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Master Thesis

Can sponsorships connected to transgender cause be beneficial? The Impact a Controversial Statement made by a Sponsored Athlete has on a Sponsor's Brand Judgments

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Can sponsorships connected to transgender cause be beneficial?

The Impact a Controversial Statement made by a Sponsored Athlete has on a Sponsor's Brand Judgments

MSc in Strategic Marketing Management

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of a sponsored athlete's controversial statement about M-W transgenders competing in women's sports has on a sponsor's brand judgment. A conjoint analysis was executed to investigate the preferences among consumers on four attributes: 1) liking of athlete, 2) liking of brand, 3) severity in athlete comment and 4) brand response. Further, a comparison between different cohorts was interpreted to see if differences in consumer segments were present. The main implication of this study is that both the sponsoring brand and the sponsored athlete face a great risk of being involved in the transgender cause and that consumers mainly have negative attitudes towards controversial statements. Our results indicate that brands are negatively impacted when engaging in the transgender cause and that a best practice is to refrain sponsorships connected to the cause. Nevertheless, interesting findings on athlete behavior and individual attitudes were also present, providing managers with insight on scenarios where positive brand outcomes occurred.

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1.0 Introduction

In October 2018, Rachel McKinnon was the first M-W (man to woman) transgender to win in a major competition. McKinnon competed and won the World Championships of the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) Master Track Cycling Worlds held in Los Angeles. The greatness of the victory, however, was shadowed by reactions towards her biologically born gender. Bronze medalist Jennifer Wagner was one of the first to negatively comment on the win. *"It is definitely NOT fair"* she posted on her Twitter account (Shen & Simpson, 2018). Another reaction happened a year later during the winner's podium of the 2019 UCI Championship where runner-up Dawn Orwick expressed her disapproval by holding her left hand behind her back instead of around winner McKinnon (Jones, 2019).

An extended series of research has investigated the effects an endorser can have on a brand (Till & Shimp, 1998; Erdogan, 1999). Anyhow, neither seems to have explored brand judgments effects nor consequences from sponsor objects' engagement in the transgender cause. As no existing literature aims at explaining how a sponsor brand is influenced by a sponsored athlete's controversial statement about M-W transgender competing in sports, this invites some interesting questions concerning the sponsorship. *What issues occur for a sponsor brand if a sponsored athlete asserts a controversial statement about transgenders competing in sports? And how should sponsoring brands deal with sponsored athletes that engage in the transgender cause?* Hence, our study aims at explaining how sponsors are affected by controversial statements made by their sponsored athletes regarding the transgender cause.

The case of McKinnon is not exclusive regarding M-W transgender to competing and winning at women's top-level sports. Laurel Hubbard, a M-W transgender weightlifter from New Zealand, won two gold medals during the Pacific Games in mid-2019 and aims at qualifying for the Olympics in Tokyo. Another M-W transgender athlete, Megan Youngren, has also set her eyes on qualifying for the Olympics and representing the U.S. marathon team (Chavez, 2020). A common denominator between these cases is that they face public criticism due to M-W transgenders' superior physical abilities which disrupts the competition in women's sports. Cyclist Victoria Hood commented in an interview with Sky Sports: *"They have a right to do sport but not a right to go into any*

category they want." In addition to athletes, sports associations, media reporters, retired sports legends, and fans are also tremendously engaged in the cause. "*It's insane and it's cheating. I am happy to address a transgender woman in whatever form she prefers, but I would not be happy to compete against her. It would not be fair."* wrote former tennis star Martina Navratilova in an op-ed discussing the topic.

As the cases above illustrate, the number of M-W transgenders to compete in women's sports is growing. And it is not only present at World Championships or the highest competitive levels anymore. During the 2019 women's NCAA Track Championship, college student CeCe Telfer won gold competing in the 400-meter hurdles, only a year after competing as a man. Another example is Terry Miller, competing at a high school level, who won the girls' 200-meter dash at Connecticut's State Open Championship (Francis, 2019). Hence, this topic is of importance as it is a complex and unprecedented phenomenon with seemingly no clear answer. And ongoing discussions are concerned about the biological advantages M-W transgenders bring into the competitive elements in their sports at any level and how this challenge the fairness of women's sports in general.

Another interesting and novel perspective about this research is that comments favoring a transgender ban in sports are not illegal per se. In other words, the morality behind the comment can be interpreted differently between individuals, meaning that there are some people supporting a transgender ban whilst others strongly castigate it. While most of the previous research has examined incidences of athletes involved in clearly illegal or unethical behavior, including other aspects such as transgressions, wife-beating, and taking steroids (Chien, Kelly, & Weeks, 2016; Lee, Kwak, & Moore, 2015), this study is distinct by letting the audience determine the consequences of the act and what effects that will follow.

Thus, the present study will investigate how a sponsored athlete's controversial statement about a M-W transgender competing in women's sports impacts a person's brand judgments of the sponsoring brand on three dimensions: liking, severity, and brand response. The insights generated by this research contribute to literature and society in three ways. Firstly, the harm and negative spillover-effects that can emerge from sponsorship connected to the M-W transgender cause should not be underestimated. Secondly, the results will interpret consumers' individual level of liking for a sponsor brand and sponsored

athlete and how this can rationalize post-incident evaluations for both parties. Thirdly, best practices for damage control to make managers well-prepared to initiate a suited brand response if sponsored athletes are making controversial statements will be mapped out.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Controversial behavior

In November of 2009, a black Cadillac Escalade crashed through multiple hedges before hitting a fire hydrant. Tiger Woods, one of the best professional golf athletes, was behind the wheel and the incident was an outburst of one of the biggest sports transgressions throughout history. Additionally, seven mistresses went public in the days following the collision, which initiated a large sex scandal damaging Wood´s life, career, and reputation. As negative associations from both scandals were transferred from the athlete to the sponsor brands (Crompton, 2004; Nickell, Cornwell, & Johnston, 2011), big sponsors such as Accenture and Gatorade terminated the sponsorship deals with him as a consequence due to dropping stock prices (Peter, 2019; Knittel & Stango, 2014). Mainly, sponsorships are utilized by the sponsor to enhance the brand image (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999), but as this example tees up, sponsorship endorsements can reflect poorly on the brand if transgressions occur. An extensive amount of literature has studied sponsorship effects between a sponsor brand and a sponsor object as well as the different outcomes that can occur throughout (Zdravkovic & Till, 2012; Erdogan, 1999). Moreover, previous research highlights that negative outcomes (i.e.: scandals and athlete transgressions) have an unbeneficial impact on the endorsed brands (Lee et al., 2015; Chien, Kelly, & Weeks, 2016; Kelly, Weeks, & Chien, 2018). However, the transgressions studied are breaking with legal and ethical regulations in society and can be defined as wrong and illegal.

On the contrary, the present study focuses on *controversial behavior*. This is behavior that is hard to label as right or wrong as it does not categorize as illegal per se. Kuypers (2002) argues that controversial issues are hard to solve as they are debatable or disputable, and by that, there seems to be no clear and unified opinion on whether an action was right or wrong. The core issue of a scandal is often related to hot and trending topics featuring discussions about

political rightness and social justice issues that provoke emotional reactions (Hess, 2004; Evans, Avery, & Pederson, 2000). Consequently, when Navratilova called transgenders competing in women's sport "*cheats*" not all people perceive the statement as offensive. Contrary, many people may also support her beliefs. This is due to a matter of personal attitudes towards the unfairness of M-W transgender competing in women's sports as there are no clear guidelines regarding their participation as well as it is hard to say to what extent a person is a man or a woman. Therefore, an athlete making a controversial statement regarding the fairness of the M-W transgenders competing in sports is a different type of transgression compared to previously investigated transgressions such as drugs, assault, and racism.

What determines an act to be considered controversial can further be discussed. Firstly, controversial behavior can be actions that miscorrelate with some people´s beliefs and principles, meaning that it causes a conflict with individual embedded values and attitudes. Secondly, it can be caused by influential people or mass media and, therefore, be driven by society (Bennett, 2016; Lee, McLeod, & Shah, 2008; Evans et al., 2000). As existing research has mapped out the positive consequences of strategically withdrawing from a sponsorship where the sponsored athlete conducts a transgression (i.e.: do drugs, racism, or assault) to achieve redress and preserve the brand image (Messner & Reinhard, 2012; Osborne, Sherry, & Nicholson, 2016), a termination of the deal seems strategically smart to ensure positive brand equity when the sponsored athlete's misconduct causes negative attention towards the brand. Nonetheless, a condemnation with a termination of the sponsorship deal may be perceived as too severe in some occasions where the controversial behavior cannot be labeled as right or wrong. As a consequence, the brand might be perceived as weak or not supportive of their athletes. Thus, the brand response may harm the brand more than it does good. Our study aims at identifying the outcomes of consumers' judgment of a brand when the sponsored athlete engages in controversial behavior or, more accurately, makes a controversial statement about M-W transgenders competing in women's sports.

2.2 M-W transgenders competing in sports

Aforementioned, the number of M-W transgenders competing and winning in women's sports is rapidly growing. Associations, competitors, and sports fans highlight the controversial aspect of transgender politics by discussing the physiological elements M-W transgenders benefit from (Silverman, 2019). A confirmation that M-W transgender runners had not changed their performance when their bodies were adjusted to the transition allowed for questions concerning the biological advantages a male body has after maturation to have remained (Harper, 2015; Pitsiladis, et al., 2016). Additionally, biologically born males are having a greater level of testosterone predominance, providing them with benefits to perform better in sports (Ziegler & Huntley, 2013; Bianchi, 2017). On average, males are stronger and faster than women, allowing the M-W transgender to benefitting from the biological advantages they are born with which can be exploited in sports (Ziegler & Huntley, 2013). In other words, biological advantages provide M-W transgenders with a great opportunity to win competitions and punish athletes who are biologically born women by taking away podiums, recognition, and opportunities from them (Silverman, 2019).

