

# [Marketing essays - sexual appeals](https://assignbuster.com/marketing-essays-sexual-appeals/)

## Sexual Appeals

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is to find out the effectiveness of a tool called sexual appeals used in the advertisement on advertisement recognition, brand recall and perception. Appeals utilizing overt sexual information are common in mainstream consumer advertising. Sex appeal is pervasive in advertising and is used with increasing frequency. As advertisers seek out ways to break through clutter and draw attention to their messages, the use of sexually oriented appeals have been used as a communication technique (Saunders 1996). Researchers like (Soley and Kurzbard, 1986), 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 the effects of sexual appeals have a more of positive effect or negative effect. Many researchers for example, Reichert, heckler, and Jackson (2001) claim that when sexual stimulus is used in advertising, viewer’s perceptual and processing resources are directed towards the sexual information in the ad rather than towards the brand. There also exist a substantial body of research that suggest sexual appeals can lead to successful advertising for example la tour (1990).

The author decided to investigate the effects of sexual appeals because he found both the positive effect as well as negative effect of sexual appeals in advertisements and there seems to be a little conclusive evidence of its effectiveness.

The main objectives of the research project are to find out if:

* Sexual appeals in advertising are successful in attracting the consumers.
* Consumers can recall the brand name of advertisements which have used sexual appeals.
* Advertisements using sexual appeals have a positive effect or negative effect on consumers.
* Consumer reacts differently with different degree of explicitness.

First the author will use the secondary sources to describe what sexual appeals are and then the effects of sexual appeals (negative and positive). Then the author will try to explain the role sex appeal plays in advertisements.

Primary research will be conducted to investigate further the effect of sexual appeals in advertising. An analysis of the results and then the limitations of the project will follow this. Finally the author will draw conclusions from both the secondary and primary research presented.

### What are sexual appeals?

Sex appeal is a tool used by the advertisers in their advertisements to attract the target audience. Sexually suggestive imagery is a powerful device employed by advertisers to create an irresistible attraction between the product and targeted consumers. Through connecting sexual ideas with a given product, advertisers hope to cloud the distinction between product and flesh, real product function and sexual satisfaction. In associating a product with sex, advertisers alter the idea of the product in the mind of the consumer, and, in doing so; alter the reaction of the consumer to the product.

Sex in the advertising is the use of sexual interest as a tool of persuasion to draw attention to a particular item for consumption and it considered one of the most influential tools of marketers and specially advertisers. (en. wikipedia. org). sexual information whether in the form of the pictures, sounds or stories, has been shown to stir up predictable range of emotional responses within viewers (hecker. et. al, 2001). The author further state that sexual appeals can be defined as messages, whether as product information in the advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in social marketing context, which are linked with sexual information. Lambiase and Reichert states five different types of sexual content identified in advertisement, these five are, nudity, sexual, behaviour, physical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds.

According to Ramirez and Reichert (2000) another definition 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, behaviour/movement, contextual features such as camera effects and intimacy between models.

There are various authors who have defined a role of sexual appeals in advertisements like Shimp.

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.

### CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Types of sexual information in advertisements

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) state that there are five types of sexual information in advertising; nudity, sexual behaviour, psychical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds.

Nudity

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) state that displays of bodies constitute a crucial source of sexual information. When people were asked to identify the characteristics in advertising that contained nudity they referred to short skirts, tight tops, muscular arms, bikini and lingerie’s. The term nudity does not imply that models are completely unclothed; a suggestive dress is often represented by open blouses with partially exposed cleavage, tight fitting clothing that highlight the body. Nudity is extremely rare in mainstream advertising and therefore it is often represented by side and back shots of the model, tub and shower scenes, and in some cases frontal nudity from the waist up (ibid).

Sexual behaviour

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) continue to state that although sexual content in the mainstream advertising leaves out the sex act, it does include sexually provocative behavioural display. Sexual behaviour can be diversified into advertisements in two ways, as individual behaviour or interpersonal interaction. In the first form models can behave sexually in advertisements by making eye contact, using different facial expression and inviting smiles with the viewer, flirting, and moving provocatively. In these ways the author further claims that models can communicate sexual interest with the viewer or simple try to bring out sexual arousal. Audiovisual characteristics of television commercials can emphasize sexual behaviour by showing models moving and talking seductively to the viewers. The second for of sexual behaviour involves two models or more engaging each other in sexual contact. The degree of explicitness of the encounter can vary from simple displays of affection, to inferred intercourse (ibid).

