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# **A Study of the Effectiveness of Using Sexual Appeals In-store in the Fashion Industry**

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# **A Study of the Effectiveness of Using Sexual Appeals In-store in the Fashion Industry**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Sexual appeal is one of the most common and widely used strategies in mainstream consumer advertising. The use of sexual appeals in advertisements seems to be increasingly popular today. Upon the effectiveness of sexual appeals elicited, an apparent fashion retail store has started to adopt this strategy and communicated in-store using posters and also decorative female and male models. However, there is a lack of academic literature on sexual appeals being communicated in a physical store environment using models to attract attention, despite the growing trend. Therefore, this research aims to provide a holistic view of the effectiveness of using sexual appeals in the fashion store as a medium. The research uses literature from advertising context and examined if similar results can be produced in a store medium. In-depth interviews and focus group interviews are used to generate detailed information and responses. Findings showed that the use of decorative female models in suggestive dressing as in-store sexual appeal does create initial attention. However, attitude towards the store, the brand and behavioral intentions varies by gender of respondents and at time individuals.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The fashion retail industry is one of the most volatile industries with increasing number of new retail brands in the marketplace (Foxall and Newman, 2003). Driven by the need to maximize profit, managers often adopt various promotional strategies to gain consumer's attention and to drive them into the stores. Frequently, managers often introduce in-store promotions and price markdown as in-store marketing strategies (Fam *et al*, 2011). However, due to highly competitive market, these in-store marketing strategies are relatively common in the marketplace. Retail stores are advised to enhance in-store customer experience instead, to achieve competitive advantage and differentiate from competitors (Bagdare and Jain, 2009; Berry *et al*, 2002; Shaw and Levin, 2002).

Advertising, as one of the promotional tools, is an important element in global marketing strategy (Cheng *et al*, 2009). As a major technique in advertising, sexual appeals have been widely used in mainstream consumer advertising (Cheng *et al*, 2009; Richmond and Hartman, 1982). Heckler *et al* (2001: p.14) defined sexual appeals as "brand information messages in advertising context that are associated with sexual information represented as either images, verbal elements, or both." As sexual appeals advertising show effective marketing communication strategy in generating readership and responses, it is of particular interest to implement sexual appeals concept into the physical store environment. Besides, it is also of particular interest in this dissertation as



seeing one of the fashion retail brand, Abercrombie and Fitch successfully implement this strategy to sell its products. Moreover, sexual appeals in advertising proved to be effective in gaining consumer's attention. Dudley (1999) claimed that nudity results in more attention-getting, interesting, and a more distinctive brand. Individuals would pay higher attention to when advertisements that is strongly emotional. Hence, in order to break through the clutter fashion retail marketplace, retail stores required a distinctiveness marketing strategy that would capture consumer's attention and evoke emotional responses toward the store; thus, leading to behavioral intentions. As a result, sexual appeals are implemented into retail stores, using decorative female models in suggestive dressing in order to produce similar effectiveness in print advertisement medium. For examples, female models wearing tight-fitted tube dress and mini-skirts.

This dissertation discusses the effectiveness of using sexual appeals in fashion retail stores, including the cognitive, affective and conative effects. As there was no previous academic research on consumers' attitudes toward in-store sexual appeals and the effectiveness of implementing sexual appeals, using decorative female models in a physical store environment, the study refers to literatures regarding sexual appeals in advertising and also in-store customer experiences. Therefore, this research focuses on providing a holistic view of the effectiveness of in-store sexual appeal concept and consumer's attitudes toward the store.

To this end, a review of the literature on fashion retailing sector will be followed by the emergence of shock appeals and research on sexual appeals in advertising. Following this, to examine consumer's responses toward in-store sexual appeal, a methodology section will discuss the research design and how the interviews are carried out respectively. Next, the data collected through two types of interviews, focus group and in-depth interviews would be analyzed and then are discussed alongside with literature in the discussion section. Limitations are then addressed as there are several shortcomings in this carried out research. Managerial implications and future research suggestions are also listed out. Lastly, this dissertation will end with a conclusion to summarize the whole research.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the emergence of shock advertising appeal and the increasing use of this appeal in a saturated media environment. Sexual appeal is known as one of the most widely used and popular shock appeal tactic. Hence, this paper solely focuses on sexual appeal marketing tactic. In order to gain deeper understanding of what is a sexual appeal, various dimensions that constitute to the definition are also explored. Next, the effects of using sexual appeal are identified in terms of cognitive, affective and conative effects. Lastly, this chapter also addresses gender differences in responses to

the definition of sexual appeal and responses toward product congruency with sexual appeal in advertisement.

## **2.2 Retail Experience**

Young consumers have become consumer trendsetters as their purchasing power increases rapidly than any other age segment of the population (Bagdare and Jain, 2009). Growing purchasing power, coupled with changing lifestyle has change consumer's expectations on retail experiences and motives for buying decisions (Bagdare and Jain, 2009). Dholakia (1999) identified three dimensions of shopping motivations – utilitarian motivation, hedonic motivation and social interaction motivation. Utilitarian motive refers to consumers' retail store visits for the purpose of product acquisition, which is conceptually equal to extrinsic shopping motivation. On the other hand, hedonic motive, also known as intrinsic shopping motivation indicates shopping as pleasure and enjoyment activity. Lastly, the social interaction motive refers to having interactions with family members and affiliation. Today, consumers not only shop for product acquisition, but also for pleasure, stress relief and fun purposes (Kim and Jin, 2001). Eastlick and Feinberg (1999) view shopping motives as a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. Thus, consumers expect both hedonic and utilitarian value to be present when shopping in-store as consumers are developing new tastes, preferences and buying habits.

Furthermore, the fashion retail industry is one of the most dynamic and volatile industry (Foxall and Newman, 2003). Fashion retailers often compete in a highly competitive market with increasing number of new retail brands in the marketplace, targeting the same audience. Driven by the need to maximize profit and to stand out from the crowd, customer experience is a major tool to achieve competitive advantage in all industries (Bagdare and Jain, 2009; Berry *et al*, 2002; Shaw and Levin, 2002). Hence, majority of fashion retailers are shifting their focus from mere transactions to building lasting relationships by providing in-store shopping experiences. Bagdare and Jain (2009) pointed out several factors that determine customer experience in new format retail stores – store atmospherics, customer service, visualscape, customer delight, merchandise and convenience. The authors also added that experience in new format stores may be interesting, entertaining, pleasurable, memorable or beyond expectations (Bagdare and Jain, 2009). Alongside with consumers' heightened desire for shopping excitement, Buchanan *et al* (1999) suggest that innovative design of store atmospherics, such as store design, ambience, music, themes and decor are able to evoke positive feelings within the shopper.

### **2.3 Emergence of Shock Advertising**

According to Lasn (1999), consumers are exposed to an estimated of 3,000 advertisements per day. In today's increasingly cluttered and information-rich environment, advertisers attempt to seek ways to break through the media clutter, get

noticed and draw people's attention to their messages. "To make advertising appeals more distinctive and hence, perhaps more persuasive, advertisers frequently use dramatic emotional ads – messages designed to 'shock the emotions and make the brain itch'" (Moore, in Moore and Harris, 1996: p. 37).

In the recent trend, shock advertising is one of the marketing communication strategies which has been widely and increasingly being adopted. Shock advertising appeals attempt to shock or surprise the viewers by deliberately, rather than inadvertently, violating the norms of societal values and personal ideals (Dahl *et al*, 2003). Norm violation can be defined as breaching shared expectations and range of acceptable behaviors that people develop through the process of social learning (Dahl *et al*, 2003; Sherif and Sherif, 1969).

Numerous authors often credited Benetton Company as the originator of using shock appeals concept during the 1980s (Vezina and Paul, 1997; Evans and Sumandeeep, 1993). Benetton uses provocative and controversial images by stating their concern in raising awareness and drawing audience's attention to social issues, such as racism and religion issues, and not solely on clothes. For example, one of Benetton's advertisements featured a black woman breast-feeding a white baby to raise social awareness in racism (Vezina and Paul, 1997). As a result of applying shock tactics in message content or images, some of Benetton's advertisements have been awarded for heightening public awareness regarding social issues (Dahl *et al*, 2003). However, the company also faced

public criticism for using such controversial images to send messages regarding social concerns (Evan and Sumandeeep, 1993). Benetton advertisements have proven that the use of shocking content and norm violation attempt are able to draw the public's attention to the advertisement. Following Benetton's example, many other companies adopted similar approach in advertising their products or services, especially the fashion companies such as French Connection, Diesel, Calvin Klein and Yves Saint Laurent (Vezina and Paul, 1997).

The use of controversial and offensive advertising tactics became more popular in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century due to the amount of advertisements consumers are exposed to. Moreover, companies witnessed successful patterns of gaining consumer's attention through shocking stimuli (Dahl *et al*, 2003; Lambiase and Reichert, 2003; Sengupta and Dahl, 2009).

Dahl *et al* (2003) explored the effectiveness of three distinct communication strategies – shock, fear and informational appeals in HIV/ AIDS prevention context. Shocking advertising content was found to be more superior in its ability to attract attention and facilitate memory for the advertisement compared to the non-shocking content (Dahl *et al*, 2003). McGuire (1978) also stated that shocking stimuli indeed attract attention and facilitate message comprehension and elaboration, enhance message retention and influence behavior. Hence, it can be concluded that distinct advertisements possess

higher possibility to attract attention; more easily memorize and easily retrieved from the memory (Childers and Houston, 1984).

Previous research identified sexual connotations, fear appeals, sexist, cultural insensitivity, personal subject matter and nudity as offensive advertising (Prendergast et al, 2002; Phau and Prendergast, 2001; Waller, 1999). In later research, Dahl *et al* (2003) classified shock advertising into seven types of shock appeals – disgusting images, sexual references, profanity or obscenity, vulgarity, impropriety, moral offensiveness and religious taboos. For detailed explanation and examples of the types of shock appeals, refer to Table 1 in Appendix A. It is contended that most of the appeals that previous researchers perceived as offensive appeared in Dahl *et al*'s (2003) classification of shock appeals.

Benady (2003) indicated that shock advertising artificially creates controversy in order to be bold and rebellious. Among the seven types of shock appeals, none has garnered as much controversy as sexual appeals. Advertisers are increasingly making use of non-subtle, gratuitous sexual content and images that many are likely to regard as being unnecessarily explicit and irrelevant to the advertised product (Dahl and Sengupta, 2008). Furthermore, Price (2002) also claimed that sexual appeal has become one of the most popular and effective tactics in mainstream consumer advertising in most of the Western countries. Based on the increasing trend of “sex sells”, this paper focuses on the use sexual appeal as an advertising and marketing tactic.

## **2.4 Sexual Appeal in Advertising**

As mentioned earlier, sexual appeals are fairly common and have been widely used in mainstream consumer advertising (Reichert *et al*, 1999; Soley and Reid, 1988; Price, 2002). For examples, Gucci Envy perfume advertisement depicts sexualized images and Calvin Klein jeans advertisement features models in suggestive posture. In a broad sense, 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). Sexual information refers to “any representation that portrays or implies sexual interest, behavior, or motivation” and is often represented as either images, verbal elements, or both (Harris, 1994: p. 206). Despite their prevalence, there has been little conceptual discussion regarding what actually constitutes a sexually oriented appeal. Sexual content can vary in form and meaning. Lambiase and Reichert (2003) have identified five common types of sexual information in advertising – Nudity, sexual behavior, physical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds.

