From Shock to Share: Analyzing the Effects of Provocative Marketing Campaigns on Social Media

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Abstract

Purpose. This study investigates the impact of provocative marketing campaigns by profit-driven companies on users of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), aiming to understand how such campaigns, characterized by shocking or controversial content, influence consumer emotions, brand perceptions, and engagement, while evaluating the potential risks and rewards associated with these strategies.

Design/Methodology/Approach. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically netnography, to analyze public reactions to 20 selected provocative marketing campaigns on X. The data comprises 2,014 X posts, systematically collected and analyzed for emotional responses, engagement patterns, and overall sentiment. The netnographic approach allows for the observation of authentic user reactions in real time, providing rich, contextually grounded insights into consumer behavior.

Findings. The results reveal that provocative marketing campaigns predominantly evoke negative emotions, including anger, disgust, and shock, leading to negative brand perceptions and, in some cases, long-lasting damage to brand equity. While some campaigns achieve short-term engagement and virality, the majority of reactions reflect unfavorable sentiment, suggesting that the risks of alienating consumers outweigh the potential benefits. The research also highlights the importance of cultural sensitivity, showing that campaigns perceived as racially or socially insensitive generate significant backlash and calls for boycotts.

Research limitations/implications. The study is limited to data from X, which may not fully capture consumer behavior across other social media platforms with different user demographics and engagement mechanisms. Additionally, the short-term nature of the data collection may not reflect long-term shifts in brand perception or purchasing behavior, and there may be potential biases due to the overrepresentation of extreme reactions in the dataset.

Practical implications. The findings underscore the need for marketers to conduct thorough risk assessments when employing provocative content. Brands must be culturally sensitive and ethically responsible to avoid negative backlash, particularly in diverse global markets. The study also emphasizes the importance of real-time social media monitoring and pre-launch sensitivity testing to mitigate potential risks. Marketers should be aware that while provocative campaigns can generate attention, their long-term effects often result in reputational damage and loss of consumer trust.

Originality/value. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on digital marketing by providing a comprehensive analysis of how provocative content impacts consumer behaviour on social media platforms. It bridges a gap in the literature by focusing on the unique dynamics of X and offering practical guidance for marketers on balancing creative risk with ethical considerations in highly interactive digital environments.

1. Introduction

Marketing strategies have evolved rapidly alongside the growth of social media platforms, providing companies with new opportunities to engage with diverse audiences (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). Socia media, particularly platforms like X, (formerly known as Twitter), offers a highly interactive environment where content can spread virally, creating both opportunities and challenges for marketers (Vargo, Guo & Amazeen, 2018). One of the more controversial tactics used is provocative marketing, a strategy that relies on shocking, controversial; or boundary-pushing content to capture attention (Vézina & Paul, 1997). While this approach can generate significant engagement, the effects of these campaigns on social media users remain a subject of ongoing debate. This thesis explores the impact of provocative and shocking marketing campaigns by profit-driven companies on users of the social media platform X, examining both the potential benefits and risks of such campaigns.

Provocative marketing involves the use of bold, shocking or controversial content, designed to elicit strong emotional reactions from audiences (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012). These campaigns often challenge social norms, address taboo topics, or use edgy humor to attract attention (Dahl, Frankenberger & Manchanda, 2003). The primary goal is to create a memorable impression that leads to increased brand visibility, engagement and ultimately, sales. Profit-drive companies, particularly those operating in highly competitive markets, use this strategy to differentiate themselves and break through the noise of traditional advertising (Paharia, Avery & Keinan, 2014). However, while these campaigns can be effective in capturing attention, they also carry significant risks. Provocative marketing has the potential to alienate certain audience segments, generate negative publicity, and even lead to consumer boycotts (Dahl et al., 2003). For example, research has shown that while some consumers appreciate the boldness of provocative ads, others may find them offensive, leading to negative brand perceptions and reduced purchase intentions (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012).

Social media platforms like X provide a unique environment for provocative marketing due to their highly interactive nature. X's real-time communication and viral content-sharing capabilities make it an ideal space for brands to quickly gain attention (Voorveld et al., 2018). The platform's algorithm prioritizes content that generates high levels of engagement—likes, shares, and comments—creating fertile ground for provocative campaigns to spread rapidly. However, this also means that negative reactions can spread just as quickly. The phenomenon of "viral outrage," where users collectively condemn a brand's marketing message, can lead to significant backlash (Zeng, Chan, & Fu, 2021). Social media users are often quick to voice their opinions on controversial topics, and the platform's culture of direct engagement with brands can escalate conflicts (Liang & Scammon, 2013). In some cases, this has led to widespread calls for boycotts or even the cancellation of a brand's products, further complicating the effectiveness of provocative marketing strategies (Voorveld et al., 2018).

Despite the growing prevalence of provocative marketing on social media platforms, there remains a gap in our understanding of how these campaigns influence user perceptions, behaviors, and interactions with brands in the digital sphere. While previous research has explored the impact of provocative advertising in traditional media contexts, the unique dynamics of social media environments—characterized by rapid information dissemination, user-generated content, and real-time interactions—necessitate a more nuanced examination. This study seeks to bridge

this knowledge gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of how provocative marketing campaigns on X influence users and shape brand perceptions, and overall consumer behavior focusing on the following research question: *"What is the effect of provocative marketing campaigns by profit-driven companies on users of the social media platform X?"*

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, specifically netnography, to explore the nuances of provocative marketing on X. By analyzing user reactions and interactions in their authentic online environment, the aim is to uncover deeper insights into how provocative content is perceived and its impact on consumer behavior. The research will consider the efficacy and risks associated with provocative marketing strategies. By delving into these interconnected aspects of provocative marketing on X, this research aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on digital marketing strategies, consumer behavior in social media contexts, and the ethical considerations surrounding attention-grabbing advertising techniques. Theoretically, this research will aim to extend existing marketing theories, by examining how emotional responses to provocative content influence consumer behavior and brand perception. It will contribute to the growing literature on digital marketing by focusing on the rapid and amplified reactions that are unique to social media platforms. Furthermore, the study will add to the ethical marketing discourse by demonstrating the fine line between effective provocation and consumer alienation. Previous studies (e.g., Sabri & Obermiller, 2012; Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003) have examined isolated effects of shocking content. Additionally, through a comprehensive analysis of the emotional, cognitive, and ethical dimensions of provocative marketing, this study will seek to enhance our understanding of how brands can navigate the risks associated with controversial content while maintaining consumer trust and loyalty. Practically, the study seeks to provide marketers with actionable guidelines for managing the risks and potential rewards of provocative content. By focusing on real-time consumer reactions on the social media platform X, the research will emphasize the importance of cultural sensitivity, ethical considerations, and real-time monitoring in the execution of bold marketing strategies. It will explore the necessity of pre-launch sensitivity testing and ongoing social media monitoring to help mitigate the potential backlash that controversial campaigns can generate. Additionally, the study intends to offer insights on how brands can balance creative risk with ethical responsibility, ensuring that campaigns generate attention without long-term damage to brand equity.

The thesis starts with a theoretical framework that establishes the foundational concepts and existing research relevant to the study. This is followed by a method section detailing the research approach, data collection techniques, and analytical procedures employed. The analysis section presents the findings, interpreting the data in relation to the research questions. The conclusion summarizes the key results and their implications. Finally, the discussion section explores the broader significance of the findings, addresses limitations, and suggests directions for future research.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents an integrated theoretical framework that synthesizes concepts from marketing strategy, consumer psychology, and business ethics. The framework serves to clarify the multifaceted nature of provocative advertising and its consequential outcomes within the broader context of corporate communication and societal response.

2.1 The importance of social media in marketing

Social media has emerged as a pivotal force in modern marketing strategies, transforming how businesses communicate with consumers and conduct promotional efforts. (Appel et al., 2020). These digital platforms enable marketers to leverage user-generated content, influencer partnerships, and real-time analytics to tailor their campaigns and measure their effectiveness with a level of precision previously unattainable (Kumar et al., 2021). The dynamic nature of social media marketing allows for agile and responsive strategies. Marketers can quickly adapt to trends, consumer feedback, and market changes, enabling them to maintain relevance in a fast-paced digital environment (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). Moreover, social media's capacity for viral content dissemination and its cost-effectiveness compared to traditional marketing channels make it an attractive option for businesses of all sizes, from startups to multinational corporations (Keegan & Rowley, 2017).

One of the key advantages of social media marketing is its ability to facilitate two-way communication between brands and consumers. This interactivity fosters a sense of community and loyalty among customers, leading to increased brand advocacy and word-of-mouth marketing (De Vries et al., 2017). Additionally, social media platforms provide valuable data on consumer behavior, preferences, and demographics, allowing marketers to create highly targeted and personalized campaigns (Yadav & Rahman, 2017). As consumer behavior continues to evolve in the digital age, the strategic use of social media in marketing has become essential for maintaining competitiveness and driving business growth. Organizations that effectively harness the power of social media marketing are better positioned to build strong brand equity, foster customer loyalty, and achieve sustainable success in an increasingly digital marketplace (Felix et al., 2017). Social networking platforms have become integral to social media marketing strategies, offering businesses multifaceted opportunities to engage with their target audience and promote their offerings (Tuten & Solomon, 2017). These platforms serve as versatile content distribution channels, enabling brands to disseminate diverse media types and facilitate direct audience engagement, thereby fostering brand loyalty (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Moreover, they provide sophisticated targeting capabilities for advertising campaigns, allowing for precise audience segmentation and potentially improved return on investment (Voorveld et al., 2018). The rise of influencer marketing has further expanded the reach of brands through strategic partnerships (De Veirman et al., 2017), while built-in analytics tools offer valuable insights for strategy refinement (Keegan & Rowley, 2017). Social networks also function as customer service portals, enabling real-time issue resolution (Gensler et al., 2013), and serve as vehicles for enhancing brand awareness through consistent presence and engagement (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Additionally, these platforms facilitate the generation and highlighting of user-generated content, which can bolster brand authenticity and consumer trust (Goh et al., 2013). This multifaceted integration of social networking platforms into marketing strategies underscores their significance in contemporary digital marketing landscapes.

However, the effectiveness of social media marketing is not without challenges. The rapidly changing algorithms of social platforms and the need for consistent, high-quality content creation pose ongoing challenges for marketers (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Furthermore, privacy concerns arise from the extensive data collection practices inherent in these platforms (Jacobson et al., 2020), while the sheer volume of marketing content can lead to information overload and decreased user engagement (Feng, Cheng & Kong, 2021). Moreover, constant exposure to social media marketing may contribute to addictive behaviors and negatively impact mental well-being (Boerman et al., 2017). The

potential for spreading misinformation, whether intentionally or inadvertently, poses risks to brand credibility and public trust (Shareef et al., 2019). As users become more aware of marketing tactics, increased consumer skepticism may develop, potentially eroding trust in brand messaging (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Poorly executed campaigns or association with controversial content can damage brand reputation (Grégoire et al., 2015), while the pressure to maintain a competitive social media presence can strain resources, particularly for small businesses (Tafesse & Wien, 2018). The various risks and downsides of social media marketing emphasize why marketers need to be careful and ethical in their online strategies.

2.2 Concepts of Provocative Marketing

Provocative marketing is a strategy that deliberately challenges societal norms, beliefs, or expectations to generate attention and engagement. It aims to stimulate discussion and create buzz around a product or brand without necessarily offending the audience (Vézina & Paul, 1997). It is a nuanced strategy that utilizes shock, controversy, or sexual content to provoke a strong emotional response from the audience, aiming to increase brand visibility and stimulate consumer interest (Vézina & Paul, 1997). This approach, while effective in grabbing attention, requires careful consideration of its potential impacts on brand perception and consumer behavior. The main and most well-known key concept within provocative marketing is shock advertising. Shock advertising, also known as shockvertising, is a type of advertising that deliberately startles and offends its audience by violating norms for social values and personal ideals (Parry et al., 2013). It is designed to break through the advertising clutter to capture attention and create buzz through controversial content (Dahl et al., 2003). Provocative marketing and shock advertising are closely related but distinct approaches in the realm of attention-grabbing promotional strategies. Table 1 displays the differences between the two concepts, where table 2 displays the similarities between them.

	Provocative marketing	Shock advertising
Intention	Aims to challenge and stimulate thought	Seeks to startle and potentially offend
Emotional Response	Typically evokes curiosity, interest or mild controversy	Often elicits strong negative emotions like disgust, fear or outrage
Social Norms	Pushes boundaries but generally stays within acceptable limits	Deliberately violates social norms and taboos
Risk Level	Moderate risk of backlash	High risk of negative reactions and potential damage to brand image
Long-Term Effects	Can lead to increased brand engagement and loyalty if done well	May create short-term buzz but can have long-lasting negative impacts on brand perception

Table 1. Differences between the concept of provocative marketing and the concept of shock advertising.

Attention Grabbing	Both concepts aim to cut through advertising clutter and capture audience attention in a crowded media landscape (Dahl et al., 2003).
Memorability	Both concepts strive to create memorable campaigns that stick in the audience's mind long after exposure (Parry et al., 2013).
Emotional impact	Both concepts seek to elicit strong emotional responses from the audience, albeit often different types of emotions (Skorupa, 2014).
Buzz generation	Both concepts are designed to get people talking about the advertisement, product or brand, often aiming to generate viral sharing and word-of-mouth publicity (Waller, 2005).
Risk-Taking	Both concepts involve a degree of risk-taking by brands, pushing beyond conventional advertising norms (Vézina & Paul, 1997).
Cultural sensitivity	Both concepts require a deep understanding of cultural norms and values to be effective, as what is provocative or shocking can vary significantly across different cultures and audiences (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008).
Regulatory challenges	Both concepts often face increased scrutiny from advertising regulatory and many challenge the boundaries of what is legally permissible in marketing (Fam, Waller & Erdogan, 2004).

Table 2. Similarities between the concept of provocative marketing and the concept of shock advertising.

Other well-known concepts and phenomena are polarizing content, emotional content and social media echo chambers. All these concepts, including shockvertising are related to provocative marketing, which is not extensively researched in comparison with the previously mentioned concepts. Besides shockvertising does provocative marketing also intersects with the creation of polarizing content, as both strategies often aim to elicit strong, divergent reactions from audiences (Berger & Milkman, 2012). This polarization can lead to increased engagement, as consumers are more likely to interact with content that evokes strong emotions, whether positive or negative. Chen and Berger (2013) found that moderate controversy increases conversation and engagement more than low or high levels of controversy, suggesting a nuanced relationship between provocation and consumer response. This relates to the broader concept of emotional content in marketing, which has been shown to increase engagement and sharing behavior (Tellis et al., 2019). Emotional appeals in advertising have long been recognized as powerful tools for influencing consumer behavior. Provocative marketing often leverages high-arousal emotions such as surprise, anger, or amusement to capture attention and drive viral sharing. Akpinar and Berger (2017) demonstrate that content that evokes strong emotional responses is more likely to be shared on social media platforms, contributing to the spread of provocative marketing campaigns. Furthermore, the amplification of provocative content through social media platforms can contribute to the formation of echo chambers, where like-minded individuals reinforce and amplify certain viewpoints (Bail et al., 2018). This phenomenon is particularly relevant to provocative marketing, as social media algorithms tend to show users content that aligns with their existing beliefs and interests. Provocative campaigns that resonate with specific groups may be disproportionately amplified within these echo chambers, potentially exacerbating societal divisions or reinforcing brand loyalty among certain segments.

From a theoretical perspective, provocative marketing draws on the concept of arousal theory, which posits that moderate levels of arousal can enhance attention and memory retention (Tellis, 2003). However, this must be balanced against reactance theory, which suggests that overly provocative messages may trigger psychological resistance and rejection of the message (Brehm, 1966). The Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) provides insight into how provocative content might influence consumer processing of marketing messages, potentially leading to stronger attitude formation and behavioral intentions when the provocation is relevant and compelling to the target audience. Recent research has also explored the role of social media in amplifying the effects of provocative marketing, highlighting both the increased reach and the heightened risks in the digital age (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). Additionally, the concept of moral foundations theory (Haidt & Graham, 2007) offers a framework for understanding how different provocative approaches may resonate or clash with diverse moral values held by various consumer segments. As brands navigate the complex landscape of modern marketing, understanding the multifaceted nature of provocative strategies becomes crucial for balancing creativity, ethical considerations, and business objectives in an increasingly saturated media environment.

2.3 The Emergence of Provocative Marketing on X

The emergence of provocative marketing on X (formerly called "Twitter") represents a significant evolution in digital advertising strategies, characterized by content that challenges norms, sparks debates, or elicits strong emotional responses from users (Albarracín et al., 2021). This approach leverages the platform's real-time, viral nature to create buzz and engagement, with research indicating that controversial tweets are 18% more likely to be retweeted than non-controversial ones (Chen & Berger, 2020). The effectiveness of provocative marketing on X stems from its ability to cut through the noise of oversaturated social media feeds, capitalizing on users' tendency to engage with content that evokes strong emotions or challenges their perspectives (Berger & Milkman, 2012). However, while provocative marketing can effectively boost visibility and brand awareness, it also carries substantial risks. Potential backlash, reputational damage, and customer loss are significant concerns if the content is perceived as offensive or insensitive (Vargo et al., 2018). The fine line between provocation and offense is often subjective and can shift rapidly in response to evolving social norms and current events. This volatility requires brands to be highly attuned to their audience's sensibilities and the broader cultural context in which their messages are received (Kozinets et al., 2010).

The effectiveness and reception of provocative marketing strategies can vary significantly across cultures, necessitating careful consideration of target audiences (De Mooij, 2019). What may be considered edgy or attention-grabbing in one cultural context could be viewed as deeply offensive or inappropriate in another. This cultural variability adds an additional layer of complexity to the planning and execution of provocative marketing campaigns, especially for brands with a global presence or those targeting diverse demographic groups (Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, brands employing provocative marketing on X must navigate complex legal and ethical landscapes, including issues of defamation, copyright, and consumer protection laws (Van Looy, 2022). The rapid dissemination of content on social media platforms can amplify the consequences of missteps, potentially leading to legal challenges or regulatory scrutiny. Ethical considerations also come into play, as brands must weigh the potential benefits of increased engagement against the risk of alienating certain segments of their audience or contributing to harmful social

narratives (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). The use of provocative marketing on X also intersects with broader discussions about social media's role in shaping public discourse and opinion formation. By deliberately creating controversial content, brands can inadvertently contribute to the polarization of online communities or the spread of misinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2018). This raises questions about the social responsibility of marketers in the digital age and the potential long-term impacts of provocative marketing strategies on social cohesion and public trust in institutions (Macnamara et al., 2016).

Despite these challenges, many brands continue to pursue provocative marketing strategies on X due to their potential for generating significant earned media and organic reach. Success in this domain often requires a deep understanding of the target audience, real-time monitoring and response capabilities, and a willingness to engage in two-way communication with consumers (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Brands that successfully navigate these complexities can create memorable campaigns that not only increase brand awareness but also position them as culturally relevant and in touch with their audience's values and concerns. The emergence of provocative marketing on X presents a double-edged sword for modern marketers. While it offers the potential for unprecedented engagement and visibility, it also carries significant risks and ethical considerations. As social media platforms continue to evolve and societal norms shift, the practice of provocative marketing is likely to remain a contentious yet potentially powerful tool in the digital marketing arsenal, requiring careful strategy, execution, and ongoing evaluation to achieve success while mitigating potential negative outcomes.

2.4 The Impact of Provocative Marketing on Consumers

The impact of provocative marketing on consumer behavior is a complex phenomenon that has garnered significant attention in marketing research. Provocative campaigns, characterized by shock or controversial elements, have demonstrated a strong ability to capture consumer attention and enhance brand recall in cluttered advertising environments (Dahl et al., 2003; Pope et al., 2004). The emotional responses evoked by such marketing can range from positive excitement to negative offense, with the valence and intensity of these emotions playing a crucial role in shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors (Parry et al., 2013). While provocative marketing can lead to increased ad memorability and viral sharing potential (Berger & Milkman, 2012), its effects on brand attitudes and purchase intentions are often context-dependent (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012; Chan et al., 2007). The effectiveness of these strategies varies across cultural contexts (Fam et al., 2004), product categories (Venter et al., 2015), and consumer involvement levels (Baines, Fill & Page et al., 2013). From a cognitive perspective, provocative advertisements often trigger deeper processing among consumers (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008), potentially resulting in better message retention but also more critical evaluation. In the digital age, the viral nature of online content has amplified both the potential rewards and risks of provocative strategies (Kerr et al., 2012; Tuten & Solomon, 2017), highlighting the need for brands to carefully consider the ethical implications and long-term effects on brand equity when employing such tactics.

The influence on brand personality perceptions is notable, with brands using provocative tactics potentially seen as more daring or innovative, but also risking perceptions of irresponsibility or insensitivity (Aaker et al., 2004). This duality underscores the delicate balance marketers must strike, particularly in an era of increased consumer

activism and social media scrutiny. The long-term effects of repeated exposure to provocative marketing remain debated, with some studies suggesting potential desensitization or brand fatigue over time (Parry et al., 2013). As the marketing landscape evolves in response to changing societal norms and technological advancements, future research will need to address emerging challenges, such as the ethical implications of provocative content in immersive technologies and the role of artificial intelligence in personalizing such content. While provocative marketing can be a powerful tool for capturing attention and driving engagement, its effects on consumer behavior are nuanced and often unpredictable, requiring marketers to approach these strategies with caution and a deep understanding of their target audience and potential long-term implications (Appel et al., 2020).

Ethical considerations in provocative marketing involve a complex balancing act between capturing audience attention and maintaining ethical integrity, a challenge that has intensified in the digital age (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). The boundary of acceptability in provocative content varies across cultures and demographics, necessitating a nuanced approach to campaign design (Taylor et al., 2011). A primary ethical concern is the potential for exploitation and objectification, particularly of marginalized groups. This is especially prevalent in campaigns using sexualized imagery or shock tactics, which can reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to broader societal issues (Boddewyn, 1991; Reichert, 2002). The impact on vulnerable populations, including children and adolescents, demands careful consideration. In the digital landscape, these ethical dilemmas are further complicated by issues of data privacy, targeted advertising, and the viral nature of online content. The ability to micro-target specific demographics with provocative content raises questions about the exploitation of personal data and potential manipulation of consumers (Kerr et al., 2012). Marketers must also grapple with the tension between short-term attention-grabbing tactics and long-term brand reputation. While provocative campaigns may generate immediate engagement, they can erode consumer trust if perceived as crossing ethical boundaries (Waller, 2005). This tension is exacerbated by the need for truth in advertising, even in provocative contexts. The rise of purpose-driven marketing and brand activism has introduced new ethical considerations. Brands increasingly use provocative messaging to highlight social issues, raising questions about the authenticity of these efforts and the potential for exploitation of serious causes for commercial gain (Vredenburg et al., 2020). As the marketing landscape continues to evolve, particularly with emerging technologies, the ethical considerations surrounding provocative marketing become increasingly complex. This requires ongoing ethical reflection and adaptation of marketing strategies to ensure responsible practices in an ever-changing environment.

Another phenomenon caused by provocative marketing is changing behavior from consumers on social media, particularly in terms of engagement, purchase intentions, and information sharing. Berger and Milkman (2012) found that content evoking high-arousal emotions, whether positive or negative, is more likely to go viral, suggesting that provocative campaigns may increase user propensity to share content. This virality can lead to enhanced word-of-mouth marketing, a critical factor in consumer decision-making processes (Eisingerich et al., 2015). However, the relationship between provocative content and purchase intentions is complex; while some studies indicate increased brand awareness and consideration (Akpinar & Berger, 2017), others caution that overly provocative content may alienate certain consumer segments (Vredenburg et al., 2020). Furthermore, provocative campaigns can alter social media usage patterns, with users spending more time engaging with controversial content through likes, comments,

and shares (Voorveld et al., 2018). This increased engagement, however, does not always translate positively for brands, as Hwang and Kim (2007) demonstrated that perceived negativity in social media content can lead to adverse effects on brand trust and loyalty. The long-term impact on user behavior remains a subject of ongoing research, with scholars emphasizing the need for brands to carefully balance the potential for viral spread against the risk of damaging consumer relationships (Veirman et al., 2017).

2.5 Efficacy and Risks of Provocative Marketing

As mentioned before, provocative marketing strategies can yield significant positive outcomes for firms, primarily through increased attention and brand awareness. Sabri and Obermiller (2012) note that controversial advertisements tend to generate higher levels of attention and recall compared to conventional marketing approaches. This heightened awareness often translates into increased brand recognition and market penetration. Furthermore, provocative campaigns have a higher potential for viral dissemination, particularly on social media platforms, offering firms cost-effective reach to large audiences (Ay et al., 2010). Chen and Berger (2013) argue that controversial content stimulates word-of-mouth communication, amplifying the campaign's impact beyond its initial audience. Additionally, provocative marketing can position a brand as daring and innovative, appealing to specific target demographics, especially younger consumers who value authenticity and boldness in brand communication (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008). This approach can differentiate a brand from competitors, creating a distinct and memorable identity in saturated markets (Vézina & Paul, 1997).

While provocative marketing can generate attention, it also carries significant risks and potential negative consequences for firms. Waller et al. (2005) highlights that controversial advertisements can offend or alienate certain customer segments, potentially damaging brand reputation and consumer loyalty. This alienation can lead to boycotts or negative word-of-mouth, undermining the brand's market position (Goh et al., 2013). Moreover, provocative campaigns may trigger backlash from media, public figures, or regulatory bodies, resulting in unfavorable publicity and potential legal issues if the content transgresses ethical or regulatory boundaries (Pope et al., 2004). Chan et al. (2007) note that the shock value of provocative marketing can sometimes overshadow the product or service being advertised, leading to reduced message comprehension and brand recall. Additionally, Parry et al. (2013) argue that repeated use of provocative tactics may diminish their effectiveness over time, as audiences become desensitized or cynical towards such approaches. Furthermore, in an increasingly globalized market, culturally insensitive provocative content can lead to international controversies, damaging a brand's global reputation and market opportunities (Waller, Fam & Erdogan, 2005).

