THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVOCATIVE ADVERTISING IN AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS IN MALAYSIA

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This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours (Graphic Design)

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ABSTRACT

This research takes a look into the awareness campaigns in Malaysia, especially in the area of the effectiveness of provocative campaigns, as well as the perception of the Malaysian society regarding the advertisements that are considered provocative. The effectiveness is measured through a quantitative research on a sampling of the Malaysian audience, with the result that summarizes the society as being aware of the ongoing campaigns in this country. Provocative campaign is an awareness drive that has the ability to trigger a very deep emotion or feelings within the onlookers, such as the feelings of anger, shock, guilt, irritation, joy, sympathy, humor and a lot others. Provocative approach is used when an advertiser needs to get the attention, and to create publicity. Throughout the years, provocative advertisements are synonymous to Calvin Klein, and also, Benetton where both names have created so many controversies with their provocative advertisements that those controversies became free publicities. However, the level of provocativeness is ever-changing and different from one person to another, as well as from one country to another. Thus, this research will focus on measuring the effectiveness of provocative advertising in awareness campaigns in Malaysia.
ABSTRAK

Kajian ini adalah kajian kampen kesedaran di Malaysia, terutamanya dari segi keberkesanan kampen berbentuk provokasi, di samping mengenai pasti persepsi masyarakat di negara ini terhadap pengiklanan yang dianggap provokatif. Keberkesanan kampen-kampen dikaji melalui kaedah berbentuk kuantitatif, yang dijalankan ke atas sebilangan audien tempatan, dengan keputusan yang merumuskan bahawa masyarakat di Malaysia sedar akan kewujudan kampen-kampen tersebut. Kampen berbentuk provokasi merupakan suatu bentuk kesedaran yang mampu mengganggu emosi atau perasaan pada yang melihat atau mengakaminya, seperti perasaan marah, terkejut, bersalah, gembira, simpati, lucu dan sebagainya. Pendekatan provokasi digunakan khasnya apabila pengiklan perlu menarik perhatian, dan mewujudkan publisiti. Sejak dahulu lagi, pengiklanan berbentuk provokasi adalah sinonim dengan nama-nama seperti Calvin Klein, dan juga Benetton, di mana kedua-dua nama tersebut telah mewujudkan banyak kontroversi melalui iklan provokatif mereka, sehingga kontroversi-kontroversi tersebut berfungsi sebagai publisiti percuma. Walau bagaimanapun, isu provokatif seriusa berubah dan berbeza dari seorang ke seorang, dan juga berbeza dari suatu tempat ke tempat yang lain, maka seperti yang telah dinyatakan, kajian ini akan lebih bertumpu pada pengkajian keberkesanan pengiklanan berbentuk provokasi dalam kampen kesedaran di Malaysia.
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PROVOCATIVE ADVERTISING IN AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS IN MALAYSIA

1.8 INTRODUCTION

Advertising, as defined by Wells et. al. (1992) in Advertising Principles and Practice – 2nd Edition, is a paid nonpersonal communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience. There are only two kinds of advertising – great and invisible (Michael Newman, 2003). An advertisement is more than the design alone. Creative without strategy is art. Creative with strategy is called advertising (Jef I. Richards, 2001). According to John Machado in his book Distilling Desire (2000), "...the first interesting thing about advertising is that you think the consumer is buying the product you are advertising. He's not. If he's buying anything at all, he's buying into the concept, or idea, or proposition you've come up with to interest him or her in the product." Thus, this shows that advertising is not merely promoting a product or service, but promoting with the right and well-planned strategies, and at the same time, it must also be attractive enough to grab attention in order to sell.

In Malaysia, the advertising industry has long existed. In fact, the nation's first advertisement was published in the year 1805 in Penang when Malaysia was still called Malaya (Mansor Ahmad Saman, 1980). During those days, advertisements were mainly for traders to promote their products and services by using print medias such as newspapers and magazines with direct text messages (Mohd Adnan Hashim, 1993).
Information rather than persuasion was the objective of early commercial messages (Wells et al., 1992). More medias were then introduced and used including radio, rediffusion\(^1\), cinema and eventually commercial television in 1964 that led to the growth of advertising industry in Malaysia (Mohd Adnan Hashim, 1993).

