



PERCEIVING CONTROVERSY: AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO CONTROVERSIAL ADVERTISING

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Abstract

The lockdowns following the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 saw many New Zealanders working and studying from home. Aotearoa New Zealand saw an increased internet usage and a rise in young people accessing online pornography. To educate young New Zealanders and their parents about the potential risks of online pornography, the New Zealand Government created the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, using two naked porn stars to educate New Zealanders about the potential harms of online pornography. This study examines public reactions to this controversial advertisement through a thematic analysis of social media comments

Findings reveal a range of responses, from appreciation for the ad's humour and educational value to discomfort and disapproval. The research highlights the influence of cultural context and individual beliefs on the reception of controversial content. It also underscores the ethical challenges of using shock tactics in public service announcements.

By providing insights into audience perceptions, this study contributes to understanding the impact of controversial advertising and offers practical implications for advertisers, policymakers, and educators.

Dedication

To my kids, Cooper and Chloe.
Thank you for reminding me to ask great questions.

:D

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature:

Date: 27 May 2024

1 Introduction: When the New Zealand Government turned to porn stars to educate children.

The purpose of this research is to analyse public responses to controversial advertising. As advertising competition continues to increase, organizations are opting to engage in controversy to attract attention (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). The expanding field of controversial advertising research has also garnered substantial interest across various academic domains, focusing on the complex factors of taboo advertising, offensive advertising, controversial products, and the impacts of controversial content on consumer behaviour. Existing studies delve into the nuances of taboo themes in advertising (Sabri, 2012), attitudes towards offensive advertising (Waller, 1999), societal implications of controversial advertising practices (Gurrieri et al., 2016), and how controversial advertising influences cognitive processing and communication effectiveness (Severn et al., 1990). Additionally, the effects of religiosity on attitudes towards controversial advertisements (Run et al., 2010) have been explored.

Despite these insights, gaps remain, particularly in understanding the cross-cultural aspects of advertising controversial products (Waller et al., 2005), effects of advertisement executions on comprehension (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008), consumer responses (Waller, 2005), and the impacts of advertising in sectors like healthcare (Dable et al., 2014). Much of the research on controversial advertising emerging from the Aotearoa New Zealand context to date, tends to focus on children's exposure to advertising for alcohol and junk foods (Hammond, et al., 1999; McCreanor, et al., 2008), with few studies exploring the types of advertising content considered controversial (Beard, 2008; Hayes, 2018), and fewer still considering the response of New Zealander's to controversial advertising outside of taboo products. It is against this backdrop that this research is developed to answer the following research question: How do audience reactions to the New Zealand government's 'Keep It Real Online- Pornography' advertisement reflect how they perceive controversial advertising?

In principle, advertising is used to provide audiences with information (e.g. the price of products), teach consumers (e.g. how or why they should do something), and it should persuade or influence audiences to hold favourable attitudes to a brand (Aaker & Biel, 2013; Lee, et al., 2009). Essentially, advertising is a persuasive tool designed to encourage attitudinal or behavioural change in audiences, often by convincing audiences of the superiority of the product, place, person or organisation promoted (Calfee & Ringold, 1994; Rodgers & Thorson, 2012; Ferrier, 2014). Accordingly, advertising can be entertaining and amusing, or confronting and challenging, with shock tactics, guilt and fear appeals, identification and desirability all considered means of engendering

audiences to the message of the advertisement (Holbrook & O’Shaughnessy, 1984; Hastings et al., 2004, Campbell, 1995; Engelbart et al., 2017; Tuan et al., 2023).

Of course, that has meant that advertising can and does become embroiled in controversy. Accusations that advertising is deceptive have long been levelled at the discipline (Carson, et al., 1985; Davis, 1994; O’Barr, 2007) particularly in relation to unethical practices such as greenwashing (Aji & Sutikno, 2015; Schmuck, et al., 2018), pinkwashing (Agostino & Middlemost, 2022; Buckely, et al., 2024; Sterbenk, et al., 2021), rainbow-washing (Rice, 2022; Schopper, et al., 2024), and native advertising (Wojdynski, 2016; Wojdynski, et al., 2018) to name a few, or because unravelling celebrity/influencer endorsement (Erdogan, 1999; Thwaiter, et al., 2012; von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2023; Wei, 2024), or even still, because the creative execution is deemed controversial (Kerr, et al., 2012). It is the latter that is the focus of this research, and therefore, controversial advertising is considered here to be “advertisers deliberately use[ing] shocking and offensive images and messages to attract consumer attention and arouse curiosity” (Arnaud, et al., 2018, p. 108). One such advertisement that aligns with this definition and forms the case study of this research project is the 'Keep It Real Online- Pornography' advertisement released by the Aotearoa New Zealand Government. This public service advertisement, or what O’Keefe and Reid (1990) consider “promotional materials that address problems assumed to be of general concern to citizens at large” (p. 67) aims to warn New Zealanders of the inappropriate content that children could be exposed to online.

1.1 Pornography

For the purpose of this research, pornography is understood to be “Material deemed sexual, given the context, that has the primary intention of sexually arousing the consumer, and is produced and distributed with the consent of all persons involved” (Ashton, et al., 2019, p. 163).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, young individuals exhibit a nuanced and critical engagement with pornography, reflecting broader sociocultural dynamics and personal agency. Studies indicate that New Zealand youth are active consumers of pornography, critically navigating its content rather than passively absorbing it. Matthews and Nairn (2020) found that New Zealand TV audiences are accepting of sexual content and graphic nudity if these were found to be entertaining, educational and deliver positive body images. Meehan (2023) underscores this by detailing how youth interpret and interact with pornographic material, engaging with it within their unique sociocultural contexts, thereby challenging traditional views of victimization (Meehan, 2023). Furthermore, Healy-Cullen et al. (2023) identify two distinct identities among young New Zealanders—“Proficient Internet Pornography User” and “Astute Internet Pornography Viewer”—demonstrating an active

discernment that challenges common perceptions of vulnerability to pornography's influence (Healy-Cullen et al., 2023).

The interpretation and consumption of pornography are significantly influenced by existing sociocultural norms and media portrayals. Young New Zealanders' interactions with pornography are embedded within complex social frameworks, which include their understanding of gender, sexuality, and societal norms. This is evident in how they negotiate their consumption and understanding, actively using pornography to inform themselves about sexual health and identities (Meehan, 2023). However, these interactions often occur within a landscape marked by significant educational and communicative gaps between youths and adults, highlighting a need for more open and balanced discussions about pornography. Healy-Cullen et al. (2022) emphasise the discrepancy in perceptions between youths and adults regarding the impact of pornography, suggesting a necessity for comprehensive sexuality education that fosters critical thinking and open dialogue (Healy-Cullen et al., 2022).

There is a strong advocacy for educational reforms that address pornography in a nuanced and culturally sensitive manner. The concept of 'porn literacy' is advocated by Healy-Cullen et al. (2024), who argue for an educational approach that transcends traditional harm-reduction frameworks. This approach would enable young people to critically engage with pornography, understanding its context, questioning its realism, and recognising its influence on expectations and behaviours (Healy-Cullen et al., 2024). Such educational initiatives would provide young people with the tools to navigate the complex digital landscape of pornography, empowering them to make informed decisions about their consumption and interpretation of such content.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a vital component of the health education curriculum that begins in primary school. The curriculum starts with fundamental topics such as understanding the human body, friendships, family dynamics, consent, and respect. As education progresses, it introduces more complex issues like puberty, relationships, and online risks, expanding in secondary school to encompass themes of intimate relationships, contraception, health management, gender dynamics, and the influence of societal factors. Notably, while the curriculum takes a holistic approach as advocated by the Ministry of Education through the Hauora model—which integrates physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of sexuality education—it does not explicitly focus on pornography, leaving a gap in direct education on this significant aspect of modern sexuality (Ministry of Education, 2021).

The implementation of RSE, compulsory up to year 10 and elective thereafter, faces significant challenges. According to Dixon et al. (2022), disparities in how RSE is delivered are prevalent, with many schools not

meeting the recommended 12-15 hours annually. This leads to a condensed presentation of essential topics and leaves little room for addressing emerging issues like pornography effectively before the subject becomes elective. Furthermore, the effectiveness of RSE is often hindered by inconsistencies across different schools and regions, compounded by teachers' personal beliefs and biases, which influence their comfort and proficiency in covering certain topics. These issues highlight the need for enhanced support and resources to ensure all students receive comprehensive and consistent sexual education across Aotearoa New Zealand (Dixon et al., 2022).

Overall, the interaction of New Zealand's youth with pornography suggests a sophisticated level of engagement that calls for mature, informed dialogue about sexuality in the digital age. This highlights the need for educational strategies that are responsive to the realities of young people's experiences, facilitating a critical understanding of pornography and its broader implications for sexual health and relationships.

1.2 Background- 'Keep It Real Online' campaign

To provide a backdrop for this study, the Covid-19 epidemic and the following lockdowns of 2020 forced many people to isolate and work from home (Ipsen et al., 2021). Internet usage during this time increased 40-100% (De et al., 2020) and this shift to working and learning online raised concerns about the effectiveness of online environments (Heo et al., 2021; Mohandas et al., 2022) and the proliferation of health-related misinformation and harmful content online during the pandemic (Chen et al., 2022). These global concerns were exacerbated by localised Aotearoa New Zealand studies, such as the 'Growing up with Porn' study, which found that teenagers were not receiving guidance from trusted adults in their lives when it came to tackling sensitive subjects like pornography, sex, relationships, and consent. The New Zealand Government acknowledged that:

the internet is out of our jurisdiction, so we can't rely on our legal frameworks to stop online harm. Instead, we need to inform New Zealanders of the harms and provide them with support to be safe. That sounds easy, but it is not. We needed to be a little creative and out of the box to get everyone's attention. (About the Campaign, n.d.).

The government then allocated \$1.5 million to educate New Zealanders about potentially harmful online concerns and encourage discussion between parents and their children (About the Campaign, n.d.).

To achieve their aims, the government partnered with creative advertising agency Motion Sickness who pointed out that "public service announcements have been needlessly heavy and overwhelming. Ultimately serving to discourage conversation, rather than foster it" (Motion Sickness, n.d.). Based on this insight, Motion Sickness suggested a light-hearted campaign that would give parents a nudge to have a frank conversation with their children (Motion Sickness, n.d.). The campaign revolved around four central films, each covering a separate

online issue: online bullying, misinformation, inappropriate content, and pornography. As well as TV advertisements, the campaign was spread through social media, radio, newspapers, social media, billboards, and posters which directed audiences to a website containing further resources and information (See Figures 1, 2, 3, 4 below).

Figure 1

Various Digital Components Utilised in the 'Keep It Real Online' Campaign



Figure 2

The 'Keep It Real Online – Pornography' Advertisement Poster Execution

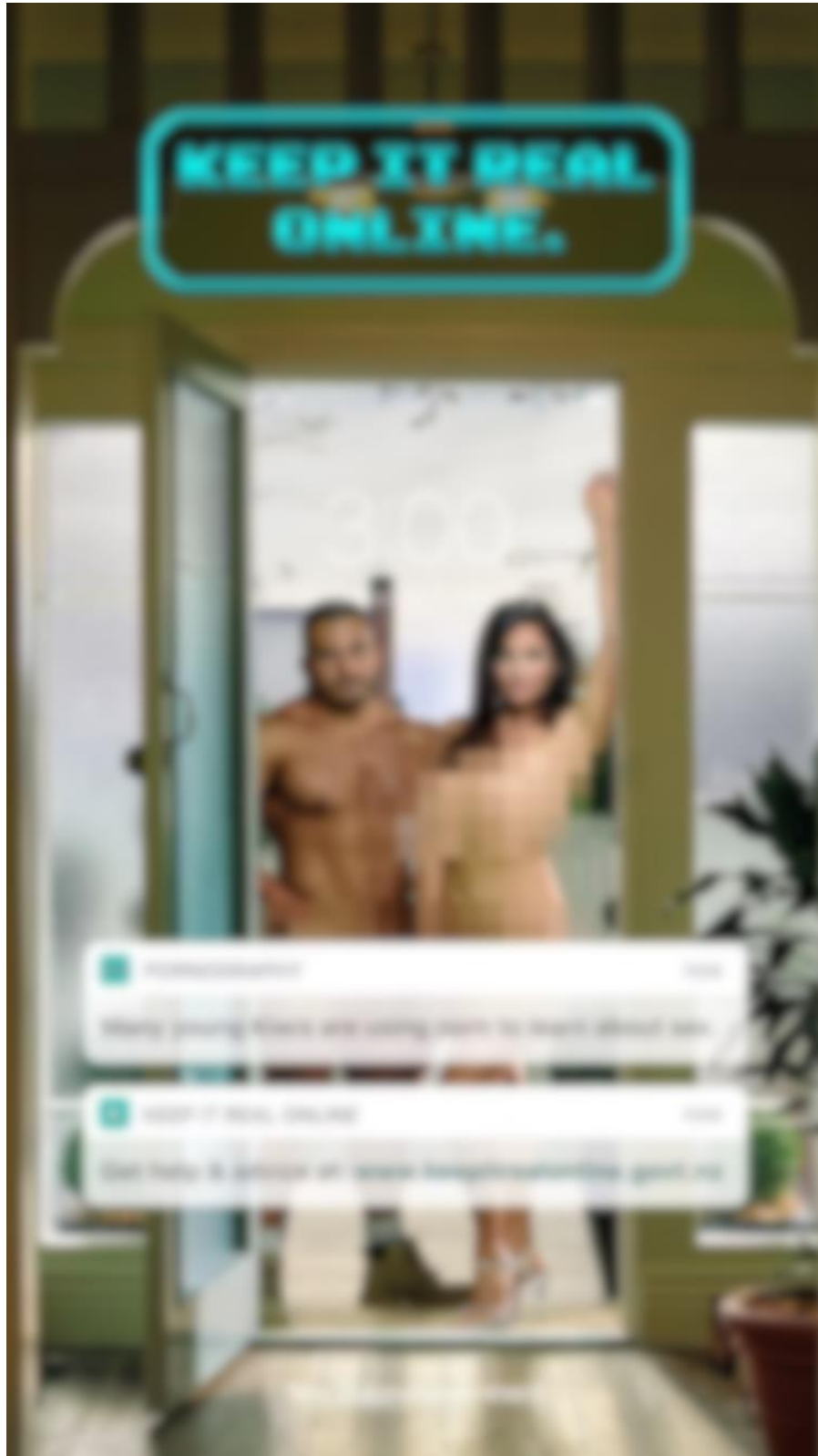


Figure 3

The 'Keep it real online' campaign street posters in situ.



Figure 4

Billboard example from the 'Keep it real online' campaign.



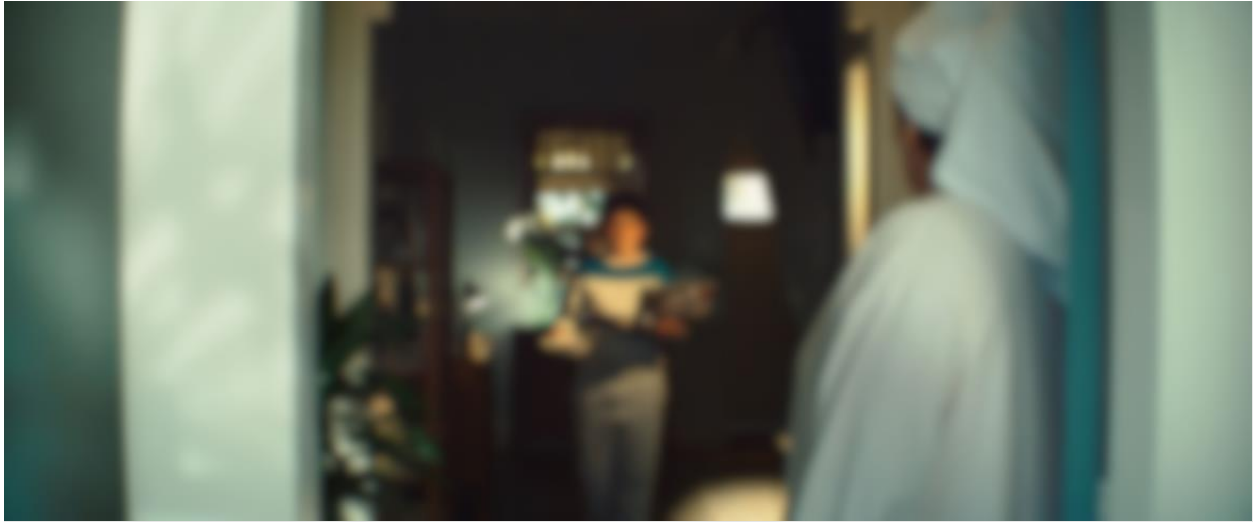
Note: Image Source: Motion Sickness (n.d.) <https://motionsickness.co.nz/work/keep-it-real-online/>

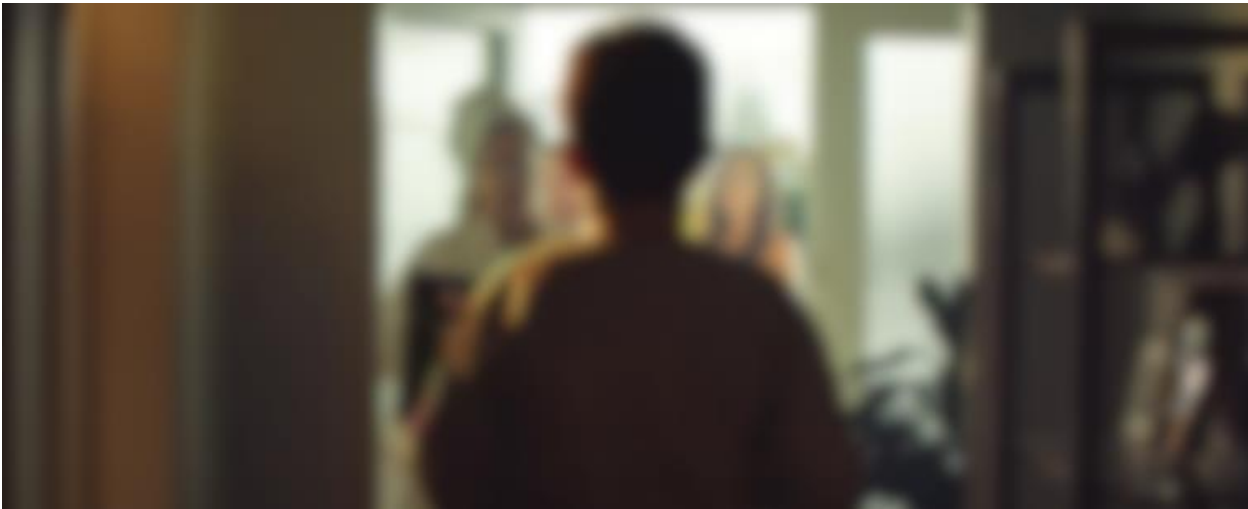
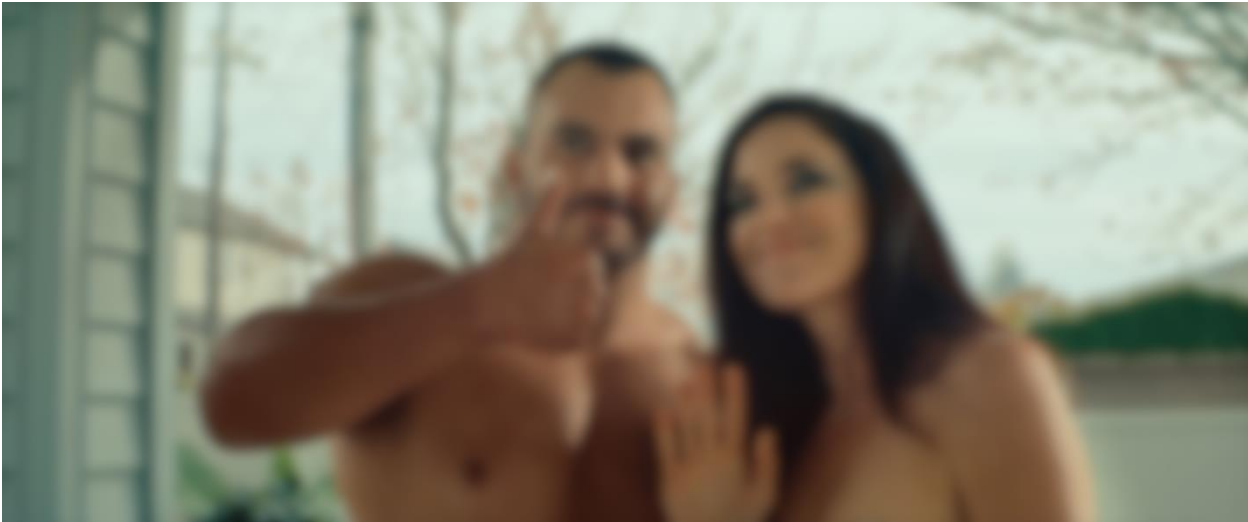
This research focuses specifically on the 'Keep it real online – pornography' advertisement from the campaign, which used 'the internet's most notorious figures to help protect the most innocent of browsers' (Motion Sickness, n.d.). The advertisement shows two naked porn stars arriving at a young boy's house to discuss the differences between online pornography and 'real-life' relationships. This execution alone was viewed millions of times, was lauded for its impact (Somerville, 2020), and received numerous advertising awards (Clio Awards, n.d.; Green, 2020). However, it also drew criticisms and official complaints to the New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) from audience members who were concerned about the use of the words 'porn' and 'sex' and who felt that the advertisement forces parents to have conversations with their children about the issues raised in the advertisement (Complaint Number 20/177, 2020). Such complaints exemplify the growing concerns over controversial advertising, as indicated by an increase in complaints to the New Zealand ASA at time of the campaign's launch (ASA, n.d.) and the challenge for advertisers to stand out amid a plethora of media channels.

Figure 5

Screen shots from the 'Keep it real online – Pornography' television/social media advertisement.







Note. Sourced from (<https://www.youtube.com/@keepitrealonline2291>)

1.3 The Moral Compass of New Zealanders

Understanding who this specific advertisement was designed by, and created for, helps to give this research context. New Zealanders' moral compass, both philosophically and politically, is often described as being rooted in egalitarianism, tolerance, and an open culture. Bealsy (2005) describes the country's transition from a welfare state to a neoliberal state in the mid-1980s which involved a move from overt government welfare provisions to more subtle forms of control such as self-regulation and market-oriented reforms which deeply influenced Aotearoa New Zealand's social, cultural, and institutional environments by emphasizing personal autonomy, reshaping educational systems towards competitive, outcome-focused models, and instituting significant changes in health, housing, and social security to reduce public spending and increase private sector involvement. These changes not only altered public service landscapes but also reshaped cultural norms around success and social welfare, fostering a climate of self-reliance and entrepreneurial spirit. The focus on norms, rights, and principles in Western moral traditions is reflected in Aotearoa New Zealand's societal values (Caldwell et al., 2010). Moreover, the incorporation of Māori knowledge and existential philosophical traditions, which emphasize the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of community and environmental relationships, challenges reductionist Western-centric perspectives on the self, contributing to a unique moral outlook and understanding of human behaviour in a way that respects cultural specificity and existential complexity. (King et al., 2017).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, a nation celebrated for its bicultural heritage and Pacific influences, the educational curriculum serves as a crucial platform for socializing moral understandings across diverse ethnic backgrounds. The inclusion of ethics in the curriculum is increasingly emphasized, reflecting a commitment to melding non-Western and Western cultural values harmoniously (Milligan, 2014). This educational approach is foundational in shaping the perspectives of young minds, preparing them to navigate and critique complex societal issues, such as environmental ethics seen in anti-possum campaigns and ecological restoration efforts (Potts, 2009; Zhang et al., 2022). Moreover, Aotearoa New Zealand's educational system aims to foster a culture of social justice and equity, which is vital in a society marked by its cultural diversity (Jayavant, 2016).

By embedding philosophical discussions into educational settings, Aotearoa New Zealand not only strengthens its moral fabric but also ensures these discussions resonate with the local context (Parkin, 2021). This philosophy extends into the public service, influenced by post-New Public Management principles that emphasize ethical governance and values-based approaches in law enforcement, as evidenced by the restorative justice practices within the New Zealand Police (Scott et al., 2022; Winfree, 2004). This comprehensive integration of ethics into various facets of public and educational life crucially informs how advertisements, even those of a controversial nature, are received and interpreted by the public.

Aotearoa New Zealand's moral compass is intricately linked to its historical, cultural, and philosophical foundations, emphasizing values of equality, tolerance, and ethical considerations across various sectors of society. By examining the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, this research project aims to bridge the gaps in controversial advertising literature, focusing on audience perceptions and reactions to the advertisement's controversial aspects. It seeks to contribute to the understanding of how controversial advertising is received in a multicultural and increasingly secular society, where traditional and digital media landscapes are constantly evolving.

1.4 Research Question

Core to this research is the question: How do audience reactions to the New Zealand Government's 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement reflect how they perceive controversial advertising? To address this question, initially, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be conducted on the advertisement itself to discern the key messages being proliferated.

In answering the research question, an examination of audience perceptions of controversial advertising will be undertaken by analysing the social media comments that accompany the advertisements presence on the likes of Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit. Social media was identified as an appropriate source of data as these platforms act as a public sphere (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001) where individuals have the opportunity to, in most cases, openly express their opinions on societal issues. Social media is considered a means of deliberative democracy, because it is generally speaking, 'free' to access and anyone has the ability to share information, fulfilling Habermas' perspective that an ideal public sphere is one where private citizens have equal and protected opportunities to articulate their positions on pertinent matters (Kruse, et al., 2018).

The advent of the internet and subsequent digital communication technologies has transformed the public sphere by significantly expanding the boundaries of discourse, enabling instantaneous global communications. This digital evolution enhances civic engagement and broadens participation, in theory, supporting a more inclusive deliberation process. However, it also introduces challenges such as information overload, the spread of misinformation, and increased political polarisation. Digital platforms often create echo chambers, where users primarily encounter viewpoints that reinforce their existing beliefs, limiting critical debate and exposure to diverse opinions (Papacharissi, 2002; Ritzi, 2023). Additionally, while digital media's interactivity could enhance governmental responsiveness, the actual engagement is typically selective and biased, favouring specific types of civic interaction and often promoting echo chambers, thereby questioning the openness and representativeness of the digital public sphere (Dekker & Bekkers, 2015; Terren & Borge, 2021). Despite these potential issues with the digital public sphere, social media affords people an opportunity to express their

opinions, and to this end, this research intends to investigate what is being communicated about how people feel about the ‘Keep it real online – Pornography’ advertisement. Social media and digital communications more broadly are a key means of sharing ideas and opinions which can shape attitudes and behaviours, and at the very least, can offer insights into public service advertisements.

Therefore, it is expected that those exposed to the pornography advertisement online are afforded the chance to respond to its content, provided they are interested and willing, and it is in these responses, that positions on the controversial advertisement will be observed. Opting to analyse social media comments was also motivated because of the volume and variety of data that social media comments accommodate (Kim et al., 2020), and cost-effectiveness of this type of data which records and stores real time public sentiment and has the potential to advance social and behavioural research if used rigorously and ethically (Chi & Yin, 2021).

Because the aims of this research hinge on understanding the audiences’ responses to controversial advertising, the research is framed according to Waller’s proposed response model for controversial advertising (2006). That is, the comments will be categorised into stages of response. These stages include: Exposure to the advertisement, the type of execution and subject of the advertisement; processing of the advertisement and the immediate or emotional response; followed by long-term communication effects which influence brand perception and social awareness, and finally the action stage which includes the actions taken after seeing the advertisement. Once these comments are categorised into these stages of response, a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is used to identify prevailing themes in each of the various stages.

This research question is driven, in part, by my own motivations. As a former art director and current lecturer in advertising, I have become increasingly interested in the role controversy can have in advertising creative, especially when used intentionally rather than being an unfortunate consequence of poor or inappropriate execution. Given that controversial advertising can affect consumer attitudes (Arnaud, et al., 2018) and I am partly responsible for training future advertising creatives, understanding the responses of New Zealanders to controversial content becomes a necessity for guiding my research and teaching practice. I expand upon these motivations later the methodology chapter.

Figure 6

The ‘Keep It Real Online’ Facebook Profile



Note. Source (<https://www.facebook.com/keepitrealonline.govt.nz/>)

Figure 7

Facebook Comments Responding to the 'Keep it real online – Pornography' advertisement.



Note. Source (<https://www.facebook.com/keepitrealonline.govt.nz/>)

1.5 Remaining Chapters of the thesis

The introduction has laid out the theoretical and practical foundations of the study, introducing the key themes and research question that guide the exploration of public reactions to controversial advertising in Aotearoa New Zealand. It establishes the relevance of studying controversial advertising and sets the stage for a deeper investigation into the specific case of the New Zealand Government's 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement. This section elucidates the complex landscape of advertising, where persuasion, shock, and controversy intersect with cultural sensitivities and ethical considerations.

The literature review that follows explores a variety of themes pivotal to understanding the dynamics of controversial advertising. It delves into historical perspectives on advertising, theoretical frameworks for analysing media effects, and specific studies on controversial and offensive advertising. This review systematically breaks down the elements of persuasive communication, shock tactics, and audience reception, integrating insights from social psychology, media studies, and marketing theory. The literature review also examines how different demographics perceive and react to controversial content, highlighting the impact of cultural and individual differences on reception.

In the method/methodology chapter, I cover the research design and methods employed to gather and analyse data. This chapter details the qualitative approach taken, particularly thematic analysis, to interpret audience responses gathered from social media platforms. It outlines the process of data collection, the selection of materials, and the coding procedures used to categorise and assess audience comments. Ethical considerations, limitations of the research method, and the rationale behind the chosen methodology are also discussed comprehensively, providing a clear map of how the research was conducted and why these choices were made.

The data analysis forms the basis of chapter 4, which presents the findings from the thematic analysis of social media responses to the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement. This chapter categorises audience reactions into themes that reflect various perceptions and emotional responses, linking these findings back to the theoretical insights discussed in the literature review. The analysis reveals patterns and anomalies in public opinion, discussing how these align with or challenge existing literature on controversial advertising.

Finally, the discussion chapter synthesises the findings with the literature, offering a nuanced interpretation of how the case study reflects broader trends in advertising reception and public sentiment. It discusses the implications of these findings for advertisers, policy makers, and educators, suggesting practical applications and strategies for managing controversial content in advertising. This chapter also proposes areas for future research, reflecting on the gaps revealed through the study and the evolving nature of digital media landscapes.

2 Literature Review: Sex, ads, and us.

To address my research question, 'How do audience reactions to the New Zealand Government's 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement reflect their perceptions of controversial advertising?' the following chapter will offer an overview of existing knowledge pertaining to advertising and its potential for controversy. Accordingly, this chapter considers persuasion theories and their applications in both commercial and public service advertising, given the intent of the advertisement to influence audience cognitions and actions. Furthermore, this review will also explore how advertising persuades, specifically incorporating theories on rational and emotional appeals, with a focus on planned controversy, a pertinent aspect of this campaign. The complexity of measuring advertising effectiveness, due to subjective and dynamic factors, will be discussed next.

The review will engage in a discussion of the strategic and creative approaches in the New Zealand Government's advertising process, including how controversies are framed within advertising strategies, employing techniques such as shockvertising, sex appeals, and humour, and this will be followed by an examination of the effect of controversial advertising on children. Noting that audiences can respond to persuasive messages from a neutral, accepting, or defensive position, the chapter accounts for these potential positions by detailing Hall's model of reception. Finally, the regulatory landscape of advertising in Aotearoa New Zealand will be outlined, culminating in an examination of how social media serves as a public sphere for audience reactions. This comprehensive framework will facilitate a robust approach to understanding the impacts of controversial advertising.

2.1 Persuasion

Understanding persuasion within the broader realm of social psychology involves examining how messages influence attitudes and behaviours through well-established psychological theories. This foundational knowledge not only enhances comprehension of persuasive communication but also premises an exploration of advertising strategies in subsequent sections. Admittedly, the field of persuasion is extensive, and it is outside the scope to explore all the possible perspectives that exist therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, persuasive communication will be synthesized to those, component parts most pertinent to the research aims: namely message processing.

Persuasive communication is rooted in the complex interplay between message content, the predispositions of the audience, and the societal context in which these interactions occur. Taillard (2000) contends that those attempting to persuade others to change their attitudes and behaviours, do so by informing people of certain assumptions, perspectives and/or situations, with the intent to have those communicated ideals manifest amongst audiences. According to Pullman (2013):

persuasion is any process that creates a new belief or changes your level of commitment to an existing one. The persuasive process may or may not include evidence; it may or may not be rational. The belief generated (or changed) may or may not be durable. It may or may not be true.

Signalled in Pullman's definition is that acts of persuasion are designed to adjust people to ideas (Bryant, 1953), but these attempts at persuasion may not be successful and may not be long-lasting. Central to effective persuasion, then, is the relevance of the message to its recipients, a principle first emphasized by Greenwald (1968) and echoed across decades of research (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Vogel & Wanke, 2016; Petty, 2018). When messages resonate with an individual's existing beliefs and experiences, they integrate more seamlessly into a person's self-concept and are therefore more likely to effect change (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980).

Personal relevance and personal identity are thus main factors in shaping the receptivity to persuasive communication (Greenwald, 1958). As Petty and Cacioppo (1980) put it, the new information received in a persuasive communication is assessed according to pre-existing knowledge and feelings. Should the information be incongruent, it can create cognitive dissonance and the development of opposing arguments that ultimately produce resistance (Festinger, 1964). The possibility of resistance can be explained by Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication. Introduced in 1980, Hall's theory accounts for how media messages are created and deciphered, highlighting that meanings are not statically transmitted but are actively constructed by both senders and receivers (Feng, 2019; Tomaselli, 2015). This concept is pivotal in analysing persuasion, as it suggests that audience interpretations can vary widely, influenced by individual backgrounds and societal contexts (Morley, 1980; Boxman-Shabtai, 2021). In keeping with this position, Siero and Jan Doosje (1993) suggest that the success of a persuasive communication hinges on the fit of the original message with the attitudes held by an individual, because recipients of persuasive messages can be active participants in the message interpretation process, particularly when applying cognitive processing.

