

**LUISS**



*Department of Business and Management*

**The Power of Sport Sponsorship**  
—  
**Adolescents Consumption of Energy  
Drink.**

*Master of Science in Strategic Marketing Management*

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## Abstract

Sport sponsorship is one of the fastest growing promotional activities for businesses worldwide, and it has proven to have positive effects on the sponsoring brand (International Events Group-IEG, 2018). According to previous research, sponsorship marketing through sports was dominated by unhealthy products (Carter, Edwards, Signal & Hoek, 2012). However, Dixon, Lee and Schully (2019) were unable to identify any published research and evidence on the relationship between unhealthy food sponsorship and adolescents. Knowing that the need for increased knowledge concerning the effect of unhealthy marketing towards adolescents, especially in terms of sports marketing, this paper will look into adolescent's drivers for adopting products and if sport sponsorship prompt adolescents to consume more energy drink.

My findings show that success of, and identification with, the sport athlete are important drivers for product adoption. If the sports athlete is successful in their performance, the adolescents are more likely to buy the products they promote. Similarly, the respondents are more prone to buy products a sports athlete promotes if they can identify themselves with the athlete. Furthermore, the findings reveal that sponsorship agreements with sports athletes do influence adolescents' adaptation of products and most respondents do believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks. Moreover, the respondents confirm that unhealthy products, including energy drinks, are top of mind products associated with sports athletes' promotion. Hence, findings show that the promotion of energy drinks through sports athletes contributes to brand awareness amongst adolescents. However, it is difficult to conclude that adolescents are likely to consume more energy drink, even though high awareness increases the likelihood of purchase. In general, the findings underline lack of knowledge and reflection amongst the adolescents, and the absence of trustworthy information and references.

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Sponsorship

Sponsorship is characterized as a “*provision of assistance either financial or in kind to an activity by a commercial organization for the purpose of achieving commercial objectives*” (Meenaghan, 1983). A sponsorship is viewed as a two-way partnership between a brand and a person/organization being sponsored (property/sponsee) (Amoako, Dartey-Baah, Dzogbenukul & Kwesie, 2012). The agreement involves supporting a sponsee by providing money or other resources of value to the sponsee (Amoako. et al, 2012; Woisetschläger, Backhaus & Cornwell, 2017). In return, it allows the brand to live in the reflection of the sponsee for access to visibility and commercial potential of that property, ensuring social consciousness and exposure for the brand (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999; Woisetschläger, Backhaus & Cornwell, 2017). This is financially profitable for both parties, resulting in a win-win situation (Burel, 2020). However, it is difficult to know the details in an agreement between a sponsor and a sponsee, as it usually includes a combination of communication effects, e.g sponsor logo, brand display during broadcast etc, and a supplement of additional spending (Cornwell, 2019).

In a report from 2018, the total global sponsorship spending reached \$65.88, an increase of 4,9% from the year before, 2017 (International Events Group-IEG, 2018). In the same report, four out of ten sponsors stated that they would increase their budgets for activation spending and 47% reported that they will spend the same amount. However, it is not only about the increase in spending, but rather the change in how brands connect with the audience (Cornwell, 2019). Research shows that consumers classify traditional advertising as selfish and without any benefit for the society (Meenaghan, 2001). Conversely, consumers are more accepting to sponsorship as it is perceived as an indirect and more subtle approach, resulting in a less obvious commercial goal, which leads to the effect of reducing the consumers defense mechanisms (Meenaghan, 2001).

Sponsorship is highly valued for its ability to achieve particular communication effects with selected audiences (Meenaghan & Shipley, 1999). In a paper written by Ryan and Fahy (2012), five distinct approaches of sponsorship were identified: philanthropic, consumer centered, market centered, the relationship/network approach and lastly, strategic resource-oriented approach. To date, most sponsorship research evolves a customer-centered and market-centered approach to increase awareness, consumers understanding cognitively and affectively, and influence their behavioral response (Ryan & Fahy, 2012). Building brand awareness and image are the most prevalent objectives of sponsorship (Cornwell & Maignan, 1998; Walliser, 2003; Cunningham, Cornwell & Coote, 2009). The ultimate goal for most brands, is to increase sales and income, and ideally attract new customers and make them curious to buy the products (Gustafson & Chabot, 2007). To do so, brand awareness is key. Brand awareness refers to *how* aware current and potential customers are of the brand and its products (Gustafson & Chabot, 2007). Additionally, brand awareness plays a major role in customers purchase decision and high awareness increases the likelihood of purchase (Gustafson & Chabot, 2007).

Sponsorships can enhance the corporate identity (Javalgi, Traylor, Gross & Lampman, 1994) and according to Cunningham, Cornwell and Coote (2009), the rationale behind it, is that each sponsorship activity has identifiable image values that transfer onto the sponsoring firm. Keller (1993) define brand image *“as the perceptual beliefs about a brand’s attribute, benefit, and attitude associations, which are frequently seen as the basis for an overall evaluation of, or attitude towards, the brand”*. A well-thought-out collaboration has significant power in projecting desired values of a firm and thereby create a distinct favorable brand image among the stakeholders of a company (Grimes & Meenaghan, 1998). Meaning that the sponsorships agreements give the sponsor the benefits of transferring the associations the potential customer has of either party, to the other, and create a relationship (Meenaghan, 1991).

### **1.1.2 Sport Sponsorship**

Over the last couple of decades, sponsorships have become an important marketing tool, especially the sponsorships within sport. It is one of the fastest growing

promotional activities for businesses worldwide, and it has proven to have positive effects on the sponsoring brand (International Events Group-IEG, 2018). Sports is followed all around the world and generate an immense amount of money and it is an important source of income for professional sporting organizations (Nufer & Bühler, 2011). In 2020, the revenue from sports sponsorship worldwide was 57 billion U.S dollars, and the market size is predicted to grow to 89.6 billion U.S dollars in 2027, an increase of 6.72% (Gough, 2021). Furthermore, spending on sport sponsorship in the U.S in 2019 reached 14.7 billion U.S, and significant spending is also happening in both Europe and Asia (Gough, 2019).

Brands are keen to connect with the passion consumers have for sports, the media coverage, and the audience (Woisetschläger, Backhaus & Cornwell, 2017). The ultimate goal is to make the fans of the athletes become consumers of the brand and love it, as a result of the sponsorship agreement. Repeated pairing of the brand with the athlete will create associations and a link in the consumers' minds (Erdogan & Baker, 2000). The most successful sports sponsorship relations are based on a good fit between the sports entity and the brand of the company sponsoring (Nufer & Bühler, 2011).

### **1.3 Sponsorship and energy drink**

Within sports sponsorship, energy drink (ED) brands are highly visible. In fact, Red Bull is considered to be a pioneer in sport-related communications in general, and their marketing success is called the Red Bull Phenomenon (Kunz, Elsässer & Santomier, 2016). Red Bull sponsors a variety of sports and some of the best athletes in the world (Red Bull, 2021 A). For instance, the famous alpine skier Marcel Hirscher who won eight consecutive World Cup titles and 67 World Cup races in his career, is a key Red Bull profile (Red Bull, 2021 B). Moreover, in 2020/2021, MMA fighter Conor McGregor was ranked to be the highest paid athlete by earnings from salary and endorsement worldwide, and one of his huge endorsement deals is with Monster Energy (Gough, 2021). Through their marketing tactics they reach out to a huge audience and the brand is always highly visible in different media. As a result of their successful marketing tactics, Red Bull and Monster are the top two most popular

energy drink brands world-wide, jointly accounting for 82% of the market share (Green Seed, 2022).

#### **1.4 Energy Drink**

Energy drink is a type of soda and a subset of a bigger category of energy products. It is important to note the difference between *sports* drinks and *energy* drinks as they are significantly different (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011). Sports drinks advertise optimization of athletic performance and refill of fluid and electrolytes during and after a training session. Energy drinks on the other hand, are beverages that are marketed to enhance physical performance and concentration, boost energy and decreased alertness (Reissig, Strain & Griffiths, 2009). Due to amount of sugar and stimulant ingredients in energy drinks, there is a concern that it can potentially cause negative side effects on consumers' health, due to the high levels of caffeine and sugar in combination with minerals, vitamins, amino acids, and herbal supplements (Seifert, Schaechter, Hershorin & Lipshultz, 2011). Energy drinks vary a lot in caffeine level, ranging from 50-505mg per can, and the higher doses can potentially lead to caffeine overdose. In comparison, a cup of brewed coffee varies from 77-150 mg (Reissig, Strain & Griffiths, 2009).

Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy drink market has continued to thrive and increase in sales. In 2020, energy drink sales reached \$57.4 billions, an increase of almost \$4.4 billion in only 2 years, 2018-2020 (Green Seed, 2022). Furthermore, it is expected to continue to grow in the future and within 2026 is estimated to reach a value of \$86.01 billions (Green Seed, 2022). From 2015 to 2020, the number of liters in millions has increased from 19 to 55 in the Norwegian market, which is an increase of 190 percent (Forbrukerradet, 2020 A).

#### **1.5 Energy drink consumption adolescents**

Furthermore, research show that there is a growing trend among younger consumers (Forbrukerradet, 2020 A), in fact, children and adolescents are estimated to be the major consumers of energy drinks (Degirmenci, Fossum, Strand, Vaktskjold & Holten-

Andersen, 2018). Forbrukerraadet (2020 A) revealed that one out of four children in the age of 10-12 years states that they consume energy drinks every week in Norway.

Numerous reports have revealed unfortunate effects of energy drink consumption and describe a variety of symptoms that effects organ systems, including tachycardia, hypertension, confusion, agitation, seizures, liver damage, kidney failure and cardiac dysfunction, with potential deadly outcomes (Degirmenci. et al, 2018). In 2018, Forbrukerradet (B) reported that close to 50 percent of children and adolescents who consumed energy drinks had experienced side effects.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The use of role models is a common strategy adopted by companies to change the behavior of the consumer (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). According to Warhurst (2011), role models have the power to influence young people to follow their behavior and patterns. In an experiment performed by Breuer, Dallmeyer, Rumpf and Orlowski (2021) there was a positive effect of sponsorship stimuli on the participants choice of brand, underlining the fact that consumers behavior can be changed due to sponsored activities. By soliciting emotional attachments, the sponsored object can alter consumers cognitive structures and lead them to engage in desirable behaviors (Mason, 2005).

Sports settings are universally acknowledged as an opportunity to promote products as sports athletes have countless fans (Sartori, Stoneham & Edmunds, 2018). A high number of authors have reached a consensus view on the effectiveness of sport sponsorship in relation to attitude and purchase decisions (Speed & Thompson, 2000; Wang, Jain, Cheng & Aung, 2012; Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross & Maroco, 2013). Fan identification plays a significant role in the area of sponsorship and a fans attachment to a sponsee can result in developing favorable dispositions towards sponsors (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross & Maroco, 2013). If the consumer has a high fan identification with the sponsee the purchase intention to buy the sponsored product is high (Wang, Jain, Cheng & Aung, 2012). Moreover, it does not only evoke purchase



intention, but it can also be translated into customer responses such as improving credibility and attitude toward the sponsor, which is beneficial to the company. In fact, attitude towards a sponsor within sports is found to be the major predictor of purchase intention and can arguably be more meaningful than pure awareness when predicting sales (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross & Maroco, 2013).

According to Shuart (2007) there is a difference between *heroes* and *celebrities*, meaning that there is greater identification with a hero than with a celebrity. On the basis of this, it was hypothesized that sports heroes were more effective endorsers than non-heroes. Research show that hero figures have greater influence than other adults on adolescents' choices in general (Boyland, Harrold, Dovey, Allison, Dobson, Joacobs & Halford, 2012). Adolescents look up to and admire their hero and their advertising will affect and influence what they purchase and select (Boyland et al., 2012). Research conducted by Clark, Martin & Bush (2015) revealed that athlete role models (heroes) have a significant positive impact on adolescents' level of knowledge concerning the marketplace. Their perceived sincerity is a significant variable to predict the customer response to sports sponsorship, and findings suggest that a sponsor who is perceived to be sincere and liked by the fans can extract superior benefits through their sponsorships (Speed & Thompson, 2000).

