

“Features of shocking advertizing impact on consumers in commercial and social context”

AUTHORS

Jūratė Banytė  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9994-9712>

Kristina Paskeviciute

Ausra Rutelione

ARTICLE INFO

Jūratė Banytė, Kristina Paskeviciute and Ausra Rutelione (2014). Features of shocking advertizing impact on consumers in commercial and social context. *Innovative Marketing* , 10(2)

RELEASED ON

Thursday, 07 August 2014

JOURNAL

"Innovative Marketing "

FOUNDER

LLC “Consulting Publishing Company “Business Perspectives”



NUMBER OF REFERENCES

0



NUMBER OF FIGURES

0



NUMBER OF TABLES

0

© The author(s) 2025. This publication is an open access article.

Jurate Banyte (Lithuania), Kristina Paskeviciute (Lithuania), Ausra Rutelione (Lithuania)

Features of shocking advertizing impact on consumers in commercial and social context

Abstract

Despite common negative attitude of society and ambiguous estimation of scientists, shock appeals in advertizing have become a popular means of conveying consumer-oriented content. Shocking advertisements have been especially successful in social advertizing, where consumers accept them with more tolerance than in commercial advertizing. Attitudes to usage of shock appeals in advertizing and their impact on consumers are diverse, which stimulates constant discussion among scientists and practitioners. The majority of studies performed until now have focused on the causes of shock and the impact of shock advertizing on consumers; however, there is a lack of scientific work that would confirm the dependence of consumer response to shock advertizing on the context. This area still remains insufficiently studied and motivates further scientific research. This presupposes the aim of the article to provide theoretical grounding for the impact of shock advertizing on consumers in commercial and social advertizing context. The results of scientific research introduced in the article have shown that in order for shock advertizing not only to attract consumers' attention but also to change their thinking, strong emotional reaction should be evoked. Theoretical studies of shock tactics in advertizing reason a comprehensive analysis of the issue, yet there are no complex studies that would reflect consumer reactions to shock advertizing in social and commercial advertizing context and there are no models developed on the basis of their results in marketing literature. With reference to the current research into the impact of shock advertizing on consumers, the article presents a conceptual model of consumer reaction to shock advertizing in commercial and social advertizing context integrating the constructs of antecedents, shocking stimuli, advertizing context as a moderating factor, consumer emotional and behavioral responses.

Keywords: shocking advertizing, consumer buying behavior, advertizing context, constructs of consumer emotional and behavioral responses.

Introduction

In modern society, advertizing provokes, stimulates, inspires, irritates, troubles, and sometimes becomes a fairly unnoticeable detail of the environment. Meanwhile shock advertizing is created to affect emotionally and shake thinking (Moore and Harris, 1996), to touch people at fundamental level and encourage them to take actions (Huntington, 2009). Shock advertizing is a conscious attempt to cause a shock to the consumer by violating social, cultural, moral, and religious values of society.

Scientific literature analysis reveals that active discussion has been going on about the purpose of shock advertizing. It is argued that shock tactics is used to make people stop and notice an advertisement. Williams (2009) agrees with her and states that shock is an effective means to capture attention and a fast way to communicate a message for any organization. Fendley (1996) notes that shock advertizing attracts interest of the press and the company's name appears in the center of public attention. Meanwhile Dahl (2002) states that shocking messages are used to capture attention to an advertisement hoping for not only noticing but also further elaboration of the issue.

On the other hand, it has been questioned recently who has a more reasoned right to use shock tactics: charity institutions solving issues that must be

communicated, or business organizations whose main aim is profit. Are the things that are condemned when used for commercial reasons allowed when social mission is pursued? Does the attitude of society depend on the context?

On the grounds of the above, we could state that the popularity of shock tactics in advertizing and aspiration to find out if society accepts the use of shock effect to increase sales and to solve sore social issues with equal (in)tolerance determined the course of the present study with the aim to reveal the impact of shock advertizing on consumers in different advertizing contexts.

The critics of shock tactics in advertizing accuse the creators of shocking advertisements of emotional manipulations and commerce of social issues; whereas the proponents of the phenomenon analyze the factors that cause shock in advertizing and seek to ascertain how they affect emotions and behavior of the audience. However, there is no unanimous opinion of marketing specialists even in this case. Moore and Hutchinson (1983), Bello, Pitts and Etzel (1983), Dahl (2002), and Williams (2009) emphasize the efficiency and positive impact of shock advertizing on the audience, while Barnes and Dotson (1990), Phau and Prendergast (2001) stress consumers being offended by it. Theoretical and empirical research undertaken by Chenesey (2000) and Van Putten and Jones (2008) confirms that consumers judge shocking advertisements ambiguously, they are differently perceived in

commercial and social advertizing context. Consequently, despite thirty years of ongoing discussions, the impact of shock advertizing on consumers still remains a relevant object of scientific research. In the light of these facts, the article raises the following *problematic questions*: What consumer reactions are provoked by shock advertizing? How are they conveyed in the case of commercial and social advertizing?

The aim of the article is to give theoretical grounding for the impact of shock advertizing on consumers in commercial and social context.

The research method is the systematic review and comparable analysis of scientific literature.

1. Literature review

1.1. The concept of shock advertizing. Advertizing may appeal to the rational side of consumers, convey information, and elicit cognitive reaction. Yet the most interesting is an emotional aspect of advertizing that affects feelings of the audience. Striving for exceptionality and persuasiveness, advertisers tend to use dramatic emotions, they create the messages that would shock consumers.

When discussing advertizing of such type, one term is particularly frequent in practice i.e. shock advertizing or shockvertising. However, the analysis of scientific literature reveals that marketing theorists use different terms to define shocking advertisements. The concepts of shock advertizing proposed by authors are very different, i.e. irritating, unmentionable, explicit, taboo, provocative, intrustive, shock and controversial advertizing, etc. Although scientific literature mentions different concepts, advertisements are basically considered shocking due to the same reasons: images of an advertised product or emotional appeals used in the message i.e. what and how it is being advertised.

Marketing specialists have divergent approaches to the causes of shock evoked by advertizing. Wilson and West (1995), Katsanis (1994), Fahy et al. (1995) argue that consumers are shocked by the advertised object itself. On the other hand, Percy (2001), Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999), Nadein and Petrova (2002) state that such a reaction is caused by emotional appeals used in advertizing i.e. the way the advertisement is presented. In their study of television commercials, Barnes and Dotson (1990) note that consumer reaction of repulse is incited by both the advertised product and emotional appeals.

