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Master Thesis

Cross-controversial athlete sponsorships: How controversiality of the brand or the athlete affect consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship and brand image.

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Master of Science in Strategic Marketing Management
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Oslo, July 1st, 2020

Sincerely,
Marte Stensrud Skui & Katharina Søhus Elnæs.

Summary

Sponsorship agreements have been a frequently used strategy employed by many companies as a marketing communication tactic for a long period of time. There exists an enormous amount of research on the topic, primarily focusing on how the sponsoring brand is affected by the sponsored object. However, little research has been done on cross-controversial sponsorship agreements, where either the brand or the athlete is controversial. Therefore, this thesis investigates how consumers' attitudes toward both the sponsorship and the brand are affected by such cross-controversial sponsorships. In order to do so, we conducted a 2 x 2 factorial between-subjects experimental design, using two brands (controversial: Red Bull, non-controversial: Møllers Tran) and two athletes (controversial: Henrik Kristoffersen, non-controversial: Kjetil Jansrud).

Our findings show that cross-controversial sponsorships differ depending on whether the athlete or the brand is the controversial partner. Furthermore, our findings show that managers of non-controversial brands should avoid engaging in cross-controversial sponsorships, as this can lead to consumers' attitudes toward the brand being negatively affected. However, our findings also revealed that high self-brand connection positively influences consumers' attitudes toward the brand, implying that brands with strong connections to their consumers face lower risks when engaging in cross-controversial sponsorship compared to brands with weak connections to their consumers. In addition, consumers' perceived fit of the sponsorship does not differ between non-controversial, controversial and cross-controversial sponsorships. This implies that consumers' perceived fit between the athlete and the brand are not necessarily dependent on each partner's level of controversiality

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1.0 Introduction

In January 2013, the former professional road racing cyclist, Lance Armstrong, admitted that he had been using banned performance-enhancing drugs during most of his career (Fotheringham, 2015). This event lead to Armstrong's seven Tour de France victories being stripped, in addition to his main sponsors, Nike, Oakley and Anheuser-Busch, cutting ties with him. The incident has been debated worldwide, and Lance Armstrong is still known as one of history's most controversial athletes. In this particular case, Nike, Oakley and Anheuser-Busch distanced themselves from Armstrong's controversial behavior, in order to maintain their brand image. This incident highlights the risk brands face when engaging in sponsorships with athletes, especially in light of controversial events.

Sponsoring of athletes is a frequently used marketing communication tactic among brands (Peluso, Rizzo & Pino, 2019), and usually accounts for a substantial amount of marketing budgets. Only in North America, more than 16 billion U.S. dollars were allocated to sports sponsorships in 2017, and substantial sponsorship spending are also present in Europe and Asia (Gough, 2019). Throughout the thesis, we interpret sponsorship between a brand and a sponsored object as a cooperation where the brand provides financial support and/or free products in order to benefit from the sponsored object's personal and professional qualities for the purpose of promoting the brand.

The rationale behind using a sponsorship strategy is to build brand equity through leveraging secondary associations to the brand (Keller, 2013). For example, a famous athlete can draw attention to the brand and shape the perceptions of the brand, by virtue of the inferences that consumers make based on the knowledge they have about the athlete. The ultimate goal is that the athlete's fans will become fans of the brand as a result of the sponsorship agreement. As a result of sponsorships often being capital-intensive, it is of great importance that the sponsorship is optimized and in line with both the brands' and the athletes' objectives (Keller, 2013).

In the case of Lance Armstrong, controversial behavior had serious consequences for his sponsorship agreements. But what constitutes as controversial behavior? What can be perceived as controversial depends on the context in which the term is being used and is often subjective, making it difficult to agree on a common interpretation of the term. According to Kuypers (2002), controversial issues are, by their nature, unsolvable to everyone's satisfaction as they are debatable. Nevertheless, the term controversial is often used about something that is disputed or repeatedly argued about, that often deviates from what is expected. For example, in sponsorship agreements, alcohol and tobacco companies, betting companies, unhealthy food and beverage companies, and oil companies are often perceived as controversial (Peluso, Rizzo & Pino, 2019).

Nevertheless, within a sponsorship, both the brand and the athlete can be perceived as controversial depending on their behavior. A behavior is controversial if it deviates from common expectations and beliefs, often known as social norms. As an example, if an athlete or a brand engages in activities that are out of character, it can be perceived as controversial. A sponsorship can be defined as either controversial, non-controversial or cross-controversial. A cross-controversial sponsorship is recognized by one of the partners being controversial, while the other partner is non-controversial. An example of a cross-controversial sponsorship is the sponsorship between Petter Northug and Coop, where Petter Northug is perceived as a controversial athlete and Coop is perceived as a non-controversial brand (Hvidsten, Bondø, Mangelrød, Larsen-Vonstett & Berglund, 2014).

Previous research on controversial sponsorships have focused, to a large extent, on how the sponsored object affects the sponsoring brand when controversial behavior occurs. To the best of our knowledge, cross-controversial athlete sponsorships seem to be absent in the literature. Therefore, cross-controversial athlete sponsorships are the focus in this thesis, where we aim to identify how consumers' attitudes toward sponsorships and brand image are affected by presence or absence of brand controversy and athlete controversy. Based on this, the main research question of this thesis is: *How does cross-controversy affect consumers' attitudes toward athlete sponsorships?*

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Sponsorships and endorsements

An agreement, or cooperation, between a sponsoring brand and a sponsored object, has in previous research been defined as either a sponsorship (Meenaghan, 1983; Rifon, Choi, Trimble & Li, 2004; Olson, 2010) or an endorsement (McCracken, 1989; Simmers, Damron-Martinez & Haytko, 2009; Carrillat & d'Astous, 2014). The terms are used in different contexts, depending on the scope of the agreement and the level of involvement from the brand and athlete. In the following sections we will present previous definitions of sponsorship and endorsement, in order to clarify similarities and dissimilarities, as well as how the definitions overlap.

Meenaghan (1983) defines a sponsorship as "an investment, in cash or in kind, in an activity in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with that activity." Rifon, Choi, Trimble, and Li (2004) define the process of a sponsorship as when "a corporation creates a link with an outside issue or event, hoping to influence the audience by the connection." Olson (2010) defines a sponsorship as "a sponsor providing cash and/or other compensation in exchange for access to an object's commercial potential." These definitions show that a sponsorship can be understood as when a sponsoring brand makes an investment in a sponsored object, either financial or through other compensations, for the purpose of promotion and transfer of associations.

On the contrary, Carrillat and d'Astous (2014) have distinguished between sponsorship and endorsement. According to them, a sponsorship is when a brand offers support to a sponsored object in order to enhance consumer goodwill, perceptions and to promote specific products, while they define endorsement as when a sponsored object is paid to become a spokesperson for the brand. This builds on research by McCraken (1989), who defines the endorser as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement."

In the case of endorsement, where the brand utilizes athletes as endorsers based on their celebrity status, the athlete endorsers are considered brands unto themselves (Simmers, Damron-Martinez & Haytko, 2009). An athlete endows his/her personality to the product, as the brand do to the athlete, creating a spillover effect based on the sponsorship. This spillover effect creates associations in the minds of the consumers, both toward the brand and the athlete. These associations are built upon the theory of Human Associative Memory (HAM), where the associative path between two concepts in memory can be traversed forward and backward (Anderson & Bower, 1973). When the athlete is associated with a brand, forward association occurs, while when the brand is associated with the athlete, backward association occurs (Anderson & Bower, 1973). These findings show that engaging in an endorsement can be a useful method of influencing the minds of the consumers, which can be utilized in favor of both the brand and the athlete.

The level of involvement between the sponsorship partners often affects which of the terms, sponsorship or endorsement, is used. Throughout the following paper, we will not make distinctions between the different terms of sponsorship and endorsement, but rather generate a common definition of a sponsorship which combines the two terms. The reason for this is that agreements between sponsoring brands and sponsored objects have evolved over time, now often including elements from both endorsement and sponsorship, implying that the distinction between the two terms is less clear. Based on previous research and definitions, we interpret a sponsorship between a brand and a sponsored object as a cooperation where the brand provides financial support and/or free products in order to benefit from the sponsored object's personal and professional qualities for the purpose of promoting the brand.

2.2 Athlete sponsorships

Sponsoring of athletes has become an attractive marketing tactic as it generally has proven to have positive effects on the sponsoring brand. According to Carlson and Donavan (2008), athlete sponsorships can increase brand awareness, favorable attitudes toward the brand and consumers' purchase intentions. These positive responses normally occur when consumers can connect and identify with

the athlete (Kamins, Brand, Hoeke & Moe, 1989). The likelihood of identification will increase depending on the attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of the athlete (Miller & Laczniak, 2011; Kamins, 1990; Till & Busler, 2000; Ohanian, 1990). These characteristics contribute to higher effectiveness of the sponsorship and thereby enhance the transfer of associations from athlete to brand.

Even though athlete sponsorships are often associated with positive outcomes, these sponsorships can also have negative outcomes. According to Misra & Beatty (1990), the effectiveness of sponsorships will decrease when there is a lack of congruence between the brand and the athlete. As a result, the brand image can be negatively affected when there is a low perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored object (Misra & Beatty, 1990).

Furthermore, sponsorships include the risk of negative information about the sponsored object becoming public. This can be harmful for brands as negative evaluations of the athlete can also lead to negative evaluations of the sponsoring brand, regardless of the strength of perceived associations between the brand and the athlete (Till & Shimp, 1998). Negative information, as well as positive information, about the athlete can affect the equity of the sponsoring brand (Amos, Holmes & Strutton, 2008). This is due to the repeated pairing of the brand and athlete that creates strong associative linkages in the minds of consumers, which will be affected by both positive and negative information (Erdogan & Baker, 2000).

2.3 Fit

Fit, also known as congruence, is one of the most used theoretical concepts related to the construct of sponsorships (Olson & Thjømøe, 2011). Becker-Olsen and Hill (2006) define fit between the sponsoring brand and sponsored object as "a match in terms of perceived similarity, consistency and sense making." The perception of fit influences consumers' evaluations of brands and products (Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). Kamins (1990; Till & Busler, 2000) tested the match-up hypothesis and found that sponsorships are more effective when there is a perceived fit

between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored object, for example when athletes promote energy bars.

Furthermore, fit between brand and athlete is found to enhance recall and affect toward the brand, as well as facilitate transfer of affect from athlete to brand (Misra & Beatty, 1990). This is supported by Cornwell, Weeks & Roy (2005), who found that higher fit is related to higher sponsor recall and recognition accuracy. In addition, low-fit sponsorships have proven to result in less favorable thoughts and attitudes toward the sponsoring brand compared to high-fit sponsorships (Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005; Becker-Olsen & Simmons, 2002).

Olson & Thjømøe (2011) claim that fit between the brand and the athlete is an important aspect of predicting effective sponsorships, and that higher fit can lead to positive attitudes toward the sponsoring brand. According to them, perceptions of fit are based on thoughts related to whether the sponsoring brand's product is used by the sponsored object, the match between the sponsoring brand's target market and the sponsored object's target audience, as well as attitude similarities. However, Olson and Thjømøe (2011) also found that a poor natural fit can be partially overcome with effective communication, such as good articulation of the message. According to them, the message should focus on the sponsored object using the brand's products/service, that there is a similarity between the sponsored object's and the brand's audience, and that there is a geographic similarity between the partners, in order to enhance consumers' perception of fit even though there is a poor natural fit.

According to Meenaghan (2002; Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006), low fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored object results in cognitive inconsistency for consumers, which negatively influence their responses. Furthermore, research by Yoon and Gurhan-Canli (2003; Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006) shows that consumers tend to question underlying motives for the pairing in situations where information is inconsistent with prior knowledge. Low-fit sponsorships can therefore lead to negative associations toward the sponsoring brand or the sponsored object. Conversely, Woisetschläger and Michaelis (2012) found that this might not always be the case. According to their research, sponsorships that

are initially perceived as incongruent can turn out to be congruent over time, as continuous pairing and linking is shown to influence brand image. This finding challenges previous research claiming that fit is a prerequisite for successful sponsorships.

