

# THE STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT: MASTER PAPERS

# SBM

STRATEGIC BRAND MANAGEMENT

MASTER PAPERS

*Pinkwashing or Pro-Diversity?*

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# Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers

The Strategic Brand Management: Master Papers is essential reading for brand strategists in both private and public sector organisations, and academics in universities and business schools.

The papers are written by master student groups and follow an international journal format. The student groups selected the topics of their papers and provided updated and relevant insights into the strategic management of brands.

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The intent of the series is to bridge the gap between academic teaching and research.

The series is a result of co-creation between students and teachers in the course Strategic Brand Management (BUSN21 – 7.5 University Credit Points; 8 weeks 50% study time), part of the master program International Marketing and Brand Management at Lund School of Economics and Management, Sweden. The published papers represent the result of the intellectual work of students under supervision of the heads of course. The content of the papers is to be read as student reports albeit the journal format. The papers are free to download and should be cited following international conventions.

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this study is to analyze and create a deeper understanding of how homosexual-themed advertising affects homosexuals attitudes towards a brand that use. This study will answer the research question as following: *How does homosexual-themed advertising affect homosexuals' attitudes towards a brand?*

**Methodology:** The study used a qualitative method and abductive research approach. Primary data are collected by semi-structured in-depth interview and selected through a snowball sample. The interviews have contained stimulus of three different homosexual-themed advertisements.

**Theoretical perspectives:** The theoretical framework is based on theories related to the advertisement message customer receive from brands and the affection on the customer's attitude.

**Empirical data:** The empirical findings consist data obtained through five semi-structured interview of homosexuals. The findings include general thoughts about homosexual-themed advertisements and more specific about three different advertisements.

**Analysis and results:** Our study showed that homosexual-themed advertisement can have both a positive and negative affect on homosexuals brand attitudes, depending on the manner in which homosexuality is presented

**Implications:** Through the study we have gained a deeper understanding of how homosexual-themed advertisement affects homosexuals' attitudes towards a brand

**Originality/Value:** This paper makes a contribution of originality by investigating a previously unexplored topic in a new manner.

**Key words:** Homosexual-themed advertising, Elaboration Likelihood Model, Attitude, Pinkwashing

## Introduction

Homosexuals are a minor group in today's society, but getting more and more attention both legally and in media. Pride parades are getting more common in the entire world and when United States legalized same-sex marriage in their country it was a big event in the world (The Guardian, 2015). Up until now we have come a long way. Companies are finally realizing that not every single family is made up of a father, mother, and two perfect children. Corporations are stepping into the present day and are printing commercials and advertisements featuring LGBT people. Showing these people in advertising reflects the society we live in today. These advertisements reflects the growing support and

acceptance against LGBT, which has lead to a raised bar for the advertising industry. The market was because of the willingness to spend known as the "Dream Market" (Armstrong, 1997).

Since 1990 more than 150 newspapers and gay magazines in the US have flooded this market with expenditures on ads with over \$120.4 million. Many corporate marketers have started including this segment in order to gain bigger market shares. It started with racial groups and has now expanded to include gays as well (Nicholson, 1999). The rising efforts on marketing efforts catering to the LGBT people as well as the increasing images in mainstream advertising of LGBT people are indeed a sign of success for the ones

that are contributing or participating in the gay niche market. When a company uses LGBT community is often a try of washing away things the company have done wrong, trying to look better and caring in the society. This is a phenomenon called Pinkwashing, and was introduced for public first time in New York Times (JenntGrace, 2014). Few studies about homosexual-themed advertisements have been done and the majority of them are in a non-homosexual perspective, how it could affect perceptions of heterosexuals or the brands behind the advertisements.

Recent studies have shown that people that are exposed to non-gay-themed ads have more positive attitudes towards the brand than the people that were exposed to ads that included gay-theme. Studies show that homosexual-themed advertisements can affect the brand evaluation negatively. Heterosexual males that are exposed to advertisements that include homosexual people have less favorable attitudes to the brand and advertising as well (Um, 2014). What about the homosexuals, how are they responding to homosexual-themes advertisements? Few empirical research studies examine how homosexuals' perceptions could be affected by homosexual-themed advertisements. A more interesting perspective is how it would affect their attitude towards the brand behinds the advertisements.

## **Aim**

The aim of this study is to analyze and create a deeper understanding of homosexuals' attitudes towards brands that use homosexual-themed advertising.

## **Research question**

How does homosexual-themed advertising affect homosexuals' attitudes towards a brand?

## **Glossary**

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (Barbara, 2004).

