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## Impact of Viewer's Perception on Effectiveness of Couple Image Sex Appeal Advertisements

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### Abstract

The present study examined the 'Influence of Youth's general perception towards use of sex appeal in advertisements on effectiveness of Advertisements using varying degree of intimacy between couple images as a tool for promotion. General Linear Model MANOVA was applied and results indicate that perception influences the effectiveness of Advertisements at multivariate level. At univariate level the influence proved significant for Wild and Mild stimuli not for moderate appeal.

**Keywords:** Perception, Couple Image sexual stimuli, Advertisement Recognition, Brand Recall, TV Advertisements.

### 1. Introduction

There is a visible trend which can be observed even by a lay man in the mainstream Indian advertising, i.e., projecting sexy models quantitatively in commercials irrespective of the relevance of the product or service advertised. This ongoing trend gained not only eyeballs but controversy as well. According to ASCI, Complaints for deodorant advertisements using sex appeal have been high in the last two years and recently the information and broadcasting ministry has ordered the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) to take action against some deodorant advertisements which found to be obscene and also ordered television channels to take down several deodorant ads that it finds offensive and overtly sexual portrayal of women. India is a potential growing market for international marketers as it has the largest youth market with significant disposable income. Youngsters in India have been seen as an adult of mixed properties like dynamism, vulnerability, idealism and fun seeking. Exploring How far advertisers successful in reaching out the target young adults with their brands by using sex as a tool in the noisy environment and youth's perception towards the ongoing trend of application of sexual themes as a communication strategy in mainstream advertising and its influence on the effectiveness of advertisements will be of immense help for international advertisers to decide to what degree and form of sex appeal will turn up their targets to brand users.

### 2. Review of Literature

Previous decade paved way for an increase in sexual stimuli advertisements in number and content. This was very well augmented by the advertisers (Wise, King & Merenski, 1974; Soley et al., 1986; Soley & Reed, 1988; Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990; Reichert et al., 1999, Kilbourne, 2005). Researchers identified Suggestive behavior, Interaction, Nudity and factors like Setting, Context are some of the forms of sexual appeal. Sex appeals can be defined as message in sense of brand information or an appeal in any context which are associated with sexual information (Reichert et al., 2001). Sex appeal is also defined as the amount of nudity or sexual lucidity (ibid). Sex appeal is defined as sexual presentation of a product or service with the sexual motives or the exploitation of the female or male body (Richmond and Hartman, 1982. According to Shimp (1993) using sexual components to increases attention, interest, involvement or recall of the message can be qualified as sexual appeal. Sexiness of clothing, amount of sexual imagery, body language, wording, and amount of nudity, were perceived sexiness (Goodrich, 1999).

Studies on Sexual appeal showed mixed result. Sex appeal is more engaging, involving, interesting, entertaining, attention grabbing, favourable and original than non sexual ads (Bello et.al., 1983, Dudeley, 1999; Jude & Alexander, 1983; Severn, Belch & Belch 1990, Reichert & alvaro,2001; Reichert et.al.,2001). Sexual stimuli had led to increased attention and recognition which was validated with empirical evidences by various researchers (Vezina and Paul, 1997, Chestnut et al, 1977, Reid & Soley, 1981, 1983, de Pelsmacker and Geuens, 1998; Lombardot, 2007; Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes, 2006). (Groza, Nicoleta and Cuesta, Jordi Fernandez, 2011) reported that positive feelings towards sex appeal Advertisements generate sexiest humour and perceived as funny, harmless, credible and less offensive There are equal numbers of studies on negative effect of sexual appeal. Steadman (1969) found that Sex appeal may act as detractor deviating the viewer from brand which may result in lower brand recall and generate poorer product and manufacturer perceptions, this effect is multiplied if the sexual explicitness is not matched well with product advertised (Peterson and Kerin (1977), Alexander and Judd, 1978; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Judd & Alexander, 1983; Reichert & Alvaro, 2001; Weller et al., 1979).

