

Unethical Advertising – a Case Study of Reserved (“Polish boy wanted”)

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ABSTRACT

One of the areas attracting the attention of representatives of media science is ethics. **Scientific objective:** The author assumes that unethical advertisements can contribute to lowering of the level of consumer confidence. The article presents a case study of the Reserved brand campaign – *Polish boy wanted* (March 2017). The main goal is to verify whether the recipients perceived the campaign as unethical and to indicate its potential effects. **Research methods:** A qualitative analysis of the comments of Internet users placed under two materials by Maciej Budzich (the first appeared before and the second after revealing the actual purpose of the discussed message) allows us to examine the recipients’ reactions to the said campaign. The study used content analysis and the technique of permanent comparison. **Results and conclusions:** Comments posted under the first material are diverse in terms of subject matter, a lot of space was devoted to the vlogger himself and the investigation of the discussed video. In the case of the second material, Internet users have already focused on the campaign itself, and often pointed to its possible consequences. **Cognitive value:** The study shows that the *Polish boy wanted* campaign could influence the attitude of consumers towards the brand as well as contribute to the decrease of trust. Advertisers should be aware of this risk.

KEYWORDS

ethics, fake, advertising, Reserved



The ubiquity of advertisements and the negative attitude of recipients to this type of communication are forcing advertisers to constantly search for new ways to reach potential customers. The striving to surprise the recipient and drawing his attention may entail crossing certain boundaries- legal or moral. Wioletta Zofia Stefaniak (2013) draws attention to additional causes of this phenomenon:

“Undoubtedly, many people professionally working in the advertising sector are guided by ethical principles and have a strong sense of social responsibility. However, one should also take into account the external pressure from the clients who commission work or competitive mechanisms typical of this area, which may be a strong incentive to behave inappropriately” (p. 72).

The cited author in 2012 conducted an interesting survey among employees of advertising agencies in Warsaw. The results provide some information on the approach of the creators of advertising to ethics. Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to employees of 70 agencies (randomly selected), and 31 individuals accepted them. Gathered and analysed responses show that 87% of the respondents, while working on advertisements, take into account ethical norms. The remaining conclusions are not so optimistic: 45% of the respondents do not employ specific regulations in their work; 52% do not know any organisation guarding ethics in advertising (3 people who declared such knowledge, were unable to specify a single name); 55% of the respondents did not have an internal (agency) code of ethical norms – it should be noted that 35% declared having the “unwritten” code (Stefaniak, 2013, pp. 69–72). The weak point of this study is certainly a small sample. Despite this disadvantage, however, it provides important information on insufficient knowledge of the advertising industry representatives about the functioning of regulations and organisations operating in the country. Ignorance of the rules may lead to their unconscious breaking.

The ethical dimension of communication is one of the areas of interest in media science. The attention of Polish researchers is primarily drawn by issues including media ethics and journalistic ethics (Czarnecki, 2008; Czuba, 2007; Drożdż, 2006; Kononiuk, 2015; Pleszczyński, 2007). The discourse on this subject is diverse and multifaceted. Michał Drożdż (2013) proposed an attempt to systematise it, which distinguished six main areas of ethical discussion devoted to the media (pp. 11–12). One of them includes “ways to regulate behaviours and professional activities, detailed rules of ethical codes, nature and scope of ethical normativity regulating professional activities” (Drożdż, 2013, p. 12). For the considerations in question – focused on the analysis of the unethicity of the selected Reserved campaign – the standards applicable to representatives of the advertising industry are of particular importance. The ethical codes functioning in the advertising industry are described in detail in, among others, by Robert Grochowski (2010, 2013). When assessing the ethical dimension of advertising messages, provisions contained in the Code of Ethics in Advertising are taken into account. There is a risk that advertising messages violating the rules of ethics may not only lead to a misconception about the product, but in some cases the consequences may be more serious. An advertisement pretending something else can contribute to the decline of consumer trust. Messages which undermine the principles of social responsibility seem particularly dangerous.

