

People's perception on the use of sexual appeals in advertising and its impact on brand image

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Abstract

Sexual appeal is one of the most common and widely used strategies in mainstream consumer advertising. The use sexual appeals in advertisements are becoming more common every day. And it is also known as a method that can be highly effective in influencing consumers' perception and attitudes. However, it is important to consider the insights of people on the sexual appeal used in advertisements and how these advertisements influence customer's purchase decisions and its impact on the image of a product advertised. In this context the present study aims to analyze the perception of people towards the use of sexual appeal in advertising, and it is also intended to understand the opinion of the customers on the usage of sexual appeal in advertisements, and the impact of using sexual appeal in advertising on the image of a product advertised. The study was conducted on a sample of 500 respondents of whom 230 were female and 270 were male respondents. An interview schedule was used to elicit the required information. The data was collected and interpreted applying the Chi-Square test to arrive at meaningful conclusions. The findings of the study indicate that

Key words: Sex- Appeals, Advertising, Sexual stimuli, Gender advertising, Sexual Advertising, Sexual Advertisement

Introduction:

Advertising is a means through which a product or a service is made known to the public. And it is one of the most powerful tools used by the marketers to induce the customers to make decisions. Different types of appeal are used in advertising to draw the attention of the customers towards a product or service. Emotional, personal, social, fear, humor, music and sex are some of the appeal that is commonly used in advertisements. Among these appeal sexuality is considered one of the most powerful tools of marketing and particularly advertising.

Sexual appeal was not common in mass media during the early twentieth century. But over the past two decades, the increasing use of sexually explicit images in advertising has become almost common place. Sexual content is used in commercials to sell everything from beer to shampoo to cars. Though not universally embraced and held in disdain by many people the use of overt sexual appeal has increased considerably in advertising.

Concept

Sexual Appeals

The use of sex appeals in advertising appears to have increased nowadays (Dianoux&Linhart, 2010) and recognized as important yet extendable area of research (De Barnier&Valette-Florence, 2006). Furthermore, such importance has become evident in almost every company around the world where highly competitive environment has made companies heavily investing in employing appeals in their advertising efforts such as sexist images, adventures, romantic issues, using more “customer language” (Akhter, Abassi& Umar, 2011). Sexual appeals are defined as “messages, whether as brand information in advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in social marketing contexts, that are associated with sexual information” (Reichert et al, 2001: p. 14). Lambiase and Reichert (2003) have identified five common types of sexual information in advertising – Nudity, sexual behavior, physical attractiveness, and sexual referents and sexual embeds.

Literature Review

Bushman (2005) analyzed whether violence and sex in television programs sell products in advertisements and came out with the findings that participants exposed to programming featuring sexual commercials where women were portrayed as sex idols were less likely to remember the advertised brands and expressed less interest in buying those brands than participants who had seen advertisements with no sexual content. Results also indicate that young women and adult women were frequently, consistently, and increasingly presented in sexualized ways in advertising, creating an environment in which to be a woman becomes nearly synonymous with being a sexual object.

Elizabeth, Wren et al (2008) analyzed the portrayal of male and female advertising characters to determine whether sexual appeals were used to sell products where 287 advertisements were content analyzed into 4 categories like gender of the actor, product type, whether or not sex was used to sell product, and what kind of sexuality if used was shown. The researchers came out with the findings that three basic ways of sexual appeals were used in advertising i.e. objectifying, alluring behavior, provocative clothing. And female advertising characters were used more often than male characters in advertisements that used sexual appeal to sell a product. 51percent of such advertisements used women actors compared to only 13 percent for men. The vast majority of advertisements that used sexual appeals to sell a product had a female somewhere in the advertisements. The results indicate that the male audiences were more likely to be gazing at objectified advertising characters compared to gender-neutral or female audiences. When sexual appeal was used to sell a product, female advertising characters appeared more than male advertising characters. The vast majority of 85 percent of advertisements that used sexual appeal to sell products included the female image. Thus the researchers concluded that it was primarily the male audiences who observed objectified female advertising characters.