In their comprehensive review, Crano and Prislin (2006) elaborate on how attitudes form and change, discussing the nuanced roles of cognitive engagement and emotional responses in persuasion. They highlight that deep cognitive processing, as described in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo (1984), is crucial for enduring attitude changes. This model illustrates how persuasion can occur through two distinct routes: the central route, which involves careful contemplation of the message's content, and the peripheral route,

which depends on superficial cues such as attractiveness or credibility of the source. Those processing persuasion according to the central route, will elaborate issue-relevant arguments, and are often highly motivated by the topic. The messages processed centrally need to be compelling, sound in argument, and the consequences of ignoring the persuasive intent of the message are clearly delineated, as are benefits that justify making attitude and/or behavioural change (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Taillard, 2000). Processing following the peripheral route is usually prompted by cues such as the credibility of the speaker, and the quantity rather than quality of the arguments (Petty, et al., 1983; Taillard, 2000). Although central and peripheral cues can work in tandem to shape how audiences make meanings from persuasive messages, key is that messages that provoke deeper thought and challenge prevailing norms can lead to more persistent changes in attitudes, highlighting the importance of cognitive involvement in effective persuasion (Moscovici, 1980; Crano, 2000).

Exploring the cognitive foundations of advertising effectiveness, Greenwald (1968) provides crucial insights into how cognitive learning and responses to persuasion shape attitude change. His work emphasizes the active role of consumers in processing advertising messages, highlighting how attention, comprehension, and encoding are critical to the persuasive process. Greenwald's concept of cognitive responses to persuasion—encompassing counterarguments, support arguments, and source derogations—further elucidates the mechanisms through which advertising influences attitudes. This theoretical framework is instrumental in understanding the conditions under which advertising can effectively alter consumer attitudes, offering valuable implications for the design of persuasive communication strategies.

Resistance to persuasion is another critical aspect, particularly relevant as we consider advertising strategies. Audiences may exhibit resistance when they perceive attempts to manipulate their beliefs or emotions, often engaging in counterarguing or outright rejection of the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Sperber, 2000). This resistance underscores the need for crafting messages that are not only strategically sound but also ethically grounded. For example, guilt and fear appeals can prompt cognitive dissonance – psychological discomfort or negative intrapersonal state (Festinger, 1964; Elliot & Devine, 1994) -- which threatens a person's sense of self and esteem, but they are only effective if people are unaware that guilt and fear are being induced (Coote, et al., 2005). As Friestad and Wright (1994) suggest, people are open to persuasive efforts to an extent, and whether they respond positively to offered changes is very dependent on their willingness to find common ground with the rhetor or identify with what is being advocated (Cheney, 1983).

As this section provides a broad overview of the psychological underpinnings and general theories of persuasion, the following section will specifically focus on applying these principles to advertising. It will delve into how

advertisers can effectively harness these insights to craft campaigns that not only capture attention but also resonate deeply with target audiences, driving both immediate response and sustained behavioural engagement.

Figure 8

Pompeii Penis



Note. The Penis' carved into the streets of Pompeii are described by tour guides as 'the oldest advertisement in the world for the world's oldest profession' as they directed travellers towards local brothels (Campaign, 2015). Image Supplied.

2.2 Advertising

With origins in the ancient markets of Egypt, Greece, and China, rudimentary yet effective, forms of advertising played a crucial role in the informational exchange between traders and consumers and would lay the groundwork for what would become a sophisticated apparatus of mass communication and persuasion (Presbrey, 2000; Hayko, 2010). The industrial revolution saw a new era for advertising, in which the advent of mass production and distribution systems necessitated innovative advertising strategies which would allow persuasive communication on a mass scale (Blackett, 2003; Beard, 2017). Advertising's effect on society can be seen through its influence on language (Bell, 2001; Vettorel & Franceschi, 2019), religion (Dondolo, 2017) and, gender issues (Middleton & Turnbull, 2021). Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) defined advertising as 'brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people', while digital-savvy millennials describe it as 'companies promoting through media' (Mortimer et al., 2018). Advertising now uses language, design, and strategic positioning to effectively resonate with audiences (Gerritsen et al., 2007) and influences behaviour through the promotion of products, services, or ideas, leveraging both rational and emotional appeals (Baidya et al., 2014; Elbardai et al., 2021).

2.2.1 Promoting public services

Advertising is recognised as a powerful tool for persuading and changing consumer attitudes (Walsh et al., 2014). So, while advertising's primary function is to introduce consumer goods to the public, it has become more involved in the shaping of social values and attitudes, and less concerned with the communication of essential information about goods and services. Public Service Advertising or announcements (PSAs) are distinct from commercial advertising as they do not highlight a particular type of product (Stone & Miceli, 2012) and instead they can be designed to stimulate changes in public behaviour on various social issues (Yun & Cho, 2014). These types of advertisements, usually created by governmental organisations, non-profit agencies, or corporations (Martins, 2024) aim to convey persuasive information or educate the public on social issues, with the goal of increasing knowledge, awareness, and promoting positive behavioural change (Korenková et al., 2020). Research has demonstrated that public service advertisements can effectively impact awareness and attitudes, leading to behavioural changes (Wu et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2017; Qin et al., 2014).

The 'Keep it real online – Pornography' advertisement is a clear example of a PSA as it is identified as being created in response to a New Zealand Government need, aims to effect behaviour change and ultimately social change, and the only call to action is to visit a website for more information and resources. PSAs have been utilised in various health campaigns to promote positive behaviour change, such as chronic disease prevention and control initiatives, where the need to enact change is advocated for to reap personal and social benefits (Wu et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2017). Mass media campaigns have been utilised to alter health behaviours, facing

challenges from factors like product marketing and social norms (Wakefield et al., 2010). Examples include melanoma prevention initiatives (Theobald et al., 1991), gynaecologic cancer awareness (Cooper, Gelb, & Chu, 2014), and encouraging physical activity (Qin et al., 2014; Bauman, 2009; Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, 2010; Leavy, Rosenberg, & Bull, 2014). These campaigns often lead to significant behavioural adjustments such as efforts to quit smoking—a modifiable risk factor crucial for individuals with chronic diseases (Monyeki et al., 2013; Lin et al., 2013). Notably, the effectiveness of PSAs is also increased by the novelty (Lee & Davie, 1997) and creativity (Shen et al., 2021) of the message. However, the effectiveness of PSAs can vary widely, ranging from highly effective to ineffective campaigns, leading to potential waste of public resources in less successful endeavours (Cartocci et al., 2018).

The use of PSAs is in keeping with Miller and Yúdice’s (2002) position of governmentality in which the behaviour of citizens is managed using calculated actions. Governmentality is a concept developed by Michael Foucault in his 1979 lecture at the Collège de France (Lemke, 2001) which refers to the way in which modern forms of governance operate through the regulation of conduct and the shaping of individuals' behaviour. This concept goes beyond traditional notions of government as a centralised entity and encompasses a broader understanding of power relations and techniques of governing (Rose, O'Malley, & Valverde, 2006) ultimately involving shaping, guiding, and affecting individuals' conduct. It is not merely about enforcing laws but about managing populations through “the conduct of conduct” (Li, 2007). Techniques such as surveillance and discipline are central to the practice of governmentality and are used not only by the state but also by various institutions across society, integrating into the everyday lives of individuals (Rose et al., 2006). Furthermore, governmentality extends to the production of knowledge and by shaping individuals’ understanding of themselves and their world, the government influences behaviours and societal norms (Rose et al., 2006). In this sense the ‘Keep it real online – Pornography’ advertisement serves as an example of governmentality, as the government influences both individual and collective practices by setting standards for normalcy and deviance guiding the populace’s actions (Rose et al., 2006).

2.2.2 Roles of advertising

In the interplay between commerce and culture, advertising plays a pivotal role, influencing consumer behaviour and societal norms. As already mentioned, advertising is employed to accomplish commercial and cultural goals, both of which are neither straightforward nor universal. This section unpacks some of the effects that advertising is capable of, and the way in which these effects have been observed in previous research.

Perhaps the most obvious effect of advertising for business is a commercial one. Advertising can include informing consumers about the existence of products (Honka, Hortaçsu & Vitorino, 2017; Tsai & Honka, 2018),

educating consumers about product benefits and features (Tellis, 2004), and increasing brand awareness, which have been shown to have a direct effect on purchase intentions (Setiawan & Rabuani's, 2019; Yohanes et al., 2021). Calfee (1998) has also described this relationship, highlighting advertising's role as a purveyor of valuable consumer information, and that through educating consumers about their choices, advertising not only empowers them to make informed decisions but also fosters competitive markets, which in turn catalyze improvements in product quality and diversity. The benefits to advertisers, in turn, drives economic activity by increasing consumer awareness and sales, thereby stimulating economic growth. According to Rajeev Batra and Kevin Lane Keller (2016), advertising plays a crucial role in enhancing market expansion and consumer reach which can be good for business. This is echoed by studies which show that advertising spending and advertising agencies are responsible for increasing sales (Karaxha et al., 2017; Agarwal, 2023). Another valuable effect of advertising is in building credibility. Keller (2013) emphasizes the importance of creating strong brand identities that resonate with consumers, differentiate a brand from its competitors and that brand equity can be leveraged to create long-term value for a brand.

According to Aaker, Biel, and Biel (2013), advertising has a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining brand equity. The authors delineate how strategic advertising efforts are crucial in enhancing brand awareness, crafting strong brand associations, and ensuring perceived quality and brand loyalty. They argue that advertising is not just a tool for visibility but a strategic asset that can fundamentally influence consumer perceptions and decision-making processes. By effectively leveraging advertising, brands can cultivate a distinctive identity and foster enduring consumer relationships, ultimately driving brand equity. This perspective is crucial for understanding how brands can deploy advertising not only to inform and persuade but also to build and consolidate their market position. Furthermore, Alhaddad (2015) suggests that advertising awareness, especially through multimedia channels, plays a vital role in shaping audience perceptions about a brand or issue. These perceptions are crucial in shaping brand attitudes, desirability, quality perceptions, trust, and purchase likelihood (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). While the effect of the 'Keep it real online – Pornography' advertisement to sales is not relevant in this case, the effect on the perception of the advertiser, and informative and educational effect of the advertisement will be considered.

The influence of advertising on the development, maintenance and challenging of societal values is complex. Polay (1986) describes how advertising mirrors societal aspirations and norms, yet it also has the power to skew these reflections, creating harmful distortions by perpetuating unrealistic ideals of beauty and success, which can lead to a culture of dissatisfaction and materialism, urging individuals to seek fulfilment in consumption rather than in more sustainable forms of well-being. Specifically, the issue of gender stereotyping in advertising is critically assessed by Lavine et al. (2009), who observe the tendency of advertisements to depict women as sexual objects, a practice that not only reinforces gender stereotypes but also contributes to widespread body

dissatisfaction. This has significant repercussions for societal views on gender roles and body image (Lavine et al., 2009). Advertising's capacity to bypass conscious awareness and have subliminal effects has been a subject of psychological inquiry by McConnell et al. (1955). Their exploration raises concerns about the ethical implications of such strategies and the extent to which they can manipulate consumer behaviour, potentially undermining consumer autonomy (McConnell et al., 1955). Later, Schudson (2009) delved into the ethical landscape of advertising, contemplating its persuasive nature against the backdrop of ethical responsibility. He points out that while advertising seeks to inform and persuade, it should not overstep into the realms of deceit or exploitation, which can lead to disillusionment among audiences.

In a global context, Kanner and Renee (2004) discuss how advertising, as a tool of multinational corporations, disseminates consumer culture worldwide. This globalization of consumerism can simultaneously free and homogenize local cultures, affecting not just economies but also individual identities and freedoms (Kanner and Renee, 2004). While Schlosser (2009) critiques the targeting of advertising at children, emphasizing the ethical challenges posed by marketing to an impressionable audience. The impact of such advertising on children's preferences and their consequent influence on parental purchasing decisions, known as "pester power," underscores the urgent need for a responsible advertising framework that protects the interests of children (Schlosser, 2009). These points converge to form a multifaceted picture of advertising's influence on society, one that requires ongoing scrutiny and ethical consideration to ensure that the messages conveyed foster a society that values informed choice, genuine diversity, and individual well-being.

2.2.3 Effectiveness of advertising

Bill Bernbach is credited with sparking the creative advertising revolution of the 1960's (Samuel, 2012) famously saying "Advertising is fundamentally persuasion and persuasion happens to be not a science, but an art" (Heath & Hyder, 2005, p. 2). His quote captures the ongoing dispute about the effectiveness of advertising. While advertising is a valuable marketing tool, measuring its effectiveness presents challenges due to the diverse nature of advertising platforms and the complexities involved in capturing and interpreting consumer responses and intentions. Although various authors have emphasised the necessity for standardised metrics and models to accurately evaluate the effectiveness of advertising campaigns (Novak & Hoffman, 1997; Patsioura et al., 2007; Vaughan et al., 2020) such standardisation proves difficult as advertisements can be delivered through a combination of various mediums and can have a range of distinct goals.

In many cases, the effectiveness of advertisements has been analysed through quantitative data, for example by measuring impressions, engagements, or sales (Zenetti et al., 2014) often comparing these to advertising

expenditure to monetise return on investment (Sharma & Kapur, 2014). However, the validity of these effectiveness measurements is a matter of ongoing debate (Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003; Manchanda et al., 2006; Varan, et al., 2015). Vakratsas, Feinberg, Bass, and Kalyanaram (2004) point out that advertising effectiveness is not solely dependent on the expenditure but also on the intricate mechanisms through which advertising impacts consumer choices. While in some cases there is a direct relationship between advertising spend and sales (Sturges & Young, 1981; Aduloju et al., 2009), in other cases it has been found that the impact of advertising spend on sales is limited (Hessner & Mellor, 1986; Aduloju et al., 2009).

Additionally, when identifying the ingredients of effective advertising, Aduloju, Odugbesan and Oke (2009) found that not only the amount spent, but the choice of advertising medium, the message, and the format are critical. In terms of the impact of medium, Zenetti, Bijmolt, Leeflang and Klapper (2014) found that, while increasing TV and search engine advertising had a positive effect on sales, banner advertising only affected sales when used in conjunction with TV advertising. During this study they also highlight the difficulty of measuring these mediums using the same tools (Zenetti et al., 2014). Moreover, sales are affected by a range of dynamic factors. For example, Zhang et al. (2021) showed that advertising during different selling periods can influence profitability, with optimal advertising investment varying based on the sales period.

Another key issue with accurately measuring advertising effectiveness is that much of the research only accounts for the direct effect of advertisements (Briggs & Hollis, 1997; Hollis, 2005; Huang & Lin, 2006; Manchanda, et al., 2006), yet there might be longer term, in-direct effects which are not accounted for in this type of measurement (Zenetti et al., 2014, Lajante et al., 2020). For example, an advertisements effects on perceived prevalence, benefits, and advertising awareness, are not considered (Brown & Moodie, 2009).

As an alternative to traditional fixed-scale measures like satisfaction, which may not fully capture the depth of consumer experiences, Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse (2015) propose a context-specific approach to measuring engagement that goes beyond the one-size-fits-all method. Focusing on qualitatively rich experiences, can provide deeper insights into audience experience and better predict behaviour (Calder, 2015) and the long-term and indirect effects of advertisements, such as credibility (Munnukka et al., 2016), perception (Manzur et al., 2012), and loyalty (Ha et al., 2011). This type of approach is an attempt to tackle methodological challenges in measuring emotions (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1984). It is also why I have opted to engage in a qualitative analysis of audiences' responses to the "Keep it Real Online - Pornography advertisement" to consider the views articulated by people exposed to the advertising. Although this is not an exhaustive account of how people reacted to the advertisement, it offers a nuanced perspective that moves past quantitative measures to address how society is constructed in language, and how meanings are made by those consuming such PSA content.

2.2.4 The advertising process

Much of the discussion thus far has focussed on the influence of persuasion and advertising, in essence, the decoding and evaluation of advertising, yet how an advertisement is encoded with persuasion and information, is the first step in the sense-making process of advertising, and so it is a consideration of the advertising process that is explored next.

Creating an advertising campaign involves a strategic and systematic process that aims to effectively promote a product, service, or idea to a target audience. The process usually begins with some research to understand a specific audience, the current market trends, and the behaviour of competitors (Agarwal, et al, 2023).

Advertising agencies specialise in developing advertising strategies and producing engaging executions across various media channels (Agarwal, et al, 2023). This expertise of handling advertising campaigns is essential to ensure the efficient use of resources and maximize the campaign's impact (Idowu, et al., 2022).

Advertising strategy encompasses the planning, implementation, and evaluation of advertising efforts to achieve specific objectives effectively (Iyer et al. 2005). There are various strategies and appeals which can be used to capture the audience's attention and evoke specific emotions or responses. Once the initial planning and strategy has been completed, the creative process begins, where novel ideas are generated for the campaign (Maragoudakis et al., 2014). This phase of the process involves brainstorming and developing innovative concepts that resonate with the target audience, but also align with the strategic approach outlined on the brief. Designing and executing these ideas is a critical step in ensuring that the campaign effectively communicates its message (Hill & Johnson, 2004) as developing engaging content, and creating memorable elements as well as selecting the appropriate advertising channels are key factors in successful advertising campaigns according to Išoraitė and Ambrusevič (2022). For example, understanding the use of humour, cultural considerations, and linguistic characteristics can enhance the effectiveness of advertisements (Marn, 2021; Skorupa & Dubovičienė, 2015).

Turnbull and Wheeler (2017) were able to outline the stages involved in the strategic process from the perspective of account managers and directors, offering a unique insight into the internal and client-facing procedures of advertising creation. Through in-depth interviews with 21 practitioners from six London-based advertising agencies, the advertising process is outlined as a series of sequentially linked stages, starting with brand review and need identification and moving towards developing advertising briefs and internal agency reviews. The process is highlighted for its adaptability, tailored to meet the specific needs of clients, project scopes, and constraints, such as time and budget. Significant stages include:

1. **Brand Review/Need Identification:** Agencies begin with a detailed analysis of the client's market position, competitor analysis, and overall strategy to tailor the advertising needs and objectives.
2. **Development of Advertising Brief:** A collaborative document outlining campaign objectives, target audience, budget, deliverables, and timelines is crafted to guide subsequent creative efforts.
3. **Client Brief to Agency and Internal Debrief:** Post-approval of the brief, it is dissected internally across various departments to ensure alignment with the client's strategic goals.
4. **Creative Development:** This stage includes developing a strategic framework, writing a detailed creative brief, and generating creative concepts. Regular internal reviews and feedback loops ensure that the creative outputs align with strategic objectives.
5. **Validation and Decision Making:** Creative outputs are internally tested, presented to the client, and further refined through consumer focus groups to ensure effectiveness and appropriateness for the target audience.

As outlined in the steps above, selecting a strategic approach and creative direction are significant steps in developing effective advertisements.

2.2.5 Types of advertising approaches:

In this section I briefly outline the academic literature on some of these strategic and creative advertising approaches, such as hard and soft sells, or rational versus emotional appeals, and the key findings identified in previous literature, before focusing on humour, planned controversy and sexual appeals, as they are particularly relevant to the 'Keep it real online – Pornography' advertisement.

2.2.6 Hard vs Soft Sell:

The distinction between 'hard-sell' and 'soft-sell' appeals is a common method of categorising advertising strategies. Hard-sell appeals focus on direct promotion and sales tactics and are characterised by being explicit, convincing, instructive, informative, and factual (Ketelaar, et al., 2015, Okazaki et al., 2010a, Okazaki et al., 2010b). Hard-sells, or "an aggressive, high-pressure sales practice or promotion" (Ammer, 2013, p. 1) encourage quick sales. An example of hard sells are warning-based appeals which communicate through cautionary content (Shen et al., 2020). Contrastingly, soft-sell appeals emphasise subtle persuasion and brand image building (Okazaki et al., 2010). This distinction aligns Petty and Cacioppo's rational (central) and emotional (peripheral) elaboration routes outlined in their Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (1984).

Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy (1984) highlight that emotions play a crucial role in capturing audience attention and creating a lasting impact. Positive emotions can be invoked by entertainment in advertising which can take

various forms, such as being amusing, lively, imaginative, or intelligent, contributing to the overall appeal of the message and can influence audience attitudes and purchase intentions (Tuan et al., 2023). Coca-Cola's "Open happiness" campaign is a prime example of leveraging emotional advertising appeals to evoke positive feelings in consumers (Shao et al., 2015). Studies have shown that Coca-Cola's brand associations are so strong that exposure to the brand can trigger changes in brain activity, leading to the evocation of positive emotions such as happiness (Gertner & Rifkin, 2017).

Conversely, sadness is leveraged in charity or cause-related advertisements to evoke sympathy and prompt donations, while excitement is used in advertisements for entertainment or high-energy products to attract consumer interest (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). Alternatively, fear appeals can also be a powerful tool in advertising to initially command attention. Fear is often used in public health campaigns to highlight the negative consequences of certain behaviours, instigating behavioural change (Witte & Allen, 2000). However, the effectiveness of fear appeals may diminish over time with repeated exposure, which highlights the importance of balancing emotional appeals with other advertising strategies to maintain audience engagement (Hastings et al., 2004). Attention-getting tactics, common in controversial advertisements, can sometimes lead consumers to perceive the advertiser as manipulative (Campbell, 1995).

2.2.7 Positive vs negative emotions:

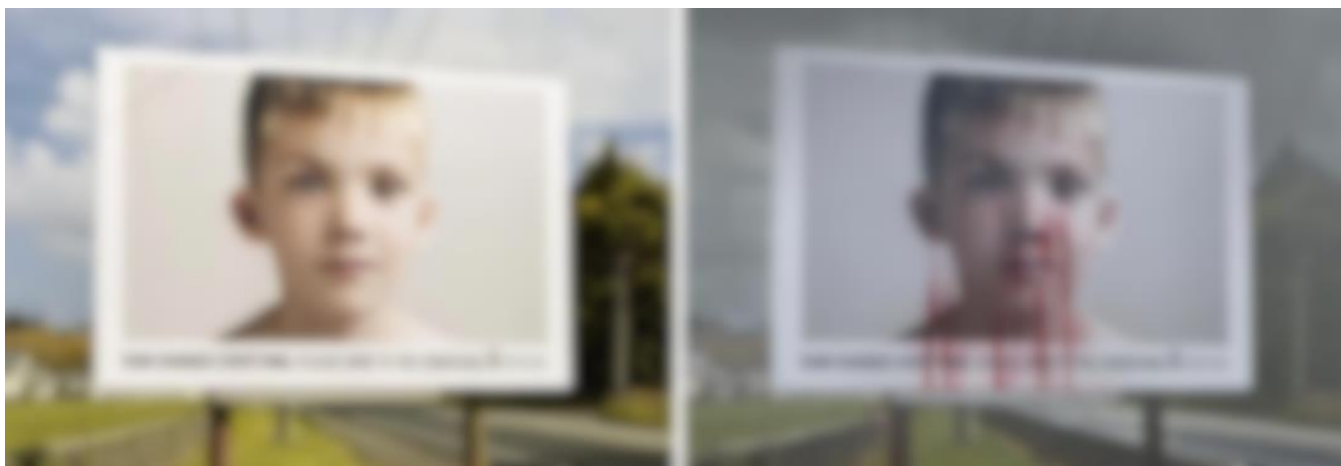
Positive appeals in advertising focus on generating optimistic emotions such as happiness, joy, and hope. Research indicates that positive appeals are particularly effective in fostering a favourable attitude toward the advertisement and the brand (Kemp et al., 2013; Rodrigue et al., 2014). These appeals work by enhancing perceived benefits, inducing empathy, and diminishing the perception of risk associated with the behaviour or product being promoted. The effectiveness of positive appeals can be attributed to their ability to create a warm, positive atmosphere that enhances receptivity to the message (Brooker, 1981; Plant et al., 2017). For instance, studies have shown that positive appeals can improve attitudes towards health behaviours and increase intentions to engage in environmentally friendly actions (Wang et al., 2017; Rodrigue et al., 2014). Positive appeals are particularly persuasive in contexts where the desired behaviour is perceived as beneficial or rewarding.

Negative appeals leverage emotions such as fear, guilt, and sadness to motivate behaviour change. These appeals are commonly used in public health campaigns, where the goal is to deter harmful behaviours or promote cautious behaviour (Struckman-Johnson et al., 1994; Hendriks et al., 2014). Aotearoa New Zealand PSAs have employed these shock tactics to improve road safety with varying success (Ward, 2023). While effective in certain contexts, negative appeals often risk eliciting defensive reactions or denial, particularly if the message induces too much fear or guilt without providing a clear, achievable call to action (Witte and Allen, 2000);

Lennon et al., 2010). Research underscores the importance of balancing the intensity of negative emotions to avoid overwhelming the audience. For instance, fear appeals (as seen in the example below) need to be carefully crafted to ensure they convey sufficient severity and susceptibility regarding the issue but also provide reassurance and efficacy measures that the audience can take to mitigate the threat (Tay, 2011; Witte and Allen, 2000).

Figure 9

Papakura District Council's 'Bleeding billboards'.



Note: These billboards were designed to 'bleed' in the rain to demonstrate the consequences of not driving to the conditions. In this case the relevancy of the message is reinforced by the placement of the billboards, which were displayed prior to the first heavy rains after summer, and leading up to a long weekend, in which New Zealanders regularly take road trips. The shocking image is attention grabbing delivers a relevant safety message to those viewing it. The year following this the council recorded no deaths during the Easter break(The One Club, n.d.-b). Image Source: (<https://www.oneclub.org/awards/theoneshow/-award/11703/bleeding-billboard>)

Coactive appeals represent a sophisticated approach that combines elements of both positive and negative appeals to harness their combined persuasive power while mitigating their individual downsides (Nabi, 2015; Alhabash et al., 2013). These appeals are designed to initiate a cognitive and emotional process where negative emotions highlight the seriousness of the issue, and positive emotions help in providing hope and actionable solutions. The potential of coactive appeals lies in their ability to reduce the defensive reactions commonly associated with negative appeals. By immediately following a negative emotion with a positive one, the approach keeps the audience engaged and reduces the likelihood of message rejection (Mukherjee and Dubé, 2012). For example, a public service announcement might first depict the dangers of texting while driving (negative appeal) followed by the benefits of using hands-free technology (positive appeal).

2.2.8 Shock and Planned Controversy

‘Shockvertising’ is a strategy which aims to startle viewers and draw attention to critical social issues or brands through unexpected and provocative content (Ho, 2019; Parry et al., 2013; Mierzwińska-Hajnos, 2014). This approach can also utilize fear tactics or controversial imagery to create a lasting impact on the audience (Ho, 2019). Similarly, ‘planned controversy,’ involves deliberately integrating controversies into advertising campaigns to generate buzz and differentiate brands (Bachnik & Nowacki, 2018). By strategically incorporating controversial elements into advertisements, companies seek to stand out and leave a lasting impression on their target audience. While the use of shock tactics in advertising have been found to enhance message recall, particularly in public health campaigns, it can be a double-edged sword, as it is effective in grabbing attention, but may also elicit negative reactions from some viewers (Engelbart et al., 2017).

2.3 Controversy

As the focus of this research is on a controversial advertisement, the focus of the next sections shift to understanding what is controversy and more specifically its role in advertising.

According to Merriam-Webster (2023) controversy can be defined as “a discussion marked especially by the expression of opposing views”. But controversial issues are not just those which people disagree with, they are issues that people often feel strongly about (Boring, 1929). Chen and Berger use LGBTQIA+ movements, abortion, and stem cell research as examples of controversial issues because differing opinions are evident, and these opinions can be strongly held. These strong opinions are sometimes based on subjective or moral predispositions about what the “right” or “wrong” thing to do is (Chen & Berger, 2013).

Due to its emotional and subjective nature, controversy is uncomfortable for some people. People like to be socially accepted (Reiss 2004), fit in and be liked (Baumeister 1998; Goffman 1959) and concerns over being judged by others (Argo, White, and Dahl 2006; Ratner and Kahn 2002) and fear of social rejection (Buss, 1990) can deter people from engaging in controversy and instead push them to adopt a “conformity” mindset (Wyer, 2022). However, simultaneously controversy evokes interest, and interesting things are more likely to be discussed (Berger and Milkman 2012; Heath, Bell, and Sternberg 2001). As an example, Chen and Berger (2013) were able to observe that while moderately controversial content increases the likelihood of discussion, more extremely controversial content is less likely to be discussed. However, predicting, recording, and measuring controversy is not straightforward as individual and cultural factors influence individual's perceptions of controversy (Chen & Berger, 2013). That is, a shared consensus of controversial topics can be developed at a

national scale, such as attitudes towards guns or abortion, while simultaneously, to a sport fan a referee's decision, or to a fashionista my outfit, might be considered controversial.

2.3.1 The Rise of Controversial Advertising

The increasing prevalence of controversial advertising has ignited a fervent debate among academics and practitioners regarding its efficacy and ethical implications. Huhmann and Mott-Stenerson (2008) provide a comprehensive definition as: "Controversial advertisement executions are provocative images, words or situations that utilize or refer to taboo subjects" (p. 294). Pope, Voges, and Brown (2004), along with Crosier and Erdogan (2001), acknowledge the strategic advantage of such advertising in penetrating media clutter, leading to more frequent use by advertisers (Pope, et al. 2004; Prendergast, et al. 2002; Vezina & Paul 1997; Waller 2005). However, this approach is fraught with risks, as Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda (2003) and Waller (1999) caution, noting the potential for significant brand damage and consumer backlash. So, the use of controversial tactics, (also referred to as shock appeals, provocative appeals or offensive advertisement executions) is a delicate balance between attracting attention and avoiding public offence (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008).

Controversial advertising remains a powerful tool in cutting through the clutter of traditional marketing channels. It seeks to capture immediate consumer attention by pushing the boundaries of societal norms and expectations. According to Hays (2018), in New Zealand, companies like 2 Cheap Cars, 30 Seconds, Hell Pizza, and the New Zealand Transport Agency have effectively employed controversial tactics to various effects (see Figure 10 below). The Hell Pizza brand has such an established reputation for using controversial advertising that New Zealand audiences and advertising regulators have an increased expectation and acceptance of the brand's provocative approaches (Fastnedge & Gould, 2024). While these strategies have proven successful in gaining visibility, they also pose significant risks, including potential backlash and damage to brand reputation. This dual-edged nature of controversial advertising makes it a critical area of study for understanding both its impact on consumer behaviour and the strategic considerations necessary for its implementation.

Figure 10

Hell Pizza: Rabbit Billboard



Note: Hell Pizza's controversial billboard for a rabbit pizza sparked complaints from Christians and animal lovers in the lead up to Easter 2014. Image Source: (<https://www.bestadsonTV.com/ad/61665/Hell-Pizza-Rabbit-Billboard>)

The inherent nature of certain products, such as tobacco, alcohol, and sexually explicit materials, often predisposes them to controversy. Schuster and Powell (1987) and Wilson and West (1995) explore the challenges faced by advertisers of these products, highlighting the societal debates they spark. This can be seen in examples including Reisach (2021), who highlights the role of social media advertising in societal and political manipulation, and Parker et al. (2023), who discuss the difficulties of regulating gambling advertising through less regulated online platforms. However, as Huhmann (2008) points out, controversy can also stem from the advertising execution of non-controversial products, underscoring the significant impact of creative decisions on public reception and the ensuing controversies.

2.3.2 Controversy and Sex Sells

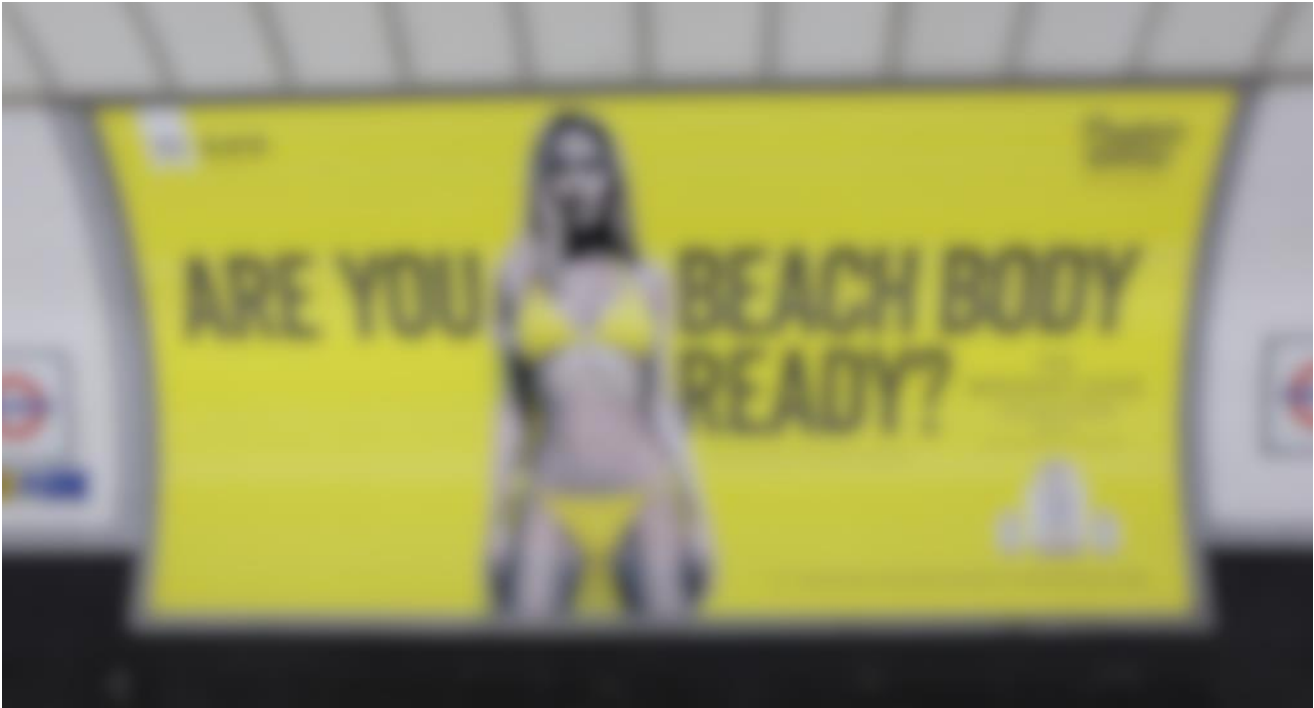
The use of sexual innuendo and sexually explicit content has been considered at the forefront of the myriad of topics that can garner controversy in advertising despite the adage 'sex sells' frequently surfacing in discussions of advertising strategies. Sexual content in advertising has evolved significantly, mirroring societal changes in

attitudes towards sexuality and decency. Initially, sexual appeals in ads were subtle and often veiled in innuendo. Over the decades, as societal norms around sexuality liberalised, advertisements have become increasingly explicit, showcasing overt nudity and sexual behaviour. The attention-grabbing power of sex appeal advertising has long been acknowledged (Baker, 1961; Reid & Soley, 1983) and as much as one fifth of advertising uses such appeals (Lin, 1998; Reichert et al., 1999; Walker, 2000). This evolution is documented in the conceptualization by Lambiase and Reichert (2003), who identified five types of sexual appeals: nudity, sexual behaviour, physical attractiveness, sexual referents, and sexual embeds. This categorization illustrates the depth and variety of sexual content used in marketing efforts over time.

