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**Provocative advertising and its effect on brand image -
A comparison between two industries**

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Provocative advertising and its effect on brand image - A comparison between two industries

Jonas Isaksson, Viola Herrmann & Svea Pohl

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate how provocation is perceived by consumers and how provocative advertising can affect brand image in different industries

Methodology: This study uses primary and secondary data. Secondary data from academic journals make up the theoretical framework. Primary data is collected using a qualitative inductive approach, utilizing two case studies. Executing focus groups help to gain in-depth insights and understanding on how provocative advertising affects brand image.

Findings: The results of this paper suggest that brand image is influenced differently by provocative advertising in different industries

Limitations and future research: Limitations of this study included the sample employed and chosen case studies from only two industries. Research did not distinguish between gender or different age groups and should be explored in future research. Further research should be conducted on the effect of provocative advertising on brand image in other communication channels.

Managerial implications: This paper suggests that managers have to be aware that provocative advertising can affect brand image. The intention of using provocative advertising should be clear and note should be taken when executing marketing strategy in different industries.

Originality and value: This paper is first of its kind to explore the effects of provocation in brand image development as well as to analyze the differences between two industries.

Keywords: advertisement, provocation, sexuality, brand image, provocative advertising

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

The concept of branding has become a crucial part of today's business environment as it can determine a company's success or failure. One important aspect of branding is to create a strong brand image in the consumers' minds. This can be executed through different forms of communication that can all affect brand image and its development (Kapferer, 2012). An effective way to reach the consumers can be through advertising.

With improved technology and increasing use of social networking platforms, exposure to advertising has increased significantly (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Therefore, advertising is seen to be an effective way to reach the consumer. The use of provocative advertising has become a commonly used method by advertisers to gain awareness from the audience (Dens, De Pelsmacker & Janssen, 2008; Waller, 2003; Fam & Erdogan, 2005). The Italian clothing firm *Benetton* is often referred to as the originator of provocative advertising. The clothing firm revolutionized the style and language of advertising with their shocking and controversial messages, which led to media attention around the world (Fileri 2015). Other apparel companies such as *Esprit* and *Diesel* adopted this method, which shows that provocative advertising is a popular strategy employed by many well-known fashion retailers and is utilized to get the attention of the audience (Dens et al., 2008; Waller, 2003). Yet, the term provocation has not been clearly defined.

A considerable amount of research about provocation in advertising has been conducted. Some research, for instance, has investigated if the method of using provocative advertising leads to higher awareness of a brand (Dens et al., 2008; Huhman & Mott-Stenerson, 2008). Other studies have explored if provocative appeals in advertising have positive or negative effects on consumers' intention to purchase (Sabri & Obermiller, 2010), and if it evokes positive or negative attitudes towards brand and image

(De Pelsmacker & Van Der Bergh, 1996; Vezina & Paul, 1997). Research has also explored how provocative advertising is perceived by different actors, depending on whether the sender is a profit or nonprofit organization (Parry et al., 2013).

After all, there is a gap in literature as no study has explored how provocative appeals used in advertising can affect brand image in different industries. This study will focus on sexuality which is an appeal often utilized in provocative advertising. Further, it seeks to build upon and contribute to previous research and theory in this area by examining differences in consumer attitudes linked to brand image.

The aim of this study is to compare and analyze how brand image is affected in different industries after seeing provocative advertising. On these grounds, the research questions will be:

1. What is provocation in advertising?
2. How is provocative advertising perceived by the viewers?
3. How does provocative advertising affect brand image differently in the fashion and the fast food industry?

This paper will use qualitative research by means of two case studies, one from the fast food industry and one from the fashion industry. The study develops understanding of provocative advertising by researching the differences and similarities in brand perception and utilization in two different types of organizational contexts.

The paper will first critically review existing literature on the concepts of brand image, advertising and provocation. Then, the methodology section will explain data collection method and the sample used in this research. In light of the research questions, the results and key findings from the study will be analyzed, discussed and concluded. Finally, with consideration of managerial implications and limitations, future research suggestions will be given.

Literature Review

Brand image

Melin (2002) identifies a brand to have four basic functions which are to act as an “information carrier, a guarantee, a catalyst and an image creator” (p. 110). He argues that all factors aim to add value to a brand and can determine consumers’ buying decisions. Extensive research that has been conducted on branding and brand value creation includes brand image as one of its main concepts. This implies that it is appropriate to examine the concept of brand image in relation to advertising in this literature review.

