



SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS AND  
MANAGEMENT

# **The Underdog Brand Position**

by

Diogo de Lima, Darragh Moorhouse & Can Üner

May 2023

Master's Programme in International Marketing & Brand  
Management

Word Count [34,293]

Supervisor: Mats Urde  
Examiner: Sönnich Sönnichsen

# Abstract

**Title:** The Underdog Brand Position

**Date of Seminar:** 31-05-2023

**Course:** BUSN39 Degree Project in Global Marketing

**Authors:** Diogo de Lima, Darragh Moorhouse & Can Üner

**Advisor:** Mats Urde

**Key words:** Underdog, Underdog Positioning, Branding, Rhetoric, Identity, Communication, Image, Top Dog.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to explore the Underdog Brand Position (and its link to Rhetoric) to understand What is an Underdog Brand Position, How are Underdog Brand Positions Used and Why and When is an Underdog Brand Position a viable strategy.

**Methodology:** A qualitative multiple case study with a constructionist approach. Case studies include Polestar, Oatly, Sibylla, and Liquid Death.

**Theoretical Perspective:** In order to develop an Underdog Positioning Framework we must examine the following in regard to Underdog Brands: Communication, Identity, Positioning, Image, and Rhetoric.

**Empirical Data:** The empirical data consists of fifteen semi-structured interviews with Marketing Department Employees and Underdog Brand Experts, Consultants and Academics. We also benefited from secondary data in terms of visual ads and videos interviews.

**Conclusions:** An Underdog Position is a method of categorisation for brands which are considered Underdogs. An Underdog Brand Position is ultimately a choice as communication shapes the Underdog Identity, leaving the brand to either embrace their Underdog status or not. The framework consists of four positions: Former Top Dog, Striving Underdog, Conscious Underdog and Fighting Underdog.

# Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our remarkable supervisor, Mats Urde. His guidance, support, and encouragement has been instrumental in the development of this Thesis. We are truly thankful for all the supervisions in which we had the opportunity to brainstorm, gain inspiration, and find clarity. We would also like to thank him for taking on the challenging task of supervising us. We cannot adequately express our appreciation for this opportunity. Thank you sincerely.

This Thesis would never have been written without the input of our respondents. We are truly thankful for them sparing time out of their lives to help us achieve a very meaningful goal. Their insights and inspiration were crucial for the development of this study and we couldn't be more grateful.

We want to extend our gratitude to our colleagues that spent hours and hours seated next to us at the LUSEM Learning Hub writing their own thesis. Together we achieved great things and it is a pleasure to share this moment with them.

Last but not least, we want to thank our families and friends for supporting and believing in us.

Lund, 31st of May 2023

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Diogo de Lima

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Darragh Moorhouse

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Can Üner

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# 1 Introduction

*This first chapter contextualises the phenomenon of Underdog Brands by presenting it and answering questions such as: why is it relevant?; how has it been ever-present? or why do we feel attached to Underdogs? It also covers key concepts such as identity, positioning, communication, and image. We outline the purpose, state our research questions, and delineate the goals of this Thesis and note our delimitations.*

## 1.1 Problematisation

If we think about the concept of Underdogs, we realise that we interact with them every day. It may be our beloved sports team that's forever at the bottom of the league, the Olympic athlete who always comes fourth, or a small business struggling to succeed in a crowded market. In fact, in many aspects of life, we ourselves may indeed feel like Underdogs.

An Underdog can be a person, a team, a brand, or a firm that presents some sort of competitive disadvantage when compared to others (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012; He, You & Chen, 2020). Even though the term is commonly linked with a higher likelihood of defeat (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012), an Underdog competes with passion and determination to strive against the leader (He, You & Chen, 2020; Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021).

Underdogs are all around us, and it can be intriguing to note how, despite being labelled as an Underdog also creates a sense of a potential success. This is due to the number of successful Underdog stories present in human memory (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). These stories, emotions, and optimistic outcomes that bring excitement to our lives connect us with Underdogs. We don't mind if they lose... at the end of the day, it was expected, but we love to see them fight with all that passion for the slightest chance of victory.

“It's not the size of the dog in the fight that matters; it's the size of the fight in the dog” (Fishman, 2014, p.28).



For Underdogs to exist, there is a need for a superior counterpart, or antagonist known as a 'Top Dog'. However, the Top Dog is more likely to succeed (or indeed have already succeeded). This brings us to the reason why this phenomenon is so important. What can Underdogs do to strive in markets dominated by Top Dogs?

The Thesis aims to bring a new option to all of those smaller brands, in a way that they might be able to understand in terms of how and why & when they can leverage being positioned as an Underdog. This brings hope to Underdogs and deviates from mainstream studies concerning how to become a Top Dog or Market Leader, giving hope to all of the smaller enterprises that desperately need it.

We can see that it is deeply rooted and close to some core aspects of Marketing and Brand Management such: Identity; Positioning; Communication; and Image. Note that it is 'Image' which overlaps the previous concepts, creating an Image of the brand to the eyes of the receiver. According to Kapferer (2012), Identity is what is meant to be transmitted from inside the brand. It defines the intended meaning, goals, and self-representation of the brand, while Positioning a brand is underlining the unique attributes that set the brand apart from its competitors and make it attractive to the public.

Communication is a wide term that covers different concepts, strategies and techniques such as advertising, public relations, events or direct marketing (Kotler & Keller, 2012) and its primary objective is to shape and influence people's perceptions of the brand value proposition by highlighting both its tangible and intangible aspects (Kapferer, 2012).

There is another concept that works as a basis not just for all of the previous Marketing topics, but also for Underdog Brands themselves. This concept is 'Rhetoric':- the ancient art of persuasion. Rhetoric involves the dynamic interaction between the speaker and their audience, with the speaker attempting to persuade the audience through the use of three proofs: ethical, emotional, and rational (Dunn, 1998). When a Brand identifies itself as an Underdog, positions itself as an Underdog and communicates that it is an Underdog, it is more prone to be seen as one. All of this works through Rhetoric and its application is fundamental for a positive outcome. This led us to build a Framework for better understanding (Figure 1, page 13).

With its close relation to Marketing, the Underdog phenomenon can easily be used as a strategy. Research from Kao (2015) supports the idea of using it as a feasible approach when facing the leading brands and even for humans. Labelling yourself as the Underdog has been a common strategy leveraged by athletes and politicians due to the potential optimistic projections it carries (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). When it comes to politicians, it is frequently a useful strategy, as research suggests that the Underdog is regarded as equally competent but more friendly and affectionate than the front-running counterpart (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2009).

The Underdog phenomenon can be highly effective not just in everyday life, but also in Business or Branding. A prime example in business of leveraging an Underdog positioning is the case of Avis vs Hertz, battling for the rental car service in the 1960's.

Avis was struggling to compete with the highly dominant Hertz, so they came up with the campaign "Avis. We Try Harder" (Ephratt, 2012; Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021), which was a set of advertisements that emphasised the fact that due to being second best, there was no space for errors and they put a lot more effort into making the clients happy when compared to Hertz.

With advertisements such as: "Avis can't afford not to be nice"; "Avis can't afford to make you wait" or "Avis can't afford dirty ashtrays", Avis made brilliant progress and significantly improved their Market Share (Lash, 1991). It is important to note that even without mentioning Hertz, Avis successfully aimed their campaign against the Top Dog, which was a crucial factor for its success, since subordinating to any other company would have been incorrect and most likely would have meant failure. (Ephratt, 2012). Avis' campaign was so successful and well executed that David Ogilvy praised Avis and considered their positioning as "diabolical" for the way it disrupted Hertz (Stevenson, 2013).

Underdog stories are abundant in our minds (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). We have seen those stories in history, as 6,700 hopeless Portuguese soldiers won the Aljubarrota Battle against 31,000 Catal an soldiers (Monteiro, 2009); in sports, when Leicester City lifted the Premier League trophy in 2016 against all the odds; in Biblical Times, as the small David defeated the giant Goliath to bring glory to its people; in politics, as in the 2008 US elections

every major politician would label himself as the Underdog with Barack Obama even claiming that his name would always portrait an Underdog in political races (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2009); in movies, such as 'Good Will Hunting' in which a Harvard janitor (Will Hunting) with a troubled past growing up as an orphan, was the individual that solved a seemingly impossible equation. We also have seen it in real-life businesses, such as the previously discussed Avis case or the German drink Fritz Cola that position themselves as the Underdogs against Coca-Cola (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021).

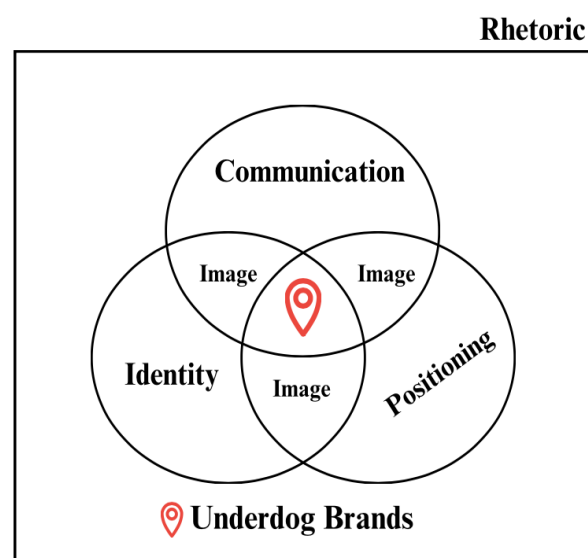
An example of our love for Underdogs is the empathy extended by Humans towards animals that are in need, often the case for the 'runt' of a dog litter. The smallest and weakest animal will often need human intervention to grow and survive, similar to an Underdog brand. However, there is a conflict between humans' desire to help those in need and the want of being affiliated with winners, as the urge to assist disadvantaged Underdogs may be overcome by the need for association with success (Kim, Allison, Eylon, Goethals, Markus, Hindle & McGuire, 2008).

Humans are often drawn to Underdogs and are likely to sympathise and support them (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012) and tend to feel empathetic and compassionate feelings towards them (He, You & Chen, 2020). Furthermore, people tend to perceive greater effort coming from Underdogs and are keen to support them due to their unequal situation as it triggers our sense of fairness and justice (Vandello, Goldschmied & Richards, 2007). All of these emotional connections exhibited towards Underdogs are defined as 'The Underdog Effect' (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021).

There is recurring uncertainty attached to Underdogs. Even when they win and continue to win, humans will still be keen on supporting them as this uncertainty raises drama, grabs our attention and even when they are winning we always expect them to lose which makes supporting them have a low cost and high reward when they do succeed. (Kim, Allison, Eylon, Goethals, Markus, Hindle & McGuire, 2008; Doyle, Pettit, Kim, To & Lount, 2022). Just as humans love to see an Underdog succeed, we are inclined to want to appreciate witnessing the downfall of the Top Dog. Ultimately we refer to the popular phrase "the harder they fall" suggesting our satisfaction in seeing the leader fail (Kim, Allison, Eylon, Goethals, Markus, Hindle & McGuire, 2008).

During a Lund University Strategic Brand Management class, lectured by Mats Urde and Frans Melin, the Avis Case discussed earlier was presented which aroused interest on our part. We ended up discussing the topic in depth with Mats Urde concluding that there is immense value in researching strategies for Underdog brands that might want to be seen as such, countering the common research about Market leaders and how to reach that position.

To summarise, we created a framework that explains the positioning of our study. When we think of an Underdog Brand we consider Identity, Positioning and Communication as crucial concepts for its existence.



*Figure 1. Thesis Conceptual Framework*

## 1.2 Research Purpose

The purpose is to explore Underdog Brands Positioning and its relation with Rhetoric in order to demonstrate: what it is; how it is used; and why & when it is a strategy. The following research questions will aid this process:

RQ1: What is an Underdog brand position?

RQ2: How are Underdog brand positions used?

RQ3. Why and when is an Underdog brand position a strategy?

The aim is to develop the Underdog phenomenon, so it becomes clear to professionals and academics what options Underdog Brands may have on the spectrum of Strategic Brand Management. The main objective is to formulate a framework that categorises positionings that Underdog Brands might have on the market, so that Brand Managers of Underdog Brands can analyse and adapt to their Brand Strategy. Despite the Underdog phenomenon being the centre of this study, related concepts such as identity, positioning, communication, image and Rhetoric, will be studied and developed. In this manner, Brand Managers will be made aware of factors that must be kept in mind while considering adopting the discovered positionings. We will clarify what an Underdog Position is along with how, and why & when can those positionings be used as strategies. This will ultimately contribute to the Strategic Brand Management body of literature, while still delving deeper into the Underdog Phenomenon.

### 1.3 Delimitations

Ideally, studying every possible brand case and examining every possible Underdog Position would be the best case scenario, but unfortunately, that's not possible. Factors such as time-frame and the need to gather data from every relevant brand pose challenges. This is not only because of time constraints but also due to respondents' availability or their non-disclosure agreements. Additionally, the constant changes in strategy further complicate the data collection process and due to this, there might be Positionings yet to be discovered in the future.

There were similar Brand cases, in similar markets. In such cases, we chose the most notable case. We cannot present all of them and had to make decisions to achieve an optimal outcome despite the brands having similar Positioning and strategies. Similarly, we had to limit the number of industries that we researched.

Caveats and omissions will always exist as it is not humanly impossible to cover everything. There may be other topics we may not be aware of at this point, but we hope to bring some valuable insight to the reader for those topics that we have covered.

## 2 Literature Review

*This Literature review examines five research aspects of Underdog Brands:*

- o Identity: This is a core component of Underdog Branding as it answers the fundamental question of 'What makes you, you?'*
- o Positioning: This is then examined as Underdog Branding is achieved through positioning.*
- o Communication: Enables us to understand how the Underdog positioning is conveyed to consumers.*
- o Image is present in Identity, Positioning, and Communication as it refers to all of these elements combined that create the consumers' interpretation of a brand.*
- o Rhetoric also ties in heavily to communication by examining the language used as a persuasion method for brand biographies.*

### 2.1 Identity

#### 2.1.1 Definition and Importance of Brand Identity

Kapferer (2012) refers to identity as drawing upon a brand's roots and heritage, describing it as everything that makes a brand unique. Aaker (1996) defines Brand Identity as a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain. These associations embody the core values and convey a promise to customers from the members of the organisation, signifying what the brand represents (Aaker, 1996). Similarly to Kapferer (2012), Aaker (1996) describes Brand Identity as a promise of what a brand stands for noting Identity must be created and maintained. Aaker (1996) echoes that of Kapferer (2012) in noting Brand Identity should be willing to create changes to the core identity of a brand. A Brand's Identity can act as a compass outlining that "a brand identity similarly provides direction" (Aaker, 1996, p.68). Aaker (1996) also declares that it creates a sense of purpose and meaning.

Kapferer (2012) notes the importance of Brand Identity creating a relationship with consumers through benefits such as emotional, functional, and self-expressive beliefs and value propositions. These elements combine in consumers' minds to create Brand Image with

Brand Identity being on the senders' side and Brand Image on the side of the receiver (Kapferer, 2012). Kapferer (2012) describes Brand Image as the reception sent back to the organisation by the market regarding their products/services.

### *2.1.2 Relationship between Brand Identity and Brand Image*

Brand identity shapes brand image with Kapferer (2012) referring to the image as a memory for consumers which can be difficult to change as it is built in the long term and difficult to change in the short term. In referring to Image, Aaker (1996) speaks of the past and notes identity is concerned with the future, a strategic outlook that reflects business strategy. According to Kapferer (2012), it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the desired image before presenting it to the public. Additionally, it is essential to determine what needs to be communicated and how it should be effectively conveyed prior to its reception. The image is shaped by the sender i.e. the brand. While acknowledging the possibility of long-term changes to identity, Kapferer (2012) advises caution and stresses the importance of a company staying true to its identity, as it is the very essence that has successfully attracted buyers. Goldschmied & Vandello (2012) exclaim that gamblers now expect Underdogs to win due to this exposure to Underdog success stories which has been coined as "favourite-longshot bias". Goldschmied & Vandello (2012) point out that gamblers are likelier to bet on Underdogs when they go with their gut instinct as opposed to the verse effect of a careful cognitive thought process.

### *2.1.3 Underdog Brand Identity*

Underdog brands' identity is built on being perceived as an Underdog by consumers and employees. Nurmohamed's (2019) article illustrates that Underdog brands often utilise their "Underdog" status to their advantage by creating a unique identity that resonates with consumers who feel underestimated or overlooked in comparison to dominant brands. Similarly, research by Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) suggests that consumers can relate to the Underdog identity and may even see themselves as Underdogs who have been overlooked. Together, these findings assert the importance of brand identity and how it can be

leveraged to connect with consumers on a deeper level. Nurmohamed (2019) concurs with Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) in reiterating that Underdog brands can leverage their perception to relate to consumers who personally feel like Underdogs in life. Both Nurmohamed (2019) and Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) point out this can lead to customers being motivated to support Underdog brands and their journey to success. Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) refer to Underdog brands inviting consumers to join them in a 'movement'- one which is heavily reliant on consumer support to grow. Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) stress that customers may feel like Underdogs in comparison to those around them. Comparison is a key element in Underdog identity.

According to Kim et al. (2008), the perception of consumers towards a product or service's failure can vary based on the brand's position in the market. The study notes that Underdog brands may be more forgiven for any perceived incompetence, as opposed to forgiveness for such for Top Dogs. In a similar vein, research conducted by Han (2023) suggests that customer purchasing behaviour is influenced by perceiving local brands as Underdogs striving to compete against larger international rivals and in such cases, customers are more inclined to make purchases from Underdog Brands. Accordingly, Kao's (2019) study highlights that consumers' envy can influence their preference towards Underdogs or Top Dogs. Those with "malicious envy" may be more likely to support Underdogs, while those with "benign envy" may be more likely to support Top Dogs. These findings suggest that consumers' emotions and perceptions of brands' positions can play a significant role in their decision-making processes (Kao, 2019).

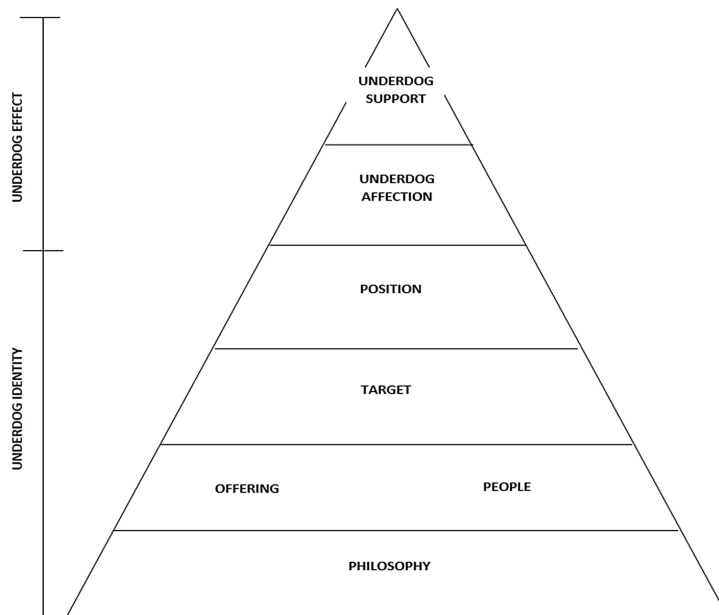
Similarly, the identity of an Underdog brand is essential to consumer purchase intentions. Indeed, the relationship between consumer purchase intentions and brand perception varies depending on whether brands are perceived as local Underdogs or global Top Dogs, according to Han (2023). The distinction between Underdog and Top Dog brands stems from the hierarchical structure of the market and the varying levels of strength among competitors (Li & Zhao, 2021). Research suggests that consumer purchase intentions are more robust when local brands adopt the Underdog role, while global brands embrace the position of Top Dogs, as consumers tend to show stronger purchase intentions when perceiving local brands as challengers striving to overcome larger global competitors (Han, 2023). Contrarily, when global brands are positioned as dominant market leaders, consumers are more likely to associate themselves with the winning brand, leading to heightened purchase intentions.



Support of Underdogs is not exclusive to forms of envy with Han & Kim (2020) finding that customers with a prosocial value orientation, who are more conscious of equality, tend to support Underdog brands as opposed to Top Dogs. Correspondingly Li & Zhao (2021) illustrate that when compared to the Top Dog brand story, the Underdog brand story emerges as more distinct and unique, effectively instilling a sense of individuality. Furthermore, although there may be a perception that Top Dog brands possess a lower level of passion and determination in comparison to Underdogs, consumers frequently demonstrate a preference for Top Dogs (Han, 2023). This preference stems from their aspiration to align themselves with a triumphant brand and bask in the association of victory.

Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) attribute brand biographies being the foundation for building an Underdog perception. Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) note four findings on the Underdog effect in noting “we show that the Underdog effect is (a) mediated by a consumer’s identification with the brand, (b) greater for consumers who strongly self-identify as Underdogs, (c) stronger when consumers are purchasing for themselves versus for others, and (d) stronger for consumers who are from cultures in which Underdog narratives are part of their national identities” (p.771).

Schmidt and Steenkamp (2021) outline themes that Underdog brands must control and incorporate into their identity to be perceived as Underdogs: philosophy, offering, people, target and position. These five factors allow the construction of an Underdog identity. However, Schmidt and Steenkamp (2021) point out that the affection and support for an Underdog brand are not directly under the control of brand managers.



**Figure 2.** *Underdog Brand Management Framework—themes (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021)*

## 2.2 Positioning

### 2.2.1 *The Importance of Positioning*

The Underdog position is not exclusive to brands, with musicians, politicians and athletes seeking to position themselves as Underdogs even in situations where they are in fact likely to be seen as Top Dogs (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021; McGinnis & Glibkowski, 2019; Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012).