1.1.1. Object of advertizing. Wilson and West (1995) assert that negative response to an advertisement is a result of an advertised product such as cigarettes, alcohol, condoms, or feminine

hygiene products. Fahy et al. (1995) refer to such products as socially sensitive, and Katsanis (1994) defines them as unmentionable i.e. offensive, embarrassing, harmful, socially unacceptable, or controversial to certain segments of the society. Marketing literature often cites the definition given as far back as 1981 by Wilson and West: “unmentionables are the products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented.”

When assessing offensive television advertizing, Barnes and Dotson (1990) identified the following offensive products: condoms, feminine hygiene products, female and male underwear. Phau and Prendergast (2001) indicate cigarettes, alcohol, condoms, female contraceptives, feminine hygiene products as being controversial. Waller (1999) presents a list of 15 products and group them according to the level of offensiveness (from lowest to highest): alcohol, cigarettes, condoms, female contraceptives, female hygiene products, female underwear, funeral services, gambling, male underwear, pharmaceuticals, political parties, racially extremist groups, religious denominations, sexual diseases, and weight loss programs. The most exhaustive list of “unmentionables” is given by Katsanis (1994); she lists 42 items and divides them according to the following categories: environmental products, social/political groups, unhealthy products and addictions, personal hygiene/sexually oriented products, personal hygiene/self-improvement products.

Fam, Waller and Erdogan (2002) divide controversial products and services into four groups:

1. Gender/sex related products (e.g. condoms, contraceptives, male/female underwear, and female hygiene products).
2. Social/political groups (e.g. political parties, religious denominations, funeral services, extremist groups, and guns and armaments).
3. Addictive products and services (e.g. alcohol, cigarettes, and gambling).
4. Health and care products (e.g. charities, sexual diseases, and weight loss programs).

Although the majority of authors define consumer response triggered by controversial products as negative (Waller, 2003; Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Hume, 1988; Rickard, 1994), successful practice of such advertizing is also acknowledged (Evans and Sumandeep, 1993; Waller, 1999; McIntyre, 2000; Phau and Prendergast, 2001). Widrick and Fram (1984) emphasize that negative attitude towards a product may vanish in a long-term perspective if the product is useful for consumers. The authors have

also established that direct and indirect publicity of an issue may also give better results than promotion of product attributes.

1.1.2. Emotional appeals. To receive emotional response from consumers and encourage the process of buying, advertizing should serve as a stimulus (Percy, 2001), and advertisers should use emotional appeals that encode one or several emotions (Albers-Miller and Stafford, 1999). Therefore, if advertisers succeed in evoking proper emotions using advertizing message as a stimulus, they will achieve higher effectiveness of advertizing than in the case of advertizing without emotional appeal.

Individual emotional appeals in advertizing and consumer response to them are salient topics in marketing literature. For example, Boddewyn (1991) analyzes sexual and race appeals, Black et al. (2010) measure consumer responses only to sexual appeals using intercultural aspect; Soderlun and Dahlen (2010) investigate consumer reaction to violence, Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) analyze sexual and death elements. According to Huang (2001), marketing tends to employ emotional appeals of humor and fear, first of which evokes positive emotions and increases attention to advertizing message, its evaluation and purchase intention; whereas the latter has an opposite effect and arouses negative emotions. On the other hand, Nadein and Petrova (1998) emphasize that advertisers are mistaken in avoiding the use of negative emotions in advertizing. According to the authors, negative emotions occupy more space in human life than positive ones and they have a greater effect on an individual's motives. Advertizing is used to create tension that could be eased only when a certain action is performed, for example, buying the advertised product. The tension may be achieved through negative emotions. Thus the so-called "unfinished act" and following

negative emotions lead to awareness of an advertisement and consumer's arousal to act.

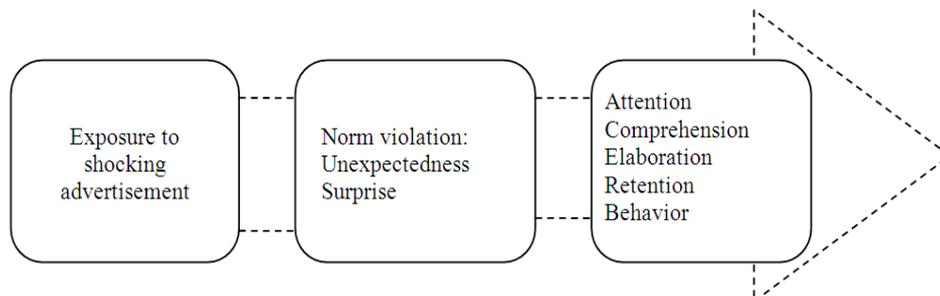
A more thorough analysis of emotions triggered by shock was performed by Dahl et al. (2003) who identified seven types of shock appeals (i.e., disgusting images, sexual references, profanity/obscenity, vulgarity, impropriety, moral offensiveness, religious taboos).

Shocking products are often described in marketing literature as unmentionable, offensive, embarrassing, socially unacceptable, that is, the ones that are not discussed or demonstrated in public due to established moral norms: contraceptives, intimate hygiene products, sexual diseases, alcohol, cigarettes, gambling, guns, funeral services, etc.

It is useful for advertisers who work with controversial products to consider the results of causal studies that reveal what is regarded offensive or repelling by consumers and to choose the foci of advertizing relevantly. Obviously, to create an effective shocking advertisement, it is necessary to evaluate its possible emotional impact and to have a clear understanding of consumer behavior that is desired to be provoked.

2. The impact of shock advertizing on consumer emotions and behavior

Some consumers perceive the whole message when they see an advertisement, others experience emotions related to objective associations and memorize emotional elements of the advertisement, and still others focus their attention on the advertizing execution. The studies prove that even brothers interpret the same message of an advertisement differently due to their different interests and life experience (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Consumer's reaction to shock advertizing can be explained using the model of Dahl, Frankenberger and Manchanda (2003) (see Figure 1).



Source: According to Dahl et al. (2003).

Fig. 1. The model of consumer response to shock advertizing

Study results show that the use of provoking, controversial, and/or offensive advertisements captures consumers' attention (Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Dahl et al., 2003), yet not all of them are

noticed by the target audience. Dahl et al. (2003) claim that violation of socially acceptable norms is the stimulus that attracts attention to a shocking advertisement and prompts elaboration of it. If an

advertisement unexpectedly “transgresses” the established norms in a proper way, tastefully and ethically, it evokes consumers’ surprise. In order for consumers to understand the message communicated through an advertisement, they are forced to elaborate it. Consequently, according to Dahl et al. (2003), surprise caused by violation of socially acceptable norms attracts attention and stimulates elaboration, retention, and, consequently, certain behavior.