2.4 Controversy

There are several dimensions of the concept of controversy, and many of these dimensions depend on the context in which it is used. In addition, what can be perceived as controversial is often subjective and dependent on each individual's perspective. According to Kuypers (2002), controversial issues are, by their nature, unsolvable to everyone's satisfaction. The reason for this is that controversial issues are open for discussion, thereby being debatable. What can be defined as controversial can therefore be discussed.

In relation to sports, several issues can be perceived as controversial. A reason for this is that sports are often related to a healthy lifestyle and physical activity. Therefore, controversial factors in relation to sports are, for example, alcohol, gambling, tobacco, and fast food. In this perspective, Heineken or Lucky Strike can be perceived as controversial brands when sponsoring athletes. Kuypers (2002) argues that people often seek opinions of prominent social figures, such as athletes, when discussing controversial issues. Therefore, both the sponsoring brand and the sponsored athlete need to make careful considerations as to whom to engage in a sponsorship with, as consumers often seek their opinions, and the choices they make can affect their image.

As presented above, brands can be perceived as controversial when sponsoring athletes. However, not only the brand can be perceived as controversial. An athlete him-/herself might be perceived as controversial if he/she engages in activities that are out of character, or that deviate from social norms. The Business Dictionary (2020) defines a social norm as the "pattern of behavior in a particular group, community, or culture, accepted as normal and to which an individual is accepted to conform." A social norm can thereby be described as a behavior that aligns with common expectations and beliefs. If the athlete, or the brand, engages

in behavior that deviates from social norms, the behavior can be perceived as controversial.

When the retired Norwegian cross-country skiier, Petter Northug, admitted to drunk driving in 2014 (Hvidsten et al., 2014), his behavior was considered to be controversial. Such behavior goes against common expectations and beliefs on how people, especially an athlete, should behave. As a result, one of his main sponsors Coop, a Norwegian brand, stated in a press release that Petter Northug had not acted in line with the ideals he was to promote according to their sponsorship agreement, and they strongly distanced themselves from his actions (Hvidsten et al., 2014).

Even though the case presented above is somewhat extreme, Petter Northug has acted controversially in other, less severe, ways as well. Another example is how he continuously throughout his career has behaved controversially, usually involving making fun of the Swedish contestants. An example of this is when Petter Northug in 2011 shouted "King Carl Gustav, can you hear me? Björn Borg, Ingemar Stenmark, your guys took a hell of a beating!" when he crossed the finish line, or when he in 2012 celebrated the Norwegian victory by waving a Swedish flag during the final meters of the rally (Godø, 2015). Petter Northug has been one of the most controversial Norwegian athletes for a majority of his professional career. Therefore, there are several situations one can use as examples, in which the ones mentioned above only accounts for a small portion of examples.

Nevertheless, one of the most known controversial acts in sports during the previous years is when Colin Kaepernick in 2016 took the knee during the National Anthem before a NFL game (Vera, 2018). Kaepernick took the knee as a protest to police shootings of African American men and other social injustices faced by black people in the United States (Vera, 2018). This behavior was considered to be controversial because the National Anthem is a strong symbol of American principles, such as freedom of religion and freedom of expression, and kneeling was seen as a disrespect to both the flag and the Anthem (Vera, 2018).

Kaepernick's act sparked a worldwide engagement and kneeling when the National Anthem was played was considered a highly controversial action, which received attention from several well-known figures all over the world, such as Donald Trump. During 2017, more NFL players joined the protest, ultimately resulting in the movement which today is known as "take the knee" (Vera, 2018). In 2017 Kaepernick became a free agent, as no team offered him a contract as a result of his actions in 2016. Nevertheless, in 2018 Kaepernick was featured in Nike's 30th anniversary advertisement with the slogan "Just Do It" (Vera, 2018), and became more known than ever before.

In addition, Kaepernick was featured in Nike's commercial campaigns with the words "Believe in something. Even if it means sacrificing everything" (Høiby & Gamlem, 2018) as a response to receiving no contract offers during the NFL season of 2017, ultimately protesting that one should stand up for what one believes no matter the consequences. When Nike featured Kaepernick in their commercials, the world responded dramatically, and Nike's sportswear and shoes were burned all over the world (Høiby & Gamlem, 2018). But over time, the controversial act by both Nike and Kaepernick became highly successful and some have claimed both parties to be "on the right side of history" (Todd, 2018).

Before the European Championship in Handball for men in January 2019, another less severe controversial issue was addressed. The Norwegian National Men's Handball Team got a new sponsor which was viewed as controversial. The team became unwillingly sponsored by Unibet, a Swedish betting company who had engaged in a deal with the International Handball Federation, leaving the team without a say (Jarlsbo, 2019). Some of the responses were clear, Unibet's logo would not be visible during the championship in 2020, as the Norwegian Handball Federation was concerned with Norwegian laws and regulations for gambling and betting (Jarlsbo, 2019). According to Norwegian laws, only Norsk Tipping is legally allowed to advertise through Norwegian channels, while other gambling- and betting companies have to make use of loopholes in order to advertise in Norway (Lotteri- og stiftelsestilsynet, 2020). In addition, sports and betting was, and still is, considered an unfortunate combination, which in terms made the situation controversial.

As these examples and many others show, controversy can take place in many different scenarios and degrees. Controversial behavior, either from the sponsoring brand or the sponsored object, deviates from common expectations and beliefs. However, a common denominator for controversial sponsorships between brands and athletes is that they receive massive attention from a large audience (Peluso, Rizzo & Pino, 2019). Whether this attention affects consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship positively or negatively, is however unclear and needs to be further researched.

According to Peluso et al. (2019) "a controversial sponsorship's lower moral appropriateness does not influence the propensity to support the team among customers with high levels of self-team connection." Self-team connection is explained by the extent to which an individual feels close to a sponsored team and identifies with it (Peluso et al., 2019; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). On the contrary, consumers with a lower self-team connection has lower propensity to support the sponsored teams. These findings imply that when we have a strong (or weak) connection to the team we support, we are more (or less) willing to make excuses if the team engages in actions that are considered inappropriate.

In addition to identify with athletes or teams, people also identify with brands, implying that we are also willing to make excuses for the brand. In general, the more people identify with a brand, the more favorable are their attitudes toward the brand (Escalas, 2004). A study conducted by Lisjak, Lee & Gardner (2012) found that when a participant identified with a brand, a threat to the brand was perceived as a threat to the participant's self. Within this perspective, if a brand people identify greatly with engages in a sponsorship agreement with a controversial athlete, this can be perceived as a threat to the brand that needs to be defended.

According to Carrillat and d'Astous (2014), there can exist a power imbalance within athlete sponsorships. They differentiate between sponsorships where the brand has the power and where the athlete has the power. Carrillat and d'Astous (2014) propose that the brand has the power when the athlete is in need of assistance to cover expenses related to his or her activities, whereas the athlete has

the power when the brand needs the athlete's image and offers monetary compensation to use it. However, both the athlete's and the brand's needs will normally be present in a sponsorship, but which need is stronger will influence the power between them.

This power imbalance affects how the athlete and the brand are associated in memory: the spreading activation potential from the more powerful to the less powerful partner should be stronger than that from the less powerful to the more powerful partner (Carrillat & d'Astous, 2014). In a situation where a negative event relating to one partner occurs, the consequence for the other partner is likely to differ depending on the balance of power between them. If the negative event strikes the less powerful partner, the other partner is less likely to suffer, and vice versa. In this perspective, if the more powerful partner engages in controversial behavior, the other partner is likely to experience negative spillover effects. On the contrary, if the less powerful partner engages in controversial behavior, these negative spillover effects are less likely to occur.

As mentioned, both the brand and the athlete can engage in behavior that make them controversial. Previous research has to a large extent focused on how a controversial event, or specific behavior, affect the brand within a sponsorship. However, little research has been conducted to investigate how consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship are affected when a non-controversial partner engages in a sponsorship with a controversial partner. When such a combination of a sponsorship occurs, this is known as a cross-controversial sponsorship. By researching combinations of controversial brands and athletes engaging in sponsorships and assessing how consumers' attitudes are potentially changed by these, we contribute to the literature within the field of sponsorship marketing.

3.0 Research hypotheses

Based on the literature review, we have developed six hypotheses that will be tested in order to answer the research question of this thesis.

Fit is one of the most important aspects of sponsorship effectiveness (Olson & Thjømøe, 2011). The reason for this is that fit between the brand and the athlete is found to enhance recall and affect toward the brand, as well as facilitate transfer of affect from athlete to brand (Misra & Beatty, 1990). We assume that in cross-controversial sponsorships, the difference in controversiality between the brand and athlete might lead to consumers perceiving a poor natural fit, and building on this we have developed the following hypotheses:

H1: *Consumers' perceived fit of a cross-controversial sponsorship will be lower compared to controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.*

H2: *Consumers' attitudes toward cross-controversial sponsorships will be more negative compared to consumers' attitudes toward controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.*

H3: *Consumers' purchase intentions of the brands' products will be lower in cross-controversial sponsorships compared to in controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.*

According to Carlson and Donavan (2008), athlete sponsorships can increase brand awareness, favorable attitudes and consumers' purchase intentions toward the brand. Previous research has shown fit to be an important aspect of successful sponsorships. As a result, the brand image can also be affected negatively when there is a low perceived fit between the sponsoring brand and the sponsored object (Misra & Beatty, 1990). Becker-Olsen and Simmons (2002; Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005) found that low-fit sponsorships have proven to result in less favorable thoughts and attitudes toward the sponsoring brand than high-fit sponsorships. Based on the assumption that cross-controversial sponsorships have poor natural fit, we have developed the following hypotheses:

H4a: *Consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be negatively influenced by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship.*

H4b: *Consumers' purchase intentions toward the brand will be lowered by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship.*

As previously mentioned, the power imbalance that exists in an athlete sponsorship affects how the athlete and the brand are associated in memory, and that the spreading activation potential from the more powerful to the less powerful partner should be stronger than from the less powerful to the more powerful partner (Carrillat & d'Astous, 2014). In a situation where a controversial event occurs, such as when either the athlete or the brand is controversial, the consequence for the other partner is therefore likely to differ depending on the balance of power between them. Based on our definition of a sponsorship, both the athlete and the brand have incentives for engaging in a sponsorship. However, the brands' needs are considered stronger than the athletes' needs, as highly desirable athletes are rarer than highly desirable brands. In contrast, highly desirable athletes often receive many offers from potential sponsors, which provide the athletes with more power than brands in choosing a potential sponsorship partner. Combining this with the research by Carrillat & d'Astous (2014), the athlete is the most powerful partner in a sponsorship, and we therefore developed the following hypothesis:

H5: *In cross-controversial sponsorships, consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be more affected when the athlete is controversial compared to when the brand is controversial.*

The more people identify with a brand, the more favorable are their attitudes toward the brand (Escalas, 2004), and Lisjak, Lee and Gardner (2012) found that people tend to identify with brands and view them as part of their self. According to findings by Peluso, Rizzo and Pino (2019), consumers with high self-connection to the brand are willing to make excuses if the brand engages in inappropriate behavior. In this perspective, when a brand engages in a cross-controversial sponsorship where the sponsored object does not align with the

brand's current image, this can be perceived as inappropriate behavior. Therefore, consumers with high self-brand connection tend to have more positive attitudes toward the brand compared to consumers with low self-brand connection regardless of the brand's inappropriate behavior. Based on this, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6: *In cross-controversial sponsorships, consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be positively influenced when self-connection to the brand is high compared to when self-connection to the brand is low.*

4.0 Methodology

In this section we will present and describe the methodology of our research.

