

Effects of Sex Appeal in Advertisements on Consumer Buying Behavior in India

Chhavi¹, Syed Fazal Karim² and Vipul Jain³

^{1,2,3}Delhi School of Management Delhi Technological University

Abstract—In recent years, it is evidently seen that the use of erotic stimuli and sexual themes have increased in advertising methods. In India also where showing sexual content publically is a taboo, this increase is significant. Despite the common intolerance in society for these practices, such kinds of advertisements are huge successes on social platforms. There have been a lot of studies on effect of using sexual appeal in advertisements on consumer behavior. However, little research has been done on what exactly consumer thinks about such kind of advertisements and why such kind of advertising practices are gaining popularity in a country like India, where there is an overall negative attitude towards this topic. The aim of this paper is to identify whether there is a change in thinking of Indian consumer towards sexual content or the perspective of consumer has changed when it comes to viewing an advertisement

1. INTRODUCTION

Sex in Advertising is basically the use of sex appeal to sell a particular product or service. The use of sexual content in any advertisement can vary from highly overt to extremely subtle. Initially illustrations of attractive women were used on the posters of tobacco, tonics and saloons. Pearl tobacco in 1871 featured a naked maiden on its package cover. This was the first known use of sexual content in advertising.

Early twentieth century was the era of mass media and modern society was involved in consumption of goods opposite to production. Middle class people pursued materialistic pleasures and goods with an aim of owning an item. Consensus of public on nature of shopping slowly and gradually shifted from “need driven activity” to “an intrinsic feature of standard urban living”. The advertising industry grew manifolds.

“People are curious about sexuality”, this is the hypothesis on which sex in advertising is built on. Today’s consumer is more exposed to sexual content in advertisements than ever before. Generally nudity, romantic themes and attractive women are used in broadcast advertisements to draw the attention of consumers. In a country like India, where public consensus on this topic is negative yet advertisers seems to be in no mood to rectify erotic stimuli from the advertisements. Surprisingly this practice followed by the advertising and marketing experts seems to be apt and absolutely right in lieu to the success of such kind of advertisements.

There are numerous examples in Indian advertising industry which prove that “sex sells”. Slice Aamsutra, despite being a mango drink uses this practice in its each and every advertising campaign. It is a well-known fact that a mango drink has nothing to do with sex. The question is why this practice is so evident? Then again, the advertisements for men’s underwear beg a very similar question. VIP, Rupa and Amul Macho rule this department. All their advertising campaigns use sexual content or messages in one way or the other. An example without which this list of examples would be incomplete is Indian advertising’s favorite product in the world: AXE. With time we’ve grown immune to ads that abandon logic for the sake of that historic formula – empty a can of AXE onto your shaved torso and the hottest women within a 100-mile radius will fly at you from every direction.

Despite there is a common unacceptance of society for these practices yet such kind of advertisements are huge successes on social platforms. There have been a lot of studies on effect of using sexual appeal in advertisements on consumer behavior. The aim of this paper is to identify whether there is a change in thinking of Indian consumer towards sexual content or the perspective of consumer has changed when it comes to viewing an advertisement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been several researches ascertaining that advertisement with sexual appeal can increase consumers’ congeniality. A strong affirmative correlation is also found between the degree of how well an advertisement is liked with the amiability to the brand advertised [1, 2, 3, 4]. In short, adding sexual aspects can increase one’s likability of an advertisement and ultimately escalate liking to the brand advertised.

Advertising aims to persuade the way customers ponder themselves and how purchasing particular products can turn out to be helpful for them. The message expressed through advertising effects the buying decisions of customers [5]. Nonetheless, the advertising plea which has generated universal censure, and which has been stated as most unethical, is sex appeal. Belch and Belch (2004) [6] notes: the advertising appeals that have got the most reproach for being

in poor tang are those using sexual appeals or nudity. These methods are time and again used to get consumers' attention and may not even be appropriate to the product being advertised. Even if the sexual appeal connects with the product, people may be affronted by it. Sometimes people complain about both nudity in advertisements and sexually reminiscent advertisements (p.755).

According to Wikipedia, sex appeal refers to a person's ability to entice the sexual or erotic curiosity of another individual. The attraction can be physical or to such qualities in the environment in which they appear. The attraction may be to somebody looks, movements or to their voice or smell, above and beyond other factors. The attraction can be enhanced by a person's embellishments, attire, cologne, hair stylishness and whatsoever which can appeal the sexual interest of another individual. The competence of a person's corporeal and other capabilities to create a sexual curiosity in others is the base of their usage in advertising.

There are several discrepancies regarding what is being considered as sex appeal. Sex appeal in advertising is the usage of sexual or sensual descriptions to draw curiosity to a specific product, for purpose of sale. A study was performed and discovered four features of sexy commercials: bodily features of models, comportment/movement, closeness between models, and circumstantial features such as camera effects (p.267) [7]. They strived to find to find what people thought as sexy in advertising and the most generic referent was physical features (66%), followed by a model's actions and verbal and nonverbal communication (39%), relative features (26%), and proxemics (15%). They made an imperative note that what people stated as sexy differed gender to gender (p.269).

