



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY  
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# **Persuasive Marketing Communications**

Football organizations pursuit of increased attendance levels through season ticket sales

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AUTHORS: ADRIEN MATHIEU & TOM LÖFGREN

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Authors: Adrien Mathieu & Tom Löfgren

Tutor: Jonas Dahlqvist

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## Abstract

**Background:** Spectator attendance levels seems to be strongly connected to sport organizations ability to strengthen its core audience. Retaining and increasing the amounts of season ticket holders is said to be a crucial part of maintaining one's business in the sports industry as many sports organizations rely on season tickets sales to ensure revenue streams. Previous research has focused on why growing a fan base is essential for business growth and what motivators can work on potential sports spectators to attract them to attend games. However, when trying to grasp what sports organizations actually do in terms of marketing communication, research gets scarce. There seems to be a need for research focused on how sports organizations manage their persuasive communication efforts to retain and grow their spectator attendance levels.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how sports organizations work with their marketing communications to be persuasive in selling season tickets and thus retaining and growing their spectator attendance levels.

**Method:** This qualitative study is based on an exploratory study with a pragmatic philosophy combined with an abductive approach. In order to collect desirable data, in-depth interviews and data observation have been conducted. The data was analyzed through theory-driven themes.

**Conclusion:** This study concludes that emotional messages with supporter-oriented content communicated through powerful videos to evoke a feeling of togetherness and community is the main way football organizations form their sales messages and arguments to be persuasive in selling season tickets. This study finds that communicating positive motives, such as extra value features, to season ticket holders may also work as a negative motivation for non-season ticket holders. This is due to them developing a fear of missing out if they do not purchase season tickets. This study also concludes that getting to know the core audience better can have effect on the persuasiveness of marketing communications. First, it can provide important knowledge on how to meet the audience's needs and demands. Second, the core audience can become an essential marketing communication channel in the future due to the immense help supporter affiliations and season ticket holders can provide in terms of season ticket marketing on their own platforms.

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# 1. Introduction

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*This chapter presents a background of the research topic, introduces the problem and presents the purpose of the study.*

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## 1.1 Background

Spectator sports can be traced back to Greece and the ancient Olympic games (Karakaya, Yannopoulos & Kefalaki, 2016). We have come a long way since and in modern times, spectator sports can even make up a substantial part of countries economic activity (Theodorakis, Alexandris & Ko, 2011). Spectator sports is a sport that attracts spectators who watches the sport event without taking part themselves. In addition, a sports fan is defined as someone who talks and thinks about sports even when they do not actively read, observe or listen to something in relation to an actual sports event (Norris, Wann & Zapalac, 2015).

Sports organizations in spectator sports can have revenue streams from ticket sales, memorabilia and merchandise sales, TV-rights deals, membership fees, sponsorship deals and sales during game day such as snacks and beverages. However, all of this is connected to one shared denominator, namely the strength of the fan base. The strength of one's fan base and the level of attendance one can achieve during game events is the initial factor of growth according to da Silva and Las Casas (2017). High attendance levels and a strong fan base is strongly connected to a sport organizations ability to attract lucrative sponsors and media deals (Biscaia, 2015) whilst also being directly connected to the revenues generated from that fan base.

Previous literature has found that economic, entertainment, escape, eustress (euphoric stress), self-esteem, group affiliation, family and aesthetics motives affect game attendance (Wann, 1995). In addition, several differences have been spotted between genders in terms of what motives that are perceived to be important.

To ensure a continuously high level of attendance as well as the revenue streams that comes with it, many sports organizations rely on season tickets sales (Warren, 2015). Thus, retaining and increasing the amounts of season ticket holders seems to be a crucial part of maintaining one's business in the sports industry. Indications from this industry is that this is preferably done through strengthening the core audience (confidential report, 2018). In connection to this, it has been shown that sports organizations ability to deliver a qualitative service that meets expectations is essential for the renewal of season tickets (Beccarini & Ferrand, 2006).

Nowadays, many industries have target markets that increasingly consume and enjoy what the online environment has to offer and so does the target market of the sports industry. Reaching potential customers in that online environment and persuade them to consume sports, not only through different play services and on television but live as well, is an essential part in sports organizations pursuit of success. Moreover, spectator attendance levels seem to be strongly connected to sport organizations ability to

strengthen its core audience (Warren, 2015). Thus, it is of great interest to understand how those organizations market and communicate one of the most important product packaging tools for doing just that, namely season tickets. In terms of marketing season tickets, it is interesting to look at how football organizations work with their marketing communication to make it persuasive and become successful in retaining and growing their spectator attendance levels through season ticket sales.

## **1.2 Problem**

Literature provides plenty of research on the sports industry and what sport organizations must do to be successful from a business perspective. Research has focused on areas such as how spectator attendance levels connects to the generation of revenues and why growing a fanbase is essential for business growth. Researchers seem to agree that high spectator levels are of the essence for sports organizations within the spectator entertainment industry and that one way to strengthen the fan base is through selling season tickets.

In order to understand this process better, researchers have put much effort into defining sport fans and what motivates them to consume goods and services connected to their field of fandom. More specifically, they have researched and found motives to why people may be interested in attending sport events and why they might be interested in doing that on a season ticket basis.

Overall, researchers seem to have a good understanding of what aspects could be leveraged to persuade potential customers into actual purchase. However, when trying to grasp what sports organizations actually do in terms of marketing communication, research gets scarce. Previous research provides very little on what sports organizations do to persuade and convert prospects into customers from a marketing communications perspective. Thus, there seems to be a need for research focused on how sports organizations manage their persuasive communication efforts to retain and grow their spectator attendance levels.

## **1.3 Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how sports organizations work with their marketing communications to be persuasive in selling season tickets and thus retaining and growing their spectator attendance levels.

## 2. Theoretical Frame of Reference

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*This chapter provides relevant knowledge about sports organizations and the importance of game attendance levels. It elaborates on communication and persuasion theories and presents the research questions.*

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### 2.1 Understanding marketing communications

Fill and Jamieson (2006) argue that there is no universal definition of marketing communications and that many definitions have originated from a promotional outlook where marketing communication was a mean to persuade people to buy products and services. Focus was mainly on short term, one-way communication with aim on products. As the concept of marketing communications emerged, new goals such as reminding and reassuring customers as well as developing better understanding and preference were introduced in addition to awareness and persuasion. The authors also state that marketing communications deal with the promotion of both the organization and its offerings. Jackson (2013) further adds to that by emphasizing that marketing communications is not a 'one size fits all' but organizations must communicate a tailored message, through different channels to a range of different audiences. As it communicates to consumers and stakeholders, it has been said that marketing communication is the voice of the corporate world (Chikandiwa, 2013).

#### 2.1.1 The development of marketing communications

Jackson (2013) provides some insight to the development in the field of communication, especially in connection to the marketing of an event. The author indicates that traditional community events, marches and public meetings are more compatible with the personal contact characteristics developed in the nineteenth century through to 1930s that mostly made use of word of mouth and flyers/posters marketing communications. When the event is of a more popular and mass attendee variety, the author suggests that mass media communications such as radio and television advertisement are often used. Furthermore, it is argued that more niched and specialized events make use of a wider range of increasingly personalized communication channels such as the Internet, direct mail, text messages as well as word of mouth.

Today, much of what we consider to be marketing communication takes place in a digital setting. According to Wymbs (2011), digital marketing refers to the use of digital technologies to create an integrated, targeted and measurable communication which helps to acquire and retain customers while building deeper relationships with them. The digital landscape in Europe has been evolving in the past few years. Internet penetration in Europe has increased to 81 per cent in 2016 compared to only 68 per cent in 2011. When looking at Sweden, 93 per cent of the population has access to internet (Ecommerce Europe, 2017).

In a digitalized global marketplace, organizations must adapt to the digital era in order to offer the experience that customers expect but also to stay relevant and survive as a business. It is now crucial for organizations to understand how consumers behave in order



to adapt its marketing strategy accordingly. Thus, it is essential to deliver the correct message to consumers and to show the right product or information at the right time. European consumers are nowadays expecting to have a full and enjoyable experience online. Consumers are expecting organizations to be present online, to be reachable and to propose an experience of high-quality that does not differ from real-life experiences. Consumers are also expecting organizations to provide an experience that holds the same standards consistently and is not dependent on the platform where it is consumed (Ecommerce Europe, 2017).

An essential part of the digital marketing ecosystem is social media sites. According to Levy and Birkner (2011), social networking sites are now utilized as credible business tools and have revolutionized how organizations communicate. There are many advantages for organizations to use social media sites as part of their digital marketing communications strategy. Marketing communications on social media sites can stimulate sales, increase brand awareness, improve brand image, generate traffic to online platforms and reduce marketing costs (Felix, Rauschnabel & Hinsch, 2017). In Sweden, Facebook has the highest share of social media users with 79 per cent of the Swedish online population connected to Facebook. Instagram is second with 47 per cent followed by LinkedIn (28 per cent), WhatsApp (25 per cent) and Snapchat (25 per cent) (Ecommerce Europe, 2017).

#### 2.1.2 The marketing communication process

When it comes to the process of marketing communication, there have been many models and theories focused on what the process actually looks like. Depending on what industry one operates in, what kind of product one sells, and what kind of communication one focus at, the process may look very different. However, to mention a few of the more general and most famous models in marketing communication, the AIDA and DAGMAR models have been around for quite some time. They have greatly influenced the way in which we think of communication and selling of products and services today.

The AIDA model constitutes of the stages of Attention, Interest, Desire and Action. As the model traces back to the American advertising and sales pioneer, E. St. Elmo Lewis all the way back to the late 19th century, one can understand that the model has been considered too simplistic (Fill, 2005).

The DAGMAR model was created by Russell Colley in 1969 when he published a book entitled *Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results* which is abbreviated DAGMAR. The model introduced the following 4 levels through which all commercial communications, focused on resulting in a sale, must carry a targeted prospect.

1. The prospect must first be aware of the existence of a brand or company
2. He must have a comprehension of what the product is and what it will do for him
3. He must arrive at a mental suspicion or conviction to buy the product
4. Finally he must stir himself to action (Mackay, 2005).

Marketing communications must not only focus on generating sales, as being the primarily objective of the DAGMAR model. Marketing communications may very well pursue goals such as improving the brand image and reputation of the corporation (Fill,

2005). However, as this study focuses on season ticket sales, it is of greater interest to review literature on such marketing communication processes.

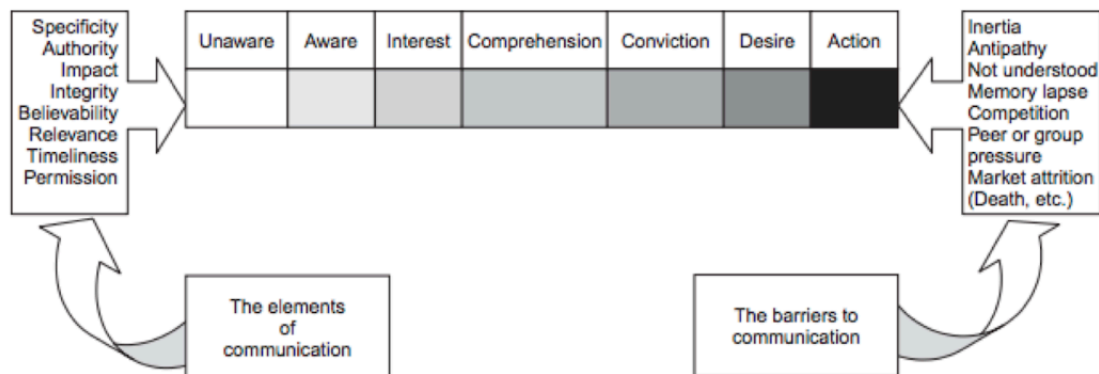


Figure 2-1 “The communication process”  
 Source: Mackay (2005) p.27

Mackay (2005) introduced an enhancement of the DAGMAR and AIDA models by combining them. This model includes the Attention (re-named aware), Interest, Desire and Action steps of the AIDA model. It also takes into consideration the 4 levels of the DAGMAR model dealing with awareness of the brand or company, comprehension of the product and its value, conviction to buy the product and ultimately the step of taking action. In addition, the model identifies opposing forces at work, affecting the end result of the communication process. Mackay (2005) states that the purpose of marketing communication is to help move potential customers from a state of ignorance to one of decision and action. Fill and Jamieson (2006) state that marketing communication, at a basic level, can be said to assume one out of four roles.

First, it may inform and make potential customers aware of an organization's offerings. Second, it can persuade potential customers to actually enter some kind of exchange relationship. Moreover, persuasion is also attempted on current customers in order to maintain the already established exchange relationship. Third, marketing communication is often used as reinforcement as people are reminded of their needs and that, yet another exchange can further aid in meeting that need. Furthermore, organizations can provide reassurance to customers just before, or more commonly, just after the purchase. This helps in making customers feel satisfied with the process and the purchase itself. Rather than constantly striving to attract new customers, the approach of retention may be much more cost-effective. Fourth, it can work as a differentiator when aspects of the offerings from different actors are very similar. In such cases, marketing communicators build images around their brand in order to make them stand out from the competition and position themselves in a favorable way in terms of attracting customers liking based on other aspects than the offering itself. These four roles constitute the DRIP model where marketing communication is said to have the power to: (D) Differentiate (R) Reinforce (I) Inform and (P) Persuade.

## 2.2 Understanding persuasive marketing communications

### 2.2.1 What is persuasion?

According to Jackson (2013), persuasion involves the use of moods, symbols, images, words and emphasis to affect a receiver of a message in such a way that they are encouraged to take the desired action proposed by the sender. The author further states that one must differentiate persuasion from manipulation as it seeks a mutual sense of fulfilment of needs and understanding rather than one actor using tricks to get what it wants. O'Keefe (2002) argues that trying to define persuasion could raise more questions than answers as it is a somewhat fuzzy subject and that one can have a clear understanding of what persuasion is without a hard-edged definition. One of the issues with defining persuasion is where one draws the line between what is required in order to call something persuasive or not.

O'Keefe (2002) states that persuasion must be successful in order to be called persuasion. The example given is that one cannot persuade someone and fail, persuasion only begins to exist when an attempt to influence is successful. This indicates that the concept of success is closely related to the one of persuasion. Thus, two other features of persuasion are the establishment of criteria and goals as well as the intent to reach them. Moreover, Perloff (2008) and O'Keefe (2002) argue that to be able to characterize something as persuasive, the persuadee must have some measure of freedom such as free will and choice to take a voluntary action. Perloff (2008) adds that persuasion relies on the communication of a message. O'Keefe (2002) also puts emphasis on the importance of the presence of communication. The author states that persuasion is achieved when communication from one actor to another succeeds in influencing that actor to act or change its mental state in a desirable way.

### 2.2.2 Changing attitudes and behaviors

The aspect of state of mind is very important to the concept of persuasion. Changes in attitudes and mental state are said to also change behaviors (Perloff, 2008). Some instances of persuasion involve only the change in mental state without any behavioral change being made. However, when behavioral change is involved, it is often presumed that this behavioral change springs from a change in mental state. This notion has led researchers to argue that when aiming at changing what people do, the way to achieve this is through changing the way people think (O'Keefe, 2002; Perloff, 2008; Jackson, 2013). Furthermore, Jackson (2013) states that both facts (what we know to be true) and our values (what we believe is right) constitute the basis on which our attitudes are based on.

Robert Cialdini (2007) argues for six basic tendencies of human behavior that affects a potential positive response to a request. By understanding how people comply with a request, one can influence behaviors and stimulate a positive response through persuasion. The six basic tendencies are as follows:

*Reciprocation* – Generally, people are more likely to say yes if you have done something for them. Giving away something may result in an increased sense of that actor wanting to give something back. *Consistency* – People want to appear consistent and rational in beliefs, statements and actions. Thus, getting people to sign up for, or agree to something

smaller can make them stay on for something bigger along the way as they want to remain consistent. *Social Validation* – Oftentimes, people decide what to do in a situation by looking at what others do and have done in similar situations. Communicating that others have complied or agreed to something may spark a potential interest in doing the same. *Liking* – People prefer to say yes to other whom they have a liking for. If there is a higher level of affection and feeling of connection, the chance of persuading that actor is greater. *Authority* – People tend to listen to authoritarian figures and experts to help us to decide how to behave and what to choose. *Scarcity* – People often finds items and opportunities to be more desirable if there is a scarce supply of them. Providing such a sense can thus lead to people making a faster decision as they do not want to get left out without the item.