While sex appeals can be attention-grabbing, they can also distract from the intended message (Samson, 2018), and in some cases audiences may react negatively as they perceive the use of sex appeals as unethical and manipulative (Noble & Pepe, 2019). The reception of sexual appeals varies significantly between genders. Males typically find sexualized advertisements more appealing and are less likely to perceive them as offensive, whereas females often view these ads as objectifying or degrading (LaTour, Henthorne, & Pitre, 1990). This divergence can significantly impact the effectiveness of these advertisements, underscoring the importance of demographic targeting in marketing strategies. Reichert and Ramirez (2000) further elaborate on this by detailing characteristics that influence perceptions of sexiness in ads, including the physical features of models, their behaviour and movement, the intimacy displayed between models, and contextual features such as camera angles and effects.

Figure 11

Protein World's 'Are you Beach Body Ready' Campaign (2015)

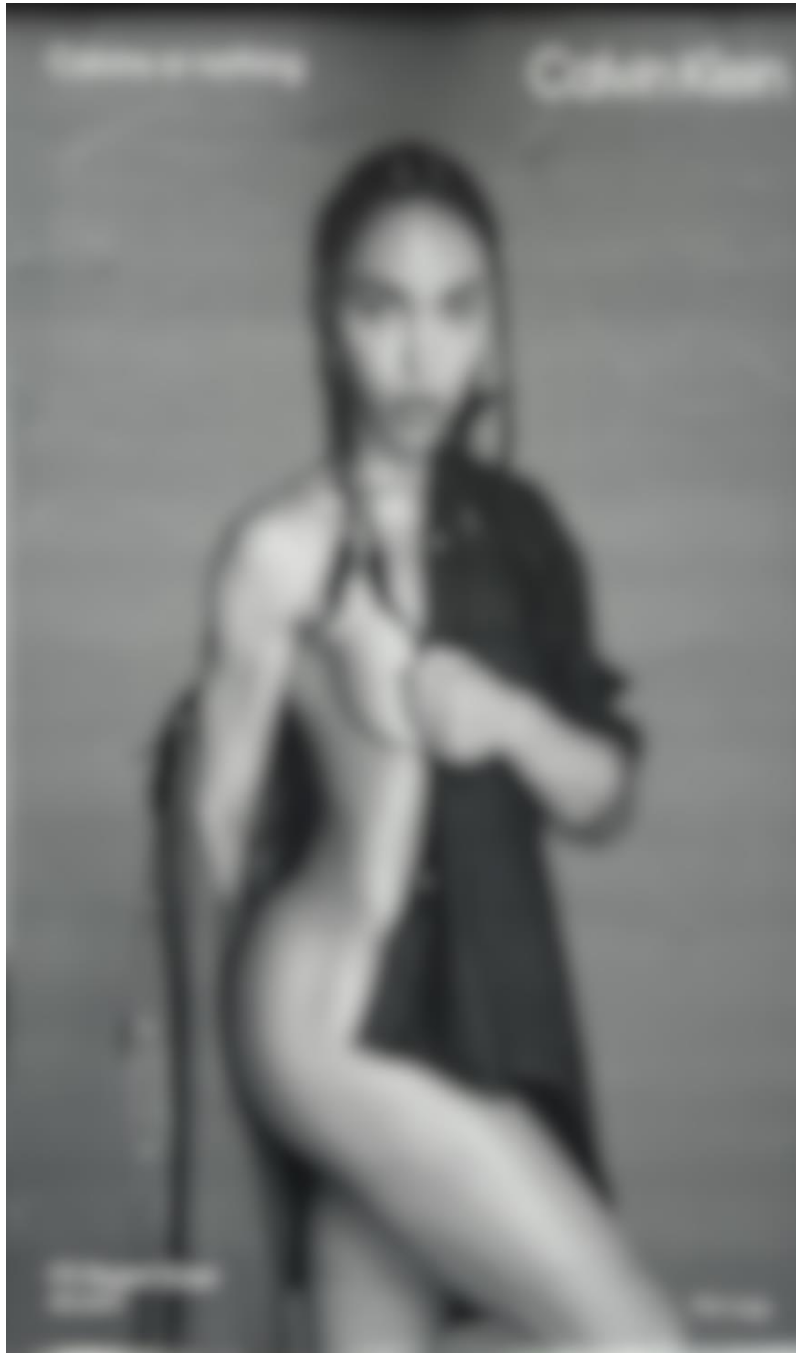


Note. This Protein World advertising campaign (2015) sparked widespread criticism, protests, and a call for boycotts in the UK. It caused the UK ASA to develop rules regarding negative stereotypes of women in advertising. Interestingly, when the same campaign ran in Times Square New York it received a 'light-hearted response' (Hackman, 2015). Image Source: Elizabeth Hotson (2018)

Much like gender, cultural background crucially shapes how audiences perceive sexual content in advertising. In sexually liberal countries, audiences might be more receptive to sexual appeals, whereas more conservative societies might find the same content offensive or inappropriate. For example, when analysing responses to the show 'Naked Attraction', Matthews and Nairn (2020) concluded that while some New Zealander's were concerned with impact that nudity and sexual innuendo might have on young people, the majority "were entertained and not offended by the nudity, sexual messages and diversity on offer" and "New Zealanders are open to a show such as Naked Attraction, and favour independent choice and liberal ideas, over censorship and conservatism" (p. 60). The cultural variances are often influenced by broader societal values, religious beliefs, and national attitudes toward sexuality (Biswas et al., 1992). For example, individuals with a strong intrinsic religious belief tend to view a company's use of sexual appeals more negatively which leads to less favourable opinions and a lower likelihood of purchasing the advertised brand (Putrevu & Swimberghek, 2013).

Figure 12

A Calvin Klein advertisement 'Calvin's or Nothing' featuring the British singer FKA twigs



Note. This advertisement for Calvin Klein was initially banned in the UK, but sparked widespread discussion as to whether the subject was a “stereotypical sexual object” or if it was “natural and neutral” the ASA later retracting their ruling (Beaumont-Thomas, 2024). Image source: (<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2024/jan/10/calvin-klein-ad-with-singer-fka-twigs-banned-for-making-her-stereotypical-sexual-object>)

Additionally, generational differences affect perceptions; for instance, Gen Y consumers have been reported to respond more positively to sexual appeals compared to older generations, highlighting shifts in societal norms and values over time (Loroz & Helgeson, 2013). These factors illustrate the various factors which contribute to an individual's perception of sexual appeals, nudity and the subject of the 'Keep it real online – Pornography' advertisement.

The use of sexual appeals in advertising has often ignited controversy due to its impact on societal norms and individual perceptions. One notable example is the 2015 Protein World campaign in London, which featured a slim, bikini-wearing woman alongside the tagline "Are you beach body ready?" (shown above in Figure 11). This advertisement, intended to promote a weight loss supplement, sparked significant backlash for promoting unrealistic body standards and contributing to body image issues. The controversy led to public protests and a petition with over 50,000 signatures demanding its removal, illustrating the potent societal reaction against perceived body shaming (Hackman, 2015; Bajekal, 2015; Davies, 2015). Another significant case involved Volkswagen's advertisements, which were banned under updated guidelines targeting negative gender stereotypes. The advertisements contrasted images of men in adventurous activities with women in passive or caregiving roles, drawing criticism for reinforcing outdated gender roles (Zawisza, 2019; Advertising Standards Authority, 2019). More recently, a Calvin Klein advertisement featuring FKA Twigs was initially criticized by the ASA for objectifying the artist, focusing excessively on her nudity and physical features (shown above in Figure 12). The backlash from the public and subsequent defence by Calvin Klein and FKA Twigs highlighted the subjective nature of interpreting sexual appeals in advertising. The ASA ultimately retracted their ruling, citing the strength of public sentiment, which underscores the evolving and culturally dependent perspectives on sexual content in advertisements (Beaumont-Thomas, 2024; Burga & Cleary, 2024; Banfield-Nwachi, 2024).

In New Zealand, the application of sexual appeals in advertising reflects both global trends and unique local sensitivities. Instances such as the banning of billboards using the word 'sex' near schools (shown below in Figure 13) highlighted community concerns about children's exposure to sexual content. The complaints, particularly from Tongan communities, emphasized the advertisement's cultural and religious offensiveness (NZPA, 2009; Gregory, 2020). The backlash against the I Love Ugly brand in 2015, where advertisements featured a man's hands on a woman's naked torso (shown below in Figure 14), became the most complained-about advertisement of the year. The public's reaction was overwhelmingly negative, viewing the imagery as exploitative and degrading to women, which led to the brand's apology and the withdrawal of the ads (ASA, 2015; Satherley, 2016).

Figure 13

'Longer lasting Sex' billboards

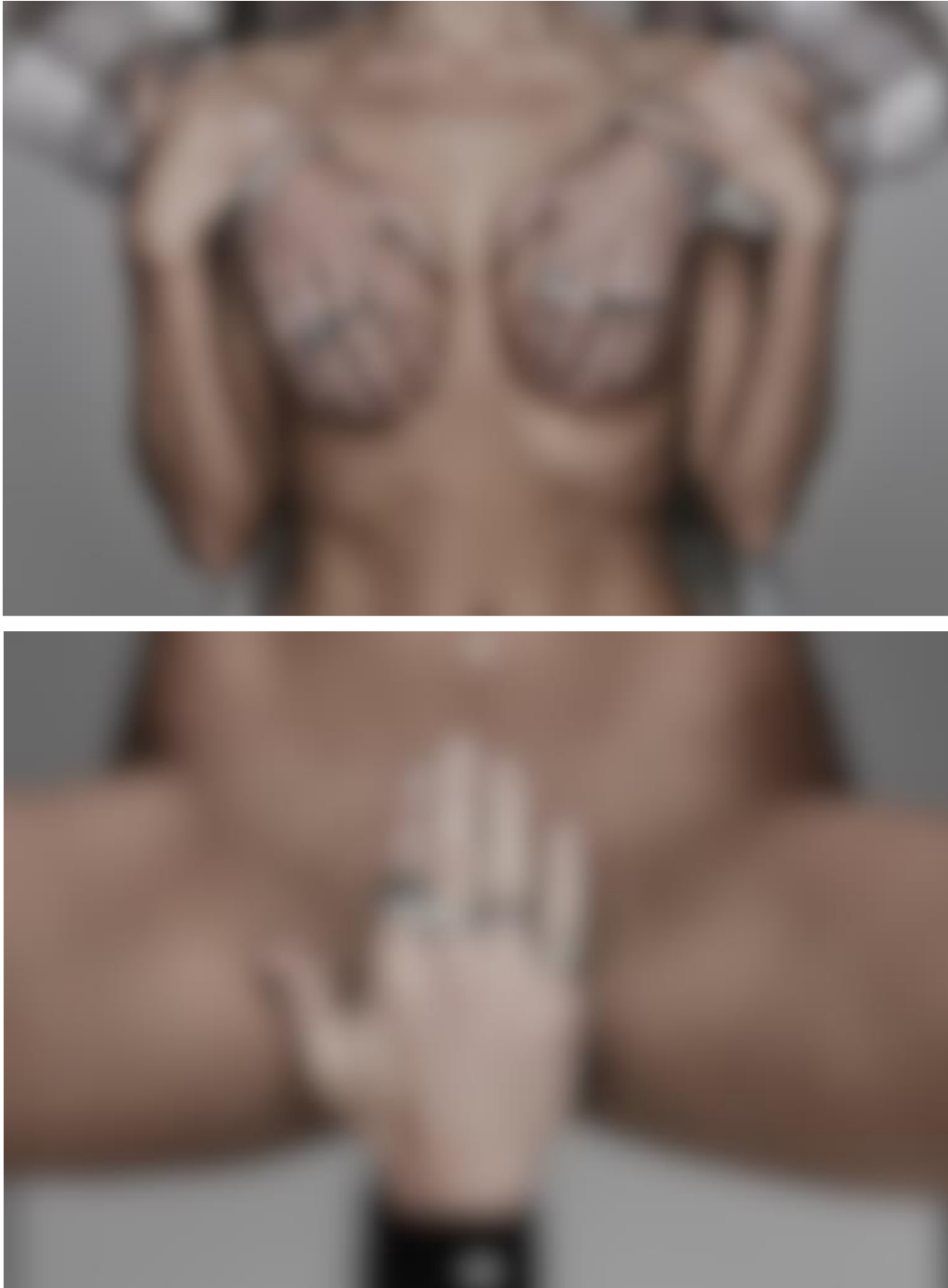


Note. Billboards mentioning 'sex' were banned by the ASA following concerns from Tongan communities in Auckland (NZPA, 2009). Image by Ben McLeay, Source (<https://www.pedestrian.tv/news/want-longer-lasting-sex-billboards-bankrupt/>)

Further instances of controversy included advertisements reinforcing negative stereotypes, such as a job advertisement specifying the need for "DD breasts" and an Auckland Council ad targeting women for taking long showers, both of which were identified as sexist and led to public outcry (Atkinson, 2022; Plummer, 2024). Additionally, the brand 'Girls Get Off,' focusing on female-oriented sex toys, tested social taboos through billboard advertising. Despite being unable to advertise on social media due to the nature of their product, the brand continued to challenge societal norms (as seen in Figure 15 below), indicating a complex relationship between New Zealand audiences and the portrayal of sexuality, and sexual products in advertising (Blommerde, 2021; LUMO, n.d.).

Figure 14

I Love Ugly Jewellery Campaign (2015)



Note. Images used to by New Zealand brand ‘I Love Ugly’ to promote a range of jewellery. The advertiser later apologised and withdrew the images following complaints to the ASA (Fahey, 2015). Image Source: (<https://stoppress.co.nz/news/backlash-feature-or-bug-i-love-ugly/>)

Figure 15

Billboards for 'Girls Get Off'



Note. New Zealand brand 'Girls Get Off' continuously test social taboos in New Zealand (Blommerde, 2021). The female-focused sex toy brand has run various billboards in cities across New Zealand, but they are unable to advertise on social media due to the nature of the product. (LUMO, n.d.). Image Source: (<https://www.lumodigital.nz/campaigns/girls-get-off>)

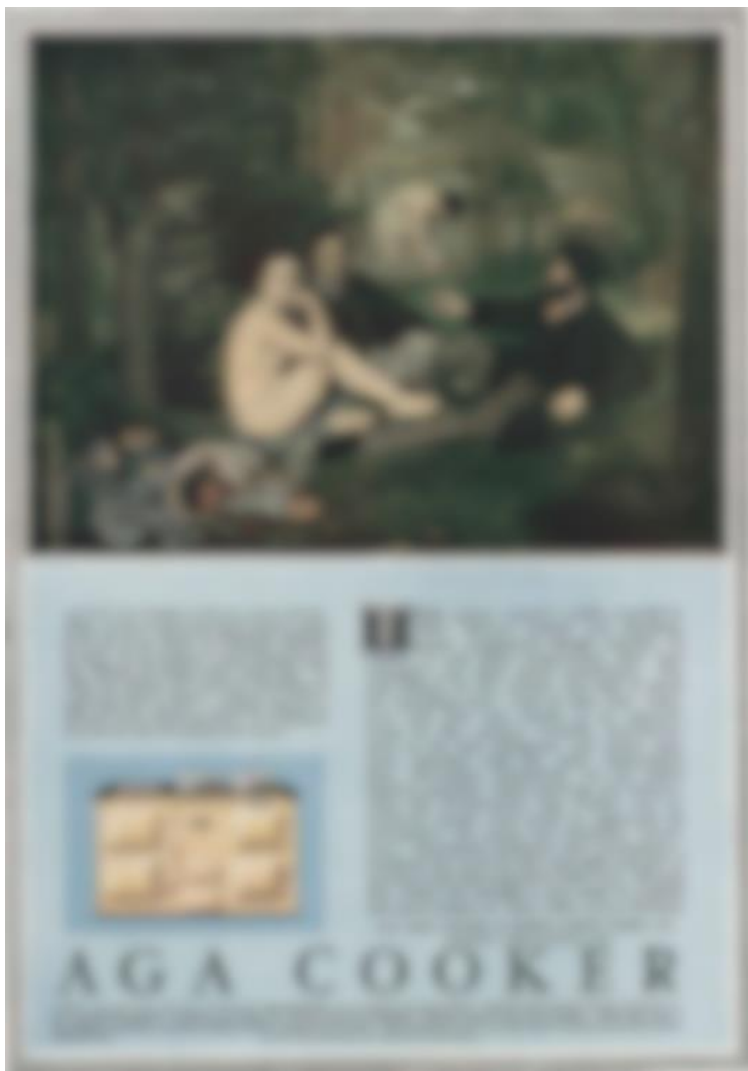
These examples demonstrate that while sexual appeals can effectively draw attention in advertising, they must be navigated carefully to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes or alienating audiences. The use of sexual appeals in advertising, then, is fraught with ethical controversies. Critics argue that such appeals, especially when they objectify individuals, perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and contribute to societal inequalities. These practices are viewed as contributing to broader issues like sexual harassment and gender discrimination. The ethical debate is intensified by concerns that sexual appeals might manipulate viewers, leading to perceptions of such strategies as unethical and exploitative (Noble & Pepe, 2019).

The advertising industry must navigate these ethical waters carefully, as the misuse of sexual content can alienate consumers, reinforce negative stereotypes and provoke public backlash and in some instances violence. Industry leaders and academic researchers agree that sexual appeals must be relevant to the product being

advertised to avoid these ethical pitfalls. This perspective is echoed by famous advertising agency founder David Ogilvy, who often used sex appeals (see Figure 16 below) but cautioned others that sex appeals must be 'relevant,' and supported by academic insights which suggest that 'sex sells, but only if you're selling sex' (Kalb, 2012).

Figure 16

Print ad for AGA Cookers



Note. A example of David Ogilvy's early experimentation with sex appeals (1930's), featuring a Monet painting which 'exuded sensuality', but proved irrelevant to the promoted product — a cooking stove (Rusho, 2024).

Image Source: (https://s3.amazonaws.com/productuploader-uploads/staging/198/Document/57708_1509646361_AGA_Cast_Iron_Ranges_How_AGA_Became_an_Icon.pdf)

2.3.3 Controversy and Humour

The intentional use of humour is clearly apparent for most of the audience viewing the 'Keep it real online – Pornography' advertisement (Saxena, 2020), therefore, the following discussion considers the appropriateness of humour in advertising. Humour has long been recognised as an effective tool in advertising, capable of capturing attention, enhancing recall, and influencing consumer attitudes (Eisend, 2009). Despite its apparent benefits, the use of humour, especially dark humour, in advertising presents a complex ethical landscape, balancing between engagement and offensiveness (Mortimer, 2010). The factors which influence perceptions of humour are complex. In some instances, responses to controversial advertising can be worsened due to the use of inappropriate humour (Dikćius et al. 2023). Another example of this is the "vampire effect," where humour may divert attention from the brand and product information (Djambaska et al. 2015). So, while there are useful benefits in utilising humour, there are also considerable drawbacks, which must be carefully considered.

The use of humour in advertising is deeply rooted in psychological theories that explain why humour appeals to individuals. The superiority theory suggests that humour arises from the perceived superiority over others, which can be leveraged in advertising to create a bond with the audience by sharing an 'inside joke' (Chan et al., 2016). This theory posits that every humorous situation involves a winner and a loser, with the humour deriving from a sense of one-upmanship (Shifman & Blondheim, 2010) and can be traced back to classical Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, who viewed laughter as an expression of the pleasant feeling of superiority (Shifman & Blondheim, 2010). Conversely, relief theory posits that humour acts as a relief from societal norms and pressures, offering consumers a temporary escape from the mundane or stressful aspects of life (Cooper, 2008). Finally, incongruity theory, perhaps most relevant to advertising, argues that humour emerges from the resolution of something unexpected or incongruous, making it a powerful tool for capturing attention and enhancing memorability (Martin, 2007). Moreover, several different humour styles have been identified, including affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating humour, each serving distinct purposes and having varying effects on individuals' well-being (Martinet al., 2003). The multifaceted nature of humour, with its myriad types and the multitude of theories explaining it, demonstrate its complexity and its fundamental relationship to human experience.

Beard (2008) emphasises the strategic deployment of humour in advertising, arguing that when humour is intentional and well-aligned with the brand's message and audience's preferences, it can significantly enhance the advertisement's effectiveness. This strategic use of humour not only attracts attention but also aids in the retention of the advertised message, making the brand more memorable. In social marketing advertisements, humour can effectively reduce counterarguments and psychological reactance by making the persuasive intention less obtrusive, thus enhancing the likelihood of positive behaviour change, especially among individuals with unfavourable prior attitudes towards the advertised behaviour (Jäger & Eisend, 2013).

However, the effectiveness of humour is contingent upon its appropriateness for the target audience, highlighting the importance of a nuanced understanding of audience demographics and psychographics. The balance between being humorous and respectful is delicate; advertisers must navigate this balance to avoid the pitfalls of offending their audience while seeking to engage and entertain (Mortimer, 2010).

Thus, the ethical landscape of humour in advertising is complicated, especially when humour is used in a way that disparages or stereotypes certain groups. For example, Grougiou et al. (2018) delve into the specific context of female-disparaging humour, investigating how such humour affects audiences' perceptions of an advertisement's ethicality. Their research reveals that while humour can increase engagement and potentially enhance the persuasiveness of an advertisement, it also runs the risk of reinforcing negative stereotypes and perpetuating societal biases. This dual-edged sword of humour highlights the need for ethical consideration and sensitivity in its use, particularly when the humour may impact how certain demographics, such as women, are perceived and treated both within and beyond the advertising context.

Of particular ethical concern is dark humour. Dark humour presents a unique challenge in advertising, as it can serve to both distinguish a brand and potentially alienate audiences. The concept of a "threshold for offense" is instrumental in understanding how brands known for their use of dark humour may cultivate a reputation that affords them greater leeway in the content they produce (Fastnedge & Gould, 2024). This increased tolerance for potentially offensive material among their audience suggests that the consistent use of dark humour can shape audience expectations and perceptions. However, this strategy requires careful management to ensure that the humour does not cross into unacceptable offensiveness and controversy, which could damage the brand's reputation and alienate key segments of the target market (Eisend, 2009).

Much like sex appeals, the perception and appreciation of humour are highly subjective, influenced by a myriad of factors including individual personality traits and cultural background. Alden et al. (2000) highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity in the use of humour in advertising, noting that what is humorous in one culture may not be perceived as such in another. This cultural variability in humour perception necessitates a tailored approach to advertising, where humour is customised to fit the cultural norms and values of the target audience. This customisation ensures that the humour resonates with the audience, enhancing the advertisement's effectiveness without risking cultural insensitivity or misunderstanding. The strategic use of humour in advertising offers significant benefits, including enhanced engagement, memorability, and positive brand perception. However, its effectiveness is contingent upon a nuanced understanding of the audience's preferences, cultural norms, and the ethical implications of the humour employed. These ideas are specifically relevant for the

'Keep it real online - Pornography' advertisement as it uses subjective humour and nudity to discuss a subject which is uncomfortable for most.

2.3.4 The ethics of controversial advertising

Given the persuasive power of advertising as well as its capitalist tendencies, advertising, then, has been the subject of on-going moral and ethical condemnation. As the advertising industry has undergone significant transformations due to organisational changes, globalisation, and technological advances, new ethical challenges emerge. Early advertising ethics research primarily addresses deceptive practices as being unethical (Drumwright & Murphy, 2009) but during the latter half of the 20th century, a significant paradigm shift in advertising strategies ensued, blurring the lines around what was considered unethical. Advertising strategies moved away from the emphasis on product features to a focus on the emotional and social resonances of brands. Lindemann (2004) and Brymer (2003) delve into this transition, characterising it as a move towards desire-based advertising. In this context, advertising became a tool for 'cultural engineering,' a process described by Heller (2000) and Holt (2002) as leveraging psychological and social insights to mould brand perceptions that echo consumer aspirations and values. During this era, new issues begin to define the agenda for advertising regulation which "transcend the traditional concerns about false, misleading, and unfair advertising and raise more subjective but no less crucial questions about taste, decency, privacy, sexism, and the advertising of objectionable products" (Boddewyn, 1981).

Not unexpectedly, a focus on how advertising could influence children remains a key ethical concern. Scholars have long contended that children are adversely impacted by, among others, alcohol and junk food advertising, because of their limited media literacy (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Anderson et al., 2009; Carter et al., 2011). As Carter, et al., (2011, p. 1235) argue, children "lack the cognitive skills required [to identify the persuasive intent of advertising] and are therefore more at risk of commercial exploitation." It is not until children are at least eleven years old that they are able to understand that advertisers are "attempting to make viewers do something they might not otherwise do" (p. 965), suggesting that youth are vulnerable to advertising messages which can affect everything from dietary choices to social perceptions. For example, advertising of unhealthy foods has been linked to poor dietary habits among children, prompting responses from governmental and health organisations aimed at restricting such marketing practices (Galbraith-Emami & Lobstein, 2013). Moreover, aggressive, and stereotypical advertising can shape children's perceptions of gender roles and acceptable behaviour, potentially embedding harmful stereotypes and behavioural norms at an early age (Šramová, 2014). The perception, therefore, is the exposure to controversial content in advertising, such as sexualized images or violent themes, can have deleterious effects on children's psychological health. Studies suggest that such content may contribute to the development of unrealistic body images and increased aggression in susceptible youth populations (Waller, 2007; Singh & Chahal, 2019).

The societal backlash against controversial advertising aimed at or seen by children reflects growing concerns about the appropriateness of such marketing strategies. Public and parental advocacy for more stringent controls underscores the widespread unease with the potential normalization of harmful themes (Waller, 2007). Ethical debates pivot on the advertisers' responsibility to safeguard children from potentially damaging messages, emphasizing the need for industry standards that prioritize child welfare over market reach (Singh & Chahal, 2019). Advertising that exploits children's impressionability can lead to public censure and calls for increased regulation. For example, campaigns that inappropriately sexualize children or use them to market products unsuitable for their age group can trigger significant public and legal backlash, affecting brand reputation and consumer trust (Waller, 2007). Regulatory responses to the challenges posed by controversial advertising to children vary globally but typically include restrictions on the types of products advertised to children and the manner in which they are marketed. For instance, many jurisdictions have implemented bans on advertising high-calorie and low-nutrient foods during children's programming hours to combat the rise in childhood obesity (Galbraith-Emami & Lobstein, 2013).

In addition to governmental regulation, there is a crucial role for parental intervention. Research indicates that parental guidance on consuming and interpreting media can significantly mitigate the negative impacts of controversial advertising. By discussing the intent and content of advertisements, parents can help children develop critical viewing skills and resilience against persuasive commercial messages (Chan & McNeal, 2003).

Despite the ethical concerns associated with children's exposure to advertising, and particularly controversial advertising, the presence of controversial advertising continues to occur. Exploring specific instances, Hays (2018) details the experiences of four New Zealand brands that implemented controversial advertising to varying degrees of success. For instance, 2 Cheap Cars utilised high-impact, provocative campaigns that, while successful in drawing attention, also led to consumer complaints and heightened scrutiny. Similarly, Hell Pizza's campaigns often walked the fine line between humour and offense, reflecting the brand's edgy marketing persona (Hays, 2018). These cases highlight the nuanced outcomes of controversial advertising—increasing brand visibility on one hand and risking public disapproval on the other. As these examples from Hays suggest, controversial advertising can challenge societal norms and push the boundaries of acceptable content, eliciting varied reactions from the public. Advertisers frequently employ provocative themes, including the use of violent imagery, which can transgress cultural and social boundaries, leading to significant debate about the ethical responsibilities of advertising firms and the balance between creative freedom and societal responsibility.

2.4 Advertising standards and regulation

The presence of regulations and standards that govern advertising are among the means with which to protect vulnerable audiences and are designed to ensure advertising agencies are held to account when controversial advertising becomes inappropriate or too challenging. Boddewyn (1985) describes a multifaceted approach to fostering 'good' advertising practices through developing standards, making them widely known, describing 'grey areas', monitoring of compliance, handling complaints, and punishing violations. This framework is underpinned by three regulatory mechanisms: laissez-faire (self-discipline), government intervention, and self-regulation. Laissez-faire relies on the self-governance of advertisers and consumers, emphasising internal policies within companies to preclude consumer backlash and further regulation, though it risks neglecting public interests (Boddewyn, 1985). In contrast, government regulation mandates compliance through legal frameworks, aimed at curbing the excesses of major corporations unable to self-regulate, despite criticisms of being overly burdensome and inflexible (Boddewyn, 1985). Self-regulation, conversely, entrusts industry peers with oversight, fostering a more responsive, cost-effective, and inclusive approach by incorporating feedback mechanisms through media entities, albeit challenged by potential conflicts of interest and inadequate enforcement (Boddewyn, 1985).

Expanding on these concepts, Boddewyn (1989) introduced the communitarian model, premised on community-defined norms and values, to counteract the perceived negative impacts of advertising, suggesting an evolving public role in advertising governance. A blend of regulatory frameworks, according to Boddewyn (1989), optimises the regulatory landscape by mitigating inherent system weaknesses. Harker (1997) evaluated the practical application of these models in Australia, the UK, Canada, the USA, and New Zealand, highlighting the synergy between legal and industry regulations, although critiquing the process by which public representatives were selected to be part of the standard committees was criticised.

The global divergence in regulatory practices is exemplified by China's stringent government-led model, focusing on comprehensive content control, which, while addressing spam and hazardous content, also suppresses political discourse, underscoring the importance of community engagement in regulation (Bamman, O'Connor, & Smith, 2012). Boddewyn (1981) and later Gao, Zhang, and Li (2014) emphasize the growing necessity for public participation in regulation, especially with evolving social issues and digital advancements enhancing the efficacy of grassroots movements, thereby illustrating a continuing evolution towards more inclusive regulatory mechanisms in addressing both conventional and emerging advertising challenges. Boddewyn (1981) suggests that "It is likely that their resolution will require new structures for self-regulation, including greater outside participation in it" (p.138).

Aotearoa's New Zealand's regulation of advertising aligns with Harker and Harker's (2002) framework for achieving 'acceptable advertising' which includes: a solid legal regulatory framework (legislation), a complimentary self-regulated body that manage disputes (the New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority), and compliance from the advertising industry. The New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), a self-regulatory body "dedicated to ensuring that advertising is truthful and not misleading or deceptive, and that it is socially responsible" (Magill 2023) was formed in 1973 and was modelled after the UK system. It has been described as "one of the most comprehensive in the developed world" (Harker et al., 2005, p. 544), as it can achieve a 100% compliance rate despite not having the same economic resources as overseas counterparts (Haker et al., 2005). This may be partly due to advertisers in New Zealand becoming accustomed to regulators who 'communicate gently and seek to influence their ethical persuasions' (Harker et al., 2005, p. 553).

The New Zealand complaints process allows anyone to report advertisements across all media that might violate the ASA Codes. Initially, complainants must fill out a Complaint Form and provide specific details about the advertisement, including when and where it was seen, along with a copy or a digital image of the ad. The Chair of the Complaints Board then decides if the complaint warrants further examination. If so, it is reviewed by the Complaints Board, which assesses whether the advertisement breaches the ASA Codes. Parties involved are informed of the decision and offered a chance to respond to complaints. If a complaint is validated, the advertiser must withdraw the ad, and media outlets are prohibited from airing or publishing it. The decisions by the Complaints Board can be appealed based on new evidence, breaches of justice, or if the decision was contrary to the evidence presented (The Complaints Process, 2024).

In the context of this research, which analyses social media comments as spontaneous public reactions to controversial advertising, the formal complaints process provides a critical contrast. While social media offers an immediate, unfiltered platform for audience feedback, the structured complaints process to the ASA represents a formalized avenue for public response. Discussing this mechanism in the literature review highlights the various channels through which individuals can express discontent or approval, shaping the broader dialogue around advertising standards and public decency. Moreover, the outcomes of such formal complaints can influence public perception and social norms, as they often lead to public discourse on the acceptability and boundaries of advertising content. Understanding these formal processes is useful, as they reinforce, develop, or alter social norms and audience perceptions, similarly to how viral social media reactions can sway public opinion and lead to broader societal impacts.

2.5 Summary of the Literature

The literature review has thoroughly explored the complexities of controversial advertising, highlighting its potential to both engage and alienate audiences. Studies such as those by Pope, Voges, and Brown (2004) and Huhmann and Mott-Stenerson (2008) have illustrated the risks and rewards of using provocative content, demonstrating the need for advertisers to carefully balance attention-grabbing tactics with cultural and ethical considerations. The role of social media as a public sphere, discussed by Chaffee and Metzger (2001) and Waller (2005), emphasizes its capacity to amplify the reach and impact of advertisements, for better or worse, reflecting the dual-edged nature of digital discourse in advertising.

Furthermore, the sensitivity to cultural differences in response to advertising content, as shown in the cross-cultural studies by Waller, Fam, and Erdogan (2005), underscores the importance of tailoring advertising messages to diverse audiences to prevent misinterpretations and backlash. This review sets a solid foundation for the empirical analysis that follows, aiming to test the theoretical insights against real-world reactions to the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement.

3 Methodology & Method: Understanding what they're saying.

The purpose of this research is to delve into the nuanced responses of audiences to a controversial advertisement — specifically, the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' campaign initiated by the New Zealand Government. Understanding public reactions to such provocative content necessitates a methodological approach that is both rigorous and sensitive to the complexities of social perceptions and media interactions. This chapter outlines the comprehensive framework employed to investigate the multiple dimensions of audience engagement with the controversial advertisement. It explicates the research paradigm that underpins the study, justifies the choice of methodology, and details the procedures for data collection and analysis.