Generally, the majority of authors agree that brand image is the perception of a brand in customers’ minds (Martenson, 2007; Urde, 2013; Park et al., 1986; Hatch and Schultz, 2001; Faircloth et al., 2001; Kapferer, 2012; Nandan, 2004). Accordingly, Reynolds and Gutman (1984) emphasize the importance of a clear definition of brand image which influences questions explored in research.

Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) have explored different definitions of brand image that have been suggested throughout the centuries and have thus, categorized different definitions of brand image. Categories of definitions range from very broad ones to ones with symbolism, meanings and messages to definitions personifying brand image (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). In accord with Reynolds and Gutman (1984), Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) highlight that there are very multifaceted definitions of brand image. However, a major drawback of the study undertaken by Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) is the lack of analysis of different meanings of the explored definitions which hence further emphasizes the importance for a clear definition of brand image.

Definitions of brand image

Both, Aaker (1992) and Keller (1993), defined brand image as the image shaped by associations that consumers have with a brand. In accord, Park et al. (1986) define brand image as “the understanding consumers derive from the total set of brand-related activities

engaged by the firm” (p. 135). Kotler’s (1988) definition of brand image is more general and focuses on “the set of beliefs held about a particular brand” (p.197). Anyhow, all definitions assert that the concept of brand image is developed by consumers (Nandan, 2004).

The majority of literature (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990; Kapferer, 2012; Melin, 2002) also agrees that many different factors make up brand image. Kapferer (2012) suggests that brand image is created by different elements that are provided by firms. These elements consist of products, people, places and communication which are sent as messages, decoded by consumers and influence consumer perception and thus brand image (Kapferer, 2012; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Early literature (Nöth, 1988) has also found semiotics, the study of symbols and signs, to influence the creation of brand image in people’s minds.

Hatch and Schultz (2001) stress the importance that a company’s vision and consumer image should be aligned in order to minimize ambiguity. This links to a relatively new concept in brand management literature which is brand identity. According to Nandan (2014), brand identity in combination with brand image can create a strong brand. Special attention should be paid to the difference between brand image and brand identity; while brand identity originates from the firm, brand image is the image created by the consumers (Nandan, 2014). Brand identity is about how a firm sees itself and communicates its identity to stakeholders as opposed to how consumers perceive the brand based on this information (Nandan, 2004; Melin, 2002). Faircloth et al. (2001) add that brand image is also found to have a central effect on brand equity, the value and complete picture of a brand. Different models, such as the brand identity prism (Kapferer, 2012) and corporate brand identity matrix (Urde, 2013) also explore brand identity in terms of internal and external factors. They illustrate that all factors are interlinked and add value to a brand. The models emphasize that it is important to

connect internal and external factors in research and that brand image and brand identity are two separate but related concepts which add value to the brand.

Having critically analyzed existing definitions of brand image, this journal will use a combination of Aaker's (1992), Keller's (1993) and Kotler's (1988) definitions of brand image. This journal will henceforth define brand image as a *set of beliefs and associations that consumers have with a brand*.

The role of advertising in brand image

There are many ways in which brand image can be created. Not only can brand image be developed through products, people and places but also different types of communication (Dobni and Zinkhan, 1990). Duncan and Moriarty (1998) who refer to Schultz et al. (1993), argue that anything a company does or does not communicate can form a brand image in consumers' minds. This section will particularly look at the effects of advertising on brand image.

In early studies Durgee (1988) argues that advertising only has two purposes: to excite and to inform. Clark et al. (2009) and Byzalov and Shachar (2004) agree with this statement by claiming that advertising primarily serves as a tool of providing information for customers. However, Buil, Chernatony and Martinez (2011) find that the role of advertising is much more than that, namely to successfully build consumer based brand equity. In other words, through consumer-brand contact, advertising can create brand awareness and evoke unique, emotional brand associations in consumers' minds. (Dobni & Zinkhan, 1990, Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 2007).

In addition to brand familiarity, advertising can have an influence on the consumer's perception of quality and other brand associations over time (Moorthy & Hawkins, 2005, Nerlove & Arrow, 1962). The effectiveness depends on several factors such as the content, the execution, the frequency and the familiarity with the product (Buil et

al., 2011, Byzalov & Shachar, 2004). Meenaghan (1995) discusses advertising in the context of branding. He refers to McDonald (1992) who argues that consumers ultimately create brands and herein advertising is a tool to control and direct its audience (p. 114). Nevertheless, each individual's experiences and their personal attitudes—towards the advertisement influence perceived quality, brand awareness and brand associations (Buil et al., 2011).

