



**The Changing Narrative of Stereotypical Portrayals of Women in Advertising:
How brands Can Use Social Taboos to Influence Social Dialogue**

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Abstract

Unspoken social taboos are seriously affecting society (Kuegler, 2020), and embracing this conversation is a necessary first step toward achieving a more equitable society (Green, 2020).

Brands have a platform to speak out about social taboos in order to influence social dialogue, because failure to do so perpetuates false and harmful narratives about women (Mihalčová, Pružinský, & Gontkovičová, 2015). As a result, the researcher looked into the Always brand, which used social taboos to address stereotypes in their '*Like a Girl*' advertisement, to see if indeed social dialogue was achieved. To accomplish this, a qualitative in-depth interview with the Head of Brand at Always was conducted, along with a quantitative survey, in order to gain a broad and deep understanding of the phenomenon.

The study's findings revealed that consumers value the need for social taboos to be discussed, and they look to brands to take a similar stance and to serve as their mouthpiece. As a result, brands must take this stance authentically, rather than as a gimmick to attract consumers' attention, otherwise, it has the potential to trivialise a serious social crisis.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Gender roles in society insist that we should act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves in accordance with our assigned sex (Targonskaya, 2014). The preconceived stereotypes that come with these roles, are typically adopted during childhood, and continue into adulthood, which explains why they have persisted for years and years (Ikegwu, 2017). These stereotypes give birth to harmful social taboos, such as the control of adolescent girls' sexuality, which is a driving force behind some of the world's most pernicious practices, such as child, early and forced marriages (Sprinkel, 2019). The continued existence of these and other stereotypes is wrong, especially when it results in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly those pertaining to women (OHCHR, 2021).

Because advertisements provide powerful models of behaviour to emulate or react against, brands have an advantageous platform for addressing and confronting such important issues (Timke & O'Barr, 2017). Therefore, this study focused on the changing narrative of portrayals of women in advertising and how brands can use social taboos to influence social dialogue. Thus, the goal of the research was to provide an in-depth look at the investigation into this research problem, as well as the research design and plan to meet the study's objectives.

The remainder of the introductory chapter outlines the study's rationale, problem, and purpose, which aided in determining the appropriate research questions and objectives and is preceded by a brief overview of the study's key concepts (brand strategy, social dialogue, social taboos, and shockvertising). Following that, a brief description of the study's research methodology is discussed, and the researcher then outlines the structure of the remainder of the document.

1.2 Rationale

Despite numerous legal, cultural, and intellectual challenges that have called gender stereotyping into question, it remains entrenched in society (Smith, 2014). We can see instances of this entrenchment in how legislation has consistently failed to protect

women from various forms of sex discrimination, or in the workplace, where the wage disparity between men and women persists (Smith, 2014). Unfortunately, the persistence of these and other entrenchments of stereotyping in society, have long-term and harmful consequences (Toegel, 2019).

Advertising reflects culture, mirroring the larger characteristics of society, and its influence comes with accountability (Bradley, 2021). This means, that because of advertising's reach and power, brands have a responsibility to set the right tone, and become problem solvers by providing a lens and challenging issues such as stereotyping (Rees, 2021). One way this has been exercised is seen through the growing commercial imperative for brands to take a people-first approach and stop using stereotypes in their advertising (McLaren, 2017), which implies that brands must remove the gender and preconception veil that we impose on individuals. Secondly, according to Gullard (2019), brands can challenge the stereotype narrative by discussing topics that people would not normally discuss in order to get their brand message across. It is these types of actions that will enable brands to begin a conversation about important human issues that would otherwise be considered inappropriate or difficult to initiate (Gullard, 2019). As a result, a look at a variety of brands that have attempted to challenge stereotype narratives in their advertising was chosen for further investigation.

For the first time in 2015, Cannes Lion, an international festival that explores the value of creativity in brand communication, created a new award to recognise advertising that challenges gender norms (Exon & Arrow, 2015). Among the nominated brands were Burger King, Pantene and Always. Following a review of these advertisements, the Always '*Like a Girl*' advertisement received the highest video reviews on their YouTube page and subsequently won the Cannes Lion award (Yi Wu, 2017), and was thus selected as the appropriate brand for this research study.

Always' values include empowering women and girls all over the world (IAB, 2017), thus, it is critical that audiences have a favourable perception of how Always addresses social taboos. This is the premise that led to the selection of this topic. Given the importance of addressing stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising, further research into how brands can use social taboos in their brand communication has the potential to influence much-needed social change.

1.3 Problem Statement

One in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime, mainly as a result of harmful social taboos that contribute to gender inequality (Oxfam, 2021). The continuation of these taboos is not only a violation of human rights, but it is also a serious development issue that must be addressed (Karki & Espinosa, 2018).

Because of the platform and reach that brands have, there is an opportunity for them to use their voice to address these social taboos and influence the conversation around them. Failure to do so risks perpetuating false and harmful narratives about women for future generations (Mihalčová, Pružinský, & Gontkovičová, 2015)

1.3.1 Why is The Problem Worth Investigating?

The perpetuation of social taboos, particularly against women, is the result of stereotyping, and they only persist because they are not questioned and thus they take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those who enforce them (OHCHR, 2021). Thus, this study has the potential to shed light on the importance of starting a conversation about these taboos, because empowering women is critical to any societal change process (OHCHR, 2021).

1.4 Research Questions

To address the key research areas identified in the problem statement in section 1.3, this study asked the following research questions:

1. What brand strategy does *Always* employ to create social dialogue on taboo topics?
2. How do consumers perceive the brand's ability to address social taboos?
3. Is there synergy between the *Always* brand strategy and consumers' perceptions of how they address social taboos to influence the subject matter dialogue?

1.5 Research Objectives

This research study included, in addition to the research questions, the following research objectives:

1. To analyse Always' brand strategy, based on creating social dialogue on taboo topics.
2. To determine the brand's ability to address social taboos among consumers.
3. To evaluate how the synergy of the Always brand strategy combined with consumers' perception of how they address social taboos, influenced the subject-matter dialogue.

1.6 Purpose Statement

Following the problem identified in section 1.3, the purpose of this study was to examine how brands that use social taboos in their messaging can influence social dialogue, specifically around the stereotyping of women. The research study was guided by the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning theory, which is a useful tool for those who facilitate dialogue (Communication Theory, 2020).

1.7 Conceptualisation of Key Concepts

In order to answer the research questions, the study included four key concepts, namely, brand strategy, social dialogue, social taboos, and shockvertising.

Brand strategy is a long-term plan developed by an organisation to achieve a series of long-term goals (Bynder, 2021). It became relevant in the study in order to understand the brand narrative, which is essentially the central building block of a meaningful brand strategy (Minds, 2019). This means that the researcher was able to investigate the extent to which brands can influence consumers, based on their basic blueprint. Secondly, social dialogue refers to a brand's ability to elicit a response from consumers (Wren, 2018). This was critical to unpack in order to understand what constitutes successful social advertising (Hensoldt-Fyda, 2018).

To realise the importance of why social taboos should be addressed, an in-depth understanding of social taboos, which are defined as subjects that should not be discussed (Hensoldt-Fyda, 2018), is required.

Finally, shockvertising is the intentional use of taboo subjects, to attract attention and elicit a strong reaction (Turgeon, 2018). The researcher investigated the link between social taboos and shockvertising in the study, and an analysis of this is critical to measuring the appropriate methods to elicit the desired response from consumers.

These key concepts are expanded upon in the study's literature review chapter in Chapter 2.

1.8 Overview of Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed method design approach. An in-depth interview was used to collect qualitative data, and a survey was used to collect quantitative data. As a result, a prior coding and statistical analysis were used to dissect the data, respectively.

This methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.9 Structure of the Document

The remaining chapters of the document are divided into four sections. The literature review in Chapter 2 unpacks the study's key concepts, as discussed in section 1.7. This is followed by the research methodology chapter, which is noted in section 1.8. The research data is unpacked in the findings and discussion section of Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, a critical evaluation of the findings in the context of the research problem is discussed.

The review of literature is discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Before delving into the literature review, it is necessary to briefly outline the study's chosen paradigm, because it highlights how meaning was constructed from the literature and data gathered (Kivunja, & Kuyini, 2019). A paradigm is a research tradition that outlines the research's intention, motivation and worldview (Mackenzie & Snipe, 2006). There are several of these research traditions, but the three most prominent are positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

In this study, the critical realism paradigm was used because the study's goal is to expose myths, particularly those surrounding social taboos and to empower society by investigating the phenomenon which is the changing narrative of stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising, and how brands can use social taboos to influence social dialogue.

With the paradigm established, the researcher was able to unpack the study's key concepts, which are brand strategy, social dialogue, social taboos, and shockvertising, in the literature review.

2.2 Brand Strategy

A brand strategy is a long-term plan developed by an organisation to achieve a series of long-term goals that ultimately result in consumer identification and preference for their brand (Bynder, 2021). This long-term plan must be well-designed and executed across all business functions in order to improve consumer experience, competitive advantage, and financial performance (Martin, 2021). A brand strategy is also used by a company to create a specific image of itself in the minds of current and potential customers (Kasza, 2021), by defining what the brand stands for, the promises they make, and the personality they convey (Marketing MO, 2021). When considering this study, it is critical when confronting the research objective, to understand the fundamentals of the Always brand strategy and how its implementation affects the brand's narrative.

The brand strategy must begin with a thorough understanding of the business strategy; this means that corporate strategy and brand strategy must be aligned in order to create stakeholder value (Baeva, 2011). A company develops this strategy to represent what consumers should expect or perceive about a specific product or organisation (Keller, Asperia & Georgson, 2012). Although brands are primarily constructed and influenced by the large corporations that own them, it has been repeatedly demonstrated that the perception of a brand is entirely up to the market (Harsh, 2016).

