



Retailing Opportunities for the National Hockey League in Finland

Fredén, Niko & Lindholm, Kent

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Niko Fredén & Kent Lindholm
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Niko Fredén & Kent Lindholm

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The idea of the thesis is to carry out a market research for the National Hockey League (NHL). The study will be about the retailing opportunities the organization has in Finland. The idea is to find out the Finnish retailing market situation and the real interest Finnish consumers have towards NHL products. The aim is to answer to following research questions; “What kind of retailing opportunities do NHL products have in Finland?” and “How can the availability and visibility of NHL products be improved in Finland?”

NHL products can be found in Finland and many other European countries, but the availability is limited. This is the case despite the fact that Finland is a country with a high level of hockey interest. NHL aims to increase the popularity of the league and its products in Finland.

The NHL brand is well-known globally, also in Finland. A well-known brand increases the value of a product and improves its image. It has also an effect in a consumer’s buying behavior. NHL believes in its own brand and is able to compete in the market with it.

Theory, related to the thesis subject was reviewed to get answers to everything needed. The questionnaire was conducted by using quantitative research methods. The questionnaires were handed out to ice hockey related people, athletes, students, friends and the middle aged people. The thesis itself is based on a market research and its results. After executing the questionnaires, the results were analyzed and the development proposal was made.

Most of the references are from English literature. The main themes are about market research, marketing, retailing, supply chain management and branding. In addition, online references have also a significant part in the thesis. Information has been gathered with questionnaires, interviews and visits. Contacts have been used and they have been really effective in the thesis process.

A written report is going to be sent to NHL. It will include results of the research, conclusions and development proposals. The goal of the whole research process and thesis is to provide a comprehensive work that will give answers to how the visibility and availability of NHL products could increase in the Finnish market.

Based on the research results, the Finnish people are very interested in the NHL products. The Finnish people prefer that the products would be more available at sports retailers. The conclusion of the market research and the whole thesis is that the NHL products should be imported more to Finland.

Key words: market research, National Hockey League, retail, products, brand

Niko Fredén & Kent Lindholm

National Hockey Leaguen jälleenmyyntimahdollisuudet Suomessa

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Tämän opinnäytetyön päämäärä on suorittaa markkinatutkimus National Hockey Leaguelle (NHL). Tutkimus käsittelee NHL:n ja sen tuotteiden jälleenmyyntimahdollisuuksia Suomessa. Työssä tarkastellaan suomalaisten, niin jääkiekon harrastajien kuin muidenkin henkilöiden, halukkuutta ja kiinnostuneisuutta NHL:n tuotteita kohtaan. Opinnäytetyön tavoitteena on vastata seuraaviin tutkimuskysymyksiin; ”Minkälaiset jälleenmyynti mahdollisuudet NHL:n tuotteilla on Suomessa?” ja ”Miten voimme kehittää NHL:n tuotteiden saatavuutta ja näkyvyyttä Suomessa?”.

NHL:n tuotteita jälleenmyydään Suomessa ja muualla Euroopassa, mutta niiden näkyvyys ja saatavuus varsinkin Suomessa on heikko. NHL:n toiveena on lisätä koko liigan ja etenkin sen tuotteiden näkyvyyttä Suomessa. Opinnäytetyö tarkastelee näitä mahdollisuuksia ja lisäksi selvittää, mihin asioihin Suomessa tulisi panostaa NHL-tuotteiden myynnin kasvattamiseksi.

NHL:n brändi tunnetaan maailmanlaajuisesti ja myös Suomessa NHL:n tunnettavuus on korkea. Tuotemerkillä on suuri merkitys kuluttajien ostokäyttäytymiseen. Tunnettu tuotemerkki lisää tuotteen arvoa ja nostaa sen imagoa. NHL luottaa omaan tuotemerkkiinsä ja kilpailee markkinoilla sen avulla.

Opinnäytetyössä käsitellään aiheeseen liittyvää teoriaa käytännön selventämiseksi. Työhön liittyen suoritetaan kyselytutkimus määrällistä menetelmää hyödyntäen. Työ perustuu markkinatutkimukseen ja sen tuloksiin. Kyselyn suorittamisen jälkeen seuraa tulosten analysointi ja kehitysehdotukset.

Lähteinä on käytetty pääasiassa englanninkielistä kirjallisuutta markkinatutkimuksesta, markkinoinnista, jälleenmyynnistä, toimitusketjun hallinnasta ja tuotemerkin merkityksestä. Lisäksi sähköisillä lähteillä on ollut opinnäytetyössä suuri merkitys. Tietoa on kerätty kyselytutkimuksen ja erilaisten haastatteluiden sekä vierailuiden avulla. Opinnäytetyötä varten on käytetty kaikki mahdolliset kontaktit, jotka ovat olleet hyödyllisiä lopputulosta ajatellen.

Opinnäytetyön tuloksena kohdeyritykselle on kirjallinen raportti tutkimustuloksineen, johtopäätöksineen ja kehitysehdotuksineen. Koko tutkimus ja siitä koottava opinnäytetyö tähtää siihen, että se tarjoaa tulevaisuuden näkökulman NHL-tuotteiden näkyvyyden ja saatavuuden parantamiseen Suomen markkinoilla.

Kyselytutkimuksen tulosten perusteella suomalaiset ovat yleisesti katsoen kiinnostuneita NHL:n tuotteista. Suomalaiset ovat myös selvästi sen kannalla, että tuotteita tulisi olla enemmän tarjolla urheilukaupoissa. Markkinatutkimuksen ja koko opinnäytetyön johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että NHL:n tuotteita pitäisi maahantuoda enemmän Suomeen tarjolle jälleenmyyntiliikkeisiin.

Avainsanat: markkinatutkimus, National Hockey League, jälleenmyynti, tuotteet, tuotemerkki

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1 Introduction

This chapter is an introduction to the thesis. It introduces the aims and objectives of the thesis, the case company and the framework of the study. It includes the delimitations and research questions which are the essential parts of the research.

1.1 Objectives and Defining of the Research

The aim of this research is to clarify National Hockey League's (NHL) retailing opportunities in Finland. The idea is specifically to show the capability the NHL has in the Finnish market, for example by importing more products to the country. This study aims also in finding out how NHL could get more visibility in Finland and if Finns have the interest for NHL products; would they buy them if there would be better opportunities to do so.

The aim of this thesis is to answer to research questions "What kind of retailing opportunities NHL products have in Finland?" and "How can the availability and visibility of NHL products be improved in Finland?"

In order to clarify the delimitation of the thesis there is a need to demonstrate few facts. This study is a market research which is concentrating in a specific place: the Finnish market. The research does not cover European countries or any other countries next to Finland. Research concentrates mostly on people who have an interest towards sports and ice hockey. Work consists of different subjects, such as market research, retailing, marketing-mix tool, questionnaires and their execution. It is important to mention that we are not importing any ice hockey products to Finland. The work itself does not increase the retailing of NHL products as an outcome; we just explore its opportunities. The final result of the study is a report which offers conclusions and development proposals for the future. We give our report to the case company so that they are able to get an understanding of the Finnish market situation. It will give them valuable information of where to invest, when planning the increasing, availability and visibility of NHL products in Finland.

1.2 Introduction of the Company

The following thesis is about the National Hockey League (NHL). NHL is the best and most known hockey league in the world. It was founded in Montreal, Canada on November 26, 1917 and established after the National Hockey Association (NHA), best league at the time, had gotten into troubles and there was a need for a new league (NHL History, 2013).

The NHA stopped its operations and the National Hockey League got started. The time that took place between 1917 and 1942 was called the founding era. In the beginning there were only four teams: The Ottawa Senators, The Montreal Canadiens, The Montreal Wanderers and Toronto Arenas as a new hockey team. After having only Canadian teams in the league, NHL expanded to the United States in 1924, as the Boston Bruins hockey team was founded. Two years later, already ten teams were part of the National Hockey League.

World War II did the same to the NHL as the First World War had done to the NHA: the league decreased and only six teams got left. This time period between years 1942 and 1967, was known as the Original Six. To the original six included The Montreal Canadiens, The Toronto Maple Leafs, The Boston Bruins, The Chicago Black Hawks, The Detroit Red Wings and The New York Rangers (Jenkins, 2010).

After playing with the same teams for 25 years, the expansion era took place between years 1967 and 1992. In 1967 the team amount got doubled when six new ones were introduced to the league. The new teams were The California Seals, The Los Angeles Kings, The Minnesota North Stars, The Philadelphia Flyers, The Pittsburgh Penguins and the St. Louis Blues. The expansion continued the following years and in 1974 there were already 18 existing teams in the league.

A few years earlier, in 1972, World Hockey Association (WHA) had been founded. It competed for years with the NHL, having many players to change the league from the NHL to the new WHA league. The story of WHA became short and it fell apart in 1979. After collapsing, NHL continued to expand and soon there were already 21 existing teams in the league (History of NHL Hockey, 2013).

During the modern area (started in 1992) NHL has become a massive organization. The league has expanded in two decades to 30 teams; 15 playing in the Western division, and 15 in the Eastern. The popularity of the league is higher than ever and more and more businesses want to be involved with the National Hockey League and their operation. Gary Bettman was named the commissioner of the NHL in February 1, 1993. During his time the league has expanded from a 400 million dollar business, to over three billion.

