadcasted at the beginning of the week will return poor attendance, whilst games played on the so called ‘more traditional football days’ (weekends) have been shown to have greater attendance levels (Jenkins et al, 2014).

In this respect, and within the Norwegian context, Kringstad et al. (2018) focused their efforts on analyzing the effects of live broadcasting, match scheduling and other factors on stadium attendance in the top division of Norwegian male football (commercially known as *Eliteserien*). Based on a fixed effects regression model on attendance at match levels and covering the period 2005 to 2011 the authors found that live broadcast domestic matches on ‘free TV’ positively affects stadium attendance, however, the increasing number of foreign matches from the big-five leagues (Premier League, La Liga, Ligue 1, Bundesliga and Serie A), act as a substitute product and, therefore, negatively affecting on match-day attendance.

In economics, a substitute good is a product or service a consumer sees as the same or similar to another product, providing more choices for consumers, who are then better able to satisfy their needs (Kenton, 2019). Thus, in this case the big-five leagues represented a viable option for football fans if the benefits of attending to the *Eliteserien* games are not attractive enough to supporters.

With regard to *sociodemographic factors*, the size of the area, ethnic population and geography are pointed by the literature (Hart et al., 1975; Hay & Thueson, 1986, Siegfried & Eisenberg, 1980; Lu & Pitts, 2004; Buraimo, 2006; Watanabe & Cunningham, 2020) as core factors that have effects on fan’s intention to go to the stadium.

Thereby, in professional teams and sport leagues worldwide, population size is perceived to have a positive effect on attendance if considered, once again, the economists’ consumer theory which

states that bigger markets possess higher demand for products than smaller markets. As a matter of fact, Buraimo et al., (2006) found, within the English Premier League, that teams located in bigger markets can generate higher gate attendances than those in smaller markets, but also that competition between clubs for the fan base in a particular region is a partially offsetting influence. Regarding competition between clubs, the common assumption is that the greater the number of competing clubs in a specific area, the lower will be matchday attendance.

On the other hand, ethnic population is a fundamental component to grasp the idea of engagement of fandom with a team or sport organization, and it is closely related with the notion of *team identification* and branding. Using the definition provided by Wann & Branscombe (1993) team identification could be depicted as ‘the extent to which a fan feels psychologically attached to a team’ and this psychological connection can be linked to different elements such as: 1., Emotional achievement and 2., Self-connection and intimate commitment (Wann & Branscombe , 1993; Schlesinger, 2013).

Following the theoretical approach of Schlesinger (2013), *emotional achievement* is depicted as the feeling of personal achievement and pride of the fans when their team is successful, it is related to the on-field performance and even if a sport marketer cannot influence the result on the pitch, marketers can use nostalgia and hope as two powerful tools to establish an emotional bond with club’s fans (Richelieu, 2019). *Self-connection* on the other hand, refers to the psychological attachment that an individual exhibit towards a specific sport brand. Last but not least, *intimate commitment* denotes a stable emotional bond between the fanbase and the organization which shows little fluctuation over time.

Therefore, sports as a cultural institution, have the unique characteristic of strengthen a shared identity that develops a psychological attachment among a community through the use of symbolic features (such as team logo, colors, team nicknames, chants, etc.) by means of which fans can communicate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward the sport (Geertz, 1973). Considering the multicultural characteristic of Oslo, especially in the Eastside of the city, ethnicity embody a crucial element on understanding what drive fans to identify themselves or not with

Vålerenga Women's team and build such an emotional bond with the team, despite their cultural specificities.

3.2.2 Game attractiveness & Residual Preferences

Game attractiveness is also acknowledged as a major player in attendance and refers on how supporters respond to promotions and special events, star players, team contender and team placement in the standings (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989). Likewise, uncertainty of outcome (Rottenberg, 1956), or the inherent benefit of sport to trigger emotions through the stage of events with an indeterminate result, is also considered in this study as part of the attractiveness of the game due to the hypothesis that attendance "is a negative function of the dispersion of percentages of games won by the teams in the league" and the "tighter" the competition, the larger the attendance (Rottenberg, 1956).

Nonetheless, Coates & Humphreys (2012) found that an asymmetric relationship exists between expected game outcomes and attendance. In other words, their study on game attendance and outcome uncertainty in the National Hockey League (NHL) sustain that attendance increases when fans expect the home team to win, but holding this constant, attendance falls for games expected to be close. Thus, analyzing whether attendance at Intility Arena in female football matches is linked to competitiveness or not, could shed some light on fan behavior within Norway.

With respect to *residual preferences* this category mostly deals with scheduling of the games and fan accommodation (Hansen & Gauthier, 1989). They argue that weekend games and end-of-season games increase attendance, while afternoon games decrease attendance, and double headers and home dates seem to have no effect on attendance, which is in consonance with the results of Kringstad et al. (2018) and Jenkins et al. (2014) whom found that matches played on weekdays have a lower level of attendance than weekend matches.

In addition to the direct impact of scheduling of the games on the fan/supporter intention to attend matches, some empirical studies demonstrate that satisfaction with stadium factors such as

accessibility, esthetics of facilities, comfort and cleanliness can have an effect on brand loyalty and therefore, in attendance to the stadium (Wakefield & Sloan, 1995).

On the other hand, in order to have a stadium or arena at full capacity the sport organization, besides considering the aforementioned factors, must also be able to engage and attract as many people as possible. Considering consumption is not simply guided by attachment but also by entertainment (Desbordes, 2019; Kahle et al., 1996), and considering that over the past few decades there has been a massive shift in marketing strategies, with teams and franchises moving from providing quality sports to an orientation focused on delivering a quality entertainment experience (Hill & Green, 2000), one way to emerge as an attractive option for the Norwegian consumer, relies on transforming the whole sportive experience, by embracing the concept of *sportainment* largely discussed by André Richelieu (2019).

Up next, the concept of sportainment will be also considered as a key element in fan enjoyment and attendance due to its proven relevance to enhance experience for fans (Hallet al., 2010).

3.3 Sportainment: going beyond the game

Sportainment is a marketing strategy that merges the dimensions of sport and entertainment by emphasizing the characteristics of the auxiliary features of a sport product, which provides a set of unique experiences and emotions that helps to sell a sporting event (Richelieu, 2016). It could also be considered as a concept that aims to exploit the commercial side of a sport event beyond the on-field performance.

Within Europe, unlike North America, there is no doubt that sporting performance is still the primary motivation for attending to the stadium for spectators and organizers alike. In fact, exists certain rejection for the transformation of sports into *sport as a spectacle* (Richelieu, 2019). Though, this shift seems inevitable, specially within female football, since European consumers are also in constant demand for stimuli and people do not seem attractiveness in the game itself. Stimuli that may be seen to be absent in the Norwegian context and to be playing against fans' intention to attend to the stadium, also affecting team's brand equity.

In view of thereof, and coming back to the core of this research, it could be argued that the lack of amusement and a festive atmosphere during female matches could be affecting the level of attendance at Intility Arena. Although, and considering the specificity of the Norwegian context other elements depicted in the literature as possible agents of change in stadium attendance.

That said, analyzing the drivers that motivate fans to attend to Intility Arena during women's football matches, and understanding the relevance of the aforementioned factors, key indicators such as per capita income, ticket price, the impact of sport television coverage with availability of other sport attractions as substitute goods will be considered in the methodological instrument. Also, cultural background, ethnicity, uncertainty of outcome, entertainment options in the venue and facilities conditions will be considered within the instrument as major player in attendance at the stadium.

Understanding the relevance of verifying a possible relationship between two or more variables in a research project (Arias, 2006) the hypothesis of this research can be presented as follows:

The levels of attendance at Intility Arena during female football matches are in direct relationship with the sportainment options offered by the organization.

4.0 Methodology

This chapter outline the methodology employed to collect the necessary data for this research project, as well as the rationale for the selection. Hence, a detailed overview on how the data was collected, processed and analyzed along with a discussion on ethical considerations will be presented.

4.1 Research Design & Approach

This research project aimed to identify the elements that condition stadium attendance at Intility Arena during elite female football matches, considering not only match day experience and economic variables but also brand equity and team identification as key drivers for attendance. Hence, finding the best and most appropriate methodology to best answer the research question and the subsequent sub-research questions was fundamental in this endeavor.

After a careful analysis, a *case study research method* was considered as the best way to effectively address the research questions previously underscored. As Veal & Darcy suggested (2014), the aim of a case study is to seek to understand the phenomenon by studying one or more single examples in depth by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative evidence (Yin, 1994). If we considered the definition provided by Yin (1994), the case study research method is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear.

