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Beyond the rainbow: Attitudes of Brazilian consumers regarding homoaffective advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Although there is societal pressure to accept diversity, negative attitudes towards minority groups such as gay men and lesbian women, especially in Brazil, remain widespread. The objective of this study was to examine whether gender, religiosity, and homonegative attitudes are associated with evaluations of homoaffective advertisements, brand, and purchase intentions. A survey with 456 university students from southern Brazil was carried out. The results demonstrate that women have more positive attitudes towards homoaffective advertisements, brands, and purchase intention. Religiosity also interferes with the attitude towards the ads and the attitude towards the brand. When analyzing religiosity and homonegativity by gender in attitudes towards the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention, it is observed that, for men, religion does not interfere in the attitude towards the brand and in the purchase intention. Limitations of the current study, and directions for future research are outlined.

KEYWORDS

Consumer Behavior, Homoaffective Advertising, Consumer Attitudes, Religiosity, Homonegativity

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1. INTRODUCTION

The acceptance of sexual minorities in Brazil and the world is been built slowly and gradually. The World Health Organization extinguished homosexuality from the International Statistical Classification of Diseases 30 years ago (Drescher, 2015). In medicine, the suffix “ism” indicates disease, and therefore, the previous classification gave an endorsement for gay cure treatments. In this sense, the Federal Council of Psychology (2020) at the end of the 90s formalized the understanding that same-sex practices cannot be considered a disease and that sexuality is part of the identity of each subject.

A survey carried out by the Pew Research Center (2020) ranked Brazil in 16th place in the acceptance of homosexuality, in a ranking formed by 34 countries. The percentage of Brazilians who accept homosexuality increased from 61% in 2013 to 67% in 2019. At the top of the survey is Sweden with 94% acceptance and lastly Nigeria with only 7%.

This recent history of advances concerning sexual minorities is reflected in still alarming numbers of violence and prejudice. Brazil has evidenced high rates of violence against gay and lesbian persons. In 2019, there were 297 homicides of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and 32 suicides in Brazil. The number represents one death every 26 hours (UOL, 2020).

In addition, Brazilians frequently boycott and establish anti-brand movements against companies that have policies and practices supportive of sexual minorities (Oliveira, 2015). The Brazilian cosmetics brand Natura faced great controversy and was threatened with a boycott of its products due to the 2020 Father’s Day campaign, which featured as protagonist the actor Thammy Miranda, a transsexual. As a target of Transphobia, netizens attacked the brand and Thammy. The hashtag “#NaturaNão” (in english #NoNatura) was among the most talked about subjects on Twitter during the controversy. On the other hand, the financial market reacted positively to inclusive marketing, raising the company’s stock values (Revista Veja, 2020).

There are several examples of Brazilian brands that have been investing in this market and realizing the opportunity for growth from this audience and its representation. Boticário, C&A, Riachuelo and Johnson & Johnson have already adopted inclusive campaigns. The Market Analysis identified in its research that sexual minorities correspond to 15% of the consumer market, it being in the majority of classes A and B (Mundo Marketing, 2020).

The inclusion and representativeness of minority groups is particularly important given the existence of cultural diversity, highly competitive markets, and corporate concern about social responsibility (Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1998). The social engagement of companies is part of a worldwide trend toward the “humanization of brands” (Correa, Ferreira, Silva, & Castro, 2015). In this scenario, the social role of advertising promotes a kind of production of meaning and provides an interaction with the social imaginary (re) building signs, reaffirming concepts and prejudices (Goffman, 1979). “Advertising is inserted in the social scene as a way to mediate, represent, reinforce a certain identity(...)” (Rodrigues, & Zanin, 2014, p.101). In the case of gay and lesbian consumers, Oakenfull, Mccarthy, and Greenlee (2008) believe that companies have assumed a sort of “corporate advocacy” role, seeking not only to include diverse consumer groups but to also enhance their social legitimacy.

Researchers have examined the content of homoaffective advertisements appearing in Brazil. The term homoaffective refers to people who feel attracted to same-sex people. The Brazilian judge, Maria Berenice Dias, was the first one to adopt the term to avoid the pejorative connotations associated with the word “homosexual” (Dias, 2000).

Baggio (2009) analyzed a series of Brazilian advertisements featuring sexual minorities, and he identified that the ads presented modernity or humor. Rodrigues and Zanin (2014) identified

that Brazilian homoaffective advertisements are often stereotypical in terms of the scenarios they depict and the actions engaged in by the central characters (e.g. ridicule and exaggeration of your characters). Also, Brazilian researchers have investigated how sexual minorities use consumption as a means of reinforcing and committing to their identities (Altaf, & Troccoli, 2011; Pereira, & Ayrosa, 2012).

