Does Humour Influence Perceptions of the Ethicality of Female-Disparaging Advertising?

Abstract

This article responds to calls for further research on ethical issues in advertising. The study examines whether advertising strategies which use female-disparaging themes are perceived as ethical, and what effect this has on ad and brand attitudes. It also examines whether or not humour assuages ethical evaluations of female-disparaging ads. The findings from an experimental research design, which included 336 British respondents, show that non-disparaging and non-humorous ads are considered to be the most ethical, while disparaging ads (regardless of the level of humour) are considered the least ethical. Across the board, female-disparaging ads are not perceived as ethical; however, high benevolent sexists appear to favour them most. Finally, an ad's perceived ethicality mediates the relationship between ad disparagement and ad attitudes; likewise, an ad's perceived ethicality and ad attitudes mediate the relationship between an ad's female disparagement and brand attitudes. Female-disparaging ads should be avoided given that they are perceived as less ethical and given the impact that advertising has on behaviour, as well as on societal and moral values. Advertisers should also avoid using female-disparaging advertising themes, even light-hearted ones, since they constitute a risky strategy for the ad and the brand as they can backfire and alienate consumers.

Keywords: Disparagement, Perceived Ethicality, Advertising, Humour, Sex, Sexism Ideology

Introduction

Sexism has historically been depicted as a manifestation of hostility towards women, and its popularity is still evident in politics[i], mass and social media, work and social interactions, and in advertising (Henthorne and LaTour 1995; Kadić-Maglajlić et al. 2017; Silván-Ferrero and López 2007). Given that advertising messages can shape people's thinking and influence their behaviour, scholars have called for further research to identify ethical issues and understand their effects in advertising (e.g. Borau and Bonnefon 2017; Drumwright and Murphy 2009; Shabbir et al. 2018; Snyder 2008; Zayer and Coleman 2015); in particular, examining the role of depictions of women in advertising (e.g. Choi et al. 2016; Cohan 2001; Plakoyiannaki et al. 2008). This article responds to these calls and aims to answer two fundamental and relevant questions: Are female-disparaging advertisements perceived as ethical? And can humour assuage ethical perceptions?

Female-disparaging advertisements are sexist ads that either demean or sexually exploit women (Glick et al. 2004). The dominance of purported egalitarian values, at least in many developed countries, might lead to the assumption that advertising which disparages women is ethically unacceptable since it can foster female self-objectification, body shame, sexism and reduced psychological well-being (Glick et al. 2004; Harper and Tiggemann 2008; Moradi 2010). Indeed, all major normative deontological and teleological ethical approaches would object to the use of sexist disparaging ads, even light-hearted ones (e.g. Fraedrich and Ferrell 1992; Gould 1994; LaTour and Henthorne 1994; Orlitzky 2017). However, despite the high risk of such ads being banned by advertising and regulatory bodies, and with advertisers not being able to recover the costs in such cases (Reklamombudsmannen 2009; Sveriges Kvinnolobby 2013), female disparagement as a thematic tool remains highly popular for ad professionals (Huhmann and Limbu 2016; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009)[ii]. This may be related to some ad professionals' adherence "to institutional norms and shared understandings

in their agencies that promote hegemonic masculine discourses, particularly as regulation with regard to gender portrayals in advertising is lacking" (Zayer and Coleman 2015, p.271). Recent examples of female-disparaging ads include: CURE Auto Insurance's commercial showing a man who is distracted by a female doctor losing out on the last seconds of his father's life, while the tagline reads "Avoid distractions"; Buick's commercial showing a woman making an over-the-head catch of a wedding bouquet while Odell Beckham Jr. (a famous American football receiver) notes that she was out of bounds (Rullo 2016); and Renault's YouTube ad (entitled: "Two unsuspecting guys take the new Renault Clio for a test drive") which features a group of women wearing burlesque-style lingerie dancing around the car. The CURE commercial uses a sexually-exploitative message by portraying the female doctor as distracting; the Buick commercial demeans women by playing into the long-standing sexist stereotype of women's obsession with marriage; while the Renault ad is offensive since it objectifies women as sexual objects (ASA 2013).

Disparaging themes can capture people's attention, generate buzz (Dahl et al. 2003; Lyons 1996) and can result in better recall and recognition (Heckler and Childers 1992; Pieters et al. 2002). Humour operates in a similar manner. Indeed, most studies report that humour increases attention and can positively affect attitudes towards the ad (Chung and Zhao 2003), attitudes towards the brand (van Kuilenburg et al. 2011), and purchase intentions (Eisend 2009). Although the advertising industry employs both humour and disparagement, only limited research has investigated whether humour can affect consumer perceptions of the ethicality of female-disparaging advertisements (e.g. Eisend et al. 2014; Förster and Brantner 2016). Humour and its associated levity may soften, relax, and even alter the interpretation of disparaging messages, making them potentially more ethically acceptable (Ford et al. 2001).

Indeed, adjudications by the UK Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) (2002) on complaints against sexist ads indicate that humour plays a key role in its decisions[iii]. However,

according to benign violation theory (McGraw and Warren 2010), and subject to the social context and normative concerns, when humour-related violations are severe (such as threatening one's wellbeing) they may not always have favourable effects (Ford and Ferguson 2004). Examples in the advertising industry that use humorous, female-disparaging themes (such as the Yorkie chocolate bar and the Dr Pepper Ten low-calorie drink) are received with mixed results[iv]. Therefore, further empirical research is warranted to determine whether humorous female-disparaging ads are perceived as ethical and, in turn, how perceptions of ethicality influence ad and brand attitudes. This study aims to address the research gap and contribute to the growing body of research on ethical issues in advertising (e.g. Drumwright and Murphy 2009; Shabbir et al. 2018; Zayer and Coleman 2015).

Furthermore, the majority of research on sexism in advertising examines consumer responses in a fairly restrictive manner (Sengupta and Dahl 2008), overlooking the critical role of social personality traits in ad evaluation (LaFrance and Woodzicka 1998; Thomas and Esses 2004). Disposition theory (Zillmann 1996; Zillmann and Cantor 1976) indicates that an individual's gender characteristics (e.g. sexism ideology) and sex[v] (i.e. biological) can explain why individuals evaluate and respond differently to the perceived ethicality of female-disparaging advertising messages.

Thus, this research makes several distinct contributions. Using dispositional theory as its overarching theoretical framework, the study examines the influence of individuals' gender characteristics (sexism ideology) and sex (biological) on their perceptions of the ethicality of female-disparaging advertising messages, as well as the mediating moral impact of this evaluation on the ad and the brand. In addition, consistent with dispositional theory, this paper examines whether an ad's humorousness moderates the effects of female disparagement on the ad's perceived ethicality.

Literature review

Disparaging advertising and disposition theory

Given the prevalence of sexism in today's advertising landscape (Borau and Bonnefon 2017; Plakoyiannaki et al. 2008), there is a need to further investigate its effects (Eisend et al. 2014). Female-disparaging ads demean or sexually exploit women (Glick et al. 2004) while portraying them as inferior to men (Lysonski 1985; Pollay 1986); this has potentially detrimental effects on women's wellbeing, including low self-esteem, self-objectification and body shame (Moradi 2010; Plakoyiannaki et al. 2008).

