

# **The Role of Religiosity and Demographics on Attitude towards Advertising of Controversial Products**

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*This study aims to explore the consumers' attitude towards promotion of controversial products, the reasons why they are controversial and how the degree of religious commitment in Sudan affects attitude. The study presents the results of an online survey of 203 Sudanese respondents to determine the type of products seen as controversial when advertised on TV and why considered controversial. The results revealed that in general Sudanese hold negative perceptions of controversial products and their advertisements. The findings revealed that the religious beliefs can potentially impact the perception of offensive advertising among Sudanese. Muslims of different levels of religious commitment show different degrees of offensiveness to controversial products advertising. The study also found that age, gender, and education have effects on survey participants' attitude towards some products controversial advertising. These findings may have important implications for international marketers in countries with religious orientations such as Sudan, or other Muslim countries.*

**Field of Research:** Marketing

**Keywords:** Attitude; Controversial advertising; Offensive; Religion; Sudan, demographics.

## **1. Introduction**

Religion is one of the most universal and influential social institutions that have significant influence on people's attitudes, values and behavior at both the individual and societal levels (Mokhlis 2009). It is considered as an integral part of culture that plays a significant role in shaping people's social and ethical behavior and its influence is observable in all aspects of Muslim personal and societal life. This influence depends on the extent or degree a person adheres to his or her religious values. The more religious a person is, the higher concern of moral standards and the more of being conservative, (Waller et al 2002).

Sudan is a multi-cultural, multilingual, multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country where such diversities co-exist' (Sudan Constitution 2005). Muslims constitute the vast majority (97% of its population) and the Islamic law and shariah rules form the foundation of the political, judicial, economic, and social systems. As such the Islamic religion plays a significant role in shaping people's views and values and governing their attitudes and behavior. Regulations controlling public media are deeply influenced by Islamic principles. Controversial advertisements in forms or contents that contradict religion, traditions, public ethics, and moral issues are not allowed to be aired on the Sudanese public and private TV channels.

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Yet Sudanese are exposed to such advertisements on foreign satellite channels which air these ads normally during the day and night.

This study will, therefore, examine the Sudanese attitudes towards advertising of certain controversial products and the reasons why an advertisement is seen as controversial. It is noted that the number of controversial advertisements is increasing and audiences are more likely to be offended (Waller 2005). Further, the study will analyze what influence religiosity has on attitudes towards the advertising of certain controversial products. Understanding of how religious beliefs and their intensity influence offense towards advertising of controversial products are of great importance to international advertisers and advertising agency managers in their efforts to improve advertising effectiveness.

The paper also examines the influence of demographics such as age, gender, and education level on attitudes towards controversial advertisements and the reasons for such controversies.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: first, the review of the related literature is presented; followed by methods used, then the findings are presented and discussed, and finally the conclusion of the study is presented.

## 2. Literature Review

The influence of Islamic beliefs on individual and social behaviour is well documented (Luqmani et al. 1987; Michell and Al-Mossawi (1995); Michell and Al-Mossawi 1999; Waller and Fam 2000; Fam 2004; Mustafa 2011, Mansour & Diab (2016), Mohammad et al (2015)). For instance, in his study on advertising in Saudi Arabia, Luqmani et al. (1989) claimed that provocative and unconventional advertising strategies and advertisements must obtain prior approval from religious authorities. Failure to do so will result in alienation of a wide segment of the conservative Saudi public. Michell and Al-Mossawi (1995) investigated the religiosity effect on consumer attitudes toward advertising messages among British Christians and Muslims. They found that both Christian and Muslim respondents with higher levels of religiosity had significantly less favorable attitudes towards a contentious message, and conservative Muslims had much lower recall scores than liberal Muslims. Mostafa (2011) investigated Egyptian consumers' attitudes toward advertising ethical issues and found that Muslims are more offended by unethical advertising than non-Muslims. Abassi et al (2011) investigated the ethical issues in the contemporary advertising campaigns of controversial products in Pakistan from *Shariah* perspective. The results revealed that Level of offensiveness towards advertisements of controversial products was found to be significantly associated with religious perceptions and nature of advertising appeals. Nudity and sexist images as advertising appeals were found to have a significant association with the level of offensiveness of the consumers. Mansour & Diab (2016), reported that advertisements that depict female, singers, and actors or using music or anything that contradicts Islamic guidance, may be considered offensive to devoted Muslims in Sudan. Mohammad et al (2015) studied the effect of religion on Malaysian consumers' perception and attitude towards two controversial products only: cigarette and alcohol and their advertisement as the domain of macro-marketing. They found that Muslim consumers are more reluctant towards such products and their advertisement compared to other consumers. Fam et al. (2004) investigated the influence of religion and intensity of belief on attitudes towards advertising of particular controversial products and services across six different countries. They found that devout followers of Islam considered advertising of gender/sex related products,