Advertising is one of the most visible marketing tools and thus a powerful means of transferring the functional and emotional values of a brand (Buil et al., 2011). Clark et al. (2009) found that advertising has an influence on brand awareness but not on perceived quality. However, Melin (2002) suggests that there is indeed a strong relationship between these two factors. Byzalov and Shachar (2004) add that uncertainty is resolved by exposing the risk-averse consumer to advertising and as a result, will be more likely to purchase the product.

Previous research discusses visual images and verbal text used in advertising (Rossiter & Percy, 1980). Meenaghan (1995) believes that symbols and images elicit a connection between the brand and the consumer by saying that "imagery advertising is identified as one of the principal components of image creation" (p. 28). In accord, Rossiter and Percy (1980) and Phillips (2000) who compare verbal and visual advertising, argue that visual imagery can alter consumer's attitude towards the product even without verbal aid. Yet, text can play a crucial role in explaining and therefore facilitating comprehension of a complex advertising image (Edell & Staelin, 1983, Phillips, 2000). McQuarrie and Mick (1992) suggest that successful comprehension of the advertisement is positively correlated with the consumer's attitude towards the ad. This supports the idea of Scott (1994) who points out that the combination of visual and verbal content presented determines how the consumer is influenced by the advertisement. Heckler and Childers (1992) further suggest that memorability of an ad can be facilitated

by unexpected interactions between image and text.

Provocative advertising

Provocative advertising is a widely used phenomenon by marketers and is utilized to get attention of the audience (Dens, De Pelsmacker & Janssen, 2008; Waller, 2003). Consumers are exposed to advertising which is spread through many different channels reaching a wide audience and as the amount of advertising increases, provocative communication is more frequently used (Huhman & Mott-Stenerson, 2008; Pope, Voges & Brown, 2004; Vezina & Paul, 1997; Waller, Fam & Erdogan, 2005).

When examining provocative advertising there are two categories that can be referred to: shock and controversy. Withal, not many researchers have distinguished shock and controversy, nor attempted to define the term provocative advertising. Many similarities make it difficult to distinguish these two terms. This has been confirmed by literature that uses shock and controversy interchangeably (Huhman & Mott-Stenerson, 2008; Pope et al., 2004). Therefore, this paper will combine both definitions within the concept of provocative advertising. For example, Dahl et al. (2003) define shock advertising to be executed intentionally to antagonize viewers by breaching social norms and values. In accordance, De Pelsmacker and Van der Bergh (1996) refer to controversial advertising as disregarding values and social norms, but also to exploit taboo topics such as violence, sexuality or politics with visual, verbal or situational elements. Nonetheless, this definition does not clearly define whether controversial advertising is intended to shock its audience. The definition of provocative advertising provided by Vezina and Paul (1997) encompasses the two definitions above. The authors describe provocative advertising as a deliberate endeavor to catch the audience's attention with the aim to shock which seems to work through three constructs that are identified as distinctiveness, ambiguity, and transgression of social norms and taboos.

Vezina and Paul (1997) argue distinctiveness to be a central element of provocative advertising and if other companies utilized comparable types of advertising, the message could lose its intensity. Therefore, companies have to continuously renew and innovate their methods in order to stay distinctive (Vezina and Paul, 1997). Be that as it may, Pope et al. (2004) suggest that in order to prompt provocation, more factors than only distinctiveness and ambiguity are needed. They assert that an advertisement that is equivocal and original can still be unprovocative. As the intention is to shock the audience, Pope et al. (2014) agree with Vezina and Paul (1997) that transgression of social norms and taboos is the core of the provocative advertising effort. This represents the use of images, words or situations that aim to provoke the public through utilization of taboo subjects such as violence, sex, vulgar body parts, and political or racial issues (Dahl et al., 2003; De Pelsmacker & Van Der Bergh, 1996; Huhman & Mott-Stenerson, 2008; Sabri & Obermiller, 2012).

It is important to note that some products are by nature perceived as controversial, without the use of provocative advertising (Waller, 2004). He proposes cigarettes, alcohol and condoms to be types of this product group (Waller, 2004). Therefore, it is important to distinguish provocative advertising from controversial products, as products that are advertised by means of—provocative advertising are not necessarily provocative by nature (Huhman & Mott-Stenerson, 2008).

