

Offensive Products and the Determinants of the Feeling of Being Offended by Online Advertising: A Study of Thai Consumers

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate which products could be considered offensive to Thai consumers and the factors that may have an effect on Thai consumers' feelings of being offended by the online advertisements of such offensive products. Questionnaires were distributed to 367 target respondents. The findings revealed that the list of products which are considered offensive to Thai consumers supports the results of previous studies in other countries. In addition, demographic factors, including gender, age, income, and education levels, have a significant influence on the feelings of being offended by the online advertisements of several offensive products. Moreover, religiosity also affects the feeling of being offended by the advertisements of alcoholic drinks and related products, whereby respondents who are more religious are more offended by this type of product. Therefore, in order to be able to create effective advertisements and marketing strategies for Thai consumers, it is important for advertisers and marketers to be aware of the list of potential offensive products and the determinants of offense among Thai consumers.

Keywords: Offensive Products, Offensive Advertising, Online Advertising, Demographic Factors, Religiosity

สินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจและปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความรู้สึกรังเกียจ ต่อโฆษณาออนไลน์ : การศึกษาผู้บริโภคชาวไทย

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ทำขึ้นเพื่อศึกษาสินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจสำหรับผู้บริโภคไทย และปัจจัยที่อาจส่งผลกระทบต่อความรู้สึกรังเกียจที่ผู้บริโภคไทยมีต่อโฆษณาของโฆษณาออนไลน์ของสินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจ ผลการศึกษาแสดงให้เห็นว่า ชนิดของสินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจต่อผู้บริโภคไทย มีความสอดคล้องกับผลการศึกษาจากงานวิจัยที่ได้ทำมาก่อนหน้านี้ในประเทศอื่น ๆ นอกจากนี้ยังพบว่าปัจจัยด้านประชากรศาสตร์ เช่น เพศ อายุ รายได้ และการศึกษา มีอิทธิพลต่อระดับความรู้สึกรังเกียจที่แตกต่างกันของผู้บริโภคไทยที่มีต่อโฆษณาออนไลน์ของสินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจหลายชนิด ผลการวิจัยยังแสดงให้เห็นอีกว่าความเคร่งศาสนาของผู้บริโภคไทย มีผลต่อความรู้สึกรังเกียจที่แตกต่างกันของที่มีต่อโฆษณาออนไลน์ของสินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจเช่นกัน โดยผู้บริโภคที่มีความเคร่งศาสนาสูงจะมีความรู้สึกรังเกียจต่อสินค้าประเภทเครื่องดื่มแอลกอฮอล์สูงกว่าผู้ที่มีความเคร่งศาสนาต่ำ ดังนั้นการตระหนักถึงชนิดของสินค้าที่อาจเป็นที่น่ารังเกียจและปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความรู้สึกรังเกียจของผู้บริโภคจึงมีความสำคัญ ต่อการที่นักโฆษณาและนักการตลาดจะสร้างสื่อโฆษณาหรือทำวางแผนกลยุทธ์การตลาดอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพสำหรับผู้บริโภคไทย

คำสำคัญ : สินค้าที่น่ารังเกียจ ความรู้สึกรังเกียจ โฆษณาออนไลน์ ปัจจัยทางประชากรศาสตร์ ความเคร่งศาสนา

INTRODUCTION

The use of the Internet has increased in recent years due to the changes in consumer lifestyles and the rapid development of e-technology. For this reason, advertisers-especially those engaged in e-commerce and m-commerce businesses-have considered this channel an attractive way to reach their target customers. Expenditure of online advertising including mobile advertising exceeded 100 Billion US Dollars in 2016 and is projected to continue growing and surpass spending on traditional media such as TV by 2017 (eMarketer, 2016). Similar to the global trend, the spending on online advertising in Thailand exceeded 9 Billion Baht in 2016, reflecting the rapid growth of online marketing in Thailand (TNS (Thailand), 2016).

This trend emphasizes the importance of online advertising and marketing. In marketing, therefore, it is important for advertisers to understand the factors that may influence consumer response toward their advertisements. Because the success of promotional and communication strategies depends on the types of product (Belch and Belch, 2015), it is beneficial for advertising designers to know whether target consumers have any negative feelings toward or are offended by the product in order for them to design their ads effectively. However, the issue of offensive, sensitive, and controversial products has received limited attention from marketers and researchers.

