

# **An Analysis of Social Awareness in Advertisements**

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## 1.0 Introduction

In such a diverse market that is continuously changing because of the advancements of technology, it is imperative for marketers to grab the attention of the audience and leave a lasting impression. This can be done through numerous theoretically based communication strategies in advertisements. In this paper we examine the use of social awareness as a means to capture an audience. Along with the attitudes of the prospective audience members when this kind of strategy is used in advertising. Advertisements were chosen to exemplify the use of social awareness. These three advertisements include an *Always* campaign commercial, a poster for an *American Apparel* store opening in Amsterdam, and an Australian *Metro Trains* video. The advertisements chosen outlined the social issues including hypersexualization, gender roles, and train safety. This study will showcase the advantages and disadvantages when using social awareness in advertisements. Results should be used for future procurement of advertisements.

## 2.0 Group analysis of advertisements

### 2.1 Always - #LikeAGirl

In the *#LikeAGirl* video from *Always*, a “social experiment” is shown in which men, women and young boys were asked how they would do different actions “like a girl”. The experiment showed that many people internalise the phrase to mean weakness and vanity. Then pre-pubescent girls are asked the same thing. They ran, threw and hit as effectively as they could. Girls’ self-esteem plummets after puberty, the advertisement told viewers, so let’s stop using “like a girl” as an insult.

The advertisement of the product is aimed at young girls, the target group of *Always*, who are starting with menstruation. But, the message is not just targeted at this group of girls. It’s also meant for other women, who should feel empowered to do things like a girl and be proud of it. Besides that, boys and men should also feel responsible for stop using “like a girl” as insult.

The advertisement uses *media internalization*, which means women often modify their behaviour to reflect the media’s ideals. They often look to the media for standards of what is considered to be beautiful. Media also often communicates that these ideals of femininity are synonymous with being valued. Most of these ideals are unattainable, girls and women are likely to experience low levels of self-esteem and body-dissatisfaction as a result. Another similar theory we can link to this advertisement is the *social identity theory*. Young girls will seek a strong connection to social groups that they perceive as important and successful as a means of gaining self-esteem, which then evokes feelings of self-worth. *Always* found that the phrase “like a girl” was synonymous with feelings of low self-esteem in pubertal girls and women. *Always* is seeking to redefine this phrase from meaning “weak” to meaning “strong” (Barley, n.d.). The *self discrepancy theory* states people have three types of self-schema: 1) actual self: the way that people are at the present time, 2) ideal self: the self that we aspire to be, 3) ought self: the way we think we should be (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The ideal self of the girls in de *Always* advertisement is to be strong too, but the ought self is to be weak.

### 2.2 American Apparel - Now Open

The second advertisement is a poster used to promote an American Apparel store-opening. American Apparel is infamous for its frequently explicit and hyper-sexualised advertisements, with many of the brands print commercials causing controversy about the portrayal of women as sex objects. This particular advertisement is for the opening of a new store in Amsterdam, however this information is in very small print and is almost entirely overshadowed by the image consisting of a young woman lying in bed with her legs spread, accompanied by the text "Now Open", which instead is implying an invitation of sex.

The use of highly sexualised imagery is a tactic regularly employed by American Apparel in order to shock and entice consumers; to create a stir of controversy which in turn garners media attention, and therefore increases publicity. Sexual appeal, vivid stimuli and shock tactics are strategies we can link to this (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The target audience for this advertisement is young men and women, approximately 14-25, because this is who the brand's clothes are made for. However the audience being more directly targeted would be the young heterosexual men from this group, because of the way it invites the male gaze. The advertisement also uses social attractiveness. The model is young and physically attractive which appeals to audiences on multiple levels. It also means that audiences may be influenced by this image for example women may compare themselves to the model physically, or a viewer may understand the model's submissive pose as an attractive/desirable behaviour.