From then onwards, advertising has evolved from being merely an information tool to promote products and services. There are now different types of advertising to cater for different target audiences such as advertising for brand, retail, political, directory, direct-response, business-to-business, institutional and also, public services (Wells et al., 1992). Public service advertisement is what awareness campaigns are all about – to communicate messages on behalf of some good cause (Wells et al., 1992) where most of the time, people are reluctant to respond positively to the message sent (Nicholas Ind, 1993).

Public service advertising, either to create awareness among the audiences, to lure positive responds or both, is very common in Malaysia. Over the years, there have been campaigns for AIDS awareness, anti-drugs, anti-smoking, healthy lifestyles, road safety, national reading, and a lot more (myceen.com.my/search/kempen.html, visited August 2005). Different persuasive tools can be applied to different campaigns to get the maximum impact (www.trinity.cumbria.sch.uk.htm, visited August 2005), such as shock or provocative elements in the recent 2004 - Road Safety Campaign advertisement (www.panducemat.org.my.shtml, visited August 2005), Say No To Smoking Campaign – Tak Nak (www.infosihat.gov.my/TakNak.html, visited August 2005) and also, 1992’s Prevent AIDS Campaign (www.infosihat.gov.my/KCHS%201992_AIDS_P01.html, visited 2005).

\(^1\) relaying of broadcast programmes esp. by wire from central receiver
According to Edwin Colyer in brandchannel.com (2002), “...it is an advertiser’s single aim: grab your attention...shock tactics make one stops and stare.”

This thesis will study on how these provocative advertisements are viewed and perceived by the Malaysian audience, especially on whether or not these campaigns manage to change the audience’s perspective and attitude towards the issues highlighted in the campaigns. The best campaigns go beyond selling products – to selling ideas about how we should live our lives (John Machado, 2000). Besides that, the elements and the suitability used in provocative advertisements will also be studied. This is mainly because “an awful lot of shock advertising is very poor simply because the shock isn’t managed properly” (Bailie, 2004, the creative director of Lyle Bailie).
1.1 PROVOCATIVE ADVERTISING

Provocative is the intention of causing anger, irritation, disgust, shock and others, while provocative advertising is the advertisements, announcements, promotions or forms of communications used with the intention to cause provocation of feelings, such as anger, irritation, disgust, shock and others, especially among its targeted audiences. Shock advertising is a form of advertising where social or moral boundaries are pushed in order to create buzz and controversy (wikipedia.com, visited August 2005). Provocative advertisement is very subjective as it involves feelings and emotions. Not everyone will have the same response, so it's very hard to shock (Bruce Grierson, 1998).

Obviously, every single techniques used in advertising to persuade audiences such as humor, repetition, stereotypes, intertextual references, music and elite persons has its own pros and cons, but all with only one goal – to grab attention and create meaning (www.trinity.cumbria.sch.uk.htm, visited August 2005). Shock tactics or also known as provocative advertising is also one of the techniques that have become more common over the last twenty years (Vezina and Paul, 1997). Nowadays, we can be titillated\(^2\), still, we can be amused, but perhaps we can never really be shocked (Bruce Grierson, 1998).

\(^2\) titillated, excited pleasantly
1.1.1 Strengths

According to Edwin Colyer (2002), the strengths or the uniqueness of provocative advertising lies in the fact that shock tactics make one stop and stare thus, fulfilling the single aim of an advertiser which is to grab or attract attention. In a way, when provocative advertising is irreverence, it creates humor. Sometimes, it is the rebellion in the advertisement that makes people take extra notice. Also, according to him, this is because dull and straight persuasive tools are not effective anymore. Awareness campaigns, in particular, adapt to this tactic because these campaigns should cause offence, especially with truth.