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social/political groups, health and care products, and addictive products very offensive compared to their more liberal followers and more offensive relative to other religions. Mansour (2014) examined the impact of religious commitment on consumers' attitudes toward ethical issues in advertising in Sudan. The findings revealed that the higher the degree of religious commitment the greater the degree of rejection and non-acceptance of the unethical offensive practices in advertising especially with regard to the misuse of women and children in TV advertisement.

Controversial advertising can be defined as "advertising that, by the type of product or execution, can elicit reactions of embarrassment, distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage from a segment of the population when presented" (Waller 2004). Controversial advertising refers to the products that may harm the public morals, affect the physical health or considered socially indecent (e.g. using indecent language) and unmentionable in public because they are offensive, embarrassing or publicly sensitive. Wilson & West (1981) brought out a description of what can be controversial: "products, services or concepts that for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality or even fear, tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or openly presented. Katsanis (1994) has further extended the definition of offensive products, as being "offensive, embarrassing, unhealthy, harmful to the environment, sexually oriented, or controversial to some significant segment of the population".

The advertising of controversial products and the use of controversial images appears to be increasing around the world. Some products, simply because of their nature, may be perceived as controversial or some members of the community may see the public promotion of them as offensive. However, apart from the general ethical issue regarding the deliberate use of controversial/offensive images for public viewing that may offend some people, it is important to determine attitudes towards offensive advertising (Waller & Fam 2000). Controversial advertisements which cause a negative reaction, and thereby offense, can result in a number of actions like negative publicity, attracting complaints to advertising regulatory bodies, falling sales, and product boycotts (Fam & Waller, 2003).

Past studies on controversial advertising (Wilson and West 1995, Waller (1999); Waller and Fam, 2000, Waller *et al.* 2005) have suggested several products as being controversial when advertised, including cigarettes, alcohol, contraceptives, underwear, political advertising, female hygiene products, male under-wears, pharmaceutical goods, political parties, weight loss programs and sexual diseases are all seen as controversial advertisements.

The potential of an advertisement to offend depends not only on the products and services, but also on the type of appeals and the manner of presentation. Previous studies examining advertising that can potentially offend have primarily centered on three basic aspects – the products being advertised, the creative execution used and the medium within which an advertisement is displayed.

The studies reviewed have been conducted in countries and societies where religion does not play a vital role in shaping the way of people behavior, thinking and attitudes. They have almost all been carried out in liberal or at least open societies. This study, however, focuses on Sudan, a rather conservative country, where religion shapes and interfere in many aspects of societal life, and as such expected to direct and affect people attitudes. In such a way this study fills a gap in the literature by attempting to examine the perceptions of a relatively conservative society towards controversial advertisements. Moreover, not like

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many studies on the topic, this study attempts to serve a dual role of studying both the perception of the consumers of controversial products and services and at the same time examining the reasons behind the offensiveness of those products and services.

Based on the above discussion, the study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What types of products advertising are considered controversial?
2. What are the most common reasons behind considering controversial products advertisements offensiveness for Sudanese consumers?
3. Does the level of religiosity have an influence on the way of perceiving controversial advertisements as offensive?
4. Do age, gender and education level have an influence on attitude towards controversial advertising?

### 3. Methodology

To ascertain the degree to which the sample chosen for this study being offended by the advertising of controversial products, an online survey questionnaire was used for collecting the data to measure the attitude towards advertising of certain controversial products, and the reasons why they are controversial. The study used a survey administered through Google Forms survey and was circulated to participants through Facebook social network pages. The survey instrument included a list of 15 products from which respondents were asked to indicate their level of personal "offense" on a five-point scale, where 1 means "Not At All" offensive and 5 means "Extremely" offensive. The list of products/services presented was based on Waller (1999). The list of products includes Alcohol, Cigarettes, Condoms, Female Contraceptives, Female Hygiene Products, Female & Male Underwear, Funeral Services, Gambling, Charities, Pharmaceuticals, Political Parties, Racially Extremist Groups, Religious Denominations, Sexual Diseases (AIDS, STD Prevention), and Weight Loss Programs. The reasons for the offense were also from (Waller, 1999) and include subject too personal, antisocial behavior, unethical, racist image, sexiest image, violence, stereotyping of people, concern for children, hard sell, indecent language, and nudity.

