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Why would an ethically proven Shockvertising campaign backfire so aggressively? Ethics boundaries in advertising and audience's perspective case study: Spinneys "missing" advertising campaign Lebanon 2025

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Abstract

In advertising campaigns, particularly billboards, brands resort to using attention-grabbing techniques to capture the audience's focus and manipulate consumer behavior. Multiple categories can also be employed to convey a message within a single campaign. These categories range from shock advertising, engagement advertising, teaser advertising, reveal advertising, and many others. This is precisely what the Spinneys campaign tended to achieve in announcing its new branch, employing these advertising techniques. This campaign initiated a wave of discontent on social media and in society. That wave quickly turned aggressive, bombarding the campaign with criticism. Many argued that, in a country already facing war and uncertainty, a commercial campaign that plays on the theme of "missing people" could feel harmful and trigger deep fear among citizens. However, the ethical boundaries of these advertising categories vary according to several factors, such as the audience's psychology and background, as well as the manner in which the campaign is executed, including its visuals, language, and other elements. The findings of this study highlight the ethical boundaries of these types of advertising, as well as how to maintain responsibility toward society while achieving creativity and leaving an impact.

Keywords: Advertising, Billboards, Consumer behavior, Consumers psychology, Engagement advertising, Ethics, Reveal advertising, Shock advertising, Spinneys, Campaign, Target audience, Missing, Teaser advertising, Utilitarian ethics.

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1. Introduction

In the realm of advertising, particularly in billboards, a single campaign may incorporate multiple categories with the purpose of conveying its message and achieving its intended objective. Moreover, one campaign can be divided into

multiple stages with the aim of outlining a sequential path and building anticipation for the major reveal. This trajectory begins with a teaser advertisement, which is often ambiguous in terms of its objective or the brand's identity. Subsequently, this path continues with the reveal advertisement, in which the brand or product identity and the campaign's purpose are revealed. This strategy may also integrate various categories of advertisements, such as shock advertising that evokes audience emotions and engagement advertising that encourages audience participation.

The Spinneys supermarket chain is established in 1924 by Arthur Rawdon Spinney in Alexandria, Egypt. It then expands to Barthes [1] opening its first branch in the old Beirut Souks. The Spinneys chain in Lebanon grows to cover most of the country and becomes a prominent name in the Lebanese market, particularly due to its continuous development and innovation. In 2019, the chain launches a new concept called "Signature by Spinneys" in the Beirut Souks store, which then expands to other branches. This transformative initiative elevates the shopping experience from a routine activity to a sophisticated and luxurious one, allowing customers to obtain food from live cooking stations representing a range of international cuisines.

In Lebanon, the field of advertising plays a fundamental role across various businesses and serves as the primary reference in which enterprises invest for marketing purposes. Notably in recent times, this field also witnesses constant competition among businesses, particularly through roadside billboards. Each enterprise exerts considerable effort to surpass its rivals through appealing ideas and creativity. Among these competitors, Spinneys plays a central role in this arena, being one of the most prominent supermarket chains in Lebanon. In August 2025, Spinneys launches a billboards' campaign that sparked widespread controversy. This campaign faced a significant amount of criticism, as some considered that in a country experiencing such a high intensity of wars and conflicts, a campaign centered on the notion of people "disappearing" could be frightening and distressing for citizens. This reaction shows exactly the kind of limits Philip Kotler [2] highlighted, when he explained that advertising should not only be creative but also socially responsible. In the same way, Dahl and his colleagues [3] who studied shock advertising, warned that when campaigns borrow from sensitive themes, they risk provoking offense or fear instead of curiosity.

From another angle, Barthes [1] would say that the word "missed" carried strong connotations of absence and loss, which are difficult to separate from the Lebanese reality. And Umberto Eco reminds us that people interpret signs through the lens of their context — so while some saw smiling faces and a playful teaser, others saw reminders of pain, and that difference explains why the campaign created such a wave of criticism. The campaign is carried out in two stages. It starts with a teaser advertisement featuring the faces of various people with the word "Missing" written across them, along with the phrase "Last seen in..." and different locations mentioned, without any indication that it was Spinneys conducting this campaign. In the second stage, using the reveal advertisement, they reveal the same faces inside one of Spinneys' branches, accompanied by the phrase "Found at Spinneys Ajaltoun" and Spinneys' logo, as a promotion for their new branch in Ajaltoun area. Opinions are divided. Some view this campaign as misleading, provoking serious confusion and great fear, while others consider it a clear and clever advertising initiative.

