

**Project Dissertation Report on**  
**WHAT FACTORS MAKE AN**  
**ADVERTISEMENT CONTROVERSIAL?**

**Submitted By**

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation report titled “WHAT FACTORS MAKE AN ADVERTISEMENT CONTROVERSIAL?”, is a bonafide work carried out by Ms. Rashmi Tyagi of MBA 2019-21 and submitted to Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, Bawana Road, Delhi-42 in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Masters of Business Administration.

**Signature of Guide**  
(DSM)

**Signature of HOD**

Place:

Seal of HOD

Date:

## **DECLARATION**

I, Rashmi Tyagi, student of MBA 2019-21 of Delhi School of Management, Delhi Technological University, Bawana Road, Delhi – 42, hereby declare that the dissertation report “WHAT FACTORS MAKE AN ADVERTISEMENT CONTROVERSIAL?” submitted in partial fulfilment of Degree of Masters of Business Administration is the original work conducted by me.

The information and data given in the report is authentic to the best of my knowledge. This report is not being submitted to any other University, for award of any other degree, diploma or fellowship.

PLACE:

Rashmi Tyagi

DATE:

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

It is pleasure to acknowledge many people who helped me in ways more than one to complete my project.

First & foremost, a deep sense of gratitude is owed Mr. Yashdeep Singh for his immense motivations and encouragement to always explore new ways and guidance on how to bring in new and fresh perspective to work.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project report is based on offensive and controversial advertising. Over time, advertising has become an integral part of our lives. With the increase in products, the advertising level has increased too. In the times of social media, it has become easy to identify the likes, dislikes and patterns of a particular consumer on internet to target him with very directed advertisements.

Amidst this clutter, the advertising agencies and the advertisers are trying hard to capture the attention of the consumers. This leads to them coming up with creative ways to create path-breaking advertisements. However, often, an advertisement sparks out controversies and offends the target population.

This report dives deep into the factors responsible for an ad to be taken as offensive by the consumers. Based on previous literature reviews and reports, a list of 11 factors is identified. Additionally, to better understand how these factors influence the controversy, 11 controversial advertisements are discussed in how the factors played a role in the consumers taking an offense to them.

A survey is administered to a sample of 63 respondents who rate various factors in how does each of them offends them in the context of an advertisement.

The findings indicate that most of the predominant factors have an average rating of greater than 3, the mean score on a Likert-type scale of 1-5.

These findings are useful for any agency or advertisers to better understand the consumer perception.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Advertising is the most commonly identified form of marketing. It has taken over the world in such a way that to ask a common person of their understanding of marketing, the first word is usually advertising. It is present in almost all the aspect of our lives, though we may or may not be aware of it.

With the increase in competition, advancement in technology and employment of new creative, there has been host of ways devised to get the message across to the consumers. However, with this rise in advertisements all around, there has been increase in questions about the ethics of advertising.

In the world of advertising, where every agency is looking out ways to stand out or cut through the clutter, there are going to be scenarios when the audience will be offended. As society advances, our perspective of what we consider offensive changes drastically. Agencies may try to break from the clutter by being more creative, leading to creativity that general public may find offensive.

The feelings evoked by an advertisement campaign in the consumers relates and reflects both on the ad and the brand. There has been a rise in the advertisements related to personal hygiene products, explicit bra ads, condom ads and menstruation products. This rapid change in the strategy by the brands and advertising agencies has led to even more conflicting opinions

## Background

The narrative around controversial advertising has two sides: either the product is controversial like alcohol, cigarettes etc., or the ad campaign has elements that offends the general public. The controversial products are the 'Lost causes' ('T Matthews', 1997) which include products like cigarettes, gambling, alcohol.

The advertising industry has what is called an Unholy Quaternity

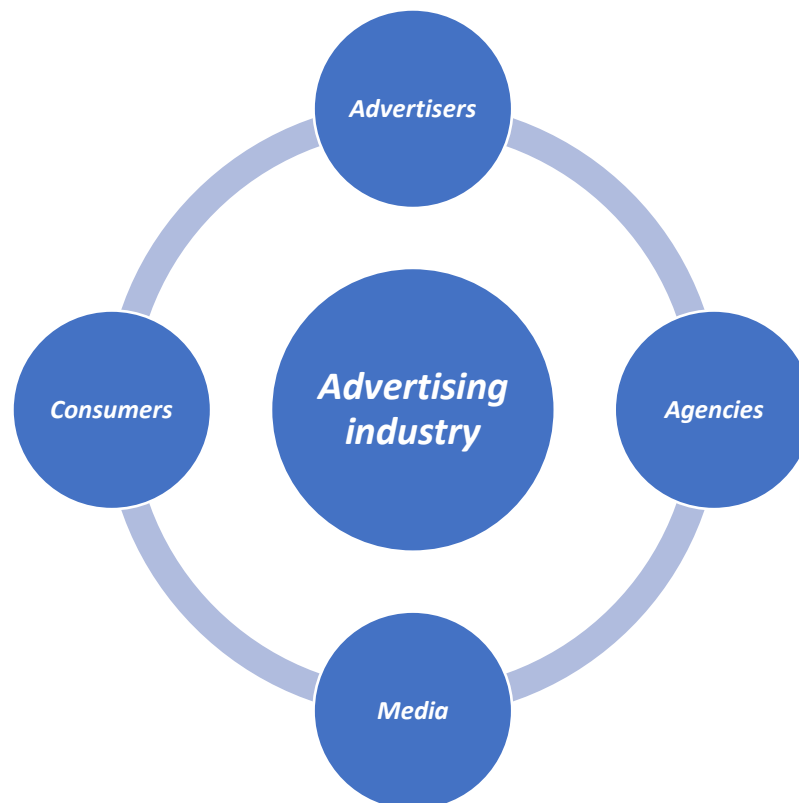


Fig 1.1 The Unholy Quaternity of Advertising Industry

These 4 factors of Advertisers, Agencies, Media and Consumers relate to Product, Execution, Medium, and Audiences respectively and can be used interchangeably.