Personal factors may influence consumer attitudes towards homoaffective ads (Eisend, & Hermann, 2019), as the = degree of homosexual prejudice (Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1998), and gender (Um, 2014). The prejudice's degree is measured through a homonegativity scale, however, the marketing researches (Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1998; Um, 2014) are still focusing on scales that do not consider the factors from a modern context (Morrison, & Morrison, 2002).

Also, gender plays an important factor in attitudes toward homoaffective advertisements (Um, 2014); men use to have more negative attitudes than women (Oakenfull, & Greenlee, 2005), but the questions about gender and purchase intentions still needs answers. Another factor is religion, as the higher the religiosity degree, as higher the homonegativity will be (Doebler, 2015). Nevertheless, there is no direct evidence between religiosity and attitudes toward the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention.

Considering all these points, the research question is: Does the gender, religiosity, and degree of prejudice of Brazilian consumers influence their attitude towards homoaffective ads, brands, and purchase intention? In this sense, the objective of this study was to examine whether gender, religiosity, and homonegative attitudes are associated with evaluations of homoaffective advertisements, brand attitude, and purchase intention in the Brazilian context. For this, a quantitative study, utilizing a questionnaire, was carried out with heterosexual Brazilian consumers.

The present research differs in three main points: First, the use of a modern scale that measures the homonegativity of the respondents considering the current and national context; Second, while previous research has identified the relationship between religion and homonegativity, in this work the difference lies in the application of these variables combined with the market context: attitude towards the advertisement, brand and purchase intention. Third, the study applies the verification of gender in the Brazilian context, mainly regarding purchase intention.

Besides that, the discussion still matters once that researchers have been studying the theme and they did not find a way to target sexual minority consumers without negative reactions from heterosexual consumers. Nölke (2018) investigated the biased and reductionist image of LGBT identities adopted by current segmentation practices. The author points out that, despite advances in the number and form of LGBT advertisements, most identities within the queer spectrum remain invisible. Gong (2019), for instance, suggests that mixed sexual advertisements “could balance between homosexual-themed advertising and gay window advertising by addressing homosexual audiences without alienating heterosexual viewers” (p. 1).

Studies examining Brazilian consumers' attitudes toward homoaffective advertising are scarce and this discussion is fundamental for the construction of strategies that can ensure that both homosexual and heterosexual publics are represented in the ads. Therefore, the research has important managerial implications for marketers, who, by understanding the reactions of the Brazilian public, can more assertively execute their campaigns involving sexual minorities. On the other hand, the research has social implications when looking for ways to include minority audiences in the media, through advertisements. Thus, there are many points to be discussed to improve the representativeness of these sexual minorities, as well as the marketing strategies of the brands.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

One of the challenges in marketing today is the connection to social causes. When a company decides to support a cause, the purpose of this association is precisely to develop a brand personality, to create a relationship or strengthen a connection with the brand (Matos, Vinuales, & Sheinin, 2017). In this way, Manstead and McCulloch (1981) believe that advertising is a mirror of society, as cited by Grau and Zotos (2016), at the same time that the social reality is molded by media.. Advertising has a great contribution to individual development. Advertising can contribute as a mirror and mold for your behavior and social relationship. So, many authors highlighted the increase in the representation of sexual minorities in advertising (Grau, & Zotos, 2016). However, this representation is not enough to interrupt the prejudice against the sexual minority. Many personal factors can influence that.

2.1. CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOAFECTIVE ADVERTISEMENTS

Understanding attitudes is important because they directly influence individuals' intentions (Bhatt, Jayswal, & Patel, 2013). Consumers' attitudes toward advertisements can vary for many reasons. When the consumer identifies with the advertisement, this generates a positive response (Aaker, Brumbaugh, & Grier, 2000); however, when the image is inconsistent with his or her prejudice, consumer reactions are negative (Bhat et al., 1998). In this regard, researchers have found that people respond more positively to advertisements without homoaffective content (Um, 2014).

The same happens with respect to the brand (Bhat et al., 1998), although it is a much more complex construct (Kirmani, & Zeithaml, 1993). In addition, the relationship between brand and consumer is built over time and on previous experiences, opinions and available information, thus being more difficult to be changed (Um, 2014). However, Lee, Byon, Ammon and Park (2016) have identified that evaluations of advertisements interfere with brand judgment. In this sense, the association with sexual minority through advertising can generate negative beliefs about the brand when the consumer does not identify with the position adopted by the brand (Matos, Vinuales, & Sheinin, 2017).

