



RESEARCH PAPER

Examining Shock Advertising in a South African
context

Nicola du Plessis

Supervisor: Samuel Enow

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Vega School of Brand Leadership



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Abstract:

This study is concerned with the phenomenon of shock advertising as it operates and functions in society. Shock advertising is characterised by content that deliberately startles its target audience. This marketing strategy will be investigated by means of qualitative research methodologies to discern how it may impact upon consumer behaviour. The study aims specifically to determine whether shock advertising could function effectively as a marketing strategy in South Africa and whether consumers would have a positive reaction to controversial advertising. This study will be useful as it may provide marketers with new data, which could be used for creating and crafting campaigns. Shock advertising has proven to be an effective mechanism in order to heighten public awareness of social issues and therefore has the potential to be implemented by marketers in South Africa to educate civilians. It is therefore worthy of investigation as it could be beneficial to the South African population if it is found that this strategy has positive outcomes. The results from the study prove that although brands implementing shock advertisements succeed in reaching and attaining the attention of their target demographic, it may be risky to implement branding of this nature and there is a possibility of creating a disassociation with the brand. Consumers are alarmed when confronted with this type of advertising thus these mechanisms may not yield the desired results. It has been demonstrated that this technique would not presently yield the desired results. Further research may consider the question of whether shock appeals are ethically justifiable in a South African context and whether there is a difference between how the various cultural groups perceive these types of advertisements.

Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework:

1.1 Introduction

This study is concerned primarily with the examination of shock advertising as it operates and functions in society. This marketing strategy will be investigated in terms of how it may impact upon consumer behaviour and preferences particularly in a South African context. Although this phenomenon has been frequently implemented in the past the ethical implications of this marketing technique have not been thoroughly investigated and is therefore worthy of further analysis. The study intends to examine previous literature and identify strengths and limitations in former studies. Additionally, the study aims to discern how South African consumers receive and interpret controversial advertisements that have previously been used in other countries. The study may lead to new conclusions regarding marketing strategies and could thus lead to new creative approaches in the advertising domain.

1.2 Background and context of the study:

Shock advertising is characterised by content that deliberately startles its target audience. This outcome is elicited by transgressing and breaching accepted societal norms (Dahl, Frankenberger, Manchanda. 2003: 268). This mechanism is often used to heighten public awareness of social issues and has proved to be successful in this regard. However, this marketing strategy has elicited public complaints in the past and therefore raises ethical issues (Waller. 1999: 290). This study will examine the concept of shock advertising as it functions in South African society. Specifically, the purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of shock advertising in comparison to other forms of marketing. The study is significant because although this strategy has been widely adopted the effectiveness and ethical implications have not thoroughly been investigated within a South African context. The research could accordingly benefit marketers who wish to implement this form of advertising and may concomitantly face ethical challenges regarding the effects which such forms of advertisements may have on consumers.

Marketers who have implemented this technique argue that it is the norm violation aspect of this type of advertising that afford it the ability to capture and maintain the interest of a target market (Dahl. *et al.* 2003). The effect is that the audience will heed the message of the advertisement and respond accordingly (Waller. 1999: 290). Norm violation can be derived from a breach of the established rules and shared expectations that have been fostered through observation and social learning (Dahl *et al.* 2003). Individuals acquire a set of rules through observation which is then used to assess actions, ideas and conduct. The phenomenon of advertising is considered to be a social object and is assessed according to the accepted rules that have been established. An advertisement may be considered as offensive if it violates the norms for personal moral guidelines, criteria for good taste and visual decency (Waller. 1999: 290).

The most well known examples of shock advertising include the marketing campaigns used by Calvin Klein and United Colours of Benetton. Throughout the years Benetton's campaigns have featured pictures of a slain soldier's bloodied clothing, a white infant suckling from the breasts of a black woman and a dying patient suffering from AIDS (Dahl *et al.* 2003). Benetton aspired to be viewed as a communication industry rather than merely a fashion supplier. Oliver Toscani, Benetton's former photographer argued that he wanted to use news as a revolutionized form of advertising (Andersson *et al.* 2003). Although many of these advertisements have won awards for increasing the public awareness of social issues, they have also given rise to critique and consumer complaint. In the same vein, many of the advertisements created and used by Calvin Klein have been chastised by the public due to their sexual nature and have been described as pornographic by political groups (Waller. 1999: 290).

Public health campaigns have also frequently implemented shock tactics in their marketing campaigns to raise awareness and combat ignorance. Shock appeals have widely been used to discourage alcohol abuse, promote HIV awareness, STD prevention and to discourage drinking whilst driving (Dahl. *et al.* 2003). Many of these advertising campaigns have been targeted by governments due to their controversial nature. The Breast Cancer Fund was scrutinized because of their implementation of a poster campaign featuring women revealing mastectomy scars instead of breasts. The Fund's founder however, defended the advertisements despite public outrage explaining that the advertisements would go unnoticed without a traumatizing element and that it was a necessary element in order to reach the audience (Dahl. *et al.* 2003). Considering the controversial nature of shock advertising in other parts of the world, it is imperative to investigate how it is perceived in South Africa.

1.3 Problem statement:

There is controversy surrounding shock advertising, as the State fears that these types of marketing strategies may affect consumers negatively. This controversy is worthy of investigation because this phenomenon is still unexplored in South Africa as most marketers rely on traditional forms of advertising. The South African censorship laws that inhibit public communications and advertisements are particularly strict. Marketers are inclined to use advertising strategies that are considered exceptionally proper and ethically justifiable (Urwin & Venter. 2004: 204). However, following stringent rules and principles when creating an advertisement may impede the marketer's creativity and imagination as the scope for creation becomes narrower (Waller. 1999: 290). Therefore, it could be useful to establish whether the fear surrounding shock advertising is indeed founded or not. The investigation may lead to new data regarding branding and could therefore lead to the implementation of innovative strategies in the advertising landscape of South Africa.

1.4 Research questions:

The main research question of the study can be stated as follows: Could shock advertising function effectively as a marketing strategy in South Africa? The sub research questions that will be investigated in the study are:

- Do consumers have a positive reaction to controversial advertising?
- How do South African consumers interpret shocking advertisements?
- Would South African consumers support brands promoted by shock advertising?

1.5 Conceptualization:

This study will look at a particular marketing tactic, which is understood as the means by which marketers reach their target audience (Urwin & Venter. 2004: 203). These strategies are formulated by conducting research concerning the target market and particular demographic that the organization wishes to reach (Dahl et al. 2003: 269). In this study the researcher will aim to understand the effect of a particular marketing tactic on consumer behavior. This concept refers to how customers buy, use and select products on offer, as well as how they respond to advertisements and commercials (Waller. 1999: 290). Furthermore, this study will analyse consumer response, which is interpreted as the effect that a brand receives about its products or advertisements. The study will consider these phenomena as they operate in the South African marketing landscape, which refers to how advertisements are perceived by South African consumers. The study will analyse the comprehension level of consumers, which is understood as the capacity of an individual to understand what is being conveyed in an advertisement (Urwin & Venter. 2004: 204). In an advertising context, the term refers to the effectiveness of an advertisement to resonate with and reach its audience (Andersson et al. 2004: 107). Additionally, the study will then consider which ethical guidelines must be followed by brands when creating advertisements. In a marketing context ethical guidelines pertain to whether it is considered fair and inoffensive to create a public advertisement (Dahl et al. 2003: 271).

1.6 Objectives of the study:

This study investigates the concept of shock advertising and will aim to discern whether this marketing strategy could succeed in reaching consumers in South Africa. It will aim to determine how consumers will react to controversial advertising and examine how young males and females may perceive and respond to shocking advertisements by recording and transcribing their reactions. The theory will be applied specifically in a South African context with the intention of assessing whether this marketing mechanism could be useful when branding products.

1.7 Purpose statement:

The focus of the study is to assess whether shock advertising can function effectively without negatively affecting consumers. The participants involved in the study will be asked specific questions regarding how they felt when viewing images that have been used in former shock advertising campaigns and how they interpreted the messages conveyed in these advertising campaigns. This will enable the researcher to understand how consumers may respond to these types of advertisements. From this data inferences can then be made regarding the effect that these images may have on consumers and a conclusion can be drawn regarding whether it would be ethically plausible and effective to use such advertising in South Africa.