With the interplay of these 4 factors, it become necessary to review and examine every advertisement and campaign from these four perspectives and understand if there are any unethical or offensive for any of these the elements.

A consumer who has no interest in a particular product is also exposed to the ad due to the TV show being interrupted by the commercial. Hence, something that is received



well in print/radio campaigns may not work so well for TV (Barnes Jr. and Doston, 1990).

Benetton company released an advertisement campaign with images throughout Europe which was received with different reactions around different (Riyait, 1993). It is a common perception of the advertising agencies that one formula fits all. However, everyone has their own set of beliefs that changes the way different people look at the same thing. In advertising too, these differences play their part in how a particular campaign is being looked at by different people. The basic component of advertising is to combine the visual imagery and the linguistic techniques to help shape the message being conveyed. The consumption ideology of the brand depends reflects in the meaning being interpreted by the consumers.

## **Problem Statement**

There can be reasons as to why a particular agency wants to take on such a product or campaign. The product may be well offset by the client, financial means, or such. For the campaign, the agency may wish to stir up emotions in order to get the publicity. An agency may also wish to establish itself as a pioneer in ads for controversial product, or developing out of the league campaigns that cause an uprising in emotions and are able to generate engagement with the brand.

The social organization and language vary widely. The two-way process of communication comes in the picture. If the message being sent by the sender is not the same as being interpreted by the receiver, there can be many complications. These differences need a common frame of reference to absolve themselves.

## **Objectives of the study**

The objective of this study is to identify the advertisements that have been regarded as controversial in the past and analyze the reasons behind them from the perspective of factors collected from previous studies.

There have been several studies done on the factors and the reasons responsible for an ad campaign to be offensive. With this there have also been studies done on the products and services that the public finds the most offensive when the advertisements are run for those.

In this study, we take a different approach and examine the advertisements that have already been found offensive are discussed in detail and rated on the factors.

Additionally, a survey was conducted to understand how the respondents feel about the advertisements which contain the parameters discussed in this report.

The findings of this study will be helpful to understand how the quaternary: advertisers, media, agency and the consumers are inter-related to each other.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

**(Waller, 1999)**

#### **Attitudes towards offensive advertising: an Australian study**

David S. Waller in his research paper presents an Australian perspective to the advertising of offensive products and the reasons for it. Offensive advertising has been studied across many literature pieces.

David Waller conducted an experimental study on university students by giving them a survey to fill consisting of two parts. The first part dealt with a list of products/services, and the other part had a list of reasons for offensive advertising. By employing a five-point Likert-type format, the responses were collected. The list of the offensive products was collated from past studies on the similar issue, notably by Wilson and West, 1981; Rehman and Brooks, 1987; Triff et al., 1987; Shao and Hill, 1994a; Fahy et al., 1995

The study establishes that racist and extremist ads were found to be the most offensive, followed by advertisements showcasing religious denominations. By employing a t-test to compare the responses between male and female, only two were found to be significantly different.

In the second part, for the reasons for offensive advertisements, females were found to be more offended than males for all the above products. Though both were almost similar on the mean score for the products and the reasons alcohol and male underwear, females are more offended with advertisements highlighting indecency, nudity, sexist, and racist behavior.

A controversial product can be a positive addition to the client list; it is important to determine what is offensive so that agencies can choose their client accordingly.

It is not just the product that is controversial but the advertisement too. This study forms a strong foundation that the audience has a general dislike for certain products. Keeping this in mind, an agency must very carefully analyze the projects it wants to take on.

**(Riyait, 1993)**

### **Is the Message Being Received? Benetton Analyzed**

Ian G. Evans and Sumandeep Riyait very beautifully brought out the differences in perception within Europe.

The researchers used 4 images from the Benetton campaign consisting of following:

1. New born baby with umbilical cord attached
2. Military cemetery
3. A zebra and a bright colored parrot
4. Children from three different races sticking their tongue out.

The company had specific themes in the mind when the campaigns were released. Four nationals from different groups were selected, one each from Britain, Norway, France and Germany. These 4 were given a questionnaire split into two sections. First part was an open-ended questionnaire to adjudge what the respondents thought of each image, and the second part was a close ended question to whether the themes Benetton had in mind were being exactly understood and perceived by the respondents. A score point system of 1 to 5 is used to identify the indifference or relatedness to the theme, with 1 being strongly disagreed to the theme and 5 being strong agreement. The objective of the study is to bring out the differences in the perception with the nationality and for this, a chi-square test is employed to get the measure employed.

The images and the meaning had a significant relationship with the nationality. With the statistical tests being employed, it has been clearly demonstrated that the images had not been perceived universally in the way Benetton had intended them to be.

This study sets a very important discussion point for the print campaigns. The visual imagery does not tell the consumers what the image is trying to depict. And while a broad paradigm is set, the boundaries can be pushed by individuals to suit their frame of reference.

**(Barnes Jr. and Doston, 1990)**

**An Exploratory investigation into the nature of Offensive Television Advertising**

The paper explores the multi-dimensional nature of offensive advertising by proposing two dimensions: offensive products and offensive execution. This dimension gains importance on the basis that advertisers and agencies can control offensive execution and for offensive products, they need to come up with novel campaigns.

The paper offers a definition of the offensive advertising as being composed of two separate and unrelated dimensions: products perceived as offensive due to their nature, and the execution of the advertisement which may have offensive elements. While offensive execution can be controlled to a large extent, there is little to no control on the offensive product. An exploratory study is conducted into the proposed dimensions.