The effects of provocative advertising

Vezina and Paul (1997) argue that provocation is a valid strategy to attract attention which was confirmed by Dahl et al. (2003), and later supported by Dens et al. (2008) and Huhman and Mott-Stenerson (2008). Dahl et al. (2003) find that purchase intentions can be positively influenced by provocative advertising. However, a serious weakness of this argument is its generalizability as only 105 undergraduate students were employed in his quantitative study. In contrast to Dahl et al. (2003) findings, research shows that

provocative appeals in advertising can evoke negative consumer attitudes towards the brand, and affect brand image negatively (De Pelsmacker & Van Der Bergh, 1996; Vezina & Paul, 1997), hence diminish consumer's purchase probability (Sabri & Obermiller 2010).

Research also shows that the audience is more accepting of provocative advertising from nonprofit organizations than from profit organizations (Parry, Jones, Stern & Robinson, 2013). A possible explanation could be that provocative advertising used by nonprofit organizations aims to positively change consumers' behavior rather than increase organizational revenue. They confirm provocative advertising to attract attention but also argue that using fear and sexuality can be risky for organisations operating in the profit sector. To explore this remark further, this paper will focus on sexual advertising used by profit organizations.

Sexuality in provocative advertising

Sexuality and nudity as means of provocation are widely used in advertising. The fashion industry has often been used as an example of leveraging sexuality in its advertisements, mostly displaying woman (Filieri, 2015; Vezina and Paul, 1997; Gurrieri, Brace-Goven and Cherrier, 2016). Nevertheless, not all nudity needs to be perceived provocatively. Vezina and Paul (1997) imply that using sexuality and nudity can have varying effects depending on the situational and geographical context as well as the gender and age of the receiver (Dahl et al., 2009). Despite of Vezina and Paul's (1997) finding that provocative advertising is usually aimed at a younger audience, Dahl et al (2009) contest that a younger audience has a higher tolerance for nudity. Furthermore, women perceive sexuality in advertising more negative than men do (LaTour, 1990; Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). This was also studied by Christy (2006) who found that women are more offended by provocative advertising because of women's intrinsic values and motherly instincts. Gurrieri et al. (2016), advocate that by sexualizing women, a so

called "rape culture" (p.1457) is created and women are degraded.

Literature agrees that consumers' brand image is influenced by advertising. In particular, sexuality in advertising is widely used to provoke emotions which can be positive or negative. Reviewed literature has discussed provocative advertising in the fashion industry (Vezina & Paul, 1997); however, no comparison has been made between industries. Therefore, this research aims to find out if provocation in advertising has a different effect on brand image in different industries. This research will contribute to existing literature on brand image development and provocative advertising.

Methodology

Qualitative Research Method

While quantitative research utilizes numbers and standardized data which can be presented in tables and graphs, qualitative research is used to collect unstandardized data which needs to be interpreted and categorized (Saunders et al., 2009).

The nature of this topic calls for interpretive investigation, and, therefore, focus groups were used for this explorative inductive qualitative research (Calder, 1977) as this method allows us to gain an insight into consumers' perceptions about the two chosen brands. Focus groups are like group interviews in which participants are able to speak freely and interact with each other without being questioned directly (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The explored topic required open-ended questions which encourage creative thinking and offer potential new in-depth insights into the subject and give participants a platform to exchange ideas (Carson et al., 2001). For this research, a less structured approach allows further exploration of the concept provocation in brand image development, thus this method was deemed appropriate.

Sample

A convenience sample of students was recruited from Lund University, as provocative advertising is usually aimed at a younger audience (Vezina and Paul, 1997). Further, the only recruitment criterion was to be familiar with the brands Burger King and Calvin Klein. The recruitment process offered snacks and drinks as an incentive to participate.

For the three focus groups we chose 18 voluntary participants with six participants in each group. This number was deemed to be appropriate as focus group literature suggests a minimum of four to a maximum of eight participants (Saunders et al., 2009). The final sample consisted of eight males and ten females between the age of 23 and 27 years.

Primary Data Collection

First, based on the definition of provocative advertising and the common use of sexuality in brand communication, this study analyzed 50 sexually provocative advertisements researched online. The analysis showed a trend towards increased use of sexually provocative advertisements in the fashion and fast food industry. Therefore, with prior existing research on the fashion industry, it was decided to compare the fashion with the fast food industry.