Other interesting perspectives are whether sponsors are willing to be involved in sponsorships with transgenders due to aspect of unfairness and the ongoing discussion of whether transgenders will bring down women's sports, or whether sponsors want to be involved in women's sport where M-W transgender competitors are present at all. Consequently, sports associations are including transgender policies to govern women's sports. An example is how the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) and International Olympic Committee (IOC) distinguish between M-W transgenders who have undergone sexual reassignment before and after puberty, and how this impacts their possibilities to compete in women's sport (Reeser, 2005). However, current policies are struggling to balance the integration of transgender athletes as well as protect women's sports (Ingram & Thomas, 2019). In other words, the topic of sponsorships involved in the transgender cause is novel and yet to be investigated.

An interest lies in how brand judgments of a sponsor will be influenced when the sponsor brand is being associated with sponsored athletes that make controversial statements about M-W transgenders competing in women's sport. Based on the limited research of this topic, our study contributes by enlightening how consumers and sports fans are dealing with such sponsorship engagements.

3.0 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Liking

As of now, research has mainly focused on the positive outcomes from successful sponsorship scenarios which often include well-liked sponsor objects. These tend to have the possibility for desired spillover effects towards the sponsor brand (Bergkvist & Zhou, 2016). This is supported by Erdogan (1999) and Rowley, Gilman & Sherman (2019) who discovered that pairing a well-liked celebrity and sponsor brand tend to generate desirable outcomes. In other words, liking of a sponsored athlete affects how consumers evaluate brands.

In such partnerships, the brand has low control of its sponsored athletes in connection to freedom of speech. Therefore, brands cannot prevent sponsored athletes from performing unethically or speak out about different topics that might be perceived as controversial to recipients. As attitudes and liking of sponsored athletes are subjective, consumers' perception of their admiration level differs and might impact brand judgments individually. Research has yet to investigate potential outcomes and consequences a brand faces when an endorser performs a controversial statement (Doyle, Pentecost & Funk, 2014; Hughes & Shank, 2005; Zhou & Whitla, 2013). Reactions towards a controversial statement might be affected by consumers' feelings towards and liking of the sponsored athlete as well as the sponsor.

Arguably, a controversial statement from the sponsored athlete which miscorrelates with personal values and ethical behavior could be affected by the degree of liking of that specific person. This study investigates whether the effect of a controversial statement differs based on subjective opinions of a sponsored athlete, and how the level of liking affects the sponsored brand based on the athlete's controversial statement. Another aspect that is yet to be investigated is if a controversial statement about the transgender cause made by a sponsored athlete could be rationalized based on the liking of the sponsor brand. Hence, the first and second research questions are formulated as followed:

RQ1: Will liking of an athlete minimize the aftermath of a controversial statement and mitigate the consequences towards the brand?

RQ2: Will the degree of brand liking cause rationalization of an athlete's statement and lead to favorable brand judgments?

3.2 Severity

Controversies differ in terms of how extreme they are, and humans react differently to the same controversial situation (i.e.: controversial statement). Previous research has shown that exposure to negative information or incidents about an endorser could lead to a negative transference towards the brand (White, Goddard, & Wilbur, 2009). Arguably, the severity of the controversial statement has an effect on the recipient's judgment of the sponsorship and the athlete's public behavior. There is a gap in the literature on how the perceived severity of a controversial statement from a sponsored athlete will affect the sponsor brand. Results from Gupta (2009) depict that recipients of the actions were more likely to perceive the endorser as blameworthy if the performed negative action was under his or her control. Making a controversial statement is arguably under an athlete's control, and recipients will possibly perceive the athlete as blameworthy for the action.

The question then arises if the perceived severity of the controversial statement could be reacted more strongly upon contrary to a less severe statement. A specific example is when the transgender cyclist Rachel McKinnon won the Master Track Cycling World Championship in 2019 (Reza, 2019). Competitor Victoria Hood than came with a statement regarding the victory of McKinnon:

> *"The science is clear – it tells us that trans woman has an advantage. It is excluding women and girls from their own category… it is human right to participate in sport. I don't think it's a human right to identify into whichever category you choose."*

People could arguably perceive Hood's statement as less severe and better reasoned in comparison to Navratilova who called M-W transgenders competing in women's sports for *"cheats"*. Hence, previous literature has yet to investigate if a variation of perceived severity towards controversial statement affects the consumers´ brand judgments. Additionally, recipients of a controversial statement could potentially react and perceive the severity differently if the comment is conducted by a liked athlete contrary to a disliked one. The outcome of the statement might vary as fans of an athlete could rationalize the severe statement in comparison to a disliked athlete. Arguably, the more perceived severity of a controversial statement made by a sponsored athlete would possibly increase the

negative impact on brand judgments. To cover the limitations within the existing literature, the third research question in this study is:

RQ3: Will a greater level of severity of a controversial statement by the sponsored athlete be least preferred and, hence, minimize the effect on brand judgments?

3.3 Brand Response

Associations that are transferred from the sponsored athlete to the sponsor brand might not be desired due to the potentially negative outcomes that can arise from the scandals or transgressions (Till & Shimp, 1998). Tennis star Maria Sharapova, who was the highest-paid female athlete over a decade, failed a drug test during the Australian Open in January 2016. This scandal resulted in multiple relationship suspensions between her and big sponsors like Nike, Porsche, and Tag Heuer (Kennedy, 2016). Another example is Donald Sterling, a previous owner of NBA´s LA Clippers, who allegedly made a racist statement. As a result, multiple sponsorship deals were terminated to end their associations with the Clippers. A common denominator between these cases is that they are illegal and unethical, making it easy for the sponsor to withdraw from the sponsorship.

Previous research provides several brand responses to perform when crises occur. One includes taking responsibility by acknowledging the wrongness, attempting to explain the situation, and seek out forgiveness, whilst another is to engage in remedial responses or end their entire involvement (Xie & Peng, 2009; Dutta & Pullig, 2011). However, when transgressions and illegal scandals occur, the most efficient strategy to minimize negative spillovers, achieve acceptance among customers, and protect brand judgments is to detach themselves from the sponsorship (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2015; Roehm & Tybout, 2006).

Previous research highlights the importance to carefully consider a sponsorship termination. As Meenaghan (2001) explains, the damage needs to be minimized to the goodwill created when a sponsor determines to exit from a sponsorship program. Supplementary, Messner & Reinhard (2012) explain how trusted sponsorship withdrawals are having a positive impact on brand image, and, as an extended contribution, the use of communicative responses can aid in protecting brand image in situations of crisis (Uhrich & Flöter, 2014). However,

issues connected to how brands either condemn or support their sponsored athlete's controversial statement which is not illegal is yet to be an investigated topic.

Hence, a limitation in the literature is that none have investigated the severity of a sponsoring brand's response when a controversial statement is facing both public support and castigation. Conceivably, condemnation with termination, condemnation without termination, and support of free speech could all be supported or castigated by fans based on their affection towards both the athlete and brand. For instance, an athlete that expresses a not severe statement, where a sponsor brand chooses to condemn the statement and terminate the sponsorship could either lead to a drop or increase in brand judgments. In other words, the variation in athlete and brand liking might affect the outcome and perceived severity of the brand response post-incident. Thus, the level of severity in a brand response to a controversial statement regarding M-W transgender competing in sports can impact brand judgments both positively and negatively. Based on this gap, the fourth and fifth research questions are formulated as follows:

RQ4: Will a severe brand response on an athlete′s controversial statement cause acceptance of their decision, and hence, protect brand judgments (i.e.: condemn the controversial act, termination of the sponsorship deal, etc.)?

RQ5: If the controversial statement is carried out by a well-admired athlete, will condemnation and termination of the sponsorship cause more negative brand judgments?

4.0 Method

This study examines the effect a sponsored athlete has on the sponsoring brand's judgments by interpreting a situation where the sponsored athlete has carried out a controversial statement about M-W transgenders competing and winning in women's sports. Moreover, the study assesses the impact of a controversial statement made by an athlete on consumers' responses to a sponsor's brand judgment through four attributes: (1) liking of the sponsored athlete, (2) liking of the sponsor brand, (3) the level of severity of the athlete comment (severe, somewhat severe, or no severe), and (4) the way a brand is responding towards the

controversial act (condemnation with or without termination, or support of free speech and no sponsorship withdrawal).

4.1 Recruitment of subjects

As sports interested respondents were targeted, participants were collected systematically through social media platforms like Messenger, Facebook, and LinkedIn by issuing an anonymous link. The survey was posted on various sports associations groups to collect relevant participants. The reasoning for the sampling of sports interested people was based on the context of the study. These would more easily be able to relate to the fictitious scenarios present in this study compared to people lacking interest in sports. Additionally, attitudes amongst sports interested people regarding controversial statements will be more efficient as these groups of people will be targeted through the sponsorships and, hence, give managers a clearer understanding of the value of the sponsorship. After eliminating incomplete responses from the main study, a total of 106 respondents completed the conjoint analysis and were further used in the analysis. One respondent did not answer the gender question, and therefore, gender consisted of 105 respondents. The sample consisted of 43 females and 62 males with an average age of 27.97. 31 participants were still active athletes themselves, and the sample consisted solely of Norwegians. When considering their occupation, 54 students and 38 full-time employees completed the survey where the majority of respondents had finished a bachelor's degree.

4.2 Pre-testing stimuli

Two pre-tests were conducted to ensure the validity of our study. The first pre-test targeted subjects' knowledge and attitudes about controversies and transgenders in general. Additionally, opinions about M-W transgender to compete in women's sports were mapped out utilizing a qualitative approach. As most participants discussed the trade-off factor between human rights and unfairness in competition, comments about M-W transgender to compete in sports were determined to be the context of the controversial statements in our study. The topic was also perceived novel amongst participants which allowed for manipulations making the study more realistic.