21 commercials from previous studies are chosen and presented to the respondents. Commercials that were ranked to be the most offensive, above the mean score, are the ones that have a personal context. In this light it is important to understand the effects of particular groups and on particular groups.

A factor analysis to understand the factors behind the advertisement being perceived as offensive is also conducted. The factors related to the dimensions of the offensive advertising i.e., whether the product or the execution is offensive Regression values are calculated by regressing the values for that advertisement on the factor.

Demographics also play an important role in whether the advertisement is perceived as offensive. The study tests the demographics i.e., age, gender, marital status, education and religious disposition. As age increases, the perception of the ads being offensive also increased. This same trend is observed in the education. However, this may be affected by the medium under consideration. People with strong religious ties are also found to be more offensive towards the ads. Keeping in line with the trend, married people were found to be more offended.

This study confirms the multi-dimensionality of offensive advertising and how demographics can be an important deciding factor.

**(Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy, 1994)**

**Ethical Judgments of Political Television Commercials as Predictors of Attitude toward the ad**

This study takes a fresh perspective on the nature of advertisements being played across by targeting the political advertisements and their ethical nature. In the United States of America, the least regulated categories as it is excluded from surveillance by the regulatory bodies. There is also an absence of self-regulation as is practiced by the advertising agencies.

Political advertising is criticized as being unethical often by popular press. The practices which would be deemed as unethical and even illegal in commercial advertising are openly practiced in political advertising. The most common practice being the emotional persuasion. Hence, the criticism of political advertisements also extends to the moral compass.

Emotional context in any form of advertising can downplay the rational decision making. Messages with negative connotation are more harmful than the ones with positive connotation. When we choose a wrong product due to product or commercial advertising, the effects are not felt as strongly as the effects of electing a wrong candidate. This raises the ethical questions on the political advertising.

The purpose of this study is to understand the way voters uses 'ethics' while they see any political advertisement. In order to provide insights into this, several additional questions are answered namely the structure of cognitive responses, how the popular belief around the commercial being unethical or not affect the reception of that advertisement.

The study proposes a conceptual framework for examining the stimulus based on salient message cognitions, salient attitude, non-salient attitude and the global attitude towards the ad.

The study observes that the ethics is one of the top salient attributes. There is an extreme positive attitude towards considering ethics while evaluating a political advertisement. In terms of non-salient attributes, it is demonstrated that these also have a relatively significant attitude on how the ad campaign is being received and also act independently.

In terms of global attitude, there is a complex interplay of beliefs, The reception may vary from country to country, and people across different political affiliations.

This study is a pioneer in listing down the salient and non-salient features while looking at an advertisement from ethical point of view.

**(Fam and Waller, 2003)**

### **Advertising Controversial Products in the Asia Pacific: What Makes Them Offensive?**

This study presents a comprehensive view of offensive advertising in the Asia-Pacific region. There have been a lot of controversial advertisements and a lot of unethical practices being raised with many campaigns around the world. However, while this has caused a lot of brand damage to many companies, there also exists companies that have knowingly created controversy through advertisements.

This study looks the controversy in advertisements through the lens of cultural values and heritage of Asia-Pacific region. A questionnaire is distributed to university students comprising of Malaysia, Taiwan, China and New Zealand nationality. The respondents were asked to give their level of indicators of ‘offense’ for the 17 listed products from (Waller, 1999). They also had a list of reasons for offence taken from (Hill, 1994).

The researchers used multi-variate analysis to analyze the country effect on the offensive products and the reasons behind. It was observed that the variables did not have same effect across the countries. Additionally, addictive products, health and care products, social and political campaigns, and sex related products were the most diverse from each other and statistically significantly different.

The major finding of the study is rooted in the fact that agencies need to consider the market and the culture while especially designing campaigns in markets around the world. Individualism, religion, and the confusion dynamism play an important role in the Asia Pacific market. Adhering to the norm, rather than focusing on the criteria of individual is more prominent here.

The study puts forth a view of media targeting strategy wherein the campaign is developed according to the distribution network of a particular medium.



**(Waller, Christy and Fam, 2008)**

### **Perceptions of Offensive Advertising Elements: A China–U.S. Comparison**

This study sheds light on the Chinese influx of new business and the advertising opportunities. Amidst the increasing competition, it becomes important for the marketing and consumer communication to be increasingly creative. One of the unique things about Chinese market and its consumers is their deeply rooted traditions and cultural values.

The researchers administered a questionnaire to the university level students at different cities across the U.S. and China. The respondents were asked to rate the enlisted products and services and in the second part, answer the reasons for offense. The researchers placed limitation on the age range from 18-23.

There is a wide disparity between the responses from U.S. and China. While U.S. sample only found racially extremist ads to be offensive above the mean score of 3, Chinese counterparts had 7 items above the mean score of 3.

For the offensive execution dimension (Barnes Jr. and Doston, 1990), U.S. sample has racist and sexist image as offensive, while Chinese sample has Indecent language, anti-social behavior, nudity and racism as offensive execution.

The prevalent differences can be attributed to the advertising being relatively new in china as compared to U.S. Again, cultural values, traditions, importance of moderation in the Chinese community play a huge important role in the results being as they are. This study gives a fundamental standing to the agencies that in the world of international advertising, it's just not the language, and one size does not fit all.

**(Singh and Vij, 2008)**

### **Public Attitude toward Advertising (An Empirical Study of Northern India)**

This study focuses on understanding the consumer behavior in terms of controversial and offensive advertising from Indian perspective. India being a multi-cultural and multi-religion country is a complex market where offense and controversy to an advertisement are dominated by religious feelings. This study puts forth the concept of attitude-institution and attitude-instrument.