### **2.4.1 Nudity**

The term nudity does not necessarily imply that models are completely unclothed. Generally, nudity refers to the amount and style of clothing worn by models (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). The authors also added that displays of bodies constitute a crucial source of sexual information (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). In a recent study, 144



undergraduate students were asked to identify characteristics of an advertisement that made receivers perceived as sexual (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). More than 65 percent of the respondents perceived physical aspects of people, which refers to the physiques and revealing clothing as important determinant of sexual in advertising. Reichert and Ramirez (2000) claimed that clothing was the most frequently mentioned physical feature, followed by physical attractiveness and body. Common responses mentioned were mini-skirts, tight tops, muscular arms, bikinis, bare midriffs and lingerie.

As nudity is often operationalized as models in various stages of undress, Soley and Reid (1988) identified four levels of dressing – demure, suggestive, partially-clad and nude. Demure dress is defined as “everyday dress” which includes walking shorts, but exclude mini-skirts, short-shorts and underwear (Soley and Reid, 1988). Suggestive dress is often represented by clothing which partially expose the upper body, such as unbuttoned blouses which partially expose cleavage, tight-fitting clothing that accentuates the body and mini-skirts (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003; Soley and Reid, 1988). Furthermore, models are considered partially clad if they are shown in underwear or bathing suits, and models that are not wearing clothing to full-frontal nudity are coded as nude (Soley and Reid, 1988). However, complete nudity is extremely rare in mainstream advertising. Thus, nudity is often represented by side and back shots of the model, frontal nudity from the waist up or tub and shower scenes (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003).

### **2.4.2 Sexual Behavior**

Although sexual content in mainstream advertising omitted the sexual act, it does still include sexually provocative behavioral displays, such as model's movements and poses, and verbal and non-verbal communication (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). In Reichert and Ramirez (2000) study, sexual behavior was the second most mentioned sexual stimuli category identified by the respondents. According to Lambiase and Reichert (2003), sexual behavior can be woven into advertisements in two ways, as individual behavior and interpersonal interaction.

In the first form of behavior, models communicate sexual interest or attempt to elicit sexual arousal through flirting behavior. For instance, exchange eye contact with the viewers, inviting smiles and moving provocatively. Reichert and Ramirez (2000) also added that act of unbuttoning clothing, rolling the pelvis and tilting or cocking the head to expose the neck are identified as provocative or inviting behaviors and indicative of flirting. For example, the Calvin Klein jeans commercial featured Brooke Shields in tight fitting jeans, with body position and voices saying the statement, "Do you know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing" contributed to the construction of sexiness in the advertisement (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). On the other hand, the second form of behavior, interpersonal interaction involves two or more models engage in sexual contact in various degrees of intimacy. The degree of explicitness and intimacy can vary from portrayals of voyeurism like a man watching over a woman, to simply

displays of affection such as holding hands, to more intimate contact such as kissing and to inferred intercourse (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003; Reichert and Ramirez, 2000).

### **2.4.3 Physical Attractiveness**

Ashmore, Longo and Solomon (1992) classified physical attractiveness into six different categories – classic beauty, cuteness, sex kitten, sensuality, girl-next-door, and trendy. Respondents claimed that sexual, cute and trendy images of female physical attractiveness are easier to differentiate among the six mentioned categories (Ashmore *et al*, 1996). In a more recent study, Reichert and Ramirez (2000) elaborated attractiveness as reference to the models' nature attractiveness which incorporates facial beauty, complexion, hair and physique. According to Buss (1994), physical attractiveness among humans is a trait that is fundamental for predicting interpersonal attraction and mate selection. For this reason, physically attractive models or decorative female models are often considered examples of sex in advertising. However, physical attractiveness is not one-dimensional, but as an integral component of representations of sex in advertising especially in advertisements featuring interpersonal attraction (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003).

### **2.4.4 Sexual Referents**

Sexual referents refer to verbal elements or mixture of verbal and visual message elements that subtly refer to sex or that trigger ideas about sex in a person's mind

(Reichert, 2002; Lambiase and Reichert, 2003; Reid, Salmon and Soley, 1984). Bello et al (1993) connoted sexual referents as “implicit” because references to sex are implied or subtle. For examples, sexual innuendo and double entendre. In comparison, these suggestive images are less concrete compared to nudity. Similarly, Richmond and Hartman (1982) labeled sexual referents as a fantasy dimension which expresses the imaginative fulfillment of motives. Tinkham and Reid (1988: p. 118) defined fantasy as “an appeal that links the product to imaginative wish fulfillment, implicitly promising fantasy gratification of sexual motives.” For example, in a study conducted by Richmond and Hartman (1982), respondents characterized J&B Scotch advertisement as having the fantasy dimension. The advertisement featured a close-up image of a smiling woman looking up and off the page with a man’s hand on either side of her face. The caption read, “Whatever you’ve got going ... keep it going with J&B.” Apart from the models, sexual stimuli such as photographic effects, setting, atmosphere, design elements, music and lighting, can also contribute to the construction of sexual meaning. These factors were often mentioned in conjunction with references to physical aspects of models and their behavior (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003).

#### **2.4.5 Sexual Embeds**

Theus (1994) defined sexual embeds as forms of sexual representation designed to be perceived subconsciously. The word sex; objects that are shaped or positioned like external sex organ and sexual acts; and small, hidden images of naked people, body

parts and sex organ are common types of embeds (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). Sexual embeds are considered sexual in advertising because they consist of sexual information, even though small and imperceptible. Sexual embeds can be characterized into two categories. The first class of sexual embed refers to sexual symbolism, which includes representation of objects that indicate either genitalia or sexual acts (Theus, 1994). For example, the image of a key inserted into a lock could symbolize intercourse (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). The second class of sexual embed refers to hidden sexual images and words. Although sexual embeds contained imperceptible sexual content, embeds are able to trigger unconscious recognition, stimulate sexual arousal and motivation.

## **2.5 Effects of Using Sexual Appeal**

### **2.5.1 Introduction**

Most research questions have sought to determine how sexual information influences processing and emotional responses. Generally, researchers employ two related theoretical approaches to explain sexual appeal in advertising processing effects. These approaches are the information-processing model and hierarchy-of-effects model. Early studies have evolved from role portrayals to the use of explicit sexual content in advertising (Soley and Kurzbard, 1986). Several studies assessed the effectiveness of sexual embedding in advertising based on three dependent attitudinal effects variables – cognitive, affective and conative effects (Kilbourne *et al*, 1985). Corresponding to

previous studies, this paper will adopt the hierarchy-of-effects model to further understand the attitudinal effects of using sexual appeals.

The hierarchy-of-effects model developed by Lavidge and Steiner (1961) suggested that there are six steps a consumer has to move through when making a purchase. Steps in the process include awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction and purchase. According to Lavidge and Steiner (1961), these steps are related to three components in the behavioral dimensions – cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive component includes the first two steps a consumer moves through when making a purchase, awareness and knowledge of the advertisement and product information. In addition, the affective component represents the feelings and emotions an individual has, either positive or negative about a particular issue. This component encompasses the liking and preference steps. Lastly, the conative component represents a person's motives and behavior, which encompasses the last two steps, conviction and making a purchase.

### **2.5.2 Cognitive Effects**

Ability to stand out in a saturated media environment and draw consumers' attention and interest to the advertising message is vital. A number of studies showed that sexual appeals do attract consumer's initial attention (Belch *et al*, 1982; Reid and Soley, 1983; Dudley, 1999; Heckler *et al*, 2001; Reichert *et al*, 2001). According to Fiske and Taylor (1991), attention can be thought of as an orienting response, an involuntary directing of

focused attention. Majority of the research, especially initial studies were in response to the portrayal of decorative female models in advertising (Baker and Churchill, 1977; Alexander and Judd, 1978; Reid and Soley, 1983; LaTour, 1990). Decorative female models serve no functional purpose other than attention-attracting stimuli (Reid and Soley, 1983; Severn *et al*, 1990; Dudley, 1999). In the advertising context, attractive, nude, decorative content and various stages of undress pertained to female models.

Baker (1961) pointed out that sexual illustrations which depict female nudity possess high attention-getting value and that sexual content in advertisements will arouse the immediate interest of both genders. To determine the effectiveness of utilizing sex in advertising to elicit attention, Belch *et al* (1982) examined consumers' physiological and cognitive responses to sexual stimuli in advertising using electrodermal (GSR) response measure. Respondents were asked to evaluate print advertisements which consist of three different levels of nudity (fully clothed, partially nude, full nudity) for each sex and male-female couples, and also three variations of suggestiveness (weak and strong suggestive couples, female suggestion). Results from the study concluded that the use of both nudity and suggestiveness in advertisements would elicit strong physiological and cognitive reactions (Belch *et al*, 1982).

In later research, Dudley (1999) examined the attitudes of young consumers toward the use of nudity in advertising employing a more developed of Belch *et al*'s (1982) research

design. Reichert (2002) commented that majority of the studies regarding sex-in-advertising effects share similar research designs. For example, a control advertisement which usually features a product only or landscape scene image, along with three experimental advertisements featuring images of women in varying degree of revealing clothing. Respondents in Dudley's (1999) research evaluated four advertisements; three dummy print advertisements that featured three levels of female nudity – a model wearing one-piece swimsuit, a topless model and a nude model, and one test print advertisement that featured a suntan lotion only. Findings from this study corroborated with the earlier findings (Baker, 1961; Belch *et al*, 1982; Reid and Soley, 1983). Moreover, Dudley (1999) also added that nude advertisement was perceived as more interesting compared to advertisement that featured a topless or swimsuit model, whereas the product-only advertisement was significantly less interesting. The study also showed that the amount of nudity exerted a strong influence on respondents' evaluations of the advertisement (Dudley, 1999). Jones et al (1998) explained that consumers carry out a limited cognitive appraisal when confronted with advertisement containing nudity. Hence, the probability that consumers pay initial attention to the advertisement is greater. Corresponding to this statement, Dudley (1999) mentioned that the more nudity in an advertisement, the more attention-getting and memorable the advertisement.



Overall, these studies showed that the presence of sexual appeals in advertisements is able to captivate the viewer's attention and also maintain their attention. However, Severn et al (1990) argued that the effectiveness of attention-getting of an advertisement may depend on both the gender of the receiver and gender of the models portrayed. Baker and Churchill (1977) pointed out that males and females rated advertisements portraying a model of the opposite sex higher than those portraying a model of the same sex. Lombardot (2007) validated the above statements and found that the presence of a nude or partially nude model of the opposite sex to the respondent significantly increases the level of attention-getting.

Although nudity may increase initial attention-getting (Baker, 1961; Reid and Soley, 1983; Severn *et al*, 1990; Dudley, 1999), the use of sexual appeal in advertising is less effective compared to non-sexual illustrations (Steadman, 1969). In a related study, Richmond and Hartman (1982) supported Steadman's (1969) conclusion. Advertisements classified as symbolism and functional dimensions, which do not contain human models but only illustrations of the product obtained higher correct recall percentage. Alexander and Judd's (1978) study also coincided with Steadman's (1969) conclusion. Advertisements that featured a scenery view obtained higher recall rates compared to those that featured female nudity.

The use of sexual illustration will interfere with product message-related processing. Consumer's emotional response toward sexual stimuli, decorative female models for instance, may be so strong that the attentive reaction is directed more to the stimuli and thus, drawing cognitive processing away from evaluations of the product and the message (Alexander and Judd, 1978, Severn *et al*, 1990). As a result, sexual appeals hinder recall and recognition effects.