The second pre-test was executed to test whether subjects managed to name one athlete and one brand they liked, felt neutral about, and disliked. The test aimed at ensuring that pitfall of having participants facing trouble naming the three athletes and the three brands were eliminated as this played a major part in our manipulations. The pre-test indicated that the majority of participants did not have trouble naming athletes and brands. Hence, this made it possible to create realistic scenarios and was included throughout our study.

Lastly, before issuing the study, the main survey was distributed to a handful of respondents to confirm that the study was straightforward and easily understood.

4.3 Design and development of the conjoint model

The main study utilized a choice-based conjoint analysis to test our research questions. Conjoint analysis was determined as the most appropriate method as this allowed for several scenarios to be evaluated by the same participant. Hence, this provided preferences of what actions a brand should carry out to best influence consumers' brand judgments if a sponsored athlete was engaging in the transgender cause.

As our research questions were related to the concepts liking, severity, and brand response, these were used to develop the conjoint attributes to include in the analysis. Highlighted by the research questions, four attributes were developed to ensure that the study was applicable: 1) athlete liking, 2) brand liking, 3) athlete comment, and 4) brand response. All attributes consisted of three levels. Athlete and brand liking both consisted of the levels (1) *like,* (2) *neutral,* and (3) *dislike.* Athlete comment included the levels: (1) *severe,* (2) *somewhat severe,* and (3) *no severe,* whilst brand response included (1) *condemnation with termination,* (2) *condemnation without termination,* and (3) *support free-speech rights and no termination.* Furthermore, an orthogonal design was generated to compute the number of conjoint cards needed to organize the analysis based on the various attributes. The orthogonal design depicted nine conjoint cards with different combinations of the attribute levels that were appropriate to complete the study (see table 1).

Description of Conjoint Cards

Card n	Athlete comment	Brand response	Athlete	Brand
1	No severe	Support free-speach rights and no termination	Like	Neutral
2	Severe	Condemnation without termination	Dislike	Neutral
3	No severe	Condemnation with termination	Dislike	Dislike
4	Somewhat severe	Condemnation with termination	Neutral	Neutral
5	Somewhat severe	Support free-speach rights and no termination	Dislike	Like
6	Severe	Condemnation with termination	Like	Like
7	Severe	Support free-speach rights and no termination	Neutral	Dislike
8	Somewhat severe	Condemnation without termination	Like	Dislike
9	No severe	Condemnation without termination	Neutral	Like

Table 1: Conjoint cards generated through the orthogonal design with the different attribute levels included for each card.

Moreover, the nine conjoint cards with their attribute levels were presented in the study by developing fictitious news articles aligned to the levels for each conjoint card (see appendix 1). Athlete names, brand names, and the newspaper VG were the real stimuli utilized in the study. Hence, the level of severity and brand response was possible to manipulate. The most and least severe conjoint cards (i.e.: Conjoint cards 6 and 1) were presented first to highlight the differences between the cards, whilst the remaining seven cards were randomized for the participants to keep an even distribution. Additionally, the randomization of conjoint cards controlled for order bias. The study also utilized the function of forced response, preventing respondents to continue the study without providing an answer.

4.3.1 Manipulating liking

Liking was manipulated on the athlete and brand attributes, each consisting of three levels: (1) *liking*, (2) *neutral*, and (3) *dislike*. As attributes towards both brands and athletes differ between people, asking participants to report the three brands and athletes allowed to customize the survey to each participant ensuring that the manipulations worked. All participants went through the same procedure. In Qualtrics the athletes' and brands' textboxes were coded as Piped Text. In that way, the assigned names were depicted later in the study when participants were exposed to the various news articles. The codes also reminded participants of what names they used and made the study more realistic.

4.3.2 Manipulating severity

The severity attribute was manipulated by including statements made by the athletes in the news articles. The statements consisted of three different levels: (1) *severe*, (2) *somewhat severe*, and (3) *no severe*.

As our pre-study mapped out a trade-off between the unfairness due to biological differences and the principle of equal human rights regarding M-W transgender competing in sports, the level of severity in the different athlete comments was based on this. Hence, the higher level of severity in the statements had to indirectly attack human rights whilst the lower levels had to only point out the unfairness aspect.

Furthermore, the statements in the news articles were inspired by real-life cases to make the behavior more believable. Using the same articles for the different cards allowed for a better comparison between the conditions. Additionally, as the different news articles also included a brand response to the statement, the level of severity had to be aligned to each level of the brand response. Thus, the severe statement was: *"This is disgraceful. Letting these fu**ing cheats compete against us is making me feel disgusted. They should have been banned from competing against us, and they are cowards to even show up! I'm absolutely in shock. These freaks have an unfair advantage and just like drug cheaters should be banned from competing with real women."* The somewhat severe statement was: *"This is completely unacceptable. Letting these cheats compete against us is wrong and I feel it is unfair to all female athletes. A transgender ban should be announced within a short time to ensure fairness in our sport."* Finally, the no severe statement was: *"I feel this is wrong and that a transgender ban should be in place, but of course I will probably be blamed for pointing out the obvious."*

4.3.3 Manipulating brand response

The brand response was manipulated in the final paragraph of the news articles. This attribute consisted of the three levels (1) *condemnation with a termination of the sponsorship*, (2) *condemnation without termination of the sponsorship*, and (3) *support of free-speech rights and no termination*. The level of severity in the different statements was tailored to the different brand responses to make each

response realistic. The condemnation with termination response stated strong disapproval of such an athlete's behavior, and that due to the extreme transphobic feelings about the topic a termination of the sponsorship is done. The condemnation without termination response disapproved of such a statement but felt a second chance was appropriate and continued the sponsorship. On the other hand, the support of free speech rights and no termination response was expressing support of the athlete´s freedom of speech, respecting her beliefs, and continuing the sponsorship (see appendix 2).

4.3.4 Measuring brand judgments

Brand judgments were decided to be the dependent variable in the study. To measure the change in brand judgments the participants were asked to evaluate their chosen brands after being presented to each of the nine conjoint cards. The items that were used to measure brand judgment was adopted from Aaker's (1997) dimensions of brand personality and aligned towards the purpose of this study. Furthermore, the participants were asked to evaluate their chosen brands post-reading the news articles using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from the lowest level of agreement (i.e: less) to the highest level of agreement (i.e.: more). Three items were included respectively on each of the cards consisting of *likability, likeliness to support*, and *appealingness.* Finally. the dimensions of brand personalities were embraced and tailored to measure participants' brand judgments on the basis of its ability to capture a brand's credibility, consideration, and attitudes (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 2013).

Another interesting perspective in measuring brand judgment was whether preferences differed between cohorts of respondents. Hence, dummy variables were created for the variables gender (0=Male, 1=Female), athlete level (0= Not an athlete, 1= Athlete), and age (0=Younger than 30 y/o, 1=Older than 30 y/o), as well as for respondent with negative coefficients (=0) and positive coefficients (=1) within *Athlete_Comment = Severe*, and *Brand_Response = Condemnation with termination*. These dummies were used throughout the analysis by running separate conjoint analysis to further investigate possible differences between the selected cohorts.

4.4 Testing procedure

The main study was accessed through Qualtrics and was distributed through the aforementioned social media platforms. The overall study consisted of four parts. In part one, respondents were asked to write the names of three different athletes and brands they liked, were neutral to, and disliked. These athletes and brands were used throughout the nine different news articles.

In part two, respondents were exposed to nine different fictitious news articles, followed by evaluations of both the athlete and brand present based on their actions. Each article contained a short description of the same situation, followed by an athlete statement performed by one of the named athletes (either severe, somewhat severe, or not severe comment). This was followed by a paragraph presenting a brand response from one of the named brands (either condemnation with termination, condemnation without termination, or support free speech). After reading each article, respondents were asked to complete three evaluations of the athlete and three evaluations of the brand on a 7-point Likert scale. These evaluations ranged from "*Less likeable*" to "*More likeable*", "*Less likely to support*" to "*More likely to support*", and "*Less appealing*" to "*More appealing*".

Part three was done to establish an overall evaluation of the respondents' attitudes related to various matters. As for transgenders, questions regarding the fairness of M-W transgenders competing against biological females and evaluations of a possible transgender ban gave insights associated with participants' thoughts concerning these topics. Attitudes regarding freedom of speech, evaluations of their athletic abilities, and if participants still were or had been active athletes themselves were also mapped out. As all participants were exposed to the same manipulations, biased responses regarding participants' views and thoughts on these topics were not expected.

Lastly, in the final part of the questionnaire respondents answered questions regarding demographics such as gender, age, nationality, level of education, and occupation. As our respondents consisted solely of Norwegians, the other demographics were considered more interesting in our analysis when interpreting the various groups' evaluations and attitudes.

5.0 Results

The results consist of two parts. Firstly, it will present the overall conjoint results of the athlete (CJA) and brand (CJB) evaluations post-incident to a controversial statement about M-W transgenders competing in women's sports. Secondly, results on brand judgments connected to our research questions will be presented and clarified.

5.1 Overall conjoint results

A conjoint analysis was conducted to investigate the outcome of a controversial statement made by an athlete about M-W transgender competing in women's sports and how a brand response affected the brand judgments post-incident. Cronbach's Alpha reliability tests were computed on the three measures of athlete evaluations and the three measures of brand evaluations on all nine conjoint cards (in total 54 variables). As $\alpha > .900$ was existing on all variables, 18 index variables were computed consisting of the mean scores of the three athlete or brand variables. The computed index variables made it possible to analyze the overall results for the two different types of conjoint cards separately, CJA (CJ1A to CJ9A, evaluating athletes) and CJB, (CJ1B to CJ9B, evaluating brands). The factors *Athlete_Comment, Brand_Response, Athletes,* and *Brands* depicted a significant correlation on Pearson's R and Kendall's tau (p<.05) for the overall results for both CJA and CJB cards.