Homosexual: A man or a woman whose primary romantic and sexual attraction is to those of same sex (Barbara, 2004).

Homosexual-themed advertisement: Advertisement with homosexual people exposure (Dotson, 2009).

Pinkwashing: when political or corporate entities promote themselves as gay-friendly in an attempt to soften or downplay of it considered negative (Levi, 2013).

Gay: this is a person who has a primary sexual orientation with others of same gender. Gay can include both men and women, but women prefer to be called lesbians (Barbara, 2004).

Lesbian: a female that have sexual orientation with other women (Barbara, 2004).

## **Limitations**

The limitations in this research is that we did not use a big sample which has lead to that we have not been able to generalize our results. Another limitation is that we did not have time to do this research in more than one city in Sweden, which made it difficult to find a wide range of homosexuals. Another limitation is our use of the Snowball sample, which means that the diversity is not that wide. To give us relative insights in our study we needed respondents to fit certain criteria. Other than being homosexual, we wanted respondents with an analytical, educated and active characteristics that is a member of different gay communities. This has also been a limitation in our study. Finally the fact that we only used three advertisements is also considered as a limitation for our research.

## **Elaboration likelihood model**

The elaboration likelihood model is used to study the effectiveness of persuasive communication. It argues that persuasion of a message or idea can be achieved through two different thought process routes in the recipient's mind, depending on their interest in and ability to analyze and elaborate the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986b). Petty et al. (1986b) argue that persuasion can be achieved through either the central or peripheral thought process route depending on the degree of engagement when evaluating the message from the recipient's side. If there is a strong willingness to elaborate and further analyze the message the recipient takes the central thought process route, whereas a lower degree of engagement means that the recipient will process the message through the peripheral route (Petty et al, 1986b). The central route is based on reasoning, deep analysis and consideration of various factors leading to a final opinion and change in attitude towards the message. The peripheral route is taken when the recipient lacks interest and engagement or the ability to constructively criticize the message. The success of persuasion taking a peripheral route depends on the associations the recipient attaches to the message; these are highly attached to the attractiveness of how the message is presented (Miller & Katherine, 2005). There are two main factors that determine whether the message takes the central or peripheral route. The first is motivation, meaning the interest in further analyzing the message being presented, which is correlated to the personal relevance to the message. The second is ability, referring to how capable the recipient of the message is to interpret and intellectually analyze the message being received. High motivation and ability means that the message will take the direct thought process route, whereas low motivation and ability means that the message will take the peripheral thought process route (Petty & Cacioppo,

1979; Petty, Wells & Brock, 1976). Messages taking the direct thought process route tend to have a longer lasting and profound persuasion, however if a message taking the central thought process route is received negatively the recipient is likely to distance him or herself even more from the message (Griffin, 2012).

## **Cognitive and affective attitude**

A hot topic within marketing research has been two characteristics that have an influence on the effectiveness of advertising are affect and cognition (Fabriguar and Petty, 1999; Zhang and Buda, 1999). Affective refers to one's emotions and feelings about a certain attitude object, while cognitive refers to one's beliefs and knowledge about a certain attitude object (McLeod, 2014). Numerous measures have been researched in order to account for the tendencies to involve in cognitive or affective activities (Sojka and Giese, 1997). The differences between these two have been a popular way of how to classify the types of persuasive communication, ie, the central and peripheral routes (Fabrigar and Petty, 1999).

## **Applications to advertising**

Every time consumers are exposed to advertising that engages them they are receiving stimulus, which leads to elaboration in the mind of the consumers. When customers elaborate a stimulating advertising message it relates to both affective and cognitive experiences in the working part of our memory (MacInnis & Price, 1987). Affective elaboration leads to message-related emotions of the consumer and according to Batra and Ray (1986) customer's affective elaborations are connected to a message's persuasive effect. A high affective elaboration can lead to stronger and more stable attitudes. Cognitive elaboration reflects message-

related thoughts caused in the same process as the affective elaboration. These message-related responses, affective and cognitive, are created when consumers get exposed to a specific advertising stimulus in brand related situations, such as TV-commercials. These elaborations, if positive, later result in the change and modification of attitude in the consumer and a lasting positive effect of the consumer's image of the responsible brand (MacKinzie et al. 1986). MacKinzie et al. (1986) mean that both cognitive and affective elaboration takes place when someone is exposed to an advertisement. However, according to Batra and Stephens (1994) the affective responses are more effective than cognitive responses in a low level of involvement, although it is still of relevance when the level of involvement is high. James and Kover (1992) studied involvement in advertising by measuring how long their respondents looked at an ad. They found that advertisements that were informative and not perceived as manipulative made respondents more willing to involve themselves in the advertisements, ie. respondents would spend more time looking at the advertisement. A high level of involvement will most likely develop a high cognitive elaboration and the costumers can set aside more of their cognitive capacity to manage analysing the message of the advertisement. The level of the consumer involvement in the message of the advertisement has an affect on the attitude (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984).

