



**The American University of Florence**

**Master of Arts in**

*Visual Media*

**MA Capstone Project:**

***How Advertising Can Affect Consumer Behavior:***

***The Usage of Reverse Psychology in Advertisements***

**Student:**

*Kristina Biundo*

**Capstone Faculty Member:**

*Dr. Nicoletta Salomon*

**Capstone Supervisor:**

*Nora Ferrucci*

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## **Abstract**

Despite how advertising has evolved throughout the years, more strategic methods have come and gone or stayed for the test of time. These advertising methods depend on the market trends and whether they can withstand the consumer's critical feedback. There are a plethora of different advertising methods that have been successful for companies, but reverse psychology in advertising is one of these methods that is not utilized as much. When it is, reverse psychology in advertising can have a significant impact on the consumer and their behaviors regarding purchasing intentions, brand identity, brand loyalty, and brand awareness after viewing the advertisements. These factors can depend on the consumer's demographics, such as gender identity, age group, and cultural background. Differences between how male and female participants responded to traditional advertisements versus those containing reverse psychology depend on how intense the advertisements' messaging, coloring, and directness are shown.

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## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

Reverse psychology in advertising is a method of advertising that stimulates companies with new ways to attract customers. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, reverse psychology is “a method of trying to make someone do what you want by asking them to do the opposite and expecting them to disagree with you” (Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus, 2025). Most businesses that have used this method in their advertisements have either resulted in positive or negative feedback from the general audience, whether it be brand loyalty, brand trust, or how it influences the consumer. This feedback can depend on how well the establishment conducted market research on its customers. There are few scholarly articles on this topic since the advertising and marketing fields have different perspectives toward the same goal, but reverse psychology in advertising is the most common.

Oftentimes, reverse psychology in advertising stimulates the customer to believe they need a particular product or service. “Customers need to think twice before they buy” (Patagonia, 2011). By contrast, most brands rely on traditional advertisements that speak directly to consumers and encourage ever-greater consumption levels in hopes their offering will be chosen over their competitors. This leads to understanding how consumers are affected by the utilization of reverse psychology in advertising, how it can affect brand loyalty and trust, how this advertising method stimulates the consumer to have a second look, and how it can influence consumer behavior. Daugherty et al. (2016) stated, “ad alternatives are viewed is used to make predictions regarding whether or not the advertisement will successfully attract product purchasing” (p. 3169); this means that the consumer can take in information about the product or service featured on an advertisement and decide whether to follow through with purchasing it. The advertisement

alternatives also show how reverse psychology in advertising can similarly affect potential consumer behavior.

Qualitative and quantitative research was conducted by sending out anonymous questionnaires and had conducted in-depth interviews. In both data collection methods, advertising campaigns will be shown to participants alongside each other from companies that produced adverts using reverse psychology and traditional advertising.

## **1.2 Understanding the Gap**

Some questions are raised to delve into this topic:

- How effective can reverse psychology be in advertising?
- Can this advertising methodology affect the consumer's purchasing habits and behaviors?
- How can this affect the consumer's decisions?
- Can this affect the consumer's mental well-being after being overexposed?

Some information already known about the problem is that reverse psychology is very effective on the average consumer and only lures them into understanding more about the product and companies without the company outwardly advertising themselves. "Paradoxical taglines or product information is not the only way to ensure brand remembrance" (Tcherenkov, 2017, p. 13). When using reverse psychology in advertising, the consumer can easily remember it while trying to understand how it can change their habits and thought processes.

Different groups must understand where they can or cannot be affected by these advertisements, such as groups based on age, cultural differences, and gender identity. Discussions include brand identity, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and purchasing intentions. It is uncertain how these groupings are affected after being exposed to reverse psychology in advertisements.

### **1.3 Focus and Goals**

The primary focus of this study is to understand how consumers may interpret advertisements differently based on their cultural backgrounds, age groups, and gender identity. Interpretations may include how brand loyalty, brand identity, and brand trust can change depending on how participants perceive the advertisements and recognize the brands featured during and after participating in data collection.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Further research is needed on how reverse psychology is used in advertising, mainly how it affects the reactions of individuals from different cultural backgrounds, age groups, or gender identities to these advertisements.

- What effects does reverse psychology in advertising have on the average consumer?
- How can consumer behavior be affected by viewing advertisements that contain reverse psychology?
- Would consumer behavior and loyalty increase or decrease depending on what type of advertisement is being shown?
- What happens when a consumer is shown reverse psychology in an advertisement?
- How would children respond to this type of advertising versus adults and teenagers?
- How would different cultures react to reverse psychology in advertising?
- Can genders react differently after seeing advertisements that use reverse psychology?
- If reverse psychology in advertising became popular, how would the consumer's behavior change?
- How does reverse psychology in advertisements affect the consumer's perspective of the brand and change the brand identity?

## **1.5 Relevance and Importance of Research**

Understanding that marketing campaigns involve ongoing trial and error, only some large companies can afford a marketing failure. Constantly viewing that the market is changing makes it difficult to gauge how to advertise to consumers, so analyzing the data collected on how customer brand loyalty, trust, and identity can change from viewing reverse psychology can be shocking.

Some of the questionnaire's responses align with marketing campaigns that utilized reverse psychology in advertising, where there was positive and negative feedback depending on how the advertising method was used. The participants in the in-depth interview had responses that aligned with the age group or gender. Responses varied throughout interviews, and insightful opinions on advertisements were posed, even if they did not pertain to the participants' interests.

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Key Concepts, Theories and Studies**

Supporting theories and studies include the Reversal Theory and the Rhetorical Theory of Advertisement, which further help to understand the usage of reverse psychology in advertising. Watkins's (2017) thesis on Reversal Theory states, "Reversal theory is holistic in that it proposes a general approach to psychology that accounts for moment-to-moment experiences, dominance or personality characteristics over time, and most importantly, inconsistencies in behaviour" (p. 17). There is a more precise understanding of how Reversal Theory and reverse psychology in advertising can connect with consumer reactions no matter the origins. Knowing that advertisements are based on a "moment-to-moment experience" (Watkins, 2017, p. 17), attitudes change within seconds of processing these messages seen wherever they are posted.

Apter (2014) explains that the Reversal Theory is about changing the thinking pattern in someone's mind without realizing it. "In the reversal theory model, when a reversal occurs, this reversal precedes, or is simultaneous with, any emotion that might be experienced in the new motivational state. The state is a *precondition* for the emotion" (p. 4). Reverse psychology in advertising allows understanding of how the brain changes its mind without realizing it. While the "*precondition* for the emotion" (Apter, 2014, p. 4) is dictated as soon as the advertisement is viewed. The reversal theory model further supports predicting consumers' feelings after they view specific adverts. "By making the customers search for more information and making the product less available, companies pull and do not push the customers to buy their product" (Tcherenkov, 2017, p. 12). This sentence refers to reverse psychology's (pull strategy), in which the consumer becomes intrigued and motivated to seek out information independently. In contrast to the (push strategy), in which, rather than being bombarded with direct promotional messages, the consumer is pushed toward making a purchasing decision. "Reverse psychology provides an effective marketing strategy to pique the consumer's attention" (Pailhes & Kuhn, 2023, p. 5). Reverse psychology increases the chance of the consumer wanting to determine why the advertisement conveyed what it did.

Further explaining how the consumer's interest can be piqued when seeing certain advertisements, such as ones shaped according to reverse psychology, implies understanding how the brain reacts and how brain chemistry can change when seeing what can be deemed "successful" or "unsuccessful" advertisements. "Significant activation differences were ascertained between successful and unsuccessful direct response ads with these differences localized to specialized areas of the brain" (Daugherty, Terry, et al., 2015, p. 3174). The differences from seeing the advertisements explain how there is a chemical reaction in the brain

after seeing an advertisement that could break the cycle or make someone think differently. For example, if a consumer is shown an advertisement on how their running shoes are slowing them down, they will stop and think *how?* and want to continue viewing that advertisement.

Reverse psychology used in advertising can spark curiosity in brands that use this marketing tactic, with different ways of understanding how it could make age groups react differently than others. For example, children can behave differently to reverse psychology in advertising than adults since they are at the age – in this case, “older children (10–11-year-olds) and younger children (seven-to-eight-year-olds)” (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 31) – where learning patterns can be malleable.

When children are in this crucial cognitive development stage, “older children (10–11-year-olds) and younger children (seven-to-eight-year-olds)” (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 31), can also easily resist when constantly being told *no*. Possible results in data from these younger children could include when wanting their guardians to purchase something after continuously viewing, *don't buy this toy* or *don't buy this toy, it's so cool*, could lead to further resistance. “Older children's brand beliefs and attitudes would be more confidently held when formed on the basis of product trial than on the basis of ad exposure, while no differences were expected among the younger group” (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 37). It is interesting that older children, “(10-11-year-olds)” (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 31) in this study, stick to their previous core beliefs and resistance but will resist when told not to do something or purchase something. Knowing that younger children “(seven-to-eight-year-olds)” (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 31) will be able to change their minds easily since they can have a different understanding of brand loyalty.