1.8 Rationale:

South African advertising is strictly censored, specifically in comparison with the jurisdictions of many other nations. The ethical concerns of marketing are of particular interest specifically because South Africans find themselves in an environment in which they must attempt to be politically correct at all times (Beekman. 2008: 42). The country has faced a struggle against discrimination and oppression in the past and has subsequently left its people in a setting in which they may be weary to speak candidly and may be inclined to pacify their ideas (Waller. 1999: 290). This concern with constantly being politically inoffensive has undoubtedly infiltrated into the domain of advertising as marketers rarely rely on controversial branding strategies (Mick. 1999: 412). Shock advertising is therefore a particularly interesting subject to consider in the landscape of South Africa because of the rigid laws that exist regarding censorship. The issue of whether advertisements should be severely monitored has not been thoroughly investigated and it is therefore worthy of further investigation.

Furthermore, the subject is specifically topical because freedom of speech has increasingly come into question in a global context in recent years. The French satirical newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, attracted controversy in 2015 because of a controversial cartoon that was published (Henley. 2016: 01). This edition of the newspaper led to several terrorist attacks in the same year giving prominence to the notion of social responsibility. Thus it is necessary to further investigate the phenomenon of censorship and freedom of expression in a marketing context (Henley. 2016: 01).

This study will be useful as it may provide marketers with new data, which could be used for creating and crafting campaigns. Shock advertising has proven to be an effective mechanism in order to heighten public awareness of social issues and therefore has the potential to be implemented by marketers in South Africa to educate civilians. It is therefore worthy of investigation as it could be beneficial to the South African population if it is found that this strategy has positive outcomes.

1.9 Critical overview and research paradigm:

This study will be carried out through qualitative research and will be conducted from an interpretivist foundation, which presupposes that individuals or communities assign to their experiences. Interpretation is required when examining consumer response since this type of behaviour is constituted by social conventions (Maree et al. 2016: 20). This approach is used because the social context, conventions and norms of the consumers are crucial elements in assessing and understanding human behaviour (Maree et al. 2016: 20). The qualitative research approach that is followed in the study is designed in order to understand consumer response. The collected data will be used to understand how young consumers respond to different types of advertising in order to gain consumer insight.

1.10 Overview of the study:

The chapter that follows will include a review of the previous literature that has been published in the field. The review of literature will explain how previous researchers have approached the subject matter and demonstrate how the current study is similar to and different from former studies. The third chapter will describe the data collection methodology in detail that will be followed by the researcher. The population and sampling of the study will be clearly discussed and motivated. The fourth chapter will explicitly define the data analysis techniques that will be used in the study and explain how this will improve the understanding of the research problem. The concluding chapter will consist of a critical evaluation of the findings in the broader context of the research problem. The study will be evaluated and the limitations of the study will be discussed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

The aim of this review is to examine the prior research that has been conducted in this field. Firstly, the theoretical foundation of former studies will be discussed followed by a description of the research problem that was investigated in previous studies. This will be followed by a definition of shock advertising as it has been characterised in former studies. Subsequently, the importance of shock advertising will be briefly discussed. Thereafter, former studies will be reviewed in terms of how consumers have reacted to this type of advertising in the past.

Former studies have found that shock advertising is more effective than informative advertising as it is retained in the memory of the consumer. Several studies have been conducted examining the efficiency of shock in comparison with other forms of advertising. The previous body of research revealed that shock advertising enhances message retention for the consumer and is thus a successful technique. The results from former studies reveal that although shock advertising may have been effective in certain instances, by leading to higher brand awareness, marketers also run the risk of creating a distaste for the brand which could lead to negative perceptions of the brand (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 203).

2.2 Theoretical foundation of former studies:

Former studies have considered shock advertising from an interpretivist perspective. The fundamental cognitive orientation of previous studies is that behaviour is constituted by social conventions. This approach is used because the social context, conventions and norms of the consumers are crucial elements in assessing and understanding human behaviour. Former studies have attempted to understand whether shock advertising will succeed in reaching the desired target market and thereby raise brand awareness. The former body of research has attempted to examine whether shock advertising evokes positive attitudes in potential consumers.

2.3.1 Definition of shock advertising:

Former studies have defined the concept of *shock advertising* as material that deliberately startles the target audience. This marketing mechanism is implemented in order to retain the consumer's attention and with the aim of enhancing message retention by transgressing the accepted societal norms or personal ideals (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 203). These types of advertisements often include controversial, explicit, or disturbing imagery that may challenge the general public's understanding of the social order. This may create a lasting impression of the brand in the mind of the consumer as it has a high impact and better recall among consumers that are exposed to these types of advertisements. This technique is frequently used in order to facilitate brand recall and recognition as well as product promotion.

2.3.2 Importance of shock advertising:

Shock advertising is a significant phenomenon to consider as it has been used by marketers in the past to catch public attention, generate word of mouth and to stimulate responsive behaviours and actions. It has however, become a subject of debate as it has evoked negative feelings in certain consumers and has even caused public outrage. It is therefore important to examine whether this phenomenon will succeed in connecting with the desired target audience and build a brand's identity in a positive way.

2.4 Review of prior literature:

In a study conducted by Dahl et al. (2003) it was found that shocking images succeed in increasing the concentration of the consumer. This was investigated through a qualitative analysis including a group of university students as participants. The study involved two examinations in which the effect of shock advertising was compared with other marketing techniques. The researchers identified former advertising campaigns in which religious taboos, profanity and sexual references were included. (Dahl et al, 2003: 271). The study was conducted in an HIV/ AIDS awareness context as health care organizations have often used shock strategies to combat ignorance. The participants involved in the study were students as this age group represented a realistic target audience for healthcare initiatives (Dahl et al, 2003: 271). One hundred and five adolescents participated in the study and were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions (Dahl et al, 2003: 271).

Three types of advertising were selected to serve as stimulus for the investigation namely, informative, frightening and shocking advertisements. (Dahl et al, 2003: 271). Each advertisement promoted habits that could reduce the risk of getting HIV and advocated conducting a healthy sexual lifestyle. A pretesting procedure was then carried out to ensure that the advertisements fulfilled their purpose namely, to inform, to scare and to shock. (Dahl et al, 2003: 272). The participants were provided with a seven-point scale from which they could rate the advertisements in terms of how educational, shocking and likeable the advertisements were. This was used as a means to sensor whether the advertisements were appropriate examples to include in the study (Dahl et al, 2003: 272).

The coded responses indicated that the shock advertisements attracted the participants' attention the most. Of the participants involved in the study, 77.8% indicated that a particular norm violation was the element that caused the advertisement to capture their attention. (Dahl et al, 2003: 272). Furthermore, the results indicated that a greater proportion of participants were able to recognize and identify the correct copy and information provided in the shock advertisements when they were cued, in comparison with the fear and information advertisements. The researchers could conclude that the shock appeals greatly outperformed the educational and fear appeals and succeeded in capturing and maintaining the attention of the participants (Dahl et al. 2003, 272). This study therefore serves as evidence for the predication that norm violation serves as an effective means of facilitating message retention and recognition (Dahl et al, 2003: 269).

2.5 Shock advertising in fashion marketing:

In an empirical study conducted by Andersson (2004) et al. the concept of controversial advertising was examined in the context of fashion marketing. This type of advertising is usually implemented to prompt dialogue of global issues and not necessarily to sell clothing (Andersson et al, 2004: 97). The objective of the study was to compare the intention of the advertisers' message with the interpretation of the consumer. Additionally, the study aimed to discern whether there is a difference in how male and female consumers perceive and respond to particular advertisements (Andersson et al. 2004: 96).