The Top Dog, the antithesis of the Underdog, holds a privileged position within the competitive landscape, enjoying advantages over its rivals that contribute to its market superiority (Li & Zhao, 2021). Per Li and Zhao (2021), Han (2023) illustrate brands that positioned themselves as industry front-runners primarily captivating consumers through their dominant market status and advantageous market positions. According to Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011), it has been established that the narrative of an Underdog

brand possesses a greater capacity to elicit consumer empathy when compared to the story of a Top Dog brand. This, in turn, exerts a positive influence on consumer responses towards the brand. In light of this, a considerable number of marketers make the strategic decision to position their brand as an Underdog in the market, rather than positioning it as a Top dog (Tang & Tsang, 2020).

Numerous studies have extensively explored the positioning of Underdog brands and their consequential positive effects, providing empirical evidence that underscores consumers' inherent motivation to support such Underdog brands (Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011; Goldschmied & Vandello, 2009; Li & Zhao, 2021). Goldschmied & Vandello (2012) use the example of Barack Obama in his competition for the presidential candidacy against Hillary Clinton. Obama continuously referred to himself as an Underdog. "When your name is Barack Obama, you're always an Underdog in political races" ("Obama: Name", 2007). Highlighting the vast resources Hilliary Clinton had at her disposal in terms of revenue and political backing enabled Obama's perception as an Underdog (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012). Goldschmied & Vandello (2012) attribute the welcoming of the Underdog label by political candidates due to the Underdog story becoming commonplace in success stories by the media, particularly in sports.

It has become quite common for us to hear success stories of the Underdog in sport and modern culture. Goldschmied & Vandello (2012) feel people expect a successful outcome when they hear the term Underdog in contemporary times. McGinnis & Glibkowski (2019) examine Bruce Springsteen's portrayal as an Underdog being rooted in authenticity. Despite his fame and fortune, Bruce Springsteen continues to wear worn-out jeans and typical 'blue collar' clothes while referring to his lower-class upbringing in his songs (McGinnis & Glibkowski, 2019).

When referring to positioning, Kapferer (2012) places emphasis on comparison, (be these products being compared with one another or with brands themselves), it boils down to consumer choice. All of these aspects of comparison take place in a competitive environment. Kapferer (2012) pinpoints two questions that a brand position must answer: Firstly "...what do they compare it with?";... and secondly "...what are they offering the customer as a key decision-making factor?" (p.154). Greyser and Urde (2019) raised a fundamental query within the framework of the Corporate Identity Matrix concerning brand positioning. They posed the question of defining the desired market position and establishing a strong presence

in the perceptions and preferences of key customers and stakeholders. Kapferer (2012) developed further on questions that must be answered in the positioning of a brand with such questions as: for what benefit? a brand for whom? reason? a brand against whom?

### *2.2.2 Underdog Brand Positioning*

Although positioning is largely centred around specific attributes, Kim & Park (2020) note that the Underdog brand positioning is not based on specific attributes but rather places a large importance on the humble beginnings of an Underdog and the struggles in Top Dog versus Underdog.

Whilst positioning the Underdog brand, brand managers and marketers need to carefully consider whether their brand has a local or global identity (Han, 2023). Particularly, when consumers strongly identify with the concept of localness, positioning the brand as an Underdog becomes more compelling and persuasive. Kim & Park (2020) proffer that an Underdog brand must share the same ‘empathic concern’ as its consumers and responsibility.

With consumers viewing themselves in the Underdog brands they buy, Kim & Park (2020) stress the importance of Underdog brands remaining ethically aligned with their consumer base; vice versa when Underdog brands hold unethical values, consumers' support is likely to backfire. Kim & Park (2020) proved that an Underdog positioning does lead to harsher judgement by consumers on ethical issues. In matters of ethical issues consumers are less forgiving of Underdog brands compared to Top Dog brands as Underdog brands are expected to up-hold moral values and they are regarded as being more symbolic than Top Dogs (Kim & Park, 2020). Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) reiterate Kim & Park (2020) regarding ethical claims supporting Underdog which by giving the example of the chocolate producer ‘Tony’s Chokolonely’, a Dutch chocolate producer founded by a former Journalist who was shocked by the child labour in the production of cocoa. He then created his own ethically produced and sourced chocolate company and actively took on the Top Dogs of the industry. Tony’s Chokolonely differentiates itself through its high moral values and ethical standpoint (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021).

Jun, Sung, Gentry, and McGinnis (2015) indicate the effectiveness of Underdog branding is greater for some industries than others, citing the example of charity brands.

Jun, Sung, Gentry, and McGinnis (2015) propose that consumers who possess higher levels of empathic concern are likely to exhibit more favourable attitudes towards a brand positioned as an Underdog rather than a Top Dog. Jun, Sung, Gentry, and McGinnis (2015) go on to declare that a person with a higher level of empathic concern is more likely to be affected by advertising.

### *2.2.3 Positioning - Winning Through Differentiation*

Underdog brands can use their identity to differentiate from the mainstream brands of the industry. This can act as an invitation to customers who are looking for an alternative value offering. An Underdog brand has the potential to create a loyal consumer base due to aligned values with consumers (Nurmohamed, 2019).

To achieve an Underdog brand position, an Underdog brand must communicate its disadvantaged beginnings through the use of its brand biography. Particular importance must be placed on humble beginnings, passion, determination, and lack of resources in comparison to Top Dogs. Leveraging these factors through the use of brand storytelling and Rhetoric allows a brand to position itself as an Underdog (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021; Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011).

Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) caution against the over-use of sympathy in the branding of an Underdog and it must be apparent that the Underdog fights the Top Dog with determination. Underdogs can avoid being viewed as losers by making their successes visible to allow them to be valued more by consumers (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021). Similarly to Schmidt and Steenkamp (2021), He, You, and Chen (2020) note that the framing of a Top Dog / Underdog can directly affect perception. Underdogs competing with a Top Dog in a specific industry are held in higher regard in the minds of consumers. This leads consumers to believe the Underdogs in such a scenario are somewhat in a position of power due to the level of competition they are bringing to the Top Dog (He, Yo & Chen, 2020).

#### *2.2.4 Positioning - Consumer Attitudes and Identification*

Cialdini and Richardson's (1980) study found that individuals tend to avoid identifying with losing sports teams, a phenomenon they refer to as "cutting off reflected failure". This literature implies that people distance themselves from Underdog brands to avoid being associated with expected losses and associate themselves with Top Dog brands to bask in the glory of winning.

From a consumer demand perspective, it is logical to assume that businesses with more resources are better equipped to provide high-quality products, while businesses with fewer resources may not have the means to do so (Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011).

#### *2.2.5 Positioning - Guerrilla Marketing for Underdog Brands*

Underdog Brands are considered to have 'humble resources' in comparison with Top Dogs (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021). Underdogs compete with fewer privileges and resources. Therefore, they must utilise means of marketing while on a significantly smaller budget (Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011). Guerrilla marketing refers to non-traditional and innovative marketing techniques that require minimal investment and are designed to capture the customers' attention by addressing the short-comings of traditional marketing (Nunthiphatprueksa, 2017). These activities are typically intended to create surprising and impactful effects in society, aiming to be unconventional and alternative in nature. Nunthiphatprueksa (2017) highlights the use of novelty in guerrilla marketing, where the word 'novelty' refers to 'unusual and infrequent'.

#### *2.2.6 Positioning - Relationship Marketing for Underdog Brands*

Relationship marketing is a business strategy that focuses on building long-term relationships with customers rather than simply acquiring new customers or making one-time sales (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 2002; Peck, Payne, Christopher & Clark, 1999). Relationship marketing sets itself apart by emphasising targeting multiple markets with marketing efforts.

Starting in the early 1980s, relationship marketing emerged as an alternative approach to marketing theory and practice (Peck, Payne, Christopher & Clark, 1999). For Underdog brand positioning, the relationship marketing concept could be complementary. Underdog brands, for instance, could leverage relationship marketing strategies to concentrate on fostering and nurturing longer-term profitable, and mutually beneficial relationships with customers and create loyal brand advocates (Peck, Payne, Christopher & Clark, 1999).

Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne (2002) assert that the primary objective of relationship marketing is to establish mutually beneficial and enduring connections with specific customers. Through relationship marketing, Underdog brands can overcome the challenges associated with their smaller size or lesser-known status by cultivating trust and fostering customer loyalty. Subsequently, relationship marketing plays a crucial role in identifying the value propositions to be created and delivered to specific customers, enabling brand managers to leverage their potential within Underdog brand positioning and establish a distinct and unparalleled market presence (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 2002).

## 2.3 Communication

### 2.3.1 *The Importance of Communication*

Kaushik (2011) argues that communication is an indispensable element of any marketing strategy, playing a critical role in shaping a brand's image and reputation by enabling businesses to effectively convey their message to target audiences and establishing a strong emotional connection with them. As also indicated by Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam (2022) and Dawle (2020), communication is a vital aspect of marketing, as it plays a pivotal role in

understanding the needs, preferences, and behaviours of the target audience, enabling businesses to tailor their message accordingly and effectively engage with their customers.

To effectively engage with customers, marketing communication strategies must encompass the use of multiple tools such as advertising, direct marketing, branding, packaging, internet, printed materials, PR activities, sales presentations, sponsorships, and trade show appearances. The selection of communication tools employed in marketing can vary depending on the company's product offerings, target markets, and overall marketing communication strategy (Dawle, 2020).

Dawle (2020) further underscores that a well-crafted marketing communication strategy serves as a roadmap for companies or individuals to reach their intended audience via different communication channels, ensuring a consistent and effective message delivery.

Grewal, Hulland, Kopalle, and Karahanna (2019) assert that the marketing landscape has experienced momentous shifts in recent times, driven by the emergence of novel technologies and platforms that have up-ended the traditional means through which brands engage with their audiences. This has elevated communication to being an essential tool for marketers to effectively connect with their intended audience, foster long-term brand loyalty, and propel business expansion.

Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam (2022) point out that social media has become a vital communication channel in contemporary marketing, offering an avenue for two-way communication and fostering customer engagement, thereby underscoring its indispensability as a key tool for marketers seeking to build and maintain lasting relationships with their target audience. As it is argued by Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam (2022) and Dawle (2020), consumer-generated media (CGM) can exert considerable sway over brand perception, thus necessitating companies to maintain openness, sincerity, and privacy in their communication tactics to preserve customer trust. To ensure the efficacy of marketing communication initiatives, communication research assumes critical importance, with social media emerging as a potent instrument that can enhance brand attraction, equity, and performance, as highlighted in the study.



According to Kaushik (2011), effective communication skills play a pivotal role in achieving success in the field of marketing since they enable marketers to effectively and convincingly communicate their message to their intended audience. Furthermore, the 4Cs Model of Effective Communication provides a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of communication strategies and ensuring that the message is conveyed to the target audience clearly and concisely (Kaushik, 2011). This model focuses on four key aspects: Comprehension; Connection; Credibility; and Contagiousness. By applying this framework, marketers can evaluate the extent to which their communication methods successfully captivate consumers, establish meaningful connections, maintain credibility, and generate a contagious response. Ultimately, the 4Cs Model aids in achieving marketing objectives and engaging the target audience efficiently. Kaushik (2011) emphasises the importance of several key elements that play crucial roles in marketing communication endeavours, including enhancing comprehension, establishing a connection with the communicated idea or message, building credibility with the audience, and achieving contagiousness. By utilising the 4Cs Model, marketers can create compelling campaigns that resonate with their target audience, build brand trust and loyalty, and ultimately drive business growth.

Effective communication plays a vital role in the marketing industry, as emphasised by the three articles discussed earlier (Rehman, Gulzar & Aslam, 2022; Dawle, 2020; Kaushik, 2011). These articles reveal that communication is a critical component of building successful marketing strategies that effectively reach and engage with target audiences. The literature highlights the importance of delivering clear and effective messages about products or services to target audiences, which requires a deep understanding of their needs, preferences, and behaviours. Furthermore, effective communication involves using various communication tools and platforms to connect with consumers, build brand loyalty, and drive business growth.

### *2.3.2 Branding & Underdog Brand Communication*

Branding is a crucial aspect of marketing which involves using various communication channels strategically to establish and maintain a brand's identity, reputation, and messaging in the minds of its target audience (Schulkind, 2023; Khan, Khan, Abosag & Ghauri, 2023). According to Schulkind (2023), the essence of the brand lies in the emotions evoked during every interaction and for this particular reason effective branding communication intends to

create a strong brand image, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and differentiate the brand from its competitors. At a global level, Brand managers should discover that a strong focus on branding enhances and fortifies market-driving behaviour (Khan, Khan, Abosag & Ghauri, 2023). In the context of the 21st-century corporate landscape, it is further asserted by Schultz & Kitchen (2004) that communication and branding will serve as driving forces behind organisational success.

To achieve effective communication, Chen (2023) recommends brand managers focus on creating a strong connection between consumer values and their products. The author proceeds to give the example from Oatly, which achieved remarkable success in advertising through various mediums such as packaging, music videos, websites, and direct interaction with consumers. Chen (2023) further advises brand managers to find a communication strategy that aligns with the brand's unique circumstances and goals.

Aligned with Chen (2023), Schulkind (2023) proclaims that visuals are often perceived as the embodiment of a brand, primarily due to their tangible and easily identifiable nature. Similarly, Chen (2023) illustrates how the combination of compelling visuals and persuasive messaging in these advertisements have effectively captured customers' attention and garnered their interest.

Building upon the insights provided by Chen (2023) and Schulkind (2023), packaging has evolved into a crucial means of communication and branding for products, as it serves as a tangible representation of a brand (Zhang & Xie, 2022). In line with this perspective, Zhang and Xie (2022) propose that consumers should effortlessly visualise the sensory aspects, including the appearance, taste, texture, aroma, and even sound of the product while observing the images displayed on the packaging. By integrating these sensory elements into packaging design, brand managers can effectively establish a strong connection between consumer values and their products, as recommended by Chen (2023), while also appealing to consumers' emotions (Schulkind, 2023).

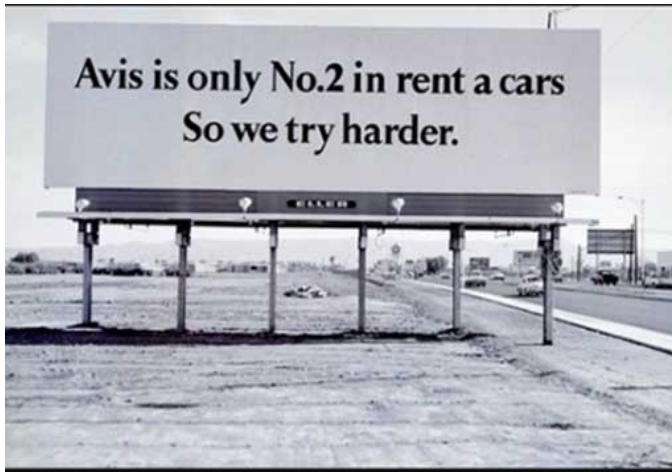
Effective communication is crucial for Underdog marketing as it enables smaller companies to differentiate themselves from larger competitors and display their unique selling proposition in the highly competitive market. Moreover, to enhance their chances of success, organisations must also concentrate on constructing a solid internal brand that cultivates a cohesive and motivated team capable of skilfully communicating their brand message both

internally and externally (Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011). As highlighted by Huber (2011), the creation of a harmonious internal brand is essential for imbuing a unified perception of the brand among employees, which can be accomplished through strong internal communication strategies that promote a collective comprehension of the brand's principles, objectives, and vision among employees.

Barros-Arrieta & García-Cali (2020) remark that internal branding aims to ensure that employees can effectively deliver the brand promise to external customers, with many definitions underlining the importance of aligning employees' understanding of the company's vision, mission, and values, all of which are crucial components in developing and maintaining a strong brand identity.

While consumers typically gravitate towards market leaders and established brands, as noted by Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021), the Underdog effect and the potential for smaller, lesser-known brands to carve out their niche in the market have often been overlooked, yet it's essential to recognise that Underdog brands can leverage their status to their advantage by creating a distinctive brand identity that connects with consumers on a deeper level.

One of the most popular examples of Underdog positioning as mentioned by Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021), He et. al (2020), and Jun, Sung, Gentry, and McGinnis (2015) is the case of Avis vs Hertz in the rental car market in the US in the 1960's. Avis used their position as the number two car rental brand as a point of differentiation through consistently using the slogan 'We are number two. So, we try harder'. This approach aimed to leverage their position and prove their dedication to providing exceptional service, aligning with the notion that Underdog positioning can elicit positive attitudes and emotional responses from consumers (Jun, Sung, Gentry & McGinnis, 2015).



**Figure 3.** *Avis advertisement 1*



**Figure 4.** *Avis advertisement 2*

Communication shapes the image consumers create in their minds through consumers' interpretation of messages and signals emitted from organisations (Kapferer, 2012). Jun, Sung, Gentry, and McGinnis (2015) point out that even large corporations such as Microsoft and Apple shape their image by leveraging on their early years of working in a garage with what Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) refer to as 'humble resources'. These large corporations pair their humble beginnings with the then dream of being successful, telling consumers their tale of innovation and rising from Underdogs to Top Dogs (Jun, Sung, Gentry & McGinnis, 2015).

Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) describe the narrative surrounding branding as akin to that of character development. However, for this to be achieved Paharia, Keinan, Avery, and Schor (2011) stress the importance of brands leaving gaps in the brand story to allow customers to interpret some of the brand story as they wish.

### *2.3.3 Authenticity, Brand Storytelling, and Consumer Perception*

Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) along with McGinnis & Glibkowski (2019) focus on communicating authenticity within Underdog branding. McGinnis & Glibkowski (2019)

outline that being inauthentic cannot last long-term for those who want to be seen as Underdogs by these brands or people. Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, and Grohmann (2015) found that authenticity is more important than quality when it comes to consumer choices. According to Siemens, Weathers, Smith, and Fisher (2020), the theory of signalling proposes that effectively conveying intangible attributes, such as authenticity, necessitates the use of observable signals that come at a cost for the sender. McGinnis & Glibkowski (2019) attribute Bruce Springsteen's success to his ability to craft a story that has a clear and consistent message over many years that he continues to be an Underdog success story. This allows Bruce Springsteen to seem timeless (McGinnis & Glibkowski, 2019).

The use of Underdog narratives is a common technique used to appeal to consumers, and it is often delivered through a brand biography - a carefully crafted story that chronicles the brand's history, experiences, and growth over time (Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011). In many modern brand biographies, Underdog narratives are prevalent, which highlights the company's humble origins, aspirations, and heroic battles against various adversaries. Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) stress the importance of an Underdog story beginning with verifiable personal information about the founders of a brand to increase the authenticity of the brand. However, the Underdog story must be presented in a manner that is exciting which will in turn enhance the level of authenticity associated with the brand by consumers.

Authenticity is sculpted by outlining who the 'big note' in the market is and that the Underdog competes with these Top Dogs in some form. This does not entail the Underdog proving they have a better product (in some cases they may) but utilising the fact they are even capable of competing with such giants (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021).

Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) align with Roberts (2005) in emphasising the significance of creating a favourable disposition towards oneself while fostering an unfavourable disposition towards one's opponent. Siemens, Weathers, Smith, and Fisher (2020) suggest some certain situations and occurrences have happened to an Underdog brand that further enhances consumer support. One of the main scenarios is a refusal of sale. Communicating that the founder refuses to sell a brand because they believe in the future potential of the brand shows true authenticity (Siemens, Weathers, Smith & Fisher, 2020). The larger corporation in this case who may have attempted to buy the brand is portrayed as the mainstream villain and the founder's refusal is seen as being a breath of fresh air.

As mentioned previously in ‘Positioning’, an Underdog must also consistently reference who the fight is against. The Underdog positioning is communicated via comparison to the Top Dogs of an industry. Paharia, Avery, and Keinan (2014) and Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) proclaim Underdogs must stress the threat the Top Dog poses to them and their entire existence, Paharia, Avery, and Keinan (2014) refer to this phenomenon as “framing the game effect” (p.647).

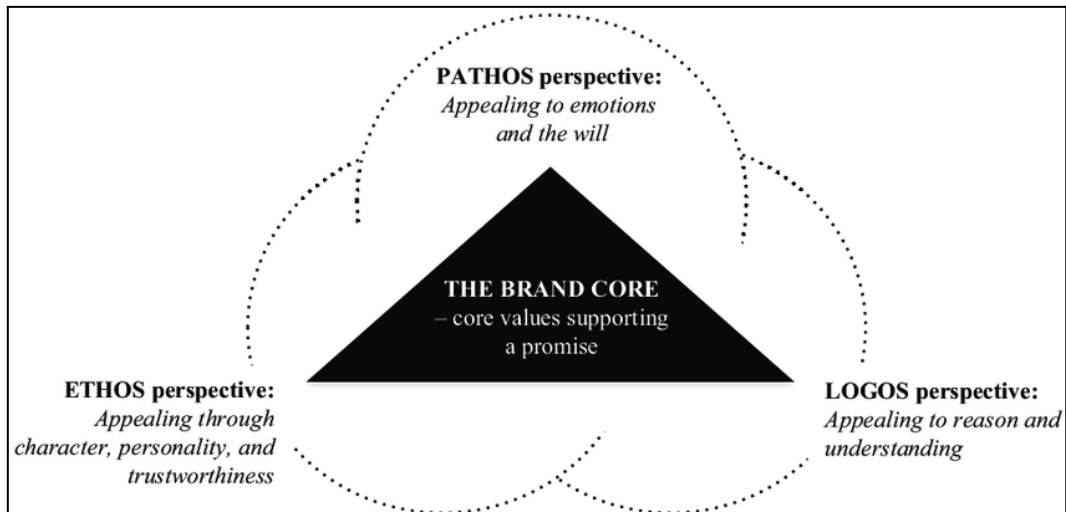
He, You, and Chen (2020) found that consumers' word of mouth recommendations of a brand are seen as an extension of themselves. Because of this, consumers cherry-pick what information they share with others regarding the brand they buy. In mentioning this He, You, and Chen (2020) note that consumers may be reluctant to talk about Underdog brands through word of mouth due to Underdog brands being thought of as a riskier alternative to the recipient of the conversation. He, You, and Chen (2020) refer to this situation as an image impairment concern.