4.1 Quantitative method

In order to collect data, we made use of a quantitative method. The quantitative method is often referred to as "the speech of the number", which has many elements that are derived from the natural science method (Johannessen, Christoffersen & Tufte, 2016). It is often extensive, meaning that it deals with many devices and that the information collected is predefined by the researcher (Jacobsen, 2015). The purpose of the quantitative approach is to collect information that can be systematized and entered into analytic software, so that several devices can be analyzed simultaneously. According to Jacobsen (2015), the logic behind this is the possibility of standardizing the information provided by the data. This is an important factor that allows for the use of statistical analyses from the data collected and to test whether the hypotheses match the data.

4.2 Experimental design

In order to gather data, we employed an experimental design, as this method is considered suitable for establishing causal relationships between an independent variable and a dependent variable (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

Furthermore, we utilized a 2 x 2 factorial design to conduct our research. This design enabled us to test the effects of two or more manipulations at the same time on the dependent variable (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). In addition, this research design was preferred in our study as it enabled collection of data from many respondents in both a time- and cost-effective way (Malhotra & Birks, 2006).

The factorial design employed in our research consist of two independent variables with two levels each; athletes (one controversial and one non-controversial) and brands (one controversial and one non-controversial). These independent variables resulted in four possible conditions (see *Figure 1*), which were tested in an experiment conducted through online surveys.

	Non-controversial athlete	**Controversial athlete**
Non-controversial brand	Non-controversial sponsorship	Cross-controversial sponsorship
Controversial brand	Cross-controversial sponsorship	Controversial sponsorship

Figure 1: Factorial design

Through conducting a pretest (see *4.5 Pretest)*, the two independent variables (brand and athlete) with each associated level (controversial and non-controversial) were chosen. The 2 x 2 factorial design is presented in *Figure 2*, resulting in four conditions. As *Figure 2* presents, Kjetil Jansrud is the non-

controversial athlete and Henrik Kristoffersen is the controversial athlete, while Møllers Tran is the non-controversial brand and Red Bull is the controversial brand.

	Kjetil Jansrud	**Henrik Kristoffersen**
Møllers Tran	Non-controversial sponsorship	Cross-controversial sponsorship
Red Bull	Cross-controversial sponsorship	Controversial sponsorship

Figure 2: *Factorial design with brands and athletes*

The factorial design consists of the dependent variables *attitude toward brand, purchase intention, self-brand connection, attitude toward sponsorship* and *perceived fit*. These were chosen based on previous research (Till & Shimp (1998); Speed & Thompson (2000); Escalas & Bettman (2003); Parker & Fink (2010); Kim & Cheong (2011); Eagleman & Krohn (2012); Anees-ur-Rehman (2012); Ko, Chang, Park & Herbst (2017);), and we claim that the variables are sufficient in answering each of the hypotheses, as well as the main research question: *How does cross-controversy affect consumers' attitudes toward athlete sponsorships?*

We chose to conduct a between-subjects 2 x 2 factorial design as our survey is substantial in regard to number of questions. This implies that the individual respondent was only exposed to one of the four possible conditions. If we were to employ a within-subjects design, each respondent would have been exposed to all four conditions (Bausell, 2015), meaning that the survey would be time-consuming, and respondents might not be able to divide their full attention to the

entire survey from start to finish. This, in turn, would have led to wrongful responses and thereby wrongful results.

Furthermore, when using a within-subjects design, respondents are more prone to recall previous conditions (Zaromb & Roediger, 2009). This implies that respondents recall previous exposure when evaluating current exposure. Therefore, using a within-subjects design for the main study indicates that there is a possibility that the respondents would have compared the four different conditions with each other and not each condition separately. This could potentially have led to wrongful results. As a result, a between-subjects design was more beneficial to employ for the purpose of the main study.

4.3 Population and selection

The population refers to the entire group of people, events or things of interest that the researcher wants to investigate (Bougie & Sekaran, 2002). In this thesis, the population refers to the general Norwegian population. A sample is defined as a subgroup or subset of the population, and there are different sampling techniques. Both the pretest and the pilot study were conducted by using convenience sampling, whereas the main study was conducted by using a sampling technique called self-selection in combination with convenience sampling (Jacobsen, 2015).

The pretest was distributed through the online channel Facebook, which is a social media platform, but was not publicly posted. We sent the pretest and the pilot study directly to friends and family through Facebook's chat function, asking them to provide their responses. This implies that we made use of a non-probability sampling technique called convenience sampling for the pretest and pilot study, as we collected the information from population members close at hand (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

The main study was also distributed through online channels, LinkedIn and Facebook, but contrary to the pretest it was publicly posted on the social media platforms. By publicly posting the survey, respondents were given the option to

participate in the study, which complies with the self-selection sampling technique (Jacobsen, 2015). Although this is an effective sampling technique, there are some challenges regarding loss of control over who participates and who does not participate in the study. Another challenge is that one ends up with a systematically skewed selection, meaning that the sample is not representative for the population and is thereby not generalizable (Khazaal et al., 2014).

Both the pretest and the main study were conducted in Norwegian, as we aimed to reach the largest number of respondents possible. Most of the brands and all of the athletes included in the pretests, as well as in the main study, were Norwegian. In addition, we distributed the surveys in Norway, and it therefore made sense to employ the Norwegian language. As such, the only requirement for the sample of this research study is that the respondents understand the Norwegian language.

A total number of 166 respondents participated in the main study, where 69.88% were female and 30.12% were male (see *Table 1*). The average age of the respondents were 29 years, ranging from 19 to 72 years.

Table 1: *Gender of respondents*

Gender of respondents				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Male	50	30.12	30.12	30.12
Female	116	69.88	69.88	100.00
Total	166	100.00	100.00	

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the four possible sponsorship conditions (1 to 4). The distribution of respondents in each condition is presented in *Table 2*. As a result of data preparation and different dropout rates, the distribution of respondents is somewhat uneven, especially in regard to condition 3. This might raise concerns, as the uneven distribution can potentially lead to unequal variances and negatively affects the statistical power. However, as the demographics are similar between conditions, we claim that the uneven distribution did not affect our results.

Table 2: *Distribution of respondents*

Distribution of respondents

	Frequency	Percentage
Condition 1: Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen	39	23.49
Condition 2: Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud	40	24.10
Condition 3: Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen	46	27.71
Condition 4: Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud	41	24.70
Total	166	100.00

4.4 Scale use

Our study applies three different response alternatives: interval, nominal and ordinal scales. Interval scales have numerically equal distances that represent equal values in the characteristics being measured. The interval scale allows us to compare differences between objects, as the difference between any two values on an interval scale is identical to the difference between any other two values of that scale (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). For example, the variable age is often measured on an interval scale.

Nominal scales allow assigning of subjects to certain categories or groups, for example the variable gender where respondents can be grouped as either male, female or other. The purpose of this is to group respondents into non-overlapping and mutually exclusive categories to obtain basic, categorical information about the sample (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

Ordinal scales assign respondents to certain categories, while it also allows for ranking the order of the respondents in a meaningful way. This means that the response alternatives represent categories that are placed on a predefined scale. The purpose of this is to group respondents into categories, as well as logically rank these categories to obtain nuanced information about the different variables (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

In our main study, we utilized a 7-point Likert scale to measure the different variables, as this scale is designed to examine how strongly respondents agree or

disagree with given statements (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). Furthermore, we used the Likert scale as it provides nuanced responses and is consistent with other studies on controversy in sponsorships (e.g. Peluso, Rizzo, & Pino, 2019; Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006). The different scale elements in the main study were adapted from previous studies by Till & Shimp (1998), Speed & Thompson (2000), Escalas & Bettman (2003), Parker & Fink (2010), Kim & Cheong (2011), Anees-ur-Rehman (2012), Eagleman & Krohn (2012) and Ko, Chang, Park & Herbst (2017). This will be further elaborated in section *4.7.2 Dependent variables*.

4.5 Pretest

We conducted a pretest prior to the main study, in order to measure which controversial and non-controversial athletes and brands to use in the main study. As our research question is built on consumers' attitudes toward a cross-controversial/non-controversial/controversial sponsorship between a brand and an athlete, we were dependent on consumers' perceptions of what constitutes a controversial or non-controversial brand and athlete.

4.5.1 Pretest - Choice of athletes and brands

The pretest consisted of a brief introduction, where we provided the respondents with a clarification of the term controversial. We predicted that some of the respondents would not be familiar with the term, or that respondents would interpret the term wrongfully. As there is no definition of the term controversial that is commonly agreed upon, we provided the following description: "the term controversial is often used about something that is disputed or repeatedly argued about, that often deviates from what is expected."

After the introduction, the respondents were asked to rate selected athletes and brands on how controversial/non-controversial they were perceived by the respondent. We made use of social media and online newspapers to draw a sample of athletes and brands, concluding in 13 different athletes and 13 different brands. The respondents were asked to rate the athletes and brands on a 7-point Likert scale from "very non-controversial" to "very controversial". We used a 7-point Likert scale as this provides more nuanced responses and is consistent with

previous research on controversy in sponsorships (Peluso, Rizzo, & Pino, 2019; Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006).

In addition to the pre-selected athletes and brands, each respondent was given the opportunity to make suggestions on athletes and brands that should have been included in the listed athletes and brands in the pretest.

The pretest was distributed through an online channel, Facebook, where the survey was sent directly to friends and family. We decided not to publicly post the survey, as we wanted the respondents in the pretest to be as separated as possible from the respondents in the main study. The reason for this is to prevent the respondents in the main study from being influenced by the pretest, which could possibly affect the reliability and validity of the results from the main study.

4.5.1.1 Pretest - Results

We distributed the pretest on Monday 23rd of March and collected the data on Wednesday 25th of March. In total, we received 42 responses. The respondents ranged from the age of 20 to the age of 55, with an average age of 28 years. 88% of the respondents were between the age of 20 and 30. The gender distribution was the following:

Table 3: Pretest 1: Gender distribution

Descriptive statistics

Gender	N	Distribution (%)
Male	10	23.81
Female	31	73.81
Other	1	2.38
Total	42	100

The results from the pretest regarding athletes were as follows:

Table 4: Pretest: Athletes

Descriptive statistics

	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Henrik Kristoffersen	42	4.86	1.775
Magnus Carlsen	42	4.33	1.959
Ada Hegerberg	42	4.14	1.661
Therese Johaug	42	4.05	1.847
Cecilia Brækhus	42	3.86	1.733
Nora Mørk	42	3.67	1.748
Johannes Høsflot Klæbo	42	3.64	1.764
Erling Braut Haaland	42	3.62	1.766
Sander Sagosen	42	3.19	1.656
Karsten Warholm	42	3.14	1.761
Kjetil Jansrud	42	2.50	1.700
Ingvild Flugstad Østberg	42	2.38	1.724
Tiril Eckhoff	42	2.36	1.246

Based on the results from the pretest, we made a choice of athletes to use in the main study. Henrik Kristoffersen ($M = 4.86$) was chosen to represent the controversial athlete, while Kjetil Jansrud ($M = 2.50$) was chosen to represent the non-controversial athlete. The two athletes are both professional alpine skiiers competing for the Norwegian National Alpine Team.

In order to confirm whether the results from the pretest were significant, we conducted a one-sample t-test in SPSS. The output from the analysis showed that Henrik Kristoffersen was significantly different from Kjetil Jansrud in regard to controversiality, $t(41) = 8.607$, $p = .000$.

Henrik Kristoffersen was voted the most controversial athlete, and we therefore chose him for our main study. Henrik Kristoffersen was recently in conflict with the Norwegian Ski Federation, as Kristoffersen wanted to promote the sponsoring brand Red Bull on his racing helmet and headwear. The Norwegian Ski Federation refused him to do so, as they had already sold this advertising

placement to their sponsor Telenor. Henrik Kristoffersen therefore chose to sue the Ski Federation, which resulted in a lawsuit between the parties (Christiansen, 2019). This was seen as a highly controversial act, and the pretest confirmed that the conflict is still affecting his image.