This article uses the case study method popular in media studies. Its purpose is to check whether the Reserved campaign “Polish boy wanted” (2017) prepared for the Reserved brand is an example of unethical advertising. This was what the Committee of Advertising Ethics considered it, which stated that the campaign could lower the level of consumer trust in messages based on a social appeal for help and discourage participation in similar actions in the future. To

reach the research objective, the comments of Internet users on the discussed video published on YouTube were analysed (the research procedure will be described later in the paper). Analysis of the collected statements allowed to check how the published audiovisual material was received (i.e. whether Internet users recognised its actual purpose) and what emotions and opinions were triggered after the disclosure of the truth about the watched video. It was also possible to indicate the potential effects of the campaign carried out by Reserved.

Unethical advertising

The “Polish boy wanted” campaign is considered in terms of unethical advertising, understood as a message violating the regulations in force in the advertising industry, contained in ethical codes. Several entities are responsible for controlling compliance with the rules of ethics in Polish advertising communication, including: IAA Poland – International Advertising Association and Union of Associations Advertising Council. The basic set of ethical standards, applicable to the assessment of commercial advertisements, is the Code of Ethics in Advertising. According to this document, ads must not, among others, contain discriminatory elements, encourage violence, cause fear in order to sell a product, rely on the recipient’s inexperience and lack of knowledge or abuse his trust. In addition, advertising messages should not mislead customers (e.g. regarding product features and its value), and any references to scientific studies or recommendations should be documented (Code of Ethics in Advertising, 2018).

Wojciech Bołoz (1998), considering the ethical standards in advertising, gives three criteria for the assessment of the message. The first is truthfulness. The author emphasises that advertising always implies some exaggeration, but – as he notes:

“applying it within the accepted boundaries is acceptable because the recipients are aware of it. The principle of truthfulness, however, excludes the deliberate misleading of the recipient, regardless of the manner in which it does so“ (Bołoz, 1998, p. 15).

It is worth mentioning that in the US, court proceedings on misleading advertising appeared in 1950s and 1960s. Anthony Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson (2003) cite a loud case against the advertisement of Colgate-Palmolive, the broadcasting of which was banned by court order (pp. 103–104). Advertising also must not violate human dignity (Bołoz, 1998, p. 15). The last requirement is compliance with the principles of social responsibility, and this needs “well-developed conscience of its creators, who are guided not only by the clients’ wishes, but also by the rights of recipients and concern for the common good” (Bołoz, 1998, p. 16).

One of the ethical standards in force in the advertising sector indicates the need for its recognition by the recipient. A record on this subject also appears in the Code of Ethics in Advertising (2018): “Advertiser, promoter, broker and the media, each of them only in the scope of their advertising activity, shall observe the principle that the recipient of the advertisement created or distributed with its participation is always able to identify that the message is an advertising” (art. 9). It seems that today – due to the strong competition between brands, as well as due to the extremely dynamic development of social media – this problem is of particular importance. Paweł Czarniecki (2008) assumes that “observance of ethical principles by the media in Poland is significantly influenced by the rapid changes that they are subject to due to technological development and the emergence of new forms of communication” (p. 7). It is worth noting that a modern recipient must more and more often deal with “parasitic advertising”, using conventions characteristic of other forms of communication, e.g. a movie trailer (Barczyk-Sitkowska, 2018). In such cases, the message is dangerously close to manipulation, because

the recipient is not aware of the actual intention of the broadcaster. The “Polish boy wanted” campaign is an excellent exemplification of this phenomenon.