It is on this principal that Kotler and Pfoertsch (2006) identified the following steps to developing an effective brand strategy, which are frequently cited when discussing brand strategy implementation. They believe that a brand strategy is based on the brand core, brand values, and brand associations, with the following building blocks used to achieve results: brand mission, brand architect, brand positioning, brand value proposition, brand promise, and brand personality (Kotler & Pfoertsch 2006). Aside from the framework mentioned above, there are several others that are used to aid in the development of brand strategies. Robertson (2016) developed a brand strategy roadmap that is centred on building brands that are relevant for the future. In this framework, he identifies the vision, purpose, values, brand promise and brand story as the starting points for developing a brand strategy (Robertson, 2016). Furthermore, Robertson (2016) unpacks the goals, issues, and approaches which are supported by tactics that the organisation can use to implement the strategy. When these frameworks are examined, it is clear that there is consistency in the elements that must be considered when brands confront their brand strategy, as both elements presented play a critical foundation in connecting with their audience and nurturing sustainable relationships for business growth (Engelbrecht, 2020). This becomes important to the study as it aimed to unpack the synergy of the Always brand strategy, combined with consumers perception of how they address social taboos, influenced the subject-matter dialogue. As a result, it then becomes necessary to identify how the brand strategy contributed significantly to the brand narrative, which is a tool for attracting people to the brand community (Hanlon, 2016).

The branding process is evolving from focusing solely on the main branding elements and toward a storytelling process that promises customers satisfaction of their needs as well as an entirely new experience (Mucundorfeanu, 2013). As a result, brand

narratives are becoming more prevalent as a strategy tool, due to their ability to access consumers' emotions and reach them on a personal and relatable level (Fog, Budtz & Yakaboylu, 2005).

More literature confirms that a brand narrative is an essential component of brand strategy. According to Lloyd (2016), a strong narrative will always help brands, even if they are operating from a position of strength. Firstly, with the help of a compelling narrative, successful brands can cement their dominance by forging far stronger and more difficult-to-break bonds with customers, prospects, and employees, as well as increasing the perceived distance between themselves and their closest competitors (Lloyd, 2016). Secondly, and most importantly, a good brand narrative aids in the creation of brand experiences that change people's perceptions of a brand, based on the emotional rewards associated with the brand and the way the brand strives to make people feel in every interaction (Lloyd, 2016).

Kopost (2020) shares similar views to those of Lloyd (2016) and affirms that a compelling brand narrative is the proverbial steel of building authentic connections, and now, more than ever, customers want to develop more meaningful relationships with brands. This means that when a brand reaches this status, it does not only fulfil its functional benefits, but it is able to impact on consumers' personal and collective wellbeing, thus building a foundation of a successful relationship with a brand (Waio, 2017).

However, although much has been written about the power of brand narratives and their role in creating successful brand strategies, there is very little empirical evidence of their effects on consumer responses, particularly around creating social dialogue (Lundqvist, Liljander, Gummerus & van Riel, 2013), therefore this study has a potential gap to fill, in closing this loop and evaluating the outcome.

2.3 Social Dialogue

Social dialogue is the opportunity for communication and conversation to take place as tools for announcing and/or explaining change (April, 1999). From the standpoint of a brand, social dialogue is the brand's ability to elicit a response from consumers, which is typically in the form of a conversation (Wren, 2018).

As a result, several theories that investigate what constitutes successful dialogue have emerged, with the goal of gaining a better understanding of how two parties co-create meaning in conversations (Pearce, 2000). One such theory is the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) theory; this theoretical framework focuses on understanding the individual meanings people take away from conversational engagements (Pearce, 2000). In essence, the theory holds that people use rules to create and interpret meaning, and that dialogue creates the social environment in which people participate (Espaillat, 2009).

Furthermore, the framework is identified as a useful tool for enriching conversations and understanding the complex role of those who facilitate dialogue (Communication Theory, 2020), and for the purposes of this study, the researcher identifies the facilitator as the Always brand, allowing the researcher to investigate whether they achieved successful dialogue with consumers.

To determine if this dialogue was successful, the theoretical framework examines the conversation or engagement by analysing it through the six hierarchies of meaning levels, all of which must be met in order to achieve the desired dialogue (Espaillat, 2009). These levels include content or message, speech acts or language, episodes, relationships, self-concept and culture (Dillman, 2021).

The framework's first level is the content or message, which is typically described as raw data at the start of a dialogue exchange (Espaillat, 2009). It is the intended data and information during communication and is the fundamental building block of any communication (Dillman, 2021). It is then followed by speech acts or language which describes how there are numerous utterances or speech acts, such as questions, commands, promises, and statements, and how a person's reception of each of these plays a significant role in their level of participation in a communication exchange (Pearce, 2000). The framework's third level are episodes, which constitutes every instance of face-to-face communication, and the fourth is relationships, which unpacks the dynamic of what connects two (or more) individuals during an information exchange (Dillman, 2021). Self-concept, which is the next level of the framework, expresses how an individual's response is frequently based on their perception of themselves (Pearce, 2000). Finally, the framework concludes with culture, which recognises that people act in accordance with their cultural values, which may include

race, economic class, gender, and ethnic background, and that these factors must be considered when facilitating dialogue (Dillman, 2021).

The CMM theory has also received some criticism. Wood (1997, cited in Imran, Chen, Wei & Akhtar, 2019) is of the view that the theory is too broad in scope because it attempts to elaborate the entire universe from different cultural problems to difficulties in close relationships. Wood (1997, cited in Imran, Chen, Wei & Akhtar, 2019) goes on to say that the observation of the hierarchy of levels pertains to internal, subjective interpretation.

On the contrary, according to Anderson (1996, cited in Imran, Chen, Wei & Akhtar, 2019), the CMM theory has provided a way in which facilitators can look at how individuals co-create their meaning in deeper understanding. Furthermore, the theory has contributed to a better understanding of how to deal with real-life social situations through conversation and interaction by utilising the hierarchy of levels (Anderson, 1996 cited in Imran, Chen, Wei & Akhtar, 2019). Buttle (1994, cited in Imran, Chen, Wei & Akhtar, 2019) supports this statement, claiming that because the theory is based on human actions and reactions, it is a social constructionist theory. Thus, it aids in making people conscious in making decisions in situations where multiple people are involved in one matter, allowing them to take better collective action, which can be especially useful in the consumer and marketing paradigms (Buttle, 1994 cited in Imran, Chen, Wei & Akhtar, 2019,).

As a result, this study's topic being the changing narrative of stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising: how brands can use social taboos to influence social dialogue, the researcher considered the CMM theoretical framework by utilising the hierarchy of meaning levels to guide the study's analysis. However, because the study will investigate social dialogue based on consumers' interpretation of the Always advertisement, no face-to-face action would have occurred, rendering the episode level inoperable in this study. As a result, the hierarchy of levels that is used in the analysis includes content, speech acts, relationships, self-concept, and culture.

The link between brand strategy and social dialogue is important because section 3.1 highlighted how the ability to access consumers' emotions and reach them on a personal and relatable level, is required when developing a brand strategy (Fog et al., 2005). Thus, brands must update their strategies to enable authentic dialogue,

communication, and relevance with consumers in order to stand out and remain top-of-mind (Salyer, 2014). Condon (2015) agrees with the preceding and confirms that advertising strategies and trends have evolved over time, and brands are increasingly under pressure to stand for something beyond the sell. As a result, advertisements have become less about the product and more about the audience's perception of the product, its place in their lives, and their place in society (Condon, 2015).

A study conducted by Accenture (2018) validates Condon's (2015) assertions and found that consumers are pressuring brands to participate in social, cultural, and even political debates. According to the findings, two-thirds of customers believe that a brand's actions, such as posting comments on social media or participating in boycotts, can influence a brand's reaction to an event or its stance on a public concern. This gives our research study an interesting perspective on the possibility of a joint-led social dialogue responsibility, because the rewards for consumers and brands are potentially significant (Mainwaring, 2011). The result could lead to the opportunity to become "brand nations" - a new model of business whose market consists of consumers throughout the world, regardless of their geographic location or nationality, who believe and trust in that brand, based on shared values and socially responsible behaviours (Mainwaring, 2011).

2.4 Social Taboos

The concept of a taboo in its most basic form, corresponds to the notion of something that should not be touched – whether out of disgust or awe (Freitas, 2008). The essence of the word applies to the realities and social concerns of communities both present and past, and it has become rather broad in its scope, standing for a wide range of avoidance behaviours (Freitas, 2008). As a result, Sabri (2010) asserts that among the various definitions provided for this concept, the main themes pertaining to social taboos include prohibition, sacredness, religion, and impurity.

In the context of this research, social taboos are examined as subjects that should not be discussed in certain societies (Hensoldt-Fyda, 2018). This means that in various cultures and communities, there are some boundaries that should not be crossed or that people simply do not want to cross (Hensoldt-Fyda, 2018).

Based on the research objective of the study, it becomes necessary to review literature pertaining to the purposes and potential outcomes of brands who use social taboos in their advertising. When advertisers take it upon themselves to discuss social problems rather than the superiority of their products in comparison to others that are similar to them, taboo issues are bound to be mentioned much more frequently, with the goal of raising social awareness (Freitas, 2008). Consequently, marketers and social advocacy campaigners are becoming more interested in the role that their brands can play in addressing entrenched social taboos (Balch, 2013). There is now a growing list of brands participating in this strategy (Balch, 2013), but there have also been some reservations about the use of social taboos in advertising.

According to Sabri (2017), using and addressing social taboos in advertising can be quite harmful. While these conversations may be necessary, there is also the risk of causing "unintended consequences" that lead consumers to undermine the level of taboo-ness addressed in the advertising (Sabri, 2017). Therefore, a better understanding of the ethics of such advertising is required, as it demonstrates its role in the trivialisation of taboo behaviours and imagery (Sabri, 2017). Furthermore, Wren (2018) contends that some brand motives are not always clear when addressing social taboos, as their goal is to 'jump on the bandwagon' and find a profitable opportunity even if it is not relevant or authentic to their brand. Before using or addressing a social taboo, brand leaders must have an answer to the question "why," because if a brand chooses to be a part of a social taboo conversation, relevance and adjacency are critical. Thus, in the study, the researcher is able to challenge and unpack the Always brand's purpose of using social taboos to address stereotypes through its brand strategy; additionally, it can be argued that the researcher cannot verify if it caused positive social dialogue without conducting the relevant research.