Additionally, children are also great tests for consumer patterns. In this case, patterns with advertisements that contain reverse psychology either pull to buy into what is being sold or push away. Since children often resist being told *no*, if they were to experience reverse psychology in advertising, depending on how the advertisement was presented to them, it could do what is intended of the advert or go the opposite way. Different advertisements were shown to the older and younger children in Moore's (2000) study, and there was a difference between older children, "(10-11-year-olds)" and younger children, "(seven-to-eight-year-olds)" (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 31): "how the older children were more sensitive to the figurative content of this message and were able to detect multiple levels of meaning in this fantasy-laden ad" (Moore & Lutz, 2000, p. 43). These older children could understand the message, whereas the younger children could not; their attention was grabbed if the commercial was loud and obnoxious. In turn, the older children would recognize the brand identity and message behind the ads.

People over the age of 49 could bring different insights into how advertising can be effective. There needs to be a stronger understanding of how consumers over the age of 49 react to advertisements as their age group grows. Advertising does not just affect consumers who are younger than this age. Martin Eisend conducted a study that looked in-depth into how older people react to advertisements and how they are still valuable pieces in consumerism. "Understanding the advertising effects of older people provides important information to advertising and marketing managers" (Eisend, 2022, p. 318). Older consumers could potentially react to advertisements that were not previously considered. Their reactions to reverse psychology used in advertising could be similar, if not the same, as those under the age of 49. When comparing the two age groups, one can be more receptive to certain advertisements than the other, depending on what the advertisement is trying to provoke. Bernritter (2016) conducted

a study on how adults and children could react to advertisements differently, whether print or digital: “Moreover, older adults liked the emotional commercials more than the younger adults did” (Bernritter, 2016, p. 122). Understanding that older adults preferred emotional commercials more than younger adults did support the difference between how adults and younger adults could react to the same advertisement based on their age and how in-depth they want to read into the message from the brand. Both factors support the study and open the possibility for further research on how older adults could respond to reverse psychology being used in brands they shop for.

The messages behind the advertisements are more profound than the surface level. Patagonia released a Black Friday ad, “Don’t Buy This Jacket,” to support environmentally conscious consumers in assisting in the “Zero-Waste Fashion” (Patagonia, 2011) movement and to produce more sustainable options. The objective of Patagonia was to allow consumers to think if they truly needed the jacket or wanted it because of the price. Loyal customers recognized this sustainability effort, but outsiders of the brand were driven into the full advert to understand further who Patagonia is and what it stands for: sustainability. Stating sustainable responsibility, Patagonia (2011) is:

Everything we make takes something from the planet we can’t give back. Each piece of Patagonia clothing, whether or not it’s organic or uses recycled materials, emits several times its weight in greenhouse gases, generates at least another half garment’s worth of scrap, and draws down copious amounts of freshwater now growing scarce everywhere on the planet (Patagonia, 2011).

This marketing campaign was an intentional marketing move that played on reverse psychology, not only causing sales to rise but allowing the ability to spread awareness of a deeper problem, sustainability, through Patagonia's efforts during the prime shopping season, Black Friday. "We should be the only retailer in the country asking people to buy less on Black Friday" (Patagonia, 2011), causing consumers to think twice about whether they needed the jacket.

Brand identity is one of the most important aspects of brands, from small businesses to large international corporations. Consumers know who these brands are because of the image they constantly put out for themselves to stand out and be remembered while being chosen over their competitors. Brands that are fictional for television shows are used to mock "nonfictional" existing, well-known companies and still play an important role in product placement since the fictional or existing product will stay in the consumer's mind thanks to repetition. A study on reverse product placement states, "fictional brand can influence purchase intention of a future defictionalised brand in the real world" (Muzellec et al., 2013, p. 2). Seeing a fake product on a television show could influence similar existing brands. "For most brands, creating images in the minds of consumers is subsequent to the manufacturing or service delivery process" (Muzellec et al., 2013, p. 3). To get through to the consumer, the product has to be well-known for its quality. Product placement relates to reverse psychology in advertising because it constantly stays in the consumer's mind, on or off screen, positive or negative advertisements.

If advertisements can support user recognition, a study was conducted to explore how advertisements can support user recognition. One of the key factors was "willingness to spend" (Laran et al., 2011, p. 1001), it had been mentioned in this study where usually "willingness to spend" (Laran et al., 2011, p. 1001) was affected by the priming behavior before showing brands. Priming behavior towards these brands suggests consumers are more likely to spend after

being exposed to the brand's advertisement first. Priming behavior could lead to stronger brand loyalty when relating it to reverse psychology in advertising. This suggests that the study could explore how priming influences consumer attitudes and long-term brand engagement. Sometimes, brand messages are hidden (Bibby, 2016) in advertisements. However, to put one brand in front of another, messages should always be beneficial, "brand positioning integrated into all brand messages" (Bibby, 2016, pp. 25-26). Brand identity must be strong to have hidden messages in advertising. Without the hidden message, reverse psychology in advertising would not be feasible for companies with a shorter range of consumer demographics than companies with a larger range of demographics.

This aspect could also affect how cultures could react to this marketing tactic. Since advertising is sometimes specific to cultures, it is important to understand how reverse psychology could also work with these varying cultures. There is an awareness of cultures reacting to advertisements differently, and Shavitt et al. 2018 study stated how "Cross-cultural comparisons can also yield evidence for distinctions between cultures" (Shavitt et al., 2018, p. 1113). These cultural groups are also noted to have different backgrounds that unify them. For example, in Asian cultures the motive is "making friends" (Shavitt et al., 2018, p. 1113), whereas in the United States, there is a higher chance of consumers directly learning about products or services from advertisements (Shavitt et al., 2018). Responding to advertisements depends on the cultural background, how the message should be spread, and how "cultures differ in terms of direct and indirect communication styles" (Majid, 2013).

In consumer behavior and reverse psychology, the value is in the product, "consumers' willingness to pay even in segments of the society where there is no ability to pay" (Sheth, 2021, p. 3). In other words, reverse psychology in advertising would not necessarily affect how

consumers purchase these products since they come into the store and believe that the product advertised is the best, from the mechanism of the described method. Consumers will also purchase products regardless of price, linking this to brand loyalty. Consumer behavior supports the advertising method by “nudging” (Flygansvær, 2021, p. 1) the consumer towards buying the product (Flygansvær, 2021), which is from the reverse psychology advertising campaigns, leaving a more considerable impact on the way the consumer could potentially decide how to shop, trust, and stay loyal to a brand. Reverse psychology in advertising is a push to the consumer instead of the traditional pull every other advertisement has.

The gender of the advertisement narrator can also influence consumer behavior and the effects of reverse psychology in advertising. “Feminist reader-response studies have found greater expression of empathetic responsivity by females” (Stern, 1993, p. 563). Particular gender ad reads lead to the belief that reverse psychology in advertising could act the same way. “Reversal theory is a valuable framework relevant for online consumer behavior in general and digital advertising in particular” (Jung et al., 2017, p. 16). Consumer behaviors are often connected to personal values (Vinson, 1977), so paying more attention to consumers’ feelings and emotions towards adverts is important (Pham, 2013).

The Rhetorical Theory of Advertisement describes how the consumer should react after viewing an advertisement: “A rhetorical theory of advertisement, like many scientific theories, is intended to be causal: to show that one factor causes another to occur. It is the form of an advertisement that determines whether it can cause one of advertising’s purposes, such as a change in attitudes or beliefs” (Rodgers & Thorson, 2012, p. 231). Rhetorical Theory relates to consumer purchasing habits formed after being probed into wanting the advertised product or service.

Another point to note is that behavioral backlash can happen when there is too much reverse psychology in advertising or when it is present in general. A study published by the Oxford University Press informs how the adverse effect of reverse psychology in advertising can occur, where the information is not taken in at all and is just taken negatively. Showing the consumer a slogan results in the opposite of the intended reaction. “Conversely, consumers exposed to slogans would engage in behavior that is opposite to that implied by the slogans. That is, the correction process would extend beyond the slogan that provoked it and would affect a consumption decision that is not directly related to it” (Laran et al., 2011, p. 1001). If an advertisement that uses reverse psychology is shown to the consumer, it could entice them to purchase the product or service. While having an adverse effect on how it could potentially affect the mental health and well-being of the consumer if shown repetitively, simulation of a new norm in advertising with reverse psychology.