Many philanthropic\(^3\) organizations have also used provocative advertising to promote their activities (Pope, Nigel K L L, 2004). Edwin Colyer (2002) also stated that long-term provocative advertising will eventually go stale, which is undeniable, but almost every advertisement will, except that provocative advertising creates impact before its period of effectiveness is over, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. He also added that shock tactic is a solution for the desperate - those who cannot think of any other ways to provoke people better than shock tactic in order for the advertisement to be effective. Angelo Fernando, in his article ‘What’s So Shocking About Shock Advertising?’ (2000) stated that shock or provocative advertising is “attracting what it always craves; controversy – which is another word for publicity, which is another word for free advertising.”

\(^3\) philanthropy: love of all mankind; practical benevolence
1.1.2 Weaknesses

Even though provocative advertising is attention-grabbing, this persuasion tool still has its weaknesses. Edwin Colyer (2002) stated that it risks damaging the reputation of the brand it seeks to enrich, and undermining the very product it is trying to promote. He added, being too provocative sometimes causes upset and complaints, such as Benetton’s ‘On Death Row’ advertisements and the Sophie Dahl campaign.

Based on a research done to know the response of kids on how they feel about seeing sexually provocative images in advertisements (reactorzresearch.com/recent/20030328.html, visited August 2005), they were quoted as saying, “...they rarely paid any attention to these kinds of advertisements. They’ve become background noise – so common that they don’t provoke comment or even awareness unless pointed out to them.” In the United Kingdom, the creative director at Irish International, Eoghan Nolan said that they “suffer from shock fatigue. There’s nothing you can put on a pack of cigarettes that we haven’t already seen on CSI: Miami, in forensic detail.” (Times Online, accessed 31 October 2004).
1.1.3 Opportunities

Despite everything, provocative tactics still has its opportunities to be widely used in advertising to influence changes in audiences. This is because, what one person sees as provocative another hails as creative (Edwin Colyer, 2002). What is considered offensive today may not be so tomorrow (William F. Arens, 2004).

Furthermore, visual satire\(^4\) and other forms of graphic criticism and abuse tend to be most highly developed in those countries that have long democratic tradition of freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

1.1.4 Threats

One of the biggest threats for provocative advertising is that some are too offensive that they are being shunned by the public (Edwin Colyer, 2002), especially when the target audience is kids, people just don’t want their children exposed to messages that they deem immoral, offensive, or strictly adult-oriented (William F. Arens, 2004). Besides that, Clients Services & Media Director with digital communication agency Profero, Eamonn Stores stated that, “sometimes people use the media to say something about their brand that isn’t there. Do you, for instance, see evidence of Benetton as a company taking risks in the rest of their business as they do in their advertising?”

\(^4\) irony, ridicule
In addition, Robert Bean, chairman of London-based consultancy Brand Bank also agreed that misleading the public with inconsistency of advertisements and products/services will not do the company or brand any good (http://www.brandchannel.com “Offensive but effective?”, visited August 2005).

1.2 HYPOTHESES

H1: Provocative advertising is very effective in awareness campaigns in Malaysia.

H2: Level of effectiveness differs from one campaign to another.

H3: Effectiveness of provocative campaigns is influenced by the frequency of appearance or exposure of the campaign to the public.
13 PROBLEM STATEMENTS

It is hard to tell whether or not all the provocative advertisements are effective in creating the impact they wanted, especially in their own target audience as measuring the effectiveness of an advertisement is very subjective. Reaching the target audience and establishing visibility with them is a necessary condition for success (John and Nicholas Jackson O’ Shaughnessy, 2004). This is because campaigns involve human and their emotions as well as attitude and perspective. Taste, of course, is highly subjective: What is bad taste to some is perfectly acceptable to others (William F. Arens, 2004).