Coming back to Veal & Darcy (2014), the scale of a case study can consist of individuals, communities (village, town, cities) even reaching whole countries as well as projects or events (Fig. 6). One of the multiple benefits from case study methods relies on its capability to adopt a range of quantitative and qualitative methods while moving up in the scale, providing a unique set of data and types of data analysis that might offer a rich description of the case (Zainal, 2007; Veal & Darcy, 2014). For the purpose of this study, the level of attendance for the female football matches during the 2019 season at Intility Arena will be the case of this research.

4.2 Research Rigor

Some researchers suggest that a case study helps explain both the “process and outcome of a phenomenon through complete observation, reconstruction and analysis of the cases under investigation” (Tellis, 1997). The main research question already put forward several elements that may affect the level of attendance at Vålerenga’s stadium during the 2019 season making it the perfect subject for case study research due to its complexity and specificity.

Nonetheless, this methodology is not exempt from controversy, in fact the literature sustained that case studies present lack of rigor and provides very little basis for scientific generalization since they use a very small sample to understand a phenomenon. Also, the main characteristic of case study of being focus on a specific phenomenon framed in a specific time and space, make it difficult to reach a generalizing conclusion (Tellis, 1997).

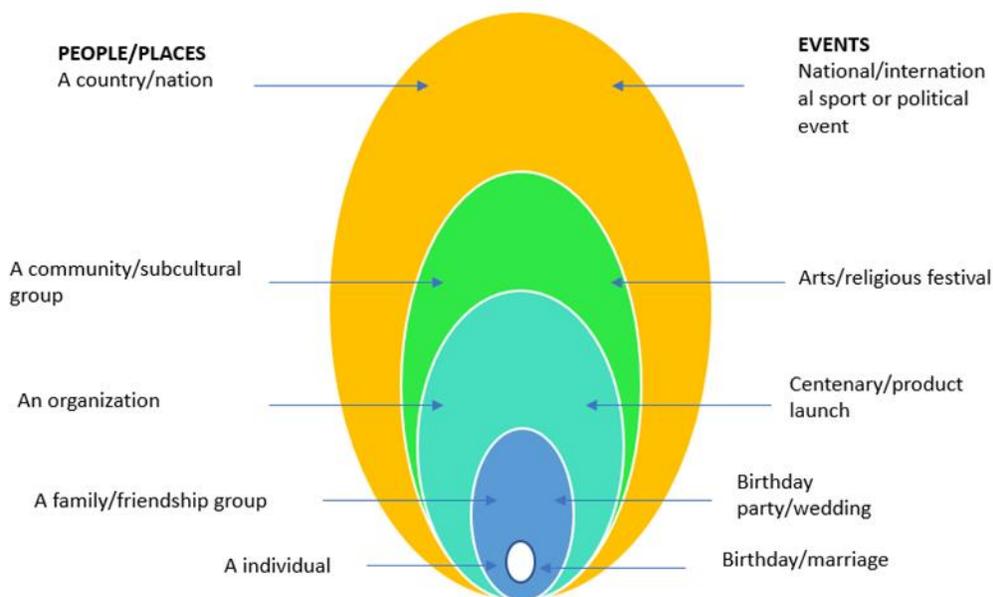


Figure 6. The case study method: demographic levels. Source: Veal & Darcy, 2014: 72

However, one of the multiple benefits from case study methods relies on its capability to adopt a range of quantitative and qualitative methods while moving up in the scale, providing a unique set

of data and types of data analysis that might offer a rich description of the case (Zainal, 2007; Veal & Darcy, 2014).

Despite the negative arguments, this method might be useful to understand the specific reality of Vålerenga Damer because allowed certain flexibility in the data collection helping to adapt the research strategy as the research proceeded. Besides, the possibility of working with a single case offered a manageable data collection strategy specially in the context of a master thesis when the resources (time, money and personnel) are usually limited (Veal & Darcy, 2014). Additionally, the detailed qualitative insights provided by case studies not only help to describe the data in real life settings but also helps to explain the complexities of real-life situations that cannot be properly captured on experimental or survey research (Zainal, 2007).

4.3 Methodological Procedure

In that sense, and by considering the resources available, several data-gathering and data-analysis techniques were used to explain the key elements that could impact the level of attendance at Intility Arena for the upcoming season. First, an on-line survey was distributed via e-mail and social media among Vålerenga's fans. This survey is divided into four sections: a) Personal background b) Brand equity c) Team Identification and d) a list of 21 factors derived from the literature (Hansen and Gauthier, 1989) that are identified to be crucial factors in stadium attendance.

The first section considered basic demographic questions such as age, sex and neighborhood. Research suggest that motives for leisure activity are dynamic and should be viewed as changing throughout a consumer's lifetime (Funk et. al, 2009; Iso-Ahola, 1980). Furthermore, game day attendance provides opportunities for socialization into fan subcultures, providing a space for the public display of fan identities (Holt, 1995; Melnick, 1993) what makes questions regarding age and cultural background crucial for the analysis of the context.

On the other hand, Aaker’s model (1991) was used as the rationale behind the questions to address the current brand equity of Vålerenga Damer according to fans perception. A 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate: 1., Brand Loyalty, 2., Perceived Quality and 3., Brand Awareness. On the downside, and as previously mentioned Aaker’s approach is often criticized as it does not offer an established method, but a theoretical framework. this makes it hard to reconstruct and interpret results (Ströbel & Woratschek, 2013). However, it is used in this study as a guidance to understand fan’s perception on the organization and as indicator for levels of attendance.

The operationalization of team identification was carried out according to an adjusted version of the Sport Spectator Identification Scale (SSIS) by Wann & Branscombe (1993), which is considered as a reliable instrument to measure team identification. This scale was developed as a eight-item scale using an eight-point response designed to measure how strongly an individual identifies with a certain sport team, (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Two of the eight items are as follows:

Figure 7. Sport Spectator Identification Scale Model. Wann & Branscombe, 1993.

Question	Not at all	Very much so
Q1. It is important to me that Vålerenga wins		
Q2. It is important to me that other people see me as a fan of Vålerenga		

Respondents tick the appropriate point on the scale that matches more closely their feelings and a score is assigned to each possible response, from one when the box on the far left is ticked, through eight for a tick on the far-right box (Gratton & Jones, 2004). For the Sport Spectator Identification Scale, the maximum score for an item is eight allowing a minimum score of seven (by scoring one in each of the seven items). However, in this study the scale was graded according to a 5-point Lickert scale due to the difficulties to find a clear description of anchors presented in the original SSIS methodology, open up for free interpretation of the scale by fans answering the questionnaire, something to avoid in any research project. Therefore, the adjustment made in this study ranked five as the maximum score for an item, and the minimum score one with a clear description of each one of the anchors presented in the scale. The average score per item is then taken, ranging

the level of fan identification between one (little or no identification with the sport team) and five (very highly identified with the sport team). In order to measure the internal consistency of the scale a Cronbach's standardize reliability test was developed, obtaining a coefficient of .883. All of the items were significantly inter-correlated, and the average item-total correlation was .873.

Regarding the model proposed by Hansen & Gauthier (1989) a 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the relative importance of each factor related to its effect on a per game basis and on a per season basis. The original model of 40 elements has been adapted to the context of this study by filtering some factors that were considered not relevant for this research (See Table 1). Cronbach's standardize coefficient for this scale was .858, representing a significant inter-correlation between items. This said, a link to the questionnaire was posted during 10 days in the female's team social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

4.4 Pilot Test

As Eldridge et al. (2016) sustain, pilot studies usually refer on "an experiment, project or development undertaken in advance of a future experiment, project or development", used to mitigate risks and as strategy to reduce the chance of failure in a larger project (Fraser et al., 2018). Hence, a pilot was taken in three stages.

First, an English version was provided to a small group of family and friends (7 people) to read through and pick out any faults or misunderstandings. Secondly, a Norwegian version of the questionnaire was developed and distributed among Norwegian native speakers aiming to adapt the questions to the modes and manners of the local community. The feedback provided, helped to reduce the number of items provided in section D (Crucial factors in Stadium Attendance) from 40 to 20 items, and due to the COVID-19 situation, an additional element was considered to seize the perceived level of importance of *health and hygiene in stadium attendance*, making a total of 21 items to measure in this section. Finally, the survey in Norwegian was uploaded into the *Nettskjema* platform and an additional examination was carried out with the aid of the Marketing Manager of Vålerenga's female team to ensure the correct display and functioning of the instrument on the platform.

Table 1. Crucial Factors in Stadium Attendance.