The study adopts a qualitative research paradigm, grounded in an interpretivist approach that seeks to understand the subjective meanings and interpretations that individuals attribute to the controversial advertisement. This paradigm is essential for capturing the depth and diversity of audience reactions, which cannot be fully understood through quantitative measures alone. Within this framework, the study employs thematic analysis — a flexible method that facilitates the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns within data. This method is particularly adept at contextualizing complex social phenomena, making it suitable for exploring the intricate ways in which individuals perceive and articulate their responses to controversial media content.

Data collection is conducted through a systematic examination of social media platforms, where the advertisement has been discussed extensively by the public. These platforms provide a rich, naturally occurring source of data that captures real-time, unsolicited public opinions and discussions. The process involves collecting comments, posts, and threads related to the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' campaign from various social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Reddit. This approach ensures a diverse sample of viewpoints and minimizes researcher-induced bias.

The analysis of the collected data is structured around Braun and Clarke's six-phase method of thematic analysis, which includes familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. This structured approach enables a systematic but flexible analysis, ensuring that the interpretation of the data is both comprehensive and coherent.

By meticulously outlining the research paradigm, methodological approach, data collection strategies, and analytical procedures, this chapter provides a clear and detailed roadmap of how the study was conducted. It ensures transparency and reproducibility of the research process and lays a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of the findings. Through this methodological rigor, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the strategic use of controversial advertising and its reception by diverse audiences.

3.1 Research Paradigm

To address my research question, how do audience reactions to the New Zealand Government's 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement reflect how they perceive controversial advertising? My study will involve, first, a thematic analysis of the chosen controversial advertisement, and second, an analysis of the responses of audiences to controversial advertisements as they appear across social media platforms. Both approaches rely on qualitative analysis (a point I will return to shortly) and are governed by my adopting of a critical interpretative perspective. According to Putnam and Banghart (2017), an interpretive approach to research requires acknowledging that reality is socially constructed and how such a reality is understood is dependent on the meanings and interpretations made by social actors. That is, organisations, and by extension, their advertising campaigns, are socially constructed and influenced by symbolic processes that shape social realities (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Interpretivist approaches, then, hinge not on providing definitive explanations of social phenomena, but rather, posits that social reality is fluid and subjective, and is a product of an amalgamation of differences between people (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). By viewing the 'Keep it Real Online - Pornography' advertisement through this lens, the research does not simply observe audience reactions as fixed responses to a given stimulus. Instead, it delves into how the campaign, as a social artifact produced by a governmental organization, participates in the ongoing construction of societal norms, values, and identities related to online safety and sexual education.

Furthermore, my approach to the research question is aligned with a critical perspective. According to Deetz (1996, p. 198), one's research trajectory can be plotted on a grid from "consensus-dissensus." Those who adopt consensus, undertake research to advocate for shared understandings of society and to cement social order. Because I intend to analyse how a controversial advertisement both reflects and challenges existing societal norms, thereby influencing audience perceptions and decision-making processes (Prasad & Prasad, 2002), my research embodies dissensus. Dissensus, or a critical perspective, explores sites of struggle, conflict, and tension (Deetz, 1996), which is not unexpected when addressing controversial content. The aim of a critical researcher is to uncover and critique ideologies that exist within a given society that may oppress of dominant peoples' views (Willis, 2007). To this end, focus needs to be placed on human interaction and power, which is likely to be evident in a controversial advertisement developed by the government for consumption by Aotearoa New Zealand citizens. Thus, by taking a critical perspective, I will be able to question the social constructions within the advertisement and its reception, shedding light on the dominant narratives that guide audience reactions and the potential constraints on individual and collective interpretations (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

As mentioned, to answer the question how do audience reactions to the New Zealand Government's 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement reflect how they perceive controversial advertising? I will be using qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis is "used to gain an in-depth understanding of human behaviour,

experience, attitudes, intentions, and motivations, on the basis of observation and interpretation, to find out the way people think and feel” (Ahmad, et al., 2019, p. 2829). Unlike quantitative research which can “freeze the social world into structured immobility” (Morgan & Smitcich, 1980, p. 498) to achieve what Taylor, et al., (2016, p. 10) consider “reliability and replicability,” qualitative researchers are interested in “gaining first-hand knowledge of social life unfiltered through operational definitions or rating scales (p. 10). Qualitative analysis, then, is not designed to produce absolute truths that are typical in the objective offerings of quantitative analysis. Rather, qualitative analysis offers the researcher an opportunity to develop societal understandings, that cannot be generalised, but nevertheless present plausibly describe certain phenomena (Cleland, 2015).

Because qualitative analysis is reliant on the subjective interpretations of the researcher, it is paramount that the researcher is conscious of any biases they may hold, and therefore, they need to take steps to mitigate the influence bias. Such steps to mitigate bias include achieving rigor or validity, which sees the researcher undertake prolonged engagement with the data while offering a rich description of what they have uncovered (Morse, 2015). The steps of the thematic analysis approach detailed below place emphasis on both these requirements. It can also mean requesting the advice of another person, which in my case, was my supervisor. Additionally, because qualitative research is predisposed to researcher bias because the samples of data are often chosen because they specifically aid in the addressing a researcher’s question, it is important that the researcher attempts to take a neutral stance to what they analyse, and this can mean, verifying assessments of the data at regular intervals (Morse, 2015). It can also require acknowledging biases and reflecting on them to ensure they do not colour the findings. With this in mind, I choose to acknowledge here, my background in advertising and specifically, how I came to pursue this research.

After completing a Bachelor of Communications, I worked as an art director in the creative department of an advertising agency. I was tasked with developing creative campaigns that would gain wide attention, and influence behaviour. Shock, sex, and humour appeals were occasionally employed, but always with caution - as it is difficult to confidently predict the reception of such tactics. These approaches felt risky but rewarding if executed correctly. Moving into the fields of education and research, this curiosity with controversial tactics remained with the me. The ‘Keeping It Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement posed an intriguing case study. The advertisement sparked numerous class debates around advertising strategy, appropriateness of content, nudity, taste, as well as the ethical and social implications. Like many New Zealanders I had watched the infamous ‘bugger ad’ as a child which used the term ‘bugger’ comically throughout the television advertisement. Unsurprisingly it drew a large number of complaints due the use of, what was considered at that time, a swear word (Casey, 2024). Conversely, many people loved the advertisement and it was highly awarded for its creativity (Scoop News, 1999), and named ‘one of New Zealand’s favourite ads’ (NZ Herald, 2016). It serves as a clear example of advertising affecting social norms in New Zealand (Bell, 2001). The ‘Keep it real online’ campaign appeared to be taking a similar approach, that is, a humorous approach to a taboo subject.

During the initial weeks following the launch of the campaign, I wrote a story for the news titled “Small budgets, big ideas — what a viral porn awareness campaign tells us about New Zealand advertising” (Fastnedge, 2020). In this piece, I highlighted other examples of New Zealand behaviour change campaigns that used humour to successfully educate, raise awareness, and spark discussion about social issues. The culmination of my background in advertising, my critical approach to research and teaching, and my fascination with controversial persuasive tactics led me to do this research. Although I had some understanding of the ‘Keeping It Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement, this thesis was an opportunity to unpack in more detail, what were the messages, and more importantly, what were the reactions of Aotearoa-New Zealanders to the advertisement. Conscious of the fact that my own experience provides me with insightful behind-the-scenes knowledge of the advertising industry, specifically the creative process, and that this may also unintentionally influence my perception of the data, I have made every effort to remain impartial.

3.2 Categorising responses to controversial advertising.

At the centre of this research is a controversial advertisement and the audiences’ responses to it. To this end, I opted to utilize Waller's *Proposed Response Model to Controversial Advertising* (2006) as a theoretical framework because it was specifically designed to map out the spectrum of responses that controversial advertising can elicit from viewers. Segmenting responses into distinct stages, helps to systematically dissect and analyse the complexity of consumer engagement and backlash, a process that is especially relevant in the highly interactive and public forum of social media. This structured approach to the social media comments assists in identifying clear, actionable insights into consumer sentiment.

Waller's development of the *Proposed Response Model for Controversial Advertising* is rooted in the observation of the dual-edged nature of controversial advertising campaigns. On one hand, companies like Wonderbra, Love Kylie, and Elle Macpherson have harnessed controversial campaigns to garner extensive publicity at a relatively low cost. On the other hand, such campaigns have at times generated significant public backlash, as seen with Calvin Klein and Benetton, where the former had to apologize for campaigns accused of using images resembling child pornography, and the latter faced criticism for its death-row campaign which was perceived as overly controversial (Waller, 1999a; Crosier & Erdogan, 2001; Miller, 2003; Curtis, 2002). This dichotomy highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of how controversial advertisements affect consumer perceptions and behaviours.

David S. Waller's (2006) proposed model for responses to controversial advertising is a framework aimed at understanding the varying reactions of consumers to advertisements that may be considered offensive or provocative. This model is grounded in the *Buyer Response Steps* by Rossiter and Percy (1997), which outlines the sequence of exposure, processing, communication effects, and action as fundamental to marketing

communications' impact on the buyer (Waller, 2006). Waller selected Rossiter and Percy's *Buyer Response Steps* as the foundation for his model due to its comprehensive approach to advertising effectiveness, which includes cognitive, affective, and conative responses. Such a choice was strategic, aiming to extend the existing framework to specifically address the complexities of controversial advertising. The model Waller proposed is designed to capture both the immediate emotional responses and the subsequent action-oriented outcomes of advertising exposure, providing a structured pathway from advertisement exposure to consumer action.

According to Waller (2006), the development of his model was driven by the following considerations: Prior to his work, there was no comprehensive model that adequately accounted for the wide range of consumer reactions to controversial advertisements. Waller aimed to fill this gap by proposing a model that considers the various stages of consumer processing and response by presenting a new definition, broadening the paradigm set by previous studies which have focused primarily on the negative effects of controversial advertising, i.e., offensive advertising, and proposing a model of responses to controversial advertising (Waller, 2006). Understanding the nuances of how consumers interpret and react to controversial content is crucial for creating effective advertising strategies. Waller's model addresses this complexity by outlining a sequence of steps from exposure to action, providing insights into the cognitive and emotional processes involved. The use of controversial elements in advertising raises important ethical questions.

Waller's model can help advertisers to navigate the fine line between capturing attention and avoiding social backlash. Due to the comprehensive nature of the model, which accounts for both controversial executions and controversial subjects, some researchers have opted to focus on particular stages, or use previous hierarchy models which focus only on 'executional' or 'subject' (Mangalam, 2022; Mukucha & Jaravaza, 2023). Waller's proposed model offers a systematic framework for analysing the multifaceted responses to controversial advertising, highlighting the intricate journey from exposure to action. This model not only facilitates a deeper understanding of consumer reactions to provocative content but also serves as a valuable framework for researchers and advertisers to navigate the complex terrain of public sentiment towards controversial subjects.

The significance and adaptability of Waller's model are exemplified through several studies, each expanding upon its theoretical and practical applications in distinct contexts. The study 'Features of Shocking Advertising Impact on Consumers in Commercial and Social Context' (2014) by Banyte, Paskeviciute, and Rutelione extends Waller's framework to a comprehensive examination of consumer reactions to shocking advertising within both commercial and social realms. Grounded in Waller's theoretical underpinnings, this work delves into the complex nature of audience responses, emphasizing how individual predispositions, such as interests, life experiences, and cultural norms, shape the reception of shocking stimuli. By conducting a systematic review and comparative analysis, Banyte et al. shed light on the spectrum of consumer reactions to shock advertising, elucidating the emotional engagement and behavioural outcomes it provokes. Their adherence to Waller's model

highlights its relevance in exploring the emotional and behavioural effects of shocking advertising, enhancing our understanding of how provocative content influences consumer attitudes and actions.

Similarly, the research conducted by Cheng and Frommann (2023) on Gillette's 'We Believe: The Best Men Can Be' campaign offers a prime example of Waller's model applied within a digital landscape. By analysing over 2,400 YouTube comments, the researchers mapped out the spectrum of emotional, cognitive, and action-oriented reactions elicited by the advertisement. Their findings highlight a significant inclination towards negative perceptions, driven by societal norms surrounding masculinity and brand expectations. This study not only showcases the model's capacity to dissect complex viewer responses in digital settings but also emphasizes its use in categorizing and understanding the nuances of public reaction to controversial advertising themes.

These studies validate the efficacy of Waller's Proposed Response Model as a foundational tool for analysing and interpreting the varied and complex reactions of consumers to controversial advertising. The research supports the model's versatility and enduring relevance in the ever-evolving field of advertising research. Using Waller's model to aid in analysing responses to New Zealand's "Keep It Real Online - Pornography" advertisement seems useful, given its proven efficacy in categorizing diverse digital reactions. This model's structured approach can facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted responses elicited by advertisements tackling sensitive societal themes, making it an ideal conceptual framework for my analysis.

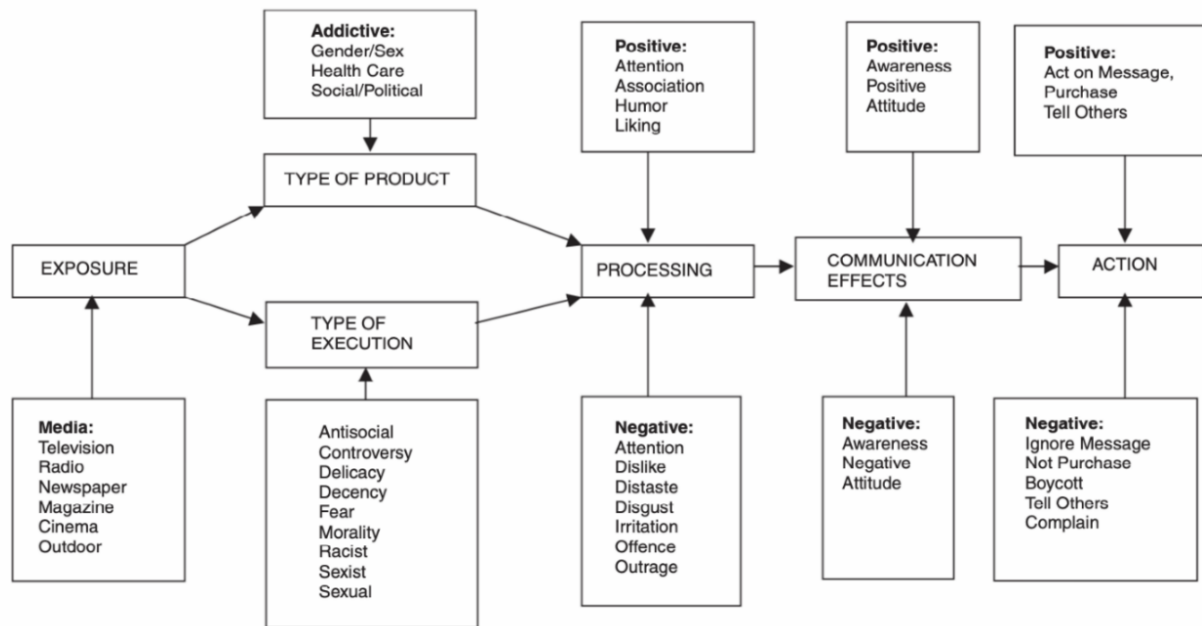
Although this framework has been recognised as a useful tool in analysing controversial advertising content, it does have some limitations. As Waller (2008) himself admits, this is only a proposed model and “research should be undertaken into testing the proposed model and identifying the specific areas of controversial and offensive advertising” and suggests that “new research could include measuring levels of offensiveness towards specific advertisements, the effect a controversial advertisement may have on purchase intention, comparing offensiveness with various demographics variables, and a cross-cultural comparison to determine if views hold across different cultures” (p. 12). The application of the model to the ‘Keep it Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement, then, tests the model against a real-world example.

3.3 Stages of the model

Waller's (2006) Proposed Response Model for Controversial advertising is made up of four stages: *exposure*, *processing*, *communication effects*, and *action*. The comments from online responders to the Keep it Real Online pornography advertisement were scraped from the social media platforms (discussed below) and categorised according to the four stages of this model.

Figure 17

Proposed Response Model for Controversial advertising (Waller, 2006)



Note. From David S.Waller PhD (2005) A Proposed Response Model for Controversial Advertising, *Journal of Promotion Management*, 11:2-3, 3-15, DOI: 10.1300/J057v11n02_02

3.3.1 Exposure

The first stage, **Exposure**, is foundational, as it involves the audience's initial contact with the advertisement. Waller emphasizes that exposure to the advertisement is the first critical step, where factors such as the medium used, the context in which the ad is placed, and the audience's pre-existing attitudes towards the product category play significant roles (Waller, 2006). Exposure not only sets the stage for further processing but also primes the audience's perception based on the context and their preconceptions. This stage sets the foundation for how consumers initially encounter and interpret an advertisement (Waller, 2006). According to Barnes and Dotson (1990) the critical issues which are considered by the audiences are: (1) the category of product advertised, and (2) the execution style utilized in the advertising. Waller's model accommodates for both controversial products and the way they are presented, in the exposure phase, by using the categories '**type of execution**' and '**type of product**'.

In the context of this analysis of responses to the 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement I have identified comments relevant to this exposure stage if they reference the way in which individuals were exposed to the advertisement. This included, but was not limited to, recognising whether the advertisement was viewed on traditional media platforms such as television, or encountered through modern digital channels, such as appearing in social media feeds. Furthermore, I paid particular attention to instances where engagement was initiated through interpersonal interactions, such as being tagged by a friend. This approach to categorising exposure not only highlights the diverse ways in which the advertisement reached its audience, but also underscores the importance of understanding the initial point of contact in assessing the nature and intensity of the public's response.

I have treated exposure to the type of execution and type of product as distinct categories, as during the initial analysis these contributed to significant volume of comments and influence later stages of response. So, building upon the initial exposures, I identified public reactions to the executional elements or what Waller refers to as 'type of execution'. This phase involved identifying comments that referenced distinct aspects of the advertisement's creative execution. Key focal points included, but were not limited to, the portrayal of characters, notably their state of dress or undress, the cinematographic techniques employed, the narrative structure, the characterisation of individuals as porn stars, the actors' performances, the utilisation of humour, and the nature of interactions depicted with a child and parent within the advertisement. These comments provide insights into how specific executional choices contributed to the audience's reception and interpretation of the advertisement's intended message.

Additionally, I identified comments that ventured beyond the confines of creative execution to explore comments that dealt with broader societal and ethical issues illuminated by the 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement. This process concentrated on discussions that transcended the immediate context of the advertisement's execution, delving into themes such as sexual education, the parental role in such education, the morals surrounding pornography, and personal experiences related to the advertisement's subject matter. Although these comments may indirectly relate to the advertisement's execution, they predominantly align with a larger discourse concerning the 'type of product' or, in this case, the subject matter of the advertisement. By identifying these comments, it allows further analysis into how public perceptions of the subject matter influence the reception of the advertisement.

3.3.2 Processing

The **Processing** stage is where the audience interprets and emotionally reacts to the advertisement. Waller (2006) elaborates that processing the ad leads to immediate emotional reactions which can be either positive, such as humour or pleasure, or negative, such as shock or offense and these reactions are pivotal in shaping the audience's attitude towards the advertisement and, by extension, the brand. Comments categorised into the

processing stage showcase the complexity of emotional responses and their direct impact on the perception of the advertiser.

For the processing stage in my analysis, I identified comments based on the posters' immediate emotional reactions to the advertisement. This stage was pivotal in understanding the visceral impact of the advertisement, as it encapsulated immediate responses ranging from laughter and shock to anger, confusion, and attraction. These initial reactions, to either the type of execution or type of subject, offer a direct reflection of the audience's initial processing and indicators of the advertisement's emotional resonance. This approach provided an understanding of how different aspects of the advertisement influenced viewers' emotional engagement.

3.3.3 Communication Effects

In the **Communication Effects** stage, the initial emotional reactions mature into more lasting attitudes toward the brand. Waller (2006, p. 11) clarifies this transition: " From the emotions generated from the immediate response to the controversial advertisement there produces a more permanent response, particularly relating to communicating a more lasting response about a brand. The positive effects are awareness of the brand with a positive attitude; while the negative effects are awareness of the brand with a negative attitude". This stage highlights the critical balance between leveraging the emotive power of advertising and mitigating the risks of engendering negative perceptions.

Focusing on communication effects, I identified comments that revealed how viewers' attitudes towards the brand or the subject matter of the 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement had shifted over time. This phase was distinct from identifying initial reactions; it aimed to uncover the more enduring impacts of the advertisement on viewers' perceptions. Comments that illustrated a change in attitude—be it through enhanced understanding, changed opinions, or altered behavioural inclinations—were key to this analysis. These reflections signify deeper cognitive and emotional engagements with the advertisement, beyond mere immediate responses. An analysis of the communication effects would help to assess if the advertisement was able to not only draw attention and provoke immediate emotional reactions, but also if it could foster shifts in perception towards the brand and the issue which prompted the advertisement.

3.3.4 Action

Finally, the **Action** stage encapsulates the behavioural outcomes stemming from the formed attitudes. Waller (2006) posits that based on the attitudes developed, actions can range from the positive, such as purchasing or endorsing the product, to the negative, including boycotting the brand or engaging in negative word-of-mouth. This stage is crucial for understanding the real-world implications of controversial advertising on consumer behaviour and brand interaction.

In the concluding stage of my analysis, I focused on coding actions that viewers reported taking or intending to take as a direct response to the ‘Keep it Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement. These comments illustrate the tangible impact of the advertisement beyond mere perception changes, encapsulating the behavioural response elicited by the campaign. Actions identified within the comments ranged widely, from digital engagements such as website visits and social media sharing or tagging, to more concrete measures such as utilizing the advertisement as an educational tool, expressing dislike through digital or physical means, and even lodging formal complaints. By cataloguing these varied responses, I was able to capture the diverse ways in which individuals were motivated to act upon their reactions to the advertisement. This not only demonstrates the advertisement's effectiveness in prompting viewers to take specific actions but also provides insight into the nature of these actions, whether they are aimed at further education, advocacy, or expressing dissent. This approach to coding actions as a response to the advertisement completes the full spectrum of its effects. It demonstrates the ability of controversial advertising not just to change minds but to spur viewers into actions that resonate with their personal convictions, thereby amplifying the advertisement's reach and impact within the public sphere.

3.4 Thematic analysis

What became clear in my initial application of Waller's (2006) model, was that it did not always offer specificity in terms of what to look for at each of the stages, nor did it aid in bridging similar ideas together. For example, although the communication effects stage suggests putting related responses together around positive or negative effects, it does not clarify what attitude might constitute a positive or negative effect. It was only after performing a thematic analysis of the comments in these different stages, that I could gain more of an understanding of how the data could be interpreted, and more specifically, what sorts of ideas, as an example, could be understood as negative or positive communication effects. Additionally, Waller's model only considers the responses to a controversial advertisement but does not offer a means for initially analysing the messages of the controversial advertisement. Therefore, thematic analysis helped to address some of the gaps in Waller's model.

Thematic analysis explores ‘the complexities of meaning’ (Guest et al. 2012: 10) to ‘make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences’ (Braun & Clarke 2012: 57). It offers a flexible, yet rigorous method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a form of qualitative analysis, it not only highlights the dominant and nuanced reactions of commenters but also reveals the underlying reasons driving such responses. By examining the themes that emerge at each stage of Waller's (2006) model, researchers can gain insights into the effectiveness of controversial advertisements and the moral, cultural, or societal norms that they challenge. Combining the proposed response model as a framework, alongside a thematic analysis, presents a means for dissecting and understanding the responses to controversial advertising in the digital age.

Thematic analysis, as interpreted by Braun and Clarke (2006), is a fundamental qualitative research method characterized by its versatility and depth. It facilitates an intricate understanding of diverse data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Its adaptability makes it suitable for a broad range of research questions, allowing researchers to delve into complex datasets to unearth nuanced insights.

However, this methodological approach is not without its limitations. The inherent subjectivity of thematic analysis poses a significant challenge, as it relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation, potentially leading to variations in the identification and analysis of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, thematic analysis can lead to data overload, with the extensive volumes of qualitative data complicating the analysis process (Boyatzis, 1998). The lack of methodological consistency across studies further complicates the application of thematic analysis, affecting the reliability and validity of research findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Moreover, an overemphasis on themes may result in the neglect of nuanced data, potentially oversimplifying the complexity of the data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). Furthermore, maintaining coherence in the development of themes from diverse data sources adds another layer of complexity, requiring iterative refinement and rigorous justification of analytic decisions to ensure the analysis remains robust and interpretatively valid (Holloway & Todres, 2003). However, this can be compensated for by applying and making explicit an epistemological position that can coherently underpin the study's empirical claims which is what I did at the beginning of this chapter (Holloway & Todres, 2003). These limitations highlight the need for researchers to employ rigorous methodologies and remain reflexive throughout the analytic process to mitigate these limitations and enhance the trustworthiness of their findings.

Braun and Clarke (2006) articulate a six-step process for conducting thematic analysis, each step critical to the integrity and depth of the research findings:

1. **Familiarizing Yourself with Your Data:** This foundational step involves deep engagement with the data, where "data immersion" is achieved by reading and re-reading the data, fostering an intimate understanding crucial for the subsequent analytical process (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Coding is described as the process of "systematically working through the entire data set" to identify data segments that offer meaningful insights related to the research question, thereby organizing the data into potential themes through a detailed and methodical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88).
3. **Searching for Themes:** At this juncture, the researcher begins to sift through the coded data to identify patterns that could evolve into overarching themes, thus moving from specific codes to broader thematic concepts.

4. **Reviewing Themes:** This critical phase involves a rigorous review process where "themes are checked against the coded extracts and the entire data set," ensuring they accurately encapsulate the intended data insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91).
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Through careful analysis and refinement, each theme is defined and named, encapsulating the core essence of the data insights it represents.
6. **Producing the Report:** The culmination of thematic analysis is the production of a coherent and compelling report that not only presents the themes but also ties them back to the research question and literature, offering "a detailed analysis of each theme" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

The recursive nature of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), highlights its non-linear approach, requiring researchers to continually revisit and refine the analysis process. This reflexivity ensures a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the data. Thematic analysis, then, allows for the exploration of underlying ideas and assumptions, making it particularly effective for studies that aim to understand complex phenomena or explore new theoretical insights.

Given the dynamic and multifaceted nature of online environments, thematic analysis presents a particularly apt method for analysing responses to campaigns such as the New Zealand government's 'Keep it real online' initiative. Thematic analysis allows researchers to navigate this complexity (Boyatzis, 1998) by identifying recurring patterns and themes within these responses (Braun & Clark, 2006), offering insights into public perceptions, engagement levels, and the campaign's impact. The method's flexibility and depth enable researchers to capture the nuanced ways in which the campaign is received and discussed among social media users, providing valuable feedback to policymakers and campaign designers on its effectiveness and areas for improvement (Mogaji & Farinloye, 2017).

3.5 Method

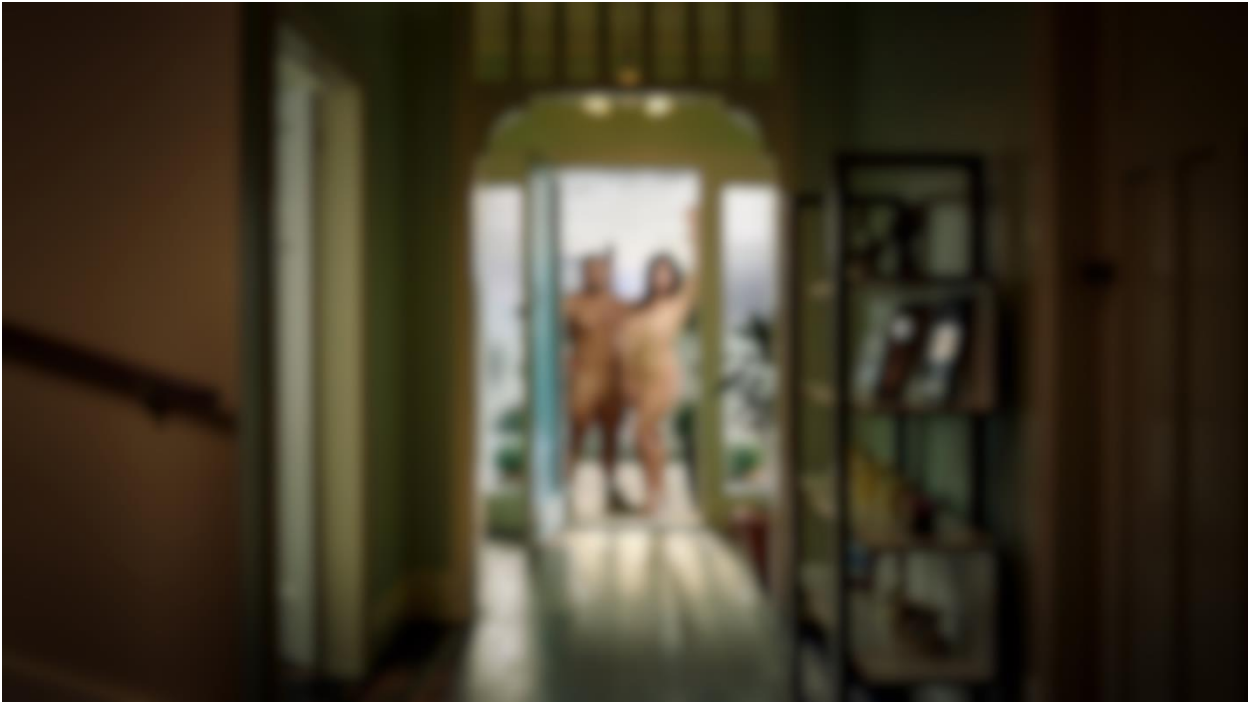
My initial research purpose was always to analyse the responses of audiences to a controversial advertisement. Of the plethora of controversial advertising that exists, the 'Keep It Real Online – Pornography' advertisement was a considered and coincidental selection for this study. In terms of selecting a controversial advertisement, the 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' exhibited several controversial characteristics which highlight its suitability for the study. Firstly, the use of nudity is a clear example of a sexual appeal (Lambiase & Reichert, 2003), which can be seen as unethical and manipulative (Noble & Pepe, 2019). Secondly, the naked characters also arrive at a young boy's house to discuss the differences between pornography and real-life relationships and asked parents to have conversations with their children about sex, relationships, and pornography, which are complex issues rooted in social and cultural values (Boddewyn, 1991). Furthermore, the New Zealand Government budgeted \$1.5 million dollars to produce the campaign (*About the Campaign: Keep It Real Online*,

n.d.), a generous amount to spend on controversial tactics. It was also supported by the Department of Internal Affairs, the New Zealand Police, the Ministry of Education, the Classifications Office – none of whom are known for their controversial tactics. And finally, coincidentally the release of the campaign aligned with timing of this study, meaning that the findings would align with contemporary public perception – especially important when analysing social norms. These factors, alongside the wide media coverage (Graham-McLay, 2020), advertising awards (Clio Awards, 2020), as well as formal complaints to the ASA (Complaint Number 20/177, 2020), reinforce the varied reception that this controversial advertisement prompted its relevance to this study of how audiences perceive controversial advertising.

Having selected the advertisement, it was analysed according to thematic analysis. The objective here was to identify for myself, the key messages that were being communicated so that I could determine how the advertisement might be interpreted. The thematic analysis of the one-minute advertisement produced three themes which are detailed in the data analysis chapter to follow.

Figure 18

Promotional imagery from the 'Keep it real online' campaign



Note. The image depicts two porn stars arriving at a young boy's house. In this imagery the genitals are pixelated, while in the TVC camera angles and framing is used, and in posters the placement of text were used to avoid explicit nudity. Image source: Clio awards (2020).

Because my interest lay in audiences' responses to a controversial advertisement, the next step after selecting the advertisement was to determine where the advertisement was likely being talked about. Naturally, that led me to the public spaces on social media which not only featured the advertisement but had the scope for people to openly discuss what they had seen. Social media platforms can act as spaces for open interaction between people and organisations, and can, therefore, capture public opinion and reflect elements that facilitate the formation of a public sphere (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Hoskins, 2014; Parker & Bozeman, 2018). The dataset is comprised of social media comments made in response to the 'Keep It Real Online – Pornography' advertisement. While it was not feasible to source and analyse every comment which referenced the campaign, this dataset has identified instances where the advertisement has been posted and users are able to respond with comments.

The examples span various social platforms including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and reddit. In most instances the advertisement has been shared by a 'Keep It Real Online' profile which has been specifically created for the campaign. However, other instances where it has been shared have been included due the social reach achieved, for example, the Guardian News shared the advertisement and there it was viewed 6.6 million times (Guardian News. (n.d.)). It was also shared by The New Zealand Police and while having a substantially

smaller reach than the Guardian, this post and its replies have also been included in the dataset given the social influence of the Police. Additionally, several reddit comments threads were identified which demonstrated substantial engagement (for example a post in the reddit thread r/videos which was upvoted 18,000 times) or cultural threads which the target audience subscribes to (a post in r/NewZealand). Thus, the social media comments that were analysed were found on posts that met any of the following criteria: they were posted by 'Keep it Real Online'; prompted substantial engagement (e.g. had over 1000 reactions, views or comments); and/or originated from a prestigious or influential institution (e.g. the Guardian).

The final dataset totalled 10 social media posts and combined produced 6,407 comments (outlined in the table below). Of the comments 2,938 were sourced from Facebook, 1,404 comments were from reddit threads 1,259 were YouTube comments, and 806 were Instagram comments. Using Apify, comments from June 8, 2020, through to June 10, 2023, were captured and then checked. Some comments were excluded from the data set as they appeared blank. Additionally comments not in English were also excluded from this analysis due to the researcher's inability to meaningfully decipher and effectively comprehend these comments. The comments were then categorised using Waller's proposed response model to controversial advertising, before being analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach, as outlined earlier in this chapter. After steps 1-5 of the thematic analysis were completed, the final step was followed leading to the writing of this thesis.