The attitude towards advertisement is greatly influenced by attitude towards advertising in general. This attitude forms the basis of why certain ads are perceived as enjoyable, irritating, or offensive. Attitude institution is the attitude towards institution that is the purpose that advertising has and attitude-instrument is the attitude towards the execution of the advertisement.

A survey is administered across 7 states in North India to a pool of 900 respondents. The responses establish that people generally have positive outlook towards advertising. However, attitude-instrument, attitude-institution and attitude towards advertising in general are three separate concepts. Despite this, these are correlated and vary significantly across samples. Demographics also seem to affect the attitude towards advertising. Young people, people in lower income groups, females and people living in joint family have a more positive and favorable outlook towards advertising. Education affects the attitude that people in the higher education strata find advertising to be stronger and cleaner as compared with other population.

This study gives out the concept of how attitude towards advertisements is correlated with the purpose and execution of advertisement in general. It also relates out important demographic features and their relation with advertisements.

**(Beard, 2008)**

### **Advertising and Audience Offense: The Role of Intentional Humor**

This study does a fresh take on humor in advertising and how under particular situations, humor can be offensive to public. With a great deal of research on potentially offensive products and services, humor does not seem to be belonging to that category. However there have been incidents of ad campaigns being criticized because the agency intended to use humor in the campaign that did not sit well with the receivers and the public. The outcry against Snicker's "Slag of all snacks" and Snickers' "Car mechanic kiss" are the top examples of humor related controversies.

Based on previous research, it has been noted that humor is often used with offensive product/execution, though there have been multiple campaigns that have employed humor with important items. One of the reasons can be to dissipate the tension and

distract the consumers from the seriousness of the product, or the execution of the campaign.

The researchers used 300 advertisement reports to Advertising Standards Authority of New Zealand (ASA-NZ). The complaints were categorized into different categories based on humor, by scrutinizing them from the perspective of the complainant by using the comments provided by them.

The definitions used to further provide context to the study were, “was the humor intentional”, “basic ethics rules”, “medium of the campaign” etc. On humor type, the complaints were categorized as:

- Incongruity-Resolution
- Arousal-Safety
- Disparagement
- Relatedness

The study finds out that the intentional humor often offends consumers, and the non-humor ad campaign can be just as offensive as humor-based campaign. Whenever an ad campaign tries to disguise an inherent offensive theme under the guise of humor, backlash is expected to be followed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology followed in this report is two-fold. The design is Descriptive Research. Descriptive studies are well organized, they tend to be unyielding and its approach cannot be altered every now and then.

Descriptive studies are undertaken in many conditions.

- When the researcher is involved in knowing the characteristics of certain groups
- When the researcher is interested in knowing the proportion of people in given population who behaves in a particular manner, making projection of certain things.

In the first part advertisement/campaigns are discussed based on factors responsible for offensiveness., 11 factors have been identified from the literature review and other studies conducted in the past. These are listed as below:

1. Anti-social behavior
2. Concern for children
3. Health and safety
4. Indecent language
5. Nudity
6. Racist
7. Sexist
8. Stereotyping
9. Violence
10. Religious concerns
11. Politics

To work with these factors, 9 controversial and offensive advertisements have been identified which would be ranked for the above factors.

The 11 controversial advertisements are:

1. Pepsi 2017 ad 'Live for Now' starring Kendall Jenner
2. Cadbury Temptations 2002 ad 'too good to share'
3. Head & Shoulder 2014 ad – 'Stop, before you stop being a man'
4. Dove 2017 'Black to White' ad
5. Avon 2019 'Anti-cellulite' campaign
6. Kurl-On 'Bounce Back'
7. Tuff Shoes
8. Motorola 'Gotchamoto'
9. YouFoodz 'Forkin Fresh'
10. Meat and Livestock Australia 'Pick a Lamb'

The second aspect of the research is based on a questionnaire which asks for basic demographic questions: Age, Gender, Education, Religiosity. It then asks the respondents to rate certain factors for offensiveness on 5-point Likert scale where 1 is least offensive and 5 is most offensive.

This allows to form a profile of the consumers' attitude towards how the advertisements with certain factors are perceived by the users. The questions are so designed that they represent the factors. The factors used in the questionnaire are related to the factors used to analyze the controversial ad campaigns.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA COLLECTION**

The data for these campaigns is collected from multiple news publications. When an ad is found to be offensive, or sparks a controversy, multiple news publications cover the issue. In addition, Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) websites has been taken to uncover some campaigns that were bought to the regulatory body's notice.

For the survey, the questionnaire has been so designed that it covers the main factors discussed in this report. The sample population chosen for this survey are students and working people, predominantly in the age bracket of 19-35. The reason behind this is the wide diversity in background, and their familiarity with various advertisements.

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA PRESENTATION

#### Campaign Discussion

1. PepsiCo's 2017 ad starring Kendall Jenner

##### Problem

PepsiCo launched a protest-theme campaign titled 'Live for Now' in 2017. The ad was targeted at the Black Lives Matter movement that was gaining strong foothold in United States of America. The attempt was to show the brand being millennial-friendly and supportive of social movement. However, the brand ended up trivializing the matter by putting a white person at the Person of Color movement and showcasing that a Pepsi can bring the protesters and security forces close. The ad was removed withing 48 hours of its release.

##### Analysis

The Live for now campaign starring Kendall Jenner trivialized an important social movement (Smith, 2017) and did not take into account the first-hand experience of the protestors. Racism (Tilman, 2017) is the main issue that made the offensive to a wide population.