Media Richness Theory (MRT), proposed by Daft and Lengel (1986), offers a framework for understanding the effectiveness of provocative marketing strategies across communication channels. The theory suggests that richer media are more suitable for complex or emotionally charged messages (Dennis & Valacich, 1999). In provocative marketing, which relies on shock value and emotional impact (Vézina & Paul, 1997), selecting appropriate media channels is crucial for campaign success. Applying MRT to provocative marketing suggests that richer media may enhance the clarity and impact of provocative messages, potentially mitigating misinterpretation risks while maximizing engagement (Lodhia, 2018). Sabri and Obermiller (2012) found that the effectiveness of sexually

provocative advertisements varied depending on the media context. The ability of rich media to provide immediate feedback can aid marketers in fine-tuning provocative content (Pieters et al., 2002). However, the relationship between media richness and provocative marketing is not always straightforward. Pope et al. (2004) suggests that in some cases, the ambiguity in less rich media can enhance the provocative nature of the message. The ethical implications of using rich media for provocative marketing also warrant consideration, as rich media can potentially amplify the negative effects of overly provocative content (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009).

In cross-cultural marketing, Taylor et al. (2011) found that cultural differences significantly impact the perception and effectiveness of provocative marketing messages, with media richness playing a crucial role in interpretation. As digital technologies evolve, new forms of rich media, such as virtual and augmented reality, offer potential channels for provocative marketing, presenting both opportunities and challenges (Scholz & Smith, 2016). In conclusion, while richer media generally offer greater potential for nuanced and impactful provocative messages, marketers must carefully consider the specific objectives, ethical implications, and cultural context of their campaigns when choosing media cannels.

Not only is the choice of medium or channel important, but also the engagement metrics play a crucial role in evaluating the effectiveness of provocative marketing campaigns on social media platforms. These metrics encompass a range of quantitative and qualitative indicators that reflect user interaction and content performance. Primary engagement indicators include likes, shares, and comments, which offer insights into user approval, content value, and discussion generation (Pletikosa & Michahelles, 2013). The virality and reach of content are particularly relevant for provocative campaigns, as they aim to maximize organic spread and audience exposure (Berger & Milkman, 2012). More nuanced metrics such as time spent, click-through rates, and conversion rates provide deeper insights into user interest and campaign efficacy in driving specific actions (Voorveld et al., 2018). Sentiment analysis of user-generated responses offers valuable context to raw engagement figures, helping marketers gauge the emotional reception of provocative content (Rathore et al., 2017). Additionally, metrics like hashtag usage, follower growth, and video-specific indicators (e.g., view count, watch time) contribute to a comprehensive understanding of campaign performance. The engagement rate, typically calculated as the ratio of total engagements to reach or impressions, serves as a standardized measure for comparing content performance across different contexts (Voorveld et al., 2018). However, it is imperative to interpret these metrics holistically, recognizing that high engagement does not invariably signify positive reception, particularly in the context of provocative marketing where user reactions can be polarized and complex.

3. Method

3.1 Qualitative research approach: Netnography

Qualitative research methodology is a comprehensive approach to inquiry that focuses on understanding complex phenomena through in-depth exploration of human experiences, behaviours, and perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This methodology employs various data collection techniques, such as interviews, focus groups, observations, and document analysis, to gather rich, descriptive information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Unlike quantitative methods,

qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation of subjective meanings and social contexts, allowing researchers to uncover nuanced insights that may not be captured by numerical data alone (Patton, 2015). The iterative nature of qualitative research enables investigators to refine their questions and analytical approaches as they delve deeper into their subject matter, fostering a flexible and adaptive research process (Miles et al., 2014). While criticized by some for its perceived lack of generalizability, qualitative research offers valuable contributions to knowledge by providing detailed, contextualized understandings of social phenomena and generating hypotheses for further investigation (Yin, 2018).

Netnography, developed by Robert V. Kozinets, is a qualitative research methodology designed to study online communities and cultures, adapting traditional ethnographic techniques to digital environments (Kozinets, 2010). This interdisciplinary approach, originally conceived for marketing research, has found applications across various social sciences (Kozinets et al., 2014). Netnography involves collecting and analysing diverse data types from online sources, including text, images, and videos, often supplemented by participant observation and interviews (Kozinets, 2014). Like traditional ethnography, it emphasizes researcher participation in the studied community, but with a heightened focus on ethical considerations due to the unique challenges of online research (Kozinets, 2019). Netnography offers advantages such as flexibility, time and cost efficiency, and access to geographically dispersed communities (Tavakoli & Wijesinghe, 2019). However, it also faces limitations, including potential misinterpretation due to lack of face-to-face cues and difficulties in verifying online identities (Costello et al., 2017). As digital technologies and online behaviours continue to evolve, netnographic methods are constantly being refined, making it a dynamic and adaptive research approach (Kozinets, 2019).

The netnographic approach was chosen for this study, since it allowed to observe and analyse user reactions and interactions in their online environment, providing authentic and contextually rich data. This is crucial in examining provocative marketing, as user responses are often spontaneous and emotionally charged, especially when companies act upon this on purpose. Besides, netnography focuses on cultural interpretation, and thus enables researchers to uncover deeper meanings and shared understandings within online communities, essential for comprehending how provocative content is perceived (Bartl et. al., 2016). Another advantage of the netnographic approach is the flexibility in data collection. It aligns with the multi-modal nature of social media marketing, since the data collection will exist out of textual, visual and interactive content. Lastly, a netnographic study ensures a responsible research practice, especially relevant for studying provocative marketing campaigns.

3.2 Data

The data that is used for this study is derived from X, previously known as Twitter. X is a free platform (with the possibility of paid subscriptions) where users answer, like or retweet to so-called 'x-users.' X has become a versatile platform with a wide range of applications. X presents a compelling platform for qualitative data collection due to several key attributes. Firstly, its public nature and real-time communication format provides immediate access to authentic, user-generated content on a wide range of topics (Bruns & Stieglitz, 2013). Furthermore, the brevity constraint of the platform encourages concise expressions, making it easier to capture and analyse large volumes of data (Quan-Haase & McCay-Peet, 2017). X's hashtag feature facilitates the tracking of specific conversations, events,

phenomena, or subjects, which allows easy identification of relevant data streams (Small, 2011). The retweet and reply functions of X are also providing valuable insights into information and user interaction, crucial for understanding the effect of provoking marketing campaigns (Highfield & Leaver, 2015). On the other hand, there could be potential biases in X's user base and the ethical consideration surrounding public data use (Zimmer & Proferes, 2014). To counter this, the data will be fully anonymized in such a way that it will not be possible to identify any user, even after anonymization of usernames and accounts.

X has emerged as a popular source for academic research due to its vast user base and the real-time nature of the data it offers, but it presents both advantages and disadvantages. One of the main advantages of X is its ability to provide researchers with access to large amounts of unfiltered, publicly available data on user behavior, attitudes, and trends, making it particularly valuable for studying phenomena like public sentiment and viral content (Boegershausen et al., 2022). X's API allows researchers to collect massive datasets, facilitating quantitative analyses of social interactions and patterns that would be difficult to observe through traditional means (Gayo-Avello, 2012). However, the API access of X is only accessible for web developers who should apply for this program. Therefore, in this study the 'advanced search tool' of X is used, to have specified and detailed searches within the X database. The platform also enables the study of information diffusion and the impact of influential figures in real-time, providing dynamic insights into the spread of ideas (Boyd & Crawford, 2012). However, there are significant limitations that need to be acknowledged. The demographic representation of X users is skewed, with certain age, gender, and socioeconomic groups being overrepresented, which may limit the generalizability of findings (Mislove et al., 2011). Additionally, the platform's character limit constrains the depth of communication, potentially resulting in the oversimplification of complex issues, making nuanced analysis more challenging (Tufekci, 2014). Ethical considerations also arise, particularly around privacy and the potential misuse of data, as scraping methods often collect information without explicit consent (Boegershausen et al., 2022). Furthermore, X's algorithmic filtering of content may introduce biases in the data, affecting the validity of inferences made from these datasets (Zafarani et al., 2014). Thus, while X offers rich opportunities for academic research, its methodological limitations must be carefully managed to ensure accurate and ethical outcomes.

A total of 20 marketing campaigns are selected for this study, spanning a diverse range of industries and thematic content. The selected campaigns are from fashion brands, food and beverages brands, car brands, sport brands, and personal care brands. These campaigns are chosen based on their prominence and the public reactions they elicited at the time of their release. They have garnered significant attention from both the public and the media, generating extensive consumer responses on social media platforms. This makes them valuable for a detailed analysis of real-time emotional and behavioural reactions. Furthermore, the campaigns are chosen based on their alignment with the research question, which seeks to understand the effects of provocative marketing on consumer emotions and brand perception. These campaigns specifically employ controversial or shocking content, making them ideal case studies for examining the impact of provocative strategies. Also, the campaigns chosen highlight key ethical and cultural challenges faced by marketers, particularly in diverse global markets. This makes them suitable for analysing the ethical boundaries of provocative marketing and the importance of cultural sensitivity. Next to this, the campaign must have been performed by a profit driven company. The campaigns selected are notable for having elicited strong, and

often negative, consumer reactions, including calls for boycotts or significant media backlash. This makes them ideal for studying the risks associated with provocative marketing. The selection is aiming to cover a wide spectrum of provocative marketing approaches, from those that sparked controversy to those that generated positive engagement.

To ensure the relevance and consistency of data included in the corpus, several criteria were established for X-user responses. Firstly, each message must explicitly mention the campaign name or the brand employing the campaign at least once or the message had to reply or retweet on a related message. Secondly, all responses must be sourced from the social media platform X. Thirdly, the X-message should directly pertain to the social media marketing campaign, either as a direct response or by referencing it. Additionally, only messages composed in English were considered for inclusion. What should be mentioned is that the personal background of the X-user who posted the message was deemed irrelevant to the study and therefore not factored into the selection process. When the X-message meets the previous mentioned preliminary requirements, it is admitted to the corpus. Since all the material consists of written, online published messages, these could be included directly in the corpus. Therefore, no further editing of the material is required. While the sender of the message has no influence on the content of the message in this study, due to privacy laws, the username and profile picture are made unrecognisable. The collected posts are compiled into an Excel file for systematic analysis. Each entry in the Excel file included the text of the post, the date of publication, and relevant metadata to facilitate further analysis. The final sample size of the corpus is N = 2.104 messages. This sample was determined by all the messages counted together from the 20 marketing campaigns, which has been done manually. The observation period for each campaign was the year that the campaign was launched.

3.3 Validity and reliability

To ensure content validity, the selection of campaigns was based on their recognized impact and public visibility. This ensures that the data collected accurately represents public reactions to significant and well-known marketing efforts. The inclusion criteria for posts (mentioning the campaign, its title, context, or replies) were rigorously applied to capture relevant and meaningful data. Construct validity was addressed by ensuring that the posts collected genuinely reflected public sentiment and reactions to the campaigns. This was achieved by focusing on posts from the year the campaigns were launched, providing real-time insights into public opinion. The diversity of campaigns selected across different industries and themes enhances the external validity of the study. This variety allows for generalization of findings across a broad spectrum of marketing contexts. To ensure reliability, a consistent approach was applied during data collection. Specific keywords and hashtags were used to identify relevant posts, and the same criteria were used throughout the data collection process to maintain consistency. The methodology is designed to be replicable, allowing future researchers to apply the same criteria and processes to study different sets of campaigns or extend the analysis to new data. The data processing steps, including anonymization and compilation into an Excel file, were precisely documented. This ensures that the dataset can be revisited and verified by other researchers, enhancing the reliability of the study.

4. Analysis

In this section, the interplay between provocative marketing campaigns and public response will be examined, focusing on several high-profile cases that have generated significant controversy.

In total, 2.014 X messages (N = 2.014) were conducted in the data collection from 20 different marketing campaigns. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of the messages. As visible, the highest value belongs to the campaign of Adidas and the lowest value belongs to the campaign of Hyundai.
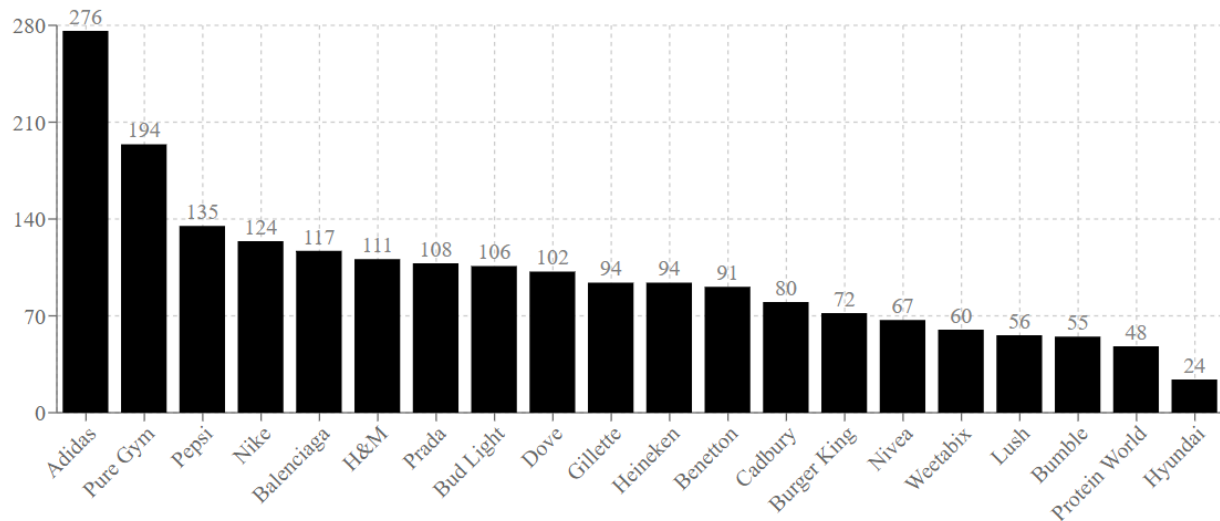

Figure 1. Distribution of the messages across the studied marketing campaigns.

Figure 2 represents the dominant emotions across all 20 marketing controversies analyzed, lexical-based. The data shows that anger was the most common dominant emotion, followed by disgust and shock (Nandwani & Verma, 2021). Disappointment and frustration also feature prominently, each being dominant in 2 campaigns. This distribution highlights the predominantly negative emotional responses to controversial marketing campaigns, while also showing the presence of some more nuanced reactions like amusement and confusion. The data shows a clear dominance of negative emotions in response to these marketing controversies. Anger (5 campaigns), disgust (4 campaigns), shock (3 campaigns), disappointment (2 campaigns), and frustration (2 campaigns) account for 16 out of the 20 campaigns. This indicates that controversial marketing campaigns predominantly evoke negative emotional responses from X-users. While negative emotions dominate, there are instances of more complex or ambivalent emotional responses. Amusement, confusion, and sarcasm each appear as the dominant emotion in one campaign. This suggests that some controversial campaigns may be received with a mix of reactions, including some that are not entirely negative. However, there are no purely positive emotions represented as dominant in any of the campaigns. The closest to a positive response might be amusement, but even this could be interpreted as a form of mockery or derision rather than genuine approval. The dominant emotions show that controversial marketing campaigns are much more likely to provoke negative emotions than positive or neutral ones. It suggests the risks involved in pushing boundaries in marketing, as the public's emotional response is often one of anger, disgust, or shock. The data also suggests that brands should be prepared for a range of negative reactions when a campaign goes wrong, from immediate anger to more lasting disappointment or frustration. The occasional presence of emotions like amusement or confusion

indicates that some controversies may be received in more complex ways, but these are the exception rather than the rule (Nandwani & Verma, 2021).
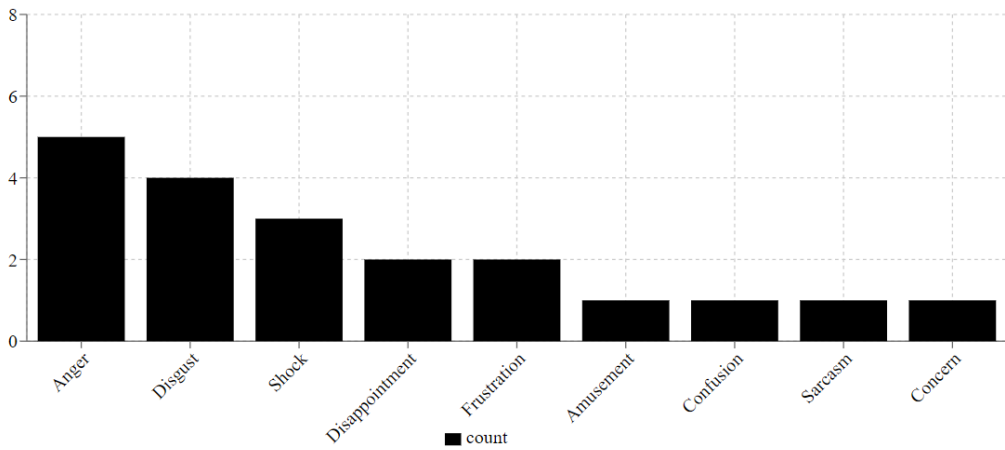
Figure 2. Dominant emotions across the studied marketing campaigns.

The pie chart in figure 3 illustrates the overall sentiment distribution across the analyzed marketing campaigns. The negative sentiment represents most reactions, indicating that most responses to these controversial campaigns were unfavorable. About a fifth of the responses were neutral, suggesting that some people remained undecided or unaffected by the controversies. A small number of responses were positive, which could represent either support for the campaigns or appreciation for the brands' attempts at addressing issues. This distribution clearly shows that controversial marketing campaigns tend to generate predominantly negative sentiment as shown in figure 2 as well. The high percentage of negative responses (65%) suggests that these campaigns often miss their mark and alienate a significant portion of their audience. The presence of neutral (22%) and positive (13%) sentiments indicates that not all controversial campaigns are universally condemned, but the risk of negative reception far outweighs the potential for positive outcomes. While controversial campaigns may generate buzz, the data suggests that this attention is more likely to harm than help a brand's reputation.

Figure 3. Overall sentiment distribution across the studied marketing campaigns.

Figure 4 shows the engagement pattern across the provocative marketing campaigns. Most of the campaigns showed a sudden and significant increase in engagement. A small number of campaigns saw engagement increase more slowly over time and only two of the campaigns saw high levels of enga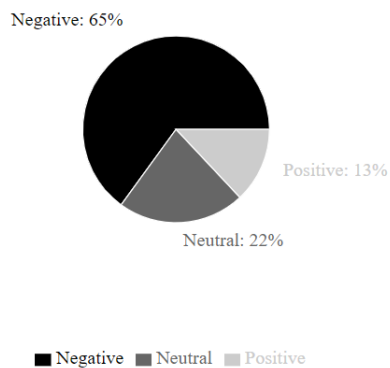gement over an extended period. This suggests that public reactions to controversial marketing are typically swift and intense rather than taking time to gain traction. Thus, brands have a very short window to respond and manage the situation once a campaign explodes in a negative way. Nevertheless, not all controversies follow the same pattern. Some issues may take time to gain traction, possibly due to slower spread of information or delayed public realization of the implications. these engagement patterns highlight the volatile and fast-paced nature of public response to marketing controversies. Brands must be prepared for sudden and intense backlash, with the understanding that while most controversies flare up quickly, they also tend to fade from public attention relatively quickly in most cases. However, the potential for sustained engagement in some instances suggests that certain types of controversies can have longer-lasting impacts on brand perception and public discourse. However, it must be taken into account that the engagement patterns are rather subjective due to the way advertisements were scheduled (Dolan et al., 2016).
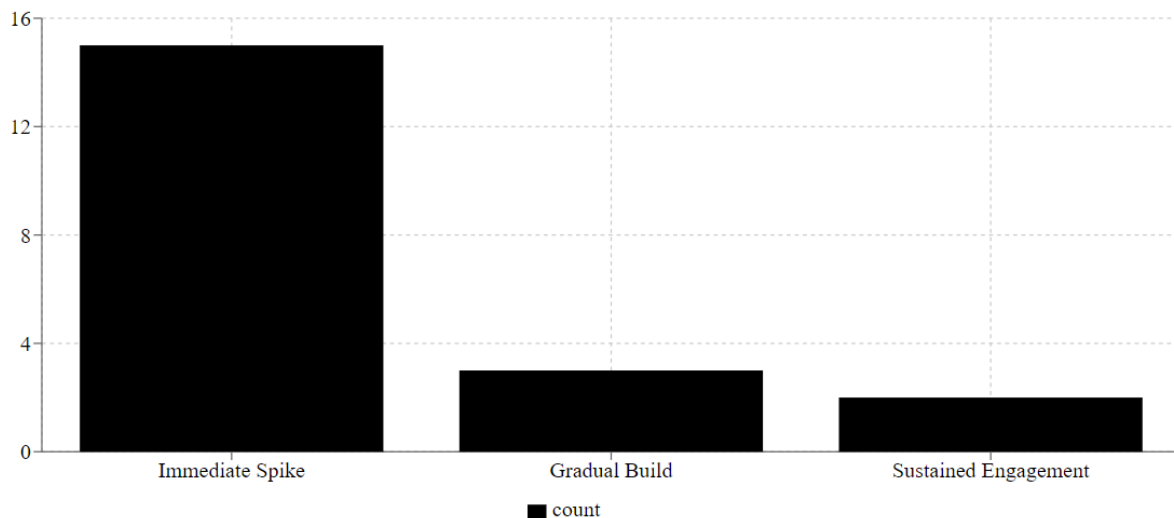
Figure 4. Engagement patterns across the studied marketing campaigns.

4.2 Moral Outrage and Brand Damage

Many brands that attempt to generate attention through provocative or shocking marketing strategies face substantial risks, particularly when their campaigns touch on sensitive social issues. Across multiple campaigns, among others Hyundai's "Pipe Job," H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle," Nivea's "White is Purity," and Dove's "Real Beauty," public reactions were often characterized by intense moral outrage. Consumers perceived these campaigns as trivializing significant cultural, social, or racial issues, which resulted in not only immediate backlash but also long-term damage to brand reputations. Hyundai's "Pipe Job" commercial, which depicted an attempted suicide, is a prime example of how dark humor can backfire when applied to sensitive topics. The public's response reflected deep moral outrage, with one user describing the ad as "*legitimately awful,*" and another expressing personal offense by stating,

"I'll never forgive Hyundai for their Pipe Job commercial... Fuck trauma porn in the shape of a cute commercial." The use of suicide as a marketing tool was seen as distasteful and insensitive, resulting in lasting damage to Hyundai's brand image, with many consumers vowing to never purchase their products. This outrage resulted in the company pulling the ad and issuing public apologies, but the damage to consumer trust had already been done. A similar narrative unfolded with H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" campaign, where the brand faced accusations of racial insensitivity for featuring a black child in a sweatshirt printed with the phrase. One outraged tweet asked, "*So is H&M going to explain why they have a 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' sweater on a Black child for their catalogue?*" The backlash was swift, leading to widespread calls for boycotts, with other tweets stating, "*H&M think black people are stupid. 'Coolest Monkey'?? Really? #BoycottHandM*" and *"The thing that troubles me about the H&M "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" issue is...all these supposedly-smart people sat around that picture at a board room table & said, "This is fine."* H&M's failure to recognize the historical and racial connotations behind their ad was viewed as a significant misstep, prompting consumers to distance themselves from the brand, a decision that many have continued to uphold years after the incident. Nivea's "White is Purity" campaign further underscores the risk of failing to account for racial and cultural sensitivities. The tagline was widely condemned as racially insensitive, drawing connections to white supremacist ideologies. One tweet encapsulated this outrage, stating, "*Nivea what the FUCK? 'White is purity'? Are you fucking serious?*" The backlash was severe, with users vowing to boycott Nivea's products, as evidenced by the tweets saying, "*I'll never get over Nivea and that 'White is Purity' ad they had a few years ago lmao*" and "*Looks like I won't be buying Nivea or Pepsi again. Idiots. Nivea's 'White is Purity' ad pulled after backlash."* Despite the brand's efforts to apologize and distance itself from the controversy, the incident left a lasting negative impression on consumers, demonstrating how racially insensitive campaigns can have enduring repercussions for brand loyalty. Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign faced a similarly strong public reaction due to accusations of racial insensitivity. The ad, which portrayed a black woman transforming into a white woman, was widely criticized for evoking harmful historical associations with skin whitening. One user captured the prevailing sentiment with a tweet that read, "*The insensitive racist ad tells me you don't have African-Americans involved in your decisions about our Culture. #NoDove*." Another user stated the following: "*At first, I thought this must be a fake -- I found it literally unbelievable. #DoverealBeauty"* The controversy not only sparked calls for a boycott but also prompted questions about the diversity within Dove's marketing team and corporate decision-making processes, leading to long-term reputational damage. These cases demonstrate the recurring theme of moral outrage in response to provocative advertising, particularly when brands fail to engage thoughtfully with sensitive social or cultural issues. The public's response to these campaigns frequently included expressions of anger and disgust, with users on social media using terms like "*disgusting*," "*offensive*," and "*tone-deaf*" to describe the ads. The combination of negative sentiment and calls for boycotts placed immense pressure on these brands, leading to long-term brand damage that extended beyond the immediate controversy. For instance, Dove's attempt to apologize and issue damage control statements was viewed as inadequate, with one user commenting, "*Weak apology is not enough.*" This highlights how the public often demands meaningful accountability and change, rather than simple apologies, when brands are seen as exploiting or trivializing serious issues. In the case of Nivea, H&M, Hyundai, and Dove, the moral outrage elicited by their campaigns illustrates the dangers of failing to align marketing strategies with consumer values, particularly

in an age where social media can rapidly amplify negative responses. Moreover, the consistency of the backlash across different industries and target demographics suggests that, irrespective of brand identity, when companies make a misstep on culturally sensitive topics, the consequences are often swift, severe, and enduring.