Hence, this study discusses advertising ethics and the underlying dilemma, in addition to the extent to which advertisements and marketing teams may push the boundaries [3]. All methods are acceptable, as long as they do not exceed social and professional ethical boundaries or cause harm to society and public [3]. Through carefully crafted visuals and appropriately chosen texts, a campaign can remain within the bounds of ethical standards. In this regard, the Spinneys campaign demonstrates the way a campaign can employ teaser and shock elements. At the same time, it maintains essential safeguards to avoid causing social or harmful issues. In addition, the reception of the approach used in the campaign may vary from one society to another, depending on each society's background.

2. Hypothesis

This study examines the contrasting opinions and perspectives that emerged in response to the Spinneys campaign. Some believe that it crossed ethical boundaries, causing social unrest, and sparking concern among the public. In contrast, others consider it a clever campaign that achieved its purpose by stimulating curiosity and encouraging public engagement. These contrasting opinions are not merely conflicting social viewpoints [2]. They illustrate how the reception of a message can vary from one audience to another, depending on each audience's background and triggers – and mostly the discourse and audience psychology [2, 4]. Regarding this aspect, the visual element, content and timing of the campaign, are responsible for determining whether the campaign is executed without triggering public comfort, or if the sense of fear it provoked is justified [4].

3. Literature Review

Advertising campaigns consist of several elements that form their structure and shape the way they are presented to the public. Each element carries its own interpretations, and every detail can play either a positive or negative role in the success of the campaign, depending on its placement. These details serve as the driving force that stimulates the audience's thinking and analysis and aim to manipulate consumer behavior. Consequently, through this process, the campaign's message will be formed in the minds of the audience, determining whether it is conveyed correctly or not. This literature review analyzes the elements that shaped the Spinneys advertising campaign. By analyzing these elements and linking them to the discourse, ethical boundaries, this study seeks to determine their impact on the audience.

Numerous studies emphasize the essential role of signs in shaping advertising campaign message and delivering them to the audience. Faizan [4] asserts that semiotics in advertising is a fundamental element in affecting the success or failure of any campaign's objective. Accordingly, interpreting a campaign through the signs used, and based on the context in which they appeared, is what indicates the audience's understanding of the underlying message. From this perspective, the

word “Missing” used in Spinneys’ recent campaign carries connotations of fear or concern. This is particularly true for the Lebanese society, which carries a wealth of memories associated with wars, abductions, and disappearances, to the point that these words have become a deep-rooted source of anxiety. However, it is the signs that help the audience recognize it as a campaign. The smiling faces on the billboards, along with the consistent font and colors, might be sufficient to some to identify it as a campaign and prevent the incitement of panic. While it was not identified by others, which has generated feelings of fear and anxiety, as they believed that these individuals were actually missing. Additionally, some recognized it as a Spinneys campaign even before the company announced it. This was due to the use of yellow and black colors and the design that Spinneys employs on its Instagram posts. This is confirmed by Faizan [4] who explains that understanding the connotations of any word in a campaign relies not only on its denotation but also on the accompanying visuals and elements.

On the other hand, other factors also contribute to shaping and defining the message of an advertising campaign. According to SanJosé-Cabezudo, et al. [5] both the central and peripheral routes in advertising play an interrelated role in shaping the campaign’s message. This is evident in Spinneys’ campaign, where both central and peripheral routes are employed across the two stages of the campaign. In the initial teaser stage, the central route is used to provoke questions in the audience’s mind. The public is prompted to think about the missing individuals, how they went missing, and where they are. Then, in the second stage, the reveal, the peripheral route is employed to announce a new Spinneys branch. The visible Spinneys logo serves as a cognitive shortcut for the audience, eliminating the need for deep thinking. Thus, the campaign’s trajectory becomes clear. Although the campaign initially evokes some feelings of concern about potentially missing individuals, it ultimately concludes with a positive announcement of a new branch at the reveal stage. The question remains in the concern about others, who could not notice or understand it.