The study used a seven- point Likert scale to measure the respondents' views towards the stated reasons for offensiveness. The idea was to give the respondents more flexibility and a wider range and scale to evaluate the reasons for offensiveness. Also included in the questionnaire were questions relating to demographics, and intensity of religious belief, where the respondents asked to rate their religious commitment on a rather, five-point scale where (1= not at all committed, 5= extremely committed). This is because religiosity is a self-evaluated variable and does not require that much of flexibility as reasons evaluation does.

It should be mentioned here that previous studies focused on gender or religiosity dimensions only, while this study introduces, besides religiosity, additional demographic factors of age, gender and education variables. Moreover, the study, using regression analysis examine whether the demographic variables have significant effects, on the attitude towards the products or also on the reasons for offensiveness.

### 4. Results And Analysis

#### 4.1 Sample

A total of 203 useable questionnaires were obtained, the respondents were Muslims and reasonably committed Muslims. The age group of 20-30 made up most of the respondents at 70%, followed by 31-40 age group at 22 % and only 8% above 40 years old. In terms of gender, most of the total respondents (56%) were male while (44%) were female.

#### 4.2 Attitude towards Advertising of Controversial Products

In order to measure the attitude towards the advertising of controversial products, the respondents were presented with a list of 15 products being advertised to indicate their level of being controversial. With a midpoint of 4 on a 7 point Likert scale descriptive analysis of data on table 2 shows that of the top five controversial advertising , alcohol (mean =6.41) was perceived to be most controversial when advertised, followed by Racially extreme groups (mean = 6.37) , Gambling (mean = 6.12), Cigarettes(mean = 5.70), Religious denominations (mean = 5.67), Pharmaceuticals (mean = 5.67), Condoms(mean = 5.0), underwear (mean =4.49), Female contraceptives(mean =4.24), Political parties(mean = 4.36). However, the results of this study revealed that Sexual diseases, Weight loss programs, Female hygiene products, Funeral services and Charities were perceived as not controversial with the mean score less than 4.

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**Table 1: descriptive Statistics of Controversial Ads and Their Underlying Reasons**

Product	Total Mean	SD
Alcohol (1 )	6.41	1.37
Cigarettes (5)	5.70	1.76
Gambling(3 )	6.12	1.54
Female contraceptives (10)	4.24	2.15
Condoms( 7)	5.00	2.17
Pharmaceuticals( 6)	5.38	1.87
female hygiene products	3.42	2.14
Underwear (8)	4.49	2.08
Sexual diseases	1.60	1.32
weight loss programs	2.02	1.61
Funeral services	2.28	1.76
Political parties (9)	4.36	2.20
Racially extreme groups( 2)	6.37	1.50
Religious Denominations (4)	5.86	1.87
Charity	1.92	1.56
Too personal subjects	4.19	2.16
anti-social behavior	5.28	2.06
Unethical (4)	4.99	2.02
Sexy images (5)	5.49	1.89
Racist images (1)	5.72	1.92
Guns and armaments	4.87	2.20
Western cultures	4.39	2.17
Childrenconcern (2)	5.71	1.83
Hardsell	4.53	2.16
indecent language	4.11	2.06
Nudity (3)	5.65	1.90
Stereo typing	5.10	2.23

In general when comparing the high committed Muslims (HC) (mean score  $\geq 3$ ) and less committed Muslims (LC) (mean score  $< 3$ ) the results revealed that respondents with high religious commitment tend to find advertising of controversial products more offensive relative to those with less religious commitments for all products except for Racially extreme groups and charity. However, there are significant differences between high committed Muslims and less committed Muslims with respect to advertising of alcohol ( $H=6.492$  &  $L=5.846$ , sig. 025), cigarette ( $H=5.825$  &  $L=4.885$ , sig. 010), pharmaceuticals ( $H=5.497$  &  $L=4.615$ , sig. 024), and underwear ( $H=4.61$  &  $L=3.654$ , sig. 028).

