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GENDER RELATED PRODUCTS: COMPARING URBAN AND RURAL VIEWS

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the difference in views between urban and rural as well as male and female regarding offensive advertising. There had been lack of study on the perception of rural consumers towards advertising. The focus product category was gender related products which consists of condom, female contraceptive, female underwear, feminine hygiene product and male underwear. Investigations were made to see the level of offensiveness of the products and also their reasons of offense. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to respondents in urban and rural Sarawak with equal distribution between male and female in each geographical location. Results showed that rural respondents were more offended by all five gender related products and gave higher means to most of the reasons of offense compared to urban respondents. Male and female showed different views regarding the level of offensiveness of the products and the reasons that causes the offense. Condom was the most offensive product among urban and female respondents meanwhile female contraceptive offended rural and male respondents the most. Of all the reasons of offense, nudity and sexist images had been the main reason that caused offense among all the respondents in nearly all of the products. Thus, advertisers should refrain from using nudity and sexist images theme in their advertisement to increase their credibility and gain better public acceptance.
ABSTRAK

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Companies communicate their messages through advertisements to the consumers, let it be to introduce their new product, provide information of their products or differentiate their products from their competitors. It is vital that the advertising activities carried out are able to attract the attention of consumers and hence persuade them to purchase the product. In order to gain awareness of the public, some advertisers use creative ways to "cut through the clutter" that causes controversy (Waller, 2004). Apart from advertising execution, advertisements of some products such as cigarettes, alcohol and condoms were found to cause negative response due to the nature of the product itself. Thus, controversial advertising is defined as "advertising that, by the type of product or execution, can elicit reactions of embarrassment, distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage from a segment of the population when presented" (Waller, et. al., 2005). However, the interpretation of the consumer regarding a particular advertisement may differ from the desired result of the advertisers and create negative consequences such as attracting complaints or boycotting the product. Thus, controversial advertising that causes negative outcome is called as offensive advertising.

There have been mixed result on the success of controversial advertising. Some companies had been successful using this strategy where they were able to gain the desired attention and increase in their sales (Evans and Sumandeep, 1993; Waller, 1999a; Irvine, 2000; McIntyre, 2000; Waller, 2002). On the other hand, Benetton had been heavily condemned for using images that causes social concern (Evans and Sumandeep 1993; Dahl, Frankenberger and
Manchanda 2003). Another clothing company, Calvin Klein had been criticized for the usage of sexual images and child pornography (Anon, 1995; Irvine, 2000). Moving closer to Asia, Fair and Lovely advertisements had been attracting a lot of criticism from the consumers in several countries such as India, Malaysia and Egypt (Karnani, 2007). In Malaysia, it was causes controversy as it was deemed racist and biased towards people who have lighter skin tone (Prystay, 2002).

Asia is home to more than three billion of people who where people speak hundreds of different languages and dialects (Birch et. al, 2001). As it counts for 60 percent of the global population, the continent is indeed a large market and companies are eager to tap on it. However, the diversity of such a large continent need to be taken into consideration for marketers as different countries have their own culture, legal and media restrictions (Cateora, 1990). For example, Malaysia’s population consists of three main ethnic groups which are Malay, Chinese, Indian as well as various local natives in Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak who speak various types of languages and dialects. Besides that, the people are free to practise their religion of choice such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhist and Taoism. Thus, marketers have to be sensitive to local cultures and religions in their advertising efforts.

According to a report by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission in 2006, global advertising market value had been on the rise yearly since 2001 from USD 413 billion to USD 460 billion in 2004. The growth in advertising expenditure also observed in Malaysia for the past few years from RM 6.2 billion in 2008 to RM 7.66 billion in 2010 (Tan, E., 2010; Joy, D. 2011). Traditionally, newspaper had been the main media utilised by most advertisers.
Furthermore, advertising expenditure on pay television which had been included in Nielson Media Research report increased the total advertising expenditure to RM 9.6 billion. Combining both free to air television and pay television, it represents for 50% of the total advertising expenditure while newspaper is second most used media with 40% share.