## **2.2 Key Debates and Controversies**

Reverse psychology used in advertising could be a point of conflict since the advertising method is not as well-known or utilized enough for the average consumer to be fully aware of what it is and how it influences their decision-making. Reverse psychology in advertising can be used, but not every brand that consumers avidly follow is utilizing the advertising method. If every brand is not using it, consumers follow the concern of decision influencing the opposite of the advertisement would not be relevant. In turn, this makes the worry of reverse psychology in advertising becoming a new “normality” low. This method of advertising should be used after proper market research of companies looking to attempt to use reverse psychology with their customers. The research needed to be conducted for these brands would be, themselves, competitors, and the target audience wanting to reach. Finding out which target audience and

brand is most suitable for reverse psychology in advertising will raise sales and decrease the risk of losing them. If the market research is not done correctly, the brand can risk losing potential sales. “Individual experience reactance occurs when one’s freedom to behave is threatened. The response can strengthen desire to the threatened freedom mentally or physically” (Chan & Leung, 2018, p. 323). If the consumer feels at any moment that their freedom to choose a product or service is being taken away, it could decrease the amount of returning customers, leading to the belief that using reverse psychology in advertising campaigns could be a risk, depending on whether it draws more curiosity towards the brand or pushes away. The end goal of the advertisement would still be present since it made the consumer think longer about the message. Changing the patterns of purchasing behaviors could disrupt consumers and possibly feelings after viewing the advertisement (i.e. their mental health).

### **2.3 Gaps in Existing Knowledge**

Knowing that there are missing pieces in the existing knowledge of reverse psychology in advertising, the data analysis will assist in knowledge gaps. Some missing pieces may include this question: How would the general audience take it? For example, when market research for any advertisement is not appropriately conducted, results like those from the Bud Light campaign can happen: “Bud Light sales have fallen sharply amid ongoing boycotts, dropping more than 23% for the week of April 29 compared to the year-ago period” (Napolitano, 2023). Bud Light was not aware of their standing market audience before having a spokesperson be the face of their campaign. The celebrity endorsement then led to a massive boycott of their products, causing sales to drop suddenly, which could have been avoided.

Understanding the ways reverse psychology in advertising can alter brand image, foster brand loyalty, and influence consumers’ self-view is crucial for any brand considering its use. Reverse

psychology in advertising is already used in today's market, but brands must evaluate its usefulness before launching campaigns containing it.

## **Research Design and Methods**

### **3.1 Aims and Objectives**

The main objective and motivation of this study is to understand how a sample of participants could react to being exposed to reverse psychology in advertisements versus traditional advertisements. Using this method of advertising more often could be more beneficial to companies, and how it could affect consumers if it is utilized more often than it is.

### **3.2 Methods and Sources**

The methods employed in this study include conducting anonymous in-depth interviews with 10 people and distributing an anonymous questionnaire.

The significance of showing different advertisements in the questionnaires versus the in-depth interviews was to create different groups to understand different levels of effectiveness in the advertisements and to gather a stronger comprehension.

The questionnaires included three sets of advertisement campaigns from three companies: the British Army, Patagonia, and Burger King. All used reverse psychology in advertising and traditional advertising, but some were more effective in provoking the intended reactions and emotions those brands were targeting. The Patagonia traditional advertisement included in the questionnaire was fictional to show a connection between brand awareness and identity, even if Patagonia itself did not put out the advertisement. The in-depth interviews also included three sets of advertisement campaigns from three companies: Oatly, Sheetz, and Takis. All used both reverse psychology in advertising and traditional advertising.

The goal was to understand that reverse psychology in advertising is being used all over the world in different campaigns, including advertisements from Great Britain, the United States of America, and Canada. Also, including adverts released worldwide because of the brand's international platform, there was more of a probing effect on the research end to see if participants would notice. All advertisements ranged from digital to print advertising, like in magazines or billboards.

## **Results**

### **4.1 Discoverings**

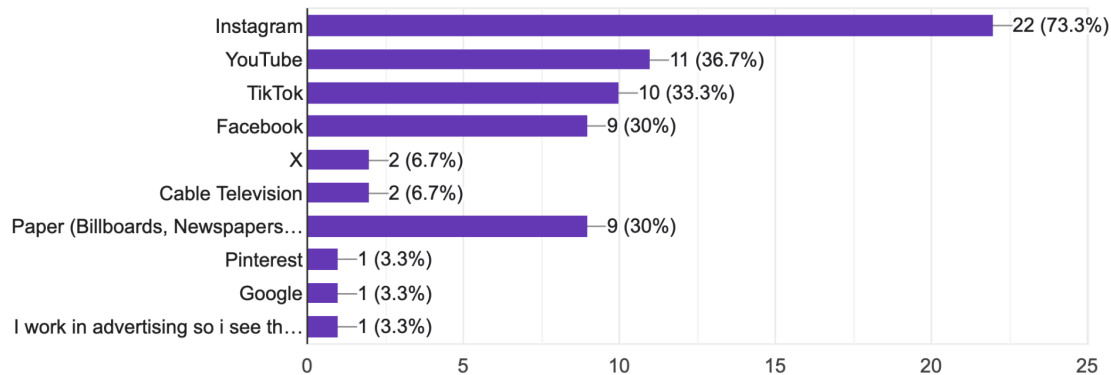
Valuable discoveries have been made in the data collected. Twenty-one people identified as female and nine people identified as male responded to the questionnaire, bringing a total of 30 respondents to the questionnaire. Twenty-eight are from the United States, one from Italy, and one from Mexico. 83.3% of the participants were in the "Teenagers" age group, ranging from 19-29; 3.3% in the "Young Adults" age group, ranging from 30-40; and 13.3% in the "Adults" age group, ranging from 41-50. The in-depth interview included five people who identified as female and five people who identified as male. The age range of these individuals was from 20-49. 90% of the "Teenagers" age group and 10% of "Adults" age group. Nine of which are from the United States and one from Turkey. The responses to advertisements had different results when comparing the genders that had participated.

All participants of the questionnaire fit the requirements of occasionally stopping to look at advertisements, but those advertisements were not always from brands that aligned with their preferences. Another important measure was which medium these participants typically consume the most. This factor dictates the types of advertisements the participants usually consume,

depending on whether the advertisements are tailored to them or if they are forced to see, for example, an unskippable ad that plays before a YouTube video or unskippable mobile game ads.

**Figure 1**

*Location of Advertisement Consumption*

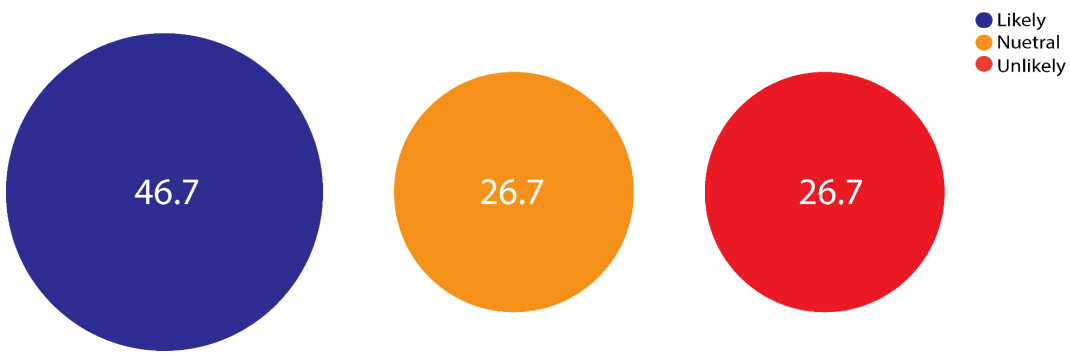


Participants in the questionnaire found themselves consuming the most advertisements on Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook. Followed by paper advertisements like on billboards, newspapers, or magazines. Participants of the in-depth interview had similar responses when it came to which platforms they consume advertisements on the most, with it being Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, then YouTube, and TikTok.

Awareness of reverse psychology with questionnaire participants had mixed reviews if they were aware of it being used in advertising before, but mostly were aware that this method was being used in advertising. 46.7% responded that they were aware they were likely exposed to reverse psychology in advertising. 26.7% were either unlikely or neutral to the fact that reverse psychology was being used in the advertisements they were exposed to.

**Figure 2**

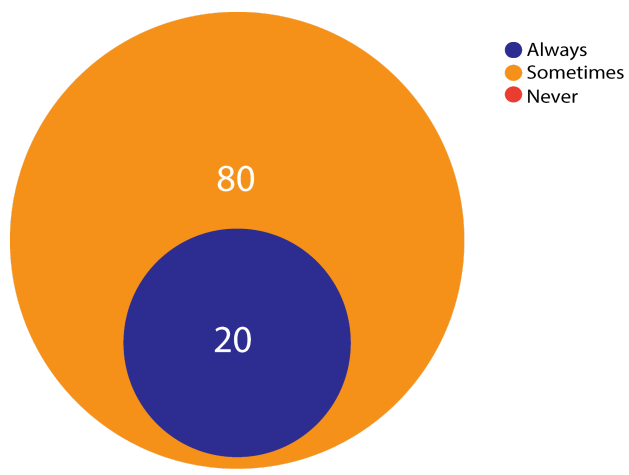
*Awareness of Reverse Psychology in Advertisements*



Similarly, in the in-depth interviews, 50% were aware, and 50% were unaware of the usage of reverse psychology in advertising. Adversely, the likelihood that they would look over the advertisements that contained reverse psychology resulted in 80% of participants saying they would sometimes look past them and 20% would always look past them.