It is also necessary to review literature that deconstructs the challenges of addressing social taboos because it establishes a guideline for what to look for when attempting to address them (Sprinkel, 2019). As a result, one of the main challenges identified is the fact that social taboos are deeply ingrained and normalised in people, making the process of ensuring long-term change on this topic extremely difficult (Sprinkel, 2019). Fershtman, Gneezy, & Hoffman (2011) agree with Spinkel (2019), in that social taboos are a part of one's identity and are strong subconscious prohibitions that are passed down through generations, making it a difficult thing to change. Consequently, it can

be argued that this is a result of culture, because culture, at its core, entails a collection of traits and characteristics that are unique to a group of people to the extent that they distinguish them from other people or societies (Idang, 2015). These peculiar characteristics extend to a people's social norms as well as social taboos (Idang, 2015). Moreover, culture is understood to be a way of life for people, this means that every human being who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the culture of that society, whether knowingly or unknowingly (Idang, 2015).

An understanding of the above indicates the sensitivity in which social taboos need to be addressed because not only is it emotion-laden and fear-provoking, but it generates a feeling of vulnerability (Condomines & Hennequin, 2014).

2.5 Shockvertising

Shockvertising is a unique advertising technique that uses 'horror' and 'disgust' to capture and hold the audience's attention (Machová, Huszárik & Tóth, 2015). These advertisements are created through the use of shock appeals, and their impact on consumers is diverse, prompting constant debate among brand practitioners and stakeholders about the negative and positive effects that may come with them. (Banyte, Paskeviciute & Rutelione 2014). Turgeon (2018) shares the definition that best fits our study, claiming that shockvertising is the intentional use of taboo subjects and societal issues that we typically ignore, to attract widespread attention and elicit a strong reaction. As a result, the advertisement generates more memorable brand awareness (Turgeon, 2018).

Thus, the relationship between shockvertising and social taboos is important in the study because shockvertising becomes the vehicle through which brands reach out to their audiences and address social taboos (Kowalik, 2021). This means that shockvertising is used to draw people's attention to a public policy or social issue and creates a buzz that draws attention to a specific audience (Kowalik, 2021). Brands are doing this because they are no longer afraid to take a stand and not remain silent on societal issues by starting a conversation (Sprout Social, 2021).

Koszembar-Wiklik (2016), on the other hand, holds a contrasting view on the use and purpose of shockvertising, referring to it as a manipulation of the audience's emotions.

Manipulation, by definition, is any impact on the doer in which he mistakenly believes he is deciding, unaware that he is merely a means in the hands of the true performer – in this case, Koszembar-Wiklik (2016) claims the brand is the manipulator. Brands are aware that they have become a catalyst through which audiences seek their own identity, unconsciously seeking answers to questions such as "How to live?" "What are we required to own?" "What should I eat?" "What should I wear?" "Where should I stay?", all in the name of social acceptance (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016). As a result, such control over their social behaviour has been kept outside of the consumers' consciousness. Consequently, when using shockvertising and blasting shocking images and words, brands are likely to use what they know about consumers and what could possibly make them tick (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016).

Moreover, Javed and Zeb (2011) also debate the purpose of shockvertising, claiming that it may be disturbing for some, with a particular concern for children. Brands should focus on instilling a moderate level of fear and shock in their advertisements because, after all, consumers are aware of the message that the brand is attempting to convey (Javed & Zeb, 2011).

The aim of this study was to examine how brands that use social taboos in their messaging can influence social dialogue; thus, Kowalik's (2021) perspective on the purpose of shockvertising is considered.

2.6 Summary

Understanding the brand strategy is critical in defining what the brand stands for and has a strong relationship with how social dialogue is formed. Furthermore, there is a link between social taboos and shockvertising based on how brands use shockvertising to draw consumers' attention to social taboos.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter begins with a discussion of the chosen research design, followed by an unpacking of the research plan that was implemented for this study.

3.1 Research Paradigm

This section of the study gives an overview of the chosen paradigm, followed by a discussion of mixed methodology.

3.1.1 *Selected Paradigm*

A paradigm is a research tradition that outlines the research's intention, motivation, and expectations, and it also describes the researcher's worldview (Mackenzie & Snipe, 2006). This worldview is the standpoint, way of thinking, school of thought, or set of shared beliefs that influences the meaning or interpretation of research data (Mackenzie & Snipe, 2006).

There are several of these research traditions, but the three most prominent are positivism, interpretivism, and critical realism (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). The critical realism paradigm was used because the study's goal is to expose myths, particularly those surrounding social taboos and to empower society by investigating the phenomenon under investigation which is the changing narrative of stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising; how brands can use social taboos to influence social dialogue.

Critical realism arose from dissatisfaction with positivism's non-humanistic and narrow approaches, as well as the passive and subjective views of interpretivism (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). As a result, critical realism then combined elements from both traditions to create a tradition which believes that real structures exist outside of human consciousness, as positivists see it, and that our knowledge of reality is a result of social conditioning, as interpretivists believe (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

Therefore, critical realism distinguishes between the 'real' world and the 'observable' world (Warwick, 2020). This means that the 'real' cannot be observed and exists independently of human perceptions and constructions, whereas the world as we know it, is built from our perspectives and experiences, through what is 'observable'

(Warwick, 2020). Hence, in the view of critical realists, unobservable structures cause observable events, and people can only understand the social world if they understand the structures that generate events (Warwick, 2020).

Given the study's goal of examining the use of brands utilising social taboos to generate dialogue and challenge stereotypes, it is clear that the study is viewed through the critical realism lens.

To further unpack it, the chosen research paradigm can be examined through its epistemological, ontological, axiological, and methodological positions (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014), which are uncovered in the following section.

According to Martinich (2005), epistemology is the philosophical study of the nature, origin, and limitations of human knowledge. Epistemologists frequently begin their speculations with the assumption that they have a great deal of knowledge, but as they reflect on what they presumably know, they realise that it is much less secure than they realised, and they come to believe that many of their firmest beliefs are dubious or even false (Martinich, 2005). As a result, critical realism insists the knowledge presented should be action-oriented and thus have practical value in causing social change by providing people with the tools they need to change their own world (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Consequently, the study's findings, particularly those concerning stereotypes and social taboos, should be able to effect social change by providing a forum for constructive and ongoing dialogue.

Ontology studies the nature of being and existence; it is the science of what is, of the different types and structures of objects (Hammond, 2017). Thus, in a nutshell, ontology seeks to classify and explain entities (Hammond, 2017). The ontological position of critical realism holds that what people observe and experience is merely a surface reality that is only partial and sometimes even false, and that as a result, deep structures are not uncovered in order to discover the truths of things (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). According to Fershtman et al. (2011), the origin of taboos is based on cultural experience and stems from strong subconscious prohibitions passed down through generations. Thus, this research study should be able to expose and criticise social taboos and gender stereotyping and empower people to liberate themselves from all forms of oppression and exploitation.

In research, methodology is the systematic and purposeful collection of data on a specific research problem (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Seeing as critical realism is based on the concept of a multifaceted reality which can be investigated from all perspectives, using a single research approach cannot provide definitive results about any given object of study (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). As a result, the research used a mixed-method approach to examine the study, which incorporates quantitative and qualitative research.

According to Dudovskiy (2018), axiology is concerned with what the researcher values in the research; this is significant because these values influence how research is conducted and what is valued in research findings. In critical realism, freedom, equality and emancipation are valued in research (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014). Consequently, the findings of this research study allow for liberation and emancipation from the perceived dangers of gender roles and stereotypes.

The mixed methodological approach used in this study, which is premised on this paradigm, is discussed further in the following section.

3.2 Mixed Method Research Approach and Design

A quantitative approach to research entails the process of objectively collecting and analysing numerical data in order to describe, predict, or control variables of interest (McLeod, 2019). In contrast, qualitative research entails gathering and analysing non-numerical data in order to comprehend concepts, opinions, or experiences (Bhandari, 2020). A researcher may choose to use both qualitative and quantitative research design methods within the same study; this is known as a mixed methods approach (Shorten & Smith, 2017).

The key word is 'mixed,' because data linkage or integration at an appropriate stage in the research process is an essential step in the mixed methods approach (Shorten & Smith, 2017). This study employed a mixed-methods research approach by gathering, analysing, and "mixing" qualitative, as the primary method, followed by a quantitative research method, in order to better understand the research problem. This approach is also justified by the fact that the study's key concepts must be investigated

from multiple perspectives, which a single method cannot provide (du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014).

Furthermore, because the goal of this study is to examine how brands that use social taboos in their messaging can influence social dialogue, an exploratory mixed method design was used. It consists of a series of phases, beginning with a qualitative phase of data collection and analysis, followed by a quantitative phase of data collection and analysis, and concluding with a phase of data integration or linking from the two separate strands of data (Berman, 2017).

A qualitative in-depth interview was conducted to determine whether brands that use social taboos actually influence social dialogue. It was then necessary to determine whether or not that specific dialogue and key message was successfully conveyed, so a quantitative survey was conducted with the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning as a foundation.

3.3 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is the major entity being analysed in the research study (Trochim, 2021). Thus, when conducting the qualitative in-depth interview and quantitative survey in this study, the unit of analysis was the Always '*Like A Girl*' advertisement. As a result, the received data was observed and analysed.

3.4 Population and Sample

A population is the entire group from which a study's conclusions are derived (Bhandari, 2021). Thus, the population of this study include Always brand representatives as well as consumers who have viewed the Always '*Like a Girl*' advertisement.

Because this study employs a mixed method approach, this section was examined both qualitatively and quantitatively.

3.4.1 Qualitative Population and Sample

The population parameters for the Always brand representative were that the individuals must have been involved in the Always '*Like a Girl*' campaign strategy and implementation. Understanding the campaign launch channels, which include the campaign's advertisement is part of this. The expected contribution of this population was to assist the researcher in unpacking the study's research questions by obtaining in-depth knowledge from those involved in the campaign.

These parameters have determined the target population to this study. However, in order to determine a suitable sample framework, an accessible population must be established (Pascoe, 2014). Thus, due to the potential large number of people who were involved in the brand campaign and subsequent advertisement, the researcher viewed Always brand representatives as a broad category. As a result, the researcher considered the Always Head of Brand in South Africa, who was the campaign's lead, to be a more specific segment of this representative group, and thus more accessible.