Most of the advertising media available in Malaysia can be used but some products cannot be legally advertised (Waller and Fam, 2000). Gender related products such as condoms, female contraceptive, female underwear, male underwear and female hygiene products were classified as “can be advertised with limitations”. Advertising Code for Television and Radio (1990) had been established by the Ministry of Information to preserve local advertising identity and the consumers from foreign cultural values (Waller and Fam, 2000). As Islam is the official religion of the country, Islamic principles and values were incorporated in the advertising code. For example, female models used follow decent dress code and show good behaviour which is acceptable by the local culture and society (Waller and Fam, 2000).

1.2 Theoretical Framework

Understanding the process from the advertisement being exposed to potential consumers to the final purchase of the product being made is an important aspect in developing an effective communication program (Belch and Belch, 2003). Various models had been created by previous researchers to measure the effectiveness of advertising and understand the advertising response process (Elmer, 1898; Lavidge and Steiner, 1961, Naples, 1979; Brown and Stayman, 1992). After reviewing various previous researches, Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) found that the advertising response process involves four stages which include
Advertising input, filtering, consumer response and their final behaviour. The theoretical framework shown in linking the four levels of how advertising works is shown in Figure 1.1.

![Theoretical Framework on Response Process and Effects of Advertising](image)

**Figure 1: Theoretical Framework on Response Process and Effects of Advertising**

**Advertising Input**

This level involves the advertising activities done by either the company itself or their competitor are made available to the public (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Advertising input involves several components such as message content, media scheduling and repetition. Here, the chosen message content is chosen through the selected media. Media scheduling is done based on the target audience and their effective frequency where brand loyalists require the least frequency compared to other consumers brand loyalist or new users. Factors such as continuity, seasonality and geographic market are taken into consideration for the repetition process (Lutz, MacKenzie and Belch, 1983)
Filters

After the consumers are exposed to the advertising campaign, their responses are mediated by factors such as motivation and ability to process the information in the advertisements (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Motivation of a person to process the advertising message depends on factors such as personal involvement, relevance of the product and whether they need the advertised products or not (Belch and Belch, 2003). On the other hand, ability to process information is dependent on one’s knowledge, intellectual capacity and opportunity to process the message (Belch and Belch, 2003).

Consumer

This level involves three dimensions; cognition, affect and experience. From the exposure towards the advertisement and filtering, advertising is deemed to have mental effects such as awareness, memory and brand attitude (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). Cognition refers to “thinking” where the information and facts being communicated through advertising is being processed (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961, Belch and Belch, 1999). Affect involves both emotions and attitudes towards the brand and advertising where it could create either positive or negative attitude (Li and Leckenby, 2004). The experience dimension comes from the previous memories of buying and using product particularly frequently purchased packaged products where consumers do not rely solely on advertising to induce them into making purchases (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999).

Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour or conation is the behavioural effects of advertising based on the cognition, affection and experience dimensions mentioned previously (Vakratsas and Ambler,
If the previous stage yields in positive attitude, then purchase will be made. Neutral attitude may result in consumers choosing products from the competitor while negative attitude can result in ignoring the message or complaining about the advertisements (Waller, 1999; Reed and Ewing, 2004).

1.3 Problem Statement

Cultural difference had always been acknowledged being an important factor especially when marketers plan to use standardized advertising strategy. Thus, previous researchers look into the different countries and religion in order to investigate the different cultures in those countries (Fam et. al., 2002; Waller et. al., 2005). Asian countries such as China, Taiwan and Malaysia were found to be more easily offended compared to New Zealand (Fam and Waller, 2003). In terms of religiosity, Islamic followers have been shown to be more offended compared to other religion followers as well as non-religious believers (Fam et. al., 2002).

Identification of offensive advertising can be categorized into two aspects which are the offensive products and its execution manner (Barnes and Dotson, 1990). The manner the advertisement being presented had been found to create more offense (Prendergast et. al., 2010). In a study on various products, gender related products had been found to be moderately offensive by Malaysian consumers. (Fam and Waller, 2003). Despite that, they found to be offended by the execution manner of the advertisements compared to the response from other countries.