Creating a fit, also called congruence, is an important concept when constructing sponsorships (Olson & Thjømmøe, 2011). According to Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) a fit between a sponsor and a sponsee is "*a match in terms of perceived similarity, consistency and sense making*" and it influences how consumers evaluate the brand. It is important to create a symbolic link between the sponsor and the sponsee in order to legitimize their role as a sponsor and create a relationship with the fan (Farrelly, Quester & Greyser, 2005). In research conducted by Till and Busler (2000), they found that sponsorships are more effective when there is a perceived fit between the sponsee and the sponsored brand. In other words, sponsors should choose properties with which they can establish association that is meaningful to consumers and assist in adding authenticity to the brand (Farrelly, Quester & Greyser, 2005). Sport sponsorship investments are characterized by products related to sports (Melovic, Rogic, Smolovis,

Dudic & Gregus, 2019). For instance, sports equipment, food and beverage, as this can be associated as a part of their success and achievements.

Knowing that sports endorsers are often considered sports heroes by many consumers, especially adolescents, there is a sociological discussion of whether they have a responsibility as a role model (Shuart, 2007). Some sponsorship agreements can be perceived as controversial. Sport settings are globally seen as an opportunity to encourage and promote healthy behavior (Sartori, Stoneham & Edmunds, 2018). However, there is evidence that role models are not always positive, and they can be seen to promote negative social images, beliefs, and behaviors (Payne, Reynolds, Brown & Fleming, 2003). Businesses are willing to utilize the positive influence sports heroes have, and promote unhealthy products to achieve positive outcomes, e.g. increased awareness and branding, attitude, and revenue. To businesses, adolescents are viewed as integral as they represent the next generation of consumers and an increasingly important group in terms of buying behavior (Clark, Martin & Bush, 2001). Each year, companies spend vast amounts of money on marketing efforts to reach adolescents as this segment spend billions on their own purchases (Lapierre, Fleming-Milici, Rozendaal, McAlister & Castonguay, 2017).

In relation to controversial issues, Kuypers (2002) argues that consumers seek profiled social figures like athletes. Sport heroes are especially appealing to adolescents as they are in a phase of life where they need to establish their own identity (Dixon, Scully, Niven, Kelly, Chapman, Donovan, Martin, Baur, Crawford & Wakefield, 2013). During the process of developing and forming an identity, adolescents will take more risks, experience novel behaviors and they often feel invulnerable, which ultimately may impair their ability to recognize the negative effects consuming energy drinks on a regular basis (Laghi, Liga, Baumgartner & Baiocco, 2012). Based on this, Bunting, Baggett and Grigor (2013) suggested that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to marketing strategies that promotes energy drinks due to their physical developmental process. Furthermore, an analysis of children/adolescents (0-18) reveal that they are particularly susceptible to convincing marketing messages as their cognitive development is relatively limited (Rozendaal, Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2010). Meaning that their ability to recognize the selling techniques and persuasive is low. Children and

adolescents associate sports teams and athletes with the product and companies that sponsor them (Sartori, Stoneham & Edmunds, 2018). In other words, adolescents do not necessarily understand whether the products a sports athlete promotes is a product that they actually consume themselves or if they are promoting the product for other incentives, e.g. monetary incentives. Thus, both the sponsored sport athlete and the sponsoring brand should carefully consider whom they enter an agreement with.

Being a young sport fan with role models, this can influence product and brand preferences, as well as buying behavior, which is not necessarily healthy. There have been longstanding public concerns about the potential effects of promoting unhealthy products (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). Concerns related to food and beverage are for example nutrition, dental health and obesity. Sponsorship of food is an important and frequently used promotional channel, and food marketing influences nutrition knowledge, preferences, purchase and consumption patterns (Cairns, Angus & Hastings, 2009). Research shows that adolescents brand preferences can be shaped early, and they can develop loyal buying behavior and patterns that will continue throughout their adult lives (Moschis, 1985). Additionally, they are considered trendsetters that have significant influence on their peers and parents buying behavior (Clark, Martin & Bush, 2001; Zollo, 1995). Thus, food marketing exerts a powerful influence and adolescents can develop a lifelong unhealthy lifestyle from young age, and their habits can again influence others.

Through an extensive literature review Kelly, Baur, Bauman and King (2018) found that food and beverage companies all over the world have attempted to develop a marketing presence at *all* levels of community and professional sport. The widespread promotion of energy-dense, nutrient-poor food and beverage, i.e. unhealthy products, through sports sponsorships is concerning (Dixon, Lee & Schully, 2019). Even though these promotions do not explicitly target youth, this type of marketing, sports sponsorship, will affect perceptions and preferences among youth (Bragg, Roberto, Harris, Brownell & Elbel, 2017). A professional athlete promoting unhealthy products will send mixed messages as they on one hand promote physical activity at the same time as they encourage consumption of unhealthy products potentially leading to negative health outcomes (Bragg et al., 2017). This could potentially create a distorted

perception and adolescents could be led to believe that the products are healthier than they in reality are, given that the promotion is associated with sports (Philipson & Jones, 2008).

A systematic review evaluated 14 studies that examined food environments in sports settings and concluded that sponsorship of sports was dominated by unhealthy products (Carter, Edwards, Signal & Hoek, 2012). The techniques businesses use to market unhealthy foods and beverages to young consumers are sophisticated, extensive, and persuasive (Smith, Kelly, Yeatman & Boyland, 2019). In fact, one study showed that a majority of adolescents were aware of the companies that sponsored their favorite sports team, and 15% correctly named one or more food and beverage company sponsors (Kelly, Baur, Bauman, King, Chapman & Smith, 2011).

As a part of the beverage market, energy drink promotes their brand to adolescents as a product that will allow them to keep up with extreme sports and a busy everyday life (Bryant Ludden & Wolfson, 2010). For instance, marketing strategies promotes a boost in energy, enhanced concentration, mental alertness, and decreased fatigue (Schneider & Benjamin, 2011). Adolescents may respond to these messages. Research conducted by Philipson and Jones (2008) found that there is a general perception among adolescents that they need extra energy or a sugar rush to enhance their performance or an energy drink to recover after sports activities. In fact, previous research shows that adolescent's motivation to consume energy drink is; the taste, the stimulating effect, the intention to increase *physical performance*, but often also pertains to marketing-related attributes such as the brand design or the *influence of the celebrities* who advertise them (Ehlers, Marakis, Lapmen & Hirsch-Ernst, 2019).

A study conducted by Costa, Hayley and Miller (2014) found that adolescents (12-15 years), knew numerous of energy drink brands. Furthermore, an analysis conducted by Nowak and Jasionowski (2015) revealed that 67% of adolescents consumed energy drinks and that those who practiced sports where even more willing to consume energy drinks. Moreover, most of the respondents reported that they consumed one energy drink every day, and some individuals even more. In another study, 10% of the adolescents who reported consuming energy drinks declared that they drank three cans

and more during sports (Zuconni, Volpato, Adinolfi, Gandini, Gentile, Loi & Fioriti, 2013). Despite this, research revealed that adolescents have very superficial or absent knowledge about the ingredients (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). Moreover, they are not aware of the proper usage of such products. In fact, if the energy drink did not have the desired effect, adolescents may increase the volume they consume in order to achieve the promoted physiological effects, which may have significant unfortunate effect on health (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014).

Even though energy drinks are standardized, certified, and assessed acceptable to use, it is neither a guarantee nor a form of justification to believe that the products are safe to consume, especially in terms of overconsumption (Kutia, Kriventsov, Moroz, Gafarova & Trofimov, 2019). The most common and well-known ingredient in energy drinks is caffeine and it is associated with positive effects on endurance performance and alertness (EFSA, 2011). However, energy drinks are a mixture of several chemical substances which interact with each other, which may cause negative effects on organs and tissues (Kutia, Kriventsov, Moroz, Gafarova & Trofimov, 2019). Due to the high levels of caffeine and sugar in combination with minerals, vitamins, amino acids, and herbal supplements, there is a concern that these energy drinks potentially cause negative side effects on consumers' health (Seifert, Schaechter, Hershorin & Lipshultz, 2011). Numerous reports of the unfortunate effects of energy drink consumption have described a variety of symptoms and affected organ systems, including tachycardia, hypertension, confusion, agitation, seizures, liver damage, kidney failure and cardiac dysfunction, with potential deadly outcomes (Degirmenci, Fossum, Strand, Vaktskjold & Holten-Andersen, 2018).

As adolescents most likely have not developed a tolerance to caffeine and the fact that they are undergoing rapid growth, the effects of consuming energy drinks might be even greater compared to adults (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). Young people consuming energy drinks every day are potentially risking an overdose of caffeine (Nowak & Jasionowski, 2015). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2011), some bottles/cans of energy drinks can contain 500mg caffeine, and in some cases even exceed. This equals 14 cans of normal soft drinks containing caffeine and can lead to caffeine toxicity. Moreover, a lethal dose of caffeine is estimated to be 200-

400 mg/kg (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2011). Taking this into consideration and the fact that adolescents have most probably not build up a tolerance to caffeine, energy drinks should not belong in the diets of the adolescents.

To date, EU have regulations requiring labelling stating “High caffeine content. Not recommended for children” if beverage contains more than 150 mg/L of caffeine (Ehlers, Marakis, Lampen & Hirsch-Ernst, 2019). However, the warning statement is placed on the back of the can, aside the nutrition information, with no distinct size or colored text, resulting in low visibility. Knowing this, and the fact that individuals do not consciously look for labels stating they should be cautious, the label would need to more clearly draw attention and be highly visible, to be noticed (Ehlers, Marakis, Lampen & Hirsch-Ernst, 2019). Also, the current regulations only require a label stating it is not *recommended* for children, without stating any specific age limit. Adolescents are often assessed as a part of the broader category of children (Truman & Elliott, 2019). Thus, the current labelling might not be neither clear nor sufficient.

Implementing clear rules with regards to alcohol consumption has been associated with lower rates of risks among adolescents (McMorris, Catalano, Kim, Toumbourou & Hemphill, 2011). To date, the law prohibiting alcohol to children and adolescents with age limits has clear benefits by delaying the usage in early age, and reducing the consumption in adulthood (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). Looking back, researchers and policy makers should take advantage of the lessons learned from promoting alcohol and tobacco, appropriate labelling, regulated sales and how it influences consumers to consume and buy product that poses a risk to human health (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). The advertisement of tobacco has proven that it predicts usage among adolescents and the transition into becoming an established user in young age is relatively short (Gilpin, White, Messer & Pierce, 2011). On the other side, anti-smoking campaigns have been effective to delay the process of smoking among adolescents (Gilbert, 2008; Costa, Hayley & Miller, 2014). Considering the literature data presented, it is reasonable to say that there is a need for changes to legalization to secure the health of adolescents.

To date, much research has explored the effect of food marketing in general on children and somewhat adolescents. In 2019, Dixon, Lee and Schully were unable to identify any published research and evidence between unhealthy food sponsorship and adolescents. However, they argued that the effect of alcohol and tobacco sponsorships on consumers awareness, preference and consumption will have a similar effect on unhealthy food sponsorship. Considering the increased popularity of energy drinks among young people all over the world, and the health risks caused by excessive consumption, it should be worthwhile to conduct research within this field. There is a lack of evidence isolating the effect of sports marketing promoting energy drinks on adolescents. More specifically, how the sports marketing of energy drinks affects the perception of adolescent's beliefs about the healthiness of consuming it, and whether they understand the health risks.

Bragg et al., (2017) argued that sports organizations and athletes should stop advertising and promoting beverages and food that is unhealthy and start encouraging healthy habits among adolescents in cooperation's with health experts. Taking the literature presented into consideration, it would be reasonable to expect the implementation of regulations to control the marketing content and strategies targeting adolescents. Globally, many countries recognize the dangerous effects of food and beverage promotion on children's health and have therefore implemented restrictions or prohibited the marketing (Truman & Elliott, 2019). However, regulations are mainly limiting food marketing focus targeting children under the age of 13.

In Norway there are only government statutory regulations related to promotion of alcohol and tobacco, while there are only limited regulations of food marketing targeting young people. However, the restricting regulations on food and beverage promotions do not apply to adolescents. This is despite the fact that it is proven that they are influenced by marketing appeals, potentially resulting in a significant impact to adolescents' health, and knowing that marketers invest heavily in targeting them. Due to the strict regulations concerning alcohol and tobacco in Norway, adolescents might have faith in the government protecting them from advertisements promoting dangerous products, and thus do not perceive any danger in consuming the product. Knowing that the need for increased knowledge concerning the effect of marketing

towards adolescents, especially in terms of sports marketing, this paper is guided by the following research questions:

*RQ 1: What drives the acceptance or rejection of adopting sponsored products promoted through sport sponsorship among adolescents?*

*RQ 2: Does sports sponsorship of energy drink prompt adolescents to drink more?*

### **3.0 Methodology**

In this section the methodology used for this research will presented and described

#### **3.1 Objective**

The objective of this research is to understand adolescents' knowledge about sports sponsorship agreements related to energy drinks and the health issues related to consumption of energy drinks. The intention is to explore whether there is a relationship between adolescents and sports athletes in terms of acceptance and consumption of energy drinks. To understand this, I need to examine the underlying reasons, the drivers, for why adolescents consume energy drinks and whether sports athletes influence adolescents' beliefs about brands and products they promote through their sponsorship agreements. Finally, the information gained from the research could potentially provide some governance guidance for policy makers and companies regarding their responsibilities and options related to preventing harmful usage of energy drinks among adolescents.