## 2.4 Rhetoric

### *2.4.1 Introduction to Rhetoric- Aristotle's Three Means of Persuasion*

The definition of Rhetoric is the art of communication through speaking or writing with the intention to influence and persuade people (Roberts, 2005). Aristotle initially introduced the notion of Rhetoric, defining it as the capacity to discern and utilise the persuasive methods accessible in a particular circumstance, translated by Barlett (2019). They went on to elaborate that Rhetoric encompasses a fusion of the logical and ethical elements inherent in politics (Barlett, 2019).

Aristotle's book on Rhetoric presents a structured core that outlines three ways of persuasion (Barlett, 2019). According to Aristotle, persuasion can be achieved through three means: firstly, by appealing to the character and reputation of the speaker ‘Ethos’; secondly, by tapping into the emotions of the audience ‘Pathos’; and finally, by presenting a strong and logical argument ‘Logos’ (Barlett, 2019).



**Figure 5.** *The Brand Core and its Management over time (Urde, 2016)*

An identical topic, the core of a brand, might be seen from different perspectives (Urde, 2016). When utilising Ethos, the speaker selects arguments that showcase and express their character, intending to establish trust with the audience (Beqiri, 2018). Concerning Pathos, the speaker employs arguments that evoke emotions within the audience. Finally, when utilising Logos, the speaker selects arguments that are intellectually appealing and increase comprehension (Urde, 2016).

Roberts (2005) in his editing and translation of Aristotle's work frequently stresses that people's judgements are interconnected to their emotions and how emotions associated with pleasure can act as a gateway to positive judgement. Within the context of Rhetoric in branding, the orator is the brand conveying the message. Aristotle notes three things the orator must ensure in their own character: good sense, good moral character and goodwill (Roberts, 2005).

Aristotle caution against the use of invented or slang words in language within the context of Rhetoric, as they believe such words deviate from what is appropriate and tend towards excessive expression Roberts (2005). Along with the use of invented words, Aristotle outlined four forms of bad taste in language in the use of Rhetoric: misuse of compound words, use of strange words, use of long epithets and obscure metaphors (Roberts, 2005).

### 2.4.2 *Rhetoric in Underdog Branding*

Annapurna & Sahai (2020) echoes that of Roberts (2005) in finding that it is vital that metaphors are appropriate and fitting. Failure to convey a metaphor in a manner that makes sense leads readers i.e. consumers to be suspicious of the story they are reading. This is often why Underdog brands commonly use the metaphor of David vs Goliath, one that is universal and withstands the test of time. Annapurna & Sahai (2020) use the word ‘harmony’ when describing fitting metaphor. Like Annapurna & Sahai (2020) and Roberts (2005), Aaker (1996) declares that symbols are stronger if they are backed up with a metaphor, one which is of emotional benefit.

McGinnis & Glibkowski (2019) notes the use of Rhetoric in conveying the message of overcoming the odds in an Underdog story. It must be conveyed that the odds are stacked in favour of a more powerful competitor who has significantly more resources. Glibkowski, McGinnis, Gillespie, and Schommer (2014) remark that overcoming a difficulty to succeed is the universal cause-and-effect relationship. ‘What’ refers to obstacles that have been overcome, ‘Why’ refers to explaining how overcoming these obstacles is rewarded with success and finally ‘How’ refers to the unique aspects of the story of the brand (Glibkowski, McGinnis, Gillespie & Schommer, 2014).

Andren (1980) refers to six features that all advertisements must contain in order for an advertisement to be effectively persuasive to consumers. These features include objectivity & informativeness (which rely on correspondence to facts), relevance, comprehensiveness, sufficient supporting evidence, intelligibility, and propositional nature. Andren (1980) further remarks that for a statement to be true in advertising it must have relevance which in turn refers to consistency.

## 3 Methodology<sup>1</sup>

*Our methodology section is the skeleton of our work, where we argue for our choices of Research Philosophy, Strategy, Design and the Methods (Sampling, Data Collection, Data*



*Analysis and Validity & Reliability) used to gather and analyse the valuable data for this Thesis. Inspired by a Constructionist Ontology and an Interpretivist epistemology, our work is followed by a qualitative research strategy with an Abductive reasoning, a multiple case study design and the explanation of the qualitative research methods and data collection put into practice. We will also argue for our sampling choices, for the data analysis proceedings, for the validity and reliability of the work as well as for our ethical considerations.*

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter may contain parts of a group assignment presented for *Qualitative Research Methods (BUSN31)*. M.Sc. International Marketing & Brand Management 2023. Lund University School of Economics & Management. Authors: Diogo de Lima, Darragh Moorhouse.

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

As research evolved, different paradigms have been supported and argued for by multiple academics with the differences and similarities between them remaining as a perennial semantic discussion. Therefore, it is difficult for us to argue with certainty for specific philosophical foundations and with this being said, our choices are what we believe suits us best and we followed them as inspiration throughout the thesis.

The essential beliefs that establish research paradigms can be summarised by the answers provided by the three crucial questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology, which by being connected, imply that the response given to one, restrict how the others can be answered, regardless of the order in which they are addressed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

We made our initial philosophical assumption about ontology, which according to Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) is often the point of origin for many philosophical discussions. Ontology answers the question of what form and nature reality takes, and consequently, what can be known about it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

For our Thesis on Underdog Brands Positions, we were inspired by a Constructionist Ontology as we believe it allows us to better understand how social constructs shape the

perception of the positioning of these brands. According to Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022), a Constructionist Ontology is connected to the post-modernist viewpoint and proposes that social actors are constantly constructing social phenomena and their definitions through their actions. It also suggests that these phenomena and categories are not only created through social interactions but are also subject to ongoing revision (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

Epistemology refers to the investigation and understanding of the fundamental nature of knowledge and the methods employed for exploring the physical and social aspects of the world (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe, 2021). The Epistemological question answers the inquiry about the nature of the connection between the individual seeking knowledge and the object of knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

We were inspired by an Interpretivist Epistemology as we acknowledge the relativity of an Underdog Brand Positioning and wish to understand the diverse perspectives and interpretations of our respondents so that we can better assess the phenomenon.

Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022) distinguish Epistemology between Positivism and its contrasting theory as Interpretivism, while Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) make their distinction between Positivism and Social Constructionism Epistemologies. There is a connection between the central questions and since we are guided by a Constructionist Ontology we automatically discard the possibility of a Positivist Epistemology. An Interpretivist Epistemology aims to comprehend the ‘Why’ and ‘How’ of social action, including the processes through which events occur, being primarily focused on comprehending human behaviour, and therefore, in order to understand social phenomena, social scientists must appreciate the distinctions between humans and the subjects of natural sciences, requiring an approach that comprehends the personal significance of social behaviour (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

With the methodological question answering how can the researcher (or person seeking knowledge) proceed to discover what can be known according to their beliefs and assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Remembering that this answer is influenced by the two previous ones, we noted that Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022) address the Theoretical Tradition of Symbolic Interactionism as a concept that is very closely related to a Constructionist

Ontology and as part of the intellectual heritage of Interpretivism. We believe it is a good perspective to answer our methodological question as it allows us to focus on the symbolic meanings and interactions of Underdog Brands. This enables us to analyse their positioning choices, uncovering underlying motivations, perceptions and strategies associated with it.

Blumer, H. (1969) explains Symbolic Interactionism as a concept based on three crucial premises. The first premise is the idea that people act towards things based on the meaning the things have for them, with those things being everything in a person's world, from physical objects to other people, institutions, values or activities of others. The second premise is that the meaning of those things is not inherent in the thing itself but is created through social interaction with others. The last premise is that people interpret and adjust these meanings through an ongoing process of interaction with the things they encounter.

This theoretical tradition comes hand in hand with our philosophical assumptions and fits perfectly with our work as it once again conveys the importance of understanding how individuals construct their meanings and interpretations of their experiences, which is highly relevant in the study of brands and brand experiences. Symbolic interactionism allows us to gain an insight into how people interpret an Underdog based on their prior experiences.

Nightingale and Cromby (2002) develop the ideas of Gergen (1994,1999) and Potter (1996) to critique Constructionism as an Ontology. It is argued that constructionism tends to fail to adequately consider external reality. The authors mean that Constructionism focused on discursive practices and languages, tends to overlook important aspects of external reality like subjectivity, embodiment, materiality, aesthetics and power, failing to acknowledge how these external factors influence the shaping of discursive practices and human experiences. In other words, they suggest that by disregarding those external factors, constructionism provides an incomplete or limited understanding of the complexity of human experiences and the ways in which reality is constructed (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002).

Nevertheless, Nightingale and Cromby (2002) don't discard the fact that if constructionism is understood in its entirety, it takes into account the influence of external reality on discursive practices and human experiences, ending up providing a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of reality construction.

To finalise, we consider the ontological and epistemological stances that were described earlier and on which we have been inspired, align best with the purpose of this study and with everything we have been doing.

We believe there are no perfect philosophical assumptions and we must be aware of their strengths and weaknesses, as multiple academics argue that being mindful of the philosophical assumptions will elevate the quality of the research and enhance creativity (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021). With this being said, and after answering the three fundamental questions, we believe our study inclines for a Constructivism paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

## 3.2 Research Strategy

### 3.2.1 *Qualitative Research Strategy*

Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022) explain such a paradigm argument by noting that quantitative and qualitative methods are never truly combined but used together simultaneously, although remaining inharmonious. They each remain fixed within their single paradigm. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) outline in its extremity the misuse of qualitative and quantitative methods can lead to a ‘semi-detached’ design, inferring both houses are linked but there is no door connecting both houses. Although there are drawbacks of mixed methods both Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022) and Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) depict that it is still possible to conduct sufficient research using mixed methods regardless.

When conducting case studies qualitative methods are often the preferred method of choice, however, they are not exclusive to qualitative methods and can also be analysed through the use of quantitative means (Yin, 2009). Gray (2014) showcases an added advantage of qualitative analysis over quantitative analysis is the range of different analytical approaches in qualitative analysis. Grounded theory, template analysis, content analysis and discourse analysis are all forms of qualitative analytical methods, whereas quantitative analysis relies

solely on the use of statistical techniques (Gray, 2014). In selecting qualitative analysis we were not bound to one analytical method when conducting our data analysis.

Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) promote qualitative research by noting that qualitative data collection is seen as more natural than quantitative which derives connotations of being artificial. Gray (2014) emphasises that although two participants can answer the same question on a survey both participants may have different perceptions of the question/answer. Due to qualitative data being seen as a more natural approach we were motivated to conduct a qualitative study as opposed to quantitative.

By virtue of Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) we argue that for our research methods to be seen as more natural (however more subjective) our research serves better in being carried out through the use of qualitative research methods. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) mentions the difficulty in data collection due to it being time-consuming along with the difficulty in interpreting data.

We believe qualitative means of conducting semi-structured interviews allow for more personal responses and in turn may provide more information on contextual settings that affect our cases.

### *3.2.2 Abductive Reasoning*

Different approaches exist to facilitate the researcher's gradual development of theories concerning the phenomenon they are studying. However, the methods by which complexity is simplified and theories constructed may differ among these approaches (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021). Even though there are three different kinds of reasoning in the field of business research, the most common approaches used to establish a connection between research and theory are deductive and inductive reasoning (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022).

It is advanced by Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) that a deductive approach is often used in quantitative research while an inductive approach is closer to qualitative research. Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007) argue that inductive and deductive logics work hand in hand, as they represent opposite sides of the same coin. They proceed to explain that

Inductive reasoning involves generating new theories based on observed cases and data, while deductive reasoning involves testing and evaluating theories using available data.

Gray (2014) uses research from Perry (1998) to add that when it comes to a case-study research design, inductive reasoning is applied when there are fewer cases and there is no initial theoretical position. On the other hand, deductive reasoning is applied when there is an initial specific theoretical position, ending up using a higher number of cases to confirm or reject the theory through cross-case analysis.

The third approach is called Abductive Reasoning and Vila-Henninger et al. (2022) suggest it was created to move past the deduction versus induction debate. The authors proceed to add that Abduction differs from a purely inductive approach by not relying solely on observed phenomena for explanation (induction) or applying existing general rules to new cases (deduction) instead involving a combination of both induction and deduction.

We believe Abductive Reasoning is the right approach for this thesis but we must keep in mind the ideas of Pierce (1934) cited in Vila-Henninger et al. (2022), that defend that abduction, induction, and deduction are not mutually exclusive forms of inference, but rather, they operate at different stages of the research process, which proves the complexity and difficulty of settling on one specific reasoning.

The term “Abduction”, has its roots in Latin and conveys the notion of leading away. (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), In the context of research, it signifies a creative inferential process in which new hypotheses and theories are formulated based on unexpected research evidence (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

Abduction involves drawing conclusions that contribute to theory-building (Vila-Henninger et al., 2022). Timmermans & Tavory (2012) see it as the primary logical mechanism for instigating new ideas into the scientific body of knowledge with Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) adding that by employing abductive reasoning, we enhance the structure of our observations of reality.

Dubois & Gadde (2002) argue that when the researcher's goal is to discover new things abductive reasoning is very insightful, and even though they recognise its close relation with grounded theory (which by itself draws attention to the creation of new concepts), they prioritise the evolution and strengthening of theories rather than the sole focus on generating new ones. Abductive reasoning is the process of making a best guess or inference using available but incomplete or uncertain evidence and is often considered the most speculative form of reasoning as it involves formulating and refining a hypothesis that requires testing and further development over time (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). With this being said, even though Abductive Reasoning is not the most common reasoning strategy (Easterby-Smith et al, 2021) it suits us best since we started the interviews and the analysis with a speculative theory based on Underdog Brands and worked towards specific observations. Our entire approach was to begin with general ideas and concepts while gathering information to develop it. While still developing new theories, our speculative theory was strengthened when data was consistent with it, and revised or abandoned when data was inconsistent.

Dubois & Gadde (2002) note that a significant distinction between studies based on abductive reasoning when compared to deductive and inductive lies in the role of the framework. In abduction-based studies, the initial framework undergoes successive modifications, due to unforeseen empirical discoveries and theoretical insights acquired throughout the process, which was exactly what happened with our framework as our speculative Underdog Strategies changed throughout the data collection phase.

### 3.3 Research Design

We constructed multiple case studies regarding specific Underdog Brands, which were established by data retrieved from employees of the brands and were additionally supported by feedback from external Underdog Brand Experts, Consultants and Academics. Through conducting four case studies with the input of both internal employees and external brand experts we are carrying out a multiple case study approach.

Research design encompasses a logical blueprint that guides the journey from the starting point of initial questions to arrive at conclusions and answers to those questions. (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009) points out that case studies are ideally used when a researcher seeks to examine a phenomenon but context is required to fully understand the conditions surrounding the phenomenon. Within our text, we will be working with case studies as Gray (2014) suggests that a case study is optimal when questions of ‘Why’ and ‘How’ are being asked about prior events in which the researchers were not involved. Two of our three research questions pertain to ‘Why’ and ‘How’ making case studies the ideal fit for our research on Underdog branding strategies.

Proponents of the case study design tend to prefer qualitative methods, such as unstructured interviewing, which is considered beneficial for conducting in-depth and comprehensive investigations of a case (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Gray (2014) suggests that when initiating a case study design, the researchers formulated a preliminary hypothesis or set of questions. These initial hypotheses or questions are considered provisional, indicating that they are subject to further refinement and modification as the study progresses (Gray, 2014), which by itself suggests an abductive approach, as in our case, there was an existence of a speculative theory.

Blumer (1969) notes how challenging it is to produce a theory with complexity and empirical grounding with fewer than four cases, albeit this can be mitigated by including several mini-cases within the cases. Unlike Blumer (1969), Dyer & Wilkins (1991) mention that it is pivotal to be careful when conducting a multiple case study approach as one can often fall into the trap of only comparing the relevant case studies to one another as opposed to analysing such cases.

Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022) distinguish multiple-case design and cross-sectional design as multiple-case study design emphasising the uniqueness of each individual case, while cross-sectional design focusing on the overall sample of cases as a whole. This definition makes us believe that a multiple-case study design is the most suitable for us.

Stake (2005) mentions three different forms case studies can take: Intrinsic, Instrumental and Multiple and argues that researchers should carefully select cases in which they anticipate potential for significant learnings and insights (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). On the other hand, Yin (2009) points out that there are four types of case study methods which can be carried out. These four methods being: Single case study (holistic), single case (embedded), multiple cases (holistic), and multiple cases (embedded). Our paper conducts case studies



through a multiple-case (embedded) approach. This refers to examining a multitude of cases to increase the odds of gaining a deeper understanding of an entire phenomenon whilst simultaneously being supported by arguments (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2003) notes that we must consider five factors to keep in mind to build an exemplary case study. The author argues that the case study must be “complete”, must display sufficient evidence, must be significant, must consider alternative perspectives and must be composed engagingly.

We built cases on well-known brands that are currently in the market and are directly connected with our phenomenon to guarantee the significance of the cases. We not only consider different perspectives by building different cases about brands in different industries but also by investigating different brands in the same industries for example Liquid Death and Thalus Water.

The last step we took to make sure the cases were written in an engaging manner was to keep in mind that we are telling a story, focusing on engaging yet crucial data to build a case structure that is easy to read and attractive.

## 3.4 Sampling

### 3.4.1 *Case Sampling*

Even though we check the viability for our speculative theory, our primary goal is to develop theory and not test it and therefore, the usage of theoretical sampling is suitable, with this meaning that the cases are chosen because they can provide a deeper understanding of how things are connected and related in the theory that is being studied (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The specific criteria of this study is that every main case must be from a different industry so different perspectives are gathered. There is no specific criteria for the brand size,

country of origin, revenue, number of employees, etc. The significance is that they must be seen as Underdogs by us as brand management students and also as consumers.

There is a fundamental concern when selecting what cases to use in order to build theory as readers may fear the generalisation of theory and question how it can be applied broadly if the cases used to develop it are not representative of an entire population (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007).

The usage of multiple cases is crucial as making generalisations from one specific case can be risky (Yin, 2009). Nevertheless, single-case studies can provide detailed descriptions of a particular phenomenon, while multiple-case studies generally offer a stronger foundation for developing theories (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009), which is compared by Gummesson (2000) cited in Gray (2014) as doctors building up knowledge from a collective of individual cases.

Blummer (1969) argues that it is very hard to build solid theory with less than four cases. According to Eisenhardt & Graebner (2007), due to the limited number of cases typically used in theory building, even a small increase in the number of cases can greatly improve the quality of the theory being developed. So therefore, adding three cases to a single-case study may seem like a small increase, but it actually provides four times more analytical strength thus we decided to employ a multiple case study approach.

As every industry is full of Underdogs, we thankfully encountered a wide poll of brands to choose from.

Relying on our own judgement, on the opinion of the interviewed Underdog Experts and on the ease and possibility of closing interviews with employees from the specific brand, we decided to build a case on the following companies:

- Polestar
- Oatly
- Sibylla
- Liquid Death.

Polestar is a Swedish Electric Vehicle manufacturer focused on performance that was established in 2017 by Volvo Car AB (along with its subsidiaries) and Zhejiang Geely Holding Group Co., Ltd. (Polestar, 2023). It is an Underdog brand competing in a market that is strongly dominated by the worldwide well known brand, Tesla (Statista, 2022).

Oatly is a Swedish food brand focused on positive societal shifts that produces dairy products alternatives made from oats (Oatly, 2023). Even though Oatly might be considered a Top Dog on the Oat Milk Market, they are a clear Underdog Brand when compared to the Dairy Industry dominated by some extremely valuable brands such as Yilli, Danone or Arla Foods (Statista, 2023).

Sibylla is a Swedish fast-food chain owned by Atria Sweden and it's one of the oldest Swedish brands (Sibylla, 2023). It is an Underdog brand competing against the fast-food giants McDonalds, Burger King and also the Swedish chain Max Burgers, which according to Statista (2018) are all first choice options above Sibylla to the Swedish consumer.

Liquid Death is a canned water brand founded in 2017 with "Murder your thirst" as their slogan that focuses on being sustainable and disrupting the market (Liquid Death, 2023). It is an Underdog Brand that competes against market leaders such as Aquafina, Smart Water, Dasani and all the dominant national private labels from each market in which they are present (Statista, 2022).

To conclude, we consider these four brands as Underdogs and choose them to take part of our cases according to our own judgement as Brand Management students and as consumers, by considering our discussions with Underdog Brand Specialists, and due to the valuable data gathered from their respective employees' interviews.

Eisenhardt. & Graebner. (2007) argue that less importance should be placed on how distinctive a particular case is and more on how the set of cases as a whole contributes to the theory development. We don't completely agree with that idea since we are doing a multiple-case design and we must give value to the uniqueness of each case. On the other hand, we don't discard the connectivity between them, as the comparison of the cases is

crucial for our Thesis. Therefore, we are confident that the set of cases, as well as their individuality, turns them into very strong cases.

We conducted interviews and gathered data of more Brands than our main four presented above. These included: a small and unique clothing brand from the Netherlands called Bram's Fruit; a small boxed water enterprise from Luxembourg called Thalus Water and a small web development enterprise that focuses especially on Underdogs called Weptile. Our decision on what brands to build the case on was either due to data quality or simply because the brands are more well known which makes it easier for visualisation and understanding. Nevertheless we also analysed those brands looking for valuable insights and tried to apply them to our framework in order to "test drive it".

### *3.4.2 Sampling of Respondents*

Sampling of our respondents was carried out using methods of non-probability sampling as we intended to gain insights from those who have experience in the relevant field of marketing/branding. Gray (2014) notes that although non-probability sampling methods are open to more criticism than probability sampling methods the validity of sampling can be further enhanced by clearly stating the opinions of respondents. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) point out that researchers feel pressured into having large sample sizes. However, we argue that for the topic of Underdog brand strategies to be explored one must seek insights from the relevant Underdog brand managers and 'Underdog brand experts' (We define Underdog brand experts as someone who possesses a wealth of knowledge and prior experience related to Underdogs in the field of branding or marketing.).