### 2.3 Metro Trains - *Dumb Ways To Die*

The third and last advertisement we chose for this report is a video from Metro Trains called *Dumb Ways To Die*. This video was designed to raise awareness to safety around trains. The advertisement was initially targeted advertisements young people in Melbourne, Australia. After clever marketing the video went viral and reached a global audience. From this success the organisation then the launch of the *Dumb Ways To Die* game, which increased awareness to the campaign and the overall message.

There are a few obvious strategies used in this advertisement, like humour appeal, repetition and music (Jansson-Boyd, 2010). The use of humor and colourful creatures is a good contrast to the actual, more serious message of the video. These well-designed creatures and the melodic music helped with bringing attention to the video. Due to the repetition, the song is catchy and easy to sing along to.

Another theory found in this advertisement is intrinsic motivation, which is very important for teenage aged individuals to feel that they produced an idea themselves (Psychology Of Advertisement, 2014). This advert didn't directly tell the audience to not do anything. They gave advice in a funny, indirect way.

The advertisement also made use of manipulative psychology. Young people have a continuous pressure to be socially accepted and to be perceived as intelligent. The advertisement implies that train safety is general knowledge, just as other scenes depicted like swimming with piranhas (Psychology Of Advertisement, 2014). Those who are unsafe around railways would be viewed as dumb, exactly what the target audience doesn't want to be.

### **3.0 Research**

#### *3.1 Outline*

For the research method, it was decided to use qualitative based research to gauge social awareness in advertisements. We decided to use qualitative instead of quantitative, behavioural, observational, or other research methods to get a better understanding of what the participants think and feel about the topic.

The main question this research aims to find out is the effectiveness of advertisements that focus on social awareness for an international audiences. This main question is split into multiple sub-questions that will include the perceptiveness and attitude of the audience and what the audience believes is the most effective form for this kind of advertisement. See appendix 7.1 for the specific questions used. These subquestions were the base to the open ended interview questions that was administered to the ten participants listed below in 3.2 *Interviewed participants*. The interviews were done in the form of one-on-one or focus groups with an available sample. The targeted sampling for this research included individuals ages 15 - 30 years old with a variety of backgrounds. It was an imperative to have a vast sampling group since the advertisements were made for audiences of different countries. We also wanted to use a range of ages, because of the content that is included in the advertisements.

#### *3.2 Interviewed participants*

Focus group 1 - Ginny

Participant 1: Alba, 22, Spanish

Participant 2: Ana, 21, British

Participant 3: Cata, 21, Spanish

Focus group 2 - Katie

Participant 4: Jespar, 26, Danish

Participant 5: Roccio, 23, Spanish

Participant 6: Paula, 20, Italian

Focus group 3 - Anouk

Participant 7: Puck, 17, Dutch

Participant 8: Donna, 15, Dutch

Single interviews - Marit

Participant 9: Ties, 20, Dutch

Participant 10: Cat, 21, Dutch

### **4.0 Discussion of findings**

#### *4.1 Comparison and contrast findings*

Always - #LikeAGirl

All participants were aware the video is about raising awareness about stereotyping, equality and women's rights. They all agreed saying things such as "like a girl" was sexist and insulting. One of the participants did not like the beginning of the video, because they thought the jokes were stupid. Another participant thought the idea was clear but it could've been more diverse instead of just using sports examples. All participants realised the message was about stopping sexism and stereotyping. They realised saying "like a girl" could make young girls feel insecure as if it's a negative thing. However, they also realise this should not be a negative thing and girls should just do what they want to do and be confident about it. While half of the participants mentioned having negative emotions such as anger, sadness and shame after seeing the advertisement, the other half of our participants felt positive emotions such as happiness and inspiration. This was because they thought it was good that Always gave some attention to the subject and because they had done it in a beautiful way. A few of the participants did not realise this was an advertisement until the end of the video, where they recognized the brand by the font that was used. It has also been mentioned the opinion towards Always products has not been changed after seeing the advertisement, which means they would not necessarily buy Always products just because of this advertisement. One participant mentioned that they associated Always with strong women and thought the message from the company worked, but the message about *#LikeAGirl* didn't resonate as much.