Case study of the Reserved campaign

In March 2017, a single-shot, three-minute video was published on YouTube, whose main character was a young American girl. A beautiful girl appealed for help in the search for a boy named Wojtek from Warsaw that she met at the concert. The material met with interest not only from Internet users – this topic was quickly picked up by Polish media. Articles about Dee Dee, who is in love with a Polish boy, were published, among others, by *wprost.pl* (“This girl met a boy in Poland. Now she begs for help in finding him”, 2017), *gazeta.pl* (“Beautiful girl using YouTube to find Wojtek from Warszawa” [VIDEO], 2017), *glamour.pl* (Wyrzykowska, 2017, “Is Wojtek found? Dee Dee published another video”) and *polsatnews.pl* (“I need your help«. Exotic beauty looking for a Polish boy that she met at the concert”, 2017). The story also gained attention of reporters of *Telewizja Polska* and became the subject of news in “*Teleexpress*” (“VOTEK\WOJTEK WANTED IN POLISH TV – *Teleexpress*”, 2017). Within a few days, the video gained more than one and a half million views (“American looking for Wojtek on YouTube is an advertising campaign”, 2017, acc. 3).

From the very beginning, Maciej Budzich (author of the *Mediafun* blog) was sceptical about the whole thing, and already on 19 March he pointed to some inaccuracies concerning the material on the web - he pointed out, among others, the lack of precise data on the time and place of the meeting with Wojtek, noted that the YouTube channel (Dee Dee.002) was founded two days before the publication of the video (*Mediafun*, 2017, “Girl looking for boy from Poland. What if it’s fake? Indicative evidence”). Three days later, on 22 March, it turned out that the story of Dee Dee was created by the Warsaw Creatives agency for Reserved. The brand’s marketing director emphasises that the campaign was primarily to “disenchant the image of Polish men” (“Reserved apologizes for the »Polish boy wanted« campaign. Dee Dee disappears from ads”, 2017, acc. 7). The creators managed to get to a precisely defined target group (men aged 20–35).

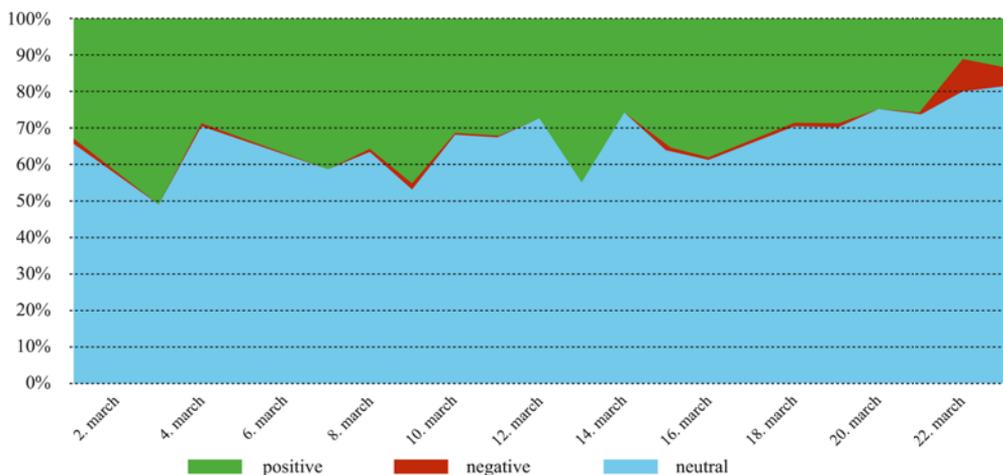


Chart 1. Comments about the Reserved brand in March 2017

Source: <https://sentione.com/pl/blog/dziewczyna-szuka-wojtka-a-on-juz-reserved-case-study>

In one of the interviews, they said that 98% of people who watched the video belonged to the target group (Mediafun, 2017, “Girl looking for boy from Poland. Interview”). The brand has gained publicity, as shown by the figures: “the average threshold of 200 mentions per day on the day of clarification of the matter increased almost nine times - on Wednesday (from 10:00 AM) more than 1,800 appeared!” (Miazga, 2017, “Girl looking for Wojtek, but he’s Reserved – case study”, acc. 6). Apparently, however, an increase in negative opinions was observed.