Subsequent to this accessible population, a sample, which is a subset of the research population (Pascoe, 2014), was determined. Thus, the researcher concluded the sample as the Always Head of Brand, who was involved in the strategy and implementation of the Always '*Like a Girl*' campaign, which includes the advertisement. In this case, the non-probability sampling method was used.

Non-probability sampling employs arbitrary or non-random sample selection (Howard, 2019). This type of sampling was used in this research, because the goal of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being explored.

There are multiple non-probability sampling methods, such as accidental, quota and purposive sampling (Pascoe, 2014). Purposive sampling involves the researcher purposefully selecting the elements to include in the sample, based on a set of characteristics (Pascoe, 2014). The Always Head of Brand in South Africa, who led the '*Like A Girl*' campaign and was involved in the campaign's strategy and implementation, is among the set of characteristics that were purposefully used to select the sample. As a result, purposive sampling was used.

Finally, the sample recruitment tactic for the Always Head of Brand entailed the researcher contacting the Always parent-brand headquarters, Proctor and Gamble,

and requesting the contact information of the individual who met the sample criteria, who was then contacted with a request to participate in the study.

3.4.2 Quantitative Population and Sample

The population parameters applicable to consumers are that they should have watched the '*Like a Girl*' advertisement. According to Dod (2019), the average advertisement viewers' attention span is becoming shorter. This means that the duration of an advertisement from start to finish is not always guaranteed. Thus, to ensure accurate data collection, it is critical that the consumers who viewed the advertisement did so from beginning to end.

Furthermore, when considering the study's purpose, particularly on the brand's ability to influence social dialogue on social taboos, perspectives from all types of people and sectors of the community are necessary, regardless of cultural difference, age, or gender (Wadud, 2021). Consequently, when examining the target audience of the '*Like a Girl*' campaign, it included young girls and women, as well younger and older men too, to drive the brand's message (Always, 2021). Thus, the accessible population for this study, from which respondents were considered, were individuals 14 years of age and older.

Thus, quantitatively, the researcher defined the study's representative sample as consumers, 14 years and older who have viewed the '*Like a Girl*' advertisement from end to end.

Subsequently, probability sampling was used in this section of the study. This method was chosen because it eliminates human bias from the sampling process through the use of random methods (Pascoe, 2014). As a result, simple random sampling as a function of probability sampling was used. This is due to the fact that each member of the population has an equal chance of being chosen to be a part of the sample, which reduces bias (Pascoe, 2014)

Finally, the sample recruitment tactics for these consumers included posting an invitation to participate in the study's online survey, on platforms where the sample could be reached, which included the Randburg Community, Lebone Student Accommodation, Sir Pierre Van Ryneveld High School, Tshwane University of

Technology Arts department, and a corporate organisation (Ogilvy) Facebook groups and page.

3.5 Data Collection Method

In this section, the researcher discusses the study's data collection methods as well as the application process.

Because this study uses a mixed method research design, the data collection methods and application were considered from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives.

3.5.1 Qualitative Data Collection

The two most prominent categories under qualitative data collection are field research and unobtrusive research (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014). Field research considers observing and interacting with participants in their natural environments as an important part of gathering data (Lumen, 2021). Unobtrusive research methods, on the other hand, do not require the researcher to interact with the participants (Strydom & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

Thus, in light of the study's purpose and design, field research was conducted through an in-depth interview with a pre-determined sample of the Always Head of Brand who led the '*Like a Girl*' campaign. Using this method, the researcher was able to obtain in-depth data relating to the conceptualisation and execution of the Always '*Like a Girl*' advertisement and decipher whether the brand's use of addressing stereotypes and social taboos was successful in generating social dialogue. It is important to note that the interview was conducted digitally using Microsoft Teams due to the COVID-19 social interaction limitation.

An interview schedule was utilised; this is a set of structured questions that have been prepared to serve as a guide for a researcher collecting information or data about a specific topic or issue (Luenendonk, 2019).

3.5.2 Quantitative Data Collection

The goal of quantitative data collection is to find generalisable causal relationships or correlations (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014). This study used a non-experimental

data collection method, which means that the researcher was not able to control, manipulate, or alter the predictor variable or subjects (Lee, 2019).

Surveys are a popular type of data collection tool in quantitative research and consist of a series of questions designed to elicit information (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014). This research tool is frequently used to provide a quantitative or numerical description of a population's trends, attitudes, or opinions by asking questions to a sample of respondents and then generalising the results to the population from which the sample of respondents was drawn (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014). As a result, surveys were used in this study to collect feedback from consumers who viewed the '*Like a Girl*' advertisement in order to determine whether the aforementioned advertisement influenced social dialogue.

Survey designs vary depending on the research focus, these include cross-sectional, before-and-after survey, and longitudinal survey designs (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014). In this study, the cross-sectional survey design was used; this is a type of survey design that allows a researcher to collect data from respondents once, with no repetition (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014).

Furthermore, using this design had the advantage of allowing the researcher to compare many different variables at the same time, and was also cost and time effective (Wilson, 2021).

There are also various types of surveys that can be used. Among the most common types are telephone surveys, personal interviews, group administration, and mail surveys (Mahmutovic, 2020). In a mail survey, the researcher can send questionnaires to individuals in the sample, who can complete them and return them at their leisure (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014). The survey questionnaire for this study was distributed by sending a hyperlink to the Randburg Community, Lebone Student Accommodation, Sir Pierre Van Ryneveld High School, Tshwane University of Technology Arts department, and a corporate organisation (Ogilvy) Facebook groups and page for potential respondents to participate. Because the respondents completed it without assistance from the researcher, a self-administered survey was used (du Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje, 2014).

3.6 Application of the Data Collection Methods

The Six Sigma DMAIC framework guided the data collection application and procedure of this study. Six Sigma is a problem-solving process used by seasoned professionals, and the framework within the process is abbreviated as 'DMAIC,' with each letter representing a phase (Master, 2021); (D = Define, M = Measure, A = Analyse, I = Improve, and C = Control). During the measurement phase, a step-by-step guide is used to create the data collection plan, which was used in this study.

3.6.1 Qualitative Data Collection Application

For the in-depth interview, the first step in the data collection plan was identifying the questions that the study wants answered. This is important because they determine if the data received is relevant to the study (Master, 2021). The interview questions were written using an interview schedule and were guided by content from this study's literature review.

The second step in the data collection plan is to identify what type of data is available for collection (Master, 2021). In this study, extensive research was conducted on the '*Like a Girl*' campaign and advertisement to ensure that the interview questions would provide new and useful information.

In the following step, it was critical to determine how much data was required. This is to ensure that enough data is collected so that the researcher can see patterns and trends (Master, 2021). A pre-test of the in-depth interview was conducted to eliminate any problems and to determine if the questions would provide enough data (Davis, 2014). This was conducted with a marketing representative from Kotex, a feminine hygiene brand that ran the '*She Can*' initiative, which champions women's advancement by combating period stigmas and the barriers they create (Kimberly-Clark, 2021).

The fourth step is to determine how the data is analysed or measured (Master, 2021). The researcher created a data collection template beforehand that categorised the *priori* codes from the content of the theoretical framework, outlined the transcription of the in-depth interview, and allowed for interpretation and key findings.

The fifth and sixth steps describe who will collect the data and where the data will be collected (Master, 2021). This study had already determined the sample from which

the data would be collected, which was the Always Head of Brand at the time of the campaign, and the researcher conducted the in-depth interview. Before approaching the sample, the researcher received approval from the Independent Institute of Education (IIE) to conduct the research, permitting the approach and invitation to the Always Head of Brand to participate in the interview.

The researcher began by telephonically contacting the South African headquarters of Always' parent company, Procter and Gamble. The contact information for the Always Head of Brand who led the campaign was provided upon request. The researcher contacted the individual, who was informed about the purpose of the study and granted permission for the interview to take place. Lastly, it was critical to establish the means of interaction for the interview date, and both parties agreed on an online Microsoft Teams interview.

Finally, the in-depth interview took place, and the researcher was granted permission to record it in order to transcribe the conversation and to begin the analysis.

Following that, the survey used the same data collection application framework as the in-depth interview.

3.6.2 Quantitative data collection application

Similarly, the first step entailed identifying questions pertinent to the study's purpose. These questions were also guided by the content from the literature review of this study.

The second step entailed determining what data was already available; this action was already taken during the interview planning phase, so the researcher ensured that the survey questions were appropriate for providing new and useful information.

Thereafter, a formal online version of the survey was created using SurveyMonkey, and a weblink to the survey was created. This weblink was shared with the supervisor in order to pre-test the survey and ensure that it was functioning properly and that the questions were properly outlined.

The next steps were to determine where the data would be collected. As a result of the approval from the IIE, potential respondents were invited to participate in the study and the purpose of the study was clearly stated to the participants in the survey.

All data obtained from the surveys was automatically put into an Excel spreadsheet and graphs were drawn up through SurveyMonkey. Data was analysed by making use of the automatic function on SurveyMonkey where data was automatically converted into graphs. In order to answer the study's purpose, the findings were compared to those obtained from in-depth interviews.

3.7 Data Analysis

When considering the data collection methods for this study, which include a qualitative in-depth interview and a quantitative survey, it is clear that mixed data analysis was applied.

3.7.1 Qualitative Data Analysis

From a qualitative standpoint there are numerous data analysis methods available, including thematic analysis, discourse analysis, conversational analysis, and semiotics (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). In thematic analysis, the researcher is able to examine the research participants' perspectives by highlighting similarities and differences and generating unexpected insights (Nowell, Norris, White, 2017). Thus, for the purposes of this study, the researcher examined the perspectives of the research participant by highlighting similarities and differences and generating unexpected insights, based on the guidance of a theoretical framework (Nowell, Norris, & White, 2017). This means that the data was then analysed through the guidance of a *priori* codes. *A priori* coding is a method of data coding in which the researcher creates the categories ahead of time based on a theoretical framework or prior knowledge (Stefaniak, 2020). The Hierarchy of Meaning guideline from the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) framework was used in this study. As a result, the five Hierarchy of Meaning elements determined the five categories into which the data was analysed.

3.7.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

From a quantitative perspective, all of the findings obtained from the survey were summarised into an Excel spreadsheet and graphs and charts were automatically set

up by the SurveyMonkey online software. All data was presented in the form of numeric data and percentages.