Physical attractiveness

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) state that physical attractiveness among humans is a trial that is central for foreseeing interpersonal attraction and mate selection. Features of physical appearance, including facial beauty and complexion, play a great role in sexual interest and desire. For this reason, physically attractive models in advertising can be, and most often are, considered examples of sex in advertising. Determination of attractiveness levels is made by a comparison by mean ratings and this rating is considered from the models hair, face, complexion, eye contact, physique and behaviour (ibid).

Sexual referents

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) state that images and words that refer to sex or activate sexual thoughts, can be considered examples of sex in advertising. According to the authors sexual referents in advertising can be defined as message elements, visual or verbal, that serve to bring forth or develop sexual thoughts. Sexual content takes from in the viewers mind, not in the advertisement. (ibid)

Sexual embeds

According to Lambiase and Reichert (2003) sexual embeds are defined as referents or forms of sexual representation designed to be perceived subconsciously. Common types of embeds include objects that are shaped or positioned like genitalia and small hidden messages of naked people and body parts. Sexual embeds are integrated into images by advertisements creators and are planned to go undetected by those people who are viewing the advertisement (ibid).

In a study by Ramirez and Reichert (2000) the most important definition of what was perceived as sexual in an advertisement were physical characteristics. Physical characteristics can be divided into three subcategories; clothing such as half naked and tight dresses, attractiveness, and body such as cleavage and chest. There were no differences between what men and women perceived as sexual concerning clothing, but men mentioned physical attractiveness as an important factor twice as often as women did. Overall men were a little bit more likely to define sexiness in this way (ibid).

The second most frequently definition of what was considered as sexual, involved movement (Ramirez and Reichert, 2000). According to the author this category included behaviour such as flirting, dancing and shaving, demeanour such as provocative, sassiness and fun loving, and voices such as singing, moans and groans. In this category there were no significant differences between the genders opinions both concerning the definition and the subcategories (ibid).

The third most frequent definition that characterizes sexiness was contextual features (Ramirez and Reichert, 2000). This category included photographic such as its faced paced, camera roams over model, setting, music, lighting such as hazy and shadows, and shots in black and white. The author state that there were no difference concerning the first four subcategories between the genders, but women were more likely to make reference to black and white as a contributing factor to sexual appeal.

When a couple is in deep embrace, which is the fourth most frequent definition of sexual appeal, a gender difference emerged (Ramirez and Reichert, 2000). This category is divided in to four sub categories, voyeurism, projection, models wanting sex with viewer and fantasy-like. According to the authors there were no significant gender differences in this category and there were also few that identified this category as sexiness and therefore the author’s state this category as not meaningful.

### Positive and negative roles of sex appeals in advertisements

Alexander and Tudd (1986) contend that ad creators must be acutely aware of the reactions (both positive and negative) of their target audience to the use of potentially controversial sexual appeals as ad stimuli.

There are evidences of both positive effects as well as negative effects of sex appeals in advertisements there are some authors who think sex appeal has a positive effect and there are some authors who think sex appeal has a negative effect on advertisements.

### Positive effects of sex appeals

One might ask ‘ why do advertisers promote sex appeals?’ the answer in its purest form is that it works well in most cares and 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. Advertisements that attract attention have the increased likelihood to affect persuasion, especially in a saturated media environment typified by passive viewing exposure (Reichert, heckler and Jackson 2001). Numerous research studies have revealed that sexual appeal , when used in advertising are attention grabbing, likeable, arousing, effect inducing, memorable, and somewhat more apt to increase interest in the topic advertised in comparison to non-sexual appeal (Severn, belch and belch 1990).

According to Shimp (2003), sex appeals serve several crucial roles in advertising. Firstly, sexual material in advertising acts as an initial attention lure to the ad, which is referred to as the stopping power of sex (Yovovich, 1983). Attention is necessary condition for learning attitudinal changes and behavioural effects, easy to relate, emotion inducing, and most of all, memorable. Finally the third role of sexual content in advertising is to evoke emotional responses, such as feeling of arousal, excitement, or even lust, which in turn can create stimulation and desire for the product (Bumler, 1999). According to Hoyer and McInnis (2001), this role may affect the consumer’s mood and can result in favourable cognitive processing of the ad and increase the persuasion impact. In addition to the aforementioned roles, Richmond and Hartman (1982) argue that sex appeal in advertising is also effective in eliciting fantasy or expressing the imaginative fulfilments of motives, such as sexual gratification.