Tamar, quimn et al (2010) examined the impact of objectification on women’s behavior in social interactions by taking into account 207 under graduates students and came out with the findings that a women narrows per presence in the interaction by spending less time talking when she believes that a man is focusing on her body. Based on the

findings the researchers suggested that recognizing female bodies as the target of visual inspection in advertising and media may also affect women's mental health, particularly the relationship between self-silencing and women's risk of depression.

Sunita Kumar (2017) conducted a study on people's perception about overt sexuality and objectification of women in advertisements through the ages. Taking into consideration both - current trending advertisements and previous studies that have been conducted, and brought to light the intentional shift in focus by brands from the features of the brand to the models in the advertisement. And Women are particularly vulnerable to an advertiser's use of representation of people as symbols and are relatively powerless because of male dominance in today's society.

Need for the study

The literature review reveals that many studies have been conducted to show that the use of sexual appeals in advertising is common and advertisements use sexual appeals to attract the attention of the customers. The studies also indicate that the use of sexual appeals in advertisements is at an alarming rate. A very few research studies have been done to explain the perceptions of people toward the use of sexual appeals in advertisements, as well as the impact of using sexual appeals in advertising on the brand image. As a result, the present study is undertaken to understand and analyze the awareness, and perceptions of people towards the use of sexual appeals in advertisements and impact of using sexual appeals in advertisements on the brand image.

Objectives of the study

1. To study the usage of sexual appeals in advertising;
2. To study the perception of people on the use of sexual appeals in advertising
3. To examine the impact of sexual appeals in advertising on brand image

Hypothesis

1. The erotic images of men and women are common in today's advertising world
2. The advertisements portraying the erotic images of men and women are interesting to watch
3. The erotic image of men and women in advertisements lowers the brand image

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on the perception of people towards the use of sexual appeals in advertising and its impact on the brand image. Both primary data and secondary data were used in the study. **The secondary data relates to the review of literature.** The primary data were collected from the field survey by using questionnaire schedule in Bangalore city. The opinions of the respondents were measured by requesting the respondents to indicate on five- point Likert-type scales, anchored on "strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree". Selection of sample and fixation of sample size has followed simple random sampling method consisting of 500 respondents from Bangalore city, out of whom 270 were men

and 230 were women respondents who watched advertisements and who were above 18 years of age. University graduates and post graduates, house wives, working men and women comprised the sample. Finally, the data was collected and interpreted applying the Chi-Square test to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

Interpretation

Opinion on 'The sexual appeal is common in today's advertising world'

Responses		Women	Men	Total
SD	Frequency	4	6	10
	Percentage	1.7%	2.2%	2.0%
D	Frequency	29	18	47
	Percentage	12.6%	6.7%	9.4%
NR	Frequency	19	27	46
	Percentage	8.3%	10.0%	9.2%
A	Frequency	126	173	299
	Percentage	54.8%	64.1%	59.8%
SA	Frequency	52	46	98
	Percentage	22.6%	17.0%	19.6%
Total	Frequency	230	270	500
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Study Data*SD=strongly disagree, D=Disagree, NR=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=strongly agree

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.979	4	.062
Likelihood Ratio	8.982	4	.062
Linear-by-Linear Association	.147	1	.701
N of Valid Cases	500		

Source: Field Study Data

The above cross tabulation presents the information about opinion on ‘The erotic images of men and women are common in today's advertising world’. It is found that, 2 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 9.4 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 9.2 percent of the respondents were neutral with the statement, 59.8 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, and 19.6 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement ‘The sexual appeal is common in today's advertising world’.

It is found from the chi-square test that the difference in opinion about the statement is significant at ten percent level. Therefore, the majority of the respondents agreed with the statement ‘The sexual appeal is common in today's advertising world’.

The association test reveals that the difference in opinion about the statement between men and women is not significant even at ten percent level. Therefore, there was no significant difference of opinion between men and women about the statement ‘The sexual appeal is common in today's advertising world’.