The nine CJA index variables were included in the syntax to analyze the attitudes towards the sponsored athlete. As expected, the overall results of the conjoint analysis depicted *Athlete_comment* (=38.891, p<.05) and *Athlete* (=26.727, p<.05) to be the most important attributes when evaluating the sponsored athlete post-statement. Further, a no severe statement ($\beta = 2.079$) was benefitting the evaluation of the athlete most and of the highest preference among participants. Followingly, a somewhat severe statement ($\beta = 1.386$) and a severe statement ($\beta = .693$) had a less positive effect. The severe-averse preferences can also be supported by the overall general attitudes among participants and will be clarified when discussing RQ3.

Regarding the *Athlete* attribute, a liked athlete ($\beta = -.307$, p<.05) was having the least negative impact on the evaluation of the sponsored athlete when

connected to the transgender cause. Both neutral ($\beta = -.614$, p<.05) and disliked ($\beta = -.921$, p<.05) athletes were having a stronger negative impact on the attitudes. Hence, the overall evaluation of an athlete was benefiting from a low severe statement as well as being liked among consumers. Regardless of the level of athlete liking, being connected with a controversial statement and the transgender cause will have a negative impact on the evaluation of the athlete post-incident. Thus, an athlete who aims its behavior to avoiding engagement in the transgender cause should be highlighted.

As for the CJB cards, findings depicted that the level of admiration of the brand (= 34.697, p<.05) and the brand response (=28.651, p<.05) was of the highest importance and had the greatest effect on brand judgments. Even though condemnation and termination of the sponsorship did not protect brand judgments ($\beta = -.285$, p<.05), condemnation without termination ($\beta = -.571$, p<.05) and support of free speech ($\beta = -.856$, p<.05) had a stronger negative effect in connection to a controversial statement made by an athlete. Another attribute that arguably would affect the brand judgments was the liking of an athlete. A liked athlete ($\beta = -.319$, p<.05) had the least negative impact on brand judgments, where neutral ($\beta = -.614$, p<.05) and disliked ($\beta = -.921$, p<.05) athletes had the most negative impacts. Hence, brands will not benefit from being associated with athletes making a controversial statement about M-W transgenders competing in sports regardless of the level of liking, although the *Athlete* attribute was considered at low importance (=19.795).

Another interesting finding was related to the comparison between the cohorts *Athletes* and *No athletes*. By executing an independent sample t-test on attitudinal questions including *Transgender_ban_in_sports*, *Politically_incorrect_things, Comfortable_sharing_LR, Unfair_athletic_advantage,* and *Speaking_the_truth,* neither of the variables were significant (p>.05), rejecting the expectation of *Athletes* to have greater acceptance for statements and engagement in the transgender cause and therefore not evaluate an athlete as negative in severe cases. This was additionally supported by the conjoint analysis which depicted *Athletes* to prefer a no severe athlete statement ($\beta = 2.468$, p<.05) with highest importance of *Athlete_comment* (=42.333) aligning them to *No athletes* also preferring a no severe statement ($\beta = 1.468$, p<.05, *Athlete_comment* importance = 37.409).

Overall statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,028	0,047	
	Neutral	0,044	0,047	19,942
	Dislike	-0,072	0,047	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,693	0,041	
	Somewhat severe	1,386	0,082	38,891
	No severe	2,079	0,123	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,001	0,041	
	Condemnation without terminatic	-0,001	0,082	14,44
	Support freespeech	-0,002	0,123	
Athletes	Like	-0,307	0,041	
	Neutral	-0,614	0,082	26,727
	Dislike	-0,921	0,123	
(Constant)		2,588	0,146	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,996	0,000
Kendall's tau	1,000	0,000

Table 2: Overall statistics CJA.

Overall statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,343	0,170	
	Neutral	0,315	0,170	34,697
	Dislike	-0,658	0,170	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,102	0,148	
	Somewhat severe	0,204	0,295	16,857
	No severe	0,306	0,443	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,285	0,148	
	Condemnation without	-0,571	0,295	28,651
	Support freespeech	-0,856	0,443	
Athletes	Like	-0,319	0,148	
	Neutral	-0,639	0,295	19,795
	Dislike	-0,958	0,443	
(Constant)		4,717	0,525	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,942	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,778	0,002

Table 3: CJB Overall Statistics.

5.2 Results on brand judgments

RQ1 aimed at testing whether the liking of an athlete minimizes the consequences a controversial statement has on brand judgments. The first insight was provided by interpreting the descriptive statistics for each CJB index variable (see table 4). By adding the mean of card 1, 6, and 8 consisting of liked athletes ($\bar{x}$ =12.431) and comparing this to the sum of cards 4, 7, and 9 consisting of neutral athletes ($\bar{x}$

=10.472) and cards 2, 3, and 5 consisting of disliked athletes (x̄ =10.551), the CJB indexes with liked athletes had greater brand evaluations on average. The overall CJB conjoint analysis confirmed that liked athletes (β = –.319, p<.05) had the least negative impact on brand judgments compared to neutral athletes (β = –.639, p<.05) and disliked athletes (β = –.958, p<.05). Hence, the liking of an athlete tends to minimize the aftermath of a controversial statement to mitigate consequences on brand judgment, and RQ1 is therefore supported.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
CJ1 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	4,23585	1,407438
CJ2 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	3,92767	1,575611
CJ3 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	3,21384	1,575734
CJ4 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	3,91509	1,511201
CJ5 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	3,40881	1,520431
CJ6 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	4,62264	1,656844
CJ7 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	2,42767	1,446583
CJ8 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	3,57233	1,346565
CJ9 Brand Index	106	1,000	7,000	4,12893	1,370568
Valid N (listwise)	106				

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics of CJB Index.*

RQ2 investigated if the degree of brand liking causes rationalization of an athlete's statement and leads to favorable brand judgments. When interpreting the overall statistics of CJB, *Brand* had the highest importance value when evaluating brand judgments (=34.697, p<.05) whilst *Athelte_Comment* was of least importance (=16.857, p<.05). Utility scores depicted that liked (β = .343, p<.05) and neutral (β = .315, p<.05) brands had the greatest preferences, whilst disliked brands had a distinctive negative effect (β = - .658, <.05). This means that liking of a brand has a positive effect when evaluating the brand judgments post-incident to a controversial statement about M-W transgender. As liked and neutral brands were favored without any big differences, an interesting perspective was to examine whether variations of rationalization between cohorts were present. Table 5 depicts that *Athletes* (N=31) had a somewhat equal preference between liked (β = .373, p<.05) and neutral (β = .391, p<.05) brands, compared to *No athletes* (N=75) who favored liked brands (β = .331, p<.05) when evaluating the brand post-incident. Commonly, the two cohorts agreed upon the negative outcome a disliked brand had on brand judgments (*Athlete* β = -.764, p<.05 and *No athlete* β = -.615, p<.05). *Males* (N=62) and *Females* (N=43) differed in the evaluation of

brands, where *Males* had the highest preference towards neutral brands ($\beta = .400$, p<.05) closely followed by liked brands ($\beta = .322$, p<.05). *Females* had a clearer distinction in preferences favoring liked brands ($\beta = .353$, p<.05). Considering age, the cohort *Older than 30 y/o* (N=21) favors neutral brands ($\beta = .399$, p<.05), while *Younger than 30 y/o* (N=85) preferred liked brands in a distinctive manner ($\beta = .407$, p<.05), indicating that younger people are more connected to brands. Arguably, as the degree of liking of a brand is of great importance for consumers when evaluating a controversial statement, and as *Athlete_comment* was of least importance, rationalization of an athlete's statement is the case when consumers like or feel neutral about the sponsor brand. Hence, RQ2 is supported.

CJB utility scores of each cohort

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate					
		Males	Females	Age >30	Age <30	Athlete	No athlete
Brands	Like	0,331	0,353	0,092	0,407	0,373	0,331
	Neutral	0,284	0,207	0,399	0,294	0,391	0,284
	Dislike	-0,615	-0,560	-0,490	-0,701	-0,764	-0,615
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,107	0,034	0,140	0,092	0,089	0,107
	Somewhat severe	0,215	0,069	0,280	0,185	0,178	0,215
	No severe	0,322	0,103	0,421	0,277	0,267	0,322
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,312	-0,616	-0,690	-0,183	-0,220	-0,312
	Condemnation without	-0,623	-1,233	-1,381	-0,365	-0,441	-0,623
	Support freespeech	-0,935	-1,849	-2,071	-0,548	-0,661	-0,935
Athletes	Like	-0,299	-0,455	-0,238	-0,340	-0,370	-0,299
	Neutral	-0,598	-0,910	-0,476	-0,680	-0,741	-0,598
	Dislike	-0,896	-1,365	-0,714	-1,020	-1,111	-0,896
(Constant)		4,632	5,740	5,300	4,544	4,927	4,632

Table 5: *CJB conjoint results of each cohort.*

RQ3 investigated if a greater level of severity of an athlete's controversial statement regarding M-W transgenders competing in sports was more harmful to brand judgments. An interpretation of the descriptive statistics of participants' attitudes (see table 6) was executed to map out the respondent's feelings towards controversial statements. As the means of *Politically_incorrect_things* = 4.23 and *Speaking_the_truth* = 4.47 were lower in comparison to other attitudinal questions, respondents were pessimistic in their attitudes towards controversial and harmful statements indicating a preference towards a low severe athlete statement. This pessimism was supported by the overall CJB conjoint results that pointed out a no severe statement from an athlete ($\beta = .306$, p<.05) to be preferred among respondents, followed by a somewhat severe statement ($\beta =.204$, p<.05) and a severe statement ($\beta =.102$, p<.05). However, when interpreting the

importance values *Athlete_comment* was of least importance (=16.857, p<.05) when evaluating the brand judgments post-incident.

