

# THE ATTITUDES OF URBAN SOUTH AFRICAN CONSUMERS RESIDING IN GAUTENG TOWARD ADVERTISING REGULATIONS AND PRACTICES

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**Abstract:** Consumers are typically exposed to various advertising messages, but only comprehend an iota of what they are exposed to. Marketers therefore often push the boundaries of what is socially acceptable in order to break through the clutter. To combat such practices, advertising is often strictly regulated. However, little is known about consumers' attitudes towards advertising regulations and practices.

This study aims to uncover the attitudes of urban South African consumers towards advertising regulations and practices. The population studied included urban South Africans residing in Gauteng. A self-administered questionnaire was used to elicit responses. Fieldworkers employed a two-stage non-probability sampling procedure to collect 270 useable responses.

The findings indicate that respondents are in favour of strict government regulation of advertising and that advertising regulations should be enforced by government instead of industry. The study identified differences with regard to attitude towards advertising regulations and practices amongst respondents, based upon demographic characteristics. The findings could guide industry and government regarding their perceived role in regulating advertising and also lead marketers in creating advertising messages that urban South Africans will accept.

*Key phrases: advertising, advertising regulation, attitude, consumer behaviour marketing, South Africa*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Consumers are exposed to an array of advertising messages on a continuous basis and they therefore selectively perceive and comprehend only a fraction of what they are exposed to in order to avoid sensory overload (Kardes, Cline & Cronley 2008:142). As part of marketing strategies to capture consumers' attention, marketers use specially designed advertising (Jordaan & Kourantas 2001:42; Meech 1999:37; Wells, Moriarty & Burnett 2006:336). Many marketers, however, push the boundaries of what is socially acceptable when doing this. They often employ advertising practices that exaggerate claims about their products, use language and images that are offensive, and refer to taboo topics in some instances. Many target vulnerable groups and market products considered unsafe (Clow & Baack 2010:419; Ouwensloot & Duncan 2008:155).

This situation has necessitated the regulation of the advertising industry which usually takes place through industry self-regulation and government regulation around the

world, including South Africa (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011: Internet; Belch & Belch 2009:694,704). Although advertising is strictly regulated in many countries, little is known about consumers' attitudes towards advertising regulation and advertising practices (Gao & Zhang 2011:78). This is emphasised through the lack of research found on this topic from a South African perspective.

The purpose of this study is therefore to uncover the attitudes of urban South Africans towards advertising regulation and advertising practices. The aim is to assist marketers in improving their understanding of urban South Africans in terms of their attitudes towards freedom of commercial speech, different forms of advertising regulation and attitudes towards advertising practices and regulation in general in South Africa. This will allow marketers to design advertising messages these consumers view in a positive light and will find acceptable.

## **2 LITERATURE BACKGROUND**

This section commences with a discussion of consumer attitude and its formation. It examines how marketers use advertising messages to capture consumers' attention and communicate with them. This literature background furthermore provides an overview of advertising regulation in South Africa and centres on a selection of advertising practices subject to advertising regulations in South Africa.

### **2.1 Attitude and attitude formation**

An attitude is a consumer's long-term favourable or unfavourable view towards an object such as a product, service, person or idea (Babin & Harris 2009:121; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh 2010:392). An attitude consist of three components, namely the cognitive component (consumer's belief about the object), behavioural component (how the consumer will behave towards the object), and the affective component (how the consumer feels about the object) (Engelbrecht & Du Plessis 2004:2; Hawkins & Mothersbaugh 2010:392). Since attitude is based on consumers' individual beliefs, feelings and behavioural intent, it stands to reason that consumers will exhibit contrasting attitudes and intensities towards objects (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh 2010:416,417). This

has led to the formulation of Hypothesis 1 (H1) that consumers exhibit different attitudes towards different and conflicting objects (attitudes towards advertising regulation in general, and commercial freedom of speech).