4.3 Cultural Insensitivity and Racial Issues

Several marketing campaigns across different brands have faced severe backlash due to their perceived racial or cultural insensitivity. These campaigns, including PureGym's "12 Years a Slave" workout, Prada's controversial "blackface" designs, Heineken's "Lighter is Better" ad, and Nivea's "White is Purity" campaign, sparked public outrage by reinforcing harmful racial stereotypes or downplaying significant cultural contexts. A common thread throughout these controversies is the apparent lack of diversity in the decision-making processes within these corporations, which may have contributed to their failure to identify and prevent racially offensive content before it was released to the public. PureGym's "12 Years a Slave" workout is a striking example of the consequences that arise when brands fail to consider the cultural sensitivities around race and history. The fitness promotion, which linked an intense workout routine to a film about slavery, was met with immediate condemnation for trivializing the brutal legacy of slavery. Users tweeted, "*How tone-deaf do you have to be to equate a brutal history of slavery with a fitness challenge?*" and *"The person who did the Pure Gym post was even Black. Ffs man TEACH BLACK HISTORY IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM!!!!!!"* This campaign demonstrated the dangers of using historical trauma as a marketing gimmick, and it provoked broader discussions about the importance of corporate responsibility in handling sensitive topics. Despite PureGym's efforts to apologize and remove the content, the damage had been done, with many calling for the company to be more thoughtful and aware of the social and historical implications of its messaging. Similarly, Prada faced severe backlash after it released a line of accessories that many felt resembled blackface imagery, a deeply offensive symbol rooted in the history of racial discrimination. The public was quick to condemn the fashion brand, with one user stating, "*How could Prada, a global luxury brand, let something so blatantly offensive hit the shelves?*" and *"Bullshit, Prada. Bull. Shit. These aren't "fantasy charms" or "imaginary creatures" they are racist blackface images and have no place in any window anywhere. Reprehensible."* This controversy highlighted the disconnect between luxury fashion brands and their audience, particularly regarding cultural and racial awareness. Prada eventually withdrew the items from its stores and issued an apology, but the damage to its brand reputation was significant. This incident further underscored the need for diversity within the fashion industry, as critics pointed out that a more diverse team might have prevented the offensive designs from being approved. Heineken's "Lighter is Better" campaign also faced accusations of racial insensitivity for promoting the idea that lighter-skinned people were somehow "better." The ad, which showed a bartender sliding a beer past several dark-skinned individuals before it landed in front of a lighter-skinned person, was condemned for reinforcing harmful colorism. One tweet encapsulated the outrage: "*Heineken's ad literally says 'lighter is better.' How do you miss that?"* The public reaction was swift and harsh, with many consumers calling for a boycott of Heineken products, like this user stated: *"Oh FFS #Heineken! Have we not yet reached the deepest level of stupid yet?! Stop this idiotic nonsense @heineken"* The backlash forced Heineken to pull the ad and issue an apology, but the controversy left a lasting stain on the brand's reputation, highlighting how racial insensitivity in marketing can lead to long-term damage. These examples highlight a

significant issue in corporate marketing: the lack of diversity and cultural awareness in decision-making teams often leads to campaigns that fail to consider or respect cultural contexts. When brands do not include diverse perspectives, they risk reinforcing harmful racial stereotypes or promoting insensitive messaging, which can lead to widespread public backlash. As seen in the cases of PureGym, Prada, and Heineken, the resulting outrage not only damages brand reputations but also raises important questions about corporate responsibility and the need for greater diversity in the creative and approval processes. One of the most common criticisms across these incidents is the belief that more diverse teams would prevent such missteps from occurring. In each case, the brands were accused of being out of touch with their audiences and failing to recognize the offensive nature of their campaigns before they were released. Prada, PureGym, and Heineken's marketing teams missed the broader racial implications of their ads, suggesting that greater diversity within these teams might have helped avoid these controversies. In summary, the backlash against these campaigns underscores the critical importance of cultural sensitivity in advertising. These incidents demonstrate how racial insensitivity, whether intentional or not, can result in significant brand damage, consumer boycotts, and ongoing public scrutiny. Furthermore, they emphasize the need for diversity in corporate decision-making to ensure that marketing campaigns are inclusive, culturally aware, and respectful of the social and historical contexts in which they operate.

4.4 Shock Value and Outrage Marketing

Many brands have deliberately employed shock and controversy in their marketing strategies, aiming to capture public attention through provocative content. Known as "outrage marketing," this approach leverages the emotional responses of consumers—whether positive or negative—to create buzz and increase visibility. However, while such campaigns often succeed in sparking conversations and driving engagement, they frequently walk a fine line between generating profitable controversy and inciting damaging backlash. Campaigns such as Protein World's "Beach Body Ready" and Balenciaga's teddy bear campaign exemplify the dual-edged nature of shock marketing: while they often achieve financial success in the short term, they can alienate key demographics, causing long-term damage to the brand's reputation. Protein World's "Beach Body Ready" campaign is a notable example of a brand deliberately courting controversy to generate attention. The advertisement, which featured a slim, toned woman alongside the question, "*Are you beach body ready?*" was criticized for promoting unrealistic beauty standards and body-shaming women who did not conform to these ideals. Many consumers expressed outrage, accusing the campaign of being sexist and insensitive. One tweet celebrated the vandalism of the advertisements, stating, "*Loving the feminist vandalism #eachbodysready to the disgusting ad (and behaviour) of @ProteinWorld.*" Protests, including the defacement of billboards, further fueled the controversy, amplifying the campaign's visibility. Despite—or perhaps because of—the backlash, Protein World's sales reportedly increased by £1 million within four days of the campaign launch, highlighting how outrage marketing can drive financial success, even in the face of public condemnation. However, the long-term impact of such campaigns is more complex. While Protein World may have benefitted from short-term sales, the backlash also caused lasting reputational damage, particularly among consumers who felt alienated by the ad's messaging. Many saw the campaign as a clear example of body-shaming, a sentiment that was echoed widely across social media and in public protests. As one tweet noted, "*It's what's known as 'outrage*

marketing' much like Protein World's 'Are you beach body ready' campaign. You outraged suckers fell for it." This comment reflects the public's awareness of the manipulative nature of outrage marketing, and while some consumers may have engaged with the brand, others were likely put off by what they saw as exploitative tactics. This illustrates the inherent risk of shock marketing: while it can lead to immediate financial gains, it often leaves a negative imprint on brand perception, particularly among more socially conscious audiences. Another campaign that relied on shock value was Balenciaga's teddy bear advertisement, which sparked significant outrage for featuring children holding teddy bears dressed in bondage gear. The campaign was widely condemned as inappropriate, with critics arguing that it sexualized children and crossed ethical boundaries. One tweet captured the sentiment of disgust, likening Balenciaga to something sinister: "*Balenciaga is the creepy white van of high fashion.*" The outrage was further amplified by the inclusion of court documents referencing child sexual abuse in the campaign's imagery, which led to accusations that Balenciaga was normalizing or endorsing such behavior. In response to the backlash, the brand issued apologies and pulled the campaign, but the damage had already been done. The incident became a focal point for discussions about corporate responsibility in marketing, with many consumers pledging to boycott the brand. As one user starkly declared, "*Balenciaga is now permanently canceled.*" The financial and reputational consequences of Balenciaga's campaign exemplify the dangers of pushing the boundaries of shock marketing too far. While the campaign certainly generated attention, the overwhelming negativity of the response, coupled with the sensitive nature of the controversy, it could be suggested that it had significant impact on the brand's image. Even though shock marketing can create buzz and attract immediate interest, the Balenciaga case shows how it can backfire when it ventures into ethically and morally charged territory. The fallout from such campaigns can be severe, as consumers increasingly demand accountability and transparency from brands that engage in controversial marketing tactics. What these examples underscore is that while outrage marketing can lead to short-term visibility and financial success, it poses significant risks to long-term brand health. By alienating key demographics—such as those who value inclusivity, body positivity, or ethical conduct—brands run the risk of losing consumer trust. In the case of Protein World, the financial success of the "Beach Body Ready" campaign came at the expense of significant public backlash and a negative association with body shaming. Similarly, Balenciaga's reliance on shock and provocation damaged its reputation to such a degree that no amount of post-controversy damage control could fully repair the brand's image in the eyes of many consumers. Shock value and outrage marketing can be an effective strategy for generating attention and driving short-term financial gains. However, these campaigns also carry substantial risks, particularly when they cross into culturally or ethically sensitive areas. It can be suggested that brands that employ outrage marketing must carefully balance the desire for visibility with the need for ethical responsibility and consumer trust to avoid significant backlash and lasting damage to their reputations.

4.5 Use of Humor and Absurdity

Humor and absurdity can be powerful tools for capturing attention, diffusing tension, and generating viral engagement. However, their effectiveness largely depends on the context in which they are used. While some campaigns successfully harness humor to create lighthearted, memorable moments, others can misfire, particularly when the subject matter is sensitive or the intended humor is misunderstood. Campaigns like Weetabix's "Beans on Bix" and

Pepsi's "Live for Now" demonstrate the contrasting outcomes of using humor and absurdity in marketing, with one generating positive engagement and the other sparking widespread backlash. Weetabix's "Beans on Bix" campaign, which suggested serving baked beans on a Weetabix cereal biscuit, is a prime example of how absurdity and humor can be used effectively in marketing. The campaign's premise was intentionally ridiculous, provoking humorous reactions from both consumers and brands alike. One tweet humorously remarked, "*Lockdown has clearly gotten too much for those eating Beans on 'bix,*" encapsulating the lighthearted spirit with which the campaign was received. Despite the initial disgust at the idea of combining beans and Weetabix, the campaign went viral, with many enjoying the playful banter it inspired. Other brands and public figures joined in on the fun, with tweets from various corporations jokingly denouncing the combination. For instance, one user commented, "*I enjoyed reading the thread... especially the responses from the other brands companies & organizations that joined in to publicly denounce this atrocity by @weetabix.*" This inter-corporate engagement and the absurd nature of the campaign turned a bizarre food suggestion into a successful marketing moment, helping the brand increase visibility and boost sales by 15%. The campaign showed that when humor is used in the right context it can be a refreshing and engaging approach that resonates positively with audiences. In contrast, Pepsi's "Live for Now" campaign, which featured Kendall Jenner, demonstrates the potential pitfalls of using humor or lightheartedness in contexts where the subject matter is too sensitive. The ad showed Jenner handing a police officer a can of Pepsi during a protest, which many interpreted as trivializing the Black Lives Matter movement and social justice protests more broadly. The campaign was widely criticized for suggesting that complex and deeply rooted societal issues could be resolved with a simple act like sharing a soda. One outraged tweet captured this sentiment: "*Could you be any more blatant with the disrespect and appropriation of a movement @pepsi? Is this a sick joke?*" The ad was perceived as tone-deaf, with critics accusing Pepsi of capitalizing on a serious movement for commercial gain. Another tweet sarcastically summarized the absurdity of the ad's message: "*So clearly the problem has been that cops are not drinking Pepsi. Who knew!*" Pepsi's attempt at using a feel-good, unifying gesture was viewed as disrespectful and oversimplified, leading to widespread backlash, brand damage, and the eventual removal of the ad. The failure of Pepsi's campaign highlights the importance of understanding the cultural and social context when employing humor or lightheartedness, especially in relation to sensitive topics like race, activism, and social justice. These two campaigns illustrate how the success or failure of humor in marketing depends on the appropriateness of the context and the audience's reception. Weetabix's campaign thrived on its absurdity and harmlessness, providing a lighthearted distraction during a challenging time. Consumers and brands alike enjoyed participating in the joke, and the engagement was overwhelmingly positive. In contrast, Pepsi's attempt to inject humor and unity into a serious social movement fell flat because it failed to account for the gravity of the issues at hand. The backlash Pepsi faced demonstrates how humor, when poorly executed or misaligned with the subject matter, can lead to accusations of insensitivity and exploitation. Ultimately, these campaigns reveal the double-edged nature of humor and absurdity in marketing. While humor can effectively generate viral engagement and positive brand associations—as in the case of Weetabix—it requires a careful understanding of context. When humor is applied to sensitive or complex social issues, as seen with Pepsi, it can provoke backlash and damage a brand's reputation. Marketers must tread carefully, ensuring that their use of humor is not only appropriate for the audience but also mindful of the broader cultural and social environment in which their message is being delivered.

4.6 Long-Term Impact and Memory

Shocking marketing campaigns, especially those that stir controversy or touch on sensitive social issues, often leave a lasting imprint on public memory. Even when brands attempt damage control through apologies and corrective actions, the negative impact frequently endures, with some campaigns continuing to be cited years after their initial release. This long-term effect can significantly hinder a brand's ability to recover, as public perception often solidifies around the misstep, making it difficult to rebuild trust or alter the narrative. Campaigns from companies like H&M and Dove are prime examples of how a single controversy can resonate for years, with the public remembering the failure more vividly than any subsequent attempts at redemption. H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" campaign is a case where the long-term damage to the brand has been significant and enduring. Despite H&M issuing public apologies and withdrawing the advertisement, many consumers were unwilling to forgive what they saw as a blatant example of racial insensitivity. Social media responses reflected this lasting outrage, with one user stating, "*I still ain't step foot in an H&M since 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle'*," years after the campaign was released. The incident became emblematic of the broader issues of racial representation in marketing, with the public's continued reference to the ad demonstrating how such a controversy can stick with a brand indefinitely. H&M's efforts to move beyond the controversy have been overshadowed by the lasting memory of the incident, with many consumers permanently distancing themselves from the brand as a result. Similarly, Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign, which featured an ad that appeared to show a Black woman transforming into a white woman, continues to face criticism for its racially insensitive imagery. Although Dove also issued apologies and attempted to clarify the intent behind the ad, the damage had already been done. Many consumers viewed the campaign as reinforcing harmful beauty standards and promoting racial stereotypes, a perception that Dove has struggled to shake off. One user tweeted, "*I've used Dove for 20+ years. As of today, it's all going into the trash,*" and another user posting: *"Missed the mark"? Are you kidding me?? It WAAAAY more than "missed the mark"! This is 2017, not 1950, FFS!! Not buying Dove again"* illustrating how a campaign can push loyal consumers away, sometimes permanently. Even though Dove has since released more inclusive and sensitive campaigns, the legacy of the controversial ad remains a reference point in discussions of racially insensitive advertising. This lasting criticism underscores how difficult it can be for brands to repair their image once they have been associated with a racially or socially offensive campaign. The long-term impact of these campaigns reflects a broader issue in marketing: the public's memory of a brand's missteps often outlasts the brand's efforts to make amends. While companies may issue public apologies, withdraw offending ads, and implement more inclusive marketing strategies, these actions rarely erase the initial negative impression. The persistence of the H&M and Dove controversies in public discourse demonstrates that once a brand is linked to a shocking or offensive incident, it becomes part of the collective memory, influencing consumer behavior and perception long after the campaign itself has faded from view. In addition to influencing consumer loyalty, the long-term memory of such campaigns can have broader reputational effects. Brands that are repeatedly cited as examples of "what not to do" in marketing face ongoing scrutiny, with each subsequent campaign examined through the lens of past mistakes. For example, Dove's continued attempts to align itself with body positivity and inclusivity have been met with skepticism by some consumers, who still associate the brand with its earlier racially insensitive imagery. H&M, too, has struggled to distance itself from its "Coolest Monkey" incident, as consumers continue to bring up the campaign when discussing

racial representation in fashion. This enduring scrutiny suggests that brands must go beyond simple apologies and damage control efforts; they need to commit to long-term, meaningful change to rebuild trust with their audience.

4.7 Consumer Reactions and Boycotts

Consumer reactions to controversial marketing campaigns often include strong calls for boycotts and demands for increased corporate accountability. In an era where consumers expect brands to align with societal values and display cultural sensitivity, any perceived misstep can lead to immediate backlash and long-term consequences for brand loyalty and trust. Campaigns such as Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" and Balenciaga's child imagery campaign highlight how quickly consumer sentiment can turn negative when brands fail to meet these expectations, with boycotts becoming a common and powerful form of consumer protest. Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" campaign, which addressed issues of toxic masculinity, provides a clear example of the polarizing effects that socially charged advertising can have on a brand's audience. While the campaign was praised by many for tackling important social issues, such as bullying, harassment, and male responsibility, it also provoked strong reactions from certain segments of the consumer base who felt alienated by the messaging. Critics of the campaign, particularly men who perceived the ad as a blanket condemnation of male behavior, quickly took to social media to express their disapproval. A significant number of these consumers called for a boycott of Gillette products, with one user expressing this sentiment by stating, "*It's putting boys playing in the same box as sexual harassment. 'Boys will be boys.' There are some horrible things in that advert, but there are also male traits that are demonized.*" This reaction highlights the delicate balance brands must strike when engaging with social and political issues, as even well-intentioned messages can backfire if they are perceived as accusatory or divisive. The backlash against Gillette also illustrates how consumer boycotts can have a lasting impact on brand perception. Many men who felt targeted by the campaign vowed to stop purchasing Gillette products, as one user stated *"It's racist, sexist, tells white men not to approach women and don't learn how to defend yourself. This is Chinese level propaganda created by FemiNazis in an attempt to emasculate men so that takeover of the nation will be easier. #BoycottGillette"* resulting in both a short-term dip in sales and a potential long-term loss of customer loyalty. This is emblematic of a broader trend in consumer behavior, where individuals are increasingly likely to align their purchasing decisions with their personal values. In the case of Gillette, the brand's attempt to take a stand on a social issue led to a polarized response, with some consumers supporting the message and others feeling alienated, a dynamic that has become common in today's marketing landscape. Balenciaga's child imagery campaign offers another stark example of how consumer reactions to controversial marketing can escalate into widespread boycotts. The campaign, as discussed above, sparked immediate outrage, with many consumers accusing the brand of sexualizing children. In response, social media was flooded with calls for boycotts, with one user declaring, *"Do you know how many layers of approval these ads have to go through before being printed? Disgusting company. #BoycottBalenciaga #Pedophiles."* The backlash not only damaged Balenciaga's brand reputation but also highlighted the power of collective consumer action, as many vowed to cease buying the brand's products indefinitely. Even after Balenciaga issued public apologies and took steps to distance itself from the campaign, the brand struggled to regain consumer trust, underscoring the long-term impact that boycotts can have on a brand's financial performance and public image: *"balenciaga.. r u trying to tell us u support child pornography???*

these designers have become sick. first the ill-fitting shoes during PFW and now this." In both the Gillette and Balenciaga examples, the campaigns sparked reactions that went beyond immediate outrage and triggered broader movements for accountability. Consumers increasingly expect brands to take responsibility for their messaging and to demonstrate a commitment to aligning with the cultural values of their audience. When brands fall short of these expectations, boycotts—whether driven by moral outrage, political disagreement, or cultural insensitivity—become a frequent and effective method for consumers to express their dissatisfaction. These boycotts not only result in short-term financial losses but can also lead to long-term damage to the brand's reputation and consumer loyalty, as trust is often difficult to rebuild once it has been broken. In addition to the financial and reputational impact of boycotts, these consumer-led movements often reflect societal attitudes toward corporate behavior. As seen with Gillette and Balenciaga, brands that attempt to engage with complex social or political issues must navigate the risk of alienating certain segments of their audience. When campaigns are perceived as misaligned with cultural values, the backlash can be swift and severe, often resulting in widespread calls for accountability and lasting damage to consumer trust. Consumer reactions to controversial marketing campaigns frequently manifest as boycotts, driven by expectations that brands align with societal values and cultural sensitivity. As seen in the cases of Gillette and Balenciaga, these boycotts can have significant financial and reputational consequences, highlighting the power of consumer action in shaping corporate behavior. The long-term impact of such boycotts illustrates the critical importance of understanding and respecting the values of a brand's audience, as once trust is lost, it is difficult to regain. Brands must therefore be cautious when engaging with socially charged issues, balancing the desire to provoke discussion with the need to maintain consumer trust and loyalty.

4.8 Corporate Responsibility and Accountability

There is a growing demand for brands to demonstrate corporate responsibility and accountability in marketing, particularly when their campaigns address sensitive social issues such as race, gender, or mental health. Consumers increasingly expect companies to operate with integrity and social awareness, ensuring that their messaging aligns with broader societal values. When brands fail to meet these expectations, they often face accusations of being tone-deaf or insincere. Apologies, in such cases, are frequently seen as insufficient, with consumers calling for substantial actions and changes rather than just words. The backlash against Burger King's "Women Belong in the Kitchen" campaign serves as a prime example of how missteps in addressing sensitive topics can result in long-lasting reputational damage and calls for deeper accountability. Burger King's campaign, which was intended to promote gender equality in the culinary industry and highlight a scholarship program for female chefs, backfired spectacularly when the brand tweeted "*Women belong in the kitchen*" on International Women's Day. The provocative phrasing, meant to capture attention, instead incited widespread outrage for its sexist undertones. Consumers were quick to accuse Burger King of insensitivity, with one user questioning, "*What the hell was Burger King thinking when they tweeted 'women belong in the kitchen' on International Women's Day?*" The follow-up tweets, which provided context for the campaign's intended message of supporting women in a male-dominated industry, did little to mitigate the backlash. Many saw the initial tweet as tone-deaf and felt that the explanation came too late, further damaging Burger King's reputation. As one user pointed out, "*No one reads the follow-up tweets,"* underscoring how poorly conceived

strategies can overshadow even the best intentions when they rely on shock value without immediately clarifying the message. The public's reaction to Burger King's campaign also exemplifies the growing expectation for brands to take responsibility for their marketing missteps. Apologies issued in the wake of such controversies are often viewed as inadequate if they are not accompanied by meaningful changes in corporate behavior. In Burger King's case, the company issued a formal apology and deleted the offending tweet, but for many consumers, these actions were insufficient to repair the damage. Critics argued that the campaign reflected a deeper problem within the company's decision-making process, suggesting that if the marketing team had been more attuned to issues of gender sensitivity, the campaign's misstep could have been avoided. As one user sarcastically remarked, "S*ooooo Burger King really thought this was a good way to promote women in the culinary industry?*" Such reactions highlight the public's demand for more than just apologies; they want to see tangible actions that demonstrate a company's commitment to ethical marketing practices. The expectation for corporate responsibility extends beyond gender issues to other sensitive topics. Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" campaign, which aimed to address toxic masculinity, is another example of how a brand's effort to tackle social issues can generate both praise and backlash. While the campaign was lauded for addressing important issues such as bullying and harassment, it also faced significant criticism from men who felt alienated by the message. Some consumers viewed the ad as a general attack on male behavior, prompting calls for boycotts and long-lasting damage to Gillette's brand among certain demographics. A tweet encapsulated this sentiment: "*It's putting boys playing in the same box as sexual harassment. 'Boys will be boys.' There are some horrible things in that advert, but there are also male traits that are demonized.*" This reaction highlights how even well-intentioned campaigns must be carefully crafted to avoid alienating sections of the audience, while also emphasizing the need for brands to act with responsibility when addressing sensitive social themes. Balenciaga's child imagery campaign offers another stark example of how a lack of corporate responsibility can quickly spiral into full-blown scandal. The campaign provoked widespread outrage and accusations of sexualizing children, with many consumers calling for boycotts. One user captured the sentiment of many, stating, "*Not enough! Cancel Balenciaga!*" highlighting the public's readiness to hold brands accountable for perceived ethical violations. The incident also demonstrated that consumers expect brands to take preemptive responsibility by ensuring ethical oversight of all marketing materials before their release, rather than relying on apologies after the fact. The backlash against Prada's "blackface" controversy further underscores this demand for greater accountability. When the luxury brand released designs that appeared to mimic racist blackface imagery, the public response was swift and damning. Consumers, including prominent figures in the fashion industry, called out Prada for cultural insensitivity, and many vowed to boycott the brand. Despite Prada's eventual apology, consumers were dissatisfied, seeing the company's response as insufficient to address the deeper issues of diversity and inclusion within its ranks. As one tweet pointedly remarked, "*I can guarantee they have zero black people on their marketing team. Even then, how out of touch with history does one have to be to not recognize a HUGELY exploited and "popularized" racist moniker!!!???? They are shady af with their responses too.*" This incident demonstrates that consumers are increasingly looking for brands to enact systemic changes, rather than offering surface-level apologies, when they are called out for insensitive behavior.

5. Discussion

This study on provocative marketing campaigns has revealed several significant insights into consumer behaviour, brand perception, and marketing strategy. The findings have important implications for both marketing theory and practice, while also providing the limitations and highlighting areas for future research.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

This study provides valuable insights into the emotional responses elicited by provocative marketing, confirming that such campaigns predominantly trigger negative emotions such as anger, disgust, and shock. This finding aligns with prior research (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012; Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003) and extends our understanding of emotional reactions in the digital context, where negative sentiments often dominate, reinforcing the potential for backlash in social media environments (Zeng, Chan, & Fu, 2021). While earlier studies have emphasized the benefits of viral engagement (Voorveld et al., 2018), the current research challenges this view by demonstrating that viral engagement in provocative marketing often results in negative sentiment, which can undermine brand equity rather than enhance it (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012). Additionally, the study contributes to the discourse on corporate social responsibility (CSR) in marketing, supporting the need for brands to be more ethically conscious in their campaigns (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009). With consumer expectations for ethical behavior on the rise, the rapid spread of backlash on platforms like X highlights the importance of brands carefully considering the ethical implications of their provocative content (Zeng et al., 2021). Moreover, the issue of cultural insensitivity, as seen in campaigns like Nivea's "White is Purity," underscores the necessity of integrating cross-cultural understanding into global marketing strategies (De Mooij, 2019; Fam, Waller, & Erdogan, 2004). The study shows that provocative marketing can easily cross-cultural boundaries, further emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches. From a theoretical standpoint, the research also extends arousal theory, which suggests that moderate arousal enhances attention and memory (Tellis, 2003), by showing that high-arousal negative emotions can damage brand perception over the long term. This finding aligns with reactance theory, which posits that overly provocative messages can lead to consumer resistance (Brehm, 1966). Lastly, the amplification of emotional responses in social media echo chambers, where like-minded individuals reinforce outrage (Bail et al., 2018), suggests that existing theories on social media amplification should consider the disproportionate spread of negative reactions, particularly when provocative content touches on divisive social issues (Akpinar & Berger, 2017).