Descriptive Statistics

Variable name	Question description	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Transgender_ban_in_sports	A male who thinks he is female should be banned from athletically competing against biological women in organized sports.	106	1	7	5,13	1,893
Politically_incorrect_things	People should have the freedom to say politically incorrect things even if they hurt some individual or group.	106	1	7	4,23	1,640
Comfortable_sharing_LR	I think most women would be very comfortable sharing a locker room or shower with a transgender woman.	106	1	7	3,46	1,708
Unfair_athletic_advantage	A male who think he is a female has an unfair athletic advantage over biologically female athletes.	106	1	7	6,10	1,272
Speaking_the_truth	People should not be punished for speaking the truth even when others find the truth controversial or hateful.	106	1	7	4,47	1,858
Athletic_level	I consider myself to be very athletic.	106	1	7	4,87	1,455
Valid N (listwise)	Valid N (listwise)	106				

Table 6: *Descriptive Statistics of attitudinal questions.*

Additionally, a comparison between the various cohorts was executed. By comparing means utilizing an independent sample t-tests on the attitudinal variables between males and females, differences in opinions were depicted on *Transgender_ban_in_sports* (males = 5.58, females = 4.56, p<.05), *Politically_incorrect_thing* (males = 4.55, females = 3.74, p<.05), *Comfortable_sharing_LR* (males = 2.94, females = 4.19, p<.05), and *Speaking_the_truth* (males = 4.97, females = 3.79, p<.05). As table 7 depicts, females were having more negative attitudes towards a transgender ban and controversial and hateful statements. Nonetheless, a difference between the level of severity in an athlete comment was not present in our conjoint results where all cohorts agreed that a no severe athlete statement had the greatest preference and positive effect on brand judgments (p<.05). As the severe athlete statement was least preferred overall, and it provides the most harmful effect on brand judgments, RQ3 is supported.

Independent t-test

Gender_dummy		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Transgender_ban_in_sports	Male	62	5,58	1,761	0,581	2,837	103	0,005
	Female	43	4,56	1,894		2,800	86,141	0,006
Politically_incorrect_things	Male	62	4,55	1,762	4,452	2,524	103	0,013
	Female	43	3,74	1,347		2,648	101,965	0,009
Comfortable_sharing_LR	Male	62	2,94	1,447	2,530	-3,934	103	0,000
	Female	43	4,19	1,803		-3,782	77,295	0,000
Unfair_athletic_advantage	Male	62	6,31	1,095	1,475	1,969	103	0,052
	Female	43	5,81	1,468		1,869	73,180	0,066
Speaking_the_truth	Male	62	4,97	1,727	0,777	3,339	103	0,001
	Female	43	3,79	1,846		3,298	86,518	0,001
Athletic_level	Male	62	5,13	1,397	0,227	2,036	103	0,044
	Female	43	4,56	1,436		2,026	88,850	0,046

Table 7: *Independent sample t-test between males and females.*

RQ4 investigated if a severe brand response on an athlete's controversial statement caused acceptance of their decision and protected brand judgments. The overall CJB conjoint results described that support of free speech connected to a controversial statement had the most negative effect on brand judgments (β = -.856, p<.05). On the other hand, a severe brand response where the brand condemns the statement and terminates the sponsorship had the least negative effect (β = -.285, p<.05). Hence, a severe brand response still harms the brand but seemed to be the action that affected brand judgments least negatively. To further confirm this insight, an independent sample t-test was conducted to investigate differences between the cohorts with positive and negative coefficients (i.e.: Positive and negative utility scores) on the brand response consisting of condemnation with termination of the sponsorship. Respondents that were negative towards such a brand response valued the importance of *Brand_response* (N=61, x̄=32.930, p<.05) greater than respondents who were positive (N=43, x̄=22.581, p<.05) (see table 8). In other words, the ones who perceive condemnation with termination to have a negative effect on brand judgments were weighting this attribute as more important than the positive coefficients. Hence, these results indicate that the most severe brand response did not protect brand judgment as this was having a negative effect on brand judgments post-incident as well as the negative coefficient cohort was weighting brand response more important than positive coefficients. RQ4 is not supported.

Independent t-test

CJB Condemnation w/ termination		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
CJB_Brand_Response	Negative coefficients	61	32,931	19,546	0,667	2,798	102	0,006
	Positive coefficients	43	22,581	17,087		2,864	97,281	0,005

Table 8: *Independent sample t-test between positive and negative coefficients on brand response consisting of condemnation with termination.*

RQ5 investigated whether negative brand judgments would occur if a brand response of condemnation with termination was executed on a well-admired athlete who stated something controversial. The overall CJB utility scores indicated that regardless of the degree of athlete liking, the athlete had a negative effect on the brand judgment. The utility scores of liked athletes (β = −.319, p<.05) were compared to disliked athletes (β = −.958, p<.05) which indicated that a liked athlete had the least negative impact on brand judgments post-incident to a controversial statement. Further, three profiles (i.e.: *Utility_liked_athlete,*

utility_neutral_athlete, and *utility_disliked_athlete)* were developed for each respondent to investigate if there was any difference in terminating the sponsorship of a liked, neutral, or disliked athlete, and whether termination of a liked athlete would cause anger amongst consumers and harm brand judgments. As table 9 depicts, *Utility_liked_athlete* (N=104, M=4.214, p<.05) had a higher mean score, indicating that condemning the behavior and terminating the sponsorship of a liked athlete to have the greatest positive impact on brand judgments. Contrary, *Utility_neutral_athlete* (N=104, M=3.895, p<.05) and *Utility_disliked_athlete (*N=104, M=3.575, p<.05) disconfirmed that more negative brand judgments would occur if a brand response of condemnation with termination was executed on a well-admired athlete who stated something controversial. Hence, RQ5 is not supported.

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3		
				t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Utility_liked_athlete	104	4,21421	1,452072	8,528	103	0,000
Utility_neutral_athlete	104	3,89476	1,204884	7,573	103	0,000
Utility_disliked_athlete	104	3,57532	1,227030	4,782	103	0,000

Table 9: *One-Sample Statistics with a comparison between liked, neutral, and disliked athlete.*

Additionally, another interesting element was to further examine whether differences among individual attitudes about controversies could influence what response a brand should carry out post-incident to a controversial statement. By developing a dummy variable *Acceptance_for_controversies* (consisting of 1= participants scoring >=5 on *Politically_incorrect_things* and *Speaking_the_truth* and 0 = else (i.e.: <5)), some interesting results occurred. By selecting cases and running a separate conjoint analysis, the cohort with greater acceptance towards controversies and harmful statements (*Acceptance_for_controversies* = 1, N=37) indicated a positive preference for brand responses to positively impact brand judgments. Additionally, support of free speech (β = .185, p<.05) was depicted as the best brand response (*Brand_response* importance = 27.409, p<.05). Contrary, *Acceptance_for_controversies* = 0 (N=69) indicated a negative preference on *Brand_response* (importance = 29.308, p<.05) with condemnation with termination as the least negative outcome (β = –.469, p<.05) (see table 10). Hence, individual attitudes towards controversial topics play a part in how brand responses effects brand judgments post-incident.

CJB conjoint results for low and high acceptance for controversies

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	
		Low acceptance	High acceptance
Brands	Like	0,321	0,385
	Neutral	0,290	0,363
	Dislike	-0,611	-0,748
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,109	0,088
	Somewhat severe	0,219	0,176
	No severe	0,328	0,264
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,469	0,062
	Condemnation without termination	-0,938	0,123
	Support freespeech	-1,407	0,185
Athletes	Like	-0,337	-0,285
	Neutral	-0,675	-0,571
	Dislike	-1,012	-0,856
(Constant)		5,037	4,112

Table 10: *Utility scores for the cohorts "low acceptance" and "high acceptance" for controversial statements.*

Figure 1 visualizes the relationship between the outcomes for *Brand_response* and *Brand* on brand judgments. As an effect, higher liking of the brand results in greater brand judgments whilst a more severe brand response towards a sponsored athlete who makes a controversial statement about M-W transgender competing in women's sports reduces the negative consequences. Figure 2 depicts the overall effect of the different levels within each attribute and complements the aforementioned findings. Our results indicate that both the sponsor brand and the sponsored athlete face great risks of being associated with the transgender cause. Respondents agreed that condemnation with termination had the least negative effect, and, hence, refraining engagement in the transgender cause seems to be most beneficial to protect brand judgments. One should, nevertheless, be aware of the differences between cohorts which enlightens that some segments are having positive perceptions toward sponsorship engagements in transgender or other controversial causes.
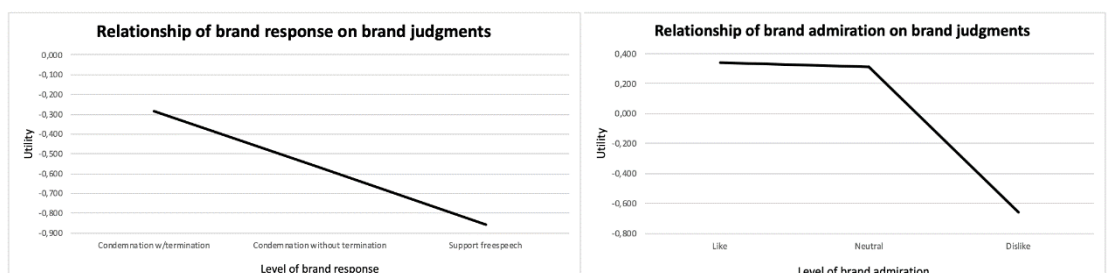
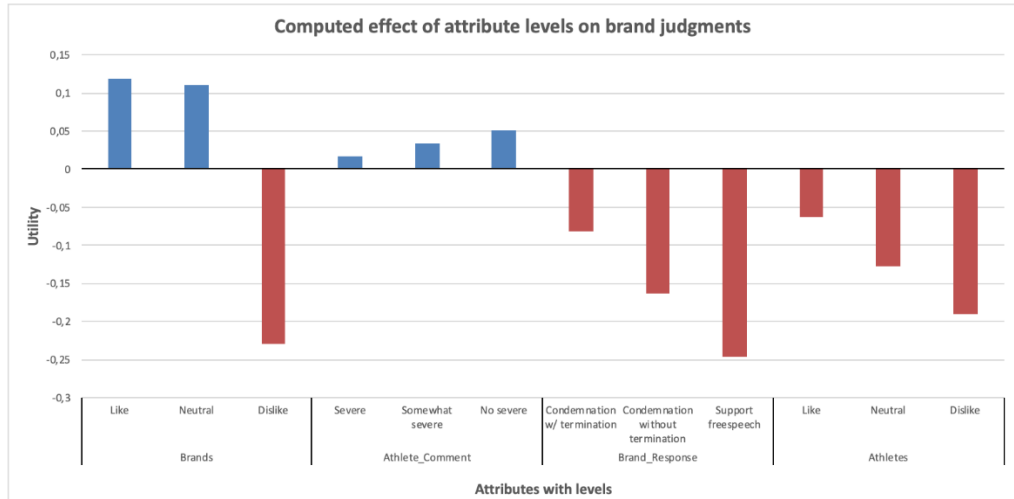**Figure 1:** *Relationship of brand response and admiration of brand on brand judgments.*