### **Advertising's effect on brand attitudes**

Many studies have been conducted on how the two persuasive communications, by different processes, change attitudes overall (Edell and Burkem 1987). According to Brown & Stayman (1992) the attitude towards an advertisement (Aad) has an impact on the attitude towards the

brand (Ab). Meuhling & Laczniaak (1988) found the same correlation and also found that already existing brand beliefs had an influence on the Ab if the person viewing the advertisement had high involvement with its message. This relationship kept its positive correlation even a week after the person saw the advertisement. When it came to people who had low involvement with the message of the advertisement, already existing brand beliefs became irrelevant after they viewed the advertisement and only Aad and Ab were positively correlated while the relationship between brand beliefs and Ab became insignificant. This goes to show that existing brand beliefs are important for the perception of the brand when the advertisements message takes a central thought process route (Meuhling & Laczniaak 1988).

### **Analysis model**

Our empirical data will be analyzed using our analysis model to create a deeper understanding of how homosexual-themed advertising can affect homosexual's attitude towards a brand. On the far left of the model we start with the Persuasion of the ad message, in accordance with the elaboration likelihood model. The vertical scale that shows high involvement at the top vs low involvement and the bottom represents degree of involvement. Depending on the degree of involvement in the advertisement message the thought process takes either the central (if involvement is high) or peripheral (if involvement is low) thought process route. The factors that cause degree of involvement, motivation and ability are represented as on the top and bottom as well. The central route then leads to cognitive elaboration and the peripheral route goes onto affective elaboration (Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Batra & Stephens, 1994). In the central route the next stage is already existing brand beliefs which according to finding from Meuhling

& Laczniak (1988) is only significant if there is high involvement in the advertisements message, therefore this step is included only in the central route, where involvement is high. The next step on both routes is attitude towards advertisement (Aad) that is proven to have an effect on the attitude towards the brand (Ab). Since Griffin (2012) states that messages taking the central route tend to have a longer lasting and more profound effect on persuasion if the recipient of the messages is positive towards the message, and can

make the recipient distance themselves even more from the message if it is received positively, the central route leads to either a long lasting positive attitude to the brand or a long lasting negative attitude to the brand. Messages taking the peripheral route do not have a strong persuasive power which is why the peripheral route ends with either a short lasting positive brand attitude or a short lasting negative brand attitude (Griffin, 2012)