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**Table 2: Religiosity commitment and Perceptions of Controversial Products advertisements**

	Religiosity	Mean	SD	t
Alcohol	HC	6.492	1.2618	2.260*
	LC	5.846	1.9119	
Cigarettes	HC	5.825	1.6814	2.586*
	LC	4.885	2.0460	
Gambling	HC	6.186	1.5353	1.531
	LC	5.692	1.5432	
Female contraceptives	HC	4.311	2.1265	1.202
	LC	3.769	2.2682	
Condoms	HC	5.062	2.1404	.980
	LC	4.615	2.3677	
Pharmaceuticals	HC	5.497	1.8251	2.269*
	LC	4.615	2.0214	
female hygiene products	HC	3.492	2.1667	1.268
	LC	2.923	1.8957	
Underwear	HC	4.610	2.0506	2.209*
	LC	3.654	2.1343	
Sexual diseases	HC	1.616	1.3565	.556
	LC	1.462	1.0288	
weight loss programs	HC	2.040	1.6144	.343
	LC	1.923	1.6229	
Funeral services	HC	2.339	1.8148	1.233
	LC	1.885	1.2434	
Political parties	HC	4.384	2.1975	.332
	LC	4.231	2.2326	
Racially extreme groups	HC	6.333	1.5655	-.892
	LC	6.615	.9829	
Religious dominations	HC	5.876	1.8329	.275
	LC	5.769	1.9038	
Charity	HC	1.910	1.5495	-.158
	LC	1.962	1.6609	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

In various studies, age has been found as a significant segmentation approach regarding attitude towards advertising. In Malaysia Ting and de run (2012) found significant differences between age groups (generation X (<=30 years) and generation Y (=> 30 years)) in attitude towards controversial advertising. While generation X found the advertising of female contraceptives, feminine hygiene products, and funeral services to be more controversial, generation y found the advertising of alcohol products, condoms and gambling more controversial. Furthermore, generation X found safety and health issues to be reasons for controversy, generation Y found hardsell, nudity, racist images, sexist images and personal matters as the significant reasons for controversy.

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**Table 3: Age and Perceptions of Controversial Products advertisements**

	Age	Mean	S.D.	T
Alcohol	>= 30	6.717	.9931	2.085**
	< 30	6.280	1.4890	
Cigarettes	>= 30	5.967	1.4954	1.382
	< 30	5.594	1.8471	
Gambling	>= 30	6.433	1.1842	1.869***
	< 30	5.993	1.6551	
Female contraceptives	>= 30	3.633	1.9655	-2.652*
	< 30	4.497	2.1750	
Condoms	>= 30	4.233	2.3533	-3.365*
	< 30	5.329	2.0098	
Pharmaceuticals	>= 30	4.883	2.0092	-2.505**
	< 30	5.594	1.7732	
Female hygiene products	>= 30	3.300	2.0361	-.512
	< 30	3.469	2.1845	
Underwear	>= 30	4.167	2.0844	-1.427
	< 30	4.622	2.0720	
Sexual diseases	>= 30	1.617	1.3789	.144
	< 30	1.587	1.2964	
weight loss programs	>= 30	2.017	1.4786	-.045
	< 30	2.028	1.6697	
Funeral services	>= 30	2.367	1.8223	.450
	< 30	2.245	1.7329	
Political parties	>= 30	4.467	2.0375	.428
	< 30	4.322	2.2661	
Racially extreme groups	>= 30	6.567	1.3196	1.211
	< 30	6.287	1.5728	
Religious denominations	>= 30	6.383	1.3912	2.657*
	< 30	5.643	1.9587	
Charity	>= 30	2.400	1.9151	2.914*
	< 30	1.713	1.3407	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

Earlier studies in Malaysia (e.g. Fam and Waller, 2003) also found that younger generations (age average 21) perceived racist and sexist images and nudity among the top reasons for controversy. However, younger generations are becoming less interested and bound by family's traditions, superstition, and cultural values.

However, Sabri (2012) found that younger subjects were more receptive to "edgy" advertising appeals. What is regarded as offensive by older subjects was judged as cool and creative by younger counterparts.

Comparing gender, Waller (2004) found that females were more offended by condoms and women underwear advertisements than the males. However, no significant differences were found between age groups. A study by Fam et al (2008) found significant differences between males and females and older and younger generations participated in a survey towards alcohol and condoms in China.