In order to identify the products or services that can be considered offensive, several previous studies have investigated the attitudes of consumers toward different products and created lists of products and services that were considered offensive to consumers or otherwise sensitive. Since each of these studies was conducted in a different region, such as Australia, Hong Kong, China, and Malaysia, the rankings in the list of offensive products were different, although the products on the lists overall were somewhat similar. The products that are most likely to offend consumers are condoms and contraceptive products, undergarment products, hygiene products, funeral services, sexual services, and alcoholic drinks (Waller, 1999; Prendergast, Ho, and Phang, 2002; Prendergast and Hwa, 2003; and De Run, Butt, Fam, and Jong, 2010).

Considering the initial reviews mentioned earlier, since no prior studies have included controversial or offensive products in the analysis and prediction of consumer response toward online ads, it is interesting to examine consumers' feelings of being offended by this type of product-in order to determine the differences in the offended responses among different groups of consumers. This paper, therefore, investigates the products that are potentially offensive to Thai consumers and the factors that influence Thai consumers' feelings of being offended by online advertisements of offensive products, in order to provide insights and valuable findings regarding the level of offensiveness caused by each different type of offensive products, and the effects of potential influences, such as demographic factors and religiosity, on consumers feelings of being offended. The result of this study also provides comparative information on whether the list of offensive products in the Thai context is consistent with those in contexts or not.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Offensive Products

Some studies, albeit limited in number, have been conducted to explore offensive, sensitive, or controversial products. For example, in 1990, Barnes and Dotson investigated the nature of offensive television advertising and found that the offense caused by some products is dictated by social norms, and is most likely to occur in products that are considered taboo.

In general, the word offensive is defined as “arousing a visceral reaction of disgust, anger, or hatred” (Wiktionary, 2017), and as “causing displeasure or resentment” by the Merriam-Webster dictionary (2017). Despite the studies regarding the types of products which can be considered offensive or controversial, the definitions used to define these types of products are still unclear. Although the meanings are similar, there are inconsistencies in the terms being used to categorize these types of products. For example, some studies use the term “offensive products” (e.g. Prendergast, Ho & Phau, 2002; Prendergast & Hwa, 2003), whereas some other studies employ the terms “controversial products” (e.g. De Run, Butt, Fam, & Jong, 2010; Fam, Waller, & Yang, 2009; Fam, Waller, Ong, & Yang, 2008; Waller, 1999), or sensitive products (Fahy, Smart, Pride, & Ferrell, 1995).

Although different terms were used, these studies all refer to similar types of products. In their literature reviews, none of these papers provided a direct meaning of the terms being used; instead, they referred the meaning of the terms to the concept of another well-known term, “unmentionables”.

The term “unmentionables” was defined by Wilson and West (1981) as “products, services, or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offence, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented” (p. 92). The meaning of the unmentionables was further redefined by Katsanis (1994) as any products/services/concepts that are considered offensive, embarrassing, harmful, socially unacceptable or controversial to a large group of the population.

For the categories of products and services covered under these definitions, the lists have been changed and updated over time. To identify offensive products, the research conducted in Malaysia by De Run, Butt, Fam, and Jong (2010); in China by Prendergast and Hwa (2003); in Hong Kong by Prendergast, Ho, and Phau (2002); and in Australia by Waller (1999) provided lists of products considered offensive in their specific research areas. Although the lists differed in their ranking orders due to differences in the cultural background of each region, a lot of similarities were observed among the items represented in the various lists. The products that were most likely to be perceived as offensive were condoms and contraceptive products, undergarments, hygiene products, funeral services, sexual services, and alcoholic drinks.

Beside the product categories, the terms being used to categorize these types of products are not fixed and are exchangeable within the literature reviews of different studies. The products and services covered by these terms are also highly overlapped. Regarding the frequency of usage, the terms “controversial products” and “offensive products” have been used somewhat more often in previous research studies than other terms. The term “controversial products” is used frequently in business-related research articles (e.g. Waller, 1999; Waller and Fam, 2000; Fam et al., 2004; Waller, 2005). Besides “controversial products”, the term “offensive products” is also used frequently in business articles and research papers (e.g. Barnes and Dotson, 1990; Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Beard, 2008).

From the earlier discussion, both “offensive” and “controversial” are used frequently in academic research papers to describe products that cause consumers to experience uneasy feelings. Since these types of product and advertising have not been widely studied, there is no standardized term to describe such categories of product up to this point. For this current study, however, the term “offensive product” is used throughout the paper and the definition of such a product is most closely related to Katsanis's (1994) definition of any products/services/concepts that are considered offensive, embarrassing, harmful, socially unacceptable or controversial to a large group of the population.

