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MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE:  
A LOOK INTO REPRESENTATIONAL ISSUES IN ADVERTISING

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THESIS

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the  
College of Communication and Information  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Elizabeth Ann Langlois

Lexington, Kentucky

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Lexington, Kentucky

2019

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

### MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE: A LOOK INTO REPRESENTATIONAL ISSUES IN ADVERTISING

Representation has become a buzzword in the advertising industry. With more consumers asking for brands to represent more diverse people in advertisements, this study examined cases when representation in advertisements received negative feedback. By examining three cases where brands received negative feedback after the release of an ad, the researcher explored perceptions and reactions toward the representation of Black people in advertisements. This study conducted a thematic analysis of popular press and trade publications to look for themes among the three cases. With the use of Critical Race Theory and Image Repair Theory, the researcher aimed to fill a gap in research by investigating the perceived problems and reactions towards negative advertisements.

The perceived problem in the ads explored in this study was that the ads were Racist. The sub-themes Skin Color and Proximity explained how racism manifested in each ad. Themes that were found relating to public reaction were: Questioning, Multiple Mishaps, Denouncing the Brand, and Solutions to the Problem. Knowing your Customers was the singular theme identified regarding the advertising industry. The themes found when examining brand's reactions were: Apologizing, Unintentional Representation, Pulling the Advertisement, and Examining Internal Processes.

**KEYWORDS:** Advertising, Critical Race Theory, Image Repair Theory, Representation, Perception, Reaction

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Representation has become a buzzword in today's cultural landscape, particularly in the advertising industry. Consumers want brands to be cognizant of the consumers brands are selling to, and consumers want to see themselves represented in those brands' advertisements (Rogers, 2016). Brands are taking this request from consumers into account by attempting to represent people: of different races, with disabilities, who are plus size, members of the LGBTQ\* community, and many more in advertisements. For instance, Aerie, a fashion brand for women, released new role models in 2019 that will be featured in its #AerieREAL campaign. These new role models will include women who are plus size, have disabilities, and are racially diverse (Aerie, 2019). In another example, Coca-Cola's 2019 Super Bowl Commercial reminded consumers that its product is for everyone "regardless of race, gender, origin, religion" (Moye, 2019). It is clear that brands are striving to be more representative, but more often than not, it seems that brands are missing the mark (Boulton, 2016; Monllos, 2017).

This study aims to examine the perceived problems in advertisements that received negative feedback. It also seeks to explore how the public, advertising industry, and brands reacted to advertisements. In order to do so, this study will examine three cases where brands' advertisements missed the mark concerning representation. The first of these cases is a three-second GIF released by Dove. This GIF was posted to the brand's Facebook page in October 2017 and showed a Black<sup>1</sup> woman taking off a brown shirt off to reveal a White woman in a lighter shirt underneath (Richards, 2017). After receiving negative feedback,

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<sup>1</sup> The term Black will be used throughout this paper as it describes multiple ethnicities, not just African Americans (Agyemang et al., 2005)

the three-second GIF ad was taken down, and the company apologized. The second case in this study comes from H&M. In January 2018, H&M released an ad for a sweatshirt on its global website modeled by a young Black boy with the slogan “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” (Bever, 2018). Consumers were upset by the release of the sweatshirt resulting in the brand taking the ad off the website and ultimately cutting the sweatshirt from production. The third case in this study is a TV spot released by Heineken Light in March 2018. The commercial featured a bartender sliding a beer past three Black people to a light-skinned woman. As the beer got to the end of the bar, the slogan “Sometimes Lighter is Better” appeared (Schultz, 2018a). The ad was pulled shortly after garnering negative attention from consumers.

Each of these cases were chosen for multiple reasons. First, each case was salient among the media, garnering celebrity attention and public attention. Second, every case dealt specifically with the representation of Black people. Third, each case emanated from a different industry including: the soap industry, beverage industry, and fashion industry, showing that representational issues in advertising are occurring across multiple industries. Lastly, each case was released within a six-month period from October 2017 to March 2018 meaning that the social climate will not have experienced major changes. Therefore, the researcher can compare perception and reaction across cases.

In previous studies, researchers have looked at specific groups of people and how these groups are or are not represented in media, advertising or industries (Hearne, 2018; Lopez, 2018). Studies have also investigated the representation of groups identifying as non-White races versus (Hooks, 1992). Further research also examined the effects of this representation, or lack thereof (Taylor, Lee, & Stern, 1995; Seiter, 1990; Boulton, 2016).

This study will fill a gap in representation research by examining consumer perceptions and reactions regarding the representation issues specifically surrounding Black people in advertising.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the perceptions and reactions of the public, advertising industry, and brands regarding the representation of Black people in advertisements, it is imperative to first examine Critical Race Theory. It is also important to examine the current state of race and racism within the U.S. and advertising industry along with crisis management, including Image Repair Theory, and crisis management in reference to social media.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) came about in the 1970's after legal scholars' were concerned that advances in civil rights were plateauing (Bell, 2018). The theory was created largely due to legal indeterminacy, which is "the idea that not every legal decision has a single correct outcome" (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2016, p. 419). Additionally, CRT explains that identities became racialized and that systems were created and implemented to oppress people not able to identify as White (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller & Thomas, 1996). In other words, this identity construction via race created power hierarches that favored those able to identify as White. From this favoring of White people came an inherent privilege due to White people not having to recognize their racial identity since it had always been accepted (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The idea that race is constructed is furthered by Littlejohn, Foss, and Oetzel (2016), who state that "race and racism are products of social interaction that society constructs, manipulates, and abandons as convenient" (p. 420). To gain a full understanding of CRT, it is important to understand the assumptions of the theory, but first it is imperative to define racism as it will be used in this study.

In Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas' (1996) overview of crucial writings in CRT, racism is described as “an intentional albeit, irrational, deviation by a conscious wrongdoer from otherwise neutral, rational, and just ways of distributing jobs, power, prestige, and wealth” (p. 14). Another definition states that racism is “an ideology sanctioning the domination or exclusion of one ethnic group by another on the basis of difference believed to be hereditary and unalterable” (Fredrickson, 2015, p. 852). In an article by Walton, Priest, and Paradies (2013), racism is described “as a phenomenon that maintains or exacerbates avoidable and unfair inequalities in power, resources, or opportunities across racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious groups in society” (p. 75). In this study, the term racism will be used as it is defined in *The SAGE Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2009), which states that racism is:

A belief that one is superior in socioeconomic, political, and intellectual standing with respect to a person of a different race or ethnic group. Racism can be expressed in an overt, covert, or unconscious manner. Racism denies individuals or groups opportunities to be recognized, respected, and accepted in society. It is founded on the belief that race is the primary determinant of both internal (social) and external (physical) traits and of the capacities of thought and reason. Racism is a learned behavior and thought process, which is generally passed down from generation to generation. It is not a natural phenomenon (p. 431).

This description of racism is used as it aids in pointing out the complexities of racism, an idea that is also expressed in CRT.

With a working definition of racism, the assumptions of Critical Race Theory may be presented. The first assumption is that racism is an everyday, pervasive phenomenon due to racism being so ingrained into the history of the United States (Littlejohn et al., 2016). Additionally, Santana (2013) posits that racism is such a common occurrence, we are only able to identify blatant and outstanding forms of racism. Because racism continues to be so pervasive, the idea that we are in a post-racial society is not necessarily correct.

Post-racial meaning that all races are considered and treated equally. The belief that the United States is post-racial can be partially attributed to the large adoption of color blindness by people in the U.S., especially White people. Color blindness is an idea that states people should be judged by their character, not their race (Crenshaw et al., 1996, p. 15). This meaning those who adopt color blindness “strive to not ‘see’ race and espouse racial attitudes that emphasize sameness and equal distribution of resources across racial lines (i.e., racial color blind ideology)” (Mekawi, Bresin, & Hunter., 2017, p. 207). While some who “endorse racial colorblindness believe they are being anti-racist,” they actually homogenize society and are unable to recognize that others may experience differences due to skin color (Mekawi et al., 2017, p. 207; Sue et al., 2008). Therefore, adopters of color blindness are not able recognize privileges associated with skin color or race, further perpetuating racism.

The second assumption of Critical Race Theory according to Littlejohn, et al. (2016) is “that white domination in the United States serves the psychological and material advantage of dominant groups, which means there are relatively few people genuinely interested in eradicating racism” (p. 419). In other words, CRT states that typical processes and everyday life favors those able to identify as White (Littlejohn et al., 2016, p. 419). This connects back to the idea of White privilege, which is not always recognized by White people, because they do not have to think about their race as their everyday experience favors the White race.

Because CRT was developed in the 1970’s, many of the seminal authors are still assisting in the evolution of the theory. These seminal authors include Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, and Kimberle Crenshaw (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For instance, Kimberle

Crenshaw not only coined the name for Critical Race Theory but advanced the idea of intersectionality (The African American Policy Forum, 2019), which can be explained as the interconnectedness of individual identities (Carbado et al., 2013). Additionally, Crenshaw examined the “marginalization of Black women within not only antidiscrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics” (p. 303).

Colorism also evolved out of Critical Race Theory and is described as “the allocation of privilege and disadvantage according to the lightness or darkness of one’s skin” (Burke, 2008, p. 17). It is important to note that “colorism is concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity” (Hunter, 2007, p. 237). Additionally, Colorism states that even within races, those with lighter skin will have more privilege, adding to the disparity between White and non-White races. Hunter (2007) argues that there are two systems of discrimination, the first dealing with race and the second dealing with Colorism. In fact, Hunter (2007) posits that:

The second system of discrimination... colorism, is at the level of skin tone: darker skin or lighter skin. Although all blacks experience discrimination as blacks, the intensity of that discrimination, the frequency, and the outcomes of that discrimination will differ dramatically by skin tone. Darker-skinned African Americans may earn less money [than] lighter-skinned African Americans, although both earn less than whites (pg. 238).

Colorism for Black people is rooted in the history of European colonialism and slavery in America (Hunter, 2007, p. 238). Although, it is imperative to note that Colorism is pervasive in many cultures. For instance, Rondilla and Spickard (2007) explained that Asian Americans have often heard their grandparents say, “Don’t go out in the sun. You’ll get too dark” (p. 2). In fact, Rondilla and Spickard (2007) point out the pervasiveness of skin-lightening lotions. Ultimately, Colorism stems from the idea that darker skin is associated with being savage, lacking beauty, an absence of education, and poverty, while

lighter skin is associated with civility, beauty, education, affluence (Hunter, 2007; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). This dichotomy of skin color either representing savagery or civility is bolstered by the assumption of White dominance in CRT.

The broad scope of CRT allows it to be applied to many different disciplines. In fact, CRT has been used in disciplines such as education, sociology, anthropology, and psychology (Stovall, 2010). Out of these disciplines, CRT is particularly prominent in educational settings where CRT is used to support “action and reflection in the world in order to change it” (Stovall, 2010, p. 3). In communication research, CRT identifies and helps explain that “non-White racial groups struggle to conceptualize and express their interests, partly because the very premises of political intelligibility and legitimacy in liberal democracy are shaped by norms that Whites have claimed as ‘their’ exclusive racial heritage” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

In relation to advertising research, a study by Mary Ball Howkins (2009) used CRT to examine hidden hierarchies and privilege within clothing advertisements by studying the placement of models of different races. Howkins (2009) stated that advertisers are able to assign, “rank or status to human figures via size, posture, lighting, and spatial placement” (p. 94). For instance, the center of any photo or painting holds a higher precedence compared to others in the photo or ad (Howkins, 2009). Although if an advertiser wants to put a Black person in the middle of the photo to appear more progressive, the importance of the center position can be reduced. This reduction in power can be made by increasing the lighting on one of the other models in the advertisement. Advertisers could also pull White models on either side of the Black model to the front, so they appear to be slightly covering the Black model (Howkins, 2009). Howkins (2009) also stated that the

“luminosity of blond hair and white face acts as a locus of visual interest [in advertisements]” (p. 95). Ultimately, Howkins concluded that ads can be manipulated so that minority models do not gain visual superiority. Howkins (2009) concluded that this intentional placement allows advertisers to “appeal to consumers of color [and] appease or satisfy white consumers” (p. 95).

Overall, Critical Race Theory provides a helpful lens for studying representation in advertising because it highlights the longstanding history of non-White suppression in the United States. With the theory’s use across disciplines, including communication, CRT also provides a framework for understanding how and why racism continues to exist in today’s world.

### **Racism in the United States**

While Critical Race Theory provides a framework for understanding the history of racism, it is also important to understand the current state of race and racism in the United States. A holistic overview of racism is beyond the scope of this study. However, a brief overview of the current state of race and racism, specifically as it relates to Black people in the United States, is important as context for this study, underscoring the current saliency of representation in advertising and consumers’ call for brands to be more diverse (Rogers, 2016).

In 2018, an NBC News poll asked consumers whether or not they believed racism was still a major problem in the United States (Arenge, Perry, & Clark., 2018). Of the 6,500 plus survey respondents, 64 percent agreed that racism was still a major problem, and an additional 30 percent said they believed racism exists, but that it wasn’t a major problem. Only a small number of respondents (three percent) answered that racism once existed but

does not anymore and even less (one percent) said that racism has never been a major problem.