This particular study focuses on measuring the cognitive component of attitude or the beliefs consumers hold towards advertising regulation. This component can best be explained through the multi-attribute attitude model that is anchored in the premise that the more positive a consumer's beliefs toward an object, the more positive the cognitive component of the attitude will be (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh 2010: 392,393). From their studies on attitude, Chen (2011:697), Dissen, Policastro, Quick and Byrd-Bredbenner (2011:289) and Jensen (2011:337) found that positive relationships exist between attitudes, beliefs and knowledge. This has led to the formulation of Hypotheses 2 (H2) that consumers' overall attitude towards an object will correlate with their beliefs regarding this object.

The measurement of attitudes assists in successful market segmentation upon attitude and the development of new products for particular market segments (Hawkins & Mothersbaugh 2010:416,417; Zakowska-Biemans 2011:122). By gauging consumer attitudes, the marketer can alter these attitudes by strengthening positive attitudes, weakening negative ones, and by creating new attitudes (Babin & Harris 2009:132). Chen (2011:700), Kardes *et al.* (2008:37) and Ozimek and Zakowska-Biemans (2011:141) observe that differences in consumer demographics such as age, gender, educational level, employment status and ethnicity impact on consumer behaviour and consequently consumer preferences, habits and attitudes towards objects. This has led to the formulation of Hypotheses 3 (H3) that groups who differ based upon demographic variables also differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation. One way in which a marketer could change consumer attitudes, involves the use of marketing communications, especially mass advertising (Belch & Belch 2009:125).

## 2.2 Advertising messages – breaking through the clutter

Advertising is a form of marketing communications targeted at a large number of consumers at the same time through messages paid for by the marketer (Ouwensloot & Duncan 2008:10). The functions of advertising are to inform consumers about a market offering, persuade them to purchase the offering, and remind them about the marketing (Yeshin 2006:8). For advertising messages to break through the clutter, it should firstly be noticed by consumers (Wells *et al.* 2006:104). Yeshin (2006:42) mentions that advertising should focus on changing consumer attitudes towards a market offering for a desired behaviour to follow. Over the years, the most successful advertising appeals used by marketers to attract customers include: fear, humour, sex, music, rationality, emotion and scarcity (Clow & Baack 2010:178).

Many advertising messages using the abovementioned appeals focus on promoting conventional attributes. Marketers often push the boundaries of what is socially acceptable by using exaggeration, blatant use of sex, images and language considered offensive by some members of society to gain attention (Ouwensloot & Duncan 2008:155, 430,431,436). It is common for marketers to target vulnerable groups such as children with their advertising messages (Clow & Baack 2010:419). Marketers also market products seen as socially sensitive or unacceptable (personal adult products and adult care products), as well as products society and government consider unsafe, such as alcohol and tobacco products (Clow & Baack 2010:419). Therefore, the marketing communications industry is regulated in countries around the world to shield consumers from the advertising practices referred to above (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet; Belch & Belch 2009:694,704).

## 2.3 An overview of advertising regulation in South Africa

The South African marketing communications industry is self-regulated and also regulated by the government. Self-regulation refers to a situation where businesses operating in a particular industry voluntarily take responsibility for, and actively participate in regulating the industry (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet).

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Advertising regulation, involves altering or removing advertisements that do not comply with regulations by the offending marketer as determined by the self-regulating body (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet; Belch & Belch 2009:694). Government regulation on the other hand, involves the laws put in place to control advertising practices in a particular country (Belch & Belch 2009:704).

The South African self-regulating body regulating advertising is the South African Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). Participating members contribute financially to the running of ASA that has a Code of Advertising Practice in place. The Code of Advertising Practice provides regulations for 30 different categories of advertising covering a wide range of products and services (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet). ASA also works closely with the South African government and consumer organisations to ensure that advertisements meet the regulations as stated in ASA's Code of Advertising Practice (Advertising Law 2011:Internet). From 2007 to 2008 ASA received 2095 complaints of which 93% came from consumers and public bodies (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa, 2009:18). Of these complaints, 29% were formally investigated by ASA, where 25% were dismissed, 21% upheld, 35% involved voluntary undertakings by the offending marketers to alter or remove advertisements, and 15% were resolved by the parties concerned (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2009:18).