On the contrary, Neuhaus *et al* (1982) argued that increasingly explicit sexual content does improve product category recall for both males and females. However, in respect to brand recall, only males responded that sexual content helps improve brand recall (Neuhaus *et al*, 1982). Besides, Lombardot (2007) also conducted a study to examine the significant influence of nudity on attention-getting and the consequences of this influence on brand recall. The study validated the hypothesis regarding attention paid to the advertisement has a positive and direct influence on brand recall. As sexual appeal advertisements encompass a strong emotional content, it will significantly increase the level of attention-getting and thus, having a direct influence on memorization or brand recall. In addition, Reid and Soley (1983) pointed out that higher recall and recognition of an advertisement only applies to the visual content. The authors found that recognition of sexually visual advertisements is significantly higher than advertisements without sexual images. Moreover, in analysis of Starch-scores, an industry measure of advertising memory, decorative female models were found to

improve recognition for the advertisement compared to advertisement without decorative female models (Reid and Soley, 1981; 1983). Mehta and Purvis (2006) explained that consumers carry out limited cognitive appraisal when are exposed to sexual appeals in advertising. Sexual stimuli in advertisements would then generate a greater amount of attention, which will then be directed toward the elements of execution, without there being an in-depth analysis of the message (Mehta and Purvis, 2006).

### **2.5.3 Affective Effects**

Another role that sexual appeals may serve in advertising is to evoke emotional responses, such as arousal, excitement or even lust (Taflinger, 1996). Advertising researchers have looked to emotional response in their attempts to determine the effects of sexual information on advertising responses. Several studies have conceptualized emotions as having two primary dimensions – valence and arousal. The valence dimension is conceptualized as continuous affective response ranging from positive to negative (Lambiase and Reichert, 2003). In this study, arousal is referred as a continuous response ranging from “energized, excited, and alert” to “calm, drowsy, or peaceful” (Cai *et al*, 1990).

According to Bello *et al* (1983), advertisements that employed controversial sexual content, such as nudity or decorative female models were perceived as more interesting and appealing. Severn *et al* (1990) and Dudley (1999) corroborated the above statement along with their findings. Respondents reacted more favorably to sexually oriented advertisements compared to non-sexually explicit advertisements, rating them as more entertaining, interesting and appealing (Severn *et al*, 1990; Dudley, 1999). Furthermore, Lang (2000) also stated that the presence of sexual appeal will elicit an emotional response which is likely to be positive and arousing.

LaTour and colleagues applied the attitude-toward-the-ad concept to further understand consumer's responses to sexually visual appeal in advertisements (LaTour, 1990; LaTour and Henthorne, 1993; LaTour *et al*, 1990). Muehling and McCann (1993) suggested that this concept is an affective evaluation of an advertisement that can influence feelings about the brand and purchase intention. LaTour (1990) explored the dimensions of arousal and impressions of both genders on advertisements which featured female nudity. Using Thayer's (1978) multidimensional arousal model, results showed that sexuality may allow men to react more favorably and to be more psychologically comfortable in their reactions to sexual stimuli than are women (LaTour, 1990). According to Thayer's (1989) model, sexual stimuli that created a high general activation (GA) would have a positive effect on attitude toward the advertisement, while high activation (HA) would have a contradictory effect. Men are found to be

positively arouse and energized (GA) by female nudity; hence, developing positive emotions and attitudes toward the advertisement (LaTour, 1990). On the other hand, women reacted more tense and fatigued (HA); hence, developing negative emotions and attitudes toward the advertisement (LaTour, 1990).

In later research, LaTour and Henthorne (1993) further explored gender responses to female nudity erotic appeals, and also gender's attitude towards the advertisement and the brand that uses sexual appeal. The research design in this study is replicates to previously conducted research, where perfume bottle was used as the advertised product because perfume is known to contain erotic connotations (LaTour and Henthorne, 1993). In addition, three print advertisements were also manipulated, featuring various degrees of exposure – nude female, partially clothed female and a fully clothed male and a fully clothed female model standing apart from each other in a non-suggestive pose (demure subjects). From the study, LaTour and Henthorne (1993) concluded that the use of nudity in print advertisements possess the potential to generate strong attitudes and significant levels of tension. Both genders perceived the nude advertisement as being the most erotic. However, their reactions in terms of attitude toward the advertisement and the brand differed. Previous finding showed that females exhibited negative feelings and higher tension arousal toward advertisements featuring female nudity, while males reacted vice-versa (Bello *et al*, 1983). In this study, males displayed stronger positive attitude toward both the advertisement and the

brand that featured the nude treatment compared to the demure model treatment. On the contrary, females were significantly more favorable in their attitude toward both the advertisement and brand for the demure and semi-nude treatment than for the nude advertisement.

Based on the studies, presence of sexual appeals can increase arousal, particularly for men (Bello et al, 1983; LaTour, 1990; LaTour and Henthorne, 1993). cai (2000) suggested that sexual appeals or arousing content in the media message will allocate resources to attention, associate sub-process of encoding and also automatically allocates resources to memory. Therefore, positive and arousing emotional responses should demonstrate higher recognition and free recall for the advertisement.

#### **2.5.4 Conative Effects**

Cai *et al* (1990) suggested that sexual appeals are a useful tool to generate initial attention to, arousal and memory for an advertisement. However, sexual appeal may not serve to motivate intent to buy or intent to use the product (Cai *et al*, 1990). Despite that, several studies showed contradictory results.

Severn *et al* (1990) investigated the effects of visually explicit and non-explicit sexual stimuli on traditional outcome measures such as recall, attitudes and behavioral

intentions. The dummy sexual stimuli used in this study was an advertisement for athletic sports shoes featuring completely nude couple in a position suggesting sexual intercourse with a line of information appearing below the illustration. Advertisements were also manipulated in other three forms – (1) high sex, high information; (2) no sex, high information and (3) no sex, low information. Behavioral intentions to purchase a pair of casual sports shoe were measured using 7-point scales. Results showed that respondents showed favorable predispositions toward the advertisement featuring sexual appeals, which in turn may lead to greater purchase intention (Severn *et al*, 1990).

Consumers perceived advertisements that featured increasing nudity treatment as offensive, immoral, unethical and exploitative (Dudley, 1999). Despite that, these advertisements were also perceived as most appealing, attention-getting, interesting and memorable compared to advertisement that only feature the product or scenery views (Dudley, 1999). According to Dudley (1999), sexual appeals advertisement is able to evoke emotional responses and respondent's interest in trying the product, consider buying the product or actively search for the product. Furthermore, Grazer and Keesling (1995) also suggested that purchase intention is likely to be higher when a brand is promoted at an appropriate level of sexual intensity. For example, consumers were found to have highest purchase intention for jeans when the advertisement employed moderate level of sexual intensity (Grazer and Keesling, 1995).

## **2.6 Gender Differences in Responses to Sexual Appeal Advertising**

Marketers generally believe that males and females react differently to different forms of sexual appeal due to their own implicit sexual and personal motivations (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994). A number of researchers believe that men and women have different perceptions about what is sexual appeal or being sexy (Garrett, 1993; Ramirez and Reichert, 2000). Similarly, both men and women considered the physical features of people as sexual. However, the physical characteristics appeared to be more pronounced for men as men are considered more visually-oriented than women in regard to sexual appeal and arousal (Ramirez and Reichert, 2000). While men are more likely to characterize physical features as being sexy, women are more likely to characterize physical distance or relative interaction between the models featured in the advertisement as being sexually appeal (Ramirez and Reichert, 2000). The authors also stated that sources that are romantic such as romantic settings and music also contributed to sexual perception in advertisements for women more than for men (Ramirez and Reichert, 2000).

As the biological and psychological needs of males and females differ, the effectiveness of sex appeal is gender related (Grazer and Keesling, 1995). Briefly, men are designed by natural selection to be favorably inclined toward casual, non-invested sexual intercourse, whereas women tend to be more selective in their choice of sexual partners (Dahl and Sengupta, 2008). Garrett (1993) claimed that advertisements using decorative female



models tend to attract both the attentions of female and male audience in almost equal amount. However, if a male model is used, only females tend to have an interest increase (Brown *et al*, 1996). Lombardot (2007) also added that men tend to have positive attitudes toward female models but negative or neutral attitudes toward nude male models.

Peterson and Kerin (1977) also pointed out that the effectiveness of sexual appeal advertisements may depend heavily on the degree of congruence between the sexy models and the advertised product. Steadman (1969) concluded that an obvious congruity between the illustration and the advertised product may contribute to positive recall. Richmond and Hartman's (1982) research supported this position with the Great Southwest Corporation print advertisement. The use of nude model is not congruent with the product, in this case, a construction company. As a result, it yielded a low brand recall rate of only 15 percent.

As men and women differ in style of message processing, both genders are likely to respond differently regarding product congruence. Women as relational processors are more likely to engage in detailed elaboration, and men as selective processors are more likely to be driven by overall message themes (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Meyers-Levy *et al*, 1991). Putrevu (2008) compared gender responses to weak and strong fit with the target brand. In the research, fit is defined as the relevance of the sexual appeal to the

target brand sexuality or in another term, product congruence (Putrevu, 2008). The results suggested that the fit between the sexual appeal and product category might be more important for women, but less relevant for men. Women respond favorably when there is a strong fit between the appeal and the target brand, whereas men are likely to respond favorably to sexual appeals irrespective of the level of fit (Putrevu, 2008). Lastly, Severn et al (1990) suggested that sexual appeals are more effective when the product category is considered sexually relevant. For examples, perfume, lingerie and clothing (Dudley, 1999). Dudley (1999) also stated that the prudent use of sexual appeal illustration and correct fit with the product would produce satisfactory results.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In general, as the media world emerges in trend, numerous ways were developed to grab consumers' attention. Thus, as the trend progresses from different forms of shock advertising, which includes controversial and offensive advertising tactics, such as sexual connotations; fear appeals, sexist remarks, cultural insensitivity, personal subject matter and nudity; the most widely seen and used aspect of seizing consumers' attention, is sexual appeal. To summarize, sexual appeal in advertising subjects to 5 common types of sexual information in advertising – nudity, sexual behavior, physical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds. Numerous researches mentioned above illustrate the effectiveness of sexual appeals in advertising.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Purposes and Objectives**

Numerous academic and practitioners' literature often discussed the effectiveness of sexual appeal in advertising, including attracting initial attention, enhancing recall and recognition, evoking emotional responses and also purchase intention. Since the mid-1960s, the use of sexual appeal in advertising has been increasing in Western countries and also becoming more overt (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994). In today's society, the use of this tactic has become fairly common in mainstream consumer advertising in order to break through the saturated media environment (Price, 2002). Similarly, the fashion retail industry too faces high competition in the marketplace. In order to distinguish from competitors and achieve competitive advantage, several researchers suggested retailers to not only focus on transaction of merchandise, but also in enhancing in-store customer experience (Bagdare and Jain, 2009; Berry *et al*, 2002; Shaw and Levin, 2002).

Considering the effects that sexual appeals generate in mainstream consumer advertising, it is of particular interest to examine if fashion retail stores are also able to generate similar results if sexual appeals theme is implemented in-store. Based on personal observations, some of the high-street fashion stores have begun to implement sexual appeals concept in-store through posters, salesperson's dressing or hiring good-looking sales personnel. Moreover, there is no extensive academic research when it comes to in-store sexual appeal.

Therefore, the main objective of this dissertation is to examine the effectiveness of implementing sexual appeals concept in the fashion retail store. This research mainly focuses on what respondents know about sexual appeals, how they feel about sexual theme in-store and how they respond to it after exposure to retail stores that implement sexual appeals concept, in terms of cognitive, affective and conative effects.

### **3.2 Research Methods**

“Qualitative research often studies phenomena in the environments in which they naturally occur and uses social actors’ meanings to understand the phenomena” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: p. 2). Qualitative research provides a narrative of people’s views of reality about how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). On the other hand, quantitative research seeks to confirm hypotheses about phenomena, using hypothetical-deductive model that tests general propositions and measures relationships among variables (Rynes, 2004).