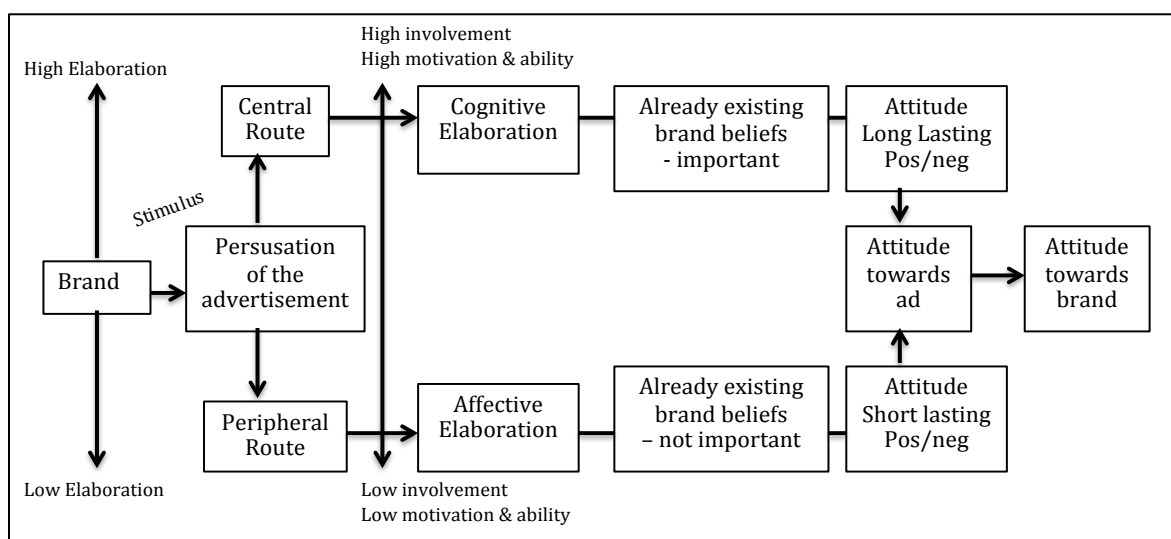


Figure: Analysis Model

## Method

### Qualitative study

The purpose of our paper is to create a deep understanding of how homosexuals perceive homosexual-themed advertisements. We have chosen a qualitative method approach in order to provide a more in-depth study where we can analyze the respondent's views on a deeper level and focus on the underlying human behaviour and attitudes. The qualitative research approach allows respondents to elaborate their thoughts and opinions and give them freedom to express themselves within a wider frame since a qualitative approach are more about words instead of numbers in analysis of society. Our qualitative study is about creating a

deeper understanding of how homosexuals perception of their reality and the social world they live according to homosexual-themed advertisement, in that way we can bring out underlying thoughts and attitudes towards a brand using a specific homosexual-themed advertisement (Bryman & Bell, 2013).

The purpose of this study, however, has not been to generalize the results to a large population or in a different context. We have only intended to create a greater and deeper understanding on the basis of a smaller sample. According to Bryman and Bell (2012), the results of this study will not be forever since the human behavior changes and adapts over time in relation to

the social world they live in and will only be seen as a temporally.

### *Abductive theoretical approach*

The theoretical framework explains the relationship between research and theory, and also the theory integrated in research (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2008) argue for a perspective for the theoretical framework called abduction and we have in this study chosen to mainly use an abductive theoretical approach. The perspective includes many elements from two different perspectives, deductive and inductive approach, but should not be seen as a combination of these, since it has many additional own aspects (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008). The basis of the abductive approach is both empirical result and theory. In this study, we have chosen to use the theory as a basis for empirical data, which is more of a deductive nature. The process has however been more consistent with abduction since it has not been linear, because we have amended and modified in both theory and empirical data during the study (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008).

### *Research Design and Qualitative Interviews*

Research design is a framework for collection of data. We have based our study on a cross-sectional design. This kind of design is mainly used in quantitative studies, but according to Bryman and Bell (2012), can also be used in qualitative studies as ours. Interviews are usually used in cross-sectional designs and have also been our choice of collecting data. Our data was collected at a certain time from more than one case (Bryman & Bell, 2012). We followed a semi-structured interview model. Our first step in the process of collecting data through this sort of interview was to create an interview guide (see Appendix 1) with some predetermined, open questions asked all the respondents. By having this flexible interview approach where questions do not

have to be in a specific order, we had great opportunities and the freedom to ask following-up questions when in need of additional information or clarification regarding certain answers (Lundahl & Skärvard, 1999). This interview layout matches our work well, since the aim is to give the respondents the chance to formulate their answers and convey their subjective opinion on the research subject. Thus, we are given more detailed answers which can contribute to a deeper understanding of their attitudes towards the brands (Bryman & Bell, 2012). Since the use of homosexuals in advertising is a social issue that can be linked to many different types of discussions the semi-structured interview layout also made us able to steer the respondents back towards the attitude of homosexual-themed advertisements when the respondent started to move towards other topics.

### *Sample*

To give us relative insights in our study we needed respondents to fit certain criteria. Other than being homosexual, respondents we looked for were to be analytical, educated and active in gay communities with a large homosexual social circle. Seeing as we wanted to research the central route thought process, we needed to fulfill the two criterias that determine whether a message is received through the central or peripheral, motivation (to elaborate) and ability (to analyze) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty, Wells & Brock, 1976). Therefore we needed someone who was homosexual and active in the homosexual community, for them to feel a strong personal attachment to the issue, and someone educated and analytical, who has the ability and knowledge to critically analyze the message. We chose one person that we knew fit the criteria and had her select the remaining respondents that fit the same criteria, this is called snowball sampling (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

### *Procedure*



We performed five different in-depth interviews, all carried out in Malmö, Sweden on 15 October, lasting approximately 40 minutes each. We conducted the interviews anonymously, in order to encourage respondents to fully express their true feelings and attitudes towards the discussed brands and advertisements. We also chose to have individual interviews to reduce the chance that respondents were influenced by other people's opinions.. All the interviews were performed in Swedish in order to not limit the respondents, since Swedish is their mother tongue. During the interview, we had a number of questions that we had designed to match the different parts of the framework that we set up. We started out by asking general questions about opinions of using homosexual messages in commercials, how it affected their view on the responsible brand and its implications on society. We did this in order to get an overview of their opinions on the matter, and for them to be able to express their opinion without being influenced. We then showed commercials from three different brands, in different orders each time, using homosexual-themed advertisement. We asked about their opinion of all the commercials and how it affected their attitude towards the brand. We consciously chose three brands with male homosexual couples seeing that this is representative of homosexual-themed advertisement. After watching and discussing the videos one by one, the respondents elaborated on which advertisement appealed to them the most and why, then we discussed. Finally, all interviews were recorded, in order to not miss out on any important information.