From a legislative perspective, several South African laws regulate the marketing activities of businesses in some form, where 65 laws affect advertising in South Africa (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet). The marketing communications industry is, however, primarily regulated by government through three entities that emerged as a result of government legislation. Firstly, the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) deals with complaints received from various parties, including consumers, regarding content aired on television and radio (Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa 2011:Internet). Secondly, the Film Publications Board deals with complaints related to movies, DVDs, videos and gaming-

related content (Film Publications Board 2011:Internet). Thirdly, the Press Ombudsman deals with print media-related complaints (Press Council of South Africa 2011).

## **2.4 Advertising practices subject to advertising regulation in South Africa**

As is evident from ASA's Code of Advertising Practice, the legislation in place in South Africa's advertising regulation is comprehensive, covering a wide spectrum of issues (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet). Pertaining to advertising regulation that regulate the impact of advertising practices on consumers, a study conducted by Gao and Zhang's (2011:72-90) in the US and China, focused on the practices of exaggeration, offensive advertising, targeting vulnerable groups, and advertising specific products and services. This particular study also focuses on these advertising practices, which are briefly addressed in the ensuing discussion.

### **2.4.1 Exaggeration**

Exaggeration or puffery is employed by marketers in order to raise awareness amongst consumers by making products look better than what they really are, and by doing so, actually deceive consumers (De Wet, Marais & Human 2010:121). Exaggeration in advertising messages is regulated by ASA through the Code of Advertising Practice, and the Harmful Business Practice Act (Act 70 of 1988) (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet; De Wet *et al.* 2010:130).

### **2.4.2 Offensive advertising**

Offensive advertising occurs when the language or images contained in the advertisement, including swearing and the blatant use of sex is seen as offensive by consumers (Wells *et al.* 2006:76), and is dealt with by the ASA's Code of Advertising Practice general principles (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet). Five per cent of complaints received by ASA during 2007 to 2008 involved offensive advertising (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2009:20).

### 2.4.3 Targeting vulnerable groups

Advertising directed at poor inner-city communities, minorities and children is viewed by many as one of the most controversial issues in advertising (Belch & Belch 2009:745). According to Cassim and Bexiga (2007:138), children are especially susceptible and vulnerable to advertising. Many countries in the world have banned the advertising of certain product categories such as toys, tobacco and alcohol to children while some countries go as far as banning all advertising to minors (Hofer & Bieri 2005:81; Moerdyk 2011:Internet).

### 2.4.4 Advertising specific product and services

Advertising regulations also affect the advertising of specific products such as tobacco, alcohol, medication and food products to consumers (Wells *et al.* 2006:84-85). Since the 1990s the South Africa government has put strict legislation in place to regulate the marketing and advertising of tobacco products. This legislation has effectively banned such advertising in South Africa and has led to a decrease of tobacco product consumption in the country (Saloojee 2006:48,52). The alcohol industry is also subject to advertising regulation (RAB South Africa 2011:Internet).

A study by St James and Christodoulidou (2011:44) found that consumers respond to advertising messages regarding alcohol products (wine in this instance). Sancho, Miquel and Aldas's (2011:22) study determined that advertising of alcoholic products promotes children's intention to consume alcohol. A total ban on the advertising of alcohol could come into effect in 2012 with the aim of reducing alcohol consumption in South Africa due to the health-related risks and associated costs cited by the South African Government (Phuzawize 2011:Internet; RAB South Africa 2011:Internet).

## 3 PROBLEM STATEMENT, PURPOSE, OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATED FOR THE STUDY

Marketers in an urban environment compete fiercely with one another to break through the clutter of advertising messages consumers are exposed to (Kardes *et al.* 2008:142). To do this, marketers often push the boundaries in terms of the advertising practices,

such as making exaggerated claims about their market offerings, using language and images that are offensive to some, and referring to taboo topics (Clow & Baack 2010:419; Ouwersloot & Duncan 2008:155; Wells *et al.* 2006:336).

Many countries therefore have some form of advertising regulation in place to protect consumers, be it through legislation and/or self-regulation by industry bodies (Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa 2011:Internet). However, little is known about consumers' attitude towards advertising regulations and advertising practices, especially from a South African perspective (Gao & Zhang 2011:78).