This paper seeks to provide insights into consumer’s opinions, attitude and emotional responses to in-store sexual appeals. According to Guest *et al* (2005), qualitative research is effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors and social contexts of particular populations. Hence, qualitative

research facilitates a more effective research method to provide deeper insights and understanding of the topic.

Moreover, it is believed that attitudes and emotional responses cannot be uncovered by quantitative research (Malhotra, 2004). Qualitative research allows participants to describe individual experiences, feelings, emotions and explain relationships through their own words and body language. Also, this research method has greater flexibility which allows greater spontaneity and adaption of the interaction between researcher and study participants (Guest *et al*, 2005). Unlike quantitative research which uses more rigid style of eliciting and categorizing responses to questions. Therefore, qualitative research is able to provide thick, detailed descriptions of actual actions in real-life contexts that pertain to the research objectives.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

This research has been ethically reviewed and granted the approval from the School's Research Ethics Committee (REC). Participants were asked to sign a consent form before the start of the interview. Participants are also reassured of confidentiality in this research. The identity of participants would remain anonymous and would only be referred as 'Male Respondent' and 'Female Respondent' if participants took part in focus group interviews; whereas interviewees from in-depth interviews would be referred as 'Male Interviewee' and 'Female Interviewee'.

## **3.4 Data Collection**

### **3.4.1 Research Design**

Data collection is regarded as an essential component in conducting a research (Kajornboon, 2005). In order to address the research questions, two types of research collection methods are used – in-depth interviews and focus group interview. Firstly, interviews can be seen as a conversation between two or more people with a purpose, where the interviewer’s aim is to obtain knowledge and insight about the respondent’s world (Holt and Thorpe, 2008). Through interviews, the interviewer is able to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes and feelings on a topic (Malhotra, 2004). In this case, interviewer can uncover participants’ shopping motivations, attitudes and opinions toward in-store sexual appeal, and also behavioral intentions. Furthermore, participants can explain their responses in detail, using their own words and body language.

There are three distinct methods of conducting an interview – structured interview, semi-structured interview and unstructured interview. In this research, semi-structured interview will be conducted, the most common of all qualitative research methods (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). Semi-structured interview involves “prepared questioning guided by identified themes in a consistent and systematic manner interposed with probes designed to elicit more elaborate responses” (Dumay and Qu, 2011: p. 246). This research method provides opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to

discuss certain topics in more detail and also allows interviewer to clear up inconsistencies in respondent's answers. Furthermore, sexual appeal is rather a sensitive topic and some participants may feel more comfortable to express their attitudes when it comes to a one-to-one interview when there is informed consent and ensured confidentiality.

Secondly, focus group interview is an interview with a small group of individuals brought together to generate data and to address a particular topic (Paton, 2000). Focus group allows interaction between participants. These interactions enhance data quality as it stimulates ideas, thoughts and feelings that might not be raised in one-to-one interviews (Holt and Thorpe, 2008). Therefore, focus group interview is useful in generating a variety of different perspectives, opinions and experience regarding a particular topic.

As mentioned earlier, this research attempts to gather data through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. The reason for using two research methods to collect data is to ensure greater depth of responses which each method might not be able to generate if used alone. For examples, one-to-one interviews may be less forthcoming due to different perspectives between the interviewer and the interviewee; hence, focus group interviews can generate data that cannot be captured by semi-structured interviews. Moreover, focus groups might not generate detailed responses as

semi-structured interviews do because of the available response time for each individual is restrained and also some individual's viewpoint might have a minority perspective (Paton, 2000; Holt and Thorpe, 2008); hence, interviews can balance-out these shortcomings.

### **3.4.2 Sample Selection**

This study adopted a convenience sample of 16 university students at the University of Nottingham, with a total of eight males and 8 females, age between 20 to 25 years old. Five males and five females were randomly selected and assigned to a male's focus group and female's focus group respectively. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to the remaining three males and three females.

University students were chosen due to several reasons. First, young consumers are considered as trendsetters, owing to the increasing spending power with higher standard of living and potential influencing power (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski, 2001). In addition, young consumers are significantly less tradition-restricted, more susceptible to innovative and new products, and quicker in accepting novel ideology as compared to other population groups (Chan *et al*, 2012). Furthermore, several researchers also pointed out that erotic appeals advertisements often target the youth-oriented market (LaTour, 1990; Dahl *et al*, 2003).



Second, in most of the previous researches that investigated about sexual appeal advertising, university students were selected as part of the research sample (Alexander and Judd, 1978; LaTour and Henthorne, 1993; Black et al, 2010). This provides this study with possibility of more reliability and easier comparing of results. Lastly, despite Patton (2002, p. 242) claimed that ‘convenience sampling is neither purposeful nor strategic’ and hinders the ability to obtain those most information in greatest utility, this sampling strategy is adopted due to accessibility restrictions placed on the researcher. As a result, the samples selected were based on personal networking and personal contacts.

### **3.5 Actual Interviews**

#### **3.5.1 Stimuli**

The stimuli used in this study represented the nudity and physical attractiveness dimensions of sexual appeal. The stimuli used are decorative female models with two different types of dressing – (1) females in polo tee and jeans and (2) tight-fitted tube dress or mini-skirts, taken from the fashion retail store, Abercrombie and Fitch. Abercrombie and Fitch is known as a company that has distinctively used sexual appeals to sell its products to fashion-savvy young adults, under the age of 25 (Driessen, 2005; Knestout, 2001). According to Safer (2003), one of Abercrombie and Fitch’s advertising strategy is their in-store employees. The company hires young and attractive sales force that reflects the brand’s catalogue and in-store posters on the wall, and are required to wear the season’s clothing while working (Safer, 2003; Canella, 2003).

### **3.5.2 Procedure**

Both semi-structured and focus group interviews are conducted in this research. Before conducting the interviews, participants were given a brief introduction about the study which allows the participants to understand the research purposes and aims of the interview. Participants were also asked to sign a consent form to protect the identity and privacy of the respondents. In addition, participants were also informed that they can remain silent and choose not to respond to questions if they felt uncomfortable as this research discusses about sexual appeals.

After initial introduction, semi-structured interviews took place. The interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes. Based on the first part of the interview guide, participants were asked some general questions related to their shopping experiences. Then, before the second part of the interview guide, an explanation about what sexual appeals in this study represent and the tested stimuli were given. Similar to semi-structured interviews, the focus group interviews also follow similar procedure. Overall, the focus group interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis is referred as “a process of making meaning” (Esterberg, 2002: p.152). In order to facilitate the analysis process, all interviews were

tape-recorded and then transcribed. Due to natural limitations of human's memories, tape recording the interviews allows the researcher to have more thorough examination of the interviewees' answers, not solely on what it is said but how it is said as well (Bryman, 2004).

The purpose of this research is to understand different individual's interpretation of sexual appeals and to generate knowledge of individual's attitudes toward the use of in-store sexual appeals. Content analysis aims to describe and quantify phenomena with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, representation of facts and a practical guide to action (Krippendorff, 1980; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Sandelowski, 1995). As there is a lack of academic research regarding in-store sexual appeal, content analysis will be used for data analysis to provide new insights of sexual appeal being applied in a different medium compared to previous researches.

## **4. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will present the data collected through in-depth interviews and two focus group interviews. The findings from the interviews are presented and analyzed according to six categories – (1) Shopping motivations, (2) Define sexual appeals, (3) Cognitive effects of in-store sexual appeal, (4) Emotional and attitudinal effects, (5)

Conative effects and (6) Conclusion which involves consumer's perceptions and views about practicing in-store sexual appeal in the near future.

## **4.2 Shopping Motivations**

All sixteen participants selected for in-depth interviews and focus group interviews often shop for clothes but each differs in the frequency they shop. Out of the eight males who participated in this research, seven of them claimed shopping as a product-oriented purpose; whereas only one male respondent shop due to the pleasure and enjoyment obtained through shopping. Majority of the male respondents would only shop for clothes if they are intended to buy one when is required.

*"To update the fashion trend and probably for new clothes. Basically, I won't shop if I have no intention to buy." (Male Interviewee 1)*

*"I shop for clothes when I need the clothes." (Male Interviewee 3)*

*"I don't really unless I need it. Like for example, last time I shop for a sport wear when I need a shoe to run because the current one was broken. So I don't really shop shop for random pleasure." (Male Respondent 1)*

On the other hand, majority of the female respondents not only shop for clothes when is needed, but also for the hedonic purposes of shopping. Females considered shopping as leisure and enjoyment activity.

*“For the pleasure of viewing and to keep up with the current trend.” (Female Interviewee 1)*

*“For me, I treat shopping as one of my hobby. As a leisure activity for me to shop for clothes, hang out with friends and also browse around to see what’s the new fashion trend. So, I shop when I feel like it.” (Female Respondent 1)*

From the above, it can be seen that the male respondents only shop when they are intended to buy something. As a result, the frequency that the male respondents shop is mostly on average, once per month. On the contrary, female respondents are more fashion conscious on the latest fashion trend. Hence, female respondents shop more frequently as compared to the males, on average twice per month.

### **4.3 Gender Differences in Defining Sexual Appeals**

According to the responses to the question regarding ‘what is a sexual appeal?’, both male and female respondents cited physical features of people as sexual appeal. By far, body or physique was the most frequently mentioned physical feature with more than half of the total respondents making reference to it. Most of the respondents described sexual appealing physique as having a nice body figure such as muscular body for male models and slim figure with long legs for female models.

*“Such as fit or good-looking girls in magazine. The use of body perfection, it can be any part of the body, to attract viewers.” (Male Interviewee 1)*

*“Like good-looking guy, hot body with six-packs, muscular and tall.” (Female Interviewee 2)*

However, findings also showed that there was a significant gender differences. Physical features are an important component of sexual appeal for both genders; though it appears to be more prominent for men. Findings suggest that the female respondents also made reference to the attractiveness characteristic of the models as sexual appeal, in terms of beauty. Moreover, references to sexual behavior and proxemics characteristics were also emphasized by two of the female respondents. One of the female respondents described it as sexual interaction between two models and more intimate forms of sexual posture. Another female respondent described it as the model’s behavior such as flirting.

*“Like sometimes they have like adverts and they have guy and girl models, but they are having some posture which looks like sexual position. Like in Gucci fragrance advert, they have all those. You can see the girl is lying down and the guy is on top of her, face-to-face.” (Female Respondent 3)*

*“Sexy and seductive look.” (Female Interviewee 3)*

Hence, it can be concluded that the nudity and physical attractiveness dimensions of sexual information are mostly mentioned and referred to as being sexual appeal by the respondents. Also, minority of the respondents also mentioned the sexual behavioral dimension as regard to sexual appeals.

## 4.4 Cognitive Effects

### 4.4.1 Attention

As mentioned earlier, a brief introduction about sexual appeals is given before the start of the second part of the interview guide. Sexual appeals in this research only constitute the nudity and physical attractiveness dimensions of the stimuli, decorative female models. Based on the guidelines provided, respondents are able to identify a few of the fashion retail stores that employed sexual appeal stimuli in their physical store environment. Abercrombie and Fitch and Hollister are the most common mentioned examples that respondents experience in-store sexual appeal.

*“Like in A&F (Abercrombie and Fitch), the models at the door who greet customers are really good-looking and they have good physique. At the front door, there’s a half-naked guy who stands there and allow customers to take pictures with him. Also, there’s pretty girls in the store that greets you with warm smile.” (Female Interviewee 1)*

*“And even in the shop, they actually differentiate people between sales, the people who actually fold the clothes and there’s like models and dancers which they just stand at the corner or dancing off at the top. That’s how they sell the products, right?” (Male Respondent 2)*

In order to examine the effectiveness of using decorative female models as in-store sexual appeal, the stimuli tested are both in different levels of dressing. One of the stimuli features decorative female models in polo tee and jeans, whereas the second stimuli features decorative female models in tight-fitted tube dress or mini-skirts. All

participants perceived decorative female models in suggestive dressing working in-store as sexual appeal, and vice-versa. Few of the respondents added that female sales personnel wearing uniform or formal wear are perceived as non-sexual appeal. However, two of the respondents also contended that in-store sexual appeal used may be corresponded to seasonal items and clothing categories that the brand sells.

