



A Literature Review on the Impact in Usurping Sex Appeal Advertising on the Consumers' Cognitive, Emotional and Attitudinal Response

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Abstract

This article examines the literatures concerning consumers' perception towards sex appeal advertising and measures the effects of sex appeal advertising in terms of cognitive, emotions and attitudes. Sex appeal advertising could affect a society's cultural values, lifestyles and behaviors. It validates the positive impact of sex appeal advertising when model and respondent are sex opposite. When comparing the responses of male and female respondents, same-sex-nude model advertisements were viewed more negatively while opposite-sex-nude model advertisements were viewed more positively. Male tends to evaluate male nudity negatively whereas female evaluated positively to male nudity. Further analyses on the acceptance of nudity in advertisement by Malaysian Chinese had significantly different compared with Chinese in China. However, no significant differences were found between Muslim and Indian respondents when viewing sex appeal advertisement. The findings indicate that female respondents are ambivalent towards sex appeal advertisement from the perspective of emotions. Sex appeal can evoke emotional responses.

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Female respondents feel more cheerful, more interested and less irritating on high emotional advertisements than non-emotional advertisements. The emotional messages also affect memory significantly. Female generate greater memory than male on those images rated as most emotionally. In general, females were found to exhibit higher memory levels than males. However, even if female view high emotional advertisements are better than non-emotional advertisements, they may still generate negative feelings towards sex appeal advertising. The general attitude towards sex appeal advertising also appears to have a strong impact on attitudes. Female reported disproportionately negative attitudes toward sex appeal advertising, but male did not show a parallel response to sex appeal advertising. However, regardless of the respondent's gender, the use of strong overt sexual appeal in advertising was not well received. The findings concluded that there are significant differences in interpretation between male and female. The study identified opportunities for further research in cognitive, emotional and attitude.

Keywords: sex appeal advertising; cognitive; emotion; attitude.

1. Introduction

According to one author [30], sex appeal advertising is a kind of emotional-based advertising. One author [20] defined sex appeal as messages, whether as brand information in advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in marketing contexts that are associated with sexual information.

One author [30] noted that sex appeal advertising can affect a society's cultural values, lifestyles and behaviors. The overwhelming amount of advertising and its prevalence in the mass media has led many critics argue that advertising plays an important role in influencing and transmitting social values. According to one author [31], different gender have different views on sex appeal advertisement. Female nudity in print advertisement generates negative feelings and tension among female consumers, whereas men's reactions are more positive. Advertisers who use sex in advertising will likely have few problems with customers, government, regulatory agencies, advocacy group, lawmakers, municipalities and others. Some on the political right will tell advertisers to avoid promoting promiscuity and some on the political left will tell advertisers to protect women from degrading image [31].

Finally, the effectiveness of sex appeal advertising also depends on whether it is appropriate to the advertised product. Authors [31, 30] claimed that sexual stimuli may enhance brand recall if the advertised product is appropriate with the product category and the advertising execution. This indicates that the use of sexual appeals in advertising have widespread and penetrating effects on several elements of an advertising and buyer behavior model.

2. Cognitive

Research also shown that women produce most negative views compared to men in overt sexual appeal advertisement [11]. According to an author [29] it is also evidenced that the presence of sexual appeal can increase arousal especially for men and non-alcohol billboards. According to another author [14] it was argued that a consumer's response to sex appeal advertisement can be influenced by the gender. Female nudity in

advertisement may produce a physiological arousal response and corresponding negative cognitions. Specifically, when comparing the responses of male and female respondents, same-sex-nude model advertisements were viewed more negatively while opposite-sex-nude model advertisements were viewed more positively. Authors [12, 27] found that opposite-sex-nude was attracting but same-sex-nude was offensive. Further, comparison of gender responses to sex appeal advertising displays that women usually respond more negatively compared to men [25]. Male tend to evaluate male nudity negatively whereas female evaluated positively to male nudity [22].

Authors [11, 29] found that women have a negative perception towards sex appeal advertising. Since sex appeal advertisement may use a partially or complete female nudity, women may react very negatively to the advertisement. Women can identify themselves with the woman in the picture and more likely to think of it as sexually demeaning. They may reject the advertisement since they would imagine they are the victims of sexism. According to one author [1], women react more negatively to the female nudity on sex appeal advertisement. They would think the female nudity look skinny, horrible and vulgar. Meanwhile, the men would think the female nudity represents love, happiness and tenderness.