Several superiority theories have attempted to explain how disparaging messages are perceived and processed (Hodson et al. 2010). Disposition theory, developed in the 1970s by Zillmann and Cantor, has been applied in various contexts and findings suggest that viewers enjoy "attacking an oppositional target" (Becker 2014, p.139). Specifically, the people who enjoy disparaging messages may have negative attitudes towards the belittled party and/or positive attitudes towards the agent of the disparagement (Zillmann and Cantor 1976). The enjoyment "increases with negative sentiments and decreases with positive sentiments toward the debased agent" (Zillmann and Cantor 1976, p. 112). However, this theory also posits that, rather than a uniform response to the viewing of others' infirmities, the acceptance of such a message depends on the predispositions of the audience (Raney 2004). These predispositions can be based on "emotional responsiveness, personal experiences, basal morality, and countless other psychological and social-psychological factors." (Raney 2006, p.147). According to Zillmann's (1996) theory of disposition, moral judgment is an important component for forming dispositions. After exposure to a disparaging ad, the viewer evaluates and makes a judgement on whether or not it is ethically appropriate/moral. If the message is considered moral then positive responses such as engagement and appreciation are generated, while the opposite is true for amoral messages (Konijn and Hoorn 2005).

Accordingly, in this study we examine whether individual differences such as sex and sexism ideologies (i.e. biological and gender predispositions) can affect the consumer's moral judgement (perceived ethicality) of female-disparaging ads.

Individual differences: Sex and sexism ideologies

Sex is an obvious and frequently-investigated factor for exploring inter-group dynamics (Abrams and Bippus 2011), with studies indicating that sex-based disparaging messages (Eyssel and Bohner 2007; Ford 2000) are more favourably evaluated by the opposite sex than the one being disparaged (Ryan and Kanjorski 1998) and, thus, are potentially considered more morally acceptable. Although the majority of research on sexist advertising is based on sex (e.g. Sengupta and Dahl 2008), scarce empirical work has examined the role of individuals' diverse sexism ideologies in their moral evaluations of female-disparaging advertising.

Sexism ideology is an important determinant of how people perceive sexist messages on ethical grounds. For example, when an individual's sexism ideology is low, they perceive sexist messages as offensive and prejudiced (Swim and Hyers 1999). However, unlike the traditional and typical definition of sexism (which is generically described as antipathy towards women), Glick and Fiske (1996) treat it as a bidirectional construct, classifying it into hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. According to Glick and Fiske (1996), hostile sexism communicates a strong and clear antipathy towards women, rooted in antagonism and indignation. On the other hand, benevolent sexism involves the depiction of women willing to conform to traditional gender roles, such as handling a disproportionate amount of housework, engaging in nurturing responsibilities, and limiting their career development and status in support of their husbands and offspring. The latter is considered a relatively tolerable form of sexism since it gratifies women and promises that they will be protected and provided

for by men (Overall et al. 2011); while, at the same time, it projects men as 'gracious' protectors (Glick and Fiske 2001) and secures their privileged access to power, status and resources (Glick and Fiske 1996). While benevolent sexism may appear innocent and even desirable to some, it has been associated with a range of negative consequences for women, including increased self-objectification (Dumont et al. 2010) and feelings of inadequacy and insecurity (Calogero and Jost 2011). Both facets of sexism shape an ideological system that validates and preserves gender inequality, preventing the validity and legitimacy of the social system from being threatened (Glick et al. 2004; Sibley et al. 2007).

Empirical research based on disposition theory indicates a link between sexism ideologies and the moral acceptance of disparaging messages. People with high levels of hostile sexism are more prone to respond to a sexist message in accordance with the view implied; this is because they are less likely to have internalised the normative, socially-acceptable standards of conduct (Ford et al. 2001). Thus, such people display sexist attitudes when the norms in a given situation permit them and suppress sexism when the prevailing norms dictate restraint (Ford et al. 2008). Related studies have found that men high in hostile sexism who witness female-disparaging comments admit a greater enjoyment (Ford et al. 2001; Thomas and Esses 2004) and are more likely to express and promote behavioural prejudice against women (Ford et al. 2008). Interestingly, Mallet et al. (2016) indicate that women with at least moderate levels of hostile sexism fail to think of their partner as sexist despite that partner making a sexist comment.

However, Moore et al. (1987) report that people with liberal (non-sexist) attitudes about gender perceive female-disparaging messages as less amusing and potentially less morally acceptable than those with more traditional gender attitudes. Similarly, Greenwood and Isbell (2002) note that an individual's sexism ideology affects the apparent offensiveness of sexist comments, with high hostile sexists and male benevolent sexists perceiving them as

less offensive than low hostile sexists and female benevolent sexists. However, LaFrance and Woodzicka (1998) argue that respondents classified as benevolent sexists display stronger negative reactions to female-disparaging messages than respondents classified as hostile sexists. On the one hand, according to Ford et al. (2001), people low in hostile sexism are less likely to perceive disparaging messages as appropriate in any situation and, thus, are less likely to tolerate any sexist message conveyed (Ford et al. 2001). On the other hand though, it could be postulated that the values of people with low hostile sexism attitudes may be aligned with the values of benevolent sexism, since both in fact serve to preserve and support male dominance over women (Jackman 1994).

However, the results and reasoning of these studies should always be examined within the cultural context that they occur (Ford et al. 2008; Sibley et al. 2007). Notwithstanding, based on disposition theory we could expect that men and those characterised by high hostile and high benevolent sexism will perceive female-disparaging ads as more ethical compared to women and their low hostile and low benevolent counterparts. Therefore, we suggest that:

> **H1.** *Female-disparaging ads are perceived as less ethical than non-disparaging ads; however, the effect is greater for women than men.*

> **H2.** *Female-disparaging ads are perceived as less ethical than non-disparaging ads; however, this effect is lower for a) high hostile and b) high benevolent sexism individuals than their low hostile and low benevolent sexism counterparts.*

Humorousness of the ad as moderator

We also postulate that the humorousness of the ad (humour is often used in disparaging advertising) moderates the impact of the disparagement on individuals' ethical judgements. This idea is compatible with Zillman and Cantor's dispositional theory of humour (1976), according to which humorous disparaging advertising can liberate opponents of the belittled party from conforming to the restrictive behavioural norms related to the focus of the denigration. Humour, similar to other types of distractions that avert objections, can divert

attention from the content of a message and, hence, interfere with consumers' ability to carefully scrutinise the ethical content (Shabbir and Thwaites 2007; Wentzel et al. 2010; Woodzicka et al. 2015). In this case, individuals interpret female-disparaging ads with a more light-hearted mindset rather than with their usual, information-processing critical one.