2. Cadbury Temptations 2002 ad 'too good to share'

##### Problem

Cadbury released an Independence Day campaign in 2002 to promote its Cadbury Temptations. The campaign displayed an Indian map with war-struck area of Jammu and Kashmir, highlighted and written over with message, "Too good to share". The campaign's timing was alluded to the fact that just months before, tensions have escalated and it was a raging issue. Cadbury issued a public apology for the same.

##### Analysis

The ad campaign played down the sensitivity around the political issue surrounding the status of Jammu & Kashmir. An issue that has led to millions of deaths, and

escalating tensions between two nations. Using a sensitized political campaign did not work in the favor of Cadbury (Cozens, 2002).

### 3. Head & Shoulder 2014 ad – ‘Stop, before you stop being a man’

#### Problem

Head & Shoulder launched an ad campaign to promote its range of men’s shampoo in 2014. The ad shows two males, in a gym, discussing about the problems faced with their house-help, while the other females in the gym looks at them disapprovingly. The ad then moves on to tell the audience that if you use women’s shampoo, you too will start behaving like women. The context being that only women discuss household related items. This particular campaign had other ads in the series where the punchline was to showcase women-like attributes in men and proceed to tell the audience that the reason is because the male is using a women’s shampoo.

#### Analysis

The campaign did not fare well with the audience. There was not a huge backlash, which can be attributed to the absence of strong presence of social media. However, the entire campaign was heavily criticized by the advertising community, and several leading publications. The ad was termed to be sexist, misogynistic and degrading women of any individuality.

### 4. Dove 2017 ‘Black to White’ ad

#### Problem

The ad campaign was released on Facebook for promoting Dove Body Lotion. The ad showcases a black woman with a Dove Body Lotion displayed towards the bottom right. The women then proceed to remove her shirt, along with her skin, and the frame then show her turning into a white woman.

#### Analysis

The ad inherently promoted racism by showcasing a black woman turning into a white woman by using Dove Body Lotion and faced a huge backlash. The community



backlashing the ad stated that the campaign feels like being black is something that should be changed. Dove proceeded to remove the ad from all platforms.

#### 5. Avon 2019 'Anti-cellulite' campaign

##### Problem

The cosmetic brand AVON released a campaign in 2019 urging the customers to be ready for their summer body to promote its anti-cellulite gel. The product is aimed at removing stretch marks from the body and the cellulite marks. The print ad showcases a woman, headlined that dimple looks cute on face, and not thighs.

##### Analysis

This campaign hurt the body-positive PR that AVON was carrying on for so long. By showcasing what a perfect body looks like the print ad did not only stereotype the perfect image of women but also is a sexist take on how women need to look.

#### 6. Kurl-On 'Bounce Back'

##### Problem

Kurl on released a campaign in 2014 to promote their mattresses. The campaign had several famous personalities like Steve Jobs, Mahatma Gandhi, Malala Yousafzai in cartoon avatars. The print shows these personalities in their grim time of lives, bouncing back to reach even greater heights, Steve Jobs is seen being thrown out of Apple, Mahatma Gandhi is seen being thrown out of a train compartment, However, Malala is seen as being shot by the Taliban.

##### Analysis

The campaign was tone-deaf in using a horrible incident from the life of a teenage girl. The ad promotes violence and is insensitive to the ongoing tensions and politics in the South-Asian region

## 7. Tuff Shoes

### Problem

1995 had an ad campaign from Tuff Shoes which was a major controversy. The ad showcases two models, Milind Soman and Madhu Sapre wearing Tuff Shoes. The two models were nude and a Python wrapped around them.

### Analysis

The ad showcased nudity at a time in India when there was no social media. A legal case was also filed against the models, publishers and the producers. The cultural and traditional mindset of the consumers did not allow them to dial down the issue and they were yet not sensitized to nude exposure in public.

## 8. Motorola 'Gotchamoto'

### Problem

In the year 2008, before the advent of smartphones, Motorola released a handset, C550 Clicker, with powerful picture taking abilities. In order to promote the handset, an ad was released which showcases the various situations in which the handset could be used to click photos. The situations shown are distasteful in taste, like a man and a woman going out of a ladies' restroom. The ad shows that taking pictures can be a fun activity.

### Analysis

The ad promoted anti-social behavior by promoting that taking pictures secretly, without the consent and stealthily is a good activity without mentioning that these are illegal activities.

#### 9. Youfoodz 'Forkin' Fresh'

##### Problem

In 2017, Youfoodz released an ad to market its fresh products, The ad showcases a young boy stressing on the freshness of the ingredients in TV Chef Gordon Ramsay's style. The boy uses the term 'forking' as a direct reference to an obscene expletive.

##### Analysis

The company was fined by the ASA committee in an order that states that the ad was aired during a family show, Moreover, the reference to the obscene expletive is clear. This promotes anti-social behavior in children and also promotes using indecent language as fun

#### 10. Meat and Livestock Australia 'Lamb to share

##### Problem

In 2017, Meat and Livestock Australia released an ad campaign promoting their lamb meat. The ad showcases different deities and gods from religions all across the world. The ad also has a Hindu deity 'Ganesha'. On the table, Lamb meat is being consumed and passed around.

##### Analysis

The ad shows complete disregard to the religious sentiments of many religions across the world. By showcasing the gods consuming and celebrating over lamb meat hurt the religious sentiments of many people over the world. A case was filed against the producers in Sydney by Consulate General of India in Sydney and the High Commission of India, following which the ad was taken down.

#### 11. Heinz 'Learn the Can Song'

##### Problem

Heinz released an ad campaign in 2016 to promote Heinz Beans. Instead of promoting the product the ad showcases a unique way to use Heinz Beans empty tin cans by

turning them into musical instruments. The ad show adults and young children tapping away on empty tin cans to learn the Can song.