In contrast, Kjetil Jansrud was voted the third least controversial athlete in the pretest. We chose Kjetil Jansrud instead of the less controversial athletes Ingvild Flugstad Østberg ($M = 2.38$) and Tiril Eckhoff ($M = 2.36$), because we preferred using two athletes from the same sport as this can eliminate some alternative explanations. Furthermore, this choice can also prevent the influence of athlete gender on the results from the main study, as they both are men. In addition, Kjetil Jansrud is commonly known in Norway as a fair, loyal and honest athlete, which was highlighted when he won the prestigious price "Role model of the year" on the annual Norwegian sports gala in 2016 (Mueller, 2016). This further supports the choice of using Kjetil Jansrud as the non-controversial athlete in our main study.

The results from the pretest regarding brands were as follows:

Table 5: *Pretest: Brands*

Descriptive statistics			
	N	Mean	Std. deviation
UniBet	42	5.10	1.559
Red Bull	42	4.95	1.710
H&M	42	4.14	1.894
Nocco	42	4.02	1.405
Mc Donald's	42	4.00	1.562
VG	42	3.64	1.679
Nammo	42	3.43	2.074
DNB	42	2.86	1.586
Telenor	42	2.71	1.503
Freia	42	2.55	1.435
Bama	42	2.29	1.453
Tine	42	2.17	1.591
Møllers Tran	42	2.07	1.386

Based on the results from the pretest, we made a choice of brands that would be used in the main study. Red Bull *(M = 4.95)* was chosen to represent the controversial brand, while Møllers Tran *(M = 2.07)* was chosen to represent the non-controversial brand.

In order to confirm whether the results from the pretest were significant, we conducted a one-sample t-test in SPSS. The output from the analysis showed that Red Bull was significantly different from Møllers Tran in regard to controversiality, $t(41) = 10.923$, $p = .000$.

Møllers Tran ($M = 2.07$) was voted the least controversial brand of all brands included in the pretest. Møllers is a Norwegian company and is one of Norway's oldest brands, founded in 1854 by an apothecary named Peter Möller (Orkla, 2020). Møllers' vision is to create quality Omega-3 products that positively influence people's health (Møllers, 2020). One of their most known products is what Norwegians know as "tran", which is a liquid supplement of Omega-3 and vitamins D, A and E (Møllers, 2020). Norwegian athletes such as Aksel Lund Svindal and Olaf Tufte have been sponsored by Møllers Tran during the past years, who both are considered to be non-controversial based on their actions as active, and retired, athletes. These factors underline why Møllers Tran is perceived as a non-controversial brand by consumers.

In contrast, Red Bull ($M = 4.95$) was voted the second most controversial of the brands included in the pretest. Red Bull is an international company founded in Austria in 1987, who produces and sells a variety of energy drinks including caffeine, vitamins and taurine (Red Bull, 2020). Red Bull's products are used by people all over the world, including concentration-demanding professions, students and athletes (Red Bull, 2020). In 2009, Red Bull was launched on the Norwegian market (Berg & Aanesen, 2009) and experienced all time high revenues in 2019 (Hopland, 2020), indicating that the brand is well-known by Norwegian consumers. The brand itself might not be perceived as controversial, but when combined with sports, reactions arise. In 2019, Aftenposten published an article on why Red Bull is perceived as controversial when combined with football (Slettemark & Skrøvset, 2019). Red Bull is also known for sponsoring

controversial athletes, such as Petter Northug, which was considered a controversial sponsorship agreement that received massive attention (Rolness, 2010). These factors underline why consumers perceive Red Bull as a controversial brand.

Even though Unibet ($M = 5.10$) was voted the most controversial brand, we chose not to include it in the main study. The reason for this is that the least controversial brand, Møllers Tran, sells fast-moving consumer-goods in grocery stores, which are more similar to Red Bull's products than to Unibet's services. In addition, comparing Møllers Tran to Unibet is difficult, as the two brands operate in highly different industries. By having two more similar brands in our main study, we eliminate some factors that might influence the results in regard to the dependent variables. For example, the barriers for purchasing Møllers Tran's products and the barriers for purchasing Unibet's services are substantially different, making comparisons difficult for the respondents.

In the section where respondents were given the opportunity to list additional athletes and brands to include in the study, we received only a few responses. However, as most of the athletes suggested are no longer active athletes and some of the athletes suggested are also not of Norwegian origin, we decided not to include them in our main study. The two most commonly listed athletes were the retired cross-country skier Petter Northug Jr. and the Irish MMA-athlete Conor McGregor. We only received two suggestions for brands to include, which we concluded not to use for the main study as one was a tobacco company, which is illegal to advertise in Norway (Helsedirektoratet, 2018), and the other was an international brand with few ties to the Norwegian market, thereby being unlikely to engage in sponsorships with Norwegian athletes. As such, we concluded that the 13 athletes and 13 brands included in the pretest were a sufficient selection.

4.6 Pilot study

Before we distributed the main study through online channels, we ran a pilot study. We conducted the pilot study by sending a replica of the main study to selected respondents, asking for feedback on structure, questions asked and the four conditions presented. The aim of the pilot study was to make sure that the

four different conditions were understandable, that the conditions were evenly distributed across respondents, and that the structure of the questions asked were understandable. Some of the respondents pointed out that questions regarding the brand needed to be specified, as the respondents were uncertain whether they were asked about the brand's product or the brand itself. As a result of the pilot study, we received valuable insights and thereby made some adjustments in the main study.

4.7 Main study

In this section we will present the independent and dependent variables, as well as describing the procedure and distribution of the main study.

4.7.1 Independent variables

The main study included two independent variables with two levels each, athletes (one controversial and one non-controversial) and brands (one controversial and one non-controversial). Henrik Kristoffersen functioned as the controversial athlete, while Kjetil Jansrud functioned as the non-controversial athlete. Red Bull functioned as the controversial brand, while Møllers Tran functioned as the non-controversial brand. These athletes and brands resulted in four fictive sponsorship conditions, whereas one is a non-controversial sponsorship, two are cross-controversial sponsorships and one is a controversial sponsorship. Both brands are sold in similar distribution channels within the same industry, which eliminates explanatory factors when comparing the two brands. Both athletes are male and active within the same winter sport, also eliminating explanatory factors when comparing the two athletes. In addition, the athletes are well-known by Norwegian consumers, as both of them were ranked among the 15 greatest Norwegian athletes of 2019 (Strøm, Welhaven, Borud & Juva, 2020).

In order to present the four possible sponsorship conditions to the respondents, we manipulated a fictive sponsorship between the athlete and the brand within each condition. We did this by creating a manipulation text for each experimental condition, and each respondent was randomly assigned to one of the conditions.

The manipulation texts were the following:

1. *Condition 1: Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen*

   "Møllers Tran produces Omega-3 supplements. Omega-3 is important for optimal development and is positively influencing people's health. Imagine that Møllers Tran, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the disputed alpine skier Henrik Kristoffersen. The sponsorship includes that Møllers Tran's logo will be visible on Kristoffersen's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Kristoffersen will be featured in Møllers Tran's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Kristoffersen frequently features Møllers Tran in his own social media channels."

2. *Condition 2: Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud*

   "Møllers Tran produces Omega-3 supplements. Omega-3 is important for optimal development and is positively influencing people's health. Imagine that Møllers Tran, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the well-liked alpine skier Kjetil Jansrud. The sponsorship includes that Møllers Tran's logo will be visible on Jansrud's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Jansrud will be featured in Møllers Tran's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Jansrud frequently features Møllers Tran in his own social media channels."

3. *Condition 3: Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen*

   "Red Bull produces and sells a variety of energy drinks with the ingredients caffeine, vitamins and taurine. Imagine that Red Bull, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the disputed alpine skier Henrik Kristoffersen. The sponsorship includes that Red Bull's logo will be visible on Kristoffersen's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Kristoffersen will be featured in Red Bull's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Kristoffersen frequently features Red Bull in his own social media channels."

4. *Condition 4: Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud*

"Red Bull produces and sells a variety of energy drinks with the ingredients caffeine, vitamins and taurine. Imagine that Red Bull, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the well-liked alpine skier Kjetil Jansrud. The sponsorship includes that Red Bull's logo will be visible on Jansrud's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Jansrud will be featured in Red Bull's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Jansrud frequently features Red Bull in his own social media channels."

4.7.2 Dependent variables

The dependent variables in the main study were chosen based on the meta-analysis developed by Amos, Holmes & Strutton (2008) about the relationship between celebrity sponsorships and effectiveness. According to them, *purchase intention, brand attitude* and *attitude toward sponsorship* are constructs well-suited for measuring sponsorship effectiveness. In addition, we chose to include the dependent variables *perceived fit* and *self-brand connection*, as this is consistent with previous research (e.g. Speed & Thompson, 2000; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Furthermore, we claim that all of these five variables had to be included in the study to properly answer our main research question. The dependent variables were measured in the following order:
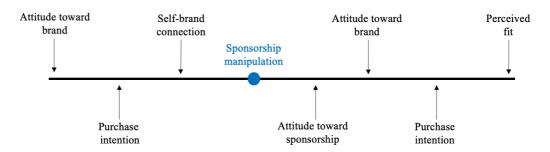

Figure 3: *Timeline of dependent variables*

Attitude toward brand

Attitude toward the brand, both before and after sponsorship manipulation, was measured on three 7-point Likert scale items. The respondents were asked *"How do you perceive Møllers Tran/Red Bull?"*, where the anchors for the items were: 1=bad to 7=good, 1=unfavorable to 7=favorable and 1=negative to 7=positive. The items were adopted from Till & Shimp (1998), Parker & Fink (2010), Kim & Cheong (2011) and Ko, Chang, Park & Herbst (2017).

Purchase intention

Purchase intention, both before and after sponsorship manipulation, was measured on three 7-point Likert scale items, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The respondents were asked "*How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?",* which were adopted from Anees-ur-Rehman (2012). The following statements were presented:

1. I would like to try the Møllers Tran/Red Bull brand
2. I would like to buy the Møllers Tran/Red Bull brand
3. I would actively seek out the Møllers Tran/Red Bull brand

Self-brand connection

Self-brand connection was measured on three 7-point Likert scale items, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The respondents were asked "*How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?",* which were adopted from Escalas & Bettman (2003). The following statements were presented:

1. I can identify with Møllers Tran/Red Bull
2. I think Møllers Tran/Red Bull (could) help me become the type of person I want to be
3. Møllers Tran/Red Bull suits me well

Attitude toward sponsorship

Attitude toward sponsorship was measured on four 7-point Likert scale items, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The respondents were asked *"How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?"*, which were

adopted from Eagleman & Krohn (2012). The following statements were presented:

1. I believe it is good for Møllers Tran/Red Bull to sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
2. My attitudes toward Møllers Tran/Red Bull are positively influenced by whether they sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
3. My attitudes toward Møllers Tran/ Red Bull are negatively influenced by whether they sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
4. I am more likely to purchase a product from Møllers Tran/Red Bull if it is a sponsor of Henrik Kristoffersen/Red Bull

Perceived fit

Perceived fit was measured on five 7-point Likert scale items, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. The respondents were asked *"How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?",* which were adopted from Speed & Thompson (2000). The following statements were presented:

1. There is a logical connection between Møllers Tran/Red Bull and Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
2. The image of Møllers Tran/Red Bull and the image of Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud are similar
3. Møllers Tran/Red Bull and Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud fit together well
4. Møllers Tran/Red Bull and Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud stands for similar things
5. It makes sense to me that Møllers Tran/Red Bull sponsors Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud

4.7.3 Procedure and distribution

We distributed the study online on May 4th through social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. As mentioned, we employed a self-selection sampling technique, meaning that participation in the study was voluntary. The respondents

did not receive any monetary compensation or other types of compensation for participating. The respondents were each randomly assigned to one of the four conditions, using the randomization tool in Qualtrics. The respondents were all presented with a short introduction before the questions were presented, informing the respondents that the responses were anonymous and would be treated confidentially. In addition, we informed the respondents that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions, that participation was voluntary and that the respondents had the opportunity to withdraw at any time.