#### **3.2 Research design - Qualitative method**

In order to research this field, I will utilize an exploratory research design to obtain insight and knowledge about the addressed issues. The collected data will contribute to define the issues more precisely and further identify relevant courses of action. The scope of the topics could potentially be difficult to capture with prefixed answers as the primary data is qualitative by nature. Thus, I will take advantage of in-depth interviews



to explore the depth of the subject. Moreover, in this research project I will interview adolescents, and by taking into consideration that their cognitive development is relatively limited, this method will be beneficial to obtain useful information.

### **3.2.1 In-depth interview**

The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews as it has been proven to be a versatile and flexible method (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). This will make it possible for the interviewer to combine a set of predetermined questions and improvise follow-up questions during the interview, depending on the response from the participant. This will create a reciprocity between the interviewer and participant and the participant will have the opportunity to provide long, well-described and complementary answers, with specific and detailed information. Before the interviews were conducted, an interview template covering the main topics was designed (Appendix 9.1). This created a structured framework without strict limits, providing the participant a guidance of the topics and at the same time ensuring similar information is collected from all participants. Lastly, prior to the interviews, two pretests were conducted on two individuals to evaluate whether or not the interview template was adequate, clear, and served the purpose. Hereafter, some minor changes were made by editing the wording and adding a few questions.

### **3.3 Population and selection**

In this research project I have decided to focus on Norwegian adolescents, due to the strict regulations concerning alcohol and tobacco in Norway. Adolescents might have blind faith in the government to inform and protect them from dangerous products, and thus do not understand the severity of consuming energy drinks being legally promoted. Furthermore, it is of importance that the participants are adolescents between the age of 12 and 17 to generate maximum insight. It is beneficial if the participants have an interest in sports or do sports themselves, however, in Norway 75% of adolescents have practiced in sports during their youth, 13-18 years, (Bakken, 2019), so I will not take this into consideration when selecting the sample. Further, the sample will equally represent both genders, 50/50 male and female.

I have chosen to utilize a convenience sampling, due to the advantage of having access to several adolescents fulfilling the control characteristics. The sampling method entails recruiting participants close to the interviewer, in this case asking friends to recruit acquaintances. Meaning that none of the respondents were close to the interviewer personally. They all represent the target segment, and their information provides valuable insight, despite them not representing the entire population. The disadvantage using this method could be biased answers, however the interview does not include sensitive topics and the respondents were not aware of the objective of the research prior to the interview.

Lastly, deciding the sample size is difficult, however there are some guidelines that I have followed. A large number of articles and books recommend and suggest anywhere from 5 to 50 participants (Dworkin, 2012), and my supervisor suggested 10-20. Thus, I decided to conduct at least ten interviews and continue until saturation. Saturation is defined as the point at which the data collection process no longer offers any new or relevant data (Dworkin, 2012). This resulted in 14 interviews in total, seven males and seven females.

### **3.4 Interview structure**

The interviews were estimated to last for approximately 25 to 35 minutes, depending on how well described and detailed the participants answered. During the interview I had to ask follow-up questions to simulate longer answers and explanations, for instance “why”, “how does this affect you” and “do you think it should stay this way or change”. Furthermore, as adolescents are not fully developed cognitively, I noticed that some participants did not understand my vocabulary or what I was asking them, thus I had to rephrase some questions and change the wording during the interview for some of the respondents. This underlines the importance of in-depth interview as the method for data collection in this research paper.

Furthermore, the interview template was divided into four different themes: a general part about the participant, sport sponsorship, energy drinks and lastly about energy drinks in relation to sports. The purpose for the first part was to get to know the

participant and to make them feel comfortable. Thereafter I moved on to the predefined questions related to their knowledge and personal beliefs about sport sponsorship and energy drinks, their personal consumption of energy drinks, their general perception of energy drink consumption among their peers. Finally, the participants were asked questions about energy drink brands being a sponsorship in sports and their beliefs about sports athletes' consumption of energy drinks. By dividing the questions into categories and asking the questions in a certain order I tried to avoid influencing their answers and thus risking biased responses. For instance, asking about the athlete's genuine support to their sponsors, before asking whether or not they believe the athletes sponsored by energy drinks actually consume these drinks.

To simplify the interviewing process and to create a natural flow in the conversation, all the interviews were recorded. This enables the interviewer to fully concentrate and listen to the participant, without having to take notes and potentially miss out on valuable information. In order to do this legally, I had to inform the participant in advance and clarify that they gave their consent. Since I am interviewing adolescents under eighteen, I had to obtain a signature from their parents. Thus, I made a consent form (appendix 9.2) explaining the purpose of the research project, how the recordings were going to be stored and when it would be deleted.

Moreover, to make the participation in the interviews as effortless as possible for the adolescents, the interviews were conducted over the phone without cameras. In this way the respondent can easily find the time in a busy daily life. Additionally, conducting the interviews in presence might have influenced the adolescent's response in a negative way, making them restrained. I believe that they are more comfortable without having someone looking at them and evaluating their response.

Lastly, since the population is Norwegian adolescents, the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, their first language. The motivation for this was to reduce the probability of misunderstandings and to not miss out on valuable information. Moreover, the adolescents will not be restricted in their communication, and they can express their exact opinions.

### **3.5 Establishing validity in qualitative research**

Through the in-depth interviews I will try to uncover the different concepts the respondents make use of when they interpret the questions in the interview, and then I need to make sure that my understanding of the key concepts is the same as the respondent. To secure the validity, I evaluate the research questions and whether they are valid for the desired outcome, if the choice of methodology is suitable for answering the research questions, if the research design is justifiable for the methodology, if the sampling and data collection is appropriate and ultimately if the results and conclusions are valid for the context.

To prevent different interpretations and understandings of the concepts I asked the respondent to share their knowledge and beliefs first, and then I shared mine. In this way I could map their current knowledge and had the possibility to correct any misunderstandings or beliefs that were not in line the theory. Follow up questions were used to guide the adolescents to provide more clear and thoughtful answers. In this way the interview had a natural flow, and the respondent had the opportunity to ask if they needed clarifications to any of the questions. The main reason for choosing in-depth interviews was to better access adolescents' reflections and to get more truthful thoughts, not a specific answer.

As for the sampling method, it was collected from a conveniently available group of respondents. However, additional inputs were not necessary for the research and there were no requirements to be a part of the sample. Thus, the sample used in this research paper is relevant for my research questions and provide useful information.

## **4.0 Analysis and results**

This analysis is structured according to the interview template and will summarize the findings and underline the most interesting details. To present it as clearly as possible, the results will be presented according to the different themes in the template; general part, sport sponsorship, energy drink, and lastly energy drink and sport sponsorship combined. Since the respondents are anonymized, they will be referred to as respondent 1, 2, 3, {...},14.

#### 4.1 List of participants and general information

The table below demonstrates the age and gender of all the fourteen respondents, and it includes their designated number. Moreover, it illustrates whether the participant has an interest in sport and if they follow sport in media.

*Table 1*

<i>List of participants</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Do sports</i>	<i>Follow sport in media</i>	<i>Role model</i>
1	Female	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Female	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Female	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Female	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Female	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Female	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	Female	14	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Male	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Male	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
10	Male	14	Yes	Yes	No
11	Male	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	Male	17	Yes	Yes	Yes
13	Male	16	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	Male	17	Yes	Yes	Yes

By this information we can see that all of the respondents do sports themselves, in addition to follow sports through media. There were some differences in media preferences, but Instagram, TikTok and TV were the most frequently used.

Furthermore, all of the respondents, except respondent 10, reported that they had a role model/hero within sports, however their reasoning for why they admire the different sports athletes varies. The most frequently used argument was their success, in terms of good results. Secondly, the athletes had to be “down to earth”, humble and true to themselves, meaning that their success does not affect their attitude in a negative way.

Lastly, three of the respondents, number 2, 11 and 12, mentioned role models that they had a relationship to, someone they felt close to. In all three cases, the respondents were connected to the same sports team and had met and talked to the athletes in person.

#### **4.2 Sport sponsorship**

The first research question includes adolescents' drivers to accept or reject adopting sponsored products promoted through sport sponsorship. To map this phenomenon, I asked the respondents several questions regarding sports sponsorship to better understand the respondent's knowledge and beliefs on the topic, and their individual behaviors. Throughout the interviews it became clear that several participants responded similarly, and I could identify a pattern.

Many of the participants were somewhat aware of the concept and terms of sponsorship, however some differences were worth noting. Respondent 1 thought that they only received products, no payments. Respondent 3 on the other hand believed the opposite, that they receive payments and not products. This is an interesting finding considering the fact that companies use vast amounts of money on marketing efforts to reach adolescents (Lapierre, Fleming-Milici, Rozendaal, McAlister & Castonguay, 2017). If adolescents are not aware that the athletes are getting paid to promote the products, it could potentially influence how they evaluate the promotion and increase their acceptance and trust.

The table below illustrates the different drivers for why/why not the respondents buy products a sports athlete promotes, and the frequency of the mentioning of these drivers. The respondents referred to several of the different drives being both negative and positive. Meaning that the respondents evaluate the drivers on a scale, from low to high, and if the drivers have a high score, then they are more likely to buy it, and vice versa. This includes all the drivers except *perceived healthy* and *discount*.

**Table 2**

<b>Drivers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<i>Success</i>	8
<i>Identify themselves with the athlete/promotion</i>	8
<i>Trustworthiness</i>	6
<i>Perceived fit</i>	4
<i>Frequency of exposure</i>	3
<i>Product likability</i>	2
<i>Perceived popularity</i>	2
<i>Perceived healthy</i>	2
<i>Discount</i>	1

Respondent 14 stated: *“If the sports athlete is successful, I associate the person with a certain lifestyle, a healthy lifestyle, so I sometimes try products they recommend”*. Here the respondent both refer to the driver *success* and *perceived healthy*, hence, this respondent could potentially create a distorted perception and believe that products are healthier than they actually are and perceive them to play a certain role in the success of the athlete, in line with Philipson and Jones (2008) theory. In fact, respondent 1 stated: *“I bought Vitamin Well, a drink my role model promoted, as I believed it was a product she used to recover faster and to stay healthy”*.

Further on, the majority of the respondents, eight out of fourteen, report that the success of the athlete, is a significant factor in their decision making. Respondent 4 stated: *“Marcel Hirscher said that Atomic was an excellent ski brand and he used it himself, thus I tried Atomic and ended up skiing Atomic skis myself”*. Additionally, respondent 11 stated: *“I am more willing to buy the product if the sports athletes are successful. It might then be an advantage for me to use the same product”*. As a follow-up question I asked the respondent whether this includes all the products they promote, like energy drinks, and he replied *“Yes, I will say so”*.

Interestingly, *trustworthiness* and *identification* were repeatedly mentioned as drivers of importance. As previously mentioned, fan identification plays a significant role in

sponsorship and it does not only evoke the purchase intention, but it can also be translated into customer responses such as improving credibility, in other words, trustworthiness (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross & Maroco, 2013). Respondent 5 support this theory by stating: *“I have bought a lot of Phenix clothes because the national alpine team in Norway use it, and since I do alpine skiing myself, I wanted to use the same clothes. If they use the brand on a daily basis, I trust their promotions. Even if there are many other nice clothing brands used by international alpine teams, I do not think this would create the same experience”*. Furthermore, the theory states that there is a difference between *heroes* and *celebrities*, meaning that there is greater identification with a hero than with a celebrity (Shuart, 2007). Respondent 5 confirms this by stating: *“If it is a sports athlete promoting something, I am more likely to buy it as they have more trustworthiness, compared to an influencer”*.

Moreover, four respondents, R3, R7, R12 and R14, stressed the fact that perceived fit is crucial when sports athletes promote products. For instance, respondent 7 cited: *“I am more likely to buy the product if the product belongs to the sport the athlete practice. For example, a swimmer promoting a bathing suit is expected and fits into their image and everyday life as an athlete”*.