Andersson's study (2004) used material from Benetton, Sisley and Diesel's advertising campaigns when designing the research study. These brands were selected due to their controversial nature and their aim to capture the consumer's attention by violating social norms. The study aimed to investigate how consumers interpret and appreciate violent advertising (Andersson et al, 2004: 98). In the study Andersson (2004) used a semiotic picture analysis as a method to understand how individuals react to violence in advertising. Three pictures were selected from the advertising campaigns of Sisley, Benetton and Diesel and utilized on test groups containing both female and male participants (Andersson et al, 2004: 99). The trend of violent advertising was started by Benetton which implemented controversial and authentic imagery in its campaigns. This trend was followed by several other brands, including Diesel who launched a campaign in 1997 depicting mutilated body parts (Andersson et al, 2004: 98). Diesel defended this advertisement by arguing that it was a manual for self – defence, after the campaign was criticized by the public. Sisley defended the use of violence in their campaigns by arguing that using shocking imagery is the most effective means of selling commodities and reaching consumers (Andersson et al, 2004: 97).

A group of university students were selected to partake in the study from the University of Halmstad. This age group was specifically chosen because young people are most interested in the clothing and fashion industry (Andersson et al. 2004: 104). The companies Diesel, Benetton and Sisley were selected as the companies whose advertisements should be included in the study as they often rely on shock or violent advertising to reach consumers (Andersson et al. 2004: 104). The researchers designed a questionnaire accompanied by a picture analysis which was used to test how the participants reacted and responded to certain violent advertisements and to discern whether there are differences in how males and females interpret these images (Andersson et al. 2004: 104).

The questions asked the participants to record which feelings and emotions are evoked by the images and to identify which elements of the advertisements caused a reaction. Additionally, the questions aimed to gather information concerning which associations the participants made when considering the advertisements and whether the images gave them a negative impression

of some kind (Andersson et al, 2004: 98). The questionnaires were distributed to 8 female students and 8 male students. After the participants were briefed about the study, they were handed the surveys and given time to consider the images (Andersson et al, 2004: 98). The participants were then given time to consider the images and answer the questions that followed. The results were then collected and analysed by the researchers (Andersson et al, 2004: 104).

A difference between the female and male responses was that females responded with lengthier answers and one can therefore conclude that the advertisements had a greater affect on the women that partook in the study. Additionally, the female participants had a better understanding of the meaning behind the advertisements and could accurately describe the origin of the social issue. The male participants sometimes failed to understand the metaphorical meanings of the images. This demonstrates that gender serves as a meaningful segmentation variable and that an alternative marketing strategy could be to devise separate advertisements for the respective gender groups (Andersson et al, 2004: 98).

The researchers concluded that the gender roles that exist in society need to be taken into consideration when advertisements are created as the respective genders react differently when perceiving the same image (Andersson et al, 2004: 97). The researchers therefore argue that Toscani succeeded with the objective to create a new type of advertising and create an interesting image around the Benetton brand. However, this marketing mechanism is found to be risky as it is not received well by all potential consumers as some images were described as “disgusting” by certain participants (Andersson et al, 2004: 98).

From the study it is clear that there are differences between how males and females perceive violence in advertisements. (Andersson et al. 2004: 96). The researchers concluded that it is risky for companies to include violent advertising in their marketing campaigns although this type of advertising certainly succeeds in capturing the attention of the audience (Andersson et al. 2004: 110).

2.6 The effects of shock advertising on students:

In a study conducted by Urwin and Venter (2014) the notion of shock advertising was examined in terms of its effectiveness on generation Y consumers. Generation Y in this context refers to individuals born during the 1980s and 1990s. The study specifically investigated norm violation, memory recall and different levels of shock. (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 203). The researchers collected data, by means of questionnaires, which were then completed by 300 university students. The study also aimed to determine whether shock advertising has become obsolete and thus ineffective as a marketing strategy (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 204).

The participants were students between the ages of 18 and 25. The students were asked to complete a questionnaire consisting of questions pertaining to five fictional brands (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 204). The images in the advertisements were of a morally offensive nature containing religious taboos and sexual references. The questionnaire included a section in

which demographic information was collected concerning the age, religious denomination, gender and income bracket of the participants (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 204). The first set of questions about the advertisements tested the participant's capacity to recall information, requiring the participant to identify which brands and products were being advertised in the images. The next series of questions related to the attitudes and emotions evoked by the advertisements, in which participants were asked to record how they felt when considering the advertisements (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 202).

The collected data were coded using Microsoft Excel and then analysed for results. The results from the study concluded that shocking imagery is overwhelming to the consumer although the images are easily recalled and the message is remembered by the participant (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 204). The participants were often able to recall the images and make links between brands and controversial imagery. The researchers therefore concluded that these types of advertisements may lead to high levels of brand awareness (Urwin & Venter, 2014: 204).

2.7 Consumer response to shock advertising:

In an Australian study conducted by Waller, at the University of Newcastle, the phenomenon of shock advertising was analysed in terms of the attitudes that are evoked in potential consumers. The attitudes were examined by means of a questionnaire in which participants were presented with a range of controversial advertisements to consider (Waller, 1999: 288). The questionnaires were distributed to a group of 125 business students at a public university in Australia (Waller, 1999: 292).

The sample group consisted of 70 male and 55 female participants. The questionnaire was administered in a controlled classroom environment and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. It included a list of services and products as well as a list of possible justifications for shocking content in advertising. The participants were required to indicate their level of personal offense on a scale and to provide reasoning for why this level of offense was evoked (Waller, 1999: 290). Additionally, the questionnaire included a section gathering demographic information concerning the ethnicity, income bracket, age, religious denomination and sexuality of the participant. This information enabled the researcher to group the data and draw conclusions about the respondents (Waller, 1999: 292).

A comparison was made between the female and male participants in order to discern whether the respective genders respond differently to shock advertising. The results demonstrated that racism was perceived to be the most startling to both male and female participants. Both male and female groups indicated that the advertisements exploiting particular racial groups attracted their attention the most and would be remembered for longer in comparison with other images (Waller, 1999: 296). The second prominent trend among the participants' responses was that the majority were alarmed by advertisements that violated particular religions or belief systems. A discernable difference between the two gender groups was that females tend to perceive sexist imagery to be more alarming than males (Waller, 1999: 294).

The study revealed that participants were particularly alarmed when viewing advertisements exploiting religion, race or sexuality in order to sell a product. The majority of the participants indicated that they would be startled when confronted with imagery of this nature (Waller, 1999: 295). Waller (1999) concludes that agencies that intend to implement shock advertising should be aware that this type of advertising could have an adverse affect on the intended target audience and that this strategy should be carefully considered before it is implemented. Specifically, it is advised that advertisements do not contain imagery or language of racist or sexist nature, particularly when targeting the female market as this gender group appeared to be more sensitive to these norm violations than their male counter parts (Waller, 1999: 288). Participants did however indicate that these advertisements were memorable and striking. Therefore, Waller does argue that this technique can be beneficial if it is used correctly to obtain publicity and raise awareness of the brand (Waller, 1999: 288).

2.8 The effect of shocking advertisements on purchasing habits:

A study was conducted at the University of Technology in Lithuania concerning the purchasing habits of consumers when exposed to shock advertising. The study aimed to discern whether shock advertising has a positive or negative impact on consumers and whether this form of advertising will influence the target audience's purchasing decisions (Matuleviciene, 2013: 135). The researchers compiled a questionnaire to gather personal information about the participants and to collect data. The first section required participants to give demographic information asking questions pertaining to their age, religious denomination, sexuality, cultural background and moral principles (Matuleviciene, 2013:134). The second section presented participants with a series of advertisements that had been used in former advertising campaigns in the United States but that had not been used in Europe (Matuleviciene, 2013: 136).

The advertisements contained sexual references and images demonstrating violence or bodily harm. (Matuleviciene, 2013: 137). The participants were asked to identify the brand that was being advertised and to indicate whether they would purchase a product of this particular brand. The participants were also required to indicate whether they had a positive or negative attitude towards the brand by means of a scale (Matuleviciene, 2013: 138). A theoretical model was then created based on the findings of the study to demonstrate the link between certain socio – demographic factors and the attitude that the consumer has towards shock advertising. The researchers found that the consumer's perception of shock advertising will depend on the socio – demographic factors, such as age, gender, moral principles and religiosity. The researchers concluded that the participants who had indicated that they were religious, or following a strict moral code were inclined to have a negative attitude towards the product or brand. Additionally, the results demonstrated that females were generally more prone to indicating that they would not purchase a product that was being advertised through shock advertising (Matuleviciene, 2013: 139).