Even though we distributed four different conditions to the respondents, the questions asked were equal in all conditions, apart from the manipulation texts. The three dependent variables *self-brand connection*, *attitude toward brand* and *purchase intention* were asked before the respondents were exposed to one of the four manipulations. By presenting these variables before the respondents were exposed to the manipulation text, we were able to measure change in attitudes and purchase intentions as a result of the fictive sponsorship presented. *Self-brand connection* was measured before exposure to the manipulation text, in order to avoid the respondents being biased by the fictive sponsorship presented in one of the four conditions. After being exposed to the manipulation text, respondents were asked the questions presented in *4.6.2 Dependent Variables*, as well as two demographic questions at the end of the survey. The survey is presented in *Appendix 2.*

4.8 Validity and reliability

Reliability is a test of how consistently a measuring instrument measures whatever concept it is intended to measure. The reliability of a measure indicates the extent to which it is without bias and ensures consistent measurement across time and across the various items in the instrument (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). In other words, the reliability indicates both stability and consistency of the measurement.

We tested for interitem consistency reliability by using the Cronbach's alpha reliability test, where the scale items for each dependent variable were measured.

In general, reliabilities less than .60 are considered to be poor, those in the .70 range are acceptable and those above .80 are considered good (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). The Cronbach's alpha reliability test showed reliable results (ranging from .750 to .959), allowing scale items to be combined, which will be further elaborated in *5.1 Data Preparation*.

Validity is a test of how well an instrument developed measures the particular concept it is intended to measure (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). We separate between external and internal validity. External validity refers to the extent of generalizability of the results of a causal study to other settings, people or events. Internal validity refers to the degree of our confidence in the causal effect; that variable *X* causes variable *Y* (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

The main study was publicly posted through the social media channels Facebook and LinkedIn, giving the respondents the opportunity to choose whether they wanted to participate in the study or not. In addition, using social media channels complies with a convenience sampling, where the possible respondents consist of friends, family and fellow students. One of the characteristics in using such a sampling technique is that the sample is not representative for the population (Khazaal et al., 2014), indicating that the sample is not generalizable for the entire Norwegian population. As a result, we have not been able to ensure external validity of our results.

5.0 Results

In this section, we will present results from the main study. We have used the statistical software IBM SPSS statistics version 26 to analyze the collected data.

5.1 Data preparation

Before analyzing the data, we made some adjustments in the data set in order to analyze in an appropriate manner. We started by removing all rows with missing values, followed by removing all respondents who did not complete the survey (rows 169-272). In addition, we removed two respondents with suspected non-serious responses, as one reported an age of 100, while the other answered the same value on all questions. This resulted in a total number of 166 respondents included in the main study.

Furthermore, we made some additional adjustments to reduce the size of the data set. Each of the dependent variables were measured by using several items (3-5 items per dependent variable). These items were combined to make analyzing more convenient. Before combining the items, we analyzed the interrelation between them by using a reliability analysis, Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is well suited for analyzing the internal consistency of respondents' answers of all the items in a measure (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020). This was done to ensure that all items measuring the same dependent variable were highly correlated. In order to accept combining of items the Cronbach's alpha values should be higher than .70, as this is considered as an acceptable level of internal consistency. Values above .80 are considered good, while values above .90 are considered excellent (Bougie & Sekaran, 2020).

The results from analyzing Cronbach's alpha indicated that for each of the dependent variables, the scale items could be combined. The Cronbach's alpha values for the dependent variables *attitude toward brand, purchase intention*, *self-connection*, *attitude toward sponsorship* and *perceived fit* ranged from .750 to .959, which indicated high levels of internal consistency and it was therefore

acceptable to combine these items (see *Appendix 1* for specified variables and Cronbach's alpha coefficients).

However, in order to merge the items measuring the dependent variable *attitude toward sponsorship*, we decided to exclude two of four items. The respondents were asked *"How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?"*, which were adopted from Eagleman & Krohn (2012). The following statements were presented:

1. I believe it is good for Møllers Tran/Red Bull to sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
2. My attitudes toward Møllers Tran/Red Bull are positively influenced by whether they sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
3. My attitudes toward Møllers Tran/ Red Bull are negatively influenced by whether they sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen/Kjetil Jansrud
4. I am more likely to purchase a product from Møllers Tran/Red Bull if it is a sponsor of Henrik Kristoffersen/Red Bull

We decided to exclude two of four items, as item three and item four were not appropriate for measuring the construct *attitude toward sponsorship.* By removing these items, Cronbach's alpha was improved from .637 to .740, which increased the validity of the study. This exclusion allowed us to merge the items into one dependent variable, which further supported the choice of removing item three and four.

First, the third item measuring *attitude toward sponsorship* was excluded, as this item measured the same as item two, only formulated differently. When reviewing respondents' answers we found that the answers were not consistent between item two and item three, indicating that the respondents might have been confused by the statements when providing their answers. As a result, we found it relevant to keep item two in the data set, as respondents were presented with this item before item three, thereby providing a better indication of their attitudes.

Second, a review of the data revealed that the fourth item did not measure respondents' *attitude toward the sponsorship*, but in fact measured *purchase*

intention, another dependent variable in the survey. As we already included three items to measure purchase intention both pre- and post-manipulation, we claim that it was not necessary to measure this in an additional dependent variable. In order to test for this, we ran a reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha, which underline the decision of removing the item from the data set. The correlation between the three items included to measure the dependent variable *purchase intention* and the fourth item included to measure *attitude toward sponsorship* was .889, implying that the four items are correlating and measuring *purchase intention* sufficiently. However, when removing the fourth item in *attitude toward sponsorship*, the correlation between the three items used to measure *purchase intention* increased to .937, which imply that the fourth item is not necessary when measuring *purchase intention* or appropriate when measuring *attitude toward sponsorship*. In addition, when measuring *purchase intention* both pre- and post-manipulation, using the same three items pre- and post-manipulation provides a clearer indication of potential changes in consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, we decided to remove the fourth item measuring *attitude toward sponsorship* and to not include it in the dependent variable *purchase intention*, increasing the validity of the results.

In addition, we merged the dependent variables measuring the same construct to further reduce the data set. This resulted in combined variables for *attitude toward brand* prior to manipulation, *purchase intention* prior to manipulation, *self-connection*, *attitude toward brand* after manipulation, *purchase intention* after manipulation, *attitude toward sponsorship* and *perceived fit*, which were used in hypotheses testing.

5.2 Results of hypotheses testing

In this section, we will present the results of the analyses conducted on each of the hypotheses developed.

5.2.1 Hypothesis 1

H1: *Consumers' perceived fit of a cross-controversial sponsorship will be lower compared to controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a two-way between-subjects ANOVA to compare the different brands' and athletes' effect on consumers' perceived fit of the sponsorship conditions. There was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of brands' and athletes' controversiality on perceived fit, $F(1, 162) = 1.624$, $p = .204$. In addition, there were no significant main effects between the non-controversial brand and controversial brand on perceived fit ($p = .131$) or between the non-controversial athlete and controversial athlete on perceived fit ($p = .096$). These results suggest that cross-controversial sponsorships do not have perceived lower fit than controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.

The mean values of each of the four conditions show that neither of the conditions are perceived to have particularly high fit, nor to have low fit (see *Table 6*). Condition 2 (Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud) is perceived to have the highest fit with $M = 4.75$, while condition 3 (Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen) is perceived to have the lowest fit with $M = 4.0043$.

Table 6: *Descriptives: Perceived fit*

Perceived fit			
	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Condition 1: Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen	39	4.0615	1.50658
Condition 2: Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud	40	4.7500	1.45055
Condition 3: Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen	46	4.0043	1.49517
Condition 4: Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud	41	4.0976	1.55185
Total	166	4.2205	1.51799

Based on the results from the two-way between-subject ANOVA, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

5.2.2 Hypothesis 2

H2: *Consumers' attitudes toward cross-controversial sponsorships will be more negative compared to consumers' attitudes toward controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a two-way between-subjects ANOVA to compare different conditions' effect on attitude toward sponsorship. There was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of brands' and athletes' controversiality on attitude toward the sponsorship, $F(1, 162) = .251$, $p = .617$. There was no significant main effect between the non-controversial brand and controversial brand on attitude toward sponsorship ($p = .779$). However, there was a significant main effect between the non-controversial athlete and controversial athlete on attitude toward sponsorship ($p = .010$).

The mean values indicate that condition 4 (Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud, $M = 4.9512$, $SD = 1.36842$) has the most positive attitudes, and that condition 3 (Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen, $M = 4.2283$, $SD = 1.44801$) has the least positive attitudes (see *Table 7*). The results also indicate that sponsorships where Kjetil Jansrud is included, regardless of brand, have the most positive attitudes. These indications are consistent with the main effect of the athlete's controversiality on consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship. However, these results are only indications, as the two-way between-subjects ANOVA was statistically insignificant, $F(3,162) = 2.243$, $p = .067$.

Table 7: Descriptives: Attitude toward sponsorship

Attitude toward sponsorship

	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Condition 1: Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen	39	4.4103	1.72395
Condition 2: Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud	40	4.9000	1.44204
Condition 3: Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen	46	4.2283	1.44801
Condition 4: Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud	41	4.9512	1.36842
Total	166	4.6114	1.51695

Based on the results from the two-way between-subjects ANOVA, hypothesis 2 is not supported.

5.2.3 Hypothesis 3

H3: *Consumers' purchase intentions of the brands' products will be lower in cross-controversial sponsorships compared to in controversial and non-controversial sponsorships.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a two-way between-subjects ANOVA to compare the different brands' and athletes' effect on consumers' purchase intentions. There was no statistically significant interaction between the effects of brands' and athletes' controversiality on purchase intentions, $F(1, 162)$ = .434, p = .511. In addition, there were no significant main effects between the non-controversial brand and controversial brand on purchase intentions (p = .334) or between the non-controversial athlete and controversial athlete on purchase intentions (p = .378).

The mean values indicate that there are only small differences in purchase intentions between the different conditions (see *Table 8*). Overall, the purchase intentions within each condition is low, but we see a slight tendency of a higher purchase intention in condition 1 (Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen, M = 3.6752, SD = 1.62849) and in condition 2 (Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud, M = 3.7417, SD = 1.92226), indicating that purchase intentions for Møllers Tran's

products are slightly higher than for Red Bull's products. However, these results are only indications, as the two-way between-subjects ANOVA was statistically insignificant, $F(3, 162) = .768$, $p = .514$.

Table 8: *Descriptives: Purchase intention*

Purchase intention

	N	Mean	Std. deviation
Condition 1: Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen	39	3.6752	1.62849
Condition 2: Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud	40	3.7417	1.92226
Condition 3: Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen	46	3.1957	1.98957
Condition 4: Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud	41	3.6504	1.99019
Total	166	3.5522	1.89051

Based on the results from the two-way between-subject ANOVA, hypothesis 3 is not supported.

5.2.4 Hypothesis 4

H4a: *Consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be negatively influenced by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted two different one-sample t-tests, one for each brand, to compare consumers' attitudes toward the brand before and after exposure to the sponsorship manipulations. We decided to conduct two separate tests in order to identify potential differences between the two cross-controversial sponsorships, which would not have been sufficiently identified with a combined test.