While NBC's survey makes it clear that the majority of people believe that racism exists, racism is an everchanging phenomenon (Holt, 2000; Bobo, 2004; Bates, 1998). Holt (2000) explained that, "Racial phenomena and their meaning change with time, with history, and with the conceptual and institutional spaces that history unfolds" (p. 21-22). In a similar way, Bobo (2004) suggests that racism in America is not an object of the past; it has changed and evolved and continues to exist. Additionally, Bates (1998) argues that "racism and its manifestations are embedded in dynamic social/political/economic processes" and therefore the definition of racism "changes as these processes evolve and interact." The fact that 94 percent of respondents in the NBC News poll agreed that racism exists in today's world reinforces the idea that racism is a phenomenon that continues to manifest itself in various ways (Arenge et al., 2018). Recognizing that racism exists is important to note as it aids in explaining why the representation of Black people in advertising is important to study and understand.

Although this study focuses on advertising, representational issues manifest not only in the advertising industry, but across many industries, such as sports, medicine and fashion. Within academic medicine, there is a severe underrepresentation of Black doctors in the U.S. (Powers, White, Oriol, & Jain, 2016). Alternately, the sports industry is able to represent Black people in ways that the advertising industry can't (Mayo, Mayo, & Mahdi, 2005). This is because many advertisements highlight unrealistic portrayals of beauty and therefore use models with lighter skin tones, narrow noses, and small lips (Mayo et al., 2005). Because athletes do not have to prescribe to unrealistic beauty standards, Black

athletes are placed in the forefront of some advertising (Mayo et al., 2005). For instance, Michael Jordan became a spokesperson for Coca-Cola, Gatorade, McDonalds, and more (Mayo et al., 2005). In a study focusing on the fashion industry, a sample of 950 ads that were taken from magazines and coded for race of models found that only 10.7 percent of the sample represented Black people (Salazar, 2001). With the exception of the sports industry, the prevalent underrepresentation of Black people in other industries reinforces the long history of racism in the United States.

The racial landscape in the United States is not easy to describe or fully understand. However, it is clear that there are many U.S. industries in which Black people are not equally represented.

### **Racism in the Advertising Industry**

While there are many industries that face representation issues, this study is particularly interested in the advertising industry. The U.S. advertising industry is 85 percent White (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), which means there are a lack of minority voices able to help identify and correct representational issues before ads run. Although, it is important to point out that the advertising industries in other countries look similar to that of the U.S. as Dove is the only brand in this study based in the U.S. In fact, H&M is based in Sweden and Heineken originated in the Netherlands. According to the World Population Review (2019b), Sweden does not report ethnicity, but of the approximately two million people that live there, only 20.1 percent are considered foreign. The major ethnic group in the Netherlands is the Dutch, who comprise 79.3 percent of the population (World Population Review, 2019a). This large proportion of Dutch people in the Netherlands, leaves 20.7 percent of the population to be considered the minority (World

Population Review, 2019a). Because both Sweden and the Netherlands major ethnicity is White, it is safe to assume that each of their respective advertising industries look similar to that of the U.S. In other words, there is most likely not much diversity in the work teams that deal with the creation and execution of advertisements.

With an understanding of who is creating and executing advertisements, it is important to understand advertising itself. This study uses the American Marketing Association's (AMA) definition of advertising, which defines advertising as "any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor" (Akrani, 2012). Based on the AMA's definition, examples of advertising include targeted ads on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Liu & Mattila, 2017); online shopping sites such as Shopify sites (Shopify, 2019); and traditional executions such as print ads, radio ads, and out-of-home (Schultz, 2013). This understanding of advertising is important as it builds the framework for how and why advertisements are made.

As stated in the literature review above, Critical Race Theory posits that society is not post-racial era, so a closer look at the history of racial representation within the soap, beverage, and fashion industries is crucial to understanding the historical context of the industries to which each case belongs. These industries are important to investigate as they situate the current case study ads within the historical context of racial representation within each industry.

#### *Advertising in the Soap Industry*

The soap industry's advertising has a long-standing history of racial discrimination due to a notion of lighter skin being more desirable than darker skin (Glenn, 2008). The

ideology of lighter skin being more desirable stems from the history of Colorism (see page 7 for more details). Additionally, soap brands have historically portrayed Black skin as dirty and White skin as clean. An infamous ad from Pears (Figure 1) that ran in 1884 shows what appears to be a young Black boy getting in a tub and stepping out White (Amato, 2015). Another well-known Fairy Soap (Figure 2) illustrates a young White girl asking a young Black girl why her mom doesn't wash her with Fairy Soap (Gebbia, 2017).



Figure 1: Pears Soap Ad



Figure 2: Fairy Soap Ad

More recently, Dove dealt with a representational issue in 2011 with a print ad released showing “a ‘before and after’ skin chart” (Rittenhouse, 2017). In the ad, “a black woman [stood] under the ‘before’ sign and a white woman [stood] under the ‘after’ [sign]” (Rittenhouse (2017). Dove released a statement saying that the ad intended to depict each woman’s skin “after” they had used Dove’s moisturizing product (Rittenhouse, 2017). Although, many thought the ad was depicting the before and after of the product lightening the skin of the Black woman (Rittenhouse, 2017). Because of historical soap ads such as the ones above from Pears, Fairy Soap, and the more recent Dove ad, the idea of lighter skin being better than dark skin continues to perpetuate the privilege that comes with being White.

### *Advertising in the Beverage Industry*

There is a lack of academic literature regarding the history of diversity in advertising in the beverage industry and, in particular, the spirits/alcohol industry. Therefore, the diversity of the beverage industry was analyzed to gain a better understanding of its workforce. In 2019, the U.S. beverage industry was 74 percent White, 16.9 percent Black, 16.2 percent Hispanic, and 3.4 percent Asian (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Although, there is more minority representation of minorities in the beverage industry compared to the advertising industry, the majority of the beverage industry is still White. When viewed through the lens of Critical Race Theory, the low number of non-Whites represented does not allow for meaningful conversations around privilege or diversity.

Additionally, a study by Noel, Babor, and Robaina (2017), the authors stated that the government was increasingly reliant upon the alcohol industry to self-regulate its marketing codes to restrict alcohol marketing activity. In fact, the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (2017) stated that advertisements including alcohol must provide the “name and address of the responsible advertiser, the type, class, and alcohol content of the specific alcohol being advertised.” A recent study by Barry, et al. (2018) also explained that alcohol was being promoted via social media sites such as Instagram but pointed out the scarce resources for information on ways the alcohol industry is advertised through social media sites.

## *Advertising in the Fashion Industry*

In the fashion industry, the idea of White skin or light skin being better than darker skin is reinforced by the men and women that consumers see modeling clothes (Morgan, 2014). Although representation seems to be changing on the runway with 44.8 percent of models in New York Fashion Week being models of color (Fisher, 2018), there have been multiple recent advertisements that have received feedback from consumers for having representation issues. During the summer of 2018, Katy Perry released a pair of shoes (Figure 3) that featured eyes, nose, and lips on them, marketed to consumers in a few colors, including black, which resembled blackface (Grinberg, 2019). Another example includes a sweater released by Gucci (Figure 4) that depicted what some thought of as black face (Holcombe, 2019). This was because the black sweater covered a portion of the models face and appeared to make her lips look larger (Holcombe, 2019). In Gucci's case, one consumer wrote that they were upset with the brand for continuing to "create offensive fashion" and responding to the negative backlash by stating that Gucci didn't know the sweater would be offensive (Holcombe, 2019).



Figure 3: Katy Perry Shoes



Figure 4: Gucci Sweater

Overall, Black people are not represented well in soap, beverage, or fashion advertising. Additionally, in the larger advertising industry, Black people only make up five percent of the advertising, public relations, or related fields (Bureau of Labor statistics, 2019). Therefore, the issues of representation in advertising may be stemming from the lack of diversity in the advertising industry.

### **Crises in Advertising**

Because the advertisements chosen for this study received such harsh consumer feedback, it is important to understand how crises can affect brands. According to Benoit (1997), organizations are considered to be under attack or in a crisis if they have done something that could be considered offensive and are being accused and held responsible for that action. More recently, an organizational crisis has been described as a “the perception of an unpredictable event that threatens important expectancies of stakeholders related to health, safety, environmental, and economic issues, and can seriously impact an organization’s performance and generate negative outcomes (Coombs, 2015, pg. 3).

When an organization is going through a crisis that involves its reputation, it can potentially experience up to three different negative attributes: (1) increased damage to the

current reputation of the organization, (2) a potential for consumers purchase intentions to decline, and (3) the spreading of negative information related to the organization (Coombs, 2007; Coombs & Holladay, 2006). All three of these effects can be detrimental to a brand because a brand has “a distinctive identity and value” and “the relationship between consumer and brand is often emotional rather than rational” (Doyle, 2011). Because of this emotional connection, brands often take on a type of perception in the mind of consumers (Doyle 2011). This brand perception is considered alive and therefore can be changed (Doyle, 2011).

Advertisers create brand reputations and personalities through executions, and a failed advertisement that receives negative consumer and media feedback can become an enduring image to a brand (Ho, Pang, AuYong, & Lau, 2014). Specific situations that affect the enduring image of a brand in times of crisis are called “defining moments,” and involve “fanatical attention of the media and the people” toward a brand (Ho et al., 2014). However, brands are able to combat defining moments by responding to the crisis. In fact, brands often used Image Repair Theory in order to combat impressionable negative feedback. Therefore, it is important to understand the tactics and strategies of Image Repair Theory.

#### *Image Repair Theory*

Image Repair Theory is a way for brands in a crisis to reduce overall negative feedback (Benoit, 1997). Although, according to Benoit (1997), two conditions must be present to consider a brand under attack. Those conditions are: 1) “the accused is held responsible for an action” and 2) “the act is considered offensive” (Benoit, 1997). Once both of these conditions are met, a brand can employ Image Repair Theory in order to begin reducing negative feedback.

Image repair theory consists of five strategies that brands are able to apply. These strategies include denial, evasion of responsibility, reduce offensiveness of event, corrective action, and mortification (Arendt, LaFleche, & Limperopulos, 2017). Each strategy contains different tactics that help the brand carry out effective communication.

Using the denial strategy to repair one's image allows a brand to state that it simply did not do or take part in something. The brand may also use denial by shifting the blame to say the occurrence was caused by a specific person or outside entity (Benoit, 1997).

Evasion of responsibility is broken up by Benoit (1997) into four sections including provocation, defeasibility, accident, and good intentions. Provocation means that the brand was merely responding to an act due to someone else (Benoit, 1997). Defeasibility allows a brand to state that there was a lack of information provided or ability to know something before it occurred (Benoit, 1997). If a brand uses accident as a tactic, it can say what happened was not the brand's intention or purpose (Benoit, 1997). Lastly, good intentions lets a brand say that it set out to do something good and didn't mean for the unfortunate outcome to occur (Benoit, 1997).

The third strategy of image repair theory, reducing offensiveness of the event, gives a brand six sub-strategies to repair their image. These strategies include: 1) bolstering, which reminds the audience of the brand's good traits; 2) minimization, which allows those under attack to make what occurred seem less serious; 3) differentiation, which makes the event seem less offensive than what was perceived; 4) transcendence, which means there are more important things for people to consider than the act; 5) attacking the accuser, which allows the brand under attack to lessen the accusers credibility; and 6) compensation, which gives some sort of reimbursement to the victim of the occurrence (Benoit, 1997).

The fourth strategy of image repair is for the brand to take corrective action. This strategy can be used by a brand to explain that it will take steps in order to mend and prevent the problem from occurring again (Benoit, 1997).

Lastly, brands are able to employ the fifth image repair strategy – mortification. Mortification states that the brand under attack can simply apologize and take responsibility for what occurred (Benoit, 1997).

In order to get ahead of a crisis and have the ability to shape consumer perception more easily, brands must respond as quickly as possible (Affect, n.d.). While it is important for a brand to get a message or apology out quickly, brands should also try to get apologies right the first time. However, if the first apology is not received well, Compton's (2016) study of multi-level apologies suggests a brand must employ mortification or evasion of responsibility tactics in the second apology.

### **Social Media Crises**

As brands consider how to respond to crises, there are now more channels of information for brands to manage. Specifically, social media sites provide added avenues for brands to communicate with consumers.

Channels through which crises can break out now include social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. In a survey, Burson-Marsteller and Penn Schoen Berland (2011) found that about 16 percent of companies have encountered “critical or negative new media campaigns” (slide 8). In other words, 16 percent of companies have received criticism over social media. Crises that are carried out over social media can create “potentially negative outcome[s] affecting the organization, company, or industry, as well as its publics, products, services, or good name” (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p.

2). Social media crises can also affect brands. The prevalence of social media crises makes it important to understand how crises begin via social media and what brands can do to manage these crises.