#### *American Apparel - Now Open*

Most participants thought that the message 'Now Open' was objectifying the girl. Some people said that they thought the naked posed women is a bit "too much," and that she attracted attention, but not in a good way. Other people said that they didn't perceive it to be overtly sexual, and that the advertisement did not shock them. Most of the participants were uncomfortable or felt awkward in the way the advertisement was presented. Related to that, there were also a few participants who didn't feel only awkward, but also felt very angry and bad for the way the women was presenting herself. Three participants didn't feel affected by the advertisement in an emotional way. They saw it as a normal advertisement. All of the participants stated that they would not follow up with the advertisement, such as going into the store. One participant said they may have wanted to look at the shop, but not buy anything because of the offensiveness of the advertisement. Another participant mentioned that the advertisement looked like an advertisement for the red-light district.

#### *Metro Trains - Dumb Ways To Die*

Half of our participants thought the advertisement was strange and confusing. They thought it was weird to depict someone dying as humorous. They also thought the video was for children and did not expect it to be about trains. While one of the participants mentioned that they thought the video was too long and dragged on, another participant perceived the length of the advertisement as more memorable than a quick video. This was also due to the memorable song. All of our participants realised the message of the advertisement was to be safe around trains. They also mentioned that it made them more aware about safety issues with trains, and increased the notions not to be stupid, because then you might harm yourself. Four of the participants mentioned they felt good and happy after this video, mostly due to the music. Other participants said they thought the video was original, surprising and effective. One participant said they did not connect with this advertisement at all. Most of the

participants are likely to follow up with the advertisement and be safe around trains. They mentioned that the song helped them remember the message. One participant said they might follow up with the advertisement, but maintained that it was inconsiderate of Metro to make fun of people dying.

#### Overview

Most of the participants mentioned that both the advertisements of *#LikeAGirl* and the American Apparel included women. One participant identified that the *#LikeAGirl* and the *Dumb Ways To Die* advertisement both want to convey an important (social) message. While one participant said that the first two advertisements had the purpose of selling something, another participant said that the product was not the main focus in any of the advertisements. Also, the use of humor in the *Dumb Ways To Die* advertisement was named by several participants as an effective strategy. All of the participants liked the idea of social campaigns being used to promote a product or brand. Most of the participants thought that the use of social campaigns was good, because the story in the advertisement made it easy to remember the product and therefore, they would be likely to relate the positive message of the campaign to the product. One participant mentioned that he liked the use of social campaigns, because they have more depth, but he didn't think that he would be influenced by these type of advertisements. A large part of the participants thought that the *#LikeAGirl* advertisement used social awareness the best out of the three campaigns, because it had a clear message that was presented originally and thoughtfully.

While one participant thought that the *Dumb Ways To Die* video used social awareness the best, because the 'product' was well related to the advertisement, another participant was unsure if it was actually a social awareness campaign. Almost all of the participants were most familiar with video campaigns. One participant mentioned that television and posters at bus stops were advertisements that they saw most often, and also remember the most. Almost all of the participants thought that video campaigns were the most effective in promoting social awareness, because only the medium of video, can really show depth in the message. Three participants thought that social media campaigns were most effective, because nowadays, so many people use social media, and therefore it reaches the most amount of people. Social media also allows individuals to interact with the campaign by commenting and sharing it with others.

#### 4.2 Comparison with our own expectations

##### Always - *#LikeAGirl*

We expected our participants to perceive the advertisement as beautifully designed, and with a positive message. We also thought people would be able to comprehend the multiple interpretations that the phrase 'like a girl' can take on, and that they would be impressed by the enlightened message from Always. We also expected the difference in the participant's responses would correlate to differences in the participant's ages. We did not expect people to suddenly start purchasing Always products after seeing this advertisement, but that they would remember and associate the advertisement with the brand after viewing it.

By comparing the results from the interviews to our own expectations we found that the interviewees were indeed impressed by the message of the advertisement. We also confirmed our expectation that the participants would not change their opinion about the

brands products, based on the advertisement.