### 2.2.3 The components of persuasion

Jackson (2013) argues that to understand a marketing communicator's ability to communicate persuasively and change mental states and ultimately behaviors, one must look at three major components of communication and persuasion. The author refers to what was coined by Aristoteles, two millennia ago, as Ethos – the speaker, Logos – the message and Pathos – the audience.

The *speaker or the source of the message* as Perloff (2008) interprets it, is according to Jackson (2013) the component that is the easiest for the persuader to control. This component is closely related to credibility and the author identifies three major characteristics of credibility. First, that the recipients of communication perceive the communicator as skillful and knowledgeable in the field. A sense of expertise helps in increasing credibility. Second, the communicator must be perceived as honest, safe and trustworthy. Third, the communicator can be perceived as more credible if there is goodwill such as a reputation of being caring and understanding the recipients' point of view.

Jackson (2013) further states that likability, similarity and physical attractiveness as potential factors to how a speaker or source of a message is perceived and met by its recipients. This has similarities to what Cialdini (2007) argued for with his 6 tendencies of changing behaviors, especially the *liking* tendency that the likeability of a speaker/sender/communicator greatly affects how the message is received and whether desirable actions are taken.

The *message* comes into play when one has identified an audience and selected the right speaker to carry out the communication (Jackson, 2013). According to Perloff (2008), structure, content and the way in which symbols and words are used are three main components of the message. O'Keefe (2002) further states that in order to provide a persuasive message, one must clearly explain what is expected of the recipient of the message and why they should do what is asked of them rather than something else. Moreover, it is mentioned that the message content can be rational, emotional or a mixture of both in its approach. When forming rational messages, one can focus on facts, quantitative information and statements from experts and credible sources. When formulating messages with a greater sense of emotions, one could make use of personal narratives, individual experiences and stories to inspire and motivate the recipient. It is also noted by Jackson (2013) that how, and not only what we say is very powerful in terms of being persuasive.

The *receiver* has, according to Jackson (2013), been somewhat underestimated as the source and the message has been perceived as more important in terms of persuasion. The author states that one should address the process of persuasion through focusing on the audience at hand rather than to begin with the source or the message. When needs and interests of the audience are taken into consideration from the beginning, a communicator will have a better understanding of how to choose source and formulate the message. To highlight the process of starting with the audience before deciding what to say to them, the author introduced the following three stage figure that starts from audience and moves on to who/how to say it and ultimately ends up at the decision of what to actually say.

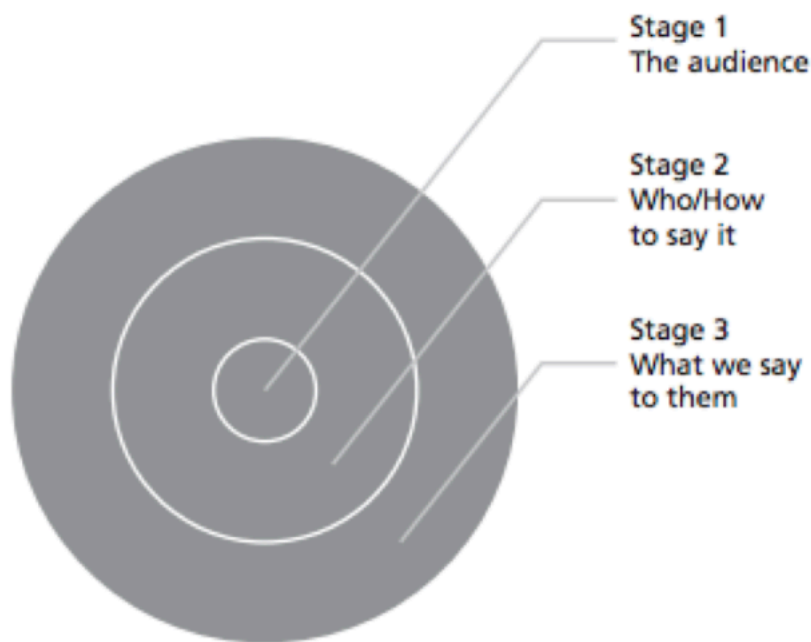


Figure 2-2 “The stages of persuasion”  
Source: Jackson (2013) p.13

Jackson (2013) further concludes that the selection of channels is essential as circumstances and audiences in play affects what channel will be appropriate. Moreover, the author puts emphasis on three demands for deciding whether persuasion is maximized. First, the needs of the audience are assessed. Second, the construction of attitudes and how to affect beliefs, values and social norms are understood. Third, a persuasive message is constructed based on knowledge about the credibility of the source as well as the needs and characteristics of the audience. Combining these conclusions, the author introduces a figure that should help event communicators to understand persuasive communication.

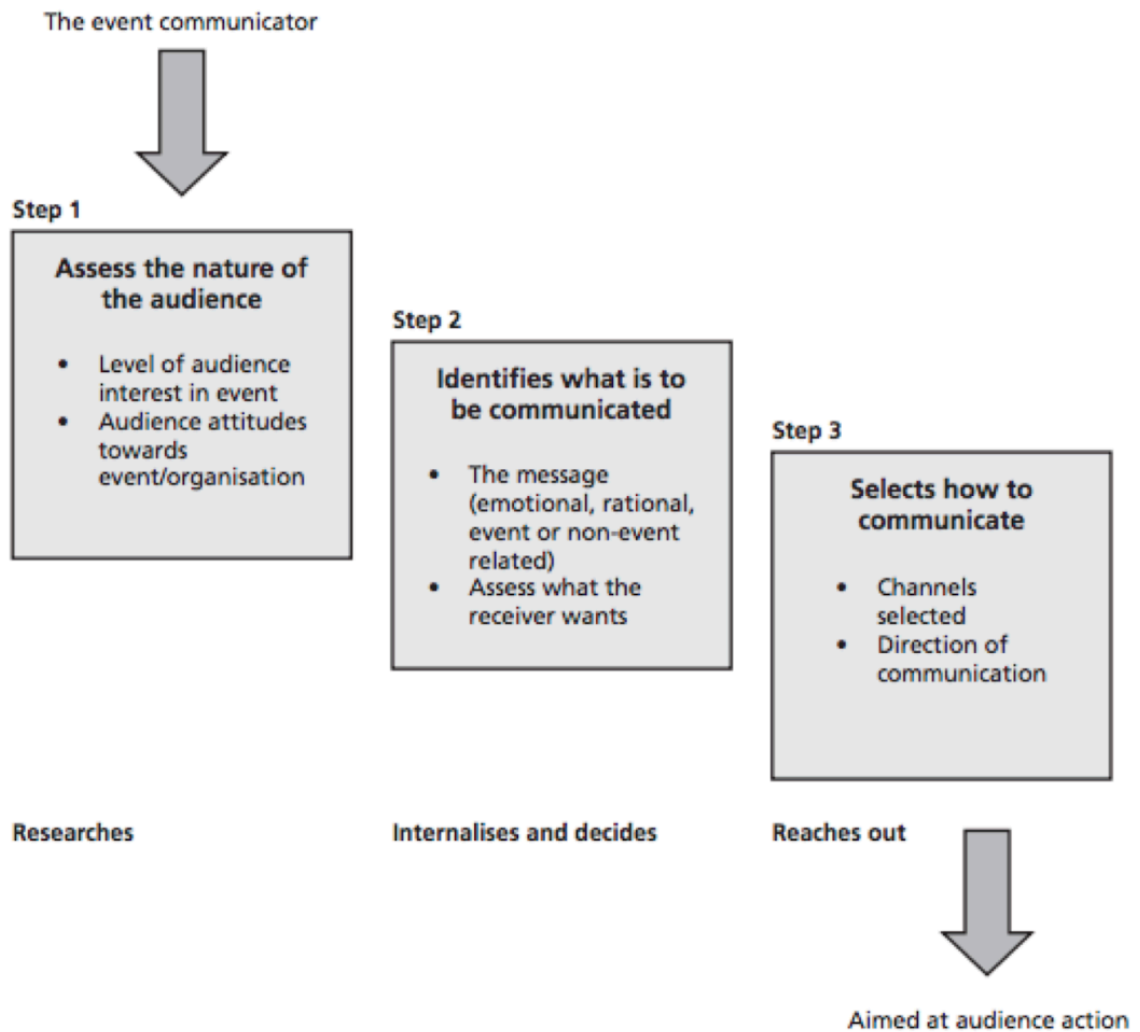


Figure 2-3 “The influence model”  
 Source: Jackson (2013) p.223

The figure provides three steps of effective communication and is named “The influence model”. The first step puts emphasis on the importance of conducting research to assess one’s key audiences. At this point, it is important to find out whether they might be interested in the offering or not. Also, one wants to clarify whether the audience have a positive or negative view of the source of message in order to understand in what way to construct the message. This can decide if the constructed message is based on emotional or rational influential stories and testimonies. In the final step, one must decide what mixture of channels to choose from to deliver the message in the most suitable way.

To summarize, the previous two sections provide a better understanding of persuasive marketing communications. To move further towards the objective of understanding marketing communications for sports organizations in terms of retaining and growing spectator attendance levels through season ticket sales, the following three chapters will look closer on sports organizations, sports spectators and season tickets.

## 2.3 Understanding sports organizations

In order to understand a sport organization such as a football club, it is important to understand the services and products it offers to its consumers. Funk, Alexandris and McDonald (2016) argue that the sports industry is largely made up of services or a combination of services and products. Services differ from products in some major areas. Services are intangible and can thus be difficult to clearly define and communicate. In the case of a football club, it may be challenging to determine what the core products are. To aid in that, one may consider the core, tangible and augmented aspects of the offering.

Zeithaml and Bitners (2003) argue that to determine the core offering of a football club, one must identify the main needs that drive individuals to watch a football match. Doing that, one may find that “entertainment” is the core offering of a football club. Having identified the core offering will help in designing the experience during the games. One may also consider the more tangible aspects. The tangible part of the offering is what the customers can see and touch upon. It may consist of the facilities such as a stadium, the players of a team, the sporting event itself or the website and platforms operated by the club. Moreover, the augmented parts of the offering are what add extra value to the tangible offering and its main purpose is to create competitive advantage. For a football club, this could include personalized materials for fans, customer service at the stadium or extra activities at the game events.

Funk, Alexandris and McDonald (2016) further state that sport services cannot be standardized and therefore the consistency of its quality is uncertain. The different factors deemed important by the consumer of the service is very difficult to control. In the case of a football game, the quality of the event may vary based on different factors such as the importance of the game, the weather and the performance of the players. Moreover, the evaluation of the quality is mostly subjective to the opinion of the spectator and often based on their personal experience. The authors also mention another aspect that differentiates team sports from common businesses; in the football industry, the organizations are dependent on their competitors to a higher degree, as they cannot deliver the service without having an opponent. Thus, there must be a willingness to help each other out in order to keep a healthy rivalry that will benefit the industry and the sport in its entirety.

### 2.3.1 High attendance levels as a foundation for revenues

For sport organizations competing in the entertainment industry, it is crucial to maintain high attendance levels on a regular basis (da Silva & Las Casas, 2017). Having high attendance levels are important for several reasons. Biscaia (2015) states that higher attendance levels have direct effect on ticket sales revenues but also leads to increased revenue streams from selling parking tickets, food, beverages, and souvenirs during games. Reese and Bennett (2013) argue that many minor-league franchises rely on ticket sales revenues to sustain their businesses whilst franchises in major league sports can generate revenues outside of what can be accomplished just through selling season tickets. This kind of revenues oftentimes come from sponsor deals with different companies. However, Biscaia (2015) argues that attendance level may be very important for this kind of revenues as well. To understand why that would be, it is important to look at the reasons for companies to enter sponsor collaborations. Turley and Kelley (2015) state that companies often become sponsors of clubs by providing money or other

resources to the club in return for direct association and publicity connected to the club. According to Plewa, Carrillat, Mazodier and Quester (2016), companies may enter these types of partnerships for altruistic reasons because they care for the club’s success or to strengthen its own CSR image. Kelly, Ireland, Mangan and Williamson (2016) put emphasize on the economical and marketing related reasons to why a company would sponsor a team. According to the them, sport sponsorship is the most popular form of sponsorship due to its capacity to influence brand awareness and positive brand associations. Turley and Kelley (2015) also state that companies enter sponsorship deals to gain favorable publicity, association to a healthy product and adding some edge to their brands’ personality.

The above statements indicate that companies oftentimes enter these kinds of sponsor collaborations for reasons connected to improving brand image and increasing publicity. In order to improve their return on investment, companies want to reach as large of an audience as possible (Kelly, Ireland, Mangan & Williamson, 2016). Low attendance during events may show a lack of interest in the franchise and this can cause clubs to have a hard time attracting companies for sponsorship deals as companies want to be associated with a successful club with many followers (Turley & Kelley, 2015). Thus, high attendance levels are not just important to increase direct revenues but to enable clubs to find lucrative sponsor collaborations (Biscaia, 2015). This is further strengthened by the arguments of da Silva and Las Casas (2017), that sponsorships and media rights emerge as the main engines of growth and that without game-attending fans, clubs have problems attracting sponsors. In addition, they conclude that the initial driver for this growth is the development of a strong fan-base.

Collignon and Sultan (2014) introduce a model that helps visualize how different parts of the sports ecosystem stays together through the flow of money.

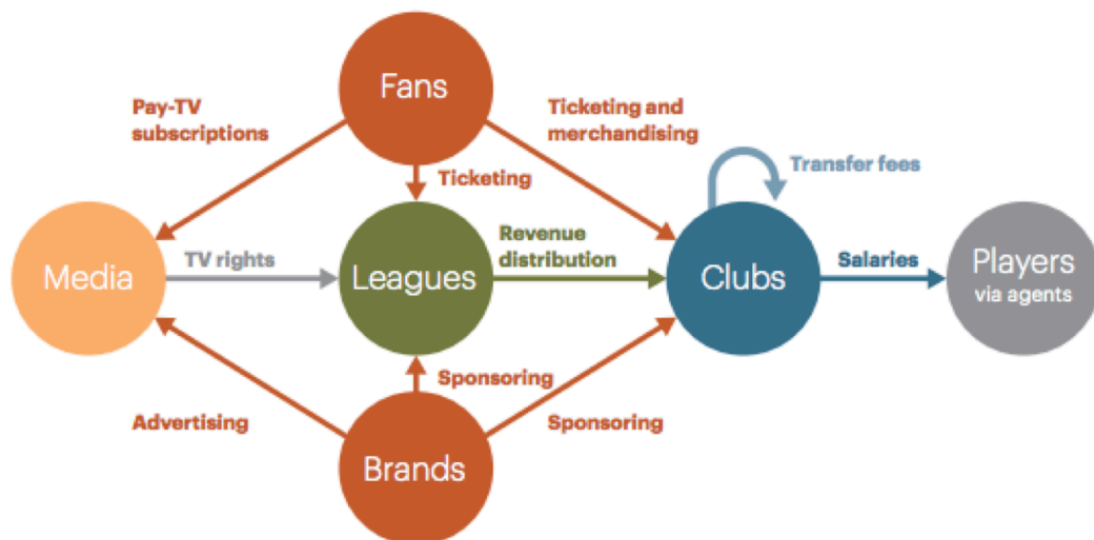


Figure 2-4 “The sport ecosystem: the flow of money”  
 Source: Collignon & Sultan (2014, p. 6)



Just as da Silva and Las Casas (2017), Turley and Kelley (2015) and Biscaia (2015), Collignon and Sultan (2014) highlight the connection between fans, leagues, media, brands and clubs. The model provides a simplified visualization of how fans are the foundation for revenues. In the model, there is a visualization of the direct revenues mentioned by Biscaia (2015) as fans buy tickets and merchandise directly from the clubs. As stated by Turley and Kelley (2015), there is a connection between brands and the clubs in the form of sponsorship deals. Another main player of this model is the Media. This relates to the argument by da Silva and Las Casas (2017) that media rights are emerging as one of the main engines of growth together with sponsorships.