In an effort to attract customers, some advertisers have consistently pushed the boundaries of what is morally and socially tolerable. It line with this that, it was suggested that the increasing gathering in the advertising environment has made advertisers to endure to use sexual appeals and other methods that affront many people but catch the contemplation of customers and may even create advertising for their businesses [8]. Since the commencement of advertisements, sex appeal has often been exploited. The earliest forms of sex appeal in marketing are wood carvings and artworks of attractive women (often unclothed from the waist up), decorated posters, signs, and commercials for saloons, tonics, and tobacco. Sex appeals in advertising are used commonly and with cumulative explicitness. While the use of such explicit sex was improbable not many years ago, it now exemplifies part of the advertising landscape [9]. It is supposed that this form of appeal goes a long way in aiding advertisers accomplish their aims, "advertising research reveals that sexual requests are attention receiving, arousing, touching, persuading and notable" [10].

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on an empirical study of effects of sexual advertisements on consumers' buying behavior. The paper takes into consideration the positive as well as negative aspects of using sexual advertisements over normal advertisements. Primarily, the focus is on recognizing the influential reasons that affects the consumer buying behavior following sexual advertisements.

The data was collected through the source directly, i.e., Primary Data Collection was done. The data that has been collected directly from the source for a study purpose is called Primary Data. The data collected through the source was via a questionnaire or survey format. The questionnaire is one of the most significant and widely used data collection methods. A questionnaire is set of questions used for gathering information and data from individuals. The questionnaire has been designed keeping in view the general views and perceptions that a consumer has while watching sexual advertisements. The survey was specifically focused on respondents who are much into advertisements and are frequent buyers. Demographic factors such as age, income level, gender and profession have also been considered.

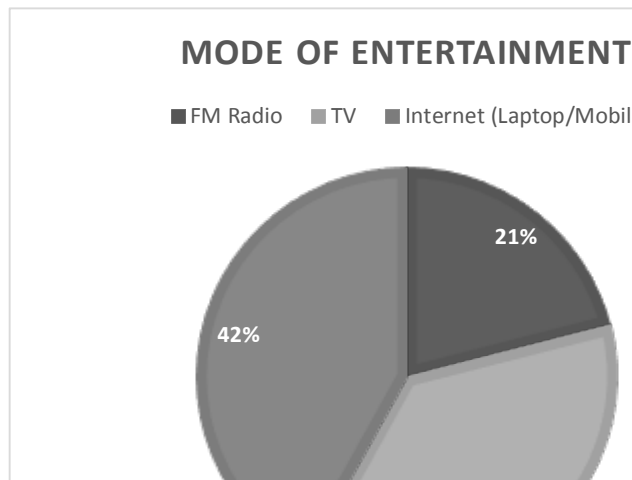
The questionnaire was based on a 5-Point Likert Scale. Likert Scale is a highly common and widely used scale for questionnaires that encourage the respondents to rank the options / quality from either high to low or low to high [11]. The 5-Point Likert Scale chosen for the study has labels attached to each point on the mentioned scale and the mid-point of the scale has been set as the point of neutrality. The label are as follows : 1 : Strongly Disagree ; 2 : Disagree ; 3 : Neutral ; 4 : Agree ; 5 : Strongly Agree.

The questionnaire was tested through a pilot study on 40 consumers. The pilot study helped in making the needed changes in the questionnaire and allowed the researchers to have a more clear knowledge of what consumers' perception is towards the usage of plastic money, thereby, leading to an improved questionnaire. The refined questionnaire was then sent to 300 eligible respondents out of which only 219 responses came back. Out of the received 219 responses, 19 responses had missing data. Therefore, only 200 responses qualified for the data analysis done. Therefore, overall response rate was 66.6%.

4. DATA REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Among 200 qualified respondents, 68% were male and 32% were female. Our sample was spread across different age groups. 63% belong to the age group of 20-30 years, 22% belong to the age group 30-40 years and the remaining 15% are from the age group of 40+ years. We did not question/consider responses from people belonging to the age group below 20 years, due to the nature of our topic.

Now, we questioned our respondents on certain factors such as viewing habits, behavioral aspects and more. When the respondents were asked about their preferred mode of entertainment, 21% answered FM Radio, 37% responded with Television and the remaining majority of 42% chose Internet (Laptop/Mobile).