2.9 Shock advertising in public health campaigns:

A study conducted by Tay and Ozanne examined the phenomenon of fear based public health campaigns. (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 01). The aim of the study was to consider the effect of a fear based advertising campaign. This study evaluated the effectiveness of fear arousal as an advertising strategy among different demographic segments of drivers (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 05). The participants involved in the study included males and females between the ages of 15 and 45. A former advertising campaign, which implemented fear appeals, was used to gather data for the study. The participants were observed during and after being exposed to the stimulus and the data was transcribed for analysis (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 03).

The results revealed that a strategy relying on fear appeals would be effective with certain parts of the population. The study demonstrated that fatal accident rates had been significantly reduced among female drivers between the ages of 15 and 24, male drivers between the ages of 35 and 54 and female drivers between the ages of 25 and 34 (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 03). The results revealed that this type of advertising is effective as it reduced the number of fatal accidents. However, the campaign did not evoke the same reaction from all segments of the population as certain segments were more affected by the campaign's message than others. The researchers concluded that female drivers were more effected than male drivers by fear appeals in advertising (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 05).

The researchers concluded that this approach will achieve the desired ends but that certain segments will be more affected than others. A possible solution could be to make advertisements more relevant and realistic to the targeted audience (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 07). Additionally, the researchers argue that there is a need for further research into the implementation of fear appeal as a marketing technique and that segmenting the target audience by psychographic characteristics is necessary when creating a marketing campaign that uses fear as an appeal. Moreover, the researchers concluded that marketers should realize that using a particular marketing scheme, such as a fear appeal strategy, may not be effective for all segments of a population and should therefore implement several strategies to reach various audiences (Ozanne & Tay, 2002: 07).

2.10 Fear appeals in advertising:

Jennifer Algie and John Rossiter (2010) conducted a study at the University of Wollongong in Australia. The aim was to examine the use of fear appeals as a marketing strategy in television

commercials. This study examined the reactions of participants to 12 road safety commercials (Algie & Rossiter, 2010: 266). Specifically, the study aimed to examine how viewers react when exposed to fear appeal television commercials and thereby determine whether this method is effective in its attempt to capture the attention of the audience. The fear patterns generated by the various advertisements were then examined by the research team (Algie & Rossiter, 2010: 264).

Television commercials were used as stimuli for the study because they are the primary medium used by road safety advertisements in Australia. This technique is used to dissuade drivers against dangerous driving habits (Algie & Rossiter, 2010: 267). Ethical clearance was obtained from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Two groups of 30 participants were selected at random for the study from a marketing class. They were required to watch six anti speeding commercials (Algie & Rossiter, 2010: 266).

The results demonstrated that the viewer feels very tense at the end of the advertisement and feels increasingly anxious as the advertisement progresses. The participant reaches the peak of his fear towards the end of the advertisement followed by a feeling of relief, which is often related to the recommendations that are given in the last few moments of the advertisements (Algie & Rossiter, 2016: 266). The justification for implementing this type of strategy is that the viewer may visualize and experience the negative emotion, that was felt during the advertisement, when they may be tempted to perform the action. The researchers argue that this technique is effective as a caution strategy (Algie & Rossiter, 2016: 266).

The researchers concluded that road safety marketers should focus on fear reduction towards the end of the advertisement as this will result in the audience heeding the message of the commercial. The study thus demonstrates that fear arousal may be an effective advertising technique if it is paired with relief (Algie & Rossiter, 2010: 266).

2.11 Relevance of previous literature to current study:

The current study will implement a data collection procedure that is similar to the methodology that has been used in former studies. In previous studies the notion of shock advertising was examined by analysing how participants react to controversial advertisements in comparison with traditional forms of advertising. Consequently, the current study will follow a similar technique in order to gain consumer insights and thereby determine whether this method is effective. However, the previous studies were conducted several years prior to the current study and these methodologies may therefore yield completely different results and may not be as appropriate when conducted at the present time.

2.12 Concluding comments about the former literature:

The former literature provides a good theoretical foundation from which the current study can gain insights in terms of which data collection procedures may be most viable and suitable when conducting research. The previous body of research demonstrated that shock advertising succeeds in enhancing message retention and is thus a successful technique. Researchers have however concluded that marketers should be aware that this strategy may create a distaste for the brand and lead to negative perceptions of the brand. The current study aims to employ a similar research procedure to discern whether this strategy will succeed when aimed at South Africans.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

3.1 Introduction to research methodology:

This study will be conducted with the aim of understanding society and specifically aspires to examine an aspect of social reality. A qualitative research methodology will be followed and will be conducted from an interpretive perspective as the participants' internal and subjective experiences will be explored (Dahl et al. 2003: 268). The research is conducted from an interpretive paradigm and thus the data collection will take place in a natural context to reach the best possible understanding of participants in this context (Maree et al. 2016). The naturalist paradigm presupposes that realities cannot be fully understood in isolation from their natural contexts (Waller. 1999: 290).

3.2 Research Methodology:

This particular study will involve the compilation of a research questionnaire, which will be designed based on data collection methodologies implemented in former studies. The researcher will ensure the protection of the participants' identities and will obtain their permission to be interviewed. Additionally, the researcher will fulfil the role of administering the questionnaire and of analysing the resulting data (Waller. 1999: 290). Additionally, a focus group will be conducted in order to gain further insights. Interviews will be conducted with an expert in the field of branding in order to discuss the subject matter and to validate ideas. The questions included in the questionnaire, focus group and interview will be formulated in order to answer the primary and secondary research questions. The researcher will then look for patterns and trends in the data and make comparisons with former theories concerning the subject matter (Maree et al. 2016: 20).

3.3 Justification for research methodology:

The research will be carried out through qualitative analysis, as the aim of the study is to gain a thorough understanding of consumer behaviour. Moreover, qualitative methods are successful when examining consumer preference and decision-making. It is thus appropriate to use qualitative research as a method for data collection in a marketing context where consumer preference is of great significance (Dahl et al. 2003: 268). In addition, qualitative research is naturalistic by nature and focuses predominantly on natural settings in which interaction occurs. A questionnaire, focus group and interview have been selected as the means by which to collect data as this is a practical method and enables the researcher to collect large amounts of data in a relatively short amount of time. Moreover, these methods are cost effective and the results can be easily quantified and analysed by the researcher.

3.4 Population and sample for questionnaire administration:

Participants will be selected from various tertiary institutions in the Cape Town area. The sample size will include 50 participants, that will be selected from within the social network of the researcher (Waller. 1999: 290). The study will be restricted to a South African context and therefore will be limited to the geographic location of Cape Town and will be conducted in this area. The participants that will partake in the study will be male and female students from within the age range of 18 to 25. This specific age group of participants is selected as this generation can be described as technologically savvy and individualistic and are also less brand loyal than former generations. This is because modern consumers are more sceptical about advertising techniques and therefore may be wise to futile attempts from marketers to sell products (Urwin & Venter. 2004: 203).

3.5 Data collection process:

Data will be collected by means of a questionnaire that will be distributed to participants. This method is selected because questionnaires provide data that are relatively easy to analyse and that are simple to administer. Additionally, the format of a questionnaire is familiar to most participants and all the information is collected in a standardised way. Questionnaires will provide the researcher with a means of analysing the perceptions, opinions and attitudes of participants towards specific images and advertisements (Waller. 1999: 290).

In addition, data will be collected by means of a focus group to gain a further understanding of how controversial advertisements are perceived by consumers. The administration of a focus group provides the researcher with the opportunity to create an interactive group setting where essential points about the subject matter can be recorded. Group interviews of this nature are useful when developing or testing whether new concepts will be successful or when trying to define a strategic direction for marketing initiative. Furthermore, these types of interactive interviews can provide valuable information about the potential acceptance of shock advertisements in South Africa. Moreover, the nature of this interview is informal providing respondents with a comfortable environment in which to express their opinions. Participants will be selected based on having similar demographics in order to keep the group as homogenous as possible. Male and female students between the ages of 18 and 25, living in the Cape Town area, will be asked to partake in the study. This location is selected as individuals living in an urbanised area are frequently exposed to advertisements.