**Figure 3**

*Interest in Reverse Psychology Being Used In Advertisements*



Most of the participants in the questionnaire responded that they were indifferent to an advertisement if it contained reverse psychology. In the in-depth interview, participants

responded that reverse psychology used in advertising would make them do what is intended by the advertisement. If the advertisement were to be correctly targeted, the participant would respond positively or become unreceptive and ignore the advertisement. The interview results showed that 40% said reverse psychology advertisements influenced them, 30% said they preferred traditional advertising more, and 30% felt indifferent since the advertisements did not interest them then. This means the advertisement would have been more effective if the participant had been naturally rebellious. When asked which was the most effective, 50% responded that advertisements that had reverse psychology were the most effective if they were rebellious by nature and the advertisement caught their attention. Meanwhile, the other 50% responded that the traditional advertisements were more effective since they were unreceptive to what was being advertised and did not enjoy the message in the reverse advertisements.

The first set of advertisements enforced a direct way of thinking about the company and making the consumers think about themselves. Participants felt that the advertisement that used reverse psychology was forceful compared to the one that used traditional advertising. The British Army released this set of advertisements that had been shown to the participants. The results of these advertisements showed that participants would rather see advertisements that contained reverse psychology in a less daunting and direct manner. The result of showing the advertisements to the participants also takes into account that the majority of the participants in the questionnaire were from different parts of the United States.

**Figure 4**

*“Don’t Join The Army”*



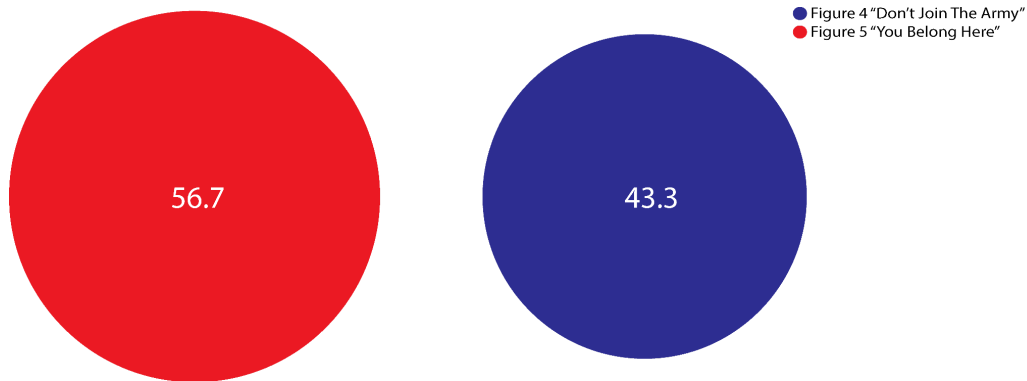
**Figure 5**

*“You Belong Here”*



**Figure 6**

*British Army Effectiveness*

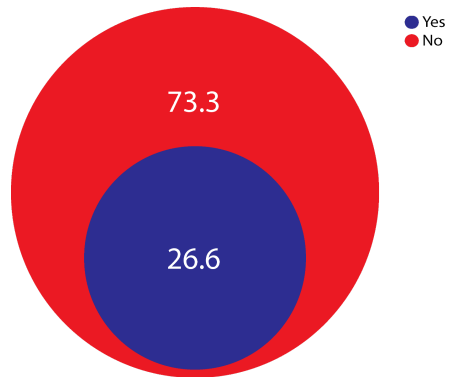


The feelings from all of these advertisements were mixed. After seeing the “Don’t Join the Army” advertisement, participants had negative emotions of shame, laughter, being personally attacked, annoyance, guilt, and being forced. Others had uplifting emotions of inspiration, challenge, urgency, growth, understanding, and attention-grabbing. The participants’ purchasing

intentions of the British Army after seeing this advertisement were almost ineffective, with reverse psychology being used because of how “forceful” and “direct” the advertisement was.

### Figure 7

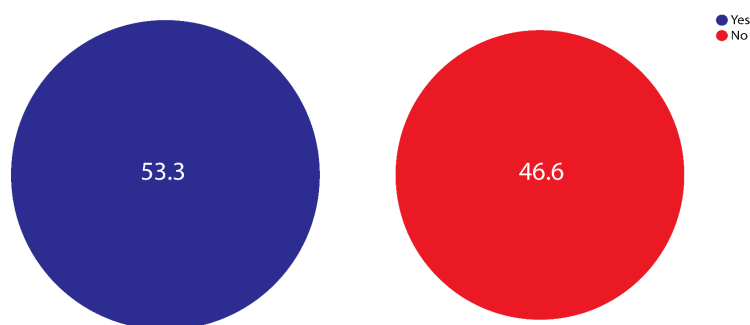
*Participant's Purchasing Intentions From British Army Reverse Psychology Advert*



The participants felt “Don’t Join The Army” was rather forceful and direct, leaving their purchasing intentions to the British Army to be negative. The responses from the questionnaire stated that the preferred invite into an environment like the army would be warm and welcoming.

### Figure 8

*Participant's Purchasing Intentions From British Army Traditional Advert*



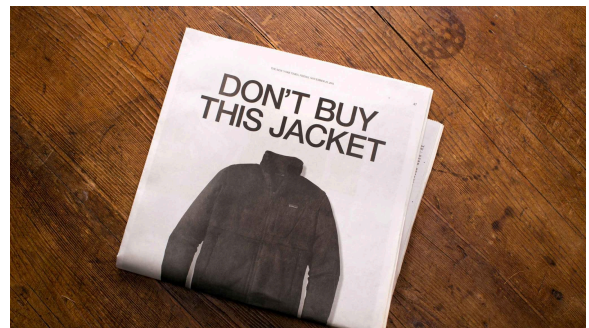
In general, participants felt that reverse psychology in advertisements was practical if appropriately used, with 41.4% voting ineffective way of advertising, 31% voting it was very effective, and 27.6% voting neutral or indifferent to the two.

After seeing the “You Belong Here” advertisement, participants had positive feelings of acceptance, inspiration, compelled to join, intrigued, interested, a sense of belonging, and a sense of want and need. On the other hand, other participants felt the opposite: scared, unwelcomed, forceful, anxious, and annoyed. After seeing the British Army’s traditional advertisement, purchasing intentions from the participants mentioned that they were more split, leaving them feeling more purposeful or not curious at all.

The next set of advertisements was from Patagonia, which had a more positive outcome for the participants when viewing the advert with reverse psychology. With the effectiveness of either one being split down the middle, the traditional advertisement was still more highly valued.

**Figure 9**

*“Don’t Buy This Jacket”*



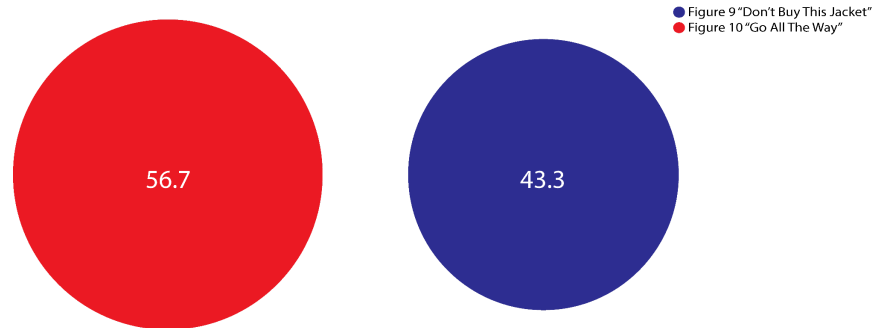
**Figure 10**

*“Go All The Way”*



**Figure 11**

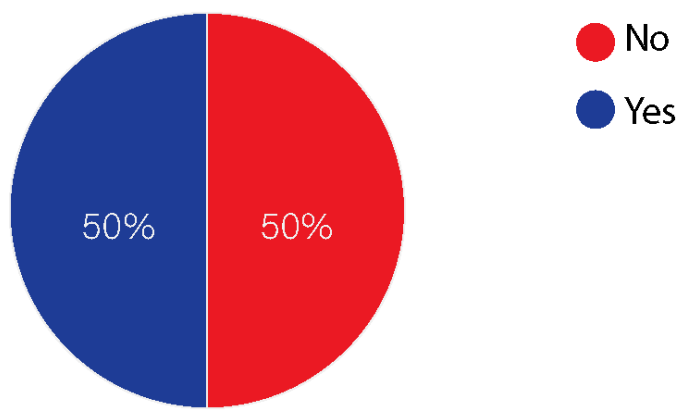
*Patagonia Effectiveness*



Participants were torn from choosing either Patagonia advertisement to be deemed more effective, but the traditional advertisement ultimately won the popular vote. Factors of this decision included display of the advertisement, direct messaging, and how it made participants feel such as interest, curiosity, and humor. In contrast, participants felt disinterested and bored from “Don’t Buy This Jacket,” leaving the decision of the group to be split.