Factors	Variables
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Television coverage of the home game in local area • Price of season ticket for home games • Television coverage of another major sport event at time of your home game • Price of ticket for home game
Attractiveness of the Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record (win-loss) of home team • Number of star athletes on visitor's team • Number of star athletes on your team (home team) • Rivalry between your team and opponent (visiting team) • Offensive output of your team (goals, points, etc.) • Defensive output of your team (goals against, defensive line, etc.) • Promotions (women's day, group promotions.) • Vålerenga's place in the league standings
Residual Preferences Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stadium atmosphere • Cleanliness of the facility • Health and hygiene of the stadium • Entertainment options (music, half-time show, fanzone, etc.) • Easy and multiple access to the stadium (via subway, highways, transit) • Parking availability close to the stadium • The games are played during the weekend (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) • Availability of Public Transportation near stadium

4.5 Ethical Considerations

According to the Universities and Colleges Act, Universities and university colleges have a statutory responsibility for ensuring that research, education and academic and artistic development are of high quality and ‘conducted in accordance with recognized scientific, artistic, pedagogical and ethical principles’ and standards (Norwegian National Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, 2019). Therefore, several ethical considerations were taken during the planning and execution of the research project aiming to protect all parts involved.

The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2019) outline several factors to be considered during a research project such as: inform consent, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage of the research process, elements fully considered in this study. Participants were informed at the beginning of the questionnaire about the purposes, usage and extent of the data collected in the survey, making them fully aware of what they were agreeing on. Even though the instrument does not touch sensitive data, all respondents were treated in anonymity and the data would be destroyed upon the completion of this master thesis. Moreover, participants were informed on their right to withdraw at any time of the study without any reason or explanation. For this, the interviewed would contact the researcher or the research supervisor to remove and destroy all their data.

This research project was completed in accordance with the *Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata* (NSD in English) in which an ethical application was submitted and subsequently approved. ethical guidelines were provided to reinforce the research project.

An initial application was submitted to the NSD on the 12th of February 2020, for the present study, however, some advices were offered (Appendix 2). Among the limitations of the project and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the assessment of the project took 5 weeks to be completed. A revised application was then submitted to the NSD and approval was granted on the 17th March 2020 (Appendix 3).

Among the recommendations, it was requested that direct contact with respondents must be avoided, hence, the survey was uploaded in the official team's social media platforms increasing the anonymity of the instrument. Additionally, the NSD requested to make participants aware that questions regarding ethnic background were present in the survey as well as respondent's free will to answer or not to this segment. Participants were also made aware that all data would be destroyed upon the completion of the master's thesis.

5.0 Findings

Descriptive statistics were used to quantify several factors related to sports branding, team identification and how frequently respondents went to games in order to analyze their perception on factors related to stadium attendance.

5.1 Demographic Results

From 153 responses out of 9,745 fans, the participation rate was placed in 0.02%. Seven answers were excluded due to: 1., Incomplete responses and 2., participants were under 18 years old providing a total sample of $n=146$.

Of the respondents, 62.3% were man and 37.0% were female with 1 participant who chose to not display his gender, representing 0.7% of the total sample (Fig. 8). 34.9% of the participants were between the ages of 45-59 years old being the largest age group, followed by respondents between 35 and 44 years old with 21.9%. Among this group 16.4% placed themselves between 25-34 years old; 13.7% are in the age range of 18-24 and 19 responses (13%) come from people older than 60 years old.

Figure 8. Gender Distribution - VIF Damer Fanpage. Source: Own dataset

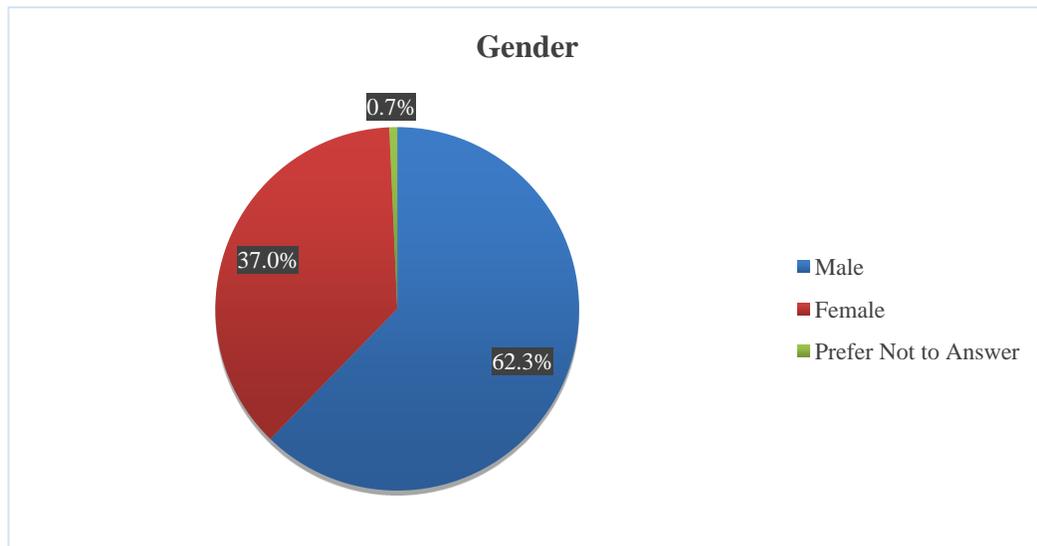
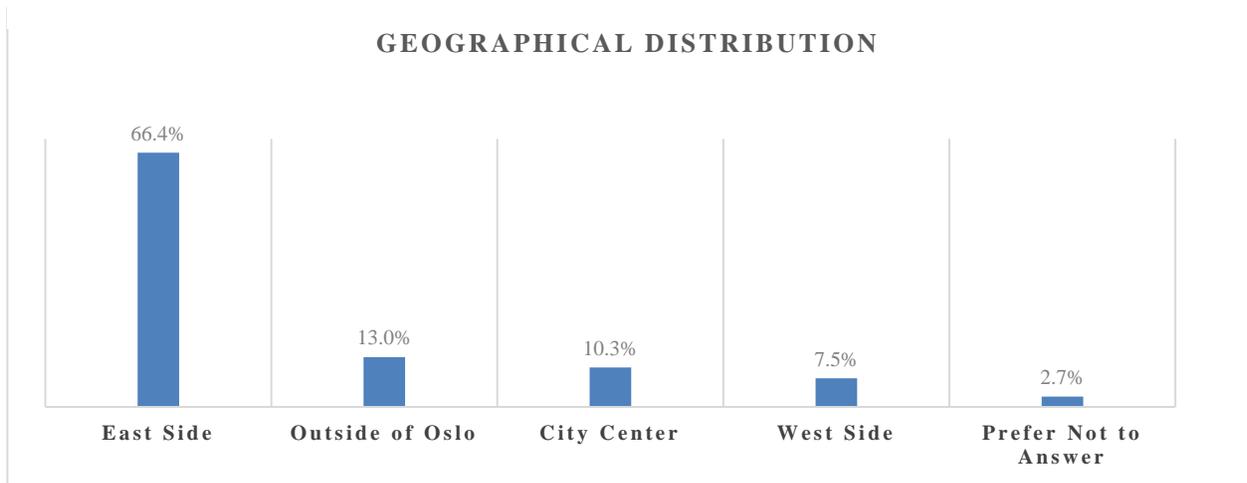


Table 2. Age Range - VIF Damer Fanpage. Source: Own dataset

Age Range		
	Count (n)	Percent (%)
18-24	20.0	13.7
25-34	24.0	16.4
35-44	32.0	21.9
45-59	51.0	34.9
60+	19.0	13.0
Total	146.0	100

Regarding the geographical distribution, 66.4% of the respondents declared to live in the East side of the city, 13.0% outside of Oslo, 10.3% in the city center and 7.5% placed their residence in the West side of the city. 2.7% choose to not share their residence in this survey as we can see in Figure 8.

Figure 9. Geographical Distribution - VIF Damer Fanbase. Source: Own dataset



The level of education of the fans was also considered in this research. These results can be break down on 27.4% declared to hold a high school degree, and the same percentage for bachelor’s degree, 21.2% hold a vocational education and 17.1% stated to have a master’s degree level. Only 6.2% was located under the Elementary school level. Culturally speaking, most of the respondents (94.5%) identified themselves as European, 4.1% were African and 1.4% placed their ethnicity in another cultural group not listed in the survey.