Further on, the respondents were asked to name any advertisement of a sport athlete promoting a product. Interestingly, the majority mentioned brands and products that play a significant role in, and were directly linked to, the sport they had an interest for and/or their role model. For instance, ski brands like Head and Rossignol in alpine and clothing brands like Adidas and Nike in football and golf. Respondent 11 mentioned several food supplements and beverage, and as a follow-up question I asked him if he experience it as common to be exposed to advertisements of food and drinks within sports and he replied: *“Yes, I actually do”*. In fact, twelve out of fourteen respondents mentioned products within the category food and beverage, such as Red Bull, Monster, Pepsi and Barilla. Whereas seven of them specifically mentioned energy drink brands. Respondent 4 stated: *“In alpine there is a lot of promotion for Red Bull in addition to ski brands. In downhill bicycling for example, Red Bull is highly visible as their logo is placed on signs all the way down the route”*. This is an interesting finding and it support a fact that that food and beverage companies have attempted to develop a



marketing presence at *all* levels of community and professional sport (Kelly, Baur, Bauman and King (2018).

Next, the respondents were asked if they have ever intentionally bought a product that their role model(s) promoted. The majority, ten out of fourteen, acknowledge that they have bought products due to exposure of advertising from their role models.

Respondent 13 stated: *“Yes, my role model Atle Lie McGrath, uses the brand Leki for protection in alpine, so I have used the same brand since I believe that is cool”*.

However, four respondents hesitated when they answered the question. Respondent 10 stated: *“It has probably had an effect, however I do not believe that I would have bought something just because an athlete promoted it”*. This could indicate that the respondents have bought products due to exposure of the brand in general, including the sports athlete, but not only as a direct result of the athletes’ promotions. For instance, respondent 1 cited: *“I bought Vitamin Well as I saw many of my peers consuming it and then my role model Ingeborg Løyning started promoting it, so then I thought – Well, there has to be something positive with this product”*.

Furthermore, I asked the respondents if they trust the promotion and recommendations sports athletes share, and whether they perceive it as genuine or not. According to theory, as mentioned previously, adolescents are particularly susceptible to convincing marketing messages as their cognitive development is relatively limited (Rozendaal, Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2010). Surprisingly, the respondents had a lot to share about their evaluation and a few reasons why/why not they trusted the promotion. In fact, none of the respondents said yes without stating some requirements to the athlete promoting, prior to trusting the message. Several respondents mentioned that the image of the athlete was very important, meaning that if the athlete had negative media coverage, that would affect their trust. For instance, respondent 3 stated: *“I am less susceptible to Therese Johaug’s promotions due to her doping case”*.

Moreover, respondent 1 stated: *“It depends on who it is. I believe that a lot of the popular and successful athletes receive a lot of offers, thus they choose more carefully who they engage with. In such cases I would trust the promotion more. However, if they*

*are not that successful or the sport does not get a lot of attention, they might then accept more shady brands just because it is seen as prestigious to have a sponsor”.*

To follow-up, I asked the participants whether or not they believe that the sports athletes use/consume all the products that they promote. If the sports athlete is being genuine in their advertisement, then they should in theory use the products themselves, not just in the media. From my participants perspective, the majority, twelve out of fourteen, do believe that the sports athletes use *some* of the products, however not everything. Respondent 2 stated: *“I do believe that sports athletes use most of it, however not everything. If I see them actually using it, then I believe that they are true consumers of the brand, but if it is only on social media then it might not be true”.* Moreover, R11 and R13, reports that they do believe that it is a matter of volume when it comes to food and beverages. For examples, when athletes promote Pepsi or Red Bull, they do consume it themselves, however not in line with the frequency of promotion.

However, respondent 4 states: *«No, I do not think they use/consume everything. A couple of years ago, the media revealed that Marcel Hircher had painted his skis to represent Atomic, but in fact, it was another brand actually producing the skis. This incident made me more skeptical to sports athlete’s promotions and I do not believe that they always use the products that they promote”.* Assumingly, the respondent had not been especially critical to the promotion from sports athletes in the past, however, after an incident in the media related to her role model and the ski brand he uses, she became more skeptical.

The interesting aspect is that even though both R10 and R14 have requirements to the trustworthiness of sports athlete’s promotion, they both believe that athletes use all the products. Respondent 10 cite: *“If it is a known sports athlete, sponsored by a famous brand, then I believe that they use everything”.* Suggesting that athletes only promote products they use personally. However, there are sports athletes who promotes products they seemingly use, but actually does it only for commercial purposes. Meaning that they are not being genuine in their recommendations. Thus, using the product, even if it is a famous brand, is not necessarily proof of trust.

In general, the respondents express that they have not given sponsorship agreements in relation to sports athletes much thought and it is not something they assess actively when they follow sport. Hence, they needed time to think and evaluate how to answer the questions. One potential issue would be that the respondents answered the questions as they perceived their answers to be beneficial to the research. They are however able to reflect when they are given the time to think, and even provide relevant and good examples to support their answers. Thus, I can assume that they are honest in their responses.

### 4.3 Energy drink

The main findings within this category seem to be the lack of knowledge amongst the adolescents, and the absence of trustworthy information and references. When being asked if they knew what energy drinks actually were, twelve out of fourteen said they knew. However, when being asked to elaborate, they all hesitated. For instance, respondent 3 stated “*Yes, it is a beverage that provides you with extra energy*”. Then, when being asked about the ingredients, the respondent stated, “*It contains sugar, but other than that I do not know*”. Several respondents also reported that they associated energy drinks with caffeine and its effect to increase the energy level. This supports the fact that adolescents have very superficial or absent knowledge about the ingredients, in line with previous research.

**Table 3**

<i>List of participants</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Consumed ED</i>	<i>Frequency ED units</i>
1	<i>Female</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0</i>
2	<i>Female</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>2x a month</i>
3	<i>Female</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0</i>
4	<i>Female</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>1x a week</i>
5	<i>Female</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>0</i>
6	<i>Female</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>0</i>
7	<i>Female</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>2x a month</i>

8	Male	16	Yes	2x a month
9	Male	17	Yes	2x a year
10	Male	14	Yes	8x a week
11	Male	15	Yes	5x a week
12	Male	17	Yes	5x a week
13	Male	16	Yes	3x a week
14	Male	17	Yes	5x a week

The table illustrates whether the different respondent have ever consumed energy drinks and if so, the frequency of their consumption in units. The majority, in total eleven out of fourteen respondents, reported that they had consumed energy drinks. However, the frequency of units consumed as an average varies a lot. Moreover, it is important to note that three respondents, 1, 3 and 6, reported that they have not consumed energy drinks, but that they had tasted a sip from a friend. As a follow-up question, I asked all the respondents whether they believe their consumption is above, equal or less than their peers, and *all* respondents reported that they consumed less. Respondent 5 stated: *“I would say that my peers consume 1-3 units a day on average”*. In addition, respondent 4 stated that *“in our classroom for instance, there are a couple of cans with energy drink on each desk”*.

An interesting finding is respondent 4’s reason for consuming less than average. She stated: *“I have always heard multiple adults say that they are addicted to coffee and if they do not consume at least one cup of coffee before work, then the whole day is ruined. As energy drinks contains caffeine, same as coffee, I am afraid to become addicted.”*

Interestingly, respondent 9 did report that he consumes energy drinks, however quite rarely. The reason for this is that he and a friend agreed on a bet- who could consume the most units of energy drinks during a month. Respondent 9 consumed 72 units and won. The competition has heavily affected his health, and he experience substantial side effects, only a sip today will result in tachycardia. In addition, respondent 8 and 10 reported that they had experienced mild side effects such as agitation and trouble falling asleep. Meaning that only three out of ten respondents who consume energy

drinks have experienced side effects, which contradicts the theory in the literature review reporting close to 50 percent. However, when the respondents were asked if they knew which side effects energy drinks could cause, the majority were not aware of many except the most severe, such as tachycardia. Thus, they might have experienced side effects without being aware of them and are not aware that energy drinks can cause the effects that they are experiencing.

Surprisingly, only two of the respondents, R1 and R7, have learnt about energy drinks and its effect on the human body, from a reliable source. Respondent 7 stated: *“I attended a seminar under the auspices of my sports team, where we learnt about having a healthy lifestyle as an athlete. and there they told us that it could be harmful to consume energy drinks before training”*. Respondent 1 attended the same seminar. The remaining respondents had only received information from friends and acquaintances. Some had heard from their parents and professors that they should not consume energy drinks, however, without any reasoning other than *“it is not good for you”*.

Respondent 1, 3 and 13 mention sports drink brands when they talk about energy drinks. As previously mentioned, sports drinks and energy drinks are distinctively different products and should not be mixed. However, not all adolescents seem to know the difference and thus often refer to them as the same product. Respondent 3 stated the following: *“My trainer has said that we should have an energy drink on the side of the pool during swimming session, and I do trust my trainer, so sometimes I bring an energy drink”*. The respondent was asked what brand and replied a brand belonging to the sports drink category. When being told that the brand was significantly different from an energy drink, she was shocked. This underlines the fact that they do hold sufficient knowledge about the products they consume.

Next, the respondents were asked about their understanding on how energy drinks effect the human body. From my respondent's perspective, the majority believe that it provides the body with more energy, however they all seem very hesitant when answering. For instance, respondent 4 asked *“Does the blood pump faster and make you more awake? At least that is what I have heard”*. Additionally, respondent 13 stated *“To be honest, I do not know, not something positive I guess”*.

When the respondents were asked if they thought there was a difference in effect on adolescents compared to adults, they were divided in opinions. As previously mentioned, adolescents most likely have not developed a tolerance to caffeine and the effects of consuming energy drinks might be even greater compared to adults (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). Respondents 10 and 12 acknowledge that adolescents are not used to the amount of caffeine, thus, the caffeine would have a stronger effect on adolescents. Respondent 1 stated: *“Adolescents will probably respond differently, adults are a lot bigger in body mass”*. In contrast, three respondents, R2, R4 and R11, did not believe that there was any difference.

The reason for my respondents not having clear opinions can be explained by the lack of knowledge. Thus, as a follow-up question I asked all the respondents if they thought adolescents should learn more about energy drinks and its effect on the human body. All the respondents replied yes, except respondent 6. In fact, respondent 14 stated *“We should learn more about how to maintain a healthy lifestyle in general, including food and drinks. The main reason for why we attend school is to learn and prepare for life, health is a huge part of it. I believe that adolescents consume a lot of products without knowing what they contain”*.

Further on, the respondents were asked to elaborate on why they consume energy drinks. Five respondents reported *increase energy level* and *taste* as the main reason. Respondent 10 stated *“If I feel tired or not physically prepared to what I am going to do, then I will consume an energy drink. For instance, it makes it easier to complete a training session”*. Additionally, respondent 4 cited *“If I am tired at school one day or have not slept very well, I might buy a Monster. For instance, yesterday I consumed one before the training session and I immediately felt more awake and ready”*. The interesting aspect is that even though the respondents state that they consume energy drinks to increase the energy level, no one believes that it enhances their performance, which contradicts Philipson and Jones (2008) findings. Moreover, respondent 13 shares that the main reason he consumes energy drink is the taste: *“The taste is fresh compared to regular soda, thus I choose energy drinks. However, I have become addicted and that might be the real reason”*.

**Table 4**

<b><i>Reasoning consumption</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency</i></b>
<i>Taste</i>	5
<i>Increase energy level</i>	5
<i>Availability</i>	2
<i>Addiction</i>	2

The second research question is related to whether sports sponsorship of energy drink prompt adolescents to drink more energy drink. When collecting and discovering the respondents reasoning for why the sales of energy drinks has increased each year among adolescents, I saw a clear pattern. Even though they reported several reasons, a few were repeatedly stated. As mentioned previously, trendsetters have a significant influence on their peers buying behavior (Clark, Martin & Bush, 2001; Zollo, 1995), which numerous of the respondents expressed in terms of the variables *perceived as cool*, *group mentality* and *role model*. All the categories embrace the fact that adolescents follow other individuals' behavior patterns. Respondent 7 states that in her class at school, they have competitions on who can manage to consume the most energy drinks, and the majority of students participate, as it is perceived to be cool.