**Figure 12**

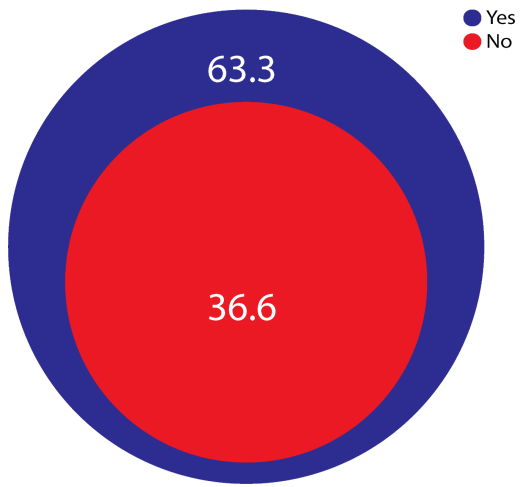
*Participant's Purchasing Intentions From Patagonia Reverse Psychology Advert*



On the other hand, the traditional advertisement, “Go All The Way,” made participants feel interested, energized, cool, intrigued, curious, inspired, and adventurous. Other participants felt somewhat confused and dizzy and had trouble reading the typography. The participant’s purchasing intentions of Patagonia were more captivated by the design elements in this advert, having the group split one way more than the other.

**Figure 13**

*Participant's Purchasing Intentions From Patagonia Traditional Advert*



The effectiveness of traditional advertising outweighs the ones that use reverse psychology, depending on how the brand uses it. 43.3% of the participants preferred reverse psychology in advertising, whereas 56.6% of the participants in the questionnaire would have preferred traditional advertising more. The Burger King advertisement of “28 Day Old Whopper,” received as much negative backlash from how unappetizing the food looked and turned participants away from Burger King as it did when it was released to the general public. The same goes for the British Army recruiting advertisements: participants preferred feeling welcomed into an environment with higher stakes, so reverse psychology was convincing for participants. In contrast, the advertisement from Patagonia, “Don’t Buy This Jacket,” received positive feedback because of how Patagonia presented the jacket directly and where more participants for both adverts shown preferred the traditional advertising method for all three sets of advertisements, even if it negatively caught their eye.

**Figure 14**

*“28 Day Old Whopper”*



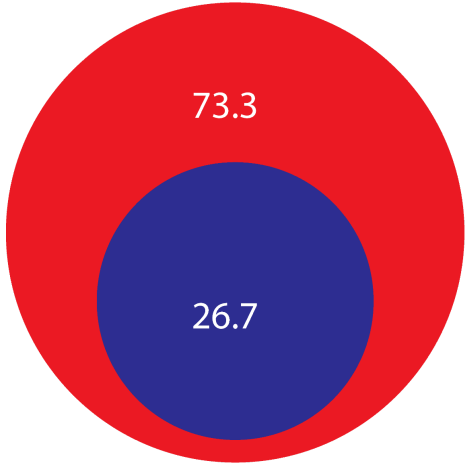
**Figure 15**

*“Crowned By You”*



**Figure 16**

*Burger King Effectiveness*



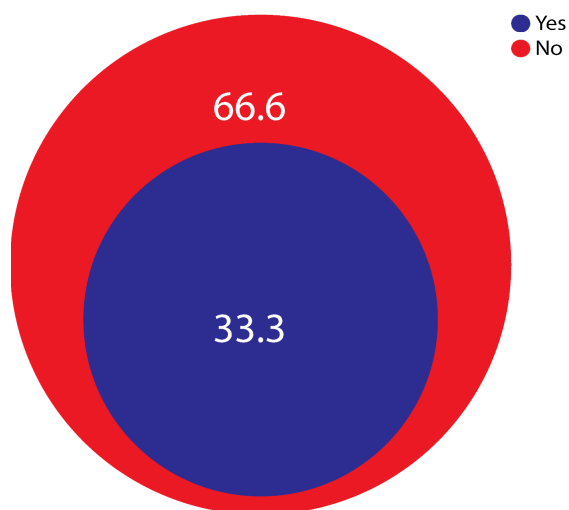
- Figure 14 “28 Day Old Whopper”
- Figure 15 “Crowned By You”

The Burger King advertisement that used reverse psychology, “28 Day Old Whopper,” was ineffective for the anonymous questionnaire participants who would rather see a traditional, photogenic advertisement of the burgers. The results showed that the participants preferred the traditional advertisement, 73.3%, compared to 26.7% who preferred the reverse advertisement. The comparison between participants’ preferences and how it made them feel was

overwhelmingly significant. After seeing the “28 Day Old Whopper,” the participant’s feelings were mixed, like feelings of disgust, while others found relief. After seeing this advertisement, the participants’ purchasing intentions for Burger King were not as triggered as expected.

**Figure 17**

*Participant’s Purchasing Intentions From Burger King Reverse Psychology Advert*

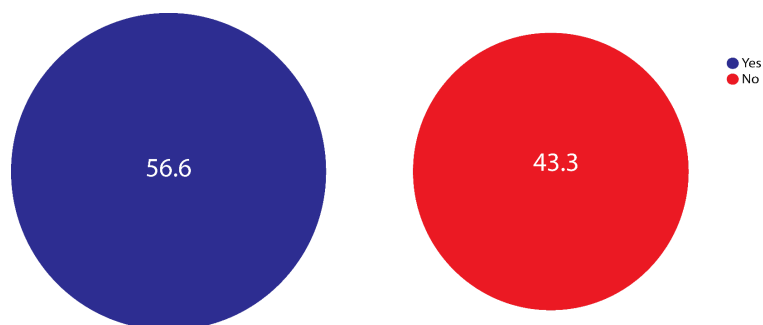


One respondent understood that the “28 Day Old Whopper” was trying to convey fresh products and ingredients. The advertisement showed consumers their food is not filled with as many preservatives as their competitors. Others felt that the advertisement triggered their purchasing intentions and understood that Burger King was trying to show consumers that their food used fewer preservatives. Most respondents perceived the advertisement was unappetizing and did not want to try to understand why they were being shown a moldy burger.

The “Crowned By You” advertisement seems to have left half of the participants feeling hungry, and they said they would prefer this advertisement over seeing the burger with mold. The participants’ purchasing intentions of Burger King after seeing this traditional advertisement increased from the one that contained reverse psychology.