Part of recipients found the campaign unethical. In August 2017 the Committee of Advertising Ethics stated that “the discussed advertisement violates art. 2 para. 1, art. 4 and art. 25 in conjunction with art. 32 of the Code of Ethics in Advertising” (Resolution No. ZO47/17 dated 29 August 2017 of the Panel on the ref. act: K/41/17/01-02). The complainants pointed out that:

“1) In the ad, a girl from USA says that she is looking for a boy she met in Poland. She asks viewers to share the video, which is supposed to increase the chance to find him. Violation of art. 8 and 9 of the Code of Ethics in Advertising. The first 2 spots on Youtube had no signs of advertisement. The advertiser abused the feelings of viewers and their will to help by making the ad viral (*original spelling*).

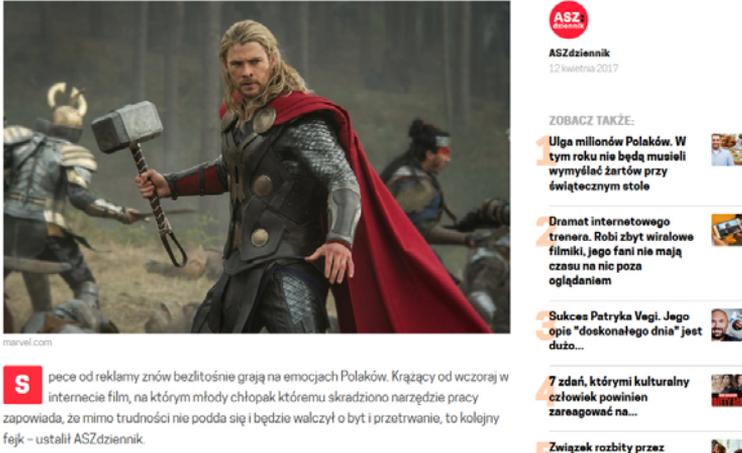
2) The video lasts for approx. 3 minutes. The girl, using a video posted on YouTube and social networking sites, tries to find a boy whom she supposedly met at the concert in Warsaw. She fell in love with him but does not have contact with him. On 22 March 2017 online media presented an official information that the material posted on Youtube.com is in fact an advertising campaign by Reserved. Meanwhile, before the release of this information and the official position of the LPP confirming it, most viewers believed that the video is a plea for help in finding a boy loved by the girl. In my opinion, the advertiser deliberately used the naivety and kindness of viewers, and their willingness to help other people, even in case of finding a boy met at the concert. Meanwhile, in accordance with art. 8 of the Code of Ethics in Advertising, an ad must not abuse the trust of the recipient, nor use their lack of experience or knowledge. The said video occurred to be an advertisement, although no circumstances indicated that (art. 9). I also believe that the ad in a special way misleads the youth, because, among others, it is directed to young people. I consider such advertising to be more damaging and reprehensible, because nowadays this kind of internet message is an invaluable means of helping to find people (also missing in tragic circumstances) or serves other commonly accepted social goals, so one should not use good customs on the web for making profits that can be achieved in a manner consistent with the law and morality (*original spelling*)”. (Resolution No. ZO47/17 dated 29 August 2017 of the Panel on the ref. act: K/41/17/01-02).

The analysed campaign clearly violates the principles of truthfulness and social responsibility mentioned earlier. The published message not only mislead recipients, but also could contribute to a drop in trust in messages based on a social appeal for help (but this is lacking in empirical evidence). The awareness of violation of ethical boundaries has also appeared in people associated with a brand, which can be proved, among others, by words of Agnieszka Łabuszewska – Reserved marketing director – spoken a few weeks later for the portal wirtualnemedi.pl:

“We have abused the trust of a large group of Internet users. This is a lesson for all of us, how carefully one has to choose content for publication on the web, being aware of the level of trust of Poles in the content published on the internet” (Reserved apologizes for the »Polish boy wanted« campaign. Dee Dee disappears from ads”, 2017, acc. 5).

