Interview with Self-Proclaimed Soda Lover

1. Hi, what is your name?

[Redacted]

1. Just for the record, would you be okay with your name being used? If not, your name will be redacted.

No. I’m sorry. I would be okay with my name being out there usually, but the topic this interview is about is kind of embarrassing to be honest.

1. Would you like to go on with the interview?

Yeah, it’s all good, I just don’t really want my name out there.

1. What is your age and gender?

Female and I’m 23 years old.

1. What is your ethnicity?

My mom is, like, half-Chamorro, half-Carolinian and my dad is half-Palauan, half-Chamorro. So I guess I’d say I’m half-Chamorro, ¼ Carolinian, and ¼ Palauan.

1. If you do not mind me asking, what would you classify your weight as?

Well, obviously looking at me you wouldn’t say I’m skinny, would you? I’m overweight, I don’t wanna give you specifics, but yeah, I’m overweight.

1. Do you consume sugary drinks?

Like soda? Yes.

1. How often do you consume these types of drinks?

Pretty often. I drink at the very least two or more a day. Usually, I would drink, like, one soda and then I’d drink Kool-Aid to balance it out. I love things like KingCar and Hi-C, even though I know it’s bad. I hate to admit it, but I don’t really like water. I think that when you drink so much sweet then water will start to taste nasty.

1. Would you consider yourself addicted to sugary drinks?

I don’t know if I’d say, “addicted,” but I will admit it’s a problem.

1. If you really wanted to stop drinking sugary drinks, would you be able to?

No. Like I said, I hate the taste of water. And those drinks that are 100 percent natural juice? Nasty. I tried the Naked Green Machine, like, two weeks ago and I almost threw up.

1. You keep mentioning that you hate water. Does this mean that you do not drink water at all?

I mean I’d drink water if it was the only thing around, but no, I don’t drink plain water if I can help it.

1. A sugar tax involves charging extra for drinks that contain added sugars (e.g., $0.85 soda will be $0.95). If this was implemented here, would it affect how often you buy these types of drinks? Please explain your answer.

To be perfectly, honest, no it won’t. I mean, I feel like it would in the beginning. Like, I’d be kind of pissed that I would have to pay almost a dollar for soda or like $1.50 for King Car that I’d not buy them out of anger. But then I’d completely get over it and start buying those drinks again. I’m not strong enough to live on only water, man.

1. Surveys have shown that a vast number of people here on Saipan are quite unhealthy and that about 75% of adults here drink one or more sugary drinks per a day. Do you think a sugar beverage tax could potentially improve health on Saipan? Why or why not?

No. I feel like us locals here are stubborn and we don’t like being told what to do. I feel like it’s going to be like the whole cigarette situation. No matter how high you raise the price, there are always going to be people who would buy it no matter what.

1. Do you believe implementing a sugar beverage tax here would be fair to the businesses and the people?

I’m not sure. I’d like to say yes, only because I know for a fact that businesses here wouldn’t really be affected by it. Like I said earlier, I feel like people would still buy it no matter what.

1. If a sugar tax were to be applied here, the money gathered from the tax will ultimately end up in the hands of the government. What do you think should be done with the money gathered?

Oh, yikes, the government gets the money? How are you sure that they’ll actually use the money for whatever they promise they’ll use it for anyway? Sorry. Anyways, I’d want the money to maybe go to PSS to rebuild Hopwood. I have a little sister that goes to school there and I feel bad for her.

1. In 2016, a couple of representatives proposed the idea of a sugar tax to Congress, but it was very unpopular with businesses, the government, as well as the people. If they were to try and reintroduce this idea today, do you think it would pass? Please explain your answer.

Oh no, man. There’s no way that bill would pass. People here would riot and be so angry about it. With the whole austerity thing and the FBI raid that just happened recently, I don’t think the people would happy if the government tried to bring this into reality.

1. How do you personally feel﻿ about the implementation of a sugar tax here on Saipan? Explain why you think so.

I don’t hate the idea because I know nothing will stop me from drinking soda, but I also don’t like it. I really wouldn’t want to have to pay extra for drinks, especially if I know it won’t stop me. I think if maybe the government were to take the money and spend it on fixing the island, like rebuilding Hopwood, then I’d be onboard. I’d most likely even give them most of their revenue.

Interview with College Student from Oakland, California

1. Hi. What is your name?

Amberlyn Palacios

1. Just for the record, would you be okay with your name being used? If not, your name will be redacted.

Yes

1. Can you tell me where you’re from?

Oakland, California

1. You guys have a sugar tax there, is this true?

Yes, there is a sugar tax implemented on sugared drinks with preadded sugars, excluding certain products.

1. Can you explain to me what the sugar tax does and how much it increases the price of drinks with added sugars?

Essentially the sugar tax purpose here is to deter the sale of sugary drinks and directly charges the distributors that bring in the sodas into Oakland.  Those distributors are known to also charge secondhand distributors such as Safeway or liquor stores that distribute sodas and other sugary beverages in the area.  There is a charge of $0.01 per ounce on sugar-sweetened beverages.  It also has to be paid BEFORE the sale of the beverages.

1. What was the purpose of your government implementing the tax?

The purpose was to stop the high distribution of sugary-drinks, I believe.  I know that in the beginning of advocation for the tax, a strong argument was that the purpose was to help prevent childhood obesity which was on a steady incline.

1. Personally, are you for or against the sugar tax? Please explain why or why not.

Personally, the sugar tax does not really directly affect me since it is more for the distributors, but it is really easy to find a loophole and charge more without citing it as the sugar tax to make up for their lost charges.   If it were to directly affect me, I am not sure I would feel any different as the charge is a smaller amount.  We already have a CRV tax placed on recyclable containers here regardless of sugary drinks.  These are more in place to try and find a way to help the public or environment as opposed to a blatant money grab.

1. Did the implementation of the sugar tax affect your buying habits? Your drinking habits?

It did not affect my drinking habits, honestly.  I am not sure many people notice when they are being charged extra, (as seen with the plastic tax: many people do not even know they are being charged extra $0.10).  If they charged a more hefty amount to me directly, I am sure my drinking habits would change.

1. As a college student, do you feel like the sugar tax is unfair to college students? Please explain.

I feel as if the sugar tax is not implemented here to be unfair, but it is implemented to help public health and avoid drinking sugary drinks.  It should be noted, however, that I do not know anyone who is affected by the tax so it is hard to know if it is helping anyone.  It does seem that it is somewhat pointless to have a tax on something that people do not feel strongly about.

1. Would you say the tax is popular or unpopular among other college students? Why or why not?

Again, I feel as if students are less aware of what they purchase and the price of the things that they purchase, especially something as trivial as a beverage (excluding financially ill citizens).  I do remember, however, that when the prospect of a sugar tax on citizens was first brought up that many people were strongly opposed as it felt similar to the tea tax that caused the Boston Tea Party, but after it was passed, it died down rather quickly.  That is why I am unsure that it had the desired effect on the people.

1. Whatever the purpose of the tax was, do you personally feel as though the tax is fulfilling that purpose?

It is definitely not fulfilling its purpose as it does not deter young people to stop buying beverages containing sugary drinks or stopping distributors from bringing sugary drinks into the city.  Those were the two main groups of people it was aimed at and it is not having its desired effect nor do I think it will.

1. Due to your experience with one, would you recommend that a sugar tax be implemented in other places as well?

I do not think that a sugar tax is useful, to be honest.  It does not decrease the sale or consumption of sugary beverages which was its main purpose.  Until it fulfills that purpose in a significant way, I would not recommend it.  However, I do think that a recyclable container tax is useful which is similar but covers a broader area.