3.6 Limitations of the Dataset

Despite the rich data provided by these social media comments, it is important to acknowledge the inherent limitations of this dataset. Firstly, the dataset's scope is restricted to social media platforms which inherently caters to a specific demographic and psychographic user base. As outlined by Whiting and Williams (2013), the Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that individuals select media that fulfil their needs and provide gratifications and other research shows that social media platforms are populated by varying audiences and demographics and some groups are under represented on some platforms (Mislove et al., 2011; Madden et al., 2013; Duggan, 2015; Chakraborty et al., 2017). The platform-specific audience may not fully represent the broader population's reactions and could exhibit biases based on the platform's predominant user demographics and engagement patterns. The exclusive focus on social media comments as the data source further introduces a platform-specific bias. For example, Facebook's user base, characterized by its unique demographic profile, may not accurately mirror the broader audience's perceptions and reactions to the 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement. This platform-centric bias is significant, as Beard (2008) posits that the medium through which content is consumed can substantially influence the audience's reception. Specifically, Beard argues that more intrusive media forms, when presenting offensive content, are likely to elicit stronger reactions. Therefore, the dataset's insights, while valuable, must be contextualized within the limitations of its platform-specific audience and the nature of engagement it fosters.

Table 3.1*Overview of the dataset*

Platform	Particulars	Reach	Positive Sentiment	Negative Sentiment	Comment Count	Link:
Youtube	Keep it Real Online (original - 60 sec)	3,245,437 views	11,812 likes	354 dislikes (3%)	670	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94mINLDSWlk
	Keep it Real Online (reposted - 60 sec)	2,795,425 views	2,504 likes	462 dislikes (16%)	89	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6c3Edm8NdGs
	Keep it real Online (30 sec version)	1,159,459 views	875 likes	145 dislikes (14%)	28	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g0YXggsNT5s
	Guardian News	6,704,044 views	11,620 likes	1,247 dislikes (10%)	472	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f29mh5ntlw4
Facebook	New Zealand Police	58,000 views	1222 likes, love, care, haha	11 shocked, sad or angry (0.89%)	176	https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=702673853878765
	Keep It Real Online	5,200,000 views	22,835 likes, love, care, haha	222 shocked, sad or angry (0.96%)	2,762	https://www.facebook.com/keepitrealonline.govt.nz/videos/3130426870334477/
Reddit	r/damnthatsinteresting	14,000,00 members	12,000 karma	Unknown	295	https://www.reddit.com/r/Damnthatsinteresting/comments/mt0l0v/this_new_zealand_commercial_is_amazing/
	r/videos	27,000,00 members	18,000 karma	Unknown	981	https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/gzxdsr/nz_govt_coming_through_with_a_great_ad_campaign/?rdt=42724
	r/newzealand	567,000 members	321 karma	Unknown	128	https://www.reddit.com/newzealand/comments/gzxdgp/nz_govt_coming_through_with_a_great_ad_campaign/
Instagram	Keep it Real Online	503,470 views	-	-	806	https://www.instagram.com/reel/CBDRjo6lk4z/

Furthermore, the data captures only a fraction of the total responses to the ‘Keep it Real Online – pornography’ advertisement. For instance, formal complaints lodged with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and offline conversations are not reflected in this dataset. Such exclusions show the dataset's limitations in capturing the entirety of public discourse surrounding the advertisement. Additionally, the dataset's reliance on public comments neglects the nuanced spectrum of engagement metrics, such as silent viewership, which could offer additional layers of understanding regarding the advertisement's reception. To achieve such understandings would have required focus groups or interviews, which may have offered deeper and more directed understandings of people’s thoughts on the advertisements, but these would have been narrower than the broad swathe of comments that could be analysed across social media platforms. Finally, the comments themselves, while rich in individual perspectives, may also be subject to self-selection bias, as individuals with strong opinions—either positive or negative—are more likely to engage in public discourse (Lee, 2012; Gearhart et al., 2020).

Despite these limitations, the dataset offers invaluable insights into the public's reactions to the 'Keep it Real Online - Pornography' advertisement. The individual comments captured in this dataset provide a rich, authentic snapshot of how a diverse set of users interprets and responds to controversial advertising content. This granularity of data, with its direct quotations and emotional expressions, facilitates a nuanced understanding of public sentiment, offering a window into the varied and complex ways individuals engage with and interpret media messages. As such, while acknowledging its limitations, this dataset serves as a crucial resource for examining the impact of digital advertising campaigns and the discourses they engender within the public domain.

In summary, by adopting a critical interpretative perspective, this study ventured beyond the surface-level interpretations of audience responses to uncover the deeper social constructions and symbolic processes influenced by this controversial advertising campaign.

The methodological approach, grounded in the understanding that organizations and their communications, including advertising campaigns, are not fixed entities but are socially constructed, with their meanings shaped by the interpretations of diverse social actors. This study's critical perspective highlighted the potential of the 'Keep It Real Online- Pornography' advertisement to both mirror and challenge existing societal norms, offering insights into how such controversial content influences audience perceptions and decision-making processes.

A thematic analysis of the advertisements provides themes which have been encoded by the creators into the film. Then by engaging with Waller's Proposed Response Model to Controversial Advertising, this research aimed to categorize and analyse the complex reactions elicited by the advertisement, from initial exposure to the lasting effects on brand perception and audience behaviour. This model, complemented by thematic analysis, provided a nuanced understanding of the campaign's impact, emphasizing the active role of audiences in interpreting and responding to controversial advertising. The use of thematic analysis provided a useful framework for dissecting the multifaceted reactions across social media platforms, revealing a spectrum of perspectives that range from approval and appreciation to concern and critique.

Despite focusing solely on social media comments and the challenges of capturing the full spectrum of public discourse, the study offers valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between controversial advertising content and audience reception in the digital age, contributing to the broader discourse on online safety, sexual education, and the role of government in shaping public conversations around these critical issues.

As this research progresses, it will continue to delve into the implications of these findings, aiming to contribute to the development of more effective, sensitive, and engaging advertising strategies that resonate with diverse audiences while addressing the complex social issues of our time.

4 Findings: So, what did people say about it?

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the findings derived from both the content analysis of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement and the thematic analysis of public reactions as captured through various social media platforms. By examining the advertisement itself and the ensuing audience interactions, this analysis reveals the nuanced ways in which audiences perceive and engage with controversial advertising content.

The findings begin with a content analysis of the advertisement, focusing on its structural and communicative elements, such as the use of nudity and porn stars. This analysis provides a foundation for understanding the intentions behind the advertisement and sets the stage for comparing these intentions with public perceptions and interpretations.

Subsequently, the chapter moves into a thematic analysis of social media responses. Here, the audience perceptions are shown to be influenced by factors such as media type and priming effects—both positive and negative—before their exposure to the advertisement. The executional elements like nudity and the portrayal of porn stars generate a broad spectrum of reactions that highlight the complex dynamics of audience engagement with controversial media.

The thematic findings are organized according to Waller's proposed response model for controversial advertising, which includes stages such as Exposure, Type of Execution, Type of Product, Processing, Communication Effects, and Action. These stages have been detailed earlier in the thesis and are briefly recapitulated here to provide a structured understanding of how each stage contributes to shaping audience reactions:

Exposure: Discusses initial encounters with the advertisement, emphasizing pre-exposure influences.

Type of Execution: Focuses on creative strategies and their impact on audience reactions.

Type of Product: Considers responses to the advertisement's subject matter—pornography and sexual education—and the societal views surrounding these topics.

Processing: Examines immediate emotional and cognitive responses to the advertisement.

Communication Effects: Explores the long-term impacts on audience attitudes and perceptions.

Action: Analyses the behaviours and actions taken by viewers as a result of their exposure to the advertisement.

By using Waller's model as a guiding framework, this chapter not only aligns the empirical findings with theoretical constructs but also provides a coherent narrative that links audience responses directly to the strategic elements of the advertisement. This approach underscores the complexities of designing and disseminating controversial advertisements and their potential to provoke varied and significant public reactions.

This structured presentation effectively synthesizes empirical data with theoretical insights, offering a comprehensive view of the strategic use of controversy in advertising and its multifaceted impact on diverse audience segments. The insights gained from this analysis contribute to both academic discourse and practical applications in media studies, advertising strategies, and public communication.

4.1 Analysis of 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement.

The advertisement begins with a knock at the door of a 'regular' suburban house by two naked people: one male, one female. The door is promptly opened by a woman, recently emerged from a shower given the towel wrapped around her hair and the dressing gown she wears. Shocked by the presence of two naked strangers on her front porch, she quickly learns from the female (introduced as Sue) that they are visiting because the woman's (bathroom attire) son has recently looked the naked pair online "to watch us". The mother promptly calls her son Matt, and in the time it takes for him to emerge, the naked couple reveal that Matt watches them on his laptop and other streaming devices. The naked couple point out that they "usually perform for adults," and because Matt is "just a kid," they are concerned that he "might not know how relationships actually work" because when they perform online, they do not discuss consent. When Matt finally arrives at the front door with his laptop in one hand and his breakfast in the other, he gets a shock and drops his breakfast to the floor. The mother gives herself an internal speech "Ok Sandra, stay calm" and then turns to her son and says "Alright Matty, it sounds like it's time to have a talk to about what you see online, and real-life relationships, no judgment." The advertisement finishes with a voiceover stating the facts about young-people's porn use and closes with the "Keep it Real Online" campaign slogan.

From an initial close reading, the advertisement is designed to reflect and everyday house and family in suburban New Zealand. The naked couple do not come out and make it explicit that they are 'porn stars', but rather, are much more casual and subtle in their delivery to the mother that her child has been accessing pornographic content online. The advertisement, while humorous because of the naked actors and the shocked expressions of the family, is underpinned by important issues around consent and understanding that there is a disjoin between authentic representation and real life when it comes to online content. The advertisement demonstrates a carrying and considerate mother, who instead of condemning her son and reprimanding him, opts instead to adopt and

educative approach. Such a decision might have been to encourage those parents watching the advertisement to adopt the same.

On applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to the one-minute advertisement, three key themes emerge. Theme one is youth and internet safety. The advertisement makes clear that as the youth of contemporary society are digital natives- having grown up with technology- they are versed in how to find content across a plethora of media channels. The advertisement actors list the types of technology that 'Matt' has accessed the pornographic content on, stressing the means and opportunities that young people can use watch pornography. Therefore, the advertisement clearly emphasises that such content is not always appropriate (Quayyum, et al., 2021). In fact, research has discerned that children are vulnerable computer users and can encounter content risks, contact risks, and privacy risks, accounting for the focus of the advertisement on pornography as a type of content that young users can encounter (Tsirtsis, et al., 2016). Furthermore, the push towards youth and internet safety as core to the "Keep it Real Online" campaign aligns with perceptions that young people lack in media literacy, and therefore, parental responsibility is key to ensuring young people are safe when using the world wide web (Martzoukou, 2020).

The second theme is parental responsibility. The advertisement documents how the mother is confronted with the knowledge that her son has been watching pornography online, and it prompts her to engage her son in a conversation about the trappings of online content. Such a message appears to emphasise the role that parents have in educating their children about appropriate internet activity. Such a storyline is unsurprising given that parental advisory is an ongoing concern when it comes to media consumption (Barnes & Potter, 2021). Because children are predisposed to increased screen time, a fact that was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic (Edwards, 2021), the need for parents to be vigilant in monitoring and policing their children's online activity has become a necessity (Barnes & Potter, 2021; Jeffrey, 2021). In fact, Keen et al., (2020) believe that parents should be having regular conversations with their children to educate them on how to interpret the appropriate and inappropriate information they can be exposed to, including pornography.

The final theme of the advertisement is exposure to pornography. The advertisement subtly signals that the young boy had been watching porn on his laptop by the fact that the two visitors to the house are naked, discuss consent, and because they admit that their relationships are nothing like what is depicted in their online offerings. Not only do they take the time to critique the lack of realism within pornographic content which has been found to influence the sexual behaviours of consumers (Wright, et al., 2021), particularly if they do not have personal experiences with which to mitigate the inauthentic messages of porn (Taylor, 2022), but they emphasise that young people, including children, can now access such content because there are not stringent

deterrents in place. It has led scholars (see Davis et al., 2021) to contend that because children can now access pornography online, more policies, resources and guidelines need to be channelled towards preventing exposure and educating those that may advertently or inadvertently see the content. Pornography, as a theme of the advertisement then, is evidence of Government attempts at trying to limit the negative impacts of porn exposure on young children.

These themes disseminate messages of parental responsibility, access and education around pornography that, ideally, will be interpreted by audiences exposed to the advertisement.

4.2 Social media reactions

The social media reactions to the advertisement show a mainly positive response. In total only 8.07% social media reactions were negative. More specifically, the comments across these social media platforms align with this positive response. For example, of the 2762 comments responding the initial Facebook post, only 40 were negative. Another initial observation from the comments was the numerous number of people tagging friends. In fact, the majority of those who commented on the advertisement were tagging others, certainly a factor in the viral success of the advertisement, but also highlights that viewers were comfortable sharing, and being associated with, the advertisement.

While these initial observations give a snapshot of the overall response to ‘Keep it real online - Pornography’ advertisement, by using the Proposed Response Model to Controversial Advertising we can identify a range of responses, at various stages, caused by a range of issues, as voiced in the comments. As summarised in Table 4.1, we see that audience perception of controversial advertising is influenced prior to being exposure by through *media type*, and *positive* and *negative priming*. Then *nudity* and *porn stars* were executional elements which elicited a spectrum of reactions. Following this, the subject of the advertisement, pornography and sexual education elicited various opinions about *sex*, *access to pornography*, *relationships*, *parent's role*, *school curriculum*, and *state's responsibility*. Individuals have an initial reaction including *humour*, *praise*, *relatability*, *indifference*, *confusion*, *discomfort*, *disgust*, and *anger*. These emotional reactions then developed in longer term communication effects which included *positive social awareness*, *positive brand awareness*, *positive brand perception*, *negative social awareness*, *negative brand awareness*, and *negative brand perception*. These communication effects triggered a range of action from viewers including *sparking discussion*, *website visits*, *education*, *expressing dislike*, and *lodging complaints*.

Table 4.1

Table Summarising Various stages of response to the ‘Keep it Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement.

Stage:	Codes	Themes	Examples
Exposure	Media	-	“@XXXX have you seen this ad lol.. it come up the other day when I was watching something on tvnz on demand”
	Positively priming	Humour	“@XXXX this actually made me giggle”
		Endorsement	“@XXXX look what a nice ad”
			“@XXXX what a cool ad”
		Direct sharing	“@XXXX”
		Informative	“@XXXX make sure you and the boys watch all of these videos. They're priceless lessons for our tamariki.”
		Relevant	“@XXXX!!!! What we always talk about!!!!”
	Negatively priming	Confusion	“@XXXX what's the advertisement about???”
		Dislike	“@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX disgusting, to think children watch this filth”
	Type of Execution	Nudity	Shock
Attraction			“That naked chick is banging”
Comedic value			“I love how Sandra has a sly glance at his bits, but is trying not to look haha!”
Appropriateness			“This is fine for adults and older kids but my 9 year old got all kinds of new ideas from this ad.”
Porn stars		Appearance	“@XXXX ummmm can he knock on my door plz”
		Relevance	“I feel like using porn stars to lecture a kid on meaningful relationships is like asking pedophiles to identify what a good touch and bad touch is and when it's ok to talk to strangers...”
Type of Product	Pornography	Access	“So they tell us to get laptops for classes they dont need laptops for then tell us our kids are watching porn ok”
		Sex	“Unfortunately, young kids that knows about sex and what it's used for would rather see it in action than waiting until u are of the age to practice sex”
	Sexual Education	Age	“Sex Ed at my kids school started at nine years old. Way too young, it stole their innocence. They can't even hug their mother anymore. Sex Ed isn't necessary until 14 years old in my opinion.”
		Relationships	“Good ad. Well presented. Real relationships should be the focus.”
		Parents role	“To be honest or old fashioned sex education should come from parents taught at home its not Tabu and all common sense surely we as parents are capable of explaining it to our kids”
		School Curriculum	“...helping young people with a framework for developing consensual and respectful relationships, and helping them understand how to deal with toxic behaviour. I feel this should be provided by schools as part of the curriculum.”
		State Responsibility	“And here I am in Poland where teaching kids about sex in school is a crime.”
Processing	Positive	Humour	“Lol”
		Praise	“When you ask for a video to promote a service and get genius instead”
		Relatability	“I couldn't agree more. Not much real these days unfortunately”
	Negative	Indifference	“Duh! is this something new?”
		Discomfort	“yuk”
		Disgust	“@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX disgusting, to think children watch this filth”
		Confusion	“What the hell?????????”
Anger	“Exactly keep it real Sex is real porn is real People need to grow up and stop the PC BS”		
Communication Effects	Positive	Social Awareness	“Wow. Thats such an important issue which nobody talks about. Great initiative. All the best.”
		Brand awareness	“@XXXX the NZ Government”

	Negative	Brand perception	“Just when I thought I couldn’t love NZ’s government any more”
		Social Awareness	“This is a govt add, why dont you block it from getting in our servers then, I am sure you guys have the intelligence to do so.”
		Brand awareness	“@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX this ad is just so Australian”
		Brand perception	“This is a govt add, why dont you block it from getting in our servers then, I am sure you guys have the intelligence to do so.”
Action	Positive	Discussion	“@XXXX we need to have a chat when I get home mate”
		Website visits	“@XXXX - have you guys checked out this page/site?”
		Sharing / tagging	“@XXXX keep it real bro”
		Education	“Great video, Is it possible that we use the video in my children online safety awareness programme?”
	Negative	Sharing	“Not cool @XXXX”
		Dislike	“yuk”
		Complain	“Take a look at the ANTI - HUNTING one disguised as a safe internet ad from the same advertising agency. Disgraceful.”

4.3 Exposure

The first stage in Waller’s (1996) model is exposure. To analyse the ‘exposure stage’ of the New Zealand Government’s 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement, the focus centres on understanding the multifaceted nature of audience engagement with controversial advertising. This examination sheds light on the campaign’s expansive reach and the varied platforms through which individuals encountered its messages, offering insights into public perception of controversial topics presented in advertising.

4.3.1 Exposure through Media

Initial reactions, such as “@XXXX this was on my feed” and “best newsfeed random pop up ever 😊”, illustrate the advertisement’s digital footprint, indicating its presence in the routine digital landscapes of social media users (Beard, 2008). These encounters, often described as spontaneous or unexpected, as seen in comments such as “Straight up in my news feed tonight lol x”, highlight how the campaign effectively wove itself into everyday digital interactions. These types of media placements can increase the likelihood of engagement (Lipsman et al. 2012) and reduces consumers’ scepticism (Tutaj and Reijmersdal 2012), but the intrusive nature of such placements can also reduce consumers’ receptivity, particularly when advertisements are not related to their personal consumer activities (Cho & Cheon, 2004).

The everyday exposure to the campaign was also apparent in that commenters on the Facebook page acknowledged seeing the advertisement across other media channels. For example, it was not uncommon to see commenters refer to how they had seen the advertisement on broadcast television and New Zealand steaming services, reinforcing the campaign’s comprehensive cross-media strategy. This approach not only broadens the campaign’s audience reach but also enriches the depth of engagement by intersecting with diverse viewing

habits and preferences (Moorthy & Hawkins, 2005). Moreover, observations on the advertisement's frequency, with viewers noting repeated exposures, point to a strategic emphasis on visibility and message reinforcement. Such repeated encounters are foundational in enhancing audience recall and fostering deeper engagement, a tactic well-documented in advertising research for its effectiveness in shaping viewer perceptions and attitudes, particularly towards controversial subjects (Beard, 2008; Moorthy & Hawkins, 2005). In essence, the comments highlight that the penetration of the campaign on a national level was notable, but some comments also indicated that the advertisement had garnered international attention as well.

International recognition, as indicated by the campaign's discussion on foreign social media platforms and international news sites, suggests the global relatability and impact of the campaign's themes. This wide-reaching appeal emphasises the universal challenges and concerns addressed by the campaign, expanding its influence beyond its primary geographic target. By leveraging a blend of digital, traditional, and international media channels, coupled with strategic frequency, the campaign prompted public exposure to controversial content. This multi-platform approach not only ensured widespread visibility but also played a crucial role in initiating dialogues around the campaign's core issues (a point I return to later). Early indications were that diverse exposure methods contribute to shaping public perceptions of controversial advertising, underlining the importance of strategic media selection and frequency in influencing audience engagement and response.

4.3.2 Primed exposures

Notable in the scraped data was the tendency of commenters towards social tagging which, as an act of 'priming,' could influence others' perceptions of the advertisement. Such priming can work as an initial filter, influencing how the advertisement is received and interpreted even before direct engagement. The use of social tagging was not unexpected. Social tagging, which is an inherently social and communicative act, broadens the advertisement's reach through personal networks, embedding an initial bias based on the tag's context. Research underscores the significance of such peer-driven endorsements in altering consumer perceptions, with Lee and Choeh (2016) and Hu, Zhang, and Zhao (2014) highlighting the critical role of credibility, timeliness, and relevance in encouraging audiences to value peer recommendations over traditional advertising approaches. When individuals tag friends with messages that convey humour or approval, it sets a frame of anticipation, predisposing the tagged individual to view the advertisement with a similar disposition. This positive priming, involving humour, approval, direct sharing, informativeness, and relevance, suggests that the tagger finds the content entertaining, worthy of endorsement, useful for sharing, informative, or relevant. This digital interaction not only broadens the ad's reach but also preconditions the audience to receive the message more favourably, illustrating the nuanced power of eWOM in the realm of controversial topics. As Smith, Coyle, Lightfoot, and Scott (2007) highlight, the impact of such social endorsements on digital content receptivity, indicating that pre-existing social cues can significantly enhance favourable perceptions and engagement.

Conversely, negative priming, characterized by tags conveying confusion or disapproval, prepares the viewer to approach the advertisement with scepticism. This initial framing can significantly influence subsequent reception and interpretation, potentially detracting from the advertisement's objectives. Das, Echambadi, McCardle, and Luckett (2003) discuss how negative priming can adjust interpretive frames and expectations, affecting the persuasive power of advertisements. The following discussion offers examples of social tagging that are primed positively and negatively.

4.3.3 Primed Positivity

In the context of the 'Keep it Real Online- Pornography' advertisement, Positive Priming emerges as a pivotal factor in shaping how audiences perceive controversial advertising. To achieve positive priming, commenters tended to enhance the advertisement's relevance and appeal through themes such as direct sharing, humour, endorsement, informative content, and relevance.

When reviewing the responses to the 'Keep it Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, the behaviour of sharing, by tagging friends, emerges as a critical mechanism in distributing the campaign's controversial content. This act was not merely a passive gesture; it represents a level of personal endorsement and serves as a barometer for the advertisement's resonance and the audience's willingness to propagate content that delves into contentious issues. As an example, Facebook comments on the 'Keep it real online' Facebook post comments tagging a friend, observed in 1,488 instances with minimal or no additional context, reflects a spontaneous decision to share the campaign, and emphasises the advertisements capacity to connect with viewers on a level compelling enough to encourage dissemination within their networks. This prevalent sharing behaviour signals the campaign's success in engaging audiences because, as Berger and Milkman (2012) suggest, a personal investment in the content needs to be had to activate a desire to share.

In terms of engagement with the content, those that opted to share and expose others to the advertisement could be said to typify active engagement. Comments like “@XXXX seen this one yet?”, “@XXXX have you seen this”, “@XXXX LOOK AT THIS!!!”, and “@XXXX ... this,” are examples where the person commenting has moved beyond passive engagement, usually observed in likes on social media posts, to active engagement, where those sharing and tagging others have consciously or unconsciously moved towards collaborating with the message distributor (Danesh, 2017). As Swani and Labrecque (2020) put it, to share content is to align the message of the advertisement with the commenters sense of self, with the sharer assisting in meaning-making and message reception, alongside projections of their own identity markers. Sharing not only broadens the

advertisement's reach, then, but also acts as a form of personal validation, suggesting the content's significance and impact from the sharer's perspective. Southgate, Westoby, and Page (2010) emphasise the value of such direct sharing in extending the visibility and perceived importance of digital content, particularly within the sensitive realm of controversial advertising.

The enthusiasm evident in shares like “@XXXX you must see this one” demonstrates the campaign's efficacy in navigating controversial advertising complexities and motivating viewers to become conversation advocates. That is, by bringing attention to the advertisement, those sharing its content can be inspiring dialogue. For example, comments such as “@XXXX like I was saying...” and “@XXXX we were JUST talking about this”, “@XXXX mate! Here’s a follow up from our conversation in the car yesterday and what you're in for” and humorous anticipations of future experiences like “Haha could be you one day soon @XXXX. Hahaha” capture how offline conversations have moved online, inspired by one’s exposure to the campaign in their social media feed. To this end, the campaign appears to have the ability to engage with and contribute to existing social conversations. The capacity for an advertisement to reflect and resonate with current discussions notably enhances its relevance and, consequently, its persuasive influence, a principle supported by Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian (2012) in their examination of social media's role in fostering relevant and engaging consumer content. Additionally, the campaign’s adeptness in leveraging viewer advocacy to amplify its message, resonates with the findings of Cheung and Thadani (2012), who contend that user-generated content can influence public discourse on controversial subjects.

Accompanying the tagging and sharing were instances of humour, which was a key means of priming audiences. The inclusion of “LOL” (Laugh Out Loud) in tags illustrates humour's capacity to serve as an inviting entryway into the campaign's potentially contentious message, facilitating a more receptive audience engagement. Instances such as “@XXXX lol” and “@XXXX this actually made me giggle” exemplify how humour can disarm and engage viewers, paving the way for a deeper connection with the advertisement's content. The description of the campaign as “hilarious,” seen in comments like “@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX this is actually hilarious and golden,” signifies humour's power not only to attract attention but also to leave an enduring, positive impression on the audience. The array of reactions, from laughter expressed through “Wait for it lololololol” to straightforward endorsements of the ad's humour in “@XXXX this is funny,” emphasises the broad appeal of humour in facilitating viewer engagement with controversial topics. Notably, some viewers recognised the campaign's deliberate use of humour to broach significant issues, with comments such as “@XXXX this is the funniest / realist ad I’ve seen about parenting. Ever!” This indicates an awareness among the audience of the campaign's dual objectives: to both entertain and impart crucial messages.

Furthermore, the unique New Zealand sense of humour emerges as a recurrent theme in positive priming, enhancing the campaign's cultural resonance. The specific mention of Kiwi humour in comments such as "kiwis have the best sense of humour" contributes an additional layer of relatability and effectiveness to the campaign's engagement strategy. Research highlights the importance of humour in advertising, particularly in the context of controversial topics. Eisend (2009) and Strick et al., (2009) have shown that humour can significantly improve ad likability and audience attention, essential components for navigating the complexities of controversial advertising. The use of humour can induce a good mood in audiences, which extends to elaborating the message of the advertisement positively (Bless, et al., 1990). Accordingly, the strategic application of primed humour in the 'Keep it Real Online – Pornography' advertisement can not only foster immediate engagement but also served as a pivotal medium for communicating sensitive messages, enhancing the ad's memorability and impact. Such nuanced use of humour illustrates its invaluable role in positively priming audiences, making it a critical element in the advertising strategy for addressing controversial issues.

The reference to "kiwis" having a good sense of humour, establishes common ground that may prompt those exposed to the content to be positively primed. Creating common ground is a useful persuasive tactic that produces message reception and induces identification (Cheney, 1983). That is, including cultural capital, such as kiwi humour, can increase familiarity and receptivity to a message, because audiences are able to evaluate the message through the lens of pre-existing information (Cacioppo & Petty, 1980), they have about what should be considered funny in the New Zealand culture. If other New Zealander's perceive the message as humorous, than the natural inclination of those seeing such comments might be to be primed to see the message as humorous as well.

The positive priming goes beyond mere social tagging; it encompasses personal endorsements that lend the advertisement additional credibility and appeal, crucial in navigating the sensitivities surrounding controversial topics. Endorsements captured by individuals' explicit expressions of support and admiration when sharing the advertisement with friends. Amongst the comments, expressions of endorsement were often articulated through positive descriptors including 'good,' 'great,' and 'cool,' which attaches a personal seal of approval to the campaign. Comments such as "@XXXX look what a nice ad," and "@XXXX what a cool ad," demonstrate how viewers not only share but also validate the campaign, embedding it with their endorsement, and in so doing, lending the campaign credibility and validity. Personal vouching can prime the recipient to anticipate content that is not only worth their time but also comes highly recommended by someone they trust, a dynamic advocated for by research on the impact of personal recommendations in advertising effectiveness (Jin & Phua, 2014).

In some cases, the endorsement of the advertisement presents the 'Keep it Real Online' as having exemplary status: commenters were happy to declare that the advertisement was "one of the best ads." Statements like "@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX this is the best" emphasize the advertisement's perceived excellence. By presenting the campaign as a standout for its quality and messaging, these endorsements shape peer expectations and pique interest, aligning with findings that highlight the persuasive power of peer endorsements in shaping individual attitudes (Eisend, 2017). Additionally, a deeper, more emotional layer of endorsement is visible in comments that express genuine affection for the campaign. Phrases like "good lord I love this @XXXX" and collective expressions such as "@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX love this," demonstrate an emotional engagement with the content. These expressions of love are potent endorsements, relaying a positive tone and personal engagement, which could shape audience interaction with controversial advertising. By coupling their personal approval with emotional reactions, individuals amplify the perceived value of the advertisement, fostering a favourable disposition towards it among their peers.

Positive priming was also notable in instances where commenters appeared to want to inform their peers about the educational potential of the advertisement and its relevance to specific friends. Comments such as "@XXXX I think you would really benefit from this" and "@XXXX, so you can learn" reflect a strategic use of the campaign for educational purposes. Here, commenters have become instrumental in navigating the complexities of contentious issues, positioning the advertisement as more than a mere message—it's seen as a pivotal educational tool. These, and other comments like them,

Informative priming within the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign exemplifies how audiences leverage advertising to disseminate essential knowledge or insights, particularly regarding controversial subjects. By tagging peers with comments that underscore the advertisement's educational value, viewers become instrumental in navigating the complexities of contentious issues, positioning the advertisement as more than a mere message—it's seen as a pivotal educational tool. This demonstrates a recognition of the advertisement's potential to not only capture attention but also to enlighten and inform, as supported by findings from Southgate, Westoby, and Page (2010), who emphasize the role of advertising in public education and its ability to facilitate informed discussions on sensitive subjects. For example, those tagging peers sometimes did so to ensure that the message of the advertisement was communicated to younger family members. When a person tags @XXXX to encourage them to "make sure you and the boys watch all of these videos. They're priceless lessons for our tamariki," the education value of the campaign gains potency and showcases the broader role that advertising can play in public education. The campaign, and its dissemination through social media, therefore, conveys meaningful lessons, reinforcing the need for informed dialogues around contentious topics (Mutinga, et al., 2011).

Relevance priming, where individuals used tagging to solidify the advertisement's connection to current discussions, personal experiences, or broader societal discourses, was also apparent and could produce favourable reactions in commenters and their peers. When commenters write, "[@XXXX](#) no idea why I thought of you" and "[@XXXX](#) I think u need to have a look at this pal," these direct communications with people serve as instances where the content's specific relevance to an individual is highlighted. This personal approach suggests a deep level of engagement with the content, where viewers not only consume the advertisement but also recognize and act upon its applicability to their peers' lives or interests. Thus, transforming the ad from a general message to one of specific pertinence to the recipient. Emphasising the advertisements personal relevance demonstrates how word-of-mouth communication can effectively target individuals (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010).

4.3.4 Primed Negatively

Although there were several instances where the campaign 'Keep it Real Online' were primed positively, there was also evidence of significant, negative priming where the controversial advertisements were perceived as confusing or disliked. These instances of negative priming tended to be less common, perhaps because the dynamics of social media platforms such as Facebook are designed to encourage interactions with agreeable content (Kim & Johnson, 2016). Of course, those who were particularly perturbed by the content might have been reluctant to further draw attention to the campaign online, and instead could have lodged formal complaints with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), where grievances are explicitly solicited. Regardless, those comments that were considered inclined towards negatively priming offer an insight into how people responded to the campaign on social media and are invaluable for dissecting how controversial advertising can inadvertently lead to misunderstandings or negative reactions among certain audience segments. Research by Skoric and Poor (2013) highlights how negative priming can impact the cognitive and emotional processing of advertising content, emphasizing the delicate balance required in crafting messages that resonate positively without eliciting unintended negative responses.

Amongst the negative priming comments there was evidence of confusion: often in relation to the message of the campaign. For instance, there were those who saw the advertisement in their social media feed and remarked 'wtf' (what the fuck), 'strange', 'why', or 'really?'. These reactions indicate a misalignment between the advertisement's intended message and its reception by viewers, suggesting challenges in achieving clear and effective communication. Specific comments such as "[@XXXX](#) what's the advertisement about???" and "[@XXXX](#) wtf did I just watch," pinpoint a significant hurdle: the campaign's inability to unequivocally convey its core message. This ambiguity detracts from the ad's primary goal of engaging viewers and compromises its overall ability to persuade. The importance of clear communication in advertising, especially within controversial contexts, is supported by the research of Lang (2000), who emphasizes the role of message clarity

in facilitating viewer understanding and engagement. The phenomenon of confusion can induce cognitive dissonance, as those exposed to the campaign struggle to reconcile their expectations with the actual content presented, potentially leading to disengagement or negative reactions towards the advertisement (Festinger, 1957). This dissonance shows the necessity for advertisers to meticulously craft their messages, ensuring clarity and precision to avoid misinterpretation and enhance the ad's persuasive potential.

The examination of negative priming in the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign reveals that dislike, particularly when expressed through tagging others, serves as a powerful trigger for negative electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This form of negative priming captures instances where viewers share their disapproval or strong aversion towards the advertisement, potentially influencing the perceptions of others even before they encounter the ad themselves. Comments such as “Not cool @XXXX”, “@XXXX wtf [what the fuck?]”, “@XXXX ffs [for fuck sake]”, and “@XXXX what the hell is this”, “@XXXX kiwis are weird...”, “@XXXX wtf did I just watch” as well as “@XXXX @XXXX Only in NZ”, serve as stark examples of how negative eWOM can prime perceptions negatively. These expressions of disapproval, especially when disseminated within one's social network, signify a direct rejection of the advertisement's message, influencing the attitudes of tagged individuals through a pre-established lens of disapproval. The act of sharing negative sentiment, succinctly or without extensive justification, can effectively predispose new viewers to approach the advertisement with scepticism or negativity. The influence of negative eWOM on shaping brand perceptions and audience attitudes is well-documented, with studies by Cheung and Thadani (2012) highlighting how adverse online conversations can significantly impact public perception of a brand or campaign.

