

Ethical judgments of sexual appeals in advertising



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Studies in the 1980s found that sexual images in advertising had become more overt over time (Soley and Kurzbard, 1986), and that models were wearing more suggestive clothing (Soley and Reid, 1988). This trend continued into the 1990s and beyond, with eroticism and nudity in advertising becoming more prevalent and increasingly blatant (Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, and Zavoina, 1999).

Sex appeals are obviously used by advertisers in the belief that they increase the effectiveness of the ad. Considering the proliferation of sexual appeals in advertising, it is surprising that although the literature indicates that attention may be increased (particularly among males (Judd and Alexander, 1983), it also indicates that brand recall, attitude (Simpson, Horton, and Brown, 1996) and purchase intention (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994; Dudley, 1999) may be negatively affected.

Researchers like (Soley and Kurzbard, 1986), also believe that advertisers are increasingly using sexual appeals in order to draw attention to their products and these appeals are becoming more explicit. But it is unclear as to whether an sexual appeal is appropriate or inappropriate for the brands. Before further investigations, let's study first what sexual appeal is. Images and words that refer to sex or activate sexual thoughts, can be considered examples of sex appeal. It can be defined as message elements, visual or verbal, that serve to bring forth or develop sexual thoughts.

If an advertisement is considered to be sexual, are if these four characteristics are included, physical features of models such as clothing, physique and general attractiveness, behavior/movement, contextual

features such as camera effects and intimacy between models.

Correspondingly, to investigate the effects of sexual appeals, either it is appropriate or inappropriate, two advertisements are taken for exploration, illustration 1, Men's Skin Centres and illustration 2, Bella Skin Care that are advertised by and also wholly-owned by Svenson Hair Center Sdn.

Bhd. Company on same date 3 July 2012, Tuesday at page 9 and 11 respectively in Star2. illustration No. 1, this ad featured a picture of half-naked hunky man with a handsome look and muscular arms who showing off his upper toned body. Male model who wearing only a pair of jean is likely portrayed in a sexual manner. This Men's Skin Centres ad is trying to promote its tummy sculpting program giving people to have an "ideal" body. As a man, my attention has been arrested by the beautiful young woman appearing in illustration No. 2.

A sexy female model with long legs, is wearing her high-heeled and her legs wide spread with her hand between her legs positioning on a chair. Amount of clothing by the long hair model is less, revealing display of her hair-free skin. In fact, this featured women clothed in tights that highlight her partially undressed body also as a means of attracting attention to a product of service-Bella Hair Removal Expert for those women who aspiring to be hair free and having smooth skin. I believe revealing display of the model's body is considered sexual by most people.

Nevertheless, this prominent image seductively tricks us into involvement with the ad and not questioned it contribute to viewers' sexual perceptions. However, one might ask ' why do advertisers promote sex appeals? '

Obviously, advertiser use sex as a promotional tools seeing that appeal to sex has several potential roles. According to Bumler (1999), most advertising executives use sex appeal as the most powerful weapon in their arsenal and therefore they use graphic images to get and hold to audiences' attention.

From a marketing perspective, sexual appeal may be advantageous for the simple reason that they prey on basic biological instinct and thus, an incredible motivational factor, which is a desirable attribute to break through clutter. Sex plays three roles in advertising (Shimp, 2003). Firstly sexual material acts as an initial attention lure and retain awareness for a longer period often by featuring attractive models in challenging poses. Secondly, potential roles are to improve recall of message points.

The author continues to claim that sexual appeals create drastically better recall when advertising execution has a suitable relationship with the advertised product. Furthermore a third role performed by sexual content in advertising is to evoke emotional responses, such as feelings of arousal and even lust. The advertisement in illustrations No. 1 and No. 2 preciously probably was designed to arouse feelings in the target audience of predominantly young and middle-men and women. Did sex sell? Although the use of sex appeal did appear to draw attention to an ad, sometimes its use also may have been counterproductive for the ad maker.

Ironically, a provocative picture could be too effective if it attracted so much attention that it hindered the consumer's processing and recall of the ad's content. Sexual appeals appeared to be ineffective when used as a "trick" to grab attention. They appeared to work, however, when the product itself was

related to sex (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). And of course, all these sexual images aren't intended to sell us on sex—they are intended to sell us on buying their products and services. Sex in advertising often offers sexual benefits as an outcome of buying and using the brand.

Consider the advertisements made in the illustrations No. 1 and No. 2. Does the sex sell? Sex doesn't sell, but it certainly captures attention and create stopping power in both illustrations. Is an appeal to sex appropriate for the brand? Attitude toward the brand is seen as flowing from attitude toward the ad, but nevertheless is specific to the brand's image (cf. LaTour & Rotfeld, 1997). In illustration 1, what I concerned about is would the inclusion of sex appeal figure, muscular man's body in this advertisement influence consumers especially male to actually to sign up their tummy sculpting program?

As a result of processing the cue, the consumers consciously or subconsciously process the embedded symbol(the fit guy figures) in the Star2 ad. It help to develop a desire for this Men's Skin Centers brand. Consumers would transfer the desire of being like the muscle-man for the advertised brand into actual purchase behavior. To the great extent, it has hinted the male " What does it mean to be a man? " It helps to reaffirmed the " manly man" ideal body-builder. It is because body image plays a significant role in a man's feelings of body satisfaction andself-esteem.

The concept of an ideal male body still reflects the equation of beauty and goodness (Mosse, 1996), for societal benefits accrue to attractive men, generally considered to be happier, more successful, and more in control of

their lives than those who are unattractive. The manly male is associated with the prevailing cultural view of masculinity, centered on the “shoulds.” Men “should” be powerful, strong, effective, and even domineering or destructive when necessary. Male musculature is the symbolic embodiment of these traits, and men view their body image and potency as related.

