

Religious Faith, Addictive Products, and Their Advertisement: A Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract:

The present study sheds some light on the issue pertaining to the influence of religious faith on marketing communication strategy. More particularly, this study attempts to answer two research questions: (i) how Malaysian consumers perceive controversial product? And (ii) what is their perception, attitude and behavioral feelings towards advertisement of the controversial products from the religious perspective? The qualitative approach has been taken to achieve the research objectives. Twenty-two in-depth interviews have been conducted on students of a reputable public university in Malaysia. It is revealed that, health conscious consumers as well as consumer with small child hold negative perception towards controversial product and its advertisement. It is also understood that, Muslim consumers are more reluctant towards such products and their advertisement compare to other consumers. Implications, limitations and future research directions are also discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords: Advertisement of controversial products, Religious influence, Malaysian consumers

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1. Introduction:

In recent years, the rapid technological advances, high materialistic views, and increased globalization have significantly changed the consumption pattern. However, religion still plays a significant role in shaping the consumer behavior (Fam et al., 2002). As the thought of *macro-marketing* is developed and practiced, there have been discussions of the ethical responsibility of marketers and agencies (Matthews, 1997). As such, the issues pertaining to advertising of controversial product which is used by various companies has raised question among scholars.

Review of relevant literature generates the idea that scant attention has been paid to understand consumers' perception towards controversial products (CP) and advertisement of controversial products (AOCP) from the religious perspective. Furthermore, the existing literature on controversial products' advertisement is based on quantitative data,

whereas, qualitative method is more appropriate to understand such controversial issue in-depth. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by exploring the effect of religion on consumers' perception and attitude towards controversial products and its advertisement as the domain of *macro-marketing*. Particularly, this study attempts to answer two research



questions: (i) How Malaysian consumers perceive product? (ii) What is their perception, attitude and behavioral feelings towards AOCP from the religious perspective?

The 'controversial product' includes products like alcohol, cigarette, condom, underwear, contraception, feminine hygiene product, the use of anti-social behavior and the use of indecent language in the advertising (Waller et al., 2005). However, this study narrows down its scope by focusing on cigarette and alcohol as the controversial products. Since, Malaysia is a multicultural country comprised of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other races, this country has been chosen as the research context. Based on Malaysian Statistical Department's (2011) report, Malays accounted for 67% of the total population, Chinese accounted for 23% while Indian accounted for 7% of the total population. Furthermore, a number of religions (Islam, Buddhist, Hinduism and Christianity) are being practiced in this multicultural and multi-racial country (Shao & Waller, 1993). Hence, it is assumed that this multicultural and multi religion environment is the best choice to carry out this study.

This study proceeds with providing a brief literature review pertaining to the study constructs. In the following section, adopted methodology is discussed. Next, summary and analysis, discussion and research propositions are presented in brief. Lastly, conclusion and managerial implications, and limitations and future research directions have been suggested.

2. Controversial Products and Its Advertisements:

Controversial Products (CP)

Wilson and West (1981) described 'controversial products' as products, services, and concepts that for reason of delicacy, morality, decency, or even fear tend to provoke reactions of distaste, disgust, offence, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented. Other researchers in this area have labeled these products as: "unmentionables", "socially sensitive products", "decent products", or controversial products (see Fahy et al., 1995;

Waller & Fam, 2000). Wilson and West (1981) suggested a number of examples for the controversial products, such as: (i) products for "personal hygiene, birth control, warfare, and drugs for terminal illness", (ii) services for "abortion, sterilization, mental illness, funeral directors, and artificial insemination" and (iii) concepts for "political ideas, unconventional sexual practices, racial/religious prejudice and terrorism". On the other hand, Fam et al. (2004) categorized the controversial products into four groups: (i) gender/sex related products, (e.g. Condoms, male /female underwear, and contraceptive), (ii) social/political groups (e.g. Political parties, religious domination, racially extreme groups), (iii) addictive products (e.g. Alcohol, cigarette, and gambling) and (iv) health and care products (e.g., Charities, and weight loss programs). In another study, Waller (1999) has presented 15 controversial products and services which include alcohol, cigarette, condoms, gambling, female underwear, female contraceptives, female hygiene products, funeral services, male underwear, pharmaceuticals, political parties, racially extremist groups, religious denominations, sexual diseases (AIDS, STD preventions, and weight loss programs.

The present study focuses on two controversial products, namely alcohol and cigarette. Based on the review of the literature, only a handful of studies have examined the influence of religion on consumer attitude toward advertising of controversial product. Hence, this study has taken this opportunity into account to understand the influence of religion on consumer perception of alcohol and cigarette in the Malaysian context.

Advertising of controversial products (AOCP)

Most of the past studies considered AOCP as a negative concept (Waller, 2003). Due to the nature of the product, some advertisements may be perceived as controversial and any promotion of these types of products (e.g., feminine hygiene products, condoms, cigarette, alcohol, etc.) may generate negative responses (Schuster & Powell, 1987; Wilson & West, 1981). Phau and Prendergast (2001) found that products like cigarette, alcohol, condoms, female



contraceptives, and feminine hygiene products were perceived as controversial products that could offend when being advertised, especially when it is related to sexual connotations, subject too personal, evoking unnecessary fear, cultural sensitivity, indecent language, sexist images and nudity. In addition, Waller (1999) has found six reasons for the AOCP for being offensive: indecent language, nudity, sexist, racist, subject too personal and anti-social behavior.