*“But I guess all the men’s brands like Ted Baker and Paul Smith, they don’t get the females there to sell. They usually wear formal wear. But like in Hollister, you’d see them wearing flip flops and shorts because they are selling the beach and summer idea. Is a completely different style in Ted Baker.” (Male Respondent 2)*

*“But sometimes I kinda find it depends on what season it is. Let’s say here it’s summer and everyone is selling bikinis and stuffs. So the posters that have in-store also becoming more like bikini wear, wet hair, splash and stuffs.” (Female Respondent 3)*

Comparatively, fashion retail stores that practice in-store sexual appeal, using decorative female models as their sales personnel would attract respondents’ initial attention. Unanimously, all female participants responded that this type of store concept would gain their initial attention and drives them into the store if they are nearby. Also, the female respondents believe it would gain the public’s attention as well.

*“It probably gives you that first drive that makes you go in.” (Female Respondent 4)*



On the other hand, only four male respondents perceived this concept as attention getting. The remaining male respondents explained that generally, they shop for a purpose. Hence, they would only enter selected stores that the items they intended to buy; otherwise they would have just ignored.

*"I know my purpose of visiting the store is for the clothes. Therefore, I don't think it will affect my frequency to the store." (Male Interviewee 1)*

*"I think it depends what you're looking for ..."* (Male Respondent 2)

In addition, one male respondent also justify that sexual elements communicated through in-store posters would generate more of attention-getting effects compared to the decorative female models on the shop floor.

*"... the poster may attract but not the employee." (Male Interviewee 1)*

During the focus group interviews, the respondents pointed out an interesting aspect. If he or she is on a holiday, the respondent would pay a visit to the store due to its renowned in-store concept. Moreover, these stores might also become one of the tourist attractions for tourists and also for people who are not familiar or exposed to this concept. The people might be of curiosity; hence, paying a visit to the store.

*"If it is famous for its sexual appeal then I think I would check it out. I mean I would definitely check it out." (Female Respondent 1)*

*“... the frequency of you going to that shop might be more because maybe your relatives or friends coming and they want to go because they think, like when you’re walking in London, they think A&F is like a destination to go. So, it becomes a destination not because it sells clothes but because to see the models, their concept.” (Male Respondent 2)*

*“So I guess for people who are not familiar with those concept, it would appeal to them.” (Male Respondent 1)*

#### **4.4.2 Recall and Recognition**

In terms of recognizing the fashion retail stores which adopt in-store sexual appeals, eleven participants claimed that they would recognize the store in the near future. Respondents have provided several reasons for the above statement. The store concept is perceived to be a creative yet daring concept because using decorative female models might spur controversial issues in the society. Despite that, practicing in-store sexual appeal allows the fashion retail stores to distinguish themselves from other retail stores in the marketplace. As a result, in-store sexual appeal becomes a trademark for that particular retail stores which allow consumers to distinguish according to the store concept.

*“It’s daring yet brilliant. I first found out it’s quite awkward but is certainly left an impression after first visiting.” (Male Interviewee 2)*

*“Yes, you will know if they have the same concept.” (Female Respondent 1)*

*“Yes, if it retains its brand identity.” (Female Interviewee 3)*

Despite able to recognize and distinguish the fashion retail store, one male respondent expressed dissatisfaction toward retail stores that constantly apply the same store concept internationally. Although being able to distinguish the stores, there would not be distinctive features and uniqueness of the stores in different countries.

*"I'll definitely recognize it and that's what I hate about it. Like when I go to different country and I go to shopping, I want to see something local but oh yea, I see H&M and I see Topshop again. I feel like I haven't gone anywhere. I flew all the way to here and the street looks exactly the same." (Male Respondent 2)*

On the contrary, one male respondent argued that this type of store concept as being unethical and would have negative reflect reactions toward the brand. The respondent also added that retail brands could achieve maximum sales and profit via other means, not necessarily exploiting the females to sell clothes. Moreover, the respondent also pointed out that regardless of the store concept, what matters most is the product quality itself. Male respondent 1 also agreed with the above statement. As a result, both male respondents showed no sign of ability to recognize the store in the near future.

*"It still felt like is more depending on the product that I bought. If is really good then I will probably do more research on that place and then get more." (Male respondent 1)*

*"Lousy marketing idea, it shows they have bad product quality. Wrong way of branding." (Male Interviewee 1)*

Although majority of the respondents are able to recognize the fashion retail store, however not all of them are able to recall the store's brand name. Respondents provided diverse responses in terms of recall.

*"Maybe not? Also depends on the brand visibility. If it's a big name brand then probably yeah, but if it's some brand I've never heard of then probably no." (Male Interviewee 3)*

*"Yes, I think is because we shop a lot." (Female Respondent 1)*

*"Because we are sensitive to fashion information." (Female Respondent 3)*

Therefore, numerous female respondents are able to recall the brand name due to personal interest in shopping, fashion-savvy personality and are more fashion conscious compared to male respondents. On the other hand, male respondents who mostly shop when presence of an intended purpose would be able to recall the brand name if the product sold is of satisfying quality, and if the brand is an international and well-known brand.

#### **4.5 Emotion and Attitude Effects**

All eight males' respondents responded favorably toward the presence of decorative female models in the physical store environment. Presence of decorative female models in mild suggestive dressing, tight-fitted tube dress for instance, evokes positive emotions of the males. Male respondents claimed that they would feel excited, lively and enjoyment.

*“Somehow will get excited, it’s the hormone.” (Male Interviewee 1)*

*“Stressed, but arousing for sure.” (Male Interviewee 2)*

*“Well, definitely positive. Lively. It’s like ‘oh, she’s cute’.” (Male Interviewee 3)*

*“I quite enjoy it.” (Male Respondent 2)*

The positive emotions are believed to have an influence on the male respondents’ attitude toward the store. Most of the male respondents identified fashion retail stores that implement in-store sexual appeal as creative and effective in capturing consumer’s attention.

*“It is rather exploitative of them to use the female body to attract attention and market their products, but it works ...” (Male Interviewee 3)*

However the respondents also added that despite having favorable attitude toward the store and sexual stimuli, in-store sexual concept is rather common these days. Due to the fact that some of the male respondents are exposed this sexual stimuli few years ago; hence, the respondents find it less interesting and fun now compared to few years back.

*“It used to be quite exciting, I felt. You know is like the fake model thing, rough and hard. But actual humans will give you like a sense of ‘oh... I can be like that too’ versus like a figure out there.” (Male Respondent 1)*

*“Because when it first came out, it was something new and people would just want to go check it out. But after few years, you just feel like it is the same thing.” (Male Respondent 3)*

Overall, the male respondents displayed positive emotions and positive attitudes toward the store. Only one male respondent, whom displayed positive emotions toward use of in-store sexual stimuli, is skeptical about the store concept and brand. As mentioned earlier, male interviewee 1 perceived the store concept as being immoral and unethical; thus reflecting it toward the brand image in the society.

*“... marketing personnel should have considered the impact to the society instead of just the business. A good company should not leave a bad impact to the society. Think of this, CSR.” (Male Respondent 1)*

Moreover, male respondents displayed a stronger attitude toward the store that features decorative female models than non-sexually appeal females.

*“Is definitely more appealing to see a super-hot girl like playing around with home furniture rather than 300 pounds big, you know.” (Male Respondent 1)*

In contrast, male respondents displayed negative attitude toward the store that features decorative male models. Majority of the males in the focus group expressed feelings of disgust and rejection when viewing same-sex models.

*“That probably put me off.” (Male Respondent 2)*

*“I won’t even look at it.” (Male Respondent 1)*

*“It will be a lot more negative.” (Male Respondent 4)*

Also, six out of eight male participants stated that the use of sexual appeals needs not to be product-related as long as it captures consumer’s attention, pertaining to sex sells. Two out of eight male participants considered vice-versa. The respondents claimed that the use of sexual appeal has to be congruent with the product the store sells. Examples of sexually related products mentioned are lingerie, cosmetics, perfume and shower gel.

*“Yes, definitely. I mean like, it has to be relevant. Using sexual advertising to advertise a screwdriver is just plain weird.” (Male Interviewee 3)*

Moving on to female respondents, in-store sexual appeal would evoke positive feelings in majority of the females. Female respondents are interested and happy to look at good-looking female models in terms of beauty, complexion and physique.

*“Is nice to see because they are pretty. I think we all like to look at pretty things.” (Female Interviewee 1)*

Generally, females are often attracted toward the opposite-sex model; however, all five respondents in the focus group pointed out that they would like to see decorative

female models working in-store. Despite that, the respondents did not show any negative attitude toward the use of decorative male models either. One female respondent mentioned that,

*"... I like to the male ones." (Female Respondent 1)*

The reason for the above response might possibly due to the fact that female respondents tend to compare their physical features with the decorative female models. The respondents would rate their physical attractiveness lower than the female models. Some respondents stated that they would be motivated to be like the model, whereas some claimed that it affects their self-esteem as the models that fashion stores often use are stereotype models.

*"Yes, definitely. I think I am motivated to be like her." (Female Respondent 3)*

Female respondent 3 also added,

*"You know that if you are in that physical appearance and that you will look good in that particular fashion that she is wearing." (Female Respondent 3)*

*"It gives low self-esteem in the sense that ..., whatever models wear they look good. But actually right, you like that skirt and when you try it on, 'oh my god, why? Why don't I look good in it?' You will feel that way. Maybe sometimes you feel like I want a model body so that I can actually wear anything because like with the clothes that they always advertised, it always look nicer on models." (Female Respondent 5)*

Besides, more than half of the respondents also mentioned that the use of sexual appeal has to be sexually related to the product, such as health and weight loss



products, perfume, cosmetics and clothing, and also related to the branding statement. When the use of decorative female models corresponds to the branding statement, the sexual stimuli play a crucial role as a persuasion tool to affect consumer's decision making process.

*"And it is also like the fact that they are so pretty, hot and whatever, in those kind of stores in those kind of clothes. You will also want to buy them. That's what I feel, like it appeals to a lot of girls I think." (Female Respondent 1)*

*"For example, like in Topshop, you see the models wearing and you feel like buying what they have ... when you are looking at those female models is also about the brand that carries out its own statements, like you can look good with these kinds of clothes." (Female Respondent 4)*

Nevertheless, female respondents claimed that they would display negative emotions and attitude when the level of explicitness increases. Decorative female models dress in either tight-fitted tube dress or mini-skirts are perceived as mild sexual stimuli. Respondents mentioned that if the female models are wearing lingerie or bathing suit, it would evoke negative responses.

*"They don't offend or make me feel discomfort as long as they are not wearing lingerie in-store." (Female Interviewee 1)*

*"If it is not too much, then yea, positive." (Female Respondent 4)*

*"Depends on how decorative they are. If it's too much, I would feel uncomfortable." (Female Interviewee 3)*

Hence, if the in-store sexual concept is implemented correctly, female respondents would display positive emotion and attitude toward the store.

#### **4.6 Conative Effects**

Both male and female respondents claimed that in-store sexual appeal or decorative female models would have little influences on their purchase decisions. In-store sexual appeal plays a role to attract respondent's initial attention and drive them into the store. However, in terms of making final purchases of the clothing, it still depends on several factors such as the style of the clothes, quality of the clothes and pricing.