#### American Apparel - *Now Open*

We expected that the participants would be shocked by the image and the text "Now Open", which had the double meaning of referring to female model's position and supposed sexual availability, in addition to the actual meaning; the opening of the store.

Most of the responses from our participants met our expectations. There were only a few of them who were not shocked by the advertisement and thought the advertisement was amusing and/or normal.

#### Metro Trains - *Dumb Ways To Die*

We expected our participants to find the *Dumb Ways To Die* video to be funny, because of the catchy song. We also expected them to not really notice the video was an advertisement, and therefore miss out on the actual message.

Only a few of the participants mentioned they did not like the video. They thought it was weird how they used death as a way to be funny. The other participants did think the video was funny and memorable, mostly because of the catchy song. They participants however did realise it was an advertisement, because they watched the whole video. This also meant they received the actual message, which was shown at the end of the video.

#### Overview

We expected our participants to realise that the *#LikeAGirl* video and the *Dumb Ways To Die* video had in shared motive of wanting to state and convey a very serious (social) 'problem'. We expected them to think the *#LikeAGirl* advertisement uses social awareness the best and the American Apparel the least.

Besides of our expectations, the participants also connected the *#LikeAGirl* video and the American Apparel advertisement to each other, because they both have product selling purposes, despite the fact that this was not the main focus of the advertisements. A few of them also linked those advertisements to each other because they both involved women. The participants found that the *#LikeAGirl* advertisement made the best use of social awareness, while the American Apparel didn't promote a social awareness campaign.

Another theoretical framework we thought our audience would connect, but failed to do so, was the self-discrepancy theory, which is apparent in all three advertisements.

Self-discrepancy theory explains the actual self, ideal self, and ought self. In the Always commercial it depicts that young girls are their actual self in the ending. The ideas of other people do not change their perspective of themselves. The next advertisement by American Apparel is an example of the ideal self. Although it may not be a standard held by everyone, many individuals aspire to be socially attractive and sexually appealing. In the last advertisement, *Dumb Ways to Die* has a great representation of the ought self. This advertisement shows the way people should think around metro trains.

#### Limitations

The interviews had a few limitations in that there were some issues with participants that may have affected our findings. We chose to use an available sample of participants for our interview, and consequently, our sample was predominantly female. Therefore our results and discussion are based on the responses of a mostly female international audience, and so may be somewhat biased by this. The male participant in focus group 2 may have also been somewhat affected in his answers because of the female presence in the group; both the interviewer and the other interviewees were female.

#### 4.3 Theories and Advertising Strategies

The theories we linked to the reactions of our interview participants were similar to the theories we found during our analysis of the *#LikeAGirl* video. A few participants felt touched by the advertisement, this could be explained by the emotional appeal of the video.

A few theories were mentioned when we asked our participants about the American Apparel advertisement. Shock tactics and sexual appeal were found very visible. The use of a pretty girl on the poster was mentioned several times. This could be linked to the social attractiveness theory.

The theories we have found during our analysis about the *Dumb Ways To Die* video, were also mentioned several times during the interviews. Music, repetition and humour appeal were obvious strategies, these were mentioned by almost all participants. A few of the participants expressed they had seen the advertisement before and remembered the catchy jingle '*Dumb ways to die*'. It was also mentioned the participants felt good after seeing this video, which could be linked to the feel-good factor of the advertisement. One participant told us he felt that people would be safer because other people were also doing it. This could be explained by the bandwagon appeal.

After the research was conducted, there were no patterns in theoretical frameworks or in the advertisement strategies, that our audience found across *all three advertisements*. However, there is a pattern between the *#LikeAGirl* and the American Apparel advertisements. They both involve social categorization. The *#LikeAGirl* advertisement is trying to raise awareness for stereotyping, the American Apparel uses stereotyping by showing a female in an objectified position.