Some of the crises that have broken out over social media have also been called digital wildfires. Digital wildfires have been explained as “viral phenomena triggered by false or sensitive information online” (Bessi & Quattrociocchi, 2015, pg. 34). The content or information spreads rapidly and can cause significant harm to the entity in which it is related (World Economic Forum, Section 2, 2013). In other words, digital wildfires can be likened to a social media crisis, where information is spread virally and is not able to be easily controlled by the brand. The study of digital wildfires has mostly surrounded the spread of misinformation online but has also been connected to the spread of provocative content online considered to be racially charged (Webb et al., 2015). According to Bessi and Quattrociocchi, it is not easy to predict what information will go viral (2015, pg. 38). According to a report by the World Economic Forum (2013), digital wildfires are most dangerous when they deal with high-tension situations, and when they cause damage before information can be corrected.

While digital wildfires and crises via social media can be difficult to control, brands do have the ability to use social sites in their favor. In fact, brands have the ability to respond quickly to consumers and address concerns as they are occurring (Affect, n.d.) In a white paper, Affect, a public relations, social media, and marketing firm, recommends that brands be as open and honest as possible when responding to consumers (n.d.). More information about a crisis reduces anxiety in consumers because it reduces ambiguity and “expressions of sympathy help to reduce anger” (Coombs, 2014). Equally as important as

the message sent to consumers is the channel the message is sent through. Affect (n.d.) cautions brands to consider which social networking sites they use to respond to consumers, recommending a brand respond via the social media channel in which the crisis first broke.

Responding quickly and appropriately to digital wildfires is important because the ephemeral nature of social media, particularly users' ability to post and delete, can make a brand's apology hard to control due (Coppola, 2016). Although brands can take down content that may have caused negative feedback, social media users may have already screen grabbed photos to post on their own timelines, walls, pages, etc. Screen grabbing can change the entire narrative of a brand's offense and apology because consumers do not always have the context of an original post (Coppola, 2016). These screen grabs can be posted to a user's page or timeline where other users are able to re-post, re-share, or re-tweet adding to the chaos that are known as trends (Kwak, Lee, Park, & Moon, 2010). Trends are accumulations of user posts on social networking sites that are collected and analyzed to expose what a majority of people on social networking sites are posting about (Kwak et al., 2010).

Because of this temporal nature of social networking sites, significant events are easily detected (Naaman, Becker, & Gravano, 2010). According to Twitter (2019) and Naaman, Becker, & Gravano (2010), when a user is logged in to his/her account, trends are tailored for him/her based on who he/she follows and his/her geographic location. Twitter (2019) does have rules for what can trend on the site, but they "also consider the newsworthiness of the content, or if it is in the public interest when evaluating potential violations" (p. 8). This means that because Twitter can assess the

newsworthiness of content and whether or not posts are of public interest, it can choose to allow a trend to continue to be seen (Twitter, p. 8, 2019). Facebook operates in the same high capacity way as Twitter because users post in a stream (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2011). Posts that Facebook users see are also influenced by who they follow and their activity on the site (Facebook, 2019). While there are trends on Instagram, ads are shown to users via their feed. Ads that are shown to users are chosen based on what users find relevant along with information that is collected from users via Instagram, Facebook, and third-party sites (Instagram, 2019, p. 12). Overall, the way information and advertisements spread through social networking sites is shared via connections to other similar users and populated based on who users follow and what they search (Naaman et al. , 2010; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2011; Instagram, 2019). Once the spread of information begins, digital wildfires are not far behind. Although, a brand can employ image repair theory to mitigate some of the damage.

Ultimately, this study aims to examine the perceptions and reactions of the public, advertising industry, and brands in regard to the representation of Black people in advertisements using case studies from Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light. More specifically, the study analyzes these perceptions and reactions toward advertisements that received negative feedback. By examining the history and current state of race and racism in the U.S. and advertising industry along with the existing literature surrounding Critical Race Theory, crises management, and image repair theory, a more thorough understanding of current representational issues in advertising is available.

## CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on this case's three selected cases (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad) along with the information presented in the literature review about advertising within the soap, alcohol, and fashion industry, it appears that there is an issue regarding the representation of Black people within advertising. To better understand this representational issue, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: Why were these advertisements perceived as problematic?
- RQ2:
  - a: How did the public react to how Black people were represented in these ads?
  - b: How did the advertising industry react to how Black people were represented in these ads?
  - c: How did brands react to how Black people were represented in their ads?

## CHAPTER 4. CASE STUDIES

Before moving forward, it is important to have a holistic and in-depth understanding of the timelines of the three ads in this study. Again, these three cases are: Dove's release of a three-second GIF ad via social media showing a Black woman taking her shirt off to become White (Richards, 2017); an ad from H&M selling a sweatshirt with the slogan "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" being modeled by a young Black boy (Bever, 2018); and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" campaign that featured a commercial showing a bartender sliding a beer past three Black people to a light-skinned woman (Schultz, 2018a).

Each of these three cases was chosen for multiple reasons. First, each case garnered viral media attention from both celebrities and the general public. Because of the large amount of attention that was garnered reactions of the public, advertising industry, and brands to be investigated. Second, all three cases dealt specifically with the representation of Black people. Cases that were specific to the representation of Black people were important as it was the main focus of this study. Third, each case emanated from a different industry including: the soap industry, beverage industry, and fashion industry. This allowed for representation of Black people to be seen across multiple industries and showed that representation issues are not specific to only one industry. Lastly, each advertisement was released within a seven-month period, beginning with Dove's three-second GIF ad in October 2017, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad in January 2018, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad in March 2018 (Richards, 2017; Bever, 2018; Schultz, 2018a). Because of the tight timeline in which each case was released, the social

media landscape, political landscape, and cultural landscape were similar as none experienced major changes. A description and timeline of each case is presented below.

### **Case One: Dove's three-second GIF ad**

Unilever is the parent company to a family of brands that, collectively, are used by 2.5 billion people a day (Unilever, 2019). Dove, a Unilever sub-brand, is based in the United States. In 2004, Dove created the Campaign for Real Beauty with the intent to “[help] women [realize] their personal potential for beauty by engaging them with products that deliver real care,” (Unilever, 2017; Unilever, Brands, 2019). However, during its history, the Campaign for Real Beauty has experienced both positive and negative feedback from consumers and those within the advertising industry, as seen in Dove's Before and After advertisement above (see page 14).

Dove's most recent representational issues stemmed from an advertisement (Figure 5) that was released on the afternoon of Friday, October 6, 2017 (Richards, 2017; Ha, 2017). Dove posted a three-second GIF advertisement to its Facebook page (Independent, 2017) that was intended to convey to women that Dove products were delicate enough to be used on many different skin types (Ogunyemi, 2017). The GIF was a short clip showing three successive women taking off their shirt to become one another. The first woman was Black and, upon taking off her shirt, she revealed a White woman (Richards, 2017). The GIF then goes on to show the white woman taking her shirt off to reveal a woman that is of Asian descent (Richards, 2017). While many consumers were upset (Richards, 2017), a woman named Naomi Blake, a Black makeup artist, screen grabbed part of the GIF (Figure 5) and reshared it to her Facebook page with the caption, “So I'm scrolling through Facebook and this is the #dove ad that comes up.... ok so what am I looking at....” (Ha,

2017; Naomi Blake Facebook page, 2017). The screen grab only shows the initial reveal of the black woman pulling off her shirt to show a white woman underneath. It does not include the woman of Asian descent who is revealed when the white woman takes her shirt off.

The original GIF advertisement was removed from Dove's Facebook page by Saturday, October 7th (Richards, 2017). After the original GIF advertisement was taken down, Dove issued an initial apology via Twitter on Saturday, October 7, 2017 at 1:27 p.m. telling consumers that it "missed the mark" (Ha, 2017). The brand's apology was not well received by the public, and Dove responded with a longer apology via Twitter on Monday, October 9, 2017 at 12:40 p.m. (Rittenhouse, 2017). The longer apology tried to explain Dove's initial intention for the ad and told consumers that the company would be "re-evaluating [its] internal processes for creating and approving content to prevent [it] from making [that] type of mistake in the future" (Rittenhouse, 2017).



Figure 5: Dove Ad Screen Grab

## **Case Two: H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" Ad**

Hennes & Mauritz, more widely known as H&M, is a clothing brand based out of Sweden that sells apparel across the globe (H&M, 2019; Nickalls, 2018). On Sunday, January 7, 2018, a screen grab of H&M's online selling page picturing a young Black boy wearing a green children's sweatshirt that read "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" in white block letters (Figure 6) went viral on Twitter (Nickalls, 2018). Consumers were upset with H&M, saying the sweatshirt implied the boy was a "monkey" – a historically racist remark (Nickalls, 2018; Hund & Mills, 2016). Consumers were further upset because the sweatshirt was sold in two other variations on the same online sale page (Nickalls, 2018). However, the other two styles – one blue with animal paw prints and the other orange reading "Mangrove Jungle Survival Expert" – were modeled by young white boys (Nickalls, 2018).

Celebrities such as LeBron James and Diddy responded to the controversy via Twitter and Instagram on Monday, January 8, 2018 (Nickalls, 2018). Both posted modified pictures of the advertisement with illustrated crowns added on top of the young boy's head with captions that were intended to demand respect and encouraging people to see the boy as a "Young King" (Nickalls, 2018). Other celebrities such as The Weeknd and G-Eazy publicly announced that they would no longer be working with H&M because they were embarrassed by what happened and didn't want to be associated with the brand (Nickalls, 2018). The Weeknd and G-Eazy were both scheduled to launch their own line of H&M clothes before pulling out of the deal via Twitter and Instagram on Monday, January 8, 2018 and Tuesday, January 9, 2018 (respectively) (Nickalls, 2018; Chervokas & Rothman, 2018).

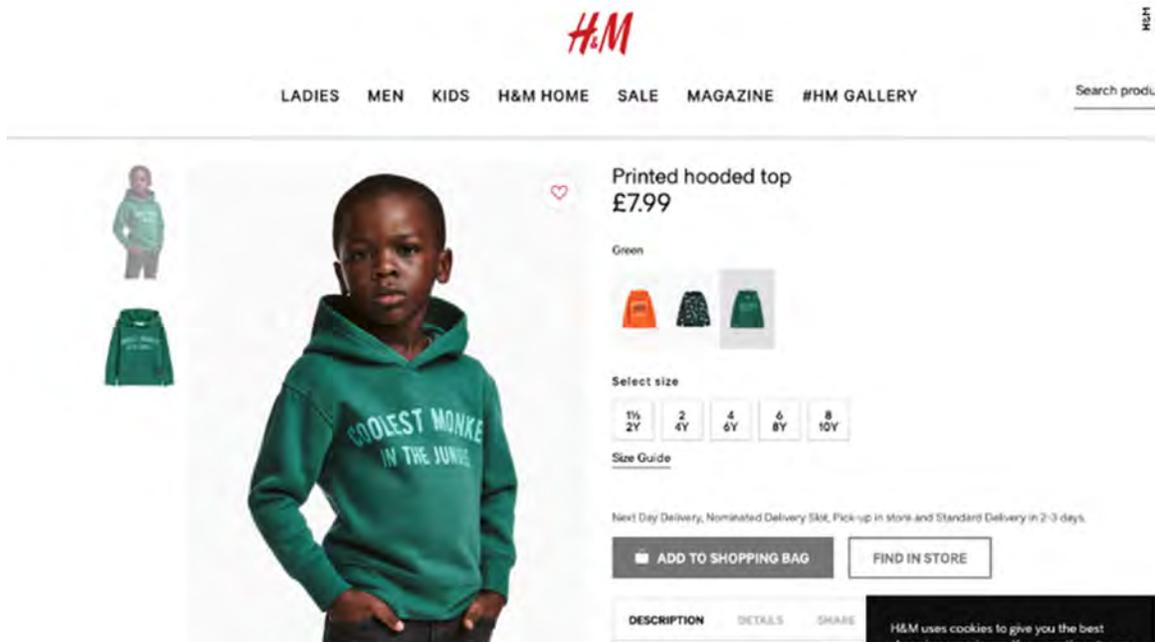


Figure 6: H&M's Online Selling Page Screen Grab

H&M apologized on Monday, January 8, 2018, and a spokeswoman from H&M said the image had been removed from all H&M sites, and the company was very sorry to anyone that was offended by the ad (Kottasova, 2018). However, according to Bever (2018), the sweatshirt was still for sale on the company's UK site. On Monday, January 9, 2018, H&M stated that the image was taken down and the garment would be removed from production (H&M, 2018). On January 16, 2018, the company announced that it had hired a diversity leader in wake of the "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad (Olsen, 2018).

### **Case Three: Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" Ad**

Created more than 150 years ago in Amsterdam, Heineken is a brand of beer that is known and sold globally (Heineken, 2019). On March 12, 2018, the company released a TV spot in the U.S. (Figure 7 and Figure 8) that was to be shown "in programming including NBA basketball, ESPN's 'SportsCenter' and 'The Late Show with Stephen Colbert' on CBS'" (Schultz, 2018b). On Saturday, March 24, Heineken Light uploaded

three more videos from the campaign each, slightly different from the spot released on March 12<sup>th</sup>, to its YouTube channel (Schultz, 2018a).