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Thus it is plausible to examine whether these two demographic variables together with a third variable, education, are significant variables in directing and influencing attitudes towards controversial advertising in Sudan, together with reasons behind such controversy. Tables 3-5 shows the sample divided along age, gender and education level. Table 3 shows that regardless of religious commitment, age is a significant factor in the attitude towards the controversial product advertisements for alcohol, gambling, female contraceptives, condoms, pharmaceutical, religious denominations, and charity. This result makes sense since young people perception and evaluation of these advertisements and their subject matter are expected to differ.

Table 4 posts the results of the survey with respect to gender, as it is reasonable to assume that attitude towards advertising material may be influenced by the sex of the survey participant. The table shows that there are significant differences between the two sexes with respect to female contraceptives, sexual diseases, and weight loss advertisements. Males are found to be more offended by these advertisements than women regardless of their religious commitments.

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**Table 4: Gender and Perceptions of Controversial Products**

	Gender	Mean	SD	T
Alcohol	M	6.469	1.3166	.698
	F	6.333	1.4456	
Cigarettes	M	5.673	1.8441	-.289
	F	5.744	1.6460	
Gambling	M	6.248	1.4112	1.293
	F	5.967	1.6857	
Female contraceptives	M	4.496	2.0491	1.902***
	F	3.922	2.2347	
Condoms	M	5.062	2.1476	.419
	F	4.933	2.2072	
Pharmaceuticals	M	5.363	1.7731	-.182
	F	5.411	1.9938	
Female hygiene products	M	3.531	2.0662	.838
	F	3.278	2.2287	
Underwear	M	4.593	1.9894	.807
	F	4.356	2.1945	
Sexual diseases	M	1.779	1.5396	2.235**
	F	1.367	.9295	
Weight loss programs	M	2.283	1.7802	2.597
	F	1.700	1.3107	
Funeral services	M	2.442	1.8123	1.474
	F	2.078	1.6708	
Political parties	M	4.389	2.2969	.180
	F	4.333	2.0772	
Racially extreme groups	M	6.372	1.5595	.024
	F	6.367	1.4414	
Religious denominations	M	5.929	1.9073	.582
	F	5.778	1.7532	
Charity	M	2.053	1.7105	1.404
	Female	1.744	1.3371	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

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Table 5 takes a look at the effect of the level of education on the attitude towards controversial products advertising. Postgraduates, who are usually older and more mature seems to be more offended by ads related to condoms and weight loss products and services while younger undergraduates show more tolerance towards these ads since these products are not in their direct circle of immediate attention and concern. Younger students, however, show less tolerance towards religious denominations advertisements than postgraduate students, indicating more religious tolerance and acceptance of other religious denominations and groups.

**Table 5: Education and Perceptions of Controversial Products advertisements**

	Education	Mean	SD	t
Alcohol	UG	6.407	1.4007	-.017
	PG	6.410	1.3592	
Cigarettes	UG	5.907	1.6777	1.413
	PG	5.556	1.8025	
Gambling	UG	6.058	1.6546	-.514
	PG	6.171	1.4580	
Female contraceptives	UG	4.105	1.9884	-.777
	PG	4.342	2.2597	
Condoms	UG	4.547	2.2837	-2.618*
	PG	5.342	2.0264	
Pharmaceuticals	UG	5.151	1.8504	-1.528
	PG	5.556	1.8729	
Female hygiene products	UG	3.244	1.9759	-.997
	PG	3.547	2.2495	
Underwear	UG	4.221	1.9668	-1.572
	PG	4.684	2.1482	
Sexual diseases	UG	1.535	1.2527	-.566
	PG	1.641	1.3675	
Weight loss programs	UG	1.802	1.3960	-1.692***
	PG	2.188	1.7416	
Funeral services	UG	2.198	1.7410	-.577
	PG	2.342	1.7722	
Political parties	UG	4.651	2.1517	1.600
	PG	4.154	2.2152	
Racially extreme groups	UG	6.523	1.4119	1.250
	PG	6.256	1.5655	
Religious denominations	UG	6.302	1.4638	2.983*
	PG	5.538	2.0152	
Charity	UG	1.942	1.4741	.200
	PG	1.897	1.6262	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

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Respondents were presented with a list of reasons for advertising offensiveness to indicate their level of offense. As shown in Table 6, the respondents indicate offense to all reasons (mean were greater than the midpoint of 4 on a 7-point Likert scale). In line with previous studies (e.g. Abbasi et al 2011), the results revealed that for Sudanese, Nudity, Children concern, Racist images, and Stereotyping of People come at the top of the reasons for offense, with means above 5. The rest of the reasons were found less offensive but they were above the midpoint of 4 as is clear from the table. With respect to religious commitment, high committed Muslims were significantly more offended than less committed Muslims for too personal subjects, sexy images, children concern and nudity. The other reasons for offense show no differences between the high and low committed Students Muslim groups.