Table 3. Educational Level - VIF Damer Fanbase. Source: Own dataset

Educational Level		
	Count (n)	Percent (%)
High school	40.0	27.4
Bachelor's degree	40.0	27.4
Vovational school or equivalent	31.0	21.2
Master's degree or PhD	25.0	17.1
Elementary school	9.0	6.2
Prefer not to answer	1.0	0.7
Total	146.0	100

5.2 Branding Findings

A total of six questions were asked in order to assess the customer-based brand equity (CBBE) of Vålerenga Fotball Damer. The first set of three questions aimed to make an approach on *Brand Awareness*. Respondents were asked to name the first football brand that comes to their minds. Results placed Vålerenga Fotball in the top of the list with 43.8%, being followed by Manchester United with 14.4%, Barcelona F.C. with 9.6% and Liverpool F.C. with 8.2% completing the top 5 clubs as we can see in the bar chart (Fig. 10). Secondly, two similar question were proposed but making stress on female football teams in Norway showing Vålerenga Fotball Damer well positioned on the top-of-mind of Vålerenga's fans with 90.4%, followed by Lillestrøm with 4.8%, Røa with 2.7% and Lyn with 1.4% of the total responses (Fig. 10).

Figure 10. Top of Mind - Worldwide Football Teams. Source: Own dataset.

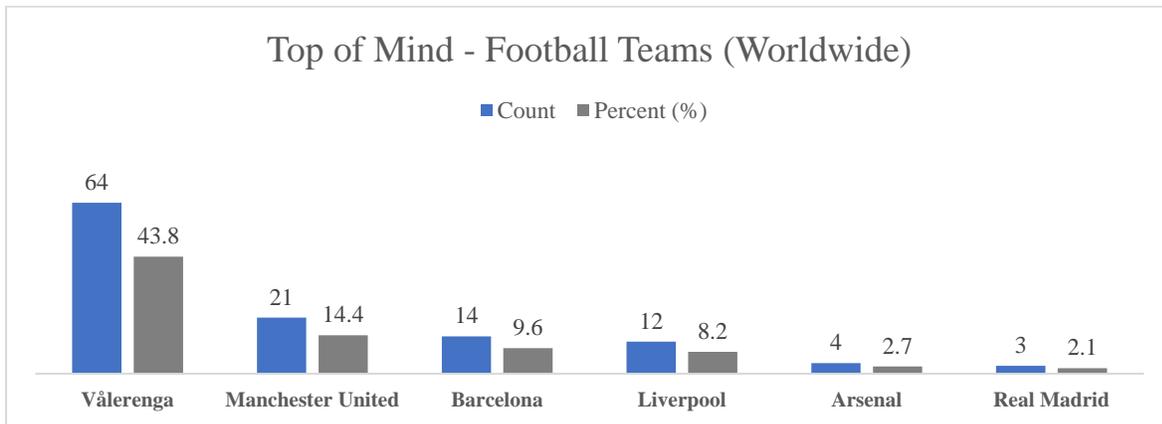


Figure 11. Top of Mind - Female Football Teams (Norway). Source: Own dataset.

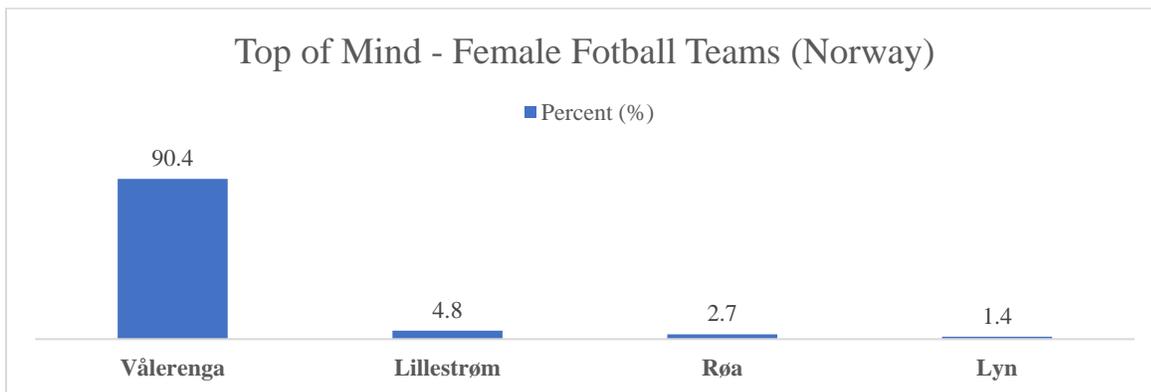
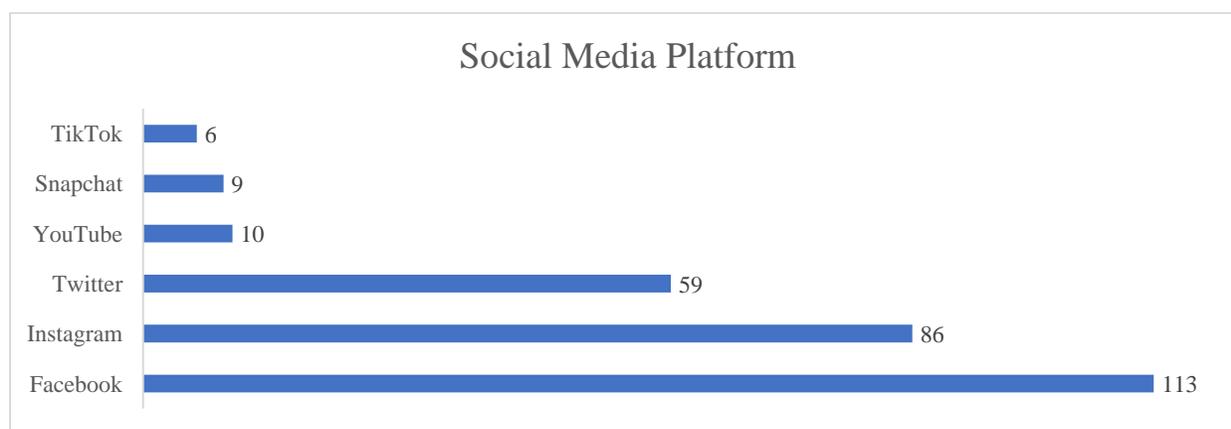


Table 4. Top of Mind - Football Teams Worldwide. Source: Own dataset.

Top of Mind - Football Teams (Worldwide)		
	Count	Percent (%)
Vålerenga	64	43.8
Manchester United	21	14.4
Barcelona	14	9.6
Liverpool	12	8.2
Arsenal	4	2.7
Real Madrid	3	2.1
Other Teams	20	14
Prefer not to answer	8	5.5
Total	146	100

On the other hand, the level of engagement with the team on social media was used as an indicator of *Brand Loyalty*. Only 4.8% of the respondents assure to not follow the team on any social media platform, while 95.2% is part of the team’s digital community in at least one social media account. Taking into consideration the size of the sample ($n=146$), participants were asked to tick into the social media platform in which they follow the team; participants had the possibility of selecting more than one option in this question. According to the chart (Fig. 12), Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are the most followed social media accounts for fans. 9 respondents ticked Snapchat, even though the brand has no presence on this platform.

Figure 12. Preferred Social Media Platform by Fans. Source: Own dataset.



In terms of *Perceived Quality*, the willingness of buying official merchandising served as a valid measurement. Here, 19.2% stated to not be interested in purchasing official merchandise from the female team while 80.8% had a positive answer to this question. From those who want to buy official products, the mode is placed in NOK 500 which in this case is an indicative of the standard amount that fans are willing to pay for a jersey; taking into consideration the total valid responses, the mean is NOK 400.7 while the maximum is NOK 1,000.

5.3 Team Identification Findings

Respondents were asked to rate their level of fandom to each of 8 factors related to team identification (See Table 5). The respondents were just above neutral in regard to attendance frequency level, exhibition of symbolic elements from the team, and relevance placed in rivalry with other squads. They were close to the maximum scale (*Very Important*) regarding self-identification with the team, level of engagement following news and updates about the squad, as well as in the importance placed in sportive results and the relevance of being a fan of the club. It is relevant to recall that an adjustment of the SSIS was made in this study ranking five as the maximum score for an item and one for the minimum score which indicates an overall high level of team identification among the respondents.

Table 5. Findings on Team Identification. Source: Own dataset.

Variable	N	M	Std. Deviation
How important is it to you that Vålerenga Damer win?	146	4.21	1.00
How strongly do you see yourself as a supporter of Vålerenga Damer?	146	4.21	0.81
How strongly do your friends see you as a fan of Vålerenga Damer?	146	4.07	0.96
Level of Engagement – Team News & Updates	146	3.99	1.03
How important is it for you to be a supporter of Vålerenga Ladies?	146	3.88	1.12
How strongly do you dislike the Vålerenga Damer rival team?	146	3.31	1.39
How often do you display Vålerenga's brand through support merchandise?	146	3.03	1.22
Were you at the Intility Arena to watch Vålerenga Ladies last season?	146	3.02	1.22

5.4 Crucial Factors in Stadium Attendance

In this section, respondents were asked to rank from one (1) to five (5) the perceived relevance of 21 factors associated with stadium attendance, being one *Not Important* and five *Very Important*. According to the results, the presence of star players in the visiting team is not a driver for going to the matches; Parking facilities near the stadium as well as if the match is broadcasted were ranked as *Somehow Important*. Respondents were just above neutral regarding special promotions towards match day, price of match-day tickets, and surprisingly in entertainment options. Nonetheless, *Stadium Atmosphere* was ranked second as one of the most important drivers for attending to women's games, besides the offensive game of the home team.