Furthermore, according to affect regulation, the positive emotions evoked by humorous ads may lead people to avoid counter-arguing, in an effort to preserve their positive state (Andrade 2005). On these grounds, it could be argued that humour, with its distracting and resistance-alleviating abilities (e.g. Mallett et al. 2016), can assuage the provocative appeals of female-disparaging ads and make them more ethically acceptable. Thus, based on the aforementioned:

> **H3.** *Female-disparaging ads are perceived as less ethical than non-disparaging ads; however, this effect is greater for non-humorous than humorous ads.*

Attitudes towards the ad and the brand

Lastly, according to dispositional perspectives, if an ad message is considered moral then positive responses such as engagement and appreciation are generated; while the opposite holds for amoral messages (Konijn and Hoorn 2005; Zillmann 1996). Given past advertising research examining the effects of attitudes towards the ad (Chung and Zhao 2003) and attitudes towards the brand (van Kuilenburg et al. 2011), we expect a double mediation of perceived ethicality and attitudes towards the ad for the relationship between an ad's female disparagement and brand attitudes. As result, the following hypotheses are formulated:

> **H4.** *Perceived ethicality mediates the effect of female disparagement on attitudes towards the ad.*

> **H5.** *Perceived ethicality and attitudes towards the ad mediate the effect of female disparagement on brand attitudes.*

In summary, the hypotheses advanced are depicted in Figure 1.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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Method and procedure

We employed an experimental research design and administered a survey to British consumers to examine the proposed hypotheses. Britain is of interest to the advertising industry because of its market size (ranking fourth worldwide and first among European markets; TSP 2018) and advertising spending (£20.071 billion; WARC 2016). Additionally, Britain offers an interesting study context since sexism in the media and advertising has been overlooked or downgraded as an "ironic 'fantasy' of a distant past" by regulators (Berg 2015, p.11). The British ASA has created an adjudication precedent by dismissing complaints about sexism in ads on the grounds that the ads are ironic and humorous in their use of sexism (Jordan and Fleming 2008, p.346). Irony and humour are two common mechanisms used to deflect the responsibility for sexism (Mills 2008). Another factor for choosing Britain is the rise of 'lad' and 'new lad' subcultures of young people since the 1990s (Benwell 2002; Nichols 2018), which are closely related to sexism.

Data were collected through a paid online panel of British people and bought from Qualtrics. Such panels offer an acceptable sampling frame for testing relationships between variables (Baker et al. 2010). Only respondents that consume the product in the chosen stimuli category (a cola drink) were included in the study. Respondents were screened with a question regarding their consumption frequency of such drinks at the beginning of the study. Those who reported that they never consume cola drinks were excluded from the study in order to avoid the potential confounding effects of habits and lifestyle choices on buying-intention responses.

Respondents were not informed about the real purpose of the study but rather simply asked to indicate their reactions to a commercial advertising prototype. They were exposed to one advertisement for one product and requested to record their reactions. We used a 2 (humorous vs. non-humorous ad) × 2 (disparaging vs. non-disparaging ad) between-subjects

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factorial design, randomly assigning respondents to one of the four cells. To ensure good quality responses, attention filters and time constraints were used to eliminate careless and satisficing respondents, as recommended by Meade and Craig (2012).

Of the 494 people that initially attempted to take part in the study, 59 reported that they did not drink cola drinks and were not permitted to participate. A further 99 respondents failed one of the attention filters used for careless responding or answered the final question of the study negatively (if, in their honest opinion, they believed that we should use the data they provided), and thus were also excluded. The data were collected in different phases (adjusting exposure to stimuli according to sex) so as to account for the losses of unreliable respondents and to ensure that an equal number of men and women were exposed to one of the four stimuli; since a balanced design is more robust (Rogan and Keselman 1977).

At the end of the data-collection process, 336 usable observations were collected. There were 84 observations in each of the four treatments, equally distributed between men and women. Of the subjects, 17.6% were between 18 and 24 years old; 27.6% between 25 and 34 years old; 26.8% between 35 and 44 years old; 17.9% between 45 and 54 years old; and 10.1% over 55 years old. Nearly half of the subjects (46.7%) had a university education.

Material preparation

A content analysis of 158 sexist ads identified on specialist advertising websites (i.e. creativity-online.com, adforum.com, adweek.com, adage.com, adsoftheworld.com, adrants.com, advertolog.com) and from the ASA revealed several frequently-employed sexist advertising themes. This analysis helped us prepare 16 mock print advertisements (four for each cell) adapted from existing ads never shown to the public. All ads were for 'Luve', a fictional cola drink to control for any prior brand learning that could potentially jeopardise

internal validity. We chose a cola drink because it is a low-involvement product and is well-suited to humour (Chung and Zhao 2003).

Next, ten raters assessed the ads in terms of humorousness (funny, amusing and humorous) and disparagement (belittling, debasing and disparaging women). After checking inter-rater agreement (intra-class correlation coefficient = .881), we selected four print ads as the most representative of the four experimental cells. Each advertisement included the same product picture (a can of the drink), the brand name (Luve), and a headline. For internal validity purposes, all elements were the same except the headline, which embedded the humour and disparagement manipulations.

The headlines used were: (1) "Girls enjoy Luve after a hard day's housework" (non-humorous and disparaging); (2) "Only for women! The only partner that will never leave you" (humorous and disparaging); (3) "Live intensively" (non-humorous and non-disparaging); and (4) "I am dying to ask you whether your bubbles are natural..." (humorous and non-disparaging). To keep the headlines simple, we selected one-liners over other more extended humorous messages (for a similar procedure, see Cline and Kellaris 2007; Krishnan and Chakravarti 2003). Furthermore, one-line messages better serve the incongruity-resolution process necessary for humour elicitation (Cline and Kellaris 2007).

Manipulation checks

We checked the humorousness and disparagement of the ads' manipulations by analysing respondents' humorousness and disparagement ratings, using a two-way analysis of variance. The humorousness of the ads' effect was statistically significant ($F(1, 332) = 26.342$, $p < .001$). Respondents perceived humorousness as higher for the humorous than the non-humorous ads ($M = 4.18$ vs. 2.93). Similarly, manipulation results were significant for the disparagement manipulation ($F(1, 332) = 178.683$, $p < .001$). Respondents perceived the

disparagement of the stimulus as higher for the disparaging than the non-disparaging ads ($M =$ 6.51 vs. 2.97).

Control variables

For control variables, we included factors such as age, education, sense of humour, gender identity, ethical idealism and relativism, and product involvement. Prior research has used some of these variables selectively across experiments on disparaging advertising (Black et al. 2010; Putrevu 2008), while other variables such as ethical idealism and relativism have been used in prior ethics research (Forsyth 1980); thus, we considered it important to take into consideration the interplay of all these factors when testing our hypotheses.

Sense of humour is a personal quality related to the creation, expression and appreciation of humour (Martin 1998). A good sense of humour helps people to appraise and deal with negative experiences in more positive and growth-orientated ways, resulting in a reduced negative effect and greater wellbeing (Kuiper et al. 1995; Martin et al. 2003). Therefore, we expect sense of humour to positively affect the way that people perceive and evaluate humorous disparaging ads. We accounted for three dimensions of sense of humour: appreciation, coping and generation (Thorson et al. 1997).