Applying this statistical analysis viewpoint removed the guesswork from data interpretation, allowing objective and defensible conclusions to be drawn (Khan, 2014).

Finally, the analysis of data can be performed inductively or deductively (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014). It has already been established that this study took a deductive approach, which meant that the researcher created categories for data analysis using the aforementioned Hierarchy of Meaning guideline from the CMM conceptual framework (Bezuidenhout & Cronje, 2014).

Now that the researcher had defined the appropriate research methodology and application, it was critical to consider the study's validity and reliability, as well as its limitations and delimitations.

3.8 Validity and Reliability /Trustworthiness

The method by which researchers assess the reliability and validity of a study's research findings is referred to as trustworthiness (Koonin, 2014). The concept of trustworthiness can be further subdivided into credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Koonin, 2014), and the trustworthiness of this study's research findings is determined using these criteria.

Credibility refers to the accuracy with which the researcher interpreted the data provided by the participants, and it is possible to achieve it when more than one research method is used (Koonin, 2014). As a result, the credibility of this study was established through conducting both a qualitative in-depth interviews and quantitative survey.

Transferability is established by providing evidence that the findings of the research study are applicable to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Statistics Solution, 2021). As a result, in this study, the researcher cannot assert that the findings of the research study would be applicable to other contexts or settings.

Dependability includes the aspect of consistency (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). It is achieved when the degree to which research procedures are documented, allowing an observer to follow, audit, and critique the research process (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams, & Blackman, 2016). Thus, the dependability of this study was ensured because the aspects relating to the research design and methodology of this study have been thoroughly discussed and documented.

Confirmability verifies that the study's findings are shaped by participants more so than they are shaped by a researcher (Statistics Solution, 2021). The study achieved confirmability because the research collection process was thoroughly discussed, and the data collected supported the findings and interpretation.

Finally, because this study included quantitative research, reliability must be ensured (Koonin, 2014). Reliability refers to the degree to which data collection results can be generalised and similar results obtained if the research was repeated (Koonin, 2014). There are different types of reliability that a researcher can consider, namely inter-rater, test-retest, parallel forms, split halves and internal consistency (Koonin, 2014). Inter-rater reliability occurs when different participants are used but the same tool is administered (Koonin, 2014). Before the study was shared with participants, the researcher invited their supervisor to pre-test and participate in it.

3.9 Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are constraints or limits in a research study that are beyond the control of the researcher (Enslin, 2014). In this study, access to the Always Head of Brand for the study's research in-depth interview was regarded as a limitation. This was due to the researcher's lack of control over their availability. Especially since the researcher felt it was critical to find the Always Head of Brand who was in charge of the brand at the start of the '*Like a Girl*' campaign in order to provide useful and accurate information.

Furthermore, COVID-19 lockdown restrictions were a limitation in terms of the physical nature of how the in-depth interview could be conducted due to social constraints at the time of data collection.

Finally, given the nature of the research topic, changes in conditions, particularly those affecting women, occurred as a potential limitation in this study, suggesting that they could influence how people perceive the topic, thus skewing the study's results. The quantitative survey, for example, was conducted shortly after the South African government declared August 2021 to have been a very dark and brutal Women's Month (Dayimani, 2021). This statement was presented with a summary of a number of heinous crimes against women that took place in that period, these included the story of 23-year-old University of Fort Hare Law student, Nosicelo Mtebeni, who was killed by her boyfriend and her limbs were found days later in a plastic bag disposed of in the street (Magaisa, 2021).

Delimitations are the parameters of the study as determined by the researcher, which may include the theoretical framework, research design, methodology, population, and sample size (Enslin, 2014). As a result, the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning theory, which was used in this study, acts as a delimitation, because the categories within the analysis provided the boundaries within which data was collected.

In the following chapter the study's findings are discussed in depth.

Chapter 4: Findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

Following the completion of the research, the findings were classified into five prior categories based on the hierarchy of meaning framework from the Co-ordinated Management of Meaning theory. This framework is an especially useful tool for enriching conversations and understanding the complex role of those who facilitate dialogue (Communication Theory, 2020). The framework's categories are levels that the brand must reach in order to create meaning and dialogue with consumers (Dillman, 2020). It is these *a priori* categories that guided the qualitative in-depth interviews and quantitative survey questions that provided data for the investigation of the research problem.

Thus, in order to present the findings, the researcher began by isolating each *a priori* category, followed by placing the data found from the qualitative in-depth interview and quantitative survey into the respective category. The qualitative findings are presented first, as the primary source of research collection, followed by the quantitative findings that add richness to the data set (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). Finally, the findings of both methods are analysed and discussed for interpretation.

4.2 Findings and discussion

The presentation of findings begins with the content and message category, followed by speech acts and language, relationship, self-concepts, and finally, culture.

4.2.1 Category 1: Content/ Message

According to the framework theory, the content or message relates to the intended data and information during communication (Dillman, 2021). As a result, it is the fundamental building block of any communication exchange (Dillman, 2021), so determining if the intended brand message of the Always 'Like a Girl' advertisement was received by consumers was critical for this study.

4.2.1.1 Qualitative data: Interview finding

In response to the question of what the primary communication goal of the Always 'Like a Girl' campaign was from a brand conceptual point, the interviewee confirmed that the campaign had a clear focus on wanting to tackle how consumers think, particularly regarding stereotypes. It is also worth noting that literature emphasises the importance of establishing this goal from the onset because it represents what consumers should expect or perceive about a specific product or organisation (Keller, Asperia & Georgson, 2012).

Table 4.1: Content/Message Themes

Category: Content / Message		
Theme	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
Tackling Biases	5	"I think it's more a tackling of biases, right? and most of the time with... I love time. Both from... both from, the male and from female side" "those biases are not only just male biases, but the society biases" "mainly to address biases and I think what it does is that it has when you see the ad at the beginning and it says run like a girl, do like a girl... You don't see anything wrong, you're looking at it like, 'OK, yeah, you know', 'It's normal'." "and then it becomes a thing of flip, actually, I have a wrong bias." "And where does this bias come from? Right then? It's so well entrenched and well established that no one sees anything wrong with it"

As a result, addressing biases emerged as a recurring theme throughout the analysis, and it proved to be the critical content building block for this communication. This means that the Always advertisement's intended content and message were clearly set and intended from a brand point as per the framework's description.

4.2.1.2 Quantitative data: Survey finding

If we now turn to the survey findings, respondents were asked if the brand's intended content/message was clear to them. As seen on figure 4.1, a large majority of the respondents (95.63%) stated yes, the intended message was clear, while 4.37% stated no. This suggests to the researcher that consumers understood the intention of the brand's messages when engaging with them, as well as the action that was required. This is important to achieve as reported in the literature review, because it becomes the foundation to enable authentic dialogue, communication, and relevance with consumers in order to stand out and stay top-of-mind (Salyer, 2014).

When comparing the two results, the researcher concludes that the Always brand's content and message were clearly defined as seen in the interviewees' consistent theme on the importance of tackling biases. It is this theme that the majority of survey respondents stated was clear and coherent to them, thus demonstrating that the brand's ability to convey their planned message was well received by consumers. If this had not been achieved, the researcher believes that the campaign exercise and overall objective of what the Always brand wanted to achieve would have failed.

This sentiment is articulated in the literature review, which discusses the relationship between brand strategies and dialogue as an important foundation, because it demonstrates the ability to access consumers' emotions and reach them on a personal and relatable level (Fog et al., 2005). This indicates the significance of the content and message building block, as well as how important it was for consumers to receive the intended message of what the Always brand wanted to convey. It is also worth noting that, while a small percentage of respondents, as shown in figure 4.1, objected to understanding the brand's intended message, the framework allows for it and states that content alone is not always sufficient to establish meaning for some people (Dillman, 2020). The researcher insists that this is what makes the rest of the steps in the framework critical to dissect in order to prove indeed if social dialogue was achieved.

Is the message that the brand is attempting to convey clear to you?

Answered: 183 Skipped: 0

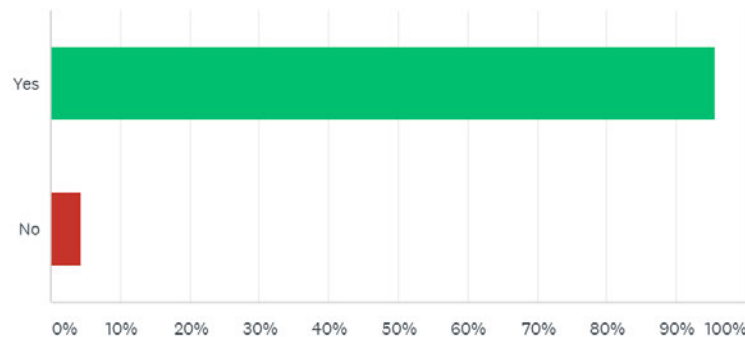


Figure 4.1: Content/Message survey findings

4.2.1.3 Summary of Category 1: Content/ Message

These findings aided the study's research question in understanding the strategies that brands employ in order to create social dialogue. It is critical for brands to establish intention from the start, especially when the end goal is to create dialogue on social issues. Condon (2012) asserts that advertising has become less about the product and more about the audience's perception of the product, its place in their lives, and their place in society.

4.2.2 Category 2: Speech Acts/ Language

The next level within the framework that must occur in order to create meaning and dialogue is speech acts or language. This section, as well as those that follow, are critical in determining a brand's ability to address social taboos among consumers in accordance with the study's research question.

For dialogue to occur, the researcher needed to investigate whether the Always brand's language elicited a response from the consumers. This is due to the framework's recognition of numerous utterances or speech acts that can be made, such as questions, commands, promises, and statements, and how the consumers'

reception of any of these plays a significant role in their level of participation in a communications exchange (Pearce, 2000).

4.2.2.1 Qualitative data: Interview finding

Subsequently, the researcher discovered that the Always brand was hesitant to launch the advertisement with its current use of language. This is evident in the in-depth interview, where the interviewee stated that there were debates and concerns about how the language in the advertisement would be received by consumers, indicating censorship as a prominent theme in this section. The finding on this theme is consistent with the discussion in the literature review, in which Sabri (2017) states that communicating and addressing social taboos in advertising can be quite harmful, and while these conversations may be necessary, there is also the risk of 'unintended consequences'.