Cleanliness and Hygiene of the stadium facilities were ranked in the top five which could be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in which the survey was carried out. It is important to mention that the survey was officially distributed four days after the World Health Organization declared the pandemic alert and the Norwegian government installed a lockdown across the country. Another significant insight relies on the rivalry between the squads as well as the security and if the matches are played on weekends as *Important* factors to consider when attending to the games.

A detailed information about these factors could be found in table N° 6, at the end of this chapter. Next, a thorough analysis of the data gathered is presented in chapter 6 connecting the information found with the theoretical framework aiming to answer the research questions previously presented at the beginning of this master thesis.

Table 6. Influential Factors for Stadium Attendance. Source: Own dataset.

Variables	N	M	Std. Deviation
Offensive game of Vålerenga	146	4.53	0.91
Stadium Atmosphere	146	4.48	0.98
Defensive game of Vålerenga	146	4.47	1.02
Cleanliness of the stadium facilities	146	4.37	1.14
Health and hygiene at stadium facilities	146	4.37	1.13
Rivalry between the teams	146	4.27	1.30
Security at the stadium	146	4.23	1.35
Matches are held on weekends (Friday, Saturday, Sunday)	146	4.23	1.24
Public transport services	146	4.12	1.40
Rcord (win-loss) Vålerenga Damer	146	4.04	1.51
Vålerenga's place in the league standings	146	3.95	1.48
Number of star players on the home team (Vålerenga Damer)	146	3.79	1.61
Special promotions towards match day	146	3.60	1.74
Ticket Price	146	3.49	1.74
Entertainment options	146	3.36	1.73
TV coverage of another major sporting event	146	3.23	1.78
Season ticket price	146	3.21	1.81
Easy access to the stadium via private transport	146	3.19	1.81
Parking lots near the stadium	146	2.91	1.79
TV coverage of VIF Damer Match	146	2.72	1.74
Number of star players on the away team	146	2.02	1.54

6.0 Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Branding – VIF Damer

Considering a brand as name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from the competition (Richelieu, 2019 pp. 29), results show a significant strong relationship between Vålerenga Fotball Damer with their fanbase by being the first option in their top-of-mind, independently of the context.

Bearing in mind that the value of a club as a brand is measured according to its capability of creating unique experiences to the consumer, and for its competence to provide direction and meaning to a community through its identity (Dunning, 2013; Bauer et al., 2005) it was found a relationship between the organization and the team which was tangible in the final comments at the end of the instrument, where answers such as *“Bleeding the suit Vål'enga”*, *“Glory be 'Enga!”* or *“Good job you are doing with the children's teams - keep going!”* were commonly found among supporters. The information also shows that, and following Dunning's (2013) idea, Vålerenga Damer provides an identity and has become a cultural symbol of the community they represent despite of gender and age, considering that 62.3% of the total responses came from male fans rejecting the popular misconception that a female team will only engage with female fans.

Also, the female squad is undoubtedly embedded into the East side and center of Oslo if considered 66.4% claimed to be living on the East part of the city and 10.3% on the city center. These results can be explained by assuming a strong psychological connection between the parental organization *Vålerenga Idrettsforening* and the fans that has been built across the years, especially with the working-class community from these two areas.

It is necessary to remember that Vålerenga IF as the parent organization of Vålerenga Damer built its identity as a working-class organization, embedded on the pride in representing the city of Oslo, its diversity and its history (Vålerenga Fotball, 2019) becoming a cultural symbol of the people from the city center and East side of Oslo, usually depicted as working-class areas of the city (Vestel, 2004, pp. 16). Nonetheless in terms of cultural diversity, the sample was not as

heterogeneous as expected considering 94.5% of the respondents identified themselves as Europeans, while 5.5% placed their ethnicity in a different cultural group.

On the other hand, it can be assumed that the marketing efforts made by the administration particularly in terms of social media, allowed Vålerenga Fotball Damer to bond with those fans away from the capital city, if the penetration that the brand has had in the countryside is considered, with 13% of the responses coming from outside the capital city.

In this regard, all the respondents specified to follow the team on at least one social media platform, being Facebook (77.3%) and Instagram (58.9%) the two most relevant for fans. It is also interesting that some of them mentioned Snapchat among the platforms they followed, considering the female squad has no official account on this platform. This raises an additional question for further analysis whether fans considered Snapchat player's profiles as part of the brand as a whole or not since some individual players have presence in this platform.

Regarding *perceived quality*, 80.8% of the respondents disclaimed their intention on buying merchandise which unveils first, brand loyalty and secondly an opportunity for commercial initiatives (e.g. higher prices, line extensions, etc.). However, and according to some answers on the questionnaire, there is not a clear differentiation between the merchandise offered by the male squad versus the offered by the female team, an element that diminishes the purchase intention from the supporters.

Going back to the concept of the *sport product* (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019), the auxiliary features are key to enhance the sport experience in and outside the stadium. Therefore, the development of merchandise is key for strengthening team identification and provide satisfaction to fans, which at the moment, and according to the data here presented are not fully addressed by Vålerenga Fotball Damer. In this regard, Funk et al. (2019) reflect that marketing efforts should highlight the benefits of excitement and sportive performance through, among other things, symbolic associations to the brand that enhances fan experiences. Hence, Vålerenga Fotball Damer has room for improvement in terms of commercial initiatives that could enhance the emotional

connection with its fanbase, specifically in the development of merchandise that differentiate itself from the one offered for the male squad.

6.2 Team Identification

Team identification is the extent to which a fan feels psychologically attached to a team (Wann & Brascombe, 1993; Madrigal, 2004), and at the beginning of this research it was inquired “What is the level of team identification of Vålerenga’s fan with the female team?” To tackle this question the Sport Spectator Identification Scale developed by Wann & Brascombe (1993) was used as the main instrument to identify the current level of team identification of Vålerenga Damer fans. The obtained coefficient of .883 on the Cronbach’s standardize reliability test, shows that the modification made in this research to the original instrument developed by the authors, was found to be reliable and quite accurate in determining people’s allegiances to a team.

This said, the results show an overall high level of team identification from the respondents considering that self-identification with the team, level of engagement following news and updates about the squad, as well as the exhibit of satisfaction due to sportive performance and the relevance of being a fan of the club were among the most important elements considered by the respondents with an average of 4.21 out of 5.

Nonetheless, respondents were less engaged in regard to attendance frequency level, exhibition of symbolic elements from the female team, and relevance placed in rivalry with other squads. In this regard, Silveira et al. (2018) found that the greater the identification of the sports consumer with his team, the greater the impact on his satisfaction, increasing his loyalty to the team and his intention to buy sports products (tickets, merchandise, TV packages, etc.), however, Vålerenga fans seems to have a strong bond with the organization but do not perceive the unique value proposition from the female squad as well as the benefits of going to the matches and buying official merchandise from this team, an assumption that is consistent with the findings in the branding section

Therefore, and understanding that success on the field it is not enough to build and sustain the psychological connection of the fandom, Vålerenga Damer is challenged to develop marketing initiatives that strengthen the levels of team identification as well as the brand.

Richelieu (2019, pp. 32) provided five strategies that managers can follow and implement to improve fan's satisfaction, which can also be applied and adjusted to the Norwegian female football market: 1. Fan-actors, 2. Storytelling, 3. Co-branding, 4. Sportainment and 5. Glocalization. So far, the elite football leagues in Norway have standard marketing techniques (fan zone, autographs signing, mascot, etc.) that are applied for the male's and female's league with a certain level of success, however, and as Richelieu (2019, pp. 29) sustain, a brand is a promise that the organization makes to its consumers which is dependent on the uniqueness of the experience delivered by the products or services that fans are able to experience every time they get in contact with the brand. A uniqueness that it is, apparently, not clear for Vålerenga Damer fans considering their neutral interest on attending to the games and buying official merchandise.

However, and as Palmero and Price (2015) found in their research, today spectators have the opportunity to attend events at many state-of-the-art venues, that arises their expectations in terms of entertainment and quality sport products. Considering female football have smaller marketing budgets than its male counterpart, makes it challenging to deliver high-quality events and products that meet fan's expectations.