According to Waller (2003), if AOCP resulted in only negative responses, advertisers would 'shy away' from this type of campaign. However, advertisers are not shying away and using it in increasing numbers (Waller, 2004). Some studies reveal that the AOCP has been successful for a number of organizations as well (see, Evans & Sumandee, 1993; Waller, 1999). These contradicting opinions and findings provide an opportunity to explore this fact in relation to the religious influence.

3. Religion and Advertisement – An Issue of 'Macro-Marketing':

Religion is one of the foundations of moral teachings in most civilizations (Bowen, 1998). As such it defines the ideals for life, which is reflected in the values and attitudes for societies and individuals, and in turn, these values and attitudes shape the groups and individual's behaviors and practices (Fam et al., 2004). Therefore, scholars need to understand the effects of religion on the kinds of issues they face in business and more importantly, how these issues are defined, informed, and regulated by religion which is the domain of *macro-marketing* (Mittelstaedt, 2002). According to Mittelstaedt (2002), understanding the relationships between religions and markets should be important to *macro-marketing* since religions affect the foundations of people's understanding of the world and thus their understanding and acceptance of markets and marketing institutions.

Religion and social value which are related to modesty and the offensive nature of some product make it difficult to advertise socially sensitive products through specific media or

during certain period of time in some countries (Boddewyn & Kunz, 1991). Moreover, religious values and beliefs have great influence in shaping individual and social behaviors. It influences the way people live, the decision they make, what to eat and even whom to associate (Fam et al., 2004). In addition, according to Hirshman (1983), the religious affiliation of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews significantly shape their attitudes towards dancing, magazines, restaurants, and political ideas.

4. Religion and Advertisement – Malaysian Perspectives:

Though Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi religious country, Islam is considered as the main religion. Hence the Advertising Code for Television and Radio is influenced by the government's effort to promote Islamic values throughout the country. This includes the imposition of stricter regulations on the mass media content based on Islamic principles and values. For example, female models must adhere to the Advertising Code's decent dress which restricts the advertising of male or female underwear (Waller & Fam, 2000). Islam also prohibits gambling and alcohol consumption. However, as Malaysia is a multicultural country, these restrictions were limited to national mass media such as television and printed media that are targeted at the Malays. Other media such as Chinese, English and Tamil language newspapers and magazines were allowed to carry both gambling and alcohol advertisements (Waller & Fam, 2000).

Cigarette:

Since 1982, the Malaysian government has banned the direct advertisement of cigarette on TV and radio. By 1994, it was totally banned to advertise in all mass media (Yong et al., 2008). However, due to a major loophole in the legislation, tobacco companies were able to promote their products in indirect way, by making promotion for other products (Yong et al., 2008). By 2002, the government banned indirect advertisement of tobacco brand names and in 2004 it became an official law under the Malaysian control of tobacco products regulations



Alcohol:

Malaysia is the tenth largest consumer of alcohol in the world which spends over US\$500 million on alcohol on a yearly basis (Yahaya, 2009). According to Global Alcohol Policy Alliance (2006), beer consumption in Malaysia at 11 liters per capita is comparable to that of European countries known for their high consumption. The easy availability of alcoholic drinks in coffee shops, supermarkets, sundry shops and plantations together with aggressive advertising and promotions are driving Malaysians to drink (Global Alcohol Policy Alliance, 2006). The average age for alcohol dependence is 22 years (Yong et al., 2008). However, direct alcohol advertising is not allowed over the broadcast media and on billboards, except in the state of Sabah in East Malaysia. Alcohol advertising is permitted in cinemas, on video cassettes and the print media. Moreover, sponsorship activities are allowed (Yong et al., 2008).

5. Methodology:

According to Bryman (2004), the choice between qualitative and quantitative research depends on the epistemological issues, ontological concerns and the role of theory. The current study is exploratory by its nature and follows the 'interpretivist' approach due to the following reasons: (i) this study aims to answer 'how Malaysian consumers perceive product?'. The research inquiry related to 'how' requires in-depth understanding which can be gained by the use of qualitative approach; (ii) on the basis of ontological assumptions, current study accepts that the reality is 'socially constructed, multiple, holistic, contextual'; (iii) social reality is seen to be inter-subjectively composed (epistemological concern), and (iv) meant for generating theory rather than testing the theory. In this study, twenty-two in-depth interviews have been conducted in a large and reputable public university of Malaysia.

Sample:

Students have been chosen as the sample for this study. The reason behind using the university students as the sample to accomplish the research objectives is for their accessibility and

homogeneity of the group (Calder et al., 1981). Using student sample has been practiced by many researchers in the field of marketing and consumer behavior (see Ehigie, 2006; Eshghi et al., 2008; Feinberg et al., 1992; Li et al., 2007; Sheth and Venkatesan, 1968). Furthermore, according to Ok et al. (2008), using students as subjects does not falsely represent research findings and are reasonable surrogates for other consumers. Moreover, in the advertisement research, student sample has been used by Rehman and Brooks (1987) and Waller (1999) as well. For this study, focus has been narrowed down to two controversial products namely alcohol and cigarette have been considered.

Interview protocol:

Semi-structured questions were used to conduct the interviews. Semi-structured questionnaire often refers to the *interview guide* but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply (Bryman, 2004). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a fairly open framework which allowed focused, conversational, and two-way communication. Guidelines for the semi-structured interview can be found in Appendix A.