Purchase intention also is related to attitudes towards both a brand and the way it is advertised (Mackenzie, & Lutz, 1989). This intention originates from the perceived value of the brand (Monroe, 1990), and when this value is higher, the purchase intention also will be higher (Chao-Sen, 2015). The purchase intention is conditioned by personal, psychological and social factors (Chao-Sen, 2015). The consumers evaluate the options according to their preferences, based on their experiences and the external environment, to make the purchase decision (Schiffman, Kanuk, 2000).

2.2. GENDER, RELIGION, AND PREJUDICE

Individuals interpret stimuli very subjectively based on their experiences, sociocultural contexts and aspirations (Bhat *et al.*, 1998), and these individual differences may have implications for consumer behavior (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2005). According to Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel (2005), individual differences involve aspects related to demography, psychographics, values, personality, consumer resources, motivation, knowledge and attitude. Based on these individual differences, people organize their social world into groups that give a sense of social identity and belonging (e.g. family, social class, football team, etc.) (Tajfel, & Turner, 1986). This is the foundation of Social Identity Theory, which helps to understand how individuals seek to identify

with people who participate in the same group, allowing them to increase their social position to the detriment of others (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Um (2014) used Social Identity Theory to explain the behavior of heterosexual consumers in relation to advertisements containing same-sex couples. The researcher found that heterosexual participants expressed a sense of belonging by denying or seeking to differentiate themselves from sexual minorities and, by doing so, elevated their self-esteem.

Thus, consumers may react emotionally and negatively to an advertisement when the image is inconsistent with the social categories to which they belong (Bhat et al., 1998). As social groups differ in affinity, skills, purpose, and even prejudice (Scott, 1994), managing multiple target markets creates strategic difficulties for advertisers attempting to attract different segments simultaneously (Grier, & Brumbaugh, 1999).

With respect to gender, Oakenfull and Greenlee (2005) assert that it is important for the marketer to understand gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality. Specifically, researchers have demonstrated consistently that heterosexual men and women respond differently to gay-themed advertisements, with the latter being more tolerant (e.g. Oakenfull, McCarthy, & Greenlee, 2008; Um, 2014).

Oakenfull, McCarthy, and Greenlee (2008) found in their studies that heterosexual women respond more positively to ads with same-sex couples than heterosexual men. In addition, the authors identified that homosexual women reacted more favorably to advertisements with elements of their subculture than homosexual men. The authors investigated the attitude of heterosexual consumers towards the ad with a same sex couple, but did not consider the attitude towards the brand and the purchase intention of these consumers. Um (2014) identified that men exposed to homoaffective ads had less favourable attitudes towards the advertising and brand as well. However, the purchase intention has not been investigated in regard to gender. In this research, considering the Brazilian context, it was investigated the three variables and confirmed whether the same result would be repeated in relation to the ad and the brand, in addition to including the analysis of purchase intention.

Um (2014) identified differences between men and women, with women having more positive attitudes towards the ad and the brand. Besides, if we consider the level of homosexual tolerance by gender, men and women who had higher levels obtained a positive attitude towards the advertisement when compared to men and women with low tolerance. However, in the attitude towards the brand, this difference between tolerance levels was not identified by men nor women.

Homonegativity, according to Gato, Carneiro and Fontaine (2011, p. 141), can be understood as a “kind of irrational fear that heterosexuals would experience towards homosexual people, as well as the self-contempt that lesbians and gays would feel for themselves”. Considering the homonegativity, Um (2014) applied the Herek’s scale (1984). However, this scale is considered outdated since it uses questions that do not represent the current social context (Morrison, & Morisson, 2002). Personal attitudes of individuals show persistent signs of homonegativity due to popular stereotypes and other factors (Morrison, & Morrison, 2002, p. 16).

Currently, prejudice does not emphasize biological inferiority but reflects the belief that minority groups are seeking undue favor in society (Morrison, Kenny, & Harrington, 2005). It is also related to the belief that homosexuals demand unnecessary social changes, that prejudice and discrimination are phenomena of the past, or that homosexuals place great emphasis on their sexuality and in doing so become responsible for their marginalization (Gato, Carneiro, & Fontaine, 2011).