Latour, Pitts and Snook-Luther (1990) have provided insight into the emotional impact of sexual appeals, specifically the level and nature of evoked arousal and attitudes towards the advertisement and brand. They have found a direct relationship between the positive arousal evoked by sexual appeals and evolutions of the brand. Nonetheless, whether sexual appeal elicits a positive or negative reaction depends on the appropriateness to the advertised product. Richmond and Hartman (1982) ascertain that sexual stimuli will enhance brand recall only if it has an appropriate relationship with the product category and the advertising execution. When sex appeal is used inappropriately such as utilizing it solely as an attention device, exploiting the female body, degrading the female role or insulting propriety, weak brand recall may occur and may in fact produce a negative attitude towards the brand. This implies that the use of sex appeal in advertising must be appropriate to the type of products being advertised and when sex appeal is used thoughtfully and appropriately, it may produce acceptable and satisfactory results.

### Negative effects of sex appeal in advertising

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. Consistently, studies have demonstrated that sexual appeal attracts attention to the ad, typically without a corresponding advantage for brand information processing. Sexual content may be eye-catching and entertaining, but it may not be communicative and might distract the viewer from the message.

Reichert, heckler, and Jackson (2001) claim that when sexual stimulus is used in advertising, viewers’ perceptual and processing recourses are directed towards the sexual information in the ad rather than towards the brand. Severn, belch and belch (1990) also argue that the use of explicit sexual messages in advertisements may interfere with consumers’ processing of message arguments and brand information, which in turn may reduce message comprehension. Furthermore, according to Stewart and Furze (2000), initial devices such as sexual stimuli overwhelm the message, and are negatively correlated to both recall and persualtion. Finally, there has been evidence to suggest that overt sexual appeals may have detrimental effects on attitudes toward the ad and brand, and therefore may reduce purchase intention (grazer and Keesling 1995). These findings led McInnis , Moorman , and Jaworski (1991, cited in Hoyer and McInnis 2001) to advance the proposition that hedonic appeals, such as sexual stimuli, increase motivation to process the ad execution, but largely at the expense of the brand. All of these threaten to act as potential hazards of using sex appeals.

The elaboration likelihood model (elm) provides a framework to understand the role of sexual appeals in persuasion (Shimp 2003). According to elm, persuasion can occur along a continuum of elaboration. Persuasion resulting from extensive issue-relevant thinking is referred to as central route processing, whereby receivers engage in vigilant examination of message information. As receivers’ motivation, opportunity, and ability decrease, receivers are less likely to engage in systematic elaboration and are consequently more likely to rely on peripheral cues to guide their decision making. Evidence suggests that this process occurs in response to sexual appeals in advertising (Severn, belch and belch 1990).

It appears that numerous advertising utilizing sex appeals seems to get attention but do little for the advertised product. For instance, Judd and Alexander (1983) found that ads with decorative female models increase memory for the image in the ad with no difference in actually reading the information of the ad. In particular, nudity and erotic content was found to increase attention to the ad, but not necessarily enhance recall or positive attitudes towards a brand. As a result, sexual appeals stimulate less argument elaboration and connecting thoughts than will non-sexual appeal. Additional evidence also suggest that , as the level of nudity and erotism increase, the intended communication effects either become negative or dissipate(la tour, Pitts and Snook-Luther 1999). Therefore, despite the persuasiveness of sexual appeals when used in advertisements, it is likely to be the result of peripheral processes and as a result may be tranent.

In additional to the aforesaid negative effects of advertising, bad uses of sex symbols in advertising may lead to unacceptable perception by audience. According to Courtney (1983), the widespread use of sex as an advertising technique has elicited significant consumer protest. On top of that, as clutter increases in advertising, consumers appear to be more able to physically avoid advertising and tune out (Bumler, 1999). 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.

### Review of current theory

In this chapter the author will present the current theories surrounding how sexual appeals work in advertising. It is necessary for advertisers to understand how consumers will process their advertisements in order to make them successful. This particular dissertation needs to understand the effects that sexual appeals will have on a consumer’s ability to process information in advertising. Get help with your essay from our expert essay writers...

### Information processing

Information processing refers to the process by which a stimulus is received interpreted, stored in memory and later retrieved, (Engel, Blackwell and Miniard 1994)

Nowadays we are exposed to hundreds of ads a day in newspaper and magazines, on TV, on billboards.’ Advertising normally forms part of the multitude of stimuli to which we pay no attention’ (Kelvin, 1962-65). There are certain ads that do grab our attention. According to James (1890) cited by health 2001), attention can be defined as “ focalisation and concentration of consciousness”. This is because we favour the perception of some stimuli more than others. However, even if attention-getting stimuli are present in an advertisement it does not necessarily mean that the viewer will remember it.