How the interviews have been conducted:

The interviews were conducted mainly at the library where students from various backgrounds (e.g., different races, different ages and different religions) could be easily accessible. Each interviewee was shown three types of advertisements related to cigarette and alcohol (see Appendix B). Each interview took about 30 minutes to complete.

How the information given by the experts are analyzed:

All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. To understand the meaning of the opinion and ideas shared by the experts, all transcriptions were read several times. The transcriptions were then analyzed and a summary and analysis table has been produced. Next, relevant facts related to the issue were found. Finally, in this way, the content analyses of all 22 interview transcriptions help to achieve the research objectives of this study.



6. Summary and Analysis:

Demographic characteristics of respondents:

All of the participants were university students ranging from undergraduate to PhD level. Among the 22 respondents, 17 were Malaysians and 5 were foreigner. The Malaysian respondents comprised of 4 Malays, 8 Chinese

and 5 Indian. Among the 22 respondents, there were 10 Muslims, 4 Christians, 3 Hindus, 3 Buddhists, and 2 free thinkers. The average age of the respondents was 31. The demographic profiles of the respondents are shown in **Table-1**.

Table 1: Respondents' demographic profile

	Malaysian	Foreigner	Total
No. of respondents	17	5	22
Gender	6	4	10
Male	11	1	12
Female			
Religion	5	5	10
Islam	4		4
Christianity	3		3
Hinduism	3		3
Buddhism	2		2
Atheist			
Average age	31	30	31
Race	4		
Malay	8		
Chinese	5		
Indian		5	
Others			
Program	9	5	14
DBA/PhD	3		3
Masters degree	5		5

Consumers' perception towards controversial product from the religious perspective:

Respondents' perception regarding the controversial products varied depending on their religious belief. Following paragraphs discuss this view in brief.

Muslim respondents' perception towards alcohol:

All Muslim respondents stated that alcohol is offensive as it is prohibited in Islam to consume (haram). For example, some of them have stated as follows:

"...In Islam, it (alcohol) is totally prohibited to take these products..."

"... Ok, my perception for alcohol is, it's absolutely haram, you know..."

"...Alcohol? You know that it goes against our religious beliefs...for me these products are offensive ..."

"...This product (alcohol) itself is offensive, because it can harm the people. I don't like it, simply because its goes against my religious rules and regulations..."

"...Yes, it has been stated very clearly in our religion to avoid this product as because it is harmful for our body and can destroy our society..."

Muslim respondents' perception towards cigarette :

In regard to cigarette, different Muslim respondents have expressed different opinions. Only one respondent felt that it is offensive and haram, as he has stated: "... for cigarette it is also haram...". Although most of the



respondents have stated that cigarette is not prohibited in Islam, it is offensive as it has bad impact on health. Some examples are as follows:

"... Cigarette is bad for health. I really dislike it. Because you know it can affect our body".

"...For me, cigarette is ok. But somehow it has some bad effects. It will toxicant you. Therefore it is not good".

"...Cigarette according to my religion is not forbidden. It's restricted, but not haram like pork and alcohol, which are 100 % forbidden. You cannot drink and you cannot eat pork. Cigarette is not like that. If you have to, you can do it. But don't overdo it. It's still discouraged. But you will not go to hell, if you smoke".

On the other hand, some of the respondents were very open in their opinion regarding the cigarette consumption. For example:

"... We are in a multi racial country. So, we are neutral regarding these kinds of products..."

"... It is a multi racial country. You cannot say that stop taking alcohol or cigarette totally..."

Christian respondents' perception toward alcohol and cigarette:

With respect to Christian respondents, they did not consider cigarette as offensive at all, because it does not go against their religion or has not been prohibited directly. However, they felt that excessive consumption is bad for health. For example:

"...In my religion there is no restriction for consuming cigarette or alcohol. But of course it is not advisable to drink or smoke too much to the extent it will affect the body. Actually it is not only cigarette or alcohol, anything that is excess is not good for health. For example, if you are taking too much sweet, it will affect you, right?"

"...From the religious point of view, I don't have any restriction to consume these two products. So for me it's quite ok. I mean I am fine with these two products".

"...I think we have the freedom to consume whatever we want... Smoking is okay. But for drinking, Bible teaches us don't drink until you drunk. In other words, if you drink and still can control then its ok..."

Nonetheless, one Christian respondent has mentioned that these products go against her religious beliefs and should not be consumed, because it would have side effects on human body and it is better to avoid it. For instance, she has mentioned:

"...In our religion, it is said that human body is the temple of the God. So, from this point of view, we should not consume anything that can harm to our body. Because we do believe that God's good spirit is with us. Therefore it is not directly stated in our religion that these are prohibited, but indirectly, we need to avoid these two products.

Buddhist respondents' perception toward alcohol and cigarette:

Among the Buddhist respondents, two of them considered these two products as against Buddhism and they should avoid from consuming not only these two products, but any kind of product that will have bad effect on their body. They did not consider these products as offensive but they mentioned that it goes against Buddha's words and instructions. The following are some examples of these views:

"... It is not consistent with our religion. If taking the Buddha's words as they are written in the Pali Cannon, that you can drink no more than a dewdrop's worth of alcohol at any time..."