#### *Stimulus material*

To access the respondents' attitudes towards commercial with homosexuals, we have chosen to conduct our study by using stimuli from three different advertisements. We wanted to get a variety of footage, where the visibility of the gay couple was more or less central to the

advertisement. We chose a variety of different themes to see how the different contexts in which homosexuality were displayed affected the views of the respondents. Since we are researching what type of portrayal of homosexuality is received positively/negatively in the gay community, it was important for us to show homosexuality being portrayed in a number of different ways to allow respondents to elaborate on why a certain advertisement affected them the way it did. We choose TV-advertisements basically because brand's ability to stir emotions among customers are higher in media-channels such as TV (Dahlén & Lange, 2011).

*Adressändring - "Idag lever Kjell med Britt-Marie"* (English translation: Today Kjell lives with Britt-Marie)

The message is that customers should change their address when moving to avoid missing any important post. In this case a gay man misses post from his lover asking him to come live with him in Paris. At the end, the advertisement reveals that the man now lives with Britt-Marie (a woman) and the logo for the "adressändring" is shown (Adressändring, 2012).

*Björn Borg - "Love for all"*

An advertisement showing two male priests getting married. There is a bit of a surprise moment when it is revealed that the second person getting married is also a man. the advertisement ends with the text, "love is for all" and then goes on to show the Björn Borg logotype. No exposure of any products (Björn Borg, 2008).

*Coca-Cola - "Reason to believe"*

A feel-good video, with singing in the background trying to convey that there are millions of reasons to believe in a better world, and that for everything negative there are a greater number of positive things. A gay newly married couple is only shown briefly to represent love as being opposed to hatred; "For every display of hatred... there 5000 celebrations of love".

The brand is first exposed in the end of the advertisement (Coca-Cola, 2014).

### *Criticism of our method*

Bryman and Bell (2013) describes that qualitative studies are usually criticized for being too subjective, since its results have often been based on researchers' own perceptions of what is important. Bryman and Bell (2013) also describe that it is not uncommon that research can be disturbed by the researcher's values or prejudices. This is a problem that also exists in our research. Therefore, we have done our best using open question instead of leading ones, and to give them time to interpret the stimulus during the interviews. We have tried not to be subjective when choosing relevant empirical data for our research. We have determined what's important according to our purpose of the study and not our personal values (Bryman & Bell, 2013). Furthermore, the respondents knew about the purpose of the study which could have affected their attention towards homosexuals in the different advertisements can also been considered as criticism. Finally, it can be difficult finding out of the respondents real attitude towards the specific advertisements showing, since they already might have a strong negative or positive attitude towards the brand in question.

## **Empirical results**

### *General thoughts about brands using homosexual-themed advertisements*

The respondents' general thoughts about homosexual-themed advertisements are basically that they dislike brands using advertisements playing the norm-card, and like brands using advertisements focusing on diversity. All of our respondents were very norm-critical and do not like being generalized. They said they experienced prejudices about homosexuals and felt that they were often stereotyped, which was not

appreciated. An example of that was the statement that "all gay male love the Swedish Schlager festival". The majority claimed that brands take a risk by using homosexual-themed advertising, since it doesn't always generate a positive effect, such as strengthening the stereotypical homosexual.

An advertisement reaching a wider audience is highly appreciated by the majority of the respondents. But in some conditions, all groups in the society should be represented. Using homosexual-themed advertisement is a positive way to contribute to diversity. Some of the respondents expressed that a positive way of creating advertisement including homosexuals would be including them in everyday life situations, making homosexuality seem more "normal" to the general public. Further they explained, the more people get exposed to homosexual-themed advertisements, the more normal it will become. Since advertising in general is a part of most people's daily life it becomes a source of information reflecting society, and it's important for the respondents to be seen in society. Important factors of homosexual-themed advertisement are how they portray homosexuals, who the sender is and what the message is.

Absolut vodka having their bottles in different colors representing the pride flag is one example of positive attitude in advertisements and Barilla's statement of never doing advertisements with homosexuals, is an example of brands the respondents boycott due to their negative attitude. Involving homosexuals in surprising moments in advertisements are also given a negative attitude towards the brand. An example of surprising moment is explained by one of the respondents as a moment when the receiver of the message realize that it's actually about a homosexual person which you didn't think before the moment.