First, we tested the cross-controversial sponsorship between Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen (condition 1). We tested consumers' attitudes toward Møllers Tran after being exposed to the sponsorship manipulation against the mean of consumers' attitudes toward Møllers Tran prior to the manipulation, which equals a test value of 5.4957 ($SD = 1.43244$). The one-sample t-test

indicates that there are significant differences in attitudes before (M = 5.4957, SD = 1.43244) and after (M = 4.8120, SD = 1.72324) sponsorship manipulation (t(38) = -2.478, p = .018). Based on the results in condition 1, consumers' attitudes toward the brand are negatively influenced by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship, which supports hypothesis 4a.

Second, we tested the cross-controversial sponsorship between Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud (condition 4). We tested consumers' attitudes toward Red Bull after being exposed to the sponsorship manipulation against the mean of consumers' attitudes toward Red Bull prior to the manipulation, which equals a test value of 4.6016 (SD = 1.65029). The one-sample t-test indicates that there are no significant differences in attitudes before (M = 4.6016, SD = 1.65029) and after (M = 4.7154, SD = 1.72008) sponsorship manipulation (t(40) = .424, p = .674). Based on the results in condition 4, consumers' attitudes toward the brand are slightly increasing, thereby contradicting hypothesis 4a. However, these results are only indications, as the one-sample t-test was statistically insignificant (p = .674).

Based on the two analyses, hypothesis 4a is partially supported.

H4b: *Consumers' purchase intentions toward the brand will be lowered by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted two different one-sample t-tests, one for each brand, to compare consumers' purchase intentions toward the brand before and after exposure to the sponsorship manipulation. We decided to conduct two separate tests in order to identify potential differences between the two cross-controversial sponsorships, which would not have been sufficiently identified with a combined test.

First, we tested the cross-controversial sponsorship between Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen (condition 1). We tested consumers' purchase intentions toward Møllers Tran after being exposed to the sponsorship manipulation against the mean of consumers' purchase intentions toward Møllers Tran prior to the

manipulation, which equals a test value of 4.0171 (SD = 1.67533). The one-sample t-test indicates that there are no significant differences in purchase intentions before (M = 4.0171, SD = 1.67533) and after (M = 3.6752, SD = 1.62849) sponsorship manipulation (t(38) = -1.311, p = .198). Based on the results in condition 1, consumers' purchase intentions toward the brand are decreasing, which is in line with hypothesis 4b. However, the one-sample t-test was statistically insignificant (p = .198), and we therefore do not have enough evidence from condition 1 to support hypothesis 4b.

Second, we tested the cross-controversial sponsorship between Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud (condition 4). We tested consumers' purchase intentions toward Red Bull after being exposed to the sponsorship manipulation against the mean of consumers' purchase intentions toward Red Bull prior to the manipulation, which equals a test value of 3.878 (SD = 2.06929). The one-sample t-test indicates that there are no significant differences in attitudes before (M = 3.878, SD = 2.06929) and after (M = 3.6504, SD = 1.99019) sponsorship manipulation (t(40) = -.732, p = .468). Based on the results in condition 4, consumers' purchase intentions toward the brand are slightly decreasing, which is in line with hypothesis 4b. However, the one-sample t-test was statistically insignificant (p = .468), and we therefore do not have enough evidence from condition 4 to support hypothesis 4b.

Based on the two analyses, hypothesis 4b is not supported.

5.2.5 Hypothesis 5

H5: *In cross-controversial sponsorships, consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be more affected when the athlete is controversial compared to when the brand is controversial.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted an independent-samples t-test to identify whether consumers' attitudes toward the cross-controversial sponsorship were more affected when the athlete is controversial compared to when the brand is controversial. To do so, we computed a variable measuring change in attitudes

before and after sponsorship manipulation within condition 1 (Møllers Tran +
Henrik Kristoffersen) and condition 4 (Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud).

The results show that the change in attitudes in condition 1 (M = -.6838, SD =
1.28634) is significantly different from the change in attitudes in condition 4 (M =
.1138, SD = .12353), ($t(63)$ = -3.321, p = .002). The change in attitudes in
condition 1 is negative, implying that consumers' attitudes toward the brand are
affected when the athlete is the controversial partner. The change in attitudes in
condition 4 is slightly positive, implying that consumers' attitudes toward the
brand are slightly affected when the brand is the controversial partner. These
results indicate that consumers' attitudes toward the brand in cross-controversial
sponsorships are more affected when the athlete is controversial compared to
when the brand is controversial. These results are shown in *Figure 4*.

CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TOWARD BRAND

Figure 4: Change in attitude toward brand

Based on the results from the independent-samples t-test, hypothesis 5 is
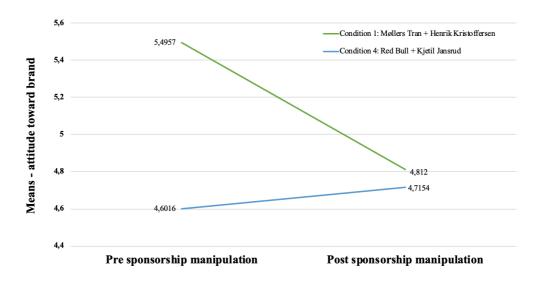supported.

5.2.6 Hypothesis 6

H6: *In cross-controversial sponsorships, consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be positively influenced when self-connection to the brand is high compared to when self-connection to the brand is low.*

In order to test this hypothesis, we conducted a linear regression analysis to measure whether consumers' attitudes toward the brand are affected by self-brand connection. The results show that self-brand connection statistically predicted consumers' attitudes toward the brand, $R^2 = .279$, $F(1, 78) = 30.171$, $p = .000$. The linear regression analysis shows that the model explains 27.9% of the variance and that the model is a significant predictor of consumers' attitudes toward the brand in cross-controversial sponsorships, meaning that self-brand connection contributes in predicting the outcome of attitudes toward the brand.

Table 9: Regression analysis

		Coefficients				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.013	.358		8.414	.000
	Self-brand connection	.626	.114	.528	5.493	.000

The findings indicate that when self-brand connection increases, attitudes toward the brand in a cross-controversial sponsorship increase. According to the output from the regression analysis ($\beta = .626$, $p = .000$), if consumers' self-brand connection increase by one item, consumers' attitudes toward the brand increase by .626. This implies that high self-brand connection positively influences consumers' attitudes toward the brand in cross-controversial sponsorships.

Based on the results from the regression analysis, hypothesis 6 is supported.

6.0 Discussion

In this section, we will discuss our findings in light of previous literature. The discussion will be organized from hypothesis 1 to 6.

As mentioned, previous research has focused on how the sponsored object affects the sponsoring brand when controversial behavior occurs. To the best of our knowledge, cross-controversial athlete sponsorships seem to be absent in the literature. Therefore, the aim of this master thesis has been to identify how consumers' attitudes toward sponsorships are affected by cross-controversy. In order to answer our research question and hypotheses, we have collected and analyzed data from 166 respondents using online surveys. In the following sections, the results from the analyses will be discussed.

The first three hypotheses aimed to test whether consumers' perceived fit, attitudes toward sponsorship and purchase intentions were affected by type of sponsorship, either cross-controversial, non-controversial or controversial. According to Carlson & Donavan (2008), a successful athlete sponsorship can lead to increased brand awareness, favorable attitudes toward the brand and purchase intentions. Fit has been emphasized as an important factor for a successful sponsorship (Olson & Thjømøe, 2011; Becker-Olsen & Hill, 2006, Till & Busler, 2000, Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005), as fit between brand and athlete is found to improve attitudes toward the brand (Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005; Becker-Olsen & Simmons, 2002).

Based on this, the first hypothesis aimed to test whether consumers' perceived fit differed between cross-controversial, non-controversial and controversial sponsorships, as cross-controversial sponsorships seem to lack a natural fit between the brand and the athlete. However, our findings indicate that there are no significant differences in consumers' perceptions of fit between cross-controversial sponsorships, non-controversial sponsorships and controversial sponsorships.

We speculate that the reason behind these findings might be that the brands included, Møllers Tran and Red Bull, have both been known to sponsor Norwegian athletes across branches. Therefore, including two such brands might lead to consumers perceiving a fit, even though the fit might not be natural. This is consistent with a finding by Woisetschläger and Michaelis (2012), proposing that sponsorships that are initially perceived as incongruent can turn out to be congruent over time, as continuous pairing and linking is shown to influence brand image. Even though for example Red Bull, which is perceived as a controversial brand, lacks a natural fit with the non-controversial athlete Kjetil Jansrud, our results indicate that consumers perceive the cross-controversial sponsorship as similar to non-controversial and controversial sponsorships in regard to fit. We speculate that the reason for this is Red Bull's continuous sponsoring of athletes during the past years, resulting in a high perceived fit among consumers despite the contrasting controversiality within the sponsorship. In addition, Red Bull has effectively communicated their sponsorships with athletes for a long period of time, which according to Olson and Thjømøe (2011) can be used to overcome poor natural fit.

Hypotheses two and three were developed based on the assumption that cross-controversial sponsorships would lack natural fit, thereby affecting consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship, as well as their purchase intentions. Regardless of the fact that the first hypothesis indicates that there are no significant differences in consumers' perceived fit between cross-controversial, non-controversial and controversial sponsorships, it was still relevant to test hypotheses two and three. The reason for this is that the findings from hypotheses two and three could either confirm or contradict the findings from the first hypothesis.

The aim of hypothesis two was to test whether consumers' attitudes toward cross-controversial sponsorships were more negative compared to attitudes toward non-controversial and controversial sponsorships. The results from the test indicate that there are no significant differences in consumers' attitudes toward either of the sponsorship types, but a slight indication that sponsorships including Kjetil Jansrud (non-controversial athlete) have more positive attitudes than sponsorships

including Henrik Kristoffersen (controversial athlete). The main effect from the test indicates that the controversiality of the athlete has more effect on consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship than the controversiality of the brand.

These indications might be explained by previous research on how consumers identify with social figures. According to Kuypers (2002), we often seek opinions of prominent social figures, indicating that consumers identify with athletes to a certain degree. The level of identification depends on the attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness of the athlete (Kamins et al., 1989), which affects the effectiveness of the sponsorship. We speculate that a non-controversial athlete, such as Kjetil Jansrud, possess higher attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness than a controversial athlete, such as Henrik Kristoffersen. This can explain why cross-controversial sponsorships with non-controversial athletes receive more positive attitudes from consumers than sponsorships with controversial athletes. However, we were not able to identify significant differences between the sponsorships, and further research is needed to confirm these indications.

The aim of hypothesis three was to test whether consumers' purchase intentions in cross-controversial sponsorships were lower compared to purchase intentions in non-controversial and controversial sponsorships. The results from the test indicate no difference across the different sponsorships. Generally, the purchase intentions across all conditions were fairly low, creating difficulties in identifying tendencies. However, results indicate that purchase intentions for Møllers Tran are slightly higher than purchase intentions for Red Bull, despite type of sponsorship. We speculate that the reason for this is that consumers' purchase intentions are based on additional factors besides controversiality, for example that Møllers Tran's products are healthier than Red Bull's products.

The results from hypotheses two and three enhance the findings from hypothesis one, that there are no significant differences in consumers' perceived fit across the different sponsorship types.

Hypothesis 4a aimed to test whether the consumers' initial attitudes toward the brand were negatively affected by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial

sponsorship. The results indicate that this is partially correct, as condition 1 (Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen) showed a statistically significant negative change in consumers' attitudes, while condition 4 (Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud) showed insignificant change in consumers' attitudes.

Our results indicate that consumers' attitudes toward Møllers Tran are negatively affected by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen, while consumers' attitudes toward Red Bull are slightly improved by sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud. This shows that in cross-controversial sponsorships where the athlete is controversial, consumers' brand attitudes are negatively affected. On the contrary, in cross-controversial sponsorships where the athlete is non-controversial, consumers' brand attitudes are not significantly affected. This highlights the assumption that there might be differences in cross-controversial sponsorships, depending on whether the brand or the athlete is controversial. According to Cornwell, Weeks and Roy (2005), low-fit sponsorships have proven to result in less favorable attitudes toward the sponsoring brand than high-fit sponsorships. However, our results indicate that this might not be the case in cross-controversial sponsorships, as we see a difference in attitudinal change between the two cross-controversial sponsorships, even though there are no significant differences in consumers' perceived fit between them.

