

A Study by

CHEQ / **M/GNA** / IPG MEDIA LAB

The Brand Safety Effect

How unsafe ad placement impacts consumer brand perception

October 2018

In collaboration with



Executive Summary

CHEQ, Magna & IPG Media Lab set out to quantify the effects of unsafe ad exposure on consumer brand perceptions. **These are the key findings:**

Many consumers view unsafe ad placement as an intentional endorsement of the negative content

"It's disturbing that they are generating revenue through disaster"

"Looks like they're exploiting shock value"

"They're stating that they agree with the negative content"

With unsafe ad placement, consumers' perception of the brand declines significantly across key brand metrics

Consumers are less willing to associate with the brand



2.8X Decline

When displayed next to generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

Consumers' purchase intent is stifled



2X Decline

When displayed next to generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

Consumers are less likely to feel the brand cares about them



4.5X Decline

When displayed next to generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

Consumers are less likely to feel the brand is "in the know"



3X Decline

When displayed next to generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

Consumers' brand quality perception drops



7X Decline

When displayed alongside generally unsafe and brand / vertical averse content

Consumers are less likely to recommend the brand



0.5X Decline

When displayed alongside generally unsafe and brand / vertical averse content

The digital landscape is filled with **content brands don't want to be near**

Brands are increasingly concerned about where their ads are being displayed. Many advertisers have pulled ads over brand safety violations and are actively seeking solutions for safe ad placement both in-house and with 3rd parties.

The scope of concern is growing as well, as more and more subjects become taboo, and as political and social sensitivities continue to grow. This means that if unsafe content was once simple to define, we must now broaden our definitions to include new categories.



Unsafe Categories of Content

- Violent
- Offensive
- Disgusting
- Disrespectful
- Hateful
- Tragic
- Criminal
- Controversial
- Fake or Misleading
- Politically Sensitive
- Brand Averse
- Vertical Averse

So we set out to answer the question on every brand's mind

How does unsafe ad placement affect consumers' perception of the brand?





Research *methodology*

We used controlled online lab testing

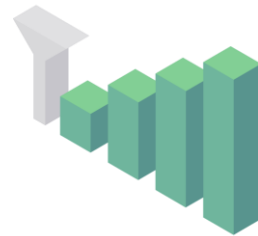
Participants

Participants recruited from nationally representative online panel across PC and Smartphone (n = 2,364)



Survey

Initial survey with demographic and media consumption questions to ensure representativeness



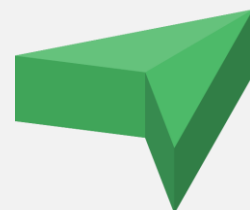
Ad Exposure

Participants randomized into test cells (safe/unsafe content) and selected a website to visit based on their preferences



Measurement

Post exposure survey to measure traditional brand metrics and qualitative feedback



Research methodology

2 verticals

We collaborated with BMW and Hulu to test the effect of unsafe content on brand perceptions in a controlled online environment



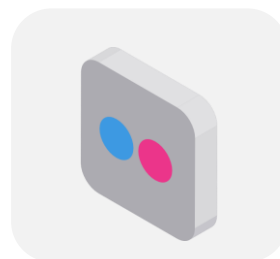
4 types of content

We displayed 4 different types of content alongside the ads ranging from safe to generally unsafe, brand averse and vertical averse



2 types of pre-roll ads

We displayed BMW and Hulu brand video ads to the test group, while the control group was shown various PSA ads



2 devices

We displayed the content on both desktop and mobile to make sure we captured and reflected consumers' genuine ad viewing experience





Examples of 4 types of content we tested (for BMW & Hulu)

All ads were displayed in a "test" environment

Safe Content
Talk Show Segment



Displayed in a "test" environment

Generally Unsafe Content
School Shooting



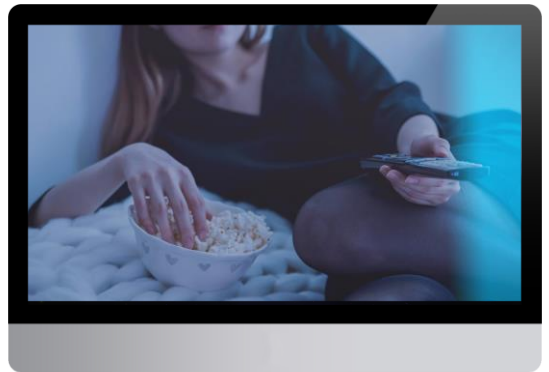
Displayed in a "test" environment

Brand Averse Content
BMW Related Incident



Displayed in a "test" environment

Vertical Averse Content
Dangers of Binge Watching



Displayed in a "test" environment

* Images are for illustration purposes only



The Key Findings

Brand perception shows demonstrable decline

when brands' ads are displayed alongside generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content