### *Coca-Cola, Adressändring and Björn Borg*

The respondent's responses toward stimulus by Coca-Cola were both positive and negative. Mainly all of them disliked the brand before the interview. That had a strong impact on the attitude toward the brand after showing the advertisement. Some of the participants claimed that their first impression of the advertisement was emotional and positive but after analyzing it, it became more negative. First they came up with positive aspects about Coca-Cola being a large corporate brand, having the power to promote diversity in society, including a homosexual newly wed couple together with different types of people. The respondents argue that the brand is showing optimism in life, which they saw as a emotional, positive message. At first, they didn't see the advertisement as stereotypical, just two men getting married. Some of the respondents later moved to a more negative attitude towards the brand. For some of them the change in attitude began at the end of the advertisement, when the brand was revealed. The other respondents started to doubt Coca-Cola, what did they have to with a gay couple getting married? They answered themselves by claiming that Coca-Cola wants to please all the groups in the world, because they want every one of them to buy Coke. They agreed that this advertisement had a pinkwashing strategy; using the homosexual couple just to gain profit, not for other reasons, not coming from the heart. The respondents thought they had a simplified message; buy a coke and you save the world. After discussing that they created a more negative attitude. According to them, the message has to be realistic and genuine in order to have a positive attitude towards the homosexual-themed advertisement. You can't save the world with a Coke. The participants were not changing their current attitude towards Coca-Cola, but the emotions when watching the advertisement in the beginning were positive due.

The stimulus of Adressändring's advertisement gave the respondents a clear vision about the perceived message. They claimed that the main message and the whole advertisement was about the brand's post-service and more implicitly about homosexuality. The respondents also claimed that the advertisement was showing diversity through communicating a service for everyone and not stereotyping homosexuals. They discussed that people in general could relate to this message of losing something important by not changing address. The participants claimed that it was a great story and that they will remember it mainly because it has a humoristic approach and created positive attitudes towards the brand. According to them, it also evokes sad emotions seeing Kjell being stock with Britt-Marie, it wouldn't be the same if he was stock with Lars-Åke. They also thought the advertisement felt real and generated respect towards the brand through further thinking of homosexual couples and that it could be a reality for many people not "coming out".

The respondents responses toward stimulus by Björn Borg were mostly negative. All the respondents agreed that the spontaneous feelings after watching the advertisement were negative. The reasons are many. First of all, they though Björn Borg went all in on the emotional parts. They thought the brand came off as "super progressive", which became too much for them. According to the participants, this means that the brand went too far by including homosexuals, priests, the church, a surprising effect, without any connection to product, basically just emotions. The surprising effect, that there were two men that got married made some of the respondents upset. They asked themselves why it was so surprising and explain that it is sending the wrong message; it shouldn't be surprising at all. One of the respondents explained his feeling as "The brand kidnapped a political message to

communicate a commercial message for benefit". He later explained, that if it is surprising it's also judging and prejudicing. He, among others, thought the brand should truly be involved in homosexual-rights and political questions if they really care and wants to communicate it. Brand takes civil rights issues and makes it about them. The conclusion of this discussion was that they didn't feel that it was credible and therefore, stated their negative thought about Björn Borg being a user of pinkwashing. Second of all, the respondents were mistrusting the message because of the lack of connection between brand and product. Many asked themselves, after watching the advertisement, where the underwear was. They claimed that the product or service of a brand should be in the advertisement to make sense and that Björn Borg has nothing to do with gay marriages. Hence, they claimed that the message; love is for all, was clear, but since it has nothing to do with the products they are selling it was perceived as irrelevant and mostly connected that to pinkwashing.

### *Overall thoughts*

Finally, the majority of our respondents thought Adressändring was the best advertisement since the context of the advertisement were about their service and not total focus or too little on homosexuals. It was also humoristic and wasn't all about gay marriage. Some of the respondents explain the advertisement as problem-solving. Others claim that the advertisement was the best since it was not the social norms that prevented the two men from being together, it was the lack of "adressändring" that came between their love. Björn Borg was the least preferred of the three advertisements. The respondents argue that there were no connection to the brand's products or service and everything was too much, and pinkwashed. They argue that Coca-Cola mostly try to reach a wider audience by using homosexuals and

sell as many cokes as possible. Coca-Cola's alleged pinkwashing was high. Although, the respondents thought Coca-Cola communicated diversity which they told us lead to a positive attitude towards the advertisement.