This open the next segment that aimed to understand what are the possible factors that influence stadium attendance for Vålerenga Football Damer in the Toppserien, the main research question of this study and the final element to be considered in this master thesis.

6.3 Elements Conditioning Stadium Attendance

Following Hansen & Gauthier's (1989) theoretical framework some *economic factors* such as ticket price, substitute forms of entertainment, as well as the availability of alternative sport attractions in the same market presented low levels of relevance in stadium turnover. Respondents were just above neutral regarding special promotions towards match day, price of match-day

tickets which can be explained as a consequence of the high quality of life and wages in the Scandinavian country. According to Statistics Norway, the average income for Norwegian workers was around NOK 372,000 (around EUR 36,600) per year, while immigrants earned a median of NOK 289,100 per year (around EUR 28,300 per year) in 2019, being one of the highest wages in Europe (SSB, 2019).

If a comparison is made with other female clubs in Europe, such as Chelsea F.C. or Liverpool F.C., Vålerenga Fotball Damer was on average 90% more expensive than its English counterpart for the 2019 season (Chelsea F.C., 2019; Liverpool F.C. Women, 2019). That said, it could be assumed that match day ticket prices as well as complementary goods prices such as travel costs (to and from the stadium) and the price of participation-related goods (i.e. merchandise and refreshment) are not perceived as outrageous among the respondents and therefore, are not affecting stadium turnover.

Regarding sport television coverage and the broadcasting of foreign sport entertainment options seem as a substitute goods, respondents were just above neutral, when identifying the impact of these elements in their intention of attending to female matches. These results differ from what Kringstad et al. (2018) found in their research of the *Eliteserien* where live broadcast of domestic matches on ‘free TV’ positively affects stadium attendance, and the broadcast of foreign sportive events acted as a substitute product and negatively affected on match-day attendance.

Another remarkable insight is the effect on when and where the matches will be played. With a mean of 4.23 out of 5, respondents placed as very important whether matches are played during weekends (Friday, Saturday and Sunday) or not. Simmons and Szymanski (2004) reflects on how live media coverage of football and the exposure and revenue that can generate, give broadcasters a significant amount of power to determine when and where the matches will be played. Even if the media coverage of the *Toppserien* is low in comparison with other sport events in Norway such as the *Eliteserien* as an example, broadcasting companies are highly influential on how the season is structured, in a way that matches are held on weekends around noon or even in non-traditional football hours such as Mondays at 14:00 h or Tuesdays at 16:00 h. This programming has a

negative effect on the league but also in the visibility and reach of each one of the teams representing quite of a challenge for many marketing departments.

It is important to mention that within the Norwegian football, the sportive element prevails over the concept of *sportainment*. Therefore, and even if female football matches is define by club's marketing department as the perfect space for family integration and socialization during weekends, fans do not perceive a Unique Value Proposition from the league and the teams that drive them to the arena, opting for other forms of entertainment during match days, reassuring the UEFA's findings in which women's football is perceived as a boring spectacle by Norwegians (Bradley, 2019).

As said, results showed that, indeed, respondents are attracted to the stadium mostly due to the on-field performance exhibited by the female squad, as well as the *stadium atmosphere* expected during a football match. This is consistent with the findings of Palmero and Price (2015), Shannon and Turley (1997), Elias and Dunning (1986) that emphasized human crowding and human interaction as essential items to spectator enjoyment and their intentions of attending and staying at the stadium. However, it is particularly interesting that respondents do not perceive *sportainment* related to the atmosphere at the stadium or even as a relevant issue when attending to female football matches, even though the theory show that these two elements are in fact interlinked.

Therefore, which elements of the sport atmosphere actually grab the attention of the Norwegian football fan during match days? What do they understand as *entertainment* in sports events? These questions open the door for future research on the topic on Norwegian female football specially within the psychological and anthropological areas.

What can be appreciated in the results here presented is that within Vålerenga Damer fans there is no doubt that sporting performance is still the primary motivation for spectators attending to the stadium, and perhaps exists certain level of rejection for the association of sports with the concept of *sport as an event* understood in the American sense (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019). Though, this shift seems inevitable since European consumers, and even Norwegian consumers, are also in constant demand for stimuli (Arif et al., 2016). Stimuli that according to the results and UEFA's report (Bradley, 2019) is absent in the Norwegian context and that is playing against fans' intention

to attend to the stadium, also having an impact on team's brand equity as it was previously discussed.

Last but not least, some empirical studies (Wakefield & Sloan, 1995; Silveira et al., 2018), demonstrate that satisfaction with stadium factors such as accessibility, esthetics of facilities, comfort and cleanliness can have an effect on stadium attendance. This can be seen on how *Cleanliness of the stadium facilities* and *Health and hygiene at stadium facilities* were among the most relevant factors for fans when thinking on attending to the matches both with a median of 4.37 out of 5. Nonetheless it is important to recall that the historical context in which the instrument was applied, the COVID-19 pandemic might have a significant impact on participant's responses.

7.0 Conclusions

The main objective of this study was to identify the key elements that influence stadium attendance for Vålerenga Football Damer in competitive matches from the Toppserien while paying special attention to key elements within the sports & event marketing area such as customer-based brand equity, team identification and *sportainment*.

To do so, a case study research method was considered as the best way to effectively underpin the elements mentioned above, and an online survey was the preferred technique to gather the data with a total of 146 valid responses. The survey was divided into four sections: a) Personal background b) Brand equity c) Team Identification and d) a list of 21 factors that were identified to be crucial factors in stadium attendance (Hansen and Gauthier, 1989).

It was found that on-field performance exhibited by the female squad, and stadium atmosphere were crucial factors for stadium attendance for the respondents presenting both a median of 4.53 out of a 5 on a 5-point Likert scale being one *Not Important* and five *Very Important*. In addition, several elements pointed by Wakefield & Sloan (1995) such as accessibility, esthetics of facilities, comfort and cleanliness can influence stadium attendance. Moreover, *Cleanliness of the stadium facilities* and *Health and hygiene at stadium facilities* were among the most relevant factors for fans when thinking on attending to the matches, presenting a median of 4.37 out of 5, perhaps

influenced by the context in which the society was immersed by the time the research was carried out.

Regarding the customer-based brand equity status of Vålerenga Fotball, a modification of Aaker's model (1991) of customer-based brand equity was developed paying special attention on brand awareness, brand loyalty and perceived quality as key elements to assess the current status of Vålerenga Fotball Damer brand equity. In that regard it was found high levels of brand awareness with 43.8% of the respondents keeping Vålerenga Fotball in their top of mind of football teams around the world and 90.4% placing Vålerenga Fotball Damer as the first brand that comes to their minds regarding female football squads.

Brand loyalty was addressed by the level of engagement of the fans with the team on social media. In that regard, only 4.8% of the respondents assured to not follow the team on any social media platform, while 95.2% is part of the team's digital community in at least one social media account which display a high level of engagement and brand loyalty among the respondents. When referred to perceived quality, 80.8% of the respondents showed willingness of buying official merchandising from the female team indicating that fans perceive Vålerenga Fotball Damer as a as a high-quality brand. It is important to recall that the use of merchandise can enhance customer's satisfaction with the use experience, for example, when attending to the matches (Aaker, 1991 pp. 27). An interesting element found in this research reflects on the capacity of Vålerenga Fotball Damer of being a cultural symbol of the community they represent despite of gender and age, considering that 66.4% of the responses came from the East side of the city which can be explained by assuming a strong psychological connection between the parental organization *Vålerenga Idrettsforening* and the fans that has been built across the years, also 62.3% of the total responses came from male fans rejecting the popular misconception that a female team will only engage with female fans.

In summary, Vålerenga Fotball Damer as a brand is well positioned among Vålerenga Fotball supporters, with potential opportunity of generating marginal cash flow (Aaker, 1991; Farjam & Hongyi, 2015).

The second sub-research question of this study was: “What is the level of team identification of Vålerenga’s fan with the female team?”, and the results showed an overall high level of team identification from the respondents being self-identification with the team, the need to remain up to date on the club’s news and the exhibit of satisfaction due to sportive performance the most important elements considered by the respondents with a median of 4.21 out of a 5 point scale. Respondents were less engaged in terms of attending to the stadium, relevance placed in rivalry with other squads and exhibiting symbolic elements from the female squad, results that are consistent with the findings on customer-based brand equity where some respondents (19.2%) do not seem the need of buying specific products from the female squad when they already have merchandise from the male’s team, a factor that unveils an opportunity to enhance the unique value proposition of the female’s team merchandise.