An emotional component of advertizing impact is determined through affective relations with an advertised object i.e. how an individual perceives the product: likes, dislikes, is repulsed by it, neutral towards it or resents it. Such reactions that cause emotional relation between individuals and advertisements, the object itself, finally boost purchase desire or reluctance.

In order to achieve emotional effectiveness of advertisements, one should imagine the advertisement and decide how people with different characters will react to it, whether it will grab their interest. Research into consumers’ emotional response to product, service, idea, or their advertisement constitutes the major part of advertizing research. According to approach proposed by most researchers, to achieve an optimum psychological effect of advertizing, it should evoke positive emotions of the audience. Yet sometimes a contrary situation is witnessed i.e. a substantial commercial effect of advertizing is produced although it elicits unpleasant, irritating emotions, fear, or anger. Huntington (2009) claims that negative consumer reaction to shock advertizing is partially caused by the fact that nobody gives them the reason why shock tactics is used. Most people are certain that shocking advertisements are created with the sole purpose to grab attention. Which is true, but in order for people to change their thinking, deep and strong emotional reaction must be provoked.

According to Williams (2009), shocking advertisements are successful because they affect the most sensitive part of the audience i.e. emotions. The author states that shock tactics acquire an increasingly strong emotional form. It was determined that people do not try to remember information that evokes negative emotions; still, however strange it may sound, consumers tend to reject a shocking emotional appeal by deciding ‘I’m not so bad’. Consequently, with the desire to affect the audience that has seen it all, ad creators started using natural human need to protect children. Shock advertizing showing emotional consequences to others, as opposed to only displaying the defect to consumers, is the latest and very effective trend (Williams, 2009).

To enhance advertisement retention, recognition, information recall, specialists often use comparison, identification, and contrasts. According to the attributes, human memory records certain elements of product advertisement, which help to retain advertised phenomena in memory for a longer period of time. One of the tasks of advertizing is to artificially elicit association to reinforce new images in the consumer’s memory.

Studies performed in Ogilvy research and development center in 2009 show that advertisements that are liked by people, help to sell more than those which irritate them. To manipulate consumers into buying, they must be captivated, shown new possibilities that would come with one or another purchased product. Therefore, advertisers should be good psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists because advertizing should affect not only mind but also will and feelings. Society has become more complex, which forces advertisers to constantly search for new ways to capture attention of the audience (Waller, 1999). The greatest challenge for advertisement creators is that shock advertizing might be absolute success or complete failure. Everything depends on consumer reaction and, respectively, its impact on market rates.

The analysis of shock advertizing effectiveness revealed that shock advertizing is considered to be more interesting than other types of advertizing (Bello et al., 1983), and shock experienced as a result of advertisement exposure grabs attention, helps to memorize the message better and recognize it. Williams (2009) argues that shocking advertisements are effective because of their direct impact on the consumer.

Marketing literature identifies three main consumer reactions to advertizing as follows:

1. *Target consumer response* is a reaction that was expected i.e. a person got interested, read or saw an advertisement and behaved in the way he/she was prompted. The studies by Dahl et al. (2003) have revealed that the use of shocking images in advertisements may positively affect the target audience, capture their attention, make them see the content and provoke desired behavior i.e. target reaction. It is noted that public relations and word of mouth advertizing are extremely significant for fashion brands, thus their advertisements tend to use shock tactics that attracts attention and publicity. The author states that ceasing to release edgy advertisements leads to decrease of interest in the fashion brand and drop in company’s sales.
2. *Incidental consumer response* is a reaction that was not expected by an advertiser. The reaction

to an advertisement is demonstrated by repulsion from society's side, by complaints to relevant institutions, and by decrease in sales i.e. the outcome of shock advertising may be negative to the brand (Burke and Edell, 1989). The studies show that consumers are less likely to choose the products of a company that propagates aggressive advertising if similar products are offered by a company that uses non-screaming advertisements (An and Kim, 2006). Contrary to Dahl et al. (2003) who claim that shock advertising has a negative impact on consumer behavior, studies by Bello et al. (1983) show that shocking advertisements are effective in capturing consumers' attention, yet they do not prompt positive attitude to the brand and purchase intention. Phau and Prendergast (2001) concur with this approach and state that shocking advertisement may cause greater interest, but appeal to consumers using less intensive means is more acceptable, better perceived, and stimulates purchase. According to Waller (2004), prior to implementing controversial campaigns, advertisers should find the fine line between communication with market and offending people.

3. *Reverse consumer response*, "boomerang" effect. It appears when an individual's attitudes and personal experience contradict the content of a particular advertisement. In such a case the consumer behaves oppositely to what was expected by advertisers. Advertising specialists claim that reverse consumer response or "boomerang effect" is triggered by an overly shocking advertisement. In such a case the risk is that a consumer will simply switch the channel or turn the page. The same may happen if advertisement execution is too dramatic as a consumer feels being manipulated right away. On the other hand, striving for publicity is a result of lack of creativity, and thus shock tactics is used only to capture attention. Consumers' awareness of an advertisement does not mean that they will befriend the advertised object.

In her studies of consumer reactions to shocking advertisements, also referred to as taboo advertising, Sabri (2012) distinguishes three dimensions of effect to consumers:

1. *Normative dimension* is expressed through *moral norms* and is associated with behavioral rules, attitudes, and values established in the society. Transgression of acceptable norms may result in negative consumer response and indignation at advertising campaign. Due to this reason, the society protests against taboo-violating advertising campaigns in the public

space and advertisers despite original and creative advertising execution or high artistic level of the advertisements. Social norms not only affect the way consumers respond to shocking stimuli in advertisements but also their intention to buy advertised products. Consumers who perceive an advertisement as unacceptable according to their values, may develop a negative attitude towards the brand which may respectively affect their purchase behavior.