**Table 5**

<b><i>Reasoning increased sales</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency</i></b>
<i>Perceived as cool</i>	8
<i>Visibility in media</i>	6
<i>Role model</i>	6
<i>Group mentality</i>	6
<i>Addiction</i>	3
<i>Increased product assortment</i>	3
<i>Curiosity</i>	3
<i>Become more accessible</i>	1

Moreover, six respondents reported that the visibility of energy drinks in media played a significant role. Respondent 4 stated, *“A lot of sports are sponsored by energy drink brands, thus it might affect the adolescents to perceive it as cool and influence them to consume it”*. In light of Boyland et al. (2012) research, this statement reinforces the fact that adolescents look up to and admire their hero and their promotions will affect and influence what they purchase and select.

Additionally, respondent 8 cited *“I believe that some adolescents drink energy drinks because it is frequently promoted in the media, and that the promotion through a sports athlete make consumers believe it is healthier than it is, helping them justify their consumption”*.

As a concluding remark, I have found both interesting and possibly contradicting findings. The fact that none of the respondents reported these reasons mentioned above, except *addiction*, as a reason for why they personally consume energy drinks, is surprising. When they talk about themselves, their reasoning is totally different from when they are asked to explain why their peers consume energy drinks, and the reason behind increasing sale of energy drinks.

#### **4.4 Energy drink with regards to sport sponsorship**

To further collect data to answer research question two, I created a category including questions about sport sponsorship in relation to energy drinks. Firstly, I started off by asking the respondents if they believe that sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle in general. According to Philipson and Jones (2008), a professional athlete practicing an active lifestyle will often be associated with a healthy lifestyle and could potentially create a distorted perception of unhealthy product, believing it is healthier than it is. Thus, it is beneficial to map adolescents' thoughts about sports athlete's lifestyle.

All fourteen respondents agreed and said that sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle. Respondent 13 cited: *«Yes, I believe so. Taking what I have learnt in school into consideration, sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle, at least when you compare them those who do not practice sport”*. Similarly, respondent 10 cited: *«Yes, I*



*believe so. From the look of it, sports athletes are strong and well trained, and to be successful they have to practice a healthy diet”.*

Interestingly, respondent 1 stated: *«I would say it varies between sports. They are all healthy, however, some are too extreme. Sports where weight is a central topic and maybe a criterion, I believe that they practice a dangerous lifestyle where they almost never eat, for instance ski jumping. On the other hand, you have swimmers who, from my perspective, eat all the time”.* Both respondent 2, 3 and 7 have similar perceptions and share almost the same examples.

Next, I asked the respondents if they believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks. A total of eight out of fourteen respondents said yes. Respondent 13 stated: *“I believe that the majority consume energy drinks once in a while, but within limits”.* As a follow-up question I asked what he meant with “within limits” and he replied: *“maybe 1-2 times a week”.* Also, respondent 3 and 14 stressed the fact that sports athletes do consume energy drinks, but in a positive way and not overconsumption. However, respondent 3 suggested five to seven times a week and respondent 14 referred to one can a day as moderate consumption.

On the other hand, the remaining six respondents were more skeptical. Respondent 6 was the only one saying that she did not believe that sports athletes consumed energy drinks, however her reasoning was: *“The taste is not that good, and it is mostly popular among adolescents, thus, I believe that they do not prefer consuming it”.* The other five (R1, R4, R5, R7 and R9) expressed that it varies from athlete to athlete, some do consume it and others do not. Respondents 1, 4 and 7 state that it is a matter of personal preferences, they choose beverages they like, if that is energy drinks or regular soda depends on each individual. Surprisingly, only respondent 5 and 9 mentioned the unhealthy aspect of energy drinks, and the fact that some athletes might not consume it based on that. For instance, respondent 5 stated: *“I do believe that some athletes, example Aksel Lund Svindal, only consume it in media for commercial purposes, like photo shoots. Other athletes, like free ski athletes, who do not necessarily need to be in extreme physical shape, can consume energy drinks on a more regular basis”.*

Further on, I asked all the respondents if they believe sports athletes who are sponsored by energy drink brand actually consume it. For obvious reasons, the eight respondents stating yes on the previous question, also replied yes to this question. In fact, respondent 8 cited: *“Yes, that is my impression and I really hope that they consume it when they promote the product”*. Similarly, the respondents who stated no to the previous question confirmed their statement - that it differs between the athletes and not everyone consume it despite the fact that they promote it. In line with respondent 5’s reasoning motioned above, respondent 9 stated: *“No, I do not believe that all sports athletes sponsored by energy brands actually consume the product outside the press zone or in marketing related settings”*. Moreover, respondent 1 underlined the fact that *if* the sport athletes sponsored by an energy drink brand actually consume it, then their heavy promotion is not in line with their level of consumption. Meaning that they consume less than advertised.

Since the majority of the respondents suppose that sports athletes do consume energy drinks and also believes that it provides the consumer with energy, I wanted to look into if adolescents expect it to have an influence on athlete’s performance. In spite of previous research stating that adolescents consume energy drinks with the intention to increase *physical performance* (Ehlers, Marakis, Lapmen & Hirsch-Ernst, 2019), *all* of the respondents said that they did not believe the products increased physical performance. This is interesting and to follow-up, I asked *why* they think sports athletes are sponsored by energy drink brands. The response from the participants was surprisingly similar and very interesting.

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**Table 6**

<b><i>Why sponsored by energy drinks brands</i></b>	<b><i>Frequency</i></b>
<i>Monetary incentives</i>	8
<i>Prestige/Status</i>	6
<i>Free products</i>	2

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Respondent 12 stated: *“The world today is dominated by money, and everything can be bought for the right amount, including promotion through sports athletes”*. Also,

respondent 7 stressed monetary incentives as a reason and stated the following: *“Sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle and a lot of consumers buy what they recommend, thus, the marketers are willing to pay a lot of money, which is attractive for the athletes”*.

Furthermore, respondent 10 stated: *“Solely due to the famousness of the brands. For instance, Red Bull are known to sponsor the best athletes, so if you are lucky enough to be sponsored, the athlete will say yes as it is viewed as status and confirmation of success”*. Interestingly, this suggests that the respondents do not believe that the product itself is an incentive, even though the respondent reported previously that he believes athletes consume all the products they are sponsored by, including energy drinks.

As a concluding remark, I have found interesting and contradicting findings underlining the fact that adolescents have very different perceptions within this category. The majority of the respondents do believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks, to different degrees, however they do not associate it with their physical performance. I therefore wonder why they believe it increases the energy level and makes it easier to complete a training session. As mentioned, the respondents used a lot of phrases like *“I have not put much thought into that”* and *“I do not know”*, throughout the interviews, indicating lack of knowledge. Hence, their replies might not be well thought through. However, some individuals state that it is a very interesting topic and that it should receive more attention. In fact, when the respondents realize their lack of knowledge within the field during the interview, several respondents stated that it should be included in lessons at school.

#### **4.5 Summary table of results**

In total there are a lot of interesting findings collected from the interviews. The table below summarizes the most important ones within each category.

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**Table 7****Important findings**

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**Sport sponsorship**

*Several respondents were unaware that sports athletes got paid for promoting products.*

*Top two reasons for buying products sports athletes promote: Success and identification with the athlete.*

*10/14 have intentionally bought products due to exposure of advertising from their role models.*

*Brands promoted by the respondent's role model are top of mind when mentioning sports advertising examples. 12/14 mentioned products within the category food and beverage. 7/12 specifically mentioned ED.*

*12/14 believe sports athletes use some sponsored products, but not everything.*

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**Energy drinks**

*Lack of knowledge about ED amongst the adolescents, and absence of trustworthy information and references.*

*More than 50% report consuming ED regularly. All respondents believe their consumption is below average compared to peers.*

*3/10 have experienced side effects. However, the majority did not know all the side effects, meaning that they could have experienced it without knowing ED was the cause.*

*Three respondents mention sports drink brands when talking about energy drinks, believing it is the same thing.*

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*Top two reasons for consuming ED: Taste and to increase energy level.*

*Contradicting findings between why the respondents consume ED themselves, and why they believe their peers consume it. Regarding peers: perceived as cool, media, group mentality, role model, was important factors.*

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*Energy drinks with regards to sport sponsorship*

*All respondents perceive sports athletes as healthy.*

*8/14 respondents believe sports athletes consume ED.*

*8/14 respondents believe that sports athletes sign agreements with ED brands due to monetary incentives. 6/14 due to prestige/status.*

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## **5.0 Discussion**

From the result part we can see that a lot of the response from the participants are in line with, and support, previous research. The majority of the adolescents confirms that they do buy products their role models promote and that unhealthy products do have a presence in sports advertisement. In fact, the category food and beverage are top of mind products associated with sports sponsorship promotion, which is concerning.

In general, all the respondents perceive sports athletes as healthy, and they trust the products sports athletes promote. Furthermore, based on the participants response we know that the top two factors for buying products a sports athlete promotes is their success and the fact that the adolescent identify themselves with the athlete. This implies that the adolescents value and evaluate the athlete's success and if they identify themselves with the athletes, they are prone to buy almost whatever they promote, including unhealthy products. In fact, perceived healthiness and product likability only

had a frequency of two each, meaning it is not a driver of importance to most of the respondents.

My sample of adolescents reveal that they are easily influenced to buy products their role models promote, regardless of healthiness and type of product. These two factors should probably have a more substantial effect, however adolescents are particularly susceptible to convincing marketing messages as their cognitive development is relatively limited. Meaning that these factors will not play a significant role until they get older. Arguably, these findings should be taken serious in terms of advertising through sports athletes and their sponsorship agreements. A role model should be aware of their power to influence adolescents to make unconsciously unhealthy decisions.

Moving on, when collecting data, there was a major difference in response from when the participants talked about his/her personal consumption behavior of energy drinks, compared to when they talked about their peers. The question was the same in both cases, however when the perspective shifted away from themselves the response was totally different. Personally, all the respondents consumed it due to the taste or to increase their energy level. However, they argued that their peers consumed as it is perceived cool, due to group mentality or influence by the media and role models. Additionally, all the respondents stated that they consumed less energy drinks than their peers. The fact that this is a pattern amongst all the participants raises questions. Why would not the same factors apply for them? And why does no one consume equal, or more than average compared to their peers? This phenomenon is complex and might be explained by several factors. It could be that the adolescents are not fully aware of their own consumption patterns or do not want to be totally honest.

From the interviews I understand that even though adolescents have little knowledge about energy drinks, the majority imagines that it might not be very healthy to consume energy drinks in large volumes. With this in mind, the respondents might be hesitant to reveal the real reason for why and how often they personally consume energy drinks. Admitting that your choices and preferences are influenced by others could be difficult or shameful, at least if they suspect it is associated to be a negative action. In this case, if the adolescents imagine that consuming energy drinks in large amounts is negative or

that they are not capable of taking their own independent decisions, they might adjust their answers thereafter. In this research project the answers changed dramatically when the perspective shifted, arguably, some of the respondents adjusted their own consumption behavior and patterns.

Another reason could be that the respondent initially tried to consume energy drinks due to influence by the media, peers or role models, however now they consume it of the reasons mentioned above. At some point someone needs to be a trendsetter and influence others to consume the product, otherwise it would not have become a success. However, trends and innovations are slowly and unconsciously implemented in the society. With this in mind, it does not necessarily mean that the adolescents are aware of them being influenced.

Further on, the findings from the interviews underline the lack of knowledge and reflection amongst the respondent about energy drinks in general. The interesting, yet alarming aspect, is that adolescents are willing to consume products without knowing the ingredients and how it affects their body. None of the respondents actually knew what energy drinks contained, and some even believed sports drinks and energy drinks were the same product. Despite it being distinctively different products, the common denominator is the sports athlete promoting the products and seemingly consuming it. In this case, the image and product characteristics of sports drink promotion can be transferred onto energy drinks and influence the acceptance or perception of the product. Since sports drinks does not contain the same ingredients, for instance caffeine, it is not viewed as a negative product for adolescents to consume. Further, the majority of the adolescents believe sports athletes do consume energy drinks, and that the products fulfill them with energy and makes it easier to complete a training session. Hence, when the sports athletes promote energy drinks it might mislead adolescents by influence their knowledge and perception.

Moreover, only three respondents reported that they had experienced side effect, but according to previous research 50% of adolescents have experienced it. Again, the lack of knowledge with regards to energy drinks could explain the low percentage experiencing side effects. Energy drinks can lead to multiple side effect, some more

severe than others. Thus, if the respondent does not hold the necessary information, they are not capable of answering the question accordingly.