Our reasoning is as per Bell, Bryman & Harley (2022) who refer to purposive sampling as cases or participants required to meet certain parameters in order to be included in research. To ensure we were carrying out purposive sampling respondents were reviewed to see if they met the criteria required. If respondents met the necessary criteria required they were then included in the study (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021).

We required our respondents to have either of the following: (a) experience in working for what we classify as an Underdog brand; (b) prior published peer-reviewed academic articles on Underdog brands. Respondents categorised within (a) are required to work or have worked within marketing or communication departments (alternatively work as a marketing consultant). Our reasoning for such stringent requirements is to ensure we are gathering data from those with relevant knowledge from the field of Underdog Branding.

We conducted a total of 15 interviews with numerous Underdog Brand Experts, Consultants and Academics, as well as one Ad Industry expert, Senior management and Marketing/Communications department employees from different Underdogs Brands. We strove to interview more than one person from the four brands that built our main cases. Additionally, the positions of said employees differ. There is a generalisation of the roles due to anonymity but it is similar as follows:

- Polestar Global PR and Communications employee
- Polestar Specialists (Sales employees)
- Oatly's Creative Director
- Sibylla's Head of Marketing
- Liquid Death Head of Creativity
- Liquid Death Marketing Department employee

The use of the social media platform LinkedIn enabled us to search for Underdog brands/consultants and request a virtual interview. LinkedIn provided us with the relevant contact information required which in turn allowed us to follow up through email be that possible respondents or the brands themselves.

BRANDS	Founded	Interviews	Industry (Market)	Top Dogs
<b>Polestar</b>	1996	- Polestar Global PR & Communications employee  - Polestar Specialists	Electric Vehicles	- Tesla

<b>Oatly</b>	1994	- Creative Director	Dairy Industry	- Arla Foods - Yillis - Danone
<b>Sibylla</b>	1907	- Head of Marketing	Fast-food Industry	- McDonalds - Burger King - Max burgers
<b>Liquid Death</b>	2017	-Head of Creativity  -Marketing Department Employee	Beverages (Water)	- Nestle - Aquafina - Smart Water
Thalus Water	2020	-Senior Management employee	Beverages (Water)	- Nestle - Aquafina - Smart Water
Bram's Fruit	2020	- Senior Management employee	Fashion & Apparel	- Kith - Aimé Leon D'or - Off-White
Weptile	2009	- Senior Management employee	IT Services & Consulting	- Accenture - Salesforce

*Table 1. Overview of the Brands Sample*

<b>Underdog Experts Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant &amp; Academic</li> <li>- Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant &amp; Academic</li> <li>- Advertising Industry Specialist</li> <li>- Storytelling Consultant for Underdog Brands</li> <li>- Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands</li> <li>- CEO of Underdog Brand in the Alcoholic Beverage industry</li> </ul>
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*Table 2. Overview of the Underdog Experts Sample*

## 3.5 Data collection

For our research, we gathered primary data since we are looking at new information directly from professionals within the field. Using multiple techniques in managerial studies is appropriate to prevent excessive reliance on any sole methodology (Denzin, 1978; Yin, 1981). Case studies accentuate collecting current and relevant information, necessitating the utilisation of various techniques such as gathering up-to-date data through contemporary documentation, direct observation, systematic interviewing, and incorporating diverse sources like archives, interviews, surveys, visual methods, and participant observation (Dooley, 2002; Gray, 2014).

### 3.5.1 *Gathering Primary Data*

We gained first-hand knowledge shared with us by brand professionals, enabling us to interpret and document it. The process of transcribing interviews indicates that our analysis involved textual analysis, yet these interviews were conducted through verbal communication, incorporating both oral and written aspects. Transcriptions allow for a meticulous examination of the respondents statements after the mediated conversation.

Our objective was to gather perspectives from brand experts regarding the defining characteristics of an Underdog brand, strategies for positioning, and various approaches to achieving this positioning. These overarching guidelines are in place to facilitate our effective response to the research question.

Eisenhardt (1989) contends that researchers aiming to construct theory often employ a combination of diverse data collection methods, wherein interviews, observations, and archival sources emerge as prominently utilised approaches. Eisenhardt (1989) echoes that of Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) in defining primary data as new information that is collected directly by the researcher. In the context of case study methodology, the acquisition of data from multiple sources is crucial; however, to prevent overwhelming the researcher, it becomes imperative to establish a focused approach (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson

and Thorpe, 2021). Hence, case studies derive significant advantages from having a pre-existing theoretical framework to guide the process of data collection and analysis.

### *3.5.2 Qualitative Interviews as Primary Data*

To investigate the Underdog brand strategies and gain insights from professionals in the field, a qualitative research approach was adopted. These interviews aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of Underdog brand strategies, including their unique approaches, competitive advantages, and the tactics they employ to succeed despite facing significant market disadvantages. In line with this rationale, managers at the selected companies were subjected to semi-structured interviews as part of the sampling process.

Our choice of semi-structured interviews was driven by the requirement to address particular subjects while permitting adaptability throughout the interview procedure (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Semi-structured interviews prove to be a valuable approach for data collection as they consider the respondents input, allowing researchers to delve further into the subject matter through follow-up questions and obtain a more comprehensive comprehension (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). However, a limitation of conducting semi-structured interviews lies in the inherent subjectivity of the brand experts we engage with (Alvensson, 2003). Considering the subjective nature of individuals, it is inevitable that some degree of partiality exists among the employees of the brand due to their diverse experiences and the studies that have influenced their convictions over the years. Alvensson (2003) further emphasises on subjectivity that it is characterised by instability and ambiguity, suggesting that it is a dynamic process rather than a rigid framework.

Prior to initiating each interview, a concise clarification was provided to the participants regarding the study's objectives and its emphasis on strategies employed by Underdog brands. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) argues the need for synchronous data collection, so we employed synchronous data collection techniques for conducting our interviews. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021), describe synchronous data collection as the direct and immediate interaction between the researcher and the research participant. According to Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021), there is a possibility of a respondent influencing responses given. However, caution was exercised to avoid



exerting any influence on their responses, ensuring they were able to freely express their perspectives.

In-depth interviews aim to uncover individuals' subjective meanings and interpretations, making it impossible to find a single 'objective' view. However, interviewers' biases can inadvertently influence respondents, raising concerns. While open-ended questions reduce bias as the respondent is not being led on, they may not always yield desired information or establish rapport. In order to mitigate bias in our study, we followed an advice put forth by Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021). In order to maintain objectivity, researchers may focus on eliciting responses related to specific alternatives, employing probes as an intervention technique to enhance and refine the respondent's response (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021). By utilising probes, we aimed to ensure a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of respondents perspectives while minimising the impact of interviewer bias. The interview inquiries were formulated in a manner that aligned with the research inquiries and aims, while also granting participants the flexibility to impart their distinct viewpoints and personal experiences.

Most of the interviews were performed through video calls and some of them via telephone. Visual aids play a significant role in the interview process during video calls, enabling us to share pertinent visual materials and resources. According to Easterby-Smith, Jasperson, and Thorpe (2021), mediated interviews refer to research interviews that take place using various forms of media such as telephone, online video and audio call applications, and social media, rather than being conducted face-to-face. Mediated interviews are less time-consuming for both parties due eliminating travel time. While mediated interviews may not offer the traditional in-person face-to-face interaction typically found in standard interviews, they prove to be a more practical option for both the interviewer and respondent in this scenario, considering time limitations and travel restrictions. By incorporating visual aids, the respondents' understanding of the topics at hand was enhanced and the overall quality of the interview outcomes were improved. Each interview had a duration of approximately 25 minutes and adhered to an interview protocol.

Purposive sampling methods were employed to select respondents who met our criteria for investigating the phenomenon of Underdog branding. According to Easterby-Smith,

Jasperson, and Thorpe (2021), purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling method that involves defining specific criteria for inclusion in a sample. Entities are screened based on these criteria, and only those that meet the defined criteria are included in the sample. Our criteria focused on the examination of positioning and the exploration of viable positioning strategies. It was essential for us to ensure that our respondents were relevant to our research question and aligned with our parameters. Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009) indicate that it is also essential for the researcher to ensure that the sequence of questions employed follows a coherent structure.

Considering that the primary goal of the thesis is to cultivate theory, we addressed the theoretical domains that we considered vital to augment, specifically the areas of Underdog brand strategies, positioning of Underdog brands, Underdog brand marketing.

The comprehensive list of our interview questions can be seen in Appendix A. Our interview guide primarily served to align with the research questions and objectives of the study. The language was adapted based on the respondents, ensuring that the questions remained unbiased and did not steer their responses.

### *3.5.3 Secondary Data*

Secondary textual data encompass written sources of information that were initially generated for non-research purposes but possess relevance to a particular research project (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021). These sources serve as valuable reservoirs of insights, despite their primary objectives lying outside the realm of research. On the same note, Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2022) explain that secondary data analysis refers to the process where a researcher analyses data that has been previously collected by another researcher. In the world of business and management research, secondary data could be useful in giving us some useful insights to help answer our research questions (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Secondary data are frequently incorporated as a component of case studies, offering meaningful and relevant insights. Secondary data sources encompass various types of information, ranging from company and government reports to websites, archival data, advertisements, and online videos, among others. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson

and Thorpe (2021) affirms that this list is not comprehensive but provides examples of the diverse range of sources that fall under the umbrella of secondary data.

Considering the resources required in terms of time and money for business research, secondary data presents a practical option as an alternative to primary data collection and analysis, offering immense savings in resources, especially in terms of time and money (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022; Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005). It enhances the worth of a study, allowing researchers to delve into their research questions without the need to undergo the time-consuming and lengthy process of gathering primary data. Similarly Easterby-Smith, Jasperson, and Thorpe (2021) also highlight the benefits of utilising secondary data, emphasising the time and effort savings it offers to researchers. The potential for analysing secondary data has expanded significantly due to extensive digital recording of information through the internet and this has resulted in the emergence of vast and diverse sources of data with tremendous possibilities for research and analysis (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022). Contradictorily, Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) discuss that even in this digital era, gathering certain types of secondary data could present challenges, usually necessitating the establishment of a robust and trusted relationship between the researcher and the research participant who possesses access to texts such as internal presentations or reports.

To complement the primary data in this thesis, various forms of secondary data were collected. Academic journals and books played a crucial role in constructing the theoretical framework, introduction chapter, literature review and providing guidance for this methodology chapter, among other aspects. In the process of data collection, publicly accessible sources were utilised, including websites and annual reports, with assistance from the Lund University Library Databases. Furthermore, reports and documents relevant to the research area were gathered from web browsers, official websites, academic journals, and books. As Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) previously discussed, it is essential to exercise careful judgement when evaluating data that has been created by external parties for purposes other than our research. In order to enhance the credibility of our findings, we conducted a thorough review of external documents, applying a critical lens to assess their reliability. This approach allowed us to assess the data from different sources, ensuring a comprehensive and robust analysis.

### 3.5.4 *Collecting Qualitative Data through Videos*

Videos serve as a legitimate and valuable source of qualitative data in research methodology (Lay & Bratty, 2023). Bell, Bryman, and Harley (2022) highlight the value of video methods in business research, as they offer a comprehensive and authentic understanding of phenomena. These methods capture not only verbal communication but also nonverbal cues and participant perspectives, making them increasingly popular in the field. Similarly to other authors, Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021), classifies online videos under the secondary data source category. According to Lab & Bratby (2023), the naturalistic context and transparency of videos enhance the validity and credibility of research findings.

In this thesis we did a video content analysis which involved the analysis of material not recorded by ourselves as researchers (Whiting, Symon, Roby and Chamakiotis, 2018). Some examples of the video content that shaped our thesis are:

- Sibylla's Swedish Football Campaign
- Oatly CEO interview and videos on Oatly's website
- Oatly "Wow, No Cow" Ad
- Polestar – "No Compromises" Ad
- Liquid Death's "Don't Be Scared It's Just Water" Ads on their website
- Liquid Death partnerships with Trevor Baker and Metallica

Per Cooper & Hughes (2014), videos enable us to animate the issues under investigation, allowing us to perceive, listen to, exhibit, and encounter the emotional, non-verbal, and contextual aspects of the phenomenon, thereby providing an opportunity to grasp certain insights that may be overlooked in a written portrayal.

## 3.6 Data Analysis

### 3.6.1 *Structure of Empirical Results*

It's arduous to analyse the massive and complex amount of data that is generated by qualitative research (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2022), which makes it imperative to us to organise the empirical data into the most structured and simple way possible.

Firstly, our approach was to mainly use the data from the brands interviewed to build the four main cases, encompassing their Brand history, if they were or not considered an Underdog by the respondents, apply our research questions of What, How and Why & When to the brand in question and finalise with additional pertinent information to build the case on the Underdog.

Secondly, we addressed the questions of What, How and Why & When in a broader sense, not focusing specifically on any Underdog Brand and using mainly the data retrieved from the interviews with Underdog Brand experts, consultants and academics.

### 3.6.2 *Analysing Qualitative Data*

In conducting our analysis we decided to avoid using a grounded theory approach to data analysis and adopt the approach of abductive reasoning. Timmermans (2012) reveals the common mistakes used by researchers in adopting grounded theory. Use of grounded theory as a method of generating empirically based theories has been critiqued by some researchers as being inefficient and hence not fulfilling its intended promise. Researchers have also questioned the overuse of grounded theory as it is used in referring to most forms of data analysis, coding and commonly used in building theory (Timmermans 2012). Gray (2014) conveys that there is confusion surrounding grounded theory due to it being viewed not only as a school of thought but additionally can be seen as a research design or research strategy.

Owing to this we opted not to employ a grounded theory approach despite Gray (2014) stating that grounded theory is common practice for qualitative data analysis.

Vila-Henninger (2022) states that abductive data analysis was developed to enable researchers to make conclusions surrounding theory building. Timmermans (2012) refers to abduction as a conclusive creative process of developing a hypothesis or theory through use of upholding theory and emphasising it seeks a situational fit between noted facts and rules. Vila-Henninger (2022) also states that abduction is a mixture of both induction and deduction. Abductive data analysis suits us best since we started interviews and the analysis with general ideas and concepts on Underdog Brands in mind (such as Underdog Positioning and the David vs Goliath strategy) working towards specific observations. Our approach from the offset was speculative theory whilst continually gathering information to test this theory. The speculative theory is strengthened if the data obtained is consistent with the theory. This data is then revised or abandoned if the data is inconsistent with the said theory (Easterby-Smith, Jaspersen and Thorpe, 2021).

Timmermans (2012) outlines that there are three logics involved with abductive reasoning that must be taken into consideration during the analytical process: Revisiting the Phenomenon, Defamiliarisation and Alternative Casing.

Revisiting the phenomenon allows us to return to our material with a different perspective due to changes that may have occurred in the circumstances surrounding the data (Timmermans, 2012).

Defamiliarisation enables us to revise the aspects we may have missed in the first instance of our observations through examining data with the prior knowledge of their theoretical understanding trying to interpret multiple ways data can be gathered (Timmermans, 2012).

Alternative casing refers to looking at the data from a different perspective aiming to link this perspective to a phenomenon which can then be generalised and applied to other theories (Timmermans, 2012).

Yin (1984) outlines that case studies allow for an embedded design in which numerous levels of analysis can be carried out within a single study. Eisenhardt (1989) warns researchers to avoid making the common mistake of going too in depth into research sites and data collection methods whilst negating the time and effort required in discussion of analysis. Eisenhardt (1989) notes this in turn leads to a gap between the data collected and conclusions drawn. In outlining the structure of our data analysis and our empirical results we aim to combat the common mistake of negating our discussion of data analysis.

Eisenhardt (1989) pin points two methods of case study analysis types: within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. Within-case study analysis refers to the immense amount of data with the task of wrapping up the open ended question that lies after (Eisenhardt, 1989). Eisenhardt (1989) suggests that although case study analysis can seem like detailed descriptive passages, it is an essential component in gaining an understanding of the case study. Eisenhardt (1989) cautions researchers to not get ahead of themselves in ensuring a thorough understanding of a case is achieved before seeking to apply generalisability. Once a researcher has fathomed their case they will then see patterns arise and may then seek to generalise these patterns and as such begin to apply cross-case analysis. In generalising patterns across a variety of cases a cross-case analysis is achieved (Eisenhardt, 1989). At the beginning of our data analysis a within-case study approach allowed us delve deep into our case studies and which then permitted us to carry out our cross-case analysis through comparison of our four case studies.

### *3.6.3 Analysis using Rhetoric*

One form of analysis we employed in examining Underdog brands as a whole was Rhetoric which we previously outlined in our literature review. In Barlett (2019) adaptation of Aristotle's teachings, he reveals Rhetoric can be used as an analytical tool to investigate persuasive narrative. reveals Rhetoric can be used as an analytical tool to investigate persuasive narrative. We will explore the language surrounding Underdog brands and methods brands employ to convey their Underdog status.

### 3.7 Validity and Reliability

Gray (2014) states that validity and reliability are of particular importance for case studies because data is derived from situations that may arise in the future. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) warn that researchers must be wary of semi-structured and non-structured interviews leading to a ‘non-directive’ interview in which the respondent controls the interview and dictates the interview without disruption. Non-directive interviews lead to bias as the respondent is guiding the interview towards their own interests. However, Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe (2021) notes that interviewers can combat non-directive interviews through the creation of a topic guide.

A topic guide is a loose structure that dictates the subjects respondents wish to cover in an interview (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021). Although our questions changed in some capacity based on the brand, our topic guide remained consistent throughout the entire process of interviews. For each interview we made it imperative to cover what a respondent considered to be the identity of an Underdog, prior experiences with Underdogs, effects of certain industries on Underdogs positioning and Underdog communications effect on image.

Internal validity relates to the link between cause and effect within research. In regard to internal validity there are two aspects that Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe highlight. Firstly, case study researchers should construct a clear framework that a cause leads to an effect. Secondly researchers should examine possible patterns in their research and compare such patterns with prior studies and previous existing knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021). Before conducting our four case studies we developed an interim framework of central Underdog strategies that brands may implement, constructed from our existing knowledge and beliefs. However, the framework has changed through the course of conducting our interviews due to what we interpreted as patterns in Underdog positioning.

External validity is associated with generalisability of results which then can be applied to the wider world. Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe define external validity as “whether the results of the research can be generalised to other settings or contexts” (Easterby-Smith, Jasperson & Thorpe, 2021, p.125). Gomm, Hammersley & Foster (2000) point out one



possible way researchers can enhance generalisability is through use of systematic selection of case studies. As stated previously our chosen method of sampling for our case studies was purposive sampling meaning it was required that cases we had chosen met parameters we had set in order to be viable. In conducting interviews with brands from multiple industries we enabled ourselves to get a more accurate interpretation of Underdog positioning and allow us to generalise our findings.

Yin notes that construct validity refers to sufficient means of measuring the concepts which are being studied, while also identifying three measures that can be carried out to ensure construct validity is being upheld. Firstly, the use of multiple sources of evidence, Secondly, establishing a chain of evidence and finally ensuring key informants review a draft case study report (Yin, 2009). To ensure we had numerous sources of evidence we carried out interviews with fifteen people. Through recognition of patterns in our research and adaptation of our framework according to such patterns we followed our chain of evidence. We asked the opinion of respondents with no involvement in the case brands we had chosen to give their input on our preliminary chosen case study brands ensuring we had an external viewpoint.

As noted previously Alvansson (2003) refers to bias being present in semi-structured interviews due to past experiences. Alvansson states that “subjectivity refers to the individual and unconscious thoughts, emotions and perceptions - the individual's self-insight and attitude to the surrounding world” (Alvansson, 2003, p.23). It is therefore unavoidable to completely remove bias in all forms from our research due to our interviews containing past experiences of brand managers/academics which in turn shapes their beliefs and viewpoint on Underdog brand strategies.

### *3.7.1 Source Criticism*

Peer-reviewed academic journals, although being sufficient literature for research, are not immune to flaws. Lundahl & Skärvad cautions that even academic journals contain bias as the world is interpreted from the perspective of the author (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999). To mitigate bias within this form of secondary data we were selective in gathering peer-reviewed articles. LUB (Lund University Database) ensured an initial stage of credibility. Articles and

books published within this database were then checked to ensure the publisher was reputable (Lundahl & Skärvad, 1999).

### 3.7.2 *Ethical Considerations*

Ethics originated from the Greek word *ethos* relating to the character of a person (Gray, 2014). Within research, the focal point of ethics is the behaviour of the individuals involved in the research. When conducting our research we constructed clear guidelines of which Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) regard the key principles of ethics. Such key principles include permission from respondents, anonymity of respondents, and transparency in research methods.

Gray (2014) stresses that ethics not only relates to conducting an appropriate research methodology but carrying out research that is virtuous and can be argued to be morally competent. We set out to follow such guidelines outlined by Easterby-Smith, Jasperson and Thorpe (2021) by carrying out three main ethical steps. Firstly permission was requested from each respondent to allow the recording, transcription and publishing of any interviews. Secondly, each respondent was made aware they would have anonymity and their name would not be included in any published works. Thirdly adhering strictly to a transcription of each interview we avoid deceit and misleading information. Within our research a large emphasis is placed on protecting the respondents. This is in turn due to Casico (2010) and Whitney et al. (2008) suggesting that research committees are too focused on protecting organisations whereas the focus should be on protecting research participants.