01

Key Findings

Consumers are less willing to associate with the brand

When displayed alongside generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

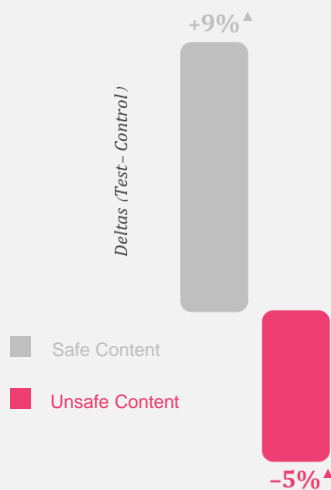
Consumer Feedback

“
I will stay away from
the brand in the future



2.8X
Decline

Willingness to Associate



▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at $\geq 90\%$ confidence
Safe n=818; Unsafe n=1,542



02

Key Findings

Consumers' purchase intent is stifled

When displayed alongside generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

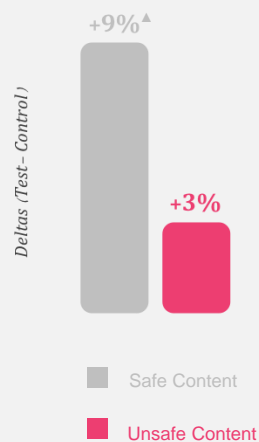
Consumer Feedback

“
After seeing a video like that, it's hard to think about buying a new car



2X
Decline

Purchase Intent



▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at $\geq 90\%$ confidence
Safe n=818; Unsafe n=1,542

03

Key Findings

Consumers are less likely to feel that the brand cares about them

When displayed alongside generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

Consumer Feedback

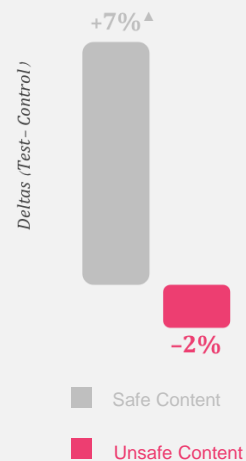
“

It's disturbing that they don't care



4.5X
Decline

Brand Cares About Me



▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at $\geq 90\%$ confidence
Safe n=818; Unsafe n=1,542

04

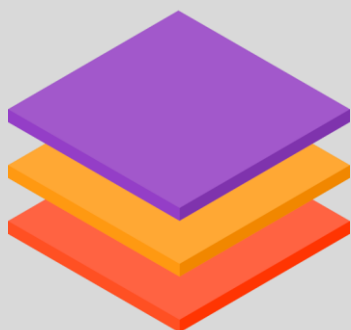
Key Findings

Consumers are less likely to feel that the brand is “In the Know”

When displayed alongside generally unsafe or brand / vertical averse content

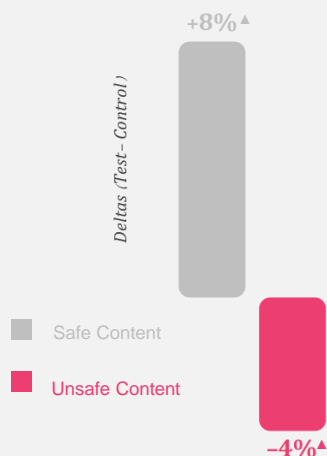
Consumer Feedback

“
Not smart to place your brand next to negative content



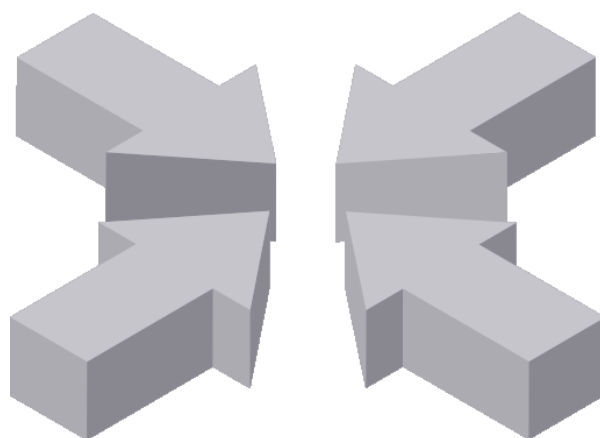
3X
Decline

Brand is “In the Know”



▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at $\geq 90\%$ confidence
Safe n=818; Unsafe n=1,542

We also measured the
effect of unsafe content when it
**directly clashes with the
brand or vertical**