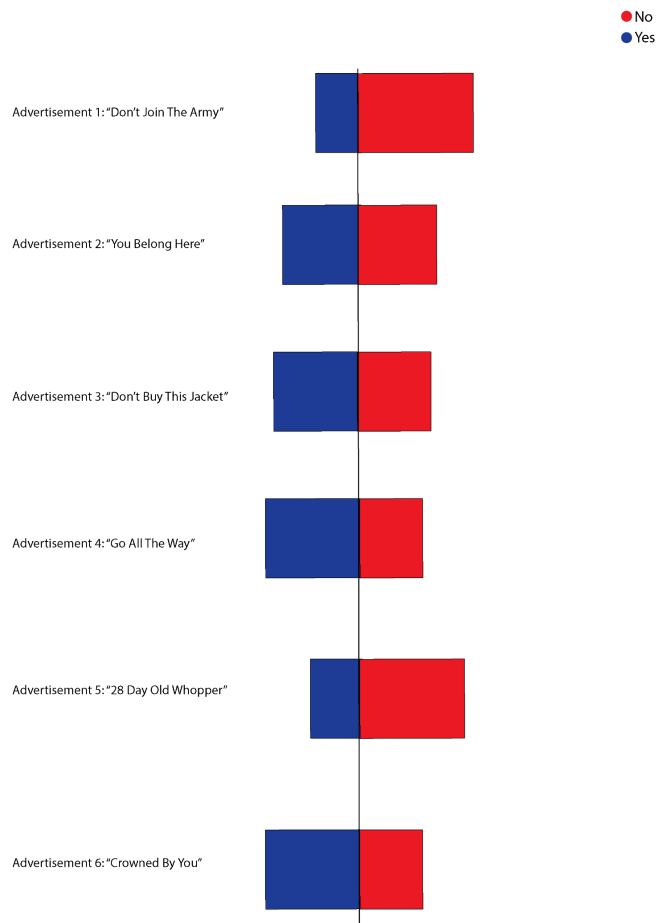
**Figure 18**

*Participant's Purchasing Intentions From Burger King Traditional Advert*

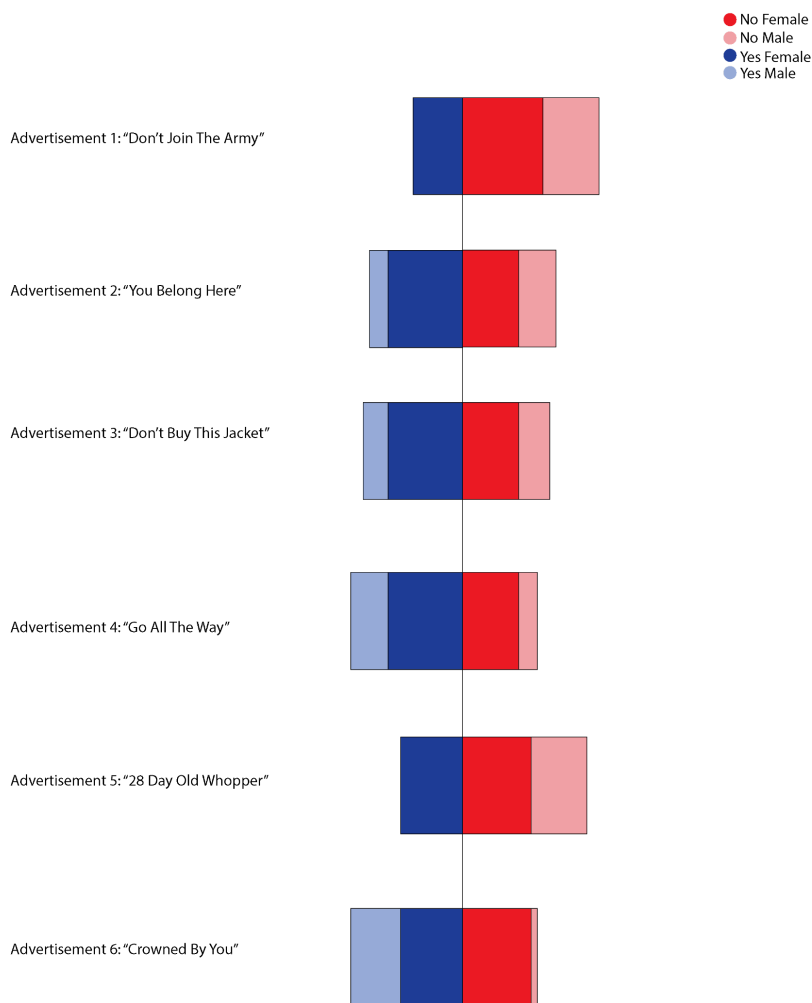


Seeing this response can result from understanding that reverse psychology does not always work in food advertising, that the advert's context is more important when using reverse psychology, and that the food still looks appealing whilst communicating the message's meaning.

Participant's purchasing intentions of these brands after viewing the advertisements side-by-side depended on how well the brands utilized reverse psychology to their audiences. Some advertisements were more effective in provoking participants' purchasing intentions after viewing the traditional advertisements.

**Figure 19***Participant's Purchasing Intentions After Viewing Adverts*

When comparing how males and females responded to the questionnaire, most females decided that traditional advertisements were still preferred. The males that responded were similar in their responses. This is interesting since in the in-depth interviews, the men interviewed were more likely to choose the advertisements that contained reverse psychology than the women.

**Figure 20***Female vs. Male Purchasing Intentions After Viewing Adverts*

Depending on the brand, the male participants in the questionnaire were either on one side cohesively in agreement or split between how curious the advertisement made them feel with the level of curiosity the advertisement sparked in them. The trend seemed to have the male participants enjoying the traditional advertisements more than the reverse psychology ones, but when reverse psychology advertisements were thought-provoking enough, they would agree that it was not effective with strong opinions. After seeing "Don't Join The Army," there was a strong agreement between both male and female participants about not wanting to join and feeling

forced in a specific direction. When seeing the “28 Day Old Whopper” advertisement, all male participants did not feel their purchase intentions were swayed, but they still felt strongly about the advertisement. One said, “It made me nauseous and never want to eat a Burger King burger,” from how daunting the advertisement was.

Female participants in the questionnaire mostly responded in a split decision, some understanding what the advertisement was trying to achieve and others not being receptive at all to the advertisements with reverse psychology. The most significant difference between traditional advertising and reverse psychology advertising shown in the questionnaire was from “Don’t Join The Army,” where female participants had strong feelings about not joining the military. One stated, “No. I disagree with the ad, joining the military doesn’t necessarily make you a better you.” Female participants responded with the advertisement that changed their purchasing intentions by stating, “Usually advertisements encourage people to join, but the opposite statement is more eye-catching.” There was a larger understanding of what the advertisement was trying to make the consumer react to. The “28 Day Old Whopper” advertisement had an almost split response to the reverse psychology tactic because it could mean that there was a deeper understanding of what Burger King was trying to promote against their competitors. One stated, “It tells me that the food will go bad, which is comforting to know because there aren’t any preservatives.” Other responses included how unappetizing it was to see food always promoted in a prim and proper way being displayed as trash and wanting to avoid the company altogether.

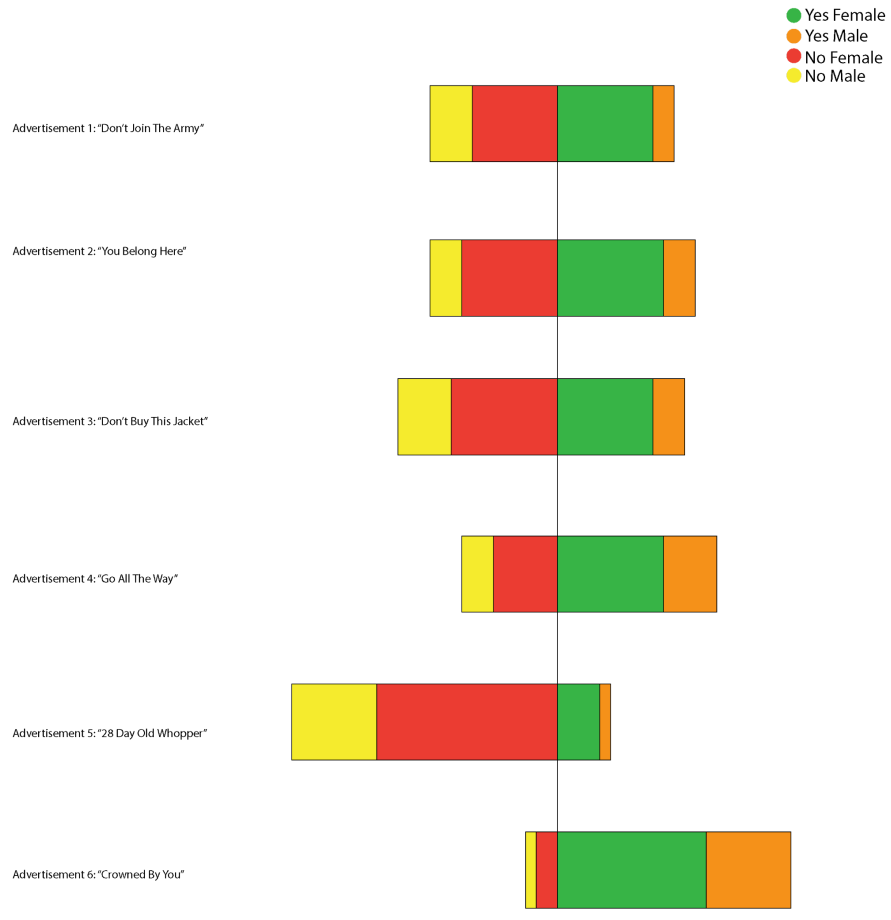
Male participants were more receptive to traditional advertising, but when knowing the advertisement was not working for them, they voted in unison to one side.

This is also to understand that the purchasing intentions of these brands are affected after seeing the traditional advertising and reverse psychology side-by-side. The reverse psychology advertisement, “28 Day Old Whopper,” puts the participants in a position where they do not necessarily want to purchase a burger from their establishment after seeing the advertisements one after another.

Next, understanding the connection between the participant’s prior beliefs and connecting to brand identity after seeing these advertisements. There was a clear representation of brand identity, whether the responses were positive or negative. After viewing “Don’t Join The Army,” participants showed that they were aware of the brand identity, with 76.6% feeling either challenged and improved with their self-worth or shamed and attacked by the advertisement. 30% were female participants, and 6.6% were male participants who felt a positive connection.

**Figure 21**

*Female vs. Male Participant's Changes in Brand Identity*



Purchasing intentions changed drastically as the advertisements shown in the questionnaire continued. This led to a unanimous decision that the Burger King advertisement was not influential, and the traditional advertisement was preferred after the juxtaposition of reverse psychology. When brand identity is consistent such as imagery and messaging, it is easier for the company, like Burger King, to create effective advertisements regardless of using the marketing method.