## 4 Empirical Data

*As part of our multi-case research design we built our in-depth cases on the brands Polestar, Oatly, Sibylla & Liquid Death. We gathered empirical data from employees of these brands. We set out the data we gathered by introducing the brands and then proceeding to categorise*

*the data into What makes said brand an Underdog; How do they use their Underdog Brand Positions and Why & When do they implement the Underdog Brand Position as a strategy.*

*In the second part of the chapter, we also address the questions of What; How; Why & When, but this time considering the empirical data related to Underdog brands in general. This data was gathered from Underdog Brand Experts, Consultants and Academics.*

## 4.1 Brand Cases

In this section we describe in depth our four main cases to present our empirical data. A brief introduction of the company is given to provide a brand overview. After this we will allocate our empirical data into categories to address the following questions:

- ‘What’ covers the differentiation and reasons that make the brand an Underdog
- ‘How’ covers the methods each of the respective companies employ to utilise an Underdog Brand Position.
- ‘Why and When’ covers the reasons a brand opts to position as an Underdog

### 4.1.1 Polestar

Polestar is a Swedish Electric Vehicle (EV) manufacturer founded in 2017 with their headquarters located in Gothenburg, Sweden. Polestar describe themselves as ‘standalone’, despite being partially owned by Volvo Car AB and Zhejiang Geely Holding Group Co. Their cars are currently available in 27 markets and they employ 3,030 people (Polestar About Us, 2023). As outlined by a Polestar employee, Polestar’s core values are centred around design, sustainability and innovation. Polestar communicates their goal to manufacture climate neutral cars by 2030, striving to live up to their core value of sustainability. Within the EV and automotive market Polestar has positioned themselves as premium (Polestar, n.d.). A Polestar employee said the following:

*“We want to be the Design Brand at least. I think if we try to be realistic, there is so much competition in the automotive industry in general. There cannot be one solely dominant player and no one else, you know?”*

### ***‘What’ makes Polestar an Underdog?***

Polestar does not have the abundance of resources that market leaders Tesla have at their disposal or even that of other major players in the automotive industry. Polestar acknowledged being an Underdog internally and particularly in the U.S market. Their current goal being to increase brand awareness in the U.S. A Polestar PR employee pointed out that despite their small size they employ methods to seem bigger than they actually are as a brand:

*“I think the main objective was to increase brand awareness in the US. We have expanded a lot there and to many new spaces so we needed to go big...We like to do big things, even though we are small. We want to appear really big in a sense. We do big events, we do big, not going to say stunts but campaigns and so on.”*

Polestar implied being an Underdog in their 2022 Super Bowl advert which was pointed out by a Polestar PR employee. The said advert uses phrases such as ‘No conquering Mars’; ‘No Dieselgate’; ‘No Greenwashing’ etc. Each of these ‘No’ phrases are combined with a characteristic synonymous with the existing big players. The Polestar PR employee outlined that Polestar initially did position themselves as an Underdog with the super bowl advert but since the advert they have begun to focus more on themselves as opposed to competitors.

*“We did that [Communicating they are an Underdog] a little bit in the past. We now have pretty strict rules and guidelines internally, where we have agreed not really to attack competitors. We want to build our own brand. We want to be good on our own, not by attacking others.”*

The same employee remarked that despite Polestar’s relatively low EV Market Share, they regard themselves as a more international brand than that of some electric car manufacturers. Polestar believe internationally that the only real players in the pure EV market are Tesla as stated below:

*“But, they [Nio] don't really sell internationally in a global sense yet. There are many [EV] brands out there that are trying to do so, but so far it's only Tesla and us that have come to that point.”*

*Is Polestar an Underdog?*

A Polestar PR employee replied

*“I am not going to say that Tesla is our only competitor but if we see only on a global scale, then I think we are in a pretty good position right now. We are still the Underdog of Tesla, yes, maybe we are too technical on this.”*

***‘How’ does Polestar position as an Underdog?***

Although Polestar are an Underdog, they want to convey that they are one of the Top Dogs as indicated below by a Polestar PR employee. In stating what their competitors do wrong in terms of sustainability, Polestar are placed in higher regard. Polestar continues to remind people that they are better than the rest of the automotive industry in terms of sustainability. In doing so Polestar are both an Underdog but also the EV brand with sustainability at the forefront making them be perceived as a Top Dog as indicated by an employee below. Polestar striving to be seen as a leader is conveyed by the same Polestar employee:

*“I think we [Polestar] will strive to be seen as a market leader and I think it pretty much comes with the light of our sustainability work that is so important to us. Because, we truly want to change the industry in that sense. We want to be the leader and the thought leader as well. Show the way and lead the way in the right direction for the rest of the industry.”*

Due to Polestar focusing their efforts heavily on sustainability they still must remain ethically sound as they are still an Underdog. By aiming to be the car brand for sustainability there must be transparency for consumers to believe in the brand. A Polestar specialist commented:

*“Polestar is very transparent with everything they do today”*

***‘Why’ and ‘When’ does Polestar implement an Underdog Position as a Brand Strategy?***

Polestar are not a Top Dog; They want to be seen as leading an industry towards change and is pointed out by the employee as quoted below. In stating what their competitors do wrong in terms of sustainability, he notes that Polestar are placed in higher regard. Polestar wants to be seen as the role model of the EV and Automotive industry. The goal of Polestar in this situation is to create an image of specialising in one feature/aspect of an industry, namely ‘Sustainability specialists’. By specialising in one aspect of an industry, Polestar are attempting to lead the rest of the industry, with the end goal of customers “Top of mind car brand” in sustainability being Polestar. A Polestar employee noted:

*“We try to say ‘hey, we want to go this way [regarding the aspect of sustainability], please come with us’. We welcome the ones [other car manufacturers] that want to come with us and if you do great - if you don’t we are not going to shove it [on you].”*

An Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (2) who is external to Polestar suggested that if Polestar decide to be seen as a Top Dog they should move on from trying to use an Underdog label in stating:

*“Being an Underdog does not always mean you have to position yourself as an Underdog. As we [Respondent and fellow colleague] said there are certain industries (probably) where it is not better to be seen as an Underdog”*

*“I would say they [Polestar] can still start as an Underdog and benefit from the Underdog effect because they [Polestar] need all the help they can get to compete with Tesla. At some point when they want to take over as leader then they stop repeating their Underdog status.”*

Within the EV industry there is a clear Top Dog of Tesla. However, “Acting like a Top Dog ” is used by Polestar as currently it is highly unlikely to displace Top Dog Tesla from their pedestal. It is still possible to compete with the rest of the EV industry to be seen as a Top

Dog but not quite a Tesla level Top Dog. With most car manufacturers moving into the EV space they are collectively a more realistic form of competition than Tesla. A Polestar PR employee along with an external Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands stated:

*“I think that if we [Polestar] knew that we could, we would probably want to be the market leader. I think that would be the objective, but I just think that we know too well that it’s not going to happen now or in the near future at all. So it wouldn’t be realistic to aim. If we would take Tesla out of the equation and you ask me the same question again, I would say that we want to be the market leader.” - Polestar PR Employee*

Outlined numerous times in interviews by a Polestar PR employee and two Underdog Brand Consultants, was the need for Polestar to know when to stay within their means of competition:

*“Polestar - they want to grow out of trying to take Tesla apart. Like their real competitors are like Chevrolet, and GM [General Motors]. You know all these big American car brands that are moving into Electric... you are going for the lagards [customers]. You know the early adopters in the electric car market are gone. You’ve got to get the mainstream now [customers], so your competitor is no longer Tesla” - Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands*

#### 4.1.2 Oatly

Founded in 1994 by brothers Rickard and Bjorn Oeste, Oatly is a Swedish brand that embodies a vision of providing sustainable and healthy alternatives to traditional dairy products (Oatly, 2023). Oatly’s focus is on providing positive societal shifts in dairy consumption. Oatly is a food brand that specialises in producing dairy product alternatives made from oats with their website clearly stating ‘we do oats because we don’t know anything about almonds or soy or cows. All we know is oats.’ (Oatly, 2023). At the heart of Oatly's growth lies its positioning as a sustainable and environmentally friendly brand.

Headquartered in Malmö, Sweden, Oatly is available in more than 20 countries across Europe, North America and Asia, and employs 1,449 (Oatly About Us, 2023). Anchored in their mission, Oatly strives to empower individuals to make better dietary choices and embrace healthier lifestyles, all while conscientiously preserving the planet's resources (Oatly, 2023).

### ***'What' makes Oatly an Underdog?***

When interviewed, the Creative Director suggests that Oatly is an Underdog as they oppose all the giants in the Dairy Industry. He adds that they have a limited marketing budget and that specifically in Sweden (due to their Lawsuit against Arla), they attained the status of “picking on the big guys”.

*“Look at the size of all plant based, like we are, as I've described it, we're a pimple on the ass of the dairy industry.”*

The Creative Director claims that the consumer might not see Oatly as an Underdog as there are a lot of smaller brands in the Oat Drinks Industry. He proceeds to explain that it also has to do with the Oatly approach as they have done things that are unusual for Underdogs.

*Would you say that Oatly is an Underdog?*

The Creative Director affirms

*“I would very much”*

### ***'How' does Oatly Position as an Underdog?***

Oatly 's goal is to encourage individuals to opt for plant-based options instead of dairy and the Creative Director added that the mission would only be completed once they surpass the



giants of the dairy industry. When the respondent started working at Oatly, he set for himself the objective of making the brand keep its “David” status (Underdog).

*“One of the goals was remain ‘David’ and by remain ‘David’, I mean that sort of David versus Goliath kind of thing”*

The brand puts a lot of effort into being loud and visible, as the Creative Director declared. Oatly wants to reach a lot of people from different ages to different markets, believing everyone can change to plant based products. He also shares the opinion that if you’re an unnoticed Underdog you're basically nonexistent.

*“If Underdogs aren't noticed, then...they kind of don't exist.”*

The Creative Director explains that Oatly is a very verbal and visual brand, and their strong branding aims to look ‘human’, through their handwritten typeface and usage of illustrations instead of photos. They want the people to feel like the ads were made by hand by their CEO in his basement to better/ come across with a personal image. They want to show they’re trying to change the global food system and make people feel like the brand understands them. The Creative Director states that Oatly relies on the ‘Underdog feeling’ that everyone has in some aspect of their life. They explain that Oatly wants to appeal to people’s emotions as the people tend to think with their head but make decisions with their hearts, ending up suggesting to either make people cry or laugh.

*“We talk about some pretty serious topics as a brand, but we don't talk about them in serious ways... we tend to favour laughter over lecture.”*

In the Appendix B we can see Figure 11 and Figure 12 which are two different advertisements from Oatly demonstrating their ideals of being loud, noticeable and somehow challenging to the dairy industry.

### ***‘Why’ and ‘When’ does Oatly implement an Underdog Position as a Brand Strategy?***

The Creative Director criticises normal marketing approaches arguing they are almost always invisible to the consumer. He further states that Oatly's approach is to be loud and provoke attention so that the consumer remembers their ads at the end of the day, which is plausible.

This is because Underdogs are very flexible and have a lot of ways to position themselves with the outcome depending on their situation and what they do with it.

*“I mean, if you look at it just purely from a marketing standpoint...the vast majority of marketing sucks, like it's invisible.”*

An Underdog approach is also viable because of how humans react to it. The Creative Director argues that humans love Underdogs stories, love the human side of Underdogs, and want to root for them, which makes playing with those qualities incredibly useful. He adds that regardless of how they act, what their voice is, how they look, they are clearly challenging a global entity which makes it easier to decide who to root for.

*“We love Underdog stories, as humans, we want to root for the Underdog”*

The Creative Director argues that related to their limited resources, they can only implement their strategies when they are sure they will have the best outcome possible. He further adds it is mandatory to be aware of who the brand is and where it plays.

It was stated by the respondent at Oatly that no one ever deliberately mentioned to play the Underdog card against the Dairy Industry. It is simply aligned with their core values and brand mission of making people change to plant based products which tends to represent that.

*“I don't think anyone here has ever purposely said, Let's be David versus Goliath, but I think just the, ‘what we're trying to accomplish’ and ‘what we're trying to take down’”*

Industry wise, the Creative Director believes it is good to be seen as an Underdog but doesn't discard the advantages of being a Top Dog either, emphasising that the necessity of their strategy is to be honest and let the consumer know all about them.

#### 4.1.3 Sibylla

Sibylla, one of Sweden's earliest brands, has strong ties to traditional Swedish food culture and the country's history. It started with its first classic hot dog sold back in 1932 (Sibylla, 2023).

Sibylla's Head of Marketing notes that the brand has over 130 franchised restaurants in Sweden, but is still a tight and small organisation. They not only reflect Swedish street food but are also deeply connected to the essence of the Swedish people. Even the name "Sibylla" traces back to Princess Sibylla of Saxe-Coburg who was the mother of King XVI Gustaf of Sweden, further emphasising its historical significance. While generally speaking about Sibylla, he added:

*“We [Sibylla] are the most Swedish Brand”*

Sibylla is currently owned by Atria Sweden, a prominent food company in Northern Europe, and has expanded its presence to nine countries. Although primarily focused on Northern European nations, Sibylla has also established itself in countries such as Spain and South Korea. However, its largest footprint remains in Sweden (Sibylla, 2022). Sibylla has clear guidelines for their franchises, offering marketing material, service and support for each location. Even though they are present in different countries, Sibylla maintains a similar image on every local page website. Always emphasising that they are a “Traditional Swedish Brand” (Sibylla, 2022).

### ***‘What’ makes Sibylla an Underdog?***

As the Head of Marketing claimed, Sibylla is not an Underdog in terms of brand recognition. There are other factors that make them an Underdog. Sibylla is a franchised brand, and our respondent argues that it has a distinct business model that differs from the other bigger players, which by itself creates differences financially and marketing wise. Sibylla doesn't have the means to compete with the larger chains as these chains have big teams and huge marketing budgets. Meanwhile Sibylla has three to five marketing department employees and a fraction of the marketing budget of some of their competitors in the fast food industry. The Head of Marketing argues that it is understandable for the consumer to see Sibylla as an Underdog because they don't have the same level of exposure as the bigger brands. The

consumer has more contact with commercials from the other chains, which inevitably will place Sibylla's competitors higher up the ladder.

*"We [Sibylla] are perhaps in a different business than Max and McDonalds because of our business model, they can't do what the others do... they put 100 million SEK in marketing. I mean, when you have that sum of money to work with you can really make an impression on people and change people's manners and whatever."*

*Is Sibylla an Underdog?*

The Head of Marketing responded:

*"We [Sibylla] are an Underdog in terms of financial strength to pick bigger pieces of the market. But we are not an Underdog in terms of recognition as a brand."*

***'How' does Sibylla Position as an Underdog?***

Sibylla focuses on a handful of different things to implement their unique strategy. Their identity is deeply rooted in the heritage of Sweden. The Head of Marketing claims that they hold a unique position as pioneers in Sweden, being seen as a regional brand and due to their genuine Swedish spirit. They want to be known for encapsulating the Swedish essence.

*"We [Sibylla] fight with passion. With the Swedish kind of soul!"*

Unlike the bigger players, Sibylla does not solely focus on big cities by ensuring they also have a presence in the smaller towns across Sweden. For their marketing efforts to be coherent they impose rules and regulations on their franchises. Preventing them from freely pursuing their own preferences and actions as the Head of Marketing suggests it could damage the brand. Sibylla provides marketing material to their locations so that they can gather awareness and transmit the brand identity. The respondent stressed the importance that Relationship Marketing has for their strategy, adding that it is crucial how the local Sibylla acts towards their local guests.

*“They [local restaurants] can work with the local market using brand material trying to buy visibility in their local areas.”*

The Head of Marketing proceeded to explain Sibylla’s heavy investment in Influencer Marketing. It is important to note that on Facebook there is Sibylla Sweden, but every franchise has their own Facebook page as well to address the local market. Even though in significantly smaller amounts when compared to the other players, Sibylla does some big campaigns every year. They do Product campaigns, show-casing specific or limited products and make sure to be present on television and different media channels, such as YouTube. Our respondent emphasised that the manner in how Sibylla engages in marketing is crucial due to the fact they are an Underdog. Their financial disadvantage obligates them to do things differently and use words, pictures, and all available resources in an effective manner. In the past two years, they have focused on communicating their product line while infusing them with their regional Swedish essence. The Head of Marketing believes this distinguishes Sibylla from the market Top Dogs, enabling the brand to stick closer to their brand identity.

*“We [Sibylla] do a couple big campaigns every year, always connected to certain products.”*

Appendix B illustrates two examples of the Sibylla marketing approach. Figure 9, shows one of their product campaigns showcased on their website, which is directly associated with the Swedish flag and culture. Figure 10, is an example of visual material provided by Sibylla at one of its locations that reminisces of Swedish Heritage.

### ***‘Why’ and ‘When’ does Sibylla implement an Underdog Position as a Brand Strategy?***

Being an Underdog is not a goal in itself for Sibylla, but rather a result of various factors. The Head of Marketing expresses that it’s ok to assume an Underdog status as long as the brand continues to grow and the business is secured. Nevertheless, he adds that being seen as an Underdog enables Sibylla to be more agile and humorous. It deviates from the strictness, seriousness, and corporate nature of their big competitors. Sibylla’s focus is on acting as the

most Swedish alternative by embracing their regional identity. An Underdog status ends up aligning due to being seen as a business that works for everybody.

*“We [Sibylla] can be a little more quick footed and a little more funny and not as strict, serious, and corporate as the other ones.”*

Sibylla’s Head of Marketing suggests that by being a franchise there are particular things to keep in mind when their strategy can be implemented. Considering their financial disadvantage and their franchise business model, in implementing such a strategy Sibylla needs to move when they are sure they are doing things right. Adding to that, Sibylla imposes strict guidelines for each one of their franchise locations to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Even though Sibylla is an Underdog, the respondent argues that some of the Sibylla franchisees are Top Dogs at their specific location. Having to address their situation accordingly. Industry wise, Sibylla’s Head of Marketing implies that an Underdog in the fast food Industry has the special trait of arousing curiosity between the masses. Providing the example of Balter Meat Burgers and how their unique Underdog Status made everyone want to try them.

#### *4.1.4 Liquid Death*

With “Murder your thirst” as their slogan, Liquid Death introduced themselves to the bottled (canned) water market in 2017 with the purpose of shaking it up and bringing a more sustainable way of drinking water (Liquid Death, 2023).

The Liquid Death Head of Creativity adds that they are eager to be the fun healthy beverage company that entertains and genuinely makes people laugh through their goofy videos and non-traditional marketing. He proceeds to explain that the idea behind the brand is that there is always a better solution in marketing healthy products since every other brand has been doing the same for many years. The brand is valued at around 700 million USD and is sold in more than sixty thousand locations in the United States alone. With each can of water

retailing for about \$1.89 (Green, 2022). Besides selling still water, the brand sells sparkling water, iced tea and also has their own line of merchandise. (Liquid Death, 2023).

**Head of Creativity:** *“We’re like, ‘What if we just made healthy actually funny for the first time?’”*

**Marketing Department employee:** *“Water brands are boring. Why don’t we make the fun water?”*

### ***‘What’ makes Liquid Death an Underdog?***

Liquid Death Head of Creativity claims that the brand is an Underdog in the realm of plastic bottle beverages. Liquid Death are facing off with the dominant heritage brands that control distribution channels, naming rights, and stadium contracts. The brand brought changes to the water industry by being the first brand without a strategy focused on water purity. Deciding to use canned water as aluminium cans are recyclable. Due to their environmental concerns and their hate for corporate marketing. The Head of Creativity believes this has significant weight on Liquid Death being labelled as Underdogs.

The Marketing Department employee suggested that even retailers considered Liquid Death an Underdog as they were sceptical about the brand and initially wouldn’t agree to sell it in their stores due to Liquid Death’s unorthodox branding. The Head of Creativity suggests that the consumers see Liquid Death as an Underdog due to acknowledging it as the manifestation of punk rock and metal within the water industry. He adds that it has to do with the brand's unconventional origins, the initially peculiar concept of naming it "Liquid Death" and its connections to subcultures.

**Head of creativity:** *“We go against them [Water Industry Top Dogs] and we just started 4 years ago. We had a fast rise but we are still a small start-up.”*

*Is Liquid Death an Underdog?*

The Head of Creativity answered:

*“Yeah, of course, I mean, we [Liquid Death] are an Underdog in many aspects.”*

The Marketing Department employee answered:

*“I personally consider it [Liquid Death] an Underdog brand. Yes, for sure.”*

### ***‘How’ does Liquid Death Position as an Underdog?***

The Head of Creativity agrees that Liquid Death is defined as authentic, different and especially unconventional. He notes that they are authentic by being rebellious, but honest, and adds that they are not niche as they target individuals who drink water and have a sense of humour. Liquid Death idea is to market something healthy as unhealthy. As communicating health would make people mentally disconnect from the advert and by changing the narrative, the Head of Creativity argues that it makes the water feel good in the hands of the consumer, just like it was a beer.

*“Our [Liquid Death] target market? Our answer is always, it's people who drink water and have a sense of humour.”*

*“Yeah, it feels good in your hand. It feels like beer. But it's actually just water”*

The Marketing Department employee argues that Liquid Death products are cool and the branding along with the packaging are vital in their success. The Head of Creativity gives the additional insight that their products are also special due to the little decisions made in the design process such as sweetening their sparkling water.

***Marketing Department employee:*** *“We have a dope product and we believe in it and we think that other people believe in it and with the reactions that people get, it sells itself.”*



In the beginning Liquid Death gave people their water for free, especially people they labelled as “cool” and due to the equally perceived coolness of the brand. The Marketing Department employee argues that the people who were given free water wouldn’t mind promoting them without even being asked. He proceeds to define it as lifestyle marketing and explains that it is connecting the brand to those cool people. With some examples being professional snowboarders, musicians and even with adult film actors.

*“Our whole job is to connect Liquid Death with cool people.”*

Liquid Death is present in a diverse range of retailers, from Bars to Amazon, supermarkets to convenience stores. The Head of Creativity claims that they do well in every single one of them. He said that Liquid Death has a footprint in a lot of festivals being the official partner of some of them and with their close ties to music, explaining the idea of being a party water.

*“we are the official water of a lot of festivals and events”*

The Head of Creativity states that due to their uniqueness, Liquid Death had a correlation with sub-cultures such as punk, skate or music. He believes that those communities are commonly driven by hate towards mainstream, which resembles Liquid’s Death market disruptive approach, but argues that ultimately the purpose is united through Humour. He believes their inside joke of a water product that looks unhealthy, encourages people to support the brand as when they are aware of it, they feel part of the collective.