In this sense, the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison, & Morrison, 2002) addresses the issue of homosexuality considering the current context, in which discrimination against this public is no longer as accepted, especially in public demonstrations of homophobia. The scale checks issues related to lifestyle, rights, privileges, differentiated treatment, and public policies for homosexuals.

Also, the degree of homonegativity is influenced by individual characteristics (Doebler, 2015). In Europe, researchers found different degrees of homonegativity between countries, showing that socio-cultural differences directly influence prejudice against the homosexual minority. Ancient Europe, composed of economically more developed and politically stable countries with a democracy and efficient legal system, has a lower degree of homonegativity. However, in this part of Europe, significant differences were noted in countries where their religion has a strong influence (Štulhofer, & Rimac, 2009).

Religious factors have been explored in relation to consumer behavior (Bazeem, & Mortimer, 2016). Religion provides principles for the organization of society and indications of social practices and sexual behaviors (Ribeiro, & Scorsolini-Comin, 2017). In this sense, Morrison and Morrison (2002) confirm the relationship between the degree of homonegativity and religious behavior, as well as Doebler (2015), who identified that religious members are more likely to reject homosexuality, considering it morally wrong. Research further confirms the direct relationship between high levels of modern homonegativity and higher levels of religious fundamentalism and church attendance (Morrison, *et al.*, 2005).

Pereira, Torres, Pereira and Falcão (2011) investigated theology students' beliefs and attitudes towards homosexuals. The results indicated prejudices related to the belief in a biological and psychosocial nature and to disbelief in an ethical-moral representation of homosexuality (Pereira *et al.*, 2011).

Most religious people associate homosexual behavior as something "unnatural", "ungodly", and "impure" (Yip, 2005). Due to these beliefs people active religiously (either through studies or interaction with the religious community) are likely to encourage anti-homosexual attitudes (Scheitle, & Adamczyk, 2009). Another point refers to the belief in divine punishment that makes religious people encourage anti-homosexual attitudes and institute policies that are consistent with intolerance (Regnerus, & Smith, 1998). So, the research is questioning how religion can interfere in the evaluation of an ad, brand, and purchase intention, considering Brazil, a country in which only 8% of the population declares itself "without religion" (IBGE, 2010). Furthermore, it is known that most of the manifestations against the brands that use same-sex couples in Brazil are promoted by religious entities (Isto É, 2020).

Thanh Nguyen, Kimura and Morinaga (2016) found significance between the degree of homonegativity and the gender of the interviewees, with men showing a higher degree of homonegativity than women. In the Brazilian context, Marinho, Marques, Almeida and Guerra (2004), applied the Implicit and Explicit Homophobia Scale, developed by Castillo, Rodríguez, Torres, Pérez, and Martel (2003), and identified strong prejudice among Brazilian university students, both male and female, with men showing a higher rate of homonegativity.

Bhat, Leigh, and Wardlow (1998) investigated the attitude towards homosexuality of heterosexual respondents using the Herek's scale (1984). The variables attitude towards the brand and attitude towards the advertisement were measured, but the respondents' purchase intention was not analyzed in this context.

Um (2014) also used the Herek scale (1984), a traditional scale, which does not take into account the current factors of society, where prejudice against sexual minorities is condemned. The author “found that people with high tolerance had more positive attitudes towards the ad than did people with low tolerance. However, the study found no difference between the two groups on attitude towards the brand” (p. 827). Considering these results, the present study uses an updated scale to measure the respondents’ tolerance towards same-sex couples, using the Modern Homonegativity scale (Morrison, & Morrison, 2002) and relates these measures to consumer attitudes towards the ad, brand and purchase intention. Thus, it seeks to identify whether the results previously found are repeated with the scale update and whether the purchase intention is also affected by the homonegativity (tolerance) of the respondents.

Considering the literature addressed above, this research aims to highlight the attitude of Brazilian consumers concerning homoffective ads, as well as about the brands that invests in this type of ad and the purchase intention of these consumers. Gender and religiosity are variables of analysis that have proved to be fundamental in determining certain behaviors. However, specifically regarding homoffective ads and religiosity, research addressing this relationship has not yet been found. As well as no research had found relating the gender and reactions to homoffective ads considering religiosity and homonegativity. Another important point is that the present study considers the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison, & Morrison, 2002), which brings social elements more consistent with reality than those used in research in Um (2014).