2. Offensiveness toward Offensive Product Advertising

It has been suggested by previous studies that a number of products, both goods and services, are considered controversial when advertised, including alcohol, cigarettes, underwear, contraceptives, and political campaigns (e.g. Fam, Waller, & Yang, 2009; Prendergast et al., 2002). In 1990, Barnes and Dotson investigated the nature of offensive television advertising and found that the offense caused by some products is dictated by social norms, and is most likely to occur in products that are considered taboo. Barnes and Dotson (1990) also proposed that “offensive advertising” has two components: 1) the products perceived to be offensive by potential consumers, and 2) the advertising execution, which may or may not relate to the product being represented in the advertisement. Therefore, this indicates that the product itself is causing offense toward the advertisements. In this study, the focus of the research is on the products that are perceived to be offensive to consumers and the factors that may cause those feelings.

3. Theories Regarding Audience Reaction

3.1 Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory was created by Blumler and Katz in 1974 to explain how psychological needs are related to the audience's media choice and engagement in certain media-use behaviors (Lin, 1999; Rubin 1994). The theory suggests that the audience uses the media to satisfy their psychological needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). The uses and gratification approach tends to center on the audience's psychological processes, and aims to describe the audience's motivations and concerns for using various types of media (Eighmey and McCord, 1998).

Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1973–1974) described the main assumptions of the U&G theory, which are 1) the audience is assumed to be actively involved and the media use is assumed to be goal-oriented; 2) much of the initiative where need gratification links to media choice in the mass communication process lies with the audience member; 3) the media compete with other sources of need satisfaction; 4) as data must be collected directly from individual audience members, they are assumed to be sufficiently self-aware; and 5) judgements regarding cultural significance should be suspended.

From the past to present time, U&G studies have been continuously conducted on several types of traditional media, such as newspapers (Elliott & Rosenberg, 1987), radio (Mendelsohn, 1964), and television (Babrow, 1987), as well as on non-traditional media such as cable television (Heeter & Greenberg, 1985), VCR (Levy, 1987), e-mail (Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000), and the World Wide Web (e.g., Eighmey, 1997; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000).

As this theory suggests that audiences use media as a means of fulfilling their satisfaction needs, this study will apply this notion to how audiences respond to advertisements for different types of products. Since offensive products can irritate viewers' feelings, the audience may avoid or decrease their exposure to the advertisements of these products. Therefore, such advertisements must be specially designed to reduce feelings of being offended in order to retain audience attention. One previous study (Bloch et al., 1986) found that people pay attention to ads not only to gain information, but also for surveillance, for entertainment, and for alleviating boredom. In this current study experiment, the uses of animation and graphical content will be tested to investigate whether these techniques can be an effective way of reducing the audiences' feelings of being offended by the advertising of controversial products.

3.2 Arousal, Mood, and Media

Developed from the uses and gratification model, this theory has placed greater emphasis on the affective rather than the cognitive states of the audiences (Zillmann, 1982; Zillmann and Bryant, 1985 & 1986). Zillmann and his colleagues proposed that a media choice, such as a TV program, is

used as a way to either maintain positive affective states or move from negative emotional states to more desirable ones. However, the desirable states of arousal may vary among individuals and across time. Since media content attributes can increase arousal potential, viewers are perceived as capable of being motivated to mediate undesirable excitatory levels through their content choices (e.g., Donnerstein and Hallam, 1978; Zillmann, Hoyt, and Day, 1974; Zillmann and Bryant, 1985).

Researchers hypothesized that positive hedonic media content, such as pleasant music (Day, 1980), erotica music (Zillmann and Sapolsky, 1977), and cartoons (Baron and Ball, 1974), can change arousal levels by reducing negative emotional states. These experiments found that pleasant stimuli improve the negative mood of the audience. This is relevant to Berlyne's (1960) suggestion that pleasure increases through the removal of adverse arousal.

In terms of the effects of emotional reaction, Edell and Burke (1987) indicated that emotional reactions to ads can affect belief formations and the nature of the subsequent processing of the ads. Also, Goldberg and Gorn (1987) found that viewing positive content leads to better recall and more positive evaluations of commercials than occurs from the viewing of negative content. However, some research suggests that the evaluation process of the viewers may differ under different arousal conditions. Sanbonmatsu and Kardes (1988) found that a highly aroused audience evaluates the ads based on peripheral cues, while a moderately aroused one evaluates the ads based more on the strength of the arguments in the ads.