*“Those communities are more driven by, like, a sort of anti-pop culture, like a sceptic mentality that feeds into a lot of like humour around that stuff...like a lot of metal is very funny punks, like very funny and weird.”*

Liquid Death additionally engages with their consumers through their website with the ‘Sell your Soul’ Club and also through their immense push on merchandise. The Head of Creativity says that they sell millions of dollars worth of merchandise annually, demonstrating why Liquid Death considers itself as an entertainment company that happens to sell water, ending up influencing the whole strategy and making them unique.

*“It’s like we’re an entertainment company that happens to sell water. And that’s, you know, if you approach it like that, you did a whole thing differently.”*

### ***‘Why’ and ‘When’ does Liquid Death implement an Underdog Position as a Brand Strategy?***

The Marketing Department employee explains that Liquid Death never intended to position itself as an Underdog but is quite satisfied to be recognised as one. This way they are seen as different and leverage the level of support that ordinary people tend to give to Underdogs. He adds that Liquid Death’s differentiation reflects on a strategy of turning a very uncool product like water into a very hyped and cool concept. The Head of Creativity implied that being an Underdog does not imply being niche and their connection to sub-cultures was a convenient and simplified way to express the underlying humour of the brand and to be a fun, healthy beverage company. Liquid Death was in need of a unique approach. Being an Underdog enables them to disrupt the norms of the industry, especially marketing wise, creating funny and entertaining advertisements that engage people. The Head of Creativity added further that the unconventional and authentic brand has inspired more than 300 customers to tattoo the Liquid Death logo on their body.

***Marketing Department employee:*** “*How do we make water, a thing which is very un-rock and roll, seem rock and roll?*”

In terms of the brand itself, the Head of Creativity suggests that there is a need to be different and do things differently in a market with very standard practices. The same respondent argues that implementing such strategies is highly dependent on the way the brand communicates and what message is communicated.

Industry wise, the employee from the Marketing Department explained that in a saturated Market their strategy is viable as it focuses on their distinguished identity being communicated through entertaining marketing. He added that being the first mover in this industry is crucial, as they were the first water brand that sold water in aluminium cans.

*“In this industry first to market is really important and there was no other can of water on the market. So it was kind of like the mixture of it being first to market canned Water, plus like introducing funny marketing that is basically entertainment.”*

### *-Liquid Death Marketing Employee*

A Senior Manager with the brand Thalus water also emphasised the difficulty in entering the Water industry. He notes the existence of not only International Big players but also strong local players that have deals of exclusivity with supermarkets which force newcomers to opt for a different approach.

## 4.2 The Underdog Questions

*In this section we will state our empirical data, addressing the questions of What; How, and Why & When, in a more generalised way focusing on the standard Underdog Brand. This data mainly comes from the interviews with Underdog Brand Experts, Consultants and Academics, but also includes input from interviews with the four case studies when addressing the more 'general' points relating to Underdogs.*

### 4.2.1 What?

The question of 'What' is our primary question and the best to start with as it compiles data about 'What an Underdog is'; 'What do brand experts define as an Underdog?' and 'What is an Underdog Strategy?' The 'What' question is somewhat broad and gathers different words, attributes and phrases associated with Underdog Brands, nevertheless, understanding it is the first step in finding relevant results. The use of recurring words/phrases from Underdog experts are evident below with the most common being: lack of resources, humbleness and emotions.

When exploring the Underdog phenomenon in branding, experts from different fields shed light on various aspects that define an Underdog brand. This way we explore an understanding of Underdog strategies from the perspectives of different experts. According to a Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands:

*“An Underdog is a brand that people underestimate. People aren't aware of how good they are.”*

This quote portrays that Underdog brands face challenges of being undervalued and overlooked with their potential going unrecognised by the general public. Another viewpoint underscores the importance of determination and resourcefulness. As stated by Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (1)

*“A brand with humble resources that competes with passion and determination against competitors that dominate a market.”*

Advertising Industry Specialist emphasised the significance of humility in Underdog Branding acknowledging:

*“Well, we [Underdog Brands] need to stay humble.”*

Further insights by an Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (2) reveal additional characteristics of Underdog brands:

*“One of the first things [characteristics] is that an Underdog is always someone who has a lack of resources. So compared with competitors, it is someone who doesn't have a lot of money, who doesn't have a lot of staff.”*

This quote reflects on the common trait of Underdogs which is the limited resources compared to competitors, driving the Underdogs to find innovative solutions and leverage their unique marketing strengths. Underdog brand storytelling emerges as a powerful tool for connecting with audiences:

*“[Underdog brand storytelling] is an emotional tie. Everyone likes a romantic story. It's a heroic story. Some guy out of nowhere grows and beats the big guys. Even when he becomes a big guy, he will keep telling the same story.”*

**- Senior Manager, Weptile**

This quote emphasises the emotional power of Underdog brand storytelling, which connects with audiences through narratives that showcase humble beginnings and triumphant journeys,

thereby strengthening the brand's identity. The complexities encapsulating Underdogs is captured by Sibylla's Head of Marketing:

*"... it's so many parts to this. There are so many rules out there, if you are an Underdog or not, if you want to be or not"*

The multi-faceted nature of Underdogs can be easily seen with different rules and factors determining Underdog status, either intentionally or not. Sibylla's Head of Marketing approaches Underdog Brand Strategies in a unique way, commenting:

*"We have to have a different kind of approach. We have to do more or less. We have to paint with the bigger pen."*

By presenting these expert definitions, we gain more insights into Underdog branding and acknowledge the need for Underdog brands to embrace innovative and strategic approaches. These observations could serve as a basis for analysing the strategies and distinctive positioning of Underdog brands in the market.

#### 4.2.2 How?

This question is arguably the most practical of them all. The 'How' strives to clarify how Underdog Brand Strategies be Implemented. Strategy is in constant change and is something normally unique to each scenario, but with this question, our objective is to uncover the fundamental principles that a brand must adhere to implement a successful Underdog Brand Strategy.

As was evident in the 'What is an Underdog?' section; passion is a notable characteristic of an Underdog.

*“The Underdog brand needs a lot of passion, and they need to see or their clients need to see that they’re passionate about what they’re doing. Because if this does not happen, the Underdog effect does not work.”*

***-Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (2)***

There are multiple avenues to adapting an Underdog brand strategy. One of these factors as is mentioned below by a consultant is ‘We hate what you hate’. In which an Underdog can attack a certain factor within an industry in order to gain support from people that share the same hatred/dislike of such a factor.

*“There is a brand tactic ‘we hate what you hate’...trying to disrupt [an industry]”*

***-Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands***

Referred to earlier as Oatly attacking the dairy industry by employing their own version of ‘we hate what you hate’. Pointing out all of the negative aspects involved in the dairy industry and thus enabling themselves to be positioned not only against the Oat milk industry (where they are regarded as Top Dogs) but the dairy industry. Use of this tactic allows Oatly (who are not an Underdog in their own industry) to reshape the landscape and be seen as an Underdog overall.

*“You must also tell your customers that you appreciate their support. We are in this together, and we can only win against this Goliath with your support. We are only winning with your support, you are keeping our hands high so that we can fight,so you make it a us versus them, join, join this movement.”*

***-Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (1)***

Seeking to be viewed fully as an Underdog a brand must communicate in their ‘about us’/brand biography that they are an Underdog. They must frame who the Top Dog is and let their consumers know who the ‘fight’ is against. Failure to convey who the fight is against and lack of ambition leads to a sympathy case. Ambition serves as a distinguishing characteristic for Underdog brands which sets them apart from Top Dogs in the industry, as noted by a Storytelling Consultant for Underdog Brands:

*“Big difference between Top Dogs and Underdogs is Ambition. It is a characteristic that I believe all Underdog brands have. It’s something that I meet all of the time. For the Top Dogs, in the market, ambition is not there anymore. It's more like, preservation. That's the fundamental difference. It's something that I use a lot to identify.”*

The perception of Underdog status also varies depending on the market context, with some brands being Underdogs on a global scale but not locally. As a Senior Management employee of Weptile states:

*“When I think of an Underdog brand, I always think that they are not an Underdog at some places. For example, Mavi is a denim brand here [in Turkey]. I think it's an Underdog in the world. But they are definitely not an Underdog in Turkey.”*

Due to this dynamic nature of Underdog status, brands must embrace the strategies accordingly, with a knowledge of the global market and local market. In saturated markets, Underdog brands sometimes can face an identity crisis according to a Storytelling Consultant for Underdog Brands:

*“My last client is in the dairy product industry. They are producing here in Athens, Greece. It is a very saturated market here, it was very hard to convince them that they are the Underdogs.”*

When faced with limited financial resources, Underdog brands could be implemented relying on creative and effective utilisation of their available assets.

*“How you do it is all that matters [Implementing an Underdog Strategy], if you don't have the big spending money to buy impressions. You need to do things differently. You need to use the words and the pictures and everything you have in a really really good way, I think we are doing that to the best of our abilities”*

***-Sibylla’s Head of Marketing***

Through the utilisation of compelling storytelling, persuasive visuals, and strategic messaging, Underdog brands can effectively amplify the impact of their marketing endeavours. In addition to storytelling, Underdogs need to align their philosophy accordingly,

*“They [Underdogs] need to focus on philosophy, offering, people and their target audience and to top it off, you bring all of this together with your Underdog biography, your Underdog stories.”*

***-Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (1)***

By integrating these core elements, Underdogs can establish a strong brand identity. In an interview with a Polestar Specialist, they acknowledged the vital role of transparency for an Underdog brand.

*“Polestar is very transparent with everything we do today”*

Dominating a niche is a crucial aspect of Underdog success, allowing them to thrive by capturing the market that top challengers might overlook.

*“Underdog must aim to dominate a niche to become successful. You must take the small niche that the big guys don't care about and dominate that area. When you do that and become successful, you are now dominating that small niche.”*

***- Senior Manager with Weptile***

By strategically focusing on a specific niche, Underdog brands can leverage their unique advantages and establish themselves as the dominant players. However, Underdogs may come across with immediate scrutiny and attacks by big players when making a loud entry into the market in an attempt to establish themselves as the dominant players.

*“When you enter the market, don't make any noise. When you loudly say “I'm going to be the biggest”, the big guys focus on you and try to destroy you immediately.”*

***- Senior Management employee of Thalys Water***

*“As an Underdog you have got to be careful what you are criticising”*



***- Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands***

Instead of criticising, Underdog brands should highlight their own strengths and value proposition which could make them distinctive from other competitors.

Considerations can act as a means of things to keep in mind on how an Underdog strategy is being implemented. Underdogs must be cautious when criticising Top Dogs. It is necessary for an Underdog to remain trustworthy in order to be capable of criticising others as noted by a Strategy consultant for Underdog Brands and a Polestar specialist.

*“Once you evolve as a brand you have got to evolve your messaging”*

***- Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands***

*“It’s not a goal in itself to be an Underdog for Sibylla, you can take it, as long as you have strong growth. That is not a problem, but you have to secure the business. That’s the most important thing. So what you do is up to you.”*

***- Sibylla Head of Marketing***

#### ***4.2.3 Why and When?***

By delving into interviews conducted with industry experts, marketing professionals, and business leaders, we tried to explore the reasoning behind why brands adopt this strategy. According to a Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands, one of the main focal points as to why a brand may adopt an Underdog positioning is Identity.

*“We use Underdogs as a way for businesses to identify [themselves]”*

When examining the reasoning behind adopting an Underdog Brand Strategy, it becomes evident that the key lies in addressing the needs and problems of the target audience. Another Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands underscores the necessity of problem-solving as a driving force behind the adoption of an Underdog Brand Strategy.

*“People don’t give a f\*ck about your brand, unless you are solving a problem.”*

A challenge in adopting an Underdog Brand Strategy lies in the awareness and acceptance of being an Underdog in the first place. Overcoming the initial resistance and convincing consumers of their Underdog status is a fundamental step for leveraging their strategy's potential benefits. A Storytelling Consultant for Underdog Brands describes it as...

*"In 90% of occasions, [brands] are not aware that they are Underdogs. Sometimes it's very hard to convince the brands that they are Underdogs. They have fewer resources, and they have to embrace and accept that. There needs to be some sort of convincing."*

Most of the experts, in the interviews, acknowledged that it is beneficial for Underdog brands to adopt the strategy because people like stories and support Underdogs. An insight by a Storytelling Consultant for Underdog Brands emphasises the significance of communicating a brand's vision and story.

*"It's always about sharing your vision and your story. People are drawn unconsciously to the Underdog bias. It's David versus Goliath."*

The allure of Underdog stories is deeply ingrained in our human nature which could be the reasoning behind why brands should adopt Underdog Brand Strategies as a beneficial concept for the sake of the brand, as emphasised by the Creative Director of Oatly, who states,

*"We love Underdog stories. As humans, we want to root for the Underdog."*

Correspondingly, a Marketing Department Employee of Liquid Death comments,

*"People do like to support the Underdog. People like to root for the Underdog."*

Similarly, the notion of rooting for the Underdog holds a significant part in the benefits of adopting the Underdog Brand Strategy, as also emphasised by a Senior Management employee of Weptile,

*“Everyone roots for the Underdog, right? It's a powerful punch line to say that you're an Underdog and you're fighting the big guys. It's actually attractive [for the consumer].”*

This quote suggests that embracing this strategy could create a stronger connection with customers by bravely challenging big guys with a powerful marketing message. Positioning the brand as an Underdog can yield benefits when specifically targeting other Underdog audiences as well, as expressed by a Senior Manager with Weptile,

*“It's beneficial to market yourself as an Underdog if you want to aim at other Underdogs. I always said I'm a solo guy [instead of saying we have a lot of employees]. Other Underdogs really like that [transparency]. Because as an Underdog, you know that you are left out anyways.”*

Contrarily, embracing these strategies could also harm the brand's reputation more than it benefits the brand. Implementing an Underdog strategy could invite competitors to respond with their own Underdog marketing, as noted by a Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands:

*“If you're doing into business with that type of strategy [Underdog Strategy] then chances are it [competitors use of Underdog marketing] is going to happen to you”*

**- Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands**

Being seen as an Underdog brand within some industries could reveal a potential drawback. A Senior Management employee of Thalus Water suggests that in sectors where trust, reliability, and established reputation is predominant, consumers could be more inclined to choose well-established and recognised brands over lesser-known Underdog counterparts.

*“Pharmaceutical [industry], ...if there's a brand that I know of in the Pharmaceutical industry, I prefer to skip [the Underdog brand].”*

Embracing the strategy, Underdog brands could differentiate themselves from more serious and corporate competitors, as noted by the Head of Marketing in Sibylla:

*“We can be a little more quick-footed and a little funnier and not as strict, serious, and corporate as the other ones.”*

It is important to note that the humorous and non-corporate approach may not always be beneficial for certain industries or target markets.

We also aim to understand ‘When should an Underdog Strategy be implemented?’ Examining the ‘When?’ relates to the particular situation of a brand and relies heavily on the context of the scenario. It will help us determine when an Underdog Brand Strategy should be implemented considering the brand industry, its competitors and factors within the brand itself.

As indicated by an advertising industry specialist, an Underdog strategy is for brands that are striving to grow and are currently not one of the leaders in their industry. Small brands are abundant, with Top Dogs making up a tiny percentage of the players in almost any industry. An Underdog consultant informs us that one way of accurately knowing a brand is an Underdog is if they are unable to afford one of the big advertising/branding agencies to enable them to grow:

*“I mean, there are very few leaders in each category. There's one and then 99% of the rest are smaller. And like I said, when they have started, they don't have the resources to hire huge branding agencies to help them to compete with these to become a Top Dog.”*

***-Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (1)***

An Underdog Consultant and Academic outlines that one must not confuse an Underdog with a Challenger Brand (who tend to be ‘top contenders’ in a given market, but with significant resources):

*“If you compare a brand that is second in the market with a brand that is first in the market again, you would say the second brand is challenging the market leader.”*

***- Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (2)***

A Marketing Department employee for Liquid Death Water indicates there may be certain industries where brands will struggle to create a fun spin on their product/service. Industries in which effectiveness and functionality are their main priorities were industries in which the respondent questioned being seen as quirky:

*“Like when it comes to medicine... I don't want the...coolest brand. I want the most effective brand.”*

**- Liquid Death Marketing Department Employee**

*“I think the medicine, medical examples, maybe a little harder, because, you know, maybe brands aren't quite as widely known there. But, you know, any, anytime you can define yourself by being against what is the kind of common conception? That's a powerful idea.”*

**- Head of Creativity Liquid Death**

Others believe that regardless of industry once a brand is not a household name and can identify as being against the industry norms, it can then adopt the position of being an Underdog in its industry:

Commonalities can be found regarding when an Underdog strategy should be abandoned. An Underdog strategy is not one that can be used by Top Dogs (at least not in its entirety). Therefore Underdogs can outgrow the Underdog positioning in becoming either a Challenger brand or a Top Dog and in turn the Underdog Strategy must then be dropped. Failure to change the brand's communication may lead to the brand being seen as inauthentic. With the example of Pepsi stated by a Strategy consultant for Underdog brands; if a brand is not the Top Dog but has a vast array of resources they have reached a point where they cannot position as an Underdog.

*“What is believable [In terms of whether a brand can be an Underdog]? There probably hits a point where [for example] Pepsi is too well known, too big.”*

**- Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands**

*“Once you get onto a really good positioning like ‘We try harder’ you should run it into the ground...You kind of hope you grow out of doing Underdog brand strategies, otherwise you are not growing as a business.”*

**- Strategy Consultant for Underdog Brands**

*“At some point when they [An Underdog Brand] want to take over as leader then they stop repeating their Underdog status and their Underdog heritage and then they accept and people will then accept that they are the leader and then they drop that label of Underdog. That can be a good strategy.*

**- Underdog Brand Expert, Consultant & Academic (1)**

## 5 Multi Case Analysis

*The purpose of this chapter is to establish an Underdog Position framework based on our findings from our empirical data. Our framework consists of four quadrants: Former Top Dog; Striving Underdog; Conscious Underdog and Fighting Underdog. Having presented this framework we analyse fundamental insights an Underdog Brand should account for when seeking to employ the framework to their brand. These insights are divided into three sections: What is an Underdog Position? How are Underdog Brand Positions Used? Why and when is an Underdog Brand Position a viable Strategy? Finally, we apply Rhetoric to each quadrant.*

### 5.1 Underdog Brand Position Framework

After analysing our empirical data we came to the conclusion that it is possible to categorise different positions Underdog Brands might have in the market. There are Underdogs that want to be seen as such while others don't, and there are Underdogs that try to leverage the fact they are Underdogs while others simply conform to their situation. With this being said, we have built a framework to ease the comprehension and visualisation of those positionings taking in consideration two specific variables (X & Y Axis).

On the X Axis of the framework we consider whether or not the brand embraces the Underdog position. On the Y Axis we consider if embracing or not embracing the Underdog position is in fact a strategic decision or not.

This enables us to identify/categorise the four different Underdog positions namely, the Former Top Dog, the Striving Underdog, the Fighting Underdog and the Conscious Underdog.

- Former Top Dog is the Underdog who does not embrace an Underdog Position and it is not a strategic decision to do so, as it is simply a consequence of their decline.
- Striving Underdog is an Underdog who does not embrace an Underdog Position and it is a strategic decision not to do so, as they want to be seen as Top Dog.
- Fighting Underdog is the Underdog who embraces an Underdog Position and it is a strategic decision to do so, as they want to challenge a stronger counterpart.
- Conscious Underdog is the Underdog who embraces an Underdog Position but it is not a strategic decision to do so, as they are realistic in terms of their situation.

Strategic Decision	Yes	<b>Striving Underdog</b>	<b>Fighting Underdog</b>
	No	<b>Former Top Dog</b>	<b>Conscious Underdog</b>
		No	Yes

**Embracing the Underdog Position**

**Figure 6.** Underdog Brand Position Framework

### *5.1.1 Former Top Dog*

The Former Top Dog is a brand who does not embrace an Underdog Position and it is not a strategic decision to do so, as it is simply a consequence of their decline in the market. This is the worst case scenario as it is an undesirable Position that ideally, every brand should avoid.

Here we consider all the Brands that were once dominant and competitive Top Dogs but have experienced a market downturn that made them acquire an Underdog reputation. These brands do not make any effort to leverage their Underdog status and we believe their significant issue lies in their disfigured Brand Identity and Image.

This Position can never be used as a strategy as it will only damage the Brand for its unclear intentions and hazardous connotations. A Former Top Dog should urgently analyse its situation and rapidly shift to the most suitable Position on the framework.

Even though at first glance it seems like the Former Top Dog quadrant is easily neglected, it is important for us to reference it because previous literature fails to acknowledge Top Dogs that have fallen from their Positioning.

The Former Top Dog Position as it is now clear, is the worst position a brand can have in our framework. Brands such as Blackberry, Nokia, Kodak or Blockbuster are brands that were once a Top Dog but are now seen as Underdogs due to their decline in the highly competitive market we live in. These brands do not embrace their Underdog status and it is also not a decision to do so. It is only an outcome of their decline as they are now fallen giants.

### *5.1.2 Striving Underdog*

A Striving Underdog is a brand that strives to be seen as a Top Dog and ultimately become one. These brands do not embrace their Underdog status and it is a strategic decision not to do so. Being an Underdog is a choice and there are Underdogs that simply want to get detached from their Underdog status. This is due to various reasons, such as alignment with their Brand Identity or incompatibility with the Industry they are inserted in. Therefore, we



found it mandatory to reflect on this possibility and eventually uncovered the Striving Underdog Position.

When the Underdog goals align with being seen as a Top Dog and there is ground for it, the Striving Underdog Position can be used as a strategy. To successfully accomplish that, brands must keep on emphasising their unique qualities or practices throughout all of their marketing efforts, pushing on what they do best and better than the competition. It is very important to note that the brands shouldn't at any point promote their attributes by attacking the Industry Top Dogs as that subordination would suggest an Underdog status which would jeopardise their whole strategy. As it will be confirmed in the following text, there are different approaches to implement this Position such as being seen as a Role Model or by being seen as a Market Leader in leading by example.