Regarding whether exists or not a link between sportainment and attendance within Vålerenga’s fans results showed, with a median of 3.36 out of a 5 point scale, that respondents are attracted to the stadium mostly due to the on-field performance exhibited by the female squad but also due to the *stadium atmosphere* expected during a football match, which is consistent with the findings of the literature (Palmero & Price, 2015; Shannon & Turley,1997) where human crowding and human interaction were identified as essential items to spectator enjoyment and their intentions of attending and staying at the stadium . However, it is important to mention that respondents do not perceive *sportainment* related to the atmosphere at the stadium or even as a relevant issue when attending to the games even though, they are eager for additional stimuli during match-day (Bradley, 2019).

7.1 Contribution to Research and Reflections on Methodology

The research project aims to bridge the lack of the existing body of literature in female football matches in Norway as well as in stadium attendance, taking into consideration some elements of sports marketing such as: branding, sportainment and team identification as key elements in the subject. Regarding the methodology framework used, the development of a case-study research allowed to adopt a range of quantitative and qualitative methods that provided a unique set of data

and types of data analysis that offered a good description of Vålerenga Football Damer context in an specific time and space.

On the other hand, working with an online survey as the chosen technique to gather data was highly beneficial during the COVID-19 lockdown, because the research was carried out despite the limitations such as on the small size of the sample of this research project, as well as the social distancing restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic that, as expected, minimized the interaction with fans and managers during the collection of the data. On the downside, the limitations of gathering data via an electronic questionnaire sent to a group of people can have an impact on the study considering results might differ when done in person. Therefore, there are opportunities to build upon this research, comparing the results here obtained.

7.2 Future Research

As said, working with a case study research method offers very little basis for scientific generalization since they use a very small sample to understand a phenomenon being framed in a specific time and space. In this study, 146 valid responses out of 9,745 online fans barely represents 0.02% of the total community, and offers an opportunity for future research that could reach a larger sample which allows to dig deeper into the possible elements that condition the level of attendance for Vålerenga Football Damer in competitive matches from the Toppserien as well as in understanding which elements of the sport atmosphere actually grab the attention of the Norwegian football fan during match days, as it was once topic that emerged from this study. There is also a possibility of going in depth on what do fans understand as entertainment in sports events, considering respondents in this study did not perceive sportainment related to the atmosphere at the stadium or even as a relevant issue when attending to female football matches.

Also, going deeper into the topic of team identification among ethnic groups and with Vålerenga Fotball Damer could be an interesting topic for future research considering this issue was not fully underpinned in this study, precisely due to the small sample size.

7.3 Implications for the Industry

This study showcases the growing interest in women's football and the different adjustments that should be made in terms of marketing and entertainment. In the specific case of Vålerenga Fotball Damer the diversification of merchandising as well as the enhancement of its unique value proposition remains crucial in the development of future marketing initiatives that engage with the fandom. As it is mentioned in the literature (Desbordes & Richelieu, 2019; Funk et al., 2019), the development of merchandise is key for strengthening team identification and provide satisfaction to fans before, during and after match days.

It is also remarkable the level of engagement of fans in social media, even from those who are in the countryside. Considering how the pandemic has affected the dynamics of our society, the investment on digital marketing is more relevant than ever as fans are having limited interaction with the organization and it seems to be a constant in the so called "New Normal". Even though the female squad is quite active on its social media profiles and website, and more recently launched an innovative podcast (Hunpresterer) that aims to connect with younger generations, there is still room for improvement.

Among the changes, an upgrade on the team's official website could be a good initiative for attracting and engaging with fans from all over the country, whilst opens the door for future business initiatives such as the establishment of an on-line store where the organization can, for example, fulfill the demand for official merchandise. It also provides an opportunity to gather information on a free and effective way considering the COVID-19 pandemic has change customer's consumption patterns and understanding how this event affects the needs of Vålerenga's fans could represent a competitive advantage within the league. An effective way to do so is by paying special attention to the data available on Google analytics® and Google Search Console® aiming for analyzing fan's trends from before and during the lockdown.

On a macro level, it is undeniable that the league must invest on understanding its fanbase and invest on market research initiatives. A good way to do that is by relying on the academic field, and the different students and specialists that are interested in enhancing the reality of women's

football in Norway. A positive aspect of the current low levels of attendance at female football matches in Norway relies on the possibility of offering the empty seats as additional advertisement option for sponsors as it is happening on several leagues around Europe; it also offers an opportunity for carrying on technical adjustments that ensures a safe return of the fans to the stadium by making them feel comfortable in a crowded stadium, such as keeping a 1.5 m distance between spectators and implementing health checks and contact-less entry.

On a bigger level, the Norwegian Football must set to undergo visible and technological overhauls to accommodate a safe return including those already applicable for the Toppserien and including major technological enhancement that help put fans at ease on the things they can't see. As it was already mentioned, the Norwegian Football Association must also invest on market research initiatives and understand its fandom on what could bring them to the different stadiums across the country considering the levels of attendance in Norwegian football were decreasing and with the impact of the pandemic, bringing fans back to the stadium will be quite of a challenge.

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9.0 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Letter of Consent

Do you want to participate in the research project:

Match Attendance and “Sportainment”: The Case of Vålerenga Fotball Damer?

Purpose

The purpose of this research project is to throw some light on the possible elements that might impact on stadia attendance of elite female football matches in Norway. Therefore, some questions regarding your personal habits as well as demographics will be asked to understand the reasons why you might want to attend or not to female football matches. Also, your responses will be used only within the scope of my Master thesis in Sports Management program at Molde University College.

Who is responsible for the research project?

This project is developed by the Sport Management department of Molde University College

What does it mean for you to participate?

Your participation is crucial to throw some light on how to attract more people to female football matches at Intility Arena

Is voluntary to participate?

Yes! Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any moment. Also, there will be questions in the questionnaire **regarding your ethnic background, but you can choose not to answer this if you do not want to.**

Your privacy – how we store and use your information

All the information collected from you will be processed and stored in a computer with restricted access, belonging to the data controller and processed by the project leader as well as the master student responsible for this project.

What happens to your information when we end the research project?

Once the project is finished, all the collected data will be stored in an anonymous form and all personally identifiable information will be removed, re-written or categorized.

Your rights As long as you can be identified in the data, you are entitled to: access to what personal data is registered about you, to correct personal data about you, deleted personal data about you, obtain a copy of your personal data (data portability), and to lodge a complaint with the Data Protection Officer or the Data Protection Authority about the processing of your personal data.

What gives us the right to process personal data about you?

We process information about you based on your consent.

Where can I find out more?

If you have any questions for the study, or would like to take advantage of your rights, please contact: Marete Ludviclesen by email (Merete.Ludviksen@himolde.no) – Molde University College. NSD – Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or phone: 55 58 21 17.

Sincerely

Elmis Sierra Salgado
MSc. Student – Molde University College

Harald Dolles
Thesis Supervisor – Molde University
College

9.2 Appendix 2: On-line Survey

Tilskuere - Vålerenga Fotball Damer

Page 1

Hensikten med dette forskningsprosjektet er å kaste lyst på noen av de elementene som kan påvirke tilskuertall i den norske toppfotballen på kvinnesiden. Din mening er derfor viktig, slik at den kan tas hensyn til når fremtidige initiativ angående kampdag på Intility Arena skal avgjøres. Det vil også være **spørsmål i spørreskjemaet angående din etniske bakgrunn, men du kan velge å ikke svare på dette hvis du ikke vil.**

Din deltakelse i dette studiet er frivillig og du vil være helt anonym. Svarene vil bare brukt til å utarbeide min masteroppgave i Sports Management ved Høgskolen i Molde.

Hvis du har noen spørsmål, eller ønsker å trekke tilbake dine data når som helst i løpet av prosjektet, vennligst ta kontakt på e-post: Elmis Sierra Salgado // e-post:

elmis.e.sierra.salgado@stud.himolde.no

*

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet "Match Attendance and" Sportainment": The Case of Vålerenga Fotball Damer, og har fått muligheten til å stille spørsmål. Jeg er enig i:

- Å delta i denne online undersøkelsen
- At personopplysningene mine blir lagret etter prosjektets slutt, for å forstå mulige faktorer som kan påvirke stadiondeltagelse i Norge - hvis aktuelt

Demografi

Generell informasjon om deg vil bli innsamlet i denne delen.

Alder *

Kjønn *

Region (for eksempel Gamle Oslo, Grünerløkka, Grorud, Bærum, etc.)

Hva er den høyeste graden av utdanning du har fullført? *

- Grunnskole
- Videregående
- Bachelorgrad
- Mastergrad eller PhD
- Faglært ved yrkesskole eller tilsvarende
- Jeg foretrekker å ikke svare

Hva jobber du som?