For this current study, the theory of arousal and media choice contributes highly to our assumption that media or advertising content with pleasant attributes, such as cartoons and animation, could alleviate a viewer's mood, and would possibly lead to reduced feelings of offense toward a product, as well as to a better evaluation of the ads.

3.3 Advertising Avoidance

The number of commercial messages is overwhelming to audiences nowadays. With approximately 5,000 messages on a daily basis (Story, 2007), consumers have developed ways to avoid increasingly intrusive methods of persuasion. According to the U&G and arousal theories, the messages which are considered unpleasant or uncomfortable to watch could encounter a higher level of avoidance from consumers. Also, audiences can mentally ignore the promotional messages by moving their attention away from the ongoing advertising message.

This knowledge regarding advertising avoidance can support this study's assumption that consumers tend to avoid advertising messages, especially when the messages are not pleasantly presented. The advertising design, therefore, can play a major role in reducing the advertising avoidance of the consumers. Based on this knowledge, the experiment in this study is designed to measure consumer reaction toward different styles of advertising executions.

4. Causes of Offensive Feelings and Hypothesis Development

4.1 Demographic Factors

It has been widely proved and concluded that consumer demographics and characteristics such as gender, age, education level and income have distinctive effects on consumer behavior (e.g., Kotler, & Armstrong, 2016; Schiffman, 2015). The demographic factors relevant to this study can be grouped as age, gender, family size, marital status, income, occupation, education level, social class and each of consumer generation (Armstrong and Kotler, 2005). These factors are widely used in consumer and marketing research. Previous research revealed that there are many demographic factors, such as age, gender, income, occupation, education, marital status, and family background, which significantly affect the behavior of consumers (Kumar, R. 2014). The study by Juyal (2013) provided support for the significant influence of demographic factors including age, gender, marital status, education, occupation, and income on consumers.

Differences in gender, age, income, and education can lead consumers to respond differently to the product (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The different demographics of consumers affect their needs, interests, tastes, purchasing ability and preferences (Bovee and Thill, 1992). This is why age, gender, income, and education are normally used as bases of customer segmentation in business (Lindsayt, 2014).

According to the literature review of demographic factors as potential causes of feelings of being offended mentioned above, hypotheses can be formed as follows:

H1: There are significant differences between different demographic groups in the feelings of offense experienced toward products

H1a: There are significant differences between gender groups in the feelings of offense experienced toward products

H1b: There are significant differences between age groups in the feelings of offense experienced toward products

H1c: There are significant differences between different education levels in the feelings of offense experienced toward products

H1d: There are significant differences between different income levels in the feelings of offense experienced toward products

4.2 The Role of Religion

The roles of religion in people's lives have been continuously studied and investigated in many dimensions. Firstly, religion was believed to play a major role in human behavior and attitudes (Armstrong, 2001). Secondly, it was also indicated by a previous study (Ellison and Coles, 1982) that religion influences the way we live and experience life, which affects our goals, motivation and satisfaction. In consumer behavior, there is evidence indicating that religion may influence consumer consumption behavior to some extent (e.g. Burroughs and Reidfleisch, 2002; Delener, 1990 and 1994; Hirschman, 1981; McDaniel and Burnette, 1990; Mokhlis, 2006; Rindfleisch et al., 2004; Wilkes et al., 1986).

There are two broad categories regarding the studies of religiosity: studies that investigate the strength of religiosity's influence on consumer behavior within one culture or region, and studies that compare consumer behaviors in different cultures or subcultures. Regarding consumer response toward controversial advertising, Fam et al. (2004) indicated that religiosity has an influence on consumer attitudes toward the advertising of controversial product.

A review of the literature regarding socialization (e.g. Moschis and Churchill, 1978; Moschis, 1980; Ginsburg and Opper, 1969; Kohlberg, 1969; McLeod and Chaffee, 1972; Moschis, 1985; Himmelweit and Swift, 1976) also revealed that consumers may or may not prefer being exposed to and paying attention to certain media content because their viewing habits were shaped by socialization during childhood and adolescence, which differed by gender, age, education, and income levels. Concerning this study's target population, Thai people-like most Asians-are very close to their family members. Parents, as well as other family members, have a profound impact on children lives in many aspects. Since most of the parents' teachings are derived from religious beliefs and cultural influences, Thai children have been taught to behave in a certain way in order to gain social acceptance. Thus, conformity in Thai culture is usually high. This may affect how young Thai adults, who constitute our target group, are offended by certain products or services.