Gaining insights into the attitudes of urban South Africans towards advertising regulation will guide both the industry and government in terms of urban South Africans beliefs regarding the roles these two stakeholders should play and regulating advertising in South Africa. Furthermore, if South African marketers are familiar with urban South Africans' attitude towards their advertising practices, they will be able to design advertising messages that urban South Africans view in a positive light and will be susceptible to. The aim of this study is therefore to identify the attitude of urban South Africans towards advertising regulation. The following objectives have been formulated to achieve the stated aim:

- Develop a demographic profile of respondents.
- Identify the attitudes of urban South Africans towards freedom of commercial speech and the different forms of advertising regulation.
- Uncover the attitudes of urban South Africans towards advertising practices subject to advertising regulation in South Africa.
- Determine the attitude of urban South Africans towards advertising regulation in general.
- Determine whether significant differences exist between urban South Africans' attitudes towards advertising regulation in general and freedom of commercial speech.



- Determine whether a correlation exists between urban South Africans' attitude towards advertising regulation and attitudes towards advertising practices subject to advertising regulation in South Africa.
- Determine whether different groups of urban South Africans differ in their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.

The following hypotheses have been formulated for this study based upon the literature background and the objectives formulated:

- H1 Significant differences exist between urban South Africans' attitude towards advertising regulation in general and their attitudes towards freedom of commercial speech.
- H2 Significant and positive relationships exist between urban South Africans' attitude towards advertising regulation and their attitudes towards advertising practices subject to advertising regulation in South Africa.
- H3 Different groups of urban South Africans differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices. This hypothesis is further refined as follows:
- H3a: Urban South Africans belonging to different age cohorts differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.
- H3b: Urban South Africans with different educational levels differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.
- H3c: Urban South Africans of different genders differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.
- H3d: Urban South Africans with different employment statuses differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.
- H3e: Urban South Africans with different home languages differ in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.

## **4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study was descriptive in nature and a quantitative approach was followed to collect data.

### **4.1 Population of the study**

The population for this study included urban South Africans residing in Gauteng, South Africa. They represent a large percentage of economically active South Africans and are exposed to more advertising messages than rural consumers (Southafrica.info 2011:Internet). Urban consumers in the Gauteng Province of South Africa were chosen since the province is highly urbanised and has 22.4% of the South African population living in the province (Southafrica.info 2011:Internet). It is believed that these consumers have clearly manifested attitudes towards the constructs under study.

A total of 270 respondents participated in the study. The sample size is in line with a similar study conducted by Gao and Zhang (2011:72-90) who obtained approximately 200 respondents in two different target populations.

### **4.2 Sampling procedure**

A two-stage non-probability sampling procedure was followed to select respondents. Firstly, quotas based upon race and age was determined to ensure representativeness. The quotas were filled through convenience sampling. Only South Africans residing in Gauteng were asked to participate in the study.

### **4.3 Questionnaire design**

A self-administered structured questionnaire containing closed-ended questions was used to elicit responses from respondents. The questionnaire consists of three sections:

- The first section explains the objectives of the questionnaire, the rights of the respondent, completion instructions and an indication of the completion time.
- The second section collects information to construct a demographic profile of respondents pertaining to their age, educational level, gender, home language, and employment status.

- The third section uses a five-point unlabelled Likert-type scale containing statements which measure the attitude towards advertising regulation of respondents, where one represents 'strongly disagree' and five represents 'strongly agree'. The statements were taken from the work of Gao and Zhang (2011) who measured the same constructs.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

Fieldworkers were selected, trained and supervised. Fieldworkers distributed the self-administered questionnaire to respondents at their homes, and recovered the completed questionnaire from them once they were done.

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

Completed questionnaires were examined for completeness, consistency in responses and errors. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to capture the data. The data was cleaned and errors that occurred during data capturing were corrected. SPSS was used to analyse the data and descriptive statistics for all variables were calculated. This enabled the researcher to report the number of respondents who indicated a response for a particular statement, the mean for the statement, as well as the standard deviation that acts as a measure of dispersion to provide insight into the distribution of results for the particular statement.