According to an author [13] Chinese are becoming more open minded to sex appeal advertising. However, there are some women still plays a traditional role in some countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand [5]. Consumers have different responses and attitudes to nudity in advertising due to cultural factors. One author [27] stated that modern Chinese in China are more liberal to sex behavior and attitudes. Therefore, they can accept the use of mild nudity in advertisement. However, the acceptance of nudity in advertisement by Malaysian Chinese may be different with Chinese in China. As an Islamic country, Malaysia's advertising code was heavily influenced by Islamic values. Malaysia's advertising code controls the content of commercial and advertisements by restricting sex to sell products.

However, one author [26] argued that different levels of religiosity by Muslim respondent have no significant difference when viewing sex appeal advertisement. Muslim with high religiosity or low religiosity responded in the same way to female nudity advertisement. Sex appeal advertisement is considered as offensive sometimes depending on the culture and the country. The sex appeal advertisement is not always perceived as acceptable from a moral and cultural point of view. Some authors [17, 27] also claimed that Indian community in Malaysia that overtly sexual was considered to be unacceptable and even immoral. It also shows that Malaysian Indians rarely receptive liberalism.

Other researchers [11, 29] focus their research on different countries since different gender in different countries have different perception towards sex appeal advertising due to their different cultures. In addition to compare cognitive between men and women, compare the same sex will bring a better understanding of their cognitive toward sex appeal advertising, even if they are not in the same country.

As explained above, there are different responses between men and women. Different findings may have a different view for sex appeal advertisements. Not every woman thinks sex appeal advertising is offensive. There may have some women have a positive thinking towards sex appeal advertising and possibly better than men.

Thus, by comparing the different gender in different countries, it helps to analyze the ideas of different genders in different countries.

3. Emotions

One author [11] opined that sexual appeal advertising was evaluated more favorably, but the overt sexual appeal advertising was evaluated more negatively. According to another author [28], Thai females generated more tension and reacted more negatively than males in the high level of nudity. It was also showed that men generated positive emotions towards nudity in advertising whereas women were negative [11].

It was found [13] that Chinese males and females only differed significantly when they were exposed to a low level of sex appeal advertisement which featured by the male model. Both males and females react less interested to the male model featured by high sex appeal, or else the most negative. It is confirmed that gender has a significant effect on arousal. Males express less tension, less fatigue, more energy and more calmness than females towards the high level of nudity. However, another author [3] indicated that overall women generate strong physiological responses than men for those advertisements containing either nude or semi-nude females and for those advertisements considered as strongly suggestive.

As mentioned above, it is difficult to determine overall women dislike sex appeal advertising. Generally, women might like mild sexual appeal advertising, but may not like overt sexual appeal advertising. Therefore, research should focus on gender emotional responses towards different levels of nudity in advertising. Women may have a positive feeling to high levels of nudity in advertising and possibly better than men. It also proves that irrespective of gender, sex appeal can evokes emotional responses such as feelings of excitement and lust, which in turn can create excitement and desire for the product [24].

One author [29] affirmed that the viewers reported more positive feelings to sexual appeal in non-alcohol advertisements compared to alcohol advertisements. It appears that both sexual appeals and alcohol could increase positive emotional response. Another author [20] clarified that sexual appeal leads a positive or negative reaction depends on the appropriateness of the product advertised. Therefore, the use of sex appeal in advertisement may not be effective if consumers do not make the connection between the sex appeal and the product or service. The message and the shock value may be diluted by everyone using sex in advertising [33]. Therefore, companies must be careful in the use of sex appeal advertising to promote their products, otherwise their brand or product will eventually be eliminated by customers.

Besides that, it must also be stated that emotional advertisements are more convincing, more attention-getting and more memorable than non-emotional advertisements. According to one author [2], high emotion advertisements make subjects feel more cheerful, more interest and less irritating than non-emotional advertisements. The emotional messages affect memory significantly. Also, in another research [4] also found that women generate greater memory than men on those images rated as most emotionally. They believe the emotional content of stimuli which exposed to an individual and the memory of that information are positively correlated. One author [15] correctly described both positive and negative emotions generated by advertising

may influence on forming memories. The use of emotional appeal in sex advertisement helps to improve higher memory levels. However, the emotions the respondent receive while being shown an advertisement can distract their attention from the information being given.

Overall, several studies support that emotional advertisements are better than non-emotional advertisements. Emotional advertisements are produce greater memory and positive feelings than non-emotional advertisements. On the other hand, women dislike overt sexual appeal advertising. This means that even a woman feel emotional advertisements are better than non-emotional advertisements, they may still generate negative feelings towards sex appeal advertising.