1.3 Description of the Study

In order to clarify this thesis and the process it is structured in the main sections. The description is demonstrated in Figure 1. This thesis consists of five main chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the thesis.

It is followed by the theoretical background in chapter two. Second chapter presents the basics of market research and retailing market. This chapter also provides a perspective on branding and marketing-mix tool. Chapter two not only focuses more closely to market research process, but also to industry, competition, customers and distribution channels of retailing. The theory is presented in a way which helps to understand our work and this thesis. Theoretical background provides the most important information related to this study.

The following section is about the research approach and methodology. Third chapter handles the reasons why a market-based research and its methods are chosen.

Fourth chapter describes our study and how it was executed. Section clarifies how the questionnaires are done and the inquiries conducted. This chapter consists of all gathered information about the inquiries, retailers and the Finnish market situation. Chapter can be considered as a practical part which introduces the research, its results and all the work carried out. It gives also a good overview of the situation on the market as it stands currently.

Fifth chapter is an introduction of conclusions. This chapter presents conclusions and development proposals of the whole thesis.

After these five main chapters there's a list of references and appendices at the end of the thesis. They conduct all the sources and attachments used in this thesis.

Introduction

Theoretical Background

Research Approach and Methodology

Study: National Hockey League in Finland

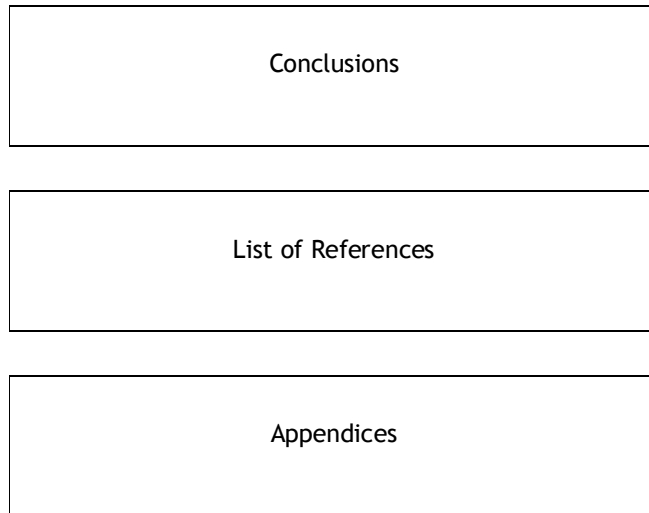


Figure 1: Structure of the thesis

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Four P's

The marketing-mix consists of the four P's which are product, price, place and promotion. According to Kotler, Armstrong, Wong and Saunders (2008, 49), the marketing mix are the tools that increases a company's product, to make it more desirable. This is also the reason why companies should be accurate when making a strategy around the four P's; that they could understand the real value of them.

2.1.1 Product

Products are all the goods and services a company is putting on the market. The national hockey league has a licensing agreement currently with one of the biggest sports producers in the world, Reebok. Reebok is manufacturing clothing for the NHL. One of the big deals is to make the player jerseys for every team. Most of the products, targeted to the consumers and fans, are then made by Reebok. The licensing agreement is done to ensure the high quality of the consumer products, which Reebok has proven to be able to offer as a company.

One of the goals of this thesis is to find out which products could be successful in smaller markets, like Finland. The well-known and potential NHL products are for instance the earlier mentioned team jerseys, sweaters and as a current theme the winter classic wear.

The clothing industry has changed also in sports, and today people are more specific with their buying behaviour. The products must be fashionable in many ways to attract the customers. The designs have to apply for as many consumers as possible. According to Kotler,

Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen (2009, 505) the idea of a product is to satisfy a want or a need. If this doesn't happen, the consumer will change the provider to another. In this case, consumers are able to change products from hockey for example to other big and attractive sport genres, like baseball or basketball.

2.1.2 Price

Price has an important part of the marketing mix. Price is the amount a company is asking from the customer to pay for their products or services. Price depends of several different factors like, the manufacturing and distribution costs. The most important pricing occurs when deciding how much the provider is asking for the final consumers to pay.

If the quality is good and the products are unique, the price is also going to be high. This is also the fact with NHL products. The manufacturer delivers premium clothing and there isn't any same kind of products that can be compared to them. That is the reason why the NHL is able to ask a certain, relatively high amount of their products. The brand value is high and the organization has seen that consumers are willing also to pay for it.

The price should still be classified that basically anyone who is interested in ice-hockey and NHL, is able to buy these products.

2.1.3 Place

Place is a critical tool in the marketing mix. Companies need to figure out what is the best way to reach the customers. Distribution channels have to be sorted out and companies must decide which retailers to co-operate with, if any. Another option is to have an own retailing store. When a company chooses to launch an own store, the main question is where the new store is going to be located. Depending on what the store is selling, it is often a big and risky investment. Countries, cities and even areas might prefer different things and that's why it is necessary to do a market research, to ensure that there really is a need for a store. One popular option, for instance in the clothing industry, has been to locate stores next to each other in malls and other dense areas. This contributes also the consumers, as they don't need to travel in to many locations to fulfil their needs.

If a company decides to co-operate with retailers, they have to arrange the distribution with them. To deal with retailers is often a good option for example to raise the brand awareness of the products, as retailing stores are popular within a big and diverse population. The disadvantage when working with retailers is that the stores are also dealing with other brands and therefore can only spend limited resources. They have to sell also all the other products

existing in the store. The consumer might also end up buying another, possibly cheaper product, when seeing the large supply of several brands products.

The National Hockey Leagues official stores are located in New York City and Toronto.

2.1.4 Promotion

Promotion is the marketing mix tool that communicates the consumer to buy the actual product. Several different promotion tools can be used and in every case when the methods are at least somehow different. Companies must decide which promotion tools they see as being the best and is able to give the most value to them.

Traditional promotion tools are for instance sales promotions and mass marketing. Their role is decreasing as new methods have come to the market. This could only happen with the help of the evolving technology. Instead of marketing a product for example on television or in public, companies are able to use cheaper and more effective options online. Products can be targeted so that the advertisements will reach the right group of consumers on the web pages.

Also the power of social media, like Facebook and Twitter, has to be mentioned. The incredible amount of people using these media means, that every time marketing and advertisement is being done, it will always reach a group that is the target market. In addition to that, the products and companies are getting more and more publicity and contribute them further to success.

All the four P's are uniting in the last P, promotion. The job of the promotion tool is to explain to the consumer the value of the product, telling also the price of the product and the place, where it can be found.

2.2 Market Research

According to Hague (2002, 1-2) market research is expected to simplify and develop the decisions made in marketing. Hague defines market research as following; "Market research - the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of information relevant to marketing decisions" (2002, 9). The meaning of market research is to collect information about the market and any facts regarding to a marketing decision.

Market research can be mixed up with marketing research. These two are different kind of researches. Market research can be considered as a part of marketing research. The concept

of marketing research is wider than the concept of market research because market research is concentrated only on a specific market. As previously described, the Four P's - product, price, place and promotion - are the main factors of marketing. Both of the researches handle all of these measures. Marketing research deals with all four P's, when market research concentrates especially on place. (Jill, 2010; My Market Research Methods, 2011)

2.2.1 Market Research Process

Market research process is a demanding project that needs to be planned and executed properly. It has several stages and each stage has different tasks and details that need to be concentrated on. Process is illustrated in Figure 2.

According to Mäntyneva, Heinonen and Wrange (2008, 13) the first stage in marketing research or market research is to define the research problem; what needs to be researched and how the subject will be delimited. In turn, referring to Hague (2002, 9), at the beginning of any market research, specification of objectives have a major purpose. Hague states that "objectives are a statement of why the research is being carried out and link to what information is being sought" (2002, 9). Definition of objectives is a significant part of the market research and it helps to understand what is being studied and explored.

Next stage of market research is planning. As any other project, market research requires proper planning before work starts. According to Hague (2002, 25) following things should take into account in planning; problems to be solved, research objectives, information coverage, research methods, resources, timetable and quality issues. Market research needs also research plan and Hague (2002, 38) amplifies the headings that should be processed in research plan:

- Analysis of the research questions and problems
- Objectives of the research
- Extent and defining are correct so the research covers the subject
- Research methods and approach
- Reporting and conclusions
- Specific timetable with different tasks
- Budget
- Guarantee of quality

Third stage of market research is to collect the data. It is essential to gather considerable amount of information when executing market research. Collection of data is important part

of any research and collected information should be realistic and reliable. Research methods, which are linked to data collection, will be explained later.

The following stage is data analysis. After the data collection, comes a need to analyse the data. Data analysis is all about turning the gathered information into reliable conclusions. This will be clarified more specifically below.

Final stage of market research is interpretation which includes reporting, conclusions and marketing decisions. This stage summary the result of the research and it offers conclusions and recommendations. This subject will also be cleared up more below.