Another problem with regards to the topic of the thesis is – some provocative advertisements are not effective, and this is influenced either by the ideas used are stale (Stuart Fogarty, 2005) and does not attract audiences such as Anti-Smoking Campaign (www.kppk.com.my/home/kempen_antirokok.asp, visited August 2005), or the provocative elements are too mild - Prevent AIDS Campaign (1992). On the other hand, provocative advertising does not necessarily always rely on the shocking images alone, but the concept and strategy of the campaign (Bailie, 2004, the creative director of Lyle Bailie). International Medical University president Tan Sri Dr Abu Bakar Suleiman commented on the Tak Nak campaign that it “was a good strategy but it represented only one aspect of the communication process…because billboard advertisements and television commercials were not enough to curb smoking among students” (The Star Online, 16 March 2005), “therefore the motivational triggers need to be right to get people to respond to a message, rather than turning away from it” (Nicholas Ind, 1993).
Besides that, the recent campaigns are also showing inconsistency in their advertisements, with some forms of their advertisements being provocative, and some not, such as the Tak Nak campaign — where the community billboards are not even showing any form of provocations.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the research is to study the effectiveness of provocative advertising in awareness campaigns in Malaysia.

Besides that, it is also to study on the elements such as the visuals, copies, colors, layouts and others that are used in provocative advertisements in Malaysia, and also, the timing of the campaign, because the time when someone is exposed can affect that person’s receptivity to the advertising message (Donald Parente, 2000).

Last but not least, it is also to experiment the use of provocative advertisements in our country as a different and growing approach in awareness campaigns to determine its effectiveness.
1.5 SCOPE OF RESEARCH

The scope of research for this thesis will include laws, customs and traditions of advertising in Malaysia especially the Advertising Code of Ethics because provocative advertisements will involve elements that will cause uneasiness especially the visuals.

Besides that, there are also customs and traditions or, taboos of the different ethnicities and races of Malaysians that will need to be taken into consideration because things that are acceptable for certain culture may not be appropriate and legal for others. Transgression\(^5\) of a social or cultural taboo is perhaps the most crucial element in a provocative advertising effort (Pope, Nigel K. Ll., 2004; Vezina and Paul, 1997).

The research will also study on the previous and current awareness campaigns throughout the nation, such as the elements that were being used, as well as the effectiveness of the campaigns, especially in provocative advertisements in awareness campaigns in our country.

The scope of study will also include a brief research on international awareness campaigns that use provocative approach in their advertisements as a comparative study, especially the successful and effective provocative advertisements for the purpose of benchmarking.

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\(^5\) infringement (law etc.); overstep (limit laid down); sin.
The location of the research will be mainly around the area of Kuching and also some other places, but questionnaires will involve samplings from other locations such as West Malaysia, as questionnaires can be done via emails. The research will also include secondary data with references from libraries, especially in UNIMAS and State Library such as books, magazines and journals.

As for the samplings for this research, it will include people of different genders, ages, occupations, races and religions because researches cannot and should not be bias, and also, respondents should represent the multi-ethnic people of Malaysia.
1.6 **DEFINITION**

effectiveness (noun); *effective*

- successfully producing the result that you want

  (Oxford Wordpower Dictionary, 2000)

provocative (adj)

- tending or intended to cause provocation or stimulation of anger or resentment/ action or feeling/ irritation/ annoyance, etc.


- to give rise to; evoke; provoke laughter.

- to bring about deliberately; induce; provoke a fight.

  (Dictionary.com)

advertising (noun); *advertise*

- to put information in a newspaper, on television, on a picture on the wall, in order to persuade people to buy something, to interest them in a new job

- to say publicly in a newspaper, on a sign, that you need somebody to do a particular job, want to buy something

  (Oxford Wordpower Dictionary, 2000)

- a paid, non-personal form of communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade or influence an audience.

awareness (noun); aware

- knowing about or realizing something, conscious of somebody or something
- interested and informed

(Oxford Wordpower Dictionary, 2000)

campaign

- a plan to do a number of things in order to achieve a special aim
- to take part in a planned series of activities in order to make something happen or to prevent something

(Oxford Wordpower Dictionary, 2000)