Based on the aforementioned review of the literature, the following hypotheses will be tested:

- **H1:** In comparison to male participants, female participants will evidence less negative attitudes toward advertisements featuring same-sex couples.
- **H2:** In comparison to male participants, female participants will evidence stronger intentions to purchase the product specified in advertisements depicting same-sex couples.
- **H3:** Female participants will evidence more positive attitudes towards the brand that features same-sex couples in its advertisement than will male participants.
- **H4:** Participants reporting greater levels of religiosity will evidence more negative attitudes toward advertisements featuring same-sex couples.
- **H5:** Participants reporting greater levels of religiosity will evidence weaker intentions to purchase the product specified in advertisements depicting same-sex couples.
- **H6:** Participants reporting greater levels of religiosity will evidence more negative attitudes toward the brand that features same-sex couples in its advertisement.
- **H7:** Participants reporting greater levels of modern homonegativity will evidence more negative attitudes toward advertisements depicting same-sex couples.
- **H8:** Participants reporting greater levels of modern homonegativity will evidence weaker intentions to purchase the product specified in advertisements depicting same-sex couples.
- **H9:** Participants reporting greater levels of modern homonegativity will evidence more negative attitudes toward the brand that features same-sex couples in its advertisement.
- **H10:** The genders will show different results correlated with religiosity and attitudes towards the ad, brand, and purchase intention.
- **H11:** The genders will show different results correlated with homonegativity and attitudes towards the ad, brand, and purchase intention.

3. METHOD

Participants were 456 university students recruited from institutions located in three southern Brazilian states (i.e., Paraná, $n = 127$; Rio Grande do Sul, $n = 176$; and Santa Catarina, $n = 156$). According to Samara and Morsch (2005, p. 244) the young consumer is more “aware of his role as an agent that transforms the quality of consumer relations and as an influence on the behavior of companies and institutions”. In addition, the youth market has been transforming itself into a segment with great potential “... their behavioral patterns are constantly evolving, which has given these young people an active voice in the process of deciding their own consumption and that of families.” (Veiga Neto, Souza, Almeida, Castro, Braga Júnior, 2015). Demographic analyses revealed that 61.4% of the respondents were female and 36.4% were male; 83.33% were single and 16.23% were married. In terms of religious identity, a majority were Catholic (63.6%) followed by evangelical (17%). Finally, most participants self-identified as heterosexual (90%).

3.1. MEASURES

At the beginning of the questionnaire, an advertisement of Closeup toothpaste was used. The advertisement, which was created in 2016 to celebrate “Kiss Day,” featured a gay couple, hinting at a kiss, with the slogan: “Single kiss rule: two wishes.” The product was chosen because it is commonly used and is applicable to both men and women.

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first, entitled “Section A,” examined consumer attitudes. Using a modified version of Mackenzie and Lutz’s (1989) scale, which was adopted by Bhat, Leigh, Wardlow (1998), participants answered three questions to determine their attitude toward the same-sex advertisement: “The ad is: Very bad / Very good”; “What’s your opinion about the ad? Very unfavorable / Very favorable”; and “Please rate how you feel about the ad”: Very negative / Very positive “. All the answers were related to a 7 points scale, with higher scores denoting more positive assessments of the advertisement.

Purchase intention was measured using a single item: “Would you buy the Closeup brand in the next two months?” The response format ranged from: “Definitely, I would not buy” (1) to “Definitely, I would buy” (7). Purchase intention was measured using the Juster’s scale (1966), which asks respondents to estimate their chances of engaging in future behavior (Wright *et al.*, 2002).

In the second part of the questionnaire (i.e., “Section B”), respondents completed the 10-item version of the Modern Homonegativity Scale (Morrison, Kenny & Harrington, 2005). A sample item is: “Many gay men (lesbian women) use their sexual orientation so that they can obtain special privileges.” The psychometric properties of this version of the MHS have been tested and deemed to be satisfactory (e.g., Morrison *et al.*, 2005). In the current study, a seven-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree* and *strongly agree*), with total scale scores ranging from 10 to 70 (higher scores represent greater levels of modern homonegativity). The MHS exists in two parallel forms: one measuring modern prejudice toward gay men, and the other focusing on lesbian women. Instead, in this research, we use the word “homosexual” to represent both gays and lesbians.

The final section of the questionnaire (i.e, Section C) contained the sociodemographic questions. Gender was measured as male or female. Sexual orientation was assessed using the following item: “If I had to categorize myself, I’d identify as” (heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual”; Bhat *et al.*, 1998). Religiosity was examined using a single item: “How would I characterize myself in relation to my religiosity” (1 = not religious; 7 = very religious). Individuals who selected response options 1, 2, or 3 were classified as low in religiosity; those who selected response option 4 were categorized as possessing a moderate level of religiosity; those who selected response option 5

were classified as high in religiosity; and, finally, those choosing options 6 and 7 were deemed to be very high in religiosity. The single item scale was used in previous researches (Abdel-Khalek, 2011; Abdel-Khalek, & Lester, 2009; Camboim, & Rique, 2015).