Only looking at sexually provocative advertisements from the two chosen industries, the search was further narrowed down based on the following criteria.

The advertisement must be:

- A brand that both, men and women, can associate with
- A brand that is accessible and well-known worldwide
- A print advertisement reaching a broad audience, including children (Waller, 2005)
- A print advertisement portraying an image as well as some text (Rossiter & Percy, 1980)
- A print advertisement depicting females in a sexualized manner

Based on the set criteria for each industry, two advertisements were selected and tested on a preliminary focus group of five students that would not be part of the final sample. Participants were presented with the four advertisements and asked about their perceptions and their level of provocation based on a seven point Likert type scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Based on their assessment, the five students, as a group, selected the most provocative advertisement for each industry. With consideration of their choice and information from the literature review, two adverts were chosen. The advertisements from Burger King and Calvin Klein were chosen and these brands used to examine in our focus groups.

Focus Groups Execution

Three focus groups were conducted, two on the 6th and one on the 7th of October 2017. All information from participants gathered in the focus groups was anonymized and recorded, which is recommended by (Calder, 1977). The three focus groups were conducted in the exact same way divided into three different activities. Firstly, the respondents were asked to discuss their general associations they had with the brands, first Burger King, and then Calvin Klein. Secondly, the provocative advertisement for each brand was shown and their perceptions and associations with the brands after seeing the ad discussed. Finally, the groups were challenged to come up with their own definition of provocation.

To ensure the best outcome, a group of three led the focus group with one person in charge of the discussion, one person responsible for the voice recording and the PowerPoint presentation and one person taking notes on a laptop. The moderator introduced the topic and structure of the focus group, guided the participants with open-ended questions and used follow-up questions to clarify any misunderstandings, an approach recommended by (Calder, 1977).

Brands

Burger King

Burger King Corporation is a privately-held American global fast food chain of hamburger restaurants that was founded in 1954 in Miami, Florida (Bloomberg, 2017). After McDonald's, Burger King is the second largest fast food chain worldwide with more than ten thousand restaurants and 11 million guests around the world (BK, 2017).

The print advertisement was a promotion in Singapore and was publicized in 2009. The advertisement shows a woman with a slightly open round mouth and red lipstick on the left and a seven-inch burger on the right, positioned on the same height as the woman's mouth. The text below the image says "It'll blow your mind away", implying sexual connotations. On the top right hand corner, the Burger King logo is placed next to a smaller heading which states "It just tastes better" (see Appendix A).

Calvin Klein

Calvin Klein, Inc. is an apparel clothing and lifestyle brand that was founded in 1968 by the designer Calvin Klein and his business partner Barry Schwartz in New York City, USA (Calvin Klein, 2017). The company offers designer collections under various different Calvin Klein sub-brands for men and women which are distributed in more than 100 countries globally (Calvin Klein, 2017).

The Calvin Klein print advertisement is a 50-foot-tall billboard that was put up in 2010 in New York City's SoHo neighborhood (Complex, 2013). The advertisement shows a woman lying on top of a man while passionately kissing another man sitting on a sofa. A third man is lying on his back on the ground in front of the couch. All four people in the picture are topless wearing only jeans. There was public outrage as some believed that the advertisement suggested a 'foursome' (Complex, 2013). In the center of the billboard advert it said "Calvin Klein Jeans" in white color (see Appendix B).

Discussion and Results

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how provocation is perceived by consumers and to find out how provocation in the fashion and fast food industry affects brand image. This section will analyze and discuss the results from the focus groups and show how it fits in with prior literature.

Burger King

The focus groups revealed that Burger King was viewed as a favorable brand by male participants whereas females disliked the brand. The majority of female participants shared the opinion that the brand is neither exclusive nor attractive to them. Participant O, who is female, said "you only go there when there is nothing else", whereby indicating that Burger King is not her first choice. In contrast to the female participants, Burger King's image was more positive for males as they believed the food quality to be of high standard.

After seeing the provocative advertisement, all participants agreed that it catches the viewer's attention but at the same time does not make the brand more appealing. This intensified Burger King's negative brand image for females:

"This ad makes me want to avoid Burger King even more. I mean of course it draws attention but it is totally against women and I don't like the message. Why are girls always so degraded?!" (Participant H)

Participant H describes how the advertisement catches her attention, which supports the findings of Dahl et al (2003). However, this stands in contrast to Durgee (1988) who believes that advertising only serves as a function to create excitement and to inform the audience. Further, Clark et al. (2009) and Byzalow and Shachar (2004) also suggest that advertising's primary aim is to provide information. The participant also indicated that this type of provocative advertising featuring only women is often utilized. This is supported by literature from Gurrieri et al. (2016) who state that females are more often

sexualized than males. Moreover, participant H also supports Christy's (2006) findings that women are more insulted by provocative advertising than men.