The commercial that aired on TV showed a bartender looking across an outdoor bar and spotting a light-skinned woman without a drink in her hand (Schultz, 2018b). In the spot, the bartender grabs a Heineken Light, opens it, and slides it down the bar, presumably to the woman he noticed at the beginning of the spot. On its way down the bar, the beer passes three Black people and stops at the end of the bar on a shot including a wine glass and a Heineken Light with the tagline “Sometimes, lighter is better” (Schultz, 2018a). It then shows a light-skinned woman picking up the Heineken Light (Schultz, 2018b).

Consumers responded to the longer commercial by screen grabbing different shots of the clip and expressing their outrage for how Heineken Light had represented people of color in the spot (Schultz, 2018a). Chance the Rapper responded via Twitter on March 25, 2018, saying that he thought brands were now releasing racist ads on purpose, so they would get publicity (Schultz, 2018a). Heineken Light pulled the ad sometime Monday, March 26, 2018 and apologized by saying while Heineken Light believed the slogan was referencing its beer, the brand “missed the mark” and it would take the feedback into consideration in the future (Schultz, 2018b). Again, it was not clear from the brand’s apology if the ad had been created by an in-house team or agency.

Interestingly, Heineken Light ran a similar campaign in Ireland in June 2017, and the brand received no negative backlash, which is why it decided to run the spot in the United States (Schultz, 2018b). Even so, once the campaign received negative feedback in the United States, the company decided to pull the commercial in the United States (Schultz, 2018b).



Figure 7: Heineken Light Ad, Screen Grab 1



Figure 8: Heineken Light Ad, Screen Grab 2

It is important to note that it was unclear from each brand's apology if in-house team's or agencies were responsible for the creation of these ads. Although, each brand was inundated with negative feedback from the general public for the ways in which the ad's represented Black people. It is from this negative feedback that the researcher aims to find the perceived problems and reactions from the public, advertising industry, and brands regarding representation. However, to do this, the method of the study must be laid out.

## CHAPTER 5. METHOD

This study will employ a thematic analysis, which is considered a qualitative research method. By using this method, the researcher will be able to identify themes that help explain the perceptions and reactions of the public, the advertising industry, and offending brands to the three case study ads detailed above.

### **Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research provides data that is “well-grounded” and rich in “descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). Qualitative analysis also allows researchers to keep the chronological flow of the study so explanations as to what “events led to which consequences” can be made (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). When trying to answer questions regarding what people are thinking or why things happen a certain way, a qualitative study can be employed because it posits that meaning arises from within, and meaning and interpretation therefore guide behavior (Morrison, Haley, Bartel & Taylor, 2002).

While there are many advantages of qualitative research, it is also important to recognize the disadvantages of qualitative research. One weakness of qualitative research is that it is not generalizable to similar situations or populations (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, pg. 355). This is because qualitative research studies “cases that are historically and culturally specific” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, pg. 355). Another weakness of qualitative research is the opportunity for researcher bias to interact with the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 2). The researcher can combat researcher bias by leaving any assumptions and knowledge behind and replacing it with the want to find new information (Morrison et al., 2002). While it is important for the researcher to acknowledge bias, it is

also important to note that this study takes more of a constructivist grounded theory approach which “begins with the empirical world and builds an inductive understanding of it as events unfold and knowledge accrues” (Charmaz, 2008, pg. 155). In other words, this study expects Critical Race Theory to assist in the understanding and formation of themes.

The validity of interpretations is important to address at the beginning of a qualitative study. Validity in qualitative research “must be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research rather than being context-independent property” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 121). In other words, validity is assessed via the relationship between the researcher and the context being studied because the two are not independent of each other. The relationship between the researcher and the context is what aids in the formation of interpretations. Lindlof and Taylor (2019, pg. 355-356) stated that qualitative researchers strive to achieve “successful interpretation” and that there are many interpretations of qualitative data that are successful. In terms of reliability, Lindlof and Taylor (2019, pg. 353) held that “reliability is typically not a serious concern in evaluating qualitative research” for several reasons, including “the overarching interpretivist assumption in qualitative research concerning the existence of multiple, dynamic, social realities” (Lindlof and Taylor, 2019, pg. 353). Because the nature of perceptions and reactions are “continually changing – as are our understandings of them,” replicating the results is not necessary in qualitative research (Lindlof and Taylor, 2019, pg. 353).

### **Thematic Analysis**

For this study, thematic analysis, a type of qualitative research, was used to understand consumer, industry and brand perceptions surrounding representation issues in advertising.

Thematic analysis uses an inductive approach, which allows themes to be identified from data rather than applying a set of pre-established codes or code sheet (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher begins the coding process by reading the full sample to gain a holistic understanding of the sample and “noting... initial ideas” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, the researcher creates initial codes that help identify potential themes illustrated throughout the sample (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The third step is to search for and refine themes that can be coded for and then (fourth step) to review those themes and codes in order to make sure that they “work in relation” to each other (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fifth step is to continue in the refining process of naming the overall themes and truly defining what can be coded under these headings so that in the last (sixth) step, the researcher can go back through the sample and extract whatever they missed, and an analysis of the findings can be completed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis allows “for [the identification], [analysis] and reporting [of] patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, thematic analyses are studies of materials that provide “a crucial interpretative tool to [understanding] the nature of society” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Geismar & Horst, 2004).

In thematic analysis, it is important to note that categories or themes develop by comparing data, in this case from one article to another (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Although it was unknown what theme would be identified in this study, it was expected that Critical Race Theory and Image Repair Theory would inform themes creation. At the end of the process, the researcher was able to analyze the drawn from the holistic sample and compare those themes across cases to answer the research questions posed.

## **Sampling Methods**

The sample for this study consisted of articles from trade publications and popular press that covered each case. This study only sampled static articles. During analysis, any video and audio coverage embedded within the sampled static articles was examined; however, stand-alone video or audio coverage was excluded. The unit of analysis for this study was articles, meaning that one unit of the sample equaled one article. Articles were used because they are rich in information (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019) and included the perceptions and reactions of consumers, industry, and brands. Many trade publication and popular press articles are written to include an overview of consumer reactions and perceptions, how brands responded to these reactions, and even offer examples/figures. Because of this information, the reactions and perceptions of each population in question (public, industry, and brand) was able to be compared across cases.

The sample of trade publication and popular press articles was collected using two online news article databases – US Newsstream and Newsbank. These databases were used as they both provide the ability to search for trade publications and popular press articles as well as refine searches based on keywords and dates. The search terms used to find the sample of articles was tailored for each case. For each case, searches included the name of the brand that released the advertisement (e.g., Dove, H&M or Heineken Light) plus other words defining the case (e.g. GIF, racist, ad, sweatshirt, hoodie, beer) or the slogan/tagline of the case (e.g. Coolest Monkey in the Jungle, Sometimes Lighter is Better). Boolean phrases were also used to exclude articles and publications that did not pertain to what was being searched. For example, articles pertaining to ads from the Dove Real Beauty Campaign that were not about the Facebook GIF ad, were excluded.

Unlike H&M and Heineken Light, Dove did not have a particular slogan or word attached to its advertisement. Therefore, the terms “Dove AND racist ad” were searched because it resulted in the most relevant articles. The terms “Dove AND racist GIF” and were also searched. Because both H&M’s and Heineken Light’s representation issues revolved around a phrase/slogan, search terms were easier to identify. To find H&M articles, the terms “H&M AND Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” were searched along with “H&M AND sweatshirt ad” and “H&M AND hoodie ad”. To find Heineken Light articles, the terms “Heineken AND Lighter is Better” was searched as well as “Heineken AND racist beer ad”.

To further refine the search, dates were specified for each case that correlated to the month each ad was released. For Dove, articles must have been written during or after the month of October 2017. For H&M, articles must have been written during or after the month of January 2018. And, for Heineken Light, articles must have been written during or after the month of March 2018.

Each case was searched individually on Newsbank and US Newsstream using the search terms specified above. Any content that was returned that was not a trade publication or popular press article, such as video/audio content, transcripts or blog posts were excluded from the sample. If duplicate articles were returned, only one was retained in the sample – all others were excluded. Duplicate articles were defined as articles that either contained the exact same information or were minor variations of the same press release. In the case of a duplicate press releases, the press release with the most information was kept in the sample and all others were excluded. Other articles that were excluded included

any articles that did not supply sufficient information about a case (e.g. one sentence about a case, a poll referencing a case that did not show results).

Dove searches resulted in 139 static articles; H&M searches resulted in 259 static articles; and Heineken Light searches resulted in 27 static articles. Because Heineken Light only returned 27 articles, a sub-sample of 27 articles was selected for Dove and H&M. This allowed the researcher to ensure that identified themes were equally representative of all three cases.

Twenty-seven articles were randomly selected for both Dove and H&M and added to the 27 Heineken Light articles that were returned. This resulted in a total sample of 81 articles (n=81) (see Appendix A for a list of all articles in the sample). To select the 27-article sub-samples for Dove and H&M, a list with each case's articles was made and then numbered sequentially beginning at one (e.g., Dove 1 – 139 and H&M 1 – 259). Once all articles were assigned numbers, 27 numbers were randomly generated using an online random number generator ([www.random.org](http://www.random.org)). The article with the corresponding numbers were selected for the sample. This process was completed twice, once for Dove and once for H&M. After the processes were completed, the researcher was able to begin analyzing the sample to identify themes.

## CHAPTER 6. ANALYSIS

Twenty-seven articles were collected for each of the three cases included in this study – Dove’s three-second GIF, H&M’s “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” ad, and Heineken Light’s “Sometimes Lighter is Better” ad – resulting in a sample of 81 articles (n=81). The researcher did not have themes defined before reading but allowed themes to be identified from the data in keeping with the processes of thematic analysis (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). These identified themes will assist in answering the research questions at hand.

### **Research Question One (RQ1)**

The first research question (RQ1) in this study aimed to discover what was perceived as problematic across Dove’s three-second GIF ad, H&M’s “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” ad, and Heineken Light’s “Sometimes Lighter is Better” ad. This means the researcher wanted to know if themes that were identified from articles specifically pointed out or defined what went wrong in these ads. In other words, why did the ads garner negative feedback? The main theme that was identified was Racism. Although the sub-themes Skin Color, and Proximity were also identified as they explained how Racism manifested in each ad.

*Racism.* Racism was identified as the major theme when investigating what was perceived as problematic in each ad. However, no articles described what racism was, but instead assumed that readers would have previous knowledge of the word. For example, H&M “sparked criticism for being racist” (Hsu, 2018). Also, according to Chaudhuri (2017), “Heineken experienced a social-media backlash that accused an ad for its light beer

as being racist.” Additionally, Dove “was accused of racism over the online advertising campaign” (Slawson, 2017).

Overall, undefined racism was used as an all-encompassing, blanket term describing the general message of each ad. However, two more specific racism-related sub-themes identified were: Skin Color and Proximity. Both Skin Color and Proximity are considered sub-themes because they rely on racism existing and having the ability to be exemplified or acted out.

*Skin Color.* The Skin Color sub-theme can be defined as the idea that Black people’s skin color makes them inferior or less than because it is darker than White people’s skin. Exemplifying this sub-theme was a tweet about the Dove advertisement from user @TshwaneloFokazi, that stated, “I’m never buying Dove again. Y’all think my brown skin symbolizes dirt” (Podnar, 2017). Another article stated that Dove was “implying that its soap could somehow help ‘purify’ the black woman into becoming white” (Reynolds, 2017) or “suggesting Dove body wash had cleansed her” (Snider, 2017). This idea that the Dove ad depicted Black skin as somehow dirty or inferior to White skin “evoked a long-running racist trope in soap advertising: a ‘dirty’ black person cleansed into whiteness” (The Plain Dealer, 2017).

However, this theme went beyond the historical issues in soap advertising. In reference to whiteness, one Heineken Light-related article stated:

The ad has been criticized for glorifying whiteness and portraying blackness in a demeaning way; the black people featured in the ad can look at, but not enjoy, a bottle of Heineken, a symbol of leisure. (Kulluk, 2018)

Further, the history of skin color was explained via an article referencing H&M, which said, “It is understandable that people get upset, because 100 to 150 years ago, some people compared black people to monkeys” (Kristiansen, 2018). Overall, the language

surrounding Skin Color in the sample further reinforced the history and prevalence of racism within advertising.

*Proximity.* The second sub-theme found under racism was Proximity. This sub-theme can be described as the literal way in which Black people and White people were placed in each ad. Specifically, the way viewers of the ad were able to visually see a power dynamic or comparison between the Black person and White person.

In Dove's case, the public seemed to be upset with the placement of the models as the ad depicted, "a black woman removing a brown T-shirt to reveal a white woman underneath" (Snider, 2017). Naomi Blake, a Black, American makeup artist who shared a screenshot of the ad, was asked in the comments of her post "if people would be offended if the white woman turned into a black woman." Blake responded saying, "Nope, we wouldn't and that's the whole point" (Slawson, 2017).

The young Black boy who wore the "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" sweatshirt for H&M was juxtaposed by "his white counterpart [wearing] a bright orange hoodie with the words printed 'Survival Expert'" (Hall, 2018). Because both were displayed on the same page, consumers were able to directly compare the power relationship between a monkey and a survival expert, with the survival expert having power over the monkey.