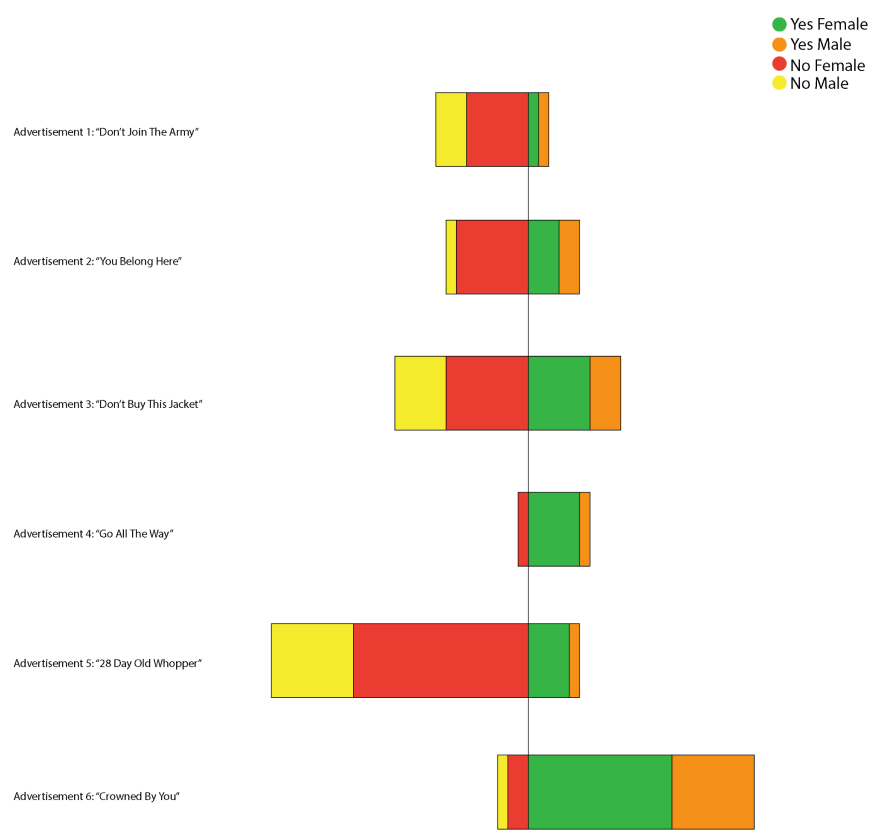
Participants in the interviews responded in a similar pattern, but male participants and their purchase intentions were stronger after seeing the Takis advertisements about “listening to the

haters” and “not eat Takis” and wanting to “prove the haters wrong” even if they had not had the chance to try the hot chip yet.

After seeing reverse psychology and traditional advertisements, brand awareness remained consistent with male respondents’ preference for traditional advertisements. The female respondents remained split between reverse psychology and traditional advertisements.

**Figure 22**

*Female vs. Male Participant’s Changes in Brand Awareness*



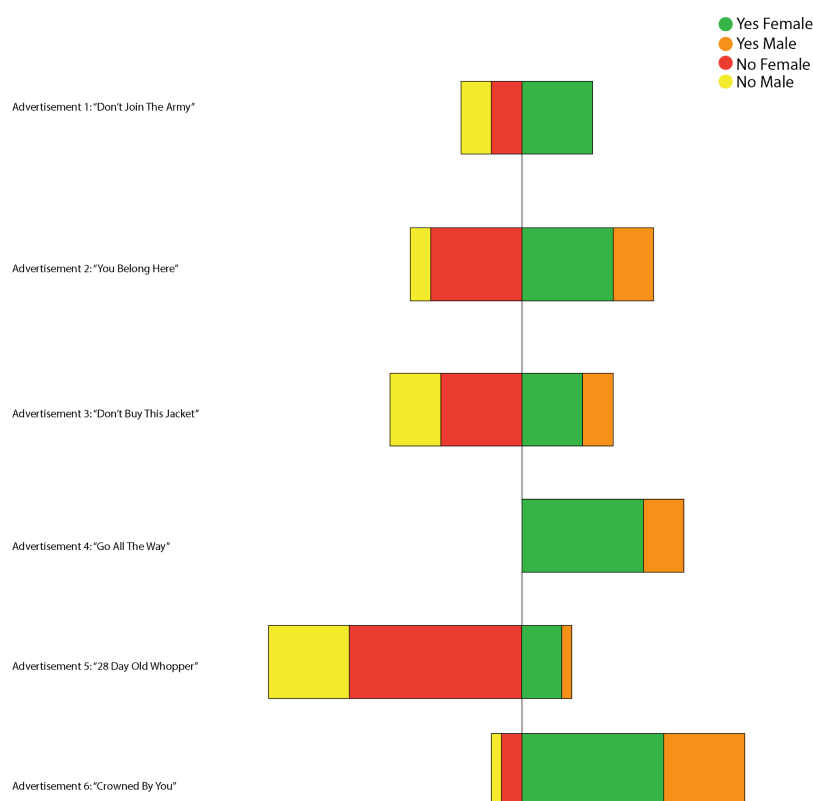
The advertisement did not receive as many responses as expected from the traditional advertisement from Patagonia. Even though there has been a consistent scale towards the traditional advertisement in this study, the Patagonia traditional advertisement is the only one

with the fewest feedback. Even negative brand awareness was received, but there was a more profound understanding from the female respondents depending on the advertisement.

Brand loyalty was the last factor focused on consumer behaviors from advertising. This measurement was not as easy to collect since the advertisements were not tailored to every participant's liking.

### Figure 23

#### *Female vs. Male Participant's Changes in Brand Loyalty*



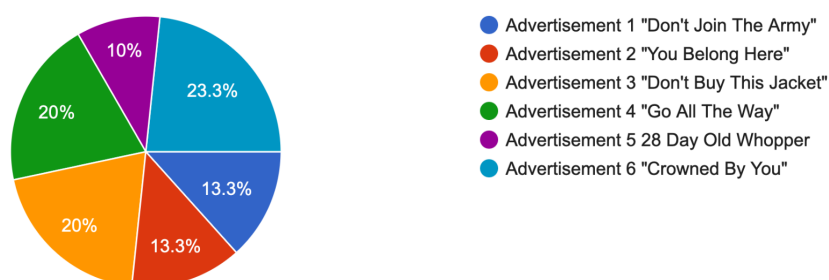
This measurement was significant to understand since even if unfamiliar with the brand, seeing their advertisement could influence the consumer towards or away from the brand and build loyalty from there. Patagonia's "Go All The Way" measurements had loyalty from traditional advertising and were split for the reverse psychology advert. The male participants enjoyed the

traditional advertisements more as the female participants were in agreement with the male participants or split between the two.

The most effective advertisement shown to the participants in the questionnaire included a mostly split response between the six. However, the larger numbers of votes were for traditional advertisements from Patagonia and Burger King and the reverse psychology advertisement from Patagonia. This means that depending on how the brands decided to use reverse psychology in their advertising, it had to fit under the same mold of how they advertise traditionally for it to be understood by their audiences.

## Figure 24

### *Most Effective Advertisement in Questionnaire*



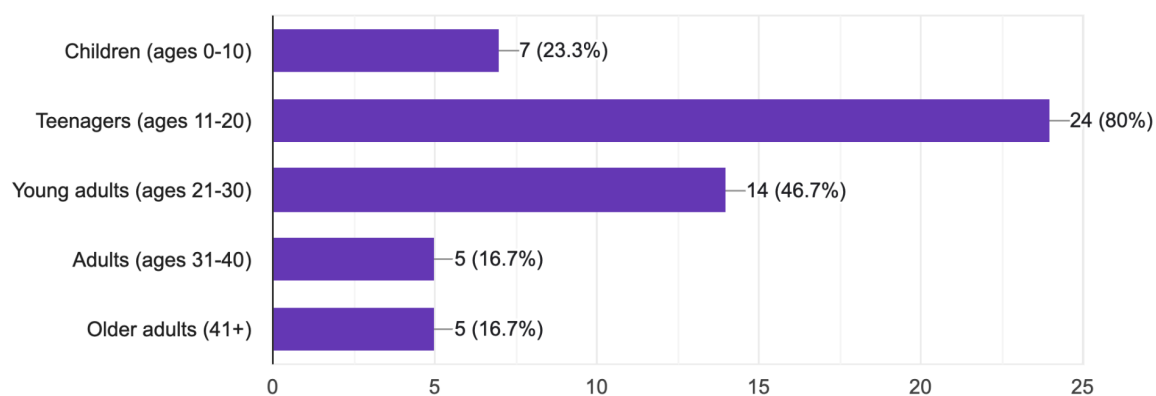
The participants that felt that “Don’t Buy This Jacket” was more effective was because it was direct and straightforward, and changed purchasing intentions, or at least made the participants hesitate. The respondents that felt that “Go All The Way” was more effective was because of the color combination. For “Crowned By You,” participants voted for this advertisement because of how hungry they were and how good the burgers looked versus the “28 Day Old Whopper”.

They were then asked if they could see companies using reverse psychology in advertising practices, and the majority responded neutral or likely, even if they did not find the

advertisements in the questionnaire as effective as intended. 56.7% responded neutral, 26.7% responded likely, and 16.7% responded unlikely. To better understand which age group companies would have the best outcomes for brand awareness, brand identity, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions, participants mostly agreed that teenagers and young adults would respond well to this type of advertising.

**Figure 25**

*Appropriate Age Groups for Reverse Psychology*



Participants answered that some age groups, like teenagers and young adults, would react to reverse psychology used in advertisements because of how influenceable they are and are often resistant. Participants in the questionnaire and in-depth interviews also responded that Americans would be the most susceptible to reverse psychology in advertising because of the culture's heavy usage of sarcasm and resistance to what is being told. Other respondents were unsure which cultural group would fit best, but most agreed that this advertising method would affect anyone in a rebellious stage of their lives.