**Table 6: Religiosity commitment and Reasons for Offense**

Reasons	Religiosit	Mean	SD	T
Too personal subjects	HC	4.2881	2.16678	1.749***
	LC	3.5000	1.98494	
Anti-social behavior	HC	5.3390	2.03891	1.048
	LC	4.8846	2.23297	
Unethical	HC	5.0734	2.00574	1.54
	LC	4.4231	2.04300	
Sexy images	HC	5.6102	1.80294	2.433**
	LC	4.6538	2.29682	
Racist images	HC	5.7062	1.94633	-0.346
	LC	5.8462	1.75937	
Guns and armaments	HC	4.9153	2.17387	0.731
	LC	4.5769	2.40288	
Western culture	HC	4.4294	2.12850	0.689
	LC	4.1154	2.43847	
Children concern	HC	5.7966	1.81327	1.684***
	LC	5.1538	1.84808	
Hardsell	HC	4.5028	2.14562	.417
	LC	4.6923	2.29380	
Indecent language	HC	4.1977	2.06717	1.528
	LC	3.5385	1.96430	
Nudity	HC	5.7288	1.85402	1.65***
	LC	5.0769	2.13397	
Stereotyping	HC	5.1017	2.28156	-0.29
	LC	5.1154	1.84015	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

Table 7 reflects on the effect of age on the attitude of respondents towards reasons for the offense. It is found that older generations are significantly more offended with respect to guns and armaments, children concern, hard sell and stereotyping. The results make sense since it is observable that older people are more sensitive to these issues and concern in daily life in Sudan.

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**Table 7: Age and Reasons for Offense**

	Age	Mean	SD	t
Too personal subjects	>= 30	4.5000	2.11932	1.342
	< 30	4.0559	2.16495	
Anti-social behavior	>= 30	5.5333	1.84544	1.13
	< 30	5.1748	2.14711	
Unethical	>= 30	5.1833	1.74173	0.883
	< 30	4.9091	2.12268	
Sexy images	>= 30	5.3167	1.66206	-.833
	< 30	5.5594	1.98453	
Racist images	>= 30	5.7500	1.73327	0.124
	< 30	5.7133	1.99867	
Guns and armaments	>= 30	5.2833	1.92302	1.734***
	< 30	4.6993	2.29216	
Western culture	>= 30	4.3333	2.05572	-.237
	< 30	4.4126	2.21813	
Children concern	>= 30	5.8000	1.75441	0.432
	< 30	5.6783	1.85989	
Hard sell	>= 30	5.0500	2.10266	2.257**
	< 30	4.3077	2.15338	
Indecent language	>= 30	4.3833	2.03438	1.210
	< 30	4.0000	2.06922	
Nudity	>= 30	5.4667	1.94384	-.868
	< 30	5.7203	1.88173	
Stereotyping	>= 30	5.5333	1.92633	1.792**
	< 30	4.9231	2.32281	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

Table 8 shows that there are no statistically significant differences between males and females with respect to the reasons for considering the advertisement as offensive. All the results point to homogeneity in two sexes responses to the statements of the survey.

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**Table 8: Gender and Reasons for Offense**

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	T
Too personal subjects	M	113	4.2566	2.11617	.513
	F	90	4.1000	2.21359	
Anti-social behavior	M	113	5.4513	1.90390	1.321
	F	90	5.0667	2.24259	
Unethical	M	113	5.1858	1.82027	1.554
	F	90	4.7444	2.22630	
Sexy images	M	113	5.5841	1.80142	.812
	F	90	5.3667	2.00813	
Racist images	M	113	5.8407	1.84471	.969
	F	90	5.5778	2.01108	
Guns and armaments	M	113	5.0177	2.12545	1.058
	F	90	4.6889	2.29138	
Western culture	M	113	4.3717	2.23285	-.128
	F	90	4.4111	2.09276	
Children concern	M	113	5.5664	1.90805	-1.295
	F	90	5.9000	1.70952	
Hard sell	M	113	4.5841	2.12437	.420
	F	90	4.4556	2.21416	
Indecent language	M	113	4.2566	2.01237	1.111
	F	90	3.9333	2.11894	
Nudity	M	113	5.8053	1.78715	1.348
	F	90	5.4444	2.02296	
Stereotyping	M	113	5.1327	2.21402	.210
	F	90	5.0667	2.25259	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

Table 9 shows the third demographic variable considered in this study, the education level of the participants. The results show total congruence between the respondents on their opinions regarding all stated reasons, except for guns and armaments. The younger students at the undergraduate level showed more agreement with this reasons than their undergraduate counterparts. This makes total sense given the age of the undergraduate students who are more likely to be under close supervision from the home, society, and authorities regarding possession or handling of guns and armaments. This might have impacted their responses and reaction to the reason for offense.