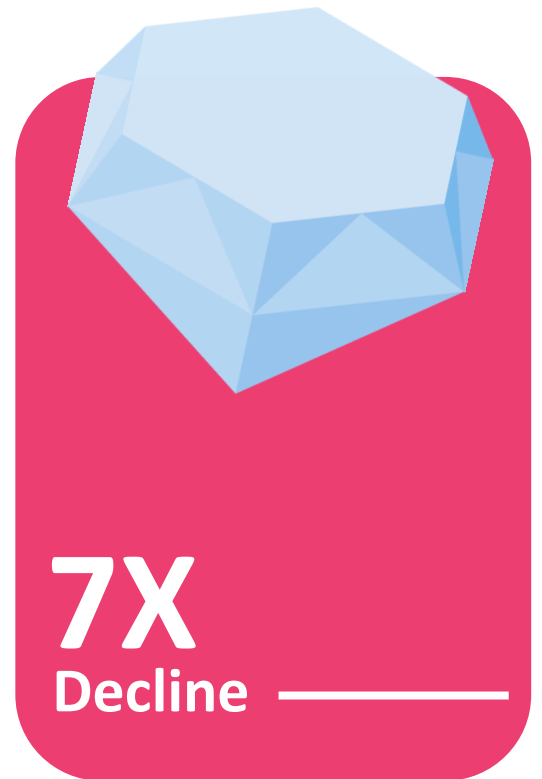
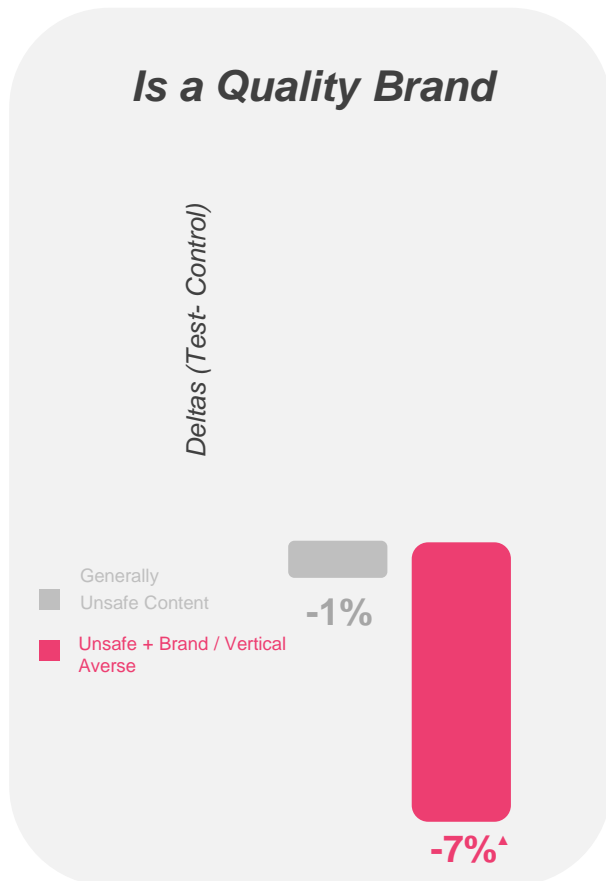


05

Key Findings

Consumers' brand quality perception drops

When displayed alongside generally unsafe and brand / vertical averse content



▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at >= 90% confidence
Generally Unsafe n=401; Unsafe + Brand / Vertical Averse n=365



06

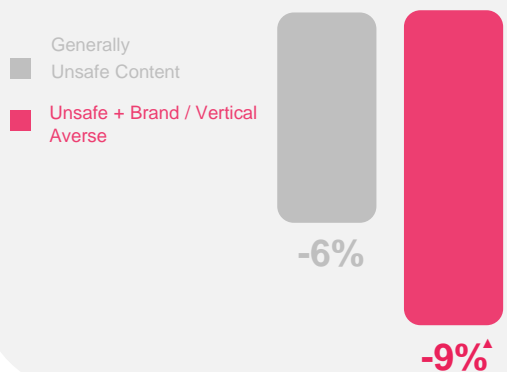
Key Findings

Consumers are less likely to recommend the brand

When displayed alongside generally unsafe and brand / vertical averse content

Is a Brand I Would Recommend

Deltas (Test- Control)



▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at $\geq 90\%$ confidence
Generally Unsafe n=401; Unsafe + Brand / Vertical Averse n=365



Additional Findings



07

Additional Findings

Content that clashes with the brand or vertical still causes damage even when that content is generally safe

Is a Quality Brand

19%

Decline



Has a Good Reputation

19%

Decline



Brand is in The Know

21%

Decline



Is a Trustworthy Brand

22%

Decline



Cares About its Customers

18%

Decline



Willingness to Associate

21%

Decline



Impact of Brand Averse Content by those who recognized connection between ad and content.