Moving directly to the ethical aspect, it is essential to address the link between creativity and the responsibility owed to society. Kotler and Keller [2] insist on the necessity of creating a balance in marketing between innovation and creativity in one hand, and maintaining ethical standards and responsibility toward public on the other. This is manifested in the Spinneys campaign, particularly through the smiling faces of the individuals portrayed. The campaign succeeded in capturing the audience’s attention with an innovative idea while trying not to cause public panic. Although some criticized the campaign from another perspective, arguing that it did not take into consideration the state of Lebanese society, as it was launched in August following the fifth anniversary of the Beirut port explosion. They viewed the campaign as a destabilizing event for the community, mistakenly associating the depicted individuals with people who went missing after the explosion. Especially since Lebanese society has long been marked by the notion of loss, from years of wars, to the port explosion, and even the continuous wave of migration. However, the pictures used were filled with positivity, featuring smiling faces, and were designed without any elements suggesting a connection to the port explosion. In doing so, it struck a balance between creativity and maintaining its responsibility toward society. This balance is also reflected in the careful use of shock advertising (shockvertising), without crossing the ethical boundaries. According to AlSharhan [6] the use of shock advertising must be approached with several considerations in mind. These include recognizing its ethical implications, avoiding harm to the audience, respecting their dignity, and preserving responsibility toward them. This falls within what some critics of the campaign experienced, as it triggered in their minds the deeply buried fears and notions of loss within Lebanese society. It could have been argued that the Spinneys campaign had crossed the line if it had featured crying or frightened faces in a dark and unsettling atmosphere. However, what appeared in the Spinneys advertisement, are smiling faces, used with the individuals’ consent, and all the billboards are designed uniformly with evident professionalism.

Moreover, the campaign did not stop at the teaser stage. It was followed by the announcement of the new branch through the reveal phase. This illustrates how the campaign contains far more elements of excitement, surprise, and joy than of fear or concern. This is referred to as utilitarianism in marketing, meaning that the intended message amplifies positive atmospheres while minimizing negative ones. Vali Asl, et al. [7] explain that utilitarianism involves studying a campaign’s outcomes and determining the proportion of positive impact it achieved relative to the negative. From this perspective, the Spinneys campaign generates a negligible amount of concern, while the emphasis is placed on arousing the audience’s curiosity, followed by surprising them with the announcement of the new branch. This is due to the fact that the location of the billboards and the new branch is in Ajaltoun, an area that was considered safe during times of war and safety crises, and did not experience any forms of conflict, war or attack. Additionally, most of its residents are classified as belonging to the upper class, and the area is often frequented as a holiday destination.

In conclusion, every advertising campaign comprises multiple elements that shape its message and define the objective it seeks to achieve. Even if the campaign employs methods that some may perceive as manipulating people’s emotions and inciting fear within society, these methods have limits that ensure they remain within ethical boundaries. This is apparent in the Spinneys campaign, which utilized shock advertising and successfully accomplished its goal of conveying its message and encouraging audience engagement.

4. Methodology

This study applies a qualitative methodology to analyze the nature of the advertising campaign launched by Spinneys to promote its new branch. This is accomplished by analyzing the stages of the campaign, from the teaser phase to the reveal phase, in addition to examining the visuals, texts, colors and tone used across all the billboards and mostly their location, its characteristics and the profile of its public. On the other hand, this study seeks to evaluate the ethical aspects of the campaign and its standards, particularly in light of the criticisms and attacks it received. Some considered it offensive to society, claiming that it manipulated people’s emotions and provoked anxiety about missing individuals. However, others

analyzed its details, recognized it as an advertising campaign, and regarded it as a clever strategy. These analyses are interconnected and converge at a common point, illustrating how the execution of the campaign's details serves as the determining factor between crossing the ethical boundaries and maintaining them. In addition, the meaning of the message varies depending on the background of each audience.

5. Theoretical Frameworks

This study draws on five interconnected theoretical frameworks to get to analyze how the Spinneys advertising campaign's execution shapes audience reception from an ethical perspective: AIDA Model Theory by Lorente Páramo, et al. [8]. Elaboration Likelihood Model Theory (ELM) by Petty and Cacioppo [9]. Semiotic Theory by Barthes [1]. Utilitarian Ethics Theory by Bentham [10] and Shock Advertising Literature by Dahl, et al. [3]. These frameworks empower an in-depth examination of how the advertising campaign executed in detail, determines the audience's response to the message, particularly from an ethical standpoint and within moral boundaries.

5.1. AIDA Model Theory

The AIDA model theory is a framework that explains the process that advertising draws for the consumer mind to drive him to make a purchase decision. This process is divided into four stages: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. Lewis [11] claims that the purpose of an advertisement is "to attract attention, awaken interest, create desire, and inspire action." With this statement, Lewis succinctly outlines the proper trajectory of a successful advertisement according to his theory.