Ultimately, the majority of the respondents reported that they believe sports athletes enter a sponsorship agreement with energy brands due to monetary incentives. However, not all of these respondents knew beforehand that sports athletes usually receive money when entering an agreement. To know that the respondents knew what I referred to when we talked about sport sponsorship, I provided them with the definition. Arguably, this have influenced some answers and a few respondents viewed the questions differently, making them more skeptical, than what they probably would have without that information.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Leveraging sports sponsorships has become an increasingly attractive marketing tactic as it has been proven to have a positive effect on the sponsoring brand. Sports athletes can increase the brand awareness, establish favorable attitudes towards the brand and increase purchase intentions (Carlson & Donovan, 2008). Through this research paper I have explored how sports sponsorship specifically affect adolescents' preferences and consumption behavior of energy drinks. One can conclude that despite being in an era of increased exposure to marketing efforts, information availability and increased focus on human health, adolescents showed lack of reflection and knowledge. However, the majority stressed that it would be beneficial to receive more information and raise awareness amongst adolescents.

Research question one was: *What drives the acceptance or rejection of adopting sponsored products promoted through sport sponsorship among adolescents?* It appears from the interviews that the answer is quite complex and to draw a single conclusion seems difficult. The respondents' state that success and identification are two important critical and drivers when adopting sponsored products. However, when changing the perspective away from the respondents' personal preferences to talk objectively about their peers, it changes. Buying products promoted by their role models is definitely a phenomenon, yet the specific drivers triggering that behavior, are



difficult to determine. My conclusion is that the success of, and identification with, the sport athlete are important drivers for product adoption. If the sports athlete is successful in their performance, the adolescents are more likely to buy the products they promote. Similarly, the respondents are more prone to buy products a sports athlete promotes if they can identify themselves with the athlete. Creating a relationship were the consumers attachment to the athlete results in developing favorable dispositions towards the sponsoring brand.

Research question two was: *Does sports sponsorship of energy drink prompt adolescents to drink more?* It is not possible to provide a clear and logical conclusion as adolescents mindsets are complex and it is not obvious that the respondents have shared honest answers. However, there is a clear pattern throughout the interviews that promotion through sponsorship agreements with sports athletes do influence adolescents' adaptation of products and most respondents do believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks. Additionally, the respondents confirm the fact that unhealthy products, including energy drinks, are top of mind products associated with sports athletes' promotion. Having said that, I can conclude that the promotion of energy drinks through sports athletes contributes to brand awareness amongst adolescents. However, it is difficult to conclude that adolescents are likely to consume more energy drink, even though high awareness increases the likelihood of purchase.

Ultimately, adolescents limited cognitive development is an important factor in this research paper, underlining the fact that adolescents do not reflect on their consumer behavior nor their consumption pattern on a regular basis. Thus, we can conclude with the fact that adolescents need to become more aware and learn more about the topic. This could for instance be done by including it as a part of the curriculum at school, by posting informative information on social media or implement regulations on food and beverage promotions.

## **7.0 Limitations and future research**

The current study is limited by utilizing a convenience sample in addition to interviewing few respondents. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalizable to a

broader population, however, the exploratory complexion can be made use of for future research. This study could potentially be used as secondary data in research with a larger sample of Norwegian adolescents, utilizing a quantitative methodology. Moreover, this could be useful in terms of investigating the necessity for more strict regulations of food and beverage marketing targeting young consumers.

Another limitation of this paper is the age of the respondents. The target was adolescents between 12 and 17 years of age however the youngest respondent in this research is 14 and the majority are either 16 or 17. Even though all respondents fulfil the criteria, it would have been beneficial to include even younger adolescents as this could contribute to a more representative result. Considering the fact that many of the respondent's state that the majority of young adolescents consume energy drinks due to the influence of others, including the media, it would have been interesting to collect data from the lower quartile of adolescents' age.

Furthermore, since I needed written consent from a parent before conducting the interviews with recordings, I had to provide some information about the objective of the research. Hence, the respondents knew the interviews were about energy drinks and sports sponsorship in advance. This might have influenced the adolescents to have energy drink brands "top of mind" when they were asked about sports sponsorship in general. For instance, as written in the result part, fifty percent of the participants mention energy drink brands when being asked to name any advertisement of a sport athlete promoting a product. However, many of the adolescents had sports athletes sponsored by energy drinks as their role models, it might not have made a significant difference to inform about the objective up front.

An approach for future research could be a causal research design, utilizing an experimental research design and conduct an experiment to investigate hypotheses. For instance, a survey-based experiment to see the effect of sports athlete's sponsorship agreement, where they promote a new energy drink brand. By introducing a new energy drink in two separate manipulations – one where the energy drink is promoted alone, and the other one with a very famous sports athlete, it will unconsciously trigger a behavior from the consumer. The respondents will be randomly assigned to the

different conditions. In this way it is possible to look into whether or not sponsorship of energy drinks through sports athletes will drive adolescents to accept or reject the product. Such research can be interesting for law enforcement purposes with regards to regulating marketing efforts towards adolescents. Additionally, in this way sports athletes can understand their power to influence adolescents' consumption behavior.

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## 9.0 Appendix

### 9.1 Template in-depth interview

#### In-depth interview

#### Master of Science in Strategic Marketing Management

This interview will be completed to obtain information for my master thesis in strategic marketing management. I will use this interview is to understand adolescents' knowledge about sports sponsorship agreements and consumption of energy drinks.

In order for the result to be as representative as possible, I want you to answer as honestly as possible. I will ask questions and encourage a discussion, further, you will have the opportunity to ask questions if there is a need for clarification. Prior to this in-depth interview, the participant has been informed that the participation is anonymous, and he / she has given his or her consent to record the conversation. The audio recordings will be deleted when the master thesis is finalized, 01.08.2022.

The interview will last for approximately 30-40 minutes. Before we start the interview, do you have any questions? Lastly, do you consent recording this interview?

#### General information:

Gender:

Age:

- Are you into sports, a sports fan?
  - o If so, which sports?
- Do you do sports yourself?
- Do you have any role models, heroes, within sports?
  - o Who?

**Sport sponsorship**

- Do you know what is a sponsor?
- Do you know anything about what sport sponsorship could be? You can say it in your own words.

Definition: A sponsorship is viewed as a two-way partnership between a brand and a person/organization being sponsored. The agreement involves supporting a sponsee by providing money or other resources of value to the sponsee. Sports sponsorship is an agreement between a brand and a sports athlete, in this case, a professional one.

- Can you name any advertisement of a sport person/athlete promoting a product? Which product and brand?
- Can you mention any known sport sponsors?
- Can you mention a brand who are sponsoring your sport hero(s)?
- Have you ever intentionally bought a product that your sport hero(s) have promoted? If so, why? When was the last time?
- What makes you buy or not buy a product a sports athlete promotes?
- Would you buy products from the brands that your sport hero(s) has a sponsorship agreement with? If so, why?
- Do you believe that the sport athlete use/consume all the products that they promote?
- Do you trust sport people in general? Or only for specific topics/advice?
- Do you trust the promotion and recommendations sports athletes share? That the promotion is genuine?
- Do you know why sports athletes are sponsored?
- Do you know that sports athletes get paid to promote products?

**Energy drink:**

- Do you know what energy drink is?
- What is your perception of energy drinks?
- Can you mention any known energy drink brands?
- Have you ever consumed energy drinks?
- How often do you drink energy drinks?

- Why do you consume energy drinks? And where have you learnt this information?
- How do you think energy drink effects the human body? Do you believe energy drinks have a positive or negative influence on the body?
- Have you ever consumed energy drinks to increase physical performance?
- Do you believe that energy drinks effects adolescents different than adults? If so, why?
- Do you know what it contains, ingredients?
- Have you ever experienced side effects of consuming energy drinks?
- The sales and consumption of energy drinks have increased tremendously among adolescents in a short period of time. In your opinion, why?

**Energy drink and sports athletes:**

- In your opinion, do you believe that sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle?
- Can you mention any athletes who are sponsored by energy drink brands?
- Do you believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks? And is there a difference in which sports the athletes' consumers energy drinks? If so, why?
- Do you believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks on a regularly basis? If so, why?
- Sports athletes who are sponsored by energy drink brands, do you think that they consume energy drink themselves?
- Do you think energy drinks have an influence on the sports athletes' achievements? If so, why?
- Why do you think sports athletes are sponsored by energy drink brands?

Ultimately, is there anything you want to add? If not, I would like to thank you for taking the time for this interview and your participation. Your participation is valuable for my research and the information will contribute to finalize my master thesis.

## **9.2 Statement of consent**

### **Statement of Consent - In-depth interview**

#### **Master of Science in Strategic Marketing Management**

##### **Objective:**

The objective of this research is to understand adolescents' knowledge about sports sponsorship agreements and consumption of energy drinks. The information collected will be anonymized and used in my master thesis. The conversation will be recorded only for the sake of producing a written transcript file of the issues covered throughout the interview. After a transcript is produced, the recording will be deleted, and respondents' profile will not be traceable anymore.

##### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

Luiss Guido Carli Business School, in Rome, Italy.

Supervisor: Professor, Marco Francesco Mazzú.

##### **What does your participation involve?**

I will utilize in-depth interviews to collect data. The information obtained during the interviews will be registered by audio recordings. The reason for this is to simplify the process of analyzing the information after the interviews and make the process of interviewing more seamless. The audio recordings will be deleted when the research paper, mater thesis, is finalized and graded.

If you choose to express your consent for your child to participate in the project, the interview will last for approximately 30-40 minutes. The participant will be asked questions about their knowledge about energy drinks, their consumption habits, their relationship to sport athletes, knowledge about sponsorship agreements and sports sponsorship.



**Your participation is voluntary.**

It is voluntary to participate in the research project. You will have the opportunity to redraw your consent at any time, without reasoning, and there will be no negative consequences. All the information about yourself and your child will be anonymized.

**Your privacy – how the information about yourself is stored and used.**

I will only use the information obtained for the purpose described in this paper. The information will be treated confidential and in line with privacy regulations.

The audio recordings will not be shared with outsiders, it will only be shared with me and the supervisor of the master thesis. The audio recordings will be transcribed into text shortly after the interview is completed and the recordings will be stored and archived with a code. The general information and perception obtained in the interview, including quotation, will be used in my master thesis and it will be published online. However, it will not be possible to identify the participants when the research project is finalized, they will be anonymized. Privat, personal information is not relevant information for this research paper and will not be asked for. There will be an oral exam, a defense of the master thesis. In this case, recordings could potentially be requested and shared with the panel of defense.

**What happens with the information obtained from the interview when the research project is finalized?**

All the audio recordings will be deleted when the research project is finalized  
01.08.2022.

**Your rights:**

As long as you can be identified in the material collected, you have the right to:

- Insight and access to the personal information registered about you.
- Have your personal information corrected.
- Have your personal information deleted.
- Be handed a copy of your personal information.

**Statement of consent**

I have received and understood the information about the research project: Master Thesis about sport sponsorship and energy drink, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions. I give my consent to:

- *participate in in-depth interview.*
- *provide information about myself.*
- *storage of audio recordings.*

I consent that the information I provide are used and stored until the research project is finalized, approximately 01.08.2022.

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(Signature by the participant, date)

**9.3 Example of transcript from an interview****Respondent 13****General information:**

Gender: Male

Age: 16

- Are you into sports, a sports fan?

- *Yes, I actually like all types of sports and everything that comes with it.*
- Do you do sports yourself?
  - *Yes, I go to an alpine gymnasium. Additionally, I play football besides alpine, a couple of days aside alpine. Sometimes it is a bit too busy, however I do not want to stop just yet. Otherwise, I do follow golf and football on TV. On social media it is mostly football and football players.*
- Do you have any role models, heroes, within sports?
  - *Yes, Atle Lie McGrath. He is humble, and that is a quality I like. That he is not cocky, that is something I value in a role model.*

### **Sport sponsorship**

- Do you know what is a sponsor?
  - *Probably that you get money for promoting products for a company. For instance, that you are use a ski brand and then receive money for it. Like promoting it in social media and show it off if you end 1., 2., or 3.*
- Can you name any advertisement of a sport person/athlete promoting a product? Which product and brand?
  - *Pepsi is fairly big, at least among football players. Then you have Red Bull within a lot of extreme sports. They sponsor Aksel Lund Svindal and Henrik Kristoffersen.*
- Can you mention a brand who are sponsoring your sport hero(s)?
  - *Atle is sponsored by Head. I have not really noticed anything else than his skiees, or wait, he is also sponsored by Leki as he skis with protection from them.*
- Have you ever intentionally bought a product that your sport hero(s) have promoted? If so, why? When was the last time?
  - *“Yes, my role model Atle Lie McGrath use the brand Leki for protection in alpine, and then I have used the same brand since I believe that is cool”.*
- What makes you buy or not buy a product a sports athlete promotes?