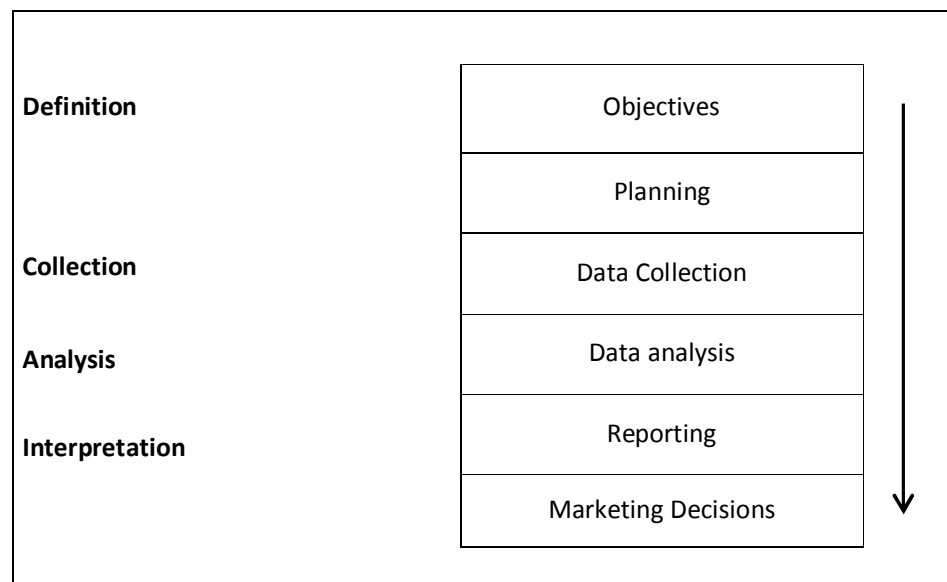


Figure 2: The market research process (Hague 2002, 10)

2.2.2 Research Methods

According to Hague (2002, 32) research methods clarify few important matters. Firstly these methods tell how efficient planning contributes awareness of options and when these options can be sensibly used. Secondly research methods also deal with the collection of demanded information.

When choosing a research method, the basic option is between desk research and fieldwork. It is also possible to combine these methods together. Desk research means exploring printed or already existing information that is available (Hague 2002, 33). Desk research is an important factor when the aim is to achieve as much knowledge as possible. It is rational to use that information which is already available and accessible than trying to “re-invent the

wheel”, as Hague narrates it (2002, 33). Desk research may not give all the information needed, and in this case, fieldwork can complete the research.

Fieldwork’s final result is finished inquiries (Hague 2002, 186). In fieldwork it is possible to use qualitative or quantitative research approach. “The roots of the words ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ imply that one is based on quality and the other on quantity” (Hague 2002, 59). In qualitative research the amount of people, questionnaires or interviews don’t have a significant role, as it is about the standard of the interviews. The main point is to concentrate on less people and more in the discussions with them. Qualitative research exploits principally open-ended questions. On the contrary, quantitative research is all about measuring something (Hague 2002, 73). According to Mäntyneva et al. (2008, 31) quantitative research approach can be used when it is possible to define measurable factors or other factors that are in numerical format. The sample sizes are bigger in quantitative research and a survey is often used (Mäntyneva et al. 2008, 32). Quantitative research exploits generally closed questions. Other differences between these two research approaches can be clarified by questions. According to Mäntyneva et al. (2008, 32) qualitative research will answer to questions why and how and quantitative research will answer to questions like what, where, how many and how often.

2.2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis can be considered as a big part of the market research. When the fieldwork or data collection is done, the outcome is finished questionnaires. After collecting considerable amount of information, there is a need to analyse the data. According to Aaker, Kumar, Leone and Day (2013, 345) data analysis has an important role when going through the gathered information and turning it into reliable conclusions and reports. However, data analysis cannot save a poorly, carried out research or fieldwork, and a bad data analysis can ruin a well-executed research.

According to Hague (2002, 186) data analysis can be considered as a project where untouched data or single answers are compiled together. In order to be wise, data analysis planning should be started at the same time when the questionnaire is being outlined. The data analysis process has several stages before the report writing can start. Data analysing depends on what kind of research approaches are being used in the research. Quantitative and qualitative approaches need different kind of data analysis.

Referring to Hague (2002, 187-189) there is a possibility to use simple quantitative data analysis for closed questions where the results are presented in simple and clear table. Other option is to use cross-analysis to compare the results between various groups of respondents.

Cross-analysis is more complicated, as cross-analysis table introduces the results in many different categories such as sex, age, income group and hobbies. It is possible to use simple quantitative data analysis for open-ended questions too but what needs to be remembered is that every single answer to open-ended question is its own kind and remarkable. It is then more difficult to find the collective format. For this reason, when using this type of data analysis, single answers should be organized into same type of categories (Hague 2002, 192-193).

Because qualitative research includes smaller samples than quantitative research, the data analysis technique is different. The easiest way is to go through the similar parts of the questionnaire and sort the responds into sensible abstracts (Hague 2002, 202-203).

2.2.4 Theory of the Findings and Conclusions in the Research

This chapter offers only theoretical view to findings and conclusions of the research. The real results of the NHL market research will be introduced later.

As previously described, the final stage of the market research is interpretation and reporting. This stage summaries the results and reveals the conclusions of the research. It is the key factor, when making decisions regarding marketing and the future. Most of the decisions made are based on conclusions of the research.

“The findings constitute the body of the report” (Hague 2002, 220). The research findings introduce all the essential issues and numbers considering the subject of the research. According to Mäntyneva et al. (2008, 91) this is usually the most extensive part of the report and it should be the most logical too. When reporting the results and findings, the concentration should be on answering the research questions.

Referring to Mäntyneva et al. (2008, 91) the researcher should compare the research results and findings to research questions and problems, when compiling the conclusions. This is the way to achieve comprehensive and versatile conclusions. After describing conclusions it is possible to present recommendations, and these development proposals should be practically useful.

2.3 Retailing Market

According to Varley and Rafiq (2004, 3), retailing is the activities when selling goods and services to the final consumers for their personal use. The purpose of retailing is to make products available to consumers as easily as possible. Without active retailing, products will not

sell and businesses will not have the best possible success. According to Arnold, Capella and Smith (1983, 4) retailers can perform any combination of marketing such as buying, selling, transportation, storage, risk taking, and providing market information.

2.3.1 Retail Industry

Retail industry has grown under the last decade. The new and different environment has changed the industry. Today, there are for instance international retailers and they have a big impact to the competition. In addition, the popularity of Internet and easiness of buying online has led to new challenges between the two parties; consumers and retailers. It is not enough anymore to understand in what the consumers are interested in and start selling. A large amount of retailers exist all around the world for the industries. The retailers must use expenses into researching and for example being aware of new products or trends, which have potential to sell in the upcoming seasons.

Companies manufacturing products must build strong relations with the whole distribution chain they are managing with. The long process from producing the products to getting them in to the stores is global, as the manufacturing takes often place abroad. Companies have factories in the developing countries like China, India and others where the manufacturing costs are much cheaper (Wilkes, 2013).

Retailing has also an enormous effect in today's economy. Consumer behaviour has led to a situation where retailing is huge and millions of jobs take place through retailing. According to Verdict, for example in the UK in 2001, one-third of consumer consumption and every ninth job was via retailing, and the amount has been growing since. UK is a mature retail market, but the employment is significant also in other developed nations, where retailing is playing a big part in the society.

Retailers do well and are often successful, but also consumers benefit from the growing retail markets. They have more options to choose from and can look for the suitable amount: when the product and price match.

According to Varley and Rafiq (2004, 12) retailing shops have five key roles for being successful and serving consumers in a proper way:

- *Advertising and promotion.* Stores use media to give consumers the knowledge of new existing products and what's on sale. In addition, the store stays in people's minds after seeing a commercial for example on television and it is expectable that the person will also visit this specific store.

- *Providing advice and guidance.* Every store has professionals helping out and making sure the consumers get the best possible service and meet the customer requirements.
- *Negotiate and form contracts.* Stores take risks with the manufacturers they operate with and the products they sell. The store is responsible and trying to ensure that quality, suitability, valuation and legality manages in a proper and right way
- *Arrange of payment and risk of default.* Stores take the risk that some part of the payment process will not always be completed in the right way or time.
- *Warranty claims and after-sales facilities.* Stores are responsible if something goes wrong after the consumer has bought a product. The store has the obligation to cover the maintenance and repair costs.

2.3.2 Retail Competition

The competition in retailing has grown and new competitors are coming to the industry constantly. Retailers must understand the whole picture what is facing them in the changing competitive market. This leads to new challenges inside the business. There is no right and wrong marketing strategies, firms should categorize where they belong in the market and use a strategy that fits them in the best possible way. Although there are existing consumers that can be found to buy products in a large scale from the market, retailers must at the same time differentiate themselves from the others to be successful. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012, 235) companies must invest in to differentiation with the products, services, channels, people or image. In today's business, also assortments and promotions are playing a key role in the retailing field and firms must also spend time to them, to show their positive difference.

Retailing has become so tough, that retail companies co-operate with professionals from the advertising and branding industry. The idea is to make advertisement that will create a positive effect in the consumer minds, along with raising the brand awareness of the company and reaching new customers in a long term.

Companies in retailing should also invest in binding long-lasting relations with their customers and partners. When doing it, companies are able to concentrate in the actual retailing with all the challenges the actual retail process brings, instead of having to spend too much of resources in getting new customers.