Further data will be collected by conducting interviews with an expert in the field of branding. This will provide the researcher with valid insights and opinions about the phenomenon of shock advertising and how it could operate in a South African context. It is necessary for the researcher to have a basic understanding of the laws surrounding advertising and the regulations concerning censorship. Additionally, a branding and communication specialist who has worked in the South African marketing industry will provide the researcher with an understanding of why this mechanism has not been relied on more frequently by marketers.

3.5.1 Design and administration of questionnaire:

The first section of the questionnaire will gather demographic information about the participant. The participant will be required to identify their gender and religious denomination in order to discern whether these demographic factors influence how shock advertisements are interpreted. The first question would gather information pertaining to how the respondents perceive the majority of print advertisements in South Africa. This question provides valuable data as it is imperative to determine how consumers feel about the advertisements they are confronted with on a daily basis.

The participants are required to consider three images used in advertising campaigns by United Colours of Benetton. The first image depicts a photo-shopped image of two political leaders in a romantic yet controversial embrace. The second image portrays a blood-stained uniform of an Israeli soldier. The third image in this series displays three human hearts with racial elements embedded within the advertisement. The respondents were then required to indicate what they thought the advertisement was conveying and to reveal whether they would feel moved by the advertisement. These questions are relevant to the study as the responses will demonstrate whether consumers can understand the purpose and intention behind shock advertisements.

Respondents are asked to consider two controversial advertisements that was used by Nandos. After considering the advertisements, respondents were asked to explain how they felt after considering the advertisements and how they perceive the messages conveyed by the brand. Additionally, participants were asked to identify how the advertisements succeed in capturing the attention of the audience. These questions will provide data revealing what effect these types of advertisements would have on consumers. Participants were asked to explain whether they felt that their gender influences how they interpret and respond to advertisements and were required to indicate which type of message would best succeed in capturing their attention. These questions provide the researcher with data pertaining to the mind set that consumers have before they interpret an advertisement and whether consumers believe that their gender will affect how they engage with images.

3.5.2 Administration of focus group:

A focus group will be used to collect data in which questions will be asked in the form of an interactive setting where the selected participants can speak freely regarding the subject matter. The purpose of the focus group is to gather opinions and attitudes about the phenomenon of shock advertising. This method of data collection is selected in order to encourage discussion about this topic and will provide an opportunity to learn about how consumers will feel about this topic.

The researcher will open the focus group by welcoming the participants and introducing the purpose and context of the focus group. The participants will be asked to consider images and advertisements which will serve as stimulation for conversation. Three types of advertising were selected to serve as stimulus for the investigation namely, informative, frightening and shocking advertisements. Shock advertisements that have been used in previous marketing campaigns were used for the focus group. The participants will be asked to comment on the images and to explain how they think this type of advertising would operate in a South African context. The conversation will be recorded and will then be transcribed into a written format for analysis. The closing of the focus group meetings will include thanking the participants for their input and explaining exactly how the data will be used.

3.5.3 Interview procedure:

A branding lecturer will be interviewed for the purpose of understanding how this phenomenon functions and why it is not frequently implemented in marketing campaigns in South Africa. The branding lecturer will be asked why this strategy is not relied on more frequently by marketers and whether this type of advertising will resonate with consumers if it is implemented in the future. This will allow the researcher to gain a further perspective on the phenomenon of controversial advertising. During the interview the lecturer will be asked about which laws in the Constitution prevent marketers from using shocking advertising when promoting products and services. Additionally, the questions will focus on whether there is a future for this type of advertising in South Africa and why it is believed that these laws fulfill the purpose of protecting individuals from harmful content.

3.6 Data analysis methodology:

The collected data will be used to gain a consumer insight and to gain an understanding of how potential target audiences will respond to shock advertising. The data analysis methodology that will be used in the study will be based on an interpretative philosophy. The aim is to examine the meaningful and symbolic content of the qualitative data that has been collected with the questionnaires, focus group and interview. The data will be grouped into sections in order to find trends and relationships. This procedure will involve the categorization of verbal or behavioural data for the purpose of classification and summarization. The content will be analysed on a descriptive and on an interpretative level. The points of focus when analysing the data will be the attitudes of the participants and which common denominators can be found in their responses. The data will be organised and sorted into a framework for descriptive analysis. An exploratory framework will be used where the data serves as direction for the analysis and where recurring themes and patterns are categorized together. The transcribed content from the focus group will be used to conduct a discourse analysis. The stories that are told by participants during the focus group meetings will be reformulated and contextualized in order to gain an understanding.

3.7 Reliability of the research instrument:

Several strategies will be employed to ensure the validity of the research and data collecting process. Participants will be carefully selected to ensure that the subsequent data is credible. Prolonged and persistent observation of the focus group will ensure that the participants are comfortable in their environment, and that the information is valid and trustworthy. Detailed descriptions of the participants will be provided to guarantee neutrality of the data analysis.

3.8 Limitations of the research procedures:

Although it is practical to use questionnaires as a means to collect data there are also several limitations which should be considered. There is a high level of involvement from the researcher which could influence how participants respond to questions. Additionally, each participant may interpret the questions differently and thus their responses may be based on their personal interpretation which could influence the validity of the responses. Focus groups may be an easy means by which to gather information although it is not possible to discern how truthful the participants are being when discussing the subject matter. In addition, it is not possible to account for certain variables that may influence the participant's involvement such as a change of emotion of feeling during the focus group (Marais et al. 2016).

3.9 Ethical considerations:

As the subject matter of the study is of a sensitive nature there are certain ethical concerns that must be taken into consideration. To combat ethical concerns, participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and should they feel uncomfortable at any stage of the interviewing procedure they may forfeit the focus group or completion of the questionnaire. Moreover, the participants will be informed that their participation is both confidential and anonymous. Additionally, they will be well informed of the nature of the images and questions prior to the administration of the data collection procedure (Maree et al. 2016). The study will not consider violent advertising or profanity in advertising as these types of advertising may cause ethical concerns. These delimiters are proposed to serve as a reminder of potential weaknesses of the study (Maree et al. 2016).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction to data analysis:

This chapter consists of an analysis of the data that has been collected by the researcher. This section of the study will include a description of the data analysis methodology that will be implemented. Thereafter, the results from the questionnaire, focus group and interview will be described.

The data analysis methodology that will be used in the study will be based on an interpretative philosophy. The aim is to examine and group the content of the qualitative data that has been collected with the questionnaires, focus group and interview. The responses of each question are considered individually and are analysed by grouping similar responses into categories. The researcher will calculate which percentage of the participants gave the same responses to determine a statistic. These percentages can then be interpreted by the researcher to make deductions about the perceptions and attitudes of the participants.

The transcribed data from the focus group will then be analysed to find trends and patterns in the responses of the participants. The data are categorized according to gender to find differences between the male and female responses. Secondly, the data will be categorized according to positive and negative responses about the advertisements. The data will be grouped into sections in order to find trends and relationships. This procedure will involve the categorization of verbal or behavioural data for the purpose of classification and summarization. An exploratory framework will be used where the data serves as direction for the analysis and where recurring themes and patterns are categorized together. The stories that are told by participants during the focus group will be reformulated and contextualized to gain an understanding.

The responses from the interview will be analysed in terms of patterns and trends. The branding expert's responses will be used to contextualise and understand the South African advertising landscape and to gain insight into how marketing tools have operated in the past. This information will be grouped into sections to find trends and patterns. This procedure will involve the categorization of verbal or behavioural data for the purpose of classification and summarization.

4.2 Research findings:

4.2.1 Data collected from questionnaires:

The first question in the questionnaire asked participants to indicate how they perceived the majority of print advertisements in South Africa. Of the 50 participants that partook in the study, 14% described advertisements as controversial and 39% described the majority of print advertisements in South Africa as entertaining, suggesting that many advertisements are perceived as amusing by consumers. Of the 50 participants that partook in the study, 47% indicated that they perceived advertisements to be informative. This question was aimed at discerning how consumers view and understand the majority of advertisements that are presently used in South Africa. It was inferred that most consumers currently feel that South African advertisements are explanatory by nature.