We also controlled for gender identity (i.e. individuals' masculine and feminine qualities) (Yoon and Kim 2014) and its connection to the perceived ethicality of female-disparaging advertisements. According to gender schema theory (Bem 1981)[vi], highly masculine people are associated with nodes of dominance and aggressiveness (Bem 1974); this would allow them to easily process and assimilate information related to disparaging ads because the associated values are in line with their masculine schema. Conversely, highly feminine people are less likely to internalise disparaging ads because the tenets of these ads go against their core values of compassion, sympathy and cordiality (Bem 1974). Related

empirical findings show that people with feminist attitudes respond negatively to sexist depictions of women in ads (Lavine et al. 1999).

Ethical idealism and relativism are primary ethical ideologies behind the reasoning of individuals faced with ethical problems (Forsyth 1980). Idealism is orientated to consequences and is consistent with deontological ethical stances (Ishida 2006; Smith 2011). It postulates that doing harm unto others is wrong and aims to secure the welfare of all (Forsyth 1980). Relativism is orientated to principles and is consistent with teleological ethical stances (Ishida 2006; Smith 2011). Thus, it disregards universal morality in favour of greater flexibility when it comes to cases of right or wrong by weighing up the nature of the situation and the individuals involved (Treise et al. 1994). Research indicates that both ethical idealism and relativism are important factors in predicting market-related ethical judgment and behaviour (Davis et al. 2001; Valentine and Bateman 2011).

Lastly, although product involvement is measured in various ways, a common issue is consumer motivation to process information (Putrevu 2008). According to the elaboration likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo 1981; Petty et al. 1983), consumers with high product involvement are more likely to follow the central path to persuasion and pay more attention to message arguments than consumers with low product involvement. Humorous and disparaging ads are less effective in influencing the ad and brand attitudes of consumers with higher product involvement because they compete for attention that could have been spent on other product messages. Conversely, the use of humorous and disparaging messages can stimulate further attention to the ad and the brand for consumers with low product involvement since the peripheral, not the central, message-processing route is used (Chung and Zhao 2003).

Measures

We employed established measures on a ten-point scale in order to assess the following: attitude towards the ad (three items: good, interesting and liked); attitude towards the brand (three items: good, pleasant and liked); perceived humorousness of the ad (three items: humorous, funny and amusing); and perceived disparagement of the ad (three items: chauvinist, sexist and misogynistic). Perceived ethicality was measured via four bipolar items (the ad is just/unjust, fair/unfair, morally right/not morally right and acceptable to my family/not acceptable to my family) from Reidenbach and Robin (1990), also on a ten-point scale. The latter measure considers both teleological and deontological perspectives (LaTour and Henthorne 1994), as individuals often employ aspects of both when making ethical evaluations (LaTour and Henthorne 1994; Reidenbach and Robin 1990). We measured hostile and benevolent sexism on a seven-point scale (22 items from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory Scale; Glick and Fiske 1996). As control variables, we used measures of: gender identity (two dimensions: feminine and masculine, 20 items from Bem 1981 on a five-point scale); sense of humour (three dimensions: appreciation, coping and generation of humour, 24 items from Thorson et al. 1997 on a seven-point scale); ethical idealism and relativism (ten items respectively on nine-point scales from the Ethics Position Questionnaire; Forsyth 1980); and product involvement (three items: interest, attachment and importance on a ten-point scale).

The measures used were reliable according to their respective Cronbach's alphas (attitude towards the ad: .858; attitude towards the brand: .903; hostile sexism: .946; benevolent sexism: .893; perceived humorousness: .934; perceived disparagement: .947; perceived ethicality: .957). For the control variables, the Cronbach's alphas were as follows: feminine gender identity: .920; masculine gender identity: .898; sense of humour appreciation: .764; sense of humour coping: .761; sense of humour generation: .938; product involvement: .728; ethical idealism: .863; and ethical relativism: .810).

Analysis and findings

Analysis and symbolism

Since many of the covariates are conceptually close to the main effect variables, it would be inappropriate to test the hypotheses with an analysis of covariance. For example, while sexism ideology is not isomorphic with sex, it may be related to sex (i.e. nested within sex) (Bristor and Fischer 1993) given sex's profound leverage on a person's socialisation (Fischer and Arnold 1990; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin 1999), with unavoidable effects. Our data confirm the nesting of sex within sexism ideologies. According to our findings, hostile and benevolent sexism differ based on sex (t(334) = 4.32, *p* < .01 and t(334) = 3.38, *p* < .01 respectively); with men having higher levels of hostile and benevolent sexism (*M* = 3.63 and *M* = 3.53 respectively) than women (*M* = 3.01 and *M* = 3.12 respectively). To overcome this problem, we used a generalised linear model from the SPSS software package (more details about this analytical methodology can be found in Zhou et al. 1999). This approach allows us to acknowledge and statistically account for the dependency between sexism ideologies and sex when examining H2, given their conceptual and statistical relationships. In our tables, the nesting methodology is symbolised in parenthesis after the main variable of interest, e.g. hostile sexism(sex) and benevolent sexism(sex).

Three generalised linear models were computed based on three dependent variables: perceived ethicality (examining H1 to H3), ad attitudes and brand attitudes (examining H4 and H5). These models take into account the control variables of: age, education, sense of humour (three dimensions); gender identity (masculinity and femininity); ethical idealism and ethical relativism; and product involvement. To examine the moderations postulated by H1 to H3, we used interaction effects. Within our tables, an asterisk between variables symbolises the interaction term, for example *disparaging * sex* examines the moderating effect of sex for the relationship between ad disparagement and perceived ethicality (H1). In addition to the

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generalised linear models for ad attitudes and brand attitudes, in order to examine the H4 and H5 mediations we also used the mediation model analysis (with a multi-categorical independent variable) proposed by Hayes and Preacher (2014) to estimate the relative direct and indirect effects of female-disparaging ads.

Perceived ethicality

Regarding the perceived ethicality of female-disparaging ads, the results in Table 1 identify an interaction between disparagement and benevolent sexism as per H2b; and disparagement and humorousness as per H3. H1 (disparagement and sex interaction) and H2a (disparagement and hostile sexism interaction) were not supported. The last rows of Table 1 show the fit statistics of the generalised linear model.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Specifically, and with regard to H2b, disparaging ads were found to be more ethical by men with high benevolent sexism than women with high benevolent sexism (.732, *p* < .05). Although the general interaction effect for disparagement and hostile sexism was not significant in the model (H2a), an examination of the model parameters illustrates that disparaging ads are considered more ethical by women with high hostile sexism than men with high hostile sexism (.590, *p* < .05). Such a finding may be consistent with justification theory perspectives that postulate different actions for underprivileged and high status groups (Jost and Banaji 1994). According to these theoretical perspectives, women with hostile sexism are less likely to hold positive attitudes about themselves and the group they belong to and serve the maintenance of gender inequality even within egalitarian societies (Jost et al. 2003; Jost and Banaji 1994; Sibley et al. 2007). However, men with high hostile sexism can occasionally evaluate subordinate groups (disparaged females) positively, possibly in an attempt to mask their hostile-sexist attitudes and leave the status-quo unchallenged (e.g. Jost

1993; van Knippenberg 1984). However, evidence for out-group favouritism among privileged groups is not very strong in the experimental literature of intergroup relations (Jost et al. 2013). Finally, as per H3, Figure 2 depicts that non-disparaging and non-humorous ads are considered the most ethical. Disparaging ads, regardless of the level of humour, are considered the least ethical ads.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Though not hypothesised, given suggestions that humorous disparaging advertising can liberate opponents of the belittled party from conforming to the socially-acceptable behavioural norms related to the focus of denigration (as per Zillman and Cantor's (1976) dispositional theory of humour), we also examined the interaction of disparagement, sex and humour. However, this interaction was not significant, as can be seen in Table 1. Furthermore, the results of the control variables in the perceived ethicality model (see also Table 1) indicate the statistically-significant effects of humour appreciation (sense of humour dimension) and ethical idealism; the other control variables were not significant. An examination of the model parameters (not reported herein) shows that greater humour appreciation (sense of humour dimension) and greater ethical idealism were positively related to the perceived ethicality of the ad.