2. *Contagion dimension* is related to cultural values and their influence on the consumer. Individuals form their understanding of culture through belief, moral, customs, traditions, art, literature, and law. Contagion dimension manifests itself in evaluation and interpretation of advertisements that contain certain *cultural symbols*. Traditionally consumers tend to form a negative attitude towards taboo-violating advertisements if the cultural symbols are not expressed in a proper way. Accordingly, such advertising develops negative consumer attitude towards advertised product and prompts them to restrain from its purchase.
3. *Ambivalence dimension*. Advertising may create confusion in a consumer's consciousness because of simultaneous positive and negative emotions e.g. pleasure and repulsion. This ambivalence phenomenon was empirically validated by research into the impact of advertisements containing provoking sexual appeals. The works of Ford et al. (1990), Keltner and Buswell (1997), Eisenberg (2000), Heywood (2002), Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006) and other scientists revealed that open sexual appeals in advertisements evoked not only negative emotional response such as shame, guilt, discomfort, but also positive emotional response like pleasure and excitement. This indicates that taboo violation in advertising elicits ambivalent feelings.

According to Sabri (2012), ambivalent emotional consumer response is expressed by mixed feelings i.e. simultaneously or consistently both positive and negative emotions are experienced. For example, a consumer may feel pleasure, excitement, and attraction and at the same time experience shame, offence, or disappointment. Nevertheless, consumer reaction may also be univalent, in other words, an advertisement may provoke only positive or negative response. Univalent perception of advertising is characteristic of consumers who have a clear feeling that the advertisement violates taboos or of those who are completely unaware of any expression of taboo. Sabri (2012) claimed that there was no univalent positive response to taboo advertisements noticed in her research. If such an

advertisement does not evoke ambivalent feelings of consumers, it is only perceived negatively.

Consumer response to taboo advertizing depends on their personal factors, understanding of moral norms, and cultural symbols that condition consumers' acceptability of shocking stimuli (forbidden or sacred images, words, topics, environment, etc.) and on their emotions evoked by such taboo violation. This accordingly influences consumers' attitude to the advertised product and the brand, purchase intention, and image of a consumer who buys a product advertised in this way. On the basis of logical sequence, Sabri (2012) has developed a model describing the impact of an advertisement on a consumer. Situational factors and characteristics of advertisement messages are used as moderators in this model; when testing the model, sexual appeals were chosen as a shock-arousing advertisement stimulus (taboo).

Being the proponent of the approach expressed by Percy (2001), Dahl et al. (2003), Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes (2006), Black et al. (2010), Soderlund and Dahlen (2010) and other researchers that emotional appeals in advertizing are the cause of shock effect, Sabri (2012) empirically verifies the impact of a sexual appeal on the consumers in two different cultures (French and Moroccan) using the example of commercial advertizing. However, the number of controversial advertizing campaigns is increasing in social context as well, because they have proved to be most efficient here.

To generalize the performed analysis of scientific literature, we could claim that strong emotional reaction is necessary to both attract consumers' attention and change their thinking. Meanwhile consumer response to an advertisement may be defined as target (expected by an advertiser), incidental (unexpected by an advertiser), and reverse (a consumer behaves contrary to advertisers' expectations). Consumer reaction to the use of shock effect may be individual as it is affected by normative, contagion, and ambivalence dimensions. Therefore, the success of a shocking advertisement depends on how a consumer will react to it and, respectively, how it will affect market rates.

In the discussion about the impact of shock advertizing on consumer emotions and behavior, a standout approach (Chenesey, 2000; Van Putten and Jones, 2008; Javed and Zeb, 2011; Sandikci, 2011, etc.) is that the nature and intensity of consumer reaction is determined by different context of advertizing. When creating either social or commercial advertisements, the same shock-causing techniques and consumer influence methods are used; however, the purposes of advertisements in

the two contexts are essentially different. Research findings reveal that consumers are more favorable to shock advertizing in social context than in commercial one. Extremely proactive attitude of the society and divergent approaches of experts prompt further discussions about the use of shocking stimuli in commercial and social advertizing contexts.

3. The impact of shocking commercial advertizing on consumers

Shock tactics are prevalently used in clothing industry (Hyllegard et al., 2009) to promote socially-responsible business, to create the brand image, to boost sales, and to increase profit (Dickson, 2001; Stabile, 2000). Fashion business is characterized by abundance of advertisements showing naked bodies. Possibly it is the reason why the majority of authors (Severn et al., 1990; Vezina and Paul, 1997; Andersson et al., 2004; Hyllegard et al., 2009, etc.) investigating the impact of sexual appeals on consumer emotions and behavior focus on the category of clothing products. On the other hand, it should be noted that empirical evidence that shock advertizing helps to sell consumables – including clothing – varies. For example, Severn, Belch and Belch (1990) uncovered that the use of sexual appeals motivated a more favorable consumer attitude to sport shoes, which boosted intention to buy. Furthermore, consumers identified that advertisements containing sexual appeals were more offensive in comparison to those that do not use shock appeals. To skeptical statements that less intensive advertisements might not attract consumer attention at all, Panda (2005) replies that an average level of sexual appeal used in advertizing of fashion goods affects consumers in a positive way. This supports the opinion of Barnes and Dotson (1990) that advertisers should choose the foci of emotional appeals correctly.

According to specific trends in fashion business, advertisements usually depict young, skinny, or fit bodies, and sexual tension is conveyed through certain body language, movement, form, and surroundings. Nevertheless, the studies undertaken by Severn et al. (1990) show that too open sexual appeals in advertizing cause consumers' cognitive processes to focus more on advertizing execution than on the product being advertised.

The importance of image to fashion brands is constantly increasing, thus controversial commercial advertisements are created not only for commercial purposes but also to provoke discussion about more global issues than the selling of clothing. On the other hand, consumers also do not want their favorite brand to be boring. One of the best ways for a brand to lose monotonicity and become interesting

is to express a clear view on sore and controversial issues. Usually by nature people like expressing their opinion and they gladly get involved into provoking discussions; shocking commercial advertisements create an interesting and exciting intrigue to consumers.

The importance of the image is constantly increasing in case of fashion brands. Contraversal business advertizings are creating not only for the commercial aims but also seeking to provoke discussions about more global problems than sales of clothes. Having analyzed genesis of shock advertizings, drastic advertizing of “United Colors of Benetton” (i.e. campaign “Unhate”) can be excluded as an example. Company has seeking to force consumers to be interested to the brand image, but not to the product. Still it is important to emphasize that even consumers want that their brand would be not the boring one. According to Bhat (2011), one of the best ways to get rid of monotony and become interesting – express the clear approach to controversial and sore questions. On the other hand, there will always occur such brands as “Calvin Klein”, “Diesel” or Virgin” those are proud of their sharpness and using such an image in their shock advertizing campaigns. Colyer (2002) states that sometimes brands are not consequent with their conception: “Did you notice that Benetton will risk in any other field in the same way as they are doing in their campaigns? Still Bhat (2011) noted that people like to express their opinion and to be involved into provocative discussions and here shock advertizing can create interesting and inspirational intrigue.