"I would say this kind of advertising definitely affects the image negatively. It's rather gross than appealing. Is this really how they want to be viewed by their customers?" (Participant B)

It is unclear to participant B which information Burger King's advert is hoping to communicate which implies that Burger King's advertisement does not clearly try to communicate brand identity (Nandan, 2004; Melin, 2002) but rather wants to only gain attention. The ambiguous message communicated through Burger King's advertisement can be a reason for negative attitudes towards the brand. This can be linked back to literature from McQuarrie and Mick (1992) who argue that understanding of the advert has a positive effect on consumer's judgement.

Both participants' attitudes towards the brand are affected negatively by the advertisement which verifies De Pelsmacker & Van der Bergh (1996) and Vezina and Paul (1997).

"Well, food and sex doesn't really fit together, but still, I have to give it to them, they are kind of creative and as we all know, sex sells!" (Participant N)

Male participant N emphasizes that sexuality is used in a creative way which increases brand awareness and recognition. This was identified by Dens et al. (2008) and Waller (2003) as one of the fundamental aims of provocative advertising. Despite the advert's creativity, brand image was found to be negatively influenced. A reasonable explanation could be that most males who participated in the focus groups intuitively linked this to be offending towards their female family member and elicited their protective instincts. This would extend Christy's (2006) research by indicating that not only women but also men have motherly instincts.

Another participant described the ad as follows:

"First, I was a bit surprised when I saw the girl and the hamburger, but when I read the text it was so obvious what it wants to imply" (Participant G)

Literature by Meenaghan (1995) can be linked to the previous quote by participant G, as it states that images act as a leading constituent in brand image development. In addition, Edell and Staelin (1983) and Phillips (2000) discuss that supportive text can further enhance comprehension of an advertisement which participant G experienced. The combination of both, text and image, completes and guides the creation of brand image (Scott, 1994).

The focus groups reveal that Burger King's brand image is affected by provocative adverts. As the brand initially had a rather negative image in female participants' minds and positive image in male minds, the results suggest that the message that Burger King sent to its customers was decoded in an unfavorable way and has thus influenced Burger King's brand image negatively (Kapferer, 2012).

Calvin Klein

The focus groups perceived the brand Calvin Klein to be an attractive brand, as it was associated with values such as *high quality* and *modernity*. Only one participant said that the quality is "horrible" and that the brand is only appealing for teenagers between the age of 13 and 19 years.

Calvin Klein's provocative advertisement evoked different emotions and reactions from the participants. All focus groups perceived the advertisement to be somehow creative and distinctive. However, the participants did not find it personally appealing.

"I think it's disrespectful against women and I don't see the meaning of it, like how it would attract more customers." (Participant K)

Existing literature by LaTour (1990) and Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) who

found that men are more tolerant in regards to sexuality in provocative advertising is contradicted by the statement of participant K, who is a male. This advertisement is another example that the fashion industry utilizes sexuality in its communication (Filieri, 2015; Gurrieri et al., 2016).

“I would argue it depends on how you see it. The woman is lying there with three guys; this could also imply that the woman is powerful and independent”. (Participant F)

In contrast to participant K, participant F, who is female, suggested that the woman on the print advert radiates power and shows superiority over the men that are with her. This advertisement is a visual advert that only states the brand name whereby the customer might lack supportive text to comprehend the complex image presented (Edell & Staelin, 1983, Phillips, 2000) and, therefore this picture is interpreted differently depending on the audience and context. It also shows that a more positive association with the picture leads to a more positive brand image (McQuarrie and Mick, 1992).

“For me it is not appealing in any way but still I wouldn’t define it as provocative. I’m so used to this kind of advertising for clothes that I don’t even think about it anymore”.
(Participant A)

A reason for this indifferent attitude towards the Calvin Klein advert could be that younger people perceive sexuality and nudity as less provocative (Dahl et al., 2009). This could be a limitation of our sample because the young audience in our focus group is increasingly exposed to such types of advertisements through different media channels on a daily basis. This type of advertisement has become more common in recent years (Huhman & Mott-Stenerson, 2008), thus evoking resistance towards sexuality in advertising (Vezina and Paul, 1997).

