

Shock advertising not so shocking

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Shock advertising has become obsolete and marketers need to implement alternative ways of "breaking through the clutter", according to Wits research.

In a paper titled "Shock Advertising: Not So Shocking Anymore—an investigation among Generation Y," published in the *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Wits student, Brandon Urwin and lecturer, Marike Venter explored the effectiveness of shock advertising on Generation Y (those born from the early 1980s to the early 2000s) consumers.

Advertising clutter

Urwin and Venter explained that in today's society, marketers are going to extreme measures and use shock advertising to attract consumers' attention in an attempt to break through advertising clutter.

A "shocking" advertisement normally deliberately contains inappropriate or indecent content.

Three variables were analysed, namely, level of shock, norm violation and memory recall, with five different types of shock: impropriety, moral offensiveness, sexual references, disgusting images and religious taboos.

Imagery

Differences in the target group regarding gender, religion and race were also explored.

"The findings indicated that the majority of respondents for each type of shock either did not remember anything about the brand or the product being advertised, but simply remembered the imagery.

Therefore, the advertisement was unable to imprint the brand into the consumer, but the imagery instead overpowered the rest of the content," the researchers explained.

The study also showed that consumers found sexual advertisements to be the most ineffective as compared to the other four types.

With regards to demographic data, there were a number of variations in the results. When determining the ineffectiveness of shock advertising, there was a difference in the opinions between genders, religions and race.

This research provides marketers with a better understanding of the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of shock advertising.

Derived from the overall research results, shock advertising may no longer be fulfilling its true definition and may not hold the viability that marketers perceive it to possess.

More information: "Shock Advertising: Not So Shocking Anymore. An Investigation among Generation Y." *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* [DOI: 10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n21p203](https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n21p203)

Provided by Wits University

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