"...I cannot say that these products are offensive. Simply they go beyond of our religious values, and if you follow the main stream of Buddhism, then you will see that Buddha encouraged us to refrain from consuming any kind of intoxicant. This included alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. These substances are said to be inconsistent with our beliefs as they distort the mind".

Few other Buddhist respondents were not sure of the religious views regarding the matter.



However, they have mentioned that although these products are not offensive, it should be consumed with a limit as they have harmful effect on human body. Some of their statements are:

“...These products are ok. I do not feel any problem with them. But I am not sure from the religious point. We are not that much strict in terms of religion as well. But my parents do not consume cigarette or alcohol either. They are very health conscious. We always try to take the food those are good for the health. For example, we are basically vegetarian”.

“...For me, cigarette and alcohol both are ok. I do not consume, but it doesn't mean that I feel them offensive... I do not consume, because I feel these are not good for health. That's all”.

“...My opinion? Personally I do not consume any of these two products. But if other people will consume it, I would not mind...”

Hindu respondents' perception toward alcohol and cigarette:

Hindu respondents' perception toward these products is similar to the Buddhists. They believe that these products are not encouraged to consume by their religion but not prohibited as well. In other words, they still have the freedom to consume these products or to leave it. They also agree with all other respondents in term of the fact that, these products have bad effects on human body, and excessive intake can cause harm as well. Nonetheless, they do not perceive these products as offensive; rather they consider it as a way for enjoyment. For example, they stated that:

“... From our religious perspective, harmful products are not allowed to consume. But now-a-days, many people are used to consume it. They don't mind to drink or smoke...”

“...From my perspective, these types of products are not encouraged to consume in my religion. But no compulsory restriction is being set by my religion. So, we have a freedom to choose, whether they want it or don't want. But in terms of social values, I

don't see any benefit from these two products. Right? For long term it of course may harm your health... These products do not have any productivity. The people take it only for amusement. That's all”.

“...I do not smoke and drink alcohol actually... I think it depends upon peoples' interest you know... some like to drink some like to smoke... if you are going in pub and drinking, then its ok. But when you are driving and you are drunk, then it is bad... It is bad when you are drunk and have lost your control upon you... otherwise its ok. Same goes for smoking. You cannot be chain smoker you know... it have some side effects...”

“...Ok, according to our culture, you should not get drink, it is not like that. But I think, in those days the guys they used to drink because they used to do hard work, for me it's not necessary that you should drink. If you are drinking with your friends just for enjoyment, then it's ok. But you should not drink all the time, I think now-a-days, it is ok. People, have accepted it. But if you say about religion, then the answer is 'no'. You shouldn't drink”.

Free thinkers' perception toward alcohol and cigarette:

Free thinkers did not perceive these two products as offensive at all. They expressed their opinion in terms of health consciousness regarding these two products. For example:

“...No, I don't think so. But excess intake is bad for health. So, in terms of health issue, the people need to be bit conscious regarding these products”.

“...Nothing wrong with smoking or drinking alcohol. Simply if you want to be conscious regarding your health, then you need to have a limit. That's it”.

Therefore, it can be said that, regardless of the religious values, all respondents perceived these two products as harmful for the health; it may cause diseases, and helps to waste one's money. For Muslim respondents, all of them considered alcohol as an offensive product because it has been prohibited in their religion. As for



cigarette, most of them did not consider it as offensive but mentioned that it should be consumed with limit as it has bad effect on the human body. Whereas, most of the Christian respondents neither perceived these products as offensive nor they found them against their religious values or beliefs. In addition, Buddhist and Hindu respondents did not consider these products offensive at all, but it goes against their religious values to some extent.

7. Consumer's perception, attitude and behavioral feelings towards advertising of controversial product (AOCP) from the religious perspective:

Malaysian government had banned the advertising of cigarette by all mass media and restricted the direct alcohol advertising for the broadcast media and on billboards, but freed the cinemas and video cassettes and the print media from these rules and regulations (Yong, 2007). Therefore, advertisements of these two products are confined only to the cinema and international magazine in Malaysia. This fact has been supported by the respondent's opinions as well. For example, in response to the question "where did you see this type of advertisement?" few of them answered the following:

"...in imported magazine and cinema..."

"...in international magazine only..."

"...in some type of magazine and Chinese newspaper..."

Respondents' perception, attitude and behavioral feelings toward AOCP are described in the following few paragraphs.

Consumers' perception and attitude toward AOCP:

Respondents' perception regarding the AOCP to great extent has been influenced by their cultural values and beliefs and their religious affiliation. The following few paragraphs provide support for these views.

Muslim respondents' perception and attitude:

Muslim respondents have differentiated between the advertisements for these two products on the basis of their religious faith. For cigarette, they mentioned that the advertisement is not

offensive if it is targeting the adult consumers. But for the advertisements of alcohol, they considered it as offensive because it goes against the Islamic rules and beliefs. As they have stated:

"...These kinds of advertisements are nice, but not advisable. The ad which is related to cigarette, its okay, but the ad which is related to alcohol is offensive. It goes against our religion".

"In Malaysia, you know we are very sensitive regarding alcohol and the advertisement of this product. Not only I, I think based on my religion everybody will dislike it. For the cigarette it's not offensive, but alcohol? It's not wise to give the ad of alcohol especially in public magazine".