In their model, Collignon and Sultan (2014) add the leagues as a hub between all the players in the ecosystem. By having many fans interested in the clubs and the leagues, the three actors; Media, Leagues and Clubs can all gain more revenues from brands as the potential publicity reach increases. This constitutes the indirect revenue streams for the clubs as the money flows from the Media, to the Leagues, to the Clubs. Simultaneously, money streams from both fans and brands directly to the clubs. Taking the fans out of the equation, money streams to the clubs would stop from all actors except for perhaps sponsors with a pure altruistic supporting mission (Plewa, Carrillat, Mazodier, & Quester, 2016). Ultimately, this shows that a club generates both direct and indirect revenues based on the strength of their fan-base.

To fully understand such a fan-base and the importance of having high levels of live spectators rather than just fans that follow from a far or via TV broadcasts, one must first understand the fans and what makes them consume sports.

## **2.4 Understanding sports spectators**

Warren (2015) states that the buyer of a ticket may not be the consumer of that ticket. There is a B2B market where companies buy tickets and then let employees and representatives consume them. In addition, the author states that while it is true that fans attend games, spectators are not required to be fans to purchase tickets. Thus, one must understand that a fan, a customer and a consumer may not be the same person. Customers may not be consumers, and a fan may not necessarily be a customer or a consumer. This also goes the other way, as a customer or a consumer may not be a fan of the specific team. With that in mind, Silva and Las Casas (2017) state that spectators of sports may be a variety of people whilst fans are rather a fraternity of people who truly cares for the clubs over a long period of time. They further state that fans form the essence of a club's following base and that sport fans engagement leads to growth and expansion for the clubs.

Norris, Wann and Zapalac (2015) state that a sports fan is defined as someone who talks and thinks about sports even when they do not actively read, observe or listen to something in relation to an actual sports event. In addition, Stewart, Smith and Nicholson (2003) as well as Johnston (2004) argue that sports fans should be defined as someone being part of an affiliation where emotional significance and value is derived from being a member of the affiliation. These sport fans show consistency, loyalty and dedication towards a sport or a team and builds up knowledge in the field. They show commitment in a tangible way through activities such as ticket or merchandise purchasing, and they have an attitude of belief and support towards their chosen sport and team.

Da Silva and Las Casas (2017) argue that fans tend to feed their feelings of identification with the team when watching games and that this strengthens the relationship between the fan and the team in powerful way. Biscaia (2015) adds to that by stating that being at the stadium, supporting the team is one of most relevant moment of the week for a sport fan. Thus, attracting people to the games may spark an interest for someone to become a fan. At this point clubs can strengthen their relation to the fans if they can continually make them go to the games and thus develop their fandom. Previous research has put much effort into understanding the motives of sports spectators to better understand how to persuade them to attend games.

#### 2.4.1 Motives for game attendance

Spectator motivation has a strong effect on sport event attendance levels (Karakaya, Yannopoulos & Kefalaki, 2016). Sloan (1989), one of the first researchers to consider motives of sports spectators, grouped the spectators into five categories; Salubrious effects, stress and stimulation seeking, catharsis and aggression, entertainments, and achievement seeking. Much of this lacked empirical support and has later been redefined into other models and theories, however it was the basis for understanding motives of sport spectators (Karakaya, Yannopoulos & Kefalaki, 2016).

Wann (1995), add to the research by introducing an eight-step scale called the Sport Fan Motivation Scale including the following steps; economic, entertainment, escape, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, family and aesthetics. The economic motive has to do with the possibility to obtain economic gain from sports wagering. The entertainment motive relates to spectators attending sport events for pleasure and entertainment. The escape motive relates to people escaping their everyday life problems. The eustress motive focus on the desire to gain excitement and a euphoric stress and stimulation from the sport event. The self-esteem motive puts emphasis on people's need for acknowledgment by other. The group affiliation motive expressed fans desire to consume sports whilst being part of a group. The family motive highlight how people enjoy watching sports as a family activity and finally, the aesthetics motive deals with the enjoyment of the perceived beauty and complexity of the sport and the event. The model has been found both valid and reliable when being tested (Wann, Schrader & Wilson, 1999; Trail, Fink & Anderson, 2003; Cohen & Avrahami, 2005; Mehus, 2005).

Biscaia (2015) goes about highlighting what spectators finds important in a different way than the previous authors. Instead of purely focusing on measuring motivational factors such as the Sport-Fan Motivation Scale by Wann (1995), Biscaia (2015) uses different motives of spectators to create seven measures on how sport clubs can increase their stadium attendance.

##### 1. *Make sure fans believe players honor the team's jersey through their performance*

In short, the attendees want to see the performers' best effort. If the players show a great commitment and works hard, spectators may still be satisfied with a negative result. Ultimately, honoring of the team's jersey may be perceived as more important than winning. This relates to the quality uncertainty argued by Funk, Alexandris and McDonald (2016) and shows that bad quality in terms of results can potentially be overcome by a display of pride in the effort itself.

## *2. Maintain high standards of functional quality*

People tend to select events they think allows them to spend an enjoyable time and is perceived to have good quality and standards. Funk, Alexandris and McDonald (2016) argue that quality evaluation is very subjective and relies with the perception of the spectator. This imposes a challenge to sports clubs as they must not only maintain an actual high standard, but they must also be perceived as a club that does just that.

## *3. Create an aesthetic pleasing atmosphere*

This refers to the aesthetic quality spectators perceive of the service environment and ancillary products to have. This could include the facility design, memorabilia and giveaways, which relate to the augmented sports products previously mentioned by Zeithaml and Bitners (2003). However, it might also include the more intangible aspect of the atmosphere created by the supporters and how pleasing that atmosphere is perceived. In addition, aesthetics quality was also one of Wann's (1995) steps in the Sport Fan Motivation Scale where he stated that the beauty and complexity of the sport and the event is an important motivator.

## *4. Trigger positive emotions within attendees*

During live event, spectators tend to experience a roller coaster in terms of emotions, and the stadium ambiance often results in strong emotional reactions. The spectator will most likely experience both pleasant, joyful emotions of excitement but also unpleasant emotions such as anger and disappointment. Ultimately, these emotions often have an influence on their intentions to attend and/or recommend future games. As previously mentioned, Mehus (2005) argues that excitement motives are stronger than social ones. This further implies that these emotional aspects of a spectator's experience are of great importance if a club wants to retain and bring back customers to their events.

## *5. Help supporters to create favorable team brand associations*

Biscaia (2015) argues that the favorable team brand association encourages supporters to attend future games and recommend them to others. Aspects directly related to the game such as team success is important but there are also aspects to this that sports organizations can manage without being dependent on the ups and downs of team success. One of those things is the stadium itself that tends to have a strong meaning for the supporters and thus help build favorable brand associations.

## *6. Work with sponsors to attract spectators and maintain attendance*

Sponsors and clubs can work together to improve the entertainment of the event. With the help of sponsors, they can even gain resources to do something in addition to the game itself. Such activities can be fun for spectators whilst also providing the sponsors with publicity and marketing opportunities.

## *7. Develop membership programs*

Biscaia (2015) argues membership programs to have a strong effect on game attendance. In accordance, da Silva and Las Casas (2017), argue that true fans form the essence of a clubs following base and that sport fans engagement leads to growth and expansion for the clubs. This is argued to be due to the strengthened bond between fans and the clubs.

#### 2.4.2 Understanding season tickets

According to Warren (2015), marketing and selling season tickets is one of the most popular strategy to guarantee continuous revenue streams for sports organizations. In addition, Reese and Bennett (2013) state that sport organizations that rely heavily on spectator attendance often place great emphasis on their season ticket holders and on increasing that part of their fan base. Schreyer, Schmidt and Torgler (2018) argue that season ticket holders are an integral part of a team's fan-base that often numbering in thousands and are very familiar with their team. Not only do they initiate supportive choreographies and chants in the stands, but also create engaging themes for external stakeholders of the club, such as media and sponsors. This correlated to what has previously been mentioned, that high attendance levels are essential for generating both direct and indirect revenues (da Silva & Las Casas, 2017; Turley & Kelley, 2015; Biscaia, 2015; Collignon & Sultan, 2014). Warren (2015) further adds to this by stating that season ticket sales approximately constitute one-third of a team's revenue and that almost all other revenue streams are dependent on high attendance levels. It is also stated that high attendance levels are ensured by selling season ticket since they package all games at purchase. Season tickets provide a solid ground for the minimum attendance figure as they are often sold many days, weeks or months before the actual game. Selling single game tickets is less predictable as purchase is most often made closer to the event.

According Burton and Cornilles (1998), techniques to sell season tickets have been an increasing concern for sport organizations due to an increased variety of other entertainment options. Several variables have been said to affect season ticket sales, one of them being the sales strategies implemented by the sport organizations. Moreover, it has been stated that these sales strategies need to be creative in order to boost attendance even when the sports organizations are not having success on the pitch (Reese & Bennet, 2013). This relates to the argument by Biscaia (2015) that players display of pride and honor to the team may be a stronger motivator for spectators to attend games than the team actually winning. The study by Reese and Bennett (2013) found that repurchase intentions were not based on a team's results. They do however state that a winning season may very well be beneficial to season ticket sales, but it should not be a main focus for marketers.

Another aspect argued to be vital to the purchase of season tickets is the satisfaction of the purchase process. This process is usually initiated with a prospect being provided some information about the good or service and its price, and then results in an informed choice. Through the buying procedure, the prospect develops impressions about the seller based on the interaction with its service personnel throughout the process (Greenwell, 2007). Greenwell (2007) further states that factors such as service fairness, expectations, choice, availability of product information, comparison of alternatives, and interaction with sales people affects the satisfaction of the purchasing process. In addition, it is suggested that fans have expectations before a potential purchase. Beccarini and Ferrand (2006) argue that sport organizations ability to fulfilling these fan expectations is essential for the final satisfaction of the purchase process. Greenwell (2007) adds to that by stating that sport organizations ability to meet fan expectations in all aspects, not only during the purchase process, is a determining factor of season ticket holders' satisfaction levels. Moreover, it is said that by identifying areas that need improvement and understanding the satisfaction of fans, sport organizations should be able to retain consumers while also finding ways to attract new ones.

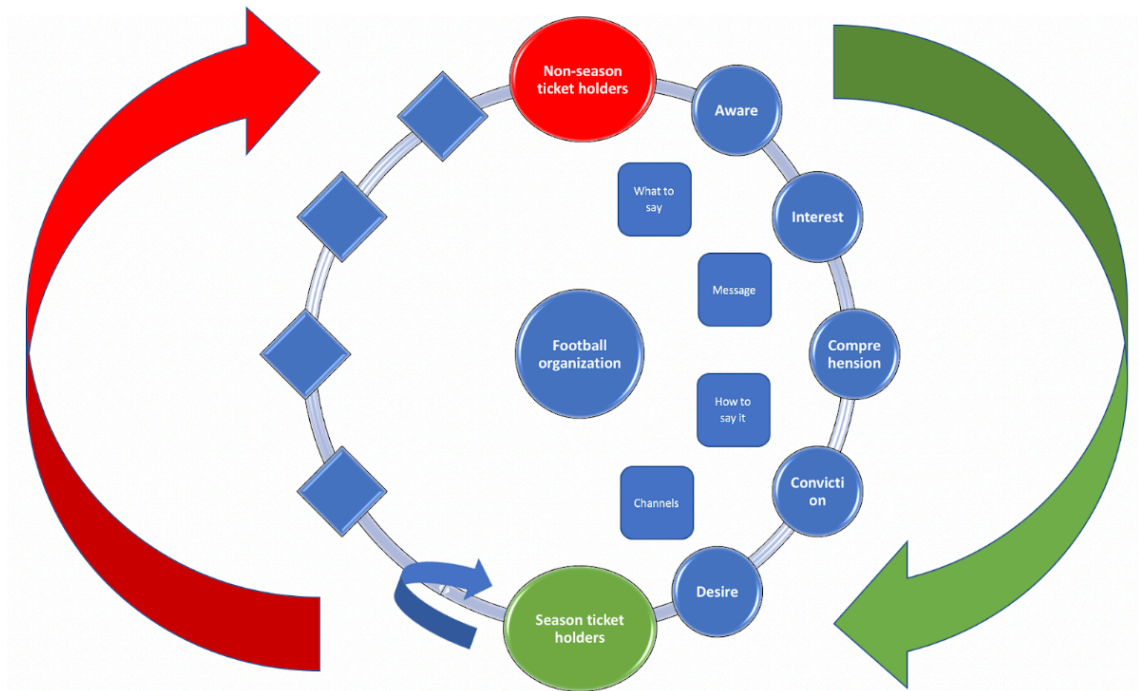
McDonald and Stavros (2007) argue that repurchase intentions of fans can be affected by management actions. Hume, Mort, and Winzar (2007) state that teams should focus on building relationships with their season ticket holders, as consumer retention is closely related to brand loyalty and repeat purchasing behavior. They further argue that fans need to feel a sense of value in order to repurchase and that they make this valuation by assessing the quality of the service.

According to McDonald and Stavros (2007), an organization is more likely to increase repurchase if they effectively recognize their member's contributions, value the members, offer quality services, and builds strong relationships with the members. In addition, organizations will be more likely to retain their existing fans if they can satisfy season ticket holders' needs based on value, quality, and loyalty. In order to do so, many sport marketers use relationship marketing to develop their bond to its fans. An essential part of that is to continuously provide current and potential fans with information of changes and improvements to the product to keep them updated and well informed (Reese & Bennet, 2013).

As stated by da Silva and Las Casas (2017), an important aspect of strengthening relationships is to make people return to the games as this is a very powerful factor for increasing a spectator's level of involvement and fandom. According to Zhang, Connaughton and Vaughn (2004), sport organizations may experience a lack of ticket utilization as season ticket holders who cannot attend games results in a non-utilized ticket. Full utilization only occurs when all tickets within a purchased season ticket package are used. As previously mentioned, attendance levels have an effect on indirect revenues such as sponsor deals and at game purchases (da Silva & Las Casas, 2017; Turley & Kelley, 2015; Biscaia, 2015). Zhang, Connaughton and Vaughn (2004) further add to that by stating that even though season ticket holder only constitute a minor part of the overall attendance, a majority of the spending at game are often considered to come from them. In combination with sponsors having a lower incentive to advertise on an empty stadium, they further emphasize the importance of high attendance levels and especially high level of season ticket attendees. Moreover, they provide the insight that a purchased ticket does not automatically result in a higher attendance at the game as that number is based on who actually shows up rather than the amount of purchased tickets.

Zhang, Connaughton and Vaughn (2004) suggest that one might overcome this lack of ticket utilization by the implementation of special services to season ticket holders such as an exchange program where the season ticket holder is allowed to transfer the ticket to another person, sell to someone else, donate, or even sell back the ticket to the organization. This is a way to strengthen relationships to fans by offering a value adding service while also keeping the game attendance high due to a supposedly lower amount of tickets not being utilized.

## 2.5 Research Model



The research model aims at guiding our study in investigating football organizations marketing communications for selling season tickets. To derive our research model, we looked at what literature suggests being the main aspects of marketing communication and persuasion. The model is theory-driven and takes into account the three main aspects of the marketing communication process as argued by Jackson (2013): *audience*, *channel* and *message*.

At the core, our research model positions the football organizations and the marketing communication choices they can make to affect the customer journey. The choices relate to what has previously been introduced as “The influence model” shown in figure 2-3 and introduced by Jackson (2013). The four boxes highlight choices that have to be made in terms of “What to say”, what “Message” to communicate as well as “How to say it” and what “Channels” to use in the communication process. These four aspects of the decision making are also represented in research questions 1 and 2 whilst the audience, that is the third aspect of the “Influence model”, is represented in research question 3 as well as with the red and the green poles in the research model.

Furthermore, to accommodate for the audience aspect as argued for by Jackson (2013), the model provides two main poles in separate parts of the cycle that makes up our research model. The red pole symbolizes an audience of people who are not season ticket holders, either because they have not been introduced to the possibility, thus being unaware, or because they have decided that they are not interested in buying a season ticket. From the red pole, there is a green arrow that symbolizes the desired journey a potential customer can take from not having a season ticket to taking action and buying one. The green pole represents customers who have taken action to become season ticket holders.

O’Keefe (2002) states that persuasion is achieved when communication from one actor to another succeeds in influencing that actor to act or change its mental state in a desirable way. Moreover, Mackay (2005) argues that the purpose of marketing communication is to help move potential customers from a state of ignorance to one of decision and action. Thus, we added the steps such an actor can take along the way to purchase. Along the green arrow, we have chosen to highlight the steps introduced by Mackay (2005) in figure 2-1 “The communication process” and these steps represent the persuasion journey of a potential season ticket customers.