However, consensus was reached to continue as is, in order to avoid diluting the intended message, as stated in the content and message category. The anticipation of backlash was the second theme identified. The brand was aware of the potential reaction that consumers may have as a result of this specific speech act, but discovered that any reaction, positive or negative, was welcomed in order to initiate dialogue. Interestingly, the interviewee's response is consistent with the shockvertising concept in this study's literature review, where brands have become less hesitant to express their views because they are no longer afraid to take a stand and not remain silent on societal issues by starting a conversation (Sprout Social, 2021).

Table 4.2: Speech acts/Language Themes

Category: Speech Acts / Language		
Theme	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
Censorship	2	"we had a...we had debates from, you know, in terms of what, how do you think was gonna land?" "Does it relate to South Africans? And was not only just discussion about South Africa, it was a discussion about the rest of the continent"
Backlash	3	"And there were questions of will we get backlash you know, uh, from it. And we were like OK if we get a backlash from guys, it's OK" "If we get a backlash from woman, then we know we have the right campaign" "And it's meant to make you feel ouch"

4.2.2.2 Quantitative data: Survey finding 1

The survey assisted the researcher in unpacking consumer feedback from the receiver's end of the speech act category, in order to test if the purpose of speech acts from the '*Like a Girl*' advertisement was achieved.

The purpose of the questions posed to respondents was to first determine how consumers perceived the language used and whether the choice of language elicited a response, which is important in the speech acts category when attempting to create dialogue.

When asked if they thought the use of language was offensive, 58.47% of respondents said no, while 41.53% said yes, as shown in figure 4.2. This was an intriguing finding when compared to the qualitative data finding in which the Always brand was not hesitant to use language regardless of whether it was offensive or not.

In fact, this contrast is also seen in opposing prior studies, where Javed and Zeb (2011) state that brands should focus on instilling a moderate level of fear and shock in their advertisements because, after all, consumers are aware of the message that the brand is attempting, whereas other brands believe that startling consumers is a good way to draw people's attention to a public policy or social issue (Kowalik, 2021).

Were the phrases used in the advertisement offensive to you? e.g. ‘Kick like a girl’ “Throw like a Girl”?

Answered: 183 Skipped: 0

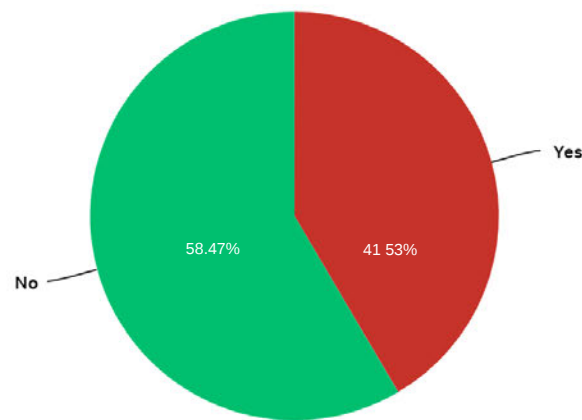


Figure 4.2: Speech Acts/Language survey finding 1

4.2.2.3 Quantitative data: Survey finding 2

It was then critical for the researcher to determine the reason for this response, particularly for the 41.53% of customers who felt that the use of words was offensive. The response as illustrated below in figure 4.3, thus demonstrated that the reason for finding offence was not necessarily in the positioning of words, but rather in the emotional appeal of the words. When considering the interviewees' responses to speech acts, creating this response was intentional. Three key points emerged from those sentiments: the words used firstly implied negative narratives about girls, secondly, they were demeaning to girls, and thirdly, they portrayed girls as weak.

It seems possible from this finding that the brand's objective regarding the use of language was met, as it elicited the desired response from consumers. The respondents who were offended by the use of language were offended only because of how strongly they felt about the biases presented.

If answered yes, please tell us why? If no, please continue to the next question.

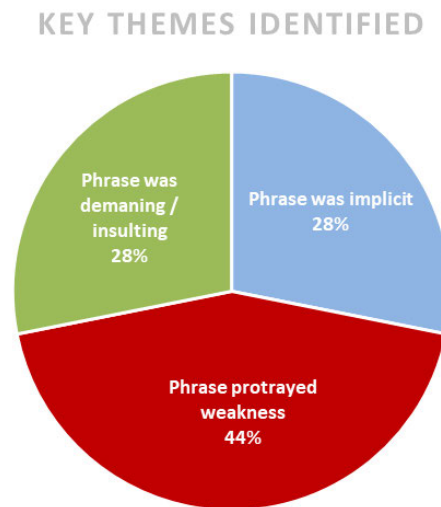


Figure 4.3: Speech Acts/Language survey finding 2

4.2.2.4 Quantitative data: Survey finding 3

Furthermore, when asked if respondents would have preferred a different choice of words in the advertisement, 85.16% found the words to be appropriate, and 14.84% stated that they could have been more censored (see figure 4.4). The high percentage of those who thought the words were appropriate, again demonstrates that the offensiveness in language was not in the placement of the words, but in how the words made them feel.

Would you have preferred a different choice of words to have been used?

Answered: 182 Skipped: 1

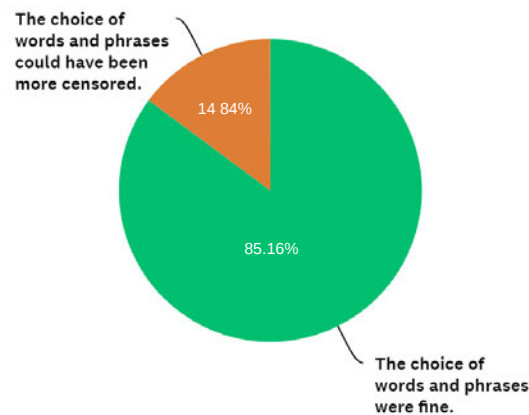


Figure 4.4: Speech Acts/Language survey finding 3

4.2.2.5 Quantitative data: Survey finding 4

Finally, respondents were asked whether the language used in the advertisement captivated their attention. This question was important because it allowed the researcher to delve deeper into the impact of language, even if it was found to be offensive by consumers. As a result, and as illustrated in figure 4.5, while a minority of respondents stated that the words used in the advertisement did not capture their attention, 93.99% agreed that they were captivated. In reviewing the literature, this is consistent with how brands are likely to use what they know about consumers and what might make them tick when using words or images (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016).

Did the phrases and words used in this advertisement grab your attention?

Answered: 183 Skipped: 0

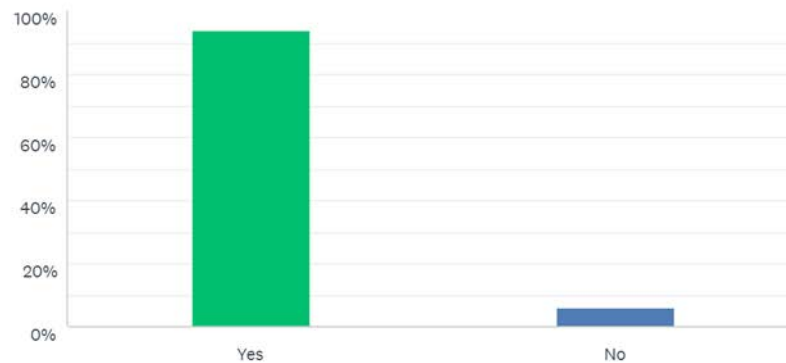


Figure 4.5: Speech/Acts/Language survey finding 4

4.2.2.6 Summary of Category 2: Speech Acts/ Language

At its core, speech acts are fulfilled as a function of the hierarchy of meaning framework, when the one who sends or designs the speech act does so with the intention of receiving an answer (Dillman, 2021). Looking at this definition in conjunction with the combined results in this section, the researcher concludes that when viewing the intention of speech acts from the standpoint of the advertisement, a high response rate to the speech act was achieved, proving that this step toward fulfilling dialogue was met.

Another significant finding from these results is the type of speech and language brands use to elicit a response. While we have established that the consumers' responded to the speech acts, the results also argue that using normal language rather than shocking language could have possibly produced the same results. This is supported by the findings, where respondents who were offended by the use of language were only offended because they felt strongly about the biases presented.

4.2.3 Category 3: Relationship

In the relationship building block of the framework, the fact that two or more parties are conversing with one another relates the communicants (Dillman, 2021). In this study, it is established that the Always brand and consumers are among those parties. Connection is important in this category because it is the dynamic that uniquely binds

these parties during an information exchange which ultimately, fulfills the relationship category (Dillman, 2021).

Thus, the researcher sought to determine the shared connection between the brand and consumers, particularly in terms of the importance of addressing social taboos. Finally, the researcher sought to investigate the type of relationship that the Always brand and consumers have as a result of the '*Like A Girl*' advertisement. This overview is also particularly useful in determining the synergy between the Always brand strategy and consumers' perceptions of how they address social taboos, which is part of the study's research question.

4.2.3.1 Qualitative data: Interview finding

In the in-depth interview, the prevalent themes as seen in table 4.3 were the importance of creating value and a bond with consumers. The Always brand considered it critical to express their values by starting an important conversation through the advertisement. This is emphasised by the interviewee who stated that having this conversation would help to establish a connection with consumers, thereby forming a meaningful relationship between the brand and the consumer. The researcher is of the view that this means that the brand made a deliberate decision to not only engage in a much-needed conversation, as a result of what they stand for, but they also knew that doing so would help them build a foundation to an even more special relationship with consumers because they are addressing something that is important to them as well. This is a stance supported in the study's literature which states that brands who exercise this, cement their dominance by forging far stronger and more difficult-to-break bonds with customers, prospects, and employees, and at the same time, increase the perceived distance between themselves and their closest competitors (Lloyd, 2016).