Varley and Rafiq (2004, 43 - 44) have listed the different types of retail competition:

- *Intratype competition* is when the two competitors have similar types of retail formats or trading styles. In this type of competition it is critical for a company to try to differentiate from the competitor and have success.
- *Intertype competition* is a competition between two different retail formats, selling the same merchandise. This can happen for instance between a supermarket and another retailer. Supermarkets are often selling clothing brands, in addition to groceries, which are their main products. Whereas many clothing stores are focused in selling just the specific clothing brands without any distinctive products.
- *Vertical Competition* is when a retailer has a competition with the producer or the wholesaler. In this situation both parties are selling the same products, but the producer is able to do it for example online via Internet.
- *Corporate systems competition* is when manufacturing, distribution and retailing are all controlled by the same management. Depending on the company and the objectives and opportunities it has, different organizations see a lot of potential in it. Companies believe for instance in getting competitive advantage and having better control in the whole process between manufacturing and retailing. Ikea is an example of a company who operates like this.

2.3.3 Customers

Retailers are facing tough challenges these days in the industry. The final consumers have plenty of different opportunities where to spend their expenses to. Businesses must be attractive so that the potential customers will be interested in spending money to it.

Under the last years, companies have started to do more researching about the consumer behaviour. The goals are simple; to internalize what the final consumers are really after and what makes them to buy products. The whole consumer behaviour process might be complicated and barely gives straight answers to the retailers directly. Companies should always build a 'customer profile', to describe a person who would be a potential customer.

Firms have an easier task to advertise and market products to the specific customer group when they know precisely who the consumers are. Normally companies do a segmentation to identify the following factors from the target customers:

- Demographic segmentation tells the external factors about a person; age, gender, family size, income and occupation.
- Psychographic segmentation means the social class, lifestyle, personality and attitudes a person has towards life.
- Behavioural segmentation is about the benefits sought, loyalty status and usage rate.
- Geographical segmentation is the area where the person is from. Companies might have success only in a specific continent, country or even cities.

Organizations have to realize all the facts that have an effect for the consumers in the buying decision. Price has a remarkable and big impact always when a customer is deciding whether to buy or not. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) defines price as being the sum of values that customers give up to get the benefits of having or using a product or service.

Before companies have reached any brand value for their products, the pricing is going to be done without reaching high profits. According to Kotler and Armstrong (2012, 319) costs determine how much a company is able to charge for products, without any brand value. Cost-based pricing is the price based on the expenses of producing, distributing, and selling the product, and an additional profit for all the effort that has been done in the whole process. Companies should then be able to keep the costs as low as possible, to be able to set the final price that the consumers are going to pay in average.

Like mentioned earlier, when an organization is able to show its difference to the competitors, it has a strong chance for reaching a high level of success with the customers. It is still worth pointing out that the differentiation can both raise costs for a firm, as well as give benefit with customers.

2.3.4 Retail Distribution Channel and Intermediaries

The distribution channel is the process when the product moves from the producer to the actual customer. Normally many intermediaries belong to the process and they are all involved in the distribution channel. Everyone has an own important part in the process in making the whole distribution process successful. All the suppliers are partly responsible that the retailers are able to provide high level of service to their customers. The way a retailer handles its distribution can sometimes be reflected in to how a company handles its organizational structure.

Companies have different ways of operating with their supply chain. Often, the manufacturing for retailers is taking place abroad. In these cases the first stage is to have the transporta-

tion via shipping or air freight to the distribution centres where it later continues to the final destination, retail stores. The key factor for a firm is to be able to deliver all the existing products in to the hands of the final consumers. Depending on the retail industry and how a company operates, some organizations are forced to use higher expenses in the distribution process, to deliver the products quickly the consumers. This must occur in today's tough market.

Retail companies exporting products to foreign countries must be extra careful with the distribution. It is normal that these organizations use different agents or export management companies. The problem is that firms have no control for example of the sales channels that are being used abroad. The channels might be poor and by then leave a weak picture of the company. Also the service might not be on a requested level and could lead to a situation where a company's reputation falls rapidly. For this reason a company should know every partner who is involved in the distribution channel and their operational methods.

Distribution centres are often managing also the preparation of products, so that they are ready to go straight to sale when arriving to the store. According to Varley and Rafiq (2004, 113) merchandise preparation should include the following activities:

- Removing all packaging
- Putting price tickets on the products
- Cleaning and dusting the products, hanging and pressing garments
- Collating products by department and organizing them as the store requires

3 Research Approach and Methodology

There are different kinds of approaches and methodologies that research can be based on. When doing a research, these approaches and methodologies should be selected carefully so that the point of view is correct and specific. Research approach tells how the research is being executed. In turn methodology clarifies what kind of method is used in research.

3.1 Market-Based Research

This thesis is a market-based research. The reason for this kind of approach is to get familiar with the market, consumer behaviour, retailing and its opportunities in Finland. For this cause the research clarifies the Finnish market and its retailing opportunities. The study is executed by exploring consumer's opinions in NHL products and the potentiality to the increase of the products. After the research, it will be easier to understand the Finnish market and retailing opportunities the company has.

3.2 Research Method

This research is mainly quantitative study, as the aim is to execute market research with questionnaires to consumers. The interest towards the NHL products is being measured. The research methodology is quantitative because people are being interviewed with questionnaires to find out the interest they have towards NHL. The questionnaires were handed out to ice hockey related people, students, athletes and middle aged people. A total of 100 respondents participated to the research. The results were analysed mainly with simple quantitative data analysis.

4 Study: National Hockey League in Finland

The following chapter is the actual study of the thesis. It explains where the NHL brand stands, what the popularity of the league and ice hockey is in general in Finland. This chapter contains also a SWOT and competitor analysis to get a deeper understanding of the current situation of ice hockey leagues. The most important part of the chapter and whole thesis is the execution of the questionnaires and the results of the market research.

4.1 NHL as a Brand

Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman and Hansen (2009, 425) determine a brand as being a name given to a product or service to distinguish it from the competitors. A brand can be a symbol, design, logo, image or a combination of the earlier, designed to identify the product or service.

Just like every other brand, also The National Hockey League has been trying to raise its brand awareness and making it stronger since the establishment. The NHL brand is different from others in many ways. As NHL represents and stands for hockey and the best league in the world, people have plenty of varying conceptions, when thinking of the NHL brand. Fans might refer the brand to their favourite players. To some others it is the company's famous logo, a team or for example professional ice-hockey in general. From a business perspective dealing with NHL can be an opportunity, worth taking a risk for. If having successful partnership with the league, both parties can benefit and be able to raise the brand awareness and also the company's value.

Hollensen (2011, 481-482) sees that product positioning can be straight related to branding. The purpose of branding is same all around the global business world. The functions of branding can be named to be:

- Distinguish a company's offering and differentiate products from the competitors.
- Creating identification and brand awareness
- Guaranteeing a level of quality among with satisfaction.
- Helping with the promotion of the product.

The National Hockey League has been dealing with difficult times for example when it has been fighting with the lockouts. Lockouts happen when different parties, in this case the NHL league and the players association (NHLPA) don't agree with the terms in contract. As lockouts lead to game cancellations and in worst case whole season cancellation, the league loses popularity and harms the brand. People lose the interest, feel more negative towards the league, and doesn't respect the game anymore in the same way afterwards. The sales fall and people might even find themselves to other sport genres. However, despite the recent lockout taking place last fall and finishing in January 2013, the NHL brand is at its top, doing better than ever before (Pearson, 2013).

Newspapers did strong conclusions about the brand and NHL's future after looking at the social media and how people reacted in Facebook and Twitter to the lockout when no games were scheduled. In the end, fans and in general supporters frustrations in social media are natural and doesn't mean it has a strong effect on the brand immediately. According to Pearson, strong brands can withstand a certain amount of negative publicity. But a brand which is effecting to consumers emotionally, like the NHL, can withstand months of public damage.

As a conclusion, the NHL brand is doing really well. The league is growing and new people are getting involved with the NHL continuously. The hockey-based people don't leave the sport even when facing difficult times. Recent lockout showed that it might even have a reversal effect when a long-lasting waiting is rewarded with high standard games being played.

4.2 Popularity

Also in Finland people see the National Hockey League as being the number one ice hockey league. NHL is then deservedly the most popular hockey league in the world. Far behind come the relatively new Russian league and the national leagues.

Despite that the time difference impedes to watch NHL hockey live from Europe, the league is still popular as people follow it daily. The Finnish sports media ensures that the game results and highlights are shown especially from the games where a native from Finland is participant. This way people will get information of what is currently going on in the league, and at the same time learn a bit more about teams and players.

Ice hockey has a strong fan base in Finland. Although there are less active ice hockey players than in football (soccer), ice hockey is the number one sport in the country. The most popular winter sport reaches bigger crowds in the games and also businesses see and have more potential in working with the Finnish hockey league and its teams, instead of being related to football. In the well-known social media in Finland, Facebook, the Finnish hockey league has over 47,000 likes, when the Finnish football league Veikkausliiga, reaches under 5000.

According to the Finnish Ice Hockey Association, in 2011, there were 67 463 registered hockey players in the country, and more than 195 000 Finns are playing it at least as a hobby (Finnish Ice Hockey Association, 2011).

NHL Premiers, the NHL season openers, took place in Helsinki in 2009 and 2011. Both occasions were a success and showed how popular the best ice hockey league really is. Two games were played on both years and they were all sold out. The media ensured that people have the knowledge of players, visiting the city and Helsinki was surrounded by NHL hockey for a few days. The premieres increased the popularity in Finland towards the league by providing a special event to the people.