- *If the athlete uses the product, then you know it is quality and it looks good. If they use it in World Cup, then you know it will work for you as well, it makes it trustworthy.*
- Would you buy products from the brands that your sport hero(s) has a sponsorship agreement with? If so, why?
  - *Yes, as it looks cool and I want to have the same as the, and if they use it then it is a confirmation that the product is good.*
- Do you believe that the sport athlete use/consume all the products that they promote?
  - *Maybe not everything, but when they use the products, it makes it more trustworthy. Given that they receive money, they might say yes to because it is a huge brand, prestige or because of the money involved.*
- Do you trust sport people in general? Or only for specific topics/advice?
  - See what is written below, answer both questions in one.
- Do you trust the promotion and recommendations sports athletes share? That the promotion is genuine?
  - *Yes, I do. At least if the athlete is professional and I perceive them as my role model.*
- Do you know why sports athletes are sponsored?
  - *Because they receive money from it, simple as that.*

### **Energy drink:**

- Do you know what energy drink is?
  - *It is a beverage that contains caffeine and other supplements that provides you with energy.*
- What is your perception of energy drinks?
  - *I have learnt it is not so smart to consume energy drinks before you go to bed and that it gives you energy fast, but it will disappear fairly quickly. It will increase*
- Can you mention any known energy drink brands?
  - *Red Bull, Monster, Brun*
- Have you ever consumed energy drinks?

- *Yes.*
- How often do you drink energy drinks?
  - *Often, Three times a week approximately.*
- Why do you consume energy drinks? And where have you learnt this information?
  - *The taste is fresh compared to regular soda, thus I choose energy drinks. However, I have become addicted and that might be the real reason. in the beginning and then decrease after a short period of time. The little information I have learnt about energy drinks is in class at school and then my dentist has mentioned that it is not good for my teeth's.*
- How do you think energy drink effects the human body? Do you believe energy drinks have a positive or negative influence on the body?
  - *To be honest, I do not know, not something positive I guess.*
- Have you ever consumed energy drinks to increase physical performance?
  - *No, not specifically to increase physical performance, however, I do consume it to increase the energy level if I am feeling tired before training.*
- Do you believe that energy drinks effects adolescents different than adults? If so, why?
  - *That was a difficult question. I am not sure. Maybe that the brain of adolescents are still in a phase where it develops compared to adults, meaning that i might affect the development.*
- Do you know what it contains, ingredients?
  - *No, not really. Caffeine.*
- Have you ever experienced side effects of consuming energy drinks?
  - *No, but I have a buddy of mine how has experienced higher heart rate. The doctor said the consumption of energy drink was the reason, however, he consumed a lot over a longer period of time.*
- The sales and consumption of energy drinks have increased tremendously among adolescents in a short period of time. In your opinion, why?

- *I believe it is influenced by several factors. My guess is that it has become more available. Next, I believe that if five adolescents go to the same store together and three of them buys energy drinks, then the other two will buy as well, so that they can try it out. Like a group thing. The other two might feel pressured in some way to try it since everyone else consumes it.*

### **Energy drink and sports athletes:**

- In your opinion, do you believe that sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle?
  - *Yes, I believe so. Taking what I have learnt in school into consideration, sports athletes represent a healthy lifestyle, at least when you compare them those who do not practice sport.*
- Can you mention any athletes who are sponsored by energy drink brands?
  - Mentioned earlier in the interview: Aksel Lund Svindal and Henrik Kristoffersen.
- Do you believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks? And is there a difference in which sports the athletes' consumers energy drinks? If so, why?
  - *"I believe that the majority consume energy drinks once in a while, but within limits".*
  - Follow-up question what does "within limits" mean?:
    - *Maybe 1-2 times a week.*
  - *I have no opinion if there exists any difference between types of sports, however, I have noticed that those who are sponsored by energy drinks as extremely famous sports athletes. I believe that energy drink brands are the ones how sponsor the most sports athletes and that the reason for this is the prestige that comes with it. Now athletes accepts an agreement because there are so many big stars are sponsored already.*
- Sports athletes who are sponsored by energy drink brands, do you think that they consume energy drink themselves?

- *Yes, I believe so.*
- Do you think energy drinks have an influence on the sports athletes' achievements? If so, why?
  - *No, but I believe that they consume it for the same reason as I do, before training if they are tired.*
- Why do you think sports athletes are sponsored by energy drink brands?
  - *Because of the money, and the prestige that comes with it.*

## 10. Summary of the thesis

### 10.1 Introduction

In a report from 2018, the total global sponsorship spending reached \$65.88, an increase of 4,9% from the year before, 2017 (International Events Group-IEG, 2018). In the same report, four out of ten sponsors stated that they would increase their budgets for activation spending and 47% reported that they will spend the same amount. Consumers are more accepting to sponsorship as it is perceived as an indirect and more subtle approach, resulting in a less obvious commercial goal, which leads to the effect of reducing the consumers defense mechanisms (Meenaghan, 2001).

Over the last couple of decades, sponsorships have become an important marketing tool, especially the sponsorships within sport. It is one of the fastest growing promotional activities for businesses worldwide, and it has proven to have positive effects on the sponsoring brand (International Events Group-IEG, 2018). Sports is followed all around the world and generate an immense amount of money and it is an important source of income for professional sporting organizations (Nufer & Bühler, 2011). In 2020, the revenue from sports sponsorship worldwide was 57 billion U.S dollars, and the market size is predicted to grow to 89.6 billion U.S dollars in 2027, an increase of 6.72% (Gough, 2021). Furthermore, spending on sport sponsorship in the U.S in 2019 reached 14.7 billion U.S, and significant spending is also happening in both Europe and Asia (Gough, 2019).

Within sports sponsorship, energy drink brands are highly visible. Red Bull and Monster are the top two most popular energy drink brands world-wide, jointly accounting for 82% of the market share (Green Seed, 2022). Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the energy drink market has continued to thrive and increase in sales. In 2020, energy drink sales reached \$57.4 billions, an increase of almost \$4.4 billion in only 2 years, 2018-2020 (Green Seed, 2022). Furthermore, it is expected to continue to grow in the future and within 2026 is estimated to reach a value of \$86.01 billions (Green Seed, 2022). From 2015 to 2020, the number of liters in millions has increased from 19 to 55 in the Norwegian market, which is an increase of 190 percent (Forbrukerradet, 2020 A). Furthermore, research show that there is a growing trend among younger consumers (Forbrukerradet, 2020 A), in fact, children and adolescents are estimated to be the major consumers of energy drinks (Degirmenci, Fossum, Strand, Vaktskjold & Holten-Andersen, 2018). Forbrukerradet (2020 A) revealed that one out of four children in the age of 10-12 years states that they consume energy drinks every week in Norway.

## **10.2 Literature review**

The use of role models is a common strategy adopted by companies to change the behavior of the consumer (Kotler, Roberto & Lee, 2002). According to Warhurst (2011), role models have the power to influence young people to follow their behavior and patterns. In an experiment performed by Breuer, Dallmeyer, Rumpf and Orłowski (2021) there was a positive effect of sponsorship stimuli on the participants choice of brand, underlining the fact that consumers behavior can be changed due to sponsored activities.

Sports settings are universally acknowledged as an opportunity to promote products as sports athletes have countless fans (Sartori, Stoneham & Edmunds, 2018). Fan identification plays a significant role in the area of sponsorship and a fans attachment to a sponsee can result in developing favorable dispositions towards sponsors (Biscaia, Correia, Rosado, Ross & Maroco, 2013). If the consumer has a high fan identification with the sponsee the purchase intention to buy the sponsored product is high (Wang, Jain, Cheng & Aung, 2012). Moreover, it does not only evoke purchase intention, but it



can also be translated into customer responses such as improving credibility and attitude toward the sponsor, which is beneficial to the company.

It is important to create a symbolic link between the sponsor and the sponsee in order to legitimize their role as a sponsor and create a relationship with the fan (Farrelly, Quester & Greyser, 2005). In other words, sponsors should choose properties with which they can establish association that is meaningful to consumers and assist in adding authenticity to the brand (Farrelly, Quester & Greyser, 2005). Sport sponsorship investments are characterized by products related to sports (Melovic, Rogic, Smolovis, Dudic & Gregus, 2019). For instance, sports equipment, food and beverage, as this can be associated as a part of their success and achievements.

Sport settings are globally seen as an opportunity to encourage and promote healthy behavior (Sartori, Stoneham & Edmunds, 2018). However, there is evidence that role models are not always positive, and they can be seen to promote negative social images, beliefs, and behaviors (Payne, Reynolds, Brown & Fleming, 2003). Businesses are willing to utilize the positive influence sports heroes have, and promote unhealthy products to achieve positive outcomes, e.g increased awareness and branding, attitude, and revenue. To businesses, adolescents are viewed as integral as they represent the next generation of consumers and an increasingly important group in terms of buying behavior (Clark, Martin & Bush, 2001). Each year, companies spend vast amounts of money on marketing efforts to reach adolescents as this segment spend billions on their own purchases (Lapierre, Fleming-Milici, Rozendaal, McAlister & Castonguay, 2017).

Sport heroes are especially appealing to adolescents as they are in a phase of life where they need to establish their own identity (Dixon, Scully, Niven, Kelly, Chapman, Donovan, Martin, Baur, Crawford & Wakefield, 2013). During the process of developing and forming an identity, adolescents will take more risks, experience novel behaviors and they often feel invulnerable, which ultimately may impair their ability to recognize the negative effects consuming energy drinks on a regular basis (Laghi, Liga, Baumgartner & Baiocco, 2012). Based on this, Bunting, Baggett and Grigor (2013) suggested that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to marketing strategies that promotes energy drinks due to their physical developmental process. In 2020, the

revenue from sports sponsorship worldwide was 57 billion U.S dollars, and the market size is predicted to grow to 89.6 billion U.S dollars in 2027, an increase of 6.72% (Gough, 2021). Meaning that their ability to recognize the selling techniques and persuasive is low. In other words, adolescents do not necessarily understand whether the products a sports athlete promotes is a product that they actually consume themselves or if they are promoting the product for other incentives, e.g monetary incentives.

There have been longstanding public concerns about the potential effects of promoting unhealthy products (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006). Sponsorship of food is an important and frequently used promotional channel, and food marketing influences nutrition knowledge, preferences, purchase and consumption patterns (Cairns, Angus & Hastings, 2009). Research shows that adolescents brand preferences can be shaped early, and they can develop loyal buying behavior and patterns that will continue throughout their adult lives (Moschis, 1985). Additionally, they are considered trendsetters that have significant influence on their peers and parents buying behavior (Clark, Martin & Bush, 2001; Zollo, 1995).

A professional athlete promoting unhealthy products will send mixed messages as they on one hand promote physical activity at the same time as they encourage consumption of unhealthy products potentially leading to negative health outcomes (Bragg et al., 2017). This could potentially create a distorted perception and adolescents could be led to believe that the products are healthier than they in reality are, given that the promotion is associated with sports (Philipson & Jones, 2008). A systematic review evaluated 14 studies that examined food environments in sports settings and concluded that sponsorship of sports was dominated by unhealthy products (Carter, Edwards, Signal & Hoek, 2012). In fact, one study showed that a majority of adolescents were aware of the companies that sponsored their favorite sports team, and 15% correctly named one or more food and beverage company sponsors (Kelly, Baur, Bauman, King, Chapman & Smith, 2011).

As a part of the beverage market, energy drink promotes their brand to adolescents as a product that will allow them to keep up with extreme sports and a busy everyday life

(Bryant Ludden & Wolfson, 2010). For instance, marketing strategies promotes a boost in energy, enhanced concentration, mental alertness, and decreased fatigue (Schneider & Benjamin, 2011). Adolescents may respond to these messages. In fact, previous research shows that adolescent's motivation to consume energy drink is; the taste, the stimulating effect, the intention to increase *physical performance*, but often also pertains to marketing-related attributes such as the brand design or the *influence of the celebrities* who advertise them (Ehlers, Marakis, Lapmen & Hirsch-Ernst, 2019).

An analysis conducted by Nowak and Jasionowski (2015) revealed that 67% of adolescents consumed energy drinks and that those who practiced sports were even more willing to consume energy drinks. Moreover, most of the respondents reported that they consumed one energy drink every day, and some individuals even more. Despite this, research revealed that adolescents have very superficial or absent knowledge about the ingredients (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). Moreover, they are not aware of the proper usage of such products.