Finally, the public said Heineken Light's ad reinforced the idea that Black people are not able to "enjoy a bottle of Heineken," only White people are (Kulluk, 2018). This is because the Heineken Light ad:

...showed a bartender removing the top off a bottle of Heineken and sliding it across a bar, passing several black men and women. The bottle ultimately reached the hands of a lighter-skinned woman, and the tagline "Sometimes lighter is better" appears on the screen (Quinn, 2018).

In reference to the Heineken Light commercial, one Twitter user, Alexander Sommer, wrote that “every person in every frame is intentional” (Connellan, 2018). Therefore, it seems that the positioning of models in advertising and layouts of advertisements is crucial to the way consumers receive the ad.

Ultimately, the researcher found an overarching racism theme across all three cases. Within the larger racism theme, two sub-themes – Skin Color and Proximity – further explained what racism looks like and how racism was depicted in these three advertisements.

## **Research Question Two**

This study’s second research question examined reactions of a) the public, b) the advertising industry, and c) the brands toward the representation of Black people in each case – Dove’s three-second GIF ad, H&M’s “Coolest Monkey in the Jungle” ad, and Heineken Light’s “Sometimes Lighter is Better” ad. To ensure each part of the question was answered, the researcher analyzed the sample for themes one reaction at a time (public, advertising industry, and brands).

### *Part A: Public Reactions*

RQ2a intended to better understand public reaction toward the representation of Black people within the advertisements in question. The themes that were identified upon analyzing the sample to find public reactions were Questioning, Solutions to the Problem, Multiple Mishaps, and Denouncing the Brand.

*Questioning.* The Questioning theme described the way the public sought information about brand decisions. It suggested that the public was skeptical about brands’ processes

around the creation, approval, and dissemination of advertisements. For example, one article that mentioned the Heineken Light ad asked:

Is it probable that none of the corporate types who OK'd the creative for the ad that was reviewed up and down the ranks foresaw how the play of lighter being better and Black people could be racist? (Paradkar, 2018).

Another article referencing the Heineken Light ad asked, "One can't help but think: how did the people who made it not recognize the racist undertones of the ad?" (Kulluk, 2018).

In the same way, an article referencing the Dove ad said, "social media users wonder[ed] how [the ad] could have made it through multiple layers of review" (The Plain Dealer, 2017).

While many questions were specifically aimed at the process through which ads are approved, some Questioning statements were more general. For example, a Heineken Light related article pointed out that "brands... rarely explain how such blunders come to pass" (Hsu, 2018). Another article referencing the Dove ad asked, "How can they do this, this is so racist?" (University Wire, 2017). Additionally, a Heineken Light article asked, "what were the ad execs drinking?" (The Sunday Mirror, 2018).

Overall, the Questioning theme was one of the most prominent across all three cases as the public tried to make sense of the advertisements presented to them by brands.

*Solutions to the Problem.* The second theme, Solutions to the Problem, referred to how the public offered their opinions on how brands could do better. According to a Dove article by Knudson (2017), a social media user wrote:

You've made 'mistakes' like this before. Until you really involve people of color at all levels of your company and every step of your decision-making processes, you will probably make this 'mistake' again.

In the same way, one H&M article said it was "crucial... for global players to take into account sensitivities and differences in cultural views in the markets in which they operate"

(Moorad, 2018). In contrast, a solution to the Dove ad posed by one Facebook user stated that the “creative director should be fired” (Peterson, 2017).

In Dove’s case, even Lola Ogunyemi, the Black woman who pulled her shirt off to become the White woman in the Dove ad, seemed to want the brand to stand up for themselves as “the screenshots that have taken the media by storm paint a slight different picture [than the full ad]” (New Hampshire Union Leader, 2017) because she didn’t “feel it was racist” (New Hampshire Union Leader, 2017). In this way, Ogunyemi suggested the solution was for Dove to explain the ad to consumers in order to show the full picture.

Ultimately, solutions to the problem included the public offering their opinion to brands on what could’ve been done better. While many opinions varied, there were plenty that pointed out how this wasn’t the first time for brands to mess up.

*Multiple Mishaps.* In the Multiple Mishaps theme, it was not lost on the public that the brands in these cases (Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light) have had to apologize for advertisements gone wrong before. For example, Reynolds (2017) said “this isn’t the first time Dove has made one of these mistakes.” Reynolds (2017) goes on to say that Dove released a “‘Summer Glow Nourishing Lotion’ ... for ‘normal to dark skin’” which “establish[ed] anyone of darker skin tone as abnormal.” According to a Dove-related article by Mike Snider (2017):

Several on Twitter recalled other instances when the brand was racially insensitive. CNN political commentator Keith Boykin included a picture of another Dove liquid soap advertisement with women of color and a white woman below an ‘After’ using the product.

Additionally, Scribner (2018) stated that, “H&M pulled an outfit that resembled a feathered headdress after receiving complaints that the clothing item made fun of First Nation tribal customs.”

It is important to mention that advertising failures are not limited to the cases in this study. Articles in the sample pointed out quite a few advertising failures created by brands other than those being studied (Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light). For example, one article referenced H&M's ad and called out the frequent mishaps within the fashion industry including one with Katy Perry's shoe line saying, "the outcry followed a particularly clueless year for fashion designers" (Caron, 2019). The article said Katy Perry had released shoes with faces and were sold in "nine different colorways, including black," which to many, "resembl[ed] blackface" (Caron, 2019). Another Dove article pointed out how Nivea used the headline "Recivilize Yourself" while showing "a black man tossing a mask of his own pre-Nivea Afro-hair," and even mentioned the Pepsi ad that "appropriate[d] the powerful image of Ieshia Evans facing down armored police" (Paradkar, 2018). Again, cases outside of those in this study are important to note as they build on the issue at hand in this study, misrepresentation of Black people in advertising.

Overall, the majority of articles across cases made some mention of the fact that brands have made representation issues in advertising before. In fact, multiple articles echoed a Dove article that said:

It is surely not the last time something like this will happen. A public apology will follow, we will go about our lives, and we will forget – until the next episode. Then our newsfeeds will be flooded once again, we'll share opinions, create memes, have discussions on power, race, and cultural sensitivity – but rarely will we rethink our spending habits (Lineo Segeote, 2017).

This statement sums up the Multiple Mishaps theme, which underscored that the advertisements examined in this study (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad) are not isolated mistakes, but rather these advertisements both follow and, theoretically, precede other mistakes.

*Denouncing the Brand.* The Denouncing the Brand theme encompassed the ways in which the public voiced their opinion of the three brands included in this study (Dove, H&M, Heineken Light). According to the study sample, the public communicated their feelings of shock and outrage because they felt the brands could have done much better, with little effort.

The public expressed their feelings via social media sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. For example, on Twitter, “the hashtag #BoycottDove became a trending topic” (University of New Orleans, 2017). In regard to Heineken Light’s commercial, one article said Chance the Rapper took “to Twitter to slam the Dutch beer company (The Breeze, 2018). In another article referencing the H&M commercial, LeBron James took to Instagram, reposting “an edited version of the ad, which includes a crown on the boy’s head and sweatshirt, labeled, ‘KING OF THE WORLD’” (Hall, 2018). Additionally, Dove’s three-second GIF was:

Screenshotted and shared on Facebook by make-up artist Nay the Mua. She said: ‘What does American tell black people... that we are judged by the colour of our skin and that includes what is considered beautiful in this country’” (Powell, 2017).

Because of social media, consumers are able to denounce brands to their followers instantly. However, consumers are able to denounce brands via traditional methods as well. For example, Isaiah Reynolds (2017), wrote an article that appeared in a University Newspaper regarding the Dove ad that said:

Dove's vision is as follows: ‘We are here to help women everywhere develop a positive relationship with the way they look, helping them raise their self-esteem and realise their full potential.’ With recent controversy, the efforts behind this statement are being questioned as a 3-second-ad suggests Dove is not as inclusive as it claims to be.

No matter the media, consumers are deciding whether or not they trust brands that make advertising mistakes. In fact, upon each brand's release of its apology, the public mostly responded by further Denouncing the Brand as well as the brand apology.

One author who wrote about the Heineken Light ad said apologies containing "'we missed the mark' [are] right up there with 'mistakes were made' and 'I was not my best self' in the pantheon of weasel words" (Zorn, 2018). A Dove article pointed out a tweet made by Ava DuVernay, the director of the film *Selma* that said, "You can do better than 'missed the mark'. Flip + diminishing. Deepens your offence." (Slawson, 2017). H&M was met with protests after a national spokesperson for a political group in South Africa, called the Economic Freedom Fighters said, "H&M apologizing and pulling the controversial advert from its website was not enough" (The Star, 2018).

Ultimately, this theme accounts for how the public vocalized their disappointment upon seeing each advertisement (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad).

#### *Part B: Advertising Industry Reactions*

RQ2b sought to understand how the advertising industry reacted to the representation of Black people in each advertisement. The single overarching theme that was identified after reading the study sample (n = 81) for advertising industry reactions was Advice to Brands. Overwhelmingly, the industry's advice was for brands to get to know their customers. This overarching theme also examined how consumers are requesting more of brands they purchase from.

In a H&M-related article, Michael Brady, a marketing professional, said, "When customers are spending their money with a company, the company should be aware of how

their advertising efforts could impact their customers” (Henley, 2017). According to an article referencing Heineken Light, this is because “consumers expect companies to strike the right tone with all of their outreach efforts” according to Matt Tidwell (Targeted News Service, 2018). In a Dove-related article, Ed Keller, who is the CEO of Engagement Labs, advice would agree with Tidwell, stating:

If brands get the messaging right and market in a way that will resonate with consumers, key influencers will be quick to recommend their products. But it cuts both ways. Miss the mark, and consumer sentiment can quickly turn negative” (MarketWire, 2017).

In an article referencing the Heineken Light ad, Hildy Kuryk, owner of Artemis Strategies, says, “Companies are being asked and demanded to state their values... and how they seize this moment could pay massive business and dividends for them” (Ortved, 2018).

Again, this theme implies that brands need to know and keep in mind who their consumers are when creating advertisements. Brands must do this in order to create advertisements that are not offensive to target markets.

Overall, not many themes explained how the advertising industry reacted to the representation of Black people in Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light ads. This may have been due to the small amount of trade publications and articles in the sample that included information from marketing professionals. Of the 81 articles in the sample, less than one percent ( $n= 0.074$ ) were articles from a trade publication or an article that included information from a marketing professional.

### *Part C: Brand Reactions*

Each brand examined in this study (Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light) released an apology in response to receiving harsh feedback from consumers (Chaudhuri, 2017; Scribner, 2018; Zorn, 2018). Although apologizing could be considered a theme, because

it is the standard response employed by brands after a crisis and because each of the brands in this study did, in fact, respond with an apology, the researcher chose to identify themes within the brand apologies as represented in the sample articles. Therefore, for this study, apologizing serves as an umbrella theme. To better understand the nature of the brands' apologies as responses to negative consumer feedback, the researcher identified the following themes within the apologies: Unintentional Representation, Pulling the Advertisement, and Examining Internal Processes.

*Unintentional Representation.* In each brand's apology, Dove, H&M and Heineken Light all mentioned that the brand did not intend to upset consumers or represent a part of its customer base negatively. For example, Dove's apology said, "the short video was intended to convey that Dove body wash is for every woman" (Chaudhuri, 2017), implying that the brand didn't intend to represent Black people in a negative way. H&M's new Global Leader for Diversity and Inclusiveness said, "the recent incident was entirely unintentional" (Smith, 2018). Additionally, while many consumers felt that Heineken Light's ad insinuated that Black people could only look at the beer, the brand's apology says that wasn't the intention. In fact, Heineken Light's apology stated that the brand felt "the ad [was] referencing [its] light beer" (Quinn, 2018).

*Pulling the Advertisement.* Although the brands in this study did not pull their advertisements in the same way, each brand did eventually pull the advertisement in question after receiving harsh consumer feedback (Snider, 2017; Smith, 2018; Tesema, 2018). For instance, Dove said it had, "removed the post and [had] not published any other related content" (The Scotsman, 2017). H&M stated that not only was the ad taken down, but that the company "no longer [sold] the hoodie" (Smith, 2018). Lastly, an article

regarding the Heineken Light commercial stated, “Heineken said it was pulling the video ad for Heineken Light from all global markets” (Reuters News Service, 2018). However, none of the brands were able to pull their advertisement before a consumer had screen grabbed the advertisement, which allowed continued circulation of the advertisements via social media.

*Examining Internal Processes.* Lastly, all of the brands in this study apologized and made multiple statements about what the brand would do moving forward. One element each brand said it would look into were the internal processes for how advertisements are developed and approved so that future mistakes did not occur.

Dove spoke out on Twitter saying it was “re-evaluating [its] internal process for creating and approving content” (Reynolds, 2017). Similarly, H&M stated the brand would “be reviewing all [its] internal policies accordingly to avoid any future issues” (Scribner, 2018). In fact, in response to the backlash, H&M appointed a Global Diversity Leader from within the company to show movement on the company’s commitment to reviewing processes (Smith, 2018). Heineken Light also said that the company was “taking the feedback... in developing future campaigns” (Tesema, 2018), implying that Heineken Light would be more cognizant of race in the future to make sure no future mistakes are made.