Extreme expressions of aversion, exemplified by comments like “@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX disgusting, to think children watch this filth,” represent an intense form of negative priming. According to Libai et al. (2010), such intense emotional responses can profoundly alter audience perceptions, embedding the advertisement with a negative aura that extends beyond initial reactions to potentially lasting effects on the brand's image. These visceral reactions illustrate the challenges advertisers face in managing negative sentiment, particularly regarding content that may provoke strong emotional responses.

The interplay of positive and negative priming is indicative of the multifaceted nature of consumer responses and the complex emotional landscape that advertisers must navigate. The power of positive priming lies in its capacity to reinforce desirable perceptions and behaviours towards the brand, leveraging the social proof and credibility that comes from peer endorsements (Cheung & Thadani, 2012). Conversely, negative priming can create barriers to message acceptance, necessitating careful consideration of audience sensibilities and potential trigger points for adverse reactions (Leshner et al., 2010).

Table 4.2*Summary of responses after exposure to the 'type of execution'*

Stage:	Codes	Themes	Examples
Type of Execution	Nudity	Shock	What sort of silly cow would bring her grandson out to the front door to meet naked people?
		Attraction	That naked chick is banging
		Comedic value	I love how Sandra has a sly glance at his bits, but is trying not to look haha!
		Appropriateness	This is fine for adults and older kids but my 9 year old got all kinds of new ideas from this ad.
	Porn stars	Appearance	@XXXX ummmm can he knock on my door plz
		Relevance	'I feel like using porn stars to lecture a kid on meaningful relationships is like asking pedophiles to identify what a good touch and bad touch is and when it's ok to talk to strangers....
		Contemplation	@XXXX imagine all the people that would be knocking on your door.

4.4 Type of Execution

Audience responses to the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign highlights the nuanced discourse triggered by its thematic execution. Although technical details like soundtrack inquiries ("Does anyone know the title of a song that starts at 0:39?"), editing queries ("Just curious, where are the legs of the woman at -21 seconds?"), and accessibility requests ("Will be great could you add captions on video") engage viewers on a production level, it's the campaign's thematic choices—nudity and the depiction of porn stars—that command significant attention and debate. The themes of nudity and porn stars signals the campaign's challenge: to engage viewers in a meaningful conversation about online safety and children's exposure to inappropriate content while navigating the potential pitfalls of controversial advertising. Accordingly, the sections to follow explore the varied reactions audiences had to the presence of nudity and porn stars in the execution.

4.4.1 Type of Execution: Nudity and Porn Stars

The responses of the audiences to the nudity tended to hinge on perceiving the nudity as a provocative executional element. In being provocative, it elicited a spectrum of reactions from shock and discomfort to amusement and attraction.

Viewer expressions of surprise were highlighted by reactions such as “cool campaign [and that] they got their ads approved,” or “What an awesome initiative, smacked me right in the face. Start the conversation.” as well as “@XXXX. Omg dying! America would never do this. Wish they would!” emphasize the unexpected nature of encountering nudity in a public advertising context. Contrastingly, those experiencing discomfort were perturbed by the explicit nature of the content. Comments like “STUPID freaking add, the adults might need educational advice as well, like not turning up at someone's door naked to start with” tended to reflect concerns about the moral implications of such portrayals. These concerns align with Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda's (2003) exploration of the ethical boundaries of shock advertising and its potential to offend but nevertheless, mirror the findings of Sabri (2012), who discusses the impact of shock advertising on consumer attention and the potential for such strategies to provoke both interest and discomfort among audiences. Interestingly, the advertisement's depiction of a boy's shocked reaction to the naked characters serves as a narrative device that amplifies the theme of shock, effectively mirroring potential viewer responses.

Alongside being shocked, it was also found that people commenting on the nudity did so because they found the characters of the campaign attractive. Commenters openly demonstrated their attraction by stating “I would like to serve some tea for those 2 if they visit my house” and “That naked chick is banging.” Additionally, expressions such as “ummmm can he knock on my door plz” where also present and suggested that the presence

of nudity can ignite fantasies or desires for personal interaction with the ad's characters. These expressions of physical attraction, alongside curiosities about the porn stars' identities ("Who is the naked lady?"), suggest that for some, the portrayal transcended shock to foster interest and appeal, which was not entirely unexpected given the sexualisation of content 'sells' because of its capacity to enhance viewer engagement and memory recall (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). Of course, not everyone found the characters of the advertisements attractive. Critiques like "That dude has no neck..." and "They porn girl talks like she's had a stroke" reflect a divergence in viewer perceptions, which is common when considering the subjectivity of attraction (Reichert & Ramirez, 2000). Such a comment also typifies a desire for realism in bodily-depictions, echoing Sengupta and Dahl's (2008) research on gender-related reactions to sexual appeals in advertising and the significant role that perceptions of attractiveness and realism play in viewer engagement.

The tension between idealized beauty and authenticity is further exemplified in comments critiquing the 'porn stars' as "oversexualised" or unreflective of reality. A viewer's observation that "In actual porn, the man is scruffy and weedy, possibly a meth head, wearing old socks" calls for more realistic depictions, resonating with McCracken's (1989) exploration of the transfer of meaning through celebrity endorsement and its impact on authenticity and audience connection. These varied reactions to the porn stars' portrayal underscore the nuanced challenge of using sexually appealing figures in advertising. While attractiveness can enhance engagement for some viewers, there's a clear call for authenticity and relatability, emphasizing the need for advertisers to navigate carefully between capturing attention and maintaining credibility in controversial advertising. This balance is crucial in ensuring that portrayals not only resonate with viewers but also effectively communicate the intended message.

As signalled in the previous section (see exposure), the advertisement was considered humorous, but that humour was often attributed to the nudity of the 'porn stars'. The ad's clever use of camera angles and props to imply nudity—while maintaining discretion—was lauded for its creativity and humour. Remarks like "I love how Sandra has a sly glance at his bits, but is trying not to look haha!", "What sort of silly cow would bring her grandson out to the front door to meet naked people?" and "Real life nudity people around here... Lol" exemplify the audience's recognition of the absurdity and humour inherent in the situation. These responses, reflective of an appreciation for the ad's humorous take on a provocative subject, align with Grazer and Keesling's (1995) exploration of content arousal's impact on advertising effectiveness. Coupling humour and nudity was also supported by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), which rules that it would not uphold complaints against the ad, citing its implicit nudity and humorous approach as decisive factors (ASA Complaint 20/177, 2020). This decision and the comments of people who found the nudity funny indicate that humour, when tactfully used to address serious subjects, can significantly enhance an ad's reception, while conforming to advertising guidelines.

Despite being seen as shocking by some and appealing by others, when synthesized further, the theme of nudity and 'porn stars' was essentially a means to debate the appropriateness of sexual content in advertising. For example, concerns over the educational juxtaposition with nude characters, as voiced in comments like "I can appreciate where this is going, but I feel like using porn stars to lecture a kid on meaningful relationships is like asking pedophiles to identify what a good touch and bad touch is and when it's ok to talk to strangers," and "Omg wtf is going on its really online #porn," (a comment made over the advertisement's explicitness possibly overshadowing its educational intent) ,spotlight the ethical dilemmas inherent in including nudity as part of an advertisement designed to instruct people on how they should act when it comes to parenting their children around safe internet use. Coupled with the remarks around whether the advertisement was appropriate for various age groups to see, "This is fine for adults and older kids but my 9-year-old got all kinds of new ideas from this ad" capture the necessity to consider audience segmentation and sensitivity when developing advertising creatives. These examples not only reaffirm Grazer and Keesling's (1995) position that there are differential impacts to advertising especially across demographic groups, but also support the view of by Reichert and Ramirez (2000), who acknowledge that there are varied receptions when melding adult themes with educational messages, suggesting that critical evaluation is needed in development and execution of advertising content.

Despite varied reactions, a segment of the audience recognized the nudity's handling as sensitive and artistic. Praise for the advertisement's 'tasteful' execution and sophisticated production choices, such as strategic camera angles, suggests a successful balance between shock value and artistic merit. This suggests that while others criticize the use of nudity it as gimmicky and attention-grabbing, others view it as an acceptable creative technique (Parry et al., 2013).

Table 4.3*Summary of responses after exposure to the 'type of product'*

Type of Product	Pornography	Access	“So they tell us to get laptops for classes they dont need laptops for then tell us our kids are watching porn ok”
		Sex	“Unfortunately, young kids that knows about sex and what it's used for would rather see it in action than waiting until u are of the age to practice sex”
	Sexual Education	Age	“Sex Ed at my kids school started at nine years old. Way too young, it stole their innocence. They can't even hug their mother anymore. Sex Ed isn't necessary until 14 years old in my opinion.”
		Relationships	“Good ad. Well presented. Real relationships should be the focus.”
		Parents role	“To be honest or old fashioned sex education should come from parents taught at home its not Tabu and all common sense surely we as parents are capable of explaining it to our kids”
		School Curriculum	“...helping young people with a framework for developing consensual and respectful relationships, and helping them understand how to deal with toxic behaviour. I feel this should be provided by schools as part of the curriculum.”
		State Responsibility	“And here I am in Poland where teaching kids about sex in school is a crime.”

4.5 Type of product: Pornography & Sexual Education

Waller's (2006) perspective that the controversy in advertising can emanate from both its execution and the subject matter it tackles is exemplified by the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign. This campaign, by addressing the sensitive issues of pornography and sexual education, has sparked significant discourse, illustrating the complex societal relationship with these topics.

4.5.1 Pornography

The dialogue surrounding the campaign extends beyond mere execution to engage with the deeper implications of pornography's portrayal, scrutinizing it through the themes of 'sex' and 'access'.

The 'Keep it Real Online' campaign's engagement with the topic of pornography catalysed a discussion about sex and porn production amongst commenters. Responses to the campaign, such as “Porn is bad for you and couples also it influxes sex trafficking and no one's gonna talk about how it's supposed to be for adults? ...”, and “Way to go in making sure that Producers of pornographic / raping content are not even mentioned or held accountable. Pathetic on *every * single * level !”, not only offer critiques of porn and the accountability of pornographic content producers, but also encapsulate the ethical and societal tensions surrounding pornography's influence on perceptions of sex. The views of this commenter are not without foundation. Peter and Valkenburg (2007), in investigating the psychological effects of exposure to sexually explicit internet material on adolescents, found that the relationship between exposure to a sexualized media environment and

notions of women as sex objects followed a hierarchical pattern, moving from semi-explicit to explicit content, while Rothman et al. (2015) research surmised that there is a potential for sexual content in media to normalize harmful sexual practices. Therefore, those taking exception to the pornography appear to be perturbed by the advertisements inability to raise awareness of perceived issues within the industry, and instead perceive the advertisement as normalising or even glamorising sexual exploitation.

In keeping with the concerns that pornography was at the crux of the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign were those that felt that the advertisement was not acknowledging the deeper issues apparent in the genre. Of particular note were those that commented on the gendered consumption and inherent sexism within pornography. "I cried when I realized how porn is directed to men online...", or "I for one am fed up of the society we live in today where sex and women are objects" and "Get in there boy" point to the industry's sexist underpinnings. Such observations resonate with Peter and Valkenburg's (2006) findings on the differential effects of sexually explicit internet material on men and women, highlighting the need for a critical examination of gender dynamics in pornography.

By contrast, acknowledgments were also made about the need for a campaign because of its ability to raise awareness of not just appropriate online material but the implications of exposure to pornography amongst youth. Using their own experience as an example, one commenter voiced their support for the campaign stating "About time people took this problem seriously. I was addicted from age 5 until age 26". Others felt that because information about sex and pornography was not being offered to youth elsewhere, the advertisement was a useful means to inspire action when it came to discussing sex with young people. One commenter lamented, "Part of this problem is parents don't know how to address it to their own children. Sex for some reason is a very touchy subject and is deemed taboo!", while another applauded the campaigns willingness to address pornography, "Wow. That's such an important issue which nobody talks about. Great initiative". The obvious insinuation being that such an advertisement might persuade parents to talk more about these subjects with their children: a point supported by Lefkowitz, et al., (2000) who have suggested that parental communication about sex is associated with more responsible sexual behaviour among adolescents."

The accessibility of pornography online was a key discussion point amongst commenters debating the necessity of such a campaign. The evolution of access from past restrictions, such as ID requirements for purchasing magazines, to the present scenario where pornography is "freely available" online, underscores the profound impact of technological advancements on the accessibility of sexually explicit content. Audience reflections, such as "It is not just an incident... 9 out of 10 boys and 6 out of 10 girls are exposed to pornography online before the age of 18. So it is a problem," highlight the pervasive nature of online pornography and its ease of


access to youth and questions like “WHY CAN ANY PERSON OF ANY AGE ACTUALLY VIEW THIS IN THE 1ST PLACE??” underline a global conversation on the need for more rigid regulations to limit minors' access to pornography. In fact, the access concerns prompted a bigger debate around the need for government interventions when it comes to online pornography. For example, while some commenters advocated that the government should act to “Block all sites,” other opinions such as “Bullsh*t ... part of law is agreeing to consent including accessing porn sites.” supported current consent-based legal frameworks”[sic] supported current consent-based legal frameworks. These latter suggestions indicated a divide in public sentiment on the effectiveness of regulatory measures and aligning with Livingstone and Haddon’s (2009) analysis which found that there is often a tension between protecting minors and upholding individual freedoms. The concerns over access tend to reflect the views of scholars who argue that navigating online and mobile spaces presents significant challenges and risks, particularly to younger audiences (Livingstone & Smith, 2014) and that ease of access to pornography is something to be concerned about because extensive exposure of adolescents to sexually explicit material online can potentially affect their sexual development and perceptions of relationships (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Naturally, the access debate also flowed into a wider discussion of the need to educate young people about pornography, because as one commenter explained, “@XXXX New Zealand even agrees with what I've been saying about the easy accessibility and how it's important to educate them on the difference of reality and porn.”

4.5.2 Sexual education

The 'Keep it Real Online' campaign spotlighted the value of sexual education with focus on the necessity of informing young individuals about sexuality, consent, and fostering healthy relationships amidst the complexities of the digital era. Themes such as ‘relationships’, ‘parent’s role’, ‘school curriculum’, and ‘state’s responsibility,’ although touched on above, will be developed further here to demonstrate how the product of the campaign stirred discussion of the multifaceted responsibility society bears in equipping its youth with the knowledge and understanding required to navigate sexual matters thoughtfully and safely.

The 'Keep it Real Online' campaign ignited significant dialogue about the necessity of incorporating teachings on healthy relationships and consent into sexual education frameworks. Comments from the campaign, such as “Way to go! I think this is fantastic! What a terrific way to bring up the much-needed sex talk! And I love that it talks about consent and healthy relationships!!” highlight the enthusiasm for consent education. This aligns with Jozkowski et al. (2014) who emphasize the pivotal role of consent in healthy sexual encounters. Echoing the sentiment, “Consent needs to be taught before sex,” also stresses the importance of early consent education, resonating with Hickman and Muehlenhard's (1999) perspective on preventing sexual misconduct and enhancing mutual respect. The need for consent education and the promotion of healthy relationship was also noted in comments where people reflected on their personal relationship experiences. For example, one person

appreciated the campaign message because of the negative impact pornography had on them: “Sounds like my exes, most of them treated me badly because porn had set unrealistic standards...” In essence, the campaign was considered a step towards focussing on the need for sexual education that addresses the need for healthy relationships between people. “The biggest and arguably most important conversation we’re still missing is helping young people with a framework for developing consensual and respectful relationships,” a position also advocated by scholars who believe education content is needed to correct misconceptions about sex and relationships and to prevent young people from developing toxic behaviours (Bridges, et al., 2010; Levant 1997).

Returning to an earlier point, the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign illuminates the indispensable role of parents in sexual education, emphasizing their pivotal duty in guiding their offspring through the nuances of sex, consent, and navigating the digital realm. Reflecting on the campaign, comments span a vast spectrum of experiences and viewpoints, accentuating the necessity for open dialogue, active parental involvement, and the strategic use of technological safeguards. As a self-disclosed parent reflected, “They do it [watch pornography] because not all parents know how to talk about it or kids don't want to learn from parents!... Consent needs to be taught before sex.” There thoughts, alongside those from others such as, “Here you go @XXXX. My job as a parent done  No but seriously consent is important,” and “Parents need to smarten up... least a parent could do is learn how to put browser restrictions in place,” acknowledged the fundamental role parents have in guiding and overseeing their children’s internet use, and the place of proactive parenting in managing children's online experiences especially when it comes to shaping children’s attitudes consent and healthy relationships (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Martino et al., 2008; Padilla-Walker, et al., 2018).

Educational professionals also contribute to this discourse, noting the observed shortfall in parental engagement in sexual education. For instance, a teacher’s comment, “I’m a teacher. Parents; PLEASE TALK TO YOUR KIDS!... It’s so sad! This is a great ad - parents with great emotional control,” echoes Shin and Min’s (2012) observations that educators often pinpoint gaps in children’s understanding arising from inadequate parental dialogue about sex.

In inspiring discussions about pornography, the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign inevitably prompted comments about the place of sexual education in school curriculum. In terms of how sex is taught in schools, questions were raised about the type of content being disseminated. As one commenter attests: “The biggest and arguably most important conversation we’re still missing is helping young people with a framework for developing consensual and respectful relationships and helping them understand how to deal with toxic behaviour.” To their way of thinking and others, too much attention is given to the biology of sexual health. The work of Goldfarb

and Lieberman (2021) supports this view because they suggest a greater integration of the social and emotional aspects that accompany sexual activity.

Alongside questioning the content of sexual education, diverging views emerged as to when the right time was to introduce young people to such education. For example, opinions from commenters ranged from “Sex Ed at my kids' school started at nine years old. Way too young, it stole their innocence,” to “Education and awareness from an early age could prevent so much in the future... keep it real. And talk about it.” These polarised positions are akin to challenges observed in academic research with the preservation of innocence often perceived as in tension with developing and implementing sex education programs that can positively impact adolescent sexual behaviours, by reducing risks and equipping them with accurate information and healthy attitudes (Kirby, 2007). The positions of commenters, then, reflect a perceived inconsistency in curriculum delivery and perhaps flag the need for regular evaluation and updates of sexual education to meet the evolving needs of students effectively and comprehensively.

Finally, the role of the government in developing the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign and using it as a tool to educate was considered with a spectrum of opinions offered by commenters, from applause for government-initiated educational efforts to calls for refined policy approaches. Public accolades for government initiatives, were exemplified by comments such as “Wow, this is one of the best initiatives I've seen from the government!” However, some voices were less supportive and instead advocated for more stringent content regulations online, especially concerning minors' access to pornography. Such a sentiment is present in “Maybe they should censor porn as much as they do free speech instead of normalizing it.” Like the discussions of sexual health education curriculum discrepancies, commenters were again polarised in their views on the government's role in educating the youth of New Zealand.

Interestingly, the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign was also discussed by overseas commenters, who tended to applaud the New Zealand government's initiative, often citing it as a means to challenge the ‘outdated’ views of their homelands. For example, “And here I am in Poland where teaching kids about sex in school is a crime,” clearly delineates global policy variances. Similarly, expressions of aspiration towards New Zealand's approach, were seen in comments wishing for similar initiatives in other countries, “Omg dying! America would never do this. Wish they would!” reflect a global yearning for progressive sexual education policies. Such positive views from New Zealander's and foreigners alike, emphasise the desire for policy action, which Bleakley, et al., (2011), Hall, et al., (2016) and Wright (2019) believe can lead to diverse educational impacts.

The conversation surrounding state involvement in sexual education illustrates the intricate public sentiment on governmental participation in sexual health education. There's substantial backing for active state-led initiatives alongside a distinct call for policies that more effectively manage access to harmful content and ensure comprehensive education. This dialogue stresses the critical balance governments must strike between safeguarding minors and facilitating access to precise, extensive sexual education.

Table 4.4

Summary of themes at the 'processing stage'

Stage:	Code	Themes	Examples
Processing	Positive	Entertained	Great add,love gets the message over & very entertaining.
		Humoured	Lol
		Impressed	When you ask for a video to promote a service and get genius instead
		Association	I couldn't agree more. Not much real these days unfortunately
	Negative	Indifference	Duh! is this something new?
		Dislike	yuk
		Disgust	@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX disgusting, to think children watch this filth
		Confusion	@XXXX Why NZ
		Sorrow	Sad when they have to learn about sex and relationships from porn. Whats wrong with a healthy balanced discussion about the subject?
		Shock	"smacked me right in the face"
		Anger	Exactly keep it real Sex is real porn is real People need to grow up and stop the PC BS

4.6 Processing

The processing stage in the context of controversial advertising is pivotal, marking the point where audiences formulate immediate, emotional responses to the presented content. This stage, as described by Waller (2006) and Wilson and West (1981), encompasses a range of reactions that may vary from positive sentiments, such as amusement and approval, to negative emotions like frustration and revulsion. This examination focuses on dissecting the range of responses invoked by the 'Keep it Real Online' Pornography advertisement. Audience reactions to the campaign are encapsulated within several key themes: humour, praise, relatability, indifference, discomfort, disgust, and anger.

4.6.1 Positive Reactions: humour, praise & relatability

The humorous approach adopted in the 'Keep it Real Online' pornography advertisement demonstrates a strategic approach to positively engage audiences with sensitive or controversial topics. Reactions from the audience,

ranged from "Lol" to declarations of the advertisement as "the funniest thing I've ever seen," demonstrating the effectiveness of humour in not only capturing attention but also in facilitating a more receptive processing of the campaign's message. The reactions "I love this ad. Funny but with a real message" and "Colour me impressed - this is a really responsible message delivered in a light-hearted but matter-of-fact way <3" further illustrate how humour can be leveraged to enhance message reception. By presenting serious topics in a humorous light, advertisers can foster a positive emotional connection, making the underlying message more palatable and impactful (Yoon, 2016). As mentioned above when discussing how tagging could prime people's exposure, humour in advertising is a well-documented strategy for enhancing memorability, likability, and comprehension of the advertised message (Eisend, 2009). Positive responses such as "Such effective use of humour...love this NZ ad style..." and "Hilarious" solidify how humour can aid processing and receptiveness and is therefore an effective tool in controversial advertising to lower defences and encourage engagement with the content. This is in line with research suggesting that humour increases the likelihood of message acceptance, particularly when addressing taboo or challenging subjects (Strick et al., 2009).

Admittedly, integrating humour with serious topics requires careful management. The audience's ability to appreciate the humour while also recognizing the ad's important message, as indicated by "[@XXXX](#) I laughed but also super important," is crucial to ensure that the humour does not overshadow the seriousness of the topic or diminish the intended impact of the message (Moyer-Gusé, Mahood, & Brookes, 2011). Accordingly, those that found the advertisement navigated the trappings of humour and education praised the campaign for its ingenuity, effectiveness in message delivery, and New Zealand's proactive stance on these crucial issues. For example, expressions of admiration like "When you ask for a video to promote a service and get genius instead" and "Omg. This is the best ad I have ever seen. What an incredible way to deal with this issue. I love it!" showcase the audience's appreciation for the campaign's creativity and its powerful communication strategy. While "These ads about kids online are brilliant...I just watched them all lol," reflect the campaign's success in captivating audiences while conveying crucial messages. This is in line with Eisend's (2011) suggestion that engaging and meaningful advertisements can positively influence viewers' perceptions of the issues presented, underscoring the importance of blending entertainment with educational content for maximum effect.

A portion of the commenters did not just enjoy the way the message was communicated using education and humour but felt that the advertisement was something New Zealanders should feel proud of, particularly when reflecting on the international acclaim the wider campaign had garnered. National pride among New Zealanders was evident in comments such as "Love the global feedback, proud to be a nzer.", "hahaha I love this country" and "I'm so proud to be kiwi". Clearly, there was a perception amongst commenters that the campaign could be viewed as projecting a positive national identity and New Zealand was a frontrunner in addressing online safety and sexual education. Holt (2004) explains that public campaigns that can invoke a

sense of national pride will generally be accompanied by positive feedback, perhaps accounting for some of the national identity comments that emerged in the data.

Finally, those processing the advertisement often did so by drawing parallels to their own personal connections with the content. As Greenwald (1965) attests, persuasive messages that are personally relevant can influence the likelihood of message receptivity and whether the persuasion is successful in bringing about attitude and/or behavioural change. Comments like “Honestly what a great ad concept! These people are real people” and reflections on the authenticity of the advertisement, such as “I couldn’t agree more. Not much real these days unfortunately,” illuminate the viewers' recognition of the realism and relatability in the campaign and why it is valuable. Furthermore, expressions of validation and agreement, for example, “@XXXX ive always said this!” and “@XXXX yess!!”, reveal how the advertisement mirrors the audience's personal convictions or experiences, reinforcing those beliefs and potentially prompting action. In some instances, the shocking nature of the advertisement prompted personal relevance and reflection. Comments such as “i was shocked and felt guilty i hadn't realized how widespread it has become...but frankly i am clueless and blind!” illustrate shock’s role in fostering self-reflection and a reassessment of personal understanding regarding the topics addressed. Slater and Rouner (2002) argue that messages congruent with pre-existing beliefs or which have personal relevance are more likely to be accepted and lead to behavioural changes.

4.6.2 Negative Reactions: Indifference, disgust, & anger

Although processing the advertisement led the majority of people to comment favourably on the 'Keep it Real Online -- Pornography' advertisement, there were detractors who opted to belittle and condemn it. Expressions such as “Duh! Is this something new?” and comments highlighting the shift from physical to digital access to sensitive content, like “Gone from trying to find dad's video stash to viewing online, big deal,” exemplify a dismissive stance towards the campaign's efforts. These reactions suggest a perception of the issues addressed as commonplace or not particularly pressing, reflecting a possible societal desensitization to the concerns raised by initiatives like 'Keep it Real Online.' This observation aligns with the phenomena of desensitization discussed in media studies, where repeated exposure to specific types of content can lead to diminished emotional responses over time (Bushman & Huesmann, 2006). Additionally, remarks emphasizing personal responsibility, such as the suggestion for parents to implement practical measures like browser restrictions, underscore an indifferent attitude towards the campaign's informational approach.

This perspective suggests a belief in the efficacy of individual action over awareness efforts. According to Bandura's social learning theory (1977), behaviour is learned from the environment through the process of observational learning. Bandura proposed that people can learn new information and behaviours by watching

other people (referred to as models). When people observe someone successful in a behaviour, they also complete the behaviour successfully themselves, thus enhancing their belief in their own capabilities, known as self-efficacy. In this context, the mention of implementing parental controls could be seen as a demonstration of self-efficacy, where individuals believe that their personal actions, such as setting up browser restrictions, are more effective than broader informational campaigns in mitigating the risks associated with online pornography. This indicates that enhancing self-efficacy, rather than merely raising awareness, might be a more effective strategy in promoting behavioural change in contexts like these.

Alongside indifferent responses to the campaign were those that were critical and sceptical of why it was needed in the first place. Critiques like “why should children have to deal with toxic behaviour, why not focus on the folk dealing out this toxic behaviour....cart before the horse....” called for a more comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of problematic behaviours rather than solely focusing on victim education, resonating with Hastings, Stead, and Webb’s (2004) advocacy for holistic strategies in social marketing campaigns. Viewer scepticism about the campaign's relevance, as voiced in comments like “Seriously this is important? How about teach your kids how to use money and budget so poverty stops climbing!” indicates a need for advertising to align more closely with audience values and perceived societal needs (Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004), while scepticism regarding content moderation, as in “Twitter and Facebook can be persuaded to remove content but we can’t stop the proliferation of porn, Hmm....” also showed why people thought the campaign was pointless, citing instead the need to reconsider internet governance and the efficacy of content regulation. The discussion of platform responsibility was not unexpected given Gillespie (2018) found that content moderation is fundamental, intrinsic, and core to the operation of social platforms, rather than just an ancillary aspect, due to its crucial role in shaping online discourse and, by extension, societal norms and regulations.

In some cases, processing the advertisement led to commenters feeling uncomfortable, and this was attributed to the use of porn stars for educational purposes. One such remark was “I can appreciate where this is going, but I feel like using porn stars to lecture a kid on meaningful relationships is like asking pedophiles to identify what a good touch and bad touch is and when it’s ok to talk to strangers”. Others simply felt bad for the kid who starred in the advertisement stating, “The poor kid, lols, now he's going to feel real awkward & embarrassed...” Feelings of discomfort or cognitive dissonance can produce defensive responses, which might account for why these commenters opted to engage in dissonance reduction strategies such as trivialisation (McGrath, 2017).

Of course, there were those who just simply disliked the advertisement or found it disgusting. What such straightforward critique was, “Not good...” which encapsulated a general dissatisfaction with the content, but others were far more emotional in their responses claiming the advertisement was and its content was

“disgusting, to think children watch this filth” and “how disgusting can they get.” Both examples indicate that, for some, a boundary had been crossed and had prompted a portion of the commenters to acknowledge their repulsion. Lerner et al.’s (2003) investigation into the impact of emotions on decision-making elucidates how disgust can profoundly affect perceptions and actions, potentially leading to avoidance or rejection of the message. In some cases, emotions such as disgust and dislike, can negatively impact on the reputation and perception people have of the brand (Phelps & Hoy, 1996). In this case, the disgust could extend to the government department responsible for developing the campaign, which can be even more problematic when considering the role of government is to advise and shape the attitudes of society and in this case, there has not been the sorts of success needed to inspire attitude and behavioural change.

The disgust exhibited in comments such as “What happened to the real world???? sinful and lust” perhaps accounts for why people were quick to condemn the campaign. The apparent belief seemed to be that the advertisement breached moral standards of decency which Rozin, Haidt, and McCauley (2008) suggest can mean that controversial advertisements need to be address societal issues without offending moral sensibilities or the possibility of persuasion will be mitigated. Simply put, some commenters instinctive response on processing the advertisement was to just consider it “yuk.”

Those that primed their peers during exposure to see the advertisement as confusing, likely processed the advertisement through a similar lens. Such confusion was observed in comments like “This is 1 bugged up video...” and “@XXXX what the hell is this.” These statements, and others like them, show moments of disconnect where the advertisement’s purpose or message was lost or misunderstood by viewers. Further, inquiries such as “@XXXX what's the advertisement about???” and “But like... what exactly did they want?” point to a deeper uncertainty regarding the campaign's goals, highlighting a potential misalignment between the advertisement's delivery and audience expectations (Potter & Choi, 2006). Specific queries about the ad, like “Just curious, where are the legs of the woman at -21 seconds?” or questions about the characters' authenticity, suggest that certain narrative choices or portrayals within the advertisement might introduce ambiguity, detracting from its clarity (Mothersbaugh, Huhmann, & Franke, 2012).

Finally, processing the advertisement left some commenters angry. Anger was seen in comments such as “Exactly keep it real Sex is real porn is real People need to grow up and stop the PC BS” indicating frustration with what some viewers perceive as an overly sanitized or politically correct approach to discussing sex and pornography. This reflects a broader discourse on the balance between sensitivity and realism in public messaging about sexual content. The reaction towards political correctness and its impact on public discourse here, shows how efforts to be inclusive and sensitive can sometimes lead to backlash or resistance (Loury, 1994)

but it was not just political correctness that commenters were angry about. Some took exception to the portrayal of the parents, while others to the inadequacies of the advertisement. For example, “The Mother - is docile in this ad. She has no input, no authority, says pretty much - nothing” express dissatisfaction with how parental figures and authority are depicted, as well as the messaging around consent. This criticism seems to point to a desire for more empowered portrayals of parenting roles in the context of sexual education. Coleman and Hendry (1999) address the importance of parental communication in adolescent sexual education, suggesting that effective messaging should reflect a more active and authoritative parental involvement.

The processing of the advertisements tends to suggest that a myriad of emotions and views were expressed by commenters, across the spectrum of positive and negative, and often in response to personal understandings of the advertisement.

Table 4.5*Summary of the Communications Effects*

Stage:	Code	Themes	Examples
Communication Effects	Positive	Social Awareness	Wow. Thats such an important issue which nobody talks about. Great initiative. All the best.
		Brand awareness	@XXXXX the NZ Government
		Brand perception	Just when I thought I couldn't love NZ's government any more
	Negative	Social Awareness	This is a govt add, why dont you block it from getting in our servers then, I am sure you guys have the intelligence to do so.
		Brand awareness	why should children have to deal with toxic behaviour, why not focus on the folk dealing out this toxic behaviour....cart before the horse....
		Brand perception	This is a govt add, why dont you block it from getting in our servers then, I am sure you guys have the intelligence to do so.

4.7 Communication Effects

Following the initial exposure and processing of the 'Keep It Real Online- Pornography' advertisement, this section examines the likely communication effects on the audience. As Waller (2005) suggests, this stage involves the development of more enduring brand attitudes, potentially positive or negative (p. 8). Such a focus highlights the crucial balance between leveraging the campaign's emotional impact and mitigating the risk of fostering negative perceptions. Through thematic analysis of social media responses, the following themes emerged within the communication effects stage: positive social awareness, positive brand awareness, positive brand perception, negative social awareness, negative brand awareness, and negative brand perception. Each theme will be explored in further detail to understand the audience's lasting attitudes towards the campaign and the advertiser.

4.7.1 Positive Social Awareness

The 'Keep it real online' pornography advertisement garnered significant praise from commenters for its focus on fostering positive social awareness regarding issues related to online behaviour, particularly concerning consent, healthy relationships, and the impact of pornography. Comments from social media platforms reflect widespread approval and appreciation for the initiative. For instance, one user remarked, "Wow. That's such an important issue which nobody talks about. Great initiative. All the best." This sentiment underscores the campaign's success in addressing a topic often overlooked in public discourse (Pittman et al., 2018).

The advertisement was also lauded for its inclusivity and broad relevance beyond specific demographics. Comments such as, "Excellent community awareness. It's not only kids that need this lesson unfortunately,"

highlight the recognition of the campaign's universal significance. Additionally, the campaign's global impact is evidenced by comments expressing admiration for New Zealand's proactive stance on sex education and consent. For example, one comment reads, "NZ does it again. Gavin," indicating international recognition of New Zealand's efforts in addressing critical issues. Furthermore, the campaign's traction on international social media platforms like Weibo and WeChat shows the ability of social campaigns to resonate on a global scale (Bazzo et al., 2017).