4. Attitudes

One study [11] found that the use of the strong sexual appeal advertisement was viewed more negatively. High sex appeal may not be feasible because of the current moral philosophical sensitivities. The use of high levels of female nudity in advertisements may not be perceived as morally right or culturally acceptable. Certain cultural values such people's attitudes towards sex are enduring and deeply rooted, therefore cannot easily be affected [5]. However, one author [13] stated that Chinese had the most positive attitudes towards all the advertisements, followed by the US and Australian consumer. It shows that cultural differences between Chinese and Western countries might lead differences in consumer response to sex appeal advertisements.

Regardless of the country, female always generate negative attitude than their male partner towards strong sexual appeal advertisement. According to one author [23] women tend to be more sensitive to the female portrayal in advertising. They generate negative attitudes because they do not believe that they are portrayed rationally in advertising. Generally, it demonstrated that gender plays a key role in attitude formation. However, it is claimed that French women seem to be more tolerant to the advertisement that they consider to be offensive [16]. They may still buy the product even if the advertisement is deemed offensive.

It is also noted that female produce more resistant and demeaning for overt sexual appeal advertisement [9]. Women seem to generate negative attitudes to advertisement featuring sexy female model, but men did not show a parallel response to advertisement featuring sexy male model. It found that women have less favorable attitudes than men toward the sexy female model advertisement. Similarly, male generate more positive attitudes toward the sexy female model advertisement than the sexy male model advertisement. These findings also support the opposite-sex effect in sexual appeal advertisement which have discussed earlier.

Generally, women seem produce more negative attitudes to sexual appeal advertisement. This may due to cultural issues and think they are not portrayed rationally in advertising. Same as a woman, they might imagine them as a female model being abused in sexual appeal advertisement. In addition, different cultures between Chinese and Western countries exhibit different consumer's responses to sex appeal advertisements. Not every culture will have a negative attitude to sex appeal advertisements.

The presence of both alcohol and sexual appeals generate more positive attitude toward the advertisement and intent to purchase. Billboards with alcohol and sexual appeals seem recognized well than those without alcohol

and sexual appeals. One author [19] found that women respond positively to sexual appeals advertisement when there is connectivity between the advertising and brand. They demonstrated that an appropriate between the advertising and brand could enhance positive attitudes. Even if women generate negative attitude to sexual appeal advertisement, but they may generate positive attitude to the advertisement if the advertisement is associated with the product advertised. The respondents produce more positive attitudes when there were presence of both alcohol and sexual appeals compared to when it was absent. Both alcohol and sexual appeals increase positive valence significantly.

Another research [7] also evaluated that overt sexual appeals have adverse effects on attitudes toward the advertisement and brand which may reduce consumer's purchase intention. Purchase intention is to predict future purchase, which is influenced by consumer's attitude and other salient referents in the society [18]. According to another author [6], the increases of nudity level could influence attitudes toward the advertisement, the company, and the viewer's interest in buying the product. A negative attitude to sexual appeal advertisement may lead to a negative brand attitude and tends to reduce customer purchase intention [25].

Overall, the literatures indicated that women generate negative attitude to overt sexual appeal advertisement. Women generate positive attitude to sexual appeal advertisement when it is appropriate with the product advertised. Some studies have also shown that a positive or negative attitude may influence purchase intention. However, some studies have shown that there were no significant differences in purchase intentions although they express negative attitude to the advertisement. Besides cognitive, emotion and attitude, further research could determine on consumer purchase intention to sex appeal advertising.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are several studies [14, 19] shown that different gender has different perception towards sex appeal advertising. Literatures show that women produce more negative feelings than men towards the overt sexual appeal advertisement. This may be due to cultural issues and their self-perception. Gender has become an important key to the effectiveness of sex appeal advertising. Sex appeal advertising helps to investigate the views, feelings and attitudes of different gender. This allows advertisers to know well about their customers. One author [29] evidenced that effectiveness of sex appeal advertising depends on whether it is appropriate to the advertised product. The literatures portray that consumers prefer the presence of both sex appeal advertising with the advertised product. Consumers may link the product with the sex appeal advertising and recognize well the brand that advertised in sex appeal advertising.

Consumers may have different cognitive, emotion and attitude towards sex appeal advertising based on their culture, gender, perception and other factors. There is a linkage between cognitive, emotion and attitude. If the audience thinks negatively to the sex appeal advertisement, they may generate negative feelings and negative attitude to the advertisement. In other words, not everyone whose attention is grabbed by sex appeal advertising will eventually become interested as well. Once consumers perceive negatively to sex appeal advertising, they may refuse to buy and decrease their purchase intention.

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