Having surveyed young consumers interested in fashion, scholars noticed that most of them did not understand the message communicated through shocking advertisements of United Colors of Benetton. The researchers think that the company’s decisions to expand advertizing perspectives while creating a positive and engaging image of the brand may be very risky if consumers perceive the advertisements as being offensive and refuse to buy the advertised products. According to Javed and Zeb (2011), for some shock advertizing is the way to save the brand while for others it serves as a source of problems. Everything depends on how advertisers use shock tactics.

The analysis of studies that reason consumer responses allows us to distinguish the following types of consumer response to shocking commercial advertisements.

- ◆ Target consumer response: attention to an advertisement and its elaboration; interest in the brand and its image; positive associations with

the brand; understanding of the brand; identyfication with the brand; trust in the brand; provoked discussion and active support; giving priority; intention to buy.

- ◆ Incidental consumer response: perceiving the brand as offensive; open outrage; spreading of negative attitude; complaints to respective authorities; boycott of goods; refusal to buy.
- ◆ Reverse consumer response: sense of being manipulated; ignoring the advertisement; ignoring the brand.

Chenesey (2000) thinks that if an advertisement shocks – with its object or emotional appeals – it should evoke a certain cognitive reaction and indicate the way to solve the issues that are depicted. The author poses a question open for discussion: Who has the right to use shock tactics, charities that deal with issues that simply have to be communicated or commercial organizations that have one ultimate goal of receiving profit?

4. The impact of shocking social advertizing on consumers

Social advertizing is intended to educate society, change attitudes, propagate and enhance social welfare, and thus it is used to solve the issues in one way or another related to actions of an individual as a member of the society. Social advertisements are most frequently used in the fields such as health care, environment protection, damage prevention, and promotion of social initiatives or involvement and is focused on changing and forming stereotypes of social behavior.

Social advertizing frequently uses shock tactics to make consumers start thinking, and the advertisements are provoking, shocking, and emotionally staggering. Wilson and West (1995) point out that non-profit organizations employ direct images to explain the causes of social problems and shock the society to get a particular response, reaction to the problem, or support to the fund they are responsible for.

Shock caused by unexpected exposure to real-life images is extremely efficient. In this case shock is a result of fear and startle, which are strong emotional appeals and have greater impact on an individual’s motives.

Studies show that shock tactics should not be used when addressing under-aged individuals contrary to adults because children do not respond to fear appeals. Threatening used in social advertizing campaigns is often ineffective as it provokes defensive reaction ‘you won’t tell me what to do’ or avoidance ‘if I am cautious, this won’t happen to me.’ However, fear affects children differently than adults, it prevents them from understanding i.e. when

threatened, children simply cease to listen. Bushman and Huesmann (2006) contradict this idea by arguing that children are especially sensitive to violence broadcasted by media since it is difficult for them to distinguish fantasy from reality and everything seems real to them. Nevertheless, they also emphasize that violence in cartoons as well as the character of a child make the greatest influence on them.

Despite the purpose of shocking social advertisements, they should be handled cautiously. Social advertizing cannot be used as a means to moralize, and threatening should be as delicate as possible so as not to evoke hostile, unwanted response from the audience. Having figured out cultural values (Fam et al., 2002) and community attitude (Van Putten and Jones, 2008), one can show the same social problem considering sensitiveness of the society.

Therefore Wilson and West (1995) argue that just because non-profit organizations are performing a noble deed, they are not granted the right to create and use any kind of harrowing or threatening images. On the other hand, Van Putten and Jones (2008) reason that the audience accepts shock advertizing in non-commercial advertisements with more tolerance than in commercial ones. Sandikci (2011) notices the participation of not only scientists who tend to express unfavorable attitude, but also consumers, tradespeople, formal institutions, intellectuals, stakeholders, and advertizing specialist in the debates. The audience includes various levels of economic, political, and legal power, represents different interests and declares diverse attitudes. Society's response to shock advertizing is expressed through protests, complaints, criticism, approval, and appreciation. Sandikci (2011) also states that scientific discussions about shock advertizing mostly encompass unfavorable attitudes, which is contradicted by Kerr et al. (2012) who argues that despite criticism, people like various extremes. Consequently, controversial advertisements have become so shocking and stunning and, according to Kerr et al. (2012), ambiguous perception of the advertisements encourages people to post comments actively and share them in the Internet.

After the analysis of the impact of shocking social advertisements on consumers, we can identify the following consumer reactions to shocking social advertisements.

- ◆ Target consumer response: attention to an advertisement and its elaboration; interest in social issues; thinking of global issues; decrease in doubts; understanding of the importance of the problem and possible damage; change in social behavioral stereotypes; formation of beliefs; provoked discussion; change in

behavior; showing initiative; engagement; donation and support.

- ◆ Incidental consumer response: fright and negative associations; feeling of being moralized and defensive reaction 'you won't tell me what to do'; perception of commercial aspect of social issues; open outrage; complaints to respective authorities; spread of negative attitude; refusal to help.
- ◆ Reverse consumer response: feeling of being manipulated; ignoring the advertisement; ignoring social issues 'if I am cautious, this won't happen to me.'

To generalize the results of scientific research into the impact of shocking commercial and social advertisements on consumers, it is possible to state that there exists an opinion that the use of shock advertizing in social context is more acceptable to consumers than in commercial context. The advertisements in fashion business tend to use sexual appeals extremely often, yet overly open demonstration of them receives negative response from the society. The studies show that fashion business advertizing that communicates the message of honest trade would create positive consumers' attitude to advertisements of fashion brands and would simultaneously form a positive image of clothing retailers.

Shocking images in social context may serve as an effective educational and preventive means; however, the advertisements should moralize and threaten in a delicate manner so as not to cause opposing, unwanted response from the audience. Furthermore, an advertisement should clearly convey a social message, that is, what issue it fights and what effective solution it suggests.

Theoretical studies of shock tactics in advertizing reason a comprehensive analysis of the issue, yet there are no complex studies that would reflect consumer reactions to shock advertizing in social and commercial advertizing context and there are no models developed on the basis of their results in the marketing literature. This presupposes the need for a conceptual model of consumer response to shock advertizing in commercial and social context.