Beginning with the concept of attracting attention and linking it to the Spinneys campaign for the promotion of its new branch. Through the word "Missing" on the billboards, the campaign captures the audience's attention and thus accomplishes the first step toward success in achieving its goal.

The process then moves to the principle of arousing interest, which the Spinneys campaign accomplished by stimulating curiosity about the missing individuals. After capturing their attention and interest, the campaign remains lodged in the audience's mind as they seek to discover the fate of these missing individuals.

These two steps belong to the teaser phase of the advertisement. In the reveal phase, after showing that the "missing" individuals are found happily at the new Spinneys brand, the process move to the third step. This step consists on creating a desire in the audience to visit and explore the new branch.

The process concludes, with the fourth and last step, when the audience takes action by visiting the new branch.

A successful advertisement must include three key features: first, capturing the consumer's attention; second, maintaining their interest so they engage with it; and finally, persuading them to believe in the message [11]. In this manner, Lewis explains the sequence of the AIDA model, that Spinneys campaign is adopting in its execution.

5.2. Elaboration Likelihood Model

Elaboration Likelihood Model is a psychological theory of persuasion that posits that people receive a persuasive message through one of two routes: the central route or the peripheral route. Petty and Cacioppo [9] explain these 2 routes, the central route "occurs when motivation and ability to scrutinize issue-relevant arguments are relatively high" (p. 131), meanwhile the peripheral route is Petty and Cacioppo [9] "when motivation and/or ability are relatively low and attitudes are determined by positive or negative cues in the persuasion context" (p. 131).

In the Spinneys campaign, both routes are employed, as the campaign is divided into two stages. In the teaser stage, the campaign follows the central route, as it prompts the audience to engage in deep thinking. As Petty and Cacioppo [9] describe it as "resulted from a person's careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented" (p. 125), the audience who encountered the Spinneys campaign also questioned the identities of these missing individuals and sought to uncover the truth behind them. Due to the collective memory of loss and fear embedded in the minds of the Lebanese, some people associated the campaign with victims of the port explosion. Especially since it was launched shortly after the fifth anniversary of the tragedy. This highlights that the central route of processing can lead to different interpretations of the intended message, depending on the audience's background and diversity.

In the reveal stage, the campaign changes its routes to the peripheral routes, as it surprises the audience with new cues. Accordingly, Petty and Cacioppo [9] portray this route "as a result of some simple cue in the persuasion context (e.g., an attractive source) that induced change" (p. 125). These cues appear in the Spinneys campaign advertisement through the smiling faces at the new branch, as well as the Spinneys logo. All of these elements provide the audience with a sense of surprise and excitement.

5.3. Semiotic Theory

Roland Barthes' semiotic theory explains how [1] signs are interpreted through their literal meaning (denotation) as well as the underlying meaning they signify (connotation). As said by Barthes [1] "a sign is the combination of its signifier and its signified".

In the Spinneys campaign, particularly in the teaser stage, the word "missing" literally indicates that someone is absent, while its underlying connotation evokes a sense of loss. On the other hand, the smiling faces signify happiness, with their underlying connotation hinting at a playful element behind the campaign.

The meaning of this playful hint becomes evident in the reveal phase of the advertising campaign of Spinneys, after revealing that these individuals are at the new Spinneys branch. Thus, the word "Missing" is reinterpreted, as it serves merely as a figurative expression.

5.4. Utilitarian Ethics

Jeremy Bentham's theory of utilitarian ethics [10] centers on the idea that a morally right action is the one that produces the maximum amount of positive impact for the utmost number of people. The concept of utilitarianism is defined by Bentham [10] as a "principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question."

In this context, Bentham [10] analyzing the utilitarian ethics behind the Spinneys advertising campaign requires comparing the benefits and positive impact it achieved on the audience with the harm it may have caused.

The use of phrases such as "Missing" and "Last seen in ..." may have provoked a certain level of fear and anxiety among the audience, creating an atmosphere of alarm. This is due to the deep-rooted subconscious ideas carried by the Lebanese audience, which resurface whenever a message evokes the notion of loss. However, the intensity of these emotions is minimal and do not cause actual harm, as the campaign includes cues that mitigated their impact. These cues include smiling faces, a consistent design across all billboards, and the use of colors such as yellow, which conveys a sense of cheerfulness. To the extent that some (depending on the public's profile), immediately recognized the campaign as belonging to Spinneys, as it employs the same format used in their Instagram posts.