The scales used were translated from English to Portuguese by the author. The final version underwent a reverse translation, carried out by an evaluator fluent in English, who checked for distortions in the translation and corrected them. Finally, all of the instruments were submitted to two pretests to verify possible incongruities and misunderstandings.

All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 22 (SPSS, Chicago, IL). Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlations were used to assess the results.

4. RESULTS

Scale score reliability coefficients for all measures ranged from good to excellent: MHS ($\alpha = .84$, 95% CI = 34.41 – 36.88), Advertisement Attitudes ($\alpha = .94$, 95% CI = 12.43 – 13.49), and Brand Attitude ($\alpha = .92$, 95% CI = 13.90 – 14.74).

As predicted, female participants ($M = 14.06$, $SD = 5.36$) evidenced more positive attitudes toward the homoffective advertisement than did male participants ($M = 11.05$, $SD = 5.84$), $F(1, 456) = 31.03$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.53$. Also, as predicted, female participants ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.79$) reported a stronger intention to purchase the advertised product than did male participants ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 2.09$), $F(1, 456) = 8.73$, $p < .003$, $d = 0.28$. Females also reported more positive attitudes toward the brand itself ($M_{\text{FEMALE}} = 14.9$, $SD = 4.27$ versus $M_{\text{MALE}} = 13.31$, $SD = 4.98$), $F(1, 456) = 12.944$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.34$. So, the hypotheses H1, H2 and H3 were confirmed.

Weak, though statistically significant, correlations were reported between participants' self-reported level of religiosity and their favourability toward the homoffective advertisements, $r(456) = -.13$, $p = .004$ and their favourability toward the brand itself, $r(456) = -.10$, $p = .035$. No statistically significant correlation, however, was noted between self-reported religiosity and intention to purchase a product featured in an advertisement that contained a same-sex couple, $r(456) = .004$, $p = .93$. Thus, the hypotheses H4 and H6 were confirmed and the H5 were not.

Finally, as predicted, participants reporting greater levels of modern homonegativity evaluated advertisements featuring same-sex couples less favourably, $r(454) = -.72$, $p < .001$; reported weaker intentions to purchase the product contained in the advertisement, $r(454) = -.33$, $p < .001$; and evidenced less favourable attitudes toward the brand itself, $r(454) = -.53$, $p < .001$. The last three hypotheses were confirmed (H7, H8 and H9).

Also, the correlations by gender has been tested (H10). Women with a high degree of religiosity showed less positive attitudes towards the advertisement $r(290) = -.17$, $p = .003$, just like men $r(166) = -.19$, $p = .010$. The attitude towards brand and religiosity showed a statistically significant correlation in females $r(290) = -.14$, $p = .013$, but not in the masculine $r(166) = -.11$, $p = .146$. The same behavior has not been identified toward purchase intention and religiosity. Women did not present significant statistic correlation $r(290) = -.010$, $p = .869$, as well as in the masculine gender it didn't find such significative $r(166) = -.03$, $p = .679$. Thus, H10 is only partially supported in this study.

The correlation by gender has been tested with homonegativity as well (H11). Women with a higher level of homonegativity showed less positive attitudes towards the advertisement $r(290) = -.65$, $p = .000$, as the men $r(166) = -.66$, $p = .000$. The attitude towards the brand and homonegativity presented a statistically significant correlation in the female gender $r(290) = -.48$, $p = .000$ and in the male gender $r(166) = -.46$, $p = .000$. The same behavior has been identified in purchase intention and homonegativity. Women and men showed a statistically significant

correlation: Women $r(290) = -.014$, $p = .013$; and Men $r(166) = -.044$, $p = .000$. Thus, H11 is supported in this study.

The results demonstrate that women have more positive attitudes towards homoaffective advertisement, brand, and purchase intention. Religiosity also interferes with the attitude towards the ad and the attitude towards the brand. However, the purchase intention did not show the same result. Homonegativity, on the other hand, interfered both in the attitudes towards the advertisement, the brand, as well as in the purchase intention.

When analyzing religiosity and Homonegativity by gender in attitudes towards the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention, it is observed that for men, religion does not interfere in the attitude towards the brand and in the purchase intention.