Hypothesis 4b aimed to test whether consumers' initial purchase intentions toward the brand were negatively affected by the brand's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship. The results from the test indicate no significant negative differences in consumers' purchase intentions in either of the two cross-controversial sponsorships. Nevertheless, the results show a slight decrease in purchase intentions after the brand engages in a cross-controversial sponsorship, which is consistent with previous research highlighted in the discussion of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 (Carlson & Donavan, 2008; Cornwell, Weeks & Roy, 2005; Becker-Olsen & Simmons, 2002). However, the results are not significant, and these indications can therefore be coincidental.

The fifth hypothesis stated that in cross-controversial sponsorships, consumers' attitudes toward the brand are more affected when the athlete is controversial

compared to when the brand is controversial. The test confirmed that there are significant differences in attitudinal change between the two cross-controversial sponsorships. The results show that consumers' attitudes toward Møllers Tran are negatively affected when engaging in a sponsorship with Henrik Kristoffersen (controversial athlete), while consumers' attitudes toward Red Bull are slightly positively affected when engaging in a sponsorship with Kjetil Jansrud (non-controversial athlete).

This is consistent with previous research by Carrillat and d'Astous (2014), highlighting that there exists a power imbalance within athlete sponsorships. In a situation where a negative event occurs, such as when either the athlete or the brand is controversial, the consequence for the other partner is likely to differ depending on the balance of power between them. As previously mentioned, based on our interpretation of a sponsorship, Carrillat & d'Astous' (2014) research indicates that the athlete is the most powerful partner in a sponsorship.

In the cross-controversial sponsorship between Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen, the athlete is the controversial partner who holds the most power. Our findings show that consumers' attitudes toward Møllers Tran are significantly affected by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen. In the cross-controversial sponsorship between Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud, the athlete is the non-controversial partner who holds the power. Our findings show that Red Bull is slightly positively affected by sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud, even though the results were statistically insignificant. Also, in both cross-controversial sponsorships there is a spreading activation from the more powerful partner to the less powerful partner. However, the change in consumers' attitudes was only significant when the most powerful partner, the athlete, was controversial. This indicates that in a cross-controversial sponsorship, consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be more affected when the athlete is controversial compared to when the brand is controversial.

The sixth hypothesis stated that consumers' attitudes toward the brand in cross-controversial sponsorships are more positively influenced when self-connection to the brand is high compared to when self-connection to the brand is low. The

analysis confirmed that consumers' self-brand connection significantly affects consumers' attitudes toward the brand, indicating that when consumers' self-brand connection increases, consumers' attitudes toward the brand also increase. This means that in cross-controversial sponsorships, high self-brand connection positively influences consumers' attitudes toward the brand.

This finding is consistent with previous research on self-brand connection in sponsorships (Escalas, 2004; Lisjak, Lee & Gardner, 2012; Peluso, Rizzo & Pino, 2019). According to Escalas (2004), the more people identify with the brand, the more favorable are their attitudes toward the brand. Our results confirm that this also holds for cross-controversial sponsorships, as we found that consumers' attitudes toward the brand are more positively influenced when self-connection to the brand is high compared to when self-connection to the brand is low. Moreover, Lisjak, Lee & Gardner (2012) found that when a consumer identifies with a brand, a threat to the brand is perceived as a threat to the consumer's self. In the cross-controversial sponsorship between Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen, the controversial behavior of the athlete can be perceived as a threat to the brand that needs to be defended. Our overall results show that, in general, consumers' attitudes toward the brand tend to decrease when a non-controversial brand engages in a sponsorship with a controversial athlete. However, if consumers' self-brand connection is high, consumers' attitudes toward the brand increase. This can be explained by consumers' defensive behavior being triggered when they perceive that the brand is threatened by the controversiality of the athlete.

In the cross-controversial sponsorship between Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud, we speculate that high self-athlete connection can explain why consumers' attitudes toward the brand increase after Kjetil Jansrud engages in a sponsorship agreement with Red Bull. According to Peluso, Rizzo & Pino (2019), consumers with high self-athlete connection have higher propensity to support the athlete. We speculate that when consumers have a strong connection to Kjetil Jansrud, they are more willing to make excuses if he engages in actions that are considered inappropriate, such as when engaging in a sponsorship with a controversial brand, Red Bull. This can potentially lead to consumers' attitudes toward Red Bull being increased,

as a result of spreading activation from Kjetil Jansrud to Red Bull. However, these indications need to be further researched, as this thesis only focuses on how consumers' self-brand connection affects attitudes toward the brand in cross-controversial sponsorships.

7.0 Conclusion

Athlete sponsorship has become an attractive marketing tactic as it generally has proven to have positive effects on the sponsoring brand. According to Carlson and Donavan (2008), athlete sponsorships can increase brand awareness, favorable attitudes toward the brand and consumers' purchase intentions. Sponsoring of athletes and sports events are common marketing activities among brands (Peluso, Rizzo & Pino, 2019), and usually accounts for a substantial part of companies' marketing budgets. As a result, there exist substantial amounts of research on athlete sponsorships.

Several factors related to sponsorships have been researched, such as fit, self-connection to brand, effectiveness and how certain behavior from either the brand or the athlete affect consumers' attitudes. The term controversial behavior has been linked to sponsorship agreements and particularly how controversial behavior affects brand image. Previous research has focused, to a large extent, on how the sponsoring brand is affected when the sponsored object engages in controversial behavior. However, research on cross-controversial athlete sponsorships seem to be absent in the literature. Therefore, the scope of this thesis has been to investigate how cross-controversy affects consumers' attitudes toward athlete sponsorships and toward the brand.

Over the past years, several incidents of controversial behavior from athletes have been reported both nationally and internationally. As previously mentioned, such incidents include Petter Northug's controversial act of drunk driving, which affected his sponsorship agreement with Coop, as well as Colin Kaepernick's act of taking the knee and being featured in Nike's commercial campaigns. These

incidents highlight that there exist substantial risks for brands when engaging in sponsorship agreements with athletes, which enhance the importance of research that identifies factors to help overcome these risks.

The main implication from our research is that cross-controversial sponsorships differ depending on whether the athlete or the brand is the controversial partner. Even though consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship as an entity are not negatively affected by the sponsorship being cross-controversial, our findings show that the brand can be harmed by engaging in a cross-controversial sponsorship. According to our research, consumers' brand attitudes toward Møllers Tran were negatively affected as a result of sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen, which highlights the risk of a non-controversial brand sponsoring a controversial athlete. In contrast, consumers' attitudes toward Red Bull were actually slightly improved as a result of sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud, even though the change was insignificant. These findings can be explained by the power imbalance that exists within a sponsorship (Carrillat & d'Astous, 2014), as there is a spreading activation from the more powerful partner to the less powerful partner, which indicates that in a cross-controversial sponsorship, consumers' attitudes toward the brand will be more affected when the athlete is controversial compared to when the brand is controversial.

Another important finding from our research is that consumers' perceived fit of the sponsorship does not differ between the different sponsorship types. Most importantly, consumers' perceived fit of a cross-controversial sponsorship is not lower than the perceived fit of non-controversial and controversial sponsorships. This implies that consumers' perceived fit between the athlete and the brand are not necessarily dependent on each partner's level of controversiality. Consumers might experience a perceived fit within the sponsorship based on other explanatory factors such as continuous pairing and linking, which is consistent with previous research (Woisetschläger & Michaelis, 2012). For instance, according to Olson and Thjømøe (2011), effective communication can be used to overcome poor natural fit through message articulation. According to them, the message should focus on the sponsoring object using the brand's products/service,

that there is a similarity between the sponsored object's and the brand's audience, and that there is a geographic similarity between the partners.

Red Bull is an example on how poor natural fit can be overcome with effective communication, as the company has engaged in sponsorship agreements with athletes for a long time. Red Bull has effectively communicated these sponsorships by focusing on athletes' usage of Red Bull's products before and after competitions. You often see athletes sponsored by Red Bull drinking an energy drink when being interviewed on TV after a competition, as well as having Red Bull's logo visible on their clothes at all times. Through this continuous pairing, Red Bull is now somewhat associated with sports and athletes, even though their products originally lack natural fit with sports.

Our findings imply that managers of non-controversial brands should avoid engaging in cross-controversial sponsorships, as this can lead to consumers' attitudes toward the brand being negatively affected. These findings imply that when engaging in sponsorships, managers of non-controversial brands need to be particularly cautious when considering whom to sponsor, as they face higher risks compared to controversial brands. Conversely, our findings reveal that consumers' attitudes toward controversial brands are slightly positively affected by engaging in cross-controversial sponsorships. Therefore, controversial brands face lower risks than non-controversial brands when considering whom to sponsor.

However, our research also found that consumers' self-brand connection increases consumers' attitudes toward the brand in cross-controversial sponsorships. This finding implies that even though most non-controversial brands should try to avoid engaging in cross-controversial sponsorships, some brands could potentially benefit from this type of sponsorship, as high self-brand connection positively influences consumers' attitudes toward the brand. This implies that brands with strong connections to their consumers face lower risks when engaging in cross-controversial sponsorships compared to brands with weak connections to their consumers.

Nevertheless, whether or not the brand is controversial, sponsoring a non-controversial athlete is generally more beneficial compared to sponsoring a controversial athlete, as this has lower risks and can enhance consumers' attitudes toward the brand.

8.0 Limitations and future research

In this section, we will discuss the limitations of our research as well as propose suggestions for future research.

First, our research cannot be generalized, as a result of methodological flaws. We distributed the survey through online channels, where we used convenience sampling and the sampling technique self-selection, implying that participation in the study was voluntary. As we used such a sampling technique, we had no control over who participated in the study and who did not participate in the study. In addition, a known challenge with this sampling technique is that one ends up with a systematically skewed selection, meaning that the sample is not representative for the population (Khazaal et al., 2014).

Second, we had a relatively small sample size (166), indicating that each respondents' answer greatly affects the data, which weakens the results' reliability. We claim that a larger sample size would provide stronger results. In addition, 70% of the respondents in the sample were female, which might have influenced the results. There might be differences in attitudes between females and males, and as the majority of our respondents were female, the results are skewed. This underlines that our sample is not representative for the population.

Third, the brands chosen for the main study might have influenced the reliability of the results. Both Møllers Tran and Red Bull are known for sponsoring athletes, which can lead to consumers perceiving a natural fit in each sponsorship condition, which might have affected their ability to differentiate between the conditions. However, this perception of natural fit also leads to the sponsorship

conditions being perceived as credible, which makes it easier for respondents to evaluate the fictive sponsorship. Furthermore, both brands are categorized as fast-moving consumer-goods, which can potentially limit the generalizability of the research. However, we claim that including two brands from the same category contribute to eliminating other explanatory factors, and that this would have been more challenging to achieve if brands from dissimilar categories were used in the study.

Furthermore, the athletes chosen for the main study are both men and active within the same sport, which eliminates explanatory variables. However, this can also limit the generalizability of our results. First, both athletes included are active alpine skiiers, which can be perceived as a high-risk and challenging sport. We speculate that this sport can be associated with brands that have a similar high-risk image, which can influence consumers' perceptions of sponsorship fit. Also, as both athletes are male, the interpretation of the results might be limited to only men. Future research should include female athletes, as there might be differences between genders in regard to perceived controversiality, and how this affects consumers' attitudes toward cross-controversial sponsorships.