One mutual factor in the three advertisements was that homosexuals were representing by two men. The reason for this is, according to our respondents, that two men are more shocking than two women and that there exist stronger prejudices against gay male comparing to gay female, they also claim that gay men are more stereotypical than gay women. Therefore, they claim that brands use of men instead of women is mainly to create stronger emotional feelings.

Our respondents also claimed that the legalization of gay marriage in USA could have a great impact on the wedding theme in two of the advertisements. They argue that it's a smart move of the brand, but ask themselves if love only is about marriage. The majority of the respondents is negative about the wedding theme and thinks it shouldn't only be about weddings when exposing homosexuals in advertisements; they can still expose two people being in love without putting a ring on the finger.

## **Analysis**

### *Analysis model and interpreting empirical data*

Our criteria show that in accordance with the presented analysis model, the respondents will take the central thought process route, since they have high involvement in the advertisement message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty, Wells & Brock, 1976). The reason they have high involvement is because it is of high personal relevance since the respondents are homosexual themselves and are an active part of the homosexual community and that they are educated and analytical

they have the ability to critically analyze the advertisement's message. This means that they should take the central thought process route when presented with the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979). This means that they have mainly a cognitive elaboration process when evaluating the advertisement (MacKinzie et al. 1986). As high involvement recipients their already existing brand beliefs should have an effect on their perception of the final perception of the brand. We noticed however that this was not always the case.

#### *Analysis of Coca Cola*

According to the respondents, Coca Cola's ad played on emotions and diversity. The advertisement was first received positively, as the emotional approach to the advertisement intended, this meant that it first took the peripheral route, due to low involvement. When the Coca Cola logo came up, they became critically opposed and switched from the central route starting a cognitive elaboration process, in this case already existing brand values played a major part, and their already existing negative brand beliefs lead to them rejecting the advertisements message, and finally to the long lasting negative brand attitude result of our analysis model.

Others stated that the pro diversity message appealed to them, saying that norms were challenged, and that the general uplifting message of the advertisement them feel positive emotions, in this case, even though the message had personal relevance, the initial thought process leaned more towards taking the peripheral route with only a low level of cognitive elaboration and high affectional elaboration. However after a short analysis these respondents all started analyzing the message of the advertisement on a deeper level and changed from the initial peripheral route to the central route and affectional elaboration sunk and cognitive elaboration became dominant, they questioned the

advertisements message, that they all in all interpreted as, drinking Coca Cola is part of creating a better society, already existing brand beliefs and the cognitive analysis of this message lead to a long lasting negative effect on brand image, and the use of homosexuals was interpreted as pinkwashing. They questioned why Coca cola should make money off of using their political struggle.

#### *Analysis of Adressändring*

The advertisement in itself had a clear message and was informative on to a higher degree than it was emotional, unlike the Coca Cola advertisement. Adressändrings advertisement created a quite unified point of view among respondents. Respondents agreed that it was a logical advertisement, which seems to have given it a higher tendency to appeal to cognitive elaboration, although the respondents also liked that the advertisement was funny which means that there was a certain degree of affectional elaboration as well. It was clear that the respondents in this case immediately took the central route and respondents admitted that the use of homosexuals in this advertisement did make it more involving because of the personal relevance. None of the respondents had any existing brand beliefs towards Adressändring but saw a strong correlation between the advertisement and the product that they agreed made the advertisement seem more genuine and there was no mention of pinkwashing. They perceived that the brand did not enforce any stereotypes about homosexuals while it still managed to normalise homosexuality. This lead to a positive attitude towards the advertisement which finally in accordance to our model lead to a long lasting positive attitude towards the brand.

#### *Analysis of Björn Borg*

The response towards Björn Borg was also quite unified and the respondents seemed to have taken similar thought processes.

Because the two men getting married was the absolute central part of the advertisement it made respondents very involved with the message of the advertisement and made it very personally relevant, which gave them high motivation to cognitively elaborate the advertisement. This meant that their thoughts went directly to the central route. Already existing brand beliefs did not play a significant importance in this case since they were generally neither positive nor negative. The attitudes towards the advertisement were very negative and the respondents were very critical to Björn Borg using homosexual-themed advertisement that did not even present the product, which made the advertisement come off as deceitful pinkwashing and that they were just paying off a political trend to gain higher market share. They were also critical of how there was a surprise moment when you got to see that the two people getting married were men, and that the advertisement used homosexuality as a shock factor, which made homosexuality come off as something strange rather than acceptable. In accordance with our analysis model cognitive elaboration of the advertisement's message was received negatively and took the path towards negative long lasting effect on brand image.