### 5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Our research question and subquestions revolved around the effectiveness of social awareness focused advertisements amongst international audiences. The advertisements that we chose fit into this category, and this gave us the ability to test how people respond to these kind of advertisements. In general, people gave quite strong responses to each of the advertisements, and whether they be negative or positive, it seems that these kinds of advertisements are able to connect with viewers on an emotional level. However, this emotional connection, does not necessarily guarantee 'effectiveness'. We measured effectiveness by trying to understand how persuasive each advertisement was to our interviewees; if they could understand the messages of the advertisements, if they supported or connected the message(s), and if in comparing the advertisements, they could identify



which left the most lasting impression. Whilst individually, some of the advertisements proved more effective than others, the results of our interviews indicated that not all social awareness driven advertisements are effective. This is because ultimately, if the advertisement does not make the message clear and memorable, or if audiences don't connect with the message, overall, it is rendered ineffective. For example, Metro Trains' *Dumb Ways to Die* had the most memorable visual and musical design, but this overshadowed the actual message. American Apparel's 'Now Open' poster was certainly clear in its message, however, it did not connect with the audience. Overall, in order to be effective, social awareness driven advertisements must take a holistic approach in order to successfully communicate their message, and have longevity in our rapidly developing media culture.

The following paragraphs detail the effectiveness of each individual advertisement and include recommendations for future improvement.

#### *Always - #LikeAGirl*

The interviewees generally agreed that this was an effective advertisement in terms of its social awareness campaign in that they could recognise that it was trying to identify the sexist stereotypes that have become inherent and normalised in everyday language and behaviour. By highlighting these stereotypes, the advertisement provoked the interviewees to think about their own behaviour and therefore the message was clear and effective. However in terms of the actual product from the 'Always' brand, many did not even realise it was an advertisement, and when they were made aware, they didn't seem to have been influenced to buy this product in any strong way. Additionally, the use of the hashtag *#LikeAGirl* was unfamiliar to interviewees so the aims of Always to try and create awareness through social media as well as the video perhaps failed in some respects, because the hashtag alone did not have had a particularly strong resonance to those who hadn't seen the video. Overall, the interviewees responded well to this advertisement, with many believing it to be the most effective of the three shown. This would suggest that emotional appeal in a video format is an effective method for social awareness campaigning in advertisements. In the future, it would be advisable for Always to focus its advertising with more inclusion of the product in order for the audience to actually realise or recognise the brand. However the use of emotional appeal in social awareness focused advertising would be an effective strategy to return to in order to try and shape attitudes and even potentially change behaviours around the issue in focus.

#### *American Apparel - Now Open*

This advertisement was the least effective of the three, due to both its medium and its content. The interviewees predominantly felt that it was objectifying towards women and that it used cheap shock-tactics to try and attract audiences, as opposed to more intelligent or original advertising strategies. Some of the interviewees were not shocked and saw the advertisement as relatively normal, however this response says less about this individual advertisement and more about the saturation of sexualised media in popular culture. Mass audiences have become increasingly desensitised to images of sex and violence because they are simply seeing this content so frequently and it has therefore become normalised. This American Apparel advertisement is playing into a culture of sexualisation that already

exists, rendering it unoriginal and ineffective in persuading audiences to buy their products. This advertisement, whilst having relevance in terms of social commentary, does not try to raise awareness of the social issues around the sexualisation and objectification of women in the media, but rather is an example of how this is a current issue. The interviewees were fairly perceptive to the shock-tactic advertising techniques used here, but this only further distanced them from wanting to associate with, or buy the product. Future advertising for this brand would benefit from more original campaigns that don't simply rely on controversial sexualised images. Instead, it would be wise to associate the product with more diverse and intelligent representations of figures from the target audience group. Younger audiences are very aware of base advertising strategies and so are turned away by them, but it is likely they would be more intrigued and interested by empowered and diverse depictions of men and women.