Attitudes towards the ad and the brand

Tables 2 and 3 provide the results of the remaining hypotheses (H4 and H5). We included all control variables again, as in the previous model. For the attitudes towards the ad model (Table 2), we also included the perceived ethicality of the ad as an independent variable (disparagement and humour nested within perceived ethicality, based on the previous results). For the attitudes towards the brand model (Table 3), we included the aforementioned perceived ethicality variable, as well as attitudes towards the ad (disparagement and humour

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nested within attitudes towards the ad, based on the Table 2 results). Both H4 and H5 were supported.

INSERT TABLES 2 AND 3 ABOUT HERE

With regard to H4, as indicated in Table 2, we found a partial mediation effect of the perceived ethicality of the ad on attitudes towards the ad. This is evident since the direct interaction effect of *disparaging * humorous* on attitudes towards the ad is not suppressed by the inclusion of ad ethicality as an independent variable. The nested effects of ad ethicality show that perceived ethicality mediates the effects of all types of ads on ad attitudes, with the exception of non-humorous/non-disparaging ads.

As noted, in addition to the generalised linear model above, we tested for mediation based on the analysis proposed by Hayes and Preacher (2014). The independent variable (IV) was the type of ad (i.e. the four types of ads used as stimuli); the dependent variable (DV) was the attitude toward the ad; and the mediator (M) was the perceived ethicality of the ad. All the control variables, sex (dummy) and hostile and benevolent sexism were included as covariates. For the mediation analysis, we used Hayes' (2013) procedure in SPSS Macro. Three dummy codes were created for three of the ads (coded as 1) with the fourth ad (non-humorous/non-disparaging) serving as the reference group (coded as 0). Bootstrapping was used to estimate the sampling distribution (n = 5000) and 95% confidence intervals for the direct and indirect effects.

We found that the perceived ethicality of the ad mediated attitudes towards the ad for the three types of ads: (1) humorous/non-disparaging ad (indirect effect = -0.563; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [-.889, -.334]); (2) humorous/disparaging ad (indirect effect = -1.666; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [-2.119, -1.225]); (3) non-humorous/disparaging ad (indirect effect = -1.573; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [-2.112, -1.404]); relative to the non-disparaging/non-humorous ad which constituted the

reference group. There was a direct effect of the humorous/disparaging ad on attitudes towards the ad (direct effect = 1.017; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [.306, 1.728]). However, there were no direct effects for the other types of ads on attitudes towards the ad (95% bootstrapped confidence intervals, CI: [-.028, 1.226] and [-.244, 1.254]). Hayes and Preacher's (2014) omnibus indirect effect test was statistically significant (effect = .154; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [.111, .218]). This supports H4, since the ethicality of the ad is a mediator for the ad effect on attitudes towards the ad; specifically, ethicality is a partial mediator for the humorous/disparaging ads and full mediator for the other ads.

In regards to H5, we found a partial mediation of perceived ethicality and ad attitudes between ad disparagement and brand attitudes, as indicated in Table 3. This is evident by the significance of the perceived ethicality of the ad and ad attitudes. The direct interaction effect of *disparaging * humorous* on attitudes towards the brand is suppressed by the inclusion of the ad's perceived ethicality and ad attitudes as independent variables.

As per H4, to test H5 we used a similar Hayes (2013) analysis to estimate the relative direct and indirect effects of perceived ethicality on attitude towards the brand. The IV was the ad's perceived ethicality; the DV was attitude toward the brand; and the mediator (M) was the attitude toward the ad. All the control variables, sex (dummy), ad stimuli (dummies), and hostile and benevolent sexism were included as covariates. Bootstrapping was used to estimate the sampling distribution (n = 5000) and 95% confidence intervals for the direct and indirect effects. We found that attitudes towards the ad mediated the effects of the ad's perceived ethicality on attitudes towards the brand (indirect effect = .205; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [.148, .278]). A direct effect of the ad's perceived ethicality on attitude towards the brand was also observed (direct effect = .473; 95% bootstrapped confidence interval, CI: [.373, .573]). The Sobel test (z = 5.798, *p* < .001) was statistically significant, which suggests a partial mediation effect. Preacher and Kelly's (2011) percent

mediation was 30.2% and the completely standardised indirect effect was .201 (CI = .150, .270).

Discussion and conclusions

Although advertising practitioners widely acknowledge the potential strategic benefits and risks associated with female-disparaging advertisements, we respond to calls to empirically examine the perceived ethicality of female-disparaging ads, as well as the effects on ad and brand attitudes (c.f. Borau and Bonnefon 2017; Choi et al. 2016; LaTour and Henthorne 1994; Putrevu and Swimberghek 2013; Snyder 2008). We also examine the effects of female-disparaging advertisements on perceptions of ethicality, by taking into account consumers' biological and gender characteristics (i.e. sex and sexism ideologies respectively). It should be noted that we are not offering an ethical theoretical perspective or framework for the study, but rather trying to better understand consumer ethical perceptions. The findings indicate that female-disparaging advertising themes are not perceived as ethical across the board and, regardless of the level of humour, are considered the least ethical ads in our study; while those that are non-disparaging and non-humorous are considered the most ethical. Finally, an ad's perceived ethicality mediates the relationship between ad disparagement and ad attitudes; likewise, an ad's perceived ethicality and ad attitudes mediate the relationship between an ad's female disparagement and brand attitudes.