For hypotheses testing, independent samples t-tests, paired sample t-tests and Pearson product moment correlations were performed. For the purposes of uncovering differences between two groups, independent sample t-tests were used. The original variable measuring educational level was collapsed into two groups (respondents who had completed high school and less *and* respondents with a post-school qualification). The original variable measuring employment status was also collapsed into two groups (respondents who are employed *and* respondents who are unemployed) and finally, the variable measuring home language was also collapsed into two groups (respondents who speak English *and* respondents who speak another language).

Paired sample t-tests were used to determine whether a significant difference exist between the means realised for two different variables. In this instance the test was used to uncover significant differences between respondents' attitude towards advertising in general, and attitudes towards freedom of commercial speech.

Pearson product moment correlations were used to determine whether significant and positive relationships exist between pairs of variables. In this instance, correlations between attitude towards advertising in general and their attitudes towards advertising practices subject to advertising regulation in South Africa were investigated.

To interpret the results, a 95% confidence level leading to a p-value of 0.5 or less was used to indicate significant differences or correlations. A correlation coefficient of 0.1 to 0.3 is indicative of a weak correlation, a correlation coefficient of 0.3 to 0.5 is indicative of a moderate correlation, and a correlation coefficient of more than 0.5 is indicative of a strong correlation between the variables (Eiselen, Uys & Potgieter 2007:87; Pallant 2007:132).

## **5 FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH**

This section provides the findings of the study with reference to the distribution of results, reliability and construct validity of the measurement instrument. The section furthermore presents the demographic profile of respondents, the descriptive results for the statements included in the questionnaire, as well as the results for the hypotheses formulated for the study.

### **5.1 Distribution of results**

In order for the distribution of results for a particular variable to be considered normal and subsequently suitable for parametric testing, the skewness and kurtosis as measures of distribution of such a variable should be examined. West, Finch & Curran (1995:79) state that a variable with a skewness of distribution of less than +/-2.00 and a kurtosis of less than +/-7.00 falls within the acceptable limits of normality, thus making the variable eligible to be subjected to parametric tests. Based on the analysis of the

distribution of the data, each variable falls within the parameters suggested, indicating that the statements measuring attitude can be considered normal and may be subjected to parametric testing.

## 5.2 Reliability and validity

The statements included in the questionnaire were taken from the work of Goa and Zhang (2011:78) which found the questionnaire reliable in their study. For this particular study, the questionnaire was pretested and statements were changed and excluded where needed. The statistical analysis in this study focused on individual statements and did not involve the calculation of overall means scores for multiple statements measuring a particular construct. Therefore the internal correlation of multiple statements was not of concern in this study and Cronbach's Alpha values were thus not calculated.

The researcher established face and content validity of the questionnaire within the South African context. The researcher ensured the questionnaire appears to be measuring the relevant constructs at hand (face validity) and contains the questions that will answer the objectives and allow for testing the hypotheses of the study (content validity).

## 5.3 Respondent profile

Table 1 provides a demographic profile of participating respondents.

TABLE 1: RESPONDENT PROFILE

<b>Age</b>
25 years and younger (40.6%); 26 to 34 years (24.4%); 35 to 46 years (14.8%) and 47 to 65 years (20.3%)
<b>Highest level of education</b>
Primary school completed (0.4%); some high school (5.5%); completed high school (37.3 %); technical diploma/degree (22.1%) and <b>university degree or postgraduate degree (34.7%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>
Male (41.3%) and <b>female (58.7%)</b>
<b>Home language</b>
Afrikaans (18.5%); <b>English (62.7%)</b> ; Nguni (Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele) (6.6%); Sotho (Sepedi, SeSotho, Tswana) (6.6%); Venda/Tsonga (3.7%) and other (1.8%)

<b>Employment status</b>
Full time (51.5%); part time (5.6%); self-employed (11.6%); student (22.4%); housewife or househusband (2.2%); retired (0.4%) and unemployed (3.4%)

**Source:** Own compilation.

The demographic profile of respondents indicates that the majority of respondents (40.6%) are 25 years and younger. The majority of respondents (37.3%) completed high school with a large contingent either completed a technical diploma or degree (22.1%), or a university or post graduate degree (34.7%). The majority of respondents are female (58.7%) and speak English as home language (62.7%). The majority of respondents are employed on a full-time basis (51.5%). From Table 1 it can be seen that respondents are typically younger, well-educated, English-speaking and employed on a full-time basis. The attitudes of this group are thus critical to marketers, since the market as described here comprises economic active individuals and a lucrative market segment.