Figure 2: *Computed utility based on the importance value of attributes, indicating brand judgment effects for the different levels.*

Research question	Description	Result
RQ 1	*Will liking of an athlete minimize the aftermath of a controversial statement and mitigate the consequences towards the brand?*	Supported
RQ 2	*Will the degree of brand liking cause rationalization of an athlete's statement and lead to favorable brand judgments?*	Supported
RQ 3	*Will a greater level of severity of a controversial statement by the sponsor object be least preferred and, hence, minimize the effect on brand judgments?*	Supported
RQ 4	*Will a severe brand response on an athlete's controversial statement cause acceptance of their decision, and hence, protect brand judgments (i.e.: condemn the controversial act, termination of the sponsorship deal, etc.)?*	Not supported
RQ 5	*If the controversial statement is carried out by a well-admired athlete, will condemnation and termination of the sponsorship cause more negative brand judgments?*	Not supported

Table 11: *Description of research questions and their results.*

6.0 Discussion and implications

The purpose of this study was to examine how a controversial statement made by a sponsored athlete concerning M-W transgenders competing in women's sports affects brand judgments of the sponsor brand. The findings can be useful and give relevant insights to managers for several reasons.

   One of the main findings was that a brand response was of significance when evaluating the brand judgments post-incident. Results depicted that a condemnation of the statement and termination of the sponsorship was preferred amongst consumers and that supporting the athlete's statement strongly harmed the brand. Arguably, a specific implication is that by condemnation with termination the brand is signaling a zero-tolerance of controversial behavior by

their athletes, and hence, distances themselves from controversies. As brand responses towards an athlete's negative statement poorly impact brand judgments, being involved with controversies about the transgender cause harms the brand post-incident. Nonetheless, results provide clarification on how to prevent and minimize the outcome of a controversial statement as different brand responses will reduce the negative effect. Managers must carefully consider their involvement with sponsored athletes connected to the controversies about M-W transgenders competing in women's sports. Regardless of the severity of an athlete's comment, the results of this study recommend the brand to condemn the behavior of the athlete and terminate the sponsorship to diminish the decrease in brand judgments. Hence, managers should be aware of this best practice and refrain from sponsoring athletes that engage in controversial causes to mitigate the negativism concerning brand judgments.

Another finding is connected to brand liking. Brand liking is crucial when determining the post-incident effects of brand judgments. This study depicts that a brand with positive affection amongst consumers will have a greater positive impact than brands with negative affection. Arguably, individual preferences as affection are hard to assure, but a brand that has established great affection with consumers will be less punished when linked to sponsored athletes that make controversial statements about transgenders in sports. An implication is therefore tied to greater slack if the brand is liked among consumers as this rationalizes the controversial engagement. Hence, managers must evaluate their brand liking among cohorts when involved with controversial statements to predict the outcome of their brand response.

Differences between gender cohorts should also be of interest when engaging in controversial causes. When evaluating brand judgments, females are more critical towards brands' engagement in transgender causes than males. One of the main differences between the cohorts was depicted when evaluating brand response. Females evaluated the brand response more negatively than males regardless of the severity in a sponsored athlete's statement, with support of free speech to have the greatest decrease in brand judgments. Additionally, females are more negative towards athletes expressing their feelings and performing controversial statements than males. The reasoning for this could be that females feel more connected to the topic as they also would suffer from being outcompeted by M-W transgenders. Hence, managers should establish knowledge

about their customer-base and what segments they are targeting as brands attracting solely female consumers should closely consider avoiding attendance in sponsorships related to women's sport where M-W transgender competitors are present. Complementary, results indicated that cohorts with greater acceptance of controversial statements had positive brand judgments when brands were engaged in the transgender cause. Managers should thoroughly monitor the market and consumer attitudes to acquire greater knowledge about individual mindsets and preferences. Consequently, this could lead to more tailored sponsorship strategies and greater acceptance of brand decisions if controversies occur.

Finally, the level of admiration for an athlete as well as the severity in a comment had the greatest effects on evaluations of the sponsored athlete and showed to be not as important when evaluating brand judgments. As a consequence, termination of sponsorship with well-liked athletes indicated the greatest preference among consumers' brand judgments. This was the case even if the athlete was commenting on the lowest level of severity regarding M-W transgenders to compete in women's sports. Nevertheless, as this was examined using conjoint analysis, we believe this result is inaccurate and that brands who terminates sponsorship deals with loved athletes in fact will result in anger among consumers. Respondents agreed that M-W transgenders had an unfair competitive advantage which supports the claim that a loved athlete stating something controversial about M-W transgender gets terminated could negatively harm the sponsor brand. Hence, managers should consider what sponsorships they engage in and what sponsor athletes they bring into the endorsements. In alignment with athlete behavior, our results depict that the athlete was benefiting from a low severe statement. This indicates that sponsored athletes refraining engagement in the transgender cause had a positive effect on their image and potential spillovers could benefit the sponsor's brand judgments. Hence, managers should prioritize the allocation of resources to find liked athletes that abstain from engagement in controversial causes.

7.0 Limitations and future research

Firstly, the pandemic of Covid-19 was a crucial limitation for this study. Difficulties gathering respondents for the survey led to somewhat potentially weakened results. Sports associations and other attractive groups of people were

less willing to participate and share the survey amongst their members as they were on leave from work. As a result, personal networks in combination with social media had to be used to reach out to the desired sports interested respondents.

As the aim of this study was to examine controversial statements regarding M-W transgenders competing in women's sports to depict attitudes amongst consumers, the possibility that the results suffer from social desirability bias must be accounted for. Signifying that respondents are conceivably answering the questions in a way they believe to be liked and accepted. M-W transgenders competing in women's sports are a relatively novel phenomenon and has blistered over the last years. As pre-tests indicated, knowledge about the transgender cause was limited within the Norwegian population and the Norwegian sports associations. Hence, difficulties in understanding the cause and insecurity in acceptance of the situation could be another aspect that led to social desirability bias amongst the sample. The generalizability of the results is therefore questionable. More generalizable results could be achieved by investigating sponsorship effects connected to controversies of M-W transgenders competing in sports in countries or cultures where this is more applicable. The United States has experienced a lot of incidents where M-W transgenders have both competed and won various sports competitions. Arguably, the results of this study might differ based on the sample from Norway compared to a sample from the U.S. where transgenders competing in sports are a more well-known phenomenon. Hence, future research could benefit from having samples where this topic is more relatable.

As the conjoint analysis consisted of nine different conjoint cards taking on the same scenario with different levels of severity (i.e.: brand response and athlete comment), distinguishing between the cards could be of difficulties. Three different athlete comments and brand responses in various combinations were possibly confusing when answering the survey. Also, as all respondents had to answer each of the nine conjoint cards, the study might have operated with a too ambiguous design and hard for respondents to complete. As each card consisted of the same news article taking on the same scenario, possibilities that respondents saw through the various manipulations might have occurred. Additionally, analyzing the data in Qualtrics depicted that respondents had some difficulties naming an athlete and a brand they disliked, and hence, many decided

to end their participation early on or filled in blanks answering these questions. Possibilities of respondents just naming a disliked athlete and brand without having negative affections towards them therefore might have occurred, and cards consisting of a disliked athlete or brand might not have given the desired results. Consequently, these elements arguably weaken the reliability of the study to some extent. Future research can conceivably use a simpler research design with solely active athletes as respondents, and we recommend avoid using neutral athletes and brands as this will help to distinguish the manipulations.

Moreover, future research should further explore situations consisting of controversial statements. Reversing of this study should be of interest, and future research could investigate how brand judgments are affected when a brand decides to establish a sponsorship deal with an athlete after making a controversial statement. Additionally, as this study only examines the short-term and immediate effects of a controversial statement, others should look deeper into how such statements affect the brand judgments long-term as spillover effects arguably could be lasting and changing over time. Another interesting perspective is to further investigate whether transgender rights are so important that female athletes do not dare to speak about how unfair it is for M-W transgenders to compete against biologically born women. As this study investigates preferences amongst consumers by utilizing a conjoint analysis, future research could benefit from experimental design to more profoundly explain the causality effects controversial statements from an athlete in connection to M-W transgenders competing in women's sports has on a sponsor brand. Especially as results depicted condemnation and termination of a sponsorship deal where a liked athlete is involved were protecting brand judgments, examining causal effects should be of interest to establish clearer reasoning for these unexpected results.

8.0 References

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9.0 Appendixes

Appendix 1: Example of a conjoint card article

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is disgraceful. Letting these fu**ing cheats compete against us is making me feel disgusted. They should have been banned from competing against us, and they are cowards to even show up! I´m absolutely in shock. These freaks have an unfair advantage and just like drug cheaters should be banned from competing with real women."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}, issued a press release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of such behavior from our athletes, and due to ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s extreme transphobic feelings about this topic we are terminating our sponsorship of her. Our brand values are strongly in conflict with her beliefs, and we therefore do not want to be associated with her in the future."