## **Result**

From our empirical results and analysis we can conclude that homosexual-themed advertisement may or may not lead to positive brand attitude in homosexual consumers. We can see that homosexuals' attitudes towards a brand as a result of these advertisements are highly dependent on the way homosexuals are displayed in the current ad. The negative or positive effect on the brand image depends on how the-homosexual community feels that these advertisements affect society's perception of homosexuality. Since homosexual-themed advertisement most likely will cause high involvement with homosexual

consumers because of their personal relevance to the advertisement's message, homosexual consumers are likely to analyze how the way the advertisement chooses to represent homosexuals, affects society. According to our study we see that in general pro-diversity messages that do not further reinforce stereotypes about homosexuals lead to a positive effect in brand attitudes. Furthermore informative and emotional advertisements lead to a more positive effect than purely emotional one, since the latter often feels less genuine and is interpreted as pinkwashing. Our results showed, that in accordance with our analysis model, that homosexual-themed advertisements that are highly emotional and uninformative tend to lead to a long lasting negative effect in homosexual consumers attitudes towards the brand in question. This conclusion is helpful to brands that are segmented towards the homosexual-community.

## **Implications**

Through the study we have gained a deeper understanding of how homosexual-themed advertising affects attitudes towards a brand, which is still a widely unexplored area of research. We gained a deeper understanding of what can be the reason to why not all the homosexual-themed advertisements are effective. This research shows that it is important to somehow be aware of how the target group thinks and what is important to them, otherwise it can be difficult to reach out and to not get misunderstood. We have also showed that different types of theory models can be applicable when analyzing the attitude of a specific target group; how they feel, think, why, and when. We have in this research observed that it may not be enough to just expose homosexuals in different advertisements. Finally, by doing this research we have gained an understanding of how advertisers can gain homosexual's appreciation by designing an advertisement in a specific way. Even

though this study not done on a large enough scale to be generalizable, the results we have achieved through our analysis can encourage other researchers to further develop our research.

## Further research

Further research can be done with other criterias that can develop the results and conclusions we came up with. Also, doing in-depth interviews that can give a better understanding of the chosen group. Since we researched this in a qualitative way one could also do a quantitative research. This can result in different findings. The advantage of doing a quantitative research is that you can have a wider sample with more respondents. By doing so, one could be able to generalize the results. Furthermore, these results could then be applied to other members of the LGBT group, meaning bisexuals and transgenders. Also, one could do the research on how companies relate to issues such as pinkwashing and pro diversity.

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## APPENDIX

### *Appendix 1 - Interview-guide*

- Lately, there has been several brands that have had homosexual-themed advertisement, what do you think about this?
- How do you think that your attitude will change towards the brand?
- What do you think about those brands that do this?
- What kind of implications do you think it has on society?

#### **Advertisement 1 - Coca-Cola**

- What is your general opinion about this advertisement?
- Did you notice that the two people getting married were men?
- Why do you think the brand chose to have two men instead of one man and one woman? What do you think their purpose was?
- What emotions do you get from watching this advertisement, why?
- What do you think about the brand if you only consider this advertisement? Is your attitude more positive or more negative?
- How does your view of the advertisement and brand affect, now when you see that they are homosexual included?

#### **Advertisement 2 - Adressändring**

- What do you generally think about this advertisement?
- What kind of emotions do you get from watching this advertisement? Would you feel differently if it had been a man and a woman in the beginning of the movie?
- What would you say the message in this advertisement is?
- Why do you think the brand has chosen two men in the advertisement? Instead of a man and a woman, or two women.
- What do you think about the brand if you only consider this advertisement? Is your attitude more positive or more negative?
- How does your view of the advertisement and brand affect, now when you see that they are homosexual included?
- What do you think is the brand's purpose in having two men in the beginning?

#### **Advertisement 3 - Björn Borg**

- What do you generally think about this advertisement?
- What kind of emotions do you get from watching this advertisement? Would you feel differently if it would have been a man and a woman in the beginning of the movie?
- What would you say the message in this advertisement is?
- What do you think is the brand's purpose in having two men in the beginning?
- Would it have the same effect on the advertisement if they would have a man and a woman instead?
- What do you think about the brand if you only consider this advertisement? Is your attitude more positive or more negative?
- What do you think is the brand's purpose in having two men in the beginning?

#### **Lastly**

- Which advertisement did you best like? Why?
- What type of advertisement do you think can gain mostly from having homosexual-themed advertisement?
- Do you think it can get too much in some type of advertisements?
- Does it feel like the brands are being honest and really mean what they say or does it feel like they do it mostly for profit?
- Would you have known what this brand sells just by watching this advertisement?
- How do you think it will look like in 5-10 years? The new normal?