The memory process is extremely important to advertising. Time elapses between the initial exposure to the advertisement and the time when the viewer will be required to make an actual purchase decision. Thus it is important to know how consumers process an advertisement and for the purpose of this dissertation, how sexually oriented advertisements aid or hinder this process.

First the author will look at two separate theories on how it is believed an advertisement can lead to brand learning.

### Hierarchy of effects model

Consumer researchers have developed those models in order to explain different levels of consumer response to advertising.

The AIDA model was developed in the 1980’s and is in use today. The AIDA model suggests there are four stages involved in motivating a consumer to purchase. The advertisement must create attention, capture interest, stimulate desire, and invoke action, (Bergman and Lindquist, and Sirgy, 1997)

Daniel starch developed model in 1925,” to be effective an advertisement must be seen , read, believed, remembered and acted upon.” The model promoted the requirement to make an advertisement easy to understand, credible and interesting, cited by hill and O’Sullivan, (1999)

Russell Colley’s model DAGMAR has four stages, awareness, comprehension, conviction and action. Colley believes that an involvement should be designed to carry the customer along through the stages towards eventual purchase, (hill and O’Sullivan, 1999)

These models rely on the assumption that buyers behave rationally. They encompass the traditional view that it persuades consumer to choose a brand and that the degree of knowledge learned about a brand corresponds directly to the attention paid (heath, 2002).

Controversially, Robert heath (2002) has found that advertising campaigns may be effective in a different and more complex way. His theory of low involvement processing demonstrates how he believes advertisements influences brand learning.

### The low involvement processing model

Researchers into cognitive science have found that memory is structured into three components; attention, short term, memory and long term memory. There are two types of long term memory, sometimes termed conscious memory and implicit memory, called unconscious or non conscious memory. (Goode, 2001)

In recent years it has been discovered that advertising has the power to work at a non-conscious level and so it is able to influence us without us realizing it. Health (2001) cited Daniel l. Schacter (1996)

“ You May Think That Because You Pay Little Attention To Commercials On T. V Or In Newspapers Your Judgement About Products Are Unaffected By Them. But A Recent Experiment Showed That People Tend To Prefer Products Featured In Advertisements They Barely Glanced At Several Minutes Earlier- Even When They Have No Explicit Memory For Having Seen The Advertisement.”

Implicit memory functions in two ways, it records what is received and it also works conceptually in the semantic memory. The implicit memory cannot work out conclusions or messages that need to be interpreted (heath, 2001). Instead it connects feelings and sensations to an advertisement sub- consciously so that these can be recalled at a later date (Goodge, 2001). As the implicit memory can’t work out messages or analyze an advertisement it is necessary for a successful ad to work at both high and low involvement levels, or in other words reach the conscious and non conscious memory.

The elaboration likelihood model attempts to explain how each of these theories work and highlights the role of sexual appeals in the memory process

### Elaboration likelihood model

“ The elm of persuasion is a theory about the processes responsible for yielding to a persuasive communication and strength of the attitudes that result from those processes,”

The ELM provides ground work for the different ways that an advertisement can persuade. There are two ways in which an advertisement can appeal to a consumer, either factually or emotionally. Factual messages focus on informational reasons to buy and are likely to be effective if the consumer is motivated to pay attention to the advertisement. Motivation to process the message depends upon the relevance of the product advertised, the need for cognition and the responsibity of the consumer to process the advertisement (Berkman et al., 1997). When the factual aspects of the advertisement are what appeals to the consumer, the central route to persuasion is taken.

Sexual appeals generally take a peripheral route to persuasion. Consumers who are not motivated to process the advertisement information respond instead to the feeling the advertisement arouses. Berkman et al .(1997) noted;

“ Given a highly motivated audience of consumers who are willing to expand cognitive effort to process marketing information, factual messages work best. Low motivation and low cognitive ability mean emotional appeals will be more effective.”

Both traditional and new theories of how brand learning works seem to suggest that sexual appeals will increase the attention paid to an advertisement.

Sexual appeals as an attention grabbing device

The most common method of attracting attention to an advertisement is to use creative devises, such as sexual appeals. Creative devises are used not only to get attention but also to “ make an ad sufficiently interesting and appealing” for the message to be registered and memorized (heath, 2001). It has been widely quoted that sexually oriented ads are successful in gaining the consumers attention, (Alexander and Judd, 1978 cite baker, 1961; Richman and Hartman, 1982).