Ultimately, the third research question aimed to find out how brands reacted to the representation issues in their own advertising. A thematic analysis of the sample found that brands reacted by apologizing for the Unintentional Representation, Pulling the Advertisement, and Examining Internal Processes.

## CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION

This study has looked at advertisements that have received negative consumer feedback in order to understand the perceptions and reactions to the advertisement from the perspective of the public, advertising industry, and brand. To conduct the analysis for this study, the researcher looked at each research question individually.

Racism was found as the major theme when exploring what was perceived as problematic with each ad. Racism was found as the major theme. Two sub-themes – Skin Color and Proximity – were also identified. These sub-themes helped define what was considered racist in each ad. In other words, Racism manifested itself in models' Skin Color and Proximity (placement) within each ad and across all three cases.

The second research question was divided into three parts, examining reactions toward representation in each ad from perspectives of the public, the advertising industry, and the brand. In regard to the public's reactions, the researcher found themes included Questioning, Multiple Mishaps, Denouncing the Brand, and Solutions to the Problem. When examining the sample for the advertising industry reaction, the only theme identified was Advice to Brands. Lastly, brand reactions included a major theme of Apologizing with sub-themes of Unintentional Representation, Pulling the Advertisement, and Examining Internal Processes.

Each of the themes above were found across all three cases. Throughout the discussion, each theme is explained and examined further drawing from information in this study's literature review.

## Research Question One

Research question one examined what was perceived as problematic in each of the advertisements (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad). The overarching theme identified the perceived problem was Racism. However, no article defined what racism meant. As shown in the literature review of this study, there are many definitions for racism (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Fredrickson, 2015); Walton et al., 2013; Sage Glossary, 2009), and many scholars have suggested that the definition of racism can change over time (Holt, 2000; Bobo, 2004). The fluidity of the definition of racism may explain why no article attempted to explain or define the term.

While no definition of racism was offered in the articles, two sub-themes were identified that assisted in explaining how racism manifested in each ad. The two sub-themes identified were Skin Color and Proximity. When speaking about Critical Race Theory (CRT), Santana (2013) posited that because racism is such a pervasive phenomenon, only blatant and outstanding manifestations garner attention. Interestingly, the two sub-themes identified under the overarching theme of racism did, indeed, depict the blatant and outstanding manifestations of racism in these cases. These sub-themes can also be further explained through Colorism, Colorblindness, and Howkin's (2009) study dealing with spatial placement.

When viewed through a CRT lens, both Skin Color and Proximity uncover power structures in each advertisement. These power structures were created due to the systematic oppression of non-White identities in America (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Concerning Skin Color, the oppression of non-White races granted an inherent privilege to White people.

Through a Colorism lens, this inherent privilege becomes visible as it rests on the color of peoples skin. According to Colorism, White skin colors, or lighter skin colors, are defined as pure, beautiful, and desirable whereas Black skin colors, or darker skin colors, are defined as the opposite: impure, not beautiful, and undesirable (Hunter, 2007; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). The dichotomy of lighter skin being more desirable than darker skin creates a power dynamic that places those with White or lighter skin colors over those with Black or darker skin colors. It is this power dynamic that is able to be seen within advertising. For example, in the Dove ad a Black woman becomes a White woman after removing her shirt (Richards, 2017). This triggered the long-standing history of Colorism within advertising in the soap industry, where White skin was depicted as pure, clean, and desirable and Black skin as impure, unclean, and undesirable (Hunter, 2007; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). Naomi Blake, the U.S. makeup artist that spoke about the Dove ad and took the initial screen grab of the ad that went viral, referenced both the Skin Color and Proximity of the two women in the Dove ad. Blake stated that if the roles had been reversed and the White woman had turned into the Black woman, the advertisement wouldn't have been considered racist (Slawson, 2017). In reference to Howkin's (2009) study, the placement of each model in the middle of the shot of the Dove ad afforded the same precedence to each. However, the order in which the models took off their shirts was problematic. Because of this production, it seemed as if the producers were perpetuating the idea that lighter skin is better than darker skin. Ultimately, the production choices in Dove's gif combined Skin Color and Proximity to imply that the Black woman became clean (White) by using Dove soap, providing her with more privilege and power. This closely resembles the history of soap ads showing Black people becoming White, or clean.

Another example of the Skin Color and Proximity subthemes illustrating CRT's power dynamic between White people and non-White people within this study's advertisements is the H&M ad that allowed consumers to select between different colored sweatshirts. One option on the company's online sales page was a green sweatshirt modeled by a young Black boy that said, "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" (Nickalls, 2018). On the same online sales page, the sweatshirt was also being sold in two other colors both modeled by young White boys. One version was orange, with the text, "Mangrove Jungle Survivor Expert" (Nickalls, 2018). A third version was blue with animal tracks across the front. Because the sweatshirt was being sold in multiple colors on the same online sales page, H&M appeared to create a power dynamic through Proximity that suggested the young Black boy did not possess enough privilege or power to be a survivor expert (Crenshaw et al., 1996; Hunter, 2007). The young Black boy also had darker skin tone, which reinforced the ad's racist undertone based on Colorism. In particular, many viewers felt that the image of the young Black boy reignited a long-standing history of Black people being compared to monkeys (Kristiansen, 2018). Additionally, similarly to Naomi Blake's comment that the Dove ad would have been perceived differently if the Black woman had taken off her shirt to reveal a White woman (Richards, 2017), the H&M ad may have been perceived differently if a lighter-skinned child modeled the green "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" sweatshirt while a darker-skinned child modeled the orange "Mangrove Jungle Survivor Expert" sweatshirt. The inattention of advertisers to the connection between Skin Color and Proximity is what amasses to the perception that each ad is racist. This is due to both Skin Color and Proximity illustrating how racism manifested in each ad.

Lastly, in the Heineken Light ad, a bartender slid a beer past three Black people to a light skinned woman. When viewing the ad through a CRT lens, one can see the power hierarchy created through the placement of particular models in front of and behind the bar. This power hierarchy can be explained best via a Heineken Light-related article. The article pointed out that the Black people in the ad were behind the bar and only able to see the beer making its way to the light-skinned woman, insinuating Black people aren't privileged enough to actually "enjoy a bottle of Heineken" (Kulluk, 2018). Additionally, when referencing Proximity, Howkin's (2009) study examining spatial placement is useful as it maintains that the Black people in the Heineken Light ad were placed behind the bar to assume a lesser precedence. Therefore, the light-skinned woman at the end of the commercial was emphasized through both her lightness and her placement in front of the bar rather than behind. Heineken Light also alluded to Skin Color being a factor in this privilege as the tagline for the commercial read "Sometimes Lighter is Better" (Quinn, 2018). Heineken Light's slogan reinforces Colorism's idea that the closer one's skin color is to White, the more privileged one is (Hunter, 2007). In other words, Heineken Light's ad reinforced the idea that the Black people in the ad weren't able to enjoy the beer both because of their Proximity to it and because their Skin Color would not allow them that privilege.

Ultimately, the Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light advertisements were each perceived as Racist. Specifically, Racism was manifest via Skin Color and Proximity.

### **Research Question Two**

The second research question examined the reactions of three separate parties – a) the public, b) the advertising industry, and c) the brands – to the representation of Black

people in each ad examined in this study. These reactions provided more insight and context into what many stakeholders felt about the representation issues in each advertisement.

#### *Part A: Public Reactions*

When reading the sample articles to identify reactions of the public, the main themes identified were: Questioning, Multiple Mishaps, Denouncing of the Brand, and Solutions to the Problem.

*Questioning.* Many of the questions raised by the public involved the processes brands go through to create and release advertisements. Specifically, the public wanted to know why these advertisements were not deemed as offensive or negative upon creation and, subsequently, blocked from release. For instance, an article about the Heineken Light ad stated, “One can’t help but think: how did the people who made it not recognize the racist undertones of the ad?” (Kulluk, 2018). These types of questions can be better understood by layering two elements.

The first element to aid in the understanding of why and how advertisements with representation issues are released is Critical Race Theory. This theory posits that White people have an inherent privilege that non-White races don’t possess (Crenshaw et al., 1996). Because this privilege is inherent and does not have to be acquired, White people are not always able to recognize their privilege (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). The second element is the current make-up of the work force of the advertising industries in the U.S., Sweden, and the Netherlands. As stated on page 11, it is safe to assume that each of the advertising industries in each country are majority White. In fact, of the people that are employed by the U.S. advertising industry, 85 percent identify as White (Bureau of Labor

Statistics, 2019). This means that only 15 percent of people who work within the U.S. advertising industry identify as non-White. By considering the combination CRT privilege and advertising industry make up, one could assume that the lack of diversity within the advertising industry limits the presence of multiple perspectives when creating and reviewing ads. Because of this lack of diversity, the teams that create and approve these ads may not be able to recognize their privilege, hindering their ability to see, or prevent, representational issues within the advertisements they create.

*Solutions to the Problem.* This theme showcased the public offering brands possible solutions to their representational advertising issues. Of all the solutions offered, the most common was a call for brands to hire a more diverse team (Knudson, 2017). Consumers believed that if the team who created and reviewed the advertisements pre-release was diverse, then the content that was released would be less racially charged. CRT supports this proffered solution, suggesting that more diversity on a team provides more perspectives and points of view, theoretically catching more representation issues before release (Crenshaw et al., 1996).

Although, a call for increased diversity on advertising teams was the most common solution offered by the public, some consumers also suggested that the brand should have explained the intention behind the ad or even fire whoever approved the ad for release. Some of these suggestions, such as the call for increased diversity, were considered as the researcher compiled a list of best practices (see Appendix B).

*Multiple Mishaps.* Based on the sample articles, the public also noted that the advertisements in this study (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better ad") are not the first

advertisements with representational issues – nor will they be the last. A telling quote in an article about the Dove ad stated:

It is surely not the last time something like this will happen. A public apology will follow, we will go about our lives, and we will forget – until the next episode. Then our newsfeeds will be flooded once again, we'll share opinions, create memes, have discussions on power, race, and cultural sensitivity – but rarely will we rethink our spending habits (Lineo Segeote, 2017).

This quote embodies why the multiple mishap theme is important to note. First, Segeote's (2017) quote voices the expectations that brands will continue to mess up and be forced to apologize for their mistakes. Because the advertising industry workforce is not diverse (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019; World Population Review, 2019) and the majority of people within the workforce don't, or can't, acknowledge their privilege (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), it seems these types of advertising issues will continue to exist until one or both of those elements changes (Knudson, 2017).

Second, Segeote's (2017) quote states that consumers will continue to point out flaws and potential implications in advertisements. Third, Segeote's (2017) quote concludes with the expectation that future consumers will resort back to normal spending routines after an unspecified amount of time. Critical Race Theory reinforces the notion that racism still exists as a pervasive and everyday phenomenon (Santana, 2013). Because racism is normalized and, at some level, expected, Segeote's (2017) quote suggests that representational issues in advertising are likely to continue to occur with the same result – the public will continue to move on and continue to buy the same products. As the Multiple Mishaps theme would suggest, not only is racism normalized, but racism in advertising is becoming ordinary. Therefore, as Santana (2013) posits, the more normalized this racist advertising becomes, the harder it will be to recognize and change.

*Denouncing the Brand.* The public is asking for brands to showcase people who look like them in advertisements (Rogers, 2016). As brands try to fulfill the request, many brands (including the brands in this study – Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light) do not always get it right, according to the public. These mistakes resulted in the public Denouncing the Brand, a theme that showcases how the public provides negative feedback to brands.

An important aspect to this theme is both the general public's and celebrities use of social media to criticize brands. In each case, the brands studied appeared to receive most negative feedback via social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In fact, the large amount of negative feedback that these brands received can be classified as digital wildfires because the spread of information was not able to be controlled and caused potential harm to the brands in question in this study: Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light (World Economic Forum, Section 2, 2013). Due to the temporal nature of these social media sites, informational messages curated by both general consumers and celebrities spread rapidly and even landed some of the brands with unwanted trending hashtags on Twitter such as, #BoycottDove (University of New Orleans, 2017). It is the ease of this spread of information via retweets and shares is what leads to situations becoming viral and potentially turning into digital wildfires.

#### *Part B: Advertising Industry Reactions*

In addition to identifying the public's reactions to representational issues, the researcher also examined reactions from the advertising industry. The major theme identified was that the advertising industry offered Advice to Brands . Many professionals in the field stated that the public is expecting more of the brands they buy from.

Specifically, modern consumers want to know what brands value (Ortved, 2018). Consumers also want consistent messaging and tone from brands will that will resonate with themselves and other consumers (Ortved, 2018; Targeted News Source, 2018).

Because messaging in advertising can either make or break a brand (MarketWire, 2017), it seems that the industry professionals were aligned in their reaction: brands either need to continue to grow with their consumers or they will continue to be the target for negative feedback.