Subsequently, in the reveal phase, the campaign creates a sense of surprise for the audience by revealing that it belongs to Spinneys, along with generating excitement to visit the new branch.

The benefits provided by this campaign, focuses on capturing the audience's attention and encouraging visits to the new branch, thereby potentially increasing sales. These benefits outweigh the level of anxiety that the campaign provoked, and which was largely mitigated by cues like the smiling faces.

As stated by Bentham [10] "the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong", thus, the Spinneys campaign adheres to this formulation, remaining within the boundaries of utilitarian ethics, specifically addressed to this particular public.

5.5. Shock Advertising Literature

Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda's literature about shock advertising, Dahl, et al. [3] describes it as one that violates social norms with the aim of capturing the audience's attention and achieving its objectives. Dahl, et al. [3] identify seven tactics used in shock advertising, which are: "disgusting images", "sexual references", "profanity, obscenity", "vulgarity", "impropriety", "moral offensiveness", and "religious taboos" (p. 270).

Referring back to the shock techniques used in the Spinneys campaign, they are limited to the phrases "Missing" and "Last seen in ...". Therefore, the campaign does not fall under any of the seven previously mentioned shock tactics. While it succeeded in capturing the audience's attention, it did not employ any methods that violated public peace or social ethics.

Dahl, et al. [3] also reveal that "shocking advertising content is superior to non-shocking content in its ability to attract attention and facilitate memory for the advertisement" (p. 276). This is what the Spinneys advertisement campaign aimed to successfully achieve without causing any unjustified social disruption or misleading the public.

6. Analysis and Findings

This section analyzes the Spinneys campaign through the audience's perspective, and media reactions, in alignment with the elements of the campaign, ethically and practically. The campaign was divided into two phases. The first, the teaser phase, was limited to billboards displayed along the roads in Ajaltoun area. These billboards featured smiling faces of people of various ages and professions, included the individuals' names, the phrases "Missing" and "Last seen in ...", and were framed with a yellow border around the images. The second phase, the reveal, also used billboards in the same area, showing all of these individuals together, happy at the new Spinneys branch in Ajaltoun, with the same design, Spinneys' logo and the phrase "Found at Spinneys Ajaltoun". This served to announce the opening of the new Spinneys branch in Ajaltoun.

Based on all of the above, the campaign is ethical, so why did it initiate this wave of discontent, and turned aggressive, bombarding the campaign with criticism?

In order to understand why some of the audience perceived the Spinneys campaign negatively, it is necessary to examine their psychological background [2]. The consumer's psychology is what determines how the message is received and explains the differences in reactions toward it. In addition to the social factors that play a fundamental role in shaping how the consumer receives the message. These two elements, the consumer's psychology and social factors, interact with the elements of the campaign. These elements, such as timing, language, and the duration between the teaser and the reveal, are all factors that form the basis of how the audience receives the message. Finally, to determine whether the campaign adheres to ethical boundaries or not.

6.1. Consumer Psychology/ Social Factors

The target audience of the Spinneys campaign is the Lebanese community, specifically in Ajaltoun area where the billboards were displayed. In addition, the ages of this audience range from 25 years and above, most of whom are parents or individuals responsible for households. Studying the psychology of this target audience reveals that they belong to the group that has experienced Lebanon's most challenging recent periods and were fully aware of them. Thus, the social factors experienced by this Lebanese audience intersect and will influence how they receive the message of the Spinneys campaign. The most significant of these factors are the Beirut explosion in 2020, as well as the war that Lebanon experienced in September 2024, which lasted for two months. Fundamentally, the Lebanese people have been experiencing

wars and security conflicts every few years for decades. During most of the wars experienced by this segment of the Lebanese population, they endured constant displacement from their homes, abductions and intimidation. This has created a society that remains perpetually cautious and sensitive to anything that might suggest danger or loss. Therefore, what has remained stored in their memory and subconscious is far from any sense of security, and now, any reference to loss triggers what is buried in their background. Consequently, the use of the teaser in the Spinneys campaign, employing phrases such as “Missing” and “Last seen in...”, captured the audience’s attention according to the AIDA model [11]. However, it also awakened lingering trauma in the audience’s minds rather than generating genuine interest. Accordingly, the consumer’s psychology and social factors were key reasons why the audience received the teaser phase of the campaign with feelings of fear and anxiety, as they feared that the individuals depicted could be missing due to the Beirut port explosion or the recent war. Some reactions on social media, such as comments and reels on Instagram and TikTok, revolved around the audience believing that these individuals were missing due to the Beirut port explosion and that the campaign was commemorating their memory. Meanwhile, a number of social media users corrected them, emphasizing that this was part of an advertising campaign and had no connection to the explosion. The central route from the Elaboration Likelihood model [9] employed in the teaser phase of the campaign, resulted in deep thinking among the audience. The outcome of this deep thinking varied among different segments of the audience, depending on the audience’s psychology, background, and collective memory.