#### 5.4 Attitudes towards advertising regulation

Table 2 provides an overview of the descriptive results for each statement measuring attitude towards freedom of commercial speech, forms of advertising regulation and practices, and respondents' attitude towards advertising regulation in general. For each statement the frequency (number of respondents who indicated a response to the particular statement), the mean (based on a five-point Likert scale) and standard deviation are presented.

**TABLE 2: ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING REGULATION AND PRACTICES**

Statements	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Attitudes towards freedom of commercial speech</b>			
An advertiser should have the legal right to use whatever images in its advertising.	269	2.64	1.336
An advertiser should have the freedom to use whatever language in its advertising.	269	2.81	1.387
Businesses should have the freedom to advertise their products, even if the products are offensive to people.	270	2.17	1.141
<b>Attitudes towards different forms of regulation</b>			
We can trust that businesses will do a good job regulating their own advertising.	270	3.01	1.166

Statements	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation
Government regulation of advertising is important.	269	3.57	1.184
Advertising regulation should be left to market forces.	269	3.09	1.187
<b>Attitudes towards advertising practices</b>			
Exaggeration in advertising is often deceptive and should be banned.	270	3.33	1.188
Advertising for alcohol and tobacco products should be banned.	267	3.00	1.410
Advertisements with strong sexual images should be banned.	267	3.35	1.383
Indecent images and languages in advertising should be punished by the government.	268	3.43	1.245
Law should require advertising to promote positive social values.	268	3.98	1.031
No advertising should be allowed during children's programmes.	265	2.87	1.323
Regulation should protect children from harmful advertising and advertising of products unsuitable for their consumption.	268	4.20	1.008
<b>Attitude towards advertising regulation in general</b>			
I am in favour of rigorous advertising regulation.	269	3.19	1.184

**Source:** Own compilation – Statements taken from Gao and Zhang (2011:90).

From Table 2 it can be seen that with regard to attitudes towards freedom of commercial speech, respondents agree most with the statement 'An advertiser should have the legal right to use whatever language in its advertising' (mean = 2.81) and the least with 'Businesses should have the freedom to advertise their products, even if the products are offensive to people' (mean = 2.17). It should, however, be noted that the means of all statements measuring attitudes towards freedom of speech are just above or below the median of the scale of 2.50 lean more towards disagreeing with these statements, indicating that they do not strongly believe in freedom of commercial speech.

With regard to attitudes towards the forms of regulation, respondents agree the most with 'Government regulation is important' (mean = 3.57). Pertaining to 'We can trust that businesses will do a good job regulating their own advertising' (mean = 3.01; p-value = 0.000), and 'Advertising regulation should be left to market forces' (mean = 3.09; p-value = 0.000) respondents exhibit a significantly lower level of agreement as uncovered by a paired samples t-test. Respondents thus believe that government regulation is important and should not be left to businesses and market forces.

With regard to respondents' attitudes towards advertising practices, the strongest level of agreement was observed for the statement 'Regulation should protect children from harmful advertising and advertising of products unsuitable for their consumption (mean = 4.20). The mean indicates a strong level of agreement with the statement, but respondents agree significantly less with 'No advertising should be allowed during children's programmes' (mean = 2.87; p-value = 0.000) according to the paired samples t-test that was conducted. Respondents therefore believe that children should be protected through regulation, but advertising to children should not be banned.

In addition, respondents agree to a greater extent (means of 3.00 or more) with the following: Laws should be enforced to 'promote positive social values' through advertising and that 'Exaggeration', 'indecent images', 'strong sexual images', and 'advertising of alcohol and tobacco products should be banned'. With regards to the statement measuring attitude towards advertising in general, it was found that respondents agree to a greater extent that they are 'in favour of rigorous advertising regulation (mean = 3.19), which is well above the median of the scale.