4.3 Visibility & Availability of NHL in Finland

Before being able to plan more on how the Finnish market could reach a stronger brand awareness of NHL, the visibility and availability of the National Hockey League in Finland, needs to be solved.

The most critical part in getting products sold and raising the awareness of NHL is to have them visible to the consumers. The biggest issue in the Finnish market regarding NHL products is the fact that the visibility of the NHL brand is really small in the country. Some sports retailers in Finland sell a certain amount of hockey products, but most of it is targeted for actual hockey players and for their own personal use.

The main issue is that NHL products can't be really found in several sports retailing stores and the supply is also too limited. Retailers sell only NHL jerseys of the most famous Finnish hockey players (Teemu Selanne, Saku Koivu, and Mikko Koivu). In addition, some lower price products exist and have slightly a wider supply. These products are for example team pucks and caps which exist in a bigger scale.

NHL operates with the media broadcaster Viasat, to be able to provide ice hockey to the Northern countries. Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark are all able to pay a monthly price

in exchange of seeing NHL games and news daily from the Viasat hockey channel. The regular price in Finland is around 30 euros for a month. The channel is currently the only provider for NHL hockey in Finland (Viasat, 2013).

Viasat is part of the Modern Times Group (MTG), which is an international entertainment broadcasting group, reaching to four continents. MTG has both free and pay TV services and a strong base in broadcasting industry. The growth of MTG has also effected to Viasat. The broadcaster has been diversifying its supply and is then able to provide better services to the consumers continuously. Viasat is making a stronger place in the Northern countries and will most likely provide NHL hockey also in the future in a large scale with high quality (MTG, 2013).

4.4 SWOT

According to Kotler et al. (2009, 101) “The overall evaluation of a company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is called SWOT analysis”. The idea of SWOT is to tell about a company’s current state and where it has potential to be in. National Hockey League’s operations are explained in SWOT analysis in Figure 3.

This analysis helps the reader to understand the case company NHL’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Perspective is mostly general but analysis takes account the situation in Finland too.

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strong brand - popularity - high quality of ice hockey - high valued league - quality product - broadcasting 	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - time difference - culture difference - distance - disagreements between parties
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - promotion - competitiveness - expansion - wider audience - NHL Premieres in Europe 	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - price and expensiveness - lockouts - KHL - less audience

Figure 3: SWOT for the National Hockey League in Finland and overall

National Hockey League has several strengths overall, and in Finland too. As previously described, NHL is having a really strong brand. Brand image is probably better than ever before and strong brand is always a huge advantage. Brand has a connection with popularity, if the brand itself is already popular, then the product and the company, in this case National Hockey League, is popular too. Popularity is probably the biggest strength of NHL because many people in Northern America and Europe are fans of ice hockey and NHL. Almost each game is sold out and millions of people watch them from TV. Popularity is enormous resource for NHL as they try to get even bigger in the future.

High quality of ice hockey can be seen as strength for NHL. They have the best ice hockey players in the world playing and for this reason ice hockey is on its best in this league. Every game is a great entertainment and skill and the level of the games are high. Because NHL has the best players and best quality of ice hockey, it is a really high valued league. It takes a lot of hard work to break into any team's line-up and for every player it is a great achievement to get there. The valuation is one the NHL's strengths too.

The whole National Hockey League can be described as a product. In other words this league offers quality product which contains games and broadcasting. All these games, broadcastings and investments on those are strengths of NHL.

Even though NHL has several strengths, it does have weaknesses in turn. In Finland's point of view, the biggest weaknesses are the time difference, distance and different culture. As Finland is located in Europe and NHL ice hockey league is being played in North America, distance and time difference are relatively massive. Because of time difference, most of the NHL ice hockey games are being played during Finnish night time, which makes it complicated to see live games. Other remarkable weakness in NHL for Finnish people is the distance. As all games are being played in North America, in the other side of the world, the Finnish people probably do not feel NHL as close to heart and definitely not as their own league. However, NHL is aware of this situation and it has brought few teams to play NHL Premiere games in Helsinki during the last couple of years. Because of these NHL Premiere games, which always has started the hockey season, NHL has given the possibility for Finns people to see real National Hockey League games live, close to home and at the same reducing the effect of distance.

Generally speaking, not from Finland's point of view, NHL has a quite big weakness, which affected to last season. This weakness is disagreements between parties, in this case between the NHL league and the player association NHLPA, as previously described. In worst case these disagreements have led to lockouts and game cancellations, as we saw last season and

less than ten years ago before that. These disagreements and lockouts affect the fans and in the brand image too.

Despite of the weaknesses, the National Hockey League has many opportunities, such as promotion, competitiveness, expansion, wider audience and NHL Premieres. All these opportunities are aiming to attract more fans for NHL. Promotion should be done all the time. Europe is a good place for NHL to gain more fans and money. The interest towards NHL is already high and most likely the right investments could help to achieve financial benefit and keep the competitiveness on high level. In this context expansion as an opportunity means mostly expansion of sales, for example Europe could be a good market place for NHL when retailing NHL products. Expansion does not necessarily need to be expansion of new teams but however; it is connected with wider audience and NHL Premieres. NHL and few teams have visited several European cities during the last couple of years and played the first league games of the season there. These events are called NHL Premieres and they have been great example of expansion without really expanding. Because of NHL Premieres, NHL and all the teams have gained wider European audience. For this reason, NHL Premieres in Europe are probably the most optimal opportunity for NHL to grow in Europe.

Economic situation is globally poor and people are going through difficult times. For this reason, prices of tickets and products and overall expensiveness can be considered as a threat for NHL. In worst case people can't afford the tickets, which might lead to smaller audiences. Earlier mentioned lockouts are a threat to NHL, as they lead to game cancellations. Lockouts should be avoided by proper negotiations between parties. Another threat for NHL is their rival ice hockey league from Russia, KHL (Kontinental Hockey League), which is growing rapidly and gaining more sponsors, fans and valuable skilled players. The threat for NHL is that KHL might interest especially the European spectators more. Now KHL will likely attract even more Finnish ice hockey fans because as Finnish ice hockey club Jokerit announced that they will join KHL on season 2014-2015 (Jokerit, 2013). Although consequences are hard to predict, this will increase the interest towards KHL in Finland, at least among Jokerit supporters around the Helsinki area. One more threat for NHL is that people will lose their interest towards the league and the result is a decreasing audience, but that is unlikely to happen as NHL is doing currently really well.

4.5 Competitor Analysis

Competition belongs to life and in business every company has different competitors. According to Kotler and Keller (2005, 341) companies should be prepared for all kind of competition coming from everywhere. New competition can come for example from international compa-

nies that are trying to conquer new markets, or from local brands aiming to offer cheaper options, or from globally well-known brands that are aiming to broaden their product range.

This is a competitor analysis which includes clarification of the biggest competitors of the case company National Hockey League. According to Kotler & Keller (2005, 347) after discovering the company's main rivals, there is a need to analyse the strategies, aims, strengths and weaknesses of the main competitors. Without a doubt, NHL is still the most popular and biggest ice hockey league in the world and for this reason the analysis processes only the most important competitors and leagues, not the smallest ones. Ice hockey is popular only in some countries; therefore analysis concentrates on Northern Hemisphere where ice hockey is one of the biggest sports. This analysis introduces the main points and factors of each rival ice hockey league so that the reader is able to internalize generally the situation of the biggest ice hockey leagues in the world. The leagues are chosen by the high popularity. Another perspective is that the introduced leagues are known well in Finland.

NHL has many competitors and the biggest ones are different ice hockey leagues such as, KHL (Russia and several other countries), Liiga (Finland), SHL (Sweden), NLA (Switzerland) and DEL (Germany). All the leagues have the same target group which is people that are interested in ice hockey. All these leagues are domestic leagues, except KHL which has also teams from other countries than just Russia. Nevertheless the European ice hockey leagues can be considered international, as having players and coaches with a variety of nationalities. These mentioned leagues are well-known in many parts of the world.

As mentioned earlier, the biggest rival and competitor, generally speaking, for the National Hockey League is the Kontinental Hockey League. This international ice hockey league has been aiming to challenge NHL as the most popular and biggest ice hockey league in the world. KHL was founded in March 2008 (About the KHL, 2013) and they have done considerable investments to achieve the title as biggest ice hockey league. Like NHL, KHL is divided into two conferences, Eastern and Western, and both conferences consist of two divisions. There are then four divisions in together. KHL was founded only five years ago, but has been expanding all the time and it already consists of 28 teams (STT/HS, 2013) from 8 different countries (KHL Teams, 2013). KHL's average attendance has been increasing every season but it does not reach the NHL's level. The season 2012-2013 average attendance of KHL was 6106 which brings third place in European ice hockey league attendance after Switzerland and Germany (Swiss on top of Europe, 2013). KHL's strength is that the teams have considerable amounts of money to attract skilled players. Probably the most famous player in KHL is Ilya Kovalchuk who is playing for SKA Saint Petersburg (KHL Teams, 2013). Even though KHL teams may have money, the weakness of the league is most likely that players do not find Russia as attractive and safe enough. However, KHL is going to challenge NHL in future. KHL is recruiting continu-

ally better players which increase the standard and level of the ice hockey (KHL Divisions, 2013).