Table 4.3: Relationship themes

Category: Relationship		
Theme	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
Values	5	"it's not just enough to talk about what your product does, you know...people are moving ...expecting more out of brands" "It's starting to become about what the brand stands for, its values and anything else. And more importantly, what are you doing in the community and society that you live in?" "Really people wanna care. OK cool you make money in this community or in this country. What do you do? So, the social currency of a brand is becoming even more important" Consumers say - "This is because what that brand stands for and what that brand delivers it also communicate my values" "Because that's what people now want these days. They really care about the values"
Connection / Bond		"I think that the main the main thing it's really creating that connection that bond of the brand understands, and the brand cares and this brand speaks to the social ills that you know we believe in" "we need to always be making sure that you refresh that connection cause it's a constant consistent effort"

4.2.3.2 Quantitative data: Survey Finding 1

If we now turn to the quantitative survey findings, it was critical for the researcher to confirm whether the brand's desire to pursue a relationship as a result of the advertisement was reciprocated by the consumer. This would provide evidence that the relationship category, which aids in the creation of dialogue was met. This action is also significant in the literature because it has been proven that consumers form relationships with brands in which they believe and trust, based on both their shared values and socially responsible behaviours (Mainwaring, 2011).

As a result, when asked if campaigns like these are important to have in society, 97.81% of respondents, as shown in figure 4.6, said they are critical. Thus, demonstrating how important it is to them as well, proving once again the literature's assertion that shared values and beliefs are critical foundations in building a relationship with consumers (Mainwaring, 2011). To the researcher, these findings suggest two critical points. First, sharing a common interest with consumers immediately puts the brand in an advantageous position and provides a point of entry for conversation to begin. Second, once this conversation has started, especially on issues that are important to them, consumers are more likely to value the brand based on the concept of shared beliefs.

Do you think campaigns like this, which challenge social taboos and stereotypes, are important in today's society?

Answered: 183 Skipped: 0

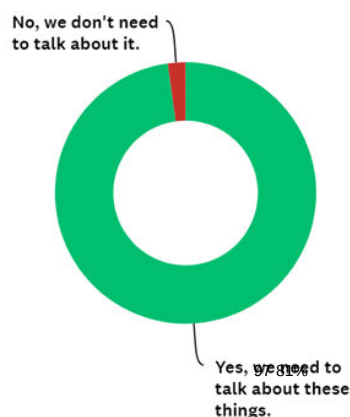


Figure 4.6: Relationship survey finding 1

4.2.3.3 Quantitative data: Survey Finding 2

Taking it a step further, based on the findings in figure 4.6, the researcher sought to determine whether a consumer's appreciation of a brand increases as a result of that brand addressing an important issue such as the social taboos addressed in the advertisement.

As a result, figure 4.7 reveals that because the Always brand initiated a conversation that consumers found important, while a minority of respondents felt indifferent, 81.32% of respondents expressed their appreciation for the brand and their belief in what the Always brand stands for. The researcher finds this consistent with Mainwaring's (2011) observation, once again in the literature, that consumers will always gravitate toward and form relationships with brands, which they believe care about what the consumer cares about.

Furthermore, this finding suggests to the researcher that brands are aware of the positive outcomes of taking a stance on difficult issues (as seen in the qualitative in-depth interview table 4.3) and how they gain favour with customers if they do. However, it is difficult to prove the genuineness of this action. This means that it is possible that brands will take these stances not because they truly value them, but because it will help them gain customers. In reviewing the literature, Wren (2018) affirms that some brand motives are not always clear when addressing social taboos, as their goal is to 'jump on the bandwagon' and find a profitable opportunity even if it is not relevant or authentic to their brand.

How does this advertisement make you feel about the Always brand?

Answered: 182 Skipped: 1

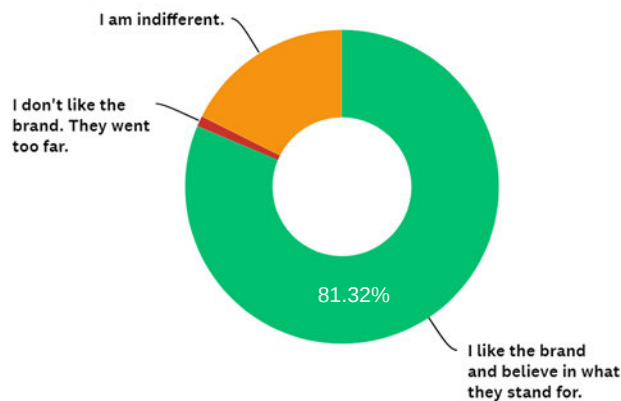


Figure 4.7: Relationship survey finding 2

4.2.3.4 Summary of Category 3: Relationship

When comparing the two sets of findings, the researcher discovered that what the Always brand thought was important to address in the advertisement was equally important to the respondents. Thus, this action established a strong connection between the Always brand and consumers, and subsequently, added to the foundation of creating dialogue. The researcher also believes it is important to note that it is difficult to determine the authenticity or true reason for a brand taking a stance, even when it gains favour with customers.

4.2.4 Category 4: Self Concept

In the hierarchy of meaning, self-concept is a crucial building block (Dillman, 2021). It describes how people's responses are swayed by their perceptions of who they are (Pearce, 2000). Thus, in order to fulfil this part of the hierarchy of meaning framework, the researcher needed to unpack whether the advertisement was able to influence consumers' beliefs as a steppingstone to creating social dialogue.

4.2.4.1 Qualitative data: Interview finding

In the in-depth interview, the Always brand was asked if they believed the release of the '*Like a Girl*' advertisement would be able to change or influence beliefs, particularly those regarding the persistence of social taboos.

The response emphasised a noticeable theme in which the brand declared its inability to completely change what people think or believe. This means that the brand recognised that there are numerous factors that must be considered when attempting to change beliefs, and thus, at its core, Always' main goal was to initiate a conversation through the advertisement.

Interestingly, very little was found in the literature on the question of brands' ability to completely change beliefs, but rather on how they can draw consumers' attention to a public policy or social issue and lay the foundation for influencing how consumers think (Kowalik, 2021).

It was then critical for the researcher to investigate the inverse from the perspective of the consumer, which is covered in the following section.

Table 4.4: Self Concept Themes

Category: Self Concept		
Theme	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
Brands can't 'change'	3	"To change, I think that will be a stretch, but I think it it...influence, yes, to start the conversation" "to drive to change behaviour, because to change behaviour is difficult, to change mindset is difficult, it takes time and it takes more initiatives." "I wish we followed up with more action orientated versus trying to have another campaign creating aha moments, so people are really enlightened"

4.2.4.2 Quantitative data: Survey finding

When following the guidance of the framework's self-concept category, it is important to investigate whether the brand was able to change or influence beliefs from the consumer's perspective. This is due to the fact that consumers' responses may be limited by their beliefs about themselves and the responses of others (Dillman, 2020).

Thus, respondents in the survey were asked if the advertisement had the ability to influence or change their beliefs, and more than half of them, as seen in figure 4.8, (57,69%) said yes. Given the discussed nature of self-concepts, the researcher considers this result to be positive because the brand (through the use of the advertisement) did not prioritise changing beliefs as a primary goal yet still managed to influence the beliefs of the consumers. Interestingly, as mentioned in the literature review, one of the main challenges identified in addressing social taboos is the fact that they are deeply ingrained and normalised in people, making the process of ensuring long-term change on this topic extremely difficult (Sprinkel, 2019). This

further indicates to the researcher that completely changing a mindset cannot be guaranteed, but influence, as seen in the survey results, can be achieved and used as a foundation for creating social dialogue.

Did this advertisement change or influence your beliefs on what girls can or can't do?

Answered: 182 Skipped: 1

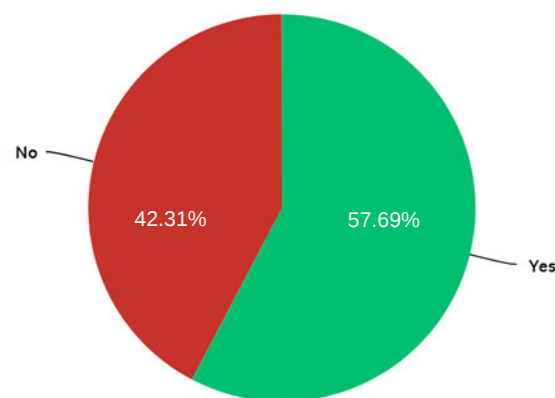


Figure 4.8: Self Concept survey finding

4.2.4.3 Summary of Category 4: Self Concept

The findings clearly indicated the importance of being clear in distinguishing between changing beliefs and mindsets as well as influencing beliefs and mindsets when addressing social taboos. While the changing of beliefs is found to be hard to do and to prove, being able to influence consumer beliefs is shown to be possible.

4.2.5 Category 5: Culture

Finally, within the culture category, people act in accordance with their cultural values, which may include race, economic class, gender, and ethnic background (Dillman, 2021). As a result, the study sought to determine whether culture was a barrier to consumers receiving the intended message from the advertisement. This is critical for brands to consider when facilitating and creating conversation, particularly around social taboos.

4.2.5.1 Qualitative data: Interview findings

During the in-depth interview, the researcher inquired whether the brand had considered the fact that they would be addressing consumers from various cultural backgrounds. Similarly, to the concept of speech acts within the framework, the brand considered censoring the advertisement at first in order to avoid offending consumers. However as seen in table 4.5, the brand believes that if this had occurred, the truth of the intended message would have been lost. As a result, the truth became a recurring theme in this section, so much so that the interviewee stated unequivocally that 'truth is truth' and cannot be localised. Prior literature also shares the interviewee's points of view in that brands are no longer holding back and are actively participating in the development of strategies for social advocacy campaigns (Balch, 2013).

This was especially intriguing to the researcher because the brand's response to considering cultural backgrounds when addressing social taboos was more focused on the use of language and in how they say what they want to say rather than the taboos' topics themselves. To return to Balch's (2013) point, this demonstrates again the brand's fearless addressing of social taboos.

Table 4.5: Culture Themes

Category: Culture		
Theme	Frequency	Verbatim Quotes
Truth	3	"we concluded on is you know truth is truth" "If the overall story is very clear and it's not offensive and not mocking a language or mocking a culture and stuff like that, Truth is truth" "you don't have to localize the truth"

4.2.5.2 Quantitative: Survey Findings

Turning now to the survey findings, it was critical to determine whether the topics addressed in the advertisement, particularly those of social taboos, were ones that the respondents would normally discuss from a cultural standpoint. This would provide the researcher with insight into whether the advertisements' efforts to drive the message were futile. Should the majority of respondents say no, it could mean that consumers are resistant to or find it difficult to appreciate the intended message; if they say yes, it can be argued that their cultural perspective creates an opportunity for the intended message to be well received. As shown in figure 4.9, 70.49% of respondents in the survey said yes, indicating that there is a limited cultural barrier in receiving the intended message.