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**Table 9: Education Levels and Reasons for Offense**

	Education	N	Mean	SD	t
Too personal subjects	UG	86	4.2326	1.96842	.256
	PG.	117	4.1538	2.29172	
Anti-social behavior	UG	86	5.4419	1.92571	.953
	PG.	117	5.1624	2.16141	
Unethical	UG	86	5.0465	1.94578	.341
	PG.	117	4.9487	2.07550	
Sexy images	UG	86	5.5465	1.66385	.379
	PG.	117	5.4444	2.05294	
Racist images	UG	86	5.8372	1.82054	.719
	PG.	117	5.6410	1.99336	
Guns and armaments	UG	86	5.6163	1.75679	4.307*
	PG.	117	4.3248	2.33721	
Western culture	UG	86	4.4767	2.07918	.493
	PG.	117	4.3248	2.23541	
Children concern	UG	86	5.8605	1.67446	.978
	PG.	117	5.6068	1.92961	
Hardsell	UG	86	4.7558	1.99373	1.296
	PG.	117	4.3590	2.26846	
Indecent language	UG	86	4.3372	1.90115	1.329
	PG.	117	3.9487	2.16495	
Nudity	UG	86	5.5581	1.91345	-.560
	PG.	117	5.7094	1.89400	
Stereotyping	UG	86	5.1395	2.14839	.198
	PG.	117	5.0769	2.28999	

\*significant at 1% level    \*\* significant at 5%    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

### 4.3 Effects of Demographic Variables on Religiosity Attitude

The results in table 2 indicate that 87% of the sample represents committed Muslims while the rest are the less committed in the sample. The table also shows a significant difference between the attitude of committed and less committed groups towards four products and services (Alcohol, Cigarettes, Pharmaceuticals, and Underwear). Table 6 on the other hand, shows statistically significant differences between the committed and non-committed groups with respect to the reasons for offenses (too personal subject, Sexy images, Children concern, and Nudity).

In this section, we test whether the demographic variables: age, gender, and education have significant effects on the attitude towards products and services and on the reasons behind such attitudes. We will test these difference only on the products and reasons that showed significant differences between religiously committed and less committed samples.

Table 10 presents the results of regressing the significant attitudes towards products and the significant reasons on the three demographic variables, age, gender, and education. The regression equation takes the following form:

$$Y_i = B_1 X_1 + B_2 X_2 + B_3 X_3 + e_i$$

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Where,

$Y_i$  = the attitude towards product or service or the reason behind such attitude

$X_1, X_2, X_3$  are the independent (demographic) variables of age, gender, and education respectively.

$B_1, B_2, B_3$  are the regression coefficients of age, gender, and level of education respectively.

**Table 10: Regression: attitude =  $B_1$  age +  $B_2$  gender +  $B_3$  education +  $e_i$**

Dependent Variable	Age	Gender	education	R2	F
Alcohol	1.027 (4.54)*	1.582 (7.63)*	1.020 (5.74)*	0.919	767.9 (0.00)*
Cigarettes	0.627 (2.651) *	1.264 (5.82) *	1.176 (6.33) *	0.893	564.48 (0.000) *
Pharmaceuticals	0.460 (1.68)***	1.66 (6.62)	0.87 (4.04)*	0.842	362.88 (0.000)*
Underwear	0.317 (1.09)	1.238 (4.40)*	0.840 (3.69)*	0.766	223.04 (0.000)*
Too Personal subject	0.836 (3.00)*	0.96 (3.765)*	0.619 (2.84)*	0.762	217.94 (0.000)*
Sexy Images	0.322 (1.19)	1.233 (4.98)*	1.265 (5.93)*	0.853	393.72 (0.000)*
Children Concern	0.462 (1.85)***	1.538 (6.82)*	1.094 (5.59)*	0.883	509.56 (0.000)*
Nudity	0.528 (1.90)***	1.269 (4.97)*	1.173 (5.37)*	0.854	389.82 (0.000)*