Urban consumers had been the focus of most researches especially those trying to investigate the markets in emerging countries (Maheswaran, 1984). With much of the focus on urban
areas, study into buying behaviour of rural consumers had been scarce (Home, 2002). The rural population in Malaysia is still significant in Malaysia as there are seven states where the rural population is more than urban population (Jamaliah, 2004). As urban and rural population had different lifestyle and culture, this cross-culture analysis will provide a useful insight for marketers.

In terms of gender comparison, female were found to be more easily offended compared to male (Fahy et. al., 1995; Waller, 1999). In terms of attitude towards advertisements, women were more offended when nudity was used in advertisements irrespective of their country (Dianoux and Linhart, 2009). The focus will be on the different gender perception on the advertising of gender related products. The study investigates into the extent of offensive advertising of gender related products and reasons that causes the offense taking into consideration the factor of geographical location and gender.

1.4 Research Objectives

The general objective and specific objectives is further discussed in the following sections.

1.4.1 General Objective

The main aim of this study is to examine the level of offensiveness of gender related products and the reasons that causes the offense.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To examine the difference in level of offensiveness of gender related products and its execution manner by geographical locations.
2. To examine the difference in level of offensiveness of gender related products and its execution manner by gender.

3. To compare the difference in perception among male from urban and rural areas.

4. To compare the difference in view between female in urban and rural areas.

1.5 Rationale of the study / Significance of Study

Various factors such as gender, age group, education level, religion had been investigated to have a better understanding on offensive advertising (Fam et. al., 2002; Phau and Prendergast 2002). Cross cultural analysis had been done between different countries in different continents to compare the difference between them. Urban and rural population were found to have different lifestyles and attitudes towards marketing mix (Sun and Wu, 2004). The differences between urban and rural areas have not been explored in the study on offensive advertising. All this while, urban areas had been the focus and little had been done to understand rural consumers (Home, 2002). Rural areas in Malaysia still represent a considerable percentage of the nation's population and marketers may need to understand them better if they decide to tap into the rural area market.

Gender differences had been evident as they consumer messages differently (Meyers-Levy, 1988) and they showed different level of acceptance towards offensive advertising (Waller, 1999). Most of the research on offensive advertising considers gender as demographic information and little had been done to study gender as a factor in determining the level of offense of a product and the underlying reason.
Many of previous researches had been more general as it covers an extensive list of products that may be offensive towards the consumers and only a few that considers a particular product category. As for reasons of offense, the result obtained was applied to all the products considered in their respective studies rather than each particular product. Thus, this study took a detailed approach by reducing the number of products and uses an extensive list of possible reasons of offense. The reasons of offense were applied on every product in this study.

All in all, the study examines the views from the rural consumers and comparison was made with their urban counterpart. Apart from that, this study also provided a different view as it investigated on how male and female react to the advertisements of products that they use and those by their opposite gender. The outcome from the study can be informative for companies who are trying to focus more on the rural market and also understand the gender response on their gender related products.

1.6 Research Scope

Advertisements of various products had been found to be offensive towards the consumers. Four categories of products had been grouped by previous researchers (Fam et. al., 2004). As this study focuses on gender related products, only the products grouped under this category namely condoms, female contraceptive, male underwear, female underwear and female hygiene products were used. As for the possible reasons of offense caused by the advertisements, an extensive lists of twelve reasons were used based on previous researcher’s effort (Shao and Hill, 1994a,b).

The two factors considered in this research were geographical locations which were classified as either urban or rural areas and gender which were divided into male and female. This study
was carried out in Sarawak where the urban and rural population was about the same. The gender distribution in the state is evenly distributed as well. The urban area considered in this study is Kuching which has the highest urban population and the rural areas were focused on the rural districts in the central region.

1.7 Limitation

This research has a few limitations. One of the limitations is that only gender related products are considered although there are more products used by previous researchers. As the reason of offense list is applied to all five products, respondents may find the list to be repetitive. Thus they tend to give same results for all the products and the reasons as well. Other demographic information such as age, level of income, occupation and religion are not considered as important factors in determining the level of offensiveness.