6.2. Campaign’s execution/ Advertising Ethics

Moving on to the campaign’s elements, it is essential to analyze them in detail to understand its trajectory and impact on the audience. Starting with the first phase of the campaign, the teaser stage, which consisted of billboards featuring smiling faces alongside the phrases “Missing” and “Last seen in...”. As previously mentioned, these phrases led the audience to associate these individuals with the port explosion. However, the timing of the billboards’ release also contributed to this line of thinking, as the campaign was launched shortly after the fifth anniversary of the port explosion. Thus, timing played a role in the spread of negative comments; still, the paradox lies in the way the campaign was executed. Initially, the campaign was limited to billboards spread in one specific area of Lebanon and was not linked to any advertisements on television channels or social media. Therefore, it could not be connected to the Beirut explosion, since such a national event would require a campaign covering all of Lebanon and across all media and communication platforms. Referring to the shock advertising literature [3] the Spinneys campaign, from an ethical standpoint, did not employ deception or instill fear, but merely aimed at capturing attention. Second, in terms of visuals, the campaign used images of smiling people and adopted a unified design that clearly signaled it was an advertisement. According to Semiotic theory [1] these visuals elements were also sufficient to clarify that it was an advertising campaign, without misleading people or causing them to associate it with social events. In fact, through the audience interactions on social media, a number of users corrected those who commented assuming that these individuals were missing from the explosion. They assured them that it was clearly just an advertising campaign.

As a result, the Spinneys campaign adhered to ethical boundaries in advertising. This campaign also clarified the limits that advertisements can reach concerning ethics. It highlighted the fine line separating creativity from irresponsibility. Additionally, Dahl, et al. [3] while shock advertising can capture the desired attention for campaigns, if executed poorly, it risks damaging the company’s credibility. In that sense, if the Spinneys campaign had featured scared or crying faces in a context implying that the individuals were genuinely missing, it would have crossed ethical boundaries. Such an approach would have been considered a moral failure toward society.

7. Conclusion

Any advertising campaign can incorporate multiple categories of advertising techniques. This is evident in the Spinneys campaign, which utilized both shock advertising and engagement advertising. Within these two categories, the campaign included a teaser advertising phase as well as a reveal advertising phase. In spite of this, each of these categories has ethical boundaries and impacts on the audience, depending not only on Faizan [4] how they are executed, contradicting with Faizan [4] but mostly on the audience’s background, psychological status, collective memory, community past experiences, and actual situation.

This study demonstrates how [3] shock advertising helps capture the audience’s attention, yet it can pose risk in terms of ethical concerns and inducing anxiety. The phrase “Missing” used in the Spinneys campaign could have rendered the campaign ethically questionable if it had not been accompanied by smiling faces. Consequently, it is crucial to balance between innovation and ethical responsibility to avoid crossing the fine line between creativity and ethical transgression.

Additionally, the ethical classification of the campaign varies among the audience, Kotler and Keller [2] depending on their psychological background and how they interpret the message. Some immediately recognized that the teaser phase of the Spinneys campaign was part of an advertising effort and interpreted it correctly. Others, however, associated it with social events such as the Beirut port explosion, which was entirely unrelated. From this perspective, crafting a message is not limited to the intent of the sender but also depends on the receiver and how they interpret the message based on their background.

Even if this campaign does not fit within [3] the seven shock tactics described by Dahl, et al. [3] and even if it can be considered ethical on paper, it can still face a strong backlash depending on who the audience is. In societies where history carries heavy collective memories, where people are deeply tied to their values, and where a certain conservatism shapes the way they see the world, the weight of social context becomes stronger than theory. In these situations, the reaction of the public puts the variables into question — the variables of culture, memory, and sensitivity outweigh the neat boundaries

of theory, showing that what works in one context may fail in another and that theory alone cannot always predict how a message will be received.

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