To the left of the green pole, there is an arrow pointing back to the pole. It represents the renewal period and customers who are satisfied enough to renew their season ticket. This arrow relates to the statement from McDonald and Stavros (2007), that an organization can increase repurchase rates if they effectively recognize their member’s contributions, value the members, offer quality services and build strong relationships with the members. When investigating football organizations pursuit of increased spectator attendance levels through season ticket sales, previous season ticket holders renewal must have a prominent role in such a research model.

In conclusion, our research model maps out our understanding of football organization’s marketing communications and highlights how their marketing communications relate to an audience’s journey from ignorance to action and renewal. The research model connects the audience of non-season ticket holders to current season ticket holders through a cycle of steps. These steps are affected by the choice of channels and messages the football organizations make in order to move the people from the red “not a season ticket holder” audience to the green “season ticket holder” pole. Moreover, it includes the process of persuading the audience in the green pole to stay a season ticket holder. To further add to this model, our research questions focus on the core aspects of our model, namely how football organizations make decisions regarding their audiences, their messages and their channels.

## **2.6 Research questions**

As stated by Jackson (2013), marketing communications is not a ‘one size fits all’ but organizations must communicate a tailored message, through different channels to a range of different audiences. Our first research question focus on the message aspect of persuasion whilst the second and third research question focus on channels and audiences respectively.

Funk, Alexandris and McDonald (2016), Biscaia (2015), Sloan (1989), and Wann (1995) all argue for different motivators that can be used as sales arguments and messages to persuade potential sport spectators into becoming season ticket holders. Our study aims at understanding this from a sports organization’s perspective and to outline how they work with their marketing communications in order to be persuasive. As previously mentioned, the *message* plays a big part in that and we must thus understand how they form their sales messages and arguments.

*1. How does football organizations form their sales messages and arguments to be persuasive in their marketing communications when selling season tickets?*

Jackson (2013) states that how, and not only what we say is very powerful in terms of being persuasive and that the selection of channels is very important as different channels will be appropriate for some circumstances, situations and audiences whilst not for others. To build a better and more well-grounded understanding of how football organizations work with marketing communication and persuasiveness, the channel aspect must be taken into consideration. Thus, our second research question focus on how the choice of channel affects the persuasiveness of the communication.

*2. How does football organizations work with different channels to affect the persuasiveness of their communication?*

The *receiver* has, according to Jackson (2013), been somewhat underestimated as the source and the message has been perceived as more important in terms of persuasion. The author states that one should address the process of persuasion through focusing on the audience at hand rather than to begin with the source or the message. Our research model provides two main audiences for a football organization in terms of selling season tickets, namely one audience of non-season ticket holders and one with current season ticket holders. Fill and Jamieson (2006) state that retention may be much more cost-effective as attracting new customers can be more challenging. In addition, Hume, Mort and Winzar (2007) state that teams should focus on building relationships with their season ticket holders and this is strengthened by McDonald and Stavros (2007). In addition, organizations will be more likely to retain their existing fans if they can satisfy season ticket holders' needs based on value, quality and loyalty. To fulfil its purpose, this study must answer the question how football organizations marketing communication and persuasiveness is affected by its audiences.

*3. What differences can be found in football organizations marketing communication to existing versus potential season ticket holders?*



### 3. Method

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*This chapter presents the different methods selected to fulfil the purpose of this study. Each method is presented with an explanation, the reasons why we chose them and why these methods are relevant to answer the research questions.*

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#### 3.1 Research approach

A study's methodological choice is generally a selection between a quantitative method, a qualitative method or a mixed method which combines both of them (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). We chose to conduct a qualitative study as the mean to understand and describe the learning outcomes on how football teams communicate in a persuasive way to retain and grow their spectator attendance levels. A qualitative method gives us the opportunity to obtain extensive descriptions and in-depth responses. The qualitative approach also fits our research questions as we aim to go deep into the subject by using multiple cases in order to gain knowledge about how football teams communicate when selling season tickets. We are looking into what types of messages football teams are posting, how they use their different channels and how they communicate differently towards existing and potential season tickets holders. Our sample size is also significantly smaller than in a quantitative study as we use data collection methods such as interviews and observations. Our research questions are also qualitative in nature as they aim to use non-numerical data. Since we do not use quantified data to accomplish the results, it is the experiences, skills and perceptions of the authors of this study that dictates the results and quality of the data analysis (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005).

##### 3.1.1 Abductive approach

In order to answer the research questions, we collected empirical data to compare with existing theories. We chose to take on an abductive approach as it allows us to go back and forth between the empirical data findings and theories (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). In opposition to the inductive approach, it appeared to be suitable as we are not collecting and analyzing the data first and then applying theories to the collected data. Instead, unanticipated findings and theoretical insights that we gain during this study can accommodate changes when choosing an abductive approach (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). First, we reviewed theories linked to our study and then conducted the interviews. By consulting the theories before conducting the interviews, we managed to gain deeper knowledge about the subject. However, when we conducted the interviews, we gained new insights that forced us to consult once again theories in areas that we did not consult prior the interview process. As a consequence, we were able to select suitable theories for our analysis after all interviews were conducted.

##### 3.1.2 Exploratory strategy

Since the purpose of this study is to investigate how sports organization work with their marketing communications to be persuasive in selling season ticket and thus retaining and growing their spectator attendance levels, we chose to conduct an exploratory study as it allows us to gain in-depth knowledge and understanding about persuasive marketing communications in a context that is not yet extensively researched. According to

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015), exploratory research provides some flexibility when conducting the research and it is also flexible for potential change of direction. It also allows us to choose different methods for data collection such as in-depth interviews that can be combined with secondary data. Furthermore, exploratory research is an appropriate way to ask open questions and acquire relevant insights and understanding of a precise problem area not well understood (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). As a result, conducting an exploratory study is a relevant choice in a context to study retention and growth of spectators' attendance levels, especially looking at season tickets sales.

### 3.1.3 Pragmatic philosophy

We chose to use the pragmatic philosophy as the research questions concern the entire Swedish football industry. It is potentially applicable to other countries as football is the leading sport globally and many football associations globally are structured similarly to the Swedish Elite Football association (SEF report, 2018). In addition, it is also to some extent applicable to similar industries such as the concert and event industry.

Pragmatic philosophy aims to provide knowledge in order to implement future actions by combining different methods of research to gather data (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). As we aim to compare how football teams communicate in theory and in practice, the pragmatic philosophy is suitable. The pragmatic point of view also places our research questions as the essence for which research philosophy should be used (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). As a result, the study provides new knowledge to the academic community and will help organizations to take decisions in the future.

## 3.2 Research design

When doing research on sports organizations in Sweden, there are plenty of sports to choose from. Football is the most popular sport in Sweden and constitute one third of all sports activity in Sweden (Nationalsporten, 2018). Moreover, Football is the most popular sport in the world and thus more recognizable and relatable to a general audience (FIFA Marketing Research, 2018). Not only do the authors of this study have a personal interest in the field but many other do as well. Being the world's most popular sport makes it one of the most researched as well. We have been able to find a gap in that research and filling that gap will help not only sports organizations in the world, but similar spectator driven businesses as well.

In addition, Swedish football is currently in a rapid development phase in terms of digital infrastructure and implementation of a centralized, shared IT system amongst the 32 elite teams in the top two Swedish divisions (16 in Allsvenskan, the first league and 16 in Superettan, the second league). Much of what is being implemented is directly connected to marketing communications. This implies an urge and willingness to improve and develop the digital prowess in terms of digital marketing and communications. In combination to the found gap in research, this makes for a great industry to investigate sports marketing communications in.

### 3.2.1 Case selection

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), there are five types of research designs such as narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory and case study. The type of research design we chose is a case study as it enables us to analyze how different football teams communicate in a persuasive way. According to Yin (2009), it is relevant to conduct a case study when we investigate a phenomenon within a specific context which is the usage of persuasive communication to sell season tickets. In addition to that, a case study is often adapted to exploratory research and usually answers the questions of *how*, *what* and *why* (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). As we are conducting an exploratory research and aim to answer research questions that include *how* and *what*, the choice of a case study is relevant. In order to understand the topic from various angles, multiple cases were studied. It is based on teams playing in Allsvenskan so that we can compare how different football teams inside the Swedish Elite Football association communicate to their fans to sell season tickets. By having multiple teams, we increase the generalizability of this study.

### 3.2.2 Selection of respondents for the case study

We chose to conduct interviews with 6 teams. All of them are currently playing in Allsvenskan. We aimed to include teams that are operating in different Swedish regions and tried to include most of the regions who have a team playing in Allsvenskan. In addition to that, we included teams from both big and smaller cities. We believe that having teams from different regions and of different sizes increase the credibility of our case study as it reflects better the entire Swedish Elite Football association. All the teams are represented by individuals that are currently working in these organizations. The sampling criteria to select these individuals inside each organization was restricted to the obligation that they are working or involved with the communication towards spectators. To summarize, the research design process is as followed:



Figure 3-1 “Our research design process”

## 3.3 Data Collection

### 3.3.1 In-depth interviews

As we chose to conduct an exploratory research with a pragmatic philosophy, it is suitable to perform in-depth interviews (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). It allowed us to ask the same questions to different teams and transcribe the data into a qualitative study. The advantage of conducting interviews compared to a survey for example, is that we were able to clearly explain the questions during the interviews. It also allowed us to provide interviewees with more information about the context of the study and why it is relevant. A survey could have reached all the teams but would not have provided us with the same level of control. In this study, the importance of the answers quality outweighs the importance of quantity. Furthermore, we were able to ask open-ended questions in a way that contributed to new knowledge and will benefit future research. Interviews also

allowed us to ask more precisely questions toward the subject based on previous interviews and it gives flexibility as previously mentioned.

In order to gather reliable data and to ask open-ended questions, we chose to conduct semi-structured interviews. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015), it is relevant to conduct semi-structured interviews when collecting primary data for a qualitative and exploratory study. Since the research questions focus on how sports organization communicate in a persuasive way to sell season tickets, it is relevant to gather data directly from the professional football teams in Sweden. Since we are novice researchers, Stake (1995) suggested that we made the semi-structured interviews on the basis of what needs to be known. The advantages of using semi-structured interviews are that we can clearly communicate with the interviewees and clarify the questions when needed. It also allows us to ask for more details about the received answers. According to Bryman and Bell (2011), a semi-structured interview allows the interviewees to answer freely to the questions, since the questions are flexible, and some are without a specific order, providing the opportunity for all participants to receive unprepared questions or answers. It gives the opportunity to gather extra information about subjects that were not directly asked (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015).

In order to prepare the interviewees, we sent the questions of the interview in advance. Even though the interviews were conducted by phone, we also asked to record the interviews in order to reduce the risk of misinterpretation and rendering the data in a wrongful manner. Fortunately, all the interviewees accepted to be recorded. Later on, we listened multiple times on each recording in order to transcribe and analyze the interviews in the best possible way. When the transcription process was completed, we sent the transcripts to the interviewees so that they could control that we understood the content correctly and that the interviewees are aware of what data is being used for this study. All interviews were conducted in Swedish and completed in April 2018.

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Team:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Length:</b>
<b>Interview 1</b>	IFK Norrköping	Phone	25 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	55 minutes
<b>Interview 2</b>	Kalmar FF	Phone	25 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	44 minutes
<b>Interview 3</b>	Malmö FF	Phone	25 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	49 minutes
<b>Interview 4</b>	GIF Sundsvall	Phone	25 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	41 minutes
<b>Interview 5</b>	IF Elfsborg	Phone	26 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	45 minutes
<b>Interview 6</b>	IFK Göteborg	Phone	27 <sup>th</sup> of April 2018	53 minutes

Table 3-1 “Details of interviews conducted”

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What channels do you use in your marketing communication?</li> <li>2. When communicating season ticket sales, can you rank what channels you use the most? Why?</li> <li>3. What channels drive most traffic to your season ticket purchasing site? (how do you determine that)</li> </ol>	<p>These three questions helped us gain knowledge about the channels used by the teams and analyse the reasons why they use different channels. It was also important to see if it was in accordance to what we have seen in section 2.1.2</p> <p>We chose to start our interviews about the second research question in order to first establish what channels the teams use in order to move on and look at the sales messages they communicate on these channels.</p>
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Table 3-2 “Questions related to the second research question”

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. What types of sales messages do you post during the season ticket selling period? Describe the three main types.</li> <li>5. What in these messages do you find to be persuasive? How do you evaluate this?</li> <li>6. How do you differentiate your sales messages on your different channels?</li> <li>7. Can you provide examples from the beginning, middle and end of the season ticket selling period?</li> <li>8. What differences do you see in persuasiveness when using video, pictures, links or text-based sales message posts?</li> <li>9. How do you decide what format to post your sales message in? What do you base this decision on?</li> </ol>	<p>It was important to learn what messages the organizations are communicating on their channels and if these messages differ depending on the channels used.</p> <p>We also aimed to gather data about what kind of messages are used by the organizations in order to communicate about the season tickets.</p> <p>We also asked about the formats used when communicating in order to know if the format also affect the persuasiveness of a message.</p> <p>By asking these questions, we were able to learn about each organization’s strategy to sell season tickets and discover how that process has been evolving recently.</p>
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Table 3-3 “Questions related to the first research question”



<p>10. How do you differentiate your sales messages to segmented groups based on previous season ticket status? If not, why?</p> <p>11. Can you provide examples from the beginning, middle and end of the season ticket selling period?</p> <p>12. Can you tell me about something different that you did this year that affected season ticket sales?</p> <p>13. Marketing communication wise, what do you think could have been done better to increase the season ticket sales even further? How would you implement these changes next year?</p>	<p>In order to have a better picture on how the teams are marketing season tickets, it was important to learn about segmentation and how teams persuade current or past season ticket holders to renew their season tickets. It was also interesting to learn how teams are attracting potential season ticket holders and how they communicate with them.</p> <p>We also wanted to learn about how the segmentation has evolved recently and how they can improve in order to be more efficient and thus sell more season tickets.</p>
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Table 3-4 “Questions related to the third research question”

### 3.3.2 Data observation

In addition to the interviews conducted for this study, an observation of the content posted on the teams’ websites and social media sites was conducted. By having these observations, we are able to analyze what and how the teams communicate to reach season ticket holders. We are also able to compare these observations to the data gathered during the interviews. It improves the quality of our findings as we see what the teams have done on these platforms to sell season tickets.

For the social media sites, we focused only on data posted on Facebook and on Instagram as these two social media sites have the highest shares of users in Sweden as mentioned in section 2.1.2 and all the teams that we interviewed have an account on these platforms. Furthermore, we decided to only focus on the content posted from the last day of the season 2017 (November 5th) until the first day of the season 2018 (April 1st). We chose to focus on this period as the research questions especially focus on the season ticket sales. In fact, most of the teams start selling season tickets in December until the season starts in April. However, many teams start to communicate about season tickets to season tickets' holders directly after the last day of the previous season (SEF report, 2018).

### 3.3.3 Secondary data

Even if this study is mainly based on primary data, we decided to also use secondary data. The secondary data consists of the Swedish Elite Football association’s report (2018). We chose to include secondary data in this study to gather additional data for our own comprehension and to better prepare the questions for the interviews.

### 3.4 Data analysis

#### 3.4.1 Analysis of the interviews

In order to conduct the data analysis, we had to prepare the data from the semi-structured interviews. In order to do so, we transcribed the recorded interviews. We also added notes to the transcript in order to highlight some content and write impressions such as the tone of the voice and personal opinions. We tried to do the transcription as soon as possible after the interview in order not to forget the context and details of the interview. The next step of the data analysis was to complete a data reduction. According to Meyer (2001), data reduction implies to summarize and clarify the data collected as well as to intentionally focus on distinctive parts. We summarized all the interviews and grouped the data by themes. These themes are theory-driven based on the theoretical frame of reference and constitute *channels*, *messages* and *audiences*. For the analysis of *messages*, we used Fill and Jamieson DRIP model (2006) to structure the highlights of the marketing communication process.