Energy drinks are a mixture of several chemical substances which interact with each other. Due to the high levels of caffeine and sugar in combination with minerals, vitamins, amino acids, and herbal supplements, there is a concern that these energy drinks potentially cause negative side effects on consumers' health (Seifert, Schaechter, Hershorin & Lipshultz, 2011). Numerous reports of the unfortunate effects of energy drink consumption have described a variety of symptoms and affected organ systems, including tachycardia, hypertension, confusion, agitation, seizures, liver damage, kidney failure and cardiac dysfunction, with potential deadly outcomes (Degirmenci, Fossum, Strand, Vaktkjold & Holten-Andersen, 2018). As adolescents most likely have not developed a tolerance to caffeine and the fact that they are undergoing rapid growth, the effects of consuming energy drinks might be even greater compared to adults (Costa, Hayley and Miller, 2014). Young people consuming energy drinks every day are potentially risking an overdose of caffeine (Nowak & Jasionowski, 2015).

To date, much research has explored the effect of food marketing in general on children and somewhat adolescents. In 2019, Dixon, Lee and Schully were unable to identify

any published research and evidence between unhealthy food sponsorship and adolescents. Considering the increased popularity of energy drinks among young people all over the world, and the health risks caused by excessive consumption, it should be worthwhile to conduct research within this field. There is a lack of evidence isolating the effect of sports marketing promoting energy drinks on adolescents. More specifically, how the sports marketing of energy drinks affects the perception of adolescent's beliefs about the healthiness of consuming it, and whether they understand the health risks.

In Norway there are only government statutory regulations related to promotion of alcohol and tobacco, while there are only limited regulations of food marketing targeting young people. However, the restricting regulations on food and beverage promotions do not apply to adolescents. This is despite the fact that it is proven that they are influenced by marketing appeals, potentially resulting in a significant impact to adolescents' health. Knowing that the need for increased knowledge concerning the effect of marketing towards adolescents, especially in terms of sports marketing, this paper is guided by the following research questions:

*RQ 1: What drives the acceptance or rejection of adopting sponsored products promoted through sport sponsorship among adolescents?*

*RQ 2: Does sports sponsorship of energy drink prompt adolescents to drink more?*

### **10.3 Methodology**

In order to research this field, I will utilize an exploratory research design to obtain insight and knowledge about the addressed issues. The scope of the topics could potentially be difficult to capture with prefixed answers as the primary data is qualitative by nature. Thus, I will take advantage of in-depth interviews to explore the depth of the subject.

The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews as it has been proven to be a versatile and flexible method (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016). This

will make it possible for the interviewer to combine a set of predetermined questions and improvise follow-up questions during the interview, depending on the response from the participant. Before the interviews were conducted, an interview template covering the main topics was designed (Appendix 9.1). This created a structured framework without strict limits, providing the participant a guidance of the topics and at the same time ensuring similar information is collected from all participants.

In this research project I have decided to focus on Norwegian adolescents, between the age of 12 and 17. Further, the sample will equally represent both genders, 50/50 male and female. I have chosen to utilize a convenience sampling, due to the advantage of having access to several adolescents fulfilling the control characteristics. The sampling method entails recruiting participants close to the interviewer, in this case asking friends to recruit acquaintances. I decided to conduct at least ten interviews and continue until saturation. This resulted in 14 interviews in total, seven males and seven females.

To simplify the interviewing process and to create a natural flow in the conversation, all the interviews were recorded. This enables the interviewer to fully concentrate and listen to the participant, without having to take notes and potentially miss out on valuable information. In order to do this legally, I had to inform the participant in advance and clarify that they gave their consent. Since I am interviewing adolescents under eighteen, I had to obtain a signature from their parents. Thus, I made a consent form (appendix 9.2) explaining the purpose of the research project, how the recordings were going to be stored and when it would be deleted.

#### **10.4 Results**

In total there are a lot of interesting findings collected from the interviews. The table below summarize the most important ones within each category.

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***Table 7***

***Important findings***

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*Sport sponsorship*      *Several respondents were unaware that sports athletes got paid for promoting products.*

*Top two reasons for buying products sports athletes promote: Success and identification with the athlete.*

*10/14 have intentionally bought products due to exposure of advertising from their role models.*

*Brands promoted by the respondent's role model are top of mind when mentioning sports advertising examples. 12/14 mentioned products within the category food and beverage. 7/12 specifically mentioned ED.*

*12/14 believe sports athletes use some sponsored products, but not everything.*

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*Energy drinks*      *Lack of knowledge about ED amongst the adolescents, and absence of trustworthy information and references.*

*More than 50% report consuming ED regularly. All respondents believe their consumption is below average compared to peers.*

*3/10 have experienced side effects. However, the majority did not know all the side effects, meaning that they could have experienced it without knowing ED was the cause.*

*Three respondents mention sports drink brands when talking about energy drinks, believing it is the same thing.*

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*Top two reasons for consuming ED: Taste and to increase energy level.*

*Contradicting findings between why the respondents consume ED themselves, and why they believe their peers consume it. Regarding peers: perceived as cool, media, group mentality, role model, was important factors.*

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*Energy drinks with regards to sport sponsorship*

*All respondents perceive sports athletes as healthy.*

*8/14 respondents believe sports athletes consume ED.*

*8/14 respondents believe that sports athletes sign agreements with ED brands due to monetary incentives. 6/14 due to prestige/status.*

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## **10.5 Discussion**

From the result part we can see that a lot of the response from the participants are in line with, and support, previous research. The majority of the adolescents confirms that they do buy products their role models promote and that unhealthy products do have a presence in sports advertisement. In fact, the category food and beverage are top of mind products associated with sports sponsorship promotion, which is concerning.

In general, all the respondents perceive sports athletes as healthy, and they trust the products sports athletes promote. Furthermore, based on the participants response we know that the top two factors for buying products a sports athlete promotes is their success and the fact that the adolescent identify themselves with the athlete. This implies that the adolescents value and evaluate the athlete's success and if they identify themselves with the athletes, they are prone to buy almost whatever they promote, including unhealthy products. In fact, perceived healthiness and product likability only had a frequency of two each, meaning it is not a driver of importance to most of the respondents.

My sample of adolescents reveal that they are easily influenced to buy products their role models promote, regardless of healthiness and type of product. These two factors should probably have a more substantial effect, however adolescents are particularly susceptible to convincing marketing messages as their cognitive development is relatively limited. Meaning that these factors will not play a significant role until they get older. Arguably, these findings should be taken serious in terms of advertising through sports athletes and their sponsorship agreements. A role model should be aware of their power to influence adolescents to make unconsciously unhealthy decisions.

Moving on, when collecting data, there was a major difference in response from when the participants talked about his/her personal consumption behavior of energy drinks, compared to when they talked about their peers. The question was the same in both cases, however when the perspective shifted away from themselves the response was totally different. Personally, all the respondents consumed it due to the taste or to increase their energy level. However, they argued that their peers consumed as it is perceived cool, due to group mentality or influence by the media and role models. Additionally, all the respondents stated that they consumed less energy drinks than their peers. The fact that this is a pattern amongst all the participants raises questions. Why would not the same factors apply for them? And why does no one consume equal, or more than average compared to their peers? This phenomenon is complex and might be explained by several factors. It could be that the adolescents are not fully aware of their own consumption patterns or do not want to be totally honest.

From the interviews I understand that even though adolescents have little knowledge about energy drinks, the majority imagines that it might not be very healthy to consume energy drinks in large volumes. With this in mind, the respondents might be hesitant to reveal the real reason for why and how often they personally consume energy drinks. Admitting that your choices and preferences are influenced by others could be difficult or shameful, at least if they suspect it is associated to be a negative action. In this case, if the adolescents imagine that consuming energy drinks in large amounts is negative or that they are not capable of taking their own independent decisions, they might adjust their answers thereafter. In this research project the answers changed dramatically



when the perspective shifted, arguably, some of the respondents adjusted their own consumption behavior and patterns.

Another reason could be that the respondent initially tried to consume energy drinks due to influence by the media, peers or role models, however now they consume it of the reasons mentioned above. At some point someone needs to be a trendsetter and influence others to consume the product, otherwise it would not have become a success. However, trends and innovations are slowly and unconsciously implemented in the society. With this in mind, it does not necessarily mean that the adolescents are aware of them being influenced.

Further on, the findings from the interviews underline the lack of knowledge and reflection amongst the respondent about energy drinks in general. The interesting, yet alarming aspect, is that adolescents are willing to consume products without knowing the ingredients and how it affects their body. None of the respondents actually knew what energy drinks contained, and some even believed sports drinks and energy drinks were the same product. Despite it being distinctively different products, the common denominator is the sports athlete promoting the products and seemingly consuming it. In this case, the image and product characteristics of sports drink promotion can be transferred onto energy drinks and influence the acceptance or perception of the product. Since sports drinks does not contain the same ingredients, for instance caffeine, it is not viewed as a negative product for adolescents to consume. Further, the majority of the adolescents believe sports athletes do consume energy drinks, and that the products fulfill them with energy and makes it easier to complete a training session. Hence, when the sports athletes promote energy drinks it might mislead adolescents by influence their knowledge and perception.

Moreover, only three respondents reported that they had experienced side effect, but according to previous research 50% of adolescents have experienced it. Again, the lack of knowledge with regards to energy drinks could explain the low percentage experiencing side effects. Energy drinks can lead to multiple side effect, some more severe than others. Thus, if the respondent does not hold the necessary information, they are not capable of answering the question accordingly.

Ultimately, the majority of the respondents reported that they believe sports athletes enter a sponsorship agreement with energy brands due to monetary incentives. However, not all of these respondents knew beforehand that sports athletes usually receive money when entering an agreement. To know that the respondents knew what I referred to when we talked about sport sponsorship, I provided them with the definition. Arguably, this have influenced some answers and a few respondents viewed the questions differently, making them more skeptical, than what they probably would have without that information.

### **10.6 Conclusion**

Leveraging sports sponsorships has become an increasingly attractive marketing tactic as it has been proven to have a positive effect on the sponsoring brand. Sports athletes can increase the brand awareness, establish favorable attitudes towards the brand and increase purchase intentions (Carlson & Donovan, 2008). Through this research paper I have explored how sports sponsorship specifically affect adolescents' preferences and consumption behavior of energy drinks. One can conclude that despite being in an era of increased exposure to marketing efforts, information availability and increased focus on human health, adolescents showed lack of reflection and knowledge. However, the majority stressed that it would be beneficial to receive more information and raise awareness amongst adolescents.

Research question one was: *What drives the acceptance or rejection of adopting sponsored products promoted through sport sponsorship among adolescents?* It appears from the interviews that the answer is quite complex and to draw a single conclusion seems difficult. The respondents' state that success and identification are two important critical and drivers when adopting sponsored products. However, when changing the perspective away from the respondents' personal preferences to talk objectively about their peers, it changes. Buying products promoted by their role models is definitely a phenomenon, yet the specific drivers triggering that behavior, are difficult to determine. My conclusion is that the success of, and identification with, the sport athlete are important drivers for product adoption. If the sports athlete is

successful in their performance, the adolescents are more likely to buy the products they promote. Similarly, the respondents are more prone to buy products a sports athlete promotes if they can identify themselves with the athlete. Creating a relationship where the consumers' attachment to the athlete results in developing favorable dispositions towards the sponsoring brand.

Research question two was: *Does sports sponsorship of energy drink prompt adolescents to drink more?* It is not possible to provide a clear and logical conclusion as adolescents' mindsets are complex and it is not obvious that the respondents have shared honest answers. However, there is a clear pattern throughout the interviews that promotion through sponsorship agreements with sports athletes do influence adolescents' adaptation of products and most respondents do believe that sports athletes consume energy drinks. Additionally, the respondents confirm the fact that unhealthy products, including energy drinks, are top of mind products associated with sports athletes' promotion. Having said that, I can conclude that the promotion of energy drinks through sports athletes contributes to brand awareness amongst adolescents. However, it is difficult to conclude that adolescents are likely to consume more energy drink, even though high awareness increases the likelihood of purchase.

Ultimately, adolescents' limited cognitive development is an important factor in this research paper, underlining the fact that adolescents do not reflect on their consumer behavior nor their consumption pattern on a regular basis. Thus, we can conclude with the fact that adolescents need to become more aware and learn more about the topic. This could for instance be done by including it as a part of the curriculum at school, by posting informative information on social media or implement regulations on food and beverage promotions.