5. DISCUSSION

Advances in the acceptance of sexual minorities have been occurring globally. For example, in 2013, the National Justice Council published Resolution 175, which granted same-sex couples in Brazil the right to civil marriage (CNJ, 2017). Another breakthrough occurred in 2018 when the Federal Supreme Court in Brazil ruled that it is no longer necessary to have sex-change surgery to change one's name in the civil registry. In addition, the economic representation of the LGBTQ segment in the world exceeds US \$ 3 trillion dollars per year (Out Leadership, 2018). The financial potential of this population in Brazil is estimated at 133 billion dollars, equivalent to 10% of the Gross Domestic Product (Out Leadership, 2018). However, despite these advances, same-sex relationships remain a taboo subject in Brazilian society. The prejudice is reflected in the numbers of violent incidents against the LGBTQ public in the country - a victim every 19 hours (Grupo Gay da Bahia, 2016).

The results of the current study confirm that consumers' gender, religion, and homonegativity are associated with their assessments of homoaffective advertisements. These results are consistent with what was predicted by Eisend and Hermann (2019) about some factors results in unfavorable responses to homosexual advertising imagery: the incongruence between imagery, consumer characteristics, cultural values, explicitness of imagery, endorser gender, and product type.

In relation to the gender differences, Hooghe et al (2010) state that sexual practices outside of the heterosexual paradigm generate fear in men for challenging the concepts of masculinity, even generating hate crimes against male homosexuals. This behavior is reflected in negative attitudes toward advertisements with same-sex persons, brands, and purchase intention. Also, the strong religious influence inherited from the people who colonized the southern region of Brazil reinforced prejudice and generates the negative attitudes associated with the ideas against sexual minorities in the most of religious (Doebler, 2015). Finally, the heteronormative foundations in the society (Um, 2014) can explain those results in relation to higher level of homonegativity and negative attitudes toward advertisement, brand and purchase intention.

The consumer's attitude toward advertising is based on affective reactions and evaluations (Mackenzie, & Lutz, 1989). Thus, these reactions and evaluations are influenced by religion which is, in the great majority, contrary to same-sex couple. Doebler (2015) states that religion promotes a moral rejection of same-sex couples as well as an intolerance of sexual minorities. Pereira et al. (2011) argue that religious and scientific institutions employ explanations for sexual minorities that have been absorbed by society and transformed into common-sense theory over time. In the religious context, the justifications relate to the spiritual weakness of the gay individual and a deviation from the model of family according to God's standards. However, the hypothesis 5, regarding to greater levels of religiosity would evidence weaker intentions to purchase, was

rejected. The image and associations made by the individual about the brand are more consistent and durable and reflect the purchase decision (Faircloth, Capella, & Alford, 2001; Keller, 1993). Despite the fact that religious judgments cause the consumer to have a negative attitude toward same-sex couple, yet the individual maintains the buying behavior unchanged.

This study is important because of the relationship provided by level of religiosity and attitudes towards the advertisement, brand and purchase intention who was not been tested before. Likewise, while previous studies have highlighted consumers' attitudes toward the brand and consumers' attitudes to advertising (Bhat, Leight, & Wardlow, 1998; Um, 2014), this study goes further by noting that, although attitudes are confirmed negatively in relation to the advertisement and in relation to the brand, the intention to purchase is maintained for those people who have higher level of religiosity. The results indicate a favorable position for brands to invest in advertisements for sexual minorities, as their profit may not be affected.

It is interesting to note that previous research conducted in Brazil has identified strong prejudice against sexual minorities from both men and women (Marinho et al., 2004). In this research, however, men showed higher levels of homonegativity. This information is essential for the establishment of marketing strategies. For example, advertisements aimed at the female audience could use elements of gay culture without suffering damage to the brand, since women are more receptive to this theme. The data can be useful both for specific products for the female audience, as well as for brands and campaigns.

Previous research has identified the relationship between religion and homonegativity, in this work the difference lies in the application of these variables combined with the market context: attitude towards the advertisement, brand and purchase intention.

In relation to religion, we can highlight several points for managerial implications. First, it is known that some media channels in Brazil are led by church pastors, who have an audience that is faithful to their religious convictions, including the condemnation of same-sex relationships. These channels, therefore, are not considered adequate to address this issue.

Furthermore, knowing the audience of the brand, knowing that it has a high degree of religiosity, it is possible to establish other forms of approach, that the content with same-sex couple is not so explicit. This knowledge can be segmented by region or by other modern marketing strategies, such as inbound marketing, which distributes the appropriate content to each consumer, at each moment of the journey.