5. The model of consumer response to shock advertizing in commercial and social context

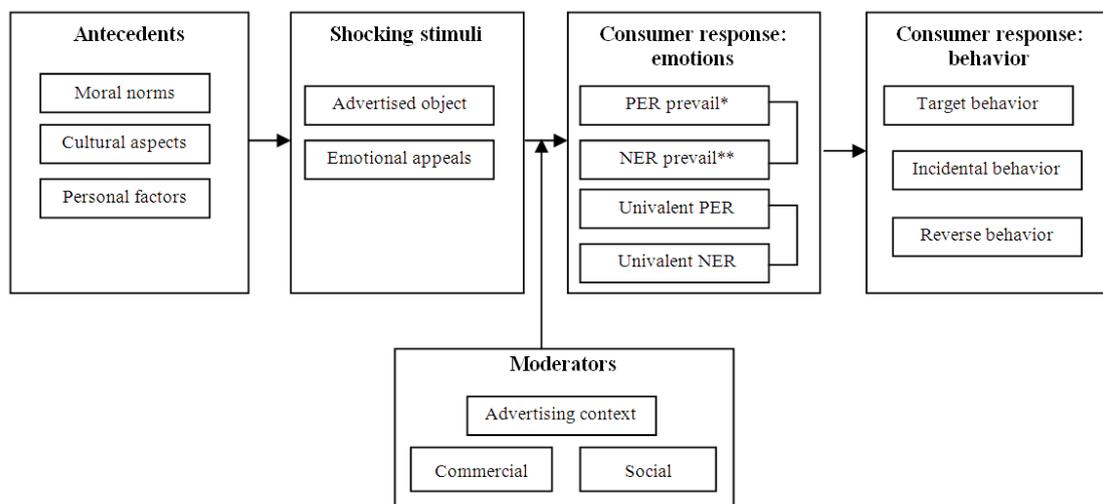
There are different opinions and evaluations of consumer response to shock advertizing in different contexts, yet there is a lack of complex scientific researches allowing to reason consumer reactions to shock advertizing in social and commercial advertizing context. Having summarized the results of undertaken research, we present a conceptual model of consumer response to shock advertizing in

commercial and social context. The model is based on these theoretical attitudes:

- ◆ Advertizing is considering shocking because of the advertizing object (Wilson and West, 1995; Katsanis, 1994; Fahy et al., 1995) or emotional appeals used in advertizing (Boddewyn, 1991; Albers-Miller and Stafford; 1999; Percy, 2001; Huang, 2001; Dahl et al., 2003; Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Black et al. 2010; Soderlund and Dahlen, 2010).
- ◆ Every consumer reacts and interprets the advertizing individually due to different interests, life experience, moral norms, cultural cognition and other factors that form the individual acceptability of shock advertizing stimuli to the consumer (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; McCracken, 1989; Mick and Buhl, 1992; Otnes et al., 1997; Waller, 2004; Sabri, 2012).
- ◆ Emotional consumer reaction to shock advertizing is evaluated as negative (Waller, 2003; Aaker and Bruzzone, 1985; Hume, 1988; Rickard, 1994) or positive (Evans and Sumandeeep, 1993; Waller, 1999; Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Williams, 2009), also may experience mixed feelings when simultaneously or consistently both positive and negative emotions are experienced (Ford et al., 1990; Keltner and Buswell, 1997; Eisenberg, 2000; Heywood, 2002; Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes, 2006; Sabri, 2012).
- ◆ Consumer response to an advertisement may be defined as target, incidental and reverse behavior (Burke and Edel, 1989; Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Dahl et al., 2003; Tylee, 2012).
- ◆ The nature and intensity of consumer reaction is determined by different context of advertizing (Chenesey, 2000; Van Putten and Jones, 2008; Javed and Zeb, 2011; Sandikci, 2011; Westcott, 2012).
- ◆ Shocking commercial advertisements create an interesting and exciting intrigue to consumers, forms exclusive brand image, increases sales and profit (Severn et al., 1990; Stabile, 2000, Dickson, 2001; Bhat, 2011). Strongly shocking advertizing can become unacceptable and not desirable for society and that leads to business problems (Panda, 2005; Hyllegard et al., 2009; Javed and Zeb, 2011).
- ◆ Shock advertizing in social context are created as an effective educational and preventive means (Von Lindenfels, 2009; Huntington, 2009; Williams, 2009).

The fundamental logic of model development is closest to the approach of Sabri (2012); moreover, consumer behavior reactions to shocking advertisements identified during scientific literature analysis (Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Dahl et al., 2003, etc.) and the constructs of consumer response dependence on the context (as moderators) formed by Van Putten and Jones (2008) are integrated into the model development. With reference to the mentioned approaches, five main constructs of the conceptual model are distinguished as follows: antecedents, shocking stimulus, moderators, emotional consumer response, and behavioral response (Figure 2).

5.1. Antecedents. The conceptual model was prepared according to the factors that determine the acceptability of shocking advertisement stimuli to consumers. Our approach is that consumer response to a shocking stimulus in an advertisement primarily depends on their moral norms, cultural aspects, and personal actions that form the acceptability of shock advertizing stimuli to the consumer. Therefore, they are shown as antecedents in the model.



Notes: *PER is the positive emotional reaction, ** NER is the negative emotional reaction.

Fig. 2. Model of consumer response to shock advertizing in commercial and social context

5.2. Shocking stimuli. The conceptual model uses shocking stimuli that are used to affect the audience and elicit its reactions. The studies of shock causes in advertizing conducted by Wilson and West (1995), Katsanis (1994), Fahy et al. (1995), Percy (2001), Albers-Miller and Stafford (1999) and other scientists reveal that both an advertised object and emotional appeals (disgusting images, sexual elements, profanity and obscenity, vulgarity, impropriety, aggression, religious taboos) can serve as shocking stimuli.

5.3. Moderators. We assume that advertizing context associated with the purpose of shocking stimulus usage described in the works of various authors may perform a significant role of moderator in the analyzed case. The same shock-causing techniques and impact on the audience methods are employed when creating both social and commercial advertisements, yet the purposes of advertisement creation are essentially different. Social goals are expressed as striving for society's welfare and better life quality and focus on relevant social issues; in other words, social advertizing is a way to attract attention to the existing social issues and encourage the change in peoples' attitudes and behavior. The purpose of commercial advertisements is business-related; they aim for greater turnover and profit while promoting the practice of socially-responsible business, creating the brand image, and increasing sales (Dickson, 2001; Stabile, 2000).