Despite the fact that strategically-employed female disparagement as an advertising theme remains highly popular for ad professionals (Huhmann and Limbu 2016; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009; Zayer and Coleman 2015), we demonstrate that this type of advertising is perceived as less ethical, and does not produce the desired attitudes towards the ad or the brand. Our findings appear to reinforce dispositional theory by indicating that the ethical perceptions of female-disparaging ads differ based on an individual's biological and gender

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characteristics. More specifically, the findings indicate that individuals who hold stereotypical views of the two genders, and particularly individuals with high benevolent sexism, are more prone to accept such messages by perceiving them as more ethical; possibly because they re-affirm the views held by those individuals. Related and alarming findings from the relevant literature have noted that benevolent sexism can be linked to women's psychological entitlement (i.e. the self is attractive and deserves nice things and praise) (Hammond et al. 2014) and life satisfaction at a personal level (Connelly and Heesacker 2012). On the other hand, benevolent sexism for men can be related to maintaining the status quo and continued privileged access to societal advantages as a 'fair return' for the reverence and material provisions they offer to women (Connelly and Heesacker 2012; Hammond et al. 2014). These findings may reveal a decreased motivation for women to reduce gender discrimination, while for men a desire to support women's subjugation. In our study, the general interaction effect for disparagement and hostile sexism was not significant, which is consistent with prior research indicating that hostile sexism may not be widely-endorsed in relatively gender-egalitarian societies such as the UK (e.g. Connelly and Heesacker 2012). However, an examination of our model parameters indicates that female-disparaging ads are considered to be more ethical by women with high hostile sexism than their male counterparts. Consistent with justification theory perspectives, it can be postulated that men with high hostile sexism may occasionally evaluate subordinate groups (disparaged females) positively, presumably in an attempt to mask their hostile-sexist attitudes and leave the status-quo unchallenged (e.g. Jost 1993; van Knippenberg 1984). Such findings indicate the existence of a prevailing ideological system that aims to justify and maintain gender inequality (Sibley et al. 2007); thus, our findings lend weight to warnings from social learning theorists (e.g. Johnson 2008; Ryan and David 2003) that the systematic use of this kind of communication message may reinforce sexist preconceptions and condition society to find female-disparaging ads ethically

acceptable, at least by certain groups of individuals. Hence, our results indicate that greater steps should be taken to examine the impact of such depictions on the beliefs of consumers, again raising the still-unresolved ethical issue of whether advertising messages 'reflect', 'reward', 'encourage' or 'mould' societal and moral values (Gulas et al. 2010; Knoll et al. 2011; Zimmerman and Dahlberg 2008). However, over time, reasoned public debates, articles and seminars at schools may persuade individuals to re-evaluate their subjective moral stances, as per Rawls' (1971) 'veil of ignorance', and hopefully become more liberated and less dogmatic regarding gender issues (Borau and Bonnefon 2017; Haidt 2013). According to Rawls' (1971) theory, people can make ethically-impartial judgments by secluding themselves behind a 'veil of ignorance'. Behind this self-imposed veil, they know nothing of themselves, their sex, race, or individual tastes. However, it may not be possible for people to forget their sex given its profound leverage on their socialisation (Fischer and Arnold 1990). According to Williams (1983, p.152):

> "Rawls' (1971) attempt to exclude knowledge of race and sex from the original position is mistaken. One needs to acknowledge that it will be present among the men and women who make choices behind the veil of ignorance and that it will make possible a degree of partiality in decision-making […] The inability of individuals to reason as a raceless and sexless individual in the original position and behind the veil of ignorance makes it impossible therefore for Rawls' procedure to function in a manner that will invoke the impartiality required for just action".

Disposition theory has been widely adopted to predict viewer responses with regard to the perceived morality of characters in dramas (Raney 2006) and soap operas (Weber et al. 2008); however, it has not been used to examine viewer responses to the moral propriety of advertising messages. Our findings indicate that, consistent with disposition theory logic, the

perceived ethicality of female-disparaging ad messages can eventually affect consumer attitudes towards the ads and the brands. Also in line with disposition theory, this study shows that individuals characterised by ethical idealism are not innocently 'challenged' by the female-disparaging ads, as some advertisers may claim. It appears that the values of such ads contradict these individuals' deontological ethical stance, which supports that harming others is wrong while securing the welfare of all is a priority (Forsyth 1980).

Contrary to previous suggestions (e.g. Ford et al. 2001; Woodzicka et al. 2015), it appears that humour cannot always conceal sexist stereotypical statements by making them more ethically acceptable. Thus, stereotypical sexist statements are still less likely to be perceived as ethical, whether they are executed in a serious or humorous manner; this leads to potential detrimental effects for the ad and the brand. However, although not hypothesised here, the findings of this study indicate that those who have high humour appreciation may view female-disparaging ads as more ethical. For those individuals, the presence of humour could indeed mitigate the female-disparaging ad's derogatory effects on their ethical perceptions.

Overall, the findings indicate that, despite their attention-grabbing, clutter-breaking and buzz-generating capabilities when transformed into ads, female-disparaging advertising themes have the potential to seriously damage the ad and the image of the brand. Thus, the short-term success of female-disparaging ads in increasing brand awareness and temporarily stimulating consumer curiosity to try the brand may have serious, long-term repercussions for the brand's image and prospects. Such an advertising tactic may actually necessitate additional corporate and advertising investments to reverse the female-disparaging ad's negative impacts, which may include: negative word of mouth, pressure on advertisers and media to withdraw the ad, and personal boycotts; all of which incrementally increase the overall marketing cost (e.g. Prendergast et al. 2008). For example, Bayer has distanced itself

from a controversial but Lion-winning Brazilian aspirin ad made by AlmapBBDO that provoked accusations of sexism, forcing BBDO to publicly apologise and take full responsibility for the creation of the ad (Adweek 2016); while the Swedish Women's Lobby employs social media to embarrass advertisers for their sexist, disparaging ads (Sveriges Kvinnolobby 2013).

The findings of this study lend weight to the debate on the ethical issues of the use of female-disparaging messages and the potential need for tighter regulation, particularly as regulation regarding gender depictions in advertising is lacking (Huhmann and Limbu 2016; Sabri 2017; Zayer and Coleman 2015). Institutional theory defines organisations as value signifiers (Scott 2008) so if, as a society, we opt to go beyond unfavourable sex roles and their associated consequences then the relevant organisations must make some changes. To this end, strategic decisions made by corporate managers, advertising managers and advertising agencies such as the ASA should prioritise social welfare (and by association brand welfare) by more critically scrutinising and monitoring the ethics of their persuasive communications, and by not simply characterising female-disparaging advertising strategies as light-hearted and humorous (ASA 2002). This monitoring can be served by the development of self-detailed organisation ethics statements which must be sexist-free. While these statements may not always equate to an ethical culture, they could bring the corporate and advertising industry closer to the goal of becoming more ethical and responsible (Drumwright and Murphy 2009).

Furthermore, in an era of increased corporate social responsibility (Chu et al. 2016), which is often projected as a sign of ethicality, it would be an oxymoron for companies investing heavily in corporate social responsibility (and claiming these interests to multiple stakeholders) to use gender-based disparaging ads, even though these ads may seem light-hearted. If such antithesis is realised by the community, media and NGOs then the legitimacy

of advertising agencies and brands could be at stake (e.g. legal sanctions, consumer protests or boycotts) (Huhmann and Limbu 2016; Zayer and Coleman 2015).