In this study, the survey was conducted in Thailand. Since more than 95 percent of the Thai population is Buddhist, the reaction that consumers have toward the advertisements of offensive products may be based on Buddhist religious beliefs, which are strongly bonded with Thai culture. The study regarding Thai consumer feelings toward the advertising of offensive products, therefore, was conducted by linking the investigation with the effects of religiosity. According to the mentioned effects of religiosity, a hypothesis can be formed as follows:

H2: Religiosity has a significant positive influence on feelings of offense toward products

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted by distributing surveys to the target respondents, who are the viewers of online advertising of offensive products. According to statistics from Innovative Internet Research Center, Thailand (IIRC), (2011), the majority of internet users are 18–44 years old, most of whom are young, well educated, and affluent. Therefore, the respondents were selected based on these demographic features by using the non-probability sampling method and convenience sampling technique. Non-probability sampling is also referred to as judgment or non-random sampling. With this method, every unit of the population does not have an equal chance of participation in the investigation. Non-probability sampling can be useful when randomization is hard, and when the researcher has limited resources, time, and workforce (Etikan et al., 2016). In every type of research, it would be superlative to use the whole population, but in most cases, it is not possible to include every subject because the population is almost finite. This is the rationale behind the use of sampling techniques like convenience sampling by most researchers (Etikan et al., 2016).

Therefore this study used the convenience sampling technique, which is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling whereby members of the target population who meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or willingness to participate, are included for the purpose of the study (Dornyei, 2007). The the researcher visited several places such as universities, shopping malls, etc. to gather useful data and information from members of the target population.

The questionnaires were designed to collect information regarding the respondent's feelings of offense toward the online advertising of offensive products, as well as details on the respondents' demographics.

In the first part of the survey, the list of seventeen products derived from previous studies mentioned in the literature review was provided in order to assess whether Thai consumers' feelings of offense toward these potentially offensive products are consistent with the findings of previous studies in various settings. The respondents were instructed to rate their feelings of offense toward the online advertising of these products on a Likert-scale of 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "Extremely Offensive". The scale used to gather the respondents' level of offense passed a reliability test with a Cronbach's alpha = 0.892.

The second part of the survey measured the respondents' religiosity. The respondents' answers to 12 questions related to religious activities, commitment, and beliefs were rated using a 5-item frequency scale of "Never" to "Very Often". This frequency scale was modified from the scale developed by Burroughs and Rindfleisch (2002) and Rindfleisch et al. (2004), and Wilkes et al. (1986), which are some of the most popular religiosity scales available. The scale used in this study also passed a reliability test with a Cronbach's alpha = 0.881.

The last part of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic data, including age, gender, income, and education level. The demographic data can be used to assess the influence of demographic characteristics on feelings of offense toward the online advertisements of offensive products.

RESULTS

1. Descriptive Data Analysis

Three hundred and sixty-seven respondents returned completed questionnaires. When considering the demographic data, the results showed that, among the respondents, 53.9% were female and 46.1% were male. The majority of respondents (59.8%) were aged between 20–25 years old; 16.0% were 36 years old and higher; 13.9% were 26–30 years old; 10.2% were 31–35 years old. Most respondents (66.2%) had a bachelor's degree, while 21.6% had a master's degree, and 11.1% have high school education. A minority of 1.1% had a doctoral degree. Regarding income, 48.6% had a monthly income lower than 10,000 baht; 28.2% received between 10,001–25,000 baht per month; 13.2% earned between 25,001–40,000 baht per month; the rest of the respondents received more than 40,000 baht per month. The mean of religiosity is 3.3975, where women (religiosity = 3.4895) are significantly more religious than men (religiosity = 3.2780), $p < 0.01$.

For consumer offensiveness, the five products that received the highest feelings of offense toward their online advertising were gambling, cigarettes, chat-line services, political campaigns, and dating services. All of these products rated significantly higher than 1 (Not Offensive at all), which is consistent with the results from several previous studies. The detailed ranking of the means of feelings of offense toward the ads for each product are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Ranking of the Means of Feelings of Offense toward Offensive Product Advertising

Products	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gambling	367	3.41	1.287
Cigarettes and Related Products	367	3.19	1.261
Chat-line Services	367	3.07	1.325
Political Parties/Campaign	365	2.75	1.284
Dating Services	366	2.61	1.283
Fortune Telling Services	367	2.40	1.369

Table 1: Ranking of the Means of Feelings of Offense toward Offensive Product Advertising (Cont.)