Two respondents stated that these two products are offensive, but not the advertisement, as indicated in the following statements:

"...My perception!!! Nothing wrong in the advertisement!! Actually cigarette is harmful, alcohol is harmful... but advertisement is ok. But as the product is harmful, I think we shouldn't give advertisement".

"...The advertisement is ok, everything is well presented. But the products are harmful..."

As Malaysia is a multicultural and multi racial country, the Malay consumers seemed to be tolerable towards the other religions, races and values. For example, according to the Muslim Malay respondents, it is necessary to show respect towards the other cultural values. Therefore, it is also necessary to show tolerance toward these kinds of advertisements, but within certain rules and regulations. According to them:

"...If you are talking from the religion perspective, then ad of alcohol should be banned. But if you do that then you have 60 % Muslims along with the 40 % non-Muslims. So if you say that it is predominantly a Muslim country, if most of the people are Muslim, then you can do it".



“...You are living in a society like Malaysia, and then you have to know that many other religions allow drinking alcohol. If you ban alcohol, then you ban the advertisement. But you can't ban it. But you can reduce the advertisement, for the cigarette ad it's not offensive, because is not totally haram, but don't overdo it”.

“...We are in multiracial country, so we are neutral regarding these products and advertisement, but it should be advertised in certain channels which are not targeting the Muslim community”.

Nevertheless, two Muslim Malay respondents were very strict in their opinion and considered these advertisements as offensive and they recommended banning these advertisements as well. For example:

“...100% these advertisements and products are against my religion faith and believes , and advertisement for these products should be ban by government level specially in Islamic countries, and I do believe that advertising that promote offensive products is also offensive”.

“...I think these advertisements are very misleading. These are trying to create images that will help those companies to promote their products”.

Christian respondents' perception and attitude:
Perception of AOCPP of the Christian respondents' is different from the Muslim respondents. One respondent mentioned that AOCPP are not offensive at all, but rather misleading. For example, *“These are not offensive at all. But for me, these are very much misleading. That's it. But not offensive at all...”*. However, mostly they did not perceive these advertisements as offensive; instead find it attractive and creative way to promote the products. For example they have mentioned as follows:

“...Both are ok for me. May be the people of other religion might consider it as offensive, but for me, I do not find any problem with these kinds of products or advertisement at all”.

“...From religious view, these advertisements are okay. I like to see them. I really enjoy these advertisements. Very creative, ya? Offensive? No!! Rather I enjoy these advertisements.”

“... I do not like these types of ad. But these are really very innovative and charming as well. They produce these kinds of ad by showing some sorts of foolish image”.

“My perception is ok. I do not have problem with these products and advertisement”.

Buddhist respondents' perception and attitude:
The Buddhists' perception for these advertisements is similar to Christian respondents. They considered these advertisements as normal, not offensive. Moreover, they consider these advertisements as charming and creative way to reach the target market. The following statements highlight their perception:

“...It's nice to see... Advertisements are ok. Because these are the way of marketing the product. Because if you are a marketer you have to tell your people about your product and you need to try to attract them...”

“...No, for me, no... But let say, you are using any sexist appeal in your advertisement, then it might be offensive or bit vulgar”.

“... For me, it's ok. I like these advertisements. These are really charming and creative... Both are fine with me.... No, I do not think so, both of them ok and not offensive for me”.

Hindu respondents' perception and attitude:
Hindus' perception for AOCPP is a bit different compared to others. They perceived this type of advertisement as offensive because children also can watch it. Moreover, their opinion is similar with other respondents that these advertisements are the company tools to reach different customers. For example:

“... I am against both alcohol and cigarette, and this media are watched by youngsters and it's an unhealthy exposure... It's offensive as being in multi religion country as it does affect the morality and individual life”.



“...Really I don't like these two products as well as their advertisements, simply because these products don't have any positive side!”

“...If I am looking from the advertisement perspective. Sometimes the school going children also can be influenced by these types of ads. Therefore, these products should not be allowed in the public advertisement or in any media”.

“... I think this is just the way to sell the product ... and to send the message related to the product to the people around you... I think this is the way to marketing your products. It's ok. But there should be a limit on it”.

Free thinkers' perception and attitude:

Like Christians and Buddhists, the Non-religious believers (2) also did not find any problem with these types of advertisements, as indicated by the following statements:

“It's ok. Nothing good, nothing bad. Like other advertisement”.

“It's ok. As usual. But the advertisements given in the cinema are more attractive than the magazine advertisement”.

On the basis of above discussions, it can be said that majority of Muslim respondents considered these advertisements as offensive especially for alcohol, because it is against Islamic rules and regulation. However, they did not consider cigarette as offensive. But as Malaysia is a multi-cultural country, most of them have mentioned that they should be more tolerable for these advertisements as long as it is not targeting the Muslim community. In general, the Christian, Buddhist, and non-believer respondents did not consider these types of advertisements as offensive as long as it is not targeting the children. They considered these advertisements as charming and creative way to reach the market and promote the products. For Hindu respondents, they considered these advertisements offensive because it can affect the children.

Consumer's behavioral feelings and action:

Respondents' reaction regarding these products and advertisements ranged from 'nothing to do it because we don't have the power', to 'we will voice up and ask the government to ban these type of advertisements'.