### *2.1 Perception towards Sexual Appeal in Advertisements*

Research showed that there is a predominant opinion among viewers, particularly among females, that there is an undue use of sex appeal in advertisements (Wise, King and Merenski 1974, Treise and weigold, 1994, Raghbir Singh and Sandeep Vij, 2007, Wise, King and Merenski 1974). It was found that females seem to find interaction between couples as sexual but physical description of the model was sexual for males (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). Asian countries seem to be more conservative than US with respect to nudity in advertisements (Frith and Mueller, 2010) but contrary to this, (Fang Liu, Hong Cheng and Jianyao Li, 2009) reported that Chinese consumers hold similar perception towards sex appeal Advertisements as US consumers and even more favourable perception than Australian consumers. Marketers often emphasize on sexuality and physical attractiveness in an attempt to sell products (Fox, 1996). According to Shimp (2003) sex appeal has found more patronage from the advertisers because sex appeal acts as an initial attention to lure the ad, which is referred to as the stopping power of sex (Yovovich 1983). It also heightens the ability of the viewer to recall the message advertised as sex is arousing, easy to relate, emotionally inducing, and most of all memorable, which in turn can create stimulation and desire for the product (Bumler 1999). Sex sells, if tastefully done and it sells at the consequence of the controversy (Treise and weigold, 1994). Indian consumers are more receptive and responsive to appeal which they can relate to their senses (Anil Mishra, 2009). Furthermore, it was found that Males perceived fascinating factor as more important in the advertising appeal than the females but when it comes to sensational factor both perceived it to be more important. Recently, (Tuhin Chattopadhyay, 2010) established that many Indian teenage boys' motives for their purchase decisions are emotional and their feelings about a brand are more important than knowledge of its features or attributes.

Apt usage of sexual appeal will lead to more positive effect than non sexual appeals (Heckler et al., 2001). Individuals not only prefer provocative sexual stimuli in ads in general (Pope et al., 2004) but also show a favourable response and intention to purchase (Grazer et al., 1995). Peterson and Kerin (1977) found that seductive or decorative model was perceived most favourably by all respondents than nude model who was perceived as least appealing and the product of lower quality and the company as least reputable. Overt sex appeal is less effective to non sexual appeal in brand and appeal evaluation (Steadman, 1969, Courtney & Whipple, 1983). Use of high sexual theme in print advertisement was not well received and was viewed as less ethically correct than use of a mild sexual version of the advertisement (Henthorne and LaTour, 1994).

Researchers have seen the effect of sex appeal on Ad effectiveness and gender difference in responses to different degrees of sex appeal (Belch et al., 1981, Jude & Alexander,1983; LaTour, 1990, LaTour & Henthorne,1993; Peterson & Kerin,1977; Sciglimpaglia et al., 1979, Simpson et al., 1996; Smith, Hautgvedt, Jadrich &Anton, 1995, Henthorne et al., 1990; Elliott et al., 1995; Jones et al., 1998; Fisher & Byrne,1978; Rubinsky, Eckerman, Rubinsky & Hoover, 1987,Orth and Holancova, 2004; Se Hoon Jeong and Yoo Ri Hwang, 2005, Putrevu, 2008; Sengupta and Dahl, 2008) or under conditions like low / high involvement , low / high Need for cognitions (Severn et al., 1990, Sanjay Putrevu., 2008), low / high arousal (LaTour, Pitts and Snook-Luther,1990). Prior studies have explored perception as a response

(dependent) variable and sex appeal in ad stimuli as Independent variable. Not much research work has been reported where influence of perception towards use of sex appeal in TV advertisements on Ad effectiveness with reference to India. It is worth citing note here that after studying the television images of women, (Malhotra & Rogers, 2001) found that the images are more openly sexual and did not match the reality of women's bodies in India. Majority of college boys and girls are of in the opinion that advertisements are not representative of the personality of Indian women as women in advertisements attired in western clothes and do not depicts Indian culture (Aruna, Nidhi Kotwaland Shradha Sahni,2008). These Gen Y college students seems to more sensitive to the use of certain appeals like sex (Maciejewski, 2004). Interestingly, men like appeals using sexy woman regardless of their moral pre-disposition (ibid) where as women reacted tensed seeing such image (Lambiase and Rechiert, 2003). To conclude, the use of sexual appeal in advertising continuous to be a controversial topic and it is evident from the variability of the previous studies' findings. Though researches have contributed much on this topic yet little agreement has been reached concerning the appropriateness and effectiveness of sex appeal used in Advertisements. The lack of consensus creates space for researchers to explore the effect of sex appeals in advertisements. The current study tries to fill in the gap by studying the influence of perception towards use of sex appeal in TV advertisements on advertisement effectiveness with reference to India.

### 3. Methodology

After reviewing the past research studies it was found that most of the effectiveness studies of sex appeal have opted stimuli containing the print image of sexy female or male model fully clothed, partially clothed or nude. Only few researchers (Fisher & Byrne,1978; Rubinsky, Eckerman, Rubinsky & Hoover, 1987, Severn et al., 1990; Smith et al., 1995, Reichert et al., 2001) have taken couple images as experimental instrument. Literature shows there are significant amount of research studies conducted on the effect of sex appeal, most of them are western studies and few studies have been done in China & Korea. Not many studies have looked at the influence of perception towards use of sexual appeal in advertisements on Ad effectiveness incorporating full TV commercials showing couples (Low degree of intimacy with partially clothed / mild sex appeal and high degree of intimacy with less clothed / wild sex appeal) as stimuli that too in Indian context. Hence, generalizing the results of previous studies to India will make less or no sense. All the above lead this study to look at the Influence of perception towards use of sexual appeal in advertisements in general on Ad effectiveness incorporating couple images containing varying degree of intimacy and nudity as stimuli in order to fill up the gap found in literature.