*"The first thing that attracts is the sexual appeal, but after that it still depends on the products. Like if you see the girl wearing it, then if you like it and then you try it. And if it looks good, then you buy it." (Female Respondent 1)*

*"Why wouldn't I buy from them? If the clothing is nice and I like it and it fits, then I will buy from any stores even in those streets, like in the market." (Male Respondent 2)*

*"Depends on other factors. Price, quality, return policy, design and etc. I won't buy something just because they use decorative female models." (Male Interviewee 3)*

One male respondent also added that by having decorative female models working in the fashion retail store, he might spend more time browsing in the store. However, it does not mean that there would be a definite purchase.

*“If you are going to a boring looking place, you won’t really spend much time in there. So it will actually make you stay longer but not necessarily buy the stuffs because when you don’t need it, you really just don’t need it.” (Male Respondent 4)*

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In sum, each individual has different perceptions of whether in-store sexual appeal marketing strategy is effective and if this in-store sexual concept should be practiced more in the fashion retail marketplace. Majority of the respondents agreed that in-store sexual appeal does attract consumers’ initial attention and then drives consumer into the store. However, it does not necessarily lead to final purchase decision.

*“It probably gives you that first drive that makes you go in.” (Female Respondent 4)*

*“I don’t think it will push the sales but it will attract people to have a look.” (Male Respondent 4)*

Male Interviewee 2 stated that this type of in-store marketing strategy is indeed effective, with reason stated below.

*“I’ve seen a topless model and bikini wear female model advertising a sushi shop in Singapore, and it did catch my attention.” (Male Interviewee 2)*

In-store sexual appeal does attract attention, but might not affect sales figure or profit maximization. In order to influence final purchase decision and to maximize sales profit, factor such as the quality of the product is more influential.

*“Well, it might not affect the sales a lot, but it attracts the turnover of people coming in.” (Female Respondent 3)*

*“It’s effective in attracting attention. But to translate the attention into sales needs other factors. Most of all, the product has to be good.” (Male Interviewee 3)*

Apart from that, a few of the respondents mentioned that this strategy is effective in a way where it builds the brand image and brand perception in consumer’s mind. Whenever the brand characteristics are mentioned, consumers are able to identify the brand name even though they have not made any purchases from the store.

*“It doesn’t really effective buying behavior, but crucial for brand perception in consumer’s mind.” (Female Interviewee 3)*

*“It is very effective in building up the brand reputation, even like people like bigger size people, they won’t buy or wear Hollister but they know what Hollister is and they know what they are selling.” (Female Respondent 3)*

Furthermore, male respondents pointed out that this strategy has becoming more common in the marketplace. Reason for that was possibly due to increase exposure to sexual appeals in media advertisements. Male respondents argued that in-store sexual appeal used to be interesting and appealing few years ago. This marketing strategy is still effective in capturing consumer’s attention but the effectiveness have deteriorate in the male respondents’ mind.

*“It looks fun and interesting, but doesn’t really appealing to me. Is something new like about four or three years ago, something like interesting because no one do that. But now like it’s just common.” (Male Respondent 1)*

*“Because when it first came out, it was something new and people would just want to go check it out. But after few years, you just feel like it is the same thing.” (Male Respondent 3)*

Respondents were then asked if they would like to see more of this marketing strategy in the marketplace. A few of the respondents would want more of this in-store sexual concept in fashion retail marketplace. On the contrary, majority of the respondents replied vice-versa, with several individual’s opinions regarding ethical issue.

*“Because we are quite normal size we can relate, but imagine if someone who is fat and she will feel so bad... if it were them walking into the shop, I think they will feel ad. So I don’t think is that good, like why do you want to make them feel bad.” (Female Respondent 2)*

*“It can be use but ethically, marketing personnel should have considered the impact to the society instead of just the business. A good company should not leave a bad impact to the society. Think of this, CSR.” (Male Interviewee 1)*

*“... And also, if this thing is commercialize, I mean think of the next generation. Are they all going to wear skimpy clothes to go out? Because talking about Abercrombie and Fitch, ten years old girls are already wearing it. Yea, think about that. I wouldn’t want to see a lot. Is still okay to see these few brands using it because it is their specialty, but I wouldn’t want to see more of it.” (Female Respondent 3)*

*“And I think it works for girls and not for guys ‘cause you have a really fit guy, like six-packs and they standing outside the door. Girls, they are openly up happily taking*

*photos and they put it on Facebook. You can't really have it the other way round. Because you can't really have a really hot girl and then all the guys just going up there saying 'Can I take a photo?' Then, if you put on Facebook, people will go like 'You pervert.'"* (Male Respondent 2)

Lastly, a few of the respondents would not want to see more of in-store sexual appeal concept because it will hinder the store's competitive advantage. The initial aim of the store implementing this concept was to stand out from the crowd. However, if this concept is widely used, the strategy will lose the effectiveness and uniqueness of it.

*"It will probably attract you if the place the design is different. Really different and something new, ..."* (Male Respondent 3)

*"... if every shops do that, there wouldn't have the meaning of being special anymore and it wouldn't be a good strategy in the business strategy wise. It wouldn't be like so special about using sex appeal advertisements anymore because everyone is doing it..."* (Female Respondent 3)

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This research sets out to examine the effectiveness of implementing sexual appeals in a physical fashion retail store environment. Prior fashion retailing researches mentioned that consumers these days seek for both utilitarian and hedonic values while shopping (Eastlick and Feinberg, 1999). Results from this research shows that the statement holds true only to women as men's primary shopping motive is for utilitarian purpose only. Moreover, the hedonic value or in-store customer experience is highlighted by several

authors, in order to achieve competitive advantage in a highly competitive fashion retail marketplace (Bagdare and Jain, 2009; Berry *et al*, 2002; Shaw and Levin, 2002). Hence, there is a growing need for that little extra something that makes a retailer stand out in a crowd. Bagdare and Jain (2009) identified store atmospherics, customer service, visualscape, customer delight, merchandise and convenience as factors to enhance customer experience. This research only attempts to enhance customer experience by providing customer delight and enhancing store atmospherics through female sexual appeals, by employing decorative female models. Dahl *et al* (2003) suggested that sexual appeals are perceived to generate emotion of surprise; hence, resulting in attention-getting and eliciting cognitive processing after initial exposure to the sexual appeal advertisements. Also, the attention gained may nevertheless, result in better brand recall, given that both effects are positively correlated (Mehta and Purvis, 2006).

First of all, respondents were asked to define sexual appeals based on individual's understanding. By far, the most common referent was physical features, which is aligned to Reichert and Ramirez's (2000) study. Body or physique was the most frequently mentioned physical feature with over half of the participants making some reference to it. Participants described long legs and nice body shape of having good physique. According to Reichert and Ramirez (2000), men are more likely to mention more sub-categories of the physical characteristics. However, in this research, women were more likely to mention more sub-categories, making reference to other categories,

such as beauty and attractiveness of the models as sexually appeal. Feingold (1992) explained that men are more oriented toward physical characteristics than women, because men tend to be more visually-oriented in regard to sexual arousal. Therefore, though both genders mentioned physical features as sexually appeal, the component appeared to be more pronounced for men than women (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). As women emphasize more on relatedness and emotional intimacy compared to men, women are also likely to make reference to proxemics, including interpersonal intimacy (Reichert and Ramirez, 2000). Corresponding to the author's study, the findings in this research showed that women indeed mentioned individual's sexual behavior and sexual behavior elicited through interactions between two models as sexually appeal.

As mentioned in the methodology, participants were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of using decorative female models in-store. According to Dudley (1999), decorative female models are functionless models who serve no functional purpose other than attention-attracting stimuli. Belch *et al* (1982) examined consumers' physiological and cognitive responses to sexual stimuli in advertising. The author concluded that the use of both nudity and suggestiveness in advertisements would elicit strong physiological and cognitive reactions (Belch *et al*, 1982). From the findings, respondents perceived the stimuli, decorative female models in tight-fitted tube dress or mini-skirts as sexually appeal. A total of fifteen participants, both males and females, claimed that the use of decorative female models in suggestive dressing as attention-getting. The



implementation of the sexual concept in-store would catch their initial attention and might be one of the factors that drive consumers into the store. The results corresponded with Baker's (1961) research. Baker (1961) pointed out that sexual illustrations which depict female nudity possess high attention-getting value and that sexual content in advertisements will arouse the immediate interest of both genders. Furthermore, Dudley (1999) also added that the more nudity, the more attention-getting and memorability. Comparing two different levels of dressing of the sexual stimuli, respondents stated that stores that employ decorative female models in suggestive dressing would stand out from other retail stores and would generate higher attention-getting value compared to the decorative female models in polo tee and jeans, which are perceived as non-sexually appeal by the respondents.

Dudley (1999) mentioned that advertisements that feature more nudity are more memorable. In later research, Lombardot (2007) validated the hypothesis and identified that attention-getting is directly and positively correlated to brand recall. Therefore, the attention gained may nevertheless result in higher brand recall. Earlier on, fifteen participants perceived in-store sexual appeal as attention-getting. Among the fifteen participants, majority of the respondents stated that they would be able to recognize the fashion retail store in the near future as the concept implemented becomes the store's identity. Hence, the sexual appeal concept allows the respondent to distinguish the store from the other retail stores in the fashion marketplace. For examples,

Abercrombie and Fitch is known for using sexual appeals to sell its products. Most of the participants mentioned this brand as an example when being asked to name a fashion retail store that uses sexual appeals. Despite the high rate of store recognition among respondents, not all respondents are able to recall the brand name in the near future. According to Dudley (1999), increasingly explicit sexual content improved brand recall for males, but not for females. Contradictory to Dudley's (1999) findings, results in this research displayed higher rate of recall among females rather than male respondents. Female respondents added that it is possibly due to the fact that females are more fashion-savvy and are more sensitive to fashion information and trends.

Steadman (1969: p.19) concluded that "non-sexual illustrations were more effective in producing recall of brand names than were sexual illustration." The use of sexual illustration will interfere with product message-related processing. Consumer's emotional response toward sexual stimuli, decorative female models for instance, may be so strong that the attentive reaction is directed more to the stimuli and thus, drawing cognitive processing away from evaluations of the product and the message (Alexander and Judd, 1978, Severn *et al*, 1990). Majority of the male responses corroborated with Steadman's (1969) conclusion. Male respondents claimed the brand will be memorable if the product's quality is satisfying and meets individual's preferences. As a result, sexual appeals hinder brand recall effects for men. Nevertheless, male respondents still

perceive that in-store sexual appeals are effective, only to attract initial attention of consumers.

Furthermore, attention-getting also influences brand recall via emotions and attitudes of consumers (Mehta and Purvis, 2006). All respondents are found to react favorably to female in-store sexual stimuli. Majority of the respondents perceived fashion retail stores that implement in-store sexual appeal as creative and effective in capturing consumer's attention. Similar to prior researches, respondents also rated sexually oriented advertisements as more entertaining, interesting and appealing (Severn *et al*, 1990; Dudley, 1999). Furthermore, Lang (2000) also stated that the presence of sexual appeal will elicit an emotional response which is likely to be positive and arousing. However, LaTour *et al* (1990) argued that emotional affect varied distinctively by gender of the respondent. Results showed that in-store sexual appeals evoke mostly positive feelings among all respondents. Males claimed that they feel livelier, arouse and experience more enjoyment in a fashion retail store that uses decorative female models. The reason for that is possibly due to the fact that men are more visually-oriented and significantly pay higher attention toward the physical features of the opposite-sex. As a result, male respondents generally display positive attitude toward the use of in-store sexual appeals. Despite that, a minority of the male respondents perceived the use of in-store sexual appeals as immoral, unethical and exploitative though able to generate high attention value. As a result, the minority of the respondents elicited negative

attitude toward the store and the brand. Positive emotions evoked would generate better brand recall, but there is lack of academic research of the relationships between negative emotions and brand recall.