#### 3.4.2 Analysis of data observation

For the data observation, we chose to conduct a content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2013), a content analysis is a wide and divergent set of techniques that analyze text data in order to receive trustworthy interpretations. There are three approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional, directed or summative. We chose to use the directed approach as the analysis starts with a theory as guidance for initial codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

According to Krippendorff (2013), there are six points to consider when conducting a content analysis. First, we had to decide what data to analyze and where the data is retrieve from. In our case, we focused on the team's websites and social media sites. According to Mayring (2000), a qualitative content analysis is common to use when analyzing media, in particular social media sites. For the social media sites, we focused only on data posted on Facebook and on Instagram as these two social media sites have the highest shares of users in Sweden as mentioned in section 2.1.2. Fortunately, all the teams that we interviewed have an account on these two social media sites. Secondly, we had to define whether there are any boundaries to the analysis. Due to a limited time frame to conduct this study, we decided to focus on a particular period as mentioned in section 3.3.2. Thirdly, we had to decide what is the initial goal for our interpretation. In our case, the content analysis provides the opportunity to compare what teams are producing online to what is initially decided inside the organization by comparing the data posted by the 6 teams on their different platforms to the data collected from the same teams during the interviews. It is important to emphasize that we did not conduct any observations on the teams' websites and social media sites before we conducted the interviews. As a consequence, we were able to analyze how persuasive communication is addressed to fans and whether or not it differed from what was initially intended. Fourthly, we selected the content from the websites and social media sites that we were relevant to understand how the selected teams use persuasive communication to retain and grow the spectator attendance levels through season tickets sales. Fifthly, we did the coding part to find themes that were included in most of the data posted by the teams and compared these themes to the ones used for the interviews. However, the results from the data observation

are first presented by teams and for each team by themes. Finally, we drew conclusions from the results.

To conclude, Yin (2009) emphasizes the importance to correctly process the data in order to reach credible and meaningful understandings from both interviews and data observation. The analysis combines both empirical findings with theories from existing literature resulting in new knowledge being added to the gap in the literature.

### **3.5 Trustworthiness**

It is of high importance for this study to establish trustworthiness. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are four quality criteria to fulfil in order to have a trustworthy qualitative study: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability*.

According to Merriam (1998), *credibility* addresses how the findings of this study are in line with reality. First, the authors were in a contact with a top manager at one football organization. Then, that top manager gave the authors information about one top manager in each of the teams in Allsvenskan. When each manager was contacted, they forwarded the interview request to a relevant employee working in that organization. As a result, it helped to establish a relationship of trust between the interviewees and the authors of this study resulting in improved data quality. Furthermore, the participants were allowed to decline the interview so that the authors only interviewed participants that were freely offering their time, data and opinion. Finally, the authors transcribed all the interviews and sent it to each participant in order to obtain their consent before using the data.

*Transferability* refers to the fact that the findings of this study can be generalized to other contexts or situations (Shenton, 2004). Even if the person conducting the generalization is responsible for the transferability, it is important that this study clearly presents the research context and the general settings of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a consequence, the person that aims to conduct the generalization has to judge if the transfer is applicable. This study provides information about the research context, the football industry and the communication theories as a detailed method part, clear references to the theories used and the interviews questions (in section 3.3.1) are presented.

According to Shenton (2004), *dependability* refers to the assumption that the same results would be gathered at another time period. Unfortunately, it is hard to observe or conduct the same observation or interview twice. However, we provided detailed information about our methodology and how we chose method, approach and philosophy. We also clearly presented our semi-structured interviews and the process on how to conduct the observation of data. Therefore, the results would be similar if someone else would conduct the same semi-structured interviews and content analysis.

Finally, *confirmability* refers to the fact that others could confirm our results. It means that the achieved results are from our experiences and actions and not from our preferences (Shenton, 2004). During this study, we remained objective and neutral. Therefore, we clearly argued why we included the selected methods, theories and underlying assumptions. Any reader is able to follow this study step-by-step with the decisions made, explained and justified leading to a credible final result.



Last but not least, the trustworthiness of this study increased as we both analyzed and compared what the teams said they were doing to what they actually did on Facebook, Instagram and their websites.

### **3.6 Ethical issues**

There are some concerns that we addressed in order to ensure this study to be ethical. First of all, we expressed morality. We made sure that the data collected for this study has been correctly reported, transcribed and that we did not conduct any manipulation. We were also concerned about the neutrality. We did not have any biased view when preparing, conducting and transcribing the interviews nor when conducting the observation of data. We also interpreted the data without any biased view. Furthermore, all interviewees gave their consent to participate in this study after being well-informed on the research setting, the aim of the study and on how they can contribute to achieve the results. We also asked all participants about their desired confidentiality level. All participants agreed to reveal their names and the team they are working for. The different organizations do not really compete for the same customers and in many regards, they operate as colleagues rather than opponents. Therefore, the data gathered during the interviews are not too sensitive toward the other organizations. Finally, it is ethical and of interest for others to conduct a study about this subject. We are providing findings that can be used by all football teams to improve their communication towards their fans.

## 4. Empirical Findings

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*This chapter presents the findings from the interviews and from the teams' social media sites and websites. The findings are divided by data collection methods and by themes that are theory-driven.*

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### 4.1 Interviewed organizations

The following table highlights some statistics for the interviewed teams:

<b>Team:</b>	<b>Founded:</b>	<b>Allsvenskan title(s):</b>	<b>Seasons in Allsvenskan:</b>	<b>Season tickets sold in 2017:</b>
<b>IFK Norrköping</b>	1897	13 titles	77 seasons	6708 tickets
<b>Kalmar FF</b>	1910	1 title	30 seasons	2700 tickets
<b>Malmö FF</b>	1910	23 titles	81 seasons	12 500 tickets
<b>GIF Sundsvall</b>	1903	0 title	18 seasons	1800 tickets
<b>IF Elfsborg</b>	1904	6 titles	75 seasons	3800 tickets
<b>IFK Göteborg</b>	1904	18 titles	85 seasons	6000 tickets

Source: Swedish Football Association (2018)

Table 4-1 “statistics of the interviewed teams”

### 4.2 Findings from the interviews

#### 4.2.1 Channels

The interviewees were asked about their choices of channels and what channels they primarily use when marketing season tickets. In interview 1, *IFK Norrköping* said that they use their website, social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram, newsletters, their own app “peking inifrån” and ads in the local newspapers to market season tickets. *IFK Norrköping* stated that they first and foremost use their website for the purpose of communicating about season tickets. In the past, they have been using Facebook to a

much higher extent than they have lately due to changes in Facebook algorithms that have negatively affected the organic reach of posts. As they only work with organic reach, they have decided to use Facebook less for this purpose. One main argument for using the website extensively was the ability to include much information. IFK Norrköping argued that they try to drive much traffic to the website, providing sufficient information on the website and then steer customers to the ticket site.

In interview 2, *Kalmar FF* argued that, in contrast to IFK Norrköping, they do not use their website as much as they use their social media sites to market season tickets. Kalmar FF argued Facebook to be their strongest channel for marketing season tickets and that fans expect their favorite team to be present on such a social media site as Facebook. In contrast to how IFK Norrköping have tried to work with organic reach on Facebook, Kalmar FF make use of paid ads on Facebook. Kalmar FF also stated that they have a younger audience on Instagram and has thus taken actions to increase their effort of marketing communications on Instagram as they perceive this audience to be very valuable to them. They have lowered their prices in the standing section, which have been seen to attract a younger crowd, and Kalmar FF believes that they can reach even more of this audience through Instagram, compared to many of their other channels. In addition, Kalmar FF make much use of newsletters connected to their CRM system where they can target people who had season tickets in the past. In addition to reaching targeted segments through newsletters, Kalmar FF also used telemarketing by having their players make calls to previous season ticket holders to see if they would like to renew their season tickets.

In interview 3, *Malmö FF* provided plenty of channels and places where they market season tickets. They use banner flow, ads in both digital and printed news magazines, billboards, radio, TV and their own channels such as their website and social media sites. Malmö FF stated that their own website and social media sites are used the most in terms of marketing season tickets. Malmö FF argued that Facebook drives the most traffic to their ticket site, in terms of total numbers but that Instagram has had the greatest development lately. When it comes to paid ads versus organic reach, Malmö FF stated that they do not pay as much for ads these days as they have been in the past. However, they have noticed that paid ads work well for marketing season tickets in particular.

In interview 4, *GIF Sundsvall* mentioned their website, social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn as well as their newsletters as their main channels being used for marketing season tickets. Out of these channels, they singled out Facebook as being the one used the most. The main reason was said to be the number of followers and the amount of people they can reach on Facebook compared to their other channels. In terms of paid advertisement, GIF Sundsvall has stopped doing any paid promotions on Facebook as they do not have the financial situation to do so. In addition to their digital channels, GIF Sundsvall make use of more traditional channels such as letters to previous season ticket holders. Similar to Kalmar FF, they had their players call previous season tickets holders to ask them to renew their season tickets.

In interview 5, *IF Elfsborg* named exactly the same channels as GIF Sundsvall, being website, newsletters, and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. IF Elfsborg stated that their website and Facebook page is what they use the most to market season tickets. Moreover, they stated that they work together with a

communication agency that helps them with their marketing communications. IF Elfsborg has started to pay for their advertisement on Facebook this year. This is not something that they have done before, however due to changed Facebook algorithms affecting the organic reach, they felt like giving paid ads a try. IF Elfsborg stated that while it is not a great amount of money that they put on paid ads on Facebook, they get better results per investment compared to ads in traditional magazines or such.

In interview 6, *IFK Göteborg* mentioned their website and social media sites to be very important channels in terms of marketing their season tickets. In addition, they also mentioned their own app “forza blåvitt”, similar to the application mentioned by IFK Norrköping. However, IFK Göteborg did not only mention their own social media sites but also put emphasize on the importance of their affiliated supporter groups social media sites. They argued that they work closely together with their different supporter affiliations to be able to gain an advantage from them doing a lot of marketing and communications about season tickets in collaboration with the club. In addition, IFK Göteborg emphasized the importance of their newsletters and CRM system in terms of reaching more targeted audiences. They try to segment groups by purchasing behavior to single out those who would be more prone to purchase season tickets. Thus, their newsletter client is used as a channel to reach both those who had season tickets in the past and those who have shown a previous purchasing pattern that suggests them to be interested in a specific style of ticket.

#### 4.2.2 Messages

In interview 1, *IFK Norrköping* stated that they put much effort into creating a sense of togetherness with their supporters. They tried to do that through posting footages on supporters in the stands and include messages that communicate appreciation to the supporters. Moreover, IFK Norrköping stated that they want to be the team that young people dream of playing for in the future and that cheering for IFK Norrköping is something that for people living in Norrköping is perceived as the only logical choice.

According to the interview, IFK Norrköping do not try to put much focus on the price of season tickets but rather use arguments connected to “not missing the party” and “securing one's seat at the stadium”. IFK Norrköping make use of the classic football phenomena of supporters feeling like they are the 12th player. For those not familiar with football, 11 players per team are allowed on the pitch and creating a sense of the supporters being the 12th one is a way of communicating how important the supporters are to the players on the pitch. This is something that IFK Norrköping try hard to achieve and they want to have an emotional sense to the content they create. In doing that, they have found video to be the most powerful format to use for them in terms of communicating emotional messages.

In terms of the most persuasive part of their sales arguments, IFK Norrköping stated two main things. First, the togetherness and the sense of being a part of something and creating a us versus them mentality. Second, IFK Norrköping stated that they started earlier with their season ticket sales this year (October) than in the past. It provided them with a higher number of sold season tickets early on which they could use in their “secure your seat” and “do not miss the party” arguments. According to them, this created a fear of missing out situation where customers felt like buying sooner rather than later.

In interview 2, *Kalmar FF* stated that they have put much effort into creating video material communicating how much the club and the players appreciate their supporters. *Kalmar FF* stated that they tried to include the players and have them tell the audience how much they mean to the team. The messages and sales arguments used by *Kalmar FF* depend on the section in the stadium that they try to sell. For the standing section, they put much emphasis on the price as these tickets are very cheap. In the seated section, they focus more on the seating and supporters' choice of keeping their own seat throughout the season and year after year. *Kalmar FF* is clear about one thing, they do not reduce any prices on tickets and do not have any sales and discounts that fluctuate the price levels from time to time. Rather, they want to communicate the value of the product and that it is worth its price. There are two main reasons for this. First, lowering prices may in the short term bring more people to the stadium, however the revenues will oftentimes be affected negatively by this. Second, the value of the product gets depreciated once a supporter can purchase a ticket for a lower price at one point than another.

*Kalmar FF* mentioned the importance of having good communication with the supporters to know what they want and expect from the club. They stated that this is something that they work hard to achieve and that "thinking like a supporter" is crucial in delivering a persuasive message. One thing that has come from this is the creation of a supporter meeting point in the stadium. *Kalmar FF* has built a pub in close proximity to the standing section to create a meeting point for the supporter community to form even stronger ties. According to *Kalmar FF*, this meeting point can provide positive word-of-mouth interactions and human social exchanges that can lead to a non-season ticket holder becoming one due to the increased sense of having a strong community and a fun social atmosphere at the stadium. *Kalmar FF* stated that they want the experience and the perceived quality of the event to be divided from the sports results. Someone may very well be disappointed after a loss, however *Kalmar FF* argued that it is important to be able to communicate other aspects of the events that are worth enjoying over and over again despite having negative results on the pitch.

In terms of how their sales messages changes over the season ticket sales period, *Kalmar FF* stated that they start selling season tickets in January and that the biggest campaigns are from January to April. Once the exhibition games begin and the spring comes closer, the interest for Allsvenskan and *Kalmar FF* as a club increases and they try to spin of that in the season ticket sales. In addition, *Kalmar FF* arranged a special night in December where they put much emphasis on season tickets sales as Christmas gifts. They stated that this is somewhat of a soft start for season ticket sales and that they increase the marketing efforts as the season approaches.

In interview 3, *Malmö FF* stated that as they have had the fortune of playing international games against European competitors, the demand for tickets to those games are very high. Thus, providing season ticket holders priority to purchase the European games have been a major sales argument to use when selling season tickets. In addition, they communicate the value of keeping one's seat, getting a lower overall price per game and that the tickets are not personal and can thus be given to a friend when one cannot attend. In similarity to what was stated by *Kalmar FF*, they do not use any sales or discounts on tickets but rather they communicate that season tickets are overall a much cheaper option than purchasing single tickets.

Malmö FF also tries to communicate the great atmosphere they have in their stadium through spectator focused pictures and videos. According to the interview, they aim at getting people who attend many games to take one more step in becoming even more loyal by purchasing a season ticket and be a part of the atmosphere for every game. In terms of the message format, Malmö FF stated that they find videos to be much more persuasive and efficient in communicating their main arguments.

Malmö FF started their season ticket sales period on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2017 and ended it in the end of April 2018. However, since August 2017, they communicated to current season ticket holders to renew their tickets for the upcoming season even if the season was not finished yet. According to Malmö FF, their main arguments stay the same throughout the season tickets' sales period. They try to include some kind of season ticket related call to action in different posts and messages throughout the selling period in order to have that information come in several different forms. This could be connected to everything from quizzes and competitions to interviews with players and coaches. Malmö FF stated that their communication is much more intense in the beginning and that they communicated to previous season tickets holders already in August to allow them to renew before tickets are released to the wider audience. Malmö FF added that these previous season ticket holders get the same price year after year and are not affected by any price increases. They work to improve their loyalty program even further to better entertain and manage their core audience.

In interview 4, *GIF Sundsvall* stated that their main sales messages and arguments tries to communicate the value of a season ticket over single tickets. Season ticket holders do not have to stand in line and they have their own seat every game. According to GIF Sundsvall, having that same seat oftentimes results in spectators getting to know the people sitting close to them and this further increases the incentive to want to keep that seat. GIF Sundsvall said that much effort has been on communicating the price of one of their new season ticket options, family tickets for only 600 SEK per person. During the season ticket sales period, GIF Sundsvall has paid for advertisements on the local buses in Sundsvall to communicate their new family season tickets.

GIF Sundsvall argued that their two main sales arguments are the ability to keep one seating and get a much better price than purchasing single tickets. In terms of previous season ticket holders, GIF Sundsvall keeps their seats until a specific date when they have to decide whether or not to renew. According to GIF Sundsvall, their season ticket sales period usually begins right after the previous season is over. GIF Sundsvall stated that having positive results in the end of the season makes it easier to start communicating season tickets. Nonetheless, they first communicate to previous season ticket holders to have them renew their tickets before they move on to try to attract new season ticket holders and despite audience, their main sales messages and arguments stay the same, focusing on the great price of a season ticket.