Our findings suggest that advertisers who plan to strategically use female-disparaging themes (either to capture attention or to exploit the identification potential of such thematic approaches) should be cautious, since these themes are considered less ethical and the potential for damaging the image of both the ad and the brand is high. Advertisers also need to realise the ethical complexity involved in using female-disparaging themes in relation to the social impact of such communication messages on societal values and norms (Gould 1994; Snyder 2008). Thus, it would be in the advertisers' best interests to exercise greater self-regulation in the employment of female-disparaging advertising (Huhmann and Limbu 2016; Snyder 2008). By stepping out of their roles as professional communicators and by evaluating the equity of their messages (through proactive discussion with the clients and the use of focus groups and other research aids to determine the ethical consequences of the advertising messages they intend to employ), advertisers can potentially assuage any gender misrepresentations and negative innuendos that may alienate consumers (Polonsky et al. 2001; Snyder 2008), while ensuring the equality of the weaker parties (as per Rawls' (1971) veil of ignorance).

Lastly, this study addresses an important research gap in business ethics literature; however, as with any study, there are some limitations which could be addressed in future research. First, the research method adopted a positivistic stance that enabled us to control for the moderating effects of female-disparaging ads on consumer perceptions of an ad's ethicality by using various psychological characteristics (e.g. ethical ideologies, femininity and masculinity traits). Embracing more socially-critical research approaches (such as ethnography and phenomenology) could potentially provide more holistic and integrated insights regarding the ethicality of female-disparaging ads and the related effects on the ad,

the brand, individuals, and society (Ahuvia 1998). Further research might also benefit from investigating alternative advertising themes, such as those which challenge traditional, stereotypical, female portrayals (see Akestam et al. 2017) or those which include portrayals of male-disparagement and additional psychological propensities, such as religious commitment (Putrevu and Swimberghek 2013). Second, we used only one (low-involvement and ungendered) product category (cola drink) and a single style of humour (disparaging). Additional research should consider other product categories as well, such as hedonistic, high-involvement products and different types of humour (e.g. slapstick, sarcasm, puns and irony) (see Newton et al. 2016). Third, this study only addresses the effects of print ads. Thus, further research might determine whether the effects are generalisable to television, internet or radio advertisements. Fourth, cross-cultural comparisons across diverse religions and value systems (e.g. collectivist vs. individualist societies) focussing on the effectiveness of ads portraying disparaging gender-roles could provide another avenue for research. Cross-cultural comparisons are particularly important because financial constraints often force business entities with global reach to limit their marketing efforts and costs by employing single advertising themes across the world.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no funding, financial relationships, or conflicts of interest to disclose.

Human and Animal Rights

All procedures performed in the studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee, as well as with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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TABLES

Table 1. Generalised linear model analysis for perceived ethicality of the ad

<div align="center">

Tests of Model Effects

</div>

Source	Type III		
	Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	**df**	**Sig.**
(Intercept)	3.667	1	.055
Disparaging	44.398	1	.000
Humorous	8.568	1	.003
Sex	.052	1	.820
H3. Disparaging * Humorous	**6.301**	**1**	**.012**
H1. Disparaging * Sex	**.226**	**1**	**.635**
Humorous * Sex	.841	1	.359
Disparaging * Humorous * Sex	.490	1	.484
H2b. Disparaging * Benevolent Sexism(Sex)	**12.096**	**4**	**.017**
H2a. Disparaging * Hostile Sexism(Sex)	**6.447**	**4**	**.168**
Sense of Humour: Appreciation	6.311	1	.012
Sense of Humour: Coping	.017	1	.896
Sense of Humour: Generation	.126	1	.722
Product Involvement	.262	1	.609
Masculinity(Sex)	3.495	2	.174
Femininity(Sex)	5.206	2	.074
Education	1.755	1	.185
Age	.430	1	.512
Ethical Idealism	6.527	1	.011
Ethical Relativism	.073	1	.787
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	214.013	27	.000
Pearson's χ^2	1362.554	308	4.424
BIC	1592.624		

Table 2. Generalised linear model analysis for attitudes towards the ad

	Tests of Model Effects		
	Type III		
Source	Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	.948	1	.330
Disparaging	1.669	1	.196
Humorous	1.853	1	.173
Sex	.139	1	.709
Disparaging * Humorous	5.361	1	.021
Disparaging * Sex	.164	1	.686
Humorous * Sex	.005	1	.944
Disparaging * Humorous * Sex	.910	1	.340
Disparaging* Benevolent Sexism(Sex)	13.412	4	.009
Disparaging* Hostile Sexism(Sex)	7.797	4	.099
Sense of Humour: Appreciation	.057	1	.812
Sense of Humour: Coping	.014	1	.904
Sense of Humour: Generation	.891	1	.345
Product Involvement	.126	1	.723
Masculinity(Sex)	5.952	2	.051
Femininity(Sex)	.344	2	.842
Education	.242	1	.622
Age	1.563	1	.211
Ethical Idealism	1.524	1	.217
Ethical Relativism	.127	1	.722
H4. Perceived Ethicality of Ad(Disparaging * Humorous)	**81.232**	**4**	**.000**
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	158.244	31	.000
Pearson's χ^2	901.336	304	2.965
BIC	1477.045		

Table 3. Generalised linear model analysis for attitudes towards the brand

Tests of Model Effects			
	Type III		
Source	Likelihood Ratio Chi-Square	df	Sig.
(Intercept)	.914	1	.339
Disparaging	.132	1	.717
Humorous	.565	1	.452
Sex	2.434	1	.119
Disparaging * Humorous	.205	1	.650
Disparaging * Sex	1.757	1	.185
Humorous * Sex	.103	1	.748
Disparaging * Humorous * Sex	.812	1	.367
Disparaging * Benevolent Sexism(Sex)	2.830	4	.587
Disparaging * Hostile Sexism(Sex)	1.947	4	.746
Sense of Humour: Appreciation	.020	1	.888
Sense of Humour: Coping	1.120	1	.290
Sense of Humour: Generation	.034	1	.853
Product Involvement	1.717	1	.190
Masculinity(Sex)	7.126	2	.028
Femininity(Sex)	.271	2	.873
Education	.682	1	.409
Age	1.610	1	.205
Ethical Idealism	.267	1	.606
Ethical Relativism	6.868	1	.009
Perceived Ethicality of the Ad(Disparaging * Humorous)	124.245	4	.000
H5. Ad Attitude(Disparaging * Humorous)	**119.656**	**4**	**.000**
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	451.286	35	.000
Pearson's χ^2	552.091	300	1.840
BIC	1335.618		