Muslim respondents' opinions:

Muslim respondents felt that they would advise others not to consume these products because it has been prohibited in Islam and also for its bad effect on health. They want to instill the Islamic values and beliefs in their children so that they can realize and understand that these products are 'haram' and not healthy. Some of their statements are as follows:

“...I will forbid who is my close, my brother, my husband... I of course will tell them not to take these products”.

“...I want to give my daughter in a religious school. So that they can understand what is right and what is wrong and can control them”.

“...For me, I will not be influenced by seeing these kinds of ad. As a multi racial county, I will not be angry upon those advertisements as well. But of course I will inform my family members, my children that in Islam it is haram. So that their mind set will be like that as well”.

In general, all of the respondents were of the opinion that the Malaysian government has already set regulation for advertisements of cigarette and alcohol, and therefore, it is not possible to see this kind of advertisement in any public media like TV, radio or billboard. However, if they see any advertisement like this, they would make an official complain and would ask the government to regulate these types of advertisements by legislating the necessary rules and laws that will control these types of advertisements. For example:

“...Yes, I will make an official complain if I see anything is coming publicly and that goes against the rules and values”.

“...Of course. If I will see these types of ad in TV or radio, I will make official complain...”



“...A person can't do much thing, but we can advise our friends our relative to not have this habit. I think we need to combine our effort together to voice to the government to ban this thing in our country”.

“... First of all, these kinds of ad should be restricted in the TV within a specific time period. You should not show these kinds of ad in the TV or any public media in a prime time when lots of Muslims are watching the TV specially the kids. If you want to show these ads, you better broadcast them at late night and in paying channel not in the general public channel. I think in this way”.

Some of the Muslim respondents have said that this is a multicultural country and therefore they should be more tolerable for these types of advertisements so far it is not targeting the Muslim community. Below are some examples of their statements:

“...For me, I will not be influenced by seeing these kinds of ad. As a multi racial country, I will not be angry upon those advertisement as well. But of course I will inform my family members, my children that in Islam it is haram. So that there mind set will be like that as well”.

“...But I think we need not to ban it totally. Because, we have multi culture in Malaysia. So we have to allow some flexibility. But only what we can do is, limiting it”.

Christian respondents' opinions:

Mostly, the Christian respondents stated that they will not react by seeing AOC. However, some of them expressed that they should be careful about their children by prohibiting them from seeing AOC and teaching them that these products are bad for health. Again, they have mentioned they will advise their friends and relatives as well. One of them noted that he would not do any thing because simply he would enjoy seeing these types of advertisements. Examples for the support of these views are as follows:

“...Why shall I take any action?...no I will not do anything....any way In Malaysia you will not see any advertisement regarding

alcohol or cigarette in the public media. So there is already some restriction, isn't it?”

“...If I will watch it in the TV along with my kids, then I will be bit worried about it. But otherwise, I don't care. I will just change the channel. Or I may try to divert my kids' concentration on that moment from watching that particular ad. That's all. And of course, I will teach them that these products are not healthy. So that they will get a strong morality and will able to control themselves from taking any harmful product”.

Buddhist respondents' opinions:

Like Christian respondents, Buddhist respondents also shared the same behavioral feelings i.e., they will not react by seeing AOC as this is a multicultural country with different races, religions, and cultures. Below are some examples of their responses:

“...For the product it self, there is already some rules and regulation are imposed. For example, in the packet of cigarette you will see it is always written that it is bad for health. But still people are consuming. So the rules are already there. For advertisement? I do not feel that there is any problem by showing these kinds of advertisements. Who will like to take it, they will buy, but who don't want, they will not buy...”

“...I do not think so... why shall I do? This is a multi racial and multi cultural country. Different people, different mindset, different cultural influences... different liking and disliking... so I don't think that I will take any move against it. But of course I will share my opinion with my close friends, my family members, my relatives...but I do believe there should be regulation that organizes the advertisement for these products, especially for our children”.

Hindu respondents' opinions:

The Hindu respondents insisted that the government should set regulation for AOC and they have proposed some suggestions as follows:



“... I think, as an individual we cannot do much. But the Government can take some action. For example, the Government can charge more for these types of advertisement; can impose tax 10 times higher for these advertisements than other products. And definitely must not advertised in public media... As a father I must teach them so that they will not indulge themselves. And they will mix with their friends, so if they have right learning, they will not follow their friends also. So we need to play an important role as parents”.

“...I think advertisement is needed for marketing. So I think, these kinds of advertisements should be shown after 11 or 12 o’ clock, when kids will not be watching the TV. And advertising for these products should be limited”.

“... If it’s wrong by law, yes I will. But, if not, then it is the individual’s right...I will not go so far ...”

On the basis of the above discussions, it can be said that regardless of the religious beliefs all respondents are very much conscious about the impact and affect of CPs and their advertisements on the children. Most of the respondents pointed that they will actively inform their children, relatives and friends about these products and advice them not to consume these products. The majority of them stated that AOCP should not target the children, and alcohol should not be targeted for the Muslims. Moreover, CPs should be restricted to be sold in certain places only.

8. Discussion and Formulating the Research Propositions:

On the basis of the summary and analysis following propositions have been developed. The propositions and the support for these arguments are given below.