Based on this information, developing content and personalized ads considering gender and religiosity are the findings of this article. In addition, the work observes the Brazilian cultural context and for the first time advances scientifically through internationally recognized methods, to establish consumer behavior.

New marketing strategies are essential considering the newly emerging social context that registers the increase in gender diversity. The companies that seek to promote Corporate Social Responsibility actions, as in the case of engagement with the causes of sexual minorities, strengthen their relations with consumers and their brand (Kamiya et al., 2018). In addition, studies show that homosexuals have made boycotts and given negative word-of-mouth against companies that do not respect them (Rosenbaum, 2005). Gay-friendly brands recognize the potential of the sexual minorities public and are gradually inserting it into the media through advertisements and the development of inclusive corporate policies (Tuten, 2005).

To reduce prejudice, actions must come from a broad social approach, based on public policies involving health, education, legislation, and market issues. The discussion is necessary for inclusion, but also for the reduction of the subcultural stigma to which they are subjected

(Wan-Hsiu, 2011). Considering this context, the development of strategies is a challenge for the market and an incentive for scientific research.

From time to time new controversies arise in relation to the theme of sexual minorities and advertisements in Brazil. The Natura brand, for example, launched a Father's Day campaign with a transsexual character (UOL, 2020). The advertisement caused controversy among consumers and boycott campaigns to the brand. This fact proves that the discussion and prejudice are far from over in the country. Constant research and updated perceptions on the theme in Brazil should be stimulated, since it is a cultural issue, in constant change.

It is a slow process of changing culture and perception of prejudice. Until then, marketing efforts, in the Brazilian context, should still consider strongly the gender of the public, as well as their level of religiosity.

5.1. IMPLICATIONS

The study replicated, in the Brazilian context, scales already tested in other countries. However, the peculiar features that existed were considered. Religiosity, gender, and the level of modern homonegativity prove to be strong factors that should be considered at the time of marketing decision-making.

The data of this study can serve as a subsidy for marketing and communication professionals to develop advertising campaigns of same-sex couple content considering the gender of the target audience, for example. As women have been more responsive, female-oriented products may dare more on their ads than male-only products. The category of products advertised, the religion of the individuals and the region where the homoaffective advertisement will be published should also be analyzed by professionals. A social contribution is also observed since the results of this study can serve as a starting point for the elaboration of public policies of education in the schools and awareness of society for the reduction of prejudice against minorities and acceptance of diversity.

5.2. LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this study refers to the number of respondents and their concentration in the southern region of Brazil, which does not allow generalization of the data to all consumers and to other regions of the country. The sample should be expanded so that it is possible to prove the repetition of this behavior in other sociocultural contexts and with a diversified sample (not only students). In addition, it is necessary to direct the research to a greater number of sexual minorities and to look for the differences in public attitudes. In addition, it is recommended to apply researches with ads that have different forms of approach, such as humor, emotion and the use of symbols of homosexual culture, for example. These elements can indicate different behaviors when evaluating an ad, brand and purchase behavior.

5.3. FUTURE RESEARCH

It is important to observe the influence of religion in the Brazilian context and the attitudes of consumers. The high level of religiosity reported by the young people of southern Brazil may be the determining factor in the rejection of sexual minorities (Morrison, Kenny, & Harrington, 2005; Doebler, 2015). However, new studies should be carried out as the purchase intention was not affected by the religiousness in this study.

Herek and Capitanio (1995) have identified that the higher the level of education, the more favorable the attitude towards the same-sex couple. Researchers could analyze consumers of different degrees of schooling to verify the influence of this variable on homonegativity. Another

potential area of inquiry would be a longitudinal assessment of participants' attitudes as they progress through their undergraduate training.

Researchers should investigate not only the factors that influence consumer attitudes toward homoaffective ads but also how is the best way to present same-sex couple in the media. New studies can use other types of communication in addition to the print ad. Videos, online content, radio spots, TV commercials, among others, should be tested. In addition, future research may investigate consumer identification with gay-friendly brands, including longitudinal studies to understand economic development from the beginning of this relationship of brand identification, engagement, and strategic change.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

The author 1 worked in textual production, theoretical framework development, statistic analysis, and results. The author 2 supervised and reviewing research at all stages (theoretical framework, methodology, results, and discussion). The author 3 dedicated to the review of the theoretical, methodological, and results framework, bringing contributions to the improvement of the work in all stages. The author 4 also reviewed all the material, improving the theoretical framework, and statistical analysis.