5.4. Consumer response: emotions. Ambivalent emotional dimension by Sabri (2012) is used to explain affective consumer reaction caused by shock advertizing. The emotional affect dimension is characterized by consecutive or simultaneous positive and negative emotions. Positive ambivalence appears when positive emotional response (PER) prevails. If negative emotional response (NER) dominates, negative ambivalence is present. Shocking stimuli may also provoke univalent consumer response when the consumer experiences just positive or negative emotions. Although empirical research carried out by Sabri (2012) did not reveal any univalent positive reaction, there is likelihood of such a reaction to shocking advertisements. Because of that, the conceptual model of consumer response to shock advertizing in commercial and social context depicts all possible affective reactions of consumers: ambivalent reactions with prevailing positive or negative emotional response and univalent positive or negative reactions.

5.5. Consumer response: behavior. Emotions experienced by consumers affect their attitude towards the advertised object and further intentions concerning it, and they are expressed as target (expected by an advertiser), incidental (unexpected by

an advertiser), and reverse (a consumer behaves contrary to advertisers' expectations) consumer behavior.

Conclusions

The existing research into the impact of shock advertizing on consumers allows us to state that increasing society's concern with the popularity of shocking advertisements results in increasing need to analyze reasons of such varied consumer reactions to shock advertizing. The conclusion is drawn that most of recent research has focused on the reasons causing shock and the impact of shocking advertisements on consumers, thus there is a lack of data confirming the trends of dependence of consumer reactions to shock advertizing on the context.

The performed analysis reveals that despite different terms encountered in the scientific literature, essentially advertisements are considered shocking because of the same reasons: advertised product or emotional appeals used in the image i.e. what is being advertised and how the advertisement is executed. The marketing literature describes shocking products as those which are offensive, embarrassing, and socially unacceptable, the ones which are not discussed or demonstrated openly due to social and moral norms established in the society. Meanwhile the analysis of shocking emotional appeals outlines disgusting images, sexual references, profanity and obscenity, vulgarity, aggression, etc.

It was found out that in order for a shocking advertisement not only to attract consumers' attention but also to change their thinking, strong emotional reaction should be triggered. The latter determines consumer response to the advertisement, which can be target (expected by the advertiser), incidental (not expected by the advertiser), and reverse (consumers behave opposite to what is expected by advertisers). Individual consumer reactions to shock effect are conditioned by normative, contagion, and ambivalent dimensions of the impact. Consequently, shock advertizing may be very successful or very damaging. Everything depends on consumer reaction and, respectively, its impact on market rates.

Having analyzed the results of scientific research into the impact of shocking commercial and social advertisements on consumers, we can confirm the existence of opinion that the use of shock advertizing in social context is more acceptable to consumers than that in commercial advertizing context.

The authors of the article present a complex model that reveals consumer reactions to shocking advertisements in social and commercial context; the model includes the constructs of antecedents, shocking stimuli, moderator as advertizing context, and consumer emotional and behavioral responses.

Further research is going to be related to empirical studies of expression of variables constituting the model constructs. This would enable us to assess which emotional appeals should be avoided in different advertising context, commercial or social. To achieve deeper understanding of the reasons and impact of shocking stimuli, it is recommended to conduct in-depth interviews with target consumer

groups or to organize discussions of focus groups combined with observation of participants. It is also recommended to devote further research to uncovering the correlations between situational factors (both reflected in the conceptual model and not included into it) and consumer behavior reactions to shocking commercial and social advertisements.

References

1. Aaker D.A., Bruzzone D.E. (1985). Causes of Irritation in Advertising, *Journal of Advertising*, 49, pp. 47-57.
2. Ajzen I., Fishbein M. (1980). *Understanding Attitudes and Predicting Social Behavior*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
3. Albers-Miller N.D., Stafford M.R. (1999). An international analysis of emotional and rational appeals in services vs goods advertising, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 16 (1), pp. 42-57.
4. An D.C., Kim, S.H. (2006). Attitudes toward offensive advertising: a cross-cultural comparison between Korea and the United States // Paper presented at the 2006 Annual Conference of the American Academy of Advertising. Reno, NV.
5. Andersson S., Hedelin A., Nilsson A., Welander Ch. (2004). Violent advertising in fashion Marketing, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 8 (1), pp. 96-112.
6. Barnes J.H., Dotson M.J. (1990). An Exploratory Investigation into the Nature of Offensive Television Advertising, *Journal of Advertising*, 19 (3), pp. 61-69.
7. Bello D.C., Pitts R.E., Etzel M.J. (1983). The Communication effects of Controversial Sexual Content in Television Programs and Commercials, *Journal of Advertising*, 12 (3), pp. 32-42.
8. Bhat H. (2011). Many a slip between lip and lip [interactive]. Business Line. Available at: <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/features/brandline/article2672020.ece>.
9. Black I.R., Organ G.C., Morton P. (2010). The effect of personality on response to sexual appeals, *European Journal of Marketing*, 44 (9/10), pp. 1453-1477.
10. Boddewyn J.J., Kunz H. (1991). Sex and decency issues in advertising: general and international dimensions, *Business Horizons*, 34 (5), pp. 13-20.
11. Burke M.C., Edell J.A. (1989). The impact of feelings on ad-based affect and cognition, *Journal of Marketing Research*, 26 (1), p. 69.
12. Bushman, B.J. & Huesmann, L.R. (2006). Short-term and long-term effects of violent media on aggression in children and adults, *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 160, pp. 348-352.
13. Chenecey S.P. (2000). *When is it right to use shock ad strategies?* London: Marketing. March 30, p. 19.
14. Colyer E. (2002). Offensive but effective? [interactive]. Brand Channel. Available at: http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=84.
15. Dahl D.W., Frankenberger K.D., Manchanda R.V. (2003). Does It Pay to Shock? Reactions to Shocking and Nons shocking Advertising Content among University Students, *Journal of Advertising Research*, 9, pp. 268-280.
16. Deutsch M., Gerard H.B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influence upon individual judgment, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 51, pp. 629-636.
17. Dickson M.A. (2001). Utility of No Sweat labels for apparel consumers: profiling label users and predicting their purchases, *The Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 35 (1), pp. 96-119.
18. Eisenberg N. (2000). Emotion, regulation, and moral development, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 51, pp. 665-697.
19. Evans I.G., Sumandeep R. (1993). Is the Message Being Received? Benetton Analysed, *International Journal of Advertising*, 12 (4), pp. 291-301.
20. Fahy J., Smart D., Pride W., Ferrell O.C. (1995). Advertising sensitive products, *International Journal of Advertising*, 14, pp. 231-243.
21. Fam K.S., Waller D.S. (2003). Advertising Controversial products in the Asia Pacific: What Makes them Offensive? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 48 (3), pp. 237-250.
22. Fendley A. (1996). *Commercial break: the inside story of Saatchi & Saatchi: the inside story*, New York: Arcade Publishing, pp. 219.
23. Ford J.B., LaTour M.S., Lundstron W.J. (1990). Contemporary Women's Evaluations of Female. Sex Roles in Advertising, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 18 (1), pp. 81-95.
24. Heywood J.L. (2002). The cognitive and emotional components of behavior norms in outdoor recreation, *Leisure Science*, 24 (3/4), pp. 271-281.
25. Huang M.H. (2001). The theory of emotions in marketing, *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 16 (2), pp. 239-247.
26. Hume S. (1988). Most Hated Ads: Feminine Hygiene, *Advertising Age*, 18 (7), p. 1.
27. Huntington R. (2009). Shock ads are about more than getting headlines, *New Media Age*, 10 (8), pp. 5-6.
28. Hyllegard K., Ogle J., Yan R. (2009). The impact of advertising message strategy – fair labour v. sexual appeal – upon Gen Y consumers' intent to patronize an apparel retailer, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 13 (1), pp. 109-127.