Consumers’ health consciousness:

The advertising of tobacco and alcoholic beverages raised concern around the globe (Baudot, 1991). Controversy stems from advertising’s pervasiveness in daily life combined with allegations as to its negative

impact on health, personal values and economic decisions (Baudot, 1991). However, health consciousness among the consumers is growing in recent years all over the world. People’s concern for health indicates that their health orientation plays an integral part in their selection many products, services (Granzin et al., 1998). This fact is supported by the findings of this study. Analysis of the 22 in-depth interviews reveals that the respondents who are very health conscious they do not have positive perception either for CP or AOCP. Some examples in favor of this idea are as follows:

“...these products are offensive case it can harm the people, I saw it in my father side, they will drink till they can’t think properly...”

“...these products are harmful for our body, our soul, our brain, we should not consume these products at all, and the advertisement should be ban totally even in cinema or magazine...”

“...But if you are careful about your health, then you must stop...”

“...Yes, it is clinically proven, that it is bad for health... many countries have restricted the consumption of cigarette as well...”

“...Everybody knows that cigarette can affect the lung. Therefore, we must not take it too much...”

“...Cigarette can affect your lung. And alcohol can divert your thinking capacity...”

“...I think its not related much to my religion, but basically we mature enough and have basic knowledge, and we should know that smoking damage our health...”

Therefore, the following proposition has been developed:

Research proposition 1: Health conscious consumers have negative perception toward CP and AOCP

CP and AOCP’s Impact on children:

In all societies, advertising appeals of alcohol and tobacco to the children and young have drawn criticism (Baudot, 1991; Hastings & Aitkan, 1995). Even though it is argued that children, as well as adults, smoke in response to



peer pressure, or family practice, the demonstration effect of glamorous ‘role model advertising’ and ‘advertising at sports events’ may also be a factor and are highly controversial (Baudot, 1991). Anderson et al. (2009) also found support for it. They stated that in markets with greater availability of alcohol advertising, young people are likely to increase their drinking as they move into their mid-20s, whereas, drinking decreases at an earlier age in people who are less exposed to it. In the present study, it is found that respondents who have children are very much worried about the harmful effect of alcohol and tobacco on their children. Content analysis reveals that, consumers who have children are more conscious to avoid CP and AOCF. As some of them have stated:

“... also this advertisement has great effect on children hence they should stop this kind of advertisements...”

“...For adult who are late 30s, I think they don’t face any problem. But for the children the advertisement should be prohibited. I am very against of these two products. You know, the ads for alcohol are always very attractive...”

“...You know, my mother has sent me to a religious school in my childhood. I also want to give my daughter in a religious school. So that they can understand what is right and what is wrong and can control themselves...”

“...As a father I must teach them so that they will not indulge themselves. And they will mix with their friends, so if they have right learning, they will not follow their friends also...”

“...if they (children) are not targeted but they are seeing it and they can be influenced by these kinds of ad. High school students, especially the teen agers you, know, it is very bad for them. That is very dangerous...”

“...Mainly, the young fellow, who are teenager and school going children, who like to live in the fantasy... you know, what I mean...”

“...You know, the youngsters, they are not matured enough and they might caught in it. Because these advertisements are always very attractive. The marketers make it in

such a way that the people tend to convince especially the youngsters. Some of them might try and get addicted to it...”

Thus it has been posited that:

Research proposition 2: Consumers with children are more sensitive (negatively) towards CP and AOCF

Religious impact on perception and consumption of CP and AOCF:

The influence of religious beliefs on individual and social behavior is well documented (see Luqmany et al., 1987; Waller & Fam, 2000). According to Mittelstaedt (2002), religion can exert authority over market activity in four ways: (i) politically, through sheer force; (ii) institutionally, through control over nonmarket aspects of life; (iii) socially, by shaping expectations of individual and firm behavior, and (iv) competitively, when religious organizations participate directly in the marketplace by goods or services. It is understood that in Malaysia, religion plays a great role in consumers’ consumption pattern. For example, being a Muslim country, the government has banned the advertisement of alcohol and tobacco in broadcast media. However, both beer and distilled spirits companies advertise in cinema and print media and sponsor sporting events, rock concerts and charitable events (Jernigan & Indran, 2004). Moreover, among the other religious believers, Muslim respondents showed their negative perceptions towards CP and AOCF consistently than the others. For example, only one Christian respondent said that alcohol and cigarette is not encouraged to consume in their religion, while the rest have stated that it is not prohibited. Same trend has been found among Hindus and Buddhists as well.

Thus it is postulated that:

Research proposition 3: Compared to other religious believers, Muslim consumers have strong negative perception toward CP and AOCF.

Nonetheless, Muslim consumers perceived alcohol consumption as ‘haram’ (strictly



prohibited) whereas; their opinion is more lenient for the consumption of cigarette. For example:

“... As a Muslim, cigarette is ok. But drinking alcohol we must not. Because it is haram...”

“...Since I smoke occasionally, I do not feel it is as offensive... But when it is related to alcohol, of course it is offensive. Because it is haram in Islam...”

“...In Islam, alcohol is totally haram. But cigarette, it is not totally haram...”