Products	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Funeral Services	367	2.29	1.252
Weight Loss Products/Programs	366	2.22	1.191
Condom and Contraceptives Products	367	2.13	1.174
Alcoholic Drinks and Related Products	366	2.06	1.128
Insurances that Cover Funeral Expenses	363	1.79	1.037
Sexual Disease Treatments/Prevention	367	1.69	.936
Underwear	367	1.68	.949
Charities/Foundations	365	1.55	.887
Mouthwash	366	1.53	.920
Terminal Disease Treatments/Prevention	366	1.51	.884
Deodorant	367	1.48	.880

2. Hypothesis Testing

In addition to the descriptive data, the important findings from the hypothesis testing indicate the following:

2.1 Hypothesis 1 stated that respondent demographics have a significant effect on feelings of offense toward products. The t-test results reveal that between the two different genders, there are significant differences in the feelings of offense toward the advertisements of several products (p -value < 0.05), where female respondents were significantly more offended than male respondents by the advertisements for condoms and contraceptives, gambling, cigarettes, and deodorant products, while male respondents were significantly more offended than female respondents by the advertisements for fortune telling services and weight loss programs/products, as shown in Table 2. Therefore, H1a is partially accepted.

Table 2: Differences between Genders in Feelings of Offense toward Offensive Products

Products	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Condom and Contraceptives Products	Male	167	1.98	1.114
	Female	195	2.25	1.186
Gambling	Male	167	3.23	1.312
	Female	195	3.52	1.253
Cigarettes and Related Products	Male	167	3.02	1.275
	Female	195	3.31	1.239
Weight Loss Products/Programs	Male	167	2.36	1.238
	Female	195	2.08	1.130
Fortune Telling Services	Male	167	2.70	1.446
	Female	195	2.17	1.256
Deodorant	Male	167	1.59	.983
	Female	195	1.39	.782

2.2 Comparing the findings for different age groups, ANOVA test results indicate that there were significant differences in the feelings of offense toward the advertisements of gambling and fortune telling services (p -value < 0.05). Younger respondents were on average less offended by gambling and fortune telling service advertisements, as indicated in Table 3. Thus, H1b is partially accepted.

Table 3: Differences among Age Groups in Feelings of Offense toward Offensive Products

Products	Age			
	20–25	26–30	31–35	36–44
Gambling	3.19	3.21	3.81	3.91
Fortune Telling Services	2.20	2.56	2.38	2.87

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2.3 Among the different education levels, ANOVA test results indicate that there were significant differences in the feelings of offense toward the advertisements of chat-line services (p-value < 0.05), where respondents with a higher education levels yielded higher feelings of offense toward such advertisements. The means were 2.45 for high school level, 3.13 for bachelor degree level, 3.25 for master degree level, and 3.27 for doctoral degree level. Therefore, H1c is partially accepted.

Table 4: Differences among Different Education Levels in Feelings of Offense toward Offensive Products

Products	Education Level			
	High School	Bachelor Degree	Master Degree	Doctoral Degree
Chat-line Services	2.45	3.13	3.25	3.27

2.4 In comparing the results from different income levels, ANOVA test results reveal that there were significant differences in the feelings of offense toward the advertisements of political campaigns, chat-line services, and fortune telling services (p-value < 0.05). Table 5 illustrates the details of income influences on feelings of offense toward the mentioned products/services. Hence, H1d is partially accepted. However, even though there significant differences were identified in the feelings of offense toward each of the products listed in the table below, the directions of the mean differences are somehow not consistent; therefore it is difficult to conclude the real impact of income on feelings of offense.

Table 5: Differences among Different Income Levels in Feelings of Offense toward Offensive Products

Products	Income Per Month (Baht)				
	10000 or lower	10001–25000	25001–40000	40001–55000	More than 55000
Political Parties/ Campaigns	2.70	2.47	2.93	2.42	3.22
Chat-line Services	3.01	2.77	3.33	4.00	3.70
Fortune Telling Services	2.22	2.26	2.57	3.58	3.26

2.5 Regression results also indicated that religiosity has a significant influence on feelings of offense toward alcoholic drinks and related products (p-value < 0.01, Coefficient = .145) as shown in Table 6. Respondents who were more religious tended to be more offended by alcoholic drinks and related products than those who were less religious. Thus, H2 is accepted.