5.2 Practical Implications

Marketers must recognize that while provocative campaigns can successfully capture attention, they tend to elicit negative emotions, as supported by Dahl et al. (2003) and Sabri & Obermiller (2012). Brands should weigh the short-term gains in engagement against potential long-term reputational damage, making it critical to implement thorough risk assessments (Waller, Fam, & Erdogan, 2005). Cultural sensitivity is also paramount, as demonstrated by the backlash against Nivea's and Prada's controversial ads. To avoid such issues, companies should integrate diverse perspectives and employ cultural audits in their marketing strategies, ensuring that their campaigns are respectful of

different cultural norms (Fam et al., 2004; De Mooij, 2019; Okazaki & Taylor, 2013). In today's fast-paced social media landscape, where backlash can spread rapidly, particularly on platforms like X, brands must be prepared to monitor sentiment in real time and respond swiftly. Social listening tools and pre-emptive crisis management strategies are essential for handling negative reactions effectively (Voorveld et al., 2018; Zeng et al., 2021). Furthermore, apologies alone, as seen in cases like Dove and H&M, are often insufficient to restore trust. Brands must take accountability through long-term actions that align with corporate social responsibility (CSR) expectations, reflecting ethical marketing practices (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009; Waller et al., 2005). With the growing demand for ethical corporate behaviour, marketers must ensure that their campaigns are aligned with consumer values. Employing pre-launch focus groups and sensitivity testing can help gauge potential audience reactions and mitigate ethical risks (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012; Vredenburg, Kapitan, Spry, & Kemper, 2020). In cases of significant backlash, such as those faced by Gillette and Balenciaga, brands need to focus on building long-term consumer trust through transparency and sustained engagement. This will help recover from boycotts and rebuild customer loyalty (Hwang & Kim, 2007; Zeng et al., 2021). Humour and absurdity can be effective tools in provocative marketing if used with care, as evidenced by Weetabix's "Beans on Bix" campaign (Akpinar & Berger, 2017). However, Pepsi's "Live for Now" campaign demonstrates the risks of applying humour to sensitive issues, underscoring the importance of pre-testing content to ensure it resonates appropriately with audiences (Parry et al., 2013). Lastly, the persistent negative perceptions of brands like H&M and Dove highlight the need for long-term reputation management. Marketers should prioritize sustained consumer engagement and ethical marketing practices to rebuild brand trust after a controversial campaign (Sabri & Obermiller, 2012; Drumwright & Murphy, 2009).

5.3 Research Limitations

One key limitation of this study is the potential bias in the selection of campaigns. The campaigns were chosen manually based on their publicity and perceived controversial nature, which introduces a degree of subjectivity into the process. Since the determination of whether a campaign is controversial was made prior to analysis, the selection could be seen as somewhat arbitrary. This method may have excluded other campaigns that, while less publicized, could have offered valuable insights. Future research could benefit from using a more systematic approach, such as random sampling or predefined selection criteria, to mitigate this potential bias. Another main limitation of this study is the potential lack of generalizability. While the research focuses on provocative marketing campaigns on X (formerly Twitter), the dynamics of this platform may not reflect user behaviors or responses on other social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook. The highly interactive, real-time, and short-form nature of X may lead to different patterns of engagement, sentiment, and emotional responses compared to other platforms with varying formats and user demographics. This means the findings may not be easily extended to all social media contexts, limiting their broader applicability. The use of public X data poses several challenges in terms of representativeness and potential biases. The study relied on X posts that mentioned or responded to specific marketing campaigns, but this sample is likely biased toward more vocal and emotionally charged users. Silent consumers or those with neutral opinions may not be represented in the dataset, potentially skewing the analysis toward extreme responses. Furthermore, the platform's user base is skewed demographically, with overrepresentation of certain age groups,

socioeconomic classes, and political affiliations, which limits the diversity of perspectives captured in the study. The research analyzed user responses during or shortly after the release of each campaign. However, public sentiment can shift over time as reactions to controversial campaigns evolve. Some negative emotions may fade, while others may intensify as the discourse continues. The reliance on time-bound data limits the ability to assess long-term shifts in brand perception or changes in consumer behavior over extended periods. This short-term perspective may oversimplify the complexity of how provocative marketing influences brand relationships in the long run. Besides, there is an inherent level of subjectivity in interpreting emotions from text. Sentiment analysis tools, while helpful, often struggle to accurately capture nuanced emotions, sarcasm, or cultural contexts embedded in user-generated content. For example, a sarcastic or ironic post may be misinterpreted as positive or negative. This limitation may have led to some misclassification of user sentiments, affecting the accuracy of the emotional response profiles presented in the study. The selection of campaigns was based on their prominence and the level of public controversy they generated. While this focus allows for the in-depth analysis of provocative marketing, it means that the study may not reflect the full spectrum of marketing strategies, particularly those that are moderately provocative or evoke more neutral responses. This focus on extreme cases may overemphasize the risks and negative consequences of provocative marketing while underexploring cases where such strategies are used more subtly and effectively. While the research provides valuable insights into online behavior and sentiment, it does not capture how these reactions translate into offline behavior, such as actual changes in purchase intentions or brand loyalty. The study measures engagement metrics like likes, retweets, and comments, but these interactions do not necessarily correlate with concrete consumer actions, such as boycotts or continued support. This limitation highlights a gap in understanding the real-world implications of online reactions to provocative marketing. Although the study aimed to account for cultural sensitivity in provocative marketing, the analysis of X data does not provide a detailed exploration of how regional or cultural differences may influence user reactions. Global brands often face diverse reactions from different markets, and what may be seen as provocative in one region could be interpreted differently in another. This limitation restricts the ability to fully understand how provocative marketing is received across varying cultural contexts. X's algorithms may influence the visibility of certain posts, which could affect the sample of data collected. Posts with more extreme sentiments are more likely to be amplified by the platform's algorithms, which could have skewed the dataset toward more provocative or polarized responses. This algorithmic bias may have affected the representativeness of the data, leading to an overemphasis on the more dramatic or negative aspects of the campaigns analyzed. These limitations suggest that while the study provides valuable insights into the impact of provocative marketing on X, its findings should be interpreted with caution, particularly regarding broader generalizations across different platforms, demographics, and real-world consumer behavior.

5.4 Future Research Directions

This study opens several options for future research in a broad perspective. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in understanding the long-term effects of provocative marketing on brand reputation and consumer loyalty. As Petersen, Kushwaha, and Kumar (2015) suggest, such studies could provide deeper insights into the sustainability of provocative marketing strategies over time, and it could help to determine if initial backlash has lasting negative

impacts or if consumer attitudes shift over time. Another future research direction could be expanding the research to include multiple social media platforms such as Facebook, or even include online chatrooms like Reddit. This could offer a more extensive and comprehensive understanding of how provocative marketing performs across different digital environments instead of only focusing on one platform, while these platforms differ significantly in terms of user demographics, engagement mechanisms, and content formats. Furthermore, future research should consider the demographic factors that influence responses to provocative marketing, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, and income. Different consumer groups may have varying levels of tolerance for provocative content, and understanding these differences could help marketers tailor their strategies to specific audiences. Studies using demographic segmentation or focusing on specific consumer groups (e.g., Gen Z vs. Baby Boomers) could offer more nuanced insights into how provocative marketing affects different target markets. This study focused on extreme cases of provocative marketing, many of which led to negative outcomes. Future research should examine whether moderate provocation or controversy can be used more effectively to generate positive engagement without the same level of backlash. Studies could explore campaigns that push boundaries in a less polarizing way, investigating what types of provocative content successfully engage consumers without alienating large segments of the audience. Given the importance of cultural sensitivity highlighted in the findings, future research should investigate how provocative marketing is received in different cultural contexts. Comparative studies between regions (e.g., Western vs. Eastern markets) could help brands better understand how cultural norms shape consumer reactions and how global marketing strategies can be adjusted to avoid offense. This could also extend to exploring how provocative content is localized and whether brands can successfully adapt such campaigns for different cultural settings without losing their intended impact. Future studies could delve deeper into the ethical boundaries of provocative marketing, exploring how far brands can push before consumer trust is irrevocably damaged. Research could examine whether there are consistent thresholds across industries or if these boundaries shift depending on societal trends, product categories, or specific consumer segments. Additionally, investigating the role of ethics in brand recovery after a provocative campaign backfires could offer important guidance for marketers on how to rebuild trust. As influencers play a crucial role in shaping public discourse on social media, future research could explore how their involvement affects the reception of provocative marketing. Studies could examine whether influencers help diffuse controversy by providing context or if they amplify outrage by drawing more attention to provocative campaigns. This research could also investigate how influencer endorsements or criticisms impact the effectiveness of these campaigns and the subsequent brand perception. Future research could explore whether the size and market presence of a brand influence the outcomes of provocative marketing. While large, well-established brands may have more resilience to backlash, smaller or newer brands might be more vulnerable to reputational damage. Comparative studies could provide insights into whether provocative marketing is a viable strategy for smaller companies or if they should avoid such high-risk tactics in favour of more traditional approaches. By addressing these areas, future research can build a more comprehensive understanding of provocative marketing's potential, its risks, and how it can be adapted to different platforms, audiences and cultural contexts in the continuously evolving marketing landscape.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has offered an in-depth exploration of the impact of provocative marketing campaigns on users of the social media platform X (formerly Twitter), revealing both the opportunities and risks inherent in this strategy. While provocative marketing is designed to capture attention by challenging norms and eliciting strong emotional reactions, the research findings indicate that such campaigns predominantly evoke negative emotions, including anger, disgust, and shock. This aligns with existing literature on shock advertising and provocative marketing, which highlights the inherent risk of alienating consumers. While these campaigns can generate high levels of engagement and virality, their long-term effects often include damage to brand equity, consumer trust, and brand loyalty. The research underscores the central role that social media platforms like X play in amplifying the effects of provocative marketing. X's real-time communication and viral content-sharing mechanisms allow provocative campaigns to spread rapidly, which can magnify both positive and negative reactions. While brands may initially benefit from the buzz and attention such campaigns create, the rapid dissemination of negative sentiment—often expressed through viral outrage—means that backlash can escalate quickly. This can lead to significant reputational damage, especially when campaigns are perceived as insensitive or offensive. The predominance of negative emotional responses in the analysed campaigns highlights the fine line between provocation and offense, showing that pushing boundaries can easily backfire. Cultural sensitivity emerged as a key theme in the study, demonstrating that provocative campaigns often falter when they fail to consider the diverse cultural, social, and racial dynamics of their audiences. High-profile campaigns like Nivea's "White is Purity," H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle," and Dove's controversial ad involving racial imagery illustrate how brands can quickly alienate consumers by overlooking cultural sensitivities. These cases emphasize the need for brands to conduct thorough cultural audits and involve diverse teams in the creative process to avoid missteps that could be perceived as racially or socially insensitive. From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with established frameworks such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory, which help explain the cognitive processes driving consumer responses to provocative content. The role of emotional appeal emerged as a critical factor, with emotions like anger, disgust, and amusement significantly influencing how provocative marketing is received. These emotional responses varied widely, highlighting the need for nuanced approaches tailored to specific audience segments. In practical terms, marketers must approach provocative marketing with caution, carefully weighing the potential short-term benefits of viral engagement against the longer-term risks of alienating consumers and damaging brand equity. The research emphasizes the need for brands to implement rigorous risk assessments before launching provocative campaigns. This involves not only understanding the target audience but also considering how different demographic groups might respond to controversial content. Furthermore, brands must be prepared to respond swiftly to backlash by employing real-time social media monitoring and crisis management strategies. The importance of humour and absurdity as tools in provocative marketing was also highlighted in the analysis. Campaigns like Weetabix's "Beans on Bix" succeeded in using absurdity to generate positive engagement, while Pepsi's "Live for Now" campaign illustrates how humour can misfire when applied to sensitive social or political issues. These examples underscore the importance of context in determining whether humour can be used effectively or whether it risks trivializing important societal matters. The persistence of negative perceptions toward brands like Dove and H&M, despite their efforts to apologize and repair the damage, illustrates

the long-lasting effects that provocative marketing missteps can have on consumer trust. This calls for a sustained focus on reputation management, with brands needing to engage in meaningful, long-term actions that align with their audience's values. Merely issuing public apologies is insufficient; brands must demonstrate a commitment to ethical marketing and transparent communication in order to rebuild consumer loyalty. In summary, while provocative marketing can be a powerful tool for generating attention and engagement, it is fraught with risks that can undermine its effectiveness. Brands must carefully navigate the ethical, cultural, and emotional dimensions of their campaigns, ensuring that they do not alienate or offend their target audiences. By employing diverse perspectives, conducting cultural sensitivity audits, and aligning with consumer values, brands can mitigate the risks of backlash and enhance the effectiveness of their provocative campaigns. Ultimately, provocative marketing requires a delicate balance between creativity, ethical considerations, and strategic risk management to succeed in today's fast-paced and highly reactive social media environment.

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8. Appendices

The following appendices provide supplementary materials and detailed information that support and enrich the main body of this thesis, offering additional context, raw data, and extended analyses pertinent to our examination of provocative marketing campaigns and their societal impact.

This section provides detailed examinations of the 20 marketing campaigns that were analyzed in this study. Each appendix entry is structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of the campaign's context, public reactions, and the thematic elements that contributed to its reception. The following components are included for each campaign:

1. **General explanation of the campaign.** Each campaign is introduced with a brief overview of the campaign, including the brand's objectives and the elements that sparked controversy. Where relevant and possible, an image of the campaign is included to provide the visual context and to illustrate the specific aspects that drew public attention.

2. **Analysis of responses.** An in-depth analysis of the responses per campaign is provided, focusing on the themes and issues that emerged from the data. This section shows the different types of reactions observed, identifying patterns and outstanding highlights that characterize the public sentiment. The analyses also explore specific instances that stood out within the broader conversation, providing insights into the unique aspects of each campaign's impact.

3. **Word visualization.** A word cloud is presented for each campaign, derived from the X-database used in this research. The visualization highlights the most frequently mentioned words and phrases, offering a snapshot of the public discourse surrounding the campaign. The size and prominence of the words in the visualization reflect their frequency and significance in the collected tweets. For enhancing the word cloud, it has been decided to filter out the articles, clue words and other adverbs which were irrelevant (e.g. 'this, 'the', 'that').

4. **Sentiment analysis.** A sentiment analysis is presented with the general sentiment (positive, negative, neutral) among the responses on X.

5. **Emotion analysis.** An emotion reveals the range of emotions that appeared the most among the responses on X. This is presented in a bar chart for each campaign separately.

1. *Campaign 1: Hyundai – Pipe Job*

The Hyundai "Pipe Job" marketing campaign was a controversial advertisement created to promote the Hyundai iX35, a fuel cell vehicle. The ad depicted a man attempting to commit suicide by running his car in a closed garage, a method that typically leads to carbon monoxide poisoning. However, because the iX35 emits only water vapor, the man survives, and the tagline highlights the car's 100% water emissions.[1] The ad aimed to emphasize the eco-friendly aspect of the iX35 by dramatizing its clean emissions in an unconventional way. However, it was met with significant backlash for its insensitivity toward the subject of suicide. The campaign drew widespread criticism for being in poor taste, leading Hyundai and its advertising agency, Innocean Worldwide Europe, to issue public apologies and withdraw the ad.[2]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Hyundai's "Pipe Job" commercial reveals strong negative sentiments, particularly around themes of disgust, moral outrage, and brand damage. Many tweets express intense emotions such as disgust and anger, using words like "*disgusting*," "*horrendous*," and "*utterly disgraceful*" to describe the ad. For example, one tweet stated, "*I think 'pipe job' from Hyundai may actually be the absolute worst commercial ever, it's legitimately awful*." Moral outrage is evident as well, with criticism focusing on the trivialization of suicide, as illustrated by a tweet saying, "*I'll never forgive Hyundai for their Pipe Job commercial... Fuck trauma porn in the shape of a cute commercial.*" The commercial also appears to have caused significant brand damage, with some users vowing to boycott Hyundai products. One such tweet reads, "*I'm not shocked by much but this puts me off ever buying a Hyundai car*." The ad's negative impact on Hyundai's reputation is reflected in comments like, "*Hyundai's 'Pipe Job' – the most disgusting car ad EVER*." Media and public attention surrounding the controversy was widespread, leading to the commercial's withdrawal and official apologies from Hyundai. The attempt at dark humor in the commercial was largely misunderstood or deemed inappropriate, contributing to the backlash. Some viewers mentioned the need to watch the ad multiple times to understand the joke, indicating a failure in message delivery. The use of suicide as a theme in advertising was widely criticized as insensitive and inappropriate, with numerous tweets questioning Hyundai's judgment in airing such content. The commercial has had a lasting negative effect on consumer perceptions, influencing potential purchasing decisions and remaining a topic of discussion over the years, demonstrating its significant impact on Hyundai's brand image. In summary, the overwhelmingly negative response to the "Pipe Job" commercial underscores the risks associated with provocative marketing strategies, particularly when they involve

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[1] From *Here's The Full Story Of That Despicable Hyundai Suicide Ad Everyone Is Talking About*, by J. Edwards. 2013, Business Insider (Here's The Full Story Of That Despicable Hyundai Suicide Ad Everyone Is Talking About | Business Insider India)

[2] From *Why Hyundai has committed brand suicide with its failed attempt at viral* by L. O'Reilly. 2013, Marketing Week (Why Hyundai has committed brand suicide with its failed attempt at viral (marketingweek.com)

sensitive topics. The backlash highlights the importance of careful consideration in the development and approval of advertising content to avoid damage to brand reputation and consumer trust.

Word visualization

Word Cloud of Hyundai Twitter Messages (Filtered Words)

Sentiment analysis

Emotion analysis
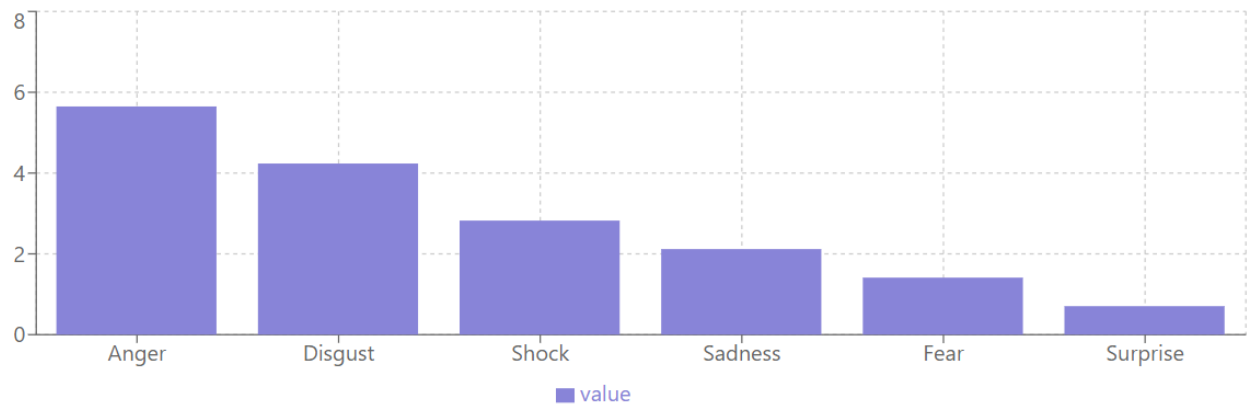
2. *Campaign 2: H&M – Coolest Monkey*

The H&M advertisement featured a young black boy wearing a green hoodie with the text "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle." The ad was intended to promote the hoodie as part of H&M's children's clothing line. However, it drew widespread criticism for being racially insensitive and inappropriate due to the historical context of racial slurs. In response to the backlash, H&M apologized, removed the image and product from its stores, and committed to increasing their awareness and sensitivity regarding racial and cultural issues.[3]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" campaign reveals widespread outrage and significant brand damage, particularly around themes of racial insensitivity, moral outrage, and long-term consumer impact. Many tweets express disgust and anger, with terms like "*disrespectful*," "*racist*," and "*tone-deaf*" frequently used. For instance, one tweet questions, "*So is H&M going to explain why they have a 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle' sweater on a Black child for their catalogue?*" The incident also led to calls for boycotts, with numerous tweets encouraging others to stop shopping at H&M, as reflected in a tweet stating, "*H&M think black people are stupid. 'Coolest Monkey'?? Really? #BoycottHandM.*" The advertisement severely damaged H&M's reputation, particularly among Black customers. Tweets highlight the long-term effects of the incident, with some users mentioning they have not shopped at H&M since the ad was released. One user commented, "*I still ain't step foot in an H&M since 'Coolest Monkey in the Jungle'.*" The campaign also drew significant criticism for its racial insensitivity, with many pointing out the historical implications of associating black people with monkeys. A tweet remarked, "*H&M threw a lil black boy in a 'coolest monkey in the jungle' shirt and yall was there the next day like nothin happened.*" The controversy also sparked widespread media coverage and public discussion, with celebrities like LeBron James and The Weeknd publicly criticizing the ad. This added to the moral and ethical concerns surrounding the campaign, as many viewed

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[3] From *H&M Apologizes, Again, for 'Coolest Monkey' Ad: We 'Got This Wrong and We Are Deeply Sorry'* by T. Kenneally. 2018, The Wrap ([H&M Apologizes, Again, for 'Coolest Monkey' Ad: We 'Got This Wrong and We Are Deeply Sorry' - TheWrap](#))

the ad as trivializing serious racial issues for commercial gain. Tweets also called for greater corporate responsibility and sensitivity in marketing practices, with one user suggesting, "*Social media marketing should be done by millennials who are experts in portraying the appropriate idea.*" The incident has had a lasting impact on H&M's brand image and continues to be a recurrent topic of discussion, demonstrating its significant and enduring effect on public memory and consumer perceptions. In summary, the overwhelmingly negative response to H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" campaign underscores the dangers of racially insensitive marketing. The backlash highlights the importance of diversity and awareness in advertising to avoid long-term damage to brand reputation and consumer trust.