The section that followed contained questions that required respondents to consider images used in advertising campaigns by United Colours of Benetton. The images in the advertisements were of a politically controversial nature with the intention of raising awareness about particular social issues. In these print advertisements, Benetton aims to alarm the public and inform viewers about the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, racial tensions prevailing in society and political alliances within different nations. The respondents were then required to indicate what they thought the advertisement was conveying and to reveal whether they would feel moved by the advertisement. These questions were aimed at establishing whether respondents can understand the purpose behind these types of advertisements.

Of the 50 participants 71% indicated that they thought the purpose of these advertisements was to raise awareness about a social issue, meaning that the majority of the participants understood the purpose of the advertisements. Of the 50 participants, 34% indicated that they felt the advertisement was attempting to convey a political message. These results suggest that most respondents are capable of discerning the purpose and intention of shocking advertisements. Of the 50 participants 9% felt that the advertisement was aiming to sell a product. This indicates that some consumers would not fully fathom the purpose of these advertisements as they were unable to identify the objective of enlightening the public about a social issue. These results demonstrate that the majority of South African consumers would understand the purpose and intention behind these types of advertisements and that they are able to fathom the deeper meaning behind them.

In the section that followed, respondents were asked to explain how they felt after considering two advertisements used by Nandos and how they perceived a brand using these types of advertisements. These questions were asked to determine how consumers are affected after being exposed to controversial images and phrases. Of the 50 participants, 44% felt that Nandos succeeds in lightening certain tensions that exist in South Africa. This statistic indicates that consumers respond well to this type of advertising and that they believe it fulfils the purpose of alleviating certain tensions in South Africa. Of the 50 participants, 48% indicated that they found the Nandos advertisement to be humorous. This statistic suggests that the majority of consumers will perceive Nandos advertisements as entertaining. Of the 50 participants, 8% felt that their advertising is inappropriate and would therefore not want to support the Nandos brand. These statistics indicate that the majority of consumers would support a brand using witty, yet controversial advertising because of its entertaining and light hearted tone.

The section that followed asked participants to examine a disturbing image that was used in a non smoking campaign and to indicate whether this would have a positive or negative effect on them. The image depicts a young girl with a sharp hook piercing her lip, intending to serve as a metaphor for the addictive effects of smoking. Of the 50 participants, 85% indicated that this type of advertisement would have a negative effect on them. This suggests that the majority of consumers would not respond positively to this type of advertising and would not support brands using such drastic or disturbing imagery in their advertising. The second question in this section required respondents to identify how they believed these advertisements succeed in reaching their audiences. Of the 50 participants, 67% indicated that the disturbing nature of the imagery captures the attention of the target audience. Of the 50 participants, 33% explained that the wordplay and metaphor included in the advertisement were cleverly phrased and therefore the advertisement succeeds in reaching the audience.

4.2.2 Data collected from focus group:

The focus group discussion was preserved by using a voice recording device and was then transcribed for analysis. The individual comments were then studied and grouped into categories to find similarities and trends within the commentary. The male and female responses were analysed separately in order to discern whether there are similarities and differences in how the respective genders view shocking advertisements. The transcribed comments revealed that the shocking advertisements prompted the most discussion and captured the attention of the participants more than the advertisements using informative and educational appeals. Female participants had emotive responses when perceiving the controversial images and were able to understand the deeper meaning behind them as well as identify the origin of the social or political issue. The male participants were less talkative than their female counterparts and were less prone to accurately discuss the metaphorical meanings behind these types of messages.

Participants explained that this type of advertising can be very effective in raising awareness about events or social issues. It can be effective in changing behaviour and draws attention to the issue at hand. It could be effective in creating a national discussion about topics as more members of society become aware of these topics and begin to actively engage in the discussion. The transcribed responses indicated that the shock advertisements attracted the participants' attention the most. The majority of the participants indicated that a particular norm violation was the element that caused the advertisement to capture their attention. It is discernable that the the shock appeals outperformed the educational and fear appeals and succeeded in capturing and maintaining the attention of the participants. The focus group discussion therefore demonstrated that norm violation serves as an effective means of facilitating message retention.

4.2.3 Data collected from conducting interviews:

During the interview, Dr de Klerk explained that there are many laws and bylaws that impact upon the publication of advertisements. She stated that the scope of the interview would not permit a comprehensive analysis of all material legislation, and that the most pertinent aspects of South African law would be discussed. She explained that whilst the Constitution protects the freedom of all citizens to express themselves, it is a right that has to be exercised subject to other entrenched rights. The individual's right to dignity will accordingly prohibit the publication of an advertisement that undermines the dignity of an individual or of a group of citizens. An advertisement which communicates to the reader a notion of racial supremacy or inferiority, will accordingly never be sanctioned by South African courts. An advertisement infringing the rights of an individual will be interdicted and restrained from further publication. It was explained that shock advertising may be a good strategy to implement, if it is produced without infringing any laws. The strict laws certainly place limits on the marketer's creativity but they do not prevent the creation of this type of advertising.

The branding lecturer explained that advertising is regulated by self-regulatory bodies such as the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa and it is ruled by a Code of Practice, which all its members (including advertising agencies and marketers) subscribe to. She described these self – regulatory bodies as reactive in the sense that they withdraw an advertisement found to be in contravention of the Code based on a complaint or a number of complaints. She argued that the advertisements that are the most challenging to judge are the ones that are offensive according to cultural norms, as that which is acceptable to one group may be offensive to another. She explained that in a culturally diverse society - like South Africa - it can be particularly challenging to meet the cultural needs of different groups. She explains that this may be one of the reasons why shock advertising is not relied on more frequently by South African advertisers. Moreover, it is expensive to withdraw an advertising campaign and marketers would therefore prefer not to risk implementing a controversial advertisement.

She explains that an advertisement is effective if it has a cognitive effect on the audience, followed by an affective change which may lead to the desired conative effect. She argues that this type of advertising can however have an adverse effect, as the target market may respond negatively to the advertisements. It is therefore evident, that a shocking advertisement may be an appropriate tactic if it succeeds in creating awareness and is followed by an attitude change which may lead to the desired behavior change.

4.3 Discussion of analysed data:

The majority of the participants that partook in the questionnaire indicated that they perceived advertisements to be informative. It is therefore discernable that most consumers currently feel that South African advertisements are explanatory by nature. Additionally, it is discernible that Nando's advertisement are well received by consumers and that these types of advertisements succeed in relieving certain tensions that exist in South Africa. Moreover, the results demonstrate that hypothetical consumers will respond well to this type of advertising and that they believe it fulfils the purpose of alleviating certain political tensions. Additionally, the advertisements are described as successful due to their humoristic nature. This indicates that the majority of consumers would support a brand using witty, yet controversial advertising because of its entertaining and light hearted tone.

The results from the questionnaire indicated that the purpose of these advertisements was to raise awareness about social issues, suggesting that most consumers may be capable of discerning the intention of shocking advertisements. These results demonstrate that the majority of South African consumers would understand the purpose and intention behind these types of advertisements and that they are able to fathom the deeper meaning behind them. However, the results from the questionnaire demonstrated that consumers would not respond positively to violent advertising and would not support brands using drastic imagery in their advertising. The results do however indicate that the disturbing nature of the imagery succeeds in capturing the attention of the target audience.

The results from the focus group indicated that controversial advertising can be very effective in raising awareness about brands or political issues. Additionally, it is discernible that this type of advertising is attracting more attention than traditional forms of advertising and may thus provoke more discussion than informative or educational appeals. The focus group demonstrated that controversial advertising serves as an effective means of facilitating message retention.

The focus group discussion indicates that a greater proportion of consumers may be able to recognize advertisements that use shock appeals. The focus group indicated that the respective genders perceive controversial advertisements differently. Female consumers may be more inclined to understand the deeper meaning behind controversial advertisements and are easily able to identify the origin of the political issue. Male consumers may be less prone to accurately understanding the hidden meanings behind these types of messages. This demonstrates that gender serves as a meaningful segmentation variable and that alternate marketing strategies could potentially be used to reach the respective gender groups.