## **5.5 Hypotheses testing**

This section presents the findings with regard to the three hypotheses formulated for this study.

### **5.5.1 Hypothesis 1**

With regard to hypotheses 1 (significant differences exist between urban South Africans' attitudes towards advertising regulation and their attitudes towards freedom of commercial speech) the following finding was observed:

- Respondents are significantly more in favour of rigorous advertising regulation (mean = 3.19) than the extent to which they believe advertisers should have the legal right to use images and language they want to (mean = 2.64; p-value = 0.000), that they should have the legal right to advertise their products even if they are offensive to some (mean = 2.81; p-value = 0.001) and that businesses



should have the freedom to advertise their products, even if the products are offensive to people (mean = 2.17; p-value = 0.000).

Hypothesis 1 can therefore be supported, since respondents are significantly more in favour of rigorous advertising regulations than the extent to which they believe advertisers should have freedom of commercial speech.

### **5.5.2 Hypothesis 2**

With regard to hypotheses 2 (significant and positive relationships exist between urban South Africans' attitudes towards advertising regulation and their attitudes towards advertising practices subject to advertising regulation in South Africa) the following findings were observed:

- No significant positive relationship could be identified between respondents' attitudes towards advertising regulation and their attitudes that advertisements containing contraceptive and female sanitary products (p-value = 0.864; correlation coefficient = -0.010) and strong sexual images (p-value = 0.211; correlation coefficient = 0.077) should be banned.
- There is a weak significant and positive relationship between respondents' attitudes towards advertising regulation and their attitudes towards the following advertising practices: advertisements that exaggerate (p-value = 0.021; correlation coefficient = 0.140), advertise alcohol and tobacco products (p-value = 0.008; correlation coefficient = 0.162), contain indecent images and strong language (p-value = 0.000; correlation coefficient = 0.255) that target children should be banned (p-value = 0.005; correlation coefficient = 0.173), and that advertising regulations should protect children (p-value = 0.014; correlation coefficient = 0.150).
- There is a moderate significant and positive relationship between respondents' attitudes towards advertising regulation and their attitudes that 'Law should

require advertising to promote positive social values' (p-value = 0.000; correlation coefficient = 0.397).

Hypothesis 2 can therefore only be partially supported, since weak to moderate significant and positive relationships exist between respondents' attitudes towards advertising regulation and a number of statements measuring respondents' attitudes towards advertising practices.

#### **5.5.4 Hypothesis 3**

With regard to hypotheses 3 (different groups of urban South Africans differ in terms of their attitudes towards advertising regulation and practices) the following findings were observed:

- Respondents of different age cohorts are significantly different from each other with regard to the following attitudes towards advertising practices; those who are 47 to 65 years of age agree significantly more that 'Advertising for alcohol and tobacco products should be banned' (p-value = 0.009) than those who are 25 years and younger. Those who are 25 years and younger hold a significantly less favourable attitude towards advertising regulation in general than the other age cohorts (p-value = 0.002) (H3a).
- Respondents with different educational levels are significantly different from each other with regard to the following belief towards freedom of commercial speech; 'An advertiser should have the legal right to use whatever images in its advertising' (p-value = 0.000) and the following belief towards different forms of regulation; 'We can trust that businesses will do a good job regulating their own advertising' (p-value = 0.001) (H3b). Those who have completed high school or less agree significantly more with these statements than those who have completed a post-school qualification (H3b).
- Male and female respondents differ significantly from each other with regard to several attitudes. Males agree significantly more with the belief towards freedom

of speech that 'Businesses should have the freedom to advertise their products, even if the products are offensive to people' (p-value = 0.013), and with the belief towards different forms of regulation that 'Advertising regulation should be left to market forces' (p-value = 0.002). Females agree significantly more with the belief towards the different forms of regulation that 'Government regulation of advertising is important' (p-value = 0.002), and with the attitudes towards advertising practices that 'Advertising for alcohol and tobacco products should be banned' (p-value = 0.004), 'Advertisements with strong sexual images should be banned' (p-value = 0.001), 'Indecent images and languages in advertising should be punished by the government' (p-value = 0.000), 'Law should require advertising to promote positive social values' (p-value = 0.032), and 'No advertising should be allowed during children's programmes' (p-value = 0.014) than males (H3c).