Word Visualization

Sentiment analysis
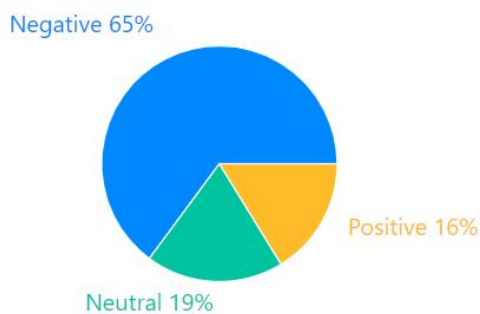
Emotion analysis
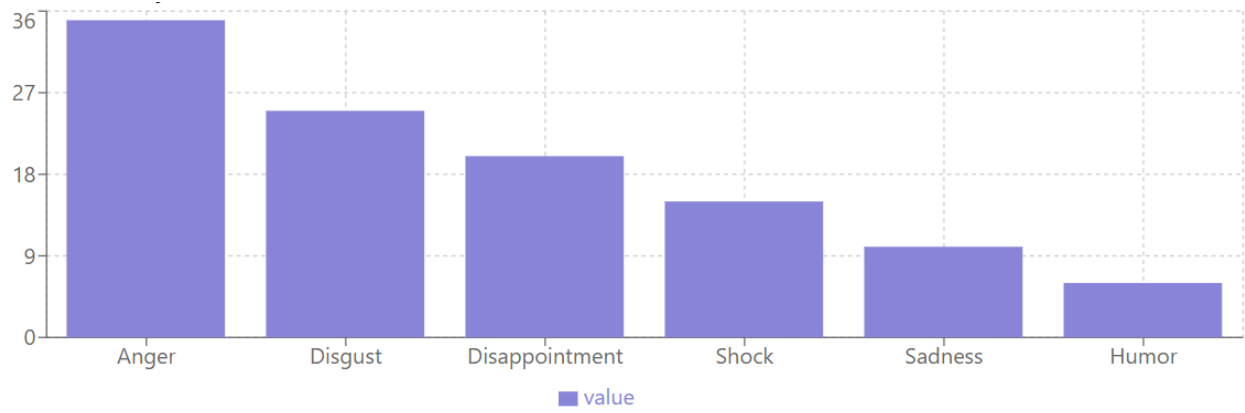
3. *Campaign 3: Nivea – White is Purity*

The Nivea "White is Purity" campaign was an advertisement launched in 2017 to promote their "Invisible for Black & White" deodorant. The ad featured an image of a woman in a white robe with the tagline "White is Purity." The intended message was to highlight the product's ability to keep clothes clean and free from stains. However, it was widely criticized for being racially insensitive and for unintentionally evoking associations with white supremacy. The backlash was swift and severe, with many people expressing outrage on social media. Critics argued that the slogan was tone-deaf and inappropriate given its historical connotations. The situation was exacerbated when white supremacist groups praised the ad, further inflaming public sentiment.[4] In response to the criticism, Nivea promptly pulled the ad and issued an apology, stating that their intention was to communicate the product's benefits in terms of cleanliness and purity, not to offend or promote any racist ideologies. The company acknowledged their mistake and reaffirmed their commitment to diversity and inclusion. [5]

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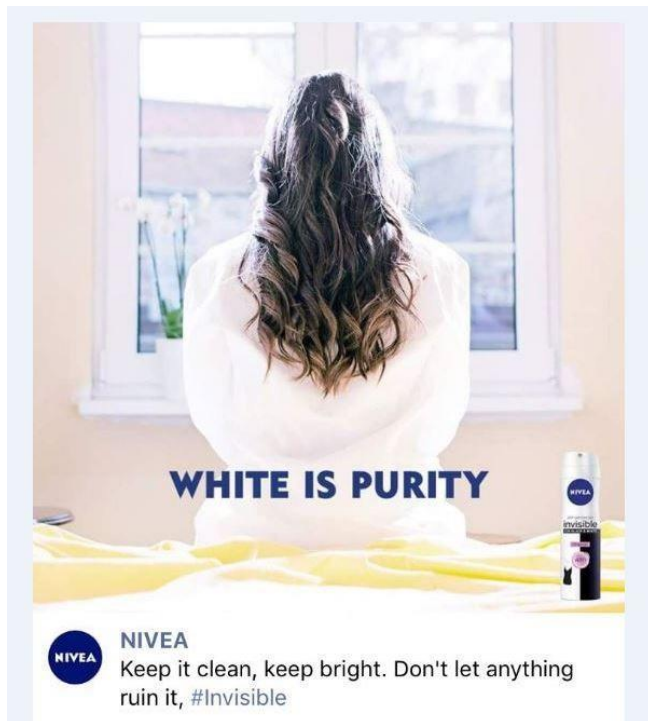
[4] From *Nivea's "White Is Purity" Advertisement* by Critical Analyses, 2019, (Nivea's "White Is Purity" Advertisement – Critical Analyses (psu.edu))

[5] From *Nivea pulls 'white is purity' advert after online uproar* by A. Tsang. 2017, The Independent (Nivea pulls 'white is purity' advert after online uproar | The Independent | The Independent)

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Nivea's "White is Purity" campaign reveals a predominantly negative sentiment, characterized by outrage, accusations of racial insensitivity, and significant brand damage. Many tweets express strong negative feelings towards the campaign, labeling it as "*racist*," "*insensitive*," and "*offensive*." For instance, one tweet asked, "*Nivea what the FUCK? 'White is purity'? Are you fucking serious?*" The tagline "White is Purity" was widely interpreted as racially insensitive, with users drawing historical connections to the KKK and Nazi ideologies, exacerbating the backlash. A tweet highlighted this issue by stating, "*White purity. Was that not a term used by the KKK and Nazis?*" The campaign also caused significant damage to Nivea's brand reputation. Some users mentioned boycotting Nivea products, reflecting the campaign's long-term impact on consumer purchasing decisions. For example, one tweet stated, "*I'll never get over Nivea and that 'White is Purity' ad they had a few years ago lmao.*" The criticism extended to Nivea's corporate practices, with users questioning how the campaign was approved and criticizing the lack of diversity and awareness within the marketing team. One user remarked, "*Diversity, a crucial value of Nivea? Seems like the marketing team needs diversifying.*" The campaign generated widespread media coverage and public discussion, with references to Nivea pulling the ad and issuing apologies in response to the backlash. Despite these efforts, the effectiveness and sincerity of Nivea's damage control were questioned by some users. Additionally, a minority of tweets defended the campaign, arguing that "white" as a color symbolizes purity and should not be seen as racist, while others criticized the backlash as an overreaction, pointing to what they perceived as excessive political correctness. In summary, Nivea's "White is Purity" campaign was overwhelmingly received with outrage and criticism, severely impacting the brand's image. The campaign is a stark example of the dangers of racially insensitive marketing, highlighting the need for corporate responsibility and diversity in advertising practices to avoid similar controversies. The incident continues to be a point of discussion, underscoring the importance of careful consideration in the development of marketing messages.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nivea Twitter Messages (Filtered Words)

Sentiment analysis
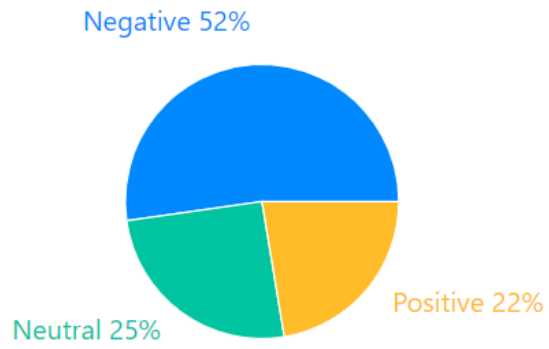
Emotion analysis
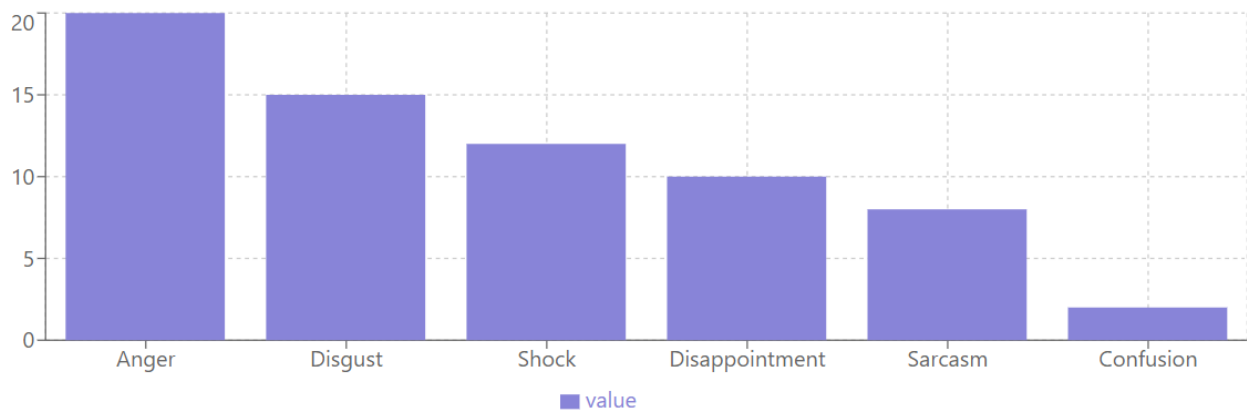
4. *Campaign 4: Dove – Real Beauty*

The Dove Real Beauty campaign in 2017 aimed to promote inclusivity and self-esteem among women by showcasing a diverse range of body types and ethnicities. However, one particular advertisement within this campaign sparked significant controversy. The ad depicted an African American woman removing her brown t-shirt to reveal a white woman in a light beige t-shirt, who then reveals an Asian woman, and so on. The intended message was to illustrate the positive effects of Dove's products on different skin types. However, many viewers perceived the ad as reinforcing negative racial stereotypes, suggesting that the product would "clean" or "whiten" darker skin. The backlash was swift and widespread, leading Dove to remove the ad and issue an apology. The company acknowledged their mistake and expressed regret for any offense caused. They promised to implement more rigorous review processes to prevent similar issues in the future. This incident highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and the need for brands to be mindful of how their messages might be interpreted by diverse audiences. Despite the good intentions behind the campaign, the execution failed to connect with its core audience and instead caused significant public relations damage. [6]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign reveals a predominantly negative sentiment, characterized by outrage, accusations of racial insensitivity, and calls for boycotts. Many tweets express strong negative feelings towards the campaign, using terms like "*racist*," "*disgusting*," and "*offensive*." For instance, one tweet remarked, "*The insensitive, racist ad tells me you don't have African-Americans involved in your decisions about our Culture. #NoDove*." The portrayal of a black woman transforming into a white woman was particularly criticized, with users interpreting it as racially insensitive and evocative of historical issues related to skin whitening. A tweet summarized this concern: "*I've used Dove for 20+ years. As of today, it's all going into the trash. How did this even get through?"* The campaign sparked widespread calls for a boycott, reflecting its impact on consumer behavior. One tweet

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[6] From *Dove's 2017 Real Beauty Campaign: Why It Crashed and Burned* by C. Lozano. 2022, Caroline Lozano (Dove's 2017 Real Beauty Campaign: Why It Crashed and Burned - Caroline Lozano)

highlighted this sentiment, asking, "*You're telling me a group of people looked at that picture, put it on a campaign ad, and said it was ok? #BoycottDove*." The controversy also led to demands for accountability within Dove, with users calling for the firing of the marketing team responsible for the ad. Additionally, Dove's apology was widely criticized as weak and insincere, with one user stating, "*I agree, whoever conceived the idea, implemented, agreed, etc. should be held accountable. Weak apology is not enough."* The campaign received significant media coverage and public attention, with many users comparing Dove's misstep to other controversial ads, highlighting broader issues in advertising practices. Despite the overwhelming criticism, a minority of users defended the campaign, arguing that the intention was not racist and that the backlash was an overreaction. Some tweets suggested that the campaign was misunderstood and that the portrayal was not inherently offensive, as one user commented, "*This literally isn't racist. It's the skin from ashy to moisturized... people are never happy."* In summary, the overall sentiment towards Dove's "Real Beauty" campaign is predominantly negative, with key themes of outrage, racial insensitivity, and calls for boycotts. The campaign significantly damaged Dove's brand image, and the effectiveness of Dove's apology and damage control efforts was widely questioned. The incident continues to be a point of discussion and criticism, underscoring the importance of sensitivity and awareness in advertising, particularly regarding racial issues. This analysis offers a clear understanding of the public's reaction to the Dove campaign and the major issues it raised.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Dove Twitter Messages (Filtered Words)

Sentiment analysis

Negative 64%

Positive 15%

Neutral 22%

Emotion analysis

	Anger	Disgust	Disappointment	Shock	Sarcasm	Confusion

value

5. *Campaign 5: Lush – Spy Cops*

The Lush "Spy Cops" campaign was launched in June 2018 to raise awareness about the undercover policing scandal in the UK, where undercover officers infiltrated activist groups and engaged in deceitful relationships with activists. The campaign featured window displays with police tape and slogans like "police have crossed the line" and "paid to lie," encouraging customers to support the affected women and sign petitions for accountability and transparency in the ongoing inquiry into undercover policing. The campaign faced significant backlash, with critics accusing Lush of being anti-police and unfairly targeting law enforcement. This led to threats and intimidation against Lush staff, prompting the company to pull the campaign from stores for staff safety. Despite the controversy, Lush maintained that the campaign aimed to spotlight specific abuses within a particular branch of policing and not to generalize all police officers. The campaign was eventually modified with more subtle displays to maintain the message while reducing the negative reactions. The controversy highlighted the challenges brands face when addressing sensitive social issues and the importance of balancing provocative messaging with public perception and employee safety. [7]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Lush's "Spy Cops" campaign reveals a mix of both support and criticism, highlighting the complexities of addressing controversial issues through corporate activism. Many tweets praise Lush for raising awareness about the misconduct of undercover officers, known as spy cops, and for advocating on behalf of the victims. For example, one tweet stated, "*Hearing all these great things about Lush, the soap company, like that they source ingredients in Palestine, refuse to open a store in Israel, are campaigning against spy cops... it's great.*" This sentiment reflects the appreciation for Lush's efforts to bring attention to important social justice issues. However, there was also significant backlash, with many users criticizing the campaign for being anti-police, misleading, and for

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[7] From *Lush drops 'spy cops' campaign after backlash and 'intimidation from ex-police officers'* by J. Dalton. 2018, The Independent (Lush drops 'spy cops' campaign after backlash and 'intimidation from ex-police officers' | The Independent | The Independent)

potentially stereotyping all police officers. One tweet expressed this concern, saying, "*Brain is leaking out of my ears as I think about how Lush did that whole campaign to publicize the activities of spy cops and the only thing that happened was the UK government went 'oh yeah you're right, hey everyone, we do this stuff' and everyone went 'nice one, keep it up.'*" The campaign was successful in raising awareness about the spy cops issue, with several tweets acknowledging that it brought the topic into public discourse and made more people aware of the unethical practices of certain undercover officers. For example, one user noted, "*This Lush campaign is tied very specifically to an inquiry around the conduct of spy cops & I don't get why you're keen to downplay undercover cops having sexual relationships with women they were being paid to spy on!*" Despite the support, there were calls for corporate responsibility, with some users demanding that Lush ensure their campaigns are accurate and not misleading. The campaign's execution was also criticized, with questions raised about the decision-making process and whether the campaign was adequately thought through. This sentiment was captured in a tweet that said, "*Should brands get involved in political campaigns like this?*" The campaign led to a consumer boycott, with numerous tweets mentioning that users would stop purchasing Lush products in response to the campaign. Some users expressed their support for the police and criticized Lush for what they perceived as an anti-police stance, with one tweet stating, "*As a police supporter, @LushLtd are now BANNED in my home.*" The campaign generated significant media coverage and public discussion, sparking widespread social media backlash with hashtags like *#FlushLush* and *#BoycottLush* trending. Although some users defended the campaign by clarifying that it specifically targeted the misconduct of spy cops rather than the police in general, the campaign's impact on Lush's brand image was profound. Lush's efforts to explain the campaign and address the backlash were noted, but the effectiveness and sincerity of these actions were widely questioned. In summary, the overall sentiment towards Lush's "Spy Cops" campaign is mixed, with both strong support for raising awareness about serious issues and significant criticism for the campaign's perceived anti-police stance and potential misjudgment. The discussion highlights the challenges of accurately targeting and executing social justice campaigns, as well as the potential risks to brand image when such campaigns are not carefully managed.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Lush Twitter Messages (Filtered Words)

Sentiment analysis

Negative 39%

Neutral 32%

Positive 29%

Emotion analysis

	Anger	Disappointment	Support	Confusion	Shock	Sarcasm

value

6. *Campaign 6: Nike – Dream Crazy*

The Nike "Dream Crazy" campaign, launched in 2018, prominently featured former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick. The campaign, celebrating the 30th anniversary of Nike's "Just Do It" slogan, aimed to inspire individuals to pursue their dreams regardless of obstacles. Kaepernick, known for his protest against racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem, was chosen for his embodiment of the campaign's core message: "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything." The campaign included a powerful commercial that showcased various athletes, including Serena Williams and LeBron James, highlighting their journeys and struggles. It emphasized that pushing boundaries and standing up for one's beliefs are integral to achieving greatness. The decision to feature Kaepernick was polarizing, leading to both support and backlash. Some consumers boycotted Nike and even burned their Nike products, while others praised the brand for taking a bold stand on social issues. Despite the controversy, the campaign proved to be a commercial success, generating significant media coverage and boosting Nike's sales and brand value. Within 24 hours of its launch, Nike received $43 million worth of media exposure and saw a 31% increase in sales. [8]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign reveals a highly polarized response, characterized by both strong support and significant backlash. The campaign, which featured Colin Kaepernick as a central figure, generated widespread admiration for its emotional and inspirational message. Many tweets expressed deep

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[8] From *Nike "Dreams Crazy": The Power of the Risk* by G. Castro. 2018, Platform Magazine (Nike "Dreams Crazy": The Power of the Risk - Platform Magazine)

appreciation for the campaign's ability to resonate with viewers, using phrases like "*goosebumps*," "*cry with pride*," and "*utterly awesome*." For example, one user shared, "*Are your dreams crazy enough??!! I'm showing this to my kids and everyone I love!! Full body chills!! Thank you @Kaepernick7 for everything you stand for!!!*" The campaign's motivational message, "*Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything*," was frequently praised for its uplifting and empowering content. However, the inclusion of Kaepernick, a polarizing figure, also led to significant criticism and calls for boycotts. While many celebrated Nike's support for Kaepernick and its stand on social justice issues, others expressed strong disapproval, viewing the campaign as anti-American or politically divisive. This dual impact was noted as an example of "*outrage marketing*," where the campaign both delighted and outraged different segments of the audience, effectively generating widespread attention and engagement. Supporters of the campaign expressed increased loyalty to Nike, with many stating their intention to purchase more Nike products in solidarity with the brand's stance. For instance, one tweet read, "*About to order some Nikes right now!! I stand with @Kaepernick.*" Conversely, critics voiced their intention to boycott Nike, citing the brand's association with Kaepernick as a reason to stop buying its products. One user remarked, "*Do they ever learn? I mean, personally, I stopped buying Nike after Colin Kaepernick.*" Despite the controversy, the campaign was widely recognized as a marketing success, with several tweets noting the positive impact on Nike's sales and stock performance. Users often referenced the campaign as a case study in successful brand strategy, highlighting how it pushed Nike's stock to historical highs, contrary to predictions that it would harm the company. The campaign was also described as a landmark moment in advertising, with discussions about its long-term impact on both the brand and the broader cultural conversation. The extensive media coverage and public discussion surrounding the campaign underscored its cultural relevance, particularly in relation to ongoing social and political issues around race and activism. The campaign's effectiveness in conveying its message was widely praised, with many finding it deeply inspiring. However, the perceived political stance of the campaign, particularly its association with Kaepernick, remained a major point of contention, influencing both the positive and negative reactions. In summary, Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign elicited strong, mixed reactions, with significant support for its emotional impact and motivational message, as well as substantial criticism and boycotts due to its political undertones. The campaign's success in terms of sales and market performance, despite the controversy, highlights its strategic use of controversy to drive engagement. The discussion reflects the campaign's broader cultural and generational impact, marking it as a significant moment in advertising and public discourse.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nike Twitter Messages (Filtered Words)

Sentiment analysis

Positive 55%

Neutral 17%

Negative 28%

Emotion analysis

7. *Campaign 7: Protein World – Are you beach body ready?*

The Protein World "Beach Body Ready?" campaign, launched in 2015, featured ads with a slim, bikini-clad model and the question "Are you beach body ready?" prominently displayed. The ads, which appeared in the London Underground and other locations, quickly drew criticism for promoting an unrealistic body image and body shaming. The backlash included protests, defaced posters, and a petition with nearly 50,000 signatures calling for the ads' removal. Critics argued that the ads contributed to body image issues and perpetuated harmful beauty standards. In response to the public outcry, the UK's Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) launched an investigation and eventually banned the ads from appearing in their original form, citing concerns over health and weight loss claims. [9] Despite the controversy, Protein World defended the campaign, claiming it generated significant media attention and increased sales. The company reported gaining 5,000 new customers in just a few days following the campaign's launch and saw a tripling of sales. Protein World's CEO even referred to the campaign's critics as "terrorists" and dismissed the backlash as irrational, further fueling the debate. [10]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Protein World's "Beach Body Ready" campaign reveals a highly controversial response, marked by significant public backlash and debate over issues of body image, representation, and corporate ethics. A large portion of tweets criticized the campaign for promoting unrealistic body standards and accused it of body shaming, with users describing the ad as "*sexist*," "*disgusting*," and "*anachronistic*." For example, one tweet praised

[9] From *Controversial 'Beach Body' ad banned after hundreds of complaints* by A. Millington. 2015, Marketing Week (Controversial 'Beach Body' ad banned after hundreds of complaints (marketingweek.com)

[10] From *Did Protein World Create the Greatest Ad Campaign Ever?* by M. Chiorando. 2015, Huffington Post (Did Protein World Create the Greatest Ad Campaign Ever? | HuffPost UK Life (huffingtonpost.co.uk)

the feminist vandalism of the ads, saying, "*Loving the feminist vandalism #eachbodysready to the disgusting ad (and behaviour) of @ProteinWorld*." The campaign sparked public protests, including the vandalism of advertisements and widespread online backlash, with calls for the ads to be removed. Despite the controversy, the campaign is frequently cited as a successful example of "*outrage marketing*." The backlash seemingly contributed to a significant increase in sales, with Protein World reportedly earning £1 million in just four days following the controversy. One tweet noted, "*It's what's known as 'outrage marketing,' much like Protein World's 'Are you beach body ready' campaign. You outraged suckers fell for it.*" Protein World's refusal to apologize for the ad was also seen as a strategic move that played into their marketing approach, ultimately benefiting the brand financially. Reactions to the campaign were mixed, with some users supporting the ad, arguing that it promotes fitness and health, while others dismissed the backlash as an overreaction. For instance, one tweet simply stated, "*Protein World 'beach body ready' ad not offensive.*" However, many tweets criticized the ad for being insensitive and promoting harmful beauty standards, with calls for it to be banned and for Protein World to adopt a more inclusive approach to body image. The campaign garnered attention from public figures and politicians, including London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who played a significant role in the controversy. Khan's decision to ban the ads was supported by some users and criticized by others. A tweet highlighted this, saying, "*One of Khan's first moves as mayor was to ban Protein World's 'beach body ready' adverts, which featured a fitness model in a bikini.*" The extensive media coverage of the campaign further amplified the public's reaction, making it a focal point for discussions on the effectiveness of outrage marketing, body image representation, and corporate responsibility. The portrayal of a "*beach body*" was a central issue, with many arguing that it promotes unhealthy and unrealistic standards, particularly affecting women. Protein World's decision to stand by their ad despite the controversy was both praised and criticized, raising questions about the ethical considerations of such marketing strategies. In summary, the Protein World "Beach Body Ready" campaign is a highly controversial example of outrage marketing that generated significant public backlash and sparked a broader conversation about body image, representation, and corporate responsibility in advertising. Despite the negative publicity, the campaign was financially successful, demonstrating both the potential benefits and risks of leveraging controversy in marketing strategies. The public's reaction reflected a diverse range of opinions, with strong criticism centered on issues of body shaming and sexism, and some support for the campaign's emphasis on fitness and health.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Protein World Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Emotion analysis

8.   *Campaign 8: Burger King – Women belong in the kitchen*

The Burger King "Women Belong in the Kitchen" campaign was launched on International Women's Day in 2021 by the company's UK branch. The campaign's initial tweet, "Women belong in the kitchen," was intended to highlight the gender disparity in the culinary industry and promote a new scholarship program for female chefs. However, the tweet sparked immediate backlash for its perceived sexist overtones, despite the follow-up explanation that aimed to contextualize the message by promoting culinary scholarships for women. [11] The campaign involved a series of tweets and an advertisement in the New York Times, emphasizing the need to increase female representation in professional kitchens. Despite the backlash, which included accusations of insensitivity and poor judgment, Burger King defended the campaign, stating that their goal was to draw attention to the issue of gender inequality in the culinary field. They later acknowledged that their execution was flawed and apologized for the initial tweet's impact. [12]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Burger King's "Women Belong in the Kitchen" campaign reveals a significant public backlash and controversy, primarily due to the perceived insensitivity of the message. The campaign, which was intended to promote gender equality in the culinary industry and highlight a scholarship for female chefs, was widely criticized for its tone-deaf execution, especially since it was posted on International Women's Day. Many users found the initial tweet offensive and overshadowing the intended positive message. For example, one user expressed, "*What the hell was Burger King thinking when they tweeted 'women belong in the kitchen' when they should spend more time worrying about why their hamburgers taste like a propane tank*." The campaign's strategy of using shock value and provocation to garner attention backfired as the message was widely misinterpreted before follow-up tweets provided the necessary context. This led to accusations of sexism and a failure to "*read the room*," as the timing and context of
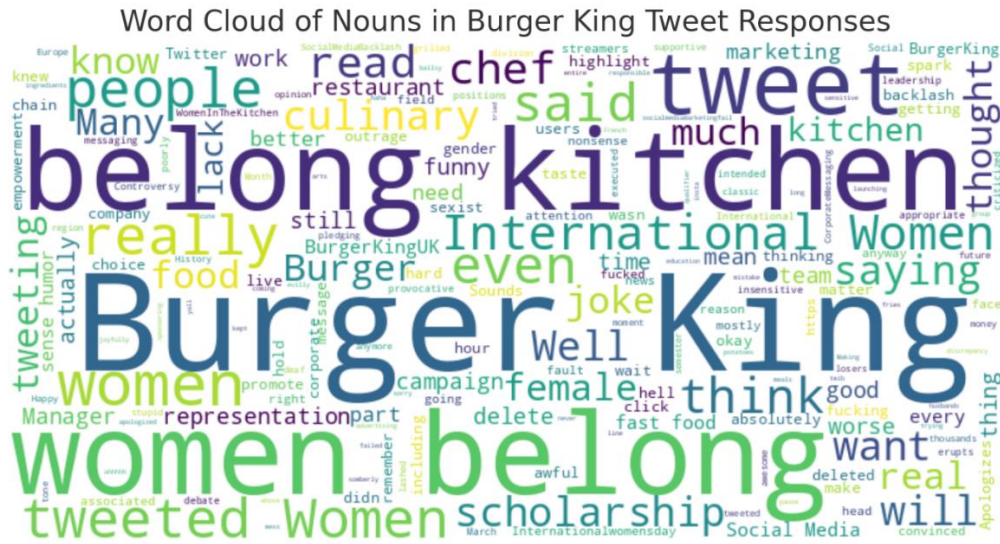
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[11] From *Burger King 'Women Belong in the Kitchen' Tweet Explained* by E. Laviola. 2022, Heavy. (Burger King 'Women Belong in the Kitchen' Tweet Explained (heavy.com)