Appendix 2: Manipulations of brand response

Condemnation with termination:

"We strongly disapprove of such behavior from our athletes, and due to ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s extreme transphobic feelings about this topic we are terminating our sponsorship of her. Our brand values are strongly in conflict with her beliefs, and we therefore do not want to be associated with her in the future."

Condemnation without termination:

"We strongly disapprove of ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s statement, and we have initiated conversations to make sure similar incidents will not happen again. None of us is perfect, however, and even though we strongly disagree with her statement, we feel it is important to give her a second chance and continue the sponsorship."

Support of free speech and continue sponsorship:

"We support and stand by ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} and her statement. In today's society, the importance of free speech is essential, and we respect her right to express her beliefs and feelings."

Appendix 3: Main Study

Main Study

Introduction

Thank you for participating in this study!

The following study aims at gathering your judgments regarding the relationship between a sponsor brand and sponsored athlete. Completing the questions will take 10-12 minutes, and we ask you to give honest answers throughout as there are no right or wrong answers. We encourage you to read all the questions and scenarios thoroughly.

All answers will be kept strictly confidential and we ensure total anonymity of respondents. Participating in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact us at:
martin_dunseth@hotmail.com
trymsmedsrud@outlook.com

Click "next" when you are ready to start the study.

Page Break

Athlete

Please think about three different **<u>individual female athletes</u>** competing in any individual sport with the 1st female athlete being someone you **admire/like**, the 2nd being a female athlete you **are neutral to** (i.e. know but don't really care about either way), and the 3rd female athlete someone you **dislike/hate**.

Athlete Like Please fill in the name of a female athlete you admire/like.

_____

Athlete Neutral to Please fill in the name of a female athlete you are neutral to.

_____

Athlete Dislike Please fill in the name of a female athlete you dislike/hate.

_____

Brand

Please think about three different brands, with the 1st brand being one you **admire/like**, the 2nd brand one you **are neutral to** (i.e. know about but don't really care either way), and a 3rd brand you **dislike/hate**.

Brand Like Please fill in the name of a brand you admire/like.

_____

Brand Neutral Please fill in the name of a brand you are neutral to.

_____

Brand dislike Please fill in the name of a brand you dislike/hate.

_____

Description of TG

You will now be presented 9 different news articles discussing transgenders competing in sports. Transgender women are people who are born biologically male, but who believe or feel they are actually women. Almost all transgender women competing in women's sports have not had any gender reassignment surgeries and are still biologically male.

Please read and evaluate the following 9 articles. Some may seem similar to each other, but they each have **small or large differences** with each other so it is important that you read each one carefully.

End of Block: Athlete and Brand

Start of Block: CJ 6

CJ6a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is disgraceful. Letting these fu**ing cheats compete against us is making me feel disgusted. They should have been banned from competing against us,

and they are cowards to even show up! I´m absolutely in shock. These freaks have an unfair advantage and just like drug cheaters should be banned from competing with real women."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}, issued a press release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of such behavior from our athletes, and due to ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s extreme transphobic feelings about this topic we are terminating our sponsorship of her. Our brand values are strongly in conflict with her beliefs, and we therefore do not want to be associated with her in the future."

CJ6b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ6c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 6

Start of Block: CJ 1

CJ1a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "I feel this is wrong and that a transgender ban should be in place, but of course I will probably be blamed for pointing out the obvious."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Neutral/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We support and stand by ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} and her statement. In today's society, the importance of free speech is essential, and we respect her right to express her beliefs and feelings."

CJ1b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ1c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand Neutral/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

CJ2a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is disgraceful. Letting these fu**ing cheats compete against us is making me feel disgusted. They should have been banned from competing against us, and they are cowards to even show up! I´m absolutely in shock. These freaks have an unfair advantage and just like drug cheaters should be banned from competing with real women."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Neutral/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s statement, and we have initiated conversations to make sure similar incidents will not happen again. None of us is perfect, however, and even though we strongly disagree with her statement, we feel it is important to give her a second chance and continue the sponsorship."

- -

CJ2b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

- -

CJ2c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand Neutral/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 2

Start of Block: CJ 3

CJ3a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "I feel this is wrong and that a transgender ban should be in place, but of course I will probably be blamed for pointing out the obvious."
Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of such behavior from our athletes, and due to ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s extreme transphobic feelings about this topic we are terminating our sponsorship of her. Our brand values are strongly in conflict with her beliefs, and we therefore do not want to be associated with her in the future."

CJ3b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ3c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 3

Start of Block: CJ 4

CJ4a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is completely unacceptable. Letting these cheats compete against us is wrong and I feel it is unfair to all female athletes. A transgender ban should be announced within a short time to ensure fairness in our sport."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Neutral/ChoiceTextEntryValue}, issued a press

release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s statement, and due to her extreme transphobic feelings which about this topic, and since our brand values strongly conflict with her beliefs we are terminating our sponsorship with her immediately."

CJ4b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ4c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand Neutral/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Unappealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 4

Start of Block: CJ 5

CJ5a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is completely unacceptable. Letting these cheats

compete against us is wrong and I feel it is unfair to all female athletes. A transgender ban should be announced within a short time to ensure fairness in our sport."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We support and stand by ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} and her statement. In today's society, the importance of free speech is essential, and we respect her right to express her beliefs and feelings."

CJ5b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ5c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 5

Start of Block: CJ 7

CJ7a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several

reactions.

${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is disgraceful. Letting these fu**ing cheats compete against us is making me feel disgusted. They should have been banned from competing against us, and they are cowards to even show up! I´m absolutely in shock. These freaks have an unfair advantage and just like drug cheaters should be banned from competing with real women."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We support and stand by ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} and her statement. In today's society, the importance of free speech is essential, and we respect her right to express her beliefs and feelings."

CJ7b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ7c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 7

Start of Block: CJ 8

CJ8a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "This is completely unacceptable. Letting these cheats compete against us is wrong and I feel it is unfair to all female athletes. A transgender ban should be announced within a short time to ensure fairness in our sport."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s statement, and we have initiated conversations to make sure similar incidents will not happen again. None of us is perfect, however, and even though we strongly disagree with her statement, we feel it is important to give her a second chance and continue the sponsorship."

CJ8b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ8c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand dislike/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ9a

TRANSGENDER WOMAN WINS THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP - COMPETITORS AND SPONSOR SPEAK OUT!

${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} expresses her feelings after a transgender competitor broke all the female records and won the championship. This has generated several reactions.

${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} has received a lot of attention in media lately for expressing her feelings around transgenders competing in sports, and especially in her own sport. To the newspaper VG, she stated that: "I feel this is wrong and that a transgender ban should be in place, but of course I will probably be blamed for pointing out the obvious."

Transgender activists condemned ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s controversial statement, and her long-time sponsor ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} issued a press release in response that said: "We strongly disapprove of ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue}'s statement, and we have initiated conversations to make sure similar incidents will not happen again. None of us is perfect, however, and even though we strongly disagree with her statement, we feel it is important to give her a second chance and continue the sponsorship."

CJ9b

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Athlete Neutral to/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

CJ9c

Using only the information in the article above, please evaluate ${Brand Like/ChoiceTextEntryValue} using the scale below:

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Less likeable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likeable
Less likely to support	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More likely to support
Less appealing	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	More appealing

Page Break

End of Block: CJ 9

Start of Block: General attitudes

Equal rights

A male who thinks he is female should be banned from athletically competing against biological women in organized sports.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Freedom of speech

People should have the freedom to say politically incorrect things even if they hurt some individual or group.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Comfortable LC-room

I think most women would be very comfortable sharing a locker room or shower with a transgender woman.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Unfairness

A male who think he is a female has an unfair athletic advantage over biologically female athletes.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Freedom of speech

People should not be punished for speaking the truth even when others find the truth controversial or hateful.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Sports interest

I consider myself to be very athletic.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	6 (6)	7 (7)	
Strongly disagree	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Strongly agree

Athlete yourself

Have you ever been an athlete yourself?

○ Yes, I still am. (1)

○ Yes, but not anymore. (2)

○ No, I have never been. (3)

Gender

    ○ Male (1)

    ○ Female (2)

    ○ Other (3)

Age

_____

Nationality

_____

Level of education

    ○ Lower than high school (1)

    ○ High school (2)

    ○ Bachelor's degree (3)

    ○ Master's degree (4)

Occupation

    ○ Student (1)

    ○ Part-time worker (2)

    ○ Full-time worker (3)

    ○ Retired (4)

    ○ Other (5)

Appendix 4: T-test between No athlete/athlete.

Independent t-test

Athleteyourself_dummy		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Transgender ban from competing in organized sports	No athlete	75	4,97	1,959	2,539	-1,348	104	0,180
	Athlete	31	5,52	1,691		-1,434	64,483	0,157
Freedom to say politically incorrect things	No athlete	75	4,19	1,730	2,723	-0,386	104	0,700
	Athlete	31	4,32	1,423		-0,419	67,593	0,677
Comfortable sharing locker rooms with M-W transgenders	No athlete	75	3,43	1,718	0,016	-0,332	104	0,740
	Athlete	31	3,55	1,710		-0,333	56,288	0,740
Unfair advantage over biological women	No athlete	75	6,11	1,237	0,116	0,036	104	0,971
	Athlete	31	6,10	1,375		0,035	51,098	0,972
Not punished for speaking the truth	No athlete	75	4,29	1,985	6,284	-1,548	104	0,125
	Athlete	31	4,90	1,446		-1,761	76,201	0,082
Self-evaluation of athletic level	No athlete	75	4,39	1,345	3,575	-6,161	104	0,000
	Athlete	31	6,03	0,983		-7,001	75,959	0,000

Appendix 5: Conjoint output for cohorts "Gender".