4.7.2 Positive Brand Awareness and Perception

The 'Keep it Real Online' pornography advertisement appears to have significantly enhanced positive brand awareness. That is the advertisements has positively shaped public views of the government's role and effectiveness, with social media comments attesting to the campaign's success in aligning the government's image with progressive values and responsible governance. It was clear people realised the advertisement could be attributed to the New Zealand Government as the initiative's sponsor. This acknowledgment in public discourse is exemplified by comments like "[@XXXX](#) the NZ Government," demonstrating the audience's recognition of the government's role in the campaign. Such direct association enhances the campaign's credibility and the effectiveness of governmental involvement in public health and safety initiatives. The visibility and acknowledgment of the New Zealand Government's role extends across various digital platforms, as indicated by comments such as "Advertisement by New Zealand Government [@XXXX](#)." This broad recognition suggests that the campaign's branding strategies have been effective in enhancing brand awareness, a key objective in public sector marketing efforts (Kotler & Lee, 2007).

Comments such as "Just when I thought I couldn't love NZ's government any more" and "NZ always makes the best ads!" express deep respect and approval for the New Zealand Government's initiatives. These reactions underscore the campaign's contribution to enhancing perceptions of the government's competence and forward-thinking approach, resonating with Young's (2006) distinction between government and political advertising in terms of purpose, funding, and content. However, the 'Keep it Real Online - Pornography' advertisement blurs these lines by eliciting emotional engagement and support, demonstrating the potential of government advertising to transcend its traditional informative role and engage deeply with the public.

Expressions like "[@XXXX](#) you bloody kiwis" and "[@XXXX](#) you Kiwi's" highlight the national pride associated with the campaign, reflecting the government's success in not only addressing critical issues but also in fostering a sense of community and national identity. This aligns with research by Naik, Raman, and Winer (2005), who discuss the impact of branding on governmental and public sector initiatives, emphasizing the importance of clear brand association in enhancing public engagement and trust. By positioning the New Zealand Government

as a proactive and responsible entity through the 'Keep it Real Online' campaign, the initiative has not only raised awareness on important social issues but has also significantly boosted the government's brand awareness. This successful branding strategy stresses the potential of government-sponsored campaigns to resonate with the public while advancing societal goals.

Furthermore, the campaign has impacted individuals' desires to migrate to New Zealand, highlighting its effectiveness in nation branding. Comments like "[@XXXX](#) another great example of NZ life. I need to move there" reflect the campaign's influence on perceptions of New Zealand as an ideal place to live, consistent with Nye's (2004a, 2004b) and Fan's (2004, 2008) discussions on soft power and nation branding's role in shaping international perceptions.

In summary, the 'Keep it Real Online - Pornography' advertisement has significantly enhanced the New Zealand Government's brand perception by showcasing its commitment to progressive policies and societal well-being. This positive reception contributes to New Zealand's image both domestically and internationally, illustrating the strategic use of advertising to bolster government and national branding.

4.7.3 Negative Social Awareness

Some comments from social media users' express scepticism or criticism towards the 'Keep it real online - Pornography' advertisement, indicating a negative social awareness surrounding its messaging and approach. One user questioned the campaign's focus, asking, "Why should children have to deal with toxic behaviour, why not focus on the folk dealing out this toxic behaviour....cart before the horse...." This comment aligns with research on moral panic and online safety. A study by Walsh (2020) explores the tendency to overemphasize risks to children online, potentially leading to campaigns that burden children and parents with the responsibility for online safety. Some comments also expressed doubt or scepticism about the campaign's effectiveness. For example, one user remarked, "Cause porn hasn't been around for decades...either the children have gotten dumber or the parents have. I think the latter..." Much like the previous example, the social issue (access to pornography) is being diluted by re-directing what the purpose of the advertisement should be. Public health campaigns can only be effective if the target audience is exposed to, attends to, and comprehends key messages (Elder et al, 2004; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). Similarly, a user directed a query to another user, asking, "[@XXXX](#) what's the advertisement about???" This comment suggests a lack of awareness or engagement with the campaign's messaging, which is problematic considering an ambiguous or unclear message can hinder campaign effectiveness (Singer & Flavell, 1981).

Additionally, there were comments that trivialized the campaign's message or made light of its subject matter. For instance, one user humorously remarked, "Porn has taught me soooo many great things, like positions and pick up lines, not to mention the toys, and don't even get me started on the game of Simon says, but you do the same as the porno." This comment trivializes the campaign's focus on consent and healthy relationships, reflecting a concerning trend of online toxicity becoming normalized. Such trivialization of serious issues mirrors findings from a study by Beres et al. (2021), which explores the normalization of online toxicity within gaming communities. Beres et al. discuss how toxic behaviours become entrenched as typical and expected elements of interaction within these communities. This normalization process is facilitated by mechanisms such as 'moral disengagement,' where individuals rationalize harmful behaviours as acceptable or insignificant. The parallels between the trivialization of the campaign's messages about consent and the normalization of toxicity in gaming suggest that addressing complex social issues with straightforward advertising messages may inadvertently contribute to their trivialization. When audiences are accustomed to dismissing serious topics through humour or cynicism, campaigns aiming to raise awareness might instead be perceived as oversimplifications, thus undermining their effectiveness in fostering meaningful dialogue or change.

4.7.4 Negative Brand Awareness and Perception

In some cases, 'The 'Keep it Real Online – pornography' advertisement has sparked confusion among audiences, leading to negative brand awareness, as indicated by comments on social media. These comments suggest misunderstandings regarding the campaign's origins and affiliations, potentially impacting the campaign's credibility and the audience's ability to correctly attribute its source. One user's remark, "[@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX](#) this ad is just so Australian," reflects a misinterpretation of the campaign's cultural context, implying that its content resonates more with Australian norms. This misattribution can lead to confusion about the campaign's origin and objectives, underscoring the significance of cultural specificity in advertising messages (Verlegh & Steenkamp, 1999). Clearly, ensuring obvious brand recognition and the importance of distinct branding strategies to prevent confusion among international audiences was needed for some commenters (Huang, Tung, & Wang, 2017).

Some users expressed surprise or disbelief at the content of the campaign, with one remarking, "[@XXXX](#) NZ is wild," and another stating, "[@XXXX](#) kiwis are loose ay..." These comments suggest a perception of New Zealand as a place where unconventional or controversial behaviour is normalized, potentially leading to a negative impression of the country as a whole. While in contrast a user's question, "[@XXXX](#) what even is NZ?" suggests a deeper lack of awareness regarding New Zealand, potentially diminishing the campaign's impact due to audiences' unfamiliarity with the country. This underscores the role of national branding in influencing public perception and the effectiveness of government-led campaigns (Anholt, 2007).

In terms of perceptions about the government's involvement in the advertisement, some opted to criticize what they felt as misleading messages. "Take a look at the ANTI - HUNTING one disguised as a safe internet ad from the same advertising agency. Disgraceful." This comment suggests dissatisfaction with the government's priorities or messaging, leading to a negative perception of its actions. The criticism also extended to the government's approach to online regulation, with one remarking, "Maybe they should censor porn as much as they do free speech instead of normalizing it." This comment reflects concerns about the government's policies and actions regarding online content, contributing to a negative perception of its competence or effectiveness. Finally, there were comments suggesting scepticism or criticism of the campaign's impact or relevance, with one user stating, "This is a govt add, why don't you block it from getting in our servers then, I am sure you guys have the intelligence to do so." This comment implies scepticism about the government's ability to address online issues effectively, leading to a negative perception of its actions or intentions, as the use of cause related marketing as a diversional tactic from other issues can be seen as exploitative (Cammarota, et al., 2021).

Overall, these comments reflect a negative brand perception of New Zealand and its government as a result of the 'Keep it real online - Pornography' advertisement. Users expressed concerns about the campaign's content, the government's priorities, and its approach to online regulation, contributing to a negative impression of the country and its leadership.

Table 4.6*Summary of the actions taken in response to the advertisement*

Stage:	Code	Themes	Examples
Action	Positive	Discussion	@XXXX we need to have a chat when I get home mate
		Website visits	@XXXX - have you guys checked out this page/site?
		Sharing / tagging	@XXXX keep it real bro
		Education	Great video, Is it possible that we use the video in my children online safety awareness programme?
	Negative	Sharing	Not cool @XXXX
		dislike	yuk
		Complain	Take a look at the ANTI - HUNTING one disguised as a safe internet ad from the same advertising agency. Disgraceful.

4.8 Action

In the Action stage of Waller's (2005) model, behavioural outcomes stemming from the formed attitudes are analysed, ranging from positive actions like purchasing or endorsing the advertisement to negative behaviours such as boycotting the brand or engaging in negative word-of-mouth. This stage is pivotal for discerning the real-world consequences of controversial advertising on consumer behaviour and brand interaction. Within this framework, the 'Keep it real online' pornography advertisement's impact will be assessed across various action themes. These themes encompass a spectrum of behaviours, including sparking discussion, website visits, education, expressing dislike, and lodging complaints.

4.8.1 Sparking discussion

The analysis explored above shows that the 'Keep it Real Online' pornography advertisement has effectively initiated widespread discussions across different platforms, highlighting the campaign's capacity to engage the public in essential dialogues about online safety, consent, and sexual education. These discussions not only span personal reflections and advice exchanges within intimate circles but also stimulate broader societal debates, illustrating the campaign's broad appeal and relevance. For instance, the campaign encourages open conversations about sensitive topics, as seen in comments like "@XXXX - hope you're keeping it real" and "@XXXX we need to have a chat when I get home mate." Both examples show personal initiatives to address the issues raised by the campaign within individual social circles. The willingness of people to discuss the pertinent messages of the advertisements indicate that, like Wilson et al. (2010) and Thoma and Huebner (2014), found, such media content can pave the way for open dialogues and communal understandings around, in this case, responsible behaviour regarding sex and relationships.

Moreover, the campaign's reach extends beyond its initial audience, prompting users from various backgrounds to share their views and experiences, thus broadening the conversation about sex education and societal attitudes towards sexuality. Discussions on geographical disparities in the acceptance and implementation of such educational campaigns reflect the global relevance of the issues addressed, supporting Isaksen et al.'s (2020) observations on the impact of cultural and societal norms on sexual education. Coupled with the fact that the advertisement emphasises the necessity for people from all walks of life to have a comprehensive sex education that goes beyond traditional biological explanations to include discussions on consent, healthy relationships, and the realistic portrayal of sex, the advertisement is considered worthwhile and successful. Not only do the discussions it prompts align with Barnett et al.'s (2022) and Martino et al.'s (2008) research on the importance of holistic approaches to sexual education, the advertisement aims to correct misconceptions and promote a healthy understanding of sexual relationships, countering the often-unrealistic portrayals found in pornography and media, and making it a commendable offering in the eyes of the majority of commenters. Essentially, the advertisement clearly sparked discussions that reflect a societal shift towards more open and inclusive conversations about sexuality and consent, challenging traditional taboos and encouraging a more informed public discourse, which Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2008) highlight is critical in achieving accurate information dissemination and fostering healthy attitudes towards sex and relationships.

4.8.2 Finding out more information

Alongside sparking discussions, the 'Keep it real online' pornography advertisement successfully drove users to visit the campaign's website, where additional resources and information are available. Several individuals indicated that they had visited the site or intended to do so, reflecting a proactive engagement with the campaign's content and a desire for further assistance and guidance. There are instances where users directly encourage others to visit the website, demonstrating a proactive effort to share useful resources and information. For instance, one user prompts their friends to check out the website, asking, "[@XXXX](#) - have you guys checked out this page/site?" This comment illustrates the campaign's potential to generate word-of-mouth referrals and increase website traffic through personal recommendations (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Other examples include one user enthusiastically recommending the website to others, stating, "[@XXXX](#). This site is awesome!!! Spread the word." Another individual shares with a friend saying "[@XXXX](#) this site may help a little with what we were talking about." These comments indicate positive experiences with the website's content and a willingness to share it with others, suggesting that the site offers valuable resources and support.

Similarly, another user acknowledges the importance of seeking out additional resources despite considering themselves knowledgeable and cautious about online behaviour. They state, "We have started conversations, but I will be checking out these resources because I thought I was grounded and open-minded and reasonably cautious but frankly I am clueless and blind!" This comment highlights the campaign's ability to provide

valuable insights and resources that may challenge existing perceptions and beliefs, prompting users to seek out further information. Overall, the positive sharing behaviours observed in response to the 'Keep it real online' pornography advertisement reflect a collaborative effort to raise awareness and educate individuals about consent, healthy relationships, and the realities of online behaviour. By leveraging social networks and personal connections, individuals are able to amplify the advertisement's message and promote meaningful discussions about health issues their communities (Sabi, 2015). Furthermore, social network studies have demonstrated that individuals' health behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs are influenced by their peer connections within their social networks (Khoshnevisan et al., 2019).

4.8.3 Using as an educational resource

As mentioned previously, the 'Keep it real online' pornography advertisement has been recognized by many individuals as a valuable educational resource, with numerous reactions suggesting its potential use in teaching and raising awareness about online safety, consent, and healthy relationships. These responses reflect a recognition of the campaign's efficacy in initiating important discussions and providing educational content that is relevant and impactful. One common theme among the responses is the suggestion to incorporate the campaign's video into educational programs or lessons. For example, one individual inquires, "Great video, Is it possible that we use the video in my children's online safety awareness programme?" This comment highlights the campaign's potential to serve as a valuable tool for teaching children about safe online behaviour and fostering awareness about the risks associated with online interactions. This supports studies which have suggested that advertising can serve as an educational tool by empowering consumers to make informed decisions (Ryan et al., 2022).

Similarly, educators and teachers express interest in utilizing the campaign's video as a teaching resource in various contexts. For instance, one user suggests, "[@XXXX](#) [@XXXX](#) here's a vid for PSE ladies," indicating a desire to incorporate the campaign's content into personal, social, and health education (PSE) lessons. This sentiment is echoed by others who see the video as a valuable addition to health classes and lessons on safe sex and relationships. There are instances where individuals recommend the campaign's video for specific grade levels or subjects, such as health classes or junior school curriculum. These recommendations highlight the versatility of the campaign's content and its potential to resonate with a wide range of audiences, from young students to adolescents.

4.8.4 Negative Sharing

The theme of Negative Sharing in the context of the 'Keep it Real Online' pornography advertisement Communication Effects stage highlights a crucial aspect of audience interaction: the propagation of negative perceptions through personal networks. While this theme is represented by a relatively small number of examples, its implications are significant, illustrating how negative reactions can transcend individual responses to influence wider social perceptions and discussions. The act of sharing negative feedback, such as “Not cool Stuart” and broadcasting disdainful remarks to others like “@XXXX @XXXX @XXXX @XXXX disgusting, to think children watch this filth,” serves as a mechanism through which individual disapproval can amplify and spread within social networks. This phenomenon is explored by Berger and Milkman (2012), who discuss how emotional arousal, including negative emotions, can increase the likelihood of content being shared. The sharing of negative reactions thus not only reflects personal disapproval but also contributes to the broader social narrative surrounding the campaign, potentially influencing others' perceptions and attitudes toward the brand and its message. Negative sharing can have profound implications for the campaign and associated brand, extending the reach of critical perspectives and potentially compounding the impact of negative sentiment. As noted by Cheung and Lee (2012), online word-of-mouth, including negative sharing, can significantly affect brand image and consumer attitudes. The dissemination of disapproval through personal networks may, therefore, contribute to a wider perception of the campaign as controversial or objectionable, influencing those who might not have otherwise engaged with the campaign directly.

4.8.5 Dislike = Complaints

As signalled above, there was a section of commenters that disliked the 'Keep it Real Online' pornography advertisement. These commenters, although in the minority, could significantly influence their subsequent behaviours towards the campaign and its associated brand. These responses, which range from succinct expressions of distaste such as “Yuk” and “Not good..”, to more elaborate criticisms, underscore the potential for controversial advertising to engender backlash or disengagement. Expressions of repulsion, as seen in comments which describe the advertisement as “filth” and “how disgusting can they get,” point to the visceral reactions that can detract from the intended educational objectives of a campaign. This reaction aligns with research by Littler (2005), who discusses the risk of negative emotional responses overshadowing the message within controversial advertising, potentially leading to brand damage or diminished message effectiveness.

The critiques extended to questioning the pedagogical approach of the campaign: “Silly add! Why bother asking for help or advise when anybody at any age would learn heaps just watching these two yummy bodies! And they're friendly too! Great teachers! Sorry but some adds just miss the mark! If a kid is on this page then he or she are not interested about how relationships work!” This suggests a disconnect between the educational intent of the campaign and the perceived messaging, further complicating the audience's reception and processing of the content and perhaps accounts for why audiences complained. Complaining occurred where dissatisfaction

transcends mere disapproval to manifest as explicit grievances about the campaign's content or its perceived implications. Although represented through a limited number of examples, the act of lodging complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) is significant, marking a transition from passive reception to active expression of concern. The ASA received 44 complaints about the entire 'Keep it Real Online' campaign but these were not upheld because “content and placement of the advertisement from the New Zealand Government was justifiable on educational grounds, to address the concern that many children are currently able to access inappropriate content online.” (*ASA Releases the Most Complained About Ads of 2020, 2021*).

4.9 Summary of Findings

The findings section of this thesis presents a comprehensive analysis of public reactions to the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, as gathered from social media platforms. This section thoroughly investigates how the advertisement was received by different demographics, highlighting the nuanced and complex perceptions and responses that shape public engagement with controversial advertising.

The analysis begins with a detailed content examination of the advertisement itself, identifying its key themes and executional elements. The advertisement's use of provocative content, including the portrayal of nudity and the involvement of characters identified as porn stars, is scrutinized to understand its impact on viewer perceptions and reactions. This initial content analysis sets the stage for exploring the thematic responses from the audience.

Through thematic analysis, several major themes are identified, reflecting a spectrum of public sentiments:

Exposure and Media Type: Insights into how initial exposure to the advertisement and the type of media through which viewers encountered it influenced their perceptions. Discussions around priming effects, both positive and negative, are explored to assess preconceived notions that viewers brought to their viewing experience.

Executional Elements: The analysis delves into the specifics of how the advertisement was executed, including the use of controversial figures and content. The range of emotional responses elicited by these elements, from humour to disgust, highlights the critical role of execution style in shaping public reactions.

Subject Matter Reactions: Viewer responses to the core topic of the advertisement—pornography and sexual education—are extensively analysed. This theme covers a broad range of opinions on related social issues, such as sexual behaviour, access to pornography, and the responsibilities of various societal entities like parents and educational institutions.

Emotional and Cognitive Responses: This part of the analysis addresses the immediate emotional and cognitive reactions of the audience, categorizing them into responses such as humour, indifference, and anger. The development of these reactions into more sustained communication effects is also discussed.

Communication Effects: The longer-term impacts of the advertisement on public attitudes and behaviours are considered. This includes changes in social and brand awareness, as well as shifts in public and brand perception—both positive and negative.

Behavioural Actions: Finally, the analysis covers the actions taken by viewers in response to the advertisement. Actions range from engaging in discussions and visiting related websites to more negative responses such as expressing dislike and filing complaints.

Each of these themes is supported by data extracted from social media, providing empirical evidence to the theoretical constructs discussed in earlier sections of the thesis. This structured approach not only offers a granular look at the diverse reactions elicited by the advertisement but also integrates these findings with broader advertising theories and models, such as those related to controversial advertising and public response mechanisms.

In summary, the findings section elucidates the complex interplay between advertisement content, viewer preconceptions, emotional engagement, and behavioural responses. By weaving together detailed thematic insights with overarching advertising theories, this section provides a robust framework for understanding and predicting public reactions to controversial advertising campaigns.

5 Discussion: Balancing with swords.

This research set out to answer the question - 'How do audience reactions to the New Zealand government's 'Keep It Real Online- Pornography' advertisement reflect how they perceive controversial advertising? As the previous chapter revealed, the advertisement used both shock tactics, in the form of nudity, as well as humour, to address serious issues surrounding children's exposure to online pornography, providing a unique case study to analyse the effectiveness of controversial advertising techniques and the public's response. The findings capture a spectrum of reactions, indicating that the audience held varied interpretations and engagements with the campaign. Essentially, the data collected across a range of social media platforms showed that, while some viewers appreciated the directness and educational intent of the campaign, others felt discomfort or disapproval, citing concerns over the appropriateness of the content and the method of delivery. However, a comparatively small number of comments, across all social media platforms were negative, which aligns with the advertisement's viral success (Burgham, 2020).

The effectiveness of the campaign was significantly influenced by various factors, including cultural context, individual attitudes towards pornography, and pre-existing beliefs about education on sensitive topics. This variety in audience response not only informs the theoretical understanding of advertising impact but also raises important questions about the ethical implications of using shock and humour in public service announcements. By analysing these findings against established theoretical frameworks and integrating insights from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and shock advertising theories (Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003), this discussion seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of how controversial advertising is received by the public and the factors that influence its success or failure. This discussion aims to contribute to the broader academic and practical discourse on advertising strategy, public communication, and the role of government in media messaging.

5.1 Summary of findings on Audience Reactions

The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement elicited a broad spectrum of reactions from its audience, reflecting diverse interpretations and levels of engagement. Positive reactions were notably prevalent among those who appreciated the campaign's boldness and its educational intent. For instance, many viewers lauded the direct approach of the advertisement, recognising its necessity in addressing a critical issue. Such responses highlight an appreciation for the advertisement's straightforwardness in tackling the sensitive issue of children's exposure to online pornography. Yet not all feedback was positive. A significant portion of the audience expressed discomfort or disapproval, particularly regarding the explicit nature of the content and subject.

Viewers who found the advertisement inappropriate were concerned about its public broadcast, fearing it might be too disturbing, especially for children. These negative reactions underscore the challenge of balancing the need to convey a serious message with the risk of alienating or offending some viewers. Such findings were not unexpected given that people bring their own experiences and understandings to the communications they consume (Festinger, 1964). Furthermore, as scholars in social judgement theory attest, how a person responds to persuasive communication will inevitably fall within a latitude of acceptance, non-commitment, or rejection, which accounts for why some people were quick to applaud the campaign, condemn it or hold mixed views (Siero & Doosje, 1993).

In addition to clearly positive or negative reactions, there were also mixed responses. Some viewers recognised the importance of the message but were conflicted about the delivery method. An example of such ambivalence is captured in the comment “I can appreciate where this is going, but I feel like using porn stars to lecture a kid on meaningful relationships is like asking paedophiles [sic] to identify what a good touch and bad touch is and when it’s ok to talk to strangers”. These mixed reactions suggest that while the campaign's intent was clear, its execution was controversial and polarising. Despite these varied reactions, the overall response leaned towards the positive, with the advertisement achieving viral success (Burgham, 2020; Siebert, 2021). It was widely shared across social media platforms, significantly amplifying its reach and impact, suggesting that while the advertisement was deemed controversial, it was generating discussions akin to what would be expected in a public sphere (Dahlgren, 2005; Elmer et al., 2012; Valtysson, 2012; Salikov, 2018).

5.2 Conservative v. Liberal views

Several factors appeared to influence how different segments of the audience perceived and reacted to the advertisement. Cultural and social context emerged as a significant determinant of audience response. Viewers who seemed to display more conservative backgrounds were more likely to find the advertisement offensive due to their cultural norms and values, which typically favour more restrained communication, especially concerning sensitive topics like pornography. In these cases, the advertisement was considered ‘sinful’, ‘pathetic’ or ‘disgusting’. Those responding with such vehement dislike of the advertisement, could be viewed as acting as “moral custodians” (Hill & Zwaga, 2001, p. 159), doing so in an effort to be altruistic (Sunstein, 2006), in what Gunther (1995) refers to as the third person effect. The third person effect is where individuals will complain about, for example, controversial advertising to address perceived societal ills, but these ills are usually considered ills based on biased, controversial feelings that are not uniformly held.

Past research has found that those predisposed to conservative views on, for example, religion, are more likely to be offended or feel sensitive towards content that challenges their beliefs, perhaps explaining why the

advertisement was deemed sinful and disgusting (Wang et al., 2018). Some viewers referenced Christian individuals who “refused to teach their children safe sex etc and instead [promote] abstinence.”. This perspective aligns with more conservative religious teachings that advocate for abstinence over comprehensive sex education. The level of religiosity of a person is a critical factor in determining their response to sex appeal advertisements. According to Gould (1994), religiosity significantly affects how consumers perceive and react to sexually explicit content. Gould's research suggests that individuals with higher levels of religiosity are more likely to view such content negatively due to ethical and moral concerns. This correlation between religiosity and negative perceptions of sexually explicit material is supported by the responses to the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement.

According to Waller (2006), religious conservatism often correlates with negative perceptions of sexually explicit material in advertising. This finding is evident in the reactions to the advertisement, where religious beliefs were a significant determinant of negative responses. This demonstrates the powerful influence of religiosity on media perception, highlighting the importance of considering religious context in the design and dissemination of advertisements. That said, historically, New Zealand has had a ‘de facto’ relationship with Christianity, as noted by Gould (2016). However, there has been a gradual decline in the number of those self-identifying as Christian, from 60.6% in 2001 to 37.37% in 2018, accompanied by a rise in the non-religious population from 29.6% to 48.59% in the same period (Stats NZ, 2019). With roots in Christianity, the nation's religious landscape is becoming more diverse and pluralist while also accompanied by a growing non-religious population. Local news media describe Aotearoa New Zealand as ‘one of the world’s most secular societies’ (Levine, 2012; Singh & Tan, 2015), perhaps explaining why religious opposition to the advertisement was in the minority.

In contrast, to the conservative views observed, those from liberal backgrounds were generally more supportive of the advertisement's direct and candid approach, viewing it as a necessary intervention to address online safety for children. In these cases, the advertisement was described as ‘genius’, ‘modern’, and ‘wholesome’ and by commenters who said ‘these are great ads...tastefully done with humor’. Such liberal views aligned with research on New Zealander’s thoughts on sexuality. Braun (2008) and Farvid, et al., (2016) contend that New Zealander’s tend to hold an open and accepting view of sex and sexuality, perhaps explaining the general favourability of the advertisement in contrast to objectors. Matthews and Nairn (2020) found that while some New Zealanders expressed concerns about the impact of nudity and sexual innuendo on young people, the majority were entertained and not offended by these elements. They noted that New Zealanders are generally open to shows like Naked Attraction and tend to favour independent choice and liberal ideas over censorship and conservatism, reflecting the country's broader societal values of personal freedom and liberal attitudes.

At a macro-level, New Zealand's remote location and its blend of Western individualism with indigenous Māori collective beliefs create a distinctive societal backdrop for media consumption. This duality fosters a unique societal framework where progressive social campaigns are generally well-received, yet there remains a strong emphasis on community values and collective well-being. For example, one commenter noted, “@XXXX make sure you and the boys watch all of these videos. They're priceless lessons for our tamariki [children].” Therefore, New Zealand's political context may have shaped responses to the advertisement. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, who identifies as a social democrat committed to human rights, social justice, and equality (Duncan, 2023), there has been strong governmental support for progressive policies. This political backdrop has likely contributed to a more favourable reception of the advertisement's message on online safety and pornography.

5.3 Sexual education

In countries like New Zealand, where sexual education is a part of the school curriculum, there is a more open attitude towards discussing sexual topics in media. The ‘Keep It Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement was generally well received in New Zealand, reflecting the country's liberal attitudes towards sexual education. Comments such as “I'm for sex education” and “@XXXX this is amazing look at this! education re consent etc” highlight the positive reception from viewers who value comprehensive sexual education. Some New Zealanders commending the improvement this has over their own sexual education saying “I mean, who actually received proper info about it as a teenager?”. Research supports the benefits of comprehensive sexual education in promoting healthy attitudes towards sex and reducing risky behaviours among adolescents (Kirby, 2001). Comprehensive programs that include discussions about consent, relationships, and online safety are effective in equipping young people with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the digital world safely. The advertisement's focus on these topics aligns with the principles of comprehensive sexual education, reinforcing its importance and relevance.

In contrast, in societies where sexual education is limited or considered taboo, discussions about sex in media can be more controversial. Viewers from such backgrounds may find the explicit content of the advertisement offensive or inappropriate. Comments like “So much truth, and awesome presentation. Wish the US would realize the importance of subjects like this.” and “you should ask Inidans... sex eds there is just BS [bull shit]!!” reflect the discomfort and disapproval from viewers who are not accustomed to open discussions about sex, because “sex for some reason is a very touchy subject and is deemed taboo!”. These reactions highlight the challenges of addressing sexual topics in media in contexts where sexual education is lacking or stigmatized.

Comparatively, the landscape of sexual education varies widely across different countries. In the United States, for instance, there is a diverse range of programs, from abstinence-only to comprehensive approaches (Santelli et al., 2006; Bleakley et al., 2006). Cross-cultural comparisons reveal differences in sexuality education between English-speaking countries like the USA and the UK and Chinese-speaking regions such as Hong Kong, Mainland China, and Taiwan (Leung et al., 2019). These variations highlight the importance of developing contextually relevant sexuality education programs that consider cultural nuances and values. Research indicates that limited sexual education can lead to misinformation and negative attitudes towards sex and sexuality (Dixon-Mueller, 2009). In these contexts, media campaigns that address sexual topics openly may face resistance, as they challenge deeply ingrained cultural norms and taboos.

5.4 Views on Pornography

One of the most pressing public concerns regarding access to pornography is its impact on children and adolescents. Research suggests that early exposure to pornography can have negative effects on young people's understanding of sexuality, relationships, and consent (Flood, 2009). Individuals who were already concerned about the impact of pornography on children and society tended to support the advertisements message. Public concerns about the accessibility of pornography, especially for minors, are widespread and have led to various legislative efforts to regulate or restrict access. Many societies recognise the potential harms associated with unrestricted access to pornography, particularly for young people, and have implemented measures to control its availability (Šramová, 2014).

Those supporting the advertisements message around parental intervention, then, could be said to view the advertisement as a critical tool in raising awareness and prompting parental engagement especially if they also perceived there was a proliferation of online pornography that could be easily accessed by young people. Such factors for why audiences could have been approving of the advertisements are perhaps explained by the work of Davis, et al. (2021), Boniel-Nissim, et al., (2020), and Burke, et al., (2023), who all acknowledge that parental involvement in sex education, such as open dialogue and repeated conversations, are a sought after means for which to address children's pornography usage. The campaign highlights the value of parents in undertaking these types of discussions with their children, which these scholars cite are a means with which to subvert the potential negative messages generated in pornography, especially as they pertain to gender and consent.

The societal views on access to pornography and their influence on the perception of the advertisement can also be understood through various theoretical lenses. Social Learning Theory, for instance, suggests that individuals learn behaviours and norms through observation and imitation of others (Bandura, 1977). In this context, the advertisement serves as a model for appropriate parental behaviour, encouraging parents to discuss online safety

and pornography with their children. This theory helps explain why some viewers appreciated the advertisement's direct approach, seeing it as a valuable tool for social learning, as seen in comments such as “This is a great ad - parents with great emotional control.”, which appreciate the exemplar parenting the advertisement includes.

5.5 Shock tactics

Shocking tactics can be highly effective in capturing attention and creating memorable advertisements. The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement leveraged shock value to engage viewers and spark discussions about online safety and pornography. Comments such as “really shocked to see two naked people” indicate that the advertisement successfully captured viewers' attention through its provocative approach. The shock value created by the unexpected and explicit content was crucial in making the advertisement stand out in a crowded media landscape.

Research supports the effectiveness of shock tactics in increasing ad recall and engagement. According to Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda (2003), shocking advertisements can be more memorable and generate higher levels of attention than non-shocking ones. This heightened attention can lead to greater message retention and a higher likelihood of the audience discussing the advertisement, thereby amplifying its reach through word-of-mouth. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides insight into how shocking content affects audience processing, suggesting that shock value can serve as a peripheral cue that captures attention and motivates deeper processing of the advertisement's message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Despite their effectiveness, shock tactics carry significant risks. Provocative content can offend or alienate certain audience segments, leading to negative reactions and potential backlash (Dahl et al., 2003; Waller, 1999). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement elicited such responses, as evidenced by comments like “This is 1 bugged up video...” and concerns about the appropriateness for children. These reactions highlight the potential for shock tactics to provoke discomfort and disapproval, particularly among more conservative viewers. The use of shock tactics must be carefully balanced to avoid crossing the line into offensiveness. Studies have shown that while shock value can enhance message recall, it can also lead to negative brand perceptions if the content is deemed inappropriate or offensive (Dahl et al., 2003). This balance is critical in ensuring that the advertisement's message is effectively communicated without causing undue harm to the brand's reputation.

The New Zealand government has a history of using shock tactics in PSAs to address serious issues such as road safety, smoking, and alcohol consumption (Ward, 2023). These campaigns often use graphic and provocative imagery to convey the dangers and consequences of risky behaviours, aiming to provoke strong emotional reactions and encourage behaviour change. For instance, the 'Bleeding Billboards' (as seen in Figure 9) created for the Papakura Council which utilise shock and fear tactics to promote road safety. These campaigns have been effective in raising awareness and prompting discussions, demonstrating the power of shock tactics in public health messaging.

The familiarity of New Zealand audiences with shock tactics in government campaigns may have influenced their perception of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement. Comments such as "New Zealand always has the best public service ads" and "The kiwis make the best PSA type videos bar none" suggest that some viewers appreciated the bold approach and recognized it as consistent with previous government campaigns. It was common to see commenters referencing other New Zealand PSA's such as a PSA which included a child being injured by an intoxicated family member, saying "stuck with me for over a decade, it came out a time when I had just started drinking and it had a major impact on me.". This familiarity may have contributed to the overall positive reception of the advertisement, as audiences were more accepting of the use of shock tactics to convey important messages.

The use of shocking tactics in advertising can be a powerful tool for capturing attention and conveying important messages (Vezina & Paul 1997; Popeet al., 2004; Crosier & Erdogan, 2001, Prendergast, et al. 2002; Waller 2005). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement effectively leveraged shock value to engage viewers and highlight the risks of online pornography. However, the mixed audience reactions underscore the risks associated with provocative content, emphasizing the importance of balancing shock value with message relevance and appropriateness. Additionally, the familiarity of New Zealand audiences with shock tactics in government campaigns may have contributed to the acceptance of the advertisement. By understanding the dynamics of shock advertising and considering audience sensitivities, advertisers can create impactful campaigns that resonate with their target audiences while minimizing the potential for negative backlash.