Although industry professionals in the study sample were very unified in their response, it is important to note that there were a limited number of professional reactions provided. It is possible that the necessity for a sub-sampling of articles for both the Dove and H&M cases resulted in fewer industry professionals' reactions, and more opinions may have been expressed in non-sampled articles. Additionally, the small number of industry reactions may be due to the fact that Heineken and Dove have previously released advertisements regarding diversity that have been well received (Segarra, 2017; Neff, 2017). Because of the low number of reactions from industry professionals, themes related to professional reactions could not be identified as conclusively as in those of the public and the brand. In fact, out of the 81 articles in the sample, only six articles included information from advertising industry and/or marketing professionals. This means that less than one percent of the articles in the sample contained trade information or insights from industry professionals.

### *Part C: Brand Reactions*

Brands reacted to the representation of Black people in each case by apologizing to consumers via social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. In the cases in this study,

no brands were said to have used Instagram as a platform to post public apologies. This may be due to the fact that Instagram is a more visual site and does not allow for as much real-time interaction such as sharing and retweeting. Facebook and Twitter may also be more popular for brands to apologize on because they are considered to be social awareness streams (Naaman et al., 2010). In other words, these sites allow users “to post streams of lightweight content artifacts, from short status messages to links, pictures, and videos” (Naaman et al., 2010, p. 902). Therefore, Facebook and Twitter allow brands a variety of options when considering how to apologize to consumers. While each brand did post some sort of apology, there were specific ways in which brands employed this strategy.

Apologizing was identified as the main theme within this question, although sub-themes were also identified as: Unintentional Representation, Pulling the Advertisement, and Examining Internal Processes. These sub-themes helped explain the content included in each brand’s apology. Interestingly, each of these sub-themes can also be found within Image Repair Theory tactics as explained by Benoit (1997). According to Benoit (1997), Image Repair Theory tactics are able to be employed by brands after receiving negative consumer feedback, making them ideal tools for the studied brands to employ in their apologies.

Specifically, Unintentional Representation correlates with the accident strategy in Benoit’s (1997) evasion of responsibility tactics. By claiming that the mishap was an accident, brands were able to tell consumers that the outcome of the advertisement was not their original intent or purpose (Benoit, 1997). For instance, the analysis of the sample found that Heineken Light claimed that it didn’t mean to appear racist as the brand felt “the ad [was] referencing [its] light beer” (Quinn, 2018). By employing this strategy, Heineken

Light was able to explain its original intentions for the advertisement. Additionally, the brand offered an actionable item to its apology by stating it would take consumer feedback into account moving forward. This addition of an actionable item further illustrated that H&M was committed to rectifying its wrong.

The sub-themes of Pulling the Advertisement and Examining Internal Processes exemplify Benoit's (1997) mortification strategy. This strategy allows brands to apologize and take full responsibility for whatever went wrong (Benoit 1997). An example of mortification in action in this study is Dove stating it had, "missed the mark" and "removed the post and [had] not published any other related content" (The Scotsman, 2017). Dove's apology also fell under the sub-theme, Pulling the Advertisement, as it allowed Dove to appear to be taking responsibility for posting the ad by removing the GIF from Facebook. By coupling these strategies for apology, Dove attempted to save face with consumers and reduce the brands negative feedback.

Examining Internal Processes included brands creating multiple statements about what they would do to make sure representation issues did not occur again. For instance, H&M said it would "be reviewing all [its] internal policies accordingly to avoid any future issues" (Scribner, 2018). According to Benoit's (1997) mortification strategy, H&M's statement illustrates the brand as one that not only owns up to its actions but creates avenues to fix its mistakes. While this is only one part of Image Repair Theory's face-saving strategies, Image Repair Theory can assist in keeping positive brand perception. Because brand perception takes so long to build, it is in a brands best interest to employ these face-saving strategies.

Overall, the third research question is important to understand as brands continue to apologize and attempt to move forward after representational issues. Dove, H&M and Heineken Light all employed the themes found in RQ2c, which parallel Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory image strategies, to attempt gain back consumer trust and move forward.

## CHAPTER 8. CONCLUSION

### **Limitations**

After analyzing the three cases in this study, (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad) it is important to note the limitations of the research. As stated in the methods section of this study, there are a few disadvantages inherent qualitative research. Of those disadvantages, researcher bias imposes the largest threat in this study. However, to combat potential researcher bias, the researcher followed Lindlof & Taylor's (2019) suggestions regarding ways to reduce researcher bias, including leaving behind prior assumptions of what themes might be found upon reading the sample.

The study's sample size (n=81) could also be considered a limitation to the study since the number of Dove and H&M articles was limited due to the small total number of Heineken Light articles. The articles that were excluded from the Dove and H&M search may have contained more themes that would offer more insights into perception and reaction. However, sub-sampling both the Dove and H&M cases ensured that each of the three cases was represented equally.

Lastly, the cases chosen for this study could be considered a limitation. The plethora of advertisements that have received negative feedback mean there were a large number of potential case studies available. Choosing different cases could have resulted in different themes. However, the researcher purposefully selected three cases – Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad –for a multitude of reasons including their attention

from the general public and celebrities, representation of Black people, prominence across multiple industries, and timeline.

### **Future Research**

Based on the high number of past issues, it is likely that representational issues will continue to occur in advertising. To better understand these mistakes, future should research replicate and extend this study by considering additional cases and applying themes that emerged in this study to other advertisements that received negative backlash. Additional research would provide researchers with a chance to identify additional themes and understand whether themes change over time or stay consistent. Continued research would also provide increased reliability and validity regarding the findings of consumer, industry, and brand perceptions and reactions. Additionally, researchers could gain a deeper understanding of what constitutes a representational advertising problem.

The researcher also suggests that future research choose representational issues that include people identifying as races outside of Black and White. The inclusion of additional races and skin tones, such as Latino, Native American, and Asian, among many others – could help broaden the academic community’s understanding of perceptions and reactions toward representational issues in advertising. Research could also be conducted to examine advertising representation issues concerning additional at-risk populations such as those with disabilities, those who are plus size, members of the LGBTQ\* community.

Further research may also take into account how social media assists in the identification of representational issues in advertisements. Especially as social media

sites represent a more diverse audience of consumer who may be able to point out representational issues that advertisers miss. Additionally, studies investigating the identification of representational issues on social media could allow a more extensive look into how social media effects the negative feedback advertisers receive.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this study aimed to understand what was perceived as problematic in each selected case study advertisements (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad), and, subsequently, how the public, advertising industry, and brands reacted to the representation of Black people in each ad.

After analyzing the sample, it appeared that Racism was the perceived wrong in each of the advertisements. Interestingly, racism was not defined in any of the sampled articles. Instead, racism was explained using manifestations of racism within the advertisements – Skin Color and Proximity.

This study's analysis showed that public reacted to the advertising representation issues by Questioning Processes, Offering Solutions, Referencing Multiple Mishaps, and Denouncing the Brand. In particular, the public was wary of the processes advertisers use to create and release ads and felt that there were steps advertisers could take to make ensure equitable representation of non-White races. Additionally, while the public was shocked and upset by the advertisements released by the brands in this study (Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light), they also pointed out that these ads were not the first of their kind. In other words, brands had released racist advertisements before and likely would again in the future.

The small number of trade publications and articles included in the sample featured insight from marketing professionals suggesting that advertisers should get to know their target audiences. This Advice to Brands came because modern consumers want brands to be more transparent about their mission, corporate social responsibility practices, and more. Ultimately, it seems that consumers want brands to understand what consumers are actually asking for in advertising. Modern consumers want brands to move beyond just checking a box for representation of race, specifically concerning people identifying as Black.

Each brand apologized for their representation issues. However, within their apology, the brands layered several elements, including Unintentional Representation, Pulling the Advertisement, and Examining Internal Processes, in an attempt to win back consumers trust,. While these apologies seem to have been enough for brands to win back consumers, many consumers seemed skeptical about when consumers as a whole will decide it isn't enough.

Considering the totality of this study, it seems clear that there is an issue with how Black people are represented in advertisements. Therefore, research, like this study, that examines representation issues in advertising is important to help the academic community better understand what occurs in advertisements that is perceived as problematic. Representational research of this kind also allows researchers to provide practical suggestions for industry professionals who want to avoid representational issues in future advertisements (see Appendix B). Additional studies in this line of research could allow researchers provide further resources for brands as they seek to create equitable representation in future advertisements.

Overall, this research adds to existing literature by examining what is considered problematic in advertisements that receive negative feedback. It also explored the reactions of the public, advertising industry, and brands toward the same advertisements. By investigating these questions, researchers and, subsequently, advertisers are able to better understand the connection between advertising and society.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: List of Articles in Sample

#### *Dove Articles in Sample*

Anonymous. (October 2017). Messy Maria. *Call & Post, All-Ohio Edition*, pp. 4c.

Chaudhuri, S. (October 2017). Business news: Unilever yanks Dove ad --- critics slammed the online video for its popular body wash as racially insensitive. *Wall Street Journal*, pp. B6

Deutsche Press-Agentur. (October 2017). Dove apologises for ‘racist’ Facebook ad. *Deutsche Press-Agentur*

The Christian Science Monitor. (October 2017). Why Rex Tillerson hasn’t quit; what Palestinian unity will, and won’t, achieve; Thaler’s ‘nudge’ worthy of the Nobel nod; the woman in the controversial Dove commercial; choosing a leader for the Federal Reserve is not game. *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Fettmann, E. (October 2017). Fast takes. *New York Post*, pp. 25.

Henley, D. (January 2018). Racist advertisement draws backlash. *The Fauman, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University*.

Kahn, S. (October 2017). Online lather over Dove ad. *The Daily Mirror*, pp. 28

Kang, B. (October 2017). Dove’s apology for its Facebook advert is insulting to people of colour – ‘sorry you’re offended’ really isn’t enough – the ad has made it more obvious than it’s ever been that we need a complete industry overhaul – and colourism needs to be taken as seriously as racism. *The Independent*.

Knudson, A. (October 2017). Ad didn’t wash – Dove apologizes. *Staten Island Advance*, pp. 3

MarketWire. (December 2017). Dove loses shine and Maybelline wins favor with a new face, while Old Space proves to be “unforsweatable”. *MarketWire*.

New Hampshire Union Leader. (October 2017). Black model who appeared in Dove ad says it was not racist. *New Hampshire Union Leader*, pp. 8.

Peterson, K. (October 2017). Dove soap ad: Advertisement criticized as racist. *The Acorn, Drew University*.

Petter, O. (October 2017). Woman in ‘racist’ Dove advert speaks out – ‘I am strong, I am beautiful, and I will not be erased.’ *The Independent*.

- Podnar, R. (October 2017). Trending: ESPN suspends Jemele Hill, Dove gets backlash over racist ad. *The Washington Post*.
- Porter-Street, J. (January 2019). Gillette's far from the cutting edge of empowering women – comment. *The Independent*, pp. 41.
- Powell, T. (October 2017). Dove advert: brand apologises for 'racist' Facebook ad after backlash. *The Evening Standard*.
- Reynolds, I. (October 2017). Dove advertisement another in long line of bad marketing. *Daily Illini, University of Illinois at Urbana – Champagne*.
- Richter, G. (October 2017). Black woman in Dove ad: 'I am not a victim'. *Newsmax.com*
- Saal, M. (October 2017). Dove body was ad racist? Only if you don't watch the whole three seconds. *Standard-Examiner*.
- Segeote, L. (November 2017). Dove takes a dive for tone deaf campaigns. *allAfrica.com*.
- Slawson, N. (October 2017). Dove apologises for ad showing black woman turning into white one – brand says it 'missed mark' after being accused of racism in campaign promoting body lotion. *The Guardian*
- Snider, M. (October 2017). Dove sorry for racially insensitive Facebook ad. *USA Today*.
- The Plain Dealer. (October 2017). News watch – California Weinstein fired after harassment claims. *The Plain Dealer*, pp. A6
- The Scotsman. (October 2017). Dove apologises for racist' picture posted on Facebook. *The Scotsman*.
- The Statesman. (January 2019). Esha Gupta's racial slurs directed to Arsenal footballer Alexander Iwobi draws flak. *The Statesman*.
- University of New Orleans. (October 2017). Dove sparks racial tension with controversial ad. *Driftwood, University of New Orleans*.
- USA Today. (October 2017). A culture war over the national anthem gets the vice presidential treatment. *USA Today*.
- H&M Articles in sample:*
- Anonymous. (January 2018). H&M ad flap reflects industry. *Philadelphia Tribune*.
- Caron, C. (February 2019). Katy Perry pulls shoes resembling blackface: 'Our intention was never to inflict any pain.'