Internauci znów dali się nabrać. Film o chłopaku szukającym młotka to kampania marketu budowlanego

[f POZIEL SIĘ \[909\]](#)
[TWEETNU](#)
[SKOMENTUJ](#)



ASZdziennik
12 kwietnia 2017

ZOBACZ TAKŻE:

- Ulga milionów Polaków. W tym roku nie będą musieli wyminąć żartów przy świątecznym stole**
- Dramat internetowego trenera. Robi zbyt wiralowe filmiki, jego fani nie mają czasu na nic poza oglądaniem**
- Sukces Patryka Vegi. Jego opis "doskonałego dnia" jest dużo...**
- 7 zdań, którymi kulturalny człowiek powinien zareagować na...**
- Związek rozbity przez**

Spece od reklamy znów bezlitośnie grają na emocjach Polaków. Krążący od wczoraj w internecie film, na którym młody chłopak któremu skradziono narzędzie pracy zapowiada, że mimo trudności nie podda się i będzie walczył o byt i przetrwanie, to kolejny fejk – ustalił ASZdziennik

Phot. 1. A specific comment to the “Polish boy wanted” campaign

Source: <http://aszdziennik.pl/119827,internauci-znow-dali-sie-nabrac-film-o-chlopaku-szukajacym-mlotka-to-tylko-kampania-sklepu>

The article, referring to the film *Thor: The Dark World* (2013) directed by Alan Taylor, published on 12 April 2017 by “ASZdziennik” can be treated as specific comment on the whole situation. The author of the text – Łukasz Jadaś – in a satirical manner describes the involvement of Internet users who wanted to help the victim of theft hammer theft.

Readers of “ASZdziennik” are usually perfectly aware that the stories described by the creators have little to do with reality. However, there are times that even media representatives are misleading and do not see the absurdity typical of the content published there. For example, it is enough to recall the case of “Gazeta Pomorska” (“How ASZdziennik news about JKM came as a serious source to election analysis in serious newspaper”, 2015). A real problem arises when *fake news* focused on sensation, the desire to win as many recipients as possible or created for the profits, go to the media that are considered reliable sources of information. That was the case with the “Polish boy wanted” campaign.

Internet users’ reactions

One of the effects of the criticism that came to Reserved was the removal of the Dee Dee.002 channel on YouTube. Two materials prepared by the Polish vlogger – Maciej Budzich – were selected to analyse the content of the comments posted on this website. This choice is associated with a certain risk – it may turn out that some of the Internet users’ opinions will refer to the vlog itself and to the host. On the other hand, the video to be analysed were published within a few days’ intervals, and therefore a juxtaposition of the comments appearing under them will show the reaction of the recipients to the discussed campaign before and after revealing the truth. For the data analysis, the constant comparing used in qualitative research was employed. It includes four phases: 1) “comparative assignment of events into categories”; 2) “development and

improvement of the category”; 3) “looking for relationships and topics among the categories”; 4) “simplification and integration of data into a coherent theoretical structure” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2008, p. 164). In the course of the study, individual statements of internet users were assigned to working categories. If necessary, new categories (e.g. “alternative stories”) were added so that all data could be included. In all of the quoted comments of the Internet users, the original spelling has been preserved.

Under the material published on 19 March 2017, “Girl looking for boy from Poland. What if it’s fake? Indicative evidence” there are 275 comments (as of 29 March 2018, number of views: 92,375). As expected, some of them refer to Budzich and his material. Among the statements in which there was a direct reference to the speaker, two distinct groups can be observed: paying attention to the dot on his nose (some Internet users suspected that it has something to do with Dee Dee) or praise, because from the beginning he suspected that the commented video can be an advertising campaign. There have been occasional negative statements about the youtuber. Sometimes internet users also referred to the material itself (e.g. “Great material” – Wendy NvrInd). Some of the statements did not concern the campaign, but were a response to another comment or opinion about the previously commenting Internet user.