[12] From *Burger King gets grilled for 'women belong in the kitchen' tweet* by J. K. Elliot. 2021, Global News (Burger King gets grilled for 'women belong in the kitchen' tweet - National | Globalnews.ca)
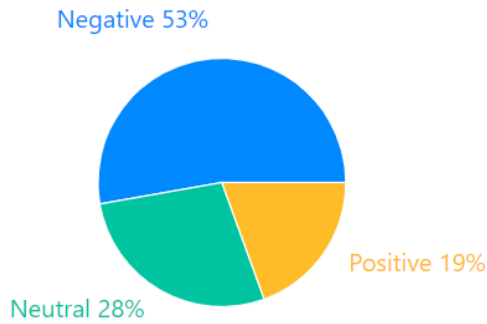
posting such a message on a significant day for women were seen as particularly ill-advised. A tweet highlighted this issue, stating, "*Sooooo Burger King really thought the best way to do some PR to encourage women into the culinary part of their business on #InternationalWomensDay was to tweet out 'Women belong in the kitchen.' Let me guess, not a single woman was part of that decision process?"* Reactions to the campaign were predominantly negative, with many tweets expressing outrage and disappointment, and some users even pledging to boycott the brand. For instance, one user sarcastically remarked, "*People were eating at Burger King before the tweet? Gross. Y'all know that real food exists, right?"* However, there were also some defenders of the campaign who suggested that the backlash was an overreaction, and a few users found humor in the situation, considering it a marketing misstep but not a significant issue. Burger King eventually apologized and deleted the tweet, acknowledging that it was poorly executed and misunderstood. Despite these damage control efforts, the incident led to a significant PR crisis, with ongoing discussions about the campaign's failure and its impact on Burger King's reputation. One tweet reflected on the situation, saying, "*I hope Burger King UK learned some important lessons after tweeting 'women belong in the kitchen': 1) No one reads the follow-up tweets 2) No matter how hard you pander, the woke social justice crowd WILL eat you in the end."* The campaign highlighted specific issues such as the misjudgment of audience reaction and the importance of timing and context in corporate messaging. Posting the tweet on International Women's Day was particularly problematic, as it appeared to undermine the day's significance and the struggles faced by women. The incident underscores the need for corporate responsibility and sensitivity, serving as a cautionary tale for brands about the risks of provocative marketing strategies. In summary, the Burger King "Women Belong in the Kitchen" campaign serves as a notable example of a well-intentioned but poorly executed marketing strategy. The campaign aimed to address gender disparity in the culinary industry but was widely criticized for its insensitivity and poor timing. The backlash highlights the importance of context and audience perception in corporate messaging, and despite an apology and damage control efforts, the incident had a lasting negative impact on Burger King's reputation, serving as a cautionary example for other brands.
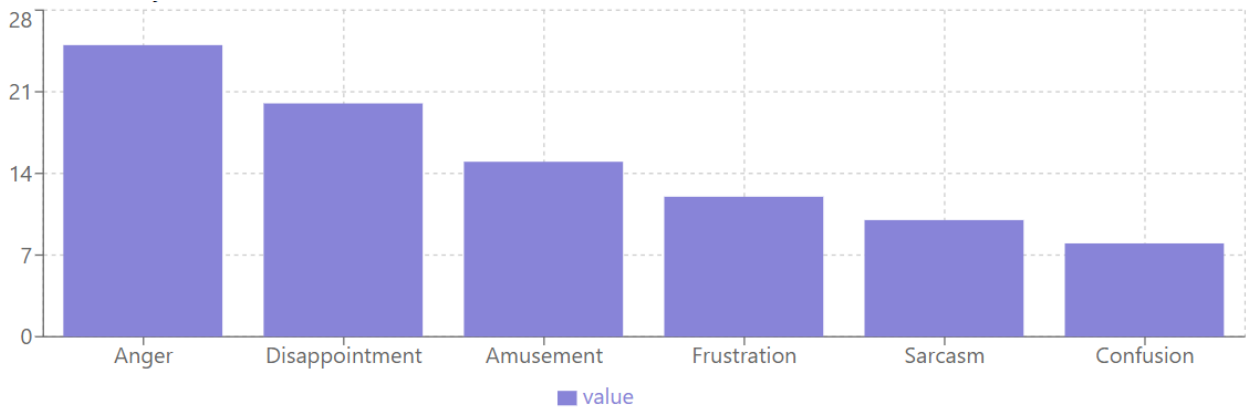
Word visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Burger King Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Negative 53%

Positive 19%

Neutral 28%

Emotion analysis

value

9.   Campaign 9: Gillette – The best men can be

The "The Best Men Can Be" campaign by Gillette, launched in January 2019, addressed toxic masculinity, bullying, and sexual harassment, aligning with the #MeToo movement. The campaign's short film, "We Believe," called on men to hold each other accountable and promote positive behavior. It sparked mixed reactions: praised for raising important issues and committing $1 million annually to support related organizations, but also criticized for perceived condescension and broad generalizations about men. Despite initial backlash, including calls for boycotts, the campaign led to a boost in sales and improved brand perception over time. Gillette continued to support the campaign's message through subsequent initiatives like the well-received "First Shave" video, which promoted inclusivity and supported the transgender community. [13]
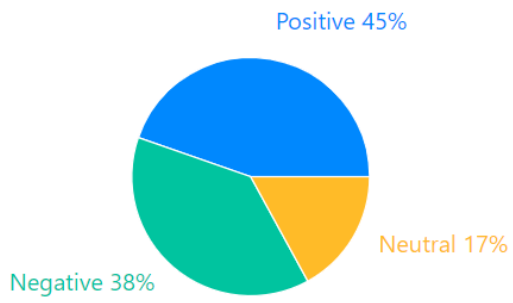
Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" campaign reveals a significant divide in public opinion, highlighting both the potential and risks of purpose-driven marketing. The campaign, which aimed to tackle toxic masculinity and promote positive behavior among men, sparked polarized reactions. Some praised the campaign for addressing important social issues, while others criticized it for being patronizing and condescending towards men. For example, one user reflected on the broader trend of brands taking moral stands, asking, "*Do you think the way forward is for brands to take a moral stand?"* The backlash was substantial, with many users expressing outrage, feeling that the campaign unfairly generalized men as inherently problematic. This led to threats of boycotting Gillette products, with one tweet illustrating this sentiment: "*It's putting boys playing in the same box as sexual harassment. 'Boys will be boys.' There are some horrible things in that advert, but there are also male traits that are demonized.*" Despite the negative reactions, the campaign succeeded in generating significant buzz and discussion, which can be considered a form of marketing success. One tweet noted, "*You are either offended by it, which means you need to watch it again. Or you agree with it, embrace it, share it, and then might as well watch it again*." The campaign's purpose-driven messaging was both its strength and its weakness. It addressed issues such as bullying, harassment, and the need for men to take a stand against inappropriate behavior, aiming to redefine masculinity in a positive light. However, critics argued that the campaign was overly simplistic and did not adequately address the complexities of gender behavior. Some found it preachy and alienating to its target audience, with one tweet criticizing those who opposed the campaign for not wanting to "*set a better example for the next generation*." Reactions were diverse, with some users praising Gillette for encouraging positive change and others mocking the campaign as a misguided attempt to virtue signal. Supporters saw it as a necessary step towards addressing toxic masculinity, while detractors accused the campaign of portraying all men negatively and questioned the brand's motives. For instance, one critical tweet claimed, "*It's racist, sexist, tells white men not to approach women and don't learn how to defend yourself. This is Chinese level propaganda created by FemiNazis.*" The campaign also raised concerns about perceived condescension, with some users feeling that it was offensive to suggest men needed to be taught how to behave properly. There were

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[13] From *A Case Study on Gillette: ''The Best Men Can Be'' campaign* by The Brand Hopper, 2024, (A Case Study on Gillette: "The Best Men Can Be" Campaign - The Brand Hopper)

mixed reports on the campaign's impact on Gillette's sales, with some claiming it led to a decline and others suggesting it boosted the brand's values-based trust score. The campaign was frequently compared to other socially conscious campaigns, such as Nike's "Dream Crazy" and various Dove campaigns, with opinions divided on which was more effective or appropriate. Skepticism about Gillette's motives was also prevalent, with many tweets questioning whether the campaign was genuinely about social change or simply a marketing strategy aimed at profit. Despite these criticisms, the campaign contributed to broader conversations about masculinity and social behavior, highlighting the role of brands in influencing cultural norms and values. In summary, Gillette's "The Best Men Can Be" campaign is a prime example of purpose-driven marketing that sought to address toxic masculinity and promote positive behavior among men. While it succeeded in generating significant discussion and aligning the brand with contemporary social issues, it also faced substantial backlash for being perceived as condescending and preachy. The campaign's impact on brand loyalty and sales was mixed, reflecting the complexities and risks of integrating social messaging into corporate marketing strategies.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Gillette Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Positive 45%

Neutral 17%

Negative 38%

Emotion analysis

	Approval	Anger	Disappointment	Confusion	Amusement	Sarcasm

value

10. *Campaign 10: Prada – Blackface*

The Prada blackface scandal erupted in December 2018 when the fashion brand displayed and sold "Pradamalia" products featuring figurines resembling blackface imagery, including monkey-like characters with dark faces and large red lips. The controversy began when civil rights attorney Chinyere Ezie posted about the products on social media, drawing widespread condemnation. Prada quickly pulled the items and later agreed to several measures, including racial equity training, creating a diversity council, and establishing scholarships and internships for underrepresented groups. [14]

Themes and Issues

The analysis of reactions to Prada's blackface controversy reveals a widespread public outcry, marked by condemnation, disbelief, and calls for greater corporate responsibility. The incident, which involved the use of imagery resembling blackface, sparked intense criticism for its apparent ignorance and insensitivity towards racial issues. Many users were shocked that a major fashion brand could be so out of touch with historical and cultural sensitivities, with one tweet encapsulating this sentiment: "*Do y'all have eyes?! Are you literally & figuratively blind?! IT. IS. BLACKFACE! Shame on you! ALL of you on that design and final approval team! #BoycottPrada #ShameOnYou.*" The use of blackface imagery was seen as a blatant form of racism, echoing offensive stereotypes from the past. Users highlighted the controversy as a clear example of cultural ignorance, pointing to Prada's lack of awareness or, worse, a deliberate attempt to provoke controversy for marketing purposes. One tweet criticized the company's explanation, stating, "*It's ignorant and racist imagery that you're trying to package as 'fantasy?' Nah. No matter how you try to spin it, it's straight up racism.*" A significant portion of the backlash focused on the lack of diversity within Prada's leadership and decision-making processes. Many comments pointed out the absence of Black voices in the company,

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[14] From *Prada Blackface Scandal Results in Major Settlement* by CCR Justice, 2020, (Prada Blackface Scandal Results in Major Settlement | Center for Constitutional Rights (ccrjustice.org)

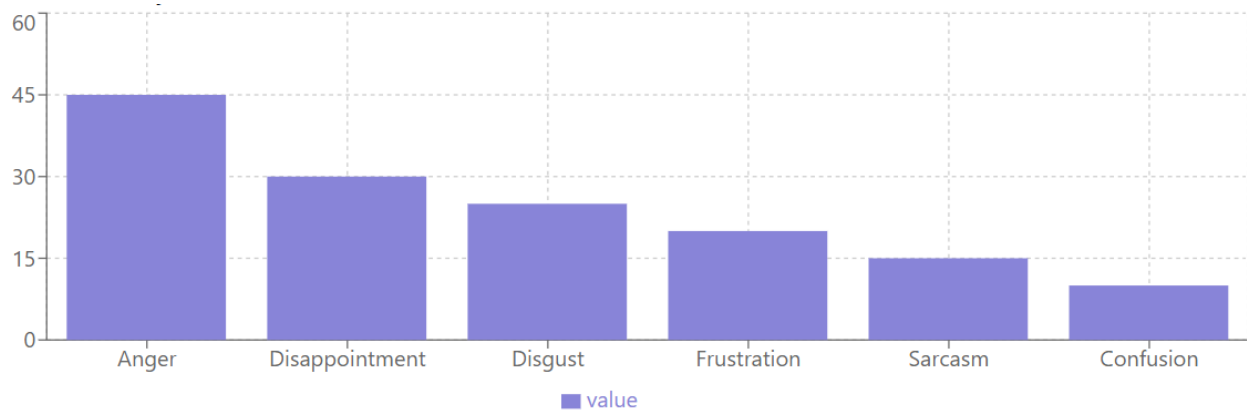which likely contributed to the insensitivity of the design. There were numerous calls for Prada to take responsibility, educate its staff, and ensure diversity in its ranks to prevent future missteps. One user suggested, "*In 2018 Prada decides it's a good idea to use blackface to sell its products. The marketing dept. needs to learn something from the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia.*" The controversy severely damaged Prada's reputation, with many consumers vowing to boycott the brand. Prada's apologies were often viewed as insincere or inadequate, with critics demanding more substantial actions beyond mere statements. For example, a tweet sarcastically remarked, "*Tip: Put REAL Black people in positions of leadership in your organization and you won't have to worry about 'imaginary' blackface anymore. What a despicable excuse for an apology.*" The Prada incident was frequently mentioned alongside similar controversies involving other luxury brands like Gucci and Moncler, suggesting a broader pattern of racism and insensitivity within the fashion industry. Users questioned how these designs were approved and why no one within these companies recognized the racist implications during the design and approval stages. The absence of Black voices in decision-making processes was repeatedly cited as a critical flaw that led to such scandals. The controversy also led to calls for boycotts and damaged consumer trust, raising serious questions about Prada's values and commitment to social responsibility. The use of blackface, with its long and painful history, made its appearance in modern fashion particularly egregious. This incident underscored the need for better education about the history and impact of racist imagery in the fashion industry. Prada's blackface controversy serves as a stark reminder of the importance of cultural sensitivity and diversity within the fashion industry. The public reaction was overwhelmingly negative, with widespread condemnation of the brand's apparent ignorance and insensitivity. The incident highlighted significant flaws in Prada's design and approval process, as well as a lack of diversity in its leadership. Moving forward, it is crucial for Prada and other brands to prioritize diversity, educate their teams on cultural sensitivities, and take meaningful actions to rebuild consumer trust and avoid similar missteps.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Prada Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Emotion analysis

11. *Campaign 11: Weetabix – Beans on Bix*

The Weetabix "Beans on Bix" campaign was a viral marketing initiative launched on February 9, 2021, by Weetabix. The campaign featured a tweet showing Heinz baked beans on top of Weetabix cereal, with the caption: "Why should bread have all the fun, when there's Weetabix?" This unusual pairing was intended to provoke a reaction and generate conversation online. [15] The campaign quickly gained traction, drawing a mixture of humor and horror from social media users and other brands. Major companies, such as Domino's Pizza and Specsavers, joined in with witty replies, amplifying the campaign's reach. Even the US and British embassies humorously commented on the tweet, showcasing the widespread engagement it generated. Despite some negative reactions, the campaign was successful in boosting brand metrics for both Weetabix and Heinz. It significantly increased Ad Awareness, Attention scores, and Word of Mouth exposure for both brands, showing that the provocative approach effectively captured public interest. [16]

Themes and Issues

The Weetabix "Beans on Bix" campaign generated widespread public reactions that combined disgust, disbelief, and humor. Many people expressed their revulsion at the idea of combining beans with Weetabix, often with a playful

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[15] From *'Beanz on bix for breakfast' boosts brand scores for Weetabix and Heinz* by S. Shakespeare. 2021, City A.M. ('Beanz on bix for breakfast' boosts brand scores for Weetabix and Heinz - CityAM)

[16] From *'Beans on Weetabix' becomes an international incident as embassies get involved* by J. Peat. 2021, The London Economic ('Beans on Weetabix' becomes an international incident as embassies get involved (thelondoneconomic.com)

twist. One user humorously remarked, "*So many great replies from big corporates. Worth a read for light-hearted silliness. Also, no. Don't do this. Lockdown has clearly gotten too much for those eating Beans on 'bix*." The absurdity of the suggestion quickly went viral, leading to a surge of jokes, memes, and humorous commentary. Another person quipped, "*That would be horrible. We add milk so we don't dry from the dryness. Bean juice instead? Naaa*." The campaign also prompted engagement from other brands, resulting in a lively exchange of witty replies and inter-corporate banter. This interaction highlighted the effectiveness of engaging social media strategies. For instance, one corporate reply humorously stated, "*Dear @weetabix, We have a variety of drinks on our shelves but for several days now, we've been thinking and struggling to recommend one for you seeing how you mix stuff...*" The public thoroughly enjoyed these exchanges, with one user noting, "*I enjoyed reading the thread... especially the responses from the other brands, companies & organisations that joined in to publicly denounce this atrocity by @weetabix*." Amid the humor, some comments jokingly suggested that the combination might require health warnings due to its unappealing nature, with one user warning, "*Beans beans good for your heart NEVER PUT THEM ON WEETABIX*." The combination was also unfavorably compared to other controversial food pairings, such as pineapple on pizza. One tweet read, "*Well I have to say I thought pineapple on pizza was bad enough but this takes the weetabix. I think I will stick with me beans on me fry up and milk for me bix*." The campaign led to broader discussions about British culinary habits and national identity, with some users even linking it to larger cultural events. For example, one comment tied it to Brexit, humorously suggesting, "*I blame Brexit. First #weetabixandbeans @weetabix @HeinzUK now this. Just the sort of thing that happens when we unmoor from Europe*." Despite the overwhelmingly negative reactions to the product combination itself, the campaign was a marketing success. It generated significant buzz and led to increased sales, with reports indicating a 15% rise in Weetabix sales following the viral social media post. One user reflected on the campaign's impact, saying, "*Weetabix has done more for the nation's morale with #beansonbix compared to most other things during lockdown. The replies are absolutely hilarious*." In summary, the Weetabix "Beans on Bix" campaign is a prime example of how a seemingly absurd idea can lead to significant marketing success through viral engagement and humor. While the public reaction was overwhelmingly negative in terms of the product combination itself, the campaign's ability to generate widespread conversation and inter-corporate banter made it a marketing triumph. The increased sales and brand visibility demonstrate the effectiveness of leveraging humor and controversy in social media marketing, offering valuable lessons for brands on how to engage audiences and create memorable marketing moments.
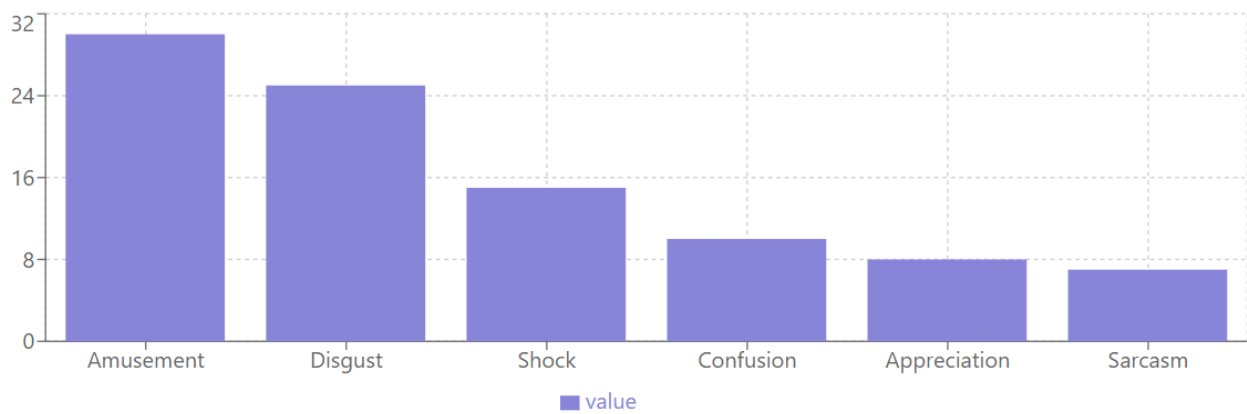
Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Weetabix Tweet Responses
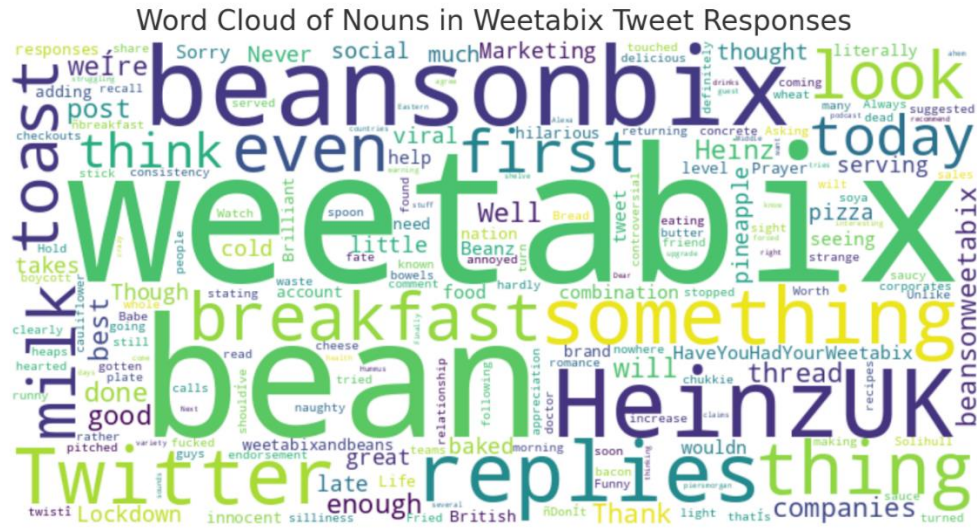
Sentiment analysis
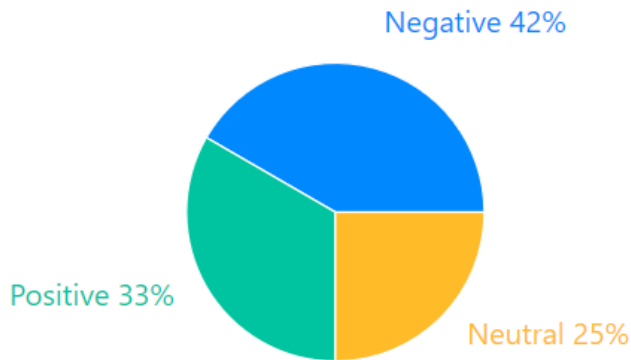
Emotion analysis

12. Campaign 12: Balenciaga – Teddy Bear Scandal

The Balenciaga teddy bear scandal erupted in November 2022, following the release of two controversial ad campaigns. The first campaign, "Gift Shop," featured children holding teddy bears dressed in bondage-like gear, which many perceived as sexualizing children. The second, "Garde-Robe," included images with a backdrop of documents related to a U.S. Supreme Court ruling on child pornography laws. Both campaigns received significant backlash for their perceived insensitivity and inappropriate content. [17] In response to the outrage, Balenciaga issued multiple apologies, acknowledging that the teddy bears should not have been featured with children and that the documents were inappropriate props. The company quickly removed the campaigns from all platforms and initiated a $25 million lawsuit against the production company North Six and set designer Nicholas Des Jardins, accusing them of including unapproved items without their knowledge. The photographer for the "Gift Shop" campaign, Gabriele Galimberti, clarified that he had no control over the props or models used and was only responsible for taking the photographs. He also faced significant personal backlash, including hate mail and death threats. The controversy led to significant reputational damage for Balenciaga, with high-profile figures like Kim Kardashian publicly condemning the brand and reconsidering their associations with it. This incident serves as a stark reminder of the potential fallout from provocative and poorly considered advertising strategies. [18]


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[17] From *Balenciaga's ad campaign scandal explained* by The Week, 2022. (Balenciaga's ad campaign scandal explained | The Week)

[18] From *A Timeline of Balenciaga's Ad Campaign Scandal* by S. Caruso. 2022, People.com (A Timeline of Balenciaga's Ad Campaign Scandal (people.com)

Themes and Issues

The Balenciaga campaign featuring children with teddy bears in bondage gear has sparked an intense and widespread backlash, with many expressing disgust and outrage at the brand's actions. The campaign has been widely condemned for being not only inappropriate but also deeply offensive, particularly in its portrayal of children, which many found to be disturbing and unacceptable. A common sentiment among critics is encapsulated in comments like, "*Balenciaga is the creepy white van of high fashion,*" and "*No one wants to support a child predator brand!"* This sentiment reflects the disbelief and anger at how such content could have been approved by the brand. The controversy was further fueled by the inclusion of court documents referencing the legalization of virtual child sexual abuse in the campaign images, which has led many to accuse Balenciaga of normalizing or even endorsing child exploitation. Critics have pointed out the extensive planning that goes into such campaigns, making it implausible that this was an oversight or mistake. As one comment highlighted, "*Fashion shoots are planned, prepared, pored over & critiqued for months before they go public. No way this wasn't passed at all levels.*" In response to the backlash, Balenciaga issued public apologies and announced that they were taking legal action against the creators of the campaign. However, these actions have been met with skepticism, with many questioning the sincerity of the apologies and the brand's attempt to distance itself from the controversy. The overwhelming consensus is that Balenciaga's actions are too little, too late, and the damage to the brand's reputation is irreparable. "*Balenciaga is now permanently canceled*," declared one user, reflecting the widespread calls for a boycott of the brand. The campaign has also sparked broader discussions about corporate responsibility and the role of oversight in preventing such massive missteps. Many comments have criticized the lack of accountability within Balenciaga, questioning how such a campaign could have been approved in the first place. *"Balenciaga are ultimately responsible for this. They commissioned it, they signed it off, they only acted when there was a public backlash,*" one user noted, underscoring the perception that the brand only responded after facing public scrutiny. In summary, the Balenciaga campaign has faced overwhelming backlash for its offensive and inappropriate content, particularly in relation to children. The controversy has significantly damaged the brand's image, leading to widespread calls for accountability and a consumer boycott. Despite the brand's attempts to mitigate the fallout through apologies and legal action, the incident has highlighted serious concerns about the company's decision-making processes and corporate responsibility.
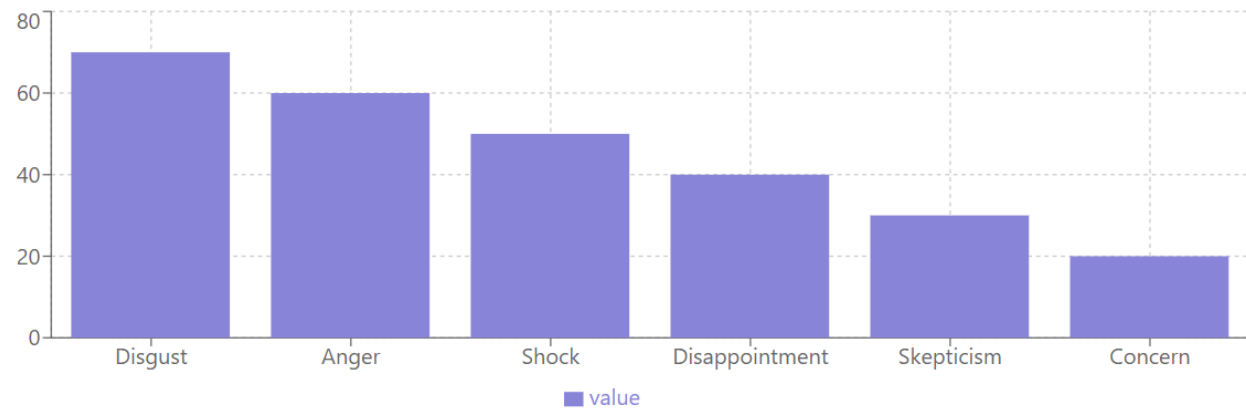
Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Balenciaga Tweet Responses
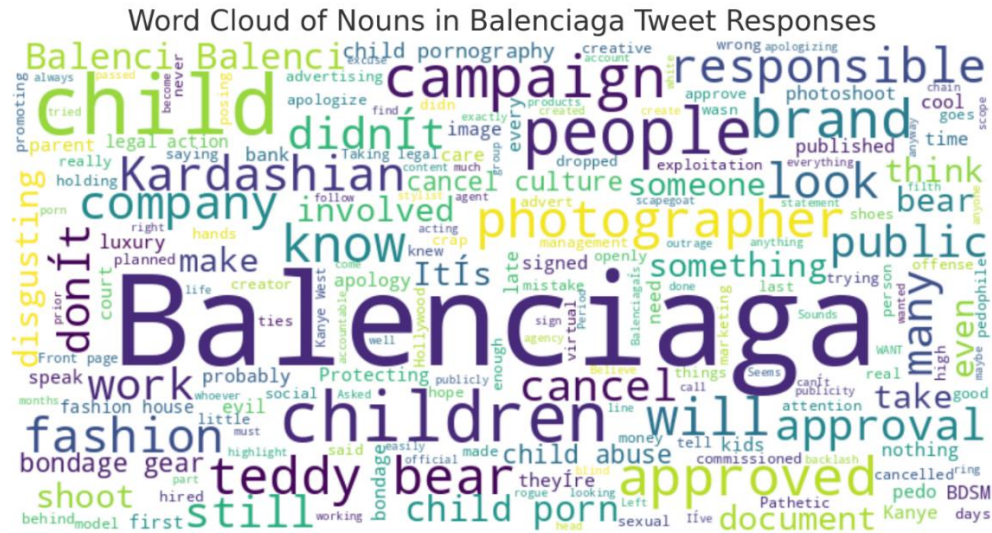
Sentiment analysis
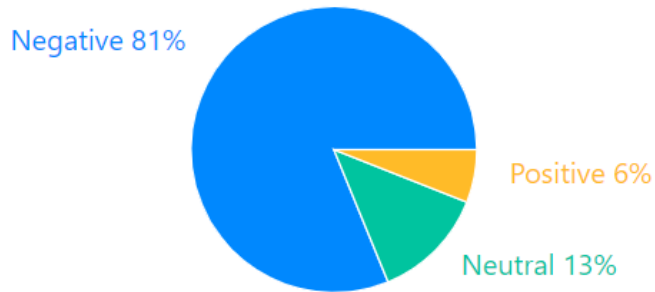
Emotion analysis