- Coulter, M. (January 2018). Protestors trash H&M stores in South Africa over ‘coolest monkey in the jungle’ jumper racism row – shocking video shows protestor tearing down displays. *The Evening Standard*.
- Degun, G. (February 2019). Liv honest little – not one to mince her words, the founder of gal-dem is clear in her creative and commercial vision for the magazine and the part it has to play in carving out a space for women of colour and nonbinary people of colour, giving them a voice as strong as her own. *Campaign*, pp. 36-41.
- Hall, D. (January 2018). Coolest monkey in the jungle. *The Ottawa Campus, Ottawa University*.
- Hindustan Times. (February 2018). Why diamonds are not forever. *Hindustan Times*.
- Hsu, T. (March 2018). How to prevent a racist hoodie. *New York Times*, pp. B1
- Kristiansen, J. (January 2018). Culture wars – is H&M racist, tone deaf, or just stupid? *Business Day*.
- Marr, M. (January 2018). ‘Have you lost your damned minds?’ Twitter freaks out over H&M hoodie. *The Miami Herald*.
- Melamed, S. (October 2018). From prisoner to muralist – Russell Craig took a chance on art; now he’s giving others a chance. *Philadelphia Daily News*, pp. 3.
- Menezes, J. (January 2018). H&M hoodie: Manchester United striker Romelu Lukaku joins outrage against ‘racist’ advertising campaign – Belgium international posted version of the controversial image that read ‘black is beautiful’. *The Independent*.
- Moorad, Z. (November 2018). Shop talk – Dolce in the doo-doo. *The Financial Mail*.
- Munusamy, R. (March 2018). H&M sensitised about racism, transformation. *Sowetan*.
- Naquin, K. (January 2018). Opinion: H&M ad alienates American customers, damages brand. *Louisiana State University*.
- Podnar, R. (January 2018). Trending: Should Oprah run for president?. *The Washington Post*.
- Rose, E. (January 2018). H&M ‘monkey’ hoodie row: eBayers cash in on ‘racist’ jumper storm with bids for the jumper hitting £1400. *The Evening Standard*.
- Scibner, H. (January 2018). H&M apologizes for using black child for ‘coolest monkey’ sweatshirt ad. *Herald-Times*.
- Silver, D. (March 2018). H&M has a pretty sustainability push – but is it just greenwashing?. *The New York Observer*.

- Smith, A. (January 2018). H&M hires diversity manager. *CNN Wire Service*.
- Sowetan. (January 2018). Ad sparks H&M diversity training. *Sowetan*.
- The All State. (January 2018). To hoodie or not to hoodie: The H&M controversy. *Austin Peay State University*.
- The Daily Record. (January 2018). H&M shop ad protest. *The Daily Record*, pp. 13.
- The Star. (January 2018a). H and M ‘coolest monkey’ slogan not racist, says mother of boy featured in ad. *The Star*.
- The Star. (January 2018b). EFF undecided on meeting with H&M. *The Star*, pp. 4.
- The Star. (January 2018c). Fashion retailer embraces diversity after racist ad. *The Star*, pp. 3
- The Sunday Times. (October 2018). Hits – business lauds Tito appointment, IMF cagey over sa’s prospects. *The Sunday Times*.
- Welle Bonn Chrispin Mwakideu, D. (January 2018). EFF supporters attack H&M stores over 'racist jumper advert'. *allAfrica.com*.
- Heineken Light Articles in Sample*
- Connellan, S. (March 2018). Chance the Rapper called Heineken ad ‘terribly racist’. *Mashable.com*
- DeSantis, R. (March 2018). He sees a Chance ads are racist plot. *New York Daily News*, pp. 3.
- Flanagan, A. (March 2018). When a brand does well even when it’s called ‘racist’. *NPR Web Edition Articles*.
- Flynn, M. (February 2019). Delta nudged passengers to slip their number to their ‘plane crush’ on napkins. Now the airline is sorry. *The Washington Post*.
- Graham, R. (April 2018). 50 years ago, James Brown’s proud moment calmed a tense city. *Boston Globe*.
- Jenkins, D. (April 2018). Diversity: Perspective vs. image. *Cerritos College*.
- Kulluk, E. (April 2018). In advertising, is all press good press? Heineken’s offense signals a need for change. *The College Voice, Connecticut College*.
- Mahdawi, A. (March 2018). Why did I risk my privacy with home DNA testing? I blame my Neanderthal heritage – diy genetics testing is a growth industry. But I probably didn’t need it to tell me I’ll never be an elite athlete. And then there are the security implications... *The Guardian*.

- Morton, V. (March 2018). Heineken pulls ‘sometimes lighter is better’ ad slammed as ‘terribly racist’. *The Washington Times*.
- Mullin, B. (March 2018). CMO today: FTC probes Facebook; Meredith reshuffles ad team; Apple news steps up monetization; here’s your morning roundup of the biggest marketing, advertising and media industry news and happenings. *Wall Street Journal*
- Ortved, J. (March 2018). Finding the right corporate message isn’t always easy. *New York Times*.
- Paradkar, S. (March 2018). Lighter isn’t better with this ad. *The Toronto Star*, pp. A8.
- Quinn, M. (March 2018). Heineken removes ad with ‘sometimes lighter is better’ tagline after racism accusations. *The Examiner*.
- Reuters News Service. (March 2018). Heineken pulls beer ad after Chance the Rapper complains of racism. *Cyprus Mail*.
- San Francisco Chronicle. (March 2018). Daily briefing, March 29. *San Francisco Chronicle*.
- Snider, M. (March 2018). Heineken draws fire for ‘terribly racist’ ad. *USA Today*, pp. Z6
- Chicago Sun-Times. (March 2018). Chance the Rapper labels Heineken’s ‘sometimes, lighter is better’ ad as raci. *Chicago Sun-Times*.
- Sykes, T. (March 2018). ‘Racist’ Heineken ad pulled after attack by Chance the Rapper – brewer insists it didn’t mean anything by saying ‘lighter is better,’ Chance the Rapper wasn’t convinced. *The Daily Beast*.
- Targeted News Service. (March 2018). Heineken ad shows consequences of corporations not thinking through implications of advertising, corporate marketing expert says. *Target News Service*.
- Tesema, M. (March 2018). Heineken apologizes, pulls controversial ad after being called out by Chance the Rapper. *Mashable.com*
- The Breeze. (March 2018). Chance the Rapper slams Heineken commercial. *The Breeze, James Madison University*.
- The Daily Mirror. (March 2018). Heineken bosses have been force [...]. *The Daily Mirror*.

The Free Lance-Star. (March 2018). Heineken pulls light beer commercial after racism complaints – Heineken pulls light beer commercial after racism complaints. *The Free Lance-Star*.

The Free Press. (February 2019). Scandal brings some hearty conversations. *The Free Press*.

The Washington Post. (March 2018). Business recap: Week of March 26. *The Washington Post*.

Wright, K. (March 2018). Heineken's 'sometimes, lighter is better' commercial. *Evening News and Tribune*.

Zorn, E. (March 2018). Mark these words. *Chicago Tribune*.

## **Appendix B: Recommendations**

This study focused on three cases where brands received negative feedback after releasing an advertisement. The cases that were examined were Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad. Each case was explored to identify the perceived wrong and examine the reactions of the public, advertising industry, and brands toward the advertisements. After analyzing each case, the researcher thought it was important to provide practical suggestions for advertisers to use in hopes of avoiding future representation issues. The researcher has three practical suggestions for advertisers as they seek to create equitable representation in future advertisements: 1) advertisers should understand the history of racism in the industries in which they work for, 2) advertisers should examine proximity as a final consideration in their advertisement approval process, and 3) advertisers should diversify their workforces.

Throughout this study, the researcher found that the perceived wrong in each of the advertisements (Dove's three-second GIF ad, H&M's "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle" ad, and Heineken Light's "Sometimes Lighter is Better" ad) was that the ads were Racist. The researcher also found that many consumers questioned how the brands in this study (Dove, H&M, and Heineken Light) could have possibly overlooked the racism in each ad before it was released. The researcher believes that this can be largely explained through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT).

According to CRT, White people are not always able to acknowledge their privilege because they often do not know that they have privilege or understand where their privilege comes from. Because the U.S. advertising industry is 85 percent White

(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), it can be inferred that many of the teams creating and releasing ads are not diverse. Additionally, the same lack of diversity in the work force of Sweden's and the Netherlands advertising industries can be inferred as both countries are largely homogenous (World Population Review, 2019). Therefore, the people at the table creating and approving advertisements may not have the knowledge to understand what to look for when trying to identify if an ad is racist. While this does not excuse the release of racist ads, it does assist in explaining why racist ads continue to be released. Therefore, the researcher feels it is important to provide advertisers with resources to assist in the process of identifying if an ad may be perceived as racist<sup>2</sup>. If advertisers are able to identify the ad as racist, they could choose to not release it or rethink problematic elements of the ad altogether.

First, the researcher believes that in order to avoid racism or racist undertones in future advertising, advertisers must know the history of racism and racist advertising within the industries in which they work. Advertisers should research their specific industries using the databases available to them, such as Academic Search Complete, SAGE databases, and Gale databases, to search for past mistakes as well as any studies that mention race or racism. For instance, the soap industry has a longstanding history of equating those with darker or Black skin with being dirty and those with White skin as being clean. So, when Dove showed a Black woman taking off her shirt to become White, consumers felt as if the brand was drawing on the historically racist idea that upon using Dove soap, the Black woman became clean. Better understanding the historical

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that following these suggestions will not ensure equitable representation. The suggestions offered are only meant to provide advertisers a larger opportunity to identify representational issues before an advertisement is run.

context of the soap industry could have helped Dove's advertisers avoid committing similar mistakes.

Second, the researcher suggests that advertisers should examine proximity as a final step in advertisement approval, particularly as proximity is defined in this study as a manifestation of racism within each advertisement. This study found that consumers identified proximity by comparing the physical placement of Black people in relation to White people in each ad. For example, negative feedback regarding the Heineken Light ad often referred to the bottle of beer physically sliding past three Black people who stood behind the bar and ending up in the hand of a light-skinned woman who stood in front of the bar (Schultz, 2018a). This physical proximity was considered racist because consumers thought the ad was:

...glorifying whiteness and portraying blackness in a demeaning way; the black people featured in the ad can look at, but not enjoy, a bottle of Heineken, a symbol of leisure. (Kulluk, 2018).

Had the beer slid past a more diverse group of people, instead of three Black people, the ad may have not been perceived as racist.

Similarly, H&M's ad sold a hoodie that was available in three colors. A young Black boy modeled the green hoodie with the phrase "Coolest Monkey in the Jungle," while a young White boy modeled the orange hoodie with the phrase "Mangrove Jungle Survival Expert" (Nickalls, 2018). Many consumers were upset because they felt the young Black boy's hoodie was alluding to the historically racist comparison of Black people and monkeys. Had the young Black boy been in the orange sweatshirt and the young White boy been in the green sweatshirt – a relatively simple adjustment of physical proximity, the ad may not have been considered racist.

By purposefully considering Proximity in the approval process for advertisements, advertisers would potentially be able to identify power structures at work based on the physical placement of models in ads. However, to ensure that this step would allow for the identification of racism in ads, brands must also know the history of racism in their industry. For instance, if Dove knew the history of the soap industry and considered the placement of the Black and White model, they may have changed the order in which the models appeared. This would have eliminated the narrative that the Black woman becoming a White woman was actually a depiction of the Black woman using soap to become clean.

A third suggestion for advertisers is to hire more diverse employees. This suggestion was identified by consumers in their reactions to the representation of Black people in advertisements. In fact, an article referencing the Dove ad stated that people of color need to be involved in all steps of advertising decision-making processes because representational mistakes occur when people of color are not involved (Knudson, 2017). In other words, without people of color at the table representation issues might not be recognized. When people of color are intimately involved in the advertising process, there is a wider diversity of perspective, and, therefore, it is more likely that a racist ad will be intercepted before it is released. According to an article that mentioned the Heineken Light ad, it is the perspectives of the people in an organization that allow diversity to move beyond looks and image and so that culture can be understood (Jenkins, 2018). Having a diversity of perspectives is important because, as CRT points out (Crenshaw et al., 1996), White people are not always able to understand or acknowledge their privilege (Lindlof & Taylor 2019). If brands hire more diverse advertising teams,

they are allowing perspectives other than the White perspective to be at the table for the creation, approval, and release of advertisements.

It is important to note that these steps should serve as suggestions to advertisers. These steps do not guarantee that advertisers will be able to identify ads that may be perceived as racist. However, these three suggestions – 1) advertisers should understand the history of racism in the industries in which they work for, 2) advertisers should examine proximity as a final consideration in their advertisement approval process, and 3) advertisers should diversify their workforces – do provide advertisers with a better opportunity to avoid releasing an ad with representational issues.

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## VITA

### **Place of Birth:**

Louisville, Kentucky

### **Education**

M.A. Communication (2019), University of Kentucky

B.A., Communication (2018), University of Kentucky

B.A., Integrated Strategic Communication (2018), University of Kentucky

### **Professional Positions Held**

**Graduate Assistant for Major Campus Programming** – University of Kentucky  
Office of Student Organizations and Activities (May 2018 – July 2019)

**Student Activities Board President** – University of Kentucky Student Activities Board  
(April 2017 – April 2018)

**Sales Consultant, Social Media Manager** – Sher's Bridal and Formal Wear (January  
2013 to July 2018)

### **Scholastic and Professional Honors:**

Graduate Assistantship

Summa Cum Laude Graduate – B.A, Communication; B.A., Integrated Strategic  
Communication, University of Kentucky

2018 National Student Advertising Competition Bronze Award

2018 Lexington ADDY Silver Award Recipient

### **Professional Publications and Presentations:**

Langlois, L. (2018, November 8). Sher's bridal turns 46. *The Voice-Tribune*, 32(31), 16.