Other competitors are Swedish Hockey League (SHL), National League A (NLA, Switzerland) and Deutsche Eishockey Liga (DEL, Germany). All these leagues have good teams and players, high attendance, and the teams play high quality ice hockey. SHL, NLA and DEL each have 12 to 14 teams playing in the league (Om SHL AB, 2013; DEL Clubs, 2013; Home page NLA, 2013). By exploring past years, it can empirically be said, that SHL has always been high-graded ice hockey league. NLA has the highest attendance in Europe and DEL has the second highest attendance (Swiss on top of Europe, 2013). NLA's strength is that the teams have remarkable audience in each game. Unfortunately from an empirical point of view, DEL's weakness is quite a low level of ice hockey.

Finnish national ice hockey league Liiga is NHL's biggest rival in Finland. Consisting of 14 teams, it is the most popular sport league in Finland. It has high quality and entertaining ice hockey with good teams and capable players. With a high attendance and interest towards the league, the Finnish Liiga can be considered as one of the top ice hockey leagues in Europe and in the world. Liiga has fifth biggest attendance in Europe, with an average of 5213 (Swiss on top of Europe, 2013). Uniformity has been Liiga's biggest strength as any team can win the championship. For this reason, the interest is high towards the league. Liiga will lose one of the biggest teams, Jokerit, to KHL in season 2014-2015 (Jokerit, 2013). This will be a major weakness for Liiga as Jokerit has been the most attractive team in the league.

Despite the fact that these ice hockey leagues of European countries are domestic, European ice hockey leagues do have cooperation. A new ice hockey tournament called the European Trophy has been started for the top European ice hockey teams. This tournament consists of 32 participating European ice hockey teams from different countries and it is "Europe's premium club competition" in ice hockey (European trophy Format, 2013). Although it has not achieved a huge popularity yet, this tournament increases European people's awareness of other ice hockey teams and leagues in Europe. There are no teams from KHL participating but this tournament can be also considered as one of the NHL's competitors.

All the leagues want more spectators and they want to be as competitive as possible. The leagues are competing and trying to attract more people to follow the league. NHL is probably the only ice hockey league in the world that has ice hockey fans globally. KHL is anyway gaining more spectators continuously, especially from Europe. Other ice hockey leagues are mostly followed only nationwide.

4.6 Positioning Statement of NHL Products

According to Tuckwell (2012, 78) positioning is the selling concept that motivates to a purchase, or the image that marketers desire a brand or an organization to have in the minds of consumers. Positioning means that a product is designed and marketed to fill the needs of a target market by standing out from the competition. Companies must then continuously internalize what the consumer interests really are and provide products and services that keep them satisfied.

NHL can be named to brand leadership positioning. In this category, brands use their icons or signatures to become recognized and synonymous to the brand. NHL has an advantage as its brand is well-known everywhere especially where their products can be found. NHL can also be categorized as a brand-leader in the hockey industry. Brand leaders use normally more expenses in marketing their products, to raise the awareness within the consumers and make their market position even stronger.

In the other hand, NHL products are different and can't be found from any other brand. Product-differentiation strategy works also then for the National Hockey League. Although sports retailers are able to provide similar clothing wear from different sport leagues, NHL is able to offer several products which differ from all the other sport genres and brands. Ice hockey has unique attributes in their products, which is the essential concept of product-differentiation. NHL's 30 teams have layouts and styles which are different from the rest of the market. These products give an advantage when advertising and marketing the products, as no one has a similar product supply.

NHL can then be stated to have a strong position with its products. Already the fact that people recognize the brand has a big effect to the buying behaviour. NHL, ice hockey and the uniqueness of the products ensures that the brand will have customers who are ready to make investments. The National Hockey League has the advantage of being a special, one of a kind organization who provides world's best ice hockey. That already attracts people towards the league and everything what it has to offer. The image of NHL is strong, but they still need to invest in raising the brand awareness and having their products and services recurring and getting them stronger continuously.

The National Hockey League products can be positioned in Finland in the same way; as a unique brand with products that are different from the rest of the market. These products are attractive and have a high interest in the country.

4.7 Ethical Issues and Trustworthiness

When conducting any kind of a research, it is important to think and follow the ethical issues and principles. These justify all the acts and decisions that are made in the research. Every single person should have the choice of their own, when participating to a research. In every research the participation should rely on voluntariness, not on compulsion. The participants cannot face any harm and they should be able to withdraw from the research at any time. One of the most important principles is participant's right to privacy. The individual is allowed to be anonymous throughout the whole research and all gathered information must be confidential (Resnik, 2011; Trochim, 2006).

These principles have been followed throughout the research. The individuals were informed that the participation is not compulsory. Every single one can withdraw from the research at any point of the inquiry. We asked for permission and sent a message regarding the research to participants in advance. The permission and information message was sent to Team Managers of few Finnish ice hockey teams that took part in the questionnaire. The message can be found in the appendices. The research included young people who were under-age. Their parents were contacted via Team Managers before conducting the inquiry. Our aim was that all the collected data will be anonymous to us and it won't be used to any other project or case than to our research results.

Some of the inquiries were hold in the ice hockey arenas, targeting plenty of people at the same time. We kept in mind that the people and their privacy must be respected. We asked for honesty from participants and proposed our desire for truthful answers, hoping for their own genuine opinion.

"Trustworthiness involves four major qualities: integrity, honesty, promise-keeping, and loyalty. Each of these qualities yields principles that tell us how a trustworthy person behaves" (Josephson Institute, 2011). Other people trust us if they think we are worth of their trust. This can be considered as one of the researcher's necessary qualities. The researcher needs to be worth of others trust. All mentioned major qualities refer to that the researcher does reasonable acts, analysis and conclusions.

Before the research execution, all the participants were informed that the research and their answers will be part of a final thesis. Our aim was to be open and trustful. We wanted to ensure that everything is clear to participants and any information regarding the research is confidential.

4.8 Execution and Results of the Questionnaires

The aim of this thesis was to clarify the National Hockey League's retailing opportunities in Finland. The goal of the thesis was to answer to research questions "what kind of retailing opportunities NHL products have in Finland?" and "how can the availability and visibility of NHL products be improved in Finland?" The best way to do this was executing an inquiry to people who are interested in to sports and ice hockey. The answers of the research questions are shown in the results below. The goal of the survey was to figure out which NHL products are the most attractive to Finnish people. The aim was also to clarify the amount Finns would be ready to invest in NHL products.

This section clarifies the whole execution and introduces the questionnaire and the results of the market research. The results are clear and shown in different tables below. When analysing the results, the simple quantitative data analysis was mainly used. Any computer data processing programs, for example SPSS, were not used because we wanted to go through the data by ourselves with simple hand analysis.

Because this thesis and research is about NHL's retailing opportunities in Finland, also the questionnaire was meant to be related to it. When planning the questionnaires, the main subjects were in the NHL products and the prices.

The idea was to have a large target group and reach people from varying backgrounds. The time and resources were limited but the questionnaires were still made to several different groups with different backgrounds. The age group participating to the questionnaire was between 13 and 53. Most of the people were men, but also women took part in the questionnaire. The total amount of respondents was exactly one hundred individuals which mean that the results were easy to analyse because the responses can be based on percentages or the base.

The plan for the research execution was to meet ice hockey related people, athletes, students and parents. Theory had to be read on how to plan and execute a good and proper questionnaire. The questionnaires used in the inquiry can be found from the appendices. The questionnaires were handed out in school, library, and in the three ice hockey trainings that were attended around the Helsinki area.

Results are shown in the following tables:

The first table includes all respondents divided by age. Total of one hundred research respondents, there are four different age categories. First age group consists of all minors and

teenagers. Second group includes all young adults. Third group contains adult participants with age between 25 and 30. Fourth and last age group comprises respondents with age 31 or over. Last group includes all the older participants from 31 till 53 years of age.

Age	13-17	18-24	25-30	31→
Amount	47	32	12	9

Table 1: Table by age of all respondents

As the table above shows, most of the respondents were at a young age. Nearly 80 percent of all participants were between age 13 and 24. Nevertheless, this was planned already in advance as we wanted to obtain young people to participate to our research. Reason for this was that this age group is a big target group and they are future consumers. Despite of young age, these individuals will have more of their own money to spend in few years as they start their work life and own a salary. The research results show that the young respondents were the most interested in NHL products too. Even though the idea was to get mainly young people to participate, we wanted to have also older respondents to the research to get a different perspective. Referring to research results, older participants expressed their interest in NHL products too, but had a more sensitive approach towards money and products.

Next table below shows the results from the first question in our questionnaire. The table describes Finnish people's interest generally in NHL products. It does not specify any products but it does give an overview how interested Finnish people are in all NHL products. Simple quantitative data analysis was used in this question to show the results in a simple and clear table.

Interest in NHL products	Persons
5=Extremely interested	21
4=Very interested	41
3=Interested	25
2=Slightly interested	10
1=Not interested	3
Total	100

Table 2: How interested consumers in Finland are in NHL products on scale 1 to 5? (1=not interested, 5=extremely interested), all respondents

These results consist of all respondents and the age groups are not separated. The aim with this question was to clarify the general interest of Finnish people in all NHL products. Later will be clarified which certain products have the highest interest. This question and the results present the overall situation how Finnish people see the NHL products. Options are di-

vided in five levels where number 5 was extremely interested and number 1 was not interested in NHL products.