#### 3.1 'Perception' 'Effectiveness' 'Recognition & Recall test'

Perception towards usage of sex appeal in advertisements is measured on a 5 point Likert scales using statements relating to attractiveness, acceptance level, reachability, receptiveness and persuasion (Impulsive/boycott brands) of sex appeal. Advertising Effectiveness is a degree to which an advertisement achieves its much-needed objective of reaching the eyeballs and catching the target minds. Hence, this study adopted Ad Recognition and Ad (Brand) recall tests to quantify effectiveness of an Ad The reason for opting Ad Recognition and Ad (Brand) recall tests measures is not only because these measures are used widely in advertisement appeal studies but also accepted as most reliable metrics (Steadman, 1969, Chestnut et al., 1977, Reid & Soley, 1981, Richmond & Hartman., 1982, Courtney and Whipple., 1983, Tinkham & Reid, 1988, Severn et al., 1990). To conduct recognition Test the participants are shown an Advertisement and asked whether he / she remember seeing it and can remember any of its salient points and as part of recall test the participants are asked to recall the Ad or brand name.

#### 3.2 Selection of Ad Stimuli

Advertisements used in the study were selected at Random. As a first step in selection of ADs, all the Couple Image Sexual appeal ADs aired in popular channels, for a four week period (December 2010), were pooled. These pooled commercials were later shown to a small group of 30 respondents and were asked to rate these ADs, on a five point scale, on the basis of Intimacy and Nudity. All ADs with mean score of 4 and above were grouped as Wild Appeal, ones with a mean score of 3 to 4 were grouped as Moderate and

the ones with a mean score of 2 to 3 were grouped as Mild appeal. One AD was selected at random from each cluster or group and these were the 3 Ads (Ref Figure 1, 2 & 3) used for the final study.

### *3.3 Method of Data Collection*

Data were collected from 350 respondents collected from in and around Chennai City by employing a non-probability sampling method. But the final sample for the study was 280 and a structured Interview schedule was the instrument used for data collection. To encourage the respondents to give true response, they were met at their homes, office cabins and college class rooms (after office or college hours with the permission of the officials or staffs) to create the much needed privacy and feasible experiment environment for the study. In the first half an hour session the respondents were asked to reveal their general perception towards sexual appeal in advertisements. Perception was measured on a 5 point Likert scale which had a reliability of 0.793. In the next 20 minutes, the selected ADS' (3 in number) brands were concealed and were played with a help of Laptop and Projector to the respondents after which they were asked to recognise the AD and recall the AD with the brand. Based on these tests results Effectiveness score were derived. MANOVA Multivariate Analysis of Variance was used to see the influence of perception on different sexual stimuli ADS. An average customer is exposed to many types and level of stimuli that was why this methodology was adopted for the study.

## **4. Findings and Discussion**

### *4.1 Perception towards Sexual Appeal in TV Commercials*

Table 1 is about the frequency of the respondents' perception towards sexual appeal in advertisements and how the sample is distributed between favorable not so favorable categories. From the table 1 it can be seen that 60.7% of the respondents have a favourable perception towards sexual stimuli advertisements in Televisions. Advertisers can take this as a positive sign as majority of the young respondents are liberals towards these types of advertisements there will be less resistance for sex appeal advertisements and advertisers can effectively use sexual stimuli to promote their products.

### *4.2 Effectiveness of Sexual Appeal in TV Commercials*

Table 2 is about the effectiveness of Wild, Moderate and Mild sex appeal TV commercials among the respondents. It can be seen that from that table that Wild sexual appeal advertisements is effective among 29.6% of the respondents, Mild sexual appeal advertisements is effective among 16.8% of the respondents while Moderate sex appeal advertisement is effective among an overwhelming 53.9% of the respondents signaling that moderate appeal Advertisements reach better than the Wild and Mild ones.

### *4.3 Impact of Perception on Couple Image Sexual Appeal TV Advertisements*

General Linear Model MANOVA was applied to study the effect of Perception on Effectiveness of different Couple Image Sexual Appeal.