GIF Sundsvall stated that they are not at a point where they can produce many different formats and measure its effects on persuasiveness, however, their more traditional marketing activities of telemarketing was perceived to have worked really well for them. According to GIF Sundsvall, the direct connection between players and previous season ticket holders gained many renewed season tickets in rather short time.

In interview 5, *IF Elfsborg* stated that they put emphasis on communicating the value of getting the whole package and not missing a game. They stated that having the same seating is a big deal for their supporters and especially for the older fans. In the interview, IF Elfsborg said that their main sales arguments are related to the seating and price but that they also try to include extra value in forms of competitions and lotteries just for season ticket holders. Sometimes, they also hold events and social happening for this audience in order to further engage them and to show appreciation for their support. Furthermore, connected to the seating argument, IF Elfsborg allowed previous season ticket holders to secure their seat before they let the general audience buy tickets. Yet very common, this is one way of showing appreciation and providing extra value to loyal season ticket holders. In terms of format, IF Elfsborg argued that when using text-based sales messages on social media sites, there is often a lot of short informative arguments whilst video material is oftentimes much more emotional focused. One example given by IF Elfsborg was videos of players telling the viewer how much the support means to them and thank the audience for their loyalty and support.

IF Elfsborg starts communicating season tickets in January with a minor exception of a Christmas offering the weeks before Christmas. They further stated that they would like to start earlier if they had more resources. Once they have started communicating about season tickets, they start by providing previous season ticket holders with the opportunity to keep one's seating from last year. Then when the season is closing in and the exhibition games are played, IF Elfsborg communicate that it is close and that it is only a few days left until the season starts. Moreover, according to IF Elfsborg, they try to use reminding messages like "We hope you haven't missed out on signing up on a season ticket" and "now is the last chance" when it is getting really close to season premiere. They further argued that this is when there is most interest in football and when they are the most active in their marketing communications.

After the season ticket sales period has ended, which for IF Elfsborg is 1,5 weeks before the season opener, they focus more on single tickets to get a good spectator number for that game. IF Elfsborg stated that season ticket sales dry up dramatically once the season starts and when that happens, they try to move on from season tickets to packaging several games similar to season ticket packages but with fewer amount of games. For example, "buy tickets to 5 games and get an extra ticket". This year, they are also looking at packaging a half season ticket for the second part of the season. According to IF Elfsborg, this can be a really good way of communicating package deals such as season, half season or packaged game tickets, especially when there are many interesting games in a short period of time. IF Elfsborg also stated that they aim at being perceived as the team that the cities inhabitants feel proud of and perceive to be the city's finest. They want to communicate that supporting IF Elfsborg is something that you do with pride.

In interview 6, *IFK Göteborg* stated that they choose a special theme for every season to follow from a marketing communication sense. When doing that, they look at several different factors such where they are at from a sports perspective, what is happening in the world of the supporters, what do the supporters think of the current state and identity of the club and where does the club see itself. All of this is taken into consideration when developing the new theme for the season. In general, these themes evolve around loyalty, supporters and the fans. For the season 2018, they developed a theme that focuses on comradeship and was named "Framåt kamrater" which translates to "comrades going

forward”. They also used a slogan called “äkta kamrat” which translates to “A true comrade” and alludes what it means to be a true supporter of IFK Göteborg. According to IFK Göteborg, the theme of a “true comrade” put much emphasis on encouraging supporters to be loyal and supportive in a time when IFK Göteborg have not had the results on the football pitch as they would have liked. According to the interview, IFK Göteborg has tried to communicate that a “true comrade” is not just someone who follows the team in success but who follows the team both in ups and downs.

According to IFK Göteborg, they do not put much emphasis on the prices other than for the absolute cheapest ticket options. They do communicate special events and activities that come with having a seat on the different sections in the stadium, however, the loyalty and comradeship that comes with being a “true IFK Göteborg comrade” is a red thread that affects every part of their marketing communications when selling season tickets.

When communicating what it means to be a “true comrade” whilst also communicating the different aspects of being a supporter to IFK Göteborg, they choose to make videos of different fans who represented different segments. For example, they made videos with a mom and her son, with three girls in the standing section, an older couple, a hard-core fan to show how different a “true comrade” can be as long as you are loyal and supports the team.

In terms of the selling period, IFK Göteborg released their season tickets in November and at first only to previous season ticket holders. At this point, much is focused on getting previous season ticket holders to renew their tickets. This is done through reaching them as direct as possible through IFK Göteborg’s CRM system so that they can target the communication about renewal. Once the renewal period is over in the middle of December, they move on to focus more of their communication about new players, new coaches as well as the overall theme of “true comrades” and “comrades moving forward” to future success.

When deciding what format to use when delivering their sales messages and arguments, IFK Göteborg make use of a content plan and they have a set out market plan for how to move forward with their set theme for the season. Thus, much of what they do is planned ahead together with their advertising agency.

#### 4.2.3 Audiences

In interview 1, *IFK Norrköping* stated that they differentiate their marketing communication based on if they communicate to previous season ticket holders or not. For those who are not previous season ticket holders, IFK Norrköping tries to communicate the ease of which they can choose their own seating and purchase season tickets. This is also pretty much the only time that IFK Norrköping puts emphasis on the price. IFK Norrköping also tries to use their CRM system to target potential customers who have attended a certain amount of games but have not signed up for season tickets. In such cases, they communicate that the price of a season ticket per game is much lower than purchasing single tickets.

For the previous season ticket holders, IFK Norrköping set a deadline when they had to renew their tickets. This is done so that they can communicate a sense of “urgency” of



doing it sooner rather than later. This helps in being able to communicate a higher number of sold season tickets earlier in time.

According to IFK Norrköping, it is much easier to sell to people who are season ticket holders already or who have purchased several single tickets. They have been able to have a renewal rate of around 90 per cent over the last years. They also see differences in terms of open rate on newsletters and the interest they show for the marketing communications in general. Thus, they try to segment groups that have purchased a minimum of 2 tickets over the season and then target this group with season ticket sales arguments.

IFK Norrköping stated that they have some people attending games to see the opponent when they are in town. Approximately 15 per cent of their visitors are actually at the stadium to see the opponent. This must be taken into consideration when communicating to game attendees as you want to reach those who care for you and not for the other teams. IFK Norrköping try to work with their CRM system to create well-structured segmented groups based on purchased tickets and fandom. Thus, they can communicate half season tickets during the Summer break. This is often communicated through newsletters to the audience who have attended enough games to make the cut but have not yet signed up for any season tickets.

In interview 2, *Kalmar FF* stated that they try to find people, through their CRM system who have had season tickets in the past but might or might not have renewed their season ticket for the upcoming season. In cases when people have not renewed their season tickets, Kalmar FF tries to understand why that is, in order to learn from it. Kalmar FF further stated that when communicating with the people who had season tickets in the past, they know that there is an original interest in the product. However, it is important to understand the different reasons that may have played a role in them renewing or not.

Kalmar FF has mostly used their CRM system to reach out to previous season ticket holders with e-mail marketing and telemarketing. Kalmar FF has found that this segment is easier to retain than to persuade someone new. According to Kalmar FF, persuading this segment is less costly than to do so with new potential customers. As Kalmar FF was asked to describe what they would like to improve in the future, they stated that they want to further develop and improve their collaboration with *supporter unionen* (their supporter affiliation) to strengthen the ties and do more marketing communicative activities together and thus becoming more effective. According to them, the supporter affiliations can be very powerful from a marketing perspective.

In interview 3, *Malmö FF* stated that a lot of their season ticket sales for the next season are made during the Fall, in the end of a season or just after and is made up of people renewing their tickets. In terms of communicating with people who do not have season tickets, Malmö FF aimed mostly at those who attend a lot of games but have not decided to take the step of becoming a regular season ticket holder. Malmö FF also argued that specific segments of their audience desire the European games and thus, Malmö FF tries to target that part of their audience with the argument that the European games are prioritized for season ticket holders.

Malmö FF argued that it is easier to sell to those who are loyal and that they make sure to take good care of their core audience during the season. That is one of the reasons why

they never increase the price for that group. They want to show loyalty back to the fans. According to Malmö FF, it is costlier to reach and persuade people who are not already season ticket holders.

Malmö FF worked hard to create good ambassadors for their season tickets by having pleased customers that spread the word and get others interested. In addition, they worked very closely to their SLO (Supporter liaison officer) who has good connection with the supporter affiliations in order to get feedback from what that audience expects from the product. Moreover, Malmö FF is aware their supporter affiliations are helping them in terms of communicating season ticket sales on their own channels.

Malmö FF stated that the supporter affiliations show a lot of affection to the club and want to attract more people who share that affection. Thus, Malmö FF lets their supporters be a part of taking decisions such as what should be sold at the arena and what activities should be connected to the supporter areas in the stadium. In addition, they include them in a competition for designing the season ticket card before a new season. Ultimately, a lot of what they do has to do with engaging supporters in different ways. This is done through competitions and quizzes. Thus, by engaging the audience that have season tickets and keeping them happy with improved loyalty programs, Malmö FF hopes to create positive word-of-mouth from their season ticket holders, whom they see as ambassadors.

In interview 4, *GIF Sundsvall* stated that they do not differentiate their marketing communication based on the audience they are communicating to but the focus is oftentimes on the cheap prices. However, in the interview, they stated that they would like to increase the effort in which they communicate to potential new season ticket holders. Moreover, they said that it might be a good thing to increasingly differentiate the communication to either previous season ticket holders or potential new ones to better match that audience. GIF Sundsvall has put much more effort into getting previous season ticket holders to renew their tickets than attracting new ones and this is something that they mention in the interview as a field they would like to improve.

In interview 5, *IF Elfsborg* stated that in communicating to previous season ticket holders, a lot of emphasis is put on them securing the same seat for another season. They make sure to thank them for their support during the last season and let them know that they, as loyal supporters, will always have the chance to buy tickets first. To the audience who are not yet season ticket holders, much of the sales messages focus on the excitement and atmosphere at the stadium. According to the interview, the communication to that audience is a bit wider and general than to the previous season ticket holders. IF Elfsborg also makes sure to have segmented groups when they send out newsletters so that they can direct them towards specific groups such as previous season ticket holders, sponsors to the team or members of the club.

IF Elfsborg also said that they would like to look at the different sections in the stadium where some sections are more active than others in terms of activities since this can provide a better understanding of the satisfaction of current season ticket holders. IF Elfsborg further stated that it is important not to take the loyal supporters for granted but to keep entertaining them and provide good value to have them stay. According to IF Elfsborg, it is about caring for and entertain the core audience.

In interview 6, *IFK Göteborg* stated that they work very closely with their different audiences to have their take on the theme of the marketing campaign for the season. A lot of the rationale for choosing a specific theme is based on what the different supporter affiliations and audiences provide in feedback and how they feel about the upcoming season. IFK Göteborg takes the ideas that they have worked out with their supporter affiliations and then takes them to their advertising agency to see what they can create from it. Meetings to make sure that marketing communication and activities are in line with the supporters' expectations are held on a regular basis.

According to IFK Göteborg, the power that lies with the supporter affiliations is enormous and that they can, through their own channels "sell out the stadium by themselves". IFK Göteborg states that they are well aware of this power and that they try to use the supporter affiliations in-puts and ideas as much as they can in order to tailor their marketing communication in such a way that it is anchored with the supporter community.

In terms of improving in the future, IFK Göteborg mentioned increased differentiation when it comes to communicating with different segments. They argued that it takes a lot of time and resources but that the results are better. Moreover, IFK Göteborg stated that they would like to further improve their loyalty programs for season ticket holders to create extra value for those who are loyal enough to have a season ticket on a regular year to year basis.

### **4.3 Empirical data from social media sites and websites**

As stated earlier in section 3.2.2, we observed data on the team's websites as well as on Facebook and Instagram that were posted from November 5th 2017 until April 1st 2018. The number of each teams' followers on Facebook were updated on May 6th 2018.

#### **4.3.1 Findings from IFK Norrköping**

IFK Norrköping's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/ifknorrkoping](http://www.facebook.com/ifknorrkoping)) has over 35 000 followers. IFK Norrköping posted about season tickets for the first time on December 15th when the organization posted a video with a text. It stated that the upcoming season is approaching soon and that it is time for the fans to buy season tickets. A direct link to buy them was included in the text. The video itself first shows a sold-out stadium followed by a goal. Then the video shows what fans can experience by coming to the stadium. This included the atmosphere, the food and the meeting of friends. At the end of the video, information about how to buy season tickets were presented.

On January 16th, IFK Norrköping posted about season tickets again on their Facebook page. On that day, the organization shared the video previously posted on December 15th. A couple of days before the start of the 2018 season in Allsvenskan, IFK Norrköping intensified their work to market season tickets. On March 29th and 30th as well as on April 1st, the organization posted 3 different videos where fans can see interviews with current players explaining the expectations for the coming season and why the fans are important to achieve IFK Norrköping's goals for this season.

When looking at IFK Norrköping Instagram's page (@ifknorrkoping), we can see that the organization has posted the same content on Facebook and Instagram. IFK

Norrköping did not create differentiated content about season tickets on these social media sites.

On their website ([www.ifknorrkoping.se](http://www.ifknorrkoping.se)), the organization had a dedicated page about season tickets and all the information needed about the different sections, prices as well as on how to buy them. IFK Norrköping is promoting season tickets by arguing that fans save money compared to single tickets. Season ticket holders also have their own seat inside the stadium so that only them can sit there during the entire 2018 season.

#### 4.3.2 Findings from Kalmar FF

Kalmar FF's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/KalmarFF](http://www.facebook.com/KalmarFF)) has over 21 000 followers. Kalmar FF posted about season tickets for the first time on November 29th. In that post, the organization created an event for December 7th which was based on a Christmas theme and the release of season tickets. The event was held for both current and future season tickets holders. On that day, fans benefited from reductions on merchandising but not on the season tickets. The event was once more promoted on December 4th. We can see that Kalmar FF tried to have their fans opting for merchandising and season tickets as Christmas gifts.

On February 28th, the organization posted a picture on its Facebook page about season tickets. Kalmar FF promoted the season tickets by communicating low prices. The picture showed the different designs of the season tickets and stated that the prices are from 750 SEK.

On March 5th, the organization posted a video with the players in order to try to sell-out the standing section. The players emphasized the importance of the fans cheering for the team and how it makes them play better. A link was also attached to the video to redirect the fans to the website where they can buy season tickets.

When looking at Kalmar FF Instagram's page (@kalmar\_ff), we can see that the organization has posted the same content that we have seen on Facebook. However, the organization did not create an event on Instagram for the Christmas evening on December 7th. Instead, Kalmar FF only posted the same post as on Facebook on December 4th.

On their website ([www.kalmarff.se](http://www.kalmarff.se)), Kalmar FF posted the same content as on their Facebook page on November 29th as well as on March 5th. The organization had also a dedicated page on their website about season tickets and all the information needed about the different sections, prices as well as on how to buy season tickets. Kalmar FF strongly emphasized on the cheap prices of the season tickets.

#### 4.3.3 Findings from Malmö FF

Malmö FF's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/malmoff](http://www.facebook.com/malmoff)) has over 183 000 followers. Malmö FF posted about season tickets for the first time on November 24th. In that post, the organization posted a video with a text. The video started with extracts from the game played on August 27th 2014 against FC Salzburg in the Champions League qualifications. It is narrated by Ahmed Mandzic that is a season ticket holder since 2015. The video showed the incredible atmosphere inside the stadium and one of the goals scored by Malmö FF on that day. The message promoted by the organization is to buy season tickets

in order to “be a part of history in the making”. Malmö FF communicated that, in order to be a part of history in the making, fans should buy season tickets. A direct link to buy season tickets was inserted at the end of the text as well as in the end of the video.

On January 15th, Malmö FF posted a picture of fans from the standing sections to promote season tickets to that section and a link to the season ticket site was posted with the picture. The organization did not present any price or information about the section, Instead, it put emphasis on being part of this group of fans that are building the atmosphere in the stadium. It also stated that there were limited tickets available.