- No significant differences could be observed between respondents with different employment statuses (H3d) and those with different home languages (H3e) in terms of their attitude towards advertising regulation.

Hypothesis 3 can therefore only be partially supported since significant differences were only uncovered between different groups of respondents based upon age cohort, educational level and gender in terms of attitude towards advertising regulation and practices.

## 6 DISCUSSION

From the demographic profile, it can be seen that the respondents who participated in this study are typically younger, well-educated, English-speaking and employed on a full-time basis. The results of the study are thus valuable to marketers, since those who exhibit this particular demographic profile represent an attractive and lucrative market for which marketers could design advertising messages in line with their attitudes towards advertising regulation and practices.

The results of the study indicate a tendency that respondents lean heavily towards disagreeing with statements regarding freedom of commercial speech. Respondents are of the opinion that government regulation is important and should not be left only to businesses and market forces. Respondents indicated that it is more important for government to regulate advertising than for marketers to have freedom of commercial speech. This is supported with the findings for Hypothesis 1 that respondents are significantly more in favour of rigorous advertising regulations than the extent to which they believe advertisers should have freedom of commercial speech. The results may guide industry and government in terms of urban South Africans' beliefs regarding their roles in regulating advertising in South Africa.

With regard to regulation and advertising to children, respondents tend to believe that children should be protected through regulation, but advertising to children should not be banned completely as is the case in a number of countries. A marketer thus has the scope to advertise to children within the regulations set by government and ASA without risking negative reaction from respondents.

Coinciding with respondents' view that government should regulate advertising, they tend to believe that laws should be enforced to 'promote positive social values' through advertising and advertising practices related to 'exaggeration', 'indecent images', 'strong sexual images', and that advertising of 'alcohol and tobacco products should be banned'. The results for Hypotheses 2 furthermore uncover that weak to moderate significant and positive relationships exist between respondents' attitudes towards advertising regulation and their attitudes towards advertising practices.

With regard to the statement measuring attitude towards advertising in general, respondents tend to agree to a great extent that they are 'in favour of rigorous advertising regulation'. The results for Hypothesis 3 found significant differences based on age cohort, educational level and gender in terms of attitudes towards advertising regulation and attitudes towards advertising practices. A marketer should take these

differences into account when designing advertising messages targeted towards consumers of different age cohorts, educational levels and genders, since they exhibit significant different attitudes to advertising regulation and advertising practices. To illustrate, females exhibit a significantly stronger belief than males that the advertising of alcohol products should be banned. The implication of this is that a marketer of alcohol products should refrain from marketing such products to females and perhaps focus on male consumers.

## **7 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

The study only included respondents from one urban setting and did not include respondents from rural areas. Respondents in the age group 66 year and older were underrepresented and their responses were subsequently removed as no comparisons could be drawn.

Future research should include respondents from other urban and rural areas. Comparison could then be drawn between different geographic areas in terms of respondents' attitudes towards advertising regulation and especially their attitudes in terms of advertising practices employed by marketers. A future study could focus on obtaining responses from the 66 years and older cohort to allow for comparisons across all generations.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS**

Advertising in South Africa is strictly regulated by the Marketing Communications Industry and the South African Government. Very little is, however, known of South African consumers' attitudes towards advertising regulation and marketers advertising practices. This study focused on urban South Africans' attitudes since they are numerous, exposed to many advertising messages, and comprise a lucrative part of the South African market. The results indicate that respondents tend to be in favour of strict government regulation of advertisements than the extent to which they are concerned to freedom of commercial speech. They also tend to believe that advertising regulations should be enforced by government. The results show that advertising practices related

to exaggeration, offensive advertising, advertising to children and the advertising of specific products should be strictly regulated. The study identified a number of differences with regard to their attitudes towards advertising regulation between different groups of respondents based upon demographic characteristics such as age, level of education and gender. These findings have several implications for marketers that need to be taken into account when planning advertising messages targeted towards urban South African consumers.

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