As results show, Finnish people are mainly interested in NHL products. Only three persons from the total group of participants were not interested at all. Over a fifth of the respondents described themselves as extremely interested in NHL products and this can be considered as a high reading. Majority of the respondents chose option 4 and were very interested in NHL products. Nearly half of the participants chose this alternative. If we combine these two alternatives and their results in total, almost two-thirds of all respondents chose to be either extremely interested or very interested. This can be considered as a sign of wide and large interest that Finnish people have in NHL products. Few participants were only slightly interested but another quarter was nevertheless “interested” in NHL products as they chose alternative 3. As conclusion, according to the research and sample, most of the people do have high interest in NHL products.

Next table introduces the results of the second question. It was about NHL product availability in Finland. There were not any different levels in the answer alternatives, meaning that the results of this question are quite radical. Options for availability were only “Yes”, “No” or “Cannot say/Don’t know” because it is difficult to measure the availability, there either are or are not enough NHL products available in Finland.

Is the NHL product supply comprehensive enough in Finland?	Persons
Yes	11
No	58
Cannot say/Don’t know	31
Total	100

Table 3: Are there enough NHL products available in Finland? (All respondents)

Second question of the questionnaire was simple. It handled the availability of the NHL products in Finland and how Finnish people see the situation. With this question we wanted to find out whether Finnish people thought there were enough NHL products available for them or not. The results include all respondents and the age groups are not separated. These results present the overview and quite strong opinion of how Finnish people see the NHL product availability in Finland. Answers are split by persons.

The result can be considered clear. Despite this question had lack of alternatives, it offers great knowledge. Only 11 respondents thought that there are enough NHL products in Finland. This can be reckoned as extremely weak result when considering the fact that most of the

respondents expressed their interest in NHL products in the research. Because of the wide interest, the respondents most likely know how wide the availability of NHL products should be. Only eleven of the respondents said that it is sufficient, which tells about the poor level of the NHL products in Finland. Relating to the same subject, over half of the all respondents and a total of 58 persons replied, that the NHL product supply is not comprehensive enough. Referring to research results, the prevailing opinion of Finnish people is that there are not enough NHL products available.

Significant detail is that nearly third of the respondents couldn't say or didn't know whether there are or aren't enough NHL products available in Finland. This detail reveals that some of the Finnish people are not aware of the situation or more likely they have not seen or discovered any NHL products in Finland. This group includes only nearly third of the respondents but the meaning of this can be reckoned as followed; the NHL product supply is not comprehensive enough in Finland if so many of the respondents don't even know, if the supply is good or weak. What needs to be remembered from previous table and its results is that most of the respondents were interested in NHL products. Despite of high interest, quite big part of the participants still don't seem to have knowledge of their object of the interest. This detail confirms the fact about Finnish people's opinion that there are not enough NHL products available in Finland.

In the table below, consumers ranked different NHL products from 1 to 5 depending on their own interest. 7 different products were as alternatives. In addition consumers had a chance to tell if they would be interested in accessories, which doesn't exist specifically in the table. The assumption was that participants knew how NHL products look like, but the last page of the survey showed some examples of them.

Consumers product interest (1=low, 5=high)

Product	1	2	3	4	5	Average
Jerseys	10	20	26	25	18	3.2
Caps	7	13	17	38	24	3.6
Jackets	21	38	19	17	4	2.4
Hoodies	7	13	28	25	26	3.5
T-shirts	4	11	27	33	24	3.6
Team pucks	28	22	28	13	8	2.5
Team bags	28	28	23	9	11	2.4
Accessories	17	18	36	16	12	2.9

Table 4: Which products consumers are interested in on scale 1 to 5? (1=not interested, 5=extremely interested), (all respondents)

The table shows that consumers have a divided interest to the products. The most popular products were caps and t-shirts, which both reached high results (3.6.). Hoodies followed up with a high interest of 3.5. Player jerseys (3.2) and accessories (2.9) reached both a relatively good average, which determine that a consumer is interested towards a product.

Notable is, that most of the popular products doesn't really have a market in Finland. T-shirts can be found from very few retailers and the supply is almost non-existent. Caps do exist more, but once they get sold out, a customer has no certainty that new ones will come to the store. Hoodies can't be found from the Finnish market. This is despite the cold weather of the country and popularity in general towards these kinds of sportswear.

Player jerseys are the most popular and visible products in the market. The supply is relatively low also with these jerseys, but the names of the popular Finnish ice hockey stars can be found. Markets offer mostly jerseys of Anaheim Ducks, with the names of Teemu Selanne or Saku Koivu, which are the most famous Finns in the National Hockey League. Also Minnesota Wild jerseys exist with Mikko Koivu's name. These jerseys are popular among the fans, but it doesn't leave room for other consumers with a different interest. In addition, some retailers might have randomly jerseys of a few other teams.

Team bags, pucks and jackets had the worst results in the questionnaire. It can be explained, at least partly, with the fact that most likely not a single team bag or jacket is can be bought from the country. People don't seem to have a picture of how the bags and jackets look like and that they can be used in to many purposes. Team pucks can be found in Finland, but they are small products. People want to buy something visible and attractive.

Product	Average price
Jerseys	94€
Caps	22€
Jackets	75€
Hoodies	62€
T-shirts	22€
Team pucks	7€
Team bags	68€
Accessories	16€

Table 5: How much money consumers are ready to invest to specific NHL product?

It is critical to keep in mind already at an early stage, that Finland is an expensive country. The value added tax is high and it means that also the products in stores are going to be expensive. The table above shows how much money people would be ready to invest in different

NHL products. In the questionnaire, consumers had a chance to circle an amount they saw as being proper for the products. With jerseys, the alternatives were between 70 and 200 euros. The average price became 94 euros. The amount is relatively high and means that consumers understand the value of the product. Sports retailers would do well with the jerseys as the questionnaire showed that the interest is also high for the product.

Although team jackets and bags weren't the most popular products in the questionnaire, this chart shows that consumers would still be ready to pay a relatively high price for them. The estimated price of jackets and bags would most likely be between 70 and 100 euros at Finnish sports retailers. Relating to this questionnaire, it could also then have a market. Consumers haven't seen these products anywhere and that's why they need to be marketed to the public.

Caps (22€) and t-shirts (22€) had a high interest, but people were still ready to pay only an average price for them. It is very likely that the price at Finnish sports retailers would be between 25 and 30 euros for these products. That amount would most likely attract the consumers to buy the products as long as the price doesn't rise from it.

As most of the questions were closed questions in the questionnaire, one open-ended question can be found as well. The question was: "How would you improve the availability of the NHL products in Finland?" Our goal was to clarify the opinion of consumers and perhaps even receive new ideas from consumers. The reason why this question was open-ended is that we did not want to give too many options or alternatives ready for respondents but instead we hoped participants to figure out new development proposals by themselves. Simple quantitative data analysis for open-ended question was used in the question. We reviewed all the 100 questionnaires of respondents and found few common patterns in the answers.

The results were as desired. Participants suggested several improvements about what should be done and how they would develop the availability of the NHL products in Finland. One of the biggest surprises was how popular the idea of an own NHL Store was. In this case, NHL Store means an official store which can be found in Helsinki or in other big cities in Finland that offer only NHL products. This store is supposed to be a smaller shop but still selling considerable variety of different NHL products. We didn't obligate any participants to answer to this question. Instead we hoped the respondents would bring up their opinions if they had any proposals or ideas. But nevertheless, 25 respondents, which is a fourth of all participants, replied that they would like to see a store of NHL's own in Finland. The question is noteworthy and because of this result, the NHL store in Finland should be considered as an option to increase the NHL product availability and visibility.

There already exists an online store for NHL products (Supportersplace, 2013; NHL Shop, 2013) but online store was still mentioned several times by participants. Total amount of 30 respondents said the online store should be improved. By this, many of them meant more advertisement to raise the visibility and to have more products available online. It is difficult to know, where from where to order NHL products easily. Four of these 24 respondents specifically mentioned Finnish online store which should be easier to use, easier to find and should have cheaper expenses of importing the products. One respondent wanted to improve especially payment methods in the online store, so that it would be clearer for consumers.

Clearly the most common and most popular development proposal was retailing. Totally 55 individuals, a bit over half of the respondents, hoped for the retailing stores to have a larger supply with the NHL products. Referring to their opinion, retailing of NHL products should be increased and the products should be easier to find. There was a need also for more advertisement when it comes to the NHL products. Big part of the respondents hoped for more NHL products into the stores” when they were being asked what kind of development they would like to see to be done.

Improving online store or establishing a NHL store in Finland is considerable options if the goal is to develop NHL product availability in Finland. However, the easiest and most popular idea is to improve importing and retailing of NHL products in Finland. According to consumers, they would like to find more NHL products especially from sport shops in Finland.

5 Conclusions

The National Hockey League is a unique brand and can't be compared to any other organization. NHL has as a league and as a brand competitive advantage to its competitors. They simply can't compete in the same level. NHL is the biggest and most popular ice hockey league in the world and effect the life of millions in a way or the other. For nearly a hundred years, the league has offered high quality ice hockey and entertainment for people. As being the most valuable ice hockey league, the NHL wants to hold on its high and successful image also in the future. Currently NHL is growing as an organization and by continuing to operate in a same way also in the future the company will only raise its value and increase the gap to its competitors.