The data collected from the interview corroborated the insights that were gained from the focus group and questionnaire. From the insights given by the branding lecturer, it is evident that shock advertising may be a good strategy to implement, provided that it is produced without infringing any laws or severely offending consumers. The results demonstrated that it is challenging to judge whether an advertisement will be appropriate in a culturally and ethnically diverse society such as South Africa. The responses from the participants indicated that it is particularly challenging to meet the cultural needs of different groups in a diverse environment such as South Africa.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction to evaluation:

This study intended to examine whether shock advertising could function effectively as a marketing strategy in South Africa. In addition, the researcher aimed at establishing whether consumers would have a positive reaction to controversial advertising and how South African consumers interpret shocking advertisements. Lastly, the study aimed at examining whether consumers would support brands using shock advertising to market their products or services. The results revealed that although this strategy would succeed in capturing the attention of consumers, they would not have a positive reaction to these types of advertisements and would not support brands using these types advertisements. However, it is discernible that consumers are currently perceiving advertisements as monotonous or ordinary and that marketers may need to conjure up innovative ways to ensure that consumers support their brands.

The majority of the participants involved in the study indicated that they perceived South African advertisements to be informative. From the results it is evident that most consumers currently feel that South African advertisements are explanatory by nature. The majority of the participants indicated that they thought the purpose of these advertisements was to raise awareness about a social issue, meaning that the majority of the participants understood the purpose of the advertisements. A minority group felt that the advertisement was aiming at selling a product indicating that some consumers would not fully fathom the purpose of these advertisements as they were unable to identify the objective of enlightening the public about a social issue. These results demonstrate that the majority of South African consumers would understand the purpose and intention behind these types of advertisements. There would however be a minority group that would not be able to fully fathom the deeper meaning behind them. Participants explained that if the wordplay and metaphors included in advertisements are cleverly phrased, they would succeed in reaching consumers.

5.2 Discussion of humour in advertising:

The majority of the participants involved in the study indicated that they found the Nandos advertisement to be humorous. This statistic suggests that the majority of consumers will perceive Nandos advertisements as entertaining. This suggests that the majority of consumers would support a brand using witty, yet controversial advertising because of its entertaining and light hearted tone. Participants have articulated that Nandos succeeds in alleviating certain tensions that exist in South Africa. This suggests that consumers respond well to this type of advertising and that they believe it fulfils the purpose of loosening certain tensions in South Africa. The majority of the participants involved in the study indicated that disturbing imagery would have a negative effect on them after having considered an advertisement. This suggests that the majority of consumers would not support brands using drastic or disturbing imagery in their advertising.

5.3 Discussion of gender differences:

The results from the focus group revealed that shock advertisements prompt the most discussion and capture the attention of the participants more than the advertisements using informative and educational appeals. The results demonstrated that female consumers have emotive responses when perceiving controversial images and are often able to identify the origin of the social or political issue. Male consumers however, are less prone to accurately discuss the metaphorical meanings behind these types of messages and are less affected by them. This reveals that gender serves as a helpful segmentation variable and that alternative marketing strategies could be implemented by South African marketers could devise separate advertisements to reach the respective genders. The results therefore suggest that the gender roles that prevail in South African society should be taken into account by marketers when campaigns are created.

5.4 Discussion of social and political issues:

The results revealed that this type of advertising can be very effective in raising awareness about events or social issues but that the brand is certainly at risk of alienating current consumers. In a South African context, it could be effective in creating a national discussion about certain political subjects that members of society are not aware of. It is discernible that shock appeals outperform educational and fear appeals and will therefore succeed in maintaining the attention of consumers. However, in a culturally diverse society, like South Africa, it is particularly challenging to meet the cultural needs of different groups rendering shock advertising a complex and risky marketing technique. This type of advertising can have an adverse effect on the target market, as consumers may respond negatively to these advertisements. It is therefore discernible, that shocking advertisements will be a successful tactic only if it creates awareness and if it is followed by the desired behavioral change. The advertising must be relevant and resonate with the values of consumers in order to engender change. In other words, this type of advertising is only an appropriate choice if it achieves attitude salience.

5.5 Discussion of findings in the context of the research question:

The results demonstrate that although shock advertising may succeed in capturing the attention of the consumer marketers run the risk of creating a distaste for the brand which could lead to negative perceptions. The results from the focus group suggested that consumers will be able to recall the images and make links between brands and controversial imagery and therefore these types of advertisements may lead to high levels of brand awareness. However, agencies that intend to implement shock advertising should be aware that this type of advertising may have an adverse impact on consumers and that this strategy should be carefully considered before it is implemented. It is therefore recommended that advertisements do not contain imagery or language of racist or sexist nature as this will not be well received by consumers. The results indicate that these types of advertisements are memorable and therefore this technique can be beneficial if it is used correctly to obtain publicity.

Furthermore, the results indicate that consumers who are religious, or follow a strict moral code may be inclined to have a negative attitude towards a product or brand using controversial imagery. Additionally, the results demonstrated that females were generally more prone to indicating that they would not purchase a product that was being advertised through sexist or controversial imagery. It is discernible that certain market segments will be more affected than others when this marketing strategy is implemented. Moreover, it is clear that there is a need for further research into the implementation of shock appeal as a marketing technique and that segmenting the target audience by psychographic characteristics is necessary when creating a marketing campaign that uses shock to reach its audience. Furthermore, it is concluded that South African marketers should realize that using a particular marketing scheme may not be effective for all segments of the population and should therefore implement several strategies to reach various audiences.

5.6 Ethical implications are evaluated:

It was imperative to consider the ethical implications of the study as shock advertising frequently contains images that are of a sensitive nature. The researcher was able to ensure that all the elements of the study were ethical and that all participants were treated fairly during the data collection procedure. Prior to the data collection procedure, participants were informed that their participation is voluntary and should they feel uncomfortable at any stage of the interviewing procedure they may forfeit the focus group or completion of the questionnaire. In addition, participants were informed that their participation is both confidential and anonymous. The nature of the imagery used in the focus group and questionnaire were explained to the participants before the data collection procedure commenced. This ensured that the participants were well informed about the content of the advertisements that would be used in the study. The study did not include violent advertising or profanity in advertising as these types of advertising may have caused ethical concerns and the well being of the participants was protected throughout the research procedure. Therefore, the researcher succeeded in conducting a study without breaching ethical guidelines.

5.7 Specific limitations of the study:

An inherent limitation of this study is that the group of participants contained 50 students, rendering the group relatively small. The findings may thus not be generalizable to all consumers in this particular age range. Moreover, the study was conducted in Cape Town and may therefore not be representative of all consumers in South Africa. Additionally, questionnaires cannot account for certain changes in behaviour such as fluctuations of emotion or feeling and are therefore argued to be an inadequate method of collecting sound data. There is no way to discern how truthful a respondent is when answering questions. Moreover, there is no way to establish how thoughtful a participant is when completing a questionnaire as the response is based on the participant's interpretation of the question.

Furthermore, there is a level of imposition from the researcher as their own assumptions are involved in the development of the questions used during the data collection. Due to time constraints, the study implemented three types of shock advertising in order to collect data. It would have been better to implement a wider spectrum of shocking advertisements as this may have created a clearer depiction of this form of marketing. Moreover, using fictitious brands may have yielded more reliable data as participants may be biased when analysing brands that they are familiar with.

5.8 Significance of the study:

The study led to deductions regarding how shock advertising would operate in South African society and led to assumptions about how it may impact consumer preferences. The results from the study therefore add to the existing body of research and provide valuable insights that can be used by marketers about how these types of advertisements will be received by potential consumers and may lead to new creative approaches that can be implemented when campaigns are created. The study did however not fully examine the ethical implications of this phenomenon, an aspect that is worthy of further analysis.

5.9 Discussion of the South African market:

The participants involved in this study have claimed that they will respond to messages that are honest, comprehensible and explicit. Additionally, they have expressed that they value the opinions of friends and word of mouth advertising more than information provided by the media when faced with a purchase decision. Generation Y is a valuable market segment to businesses as the youth can be seen as trend setters for future generations, and will inadvertently influence their choices and preferences. This age group, frequently influences the purchasing habits of their parents, as the older generation is inclined to trust a youth that is technologically advanced and well educated about current products and purchasing products.