13. Campaign 13: Bud Light featuring Dylan Mulvaney

The Bud Light campaign featuring Dylan Mulvaney, a transgender influencer, began in April 2023 and quickly became controversial. Bud Light sent Mulvaney a personalized can of beer to celebrate her "365 Days of Girlhood" milestone, which she shared on social media. This partnership sparked a significant backlash, particularly from conservative groups, leading to a boycott of Bud Light. The backlash included transphobic comments, social media outrage, and high-profile figures like Kid Rock and Travis Tritt publicly denouncing the brand. In response, Anheuser-Busch, Bud Light's parent company, attempted to distance itself from the controversy by issuing a statement that the commemorative can was not for sale to the public and emphasizing their aim to bring people together over beer. The company also placed two marketing executives on leave and paused all influencer marketing deals to reassess their strategies. [19] Despite the company's efforts to mitigate the situation, the response from both sides of the political spectrum remained intense. Supporters of LGBTQ+ rights criticized Bud Light for not standing by Mulvaney more firmly, while conservative critics continued their boycott. The controversy led to a significant drop in Bud Light's sales and damaged its brand perception. [20]

[19] From *Why was everyone mad at Budweiser in 2023? The Dylan Mulvaney 'controversy' explained* by E. Chudy. 2024, The Pink News (Budweiser transgender commercial: why were people so angry? (thepinknews.com)

[20] From *Everything to Know About the Bud Light Controversy* by S. Caruso. 2023, People.com. (Everything to Know About the Bud Light Controversy (people.com)

Themes and Issues

The Bud Light campaign featuring Dylan Mulvaney generated a wide range of reactions, with the majority being negative, though some supportive voices emerged as well. The campaign faced significant backlash, particularly from conservative and traditional Bud Light consumers, who felt that the brand had lost touch with its core audience. Many users expressed their intention to boycott Bud Light, resulting in a noticeable drop in sales and market share. For example, one user commented, "*Dylan Mulvaney is the new (botched) face of Bud Light. @budlight either doesn't know their customers or they do and just don't give a shit. I'm guessing the latter. What a disgrace*." This sentiment was echoed by others who saw the partnership as an unwelcome push of a "woke" agenda, with comments like "*I reject woke in any form or shape*" and "*Damn right, they go woke, they go broke*" reflecting the strong resistance to perceived social and political messaging in advertising. A key point of contention was the perceived mismatch between Dylan Mulvaney and Bud Light's traditional image. Many users felt that Mulvaney, as a transgender influencer, did not align with the brand's image, which they associated with "*good old boys*" and "*American beer that caters to men*." One user captured this sentiment, stating, "*Bud Light is an American beer that caters to men. Partnering with Dylan Mulvaney is a HUGE turnoff to most men.*" The campaign also sparked cultural and political opposition, with some users expressing transphobic sentiments and criticizing the inclusion of a transgender figure in the advertising. Comments like *"Hired a man pretending to be a woman"* and "*Bud Light is as bad at being a beer as Dylan is at being a woman*" exemplify the identity and representation issues that fueled much of the negative feedback. However, there were also pockets of support for the campaign, particularly from those who appreciated its inclusivity and representation of the transgender community. Some users expressed admiration for Mulvaney's journey and the campaign's effort to broaden representation, with one person noting, "*I don't understand the ruckus about #dylanmulavaney. She is merely following her dreams and aspirations*." Others critiqued the backlash as an overreaction, suggesting that it was disproportionate to the actual content of the campaign. A user pointed out, "*The funniest thing out of the whole reactionary tantrum throwing about Dylan Mulvaney and Bud Light is that you and all others outraged by them are doing free advertising for Bud Light.*" Some also viewed the campaign through the lens of marketing strategy, acknowledging it as a bold, if risky, move. A few users recognized the complexities of influencer marketing, with one remarking, "*Fun fact: I have spent over 20 years in marketing. Influencer marketing is a crapshoot,*" indicating an understanding of the challenges and unpredictability inherent in such strategies. In summary, the Bud Light - Dylan Mulvaney campaign sparked a highly polarized reaction. The majority of feedback was negative, driven by perceived cultural and political misalignment, as well as issues of gender representation. However, there were also supportive voices that appreciated the campaign's inclusivity and criticized the backlash as excessive. The controversy had a significant impact on Bud Light's sales and brand image, underscoring the challenges brands face when addressing social issues in their marketing strategies.
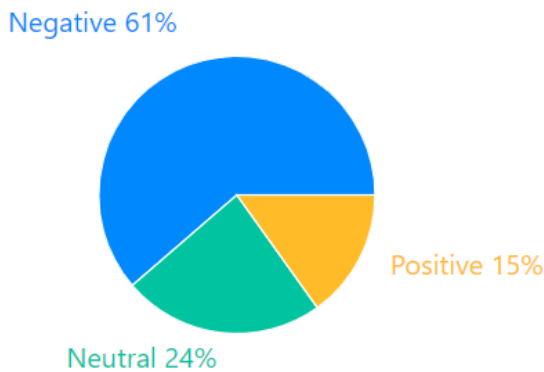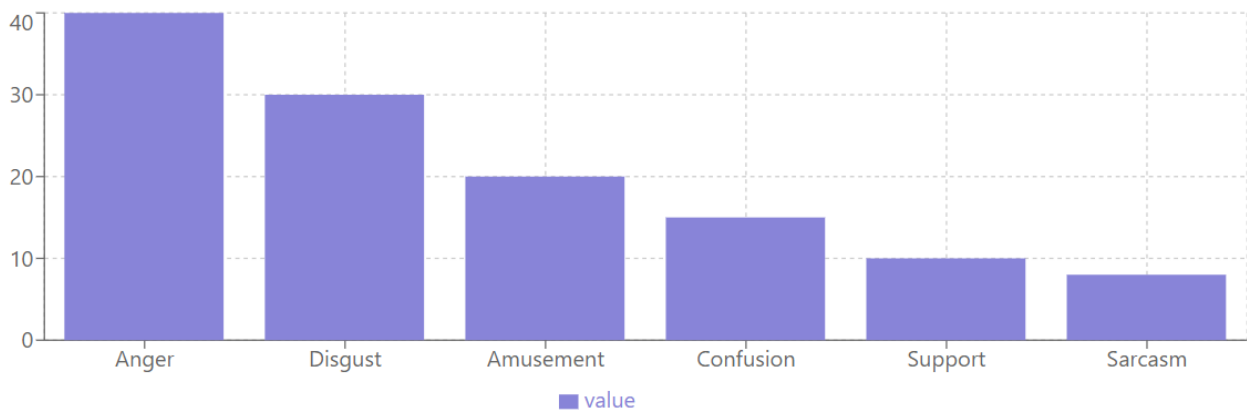
Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Bud Light Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Negative 61%

Positive 15%

Neutral 24%

Emotion analysis

14. *Campaign 14: Pepsi featuring Kendall Jenner*

The Pepsi commercial featuring Kendall Jenner, released in April 2017, was intended to depict unity and the power of protest but instead sparked significant controversy. The ad showed Jenner leaving a photoshoot to join a protest, ultimately handing a can of Pepsi to a police officer, which seemingly resolves the protest's tension. This scene drew immediate backlash for trivializing social justice movements, particularly the Black Lives Matter movement, and for presenting a privileged, superficial solution to deep-seated issues of police brutality and racial inequality. [21] The negative reaction was swift and widespread. Critics accused Pepsi of exploiting serious social issues to sell a product, and the ad was condemned for its insensitivity. The backlash was so intense that Pepsi pulled the ad within a day and issued an apology, acknowledging that they had missed the mark in trying to convey their message of unity. [22]
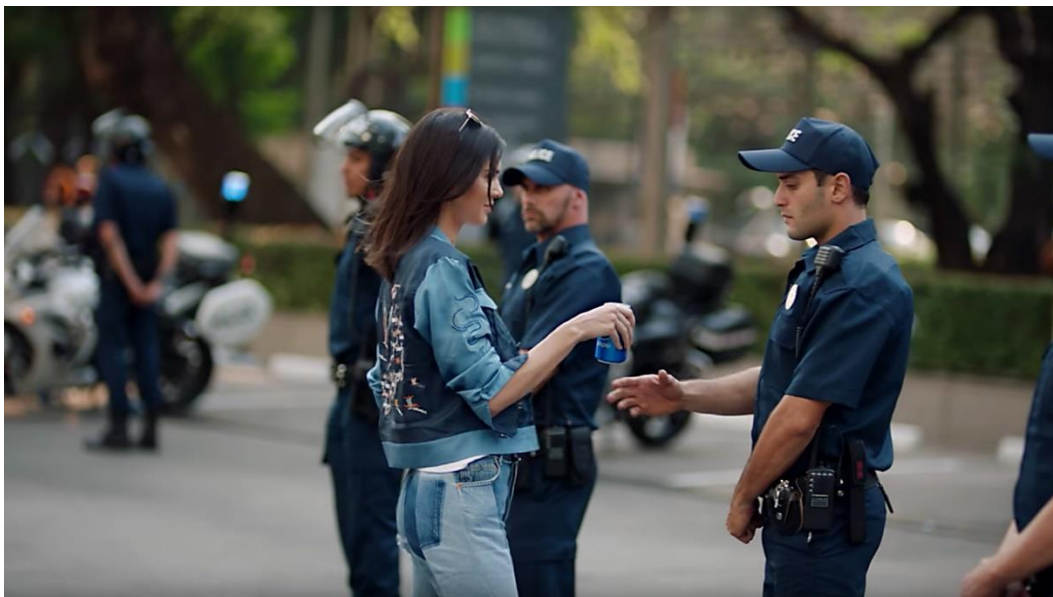
Themes and Issues

The Pepsi "Live for Now" campaign featuring Kendall Jenner sparked widespread public outrage and disbelief, with many condemning it for its perceived appropriation of social justice movements. The ad was widely criticized for being tone-deaf and disrespectful, with comments highlighting the insensitivity of using a serious social issue as a marketing tool. One user summed up the sentiment by asking, "*Could you be any more blatant with the disrespect and appropriation of a movement, @pepsi? Is this a sick job?*" The disbelief was palpable, as many questioned how such an ad could have passed through the decision-making process at Pepsi. For example, one person remarked, "*I'm at the*

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[21] From *What Really Went Wrong With Kendall Jenner's Controversial Pepsi Commercial* by A. Vargas. 2022, Nicki Swift (What Really Went Wrong With Kendall Jenner's Controversial Pepsi Commercial (nickiswift.com)

[22] From *Pepsi pulls controversial Kendall Jenner ad amid backlash* by J. Dye. 2017, Financial Times (Pepsi pulls controversial Kendall Jenner ad amid backlash (ft.com)

store buying all the coke products I can, smh because cops just need a soda that's why they're the way they are with poc." The ad's absurdity led to viral reactions, with a flood of jokes, memes, and mockery circulating online. The trivialization of social justice issues, implying they could be resolved with a simple can of Pepsi, was particularly galling to many. One sarcastic comment captured the general mood: "*So clearly the problem has been that cops are not drinking Pepsi. Who knew!*" The backlash was not limited to the public; it extended to corporate criticism as well. Other brands and public figures criticized Pepsi's approach, with some using the opportunity to distance themselves from the controversy and capitalize on Pepsi's misstep. This corporate engagement added another layer to the widespread criticism, underscoring how poorly executed social media campaigns can lead to significant backlash. The health of social movements was another major concern. Many people emphasized that social justice issues should not be trivialized for commercial gain. The idea that a can of Pepsi could resolve deep-seated social problems was seen as absurd and insulting. One user pointedly noted, "*This is the ad that shows the Pepsi marketing team is about to get some new hires, a vice president will be shifted as well.*" The campaign was also criticized for its cultural insensitivity, with comparisons made to real historical protest moments, such as the iconic "Flower Power" photo. These comparisons highlighted the ad's lack of authenticity and respect for the movements it appeared to reference. Cultural identity and appropriation were also hot topics in the discussions surrounding the ad. Many saw the campaign as condescending and out of touch with the real struggles of marginalized communities. The portrayal of protests and social justice in the ad was criticized for lacking depth and authenticity, with comments like, "*This is so condescending to people of color*," reflecting the widespread disapproval. The use of Kendall Jenner as the face of the campaign was seen as a major misstep, further highlighting the disconnect between the brand and the real issues it sought to address. One critique pointed out, "*What is this hot mess? Jenner wasn't standing up for justice & fighting police brutality.*" The impact on Pepsi's brand and sales was significant. The ad led to widespread calls for boycotts and a potential drop in sales. Many consumers expressed their intention to switch to competitors, with one user stating, "*I'm at the store buying all the coke products I can.*" The campaign was widely regarded as a public relations disaster, with many commentators suggesting that the entire Pepsi advertising department needed a rethink. The backlash served as a stark reminder of the importance of understanding cultural and social contexts in marketing. In summary, the Pepsi "Live for Now" campaign is a prime example of how a well-intentioned idea can backfire due to poor execution and insensitivity. The campaign faced widespread public outrage and disbelief, with many criticizing its appropriation of social justice movements for commercial purposes. The use of Kendall Jenner as the face of the campaign was seen as particularly inappropriate, highlighting the disconnect between the brand and the real issues it sought to address. Despite the campaign's failure, it provided valuable lessons on the importance of cultural sensitivity and the potential backlash from misappropriating social movements. Moving forward, brands must be more mindful of the social and cultural contexts they operate in to avoid similar pitfalls.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Pepsi Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Negative 67%
Positive 11%
Neutral 22%

Emotion analysis

15. *Campaign 15: Heineken – Sometimes, Lighter is Better*

The Heineken "Lighter is Better" campaign, launched in 2018 to promote Heineken Light beer, became highly controversial due to accusations of racism. The ad featured a bartender sliding a bottle of Heineken Light past several dark-skinned people before it reached a lighter-skinned woman, accompanied by the tagline "Sometimes, lighter is better." Critics, including prominent figures like Chance the Rapper, condemned the commercial for its insensitive implications and racial undertones. The backlash led to Heineken pulling the ad and issuing a public apology, acknowledging that the campaign had missed the mark and caused offense. The company emphasized that their intention was to highlight the light nature of their beer and not to offend or alienate viewers. Despite the swift removal of the ad, the controversy underscored the need for brands to be acutely aware of the social and cultural implications of their marketing messages. [23]
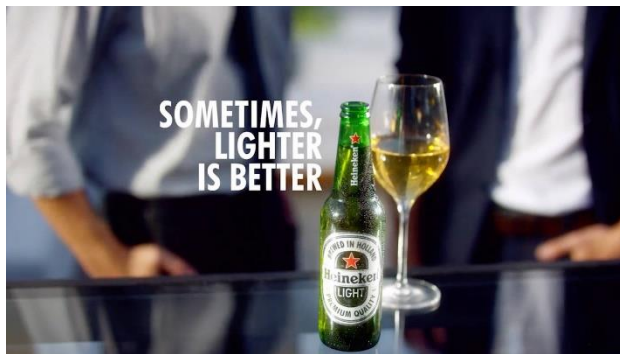
Themes and Issues

The Heineken "Sometimes Lighter is Better" campaign sparked widespread public outrage and disbelief, with many condemning it as racially insensitive. The campaign was perceived as tone-deaf, with numerous reactions expressing outright disgust and questioning how such an ad could have been approved. For example, one user reflected the general sentiment by saying, "*Damn, this is pretty petty af... I don't even [care] who always complains but this shit is wrong!. What the actual fuck were they thinking?*" The ad was criticized for trivializing serious racial issues by reducing them to a marketing gimmick, with another user sarcastically asking, "*Sometimes lighter is better. Why did Heineken think this ad was OK?*" The backlash extended beyond individual consumers to include criticism from various sectors, including public figures and other corporations. This criticism highlighted the potential consequences of insensitive marketing, as Heineken's reputation took a significant hit. Many users called for a boycott of Heineken products, with one tweet urging, "*For those that care let's #BOYCOTT @heineken nd drink other #beers like @PresidenteBeer.*" The calls for a boycott and the negative engagement underscored the importance of understanding cultural sensitivities in marketing. The ad was also seen as reinforcing harmful stereotypes, with the tagline "*lighter is better*" being interpreted as promoting a preference for lighter skin tones. This messaging was criticized for being culturally

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[23] From *Heineken removes 'Lighter is Better' ad following online racial backlash* by C. R. Duster. 2018, Euro News (Heineken removes 'Lighter is Better' ad following online racial backlash | Euronews)

insensitive and tone-deaf, with one user commenting, "*Clearly you not black so you won't get it. Why used black people and say light is better."* The campaign was compared to other historically insensitive advertising blunders, emphasizing Heineken's lack of awareness and the need for greater cultural sensitivity in marketing. The public reaction also included satirical and humorous takes, with some users mocking both the ad and the backlash it provoked. However, the majority of responses were critical, highlighting a broader conversation about the role of brands in addressing social issues. The ad's failure to connect with its intended audience was seen as a major misstep, leading to widespread criticism of Heineken's marketing strategy. One tweet pointed out the irony of the situation, noting, "*The Heineken 'Sometimes lighter is better' Ad was not racist tbh. But where's the fun on the internet if people are not fake mad?"* The incident also prompted reflections on the importance of diversity and sensitivity in advertising, with many users calling for greater inclusion in corporate decision-making processes. The negative impact on Heineken's brand image was clear, with many consumers expressing their intention to switch to competitors. The campaign was widely regarded as a public relations disaster, with users questioning the competence of Heineken's marketing and PR teams. One tweet summed up the general consensus, "*How stupid could u be Heineken! U had to know there would be criticism for this ad!"* In summary, the Heineken "Sometimes Lighter is Better" campaign is a prime example of how a poorly conceived idea can lead to significant backlash due to its insensitivity and cultural tone-deafness. The campaign faced widespread public outrage, with many criticizing its appropriation of racial issues for commercial purposes. The ad's visuals and tagline were seen as particularly inappropriate, highlighting the disconnect between the brand and the real issues it sought to address. Despite the campaign's failure, it provided valuable lessons on the importance of cultural sensitivity and the potential backlash from misappropriating social issues. Moving forward, brands must be more mindful of the social and cultural contexts they operate in to avoid similar pitfalls.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Heineken Tweet Responses
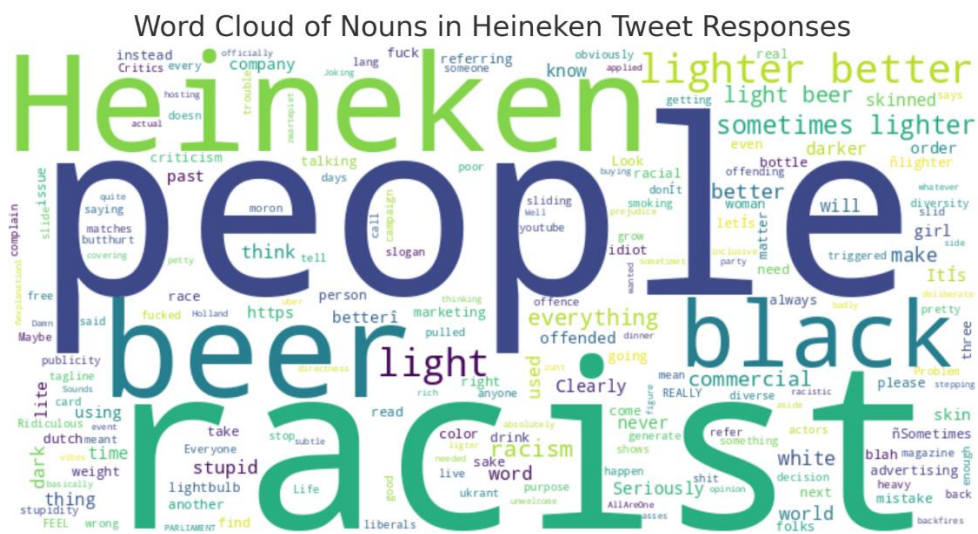
Sentiment analysis
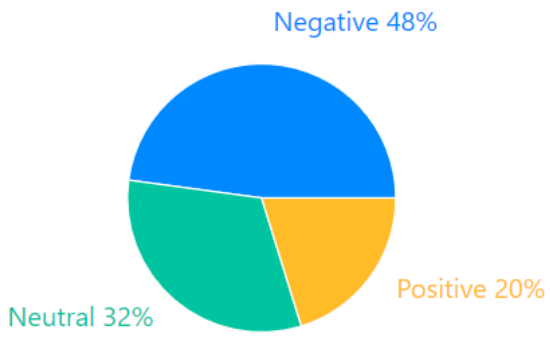
Emotion analysis
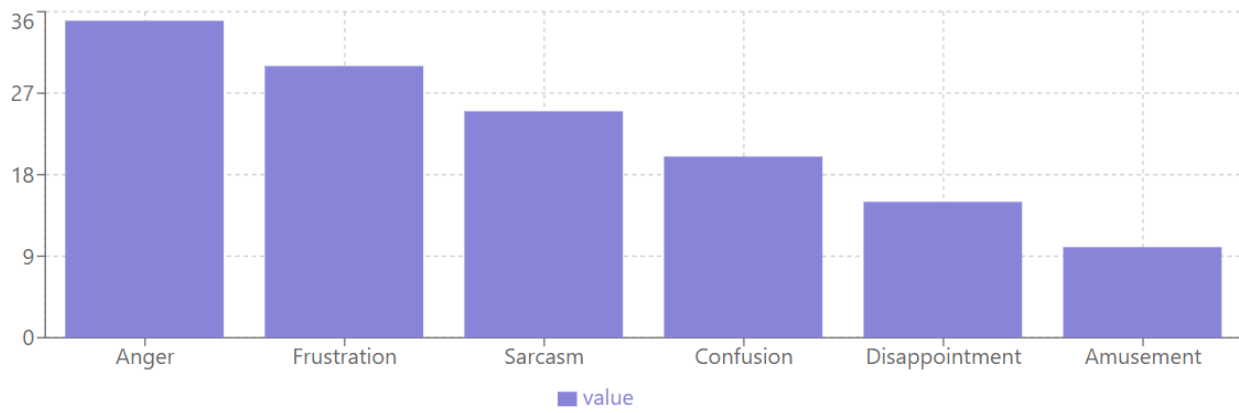
16. *Campaign 16: Cadbury – Easter/Gesture Eggs*

The Cadbury Easter controversy erupted when images surfaced showing "gesture eggs" being sold at a Cadbury outlet store, leading to accusations that Cadbury was removing references to Easter. The controversy was fueled by social media posts and commentary from public figures. However, Cadbury clarified that it had no involvement in the "gesture eggs" promotion and that all their Easter eggs in the UK still included the word "Easter" in their branding and marketing. The promotional posters were created by the independent outlet store, not by Cadbury itself. [24]

Them es and Issues

The Cadbury "Easter Egg Hunt" campaign, which omitted the word "Easter" from its promotional materials, sparked significant public outrage and disbelief. Many saw the omission as an attack on tradition and Christianity, leading to widespread criticism and calls for boycotts. For example, one Twitter user stated, "*Cadbury is guilty of breaking tradition, penalty and apology is a must*," while another urged, "*We should boycott Cadburys and Nat Tru.*" These comments reflected the strong feelings of those who felt the move was both disrespectful and unnecessary, questioning why Cadbury would choose to remove such a central aspect of the holiday. The backlash wasn't just limited to outrage; it also inspired mockery online. Some users humorously exaggerated the situation, pointing out how trivial the controversy seemed compared to more serious global issues. One tweet sarcastically compared the omission to major historical atrocities, stating, "*CADBURY DROPPING EASTER FROM OUR EASTER EGGS IS COMPARABLE TO THE HOLOCAUST OR RWANDA OR THE KILLING FIELDS OF CAMBODIA #genocide #purge*." This response highlighted how some viewed the intense reactions as overblown. Public figures also weighed in, with some criticizing the disproportionate attention given to the issue. One tweet noted, "*Theresa May has spent more time and effort condemning Cadbury for their 'missing Easter' than she has Donald Trump*," illustrating the broader political commentary that the controversy spurred. The negative response underscored the importance of respecting cultural