*Analysis*

The ad does not show any safety pre-requisites to seal the can before attempting to learn the song. Though the tutorials on how to safely tape the can are available, they are not included in the ad. Since tan cans are sharp, they pose a threat to the children, who may inadvertently take up empty tin cans and hurt themselves.

## Survey Discussion

### 1. Age

In this the respondents have to enter their age. The age has been divided into 4 brackets

>18

19-25

26-35

>35

Out of 63 responses, 65% of respondents belong to 19-25, 33,3% belong to 26-35, and 1.6% belong to >35

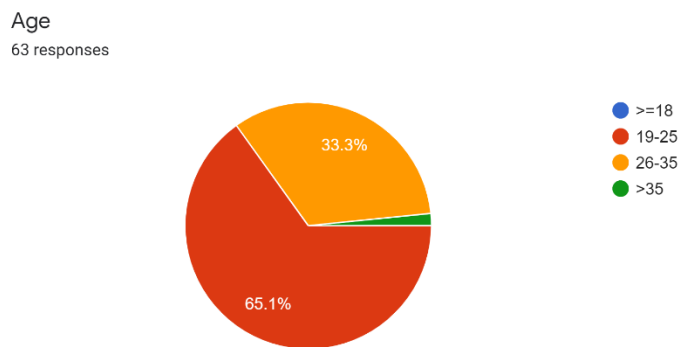


Fig 5.2 Distribution of Age of respondents

### 2. Gender

The Gender of the respondents can be male, female, or if the respondents prefer not to answer.

Out of 63 responses, 58.7% of the respondents are male, and 41.3% are female.

### 3. Highest Education

The respondents have to enter their highest education level(completed/pursuing). The responses are then split into graduation, post-graduation, pre-graduation.

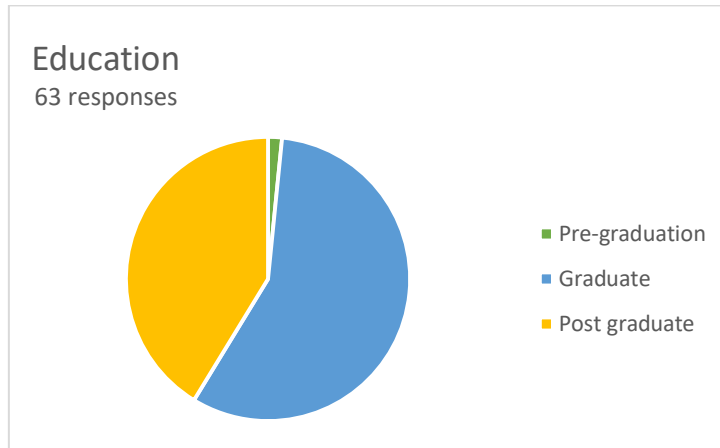


Fig 5.2 Distribution of Education of respondents

### 4. Religiosity

This question attempt to ask the respondents how religious they are on a scale of high and low.

34.9% have high religiosity, while 65.1% have low religiosity.

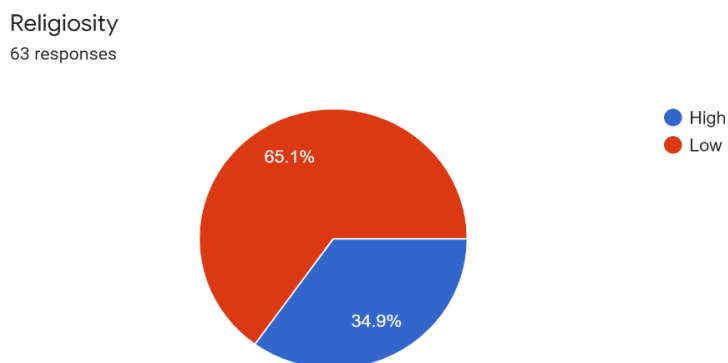


Fig 5.3 Distribution of Religiosity of respondents

In the next section, factors are listed that play a role in making the advertisement offensive to a group of people. The respondents are asked to rate each factor on a scale of 1-5, 1 being least offensive and 5 being most offensive, on how offensive would an advertisement with the factor be offensive to them.

5. Advertisements promoting anti-social behavior

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.65 on a scale of 5. 44 responses out of 63 (69.8 %) had score more than the average.

6. Promoting unhealthy behavior in children

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.8 on a scale of 5. 43 responses out of 63 (68.2 %) had score more than the average.

7. Healthy and Safety issues

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.4 on a scale of 5. 33 responses out of 63 (52.3 %) had score more than the average.

8. Indecent Language

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3 on a scale of 5. 24 responses out of 63 (38 %) had score more than the average.

9. Nudity

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.2 on a scale of 5. 28 responses out of 63 (44.4 %) had score more than the average

10. Racism

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.9 on a scale of 5. 47 responses out of 63 (74.6 %) had score more than the average

11. Promoting sexism in society

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.9 on a scale of 5. 46 responses out of 63 (73 %) had score more than the average

12. Stereotyping a general group of population

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.9 on a scale of 5. 44 responses out of 63 (69.8 %) had score more than the average.

13. Promoting violence

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 4 on a scale of 5. 35 responses out of 63 (55.5 %) had score more than the average.