Literature by Moorthy & Hawkins (2005) and Nerlove & Arrow (1962) suggests that advertising affects brand association over time

rather than in an instant which is supported by participant A’s brand image of Calvin Klein. The focus groups overall agreed that even if there were different opinions about the advert itself the associations with Calvin Klein and attitude towards the brand was not influenced. Another possible explanation could be that the advert was perceived to be “artsy” and “creative” which imply that provocative advertising does not need to have negative connotations, thus not decrease brand image.

Comparison of industries

The results from all focus groups showed that the brand image for Burger King slightly changed, whereas for Calvin Klein it did not change.

A possible explanation for these results is that, as has been explored by literature (Vezina and Paul, 1997; Filieri, 2015), sexuality is often used as an advertising tool in the fashion industry and can, thus be regarded as acceptable. People are more used to seeing those types of adverts in connection with fashion, whereas in the fast food industry the link between food and sexuality is not expected by the audience.

Additionally, as has been found in literature from Kapferer (2012), brand image is entrenched in consumers’ minds and is difficult to change once it has been established. Consequently, viewers do not feel the need to further interact and think about the brand, especially when a predominantly negative brand image was created.

A similarity of both adverts was the objective to shock the audience which is the aim of this type of advertising (Dahl et al., 2003), thence it was surprising that the outcome of the focus groups differed for each industry. Since provocative advertising is used to attract attention (Dens et al., 2008) rather than to communicate the company’s vision, there is a risk that a gap between vision and image is created (Hatch & Schultz, 2001). This could explain why provocative advertising is viewed negatively by stakeholders, as Hatch and Schultz (2001) recommend that a company’s vision and image should be aligned.

Research has found that any type of brand communication, deliberate or not, forms brand image (Schultz et al., 1993), whereby it can be assumed that it reaches a wide target audience. This implies that provocative advertising can be interpreted differently because of its inappropriate nature. As the Calvin Klein and Burger King adverts were printed, reaching a large public audience, it was surprising to find the provocative advert to not change Calvin Klein's brand image. Therefore, this research might have shown different results if other channels such as social media would have been analyzed. Especially, with new challenges posed by social media allowing an overabundance of information, brands only have seconds to grab the user's attention in order to compete against others (Boulianne, 2015).

Exploration of the term provocation in advertising

In the focus groups the participants were asked to collectively interpret the term provocation in advertising. The aim of this task was to explore whether the term provocation is understood the same as literature has defined it. Terms that were used to define the term provocation included:

Focus group 1	<i>emotional, unexpected, triggering, offending, negative, against usual expectations, surprising, creates a strong reaction, positive, neutral, controversial</i>
Focus group 2	<i>trigger interest, appealing, funny, distinctive, different, artsy, smart, start discussions, offensive, shocking, creative, humiliating</i>
Focus group 3	<i>irritating, offending, different, insulting, degrading, attention-seeking, unexpected, disturbing, funny, ineffective</i>

In the three focus groups several different keywords were used to describe provocation. However, what stood out most, was that provocation is perceived to be offensive. Many negative adjectives were used to define

provocation such as *shocking, irritating, insulting, degrading and disturbing*. This can be related back to previous research which mainly suggests that provocative advertising has negative connotations such as violating social norms and taboos (Vezina and Paul, 1997) and to shock the audience (Dahl et al., 2003). Thence, it reflects Vezina and Paul's (1997) definition of provocative advertising. Notwithstanding, some other adjectives were used to define provocation which stood in contrast to Vezina and Paul (1997), these included *funny, appealing, artsy, smart and creative*. Those words imply that provocative advertising can also have positive connotations, hence, a positive effect on brand image. Yet, this assumption has to be explored by future research.

Conclusion

This study clearly answers the three research questions. The first research question aimed to explore the term provocation in the context of advertising. The findings revealed that the most used keywords to describe provocation were *offensive, shocking, degrading* but also *funny, appealing, creative*.

This emphasises that provocation can be perceived in various ways, positive and negative. The words that were found to describe provocation in advertising add to literature by suggesting that the already given definition of provocative advertising can not only be negative but more so positive and controversial.

Nevertheless, the results from the focus groups confirm Vezina and Paul's (1997) definition of provocative advertisement but suggest that there are more aspects to be considered.