5.5.1 Reacting to shock tactics: nudity & sexual appeals.

Societal attitudes towards nudity play a crucial role in shaping audience perception of controversial advertising. In the context of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, reactions to the explicit content ranged from support to disapproval, illustrating how social norms and values influence perceptions of nudity in advertising. The use of nudity and sexual appeals can enhance attention and recall but also risks offending more conservative audiences. However, the relevance of nudity to the advertisement's message and its tasteful portrayal, along with its narrative and humorous value, were crucial factors that shaped audience responses.

The use of nudity and sexual appeals in advertising has been extensively researched. According to the literature, sexual appeals can enhance attention and recall, but they also risk offending certain audience segments, particularly those with more conservative views (Reichert, 2002). Nudity, as a form of sexual appeal, can attract attention due to its provocative nature, but it must be relevant to the advertised message to avoid being perceived as gratuitous or offensive (Eisend, 2009). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement effectively utilized nudity to attract attention and deliver its message concerning online pornography, aligning with the research that highlights the importance of relevance in the use of sexual appeals in advertising (Kalb, 2012).

Reactions to the advertisement highlighted a spectrum of responses. Some viewers supported the use of nudity, recognizing its relevance and effectiveness in conveying the message about online safety and the dangers of pornography. Comments such as "Great campaign great production!" and "tastefully done" reflect an appreciation for the bold approach and the educational intent behind the advertisement. Others appreciated the clever avoidance of explicit nudity, as highlighted by the comment, "Love the camera angles and placement of the likes of the coffee cup.". Conversely, other viewers found the use of nudity inappropriate and offensive, reflecting discomfort with explicit content in media. This response was particularly prevalent among more conservative audiences who adhere to traditional norms around modesty and decency. Comments like "people sexualizing everything these days" underscore the discomfort and disapproval from those who view nudity in media as morally wrong, while others questioned why nudity was considered taboo asking, "What do you mean by 'porn'? Erotica? Nudity? It is just a construct to railroad peoples thoughts toward prudery."

The reactions to the advertisement can be understood through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). According to ELM, peripheral cues such as nudity can capture audience attention and provoke immediate reactions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). In the case of the 'Keep It Real Online – Pornography' advertisement, the use of nudity served as a strong peripheral cue, making the advertisement memorable and sparking discussion. This is evident in comments like "That naked chick is banging" which highlight immediate attention or reaction. However, the model also suggests that such peripheral processing can lead to temporary attitude changes, rather than the more enduring changes associated with central processing of the advertisement's core message about online safety and pornography.

The literature suggests that the effectiveness of sexual appeals in advertising is closely tied to their relevance to the advertised message (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). In the case of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, the nudity was integral to the narrative, serving to illustrate the reality and risks of the explicit

content including “nudity and blatant porn on my feeds” which recognises the relevance and the broader social context of nudity. Viewers also acknowledged the narrative relevance of nudity. Comments such as “The boys are really shocked to see two naked people in front” highlights the narrative use of nudity as a hyperbole to effectively deliver informative content about a serious issue. This relevance helped mitigate some of the potential backlash, as the nudity was not perceived as gratuitous but as a necessary component of the message.

Understanding societal attitudes towards nudity is essential for designing effective controversial advertisements. The ‘Keep It Real Online – Pornography’ advertisement demonstrates how the relevance, portrayal, and narrative value of nudity can influence audience reactions. By acknowledging these factors, advertisers can create more resonant campaigns that navigate the complexities of public perception. The varied responses to the advertisement highlight the importance of considering the social norms and values of the target audience in the design and dissemination of public service announcements.

5.5.2 Reacting to shock tactics: humour.

Humour is a powerful tool in advertising, capable of engaging audiences, creating positive associations, and enhancing message recall. The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement utilized humour to address a serious topic in a way that was approachable and engaging. Humour can make advertisements more relatable and memorable. In the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, humour was used to diffuse the tension associated with discussing online pornography and to make the message more accessible to a broad audience. Comments such as “Real life nudity people around here... Lol” and “ I just love the expressions on the mother's face so fricken funny” indicate that the humorous elements of the advertisement resonated with viewers and made the content more engaging. Research supports the effectiveness of humour in advertising. Studies have shown that humorous advertisements are more likely to be remembered and shared, leading to greater message reach and impact (Eisend, 2009). Humour can also create positive emotions and associations with the advertised message, making it more persuasive. The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) suggests that humour can serve as a peripheral cue that captures attention and encourages deeper processing of the advertisement's message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

While humour can enhance engagement and recall (Eisend, 2009), it also carries risks, especially in controversial advertising (Dikćius et al. 2023). Humour is highly subjective, and what one person finds funny, another might find offensive or inappropriate. The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement received mixed reactions, with some viewers appreciating the humour and others finding it distasteful. Comments like "What sort of silly cow would bring her grandson out to the front door to meet naked people?" highlight the potential for humour to be perceived as trivialising or disrespecting the seriousness of the issue. The challenge with using humour in

controversial advertising is striking the right balance between being funny and being respectful of the topic (Mortimer, 2010). While some individuals did not find the humour effective, most commenters were able to comprehend the advertisements' intended message, despite the use of humour, saying "I laughed but also super important". Studies have shown that humour can backfire if it is perceived as inappropriate or insensitive, leading to negative brand perceptions and audience backlash (Eisend, 2009). Therefore, advertisers must carefully consider the context and audience when incorporating humour into their campaigns.

Humour played a crucial role in diffusing the tension associated with discussing online pornography and safety. By incorporating humour, the advertisement made it easier for viewers to engage with the content without feeling overwhelmed or uncomfortable (Jäger & Eisend, 2013). This approach is particularly important in public service announcements, where the goal is to educate and inform without alienating the audience. Research suggests that humour in PSAs can increase audience engagement and retention of the message, making it a valuable tool in public health campaigns (Lee & Ferguson, 2002). The humorous elements of the advertisement, such as the awkwardness of the situation and the characters' reactions, helped to normalize the conversation about online safety and pornography. Comments like "@XXXX this site may help a little with what we were talking about. If not, funny videos!" indicate that the humour made the topic more approachable and less intimidating for viewers. Furthermore, humour was referenced when tagging friends or sharing the advertisement, as in "@XXXX this is the funniest / realist add I've seen about parenting. Ever!" which suggests that the use of humour increased the likelihood of associating with the controversial advertisement.

5.6 Public Service Announcements and Governmentality

PSAs play a pivotal role in public communication strategies (Walsh et al., 2014; Wu et al., 2017; Hu et al., 2017; Qin et al., 2014), especially when spearheaded by government entities (Martins, 2024). These campaigns often aim to modify public behaviour or attitudes towards socially relevant issues under the broader framework of governmentality (Miller & Yúdice, 2002). Foucault's concept of governmentality emphasizes the techniques and strategies by which a society is rendered governable through the dissemination of knowledge and power relations (Foucault, 1991). In the context of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, the New Zealand government's approach exemplifies an intricate blend of public communication, ethical considerations, and the influence of governmentality on public perception.

As an advertiser, the government assumes a unique position of authority and trust. This role imbues its campaigns with a significant degree of influence and responsibility (Rose et al., 2006). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement is a prime example of how government-led PSAs attempt to educate the public on critical issues—in this case, the exposure of children to potentially harmful online content. The campaign

leverages this authoritative stance to underscore the importance of parental awareness and intervention in protecting children online. For instance, the campaign's focus was to emphasise the necessity for parental engagement in monitoring online activities of children and the potential risks associated with unregulated internet use. One commenter arguing “Yes great Ad, however, the most obvious question ever for the government is ‘WHY CAN ANY PERSON OF ANY AGE ACTUALLY VIEW THIS IN THE 1ST PLACE?? Some countries have stricter laws for online porn memberships.’”

However, this authoritative approach also raises questions about the government's role in regulating information and influencing private family matters. This tension reflects the broader concerns of governmentality—where the line is drawn between informing the public and imposing governmental views on personal freedoms (Rose et al., 2006). The campaign's focus on education over legislation or censorship suggests that the government is dictating how families must address sex education, which could be perceived as an overreach into private family matters. This was highlighted in the thematic analysis of the advertisement, which indicated that many viewers appreciated the educational intent but were wary of the government's influence in personal family dynamics.

The ethical implications of government-led PSAs are profound, especially when these campaigns deal with sensitive subjects such as pornography. Ethically, the government has a responsibility to respect the autonomy of individuals and families while also providing necessary guidance and information to protect public welfare “because these are topics that young people sometimes feel awkward or uncomfortable talking about, parents and caregivers might be unaware of the challenges they are facing. So it’s really important to connect them directly with the knowledge and support they need to deal with these issues” says Internal Affairs Minister Tracey Martin (2020). Critically, the campaign's use of shock and humour to convey its message brings forth ethical considerations. While these elements can effectively draw attention and stimulate discussion, they must be carefully managed to avoid trivializing the subject matter or causing distress to the audience (Noble & Pepe, 2019; Dikćius et al. 2023; Mortimer, 2010). Admittedly, most of the audience were accepting of the controversial elements, but others described the government's content as having “low moral conduct” and “disgusting”. These negative comments reinforced by the ASA complaints regarding the advertisement which were “concerned about the use of the words ‘porn’ and ‘sex’ and that the advertisement forces parents to have conversations with their children in response to the issues raised.” (Complaint Number 20/177, 2020). The ethical challenge lies in balancing the need to communicate effectively while respecting the sensitivities and values of diverse audience segments.

The complaints articulated by the audience reveal essential considerations for advertisers and campaign designers, particularly when addressing sensitive issues within public messaging. For example, some viewers felt

that the advertisement's approach was too intrusive and uncomfortable, saying “This is a govt add, why dont you block it from getting in our servers then” and “Gees, his dad should be the one who teaches him about the birds & the bees”, reflecting a concern that the government's messaging overstepped personal boundaries. These complaints suggest a need for greater transparency in intent, careful consideration of content appropriateness, and an understanding of the diverse ways audiences might interpret and react to campaign messages. As posited by Ward and Ostrom (2006), managing and responding to customer complaints is crucial for maintaining trust and credibility, suggesting that campaigns should incorporate mechanisms for feedback and redress to address concerns effectively.

The effectiveness of government-led PSAs, therefore, hinges not only on the clarity and appropriateness of the message but also on the government's ability to engage with the public in a manner that is perceived as both respectful and empowering. This engagement involves a transparent dialogue where feedback is sought and valued, ensuring that the campaigns reflect a true partnership between the government and the communities it serves. Research highlights the importance of reputation and brand equity in the effectiveness of advertising campaigns (Fastnedge & Gould, 2024). The credibility and trustworthiness of the advertiser play a crucial role in shaping audience perceptions and responses (Keller, 1993). Government-led campaigns benefit from the inherent trust and authority associated with public institutions, but they must navigate the fine line between education and overreach to maintain and enhance their reputation. Effective management of public perceptions and addressing feedback promptly can bolster brand equity and foster a positive relationship with the audience (Aaker, 1996). The New Zealand Government's leadership during the outbreak of the Covid pandemic and decisive management of outbreaks created an elevated level of trust within the public (Wilson, 2020; North, 2020). This trust in the advertiser of the ‘Keep it real online – Pornography’ could account for the higher level of acceptance of controversial advertising for social benefit.

5.7 Public Sphere and the Role of Controversial Advertising

The concept of the public sphere, as articulated by Jürgen Habermas, refers to a domain of social life where individuals come together to discuss and form public opinions. In this space, citizens engage in rational-critical debate about societal issues, ideally free from external influences such as political or economic power (Habermas, 1989). Controversial advertising, particularly PSAs like the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, plays a critical role within the public sphere by bringing important and often contentious issues to the forefront of public discourse. That is, controversial advertising can stimulate public debate and awareness on topics that might otherwise be neglected or considered taboo (Kerr et al., 2012). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, for example, successfully brought the issue of children's exposure to online pornography into the public sphere, prompting discussions among parents, educators, and policymakers. As seen in comments such as “In the US, this ad would be received with pitch forks, a campaign to ban it, more talk

about online censure and complete ignore the point.” By using humour and shock tactics, the campaign not only captured public attention but also encouraged a broader conversation about digital safety and the role of sex education.

The interactive nature of the public sphere allows audiences to provide feedback and engage in discussions generated by controversial campaigns (Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). Social media platforms, comment sections, and public forums serve as venues where individuals can express their views, share their experiences, and debate the merits and drawbacks of the advertisements (Kruse, et al., 2018). This communitarian response is crucial as it not only reflects the public's reception of the campaign but also provides valuable insights for advertisers and policymakers (Boddewyn, 1989). For instance, the mixed reactions to the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement highlight the diverse perspectives within the audience, ranging from support for its educational message to criticism of its explicit content.

These discussions within the public sphere serve as indicators of social acceptance, influencing future advertising campaigns (Boddewyn, 1989). Advertisers closely monitor public reactions to controversial content to gauge the societal climate and determine the feasibility of similar strategies in the future (Hackman, 2015; Bajekal, 2015; Davies, 2015). Positive engagement and widespread acceptance can encourage advertisers to continue using bold and provocative tactics (Fastnedge & Gould, 2024), while significant backlash and criticism may lead to more cautious and conservative approaches (Cheng & Frommann, 2023). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' campaign's ability to spark widespread debate demonstrates its effectiveness in engaging the public, while also providing a benchmark for what is considered acceptable or overstepping by the audience.

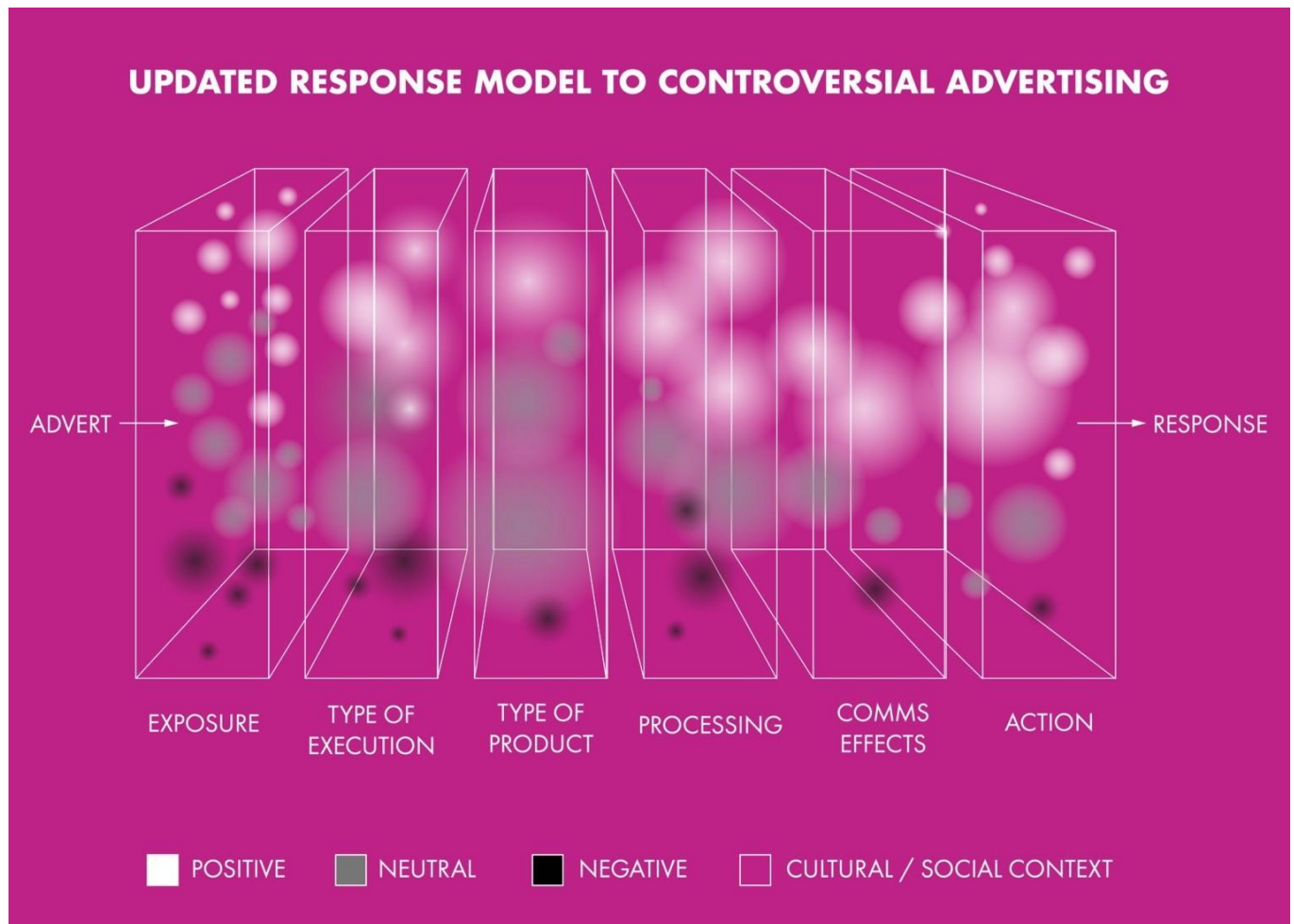
The feedback loop created by public discourse also plays a vital role in shaping the evolution of advertising strategies. As advertisers learn from the successes and failures of previous campaigns, they can refine their approaches to better align with public sentiment and societal norms (Zawisza, 2019; Advertising Standards Authority, 2019). This iterative process ensures that advertising remains relevant and responsive to the changing dynamics of the public sphere (Beaumont-Thomas, 2024; Burga & Cleary, 2024; Banfield-Nwachi, 2024). The 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' campaign's reception can inform future public service announcements, highlighting the importance of balancing educational content with sensitivity to audience values and expectations.

5.8 Reflecting on and updating the Response Model to Controversial Advertising

Revisiting Waller's foundational model, which articulates the stages of audience engagement through exposure, processing, communication effects, and action (Waller, 2006), reveals the need for a model that more accurately mirrors the complex interplay of audience responses to controversial advertising. Traditional models, typically linear in their approach, do not fully capture the varied reactions that contemporary, diverse audiences have towards provocative advertisements. In my application of the model, I needed to integrate Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis in order to capture the nuanced responses of audiences in each stage of Waller's model and had to apply that same methodological approach to analysing the advertisement, to establish what sorts of messages were being advocated. In this section I outline some of the limitations of Waller's model and propose a developed conceptual model for analysing controversial advertising, based on the findings from this research, to be applied and tested in other cases.

Figure 19

Updated response Model to Controversial Advertising



Note. My updated response model to controversial advertising. The model incorporates a historical and cultural backdrop behind lenses or stages which controversial are perceived through. The white, grey and black areas represent possible reactions at various stages. In reality, this would be a dynamic and cyclical process, where the cultural background and possible reactions are dynamic and constantly changing.

As suggested above, the first suggestion I posit, is marrying thematic analysis (Braun & Clare, 2006) with the response model to controversial advertising to not only have a framework to gain familiarity with the advertisement under analysis, but to expand upon the types of interpretations offered by audiences at each stage of the model. For example, rather than simply acknowledging that exposure has taken place prompting a response, thematic analysis can help to categorise and identify patterns for how that exposure has manifested, what sorts of prevailing thoughts are being offered in response to exposure to the advertisement, and what sorts

of activities accompany exposure behaviour. Such a thematic analysis will also help to identify whether responses are positive, neutral or negative, and what sorts of responses are passionately and frequently expressed (Boyatzis, 1998).

The most significant visual change in the updated response model is the addition of a coloured background to represent the cultural and social context. This modification underscores the profound influence that societal norms and cultural values have on audience perceptions of controversial advertising. Research consistently demonstrates that cultural and social factors are critical determinants in shaping how audiences interpret and react to advertisements (Hofstede, 2001; Fam et al., 2004; Waller et al.; 2005, Khairawati, & Murtadlo, 2020; Farah & Samad, 2015; Sumiala & Harju, 2019; Fastnedge & Gould, 2024). These factors include national cultural dimensions, religious beliefs, societal norms, and historical context. For instance, what is considered acceptable in one culture may be deemed inappropriate or offensive in another. By incorporating a background colour that represents these factors, the model visually acknowledges their pervasive influence throughout all stages of audience engagement with controversial content. Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory provides a framework for understanding how national culture influences individual behaviour and perception. According to Hofstede, factors such as power distance, individualism versus collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance can significantly impact how audiences perceive and react to media content. For instance, cultures with high uncertainty avoidance may react more negatively to advertisements that use shock tactics or provocative themes, while more individualistic cultures might appreciate the boldness and directness of such advertisements.

In the context of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, cultural and social factors played a pivotal role in shaping audience responses. As signalled above, the thematic analysis that was applied in conjunction with Waller's (2006) model revealed, for example, that viewers from more conservative backgrounds were more likely to find the advertisement offensive due to their stricter views on nudity and sexual content. In contrast, viewers from more liberal backgrounds generally appreciated the advertisement's direct and humorous approach to addressing online safety for children. The example here demonstrates the need for the model to consider cultural and social factors into the reception to controversial advertising.

Another suggested change Waller's model is the conceptualization of stages as three-dimensional areas instead of linear steps. This adjustment provides a more dynamic and interconnected visualization of audience responses, capturing the complexity of how different elements of an advertisement influence perception and reaction. By conceptualizing the stages—exposure, type of execution, type of subject, processing, communication effects, and action—as three-dimensional areas, the updated model recognises that these stages

are not isolated events but are influenced by a myriad of factors that interact in complex ways. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different elements of an advertisement contribute to the overall reception. For example, the type of execution (e.g., humour, shock) and the type of subject (e.g., pornography, online safety) can be analysed separately but also in conjunction to see how they interact to shape audience responses.

Using three-dimensional conceptualization is common amongst researchers engaged in concept mapping techniques to visualize relationships and enhance understanding of complex data sets. For instance, Waller and Casidy (2021) employed conceptual mapping to depict the interconnections between different themes in their analysis of religion, spirituality, and advertising. This method helps illustrate how various factors are interrelated and how their interplay can influence outcomes. In the context of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, this three-dimensional approach helps illustrate how different themes—such as humour, shock, and educational content—interact to shape audience perceptions. For example, while the humour in the advertisement might mitigate some of the initial shock, the ongoing processing and communication effects are influenced by how audiences perceive the educational content in relation to their own cultural and social backgrounds.

A recommended change would also be the separation of execution, type of execution, and type of subject into distinct, sequenced stages. By treating execution, type of execution, and type of subject as separate stages, the updated model enables a more nuanced mapping of their individual and combined effects on audience perception. Traditional models often conflate these elements, which can obscure the distinct roles they play in shaping responses. Separating these stages allows researchers and practitioners to pinpoint how different aspects of an advertisement influence reactions and to identify areas that may require adjustment. The separation aligns with existing research that emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between different facets of an advertisement. For example, research on advertising effectiveness highlights that the execution (how the message is delivered), the type of execution (e.g., humorous, shocking), and the subject matter (the topic being addressed) each uniquely contribute to audience reactions (Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Anckaert, 2002).

In the context of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, separating these elements helps clarify how each component influenced audience perceptions. The execution involved a direct and candid approach, the type of execution employed humour and shock tactics, and the subject matter was the exposure of children to online pornography. By analysing these elements individually, we can better understand their specific contributions and interactions. Separating the execution, type of execution, and type of subject provides a clearer framework for analysing and improving controversial advertisements. It allows advertisers to identify which

elements are working effectively and which may need adjustment. For example, if the type of execution is found to be too shocking and detracts from the message, advertisers can modify this aspect while maintaining the core subject and overall execution strategy.

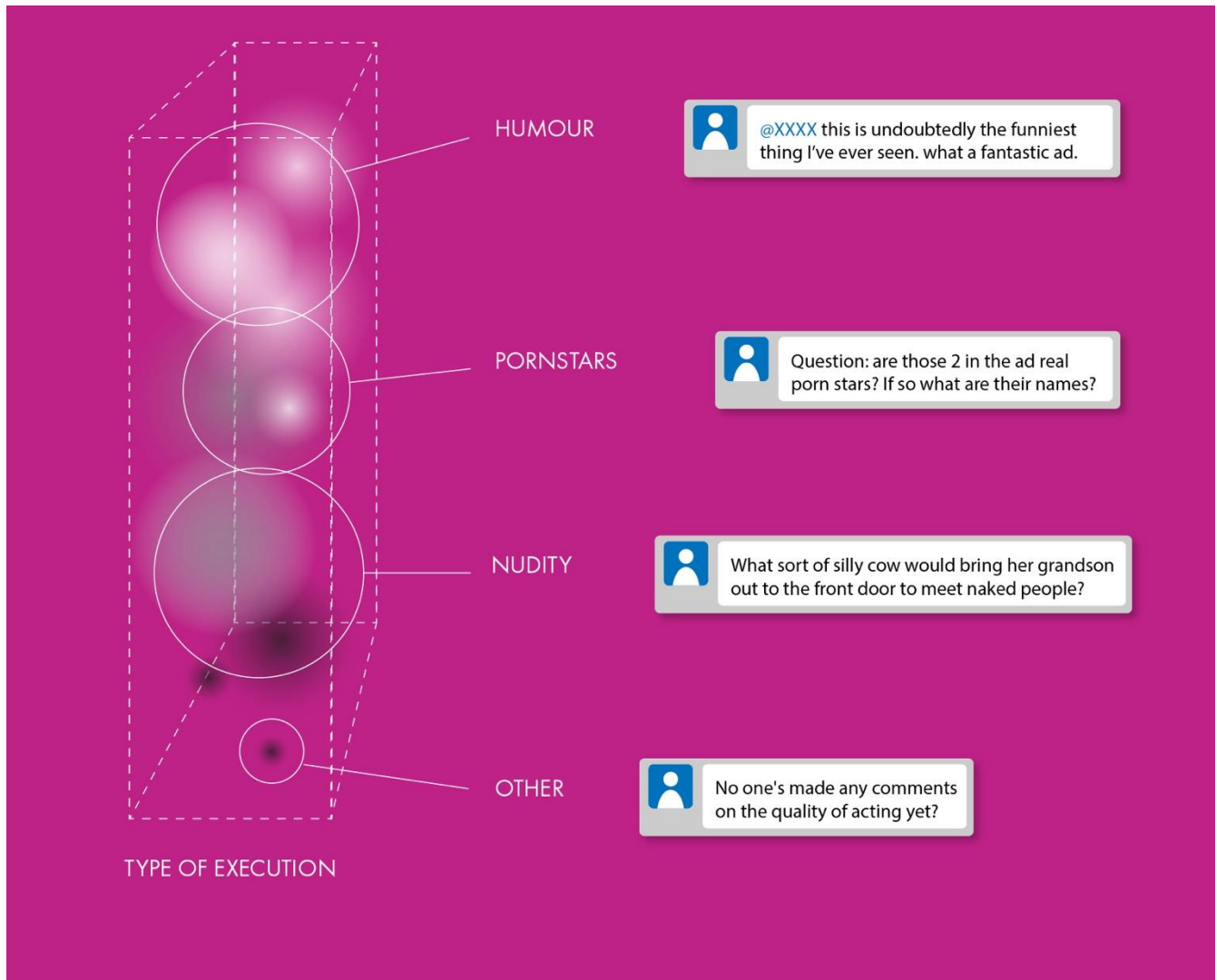
The final suggested change is to the representation of audience responses as dynamic, interconnected concept clouds. This visualization method captures the complexity and fluidity of how different elements of an advertisement interact and influence perceptions. By using dynamic concept clouds, the updated model acknowledges that responses are not static but constantly changing and influenced by multiple, interrelated factors. This approach aligns with concept mapping techniques used in research to depict relationships and enhance understanding of complex data sets. Such concept mapping is a well-established method in educational and cognitive psychology for representing knowledge structures and relationships between concepts (Novak & Cañas, 2008). In advertising research, this technique helps illustrate how different elements of an advertisement and audience perceptions are interconnected (Waller & Casidy, 2021).

The dynamic nature of these concept clouds reflects the ongoing interactions between different themes and audience responses. For example, in the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, themes such as pornography, nudity, humour, and education are not isolated but overlap and interact in complex ways. This representation helps visualize how these themes influence each other and contribute to the overall reception of the advertisement.

Using dynamic concept clouds allows for a more comprehensive and flexible analysis of audience responses. This method can highlight which themes resonate most strongly with audiences and how different elements of an advertisement reinforce or undermine each other. For instance, if the concept cloud for humour is large and closely connected to positive reactions, it suggests that humour is an effective strategy for engaging the audience and mitigating the shock of controversial content. This approach also helps identify potential areas of conflict or disconnect. For example, if the concept cloud for nudity is associated with both positive and negative reactions, it indicates a polarizing effect that requires careful consideration in the advertisement's design and execution.

Figure 20

Incorporation of concept Clouds into the 'type of execution' stage.



Note. Concept clouds at the type of execution stage showing various executional elements that audiences responded to, grouped by proximity. Note that within each concept there can be a variety of reactions (as indicated in the nudity cloud, where there were mixed reactions). Also, the proximity and overlap between Porn stars, humour and nudity illustrates the overlap of the content (eg, that some humour was created by the arrival of the naked characters, who are identified as Porn stars).

5.8.1 Limitations of the Updated Response Model to Controversial Advertising

While the updated model offers several improvements over traditional linear models, it is not without limitations. One primary concern is the complexity of the three-dimensional visualization, which can be challenging to interpret without adequate explanation. This complexity may require additional resources to ensure that stakeholders fully understand the model's implications and applications, potentially limiting its accessibility and usability.

Another limitation is the potential subjectivity involved in the placement and size of concept clouds. These visual representations may be influenced by subjective interpretations of the data, introducing biases that must be carefully managed and acknowledged. Although the model aims to provide a dynamic and flexible representation of audience responses, the inherent subjectivity in concept mapping techniques can affect the accuracy and reliability of the analysis.

Furthermore, while the model attempts to capture the dynamic nature of audience responses, it may still fall short of representing the full spectrum of variability in real-time reactions. Audience perceptions are constantly evolving, influenced by a myriad of factors that the model may not fully account for. This necessitates continuous updates and refinements to ensure the model remains accurate and relevant over time.

Given these limitations, it is essential to test the updated model on a broader range of cases to validate its applicability and effectiveness across different contexts and types of controversial advertising. Such testing would provide valuable insights into the model's strengths and weaknesses, offering opportunities for further refinement and enhancement. The updated model represents a significant advancement in our understanding of audience reactions to controversial advertisements by incorporating cultural and social factors, enhancing complexity and interconnectedness, and providing a more granular analysis of key elements. However, its complexity, potential subjectivity, and need for continuous refinement highlight the importance of further testing and validation. By addressing these limitations, we can develop a more robust and reliable framework for analysing and predicting public reactions to controversial content, ultimately leading to more effective and nuanced advertising strategies.

5.9 Limitations of the research and future directions

The analysis of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement, while insightful, encounters limitations that impact the generalisability of the findings and highlight the need for further research.

The study considered a broad overview of New Zealand's diverse cultural landscape but did not delve deeply into the intricate ways that intersecting cultural and demographic factors—such as age, gender, socio-economic status, and specific cultural identities—impact the perception of controversial advertising. Future research should integrate a more nuanced examination of these factors to uncover how various segments of the population differently perceive and react to sensitive topics in advertising. This would involve a detailed segmentation analysis that not only categorises responses by broad cultural groups but also explores the intersections of cultural and demographic attributes that influence media reception.

The focus of the research was only on one advertisement from the 'Keep It Real Online – campaign which was made up of several assets including other advertisements and online information across websites and social media. Due to the constraints of this thesis, I was unable to assess all the assets associated with the campaign, nor were they all considered controversial, but there is scope to consider the impact of a campaign when some elements can be construed as controversial while others are not. Additionally, applying the model to only one controversial advertisement from a New Zealand campaign means that the findings cannot be generalised. Accordingly, another avenue future research project, then, could be to compare and contrast New Zealander's responses to controversial advertising, similar to Hays (2018).

The impact of the advertisement was primarily assessed through qualitative feedback, which provides rich, narrative data but lacks the empirical robustness that quantitative methods can offer (Ahmadet al., 2019). Such subjectivity can lead to biased results, and while I made a conscious effort to approach this research from an unbiased position, my background as someone who has worked in and now teaches advertising could subconsciously have skewed the results. Future studies could rely on a combination of qualitative insights and quantitative measures such as surveys to more accurately gauge changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours as a direct result of a controversial advertisement.

Finally, the focus on this research was on controversial subjects such as sex, pornography, and humour. These subjects are but a few of the possible controversial present in controversial advertising suggesting that future research might also consider campaigns that use fear and violence (as examples), which could yield other important insights into ethical boundaries and effectiveness of advertisements.

5.10 Conclusion

The analysis of the 'Keep It Real Online - Pornography' advertisement underscores the profound impact of controversial advertising on public perception and engagement. By employing shock tactics, such as nudity and humour, the campaign effectively captured attention and stimulated discourse on the critical issue of children's exposure to online pornography. The varied audience reactions, ranging from appreciation of the direct educational approach to discomfort and disapproval, illustrate the complex dynamics of controversial advertising reception.

This study contributes to the broader understanding of how controversial content is received by diverse audiences. The thematic analysis revealed that factors such as cultural context, individual attitudes towards pornography, and pre-existing beliefs about sensitive topics significantly influence the effectiveness of such campaigns. The findings align with established theories, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and shock advertising theories, offering a nuanced interpretation of public responses.

Importantly, this research highlights the ethical considerations inherent in controversial advertising. The discomfort and disapproval expressed by segments of the audience call attention to the fine line advertisers must tread between capturing attention and respecting societal norms and values. The study's critical perspective, focusing on the social constructions and symbolic processes at play, provides valuable insights into how controversial advertisements can both reflect and challenge societal norms.

The insights gained from this research have practical implications for advertisers, policymakers, and educators. For advertisers, the findings emphasize the need for a careful balance between shock value and ethical responsibility. For policymakers, the study underscores the importance of considering public sentiment in the regulation of controversial content. Educators can leverage these insights to develop more effective strategies for teaching media literacy, particularly in the context of controversial and sensitive topics.

In conclusion, this thesis has illuminated the intricate interplay between controversial advertising and audience reception, contributing to the academic discourse on advertising strategy and public communication. Future research could further explore the impact of different types of controversial content across various cultural contexts, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its effects on public perception and behaviour.

6 References

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