An attempt to organise opinions on the Reserved campaign leads to the indication of several key thematic categories. Essentially, these comments concerned:

- The main character of the material – interestingly, people focused not only on her beauty, but also pointed out some symptoms that may indicate that Dee Dee is disabled (“Nobody noticed that we can only see the upper half of her body? She looks nice, everyone is mailing her, and suddenly we are going to find out that she is on a wheelchair. Would she still be popular in such case? How about that, Mediafun?” – barbeqium). One of the Internet users also stressed that Dee Dee is not credible (“The chick is suspicious”. – asam920).
- The way of implementing the material – Internet users pointed out the professionalism of the published video, analysed the sound quality, applied lighting and non-verbal communication of the main character. All these elements can also be combined with the analysis of the reliability of the material in question.
- Investigation of Internet users (inspired by the creator of the material) – first of all, the lack of specific data regarding the meeting of Dee Dee and Wojtek was emphasized (e.g. “I am surprised by the lack of data from her. We have no date, no place and no band name – only general information”. – jotka132; “exactly, I need some details as well, right???” – Slawek Gaszteccki). For some, general information did not constitute any problem: “jotka 132 maybe she did not give a date to check those who write to her, the real Wojtek will know when it was. Regards :)” – BeasT™. Those more inquisitive recipients also analysed the number of material views, and one of them even managed to discover that the girl “Has a Polish phone number assigned to her account :)” – Dawid. TheVarus – BEST VIDEOS CS:GO also performed a thorough visual analysis of the material: “I am no expert, but on this latest video you can see the ring on her ring finger, and this is a finger intended to wear an engagement ring; there is no ring on the first video; if it is a *fake* it means that our star forgot to take off her ring. I do not see any other explanation”. Some – just like Budzich – from the very beginning indicated that the whole material can be fake.
- Specified suspicion – in a dozen or so comments, there is a suspicion that the video published by Dee Dee is an advertising campaign. These accusations differ only in terms of suggested brand/campaign. Internet users suggested: dating site, anti-pimple cosmetics, Google Translator. The vast majority pointed to a potential social campaign: the moving problem of the missing people and presenting the activities of the ITAKA Foundation; encouraging

the prevention of melanoma; drawing attention to the problem of disability; urging people to accept refugees or warning young girls about unwanted pregnancies.

- Alternative stories – or Internet users’ suspicions that are not directed to an advertising campaign. This group is represented by, among others, the following statements: “Well, she wants to trick Poland just like Trump by making Poland a front country ;-)” – Tajfun “Or maybe Lukas hired an actress (another one) and if Ellen invites her, he will come with her disguised as Wojtek :)” – Grzegorz Kedzierski.

On 19 March, under the discussed material, there appeared dozen comments showing the reactions of viewers after the truth has been revealed. It seems that some Internet users did not care too much about this and rather did not feel cheated (“Another video appeared on her channel, everything turned out to be a well-thought-out advertisement for the RESERVED brand, greetings ;)” – Hubert Berndt; “HA! Everybody’s trying to figure it out, and they are simply selling CLOTHES! xD frippery for poliszboys xDD” – Zdolny Ale Leniwy). Some of them, however, strongly criticized the brand presented in the campaign: “You were right... Reserved... Pathetic...” – Piotr Kaciczak; “Reserve f*** us all I suggest to do the same and boycott their stores. They brag about a successful campaign like it’s fine... These times we are living in – this is sad”. – John Dow; “RESERVED IS GOING TO PAY FOR THAT!!!” – Maya Minuminati.

The material published on 22 March 2017, “Girl looking for boy from Poland. Interview” has 485 comments (as of 4 April 2018, number of views: 153,875). This time, the internet users’ comments concerned mainly the “Polish boy wanted” campaign (in the first material a lot of attention was paid to the vlogger and – to a much lesser degree – to the material he prepared). An initial review of the comments showed that in the discussion on the subject of the advertisement, the presence of pejorative terms indicating that it could mislead viewers is strongly marked. Content analysis was used to determine the frequency of their occurrence. During the World War II this method was used, among others “to verify the authorship of historical documents. These studies dealt primarily with the counting of words in documents whose authorship was questioned, and comparing the frequency of their use with documents whose authors were known (Yule, 1944)” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2008, p. 210). The research material was 485 comments, and the word was chosen as a unit of analysis. Emergent encoding, consisting of a preliminary review of comments before determining the category, allowed to distinguish four categories: cheating, lying, *fake*, manipulation.