Opinion on ‘Advertisements depicting the erotic images of men and women are interesting to watch’

Responses		Gender		Total
		Women	Men	
SD	Frequency	50	18	68
	Percentage	21.7%	6.7%	13.6%
D	Frequency	106	66	172
	Percentage	46.1%	24.4%	34.4%
NR	Frequency	35	30	65
	Percentage	15.2%	11.1%	13.0%
A	Frequency	30	133	163
	Percentage	13.0%	49.3%	32.6%
SA	Frequency	9	23	32
	Percentage	3.9%	8.5%	6.4%
Total	Frequency	230	270	500
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Study Data *SD=strongly disagree, D=Disagree, NR=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=strongly agree

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	93.354	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	98.885	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	81.137	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	500		

Source: Field Study Data

The above cross tabulation presents the information about opinion on ‘Advertisements depicting sexual appeal are interesting to watch’. It is found that, 13.6 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 34.4 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 13 percent of the respondents were neutral with the statement, 32.6 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, and 6.4 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement ‘Advertisements depicting sexual appeal are interesting to watch’.

It is found from the chi-square test that the difference in opinion about the statement is significant at five percent level. Therefore, respondents significantly differ in their opinion about the statement ‘Advertisements depicting sexual appeal are interesting to watch’.

The association test reveals that the difference in opinion about the statement between men and women is also significant at five percent level. Therefore, there was significant difference of opinion between men and women about the statement ‘Advertisements depicting sexual appeal are interesting to watch’.

Opinion on ‘The sexual appeal in advertisements lowers the brand image’

Responses	Gender		Total	
	Women	Men		
SD	Frequency	13	21	34
	Percentage	5.7%	7.8%	6.8%
D	Frequency	76	91	167
	Percentage	33.0%	33.7%	33.4%
NR	Frequency	50	47	97
	Percentage	21.7%	17.4%	19.4%
A	Frequency	72	90	162
	Percentage	31.3%	33.3%	32.4%

SA	Frequency	19	21	40
	Percentage	8.3%	7.8%	8.0%
Total	Frequency	230	270	500
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Study Data*SD=strongly disagree, D=Disagree, NR=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=strongly agree

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.237	4	.692
Likelihood Ratio	2.243	4	.691
Linear-by-Linear Association	.147	1	.702
N of Valid Cases	500		

Source: Field Study Data

The above cross tabulation presents the information about opinion on 'The sexual appeal in advertisements lowers the brand image'. It is found that, 6.8 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 33.4 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 19.4 percent of the respondents were neutral with the statement, 32.4 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, and 8 percent of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement 'The sexual appeal in advertisements lowers the brand image'.

It is found from the chi-square test that the difference in opinion about the statement is not significant at five percent level. Therefore, respondents more equally agreed the statement 'The sexual appeal in advertisements lowers the brand image'.

The association test reveals that the difference in opinion about the statement between men and women is not significant at five percent level. Therefore, there was no significant difference of opinion between men and women about the statement 'The sexual appeal in advertisements lowers the brand image'.

Conclusion

The present study is mainly focussed on perception on the use of sexual appeals in advertising and its impact on brand image. The major objective of the study was to study the usage of sexual appeals in advertising; to study the perception of people on the use of sexual appeals in advertising to examine the impact of sexual appeals in advertising on brand image.

Advertisement is necessary to provide the necessary information to customers to make them aware of the features of a product, benefits, price etc. The respondents are of the opinion that sexual appeal is common in present advertising world. And they were of the opinion that the sexual appeal in advertisements are not interesting to watch. The use of

sexual appeal lowers the brand image. Hence the present study strongly argues that the advertisers must focus on the product features, benefits, price instead of focusing on female models and figures. The advertisers need to concentrate more on creativity and should make the advertisement more attractive to people by making use of humour which is one of the most important advertising appeal. Advertisers need to focus on brand equity, brand loyalty, brand awareness which is some of the most important underlying elements of a brand. An advertisement must be such that it up holds the dignity of a brand.

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