▲ = Statistically significant difference between test groups at >= 90% confidence

Brand Averse: Ad Was Relevant n=150; Ad Was Not Relevant n=36

08

Additional Findings

Many consumers view the ad placement as an intentional endorsement of the content

Consumer Feedback



Seems manipulative. I'd prefer a company that doesn't use that kind of technique



They're stating that they agree with the negative content



Looks like they're exploiting shock value



I think the brand is taking advantage of people's emotions



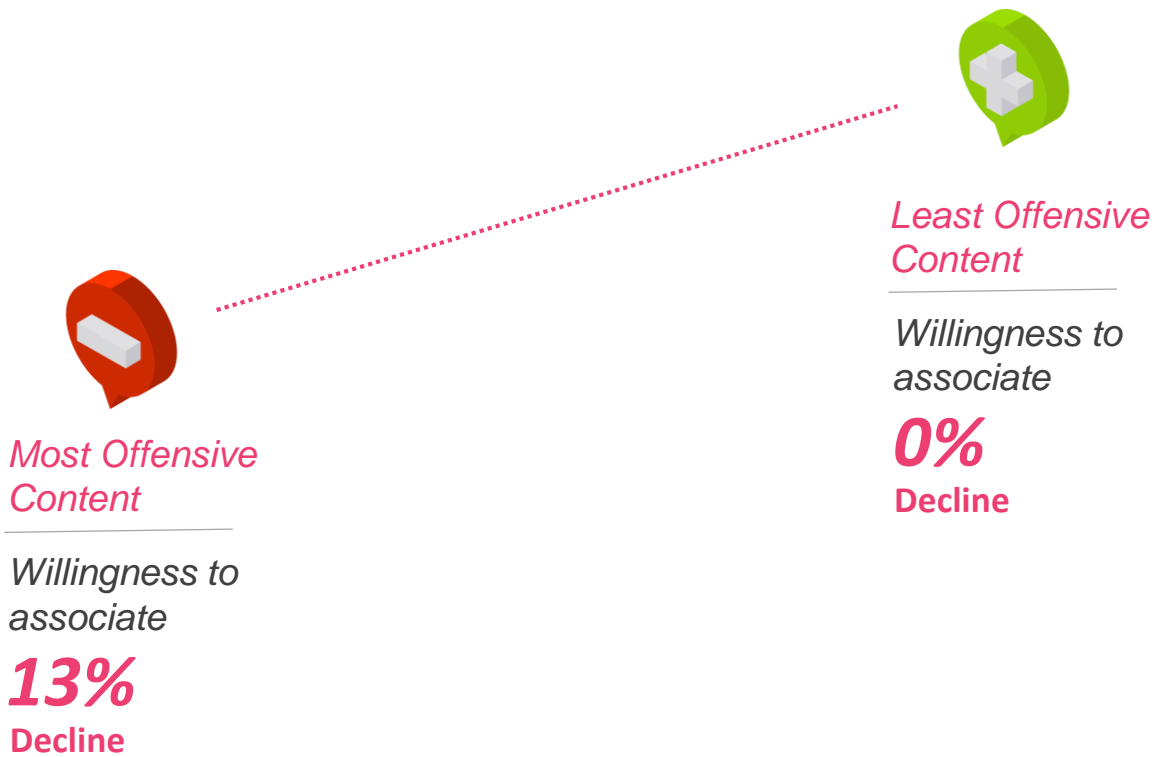
It's disturbing that they are generating revenue through disaster

09

Additional Findings

Consumers' aversion to associate with brands Is driven by "offensive" content

Impact of Content Offensiveness on Willingness to Associate: Deltas (Test – Control)



Most Offensive
Content

Willingness to
associate

13%
Decline

Least Offensive
Content

Willingness to
associate

0%
Decline

▲ = Statistically significant difference between test and control at >= 90% confidence
Most Offensive n=178; Neutral n=459; Least Offensive n=1,169



What

we've learned

01

Consumers tend to assume each ad placement is intentional

This means that when they see ads next to unsafe content, they view the brand as “not smart” (at best) and “manipulative” (at worst)

02

Consumers view the ad placement as an endorsement of the content

This means that by being near certain types of content, it's seen (by the consumer) as taking a position

03

Measuring unsafe ad exposure without preventing it could seriously hurt the brand

Once the consumer has viewed ads alongside unsafe content, the damage to the brand is already done, and measuring becomes futile

04

Brands must go beyond “bad” content and avoid content which counters their brand

Traditionally unsafe content like “crime” and “terrorism” does damage, but so does neutral content, if it clashes with the brand / vertical

Thanks

**For further questions
and information, contact:**

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