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[24] From *Claim Cadbury removed Easter from chocolate eggs advert is false* by The Ferret, 2024, <u>Claim Cadbury's removed 'Easter' from eggs advert is False (theferret.scot)</u>

and religious traditions in marketing. The omission of "Easter" was widely seen as culturally insensitive and tone-deaf, with many arguing that it disrespected the holiday's historical and cultural significance. Some users even referenced Easter's pagan origins, with one commenting, "*Given Easter originates from the pagan goddess Eastari, she might want to rethink her objections due to Easter being a 'Christian' festival*." The incident also sparked broader discussions about religious identity and the role of tradition in modern marketing. Many felt the campaign failed to connect with its intended audience, leading to significant criticism and damage to Cadbury's brand image. Calls for boycotts were widespread, further emphasizing the public's strong reaction. As one user suggested, "*Don't buy Cadbury eggs full stop, or any Cadbury products. They can send them as a gift to the Islamics.*" In summary, the Cadbury "Easter Egg Hunt" campaign serves as a cautionary tale about the importance of respecting cultural and religious symbols in marketing. The backlash it received illustrates the risks brands face when they deviate from tradition in ways that can be perceived as insensitive or disrespectful. The campaign's failure highlights the need for brands to be mindful of the cultural and religious contexts in which they operate to avoid similar pitfalls.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Cadbury Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Negative 50%

Neutral 31%

Positive 19%

Emotion analysis

Anger	Frustration	Sarcasm	Confusion	Amusement	Disappointment

■ value

17. Campaign 17: Benetton – Unhate

The Benetton "UNHATE" campaign, launched in 2011, aimed to promote global tolerance and reconciliation. The campaign featured a series of provocative images depicting world leaders and religious figures kissing, including notable pairs like Barack Obama and Hu Jintao, and Pope Benedict XVI and Ahmed Mohamed el-Tayeb, the Imam of the Al-Azhar mosque. These images were intended to symbolize the idea of overcoming differences and fostering dialogue. [25] The campaign was part of the broader "UNHATE Foundation," created by Benetton to combat hatred and promote tolerance. The initiative included various events and activities designed to engage the public and encourage active participation in promoting social harmony. The campaign's striking visuals and bold messaging sparked significant media attention and public discourse, although it also faced criticism and backlash from some quarters for being too provocative and disrespectful to certain cultural and religious sentiments. [26]
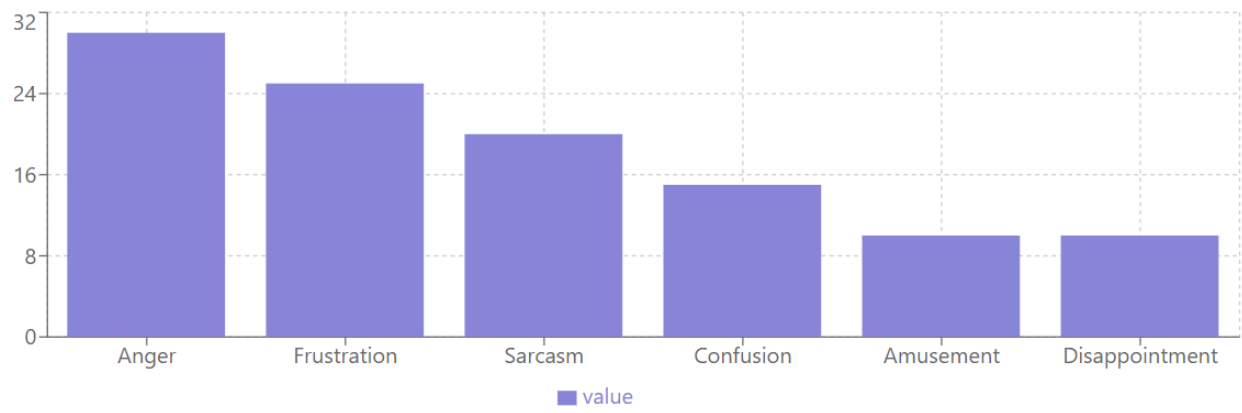

Themes and Issues

The Benetton "Unhate" campaign, featuring photoshopped images of world leaders kissing, generated a mix of outrage, disbelief, and humor. Many found the campaign offensive and disrespectful, particularly toward religious and political figures. Comments like "*The Vatican was hell displeased by Benetton's 'UNHATE' ad campaign*" and "*The Pope hates it*" captured the sentiment of those who felt the images crossed a line. The audacity of the campaign led to reactions of disbelief, with users expressing shock at the concept of world leaders kissing, as seen in tweets like "*This #benetton unhate is ridiculous. World leaders kissing?*" and "*A new Benetton 'UnHate' campaign shows presidents making out. Awesome.*" The campaign's controversial nature resulted in widespread humor and mockery. Many found the concept absurd yet engaging, with comments like "*Benetton Unhate Campaign: Marketing Genius Or Tasteless Stunt?*" reflecting the duality of public opinion. Despite the backlash, the campaign succeeded in generating extensive

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[25] From '*Unhate' Ad Campaign by Benetton Shows World Leaders Kissing* by Tom. 2011, Bored Panda, 'Unhate' Ad Campaign by Benetton Shows World Leaders Kissing | Bored Panda
[26] From *UNHATE worldwide campaign* by Benetton Group. UNHATE worldwide campaign | Benetton Group

discussion, which some praised as bold and creative. Tweets such as "*Absolutely brilliant @benetton #unhate is one of the best things I have seen in a very long time*" and "*Bold Benetton! Unhate!!*" illustrated support for the campaign's daring approach. However, the campaign also faced significant criticism for its insensitivity, particularly fro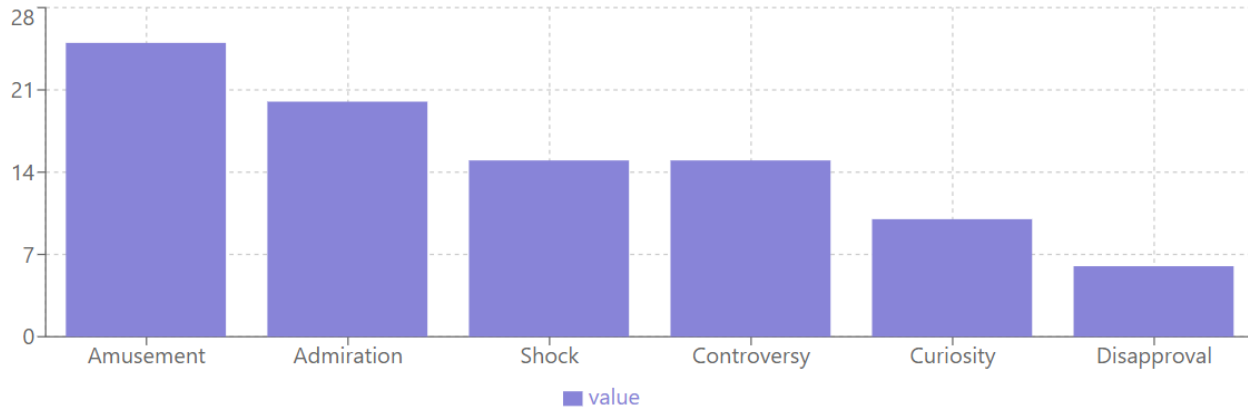m religious groups like the Vatican, which called the images "*disrespectful.*" The use of religious and political figures in such a provocative manner was seen as a major misstep, with some accusing Benetton of trivializing serious issues. Comments like "*Benetton's 'Unhate' ad campaign spotlights Photoshopped images of world leaders kissing, sparks outrage from Vatican*" and "*Benetton #Lebanon rejects #Benetton #unhate campaign and describes it as offensive!*" highlighted the cultural insensitivity perceived by many. The campaign's impact on Benetton's brand was polarizing, with some users calling for boycotts and others praising the boldness of the campaign. The reactions ranged from "*What if I hate Benetton? #onedaytoolate #unhate*" to "*Holy crap, I LOVE Benetton's UnHate Campaign! =))*". While the campaign garnered significant attention, it also highlighted the risks of using provocative imagery in marketing, especially when it involves sensitive cultural and religious figures. In summary, the Benetton "Unhate" campaign serves as a clear example of the power and peril of controversial advertising. While it succeeded in generating buzz and bringing attention to the brand, it also sparked significant backlash and was criticized for being culturally insensitive and disrespectful. The campaign's mixed reception underscores the importance of balancing bold messaging with cultural sensitivity in marketing strategies.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Benetton UNHATE Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Positive 49%

Negative 18%

Neutral 33%

Emotion analysis

Amusement	Admiration	Shock	Controversy	Curiosity	Disapproval

■ value

The Adidas campaign featuring Bella Hadid aimed to promote the re-release of the SL72 sneaker, originally launched during the 1972 Munich Olympics. The campaign faced significant backlash from pro-Israel groups due to the association with the tragic events of the 1972 Olympics, where 11 Israeli athletes were murdered. Critics viewed the campaign as insensitive, particularly with Hadid, a Palestinian-American model, as its face. Adidas quickly apologized, pulled the ads, and announced plans to revise the campaign to avoid further controversy. [27]

Themes and Issues

The Adidas campaign featuring Bella Hadid sparked a highly polarized reaction, reflecting deep-seated political and cultural tensions. Many were outraged by Adidas's decision to drop Hadid, viewing it as a betrayal of her support for Palestine. One tweet captured this sentiment: "*Bella Hadid supports 'Palestine', and I would love to tell her WHAT she is. Oh, besides: I will never buy a product from @adidas again.*" These reactions often called for boycotts of Adidas, expressing strong disapproval of the brand's decision. Conversely, a significant number of users supported Adidas's move, praising the brand for distancing itself from what they perceived as an anti-Israel stance. One tweet reflected this approval: "*You guys are a Joke! I like Adidas more now.*" This divide highlighted how the campaign intersected with broader political and cultural issues, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Many users emphasized Hadid's support for Palestine, interpreting her removal as a response to pressure from pro-Israel groups. A tweet expressed this view: "*Bella Hadid gets canceled by @adidas because she is a Palestinian-American. Adidas clearly displaying their Islamophobia for the world to see! Boycott Adidas!!*" However, others pointed to the sensitivity of using a Palestinian model to commemorate the Munich Olympics, where Israeli athletes were killed by Palestinian terrorists, criticizing the choice as deeply inappropriate. One tweet articulated this stance: "*Excuse me!? Adidas tried to cash in by opportunistically targeting the 'From the river to the sea' market with an antisemitic campaign.*" The controversy led to widespread calls for boycotts from both pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel supporters, demonstrating the polarized nature of the issue. Despite this, some users continued to support Adidas, indicating a

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[27] From Adidas Apologizes After Backlash over Bella Hadid 1972 Sneakers Campaign by E. Vlessing. 2023, Yahoo News, <u>Adidas Apologizes After Backlash Over Bella Hadid 1972 Sneakers Campaign (yahoo.com)</u>

divided consumer base. For instance, one user noted, "*Good thing they deleted it. It's disgusting to have an anti-Israel model promoting a shoe connected to Palestinian terrorists who killed innocent Israeli sportsmen*." Discussions around Bella Hadid's identity as Palestinian-American also surfaced, with debates on whether her background should influence her participation in the campaign. Some users questioned her identity, with one tweet stating, "*She's American not Palestinian. Born and brought up in USA. Her dad is 'Palestinian' but her mum is DUTCH. Don't hear her saying she's Dutch*." Adidas faced widespread criticism from both sides of the political spectrum, highlighting the complex and sensitive nature of the issue. The decision resulted in significant public relations challenges, with the brand being accused of both anti-Palestinian and anti-Israeli sentiments. Additionally, some users referenced Adidas's historical connections to the Nazi party, further complicating the brand's image. The campaign's impact on sales and brand loyalty was mixed. While some users called for boycotts, others expressed increased support for Adidas, showing a complex consumer response. The polarized reactions underscore the risks brands face when engaging with politically sensitive issues and the significant impact such decisions can have on consumer behavior. In summary, the Adidas campaign featuring Bella Hadid serves as a clear example of the challenges brands encounter when navigating politically charged issues. The controversy highlighted the need for careful consideration of political and cultural implications in marketing decisions, as well as the importance of understanding how representation and identity can influence public perception and consumer behavior.
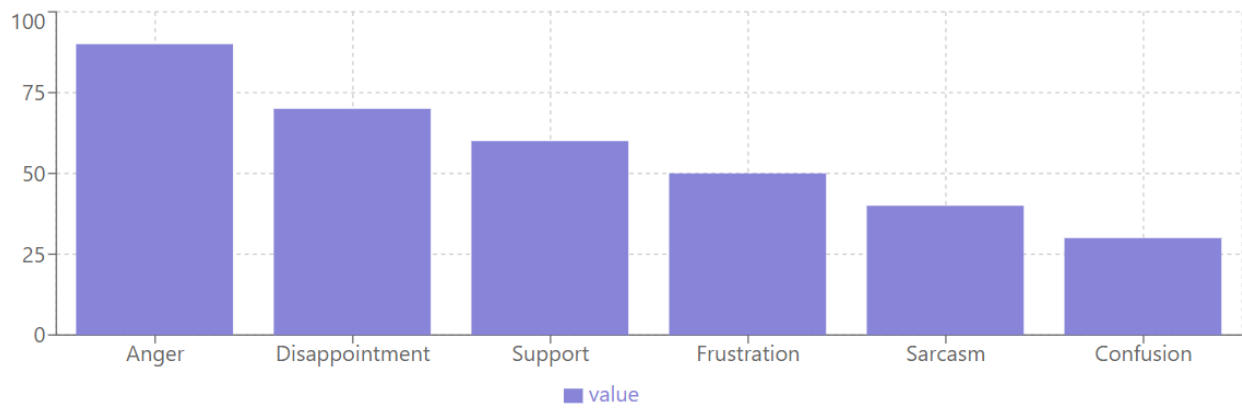
Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Nouns in Adidas Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis
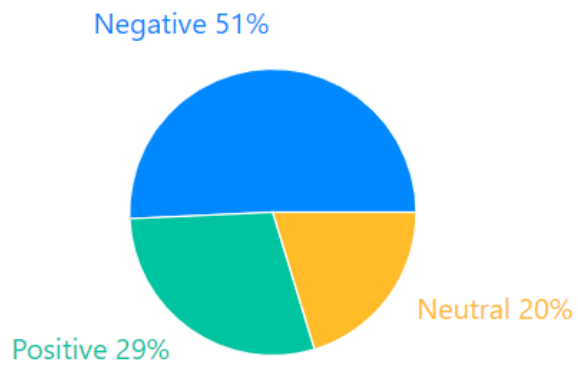
Emotion analysis

The Bumble campaign titled "A vow of celibacy is not the answer" sparked considerable backlash shortly after its launch. The campaign featured billboards with messages that many perceived as shaming those who choose celibacy. The intent behind the campaign was to address frustrations with modern dating humorously, but it was criticized for being insensitive and dismissive of personal choices regarding celibacy. Critics pointed out that the campaign undermined the legitimacy of celibacy, which some people choose for personal, religious, or health reasons.[28] The campaign also faced backlash from those who viewed it as insensitive to issues of reproductive rights and trauma. In response to the criticism, Bumble issued an apology, acknowledging that the campaign did not align with the company's values of supporting women's autonomy and personal choice. They announced plans to remove the controversial ads and committed to donating to the National Domestic Violence Hotline and other relevant organizations. Additionally, Bumble offered the billboard space to these organizations to promote messages of their choice. [29]

Themes and Issues

The Bumble campaign "A vow of celibacy is not the answer" sparked significant backlash, with many expressing disgust and disbelief at the message. The campaign was widely criticized for being tone-deaf and out of touch, with some users finding humor in the absurdity of the suggestion. One tweet highlighted the irony: "*Speaking from experience, Bumble is just a vow of celibacy you have to pay for,*" while another pointed out, "*Celibacy is a deeply personal choice YOU have to make. Everybody else has to stay outta that life choice*." The backlash quickly went viral, with numerous comments mocking the campaign's messaging. Critics argued that the campaign was insensitive

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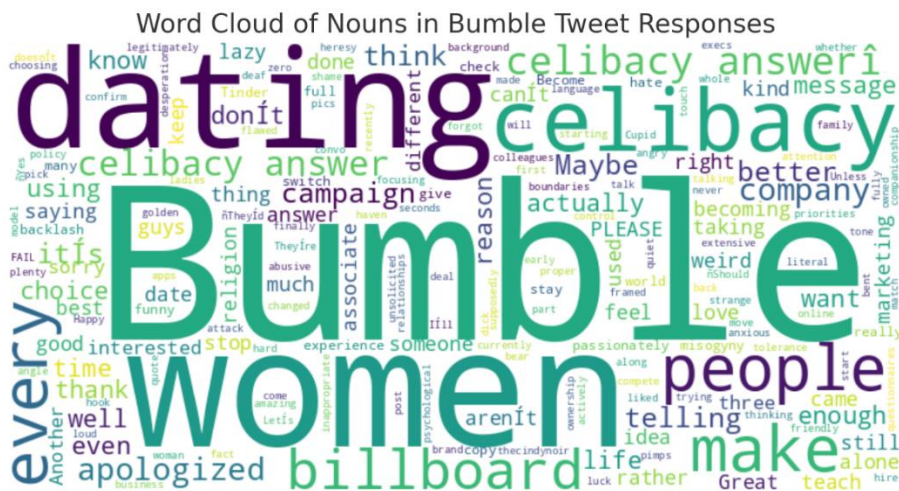[28] From *Bumble apologises for celibacy ads: 'We made a mistake'* by O. Hebert. 2024, The Indepentdent (Bumble apologises for celibacy ads: 'We made a mistake' | The Independent)
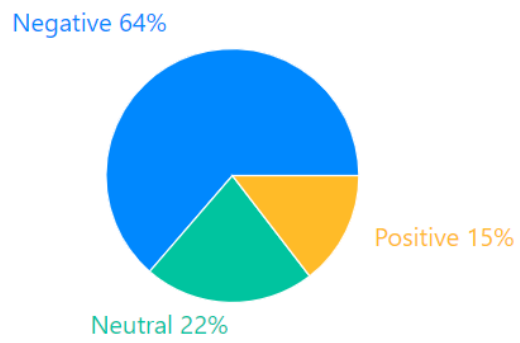
[29] From *Bumble apologises over ad saying 'celibacy is not the answer' after criticism* by D. Keane. 2024, The Standard (Bumble apologises over ad saying 'celibacy is not the answer' after criticism | Evening Standard)

and poorly conceived, with one user commenting, "*My god, the tone-deaf desperation... And what a strange bent to it. Why actively attack religion? Why associate your brand with literal heresy?*" Bumble's attempt to address the backlash with apologies and retractions only fueled further criticism, as seen in the sarcastic tweet: "*After the Rumble Here's Bumble A Sorry attempt to be Humble Apology stumble Insurmountable fumble."* The campaign was also condemned for its perceived sexism and for shaming women who choose celibacy. Many pointed out that the messaging seemed to blame women for not wanting to date, rather than addressing issues with the men on the app. One user criticized the campaign with, "*It's also confusing and unserious cuz like, nuns and celibate people aren't their competition, who is their audience??*" Humorous criticism was rampant, with users pointing out that the campaign itself could push people towards celibacy. A tweet humorously remarked, "*I'm all good. I have plenty of love in my life with my family, three amazing bffs, and music. And a puppy and three cats. No thanks Bumble.*" The negative reception was overwhelming, leading many to question how such a campaign was approved. The incident also raised concerns about Bumble's understanding of its user base, with users expressing disappointment in the brand. In summary, the Bumble campaign faced intense backlash for its tone-deaf and insensitive messaging. The attempt to discourage celibacy was seen as offensive and out of touch, leading to widespread criticism and mockery. Bumble's subsequent apologies did little to mitigate the outrage, underscoring the importance of thoughtful, respectful messaging in marketing, particularly on sensitive topics related to gender and relationships.

Word Visualization

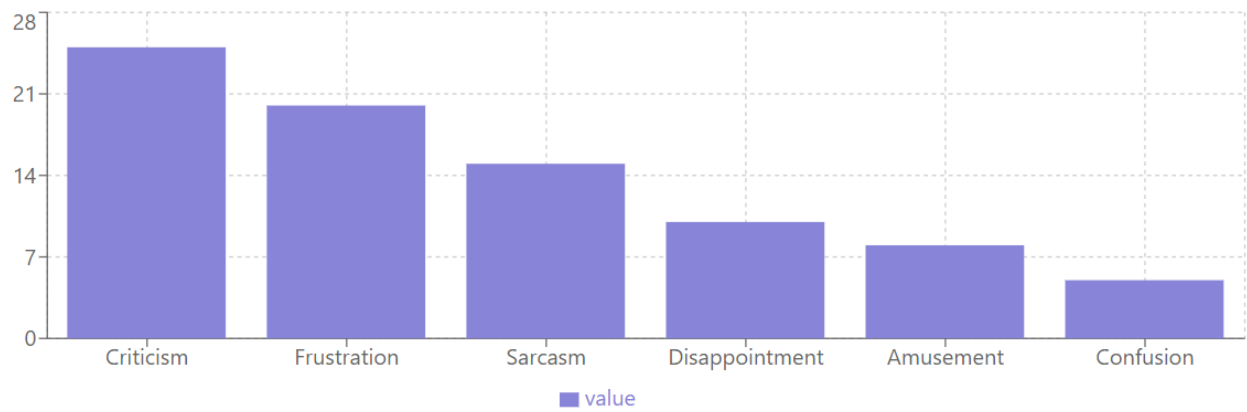Word Cloud of Nouns in Bumble Tweet Responses

Sentiment analysis

Negative 64%

Positive 15%

Neutral 22%

Emotion analysis

	Criticism	Frustration	Sarcasm	Disappointment	Amusement	Confusion

■ value

20. Campaign 20: Pure Gym – 12 years a slave

The PureGym "12 Years a Slave" workout controversy began in October 2020 when the Luton & Dunstable branch posted a workout named after the Oscar-winning film "12 Years a Slave" to celebrate Black History Month. The post, which included the phrase "Slavery was hard and so is this," received widespread backlash for its insensitivity and tone-deafness. Critics condemned the comparison of a workout to the brutal history of slavery, calling it offensive and inappropriate. PureGym quickly apologized, stating that the post was neither approved nor endorsed by the company and was removed as soon as it was brought to their attention. They also announced an urgent investigation into how and why the post was made. [30]
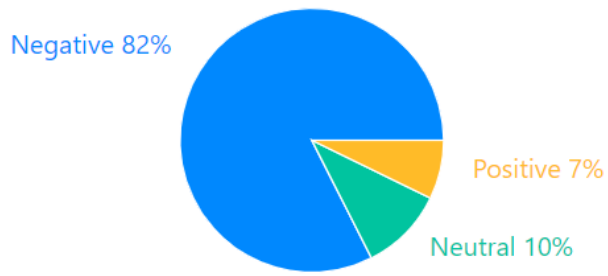

Themes and Issues

The Pure Gym campaign "12 Years a Slave" faced overwhelming backlash for its deeply insensitive and offensive messaging. The campaign, which compared a workout to the brutal history of slavery with the tagline "*Slavery was hard and so is this*," was met with disbelief and anger across social media. Many users expressed outrage at the insensitivity, with one tweet stating, "*It's a national campaign and advertising. Their ignorance, marketing and authorizers is just plain awful! You think 1 person was responsible? Imagine Coca-Cola doing something like this! It tarnished the whole brand!*" The backlash included demands for accountability, with numerous users calling for those responsible to be fired and questioning how such a campaign could have been approved. One tweet captured the sentiment: "*Who is responsible for this sick post in the Luton gym and have they been fired yet?*" Additionally, many users responded by canceling their memberships in protest, showing the potential financial repercussions of such a misstep. As one user put it, "*Deleted my membership. Disgusting behavior.*" Pure Gym's attempts to apologize and retract the campaign did little to quell the outrage. The apologies were widely criticized as insufficient, with users pointing out that the post remained up for hours despite its offensive nature. One tweet summarized the frustration: "*Disgraceful @Puregym_Luton 'slavery was hard and so is this'?!? Excuse me?! An apology does not suffice, there*

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[30] From *PureGym apologises for sharing '12 Years of Slave' workout during Black History Month* by S. Gallagher. 2020, The Independent (PureGym apologises for sharing '12 Years of Slave' workout during Black History Month | The Independent)

were multiple people at this gym that could have said something but didn't." The incident also sparked a broader discussion about the need for better oversight and training in social media and marketing practices, particularly regarding cultural sensitivity. Critics emphasized that such a significant misstep pointed to a larger issue within the company's marketing approach. As one user noted, "*Other than the 100 things wrong with this, it's also an example of why companies need social media approval policies and inclusive marketing training."* Humor was also used by some to critique the campaign, highlighting the absurdity of the comparison. One user humorously commented, "*I can already see people going to Pure Gym posting on their Instagram '12 years a slave challenge? completed it mate' this is actually taking the piss! Wow.*" However, the overall response was one of disgust and disappointment, with many questioning the brand's understanding of cultural sensitivity and historical awareness. In summary, the Pure Gym "12 Years a Slave" campaign was met with significant outrage due to its insensitive and offensive content. The backlash highlighted the importance of careful, considerate messaging that respects historical and cultural sensitivities. Pure Gym's inadequate response to the situation underscored the challenges brands face when handling sensitive topics, and the incident serves as a stark reminder of the potential consequences of poor marketing decisions.

Word Visualization

Word Cloud of Twitter Messages (Filtered Words)

Sentiment analysis

Emotion analysis