Table 6: Influence of Religiosity on Feelings of Offense toward Alcoholic Drinks and Related Products

	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	p-value	Adjusted R ²
(Constant)	.268		.000	0.018
Religiosity	.092	.145	.006	

Table 7: Means and Detail Information of Religiosity

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Religiosity	359	2.8354	.62545

No violation of the regression analysis assumption was found. It is noteworthy to also mention that the factorability of the 12 religiosity items was examined to ensure the validity of this regression analysis. Firstly, it was observed that 11 of the 12 items correlated at least .3 with at least one other item, suggesting reasonable factorability. Secondly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was .895, which is above the recommended value of .6, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1727.992$, $p < .001$). The diagonals of the antiimage correlation matrix were also all over .5. Finally, the communalities were all above .3, further confirming that each item shared some common variance with other items. Given these overall indicators, factor analysis was deemed to be suitable with all 12 items.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study support the findings of previous research regarding offensive product advertisements in other countries (e.g., De Run, Butt, Fam, and Jong, 2010; Prendergast and Hwa, 2003; Prendergast, Ho, and Phau, 2002; Waller, 1999). It is also consistent with the theories and notions such as U&G (e.g., Blumler and Katz, 1974; Lin, 1999; Rubin 1994; Eighmey and McCord, 1998), Arousal (e.g., Zillmann, 1982; Zillmann and Bryant, 1985 & 1986), and Advertising Avoidance (Speck and Elliott, 1997),

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discussed in the literature review. In particular, the products that are perceived to be offensive by Thai respondents are similar to those that are also found to be offensive in other regions, although the rankings differ somewhat from the previous findings. Thai consumers rate gambling as the most offensive product, with sexual related products such as condoms surprisingly not ranked very high in the list when compared with the findings of previous research which mostly reported such products among the top five most offensive.

It is also apparent that when it comes to offensive behavior, demographic factors play an important role in Thai society. This is consistent with the findings of the numerous studies mentioned in the literature review regarding different beliefs, motivation, attitudes, and consumption behaviors among children and adolescents, which are caused by socialization (e.g., Moschis and Churchill, 1978, Moschis, 1980) and family patterns (e.g., McLeod and Chaffee, 1972; Moschis, 1985). As most developmental theories conclude that the highest level of learning occurs during adolescence and early adulthood (e.g., Ginsburg and Opper, 1969; Kohlberg, 1969), consumer behavior only changes very little during adulthood (Himmelweit and Swift, 1976). In particular, gender yielded a more significant effect than age, education, and income on Thai consumers' perception of the offensiveness of products. This may be caused partly by the fact that Thai females have been taught during childhood and adolescence to limit themselves when expressing their opinion and feelings. This in turn implies that because Thai culture perceives sexual related products as something that should not to be discussed openly especially for women, Thai females feel significantly more offended when being asked about their feelings toward condoms and contraceptive products. Also, seniority, income, and education are valued in Thai culture and people tend to think and behave differently when they get older and/or richer and/or more educated, as they gain more respect from society, which in turn could boost their confidence and change their ways of thinking. This can explain the effects of age, income, and education level on selective products such as fortune telling, which is more offensive to those who are older, wealthier, and more educated, and who may consequently possess higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.

The role of religion is also proved to have a significant influence on one product category: alcoholic drinks and related products. In traditional Thai culture which is strongly connected to Buddhism, alcohol and related products are prohibited as they are stated clearly as one of the five moral precepts taught by Buddha. Thai consumers who are more religious are therefore more offended by the advertisements of alcoholic drinks and related products. This also supports the discussion regarding the potential role of religiosity in many previous studies (e.g., Mokhlis, 2006; Fam et al., 2004; Rindfleisch et al., 2004; Burroughs and Reidfleisch, 2002; Armstrong, 2001).

For the theoretical contribution, the results of this study can be supplementary to previous and future studies regarding consumers' negative feelings in general, or feelings of being offended by an object, such as a product or brand in particular, which can be applied in many ways. In the overall picture, these results support the U&G, arousal, and advertising avoidance theories and concepts that were mentioned earlier in the literature review section, whereby consumers tend to avoid messages that are considered unpleasant to them. A model describing the factors that affect consumers feelings of offense may be formed or compared with existing theories such as the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) by Fishbein, M. (1980) as shown in Figure 1.