When it comes to a Striving Top Dog Position, even though the Brands share the fundamental goal of being seen as a Big Player there are different situations to do so as we will see from the Polestar example and from our secondary case of Thalus Water.

Even though Polestar is an Underdog in the Electric Vehicle Industry that is highly dominated by the infamous Tesla. The brand does not embrace their Underdog status and it is a strategic decision to do so as they want to be perceived as a Top Dog. Polestar realised they were doing things better than the rest of the Industry in terms of sustainability and instead of attacking the Top Dogs. They changed their strategy to be that of a Role Model to be seen as Top Dogs. The brand highlights their good progress and initiatives on Sustainability and invites any other brand from the industry to do the same, not opposing anyone, just consistently emphasising what they do best and how it is incorporated to their products.

Our secondary case of Thalus Water, a clear Underdog water brand from Luxembourg, adopts a Striving Underdog position in their local market. They do not embrace their Underdog status and it is a strategic decision not to do so as they want to be seen as one of the Top Dogs in Luxembourg as this is the market they feel comfortable in. The brand focuses on its sustainable cardboard packaging, their support to different charities, their aesthetic design and their striving for awareness. Thalus Water wants to be present in the most locations possible, from Supermarkets to Hospitals and even work with NGOs. The brand wants to elevate their business to be seen as a Top Dog, by offering personalisation of their packaging for the biggest business clients enabling them to co-brand and allowing them to choose which

charity to support. Their focus on B2B is strategic as they want to appear to be present in every retailer in Luxembourg, so that consumers perceive them as a Top Dog that is dominant in the market.

### *5.1.3 Fighting Underdog*

A Fighting Underdog is an Underdog that challenges a bigger counterpart, either the Top Dogs in their industry or even an Industry as a whole. These brands embrace their Underdog Status and it is a strategic decision to do so. There are a lot of brands that oppose stronger counterparts in order to leverage the Underdog Effect (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021). This confrontation of a weaker side against a more powerful one, suggests a certain subordination to a specific Top Dog. This ultimately attaches an Underdog connotation to the brand. A clear and undisputed example of this is our case of Oatly, which highlights the importance of reflecting on this positioning.

The Fighting Underdog Position can be used as a strategy when the brand is not afraid to be seen as an Underdog in order to accomplish its motivations. As we have noticed through the extensive literature that highlights our love for Underdogs, clear positioning as an Underdog is highly likeable by consumers, as they empathise and are more likely to support them (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012; Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021). Nevertheless, the consumer must comprehend and see that the brand lives up to what it promises. Any challenge, critique or affirmation made by a Fighting Underdog must be ensured to be truthful and executed to perfection.

In the examples given in the following paragraphs of this text we will see that there are many different approaches to implement this Position. A brand can achieve it by calling-out the Top Dog for their bad practices; by emphasising their superior efforts compared to the Top Dog; by being unique enough to disrupt the market or even by making jokes about the Top Dogs just like Fritz Kola mocks Coca-Cola for product developments that a small brand like them have made a long time ago (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021).

There are different approaches to strategically leverage a Fighting Underdog Position as we see by the likes of Oatly, Liquid Death and Avis.

The Fighting Underdog Position of Oatly, is against a whole industry. Oatly is a Top Dog in the Oat drinks market but by challenging the whole Dairy Industry they embrace an Underdog Position. They approach this Position and solidify their Underdog status by directly attacking their “Goliath” with constant advertising highlighting the unethical practices of the Top Dogs (Appendix B, Figure 11 and 12, page 126).

Liquid Death also challenges a whole industry but in their case, they face the bottled water industry. The difference with Oatly is that they do not need to directly attack any Top Dogs to embrace an Underdog Positioning. In their case, they oppose everything that is mainstream, they fight by being completely unique to the point of disrupting the market. By combining their strong visual branding with their unconventional marketing approaches, Liquid Death is able to strategically use their positioning to passionately challenge the bigger players.

Avis was likely the first brand in the World to embrace an Underdog Position and use it as a strategy. The brand also didn’t directly attack the Top Dog in order to succeed. Instead, Avis challenged the market leader by focusing on their own brand, assuming the Underdog Position and emphasising all the extra efforts they made to satisfy the customer. Avis clearly stated that due to being the Underdog, they “Try Harder” than Hertz (Figure 3 and 4, page 28).

Interestingly, Polestar was once a Fighting Underdog and strategically chose to embrace that Underdog Positioning through an approach similar to Oatly with an affront against the industry Top Dog. For the Superbowl LVI (2021) they came up with an advertisement (Appendix B, Figure 8, page 124) that specifically targeted Tesla, with statements such as ‘No False promises’, ‘No conquering Mars’, trying to leverage a Fighting Underdog Position. As strategy is something that in contrast they change, they eventually decided to shift and are now a Striving Underdog.

#### *5.1.4 Conscious Underdog*

A Conscious Underdog embraces the Underdog status but it is not a strategic decision to do so, it is more of a result of their situation. These brands do not mind to be seen as an Underdog and focus on their strengths and differentiation to survive in a market dominated by Top Dogs that are very unlikely to be surpassed.

Through our Sibylla case, we realised that some brands are indifferent to the Underdog status if ultimately the business is doing well. We understand that they do not necessarily want to be Underdogs or either want to leverage it like a Fighting Underdog does. They are simply aware that they are an Underdog and focus on what they can do best in order to endure in a highly competitive market.

A Conscious Underdog embraces its Underdog Position but unlike a Fighting Underdog is not to strategically use it. The brand passively focuses on themselves without challenging any Top Dog. Therefore, we can say that this Position is not a strategy by itself but is rather dependent on how the brand exploits it. Nevertheless it is crucial to understand how and when it happens.

Conscious Underdogs are often present in highly saturated markets that are dominated by giant corporations and international players that possess huge financial and brand advantages towards them. A Conscious Underdog is aware that it is better to play it slow than gamble on an all in against the Top Dogs. Such a decisive move is very hard to accomplish as it requires either strong motivation for a call-out or a clear and unique distinction that is powerful enough to disrupt the market.

There are different examples of Conscious Underdogs such as our main case of Sibylla and the secondary case of Thalus Water when it comes to the International Market.

Sibylla does not mind the Underdog status and recognises their financial disadvantage on the fast food industry. This market is dominated by giant international players such as McDonalds and Burger King, and in Sweden, there is also a strong player called Max Burgers. Being aware of the almost unattainable goal of becoming a Top Dog, Sibylla plays it passively and focuses on what makes them different. They embrace the Underdog Position not as a strategic decision but rather as an outcome of their situation. The brand places emphasis on being 'the most Swedish option' on the market, exerting energy to highlight that trait even in other countries in which they are present. Sibylla truly embraces their nationalism in their brand core.

In International Markets Thalus water tries to adopt the opposite Position then what they portray in their Local Market. Being aware and conscious of the highly competitive Water Market dominated not only by International but also by strong local players of each country.

Thalus Water embraces an Underdog Position but not as a strategic decision and rather as an outcome of the situation. The brand wants to fly under the radar of the Top Dogs, afraid that their dominance might suffocate its progress. Therefore, Thalus water quietly and solely focuses on its own strengths such as their sustainable cardboard packaging.

Strategic Decision	Yes	<b>Striving Underdog</b> <b>Polestar</b>	<b>Fighting Underdog</b> <b>Oatly, Liquid Death</b>
	No	<b>Former Top Dog</b> <b>Blackberry</b>	<b>Conscious Underdog</b> <b>Sibylla</b>
		No	Yes

**Embracing the Underdog Position**

*Figure 7. Underdog Brand Position Framework with Cases applied*

## 5.2 General Underdog Insights

When we examine the general insights of an Underdog Position we return back to our three research questions. Firstly we must determine what an Underdog Position is. Secondly, we investigate how an Underdog Brand Position is used. Thirdly, we explore why and when is an Underdog Brand Position a viable strategy. Having built ‘The Underdog Brand Position Framework’ and applied it to our cases we stress the importance of general insights regarding an Underdog Positioning. A brand must acknowledge these insights before opting to use an Underdog Position as a brand strategy.

### *5.2.1 What is an Underdog Brand Position?*

Commonalities can be seen in how an Underdog Brand is defined by those in the Marketing industry. Attributes such as: Passion, humbleness and determination are often evident in Underdog Branding. Passion enables an Underdog to be seen as putting up a fight to a Top Dog and not be seen as a sympathy case. An Underdog communicates that they are proud of what they do and what their brand stands for. Underdogs often acknowledge they are the Underdog and embrace it which is seen as humbleness. Being an Underdog is ultimately a choice. Once a brand fits the necessary parameters mentioned they can opt to utilise this status as a strategy to position their brand as an Underdog. Those brands categorised within the Striving Underdog quadrant on our framework do not wish to adopt an Underdog Position as a strategy. They are striving to be seen as Top Dogs, meaning those brands on the Striving Underdog quadrant do not wish to convey their humble origins.

Humbleness refers to a brand holding their hands up and saying ‘yes we are not the Top Dog or one of the Top Dogs’. Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) state that the humbleness aspect of an Underdog typically relates to how the company was founded and the small and humble origins of the brand founder/s. These humble origins are often communicated in the brand biography.

Lack of resources is the one common feature that is apparent in all Underdogs. However, lack of resources is in comparison to the market leaders in an industry, the Top Dogs. Underdogs do not have the money, staff or facilities to compete on an even playing field with the Top Dogs. Underdogs will not have massive headquarters. Nor will they have a huge marketing budget or thousands of employees. Brands that are positioned as Conscious Underdogs tend to have less resources than Former Top Dogs, Striving Underdogs and Fighting Underdog. This is due to Conscious Underdogs not being Underdogs by choice. They are realistic about their positioning in the market and as such they embrace it.

It is important to note the difference between a Challenger Brand and an Underdog Brand. A Challenger Brand is a Brand that is commonly number two in an industry, a step behind the Top Dog. Challenger Brands may be an Underdog to the Top Dog but this does not make them a true Underdog in regard to the entire industry. An example provided by a respondent

is that of Pepsi cola. Pepsi is an Underdog to Coca-Cola, However when you compare Pepsi to the rest of the Cola industry they are not an Underdog. They have a wealth of resources at their disposal when we compare them to the likes of Fritz Kola, Cuba Cola and Inca Kola. When a brand has reached the status of being a household name it is often a clear indicator they are positioned as either (a) a Top Dog or (b) a Challenger Brand. Morgan (2009) refers to a Challenger Brand having three factors that deem it to be a Challenger Brand; state of market; state of mind; and rate of success. Brands that fall under the Fighting Underdog quadrant of our framework are more likely to see a fine line between being categorised as Underdogs and being known as Challenger Brands.

### *5.2.2 How are Underdog Brand Positions Used?*

As highlighted to us by the majority of respondents the most effective way for a brand to communicate their positioning as an Underdog is through use of their brand biography. It is important to note Striving Underdogs will not communicate their Underdog position in their brand biography despite being Underdogs. McGinnis and Gentry (2009) support this view in arguing that an Underdog position can have a differentiated appeal to consumers and should be evident in a brand biography. The 'About Us' on a brand's website should tell the consumer clearly who they are an Underdog against. Who is the Goliath they are facing? In doing so the brand is inviting consumers to help them in their struggles of competing against the Underdog. Shirai (2017) brings to light that consumers will support Underdogs because consumers predict these brands will fight hard against all odds to achieve a result against competitors. One of our respondents communicated four attributes that an Underdog brand biography must focus on: philosophy, offering, people and the brand's target audience. These four themes are also what Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) attribute to crafting an Underdog Identity.

A 'We hate what you hate' approach as pointed out by one of our respondents, should be communicated by Underdog brands' biography. Brands that wish to target something within an industry that consumers are against do so with the ambition of creating support in tackling such issues, be that a certain brand or bad practice within an industry.

When a brand decides to implement an Underdog Brand Strategy they must be wary that due to a lot of Underdogs targeting Top Dogs they themselves need to be seen as exemplary. As indicated by one of our respondents Underdogs need to be as good if not better ethically than the Top Dogs they are targeting. Along with also competing with Top Dogs in terms of quality of Product/Service offering. Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) infer that Underdogs must show their dedication to consumers in providing sufficient alternatives to the Top Dogs products and services. All Underdog Positions mentioned in the framework must acknowledge the importance of being ethically on par or better than Top Dogs.

Two respondents who are Senior Managers of Underdog Brands presented the importance of entering a market without making too much noise when you are a niche player. However, this is only viable in the early stages of market entry as one of the most popular forms of communicating your Underdog status is by targeting the big players, framing the Goliath.

### *5.2.3 Why and When is an Underdog Brand Position a viable Strategy ?*

One of our respondents made it known that most of his clients were unaware they are indeed Underdogs, having to explain to them the benefits they can obtain from leveraging the fact they are not as big or popular as the Top Dogs of their industry. These benefits include: Underdogs attract business from other Underdogs (In B2B); Creation of Empathy; a Less Corporate Approach.

Although we primarily looked at B2C in terms of Underdog Strategies, we discovered in interviewing Marketing/Web-Design Agencies that Underdogs can attract other Underdogs in B2B. Particularly in terms of usage of external agencies. Meaning consultancy agencies that have branded themselves as Underdogs found themselves attracting Underdog businesses. Not all businesses can afford top agencies in terms of marketing, IT, accounting etc. Thus these businesses need to find agencies that are within their means of budget, turning them in the direction of searching for fellow Underdogs whose services are within their means of budget. Underdogs in B2B that wish to attract other Underdogs must communicate their Underdog Position and by doing such they cannot position as a Striving Underdog.



An Underdog Position as a Strategy is a means of creating an empathetic connection. However it cannot be the sole identity of the brand. As noted by one of respondents a brand must solve a problem. An Underdog Strategy is benign unless the brand is offering a solution to a problem. Liquid Death is solving the problem of plastic in the bottled water industry. Oatly are solving the problem of alternative dairy products and Polestar are solving the issue of sustainability in the Automotive and EV industry. Thus adopting an Underdog approach allows them to draw attention to solutions they are attempting to resolve.

There was a common acknowledgement among respondents that consumers love Underdogs and the stories Underdogs have to tell. People are attracted to stories of brands defying the odds and competing with the Top Dogs in their industry. Paharia et al. (2011) supports the love consumers have for Underdogs in pointing out that Underdogs are capable of eliciting more empathy from consumers in comparison to empathy shown toward Top Dogs.

Underdogs are enabled to act less corporate and introduce more humour than Top Dogs and even challenger brands. In the cases which we categorise as Fighting Underdog, employees from each brand noted how Top Dogs in their industry have a mundane approach to branding and storytelling. Although there is more room for Underdogs to take a less serious approach than Top Dogs it is critical to note this is not the case in ethics. The reasoning for such will be examined in 'How are Underdog Brand Positions Used'. However, due to Striving Underdogs seeking to be seen as Top Dogs they tend to act more corporate than Fighting Underdogs or Conscious Underdogs.

As mentioned previously in 5.2.1 it is vital for an Underdog and a Challenger brand to not be confused with one another. One of our respondents expressed that a brand can only begin to implement an Underdog strategy when it is believable. Brands that do not have humble resources should not try to implement an Underdog strategy.

In every industry there can only be one market leader and several Top Dogs as stated by one of our respondents. Meaning there is opportunity for many Underdogs to co-exist while there is less space for such magnitude of Top Dogs in one industry. One respondent remarked that markets that are saturated provide a prime opportunity for brands to implement an Underdog Strategy. This allows brands in saturated markets to stand out. Although there will be

numerous other Underdogs in the industry, not all of these brands will communicate their Underdog status sufficiently to be differentiated from the rest of the industry.

Amongst our respondents there was a difference of opinion on whether an Underdog Brand Position can be used in any industry. Those respondents with a background in storytelling and copywriting believe it is possible to position your brand as an Underdog regardless of industry. Respondents who believed there may be some industries in which brands opt to avoid being seen as Underdogs are from a brand management background. Such industries mentioned in regard to avoiding an Underdog Positioning were: Medicine, Telecommunications, and the Technology industry. These industries rely heavily on functional products. Underdogs in industries in which it is possible being perceived as an Underdog is negative can resolve this issue by adopting a Striving Underdog position in which an Underdog masquerades itself as a Top Dog.

Although an Underdog Strategy can be utilised by brands which fit the parameters, the Underdog Strategy is not eternal. With continued growth there will come a point where a brand must abandon their Underdog status and as mentioned by a respondent they must evolve their messaging. Similarly if an Underdog decides they want to truly challenge a Top Dog they must discontinue their communication of the Underdog narrative. However, an exception noted in this case is the scenario in which a brand can position itself as an Underdog against a similar industry such as the case with Oatly in the Fighting Underdog position. In which Oatly positions itself against the Dairy industry as they are a Top Dog in the Dairy alternative industry.

### 5.3 Rhetoric Of Underdog Positions

In Underdog Brands, the dynamic interplay of pathos, ethos, and logos shapes brand perception. Rhetoric has been used strategically by Underdogs to create strong connections, gain credibility, and present logical arguments to their target group. Likewise, when it comes to the positioning of the brand we cannot neglect any of the specific Rhetorical dimensions as it is their harmony that completes it. Nevertheless, we will be analysing each different

Underdog Position of our framework using Rhetoric. The aim in our Rhetorical analysis is to discover if any dimension is more predominant when it comes to Underdog Positioning.

We will abstain from analysing the Former Top Dog Position as it is a Position that we clearly advise every brand to avoid. We believe a brand in this situation should aspire to transition to another suitable option.

### *5.3.1 Rhetorical Appeal of the Striving Underdog*

Striving Underdogs aim to be seen as Top Dogs and to do so, they have to behave like one. A Top Dog tries to demonstrate a notable track record of practices and achievements, which by itself suggests Logos. As a Rhetorical appeal Logos focuses on logical appeals, evidence, and reasoning to persuade the audience (Barlett, 2019), which any Top Dog is comfortable in doing so. We can see this in the Role Model approach of Polestar as they are aware of their superiority on sustainability relative to their industry and provide indisputable evidence through logical facts doing so to Position themselves as a Top Dog. However, there is still a slight occurrence of Ethos and Pathos appeals due to the interconnectivity of Rhetoric. Polestar, by being transparent, grants a certain level of credibility and trustworthiness towards customers which is a characteristic of the Ethos dimension. Polestar also explores the Rhetorical appeal of Pathos, due to addressing ethical concerns such as sustainability which is an emotional concern of consumers.

### *5.3.2 Rhetorical Appeal of the Fighting Underdog*

The illustration of the David versus Goliath story is frequently employed by Underdog brands to evoke emotions of inspiration, determination, and triumph. By utilising this storyline, Underdog brands tap into connection and understanding, as consumers can relate to the difficulties and barriers faced by Underdogs. The Fighting Underdog position relies on emotions to create empathy in the minds of consumers in regard to their Underdog status, which naturally suggests the Rhetorical Appeal of Pathos. Fighting Underdogs connect with the emotions of consumers through use of storytelling of their disadvantaged position, most

commonly done through the use of a brand biography. An example can be seen in Oatly framing the Dairy industry as a Goliath in which Oatly is at a disadvantage of trying to compete with. The Fighting Underdog frames who their fight is against with the aim of attracting consumers who empathise with their struggles and thus appealing to the goodwill of human nature. In focusing on the emotions of consumers, Fighting Underdogs are relying heavily on Pathos. Fighting Underdogs also appeal to the Rhetorical Dimension of Ethos as we confirm by the approach of Liquid Death and Oatly. These brands clearly communicate their identity without being afraid of any repercussions from Top Dogs. This meaningful display of personality and character suggests to consumers that an Underdog is credible which ultimately suggests Ethos. They transmit trustworthiness to the consumer not only by being truthful to their identity but also due to supporting sustainable options, which continuously indicates the presence of Ethos.

### *5.3.3 Rhetorical Appeal of the Conscious Underdog*

Being local as an Underdog brand aligns closely with the Ethos aspect of Rhetorical appeals. Conscious Underdogs are clearly aware of who they are and what their situation is. Ensuring they stay truthful to their identity and personality. This implies a predominant presence of Ethos as it conveys trustworthiness and credibility in the minds of the consumer. On the example of Sibylla it is evident that they place emphasis on being the ‘most Swedish’ fast-food restaurant and focus heavily on their Swedish Community connection. This approach suggests the Rhetorical appeals of Ethos and Pathos. As suggested from their Conscious Underdog Position, the trustworthiness they convey in their community focused strategy appeals to Ethos. Similarly, Pathos is present as this sense of community appeals to the emotions and sense of belonging consumers have.

## 6 Discussion

*In this chapter we will be discussing, considering and exploring our findings of the thesis predominantly related to the Framework. We will develop our critical observations concerning the four possible Underdog Positions, while considering General Underdog insights and the Rhetorical appeal of each Position.*

After constructing and analysing The Underdog Position Framework, which encompasses four distinct Underdog Positions, we can now discuss the interrelation of these Positions in terms of theory, correlation between them, along with their similarities and contrasts. It is crucial to emphasise to brand managers that the framework serves as a categorisation of the four Underdog Positions, rather than a scale or measurable tool. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that an accurate analysis and categorisation of the Brand Position will result in more concrete choices regarding its strategic implementation.

Communication is the heartbeat of the Fighting Underdog position. A brand achieves positioning through communication. For a Fighting Underdog to be acknowledged by consumers as fighting something in any capacity they must communicate to consumers ‘This is what we are fighting against. We need your help in competing with...’. Although an Underdog brand does not explicitly need to ask for consumers help they insinuate it by inviting consumers to join them on the brands journey. Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) refer to it as Underdog brands communicating to consumers that they should join the Underdog brand on a ‘movement’. Underdogs need to be clear and concise with consumers that the Underdog needs the consumers' help to fight. An Underdog that does not make it explicitly clear what it is fighting against falls amongst the Conscious Underdogs. If a Fighting Underdog is changing or going against norms in their industry such as Liquid Death or Oatly then they must ensure this is known to consumers. Communication directly shapes the image consumers have in their mind of a brand. Paharia et al. (2011) state the importance of communication for brand managers in differentiating their brand and using their Underdog status as a means of doing so..