14. Deceptive/Misleading

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.7 on a scale of 5. 40 responses out of 63 (63.4 %) had score more than the average

15. Showing a particular religion in bad-light

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 4.0 on a scale of 5. 35 responses out of 63 (55.5 %) had score more than the average



16. Inter-faith marriage

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 2.0 on a scale of 5. 19 responses out of 63 (30.15 %) had score more than the average

17. Inter-faith celebration of festivals

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 1.9 on a scale of 5. 24 responses out of 63 (38 %) had score more than the average

18. Using a political affair to promote the product

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.3 on a scale of 5. 31 responses out of 63 (49.2 %) had score more than the average

19. Using body-image issues

Out of 63 responses, the mean response is of 3.6 on a scale of 5. 39 responses out of 63 (61.9 %) had score more than the average.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS

Questions	Mean Score	% above mean score
Promoting anti-social behavior	3.6	69.80%
Promoting unhealthy behavior in children	3.8	68.20%
Healthy and Safety issues	3.4	52.30%
Indecent Language	3	38.00%
Nudity	3.2	44.40%
Racism	3.9	74.60%
Promoting sexism in society	3.9	73.00%
Stereotyping a general group of population	3.9	69.80%
Promoting violence	4	55.50%
Deceptive/Misleading	3.7	63.40%
Showing a particular religion in bad-light	4	55.50%
Inter-faith marriage	2	30.15%
Inter-faith celebration of festivals	1.9	38.00%
Using a political affair to promote the product	3.3	49.20%
Using body-image issues	3.6	61.90%

Table 6.1 Mean score of questions administered in the survey

The table above summarizes the responses from the questionnaire administered.

- It is evident that out of 15 factors, 11 factors had more than 50% of the respondents above the mean score.
- Inter-faith marriage, inter-faith celebration of festivals has an average score of less than 3, which is the general mean score on a scale of 1 to 5.

Factors	Pepsi	Cadbury	Head & Shoulder	Dove	Avon	Kurt-On	Tuff Shoes	Motorola TV Commercial	YouFoodz	Meat and Livestock Australia	Heinz
Anti-social behavior								✓	✓		
Concern for children									✓		
Health and safety											✓
Indecent language									✓		
Nudity							✓				
Racist	✓			✓							
Sexist			✓								
Stereotyping			✓		✓						
Violence						✓					
Religious concerns										✓	
Politics		✓				✓					

Table 6.2 Campaigns and the factors responsible behind the reasons for their offensiveness

The advertisements campaigns that have been discussed in this study fall under one of the factors from factors list that has been collated from previous studies. This shows that there are certain factors that need to be taken care of the 'Trinity of Advertising' i.e., Product, Execution, and Media.

While there are certain products that are considered taboo, or the lost causes, the advertisements for the products discussed did not belong to the taboo category.

## Survey Analysis

Few analyses done on the basis of gender and religiosity are shown below

### 1. Gender and Body-image issues



Females have a larger mean score than males for offense for ads showing body-image issues.

2. Gender and sexism

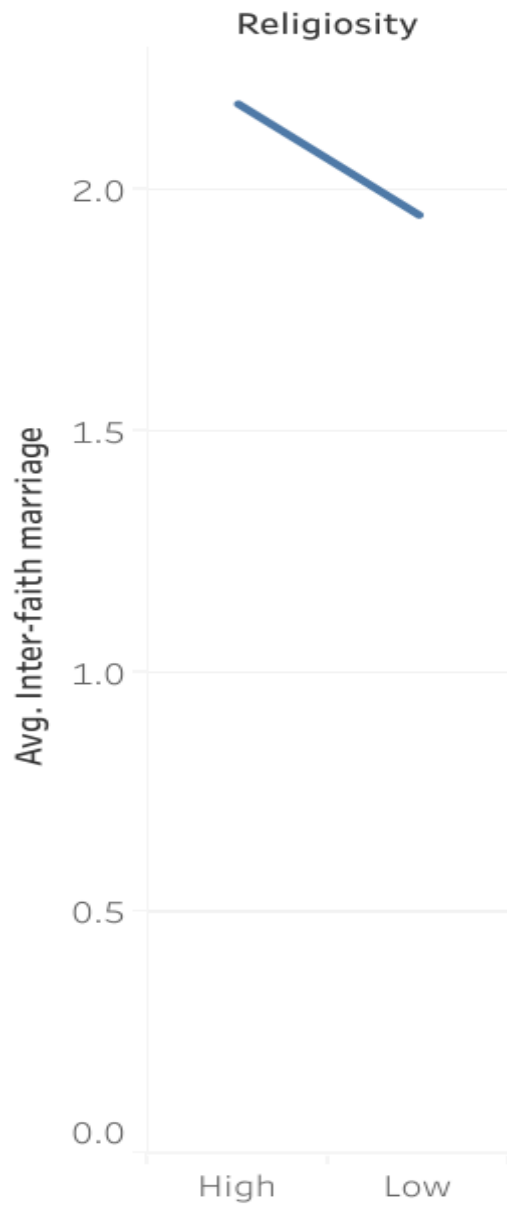
Gender v/s Sexism



Females are more offended by sexism in advertisements than their male counterparts, as indicated by their mean score