On the other hand, female respondents displayed strong positive emotions and attitude toward the store. The respondents claimed that they would be interested and are excited to see good-looking female models in-store. Some of the respondents added that they would compare themselves with the decorative female models and are motivated to look like the models in terms of body. The findings showed opposite results from LaTour's (1990) research. The authors found that males displayed stronger positive attitude toward both the advertisement that contains sexual information. Contrarily, females were reacted more tense and fatigued, displaying negative emotions and attitudes toward the advertisement (LaTour, 1990). Comparing the results with the findings in this paper, the responses from the male respondents is aligned with previous research. However, responses from the female respondents differ. The difference might possibility due to women's attitude toward sexual appeal in terms of individual's personality and also due to the social influences that has shaped women's thinking. Some of the female respondents in this study commented that they are neutral to the use of sexual appeals as a marketing strategy as sexual appeals tactic is common and prevalent in today's society.

However, female respondents contended that increasing level of explicitness of the decorative female models would evoke negative feelings and negative attitude towards the retail store. Females would feel unease and uncomfortable if the dressing of decorative female models is more explicit than tube dresses or min-skirts. For examples, in-store decorative female models wearing bathing suit or lingerie to attract consumer's attention. The findings are consistent with Belch *et al's* (1982) research where the author claimed that women tend to display stronger physiological reactions than men for those advertisements perceived as strongly suggestive. Therefore, it can be concluded that females were significantly more favorable in their attitude toward both the advertisement and brand for the demure and semi-nude treatment than for the nude advertisement (LaTour and Henthorne, 1993). In this case, in the physical store environment, semi-nude treatment can be referred to female models wearing mini-skirts while nude treatment can be referred to more explicit dressing, such as bathing suit or lingerie.

Moreover, the effectiveness of sexually oriented advertisements may also depend on the degree of congruency between the product being advertised and the use of sex appeals (Peterson and Kerin, 1977). According to prior researches, product-model congruency or the fit between sexual appeal and product category is significantly more important for females, but less relevant for males. Findings from this research show consistency with previous findings. Female respondents in this research stated that the

use of sexual appeal must be congruent with sexually relevant products such as cosmetics and fashion. Putrevu (2008) explained that women are relational processors; hence, are more concerned with how everything in the message fits together along with the execution styles. On the contrary, Putrevu (2008) described men as item-specific processors who are more concerned about particular unique attributes; hence, men are display favorable attitude irrespective of fit. Majority of the male respondents stated that the main purpose of sexual appeals is to generate attention; thus, sexual appeals can be used regardless of the level of fit. However, two male respondents who emphasized on ethical issues responded differently.

In terms of purchase intention, majority of the respondents commented that range of products and product qualities sold in-store are the most influential factors in consumers' decision-making process. Respondents regard in-store sexual appeals as a tool merely to attract consumer's initial attention and to drive them into the physical store. Nevertheless, in-store sexual appeals may influence them to spend longer time in the store. The statement is validated by Jin and Kim (2001), where the authors agreed that store-induced excitement results in favorable purchase behavior outcomes. For examples, amount of money and time spent in the store and frequency visits to the store. Besides, Severn *et al* (1990) also mentioned that respondents showed favorable predispositions toward the advertisement featuring sexual appeals, which in turn may lead to greater purchase intention. Female respondents mentioned that the decorative

female models portray the brand's statement. Due to their good physique and beauty, clothes worn on them would turn out appealing; hence catching the female's attention and would have an intention to try them on. However, sexual appeals are claimed to be non-influential in their purchase behavior. In the end, the product itself matters the most. Though sexual appeals are not influential in consumer's final purchasing decision, Dudley (1999) claimed that sexual appeals is able to evoke emotional responses and respondent's interest in trying the product, consider buying the product or actively search for the product. Furthermore, Grazer and Keesling (1995) also suggested that purchase intention is likely to be higher when a brand is promoted at an appropriate level of sexual intensity. It is showed in this research that female respondents would display negative attitude toward the store if the in-store sexual appeal concept is implemented wrongly, in a higher level of in-store sexual intensity. The female respondents mentioned that without proper implementation of in-store sexual appeal, it is rather exploitative of the brand to use decorative female models in the store in highly suggestive dressing. As such, the store might lead to greater controversial issues in the public.

## **6. LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **6.1 Limitations**

The findings of this study provide a holistic view of the effectiveness of using sexual appeals in the physical store to attract initial attention, enhance brand recall and

recognition, emotions and attitudinal effects and purchase intention. However, this study has limitations in generalizing the findings as only a small sample size of sixteen participants in total are interviewed. Furthermore, as most of sexual appeals advertisements are targeted toward young consumers, this research only interviewed students ranging between 20 to 25 years old. According to Chan *et al* (2012), young population range from 15 to 39 of age. Hence, this research might not provide a holistic perception of the young population, but only the young adults ranging from age 20 to 25. Moreover, due to time constraints, convenience sampling technique was used. This technique is regarded as having lowest credibility and yields poor information (Patton, 2002). Lastly, due to limited academic literature that directly address the topic of sexual appeals in a physical store medium, this study refers to related literature – sexual appeals in advertising and fashion retailing sector. As a different medium to communicate sexual appeals is used, results might not be consistent with previous researches and also might not be a good comparison in reflexivity wise.

## **6.2 Future Research and Recommendations**

For future research, it is recommended to conduct similar experimental design to test the effectiveness of in-store sexual appeals using a younger age group of 15 to 19 as sample population. A few of the male respondents in this research claimed they have passed the age range where they are filled with high curiosity. Furthermore, young adults are exposed to sexual stimuli a few years longer than the younger generation.



Hence, interviewing younger age group might yield different results and perceptions. Furthermore, this research found an interesting aspects where contradicts to prior researches. Prior researches claimed that females respond more favorably to advertisements containing nude male models in various dress levels and male nudity would cause significant increases in attention-getting if model and respondent are opposite-sex (Brown et al, 1996; Lombardot, 2007). In this research, female models showed more favorable attitudes toward use of decorative female models. Decorative female models are used as a persuasive tool to influence female's buying decisions. In addition, it was found that female respondents tend to compare themselves against the decorative female models. Therefore, it is recommended to further research in the area of social comparison and idealized images in advertising through physical store. Lastly, men are generally perceived to have positive attitudinal effects and women vice-versa. However, not all male respondents displayed attitude toward the advertisement via store as a medium accordingly to prior research. Also, female respondents' attitudinal effects contradict to past researches. It is believed that a person's characteristic patterns of behavior, thoughts and feelings would have an influence on how people respond to sexual appeals (Black et al, 2010). Therefore, it is recommended to examine the role of personality in how people respond to sexual appeals in fashion retail store environment.

### **6.3 Managerial Implications**

The results of this research provide a holistic view of practicing sexual appeals in-store, using human models known as decorative models. In order to implement sexual appeals concept into the fashion retail store, it has to be done with careful implementations. Marketing managers should firstly, identify the target market. If the fashion apparels in-store is targeted toward the male audiences, decorative female models should be used instead of men. Men displayed strong negative emotions and attitude toward the store when same-sex models are being used. On the contrary, female respondents commented that they would like to see more decorative female models in-store. The decorative female models not only play a crucial role of carrying the branding statement, but also act as a role model for the females. Hence, female respondents display positive emotions and attitude toward female sexual stimuli, though the females would also be interested to see decorative male models. However, the level of suggestive dressing should be paid careful attention. Females would display negative attitudes when female bodies are being exploited. Besides, in-store sexual appeals are perceived as an effective marketing strategy to generate initial attention-getting. So far, only Abercrombie and Fitch and Hollister are the most apparent brands that use sexual appeals to sell. Managers have to note that if this strategy is widely used by majority of the retailers, this appeal would lose its values and distinctiveness. As a result, it is always more effective to practice new ideas which has not been practiced yet in the marketplace.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

The main objective of this dissertation is to examine the effectiveness of implementing sexual appeals concept in the fashion retail store. This dissertation focuses on attitudes toward in-store sexual appeal concept using decorative female models and the reactions after exposure to store medium that implements sexual appeals concept in a holistic view approach. Numerous researchers have examined the effectiveness of using sexual appeals in print advertisements to gain attention, evoke emotions and enhance brand recall. However, there is lack of directly related literature or research toward the sex appeals in store medium using human models instead of print media. Therefore, it is of particular interest to examine whether would the effects in advertisements be translated into store medium.

Generally, both men and women referred physical features such as body shape as sexually appealing to them. Hence, decorative female models stimuli in this study reflected nudity and suggestiveness dimensions to examine the research aims. Similar with the effect generated from advertisements, sexual appeals in the physical store using decorative female models are also able to capture the initial attention of consumers. Furthermore, the decorative female models themselves are regarded as attention attracting stimuli (Dudley, 1999). Comparing both style of dressing tested in this research, respondents claimed that the suggestive dressing and more exposing of body figure as sexually appeal, whereas the polo tee and jeans as non-sexually

appealing. Hence, the decorative female models are dressed in suggestive dressing to portray the sexual theme concept.

From the research, it was found that both men and women responded favorably toward female sexual stimuli presence in physical store environment. Decorative female models generate the surprise effect as majority mentioned this marketing strategy as being creative and interesting. Positive emotions are evoked through the stimuli. As decorative female models generate surprising effect, it would catch initial attention of consumers and hence, directed toward the elements of execution without there being an in-depth analysis of the message (Lombardot, 2007). Dudley (1999) also added that consumers carry out limited cognitive appraisal when there is presence of nudity in advertisements. Nevertheless, the implementation of sexual stimuli in physical store would result in attention-getting and brand recall, given both variables is positively correlated (Mehta and Purvis, 2006).

Furthermore, the findings in this research showed slightly contradicting results from Mehta and Purvis (2006) statement. Corresponding with this research are the female respondents' responses where they are highly likely to remember the brand name and recognize the store in near future. However, the respondents added that this may be due to their personal interest in shopping. The male respondents depicted contradictory results. Male respondents are able to recognize the store as every brand has their own

store identity. However, in terms of brand recall, the male respondents doubt themselves to be able to recall the brand name in future. Reasons are due to that men only paid attention to the product itself. Putrevu (2008) described men as item-specific processors who only paid concerned about particular unique attributes. From the findings, majority of the male respondents claimed their main purpose is to look for clothes. They would enter the job, purchase the pre-selected items and then leave the job. Alongside with their shopping motives and men's processing style, this is one of the reasons why the male respondents may fail to recall brand name. In addition, the decorative female models might also distract male respondents from taking notice of the store's brand name. Grazer and Keesling (1995) pointed out that higher levels of sexual intensity may distract the audiences from the advertisement's purpose. Moreover, several researchers also concluded that non-sexual illustrations would be better in enhancing brand recall (Steadman, 1969; Alexander and Judd, 1978).

However, brand recall also depends on individual's attitude. Steadman (1969) found that individuals holding favorable attitudes to the use of sex in advertising would recall more correct brand names than those possessing negative attitudes. This statement holds true in the findings. All female respondents who displayed positive attitudes toward the use of in-store sexual appeal are able to recall the brand names. A male respondent who displayed strong negative attitudes toward the use of in-store sexual appeal is not able to recall the brand name of the store in future. For some male

respondents, it might not hold true as there are other factors that influenced their memory, which is discussed earlier.