Besides that, the samples in the study only come from one state rather than all the states in Malaysia. Thus, the findings cannot be applied to the whole country. There are many districts spread throughout the state but only samples from the capital of the state were taken to represent the urban population and three districts in the central region were taken as rural areas. Most of the respondents in the rural areas had low education level and they had difficulties in understanding the reasons of offense despite the explanation provided.

Finally, advertising of gender related products in Malaysia is tightly regulated and products such as condom and female contraceptive are not heavily advertised in the media. Some respondents claimed that they never seen advertisements of those products and it is hard for
them to decide whether the advertisement is offensive and unable to give the reasons of offense.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction
This chapter examines the previous literature related to product that causes controversies with a more detailed look into gender related product category as well as the reasons that causes offense among consumers and its potential impact. The differences in the views due to geographical areas and gender will also be reviewed.

2.2 Controversial Products
There are several terms used for controversial advertising products by different researchers in their respective studies. Following were the terms used in previous researches:

- "unmentionables", (Wilson and West, 1981; Alter, 1982; Katsanis, 1994; Wilson and West, 1995; Spain, 1997; Norrie, 2005),
- "controversial products" (Rehman and Brooks 1987; Fam et. al, 2004; Waller et. al, 2005),
- "decent products" (Shao, 1993)
- "socially sensitive products" (Shao and Hill, 1994a; Shao and Hill 1994b; Fahy et. al, 1995) and
- "offensive products" (Prendergast et. al, 2002; Prendergast and Hwa, 2003).

In early research, Wilson and West (1981, pg 92) introduced the concept of “unmentionables” to explore product categories which created uneasiness among consumers. They defined “unmentionables” as “products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency,
morality, or even fear tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented". This definition was then supported and used by other researchers (Triff et. al, 1987; Fahy et. Al 1995). The categories used in the original research were “products” (personal hygiene, birth control, warfare, and drugs for terminal illness), “services” (abortion, sterilization, VD, mental illness, funeral directors, and artificial insemination), and “concepts” (political ideas, palliative care, unconventional sexual practices, racial/religious prejudice and terrorism). The findings were classified into two categories: products with limited market and could be harmful but tolerable (cigarettes, alcohol and guns) and products that people need but were not openly discussed (personal hygiene and birth control).

Katsanis (1994, pg 5) shared the same view and defined “unmentionable” as “products were those that are considered to be offensive, embarrassing, harmful, socially unacceptable, or controversial to some significant segment of the population”. The research considered an extensive list of products that were divided into four categories: unhealthy products, environmental products, personal hygiene/sexually oriented products and personal hygiene/self improvement products.

Rehman and Brooks (1987) considered products such as undergarments, alcohol, pregnancy tests, contraceptives, medications and VD services. Of the products, only male and female contraceptive were considered as unacceptable by a group of college respondents. In the study focusing on “advertising ethics”, Triff et. al. (1987) looked at the products under three advertising directions which were children, alcoholic beverage advertising and political
advertising. Barnes and Dotson (1990) considered condoms, female hygiene products, male underwear and female underwear in their research on offensive television advertising.

Shao (1993) and Shao and Hill (1994a,b) used condoms, cigarettes, feminine hygiene products, male/female underwear, sexual diseases (e.g. STD’s, AIDS) and pharmaceutical products as their list of controversial products or services in their study on advertising agency’s attitude regarding advertisements of “sensitive products”. Fahy et. al. (1995) categorized their “sensitive products” into three major categories which were alcoholic beverages, products directed at children and health/sex related products in their study on television advertising.

Waller (1999) combined various products from previous researches and came up with a list of 15 products in his study on Australian’s attitude towards offensive advertising. The list was further expanded to 17 products and subsequently being grouped under four categories. (Fam et. al, 2004). The list was later replicated by other researchers (Waller et. al, 2005; Toghani, 2009; De Run et. al, 2010). The four categories were:

- Gender / Sex related products (e.g. condoms, female contraceptive, male/female underwear, and feminine hygiene products)
- Social / Political groups (e.g. political parties, religious denominations, funeral services, racially extreme groups, and guns and armaments);
- Addictive products (e.g. alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling);
- Health and care products (e.g. Charities, sexual diseases (AIDS, STD prevention and weight loss programs).