Table 1. Frequency of selected pejorative terms in Internet users’ discussion about the “Polish boy wanted” campaign

Category (all forms of all parts of speech from a given noun)	The number of specific uses of a given category (in some comments a given category has been used several times)	Number of comments, in which a given category appears	Percent of comments, in which a given category appears (N = 485)
cheating/cheater/cheat/ cheated/etc.	81	60	12%
lie/liar/to lie/lying/etc.	47	40	8%
fake/faked/etc.	63	59	12%
manipulation/manipulate/ be manipulated/etc.	15	14	3%

Source: own study

According to some Internet users, the discussed campaign, misleading the public and abusing their emotions and willingness to help, has exceeded the limits of ethics. Such a tone can be found, among others, in the following statements: “The campaign failed because it went beyond the limits of ethics; many could and can go this way, but they had enough honour not to play with the emotions of the viewers”. – Błażej Duk; “Well, LPP (company behind the Reserved brand) has always been at odds with ethics. After all, this is not the first online, marketing and image-related fail of Reserved. Kids cannot remember this, but 6.5 years ago, Reserved stole a photo from an internet user. And there is more – when they got caught, instead of apologising and showing some humility, they pretended that nothing had happened until the girl went to court to teach them a lesson” – Winston Knowitall; “In general, it’s about ethics, to show people not to cheat, not to disappoint others”. – Tomasz Błaszczak. However, it should also be noted that there are also (though less often) opinions that the Reserved campaign has not exceeded any boundaries: “To everyone who feels cheated I would say that marketing is all about publicity, or advertising; see how many views and hashtags this DeeDee has collected (read: ad. Campaign). Original idea and high internet traffic have provided this company with advertising worth millions. Even if many people question the ethics of the campaign, I think they have not gone too far”. – MarcaF7.

Comments on the potential effects of the analysed campaign seem the most interesting. In the statements gathered under the material there are attempts to determine the impact of advertising on the receipt of similar messages in the future and on the Reserved brand. It should be borne in mind that these are only subjective assessments and predictions based on no specific evidence. The statements regarding own behaviour seem to be more reliable, e.g. declarations on resigning from the brand’s clothes (it should be remembered, however, that they are only spontaneous declarations, moreover possibly influenced by emotions, because the comments analysed are a rapid reaction to the new situation). The likely directions of impact of the campaign, highlighted on the basis of the analysis of Internet users’ statements, are presented in Table 2.

Finally, it is worth noting sporadic comments that refer to the campaign in a positive way. Paulina G. stressed the unfortunate moment in which the advertisement appeared on the web (immediately after the fake material of Łukasz Jakóbiak – a fake interview with Ellen DeGeneres). AndrewM pointed out that there were elements in the material indicating the intention of the message. Some (e.g. tessir) openly praised the idea on which the entire campaign was based, emphasising its unconventional nature. EL Y ELLA declared faith in man: “there are so many human reflexes that people will still not be immune enough for a very long time”.

Table 2. (Potential) effects of the “Polish boy wanted” campaign

Impact on the comment’s author	Impact on society	Impact on Reserved
Frustration/disappointment/disgust/confusion Impact on the attitude toward the brand (mostly negative) Impact on consumer behaviour (usually declaring boycott of Reserved brand) Increased carefulness against social appeals for help	Frustration/disappointment Impact on consumer behaviour (boycott of Reserved brand) Decreased trust in the media Reduced engagement in actions based on helping Increased social insensitivity	Publicity Possible deterioration of image Potential loss of customers and financial losses

Source: own study

Final remarks

The limited amount of material enabled its qualitative analysis. The research so designed allowed to show the differences between the comments appearing under the materials selected for analysis created by Maciej Budzich. In the case of the first video, it was particularly important to determine the thematic threads discussed by the Internet users. It turned out that their attention was often directed at the vlogger and his material. A lot of attention was also devoted to the analysis of tracks that would help to indicate the actual goal of the message discussed by the speaker. The matter of material from 22 March was completely different – here the discussion focused on the campaign itself and considering its potential effects. Comments were longer, and fewer comebacks appeared against the statements of others. In this case, it also seemed necessary to include the analysis of the content allowing to show how much space in the discussion of Internet users was devoted to identified categories of terms indicating the misleading of viewers.