Results also show that provocative advertising was perceived differently by the focus groups, answering the second research question which examines the perception of provocative advertising. The provocative Burger King advert elicited different emotions but the overall perception was negative as it was seen to be degrading towards women. Yet, the majority of men and women agreed that the

advertisement catches the viewer's attention. Also, it can be concluded that image and text are strongly related and can influence the understanding of the message which in turn affects brand image.

Provocation used in Calvin Klein's advertisement was generally perceived to be rather positive. Results showed that the advertisement was seen as creative, yet, was provoking and not personally appealing.

An interesting insight was that the advertisement was also interpreted as a means to empower women. Therefore, Calvin Klein's brand image was not found to be influenced by provocative advertising.

Finally, the third research question, intended to find differences between the influence of provocative advertising on brand image in the fashion and the fast food industry, was resolved.

Although findings only found a change in brand image for Burger King in the fast food industry, provocative advertising seems to affect brand image differently in different industries. No effect was found for Calvin Klein in the fashion industry. These findings suggest that there is a different level of acceptance amongst consumers depending on the industry. While prior literature found that provocation used in the fashion industry does change brand image (Vezina and Paul, 1997) this research contradicts these findings and suggests that this complex phenomenon has to be further analyzed in future research. Additionally, the results showed that a relationship between text and image in provocative advertising does exist and can further influence consumer's associations with the brand and hence brand image.

Prior literature was extended by expanding the field of research to other industries other than fashion.

Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective this research offers guidance on how to use provocative advertising in the fashion and fast food industry. Managers and marketers can gain

leverage from this research, as the findings from this study emphasize that there is a difference on how provocation in advertising can affect brand image in different industries.

This study has improved our understanding of provocation in advertising and future research should further study this complex phenomenon. This research has verified and extended prior research on provocative advertising and brand image, by exploring the differences between the fast food and fashion industry. It emphasizes the importance of understanding that communication utilized by a firm can affect brand image and thus the success of a brand.

Another implication of this study is that companies need to be clear whether they want to communicate their brand values and thus identity. Through provocative advertising brand image might be distorted, hence can create confusion amongst consumers.

This research also adds to literature by examining provocative advertising in the fast food industry and highlighting the importance of gaining thorough knowledge about the chosen target group, for example depending on gender or age, as this might determine the effectiveness. Managers should take into account that the effect of sexuality in advertising might not be as powerful as it used to be because people are getting more accustomed to such type and intensity of provocative advertising.

Limitations and future research

There are also some limitations in this study. As this research has only looked at two adverts and two companies from two industries, the results are not generalizable (Saunders et al., 2009). Future literature should validate this research by looking at more industries and include different types of provocative advertising, for example the use of political or religious elements.

Due to time constraints of this research, only three focus groups were conducted. Therefore, future studies should aim to exhibit this research on a larger scale. With improvements

in technology and the rise of web 2.0 (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), future research should examine the effects of provocative advertising online or in social media to find out whether it affects brand image differently.

Another limitation is that the sample only consists of Lund University students from a specific age range. There is a possibility that within this group similar views on provocative advertising exist. Further research should compare if any contrasting views occur between different age groups.

This research method did not distinguish between only male and female focus groups, hence future research should clearly undertake separate focus groups which might lead to different outcomes. Furthermore, cultural influences on developing brand image can also be explored.

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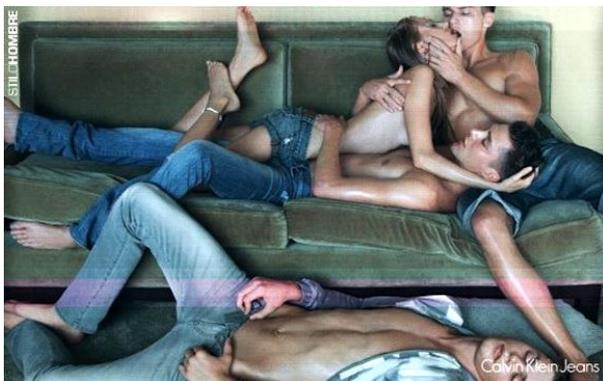
Appendices

Appendix A: Burger King Advert



Source: <http://shapingyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/burger-sex-blow.JPG>

Appendix B: Calvin Klein Advert



Source: <http://www.antinews.gr/media/2012/01/sto-pasok-kanoun-omadiki-psuxotherapeia.jpg>