Page break

Page 2

Merkevare

Tenk på fotballag verden rundt, hvilket er det første du tenker på? *

Av kvinnelagene i Norge, hvilke er de første du tenker på? Vennligst svar de tre første du kommer på, i rekkefølge. *

1.-

*

2.-

*

3.-

Følger du Vålerenga Damer i sosiale medier? *

Ja

Nei

På hvilke plattformer følger du dem? *

 This element is only shown when the option "Ja" is selected in the question "Følger du Vålerenga Damer i sosiale medier?"

Instagram

Facebook

TikTok

Snapchat

YouTube

Twitter

Hvis det er tilgjengelig, ville du være interessert i å kjøpe varer fra damelaget? *

Ja

Nei

Hvis du svarte på spørsmålet over, hvor mye er du villig til å betale for en drakt? *

NOK:

Supporteridentitet

Velg på en skala fra 1 til 5 det svaret som er nærmest dine følelser. Igjen, det finnes ingen rette eller gale svar

Hvor viktig er det for deg at Vålerenga Damer vinner

Der 1 er "Ikke viktig" og 5 "Veldig viktig"

	1 Ikke viktig	2 Litt viktig	3 Nøytral	4 Viktig	5 Veldig Viktig
Nivå av betydning *	<input type="radio"/>				

Hvor sterkt ser du på deg selv som en supporter av Vålerenga Damer?

Der 1 er "Ikke en supporter" og 5 "Absolutt en supporter"

	1 Ikke en supporter	2 Uregelmessig supporter	3 Nøytral	4 Supporter	5 Absolutt en supporter
Engasjementsnivå *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Hvor sterkt ser vennene dine på deg som en fan av Vålerenga Damer?

Der 1 er "Ikke en supporter" og 5 "Absolutt en supporter"

	1 Ikke en supporter	2 Uregelmessig supporter	3 Nøytral	4 Supporter	5 Absolutt en supporter
Engasjementsnivå	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I løpet av sesongen, hvor tett følger du Vålerenga Damer på en eller flere av følgende plattformer: a) På stadion eller TV. b) via avis c) på nettsidene d) Sosiale Medier e) Radio

Der 1 er "Aldri" og 5 "Nesten hver dag"

	1 Aldri	2 Sjelden	3 Noen ganger	4 Som oftest	5 Nesten hver dag
Engasjementsnivå *	<input type="radio"/>				

Hvor viktig er det for deg å være supporter av Vålerenga Damer?

Der 1 er "Ikke viktig" og 5 "Veldig viktig"

	1 Ikke viktig	2 Litt viktig	3 Nøytral	4 Viktig	5 Veldig Viktig
Nivå av betydning *	<input type="radio"/>				

Hvor sterkt misliker du Vålerenga Damers rival lag?

Der 1 er "Misliker de ikke" og 5 "Misliker de sterkt"

	1 Misliker de ikke	2 Misliker dem litt	3 Nøytral	4 Misliker	5 Misliker de sterkt
Nivå av mislike *	<input type="radio"/>				

Hvor sterkt misliker du Vålerenga Damers rival lag?

Der 1 er "Misliker de ikke" og 5 "Misliker de sterkt"

	1 Misliker de ikke	2 Misliker dem litt	3 Nøytral	4 Misliker	5 Misliker de sterkt
Nivå av mislike *	<input type="radio"/>				

Hvor ofte profilerer du Vålerengas merkevare gjennom supportereffekter, både der du bor og der du jobber?

Der 1 er "Aldri" og 5 "Alltid"

	1 Aldri	2 Sjelden	3 Noen ganger	4 Som oftest	5 Alltid
Frekvens *	<input type="radio"/>				

Var du på Intility Arena for å se på Vålerenga Damer forrige sesong? *

Ja

Nei

Hvor ofte var du på Intility Arena? *

Veldig ofte (7 eller flere kamper)

Ofte (3 til 6 kamper)

I blant (1 eller to kamper)

Var ikke på kamp

Stadionoppmøte

Denne delen tar for seg ulike faktorer som kan være viktige for hvorvidt du bestemmer deg for å dra på kvinnefotballkamp eller ikke.

Hvor viktige er følgende faktorer for om du drar på stadion eller ikke? Skalaen går som følger: Ikke viktig, Mindre viktig, Verken eller, Viktig, Veldig viktig.

	Ikke viktig	Mindre viktig	Hverken eller	Viktig	Veldig viktig
TV-dekningen av den aktuelle kampen *	<input type="radio"/>				
Prisen for sesongkort *	<input type="radio"/>				
TV-dekningen av en annen stor sportsbegivenhet samtidig som kampen foregår *	<input type="radio"/>				
Billettpris *	<input type="radio"/>				
Resultatene til Vålerenga Damer *	<input type="radio"/>				
Antall stjernespillere på bortelaget *	<input type="radio"/>				
Antall stjernespillere på hjemmelaget (Vålerenga Damer) *	<input type="radio"/>				
Rivaliseringen mellom lagene *	<input type="radio"/>				
Spesielle promoteringer inn mot kampdag (kvinnedag, gruppetilbud etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>				
Vålerengas tabellplassering *	<input type="radio"/>				
Atmosfæren på stadion på kampdag *	<input type="radio"/>				

Rensligheten på stadionfasilitetene *	<input type="radio"/>				
Helse og hygiene på stadionanlegg *	<input type="radio"/>				
Sikkerhet på stadion *	<input type="radio"/>				
Underholdningsalternativer (musikk, pauseunderholdning, fanzone etc.) *	<input type="radio"/>				
Enkel tilgang til stadion via privat transport *	<input type="radio"/>				
Parkeringsmuligheter i nærheten av stadion *	<input type="radio"/>				
Kampene avholdes i helger (fredag, lørdag, søndag) *	<input type="radio"/>				
Kollektivtransporttilbudet *	<input type="radio"/>				

Hvilken av disse etniske gruppene identifiserer du deg som? *

Eventuelle tilleggskommentarer.

Takk for at du tok deg tid til å svare på undersøkelsen!

9.3 Appendix 3: First Email Response from NSD with Recommendations.

N

NSD Personvern

10.03.2020 10:02

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 173650 må kompletteres for at NSD kan fortsette vurderingen.

Når du har gjort oppdateringene i skjemaet, må du gå til siden "send inn" og trykke "bekreft innsending".

Dersom du har ytterligere kommentarer eller spørsmål kan du skrive en melding i dialogfeltet over og trykke "send melding".

Følgende kommentar er gitt av NSDs personvernrådgiver:

Hello Elmis

We have taken a look at your notification form and have a few comments.

1. What survey provider will you be using? This is a data processor. On the page processing, please pick "External service or network (data processor)" on the first question, and "Data processor" on the second question. Will IP-addresses be stored by the survey provider? In that case you must answer yes to "mail address, IP address or other online identifier" on the page personal data. Please make sure that the survey provider of your choice has a data processor agreement with your institution.
 2. On the page Sample 1, please pick "Explicit consent (art. 9 nr. 2 a)".
 3. In the information letter you should include some information on how you were able to get their contact information. You should also include the fact that there will be questions in the questionnaire regarding the respondents ethnic background, but that they can choose not to answer this if they do not want to.
 4. In the final part of the information letter, where respondents choose what they agree to, please remove any unnecessary points. (I.e: that teacher can provide information)
 5. We ask that social media is not used for direct contact with respondents. It is not possible to get a data processor agreement with Facebook, and direct contact with respondents should be avoided. Putting a link to the questionnaire for a group of Vålerenga-fans is acceptable, as long as you disable comments on the message.
- Please update the notification form according to our points, and then press confirm send in on the final page. We will then continue our assessment of the project.

9.4 Appendix 4: NSD Granting Permission for Study.

N

NSD Personvern

17.03.2020 14:01

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 173650 er nå vurdert av NSD.

Følgende vurdering er gitt:

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 17.03.2020, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin.

NOTIFY CHANGES If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes.

TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION

The project will be processing special categories of personal data about race and ethnic background, and general categories of personal data, until 31.05.2020.

LEGAL BASIS

The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn.

The legal basis for processing special categories of personal data is therefore explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6.1 a), cf. art. 9.2 a), cf. the Personal Data Act § 10, cf. § 9 (2).

PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA

NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding:

- lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and will give their consent
- purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes
- data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which are adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed
- storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose

THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS

Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing

(art. 18), notification (art. 19), data portability (art. 20). These rights apply so long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data.

NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13.

We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month.

FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES

NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data.

Nettskjema is a data processor for the project. NSD presupposes that the processing of personal data by a data processor meets the requirements under the General Data Protection Regulation arts. 28 and 29.

To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project).

FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT

NSD will follow up the progress of the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Henrik Netland Svensen

Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)