On January 26th, the organization posted a picture taken from the standing section during a game providing the amount of season tickets sold at that point of time (11 000 season tickets sold) and urged fans to follow the 11 000 season ticket holders and buy season tickets before it was too late. The content was similar to what was posted on January 15th, the organization did not present any price or information about the section, only a link to buy the season tickets.

On March 20th and 22nd, just a couple days before the new season started, Malmö FF posted two videos with players in order to promote seasons tickets. The videos starred with Fouad Bachirou and Markus Rosenberg asking fans to “do” as 12 000 season ticket holders and buy or renew their season tickets. Malmö FF used the same strategy as when they posted an update about how many season tickets were sold in January 2018.

When looking at Malmö FF Instagram’s page (@malmo\_ff), we can see that the organization has posted the same content that we have seen on Facebook.

However, on their website ([www.mff.se](http://www.mff.se)), the organization posted different content compared to their social media sites. For example, on December 14th, Malmö FF promoted the season tickets as a Christmas gift. This was not done on Facebook nor Instagram. On December 23rd, Malmö FF posted a campaign on their website about selling out the standing section season tickets. They did that once more on January 12th. Later on, Malmö FF updated its number of sold season tickets in the same way as they did on their social media sites.

#### 4.3.4 Findings from GIF Sundsvall

GIF Sundsvall’s Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/gifsundsvall](http://www.facebook.com/gifsundsvall)) has over 16 000 followers. GIF Sundsvall posted about season tickets for the first time on November 29th. In that post, the organization promoted the season tickets for current season tickets holders. The post had a link to the team’s website where fans can buy season tickets. The organization promoted season tickets as the perfect Christmas gift.

On December 18th and 19th, the organization promoted the season tickets by inviting fans to come to the organization facility in order to have a coffee break and buy season tickets. They also created an event for the first home game on April 2nd with links for both single and season tickets.

On January 29th, the organization communicated the season tickets by stating that the selling of season tickets this year was 30 per cent better compared to last year at the same period of time. The post included a picture of the fans during a game.

On February 26th, GIF Sundsvall posted a picture of current players to promote season tickets. In text, they also explained that the players would call previous fans that attended games last season that have yet not renewed or bought season tickets. GIF Sundsvall did not put more emphasis on selling season tickets on Facebook in March 2018. Instead, they promoted intensively the first home game and sold a package for the first 5 home games.

When looking at GIF Sundsvall Instagram's page (@gifsundsvall), we can see that some content is the same as on Facebook such as what was posted on January 29th and on February 26th. On the other hand, GIF Sundsvall promoted season tickets with new content dedicated for the Instagram platform. On January 30th, the organization posted a video of season tickets being printed out at the factory. In addition, the organization posted a picture of the players on March 29th promoting both single and season tickets. A link to the season ticket site was included in the text. GIF Sundsvall has started to differentiate its content on Instagram compared to Facebook, even though much of the content is still similar.

On November 24th, the organization dedicated a page on their website ([www.gifsundsvall.se](http://www.gifsundsvall.se)) about season tickets and provided all the information needed about the different sections, prices as well as how to buy season tickets. The page was informative and did not contain any theme or specific angle in terms of communication.

#### 4.3.5 Findings from IF Elfsborg

IF Elfsborg's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/ifelfsborg](http://www.facebook.com/ifelfsborg)) has over 40 000 followers. IF Elfsborg posted about season tickets for the first time on November 24th. In that post, the organization promoted season tickets with a much emphasis on the prices of these tickets. Beside the prices, the picture also provided arguments to buy season tickets. These arguments focused on "loyalty", a sense of "community" and "atmosphere". It is also important to highlight that these cheaper prices were only available until the end of December 2017 in order to create a sense of urgency and exclusivity. IF Elfsborg also updated its cover picture emphasizing the low prices on the standing section from 799 SEK for adults and 499 SEK for reduced prices.

On December 1st, the organization released a video about fans putting on the team's clothes and going to the game. The campaign was about "We are Yellow and Black" which are the two main colors of IF Elfsborg. On this video, IF Elfsborg communicates a sense of community as an argument to buy season tickets.

On February 26th, the organization posted a video of the fans from the standing sections and promoted the standing season tickets. IF Elfsborg has posted many different videos with players being interviewed, from the team's practices or with extract from the previous season's games that have been released during March 2018. These videos promoted both season tickets as well as tickets for the first home game. A link to these tickets was included to the texts. The organization put emphasis on the hashtag "We Together" on a continuous basis in order to sell tickets. This creates the sense of community and build the atmosphere for the games. By the end of March, most of the communication on Facebook was about single tickets for the first game of the season instead on the season tickets.

When looking at IF Elfsborg Instagram's page (@ifelfsborg), the organization has posted the same content as on Facebook.

On their website ([www.elfsborg.se](http://www.elfsborg.se)), the organization has posted some information about season tickets. On November 24th, IF Elfsborg posted similar information to what was posted on Facebook about the season tickets and their prices. On December 1st, the organization promoted the seating sections for season tickets. In early 2018, IF Elfsborg mainly promoted the first home game on its website and did not post content about season tickets. The hashtag "#WeTogether" was also present around the website.

#### 4.3.6 Findings from IFK Göteborg

IFK Göteborg's Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/ifkgoteborg](http://www.facebook.com/ifkgoteborg)) has over 152 000 followers. IFK Göteborg posted about season tickets for the first time on November 25th. In that post, the organization promoted season tickets and the option to buy season tickets now and pay with Klarna, a Swedish company that provides online financial services such as payment solutions, a month later (December 29th) for a fee of 29 SEK.

On December 6th, IFK Göteborg promoted season tickets as Christmas gifts. It was again promoted on December 16th and 18th. The picture used for these three posts included a season ticket card packed as a Christmas gift. It stated that the small gift (in reference to the size of the card which is similar to the size of a credit card) has the biggest content (in reference to the 15 home games included in a season ticket). The text emphasized that it is an easy gift to buy as it can be quickly be bought online. On December 27th, the organization promoted season tickets by providing the feeling that "It is time to gather the troops". It created a sense of unity and community. IFK Göteborg promoted the season tickets in a similar way on January 15th by stating "Back together" when selling season tickets. Once again, the feeling of belonging was used to promote season tickets.

In order to promote season tickets in the different sections in the stadium, the organization posted interviews of season tickets holders from different sections. The interviews explained why the ticket holders should come back each year, what the advantages are of having a season ticket, what the advantages are of sitting at a specific section as well as their best memories from previous seasons. The interviews were posted on December 15th, on January 27th and on February 4th and 12th.

On January 18th and 25th, IFK Göteborg promoted season tickets with two pictures of the design of the card itself and a text about community and fellowship. The text emphasized that the readers can be part of the fellowship already today, by buying a season ticket. As we can also see on the video posted on January 24th, the organization used the theme "Framåt Kamrater" which approximately means "comrades going forward" in English. It emphasizes how being a season ticket holder makes the holder part of the fellowship of fans cheering for IFK Göteborg.

On January 30th, IFK Göteborg posted about a coming friendly game against Örgryte IS on March 24th. The text encouraged fans to buy season tickets latest on January 31st in order to have the same seat that is included in the season ticket for the 15 home games in Allsvenskan. The text also emphasized that if fans buy season tickets after January 31st, these new season ticket holders will only receive a ticket for the friendly game against Örgryte IS if there are tickets left. Furthermore, IFK Göteborg does not guarantee that the

season tickets holders will receive the same seat in the stadium as the one included in their season tickets for Allsvenskan.

During February 2018, IFK Göteborg promoted their season tickets by listing the advantages of having season tickets. Once again, these posts were mainly based on being “a true comrade”. When looking at IFK Göteborg Instagram’s page (@ifkgoteborg), we can see that the organization has posted the same content that we have seen on Facebook.

On their website ([www.ifkgoteborg.se](http://www.ifkgoteborg.se)), IFK Göteborg posted similar content about season tickets as on their Facebook page. The organization also dedicated a page on their website about season tickets and all the information needed about the different sections, prices as well as on how to buy season tickets. IFK Göteborg combined this with plenty of content related to their campaign “true comrades” which communicates the campaigns message with emotional pictures, videos and slogans.



## 5. Analysis

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*This chapter presents the analysis on how sports organizations try to communicate in a persuasive way. The analysis focus on the findings of this study that are strengthen with theories from the theoretical frame of reference.*

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### 5.1 Channels

As previously mentioned in the theoretical frame of reference, Levy and Birkner (2011) stated that social media sites are credible business tools. The interviews showed that all organizations rely heavily on social media sites to sell season tickets. The interviewed organizations mainly use Facebook to reach their fans as it is the social media site where they already have the most followers and it is the platform with the highest share of social media users (Ecommerce Europe, 2017). As stated by Kalmar FF and IFK Norrköping, it is easy for the teams to reach new fans on this platform and fans expect their favorite team to be on the platform. However, according to IFK Norrköping, changes in Facebook's algorithms have affected the organic reach of posts. It means that the organizations might have to increase the amount of resources allocated to Facebook to maintain the efficiency of the channel.

For a team such as Malmö FF, who has resources to allocate, paid ads on social media sites have shown great potential. Malmö FF has experienced positive results of sales when reaching potential season tickets holders with paid advertising on social media sites. However, not all the teams can allocate resources to paid advertising on social media sites. For example, GIF Sundsvall was not able to allocate money to paid advertising for the season 2018 even if it could have been an effective way to persuade fans to buy season tickets. On the other hand, IF Elfsborg has seen the change in Facebook algorithms as a call to action for allocating resources to paid advertisements on Facebook resulting in the usage of paid advertising for the first time.

The teams are also present on Instagram. According to Kalmar FF, a younger audience is present on this platform. It is positive for the teams as they aim to reach a larger audience by having a broader range of channels. Even if social media sites are an important part of marketing season tickets, organizations may not want to forget traditional channels such as newspapers, radio, telemarketing, campaigns on local buses and billboards which most of the organizations mentioned during the interviews. These types of channels can reach current and potential season ticket holders that are not members of social media sites.

On the different organizations' websites, the organizations are posting most of the general information about season tickets. All the interviewed organizations have a dedicated part of their website to explain clearly what it means to be a season ticket holder, what are the different sections fans can choose from, the different prices as well as how to buy the tickets. When comparing the observation data to the interview data, it seems that teams can post longer texts with more details on their website compared to social media sites where the content must be short. According to Malmö FF, it is more efficient to have short information as well as having the main information on a picture or video instead of

a text. In order to be more efficient when using different channels, the organizations use different formats on different platforms. This relates to what Jackson (2013) states that how, and not only what we say is very powerful in terms of being persuasive and that the selection of channels is very important as different channels will be appropriate for some circumstances, situations and audiences whilst not for others.

## 5.2 Messages

As previously mentioned in the theoretical frame of reference, Mackay (2005) states that the purpose of marketing communication is to help move potential customers from a state of ignorance to one of decision and action. This part of the analysis looks at the “message” aspect of doing that. As stated in the DRIP model by Fill and Jamieson (2006), marketing communication, at a basic level, can be said to assume one out of four roles: Inform, Persuade, Reinforce and Differentiate. Even though one role is actually named “persuade”, all of the roles can be connected to our research question of how football organizations form their sales messages and arguments to be persuasive in their marketing communications when selling season tickets. As stated in the theoretical frame of reference, in order to persuade someone and call it persuasion, one must first inform them about the desirable action. The reinforcing and differentiating role of communication can be seen as means to strengthen the persuasive messages and have them stand out in the crowd. Taking this into consideration, this model will be used to guide us in outlining the analysis of how football organizations work with making their communication messages persuasive when selling season tickets.

### 5.2.1 Inform

The “I” in the DRIP model stands for “inform” and when first informing about season tickets, the organizations do so on their websites. When doing so for the first time of the season, much of the content in the messages was informative. These informative messages were apparent on the different organizations’ websites. Each team devoted a page on their website to communicate information about the season tickets. These pages involved information regarding price, sections in the stadium and a guide on how to purchase the tickets. IFK Norrköping mentioned that they are able to involve more informative messages on their website compared to their social media sites and that they drive traffic to the website first in order to not risk anyone missing out on that information. Overall, the observations showed that the websites held the most amount of information. In the case of GIF Sundsvall, our observations showed that they focused almost solely on informative messages such as price information. The interview with GIF Sundsvall also stated that much of their focus was put on communicating prices. This was very evident when looking at their website as they did not have any messages that was not informative and price oriented. The other organizations also included much informative messages on their websites. However, they mixed it up with messages focused on loyalty, community and emotions. This relates to literature as it is said that the content of a message can be rational, emotional or a mixture of both. Rational messages are said to focus on facts, quantitative information and statements from experts and credible sources whilst messages with a greater sense of emotions can make use of personal narratives, individual experiences and stories to inspire and motivate the recipient Jackson (2013).

Whether the organizations formed their sales messages and arguments based on informative content, such as price information, differed from case to case. IFK Norrköping stated in their interview that this is something they try to avoid in the sales messages other than to most basic information on their website. IFK Göteborg also put much more effort into communicating their theme “True comrade” than to focus on price information. For Kalmar FF and IF Elfsborg, the strategy seemed similar as both organizations do want to communicate the price advantage of purchasing season tickets over single tickets. However, they are both determined to communicate that the tickets are worth its price and communicate extra value features rather than to lower prices and communicate such aspects. What seemed to be a common denominator in terms of communicating price is that the organizations choose to communicate their cheapest season ticket option. For example, GIF Sundsvall communicated their cheapest option in their family tickets and Kalmar FF choose to promote their standing section tickets. Similarly, Malmö FF also mentioned that they promote their standing tickets in terms of price more than other sections.

As stated by Greenwell (2007), audience will measure much of their satisfaction of a season ticket purchase to their expectations of the product before purchase. When informing about season tickets for the first time before a season, one can assume that the information and promises given about the delivery will provide certain expectations. Thus, one could argue that they must deliver what they have promised, as expectations versus delivery has such great impact on satisfaction. As with the cases of Kalmar FF and IF Elfsborg, they seem to be aware of this as they argue for the importance of being able to show that the season tickets are worth its price with good delivery of every aspect of the product. This relates to the second and third motivation aspects regarding aesthetic and functional quality stated by Biscaia (2015).

### 5.2.2 Persuade

The results from how the football organizations form sales messages and arguments in order to be persuasive provided interesting insights that can be connected, compared and measured towards what literature has pointed out as important motives for football spectators.

All the organizations used the argument that season ticket holders get to keep the same seat throughout the season. This is one of the main features of having a season ticket, however, in the standing section, this will not be a persuasive argument as there are no reserved seats. For the standing sections, the organizations rather put emphasis on the cheaper price and the atmosphere in the stands. For Kalmar FF, the cheaper price in the standing section had attracted a younger crowd which was something desirable for them. For IFK Norrköping, the creation of a cheaper section with standing tickets attracted a wider crowd that could afford those tickets and that audience also improved the atmosphere in their stadium as it is often the case with the standing section due to the culture of singing and chanting. For GIF Sundsvall, the communication of their cheapest alternative, the family season tickets, was a mean to bring in more families to their stadium. Taking all of this into consideration, communicating price for specific sections in the stadium seems to be a way to persuade groups that previously could not afford to attend the games. Other than that, price is not mentioned by the organizations, nor literature, as a strong persuasive factor when selling season tickets.

On the contrary, what seems to be used to form a persuasive message are arguments related to the fear of missing out. IFK Norrköping even started to sell season tickets earlier and intensified their marketing at an earlier stage to be able to communicate a higher number of sold tickets to further push for people securing their seats before it is too late. For Malmö FF, one of their main arguments was the priority season ticket holders get when buying tickets to the European games. To form their communication in a persuasive way, it appears that they took their audience's fear of not getting tickets to the European games as an argument to secure a season ticket. IF Elfsborg provides extra events and happenings to their season ticket holders. This appears to be a similar way of providing loyal fans with something that they desire whilst also showing non-season ticket holders what they are missing out on. IFK Göteborg communicated that those who purchased season tickets before a specific date would be allowed entrance to the last exhibition game before the season, whilst those who had not, would risk not being able to attend the game. In addition, IFK Göteborg also chose to do this in a more general and emotional sense as they communicated that one should buy tickets and especially season tickets to be a part of the team's way back to greatness. Malmö FF communicated a similar message about the opportunity of being part of history in the making rather than missing out. This can be connected to the Sport Fan Motivation Scale and the step focusing on the group affiliation motive and desire to consume sports whilst being part of a group (Wann, 1995). The motivation of being part of group doing something desirable rather than missing out seems to be a strong persuasive argument for football organizations.