The researcher also acknowledges the 29,51% of respondents who indicate a cultural barrier to receiving the intended message. Prior studies show that this is possible due to culture being a way of life for people; this means that every human being who grows up in a particular society is likely to become infused with the culture of that society, whether knowingly or unknowingly (Idang, 2015).

From a cultural perspective, are the topics addressed in the advertisement ones that you would normally speak about?

Answered: 183 Skipped: 0

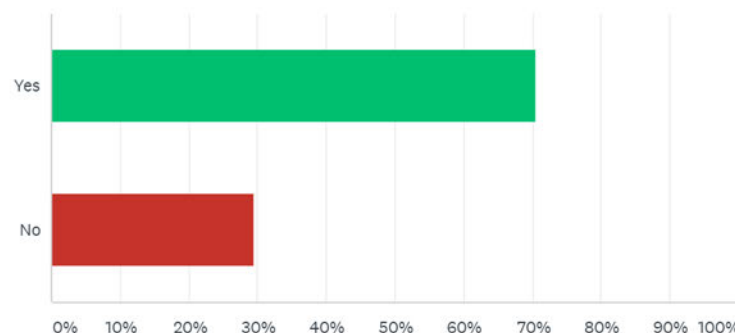


Figure 4.9: Culture survey finding

4.2.5.3 Summary of Category 5: Culture

The findings in this section indicate cultural compatibility between the interviewee and the respondents. Despite the fact that the Always brand did not fully consider cultural backgrounds when launching the '*Like A Girl*' advertisement, because they believed in the truth of what they wanted to address, consumers were open to receiving the message because they, too, felt it was important to be addressed.

This led the researcher to believe that the cultural building block of this framework was met, and thus dialogue could take place.

The following chapter summarises the study's findings in relation to the research questions.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to look into how brands that use social taboos in their messaging can influence social dialogue, particularly around female stereotyping. This was significant to the researcher because it is these stereotypes that give rise to harmful social taboos (Sprinkel, 2019), and if they are not addressed or discussed, they will result in violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, particularly for women (OHCHR, 2021). Thus, this premise motivated the study's topic which is the changing narrative of stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising: how brands can use social taboos to influence social dialogue.

The researcher discusses the study's findings in this chapter by answering the research questions outlined in section 1.4 of Chapter 1. Secondly, the discussion delves into the implications of these findings for future practices. Finally, the chapter discusses the ethical considerations raised in this study and how they were addressed.

5.1 Concluding answers to the research questions

The research questions addressed in this discussion are, firstly, what brand strategy does Always use to create social dialogue on taboo topics? Secondly, how do customers perceive the brand's ability to address social taboos? Finally, is there synergy between the Always brand strategy and consumers' perceptions of how they address social taboos in order to influence the subject-matter dialogue?

5.1.1 Research Question 1: What brand strategy does Always use to create social dialogue on taboo topics?

In the building of this study, it was critical, when confronting this research question, to understand the fundamentals of the Always brand strategy and how its implementation affects the brand's narrative.

According to the review of literature, a brand strategy is used by a company to create a specific image of itself in the minds of current and potential customers by defining what the brand stands for, the promises they make, and the personality they convey

(Kasza, 2021). As a result, the literature revealed that the brand narrative is an essential component of brand strategy, assisting brands in developing strong relationships and creating experiences that change people's perceptions of a brand (Lloyd, 2016).

According to the findings of this study, the main strategy of the Always brand was to take a stand as an advocate for what they believed was right, especially when it came to challenging stereotypes. This means that, from a campaign conceptual standpoint, the brand made a conscious decision to position itself as a fearless brand, addressing topics and issues that many people, including brands, are afraid to address. As a result, the researcher concludes, based on the definition of a brand strategy in the literature, that this was the personality the brand desired to portray of itself. This is evident in the finding, in which the interviewee in the in-depth interview was adamant about how the brand was not afraid to speak not only their truth, but what they believed to be a universal truth as well.

Another significant finding was that the Always brand strategy exercise included portraying the brand as meaningful and valuable to consumers. The brand recognised that if they address and tackle issues that are close to the hearts of their customers, they will have a better chance of connecting with them, thus strategically establishing themselves as a valuable brand.

This finding explains the relatively good correlation between how consumers now perceive Always tackling of social taboos as a result of following this brand strategy, which is explored further in the next research question.

5.1.2 Research Question 2: How do consumers perceive the brand's ability to address social taboos?

According to the findings of this study, consumers were able to clearly understand the purpose and intention of what the Always brand wanted to convey regarding taboos. This is demonstrated by the findings, which show that a large number of respondents reacted favourably in their understanding of how the taboos were addressed. A possible explanation of this result is how the brand intentionally spoke to an issue equally important to the consumers which was also a relevant finding in this study, where more than 70% of respondents felt that challenging stereotypes was as an important conversation to them as it is for the brand. This is consistent with prior

research, which indicates that the ability to access consumers' emotions and reach them on a personal and relatable level enables brands to engage with their audience more effectively (Fog et al., 2005).

Thus, the researcher believes that if this finding had not been positive and respondents had not been able to grasp what the brand was attempting to address in terms of stereotyping and essentially social taboos, the Always brand strategy, as discussed in section 5.1.1, would have failed.

Another notable finding concerning consumers' perceptions of the brand's ability to address social taboos was the preferred approach in which consumers received the brand's message. This means that, while the researcher established that consumers understood the brand's key message regarding the social taboos addressed, the manner in which the message was conveyed was not as positively perceived. This is evident in the results, where respondents felt that the use of language in the advertisement was offensive, and while they understood why the brand chose that approach, using less shocking language could have produced the same result. Thus, the researcher believes that the Always brand may have pushed some boundaries to get their message across by using elements of shockvertising, but in retrospect, because consumers already found the topic important, the brand may not have needed to push boundaries.

5.1.3 *Research Question 3: Is there synergy between the Always brand strategy and consumers' perceptions of how they address social taboos to influence the subject matter dialogue?*

The third research question looked into the synergy between the Always brand strategy and consumers' perceptions of how they address social taboos in order to influence the subject matter dialogue. The researcher believes that a mutually beneficial conjunction was achieved after reviewing the findings of the first and second research questions. This is seen with the help of the study's framework, as seen in Chapter 4, which provides a step-by-step guide through the lens of its categories on what should be accomplished in order for dialogue to take place.

As a result, the findings revealed that respondents understood the brand's intended message and supported the fact that the subject matter was addressed. However,

even though the language used to convey the message was unfavourable to respondents, as evidenced by the results, the core message was still accepted.

Furthermore, the findings show that the brand's ability to address social taboos strengthened the respondents' connection with the brand, which is an important step in fostering social dialogue. This could be explained by the fact that, in the nature of relationships, one party has a better chance of hearing or listening to the other if a solid foundation is established. Prior research also shows that consumers will always gravitate toward and form relationships with brands that they believe are concerned about what is important to them (Mainwaring, 2011).

Finally, the most clinically relevant finding was that, despite both the brand and respondents having a common interest in the subject matter, which is also important in creating dialogue, respondents believed that what they saw in the advertisement could influence their beliefs on the subject. This finding is significant because it could indicate that a meaningful mind shift occurred, and according to the study's literature on the relationship between culture and social taboos, being able to influence one person is the beginning of a ripple effect in influencing society (Idang, 2015).

5.2 Implications of findings for future practices

Acknowledging implications and anticipated contributions to a study is important because it highlights the type of input that the study can make to the existing body of knowledge (du Plooy-Ciilliers, 2014). Thus, the study discovered a strong link between brands' intentions through their strategies and how they can align it to addressing critical issues, such as stereotyping, as a result of social taboos.

As a result of reviewing the literature, it became clear that there is still much more that could be written and shared about the role that brands can play in addressing social taboos if the intention is built into their strategy.

Furthermore, the study's findings revealed the equal importance from a consumer's perspective for these conversations to take place, as well as how they view brands as an essential platform to driving the conversation. This also demonstrates that this study can help brands understand the importance of engaging consumers authentically rather than as a ploy to capitalise on a trend. Finally, the study highlights

the responsibility that brands have to society in opening their eyes to issues that they are aware of or are unaware of in order to influence much-needed change, because while brands sell a product, they are also a catalyst through which audiences seek their own identity (Koszembar-Wiklik, 2016).

5.3 Conclusions

Brands and customers share an equal desire for social dialogue to take place, specifically when it comes to social taboos. As a result, consumers expect brands to lead these conversations in a genuine and non-gimmick way. This means that brands have a responsibility to drive these conversations ethically and to take the necessary steps to ensure that true dialogue occurs.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics are principles that guide researchers to conduct and report research without deception or intention to harm the participants of the study (Singh, 2019). There are a number of significant ethical issues that affect research participants, such as informed consent and dealing with sensitive information (Louw, 2014).

If an individual is involved in a research study, informed consent must be obtained from the participants (Louw, 2014). This means that they should be formally informed of their participation and understand exactly what is expected of them (Louw, 2014). Furthermore, because some research requires sensitive information about participants, an ethical researcher should protect this information as a matter of principle (Louw, 2014).

Thus, for this study's qualitative in-depth interview, the interviewee was given a copy of Vega's most recent consent document, which included information specific to this study. It was also critical to ensure the confidentiality of the Always Head of brand's personal details. Participants in the quantitative survey were made aware of the study's purpose, that the survey questionnaire was voluntary, and that their identity and the confidentiality of their responses were highly valued. Furthermore, respondents had the option to withdraw from the survey at any time.

Finally, in accordance with the study's ethical conduct, the findings were reported honestly, and the final report is available for audit upon request.

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Annexure List

Annexure A: Research Report Summary

Annexure B: Ethical Clearance Letter

Annexure C: Consent Form

Annexure D: Qualitative In-depth Interview Schedule

Annexure E: Pre-test In-depth Interview Schedule

Annexure F: Qualitative In-depth Interview Transcript and Recording

Annexure G: In-depth Interview Analysis

Annexure H: Quantitative Survey

Annexure I: Originality Report