### *Metro Trains - Dumb Ways To Die*

Interviewees seemed to have mixed emotions towards this advertisement. Many found it strange and confusing because of the child-like animation and the use of a happy sounding song, juxtaposed with a very serious message around human death. Whilst the theme song was certainly effective because it was catchy and memorable, the message was unclear until the end of the advertisement. Because of this, in the long term, audiences may not remember Metro's message so much as the song itself, rendering the advertisement ineffective in its goal of raising awareness about safety around trains. The originality of the advertisement was certainly a positive factor for audiences, because it stood out amongst similar kinds of ads about transport or road safety which often tend to be more graphic or use emotional appeals as opposed to humour. The other component to consider about this advertisement is that it's intended audience, Australians, tend to have a sense of humour which is perhaps slightly darker than that of international audiences. Australians may also be generally more responsive to humorous campaigns because of their stereotypically laid-back nature. Potentially, the reason the audiences interviewed were more confused and less receptive was because of the gap in colloquialism and humour sense for the intended audience, versus foreign audiences. What was more received and popular with international interviewees about this advertising campaign, was the accompanying smartphone game that came out with the video. Whilst this raised international awareness of the song and the animated characters from the advertisement, it did not work to translate the message to these audiences. The originality of this advertisement has earned it international acclaim, but it is evident that look and music within an advertisement, are not enough to communicate a message. Metro would benefit from creating shorter and more direct advertisements in the future, which can still include interesting, humorous and original design elements, but still need to be more in tune with the central message.

## **6.0 Individual reflection**

### *6.1 Anouk Straver*

This course taught me a lot about the way people communicate with each other. I have learned a lot about the difference in how people respond to media, i.e. advertisements. Everyone in the team was very involved in this course and took initiative to counter workt.

The least enjoyable of the course was the short time we had to work on the course. Good communication within the group made sure that we could finish the course well.

### *6.2 Ginny Salmon*

I have really enjoyed working with my group, we have all worked together really well and each participated actively in doing research and writing the assignment. I have learned a lot about advertising strategies and how they affect audiences, as well as how to communicate and work efficiently within a group. I think that our time during tutorials could have been better utilised however, by allowing more time for us to talk with our group and discuss the assignment.

### *6.3 Katie Nimtz*

Working on the course assignment has been insightful. The team has worked together and split all parts quite evenly. I have enjoyed looking at how much strategy goes into the production of an advertisement. The time restraints on the course were the least enjoyable. As an exchange student I found it hard to fit all the the design, research, sampling, and analyzing into the short time that was given.

### *6.4 Marit Kerdijk*

I found this Mass Media and Mass Persuasion course very interesting. The information received was new for me and could be of good use in my further career. I also really enjoyed working with this team. We've divided all tasks evenly and the communication was very pleasant. The time given for the assignments however were tough. Due to the lack of working time during tutorials and different schedules in the team, it was hard to meet up and discuss the assignments.

## **7.0 Appendices**

### *7.1 Questions*

For each of the research questions multiple interview questions were created. Please review the list below.

#### Main research question:

- How effective are advertisements that focus on social awareness in international audiences?

#### Sub-questions:

- How perceptive is the audience of persuasive techniques applied in the advertisements?
- What's the attitude towards social awareness in advertising?
- Which platform is most effective for social awareness advertising?

#### Interview questions:

- What do you think about the advertisement?
- What is the message of the advertisement?

- What kind of feeling do you have about the advertisement?/Do you emotionally connect with the advertisement?
- How likely are you to follow up with the advertisement?/How persuasive is the advertisement?
- What have the advertisements in common?
- How do you feel about advertisements that use social campaigns to promote a product or a brand?
- What advertisement uses social awareness the best in your opinion?
- What kind of advertisements, eg. print, video, social media campaigns are you most familiar with?
- What kind of advertisement, eg. print, video, social media campaign do you think is most effective in promoting social awareness?

## 7.2 Advertisements

### 1. #LikeAGirl Always Commercial

<https://youtu.be/XjJQBjWYDTs>

### 2. American Apparel Now Open poster



### 3. Metro Trains *Dumb Ways to Die* Commercial

<https://youtu.be/IJNR2EpS0jw>

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