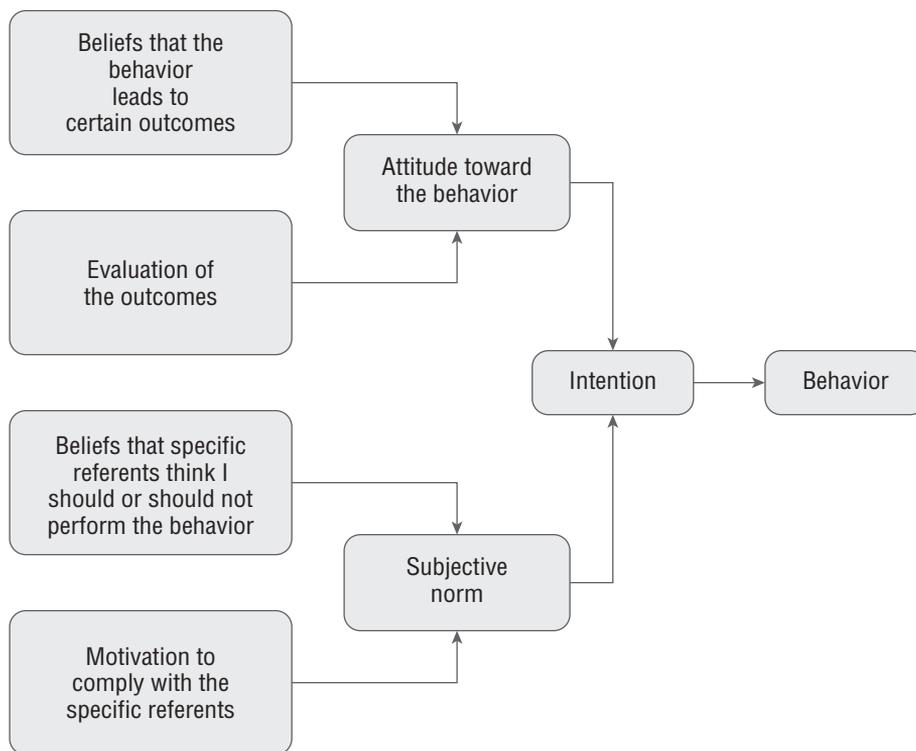


Figure 1: A Simplified Version of Theory of Reasoned Action

Source: Schiffman and Kanuk (2010)

From the TRA model, there is an indication that customer demographics have an influence on consumer attitudes, while subjective norms and beliefs which have a strong tie with religiosity can effect consumer behavior as well. This model therefore also supports the research findings of this study. However, to be able to develop a new theory out of this, there are additional variables that still need to be explored in order to provide a complete description of the determinants of feelings of being offended by products.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

According to the findings and reviews regarding offensive products and the factors that may cause feelings of being offended mentioned throughout the article, it is important for advertisers and marketers to be fully aware of these feelings of offense toward the advertisements of offensive products because it may lead to negative or unfavorable responses toward the ads or even toward the brand in general. Because the results of this research also reveal the differences the levels of offense that different groups of consumers may have toward the same product category, careful consideration and design therefore are required for these types of sensitive products when being advertised to different groups of target consumers.

To address the negative and offensive feelings toward the advertisements of these products, it has been recommended by many researchers such as Day (1980), Zillmann and Sapolsky (1977) and Baron and Ball (1974) that the use of mood lifting advertising design elements such as music, animation, and cartoons can be used to promote positive feelings and reduce negative feelings toward the products. Although the results may still be dependent on many factors such as purchase involvement levels and the atmospherics of the online environment, cartoons and animations can yield better responses when they are used in the advertisements of offensive products (Rakrachakarn & Moschis, 2013 and 2015).

Therefore, in practical terms, beside the types of products and demographics of the consumers, the design elements of the ads themselves, such as the use of color, graphics, and layouts, are important factors that advertisers have to consider in order to ensure the suitability of their usage in the advertisements of different product categories targeted at different demographic groups. For example, if the advertising designer has to create an ad for contraceptives, gambling, cigarettes, and deodorant products, and the target customers are women, they should pay more attention to finding a way to reduce the feelings of offense that women have toward those products, which are higher than those of men. In this case, the delightful or pleasurable ad elements that are mentioned earlier should be employed to tone down the negative feelings more so than when the target group are male consumers.

Looking forward to future research, some limitations of this present study should be addressed in order to improve the practicality of the results. First of all, more variables such as involvement levels, social influences, self-perception related variables, and other possible factors based on reliable theories and literature reviews that may impact offensive feelings should also be tested in order to better explain the determinants of consumers' feelings of offense. Furthermore, in order to improve the generalizability and overall quality of the results, there should be more variety in the sample groups, such as occupation, while more data collection locations and methods should also be used in future research.

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