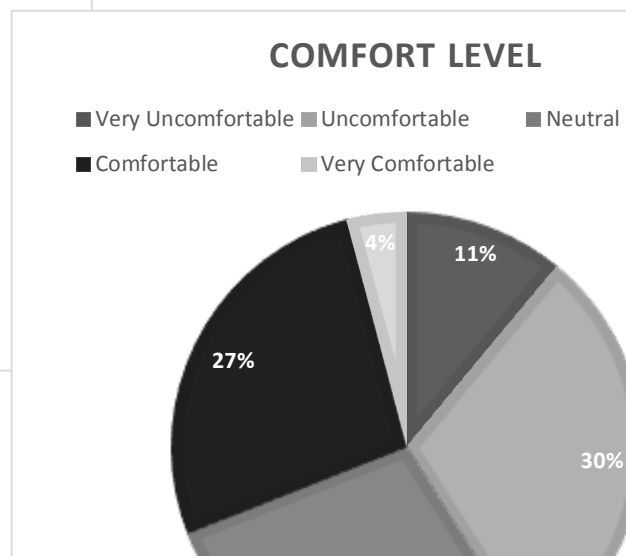


The sample was also questioned about their viewing timings in two ways – the preferred time to view and the amount of time spent in viewing. When asked about the preferred timing, a mere 7.5% answered morning, a substantial 22.5% chose the afternoon, surprisingly just 11% chose the evening time and a whopping 59% answered the night time. Regarding the second part i.e. the amount of time spent viewing their mode of entertainment, 28% replied 0-1 hours, 39% answered 1-3 hours and the remaining 33% chose 3+ hours.

Getting on topic, we asked whether people switch channels when such advertisements play. 83% responded with a yes and only 17% said no. Next we asked that, whether people feel that the nature of advertisements has grown to be more sexual/erotic in nature. As expected 71% said yes and 29% thought that it hadn't. As a follow up question, we asked on a scale of 1-5, how uncomfortable it made them. 11% chose very uncomfortable, 30% chose uncomfortable, 27% felt comfortable watching such ads, 4% were very comfortable and 28% weren't affected and felt neutral about such advertisements. Moving on to content, we asked how relevant they felt this content was to the product/service being marketed. This was again done on a scale of 1-5, 1 being very irrelevant and 5 being very relevant. Only 3% thought it was very irrelevant, 19% felt that it was irrelevant, 23% were indifferent, 39% thought that it was relevant and the remaining 16% thought that the advertisement really needed that nature of the content.

In addition to this we asked whether the same advertisement could have been done without using sexual content or innuendos. To this 69.6% said that it could have been done and 30.4% said it was essential. Moving on to the relation

between such content and the buying behavior, we categorized our question in 2 parts. We noticed that a majority of such advertisements were deodorant and perfume ads and the others were a smaller part. So we asked whether the sex appeal in deodorant advertisements attracted our respondents and gives the product an edge over others. To this a huge majority of 88.2% replied that it does and only 11.8% people said that they're unaffected. In the next part we asked the same question but in context of retail and FMCG (fast moving consumer goods). We asked whether the sex appeal in advertisements about clothing, food, drinks etc. were more attractive as compared to normal ads. To this an equally opposite response was gathered with 75.5% responding with a no, and 24.5% replying as a yes.



5. CONCLUSION

From the data analysis done on the respondents' answers, we found out that people of India have actually broadened their mindsets. With a majority of people feeling comfortable with erotic advertisements, the times have really changed. Our assumptions about the consumers, that they are still shy and do not accept of such advertisements, were shattered with these findings. But a change in mindset does not give a reason to exploit the consumer's desires. As our respondents replied too, that these sexual innuendos were not essential and the advertisements can be made without them too. So, we conclude that the effect of sex appeal in advertisements, neither has a negative effect (as we assumed), but nor it has a positive effect (as the advertisers feel), barring only one category i.e. the deodorants and perfumes. In this sector, the sex appeal in advertisements does seem to work for the benefit of the companies.

REFERENCES

- [1] Gelb, B. D., & Pickett, C. M. (1983). Attitude toward the ad: Links to humor and to advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, 12, 34-42.
- [2] Haley, Russell I.; Baldinger, Allan L. (1991) *The ARF Copy Research Validity Project*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol.31, April/May, p.11-32.
- [3] Weinberger, Marc G. and Leland Campbell (1991). "The Use and Impact of Humor in Radio Advertising," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 30(6), 44-52.
- [4] Zhang, Y. (1996), The effect of humor in advertising: An individual-difference perspective. *Psychol. Mark.*, 13: 531-545. doi: 10.1002/(SICI)1520-6793(199609)13:6<531::AID-MAR1>3.0.CO;2-9.
- [5] Ashwini Ambekar. (2009). *Advertising appeals*. Retrieved on May 2, 2012 from <http://www.articleswave.com/advertising-articles/types-of-advertising-appeals.html>.
- [6] Belch, G.,and Belch.M. (2004). *Advertising and promotion: An integrated marketing communication perspective*. Sixth edition.
- [7] Reichert, T. and Ramirez. A. (2000). *Defining Sexually Oriented Appeals in Advertising: a Grounded Theory*
- [8] Belch, G.,and Belch.M. (2004). *Advertising and promotion: An integrated marketing communication perspective*. Sixth edition.
- [9] Shimp, T. A. (2003). *Advertising, promotion and supplemental aspects of integrated marketing communication*. Sixth edition.
- [10] Traudt, P. J. (2005). *Media, audiences, effects: An introduction to the study of media content and audience analysis*. Pearson Education, Inc.
- [11] Shimp, T. A. (2003). *Advertising, promotion and supplemental aspects of integrated marketing communication*. Sixth edition.
- [12] Albaum, G. The Likert scale revisited: An alternate version. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 1997, 39, 331-349