Therefore, the following proposition has been suggested:

Research proposition 4: Muslim consumers are very strict toward CP and AOCF of alcohol rather than cigarette consumption

9. Conclusion and Implications:

This study shows that religion plays a greater role on consumers' perceptions of CP and AOCF. On the basis of religious beliefs, different respondents have different opinions and perceptions towards the controversial products and its advertisements. All of the Muslim respondents have showed negative feelings towards alcohol and its advertisement as it is being considered as 'haram' in their religion. But for cigarette their perception is more flexible. On the other hand, the majority of Christian, Buddhist and the non-believers considered these advertisements as not offensive but rather attractive and creative way to reach the customers. Beside that Hindu respondents' opinion were alike Muslims. They have perceived these advertisements negatively due to its harmful effect on children. Therefore, these advertisements should maintain certain rules and regulation. Furthermore, though they find these advertisements attractive, many of the respondents stated that they would make complain against these kinds of advertisements if it is being shown in the public media publicly. They have also stated that this is government's responsibility to maintain certain rules and regulation regarding the advertisements of these kinds of products to limit the consumption of alcohol and cigarette. In nutshell, though broadcasting the advertisements of alcohol and

cigarette is banned in Malaysia, still this country is the tenth largest consumer of alcohol in the world (Yahaya, 2008). It can be said that, imposing the rules and regulation cannot reduce the consumption of alcohol and cigarette totally, religious faiths also takes part in this regard. Last but not the least, it is being understood that most of the respondents are very much health conscious regardless of their religious beliefs and faiths. Therefore, they have mentioned that it is better to limit the consumption of these two products as well.

Findings of the present study contribute to both theory and practice. First, it is necessary for the international marketer to concentrate their effort to understand the religious beliefs and values of the country especially where various races and different religion people staying together like Malaysia. Second, as Malaysian consumers are very much health conscious regardless of race or religious faiths, it is important for the marketer to provide more information regarding the health and cigarette and alcohol consumption. Third, International marketer should be conscious about the sensitivity of these product especially alcohol for Muslim community, therefore, advertisements for these products should be through certain channel like the magazine or cinema that will not target the Muslim community. Lastly, it can be suggested that the international marketers can target the Christian and Buddhist consumers to market alcohol for the purpose of profitability.

10. Limitation and Future Research

Directions:

Although the present study contributes new knowledge to the existing literature, it is not free from some limitations. However, the limitations from this study provide research direction for the future studies. First, the current study has chosen university students as the sample pool. Therefore, it can be suggested to conduct future study by taking the respondents of different area other than the education institution and comprising different age groups and education levels to get more concrete result in this topic. Besides that, this study has utilized the advertisement of two controversial products



only: cigarette and alcohol. For future researchers, it is recommended to use more controversial products like underwear, contraception, and famine hygiene products to

generate more powerful conclusion regarding the effect of religion upon advertisements of the controversial products.



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Appendix A

Interview Protocol for the in-depth interviews

Respondent background

1. Name
2. Age
3. Race
4. Religion
5. Gender
6. Faculty
7. Program

Consumers' perception towards controversial products i.e., alcohol and cigarette on the basis of their religious beliefs

8. What is your perception about alcohol and cigarette?
9. Is allowed to consume these two products in your religion?
10. Do you think these products have negative side effect on the individual and the entire society?
11. Do you think that these products give you the feeling of confidence? Or do feel that you look more attractive?

Consumers' perception, attitude and behavioral feelings towards AOCP

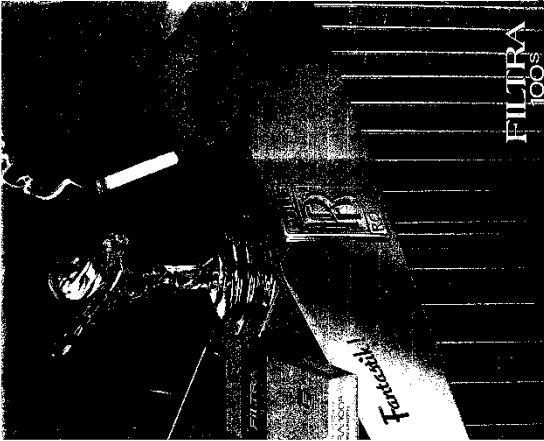
12. Have you ever seen any advertisement related to alcohol and cigarette?
13. If yes, where did you see this advertisement? TV? Newspaper? Bill board? Magazine?
14. How do you perceive these advertisements?
15. Do you think its offensive? If yes, why? If not, why?
16. Do you enjoy these types of advertisements? If yes, why?/ If not, why?
17. Do you think these types of advertisement go against your own believes, values, culture and your religion?
18. Do you think AOCP may increase the percentage of smoker and drunker in the society?
19. If you see advertisement regarding alcohol and/or cigarette in the public media, will you complain to different social/consumer groups officially against these products/ advertisement?



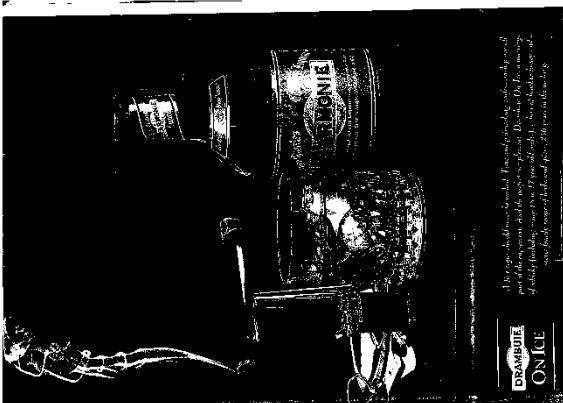
Appendix B

The images of the advertisements that have been shown to the respondents for the research purpose

a. First advertisement



b. Second advertisement



c. Third advertisement