Gender = Male statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,030	0,045	
	Neutral	0,041	0,045	21,034
	Dislike	-0,070	0,045	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,701	0,039	
	Somewhat severe	1,401	0,078	37,269
	No severe	2,102	0,117	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,010	0,039	
	Condemnation without terminatic	-0,020	0,078	14,331
	Support freespeech	-0,030	0,117	
Athletes	Like	-0,419	0,039	
	Neutral	-0,839	0,078	27,366
	Dislike	-1,258	0,117	
(Constant)		3,121	0,139	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,997	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,944	0,000

Gender = Male statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,322	0,171	
	Neutral	0,400	0,171	36,509
	Dislike	-0,722	0,171	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,151	0,148	
	Somewhat severe	0,302	0,296	16,723
	No severe	0,454	0,444	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,067	0,148	
	Condemnation without	-0,135	0,296	27,895
	Support freespeech	-0,202	0,444	
Athletes	Like	-0,219	0,148	
	Neutral	-0,439	0,296	18,873
	Dislike	-0,658	0,444	
(Constant)		4,022	0,527	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,936	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,778	0,002

Gender = Female statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,026	0,058	
	Neutral	0,045	0,058	18,514
	Dislike	-0,071	0,058	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,679	0,051	
	Somewhat severe	1,358	0,101	41,283
	No severe	2,037	0,152	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	0,003	0,051	
	Condemnation without terminatic	0,006	0,101	14,345
	Support freespeech	0,008	0,152	
Athletes	Like	-0,131	0,051	
	Neutral	-0,261	0,101	25,858
	Dislike	-0,392	0,152	
(Constant)		1,807	0,180	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,992	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,944	0,000

52

Gender = Female statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,353	0,170	
	Neutral	0,207	0,170	31,731
	Dislike	-0,560	0,170	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,034	0,147	
	Somewhat severe	0,069	0,294	17,391
	No severe	0,103	0,441	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,616	0,147	
	Condemnation without	-1,233	0,294	30,065
	Support freespeech	-1,849	0,441	
Athletes	Like	-0,455	0,147	
	Neutral	-0,910	0,294	20,813
	Dislike	-1,365	0,441	
(Constant)		5,740	0,524	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,963	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,986	0,000

Appendix 6: Conjoint output for cohorts "Age".

Age = Older than 30 y/o statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,049	0,122	
	Neutral	0,014	0,122	18,626
	Dislike	-0,062	0,122	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,798	0,106	
	Somewhat severe	1,596	0,212	44,364
	No severe	2,395	0,318	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,026	0,106	
	Condemnation without terminatic	-0,053	0,212	13,852
	Support freespeech	-0,079	0,318	
Athletes	Like	-0,260	0,106	
	Neutral	-0,520	0,212	23,158
	Dislike	-0,781	0,318	
(Constant)		2,144	0,377	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,977	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,889	0,000

Age = Older than 30y/o statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,092	0,183	
	Neutral	0,399	0,183	32,818
	Dislike	-0,490	0,183	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,140	0,159	
	Somewhat severe	0,280	0,317	15,524
	No severe	0,421	0,476	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,690	0,159	
	Condemnation without	-1,381	0,317	34,580
	Support freespeech	-2,071	0,476	
Athletes	Like	-0,238	0,159	
	Neutral	-0,476	0,317	17,078
	Dislike	-0,714	0,476	
(Constant)		5,300	0,564	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,954	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,548	0,008

Age = Younger than 30 y/o statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
	Like	0,023	0,066	
Brands	Neutral	0,051	0,066	20,240
	Dislike	-0,074	0,066	
	Severe	0,669	0,057	
Athlete_Comment	Somewhat severe	1,339	0,115	37,653
	No severe	2,008	0,172	
	Condemnation w/termination	0,005	0,057	
Brand_Response	Condemnation without terminatic	0,011	0,115	14,573
	Support freespeech	0,016	0,172	
	Like	-0,317	0,057	
Athletes	Neutral	-0,635	0,115	27,534
	Dislike	-0,952	0,172	
(Constant)		2,689	0,205	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,977	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,889	0,000

Age = Younger than 30y/o statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,407	0,174	
	Neutral	0,294	0,174	35,172
	Dislike	-0,701	0,174	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,092	0,150	
	Somewhat severe	0,185	0,301	17,194
	No severe	0,277	0,451	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,183	0,150	
	Condemnation without	-0,365	0,301	27,151
	Support freespeech	-0,548	0,451	
Athletes	Like	-0,340	0,150	
	Neutral	-0,680	0,301	20,483
	Dislike	-1,020	0,451	
(Constant)		4,544	0,535	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,941	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,873	0,001

Appendix 7: Conjoint output for cohorts "Athlete".

Athlete = Serious athlete statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	-0,011	0,118	
	Neutral	0,022	0,118	17,379
	Dislike	-0,011	0,118	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,823	0,102	
	Somewhat severe	1,645	0,205	42,330
	No severe	2,468	0,307	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	0,027	0,102	
	Condemnation without terminatic	0,054	0,205	15,180
	Support freespeech	0,081	0,307	
Athletes	Like	-0,349	0,102	
	Neutral	-0,699	0,205	25,108
	Dislike	-1,048	0,307	
(Constant)		2,602	0,365	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,981	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,944	0,000

Athlete = Serious Athlete statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,373	0,145	
	Neutral	0,391	0,145	38,281
	Dislike	-0,764	0,145	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,089	0,126	
	Somewhat severe	0,178	0,252	16,259
	No severe	0,267	0,378	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,220	0,126	
	Condemnation without	-0,441	0,252	23,388
	Support freespeech	-0,661	0,378	
Athletes	Like	-0,370	0,126	
	Neutral	-0,741	0,252	22,172
	Dislike	-1,111	0,378	
(Constant)		4,927	0,448	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,964	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,889	0,000

Athlete = No serious athlete statistics CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
	Like	0,044	0,039	
Brands	Neutral	0,053	0,039	21,045
	Dislike	-0,098	0,039	
	Severe	0,637	0,034	
Athlete_Comment	Somewhat severe	1,275	0,068	37,409
	No severe	1,912	0,102	
	Condemnation w/termination	-0,012	0,034	
Brand_Response	Condemnation without terminatic	-0,025	0,068	14,122
	Support freespeech	-0,037	0,102	
	Like	-0,289	0,034	
Athletes	Neutral	-0,577	0,068	27,424
	Dislike	-0,866	0,102	
(Constant)		2,582	0,121	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,997	0,000
Kendall's tau	1,000	0,000

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Athlete = No serious Athlete statistics CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Importance Value
Brands	Like	0,331	0,183	
	Neutral	0,284	0,183	33,244
	Dislike	-0,615	0,183	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,107	0,158	
	Somewhat severe	0,215	0,317	17,099
	No severe	0,322	0,475	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,312	0,158	
	Condemnation without	-0,623	0,317	30,825
	Support freespeech	-0,935	0,475	
Athletes	Like	-0,299	0,158	
	Neutral	-0,598	0,317	18,832
	Dislike	-0,896	0,475	
(Constant)		4,632	0,564	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,93	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,722	0,003

Appendix 8: Conjoint output for cohorts "Acceptance for controversial statements".

Low acceptance for controversial asserts CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Improtance Value
Brands	Like	0,034	0,078	
	Neutral	0,017	0,078	19,374
	Dislike	-0,051	0,078	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,654	0,067	
	Somewhat severe	1,308	0,135	39,026
	No severe	1,962	0,202	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,019	0,067	
	Condemnation without termination	-0,039	0,135	14,537
	Support freespeech	-0,058	0,202	
Athletes	Like	-0,311	0,067	
	Neutral	-0,623	0,135	27,063
	Dislike	-0,934	0,202	
(Constant)		2,483	0,240	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.
Pearson's R	0,987	0,000
Kendall's tau	0,944	0,000

Low acceptance for controversial asserts CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Improtance Value
Brands	Like	0,321	0,141	
	Neutral	0,290	0,141	35,772
	Dislike	-0,611	0,141	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,109	0,122	
	Somewhat severe	0,219	0,244	15,447
	No severe	0,328	0,366	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	-0,469	0,122	
	Condemnation without termination	-0,938	0,244	29,308
	Support freespeech	-1,407	0,366	
Athletes	Like	-0,337	0,122	
	Neutral	-0,675	0,244	19,473
	Dislike	-1,012	0,366	
(Constant)		5,037	0,435	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.	
Pearson's R	0,966	0,000	
Kendall's tau	0,944	0,000	

High acceptance for controversial asserts CJA

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Improtance Value
Brands	Like	0,017	0,046	
	Neutral	0,092	0,046	20,955
	Dislike	-0,109	0,046	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,763	0,040	
	Somewhat severe	1,526	0,079	38,649
	No severe	2,288	0,119	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	0,033	0,040	
	Condemnation without termination	0,066	0,079	14,267
	Support freespeech	0,099	0,119	
Athletes	Like	-0,299	0,040	
	Neutral	-0,598	0,079	26,128
	Dislike	-0,896	0,119	
(Constant)		2,776	0,141	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.	
Pearson's R	0,997	0,000	
Kendall's tau	1,000	0,000	

High acceptance for controversial asserts CJB

Attributes	Levels	Utility Estimate	Std. Error	Average Improtance Value
Brands	Like	0,385	0,230	
	Neutral	0,363	0,230	32,667
	Dislike	-0,748	0,230	
Athlete_Comment	Severe	0,088	0,199	
	Somewhat severe	0,176	0,399	19,520
	No severe	0,264	0,598	
Brand_Response	Condemnation w/termination	0,062	0,199	
	Condemnation without termination	0,123	0,399	27,409
	Support freespeech	0,185	0,598	
Athletes	Like	-0,285	0,199	
	Neutral	-0,571	0,399	20,405
	Dislike	-0,856	0,598	
(Constant)		4,112	0,710	

Correlations

	Value	Sig.	
Pearson's R	0,901	0,000	
Kendall's tau	0,667	0,006	