This study sets out to answer the research question: "To what extent can a sports-event create value for a health-related charity?" After exploratory discussions with stakeholders in the field, desk-research was performed to create a hypothetical model answering the research question. This model was first then, first of all, tested using a case study and after minor initial adjustments, a subsequent testing of the previous findings was performed using in-depth interviews with various experts.

The initial rationale for this research stems from the perceived improvement opportunities related to the way which charities and sporting events initiate relationships with one another. Currently these relationships are purely based on coincidence and/or use of an existing relationship-network. As chance and interpersonal benevolence are the main factors for the foundation of an otherwise professional cooperation, it is likely that chance plays an important role in the potential success of such cooperation. This idea was confirmed in an exploratory round of preliminary interviews. The hypothesis underlying this study is that if the connection between the event and charity would be achieved in a more scientifically validated fashion, it would then subsequently be professionally executed, the chances of a successful cooperation would be increased considerably.

Researching this hypothesis is relevant and even important, as in the European social-economical context, both private companies and institutions are forced towards a greater degree of self-reliance as one of the outcomes of the various crises in the economic domain during the past decade. In the Netherlands too, these crises have led to budget-cuts. Both charities and sports-related organizations were confronted with a substantial reduction in financial support from government institutions. Simultaneously consumers were confronted with substantially reduced purchasing power, which caused charitable donations by consumers to be reduced. (VFI, 2014) Average per household donations have decreased, and donors have become more critical, and less loyal to charities. This whole new situation implies that it is increasingly difficult for charities to acquire sufficient resources. A major assumption that initiated this research is that if charities increase the effectiveness of their efforts to communicate the value they create for consumers in the social domain more effectively, they will be able to counter the decreasing trend in donations. The hypothesis is that instruments that have been commonplace in commercial organizations for some time now, will be beneficial in linking charities and sports-events more effectively, and subsequently enhance the communication of the value-proposition that emerges from this relationship between charity and sports-event. In an intensifying struggle for a share of the consumer’s budget charities find themselves competing more and more with those who are already working for decades with this address in a professional manner. This research assumes that with a clear concept and ditto positioning of the value proposition, a charity will be in a more level playing field and thus achieve better results in this competition. (MVO Nederland, 2014) (Rijkenberg, 2014)

First of all, developing a validated concept and subsequently ditto positioning based instruments is crucial in preparing to achieve effective exposure towards potential donors. And this is of crucial importance to charities if they are to survive in the competition for the donation budget. This study focuses specifically on the exposure that could arise from collaboration with sporting events. The starting assumption for this research is that sports-events and health-related charities reinforce each other character-wise (i.e.: both in concept and in positioning). This creates reciprocal value by confirming the core of the existence of both the charity and the sports-event. Thus, the event visitor/consumer can give substance to an ever increasing need to be both socially responsible and more morally engaged. Moreover, the assumption is that the if the relation is based on a scientifically validated, and therefore mutually reinforcing combination sports-event & charity, this will reinforce the consumers’ loyalty towards the
In addition, the average consumer in a ‘festivalising’ society is increasingly looking for a more and more unique experience. (Vliet, 2012) (De Cauter, 2013) The next assumption therefore is that by enhancing the experience in a validated manner, by combining the already mutually reinforced concept and positioning with the experience-related instruments through the utilization of proven theories for experience economy phenomena, an even greater value-creation or the consumer/event visitor will be realized. This will focus the spending preferences of the consumer even more durable and to a higher amount towards the charity. All this leads to a fundamentally different brain position of the charity amongst consumers. (Rijkenberg, 2014), (Vliet, 2012), (Kapferer J., 1992), (Kapferer, Strategic brand management: new approaches to creating and evaluating brand equity, 1992), (Bogaarts, 1992), (Bellens, de Jonge, & Hazelhoff, 2003), (Adkins, 1999).

Starting from exploratory interviews with both event organizers and fundraisers for charities it was determined that coincidence indeed plays a major role in the establishment of these professional relations, and that there is definitely a perceived need for validated tools that will enable amore professional cooperation basis to be established, in order to increase the probability of a successful cooperation. Starting from these findings, desk-research was used to build a model combining Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 1992), Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2012) and Concepting-Positioning. (Rijkenberg, 2014).

From the validated analysis of both the charity’s and the sports-event’s identities, a more deliberately founded connection between a specific charity and (sports) event can be created (Coalter & Taylor, 2008). This will then subsequently lead to an experience for the sports-event visitors that is much more rewarding from a perspective of meaningfulness and signification, which in turn then leads to a more genuine, and therefore more loyal connection with the charity. Furthermore, by tuning the actual content of the event through incorporation of the ideas of the Experience Economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2012) aimed at maximizing the coordination with concept and identity to even further align the partners, the value for the event visiting consumers in search of meaning and signification increases significantly. Thus the likelihood of creating a (more) loyal donor-relationship between consumer and charity has become more manageable, and the donorship can be more actively influenced. (Rijkenberg, 2014)

The initial hypothetical model based on literature/desk-research, which had undergone minor adjustments after an initial case-study based on desk-research, subsequently has been validated through further in-depth expert interviews, according to which further minor adjustments were made in the hypothetical model. The resulting model will, according to the outcomes of the expert-interviews have a convincingly positive impact on both consumer loyalty and donating behavior through its more validated, analytical method to address the connection between The results of the hypothetical model based on literature have been validated with concerned expert interviews, according to which minor adjustments were made in the model. For the most part, the experts appeared convinced of the positive impact on loyalty and give consumer behavior by a more validated analytical method to address the connection between charity and sporting event and charity.

Although the entire study was originally aimed and conducted in the Dutch environment, there is reason to believe that the findings are applicable in countries with a comparable economic and situation (post-crisis increased budgetary scrutiny) and comparable (western) cultures.