As previously mentioned, in-depth interviews were conducted, and their responses were supplemental to the findings of this study. They had more connections to the advertisements for

food in the interview than the questionnaire, which could lead to how different brands decided to use reverse psychology to make it more effective in the respected target audiences. In the interviews, participants saw advertisements from two brands that produced edible items, Oatly and Takis. Oatly had a direct and shocking approach when they were trying to grab the attention of the consumers by adding reviews from customers that contained profanity. This approach also showed consumers that Oatly was aware of the negative feedback and used it as self-awareness.

**Figure 26.**

*“This Tastes Like”*



The self-awareness that Oatly has grabbed more of the participant’s attention towards the advertisement with reverse psychology over the traditional advertisement with about 60% responding that this advertisement caught their attention the most because of how offsetting it was. The headline was more important than reading the entire text, which had been explained to the participants.

The traditional advertisement shown to the participants just below the reverse psychology one had only caught 40% of the participants’ attention; most preferred the advertising not to be as direct as the reverse psychology one had been.

Participants’ brand awareness of Oatly grew after viewing this advertisement since it caught most of the participants’ attention. Most participants felt “taken off-guard” or “curious” since

advertisements like this are not common. Most male participants preferred this advert with reverse psychology over the traditional advertisement because it used profanity but drew them into the advertisement when they were not expecting it.

Brand identity and brand loyalty from this advertisement showed that the advertisement influenced participants and would like to try or look into Oatly. This advertisement influenced 30% of the participants. For the traditional advertisement, more thought was given to responses from participants.

### Figure 27

*“But Made For Humans”*



This advertisement was just as attention-grabbing as the first one shown to participants. The difference here was that this advertisement did not contain profanity and was asking more of the consumers to stay curious or to do their research on Oatly and other kinds of milk that could be *Figure*

27. *“But Made For Humans,”* Participants in the interview mentioned how it made them wonder how other kinds of milk were taught to be good for them and want to relearn what to consume. The shock factor of the reverse psychology advertisement is what made the participants want to continue reading even if they did not enjoy the advert. Participants also noted that viewing these advertisements did not affect their perception of Oatly’s brand identity. One even said that she would purposely buy a different brand of milk if she saw the print advertisement about it not tasting good. She even stated, “that if an advertisement is blatantly telling her not to do something, I will listen and move on.” This can point to Oatly not showing a moldy version of their product like Burger King had done.

Brand loyalty was shown from the want to learn more about why Oatly said what they did, and most participants enjoyed that, but it did not change the initial brand identity participants had of them. For brand awareness, most did not know what the milk brand was and wanted to learn more about what the brand stood for.

The next set of advertisements that were shown to interviewees was for Sheetz. These advertisements included an ambiguous way to catch the attention of customers looking for a job. If the customer only had time to read one part of the advertisement, they could feel confused unless they read the other section.

## Figure 28

*“Unless”*



This advertisement that contained reverse psychology only struck the attention of 40% of participants, leaving the other 60% preferring traditional advertisements. Participants stated that the reverse psychology advertisement was more engaging but preferred the traditional

advertisement if they were looking for a job since it listed how much extra money they could earn if they applied to Sheetz.

Brand loyalty had not changed for these participants after viewing this advertisement since the advert did not pertain to them. Brand awareness of Sheetz changed for most participants who did not know about the company until after seeing the reverse psychology advertisement. Most male and female participants did not prefer this advertisement over the traditional advertisement.

### Figure 29

*“Now Hiring”*



Even though participants felt challenged after seeing the advertisement with reverse psychology, the preferred one was traditional advertising. The consumer perspective of the Sheetz brand identity did not change after viewing either advertisement.

The last set of advertisements shown to interviewees were from the chips brand Takis. Interviewees had responded with the advertisement that contained reverse psychology to the one of traditional advertising. 80% of participants answered with the reverse psychology advertising to catch their attention more, positive or negative reactions, the advertisement caught their attention more than the traditional advertisement.

**Figure 30***“School is Back”***Figure 31***“Don't Eat Takis”*

The advertisement with reverse psychology changed some respondents' perspectives by making them wonder *why* they should “listen to the haters” when they know Takis is a reputable brand. The 20% of participants said that the reverse psychology advertisement had given them prejudgement of not enjoying the chip or disliking the direct tone after being told not to eat something. The participants' brand awareness was strong, and all participants were aware of the brand. The brand loyalty from the participants grew stronger after seeing the reverse psychology advert. Reverse psychology in Takis influenced the participants' purchasing decisions, and some were more inclined to buy the chips after seeing “Don't Eat Takis,” while others wanted to listen directly and not eat them.

The oldest participant, 49, stated in the interview, “I don't like it, so it doesn't work on me because it makes me irritated that it was promoted to me that way.” Her statement helps to understand that reverse psychology in advertising does not always work on older consumers because they want to avoid feeling deceived and would rather have a product marketed with positive messaging.

The most effective advertisement shown to the interviewees was Sheetz's "Now Hiring" because it showed the participants how much more money they could be earning if they decided to work later. Realizing that reverse psychology does not always work if it catches a consumer's attention, it pushes them to think more about the brand.

Male and female participants who were interviewed answered differently than those who participated in the questionnaire by having male participants enjoy the reverse advertisements more than the traditional ones. The majority of male participants that preferred traditional advertising out of the three sets of advertisements were for Sheetz's "Now Hiring" since it was more straightforward about compensation.

Female participants enjoyed the traditional advertisements more than the reverse psychology except for the Takis "Don't Eat Takis" advertisement. This advertisement had the female participants split between which was more effective and which they were completely unreceptive to.

## **4.2 Limitations**

Limitations in this study included time constraints, the selected research, and groups that were focused on, like gender identity groups, age groups, and cultural backgrounds. This is because the number of participants in the study was not large, but the ones that participated made an impact.

Cultural backgrounds should have been more specific on what findings were anticipated to make the process of gathering research structured since there were some participants with answers about income classes and others about which country would be the most receptive to this advertising method. Not asking enough questions about education and income to understand if

these factors prevent participants and consumers from perceiving reverse psychology in advertising differently. Not being able to understand every language is a limitation on personal knowledge, so in the future, there could be advertising campaigns in different countries or regions that have used reverse psychology but not being able to understand it to use it as an example in research gathering or opening the research to these cultural backgrounds and groups. Along with this limitation was not having enough participants from other countries or regions to clearly understand how reverse psychology in advertising can impact participants of differing cultural backgrounds.

Another limitation was the country of origin of participants where most participants were from the United States, and not so many were from different regions of the world as expected, but this should have been understood from the beginning of the research to focus on Americans and allow the research to grow in the future.

Age groups should have focused more on a specific age group rather than leaving the age gap large for this study. Gender identity groups were a constraint, as there were not enough male participants to balance out the female participants.

Advertisements in the study included one that was not an official advertisement released by the company, but from a student who put together an advertisement campaign. The advertisement, “Go All The Way,” was not released by Patagonia, but the importance of having this advert in the study was important to show there is brand awareness in a fictional space.

Future research can be carried out where brand loyalty is measured closely while having more prerequisites for the participants to have a more accurate representation of how these advertisements can affect consumers who are current customers of the brand. As the advertising

method grows in popularity, the more that the companies need to understand how the method needs to be used tastefully.

Future research can also be carried out that focuses on other age groups, specifically children or older people since their reception to advertisements differs so much from each other, and knowing from this research, the focus was primarily on teenagers to adults. Participants were unsure which specific cultural group reverse psychology in advertising would work the best, so this opens another opportunity to expand future research.

Further research can be conducted on whether reverse psychology was continuously exposed to the consumer, whether there could be potential changes in their mental health, or whether they would be more receptive to traditional advertising.

### **Conclusion/Discussion**

In conclusion, reverse psychology in advertising could entice consumers to go towards or away from the brand, depending on how it represents the brand. There could be potential changes in brand identity, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and consumer purchasing intentions thanks to reverse psychology. The advertisements in the questionnaire versus the interview showed how reverse psychology can be successful and unsuccessful in food advertising. The result from the interview was that people were more receptive to the reverse psychology advertisements because the adverts were not as memorable as those featured in the questionnaire. The questionnaire included extreme versions of the reverse psychology method, which is why the responses to the interview were more positive than those of the questionnaire. Other advertisements that used the marketing method were more successful with their traditional advertisements, concluding that not all markets have the environment to release adverts containing reverse psychology.

Consumer behaviors could change positively or negatively depending on how the messaging in the advert's design, message, and colors. There is a basic understanding that reverse psychology in advertising is successful when it is used similarly to the traditional advertising of that brand when it is implicit. Leading to the understanding that results from the consumer can also differ depending on the consumer's gender identity, cultural demographics, and age group.

Gender identity can potentially differ in responses depending on the tone, messaging, imagery, etcetera. From the gathered research, it was clear that female participants were more receptive to reverse psychology used in advertising rather than how the male participants were. This advertising tactic can have different reactions from consumers depending on how it was used.

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*Grammarly was used to check grammatical and spelling errors.*