### 3. Religiosity and Inter-faith marriage

Religiosity v/s Inter-faith marriage

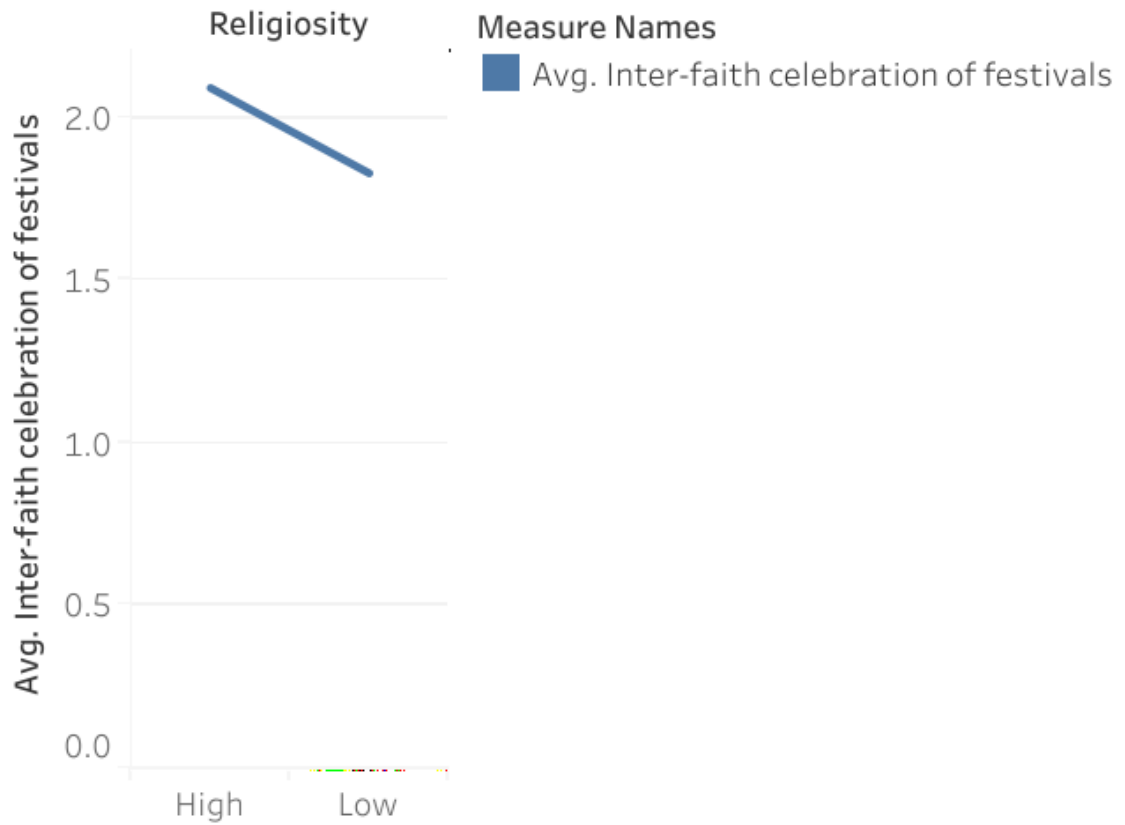


Respondents with high religiosity are more offended by portrayal of inter-faith marriage. However, the mean score is lower than 3. This indicates that the offense level is not very huge.



#### 4. Religiosity and inter-faith celebration of festivals

Religiosity v/s Inter-faith celebration of festivals



Respondents with high religiosity are more offended than respondents with low religiosity with an ad portraying inter-faith celebration of festivals.

5. Religiosity and showing a particular religion in bad light

Religiosity v/s showing a particular religion in bad light



Respondents with high religiosity are least offended with ads showcasing a particular religion in bad light.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK**

This study deals with discussing the offensive advertisements and gathering a general public perception towards the factors responsible for offensive. There are a few limitations to this study.

The sample used for this data is skewed in terms of age and education level of the respondents. The study should be conducted with a diverse set of population to properly understand their concerns and get a comprehensive view.

The future work that can be attempted for this study is to merge the ads and the factors and conduct a survey to identify what did the sample population find offensive in the particular campaign. This study can be conducted with a relatively small set of advertisements, or employing a diverse focus group.

This would allow to gather more insights into what aspect of the campaign did not fit in, and how the pitfalls could have been avoided. This can also help uncover any more factors for the ad being offensive apart from the one uncovered in this and previous studies.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

Controversial and offensive advertisements do not only hurt the brand image but also can lead to complaints on advertising forums and regulatory bodies, boycotting products, plummeting stocks and in some cases, even loss of lives. It, therefore, becomes necessary to understand the general perception of the region in which the ad campaign is to be released, especially if the market is new. The more is the similarity between the thoughts expressed in campaigns and the audience' views, the greater will be the positive popularity of the brand, and vice-versa to the level to which the audience takes offense on a particular theme of the ad.

With the final aim of every advertisement campaign is to generate awareness about the product, or the brand/company, a certain caution must be exercised by the agencies, on selecting the medium and setting the message being conveyed. It can be irresponsible to assume that the message being transmitted is the message being received. If the campaign is critical to the brand, it can be of great help to set-up focus groups to identify alternate understanding.

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## ANNEXURE

Survey to collect responses for factors that makes an ad offensive

### Controversial Advertising: Preliminary Study

\* Required

Age

- >=18
- 19-25
- 26-35
- >35

Gender \*

- Female
- Male

Gender \*

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say
- Other...

Highest Education \*

Short answer text

Religiosity \*

This indicates how strongly aligned are you to your religion

- High
- Low

# Factors that make an advertisement offensive



Description (optional)

We have seen several campaigns being pulled down due to the vocal outcry against them. Below we have listed factors that play a role in making the advertisement offensive to a group of people. Please rate each factor on a scale of 1-5, 1 being least offensive and 5 being most offensive, on how offensive would an advertisement with the factor be offensive to you.

Description (optional)

## Promoting anti-social behavior \*

Example: Promoting Drug use, Littering, Vandalism of property etc.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Promoting unhealthy behavior in children \*

Example: Nagging parents, unhealthy competition in children, bullying

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Healthy and Safety issues \*

Example: Dangerous stunts, unsafe online behavior like sharing passwords, hazardous activities with fire, water etc.

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Indecent Language \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Nudity \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Racism \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Promoting sexism in society \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Stereotyping a general group of population \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Promoting violence \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Deceptive/Misleading \*

Fine-print advertisements with typical high-risk activities and not communicating the same to the audience

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Showing a particular religion in bad-light \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Inter-faith marriage \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Inter-faith celebration of festivals \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Using a political affair to promote the product \*

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Using body-image issues \*

Promoting a particular body type as the ideal one

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>