In a 1994 survey (Horrocks), men were asked about how they would like to see themselves—that is, what their ideal self-image is. They answered that they would like to be sexy, good-looking, and attractive to women. I could say it is appropriate as this ads actually produce the brand awareness when it increased male emphasis on dieting, body-sculpting, and exercise.

Similarly, the sexy female model in the Bella Hair Removal Expert promotional ad embodied a strong emotional appeal rather than only sexual appeal to women’s desire to be beautiful and charming, especially to have a smooth, clear, attractive skin.

It also has successfully invented a situation or create an interest on the product itself or its uses and even its brand, in order to awaken an emotional response. Emotional appeals base the selling argument on emphasizing the satisfaction that comes from purchasing the product and then owning it or making a gift of it. An extremely strong emotive appeal tells the consumer: “This is the brand that will meet your needs or fulfill your desires.” The ad convinced women that the advertised brand could help to own hair-free and smooth skin and thus persuaded them that they would become more attractive to the opposite sex.

Moreover, an appeal to sex is appropriate for illustration 1 and 2 because advertisers not only use sexual appeals to attract attention to their ads, but to position their brands, and to create brand awareness and also suggest the related benefits can accrue to the brand purchasers. As an evidence, let's say if the advertisers are trying to use sex to attract male customers to sell "male products", advertisers often will use images of sexy women to get the reader's attention, because there could be reasonably certain the viewer would be male. If so, why don't advertisements in illustration 1 use women's bodies to target men?

Perhaps it is trying to influence their wife or girlfriend to bring to his husband or boyfriend to purchase the product? Absolutely not, using women or men as an object to attract and influence consumers' attitudes towards the products they sell, it really depends on the nature of the product and the brand. It is all correct to use sexual appeals for the products it is relevant to. Like the brand in illustration 1 and 2, their product target market is still man to man, woman to woman but it is not simply try to bring out the sexual arousal. Too much reliance on sex for advertising, especially if it is not relevant, can be counterproductive.

Thus, an appeal to sex is appropriate and effective for the brand so long as it is used in a relevant context and within the appropriate level of explicitness. Is an appeal to sex inappropriate for the brand? While studies have shown that overt sexual portrayals attract attention to an advertisement, other numerous advertising research have also suggested that inappropriate and excessive use of sexual content can actually have a number of negative

effects. Sexual content may be eye-catching and entertaining, but it may not be communicative and might distract the viewer from the message.

From a teleological standpoint, the use of sexual appeals in advertising may not be appealing to viewers and may, in fact, produce potentially negative side effects (e. g. , gratuitous sex or sexual obsession). Therefore, the consequences of using such sexual appeals in advertising, as well as the basic fundamental rightness of its use, should be of concern to all (Gould, 1994). There is a considerable body of evidence that suggests that the use of sex appeals may result in more negative attitudes toward a brand (Simpson et al. , 1996) and lower purchase intention (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994).

Nevertheless, there is often a level of complacency among advertisers that is based on the argument that, as it is women who are primarily offended by sexist advertising, reports of reduced purchase intention from studies of mixed-gender groups are not important to marketers of products such as beer, which are predominantly targeted toward men. While sex appeals are more effective for men, Fahy and colleagues stated that the issue for advertisers is clearly that? An important balance needs to be achieved between ensuring that target markets are reached, and refraining from offending other members of the viewing audience? Fahy et al. , 1995; p. 243). With regard to societal effects, the potential effects of sex and sexism in advertising are broader than the direct impact on purchase intention.

There is evidence that the ubiquitous presence of sexually attractive female models in advertising contributes to body dissatisfaction and eating disorders (Harrison, 1997; Harrison and Cantor, 1997); subsequent depression and loss of self-esteem (Lavine, Sweeny, and Wagner, 1999); a

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climate that tolerates sexual harassment (Elliott, 1991); and sexual aggression and domestic violence (Lanis and Covell, 1995; MacKay and Covell, 1997).

It might be true cause I have a strong feeling that most of the reader when they see the advertisements, they will compare themselves with models in the illustration no. 1 and no. 2 about half of the time or more frequently. They might feel envy and compare the beauty with models in advertisement. As pointed out by Lass and Hart, using images in ads indicating irresponsible, inappropriate sexual behavior as a result will only make the advertisers' position look less responsible and more vulnerable in the eyes of both consumers as well as advertising policing organizations? Lass and Hart, 2004; p. 620). For this reason, every advertiser has pragmatic need to stand out. As marketer focus on developing messages that stand out too many of them forget that their focus should not solely be on the executional devices, but on the core message. As a conclusion, it is clear that at the time being, sexual appeals will continue to be used. If it is used appropriately, especially, it is capable of bringing out attention, enhancing recall, and creating a favorable association with the advertised product.

It is stand a high chance of being effective at it is directly relevant to the advertisement's primary selling point. In spite of it is not appropriate to use sexual appeals in advertisements at all times, it really depends on the nature of the product and the brand but it is all correct to use sexual appeals for the products it is relevant to. If the advertisement contains sexual appeals that is not in accordance with the product, people might change their attitude towards that product.

If the corporations use sexual appeal the wrong way in advertisement, people will be against them and maybe go as far as not getting their product or service. Besides, corporations might consider using other tools than sex in advertising, since sex is that common today. Sometimes a product works better with other appeals, such as humour, fear or guilt. Thus, an appeal to sex is appropriate so long as it is used in a relevant context and within the appropriate level of explicitness.