Finland is a European country with a small population. People are highly educated and living in a welfare state. Located in the Northern Hemisphere under Arctic Circle, Finland has long winters when it's mainly cold, dark and snowy. These circumstances are one reason among others to enable the popularity of ice hockey as the biggest sport in Finland. Finnish people have had a big interest towards ice hockey and its players for ages; the Finnish league was

founded in 1928, only 11 years after the NHL. The famous winter sport makes a strong connection among the Finns.

The idea of the thesis and its research was to figure out if there could be a bigger market for the National Hockey League's products in the country. There was knowledge that Finnish people are interested in ice hockey and especially NHL products, but the level of interest and towards which products, needed to be specified. The starting point was that consumers are not able to get products they are interested in, as the NHL supply is really low. In addition, only some sports retailers are able to even provide a certain amount of products. The Finnish retailing stores are often specialized to serve ice hockey players with the equipment they need for their practices. The ice hockey section is then fulfilled with these products while the supply and availability of NHL hockey products doesn't meet with the demand.

The questionnaires were done to people from different age groups and backgrounds to get a diverse picture on how people see the NHL products. The aim of this thesis was to answer to research questions "What kind of retailing opportunities NHL products have in Finland?" and "How can the availability and visibility of NHL products be improved in Finland?" The results from the questionnaire showed that the interest towards NHL and its products is high. 21 percent of the respondents told that they are extremely interested, while the biggest percentage (41) said they were very interested. 11 percent saw that the availability of products is comprehensive enough, while most of the people (58%) didn't think there were enough products available in Finland. When asking where the NHL products should be available for the consumers, over half of the respondent saw that the retailing stores would be the best option to buy the products from. A smaller group preferred a modern online store with a large supply. According to the questionnaire, the most popular products, among Finns, are caps, t-shirts and hoodies, while team pucks, bags and jackets gathered the least popularity.

Notable is that the supply of all the products that were popular in the questionnaire is low around Finland. Still, consumers seem then to have a high knowledge of the NHL products they prefer. The survey also confirmed that consumers are willing to pay a reasonable price for the products they have a desire for. The main point that should be exploited from the questionnaire and the research work is then, that people are really interested in the products the National Hockey League has to offer. That is then the answer to the first research question: "What kind of retailing opportunities NHL products have in Finland?" They are also ready to invest amounts that could meet the potential prices in the retailing stores. Retailing stores would also be the best alternative where the products would be available to the consumers; Finns seem to prefer going to stores and comparing the alternatives and prices, instead of ordering online, paying for shipping and being unsecure how the product fit. NHL products should be imported more to Finland and retailers should buy-in more products. That is the

answer for the second research question: “How can the availability and visibility of NHL products be improved in Finland?”

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire for consumers

NHL Retailing Opportunities in FinlandBackground:

The supply of NHL products is low in Finland. However, Finns are in to NHL and everything it has to offer. The idea of the survey is to find out how interested Finns really are to NHL and to the products they have to offer.

Your answer will help us to examine the availability and need for NHL products in the Finnish market.

Information of the interviewee

Age: _____ Gender: Female ___ / Male ___

Student ___ / Worker ___ / Other _____

Hobbies _____

Time and Place: _____

Questions

1. How interested are you in NHL products in a scale 1 to 5? (1=not interested, 5=very interested)

1 2 3 4 5

2. Is the supply of NHL products comprehensive enough in Finland?

Yes No Cannot say

3. In a scale 1 to 5, what kind of products are you interested in? (1=Not interested, 5=extremely interested)

Jerseys	1	2	3	4	5
Caps	1	2	3	4	5
Jackets	1	2	3	4	5
Hoodies	1	2	3	4	5
T-shirts	1	2	3	4	5
Team pucks	1	2	3	4	5
Team bags	1	2	3	4	5
Accessories	1	2	3	4	5

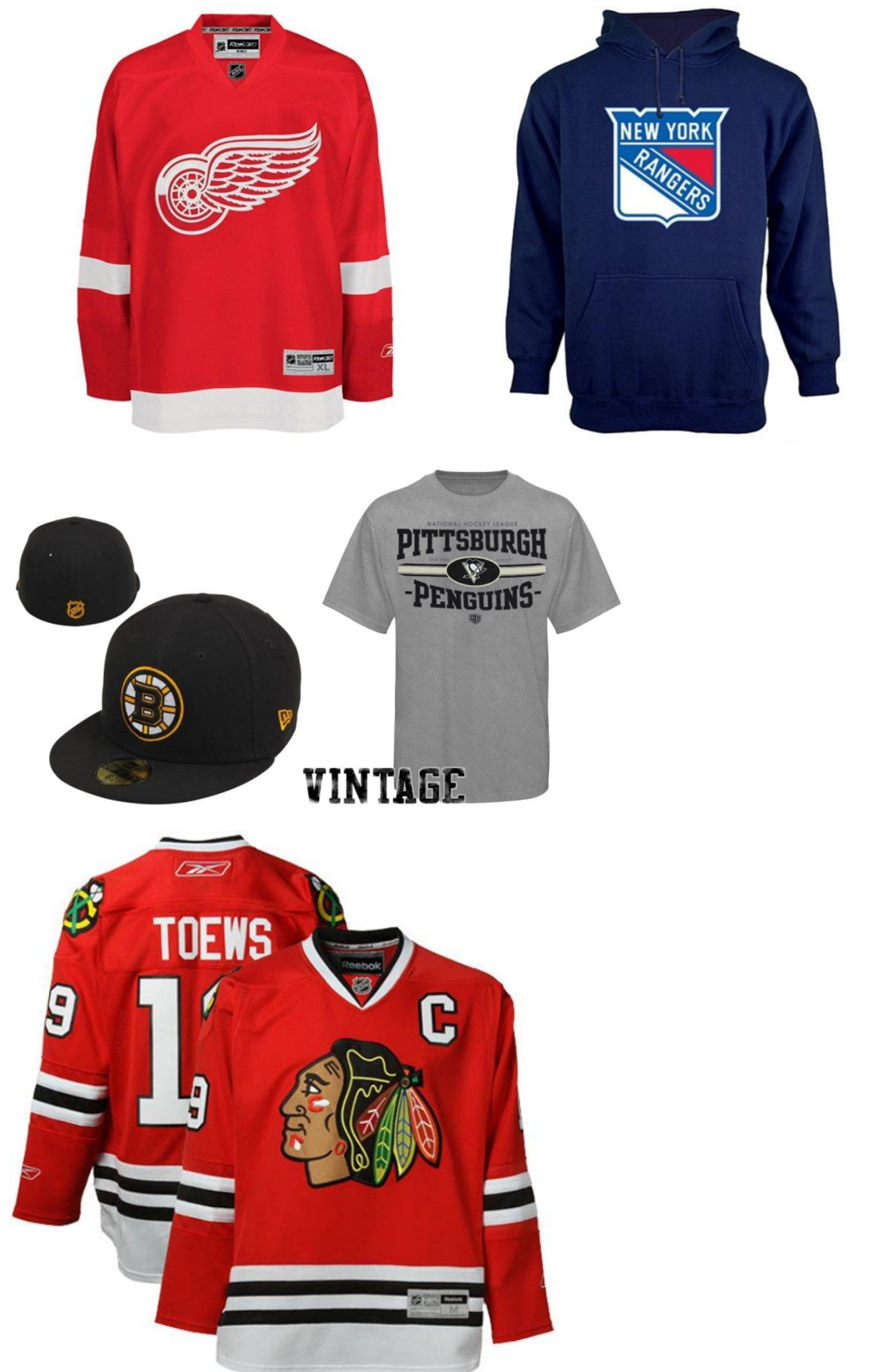
4. How much money are you willing to invest for the following products?

Jerseys	70	90	120	150	200
Caps	10	15	20	30	40
Jackets	70	80	90	100	120
Hoodies	50	60	70	80	100
T-shirts	15	20	25	30	40
Team pucks	5	10	15	25	30
Team bags	60	70	80	90	100
Accessories (NHL cup, phone shell, etc.)	_____				
	5	15	25	35	50

5. How would you improve the availability of NHL products in Finland? Own NHL store? New online store? More products to retailing stores?

6. Are you interested in the products that can be found in the following page? Which ones?

Examples of NHL products (NHL Shop, 2013)



Appendix 2: Permission and information message of the research execution

Hi,

We are two students from Laurea University of Applied Sciences working with our final thesis. Relating to our thesis, we want to conduct a survey about Finnish people's interest in NHL products. We are hoping to get some responses from people who are interested in ice hockey.

The idea is to execute the inquiry to the players and coaches of your team and if possible, also to the parents of the players. The inquiry would be executed before, during and after the team trainings. The trainings come first and we don't want to disturb the concentration of any player. The questionnaires would be conducted when possible.

There are no names required for the questionnaire and it takes only few minutes to answer to the questions. The participation is voluntary and everyone can withdraw from the research at any time. We are happy to answer any questions you may have in mind, our e-mail addresses are below.

We hope that our thesis and research attracted your attention and interest.

Best regards,
Niko Fredén ja Kent Lindholm
Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Otaniemi

niko.freden@laurea.fi & kent.lindholm@laurea.fi