All of the above seems to be a two-way persuasion strategy as it provides loyal season ticket holders with extra value that they will be very happy about whilst also communicating some kind of risk of missing out to those who do not decide to buy season tickets. In the literature, much of the motives for attending games were positive motivators. However, this seems to be both positive and negative motivation as it communicates both opportunities and risks

In the eight-step, Sport Fan Motivation Scale introduced by Wann (1995), many of the motives had to do with the experience at the stadium. Entertainment, eustress, self-esteem, group affiliation, family and aesthetics all deals with the football events effect on emotions. The findings of this study further provide strength to the assumed importance of emotions on motives and persuasiveness for attending football games. In different ways, the football organizations described and showed on their channels how they attempt to create strong emotional content to form persuasive arguments for purchasing season tickets.

All teams chose to focus much of their messages on communicating the importance of the supporters' support. IFK Norrköping, Kalmar FF and Malmö FF chose to have their players starring in videos where they thanked the supporters for previous support and encouraged continuous support by emphasizing its importance for the players. IFK Göteborg took this one step further to have their whole campaign theme revolving around being a "true comrade" and supporting your team no matter what. In addition to their videos with their players, IFK Norrköping and Malmö FF posted videos with emotional content related to the atmosphere in their stadiums. Overall, footage of fans chanting and celebration were mentioned as persuasive messages to communicate a sense of togetherness and community. Moreover, these footages tended to be in video format as all the organizations put emphasis on video being the best format for delivering an

effective and emotional message to persuade viewers to desire some kind of belonging to their community and togetherness.

### 5.2.3 Reinforce

Kalmar FF and GIF Sundsvall had their players call their previous season ticket holders to provide the message that the time to renew their tickets was running out. This was a very clear example of reaching out to an audience to reinforce and remind about an action that the receiver wants the audience to take but that it has yet to complete. Another part of the findings that seems connected to the reinforcing role of marketing communication is the sales messages that showcase the number of season tickets being sold. Every time an organization communicates the number of season tickets sold, it works as a reinforcement and reminder of the original message (to buy season tickets). For some organizations, such as IFK Norrköping, this reinforcement also affects the increasingly urgent feeling of missing out as tickets on different sections may sell out. With every post related to the increased number of sold season tickets, one can assume that the fear of missing out would increase for those who have yet to purchase a ticket. The organizations who intensify their marketing communications as the season comes closer, communicate a dense amount of reinforcement messages before it the season starts, and it is too late.

### 5.2.4 Differentiate

Much of the football organizations messages connected to differentiating their brand had to do with creating a sense of “we against them”. As previously mentioned, all organizations put much emphasis on creating a sense of community, togetherness and pride in supporting one's team. This could be argued to be differentiating the organizations brands as supporting a team is a very strong bond created between fans and an organization.

IFK Norrköping and Elfsborg both stated that they aim at being perceived as the team that the cities inhabitants feel proud of and perceive to be the city's finest. In doing that, they try to differentiate themselves from other teams in the same city. In some instances, multiple teams from the same city play in the same league and then differentiation may become even more essential to stay competitive.

## 5.3 Audiences

As previously mentioned by Jackson (2013), the importance of the *receiver* has been somewhat underestimated whilst the source and the message has been perceived as more important in terms of persuasion. The author states that one should address the process of persuasion through focusing on the audience at hand. In our findings, this issue presents itself in an interesting light as the amount of focus put on the audience differs greatly from organization to organization. First of all, GIF Sundsvall have not been able to differentiate their strategy in terms of reaching an audience of previous season ticket holders or an audience with non-season ticket holders. However, they show some effort in terms of reaching previous season ticket holders with direct letters and phone calls in order to persuade for renewal. As stated by Hume, Mort and Winzar (2007), sport organizations should focus on building relationships with their season ticket holders, as consumer retention is closely related to brand loyalty and repeat purchasing behavior. Having their players directly contacting the season ticket holders may very well provide

a sense of value and selectiveness that leads to repurchase and a positive valuation of the quality of the service. At least this was indicated by GIF Sundsvall in their interview as the telemarketing strategy had shown some great success for them in terms of persuading previous season ticket holders to renew. To further reinforce this, Kalmar FF experienced similar results and feedback from providing this communication exchange with their season ticket holders.

As argued by Biscaia (2015), membership programs have a strong effect on game attendance. In accordance, da Silva and Las Casas (2017) argue that true fans form the essence of a sport clubs following base and that sport fans engagement leads to growth and expansion for the clubs. This is argued to be due to the strengthened bond between fans and the clubs. In terms of strengthening those bonds, many of the organizations in our study argued that this is something that they would like to improve further and that it is one of their main objectives going forward.

IFK Norrköping focus on the audience in order to create target segments with higher chance of being receptive to purchasing season tickets. They mentioned that they have a high level of renewal and retention of season ticket holders. Ultimately what they do could be seen as a way to increase the chances of having their communication to be persuasive. In relation to this, Kalmar FF stated that they would like to increase their connection with fans in order to gain a better understand why they make the decisions they do in terms of renewing or not. This is similar to what was mentioned by IFK Norrköping, however, it relates even more to getting feedback in order to improve. Kalmar FF stated that persuading previous season ticket holders to renew is easier than to convince someone new. This also relates to Malmö FF who mentioned this to be much costlier than to reach previous season ticket holders.

In terms of listening and adapting based on the audience at hand, Malmö FF indicated that they see different motives of purchasing season tickets based on different kinds of supporters. This indicates that within the audiences of “non-season ticket holders” and “season ticket holders” presented in our research model, there are plenty of smaller audiences that need to be taken into consideration. This relates to what O’Keefe (2002) argued for in terms of creating messages that deliver as individualized experience as possible to the chosen audience.

The organizations in our study mentioned that loyal fans are sometimes taken for granted and that this is something that should not be allowed to continue. IF Elfsborg put emphasis on this and argued for the importance to entertain and manage their loyal supporters continuously. In addition, Malmö FF said that they work hard to create “ambassadors” in terms of happy season ticket holders who communicate the value of having a season ticket and thus spread the word. IFK Göteborg has taken this a step further by their involvement of their season ticket audience. As stated in the findings, they include their audience in the decision making before the season, allow them to compete for designing the season ticket design and include them in making decisions both connected to their marketing communication and game related activities. All of this is said to be done because they understand the importance of this audience as an additional channel for them. Similarly to Malmö FF, IFK Göteborg stated that this group can actually sell out a stadium all by themselves and that they get much help from their supporter affiliations in marketing season tickets. This was also mentioned by Malmö FF who said that they work closely

with their supporter affiliations when communicating season tickets. This may indicate that what we have categorized as an audience in this study may very well be one of sports organizations most important channels in terms of communicating season tickets in a persuasive way.

## 6. Conclusion

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*This chapter presents the results of this study and concluding remarks.*

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### *1. How does football organizations form their sales messages and arguments to be persuasive in their marketing communications when selling season tickets*

In general, one can conclude that emotional messages with supporter-oriented content communicated through powerful videos to evoke a feeling of togetherness and community is the main way football organizations form their sales messages and arguments to be persuasive in selling season tickets. However, after studying the subject, we also conclude that there seems to be a difference in what football organizations use as persuasive arguments dependent on the receiving audience.

First of all, this can be noticed in the communication of seated or standing season tickets. For the seated option, literature suggested that one of the core aspects of such a season ticket is the value of keeping the same seat throughout the season. This was further emphasized by the sports organizations as something that they actually try to use as a persuasive argument when marketing those tickets. However, the standing section was found to be lacking this option. In those cases, the sports organizations made use of price arguments as these tickets are oftentimes the cheapest in the stadium. It was stated that the lower price attracted a larger, younger audience to these sections and that these sections often were those who delivered the most amount of chanting, cheering and celebration. Thus, one can conclude that the standing sections are communicated with the persuasive argument of being cheap and delivering a high amount of emotional activities during the events that seems to be suitable for a somewhat younger crowd. The older audience was said to enjoy the value of having their own seats and thus being prone to being persuaded by such arguments. Thus, one can conclude that sports organizations form their persuasive communication arguments much based on the audience that is to receive the message.

In connection to the previous part, this study can conclude another interesting phenomenon in sports organizations persuasive communication. Namely that sports organizations make use of much persuasive arguments that can be found to be connected to the fear of missing out. What makes this conclusion interesting is that, at first, it seemed that the organizations either communicated to season ticket holders what extra value they can get from having a season ticket or to non-season ticket holders what they were missing out on. However, after analyzing the findings, we found that oftentimes these messages are the same, only that they are intended to work in two different ways depending on who is the recipient of the message. Literature provided plenty of positive motivations to why someone would like to buy season tickets. However, our findings show that whilst communicating these positive arguments of motivation to people who have season tickets, the very same message also provides a negative motivation to those who do not have season tickets as they will be missing out on the extra-value provided to season ticket holders. That is, without a season ticket, one will not be able to take part in the extra value features. A very apparent example of this is Malmö FF who prioritizes their season ticket



holders when releasing tickets to European games. Ultimately, this phenomenon also relates to how persuasive communication is perceived based on the audience who receives it.

*2. How does football organizations work with different channels to affect the persuasiveness of their communication?*

One can conclude that in order for the football organizations to persuade their fans to buy season tickets, they must use their channels differently depending on the audience and message they want to communicate. Each channel is not functioning by itself. Instead, it is the combination of the different channels that can persuade fans. By having different channels, the organizations are able to redirect fans from one channel to another so that the fans can see content that they are interested in. For example, IFK Norrköping drive traffic to their website where they provide all the required information related to season tickets. Social media sites are particularly efficient to share content such as videos and pictures while an organization's website allows for much more detailed information. Local channels such as newspapers are also important channels to persuade potential season ticket holders that might not be reached online. We can further see that the football organizations make great use of their CRM systems to create more direct communication to segmented groups such as previous season ticket holders or returning single ticket buyers. Channels such as telemarketing and newsletters connected to their CRM systems are often used to deliver a more individualized message to that specific audience.

*3. What differences can be found in football organizations marketing communication to existing versus potential season ticket holders?*

One can conclude that the football organizations in our study make attempts to individualize their sales messages depending on the desired recipients previous season ticket status. In comparison to the communication made to non-season ticket holders, the organizations are able to easier target the season ticket audience in a specific segment through their CRM systems and this allows for an increasingly niched and individualized communication aimed at an audience that they know is interested in their offerings. The communication to those segments tend to be focused on loyalty, community, togetherness and value-added features given to loyal supporters. In terms of channels and formats, the marketing communication efforts displayed by the organizations in our study is much more direct and aimed at specific individuals when communicating to previous season ticket holders compared to potential new customers.

We see that the football organizations put much effort into reaching previous season ticket holders with persuasive messages about renewal. The organizations agreed that persuading this audience to renew for another season is much easier than to persuade new customers.

Furthermore, we can conclude that whether or not the organizations have extensive strategies for working with loyal supporters, they all wanted to improve this aspect of their marketing communications even further. The reason seems to be the potential knowledge of the audience. For example, about how the organizations can manage their offerings and marketing communications to better facilitate and meet the needs of the wider supporter audience. Another reason for this is the perceived notion from some of

the organizations that this audience can actually work as an additional channel in marketing season tickets as the supporter affiliations and the audience of current season ticket holders are oftentimes eager to help increase the number of supporters attending games.

We can conclude that IFK Göteborg seems to be a role model out of the organizations in our study when it comes to engaging their loyal audience in helping them reach their audience of potential season ticket holders as well as providing knowledge on what to do to keep the loyal crowd happy. Malmö FF also stated the importance of their supporter affiliations in terms of marketing season tickets and this further strengthens our beliefs in our conclusion that this audience can actually work as a very powerful channel for persuasive marketing communications for football organizations.

## 7. Discussion

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*This chapter presents the discussion on the results of this study, managerial implications, limitations and future research.*

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### 7.1 Discussion

This study provides insights on how football organizations form their messages, choose channels and differentiate this based on the receiving audiences. It provides another perspective to the one of literature that mainly focus on sport spectator motivators. This study was able to decrease the gap of literature related to what football organizations actually do in terms of persuasive marketing communication when selling season tickets. As this study adds the organizations' perspective to the aspects of messages, channels and audiences introduced by Jackson (2013), one can argue that this study could help managers and organizations in benchmarking their own marketing communication activities connected to these aspects.

This study found an interesting common denominator that all teams wish to further strengthen their collaboration with their affiliated supporter groups in terms of marketing communication and knowledge exchange. This implied that the core audience could be used as a source of knowledge but also as a very powerful additional channel in terms of marketing season tickets. In recent years, one can see that much effort has been on understanding communities and the power of consumers. For football organizations, this seems to be of extra importance due the strong emotional bond that comes with supporter ship. After completing this study, the importance of emotions and the value in being able to communicate appreciation cannot be understated. For football organizations, this ability seems connected to not only the persuasiveness of the message itself, but the extent to which an organization can make usage of their audiences in their marketing communication when selling season tickets.

This study is able to show how football organizations work with different aspects of marketing communication, however, it is lacking the aspects of timing and measurement of persuasiveness.

To further be able to aid organizations in improving their persuasive marketing communication, it would have been interesting to outline how timing is perceived to affect persuasion. We do touch upon this in some sense as the teams mentioned different starting points for selling season tickets. However, our purpose, problem formulation nor the research model or research questions outlined any timing aspects to guide this study. Nonetheless, as the questions in the interviews at times asked for examples throughout the sales period, timing still became somewhat included. For example, IF Elfsborg stated the timing aspect to be something they would like to address as they would like to market season ticket at an earlier stage. IFK Norrköping argued this to be a big part of their strategy in being able to communicate a high number of sold tickets early on. This indicates that the topic was somewhat touch upon but maybe not to the extent that it made

any greater impact on the conclusions and thus helped in outlining its importance to persuasion.

The measurement of persuasion was not in any way included in this thesis. This was purposely chosen as that would have called for another study design. Despite this, one should not neglect the potential importance of studying persuasion in a more measurable and interpretative sense. Doing that should provide further suggestions and inspiration to the sports industry community in general, and football organizations in particular, on how to improve the persuasiveness of their marketing communications.

#### 7.1.1 Managerial implications

Managers from different sport organizations can learn from this study in terms of inspiration of persuasive messages, channel usage and audience management. This study presents an overview of the professional Swedish football. Managers are then able to provide guidance to their employees on how sport organizations could allocate their resources to sell season tickets and suggest new ways to reach their goals.

#### 7.1.2 Limitations

We are aware that our study has some limitations. It could have been better to interview all teams playing in Allsvenskan in order to have a better picture on how the teams sell season tickets. It would also have been beneficial to meet the interviewees in person instead of conducting the interviews by phone so that we could have seen the respondent's body language. We are also conscious that the interviews were conducted in Swedish and that we had to translate the findings into English which is not ideal. For the observation of data on social media sites and websites, we only looked at data from November 2017 to April 2018. It would have been preferred to analyze the data over a longer period as the period of time for selling season tickets was shown to be longer for some teams. Finally, as we conducted the data observation in April 2018, we were not able to see previous Facebook and Instagram stories when conducting our data observation as this type of content is only available to viewers for 24 hours. It is the same for the teams' websites where we did not see the eventual pop-up teams could have published during this period.

#### 7.1.3 Future Research

There are three main areas on which we suggest future research to focus on. The first is the effect that timing has on persuasiveness. Future research could focus on whether an early or late start of selling season tickets after a completed season is preferable or not from a persuasive perspective. In addition, such research could include frequency and how the number of messages affect persuasion. Thus, the general focus would be on *when* and *how much* to communicate when marketing season tickets in a persuasive way.

Second, research could increasingly focus on measurable and interpretative aspects of persuasive marketing communications for football organizations. As our study focus on how football organizations work with persuasive marketing communication, future research could focus more on the measurable and interpretative aspects to outline what of this is actually working and what is not. This relates to the previous section.

Third, this study only focus on some teams in one league. Focusing on other leagues as well could allow for comparisons between leagues, countries and organizations. Such comparisons should be done through a lense of measurability and interpretative as mentioned above in order to outline what one organization, country or league does that affect the persuasiveness of their marketing communication in a specific way in comparison to the others.

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