It is clear that South African adolescents have become better informed and more empowered through digital channels, and consequently consumer habits have undergone a transformation. As a result, marketing strategies that previously resonated well with consumers may not succeed in reaching them in present times. It is necessary to reanalyse the techniques that are used to reach consumers in order to discern whether they are relevant and effective in a constantly changing environment. (Atmon & Seong, 2012: 03). South African marketers must therefore ensure that they understand their social role and how this impacts upon branding. Previously, marketers have relied predominantly on traditional marketing strategies, such as informative or explanatory mechanisms and have chosen to avoid employing controversial techniques. However, strong marketing strategies are characterised as being able to maintain the attention of their target demographic while maintaining an understanding in cultural shifts and nuances (Atmon & Seong, 2012: 03).

The results from the study prove that although brands implementing shock advertisements succeed in reaching and attaining the attention of their target demographic, it may be risky to implement branding of this nature and there is a possibility of creating a disassociation with the brand. Consumers are alarmed when confronted with this type of advertising thus these mechanisms may not yield the desired results. It has been demonstrated that this technique would not presently yield the desired results. However, it may be worthwhile to reinvestigate the outcome of this strategy as the South African nation becomes more progressive. Future studies may discover that if this strategy is combined with the right measure of humour, it may have a promising future in reaching South Africans. Further research may consider the question of whether shock appeals are ethically justifiable in a South African context and whether there is a difference between how the various cultural groups perceive these types of advertisements. Furthermore, future studies could be performed in order to give marketers an alternative to shock advertising which can be applied to remain unconventional and progressive.

[14 633 words].

Appendix B: Focus group transcript

The focus group was conducted at Vega School of Branding in Cape Town in a classroom. Participants were asked to gather at this location beforehand and briefed on the subject matter of the researcher. The classroom contained a large table with several chairs in order for participants to feel comfortable and at ease when discussing the subject matter. Prior to the discussion participants were welcomed and reminded that their participation is anonymous.

Researcher: Welcome everyone, and thank you for participating in this focus group. Your participation is appreciated. The nature of some of the images that you will be viewing today are of a sensitive nature, but if you feel uncomfortable at any point you may forfeit the focus group. I would like to remind you that your participation and commentary are anonymous and that your commentary will be used for research purposes only. I am going to show you three advertisements, and give you a few minutes to consider them before we commence the discussion. I would like you to think about the purpose of the advertisements and about how the advertisements make you feel. Take a few minutes to consider the message being conveyed and whether you would support brands using these types of advertising.

The researcher hands the three advertisements to the participants and they are then passed around the table. The participants are given a few minutes to consider the advertisements and are then prompted by the researcher to commence the discussion.

Female participant 1: This advertisement could be very effective in changing behavior. By making these types of issues public, it draws attention to them, which can have a positive impact on the viewer.

Female participant 2: It could succeed creating a national discussion about these topics.

Female participant 3: Although it may have an adverse effect on the consumers – they may be offended by these types of advertisements. Brands implementing such controversial imagery run the risk of losing their current consumers.

Male participant 1: I don't really understand the point of this advertisement – I don't see the connection between the political elements and the brand.

Male participant 2: I understand the origin of the advertisement, but I do not feel that a brand will benefit from using an advertisement of this nature. I think the brand is trying to get attention by using political figures in a controversial embrace – this does not seem like it will make a product or service more popular.

Female participant 2: But it will succeed in drawing my attention – especially when I compare it with the other two advertisements. They are certainly not as shocking as this one - I think I would remember this brand more clearly.

Female participant 1: Well this type of advertising can be very effective in raising awareness about events or social issues; and I think can be effective in the changing behaviour of the consumer.

Female participant 2: I agree – the advertisement draws attention to the issue at hand. It could be effective in creating a national discussion about topics as more members of society become aware of these types of issues that are at stake. The controversial advertisements attract my attention the most.

Female participant 3: Yes, these advertisements draw attention to the social issues. I also agree that they could be quite effective in creating a national discussion and educating the general public. Although not every member of the public will have a positive reaction to these advertisements and this will need to be taken into account by the brand. The controversial advertisements also attracted my attention the most!

Female participant 1: It is the violation of norms that was the element that caused the advertisement to capture their attention. I think shock appeals are more effective than the educational appeals and succeed in capturing my attention.

Male participant 3: I think that the controversial imagery is really memorable and impressionable – although I don't really see the connection between the imagery and the brand. But this would really stay with me. This is something that I wouldn't forget easily.

Researcher: Thank you to all of you for participating in the study and for taking part in the discussion today.

Appendix C: Interview transcript

Researcher:

My paper is concerned primarily with the examination of shock advertising as it functions in society and why it is not frequently implemented in marketing campaigns in South Africa. Specifically, I am analysing how South African consumers would respond to this type of advertising and whether it will be well received by individuals.

As an expert in South African branding, I was wondering why you believed that this strategy is not relied on more frequently by marketers? Do you think there is a future for this type of advertising in South Africa?

Responses from the branding lecturer:

It all depends on how you define or conceptualise shock advertising. If by that you mean advertising that ‘challenges the public’s conventional understanding of the social order’ and ‘deliberately startles and offends its audience by violating norms for social values and personal ideals’ like, Benetton, Calvin Klein and Get Unhooked anti-smoking campaigns, then you are immediately in the very complex arena of what is regarded by the public as ‘in good/bad taste’ and what is regarded as offensive to social values.

Advertising is regulated by self-regulatory bodies e.g. the ASASA (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa) and it is ruled by a Code of Practice, which all its members (including advertising agencies and marketers) subscribe to. The ASA is reactive in the sense that it only acts or withdraws an advertisement found to be in contravention of the Code based on a complaint or a number of complaints. The ones that are most difficult to judge is whether the advertising is offensive to social values or in ‘bad taste’ – as what may be acceptable to one group may be offensive to another. Naturally, the more diverse a society is (and SA is a very diverse society) the more chance there is of individuals or interest groups complaining – particularly where issues of race may come to the fore (as is often the case with shock advertising).

This may be one of the reasons why shock advertising is not relied on more frequently by SA advertisers, apart from the costs involved when an advertising campaign has to be withdrawn. A suggestion is that you perhaps contact the ASA and ask for a breakdown of ads withdrawn based on the above (of course there may be other reasons for withdrawals e.g. infringement of trades mark act, puffery, misrepresentation, ‘passing off’ etc.) You should however concentrate specifically on ads that have been withdrawn on the basis of shock value or being offensive to norms and values or in bad taste. They may send you a list and you will have to do your own trend analysis – which will already be an excellent way of doing research and obtaining a more objective benchmark of the number of times ‘shock ads’ have been attempted but withdrawn as a result of public outcry. At the same time it may give you an idea of how well or badly South Africans respond to this type of advertising.

Setting regulatory and legal matters aside for the moment, there are other reasons why marketers may be hesitant to employ shock advertising tactics. It is one thing to create ‘buzz’ or awareness and break through the clutter, but quite another for the advertising to ‘work’ or be effective. Awareness (the cognitive effect), must be followed by attitude change (the affective effect) and only thereafter can one hope for behaviour change (the conative effect). That is after all the purpose of advertising. In other words, the advertising must be relevant and resonate with most of your consumers’ values to engender change. It is also called ‘attitude salience’.

If your consumers are different from the norm (e.g. some say Nike is, per definition, an unconventional brand targeting ‘unconventional’ sportsmen and women), shock advertising or unconventional, controversial advertising may be effective – and the same may apply for Benetton or Calvin Klein. But shock advertising may also backfire and create the very opposite effect that you intended – that of your target market ‘switching off’ as a result of a defence-mechanism kicking in. This has been proven to be the case in advertising using shock tactics such as excessive fear appeals e.g. in HIV, STD’s or anti-smoking campaigns. Seminal researchers such as Janis and Feshbach and Cohen (*Attitude Change and Social Influence*) have all as early as the 1960’s warned against the use of excessive fear appeals in getting people to change their attitudes and behavior. You can also consult more recent studies on the effects of fear appeals.

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