HO<sub>1</sub> There is no influence of perception on Effectiveness of Sex Appeal Ads

From Table 3 it can be said HO<sub>1</sub> is not supported, there is an influence of Perception on Effectiveness at the multivariate level. The interesting finding is that Perception has an influence on Wild and Mild appeals but it has no influence on Moderate appeal at Univariate level. The empirical evidence of this study indicate that people those who perceive sex appeal more favourably in general will likely to exhibit more favourable responses regardless of the level of sexual appeal in the advertisements. This is evident as the mean scores of the high perception group in all three cases are more than the low perception group. This is in turn throws up an important message to the advertisers that standardizing the message strategy using sex appeal might be effective and elicit positive responses among the favourable group but the same might be counterproductive with the unfavorable group. To eliminate such risk advertisers can use moderate sex appeal in their promotional announcements, which is found to be effective among audience irrespective of their perceptual differences (Ref means scores).

## **5. Conclusion**

The current study has explored the Perceptual difference among youth and from the results, it can be said that majority of the respondents have a favourable perception towards sexual stimuli in advertisements. In general, sex appeal Advertisements are effective among the respondents, more specifically, Moderate sex appeal is more effective when compared to Wild and Mild ones. Perception seems to have an influence on the Effectiveness of sexual stimuli advertisements. Therefore, the success of the advertisements not only lies in the careful planning and creative execution of the message content but also depends on the audience to whom it has been targeted. Responsibility of the advertisers goes beyond designing an Advertisement campaign in country like India, where conservative mentality and liberal perception prevail simultaneously. From the results it can be concluded that Perception has an influence on the Effectiveness of different couple image sexual stimuli. Success of a Sexual Stimuli lies on the Perception of the customers to Ads. Favorable perception may lead to higher effectiveness of the stimuli and vice versa. Therefore marketers have to concentrate on the perception of the customers before constructing the stimulus.

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Table 1 Perception towards sexual appeal in TV commercials

Perceptual Group	Frequency	Percentage
Favourable	160	60.7

Not so favourable	110	39.3
Total	280	100.0

Table 2 Effectiveness of sexual appeal TV commercials

Effectiveness	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
	Wild		Moderate		Mild	
Effective	83	29.6	151	53.9	47	16.8
Not so effective	197	70.4	129	46.1	233	83.2
Total	280	100	280	100	280	100

Table 3 Effect of Perception on Couple Image Sexual Appeals

Couple Image Sexual Appeal	Perception	Mean	Effect	Value	F	Sig.	
Wild Appeal	Low	1.01	Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.672	188.501	.000
	High	1.32		Wilks' Lambda	.328	188.501	.000
	Total	1.18		Hotelling's Trace	2.049	188.501	.000
Moderate Appeal	Low	1.67	Perception	Roy's Largest Root	2.049	188.501	.000
	High	1.86		Pillai's Trace	.048	4.606	.004
	Total	1.78		Wilks' Lambda	.952	4.606	.004
Mild Appeal	Low	.45	Perception	Hotelling's Trace	.050	4.606	.004
	High	.92		Roy's Largest Root	.050	4.606	.004
	Total	.71					

Table 4 Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (Individual effect)

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects (Individual effect)						
Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	Wild	6.744	1	6.744	4.391	.037
	Moderate	2.484	1	2.484	1.353	.246
	Mild	15.356	1	15.356	13.519	.000
Intercept	Wild	374.602	1	374.602	243.905	.000
	Moderate	860.055	1	860.055	468.501	.000
	Mild	130.556	1	130.556	114.934	.000

Perception	Wild	6.744	1	6.744	4.391	.037
	Moderate	2.484	1	2.484	1.353	.246
	Mild	15.356	1	15.356	13.519	.000
Error	Wild	426.966	278	1.536		
	Moderate	510.341	278	1.836		
	Mild	315.787	278	1.136		
Total	Wild	825.000	280			
	Moderate	1395.000	280			
	Mild	474.000	280			
Corrected Total	Wild	433.711	279			
	Moderate	512.825	279			
	Mild	331.143	279			
a. R Squared = .016 (Adjusted R Squared = .012)						
b. R Squared = .005 (Adjusted R Squared = .001)						
c. R Squared = .046 (Adjusted R Squared = .043)						





After seeing the visual clipping answer the following:

i) Did you remember seeing this Commercial?

[  ] Yes [  ] No

ii) Name the Commercial / Brand

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Figure 1. Wild Ad Stimulus Used in the Study



Figure 2. Moderate Ad Stimulus Used in the Study



After seeing the visual clipping answer the following questions:  
i) Did you remember seeing this commercial?  
[ ] Yes [ ] No  
ii) Name the Commercial / Brand

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Figure 3. Mild Ad Stimulus Used in the Study

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