29. Javed M.B., Zeb H. (2011). Good shock or bad shock: what impact shock advertisements are creating on the mind of viewers, Annual Conference on Innovations in Business & Management, London, UK.
30. Katsanis L.P. (1994). Do Unmentionable Products Still Exist? An Empirical Investigation, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 3 (4), pp. 5-14.
31. Keltner D.Y.R., Buswell B.N. (1997). Embarrassment: its distinct form and appeasement function, *Psychological Bulletin*, 122 (3), pp. 250-270.
32. Kerr G., Mortimer K., Dickinson S., Waller D.S. (2012). Buy, boycott or blog: Exploring online consumer power to share, discuss and distribute controversial advertizing messages, *European Journal of Marketing*, 46 (3), pp. 387-405.
33. Manceau D., Tissier-Desbordes E. (2006). Are sex and death taboos in advertizing? *International Journal of Advertizing*, 25 (1), pp. 9-33.
34. McCracken G. (1986). Culture and consumption: a theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13 (1), pp. 71-84.
35. Mick D.G., Buhl C. (1992). A Meaning-Based Model of Advertizing Experiences, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (12), pp. 317-338.
36. Moore D.J., Harris W. (1996). Affect Intensity and the Consumer's Attitude toward High Impact Emotional Advertizing Appeals, *Journal of Advertizing*, 25 (2), pp. 37-50.
37. Moore D.L., Hutchinson J.W. (1983). The effects of ad affect on advertizing effectiveness, *Advances in Consumer Research*, 10, pp. 526-531.
38. Naomi M., Petia K., Petrova P.N., Cialdini R.B. (2006). Images of Success and the Preference for Luxury Brands, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16 (1), pp. 57-69.
39. Otnes C., Lowrey T.M., Shrum L.J. (1997). Toward an understanding of consumer Ambivalence, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24 (1), pp. 80-93.
40. Panda T.K. (2005). Sex-oriented advertizing and its impact on attitude of teenagers: application of behavioral intention model across product categories, *The Journal of Business Perspective*, 9 (4), pp. 15-26.
41. Percy L. (2001). The role of emotion in processing low involvement advertizing, *European Advances in Consumer Research*, 5, pp. 293-296.
42. Phau I., Prendergast, G. (2001). Offensive Advertizing: A View from Singapore, *Journal of Promotion Management*, 7 (1/2), pp. 71-90.
43. Rickard L. (1994). Consumers Would Rather Skip Feminine Hygiene Ads, *Advertizing Age*, 65 (11), p. 29.
44. Sabri O. (2012). Preliminary investigation of the communication effects of 'taboo' themes in advertizing, *European Journal of Marketing*, 46 (1/2), pp. 215-236.
45. Sandikci O. (2011). Shock Tactics in Advertizing and Implications for Citizen-Consumer, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 1 (18), pp. 42-50.
46. Severn J., Belch G.E., Belch M.A. (1990). The effects of sexual and non-sexual advertizing appeals and information level on cognitive processing and communication effectiveness, *Journal of Advertizing*, 19 (1), pp. 14-22.
47. Söderlund M., Dahlén M. (2010). The "killer" ad: an assessment of advertizing violence, *European Journal of Marketing*, 4 (11/12), pp. 1811-1838.
48. Stabile C.A. (2000). Nike, social responsibility, and the hidden abode of production, *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 17 (2), pp. 186-204.
49. Tylee J. (2012). Do shock tactics work in retail ads? [interactive]. Campaign. Available at: <http://www.campaignlive.co.uk/analysis/1138526/>.
50. Van Putten K., Jones S.C. (2008). It Depends on the Context: Community Views on the Use of Shock and Fear in Commercial and Social Marketing, *Partnerships, Proof and Practice – International Nonprofit and Social Marketing Conference 2008, Proceedings*, Paper 17.
51. Vezina R., Paul O. (1997). Provocation in Advertizing: A Conceptualization and an Empirical Assesment, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14 (2), pp. 177-192.
52. Von Lindenfels M. (2009). If charities are going to shock, they must also offer meaningful ways to help [interactive]. Third Sector. Available at: <http://www.thirdsector.co.uk/news/907986/>.
53. Waller D.S. (1999). Attitudes Toward Offensive Advertizing: Australian Study, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 16 (3), pp. 288-294.
54. Waller D.S. (2003). A Proposed Response Model For Controversial Advertizing, *Journal of Promotion Management*, 11, pp. 3-15.
55. Waller D.S. (2004). What Factors Make Controversial Advertizing Offensive? A Preliminary Study, ANZCA04 Conference, Sydney.
56. Westcott K. (2012). Are these the most offensive ads of all time? [interactive]. BBC News. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-18243577>.
57. Widrick S., Fram E. (1984). Identifying Negative Products: Do Customers Like to Purchase Products? *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 1 (2), pp. 59-66.
58. Williams, Matt (2009). Does shock advertizing still work? *Campaign (UK)*, 4/24/2009, Issue 16, p. 11.
59. Wilson A., West C. (1981). The marketing of unmentionables, *Harvard Business Review*, 1/2, pp. 91-102.
60. Wilson A., West C. (1995). Commentary: permissive marketing – the effects of the AIDS crisis on marketing and messages, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 4 (5), pp. 34-48.