FIGURES

Figure 1. Hypothesised model
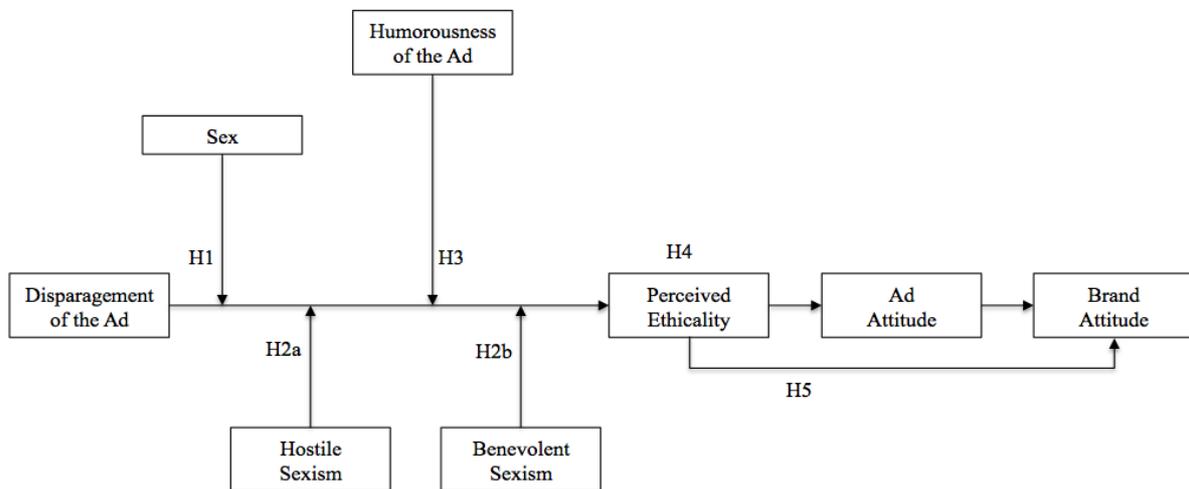
Figure 2. Humour moderates the relationship between disparagement and perceived ethicality

Perceived ethicality of the ad
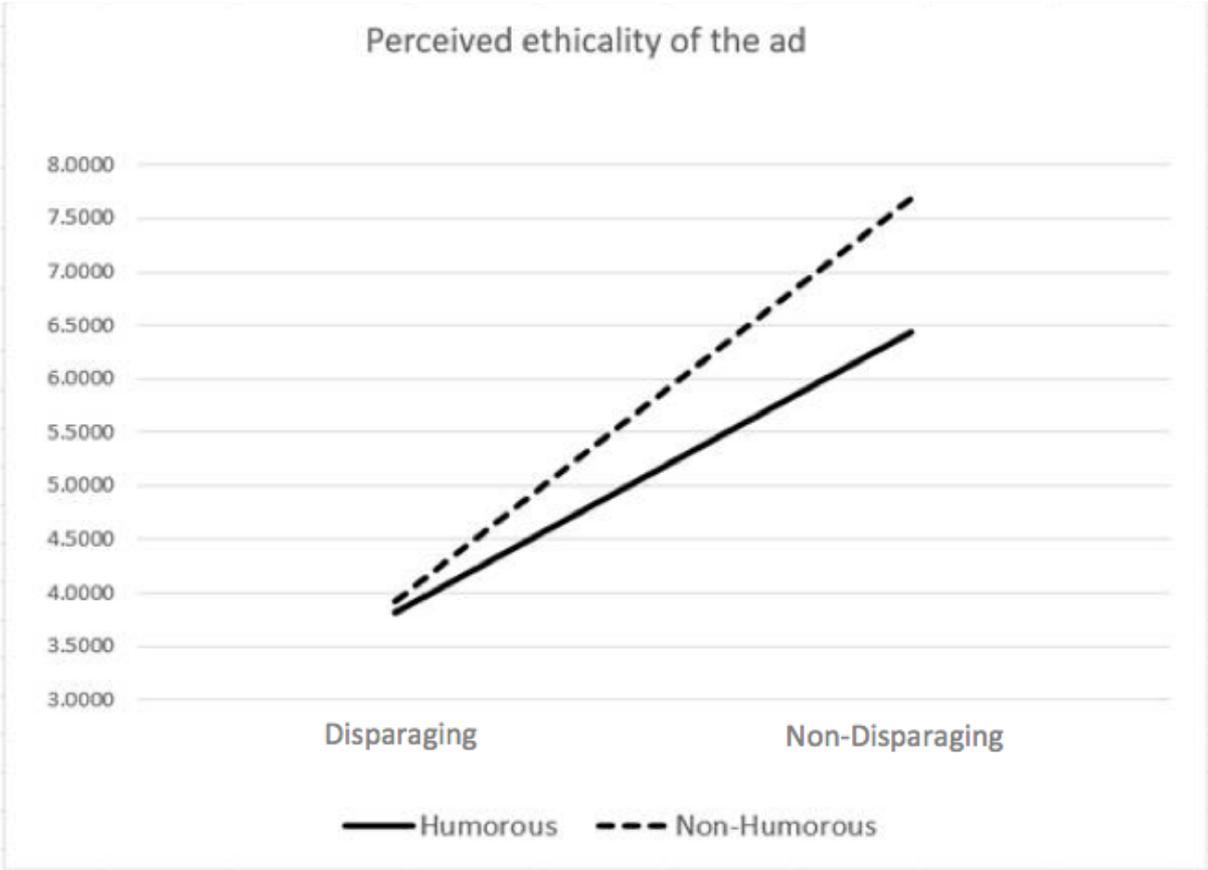
[i] An example is Donald Trump's sexist references to women (Cohen 2017), which have resulted in many protests.

[ii] The Austrian Advertising Council notes that, in 2013, almost half of the complaints it received pointed towards unjust gender treatment, with female-objectification themes outnumbering those referring to males (Förster and Brantner 2016).

[iii] For example, the ASA (2002) dismissed complaints against the Yorkie chocolate bar ad because it was light-hearted and humorous and, as such, was unlikely to cause serious or widespread offence.

[iv] Although female sexist advertisements would be expected to provoke female sensitivities and objections to the disparagement of the gender, the sexist Yorkie chocolate bar campaign in Britain succeeded in doing the opposite (Mills 2003). Yorkie managed to increase its sales by 30% even though the chocolate was banned from shops in Birmingham and Liverpool. Inspired by Yorkie's success, in the United States Dr Pepper used a similar "It's not for women" theme for its low-calorie Dr Pepper Ten brand advertising campaign. Dr Pepper tested the ad in six markets and found that 40% of people who tried the soda were women (Anderson 2011). The campaign's commercial featured men in a faux-action film telling women that they should drink their girly diet sodas and watch romantic comedies. The campaign included a Facebook page with an app that prohibited women from viewing the page's content. The page had a "manly shooting gallery" game in which men had "23 seconds to take out all the girlie stuff", with the directions that, "If it's girlie shoot it – if it's manly avoid it". However, according to a study by YouGov's BrandIndex (a daily measure of brand perception), unlike the Yorkie ad the advertising campaign backfired. The Dr Pepper ad lowered women's opinions of Dr Pepper while leaving men's perceptions unaffected (YouGov 2011).

[v] 'Sex' is a biological term that permits the distinction between females and males based on their physiological characteristics which may, in turn, profoundly affect a person's socialisation (Bristor and Fischer 1993). On the other hand, 'gender' is a social concept that refers to psychological, sociological and cultural traits, attitudes, beliefs and behavioural inclinations that work as filters through which individuals experience their social settings as well as matters of consumption (Chen et al. 2009; Hearn and Hein 2015). Though the concepts of sex and gender may be related, they are not fully regulated by sex (Bristor and Fischer 1993).

[vi] Gender schema theory elucidates the ways in which individuals establish and employ their masculine or feminine propensities in the evaluation and control of experiences and behaviours (Bem 1981).