\*significant at 1% level    \*\*\* significant at 10% level

The results in Table 10 show that the demographic variables are statistically very significant in explaining the differences in attitude by the religiously committed individuals towards controversial ads on products and services and the reasons behind these attitudes. Except for age in the case of underwear and sexy image reasoning, the demographic variables are all very significant in reflecting the variation in the attitudes of the religious committed group towards products and services and the stated reasons for such attitudes.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to increase the understanding of Muslims Sudanese attitude towards the advertisement of controversial products on TV from a religious perspective to determine the degrees of and reasons for the offense. Overall, in line with previous studies, it appears that Sudanese were less accepting and are offended by most of the controversial product's advertising presented to them. As expected from most Muslims Alcohol was perceived to be most controversial when advertised as it is being prohibited in Islam. The same finding was reported by Mohammad (2015). The second most offensive product is Racially extreme groups which can be explained by the fact that racism in Sudan is a complex matter due to the racial mixture of various populations. Gambling ranked third followed by Religious denominations and Cigarettes, Pharmaceuticals Condoms, Underwear, Female contraceptives, and Political parties came late. However, the results of this study revealed that Sexual diseases, Weight loss programs, female hygiene products and Funeral services and Charities were perceived as not controversial all with mean scores less than 4.



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As for the reasons why the advertisements offend the respondents, the results revealed that the respondents feel offense to all of the reasons (mean were greater than the midpoint of 4 on a 7-point Likert scale). The results revealed that for Sudanese, Children concern, Nudity, Racist images, Sexiest images, Anti-social behaviors, Stereotyping of People, and Unethical behavior are all important reasons for concern. The rest of the reasons were found less offensive but all were above the midpoint of 4. Same results reported by Mansour (2014) that Sudanese have negative attitudes toward ethical issues in advertising especially when using women and children in advertising. The study found that highly committed Muslims are significantly different from less committed Muslim in their perceptions of unethical issues in advertising especially with respect to exploiting women and children in advertising.

Finally, the study findings show that those with high religious commitment tended to find advertising of controversial advertising more offensive relative to those with less religious commitments for all products except for racially extreme groups and charity. However, there is a significant difference in attitudes between high committed Muslims and less committed Muslims in response to advertising of alcohol, cigarette, pharmaceuticals, and underwear. High committed Muslims perceived the advertising of alcohol and cigarette more controversial than less committed Muslims.

In line with earlier studies conducted in various Muslim and Arab countries, this study showed that some of the highly rated reasons behind viewing controversial advertising are advertisements that include Nudity, Racist images, Sexiest images and too personal subjects.

Regardless of religiosity, age was found to affect attitude towards gambling, condoms, pharmaceuticals, and has an influence on the religious denominations and charity. Gender, however, influences attitudes towards advertising relating to females contraceptives, sexual diseases, and weight loss programs. Education level affects attitude towards advertisements relating to condoms, weight loss programs, and religious denominations. However, only very few reasons that respondents to get offended.

Results show that age, gender, and education level are almost all important factors in determining the degree of offensiveness religious Sudanese feel towards controversial products advertisement and the reason behind them. The study indicates that consumers' religious beliefs can play a determining role in how people perceive product advertisement, thus encouraging marketers to consider the differences between these beliefs while advertising to ensure no potential consumers are alienated.

International companies with controversial products should be aware of what issues are offensive to their customers and be careful when deciding what images should be used in their advertisement of those controversial products or in the execution of their advertising campaigns. This is particularly important when entering markets where Muslim are the majority. It is advisable to dedicate considerable time and resources on understanding cultural issues, and above all religious beliefs, upon entering a new market where advertising images can cause offense to people.

Advertisements of controversial or socially sensitive products can clash with the traditional and cultural values of a country, create a negative impact in the minds of the general public and damage the brand name or image of the company (Waller *et al.*, 2004). While the present study contributes new knowledge to the existing literature, it is not free from some limitations.

However, the limitations of this study provide research direction for the future studies. This study used a small sample size of online social media users from Sudan which might not reflect reality, so the results of this study should be read with this limitation in mind, especially if want to generalize the results to different Arab Muslims countries. Future studies could endeavor to measure levels of offensiveness towards specific advertisements, comparing offensiveness with other demographic variables such as level of education, gender, and age.

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