The main purpose of the article was to check whether the analysed campaign is – according to Internet users – an example of unethical advertising. The discussed material pretended something to be something different and hid its actual agenda, which broke one of the basic principles contained in the Code of Ethics in Advertising. As a consequence – as evidenced by the comments of Internet users included in the study – some of the recipients have been misled. Revealing the truth about the video caused strong, but not always negative emotions. Although some of the collected statements drew attention to the unethical nature of the campaign (frequency of occurrence of pejorative terms is presented in Table 1), there were also occasional positive comments about the brand’s idea. The latter may have resulted from the creativity of the authors of the campaign, appreciated by recipients bombarded with advertisements. However, the question arises about the boundaries of the said creativity. In a world where *fake news* become normal and the desire to stand out from the competition forces advertisers to look for newer forms and means of expression, creators of ads must face an ethical dilemma. As Czarnecki (2008) notes: “In the media, most phenomena deserving a negative ethical evaluation result from the subordination of the message to the primacy of profit” (p. 8). The flow of information, lack of time to verify them and the speed of transmission and the possibility of sharing it in social media create favourable conditions for the development of manipulative practices. As a result, authors’ creativity does not always go hand in hand with truthfulness or respect for the principles of social responsibility. The Reserved case also shows that creativity requires courage, responsibility for one’s actions and readiness to admit when you are wrong.

The analysed statements allowed to indicate the potential effects of the campaign, including not only a change in attitude towards the known brand, but also a change in social behaviour. Internet users have often pointed to possible threats that the Reserved campaign may cause, i.e. increased insensitivity and indifference to human problems and decreased public trust. It seems that these predictions are consistent with the theory of cognitive dissonance, which is understood as “drive caused by a sense of discomfort, originally defined as the consequence of maintaining two or more incompatible cognitive elements, then referred to as the consequence of engaging in action that is contrary to the concept of self as a decent and reasonable person” (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 1997, p. 81). One way to reduce this unpleasant feeling is to change behaviour. It is possible that people who feel that sharing online content referring to a social appeal for help is irrational (and as a result, it threatens their self-assessment, because they can be fooled again) will abandon such activities to avoid another disappointment. However, social psychology also provides other hints – research shows that there is no simple relationship between attitude and behaviour (Aronson et al., 1997, p. 343).

Analysis of the collected data is only a starting point for further research. Nevertheless, it allowed to indicate that the problem exists in the consciousness of Internet users. It is interesting how this phenomenon translates into specific actions of Internet users. It seems that an appropriate verification method would be to design an experimental study that would allow observation of the impact of a particular variable on the participants in the experiment. Perhaps the question should be asked here: is it worth to further analyse this issue? In response, we can recall the words of Natalia Hatalaska (2017), who draws attention to the global crisis of trust:

“Importantly, this crisis applies not only to governments and the media, but also to social organisations and enterprises – as indicated by the Edelman report (Edelman Trust Barometer 2017) carried out annually for 17 years based on research in 28 countries (...). In 13 of the 28 analysed countries, including Poland, the society has no trust (index between 1–49) to business”.

In the light of this data, any actions that may contribute to an additional drop in trust seem dangerous. Even if the campaigns employing the mechanism used by the Reserved brand will not significantly affect the level of trust, the risk itself seems to be a threat. The lack of condemnation of practices violating the principles contained in the Code of Ethics in Advertising and consent to similar actions would be harmful and could lead to further shifting of boundaries.

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