Former Top Dogs find themselves in a precarious position. They were once the big boys in their industry, dominating the market. However, they now find themselves back down in the pecking order. Likely, their brand awareness is high. Consumers would often remember them but often associate them with a negative image. There is always a reasoning as to why a Top Dog had their fall from grace. With the case of Nokia, Blackberry and Kodak it was the refusal to adapt to a changing market that ultimately led to their decline. As mentioned in our literature review Kapferer (2012) refers to the image of a brand as a memory for consumers. Along with noting this, memory can be difficult to change as it is built in the long term through a brand's identity. Unfortunately for Former Top Dogs there is no quick fix solution to negative connotations surrounding their brand.

As we stated in 5.2.3 with an Underdog brand position not being eternal or everlasting, Striving Underdogs are those who want to ditch the Underdog status. Brands which categorise themselves as Striving Underdogs are likely to perceive the term Underdog as a negative characteristic in comparison to the Fighting Underdogs as seen on the X axis on the framework which notes they embrace their Underdog Status. Having seen indications that an Underdog positioning may not be the best strategy in an industry of functional products, maybe Striving Underdogs are justified in their decision. When we look at the automotive industry it is one which produces functional products and it is a highly competitive industry. So in looking back at our case of the Striving Underdog Polestar, their strategic decision to attempt to position themselves as Top Dogs seems justified. Polestar goes against the recommendation of Kim & Park (2020) who note a large part of the Underdog Brand Positioning is placed on struggles and humble beginnings. Polestar refuses to communicate this as being positioned as an Underdog would jeopardise their end goal of being seen as an Underdog.

A Conscious Underdog embraces its identity as an Underdog as they have accepted that it would currently be an unrealistic goal to strive to compete or fight against Top Dogs. However, we return to Schmidt & Steenkamp (2021) in cautioning Underdogs in the over-use of sympathy. Usage of sympathy without being accompanied by passion or determination leads consumers to believe a brand has no desire, deeming it as such a lost cause.

As we delve further into the Underdog Positions individually, we realise there are a set of approaches and situations that are crucial when aiming to utilise the Position as a strategy. For Striving Underdogs there is a need to be seen as the Top Dog, either by exerting an extraordinary effort to increase awareness across different channels or by becoming a Role Model through highlighting qualities or noble practices that are superior to the rest of the industry. These strategies contrast with the ones applied by Fighting Underdogs due to the fundamental point of this being perceived as an Underdog and subordinating to a stronger counterpart. This recognition of the Top Dog comes in many forms, implying the importance of effective communication and the inherent value of storytelling (Kaushik, 2011; Paharia, Keinan, Avery & Schor, 2011). Whether it involves calling out the Top Dog; possessing unique traits that disrupt the market; emphasising the brand greater efforts compared to the Top Dog or simply engaging in a playful mockery about the Top Dog, there are diverse and most likely more ways Underdogs can embrace an Underdog status and leverage the good connotations attached to it. This becomes an obligatory task for brand managers to analyse and design the strategies through which they should challenge the dominant players.

The Underdog Brand Positions are not static and Underdogs may shift between them when needed. We have the explicit example of Polestar that started as a Fighting Underdog calling out Tesla on their SuperBowl Advertisement but gradually shifted to a Striving Underdog by leaving any challenge behind and focusing on becoming the industry Role Model. Another mandatory moment for a Position shift is when a brand falls into the Former Top Dog Position. This Position brings bad connotations to the brand and they miss out on capitalising on their new Underdog status. Therefore, we strongly recommended brand managers assess their situation and aim to transition to the most suitable Position of the Framework. Another reason that might incite a shift on the brand position is when the Underdog Brand outgrows their Underdog Identity. As we mentioned before, the Underdog Position is most likely not eternal, so when a Fighting Underdog or a Conscious Underdog (even if less plausible) outgrow their Underdog Identity they must assume a Top Dog Position.

As we have seen from our secondary case of Thalus water, brands may exhibit different Underdog Positions on different markets. Thalus Water adopts a Striving Underdog Position in their local market in order to seem like a Top Dog and proliferate better on the small and comfortable market of Luxembourg. On the other hand, the brand portrays a Conscious

Underdog Position on the International Market as they don't want to create a scene, being aware of the sharks that dominate that market and are almost impossible to defeat. It is important to note that while a conjunction of a Striving Underdog and a Conscious Underdog Position works, it is very unlikely that any other combination does as well. A brand must never position itself as a Striving Underdog in one market and as a Fighting Underdog in another on account that these positionings completely contradict each other, overruling any purpose that aims to be transmitted. Even though it is not as hazardous, a combination between Fighting Underdog and Conscious Underdog is also not advisable. A brand that has a strong motive to challenge a Top Dog or is unique enough to disrupt a market, should never play it passively and adopt a Conscious Underdog Position. Therefore, the only combination that is prone to function is a Striving Underdog with a Conscious Underdog.

In section 5.2.3 we get a glimpse as to what Underdog Positioning in B2B may pertain due to insights gathered from the Underdog Brand 'Weptile'. We speculate that if we were to apply our Underdog Position Framework to B2B most of the Underdog Brands would position themselves as Striving Underdogs. With most of the B2B industry producing functional products/ offering functional services such as Web Development brands are more likely to align themselves with the characteristics and attributes one associates with Top Dogs. However, it seems B2B is not limited to only functional products/services with one of our respondents from Thalus water noting that despite selling a FMCG their target is business not consumers and hence they adopt a Striving Underdog Position.

As we stated in our Analysis, respondents who had a background in brand management believed industries such as Medicine, Telecommunications, and Technology do not welcome Underdogs. All of these stated industries revolve around functional products as does most of the B2B industry. We must not negate that Underdogs exist within these industries but we wonder if Underdogs in these industries communicate their Underdog status in any form? Or do they treat it as that which shall not be named?

As we apply Rhetoric to each Position of the Framework, we start to note some patterns. Underdogs that embrace an Underdog status present a consistent appeal to character, trust and emotions which induces the Rhetorical dimensions of Ethos and Pathos (Barlett, 2019). This perfectly aligns with the core of Underdog Brands as it involves passionately fighting and



communicating their identity (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021), which develops character and inspires trust (Ethos). The Underdog Brands essence also goes through an awakening of empathy and sympathy emotions in human beings (Goldschmied & Vandello, 2012), which directly suggests the existence of Pathos. Especially for Fighting Underdogs, the idea behind embracing an Underdog Status is closely tied to those brands seeking to benefit from the Underdog Effect, which encompasses all the positive emotions Underdog Brands inflict on consumers (Schmidt & Steenkamp, 2021), once again reminiscing to the crucial role of the Rhetorical appeal of Pathos. On the other hand, Top Dogs will gladly remind the consumer about what they do best through strong, logical and appealing arguments that suggest the Rhetorical Dimension of Logos (Barlett, 2019; Urde, 2016). Therefore, it is quite logical that a Striving Underdog which aims to be seen and eventually become a Top Dog will hold a strong connection to this specific Rhetorical appeal. Nevertheless, as we have noticed by the Polestar approach, the remaining Rhetorical dimensions of Ethos and Pathos are still valuable and shall not be neglected, emphasising their crucial involvement with Underdog Brands. In general, the Rhetorical Dimensions of Ethos and Pathos are the building blocks for Underdog Brands in general, but especially for the ones which the Position embraces the Underdog status. The remaining Rhetorical appeal of Logos ends up being commonly attributed to Striving Underdogs given their ambitions of being seen as a Top Dog and their need to behave like one.

We were astonished that nobody in previous literature (that we are aware of) mentioned the possibility of an Underdog wanting to be perceived as a Top Dog in a form of masquerading. We unveiled this strategy while interviewing the Polestar Global PR and Communications employee. We were also pleasantly surprised to find that an Underdog can utilise multiple Positions at the same time but the only combination that is likely to work is the Striving Underdog and the Conscious Underdog.

## 7 Conclusion

*This final concluding chapter will provide a summary and return to the purpose, research questions, aims and objectives to ensure each aspect of this has been covered. Followed by such conclusions are the theoretical contributions and managerial implications of this study. To finalise we will expound upon the limitations of this study and provide a recommendation for future research.*

At the beginning of this thesis, we posed three research questions with the aim of ‘Exploring the Underdog Brand Position’.

RQ 1: What is an Underdog Brand Position?

RQ 2: How are Underdog Brand Positions Used?

RQ 3: Why and When is an Underdog Brand Position a Strategy?

As a result of analysing vast amounts of qualitative data, we determined that an Underdog Position is a method of categorisation for brands which are considered Underdogs. An Underdog Brand Position is ultimately a choice as communication shapes the Underdog Identity, leaving the brand to either embrace their Underdog status or not. Comparison is ever present when measuring the positioning of an Underdog brand, as an Underdog can only be classified as an Underdog when compared to Top Dogs.

The Underdog Positions serve as guidelines for brands to be aware of what to pursue, keeping in mind that different means (approaches) exist to reach the same goal. We have categorised four different Underdog Brand Positions. These four Positions that we outlined are ‘Former Top Dog’; ‘Striving Underdog’; ‘Fighting Underdog’, and ‘Conscious Underdog’. Former Top Dogs are those brands that were once Top Dogs of their industry however due to change of circumstances they now find themselves as Underdogs. Striving Underdog concerns Underdogs who wish to be seen as Top Dogs, they often implement this by focusing on what they do better than the rest of the industry along with negating to communicate any Top Dog subordination. Fighting Underdogs are brands that embrace their Underdog position, challenge the Top Dogs, and disrupt the market. Conscious Underdogs refers to Underdogs

who are realistic about their place in the market, embracing the Underdog Status not directly as a strategy but as an outcome of their current situation .

An Underdog Brand Position is more than a categorisation, it is a strategy as it defines a clear goal for the Underdog Brands to pursue. Brands either want to be seen as a Top Dog, neglecting their Underdog status, or want to embrace it, leveraging the Underdog effect through challenges opposing the Top Dogs. The strategy is implemented once the brand deliberately decides to embrace their Underdog status or not (Striving Underdog; Fighting Underdog) having diverse approaches to achieve the same end goal. When it is a strategic decision but the brand still adopts its Underdog status due to being aware of its situation (Conscious Underdog) it is not a strategy by itself but is rather dependent on how the brand makes the most of it.

We discovered that it is possible for a brand to shift between Underdog Positions according to their necessity. Polestar is a prime example of that, as they used to be a Fighting Underdog that shifted into a Striving Underdog. We conclude that a former Top Dog should quickly try to transition out of their hazardous Position and any Fighting Underdog or Conscious Underdog that outgrows its Positioning should actively do the same.

A brand must ensure they accurately categorise themselves within the correct Underdog Position. Referring back to the definition of an Underdog ensures a brand does not attempt to position as an Underdog whilst being too big to fit the parameters of an Underdog. For an Underdog Positioning to be successful it must be believable to consumers. Caution must be taken regarding positioning a brand as an Underdog in industries in which functional products are produced. This is due to negative preconceptions existing in cases of consumers believing Underdog products are ‘inferior’ to that of established Top Dogs.

This Thesis is concluded by studying the correlation of Rhetoric and Underdog Brand Positions. We noticed that the Rhetorical Appeal of Logos tends to be associated almost solely with the Striving Underdog Position. We also determined that Ethos and Pathos are the most significant Rhetorical Dimensions when it comes to Underdog brands in general, especially for Fighting Underdog and Conscious Underdog Position, as those dimensions align perfectly with what an Underdog Brand conveys.

## 7.1 Theoretical Contributions

Our first theoretical contribution is the in depth exploration of an Underdog Brand Position. Previous literature typically focuses on the phenomenon of Underdog Branding or ‘The Underdog Effect’ whilst we explore the different positions associated within Underdog Branding. This theory allows researchers to uncover what an Underdog position entails; how are Underdog Brand Positions used and why and when is an Underdog Brand Position a viable strategy.

Our second contribution was the construction of The Underdog Brand Position Framework. This was the first time (as far as we are aware) that a framework enabling the categorisation of different Positions an Underdog Brand can pursue was introduced to literature. This study enriched the theoretical understanding of Underdog Brands as until now the closest consideration of a Positioning for an Underdog Brand was positioning through the ‘David vs Goliath’ strategy. This strategy was employed by brands such as Avis and Fritz Kola (Steenkamp & Schmidt, 2021), which by itself is not a clearly defined Position that an Underdog can pursue. The Framework not only englobes Positioning as in its construction there was need for research on the realm of Brand communication, image, identity, and strategy. After carefully analysing the Framework, four different elements emerged from the cross-over of the variables ‘Embracing an Underdog positioning’ (X-axis) and the adoption of such being a ‘Strategic Decision’ or not (Y-axis). These elements account for the different Positions discovered that are namely, Former Top Dog; Striving Underdog; Fighting Underdog, and Conscious Underdog.

Our third theoretical contribution to the field of Underdog Branding was the consideration of the connection between Rhetoric and Underdog Positions. The appliance of Rhetoric to Underdog Brands is narrowed down by focusing on each specific Underdog Position. This allows us to identify when and what Rhetorical appeals to utilise when implementing a specific Underdog Brand Position. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first comprehensive research on how the Rhetorical Appeals, namely Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, are strategically employed by Underdog Brands to enhance their Underdog Position. We are pioneers of pointing out the interconnection between Rhetoric and Underdog Brands in

theory. The research suggests that the Rhetorical Dimensions of Ethos and Pathos, are in general extremely important for Underdog Brands, especially for the Fighting Underdog and Conscious Underdog Positions. On the other hand, the remaining dimension (Logos) tends to be associated with a Striving Underdog Position, due to this Position focusing on being seen as a Top Dog.

Lastly, our fourth theoretical contribution is the general insights we added to the existing body of literature concerning Underdog Branding. We gathered a vast amount of data from different Underdog Brand Marketing employees, Underdog Brand Experts, Consultants and Academics which ended up being credible and valuable to gain insights about the phenomenon of Underdog Brands. We end up touching upon, reflecting and discussing crucial ideas that to the best of our knowledge were until now, overlooked by the literature.

We introduce the idea of an Underdog Position being non eternal and that Underdogs will eventually outgrow their Position. We also present the desire of some Underdogs to be seen as Top dogs, which was not considered in previous literature. Finally we also introduced the idea that in some industries it is not advisable to be seen as an Underdog. This was an insight that emerged during our interviews with Underdog Brand Expert, consultants and academics (1) and (2), which turned out to be crucial for our research. All of these reflections, besides being valuable for our research and discussion, enhanced the phenomenon of Underdog Brand Positioning. Leading us to believe this is also a crucial theoretical contribution.

## 7.2 Managerial Implications

In Brand Management, Positioning is a concept of great importance that is meticulously discussed by the marketing department of any brand regardless of the complexity of their strategy. Our advice is useful for anyone from junior to senior positions within the marketing department, as to successfully conduct a Brand Strategy and to be on the same page in terms of positioning and communication. There is also a need for awareness of clear goals and guidelines. The first implication relates to the application of our framework, the second implication concerns the different options existing for each of the Positions and the third managerial implication consists of a concise set of small tips for the brand manager.

The first Managerial implication, refers to how Brand Managers apply our framework to their Underdog Brand. The first fundamental step is to accurately evaluate what is the current position of the Brand and to the best of the brand managers knowledge choose the Underdog Position that fits best. A hasty evaluation might lead to disastrous outcomes, so we stress the importance of conducting a good assessment of the company situation. After an understanding of the suitable Underdog Position has been acquired, the Brand manager must keep in mind that strategy is constant change. The Brand Position is prone to shift overtime due to various reasons, this includes changes in the brand core, goals and motivations (Polestar Example); the brand outgrowing its identity and no longer being considered an Underdog and the extremely urgent transition in case of the Former Top Dog Position. Only after this, the Brand Manager must be mindful that there are different means to implement its specific Underdog Brand Position as a strategy.

The second Managerial implication concerns what Brand Managers must take into account after settling for one specific underdog Position. It is crucial for the manager to recognise the potential for the brand to assume different Underdog positions when operating in various markets (Thalus Water example). Nevertheless, it is imperative to bear in mind that only a Striving Underdog Position and a Conscious Underdog Position can complement each other effectively, with any other combination being increasingly likely to harm the Brand Image. The two Underdog Positions in which it is a strategic decision to embrace the Underdog status or not, are used as a strategy by the brand (Striving Underdog and Fighting Underdog). The brand manager must acknowledge that to fulfil these strategies there are different approaches that they can pursue. There is not a guarantee that a previously applied approach will work with maximum certainty, leaving the job to assess the best option to the Brand Manager. Likewise, there are definitely approaches that were not identified in this Thesis and it is the Brand Manager duty to discover them and apply if suitable. For a Striving Underdog Position, with its goal of being seen as a Top Dog, we identified the role model approach (Polestar) and the awareness leader approach (Thalus Water Local market). For a Fighting Underdog, with the objective of challenging the Top Dogs, we have identified the call-Out approach (Oatly); the disruptive approach (Liquid Death); the effort emphasis approach (Avis) and the mocking approach (Fritz Kola). A special note should be made for the Conscious Underdog as this Position is not strategy in itself. Brand Managers should understand that Conscious Underdogs don't mind the underdog Status and they don't

necessarily need it for their strategy, they are especially dependent on how they address the market. For example, even though they embrace their Underdog Position, Sibylla's strategy is to be the most Swedish option in a market dominated by international players. On other hand, the specific strategy of the Fighting Underdog Oatly is being the Underdog. Oatly presents a specific approach that involves calling out the Top Dog, which is highly dependent on their Underdog status and regards their strategy of clearly leveraging this Position

To conclude our Managerial Implications chapter, we have compiled a handful of suggestions for a Marketing Department to consider when analysing their Brand Strategy. This will function as our third Managerial Implication and these additional recommendations should not be seen as a detailed compilation but rather as a simple summary with practical tips and ideas based on our observations during the study:

- There is a need for a careful examination of each Position to categorise the brand, as a faulty one can be devastating.
- There is a lack of clarity on the use of Underdog Brand Positioning in industries of functional products.
- Brands that require their products to be used in an ecosystem to enhance consumers' experience (Apple) are most likely better to follow a Striving Underdog Position.
- Shifting from one Position to another is a long term process as there is a change in communication, identity positioning, and image.
- Even though there are certain Rhetorical appeals that are predominant for Underdogs, the Brand Manager should always try to integrate all three to the best of their capabilities.

## 7.3 Limitations and Future Research

### *7.3.1 Limitations*

One of the most notable limitations of our study was the sample size of cases. With only four case studies carried out our possibility of discovering more possible avenues of how an

Underdog Position could be carried out is likely to be inhibited. Rhetorical analysis of language was also inhibited by a small case poll. A larger case poll would have allowed a more accurate means of investigating the language used in Underdog brand biographies with the aim of convincing consumers a brand is truly an Underdog.

The sample size of respondents also limited our research due to only having fifteen respondents. We were unable to explore the Underdog Position in specific industries and in turn, we had to generalise industries. This was due to conflicting opinions amongst brand experts on whether or not an Underdog Position can be adopted in all industries.

Within our study, there is a lack of longitudinal perspective as all of our cases are from a time span of the past decade. Even though we were able to encounter one example of a Position shift (Polestar), the time span may have inhibited us from discovering other developments of such Positions when longer timespan has elapsed.

The subjectivity of analysis is a limitation that is unavoidable in Qualitative research, although it can be mitigated. Other researchers may interpret our data completely differently than us as analysis is a subjective interpretation of results and findings.

### *7.3.2 Future Research*

Although this study only briefly touched upon Underdog branding in B2B, with the likes of Thalus Water and Weptile. We gathered indications of Underdog brands focusing on B2B as the means to implement their Underdog Position strategically and indications of Underdog businesses attracting other Underdog businesses/agencies. It is apparent to us that there is sufficient evidence available to warrant future research. Possible future research could include case studies conducted with a sample poll consisting entirely of B2B brands to discover the differences of Positioning in B2C in comparison of B2B or a study to check the plausibility of B2B brands being categorised by the Positions developed in this thesis.

In future, it would be interesting to conduct more qualitative interviews with Marketing Department employees from a multitude of brands in order to build more cases and discover



more categorisations to implement our Underdog Positions strategically. By doing so, the researcher might be able to either expand on our existing framework or to use it as a basis to develop a new framework which is capable of not only categorising but also used as a scale to measure where the brands are allocated between the different Positions.

Although we introduced the idea of industries in which an Underdog Positioning isn't viable, there is still not enough data to confirm with full certainty all of the industries in question. Therefore, considering the intriguing fact that only respondents with a storytelling/copywriting background believe that a brand can be seen as an Underdog in any industry while other respondents argue that there are industries where it is unfavourable to be seen as one. It would be insightful to conduct a study focused on discovering which industries are not desirable for brands to position themselves as an Underdog.

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## *Appendix A - Interview Guide*

### Interview Questions

1. Could you tell me your role and talk very briefly about your work at XXX?
2. Do you consider XXX as an Underdog? Why?
3. Do you think the consumer sees XXX as an Underdog?
4. Could you tell me about XXX marketing strategies, what are they, why they were implemented and what is their goal?
5. Would you say being seen as an Underdog in XXX industry is good or bad? Why?
6. Why would you like to be seen as an Underdog?
7. How do you utilise your Underdog Positioning?
8. Is it good for a brand to be seen as an Underdog in this market? Why?

## *Appendix B - Brand Advertisements*



*Figure 8. Polestar Superbowl Ad*



*Figure 9. Sibylla Product Campaign on their website*



*Figure 10. Poster outside a Sibylla in Malmö, Sweden*



*Figure 11. Oatly Climate Foot-Print Billboard*



*Figure 12. WOW NO COW Ad*