Fourth, the dependent variable *attitude toward sponsorship* was measured by using four different items based on research by Eagleman & Krohn (2012). However, when analyzing the collected data, we discovered that only the first two of these four items measured what we intended to measure. As a result, we decided to remove these items before merging the other two items into one variable (see *5.1 Data preparation* for further elaboration). Measuring the dependent variable with only two items might have negatively influenced the reliability of the results.

Fifth, before running the two-way between-subjects ANOVA tests for hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, we ran the Shapiro-Wilk's test for normality and the Levene's test for homogeneity. In both hypotheses 1 and 2, the Shapiro-Wilk's test indicated that our data deviated from a normal distribution, as one of four conditions had a significance value of $p < .05$. For hypothesis 3, three of four conditions deviated from normal distribution with significance values of $p < .05$ (Laerd, 2019). In

contrast, Levene's test for homogeneity showed significant values of $p > .05$, indicating that equal variances could be assumed (Laerd, 2019). The results from the Levene's test for homogeneity enhance the reliability of our results, while the results from the Shapiro Wilk's test decrease the reliability of our results. With normally distributed data, the test results of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 could have had different outcomes, which future research should emphasize.

Sixth, in addition to the dependent variables included in the main study, other explanatory factors might have influenced the results. Most importantly, athlete liking should have been included as one of the dependent variables, as we assume that this variable mediates consumers' attitudes toward both the sponsorship and the brand. For instance, consumers' attitudes toward Møllers Tran were negatively affected by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen, but this might be due to other factors than the level of controversiality. In this study, we have measured change in brand attitudes based on the controversiality of the athlete, but there might be other variables that influence the change in attitude, such as athlete liking. Therefore, we propose that further research is needed to identify whether athlete liking mediates consumers' attitudes toward the brand in a cross-controversial sponsorship. Can consumers' attitudes toward the brand be positively affected even though the athlete is controversial, if athlete liking is high?

Additionally, in this thesis we have only focused on how consumers' attitudes toward the sponsorship and attitudes toward the brand are affected by the brand's engagement in cross-controversial sponsorship. Future research should also focus on how consumers' attitudes toward the athlete are affected by the athlete's engagement in a cross-controversial sponsorship. Based on the power imbalance that exist within a sponsorship (Carrillat and d'Astous, 2014), the athlete should not be significantly affected by controversiality of the sponsoring brand, but this needs to be properly researched.

Finally, future research should focus on whether different combinations of cross-controversial sponsorships might lead to different results. This thesis only investigates two types of cross-controversial sponsorships, but including other

brands and athletes can potentially result in confirming or contradicting findings. As it is difficult to agree on a common definition of controversy, in addition to controversy being subjective, future research should focus on assessing what consumers perceive as controversial in the perspective of athlete sponsorships.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Cronbach's alpha

Cronbach's alpha

Combined variables	Cronbach's alpha	N of items
Combined_Attitude_pre	.935	3
Combined_Purch_pre	.940	3
Combined_SelfCon	.901	3
Combined_Attitude_spons	.740	2
Combined_Attitude_post	.959	3
Combined_Purch_post	.937	3
Combined_Fit	.940	5

Appendix 2: Survey

Condition 1: Møllers Tran + Henrik Kristoffersen

Q1: *Introduction*

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire.

This survey is part of our master thesis and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

The aim of this survey is to measure your attitudes toward different athletes, brands and the sponsorship agreements between them. There are no right or wrong answers.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the option to withdraw at any time. Your answers are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Kind regards,

Katharina and Marte

MSc students at BI International Business School, Oslo

Q2: *Brand presentation*

In this part of the survey we are interested in your attitudes toward the brand Møllers Tran. Møllers Tran produces and sells Omega-3 supplements, which is important for optimal development and is positively influencing people's health.

Q3: *Brand attitude*

How do you perceive Møllers Tran?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q4: *Purchase intention*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5: *Self-brand connection*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I can identify with the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would think Møllers Tran (could) help me become the type of person I want to be	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Møllers Tran suits me well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6: *Sponsorship manipulation*

Møllers Tran produces Omega-3 supplements. Omega-3 is important for optimal development and is positively influencing people's health.

Imagine that Møllers Tran, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the disputed alpine skier Henrik Kristoffersen. The sponsorship includes that Møllers Tran's logo will be visible on Kristoffersen's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Kristoffersen will be featured in Møllers Tran's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Kristoffersen frequently features Møllers Tran in his own social media channels.

Q7: *Attitude toward sponsorship*

After Møllers Tran has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Henrik Kristoffersen, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I believe it is good for Møllers Tran to sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Møllers Tran are positively influenced by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Møllers Tran are negatively influenced by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am more likely to purchase a product from Møllers Tran if it is a sponsor of Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q8: *Attitude toward brand*

After Møllers Tran has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Henrik Kristoffersen, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q9: *Purchase intention*

After Møllers Tran has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Henrik Kristoffersen, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q10: *Perceived fit*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
There is a logical connection between Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The image of Møllers Tran and the image of Henrik Kristoffersen are similar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen fit together well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Møllers Tran and Henrik Kristoffersen stands for similar things	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It makes sense to me that Møllers Tran sponsors Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q11: *Demographics*

Please enter your age:

Q12: *Demographics*

Please enter your gender:

○ Female

○ Male

○ Other

Condition 2: Møllers Tran + Kjetil Jansrud

Q1: *Introduction*

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire.

This survey is part of our master thesis and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

The aim of this survey is to measure your attitudes toward different athletes, brands and the sponsorship agreements between them. There are no right or wrong answers.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the option to withdraw at any time. Your answers are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Kind regards,

Katharina and Marte

MSc students at BI International Business School, Oslo

Q2: *Brand presentation*

In this part of the survey we are interested in your attitudes toward the brand Møllers Tran. Møllers Tran produces and sells Omega-3 supplements, which is important for optimal development and is positively influencing people's health.

Q3: *Brand attitude*

How do you perceive Møllers Tran?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q4: *Purchase intention*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5: *Self-brand connection*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I can identify with the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would think Møllers Tran (could) help me become the type of person I want to be	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Møllers Tran suits me well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6: *Sponsorship manipulation*

Møllers Tran produces Omega-3 supplements. Omega-3 is important for optimal development and is positively influencing people's health.

Imagine that Møllers Tran, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the well-liked alpine skier Kjetil Jansrud. The sponsorship includes that Møllers Tran's logo will be visible on Jansrud's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Jansrud will be featured in Møllers Tran's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Jansrud frequently features Møllers Tran in his own social media channels.

Q7: *Attitude toward sponsorship*

After Møllers Tran has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Kjetil Jansrud, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I believe it is good for Møllers Tran to sponsor Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Møllers Tran are positively influenced by sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Møllers Tran are negatively influenced by sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am more likely to purchase a product from Møllers Tran if it is a sponsor of Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q8: *Attitude toward brand*

After Møllers Tran has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Kjetil Jansrud, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q9: *Purchase intention*

After Møllers Tran has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Kjetil Jansrud, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Møllers Tran brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q10: *Perceived fit*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
There is a logical connection between Møllers Tran and Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The image of Møllers Tran and the image of Kjetil Jansrud are similar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Møllers Tran and Kjetil Jansrud fit together well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Møllers Tran and Kjetil Jansrud stands for similar things	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It makes sense to me that Møllers Tran sponsors Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q11: *Demographics*

Please enter your

age:

Q12: *Demographics*

Please enter your gender:

○   Female

○   Male

○   Other

Condition 3: Red Bull + Henrik Kristoffersen

Q1: *Introduction*

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire.

This survey is part of our master thesis and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

The aim of this survey is to measure your attitudes toward different athletes, brands and the sponsorship agreements between them. There are no right or wrong answers.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the option to withdraw at any time. Your answers are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Kind regards,

Katharina and Marte

MSc students at BI International Business School, Oslo

Q2: *Brand presentation*

In this part of the survey we are interested in your attitudes toward the brand Red Bull. Red Bull produces and sells a variety of energy drinks with the ingredients caffeine, vitamins and taurine.

Q3: *Brand attitude*

How do you perceive Red Bull?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q4: *Purchase intention*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5: *Self-brand connection*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I can identify with the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would think Red Bull (could) help me become the type of person I want to be	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Red Bull suits me well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6: *Sponsorship manipulation*

Red Bull produces and sells a variety of energy drinks including caffeine, vitamins and taurine.

Imagine that Red Bull, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the disputed alpine skier Henrik Kristoffersen. The sponsorship includes that Red Bull's logo will be visible on Kristoffersen's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Kristoffersen will be featured in Red Bull's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Kristoffersen frequently features Red Bull in his own social media channels.

Q7: *Attitude toward sponsorship*

After Red Bull has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Henrik Kristoffersen, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I believe it is good for Red Bull to sponsor Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Red Bull are positively influenced by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Red Bull are negatively influenced by sponsoring Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am more likely to purchase a product from Red Bull if it is a sponsor of Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q8: *Attitude toward brand*

After Red Bull has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Henrik Kristoffersen, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q9: *Purchase intention*

After Red Bull has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Henrik Kristoffersen, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q10: *Perceived fit*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
There is a logical connection between Red Bull and Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The image of Red Bull and the image of Henrik Kristoffersen are similar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Red Bull and Henrik Kristoffersen fit together well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Red Bull and Henrik Kristoffersen stands for similar things	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It makes sense to me that Red Bull sponsors Henrik Kristoffersen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q11: *Demographics*

Please enter your age:

Q12: *Demographics*

Please enter your gender:

○   Female

○   Male

○   Other

Condition 4: Red Bull + Kjetil Jansrud

Q1: *Introduction*

Dear respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire.

This survey is part of our master thesis and will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

The aim of this survey is to measure your attitudes toward different athletes, brands and the sponsorship agreements between them. There are no right or wrong answers.

Participation in this survey is voluntary and you have the option to withdraw at any time. Your answers are anonymous and will be treated confidentially.

Kind regards,

Katharina and Marte

MSc students at BI International Business School, Oslo

Q2: *Brand presentation*

In this part of the survey we are interested in your attitudes toward the brand Red Bull. Red Bull produces and sells a variety of energy drinks with the ingredients caffeine, vitamins and taurine..

Q3: *Brand attitude*

How do you perceive Red Bull?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q4: *Purchase intention*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q5: *Self-brand connection*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I can identify with the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would think Red Bull (could) help me become the type of person I want to be	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Red Bull suits me well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6: *Sponsorship manipulation*

Red Bull produces and sells a variety of energy drinks with the ingredients caffeine, vitamins and taurine.

Imagine that Red Bull, as a part of their market strategy, now has decided to engage in a sponsorship with the well-liked alpine skier Kjetil Jansrud. The sponsorship includes that Red Bull's logo will be visible on Jansrud's clothes before, during and after competitions. In addition, Jansrud will be featured in Red Bull's television and internet advertisements. The sponsorship will also imply that Jansrud frequently features Red Bull in his own social media channels.

Q7: *Attitude toward sponsorship*

After Red Bull has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Kjetil Jansrud, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I believe it is good for Red Bull to sponsor Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Red Bull are positively influenced by sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My attitudes toward Red Bull are negatively influenced by sponsoring Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am more likely to purchase a product from Red Bull if it is a sponsor of Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q8: *Attitude toward brand*

After Red Bull has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Kjetil Jansrud, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	
Bad	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Good
Unfavorable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Favorable
Negative	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Positive

Q9: *Purchase intention*

After Red Bull has engaged in a sponsorship agreement with Kjetil Jansrud, how do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
I would like to try the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to buy the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would actively seek out the Red Bull brand	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q10: *Perceived fit*

How do you disagree or agree with the following statements?

	1. Strongly disagree	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7. Strongly agree
There is a logical connection between Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
The image of Red Bull and the image of Kjetil Jansrud are similar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud fit together well	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Red Bull and Kjetil Jansrud stands for similar things	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It makes sense to me that Red Bull sponsors Kjetil Jansrud	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q11: *Demographics*

Please enter your age:

Q12: *Demographics*

Please enter your gender:

○ Female

○ Male

○ Other