The next section will examine how sexual appeals gain attention.

### Arousal

Howard (1977) cited in Wilson and Moore (1980) described arousal as;

“ Usually the degree of tension in the body ….. Which gave rise to attention and search in the consumer decision process?”

It is thought that arousal is a form of consumer motivation. Sexually explicit ads shown that if the stimuli used is too explicit it will lead to a decrease in the cognitive capacity available for message elaboration (Engel et al., 1995). Thus, a consumer would be paying attention to the sexual appeal but not necessary the other elements of the advertisement, like the product and the message that the ads is trying to covey. The theory of perceptual filtering explains this research.

### Perceptual filtering

Sexually oriented advertisements are a popular method o attention grabbing. The problem with this method is that attention is divisive, we use a mechanism called perceptual filtering.’ heath (2001) cited Rose (1992);

“ Perceptual filtering…. Ensures that, of all the information arriving tab ones eyes or ears at any given time, only a small proportion is actually remembered….”

This in turn means that the more attention is paid to the attention is paid to the attention getting device the less attention is being paid to other aspects of the advertisement, such as the brand name and product information.

### Review

In this chapter the author has out lined the theoretical knowledge necessary to understand how information in advertisements is processed by consumers how sexual appeals influence this process.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter will show how the data was collected in order to find the answers to the research questions and in that way fulfil the purpose of my dissertation. The chapter starts by stating the research purpose. It continues by presenting the research approach and the research strategy used. After that, a presentation of how the data collection was carried out follows

### RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose with the research is to state what is to be accomplished by conducting research can be used (Eriksson and Wiedersheim-paul, 2001). According to Yin (2003), research can be classified as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. It is also possible according to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2000) to have more than one purpose.

Exploratory studies are valuable means of finding out, what is happening, to look for new insights, to ask questions and to evaluate phenomena in a new light (Saunders ET. Al, 2000). According to the authors’ exploratory research is a particularly useful approach if u expects to clarify the understanding of a problem. There are three principle ways of conducting exploratory research (ibid).

* a search of the literature
* talking to the experts in this subject
* conducting focus group interviews

The objective of descriptive research is to accurately portray of profile of persons, situations or events (Saunders et al, 2000). According to Eriksson and Wiedersheim-paul (2001) descriptive research involves the choice of perspective, aspects, level, terms and concepts. It is also necessary to observe, register, systematize, classify, and interpret (ibid). The authors further state that good description is often a necessary foundation when the researchers want to explain, understand, predict, and/or decide.

Studies which establish casual relationships among variables may be termed explanatory studies (Saunders ET. Al, 2001). To explain means to analyze cause-effect relationships (Eriksson and Wiedersheim-Paul, 2001). It has to be explained what causes produce what effects (ibid). The emphasis is on studding a situation or a problem in order to explain the relationship between different variables (Saunders et al, 2000).

The research purpose and questions of our dissertation indicate that initially my dissertation exploratory. In the beginning it is aiming to formulate and precise problems, to give us as researchers an orientation in the question to be invested. When the data is analyzed it becomes descriptive, as I document, register, and identify the finding of my research. Finally, when answering the research questions in the final chapter it will become slightly exploratory, though a quantitative approach and a larger sample would have ascertained this to a greater degree.

### RESEARCH APPROACH

Studies can be of two types, qualitative and quantitative research, based on the researcher’s type of data. Qualitative research involves numerical data that usefully can be quantified (Saunders ET. Al, 2000). It could range from simple counts such as the frequency of occurrences, to more complex data such as test scores or prices (ibid).

The conclusions of qualitative research are based on non-quantifiable data, such as attitudes, values or perceptions (Lundahl & Skarvad, 1992). Qualitative research is characterized by the opportunity to explore a subject in a real as possible (Saunders ET. Al, 2000). The authors further state that the nature of qualitative data has implications for both its collection and its analysis. To be able to capture the richness and fullness associated with qualitative data it cannot be collected in a standardized way, like quantitative data (ibid). Instead the purpose with the qualitative approach is to gain a deeper understanding of studied area (Holme & Solvang, 1991).

The choice of approach in my dissertation will be based on the purpose of research. I find that it is of great importance to reach a closer contact with my studied objects in order to gain a better understanding of my stated purpose in chapter one. Since I am studding people’s attitudes and perceptions towards different advertisements that I will show, the choice fell on a qualitative approach for my thesis.

### RESEARCH STRATEGY

The selection of research strategy depends on three conditions (yin, 2003). These three c