Moreover, the use of decorative female models acts as a persuasion tool for the female audiences. Female respondents pointed out those clothes worn on the models are attention-getting. One of the females perceived the models as mobile advertising in the store. As a result, corresponding to Dudley (1999), respondents are more interested in trying the product and more likely to search for the products worn on the decorative female models. On the contrary, for male respondents, decorative female models merely serve as attention-attracting stimuli and for visual purposes only. The decorative female models would not have significant influence on males' purchase decision. Their final purchase would depend on the product itself, if it fits their style and body.

In sum, in-store sexual stimuli are high effective in generating initial attention of consumers. This new store concept may stand out from other retail stores, taking Abercrombie and Fitch as an example. Their marketing strategy by using decorative female and male models in-store have generated much attention-getting. When in-store sexual appeals are properly implemented, sexual stimuli would evoke positive emotions and attitudes in most of the respondents, regardless of gender. However, it is also believed that individual's personality has great influence in the attitudes toward in-store sexual appeals. In terms of brand recall and recognition, and purchase intent, it varies

according to shopping motives and gender of respondents. Overall, there are no definite answers that the use of in-store sexual appeal would influence consumer's decision-making, but would definitely catch the public's eye and drive them into the store.

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## 9. APPENDIX

### 9.1 APPENDIX A

**Table 1: Types of Shock Appeals**

<b>Offense Elicitor</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Advertising Examples</b>
Disgusting images	References to blood, body parts or secretions, orifices, especially urinary/ fecal, gases, odors, disease, parasites, bodily harm (e.g., dismemberment), death and decay.	<i>Playstation, United States, 2000</i> Television commercial wherein chef wipes steak around toilet bowl rim and adds rolled up nose pickings as garnish in preparation for serving.
Sexual references	References to masturbation, implied sexual acts, sexually suggestive nudity or partial nudity.	<i>Reebok, United States, 2000</i> A guy sucks snake venom out of his friend's leg in a position that is mistaken for felatio by an onlooker.
Profanity/ obscenity	Swear words, obscene gestures, and racial epithets.	<i>Holsten Pils, United Kingdom, 1996</i> Print advertisement depicts smashed bottles of the product accompanied by the word "shit".
Vulgarity	References to crude or distasteful acts by humans or animals, such as nose picking, farting, licking, humping, or drinking from the	<i>Smartbeep, United States, 1999</i> Woman "lets rip a frat-house blast" of gas while waiting for

	toilet.	date to join her in car.
Impropriety	Violations of social conventions for dress, manners, etc.	<i>Adidas, Canada, 1993</i> Magazine advertisement depicts all nude male soccer team.
Moral offensiveness	Harming innocent people/ animals gratuitous violence of sex, alluding to people or objects that provoke violence, violating standards for far behavior (e.g., shooting a person in the back), putting children in provocative situations (e.g., sexual, violent, victim exploitation).	<i>Diesel Jeans, Italy, 1998</i> Television commercial features a soldier who is shot in the back by a German sniper while protecting a friend wearing Diesel jeans.
Religious taboos	Inappropriate use of spiritual or religious symbols and/ or rituals.	<i>Benetton, 1994</i> Depicts a priest and nun kissing.

## 9.2 Appendix B: Interview Consent Form



### University of Nottingham Business School

#### Consent Form for Research Participation

1. I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Su Wen, Chuan from University of Nottingham Business School. I understand that the research is designed to gather information about academic work relating to dissertation.
2. The purpose and nature of the interview has been explained to me.
3. I agree that the interview carried out may be audio-recorded for research purposes.
4. I have asked and clear all questions I needed to ask before actual interview takes place.

Name of participants :

Signature of participant:

Date :

### **9.3 Appendix C: Focus Group Interview Guide**

Approximately 45minutes long interview will be conducted with participants. Before actual interview takes place, participants are briefed with the topic of this research and the research aims of the dissertation. Then, participants are provided with a consent form to agree on voluntary participant in this research.

First part of the interview:

#### **Shopping Motives**

1. Do you shop for clothes in the United Kingdom (UK)?
2. What motivates or drives you to shop for clothes?

#### **Store Attributes**

3. Can you name me a few of the fashion retail stores you usually visit?
4. When you enter a fashion retail store to shop, what do you expect to see or experience in the retail store environment?
5. Can you name me a fashion retail store where you have had a good experience in-store? *(Tell me more about the experience)*

#### **Sexual Appeal**

6. Do you know what sexual appeal is? What would be a sexual appeal?
7. What is your opinion about sex sells?
8. What is your opinion on the use of sexual appeal in advertising?
9. Do you remember any examples of sexual appeal advertising? Can you tell me more about the examples you remember?

Second part of the interview:

#### **In-store Sexual Appeal**

10. Have you come across any fashion retail stores that have elements of sexual stimuli in their store environment?

11. What elements do they have in the store you mentioned that makes you consider it as sexual?

### **Attention**

12. Can you remember any fashion retail stores that do not use sexual appeal concept in their store environment?
13. Comparing stores that use sexual appeal and non-sexual appeal, which type of store would gain your attention? Why?
14. Will the sexual appeal concept store drives you into the store if it is new in town?

### **Emotion and Attitude Effects**

15. What type of product category do you think is suitable to use sexual appeal in advertising?
16. Does the relationship between the use of sexual appeal and product advertised matters to you?
17. How do you feel when you see female sexual stimuli or in another term, decorative female models used in-store? (*Excited, arouse, skeptical, etc.*)
18. What do you think of the store itself that uses decorative female models that serve as attention-attracting stimuli?
19. What do you think of the brand that uses decorative female models?

### **Purchase Intention, Brand Recall and Brand Recognition**

20. Will you purchase goods from stores that use decorative female models?
21. Will you revisit the store in your next shopping trip?
22. Do you think you are able to recognize the store in the near future?
23. Do you think you are able to remember and recall the store name?

### **To Conclude**

24. What is your opinion about this store concept or theme? Do you perceive it as creative, offending or both?
25. Do you think this type of in-store marketing strategy is effective?
26. Should it be use more or less in the fashion retail marketplace?

## 9.4 Appendix D: In-depth Interview Interview Guide

Approximately half an hour long interview will be conducted with participants. Before actual interview takes place, participants are briefed with the topic of this research and the research aims of the dissertation. Then, participants are provided with a consent form to agree on voluntary participant in this research.

First part of the interview:

### Shopping motives

1. How often do you shop for clothes in the United Kingdom?
2. What motivates you to shop for clothes? (*Product-oriented motivation, hedonic motivation or both*)
3. What are the fashion retail stores that you usually visit?

### Store Attributes

1. In consumer's viewpoint, what do you expect to see or experience in a fashion retail store environment? (*Example: store atmospherics, customer service, convenience*)
2. Can you name me a fashion retail store where you have had a good experience in-store? Can you tell me as much as possible about the experience?
3. What did you like in that store and why?

### Sexual Appeal

1. Do you know what sexual appeal is? In your understanding, what would be a sexual appeal?
2. What is your opinion about using sexual appeal in advertising?
3. Do you remember any examples of sexual appeal advertising?
4. Could you tell me more about the examples you remember?

Explain to participants that the following questions are based on in-store sexual appeal. Explain that sexual appeal herein after refers to female nudity and physical attractiveness dimensions of sexual appeal to participants. The fashion retail brand, Abercrombie and Fitch is used as an example that portrays in-store sexual appeal, similar to the purpose of this research.

### **In-store Sexual Appeal**

1. Have you visited or come across any fashion retail store that uses sexual appeal in the store environment?
2. What elements do you consider it as sexual?
3. What is your opinion about this store concept or theme? How did you feel about it?
4. Do you perceive it as creative, offending or both?

### **Gender Responses: Effects of Decorative Female Models (Female Sexual Stimuli)**

#### **Attention**

1. What are the fashion retail stores that use non-sexual appeal concept?
2. Comparing stores that use sexual appeal and non-sexual appeal, which type of store would gain your attention? Why?
3. Will you visit the sexual appeal concept store if it is new in town?

#### **Emotion and Attitude Effects**

1. What type of product category do you think is suitable to use sexual appeal in advertising?
2. Does the relationship between the use of sexual appeal and product advertised matters to you? For example, using sexual appeal illustration to advertise rice or a corporation.
3. How do you feel when you see female sexual stimuli or in another term, decorative female models used in-store?
4. What do you think of the store image that uses decorative female models or sexy female models that serve as attention-attracting stimuli?
5. What do you think of the brand that uses decorative female models?



### **Purchase Intention, Brand Recall and Brand Recognition**

1. Will you purchase goods from the store using decorative female models?
2. Will you revisit the store in your next shopping trip?
3. Do you think you are able to recognize the store in near future?
4. Do you think you are able to remember and recall the store name?
5. Do you think this type of in-store marketing strategy is effective?
6. Should it be use more or less in the fashion retail marketplace?

## 9.5 Appendix E: Interview Data #1 (Male Interviewee 1)

Interviewer: How often do you shop for clothes in the UK?

Respondent: Average once a month.

Interviewer: What motivates you to shop for clothes? For example, just for the clothes, clothing and some in-store experience or just for pleasure of browsing and shopping.

Respondent: To update the fashion trend and probably for new clothes. Basically I won't shop if I have no intention to buy.

Interviewer: What are the fashion retail stores that you usually visit?

Respondent: Most frequently in Zara, Topshop and Him by Mango.

Interviewer: In consumers' viewpoint, what do you expect to see or experience in a fashion retail store environment? For example, store atmospherics, lighting, music; convenience like faster till service; customer service; etc.

Respondent: New, updated fashion ambience and good customer service.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate more regarding updated fashion ambience?

Respondent: I'm referring to the overall feeling which I think consist of decoration mostly with poster, music, employee attire. Besides that, the product make the most difference, they can't put all clothes on model right? So choosing the right cloth that can represent the season is very important.

Interviewer: Can you name me a fashion retail store where you have had a good experience in-store?

Respondent: The best experience I had was at Coach in Hong Kong. If you want a local then would be Topshop in KL.

Interviewer: Can you tell me as much as possible about that experience?

Respondent: The staff served very well. She is patience, responded to my enquiry and concern very well, gave me lot of useful opinion to judge on the product. I'm actually buying a shoe, she explained to me why is it

design this way, allow me to understand the product very well. The shoe was designed to be tight to wear for the first few time and she taught ways to cope with it. Willingness to share, not rushing to sell even the shop is closing.

Interviewer: What did you like in that store and why?

Respondent: I think this will be pretty much the same as the previous question.

Interviewer: Do you know what sexual appeal is?

Respondent: Yes

Interviewer: In your understanding, what would be a sexual appeal?

Respondent: Such as fit or good-looking girls in magazine. The use of body perfection, it can be any part of the body, to attract viewers.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about using sexual appeal in advertising in print media and television?

Respondent: I think it depends on the local culture, are they conservative. It's fine for me but depends on the purpose of using it. I do not agree if a watch company have their model wearing bikini. And I have no idea why a car expo needs to put a sexy girl beside the car. Some people are just there to shoot the girl not the car. I think these are all against the nature of advertising. But it's good for fashion, apparel are meant to be on the body.

Interviewer: Do you remember any examples of sexual appeal advertising?

Respondent: A tv ads of Gucci perfume, Flora.

Interviewer: Could you tell me more about the examples you remember?

Respondent: The ads is showing the emotion, pleasure of the lady using the perfume, but I only know it is a perfume ads at the last scene when they show the image of the perfume and brand.

Interviewer: The following questions are based on in-store sexual appeal where sexual stimuli are brought into the physical store environment. Herein after, sexual appeal refers to both nudity and physical attractiveness of female models. Nudity refers to amount and style of clothing worn by the models. For example: clothing ranging from tight-fitting, to linger

and underwear. Physical Attractiveness refers to the model's physical beauty which includes facial beauty, complexion and physique. In this research, the brand Abercrombie and Fitch will be used as one of the main example. When you enter the store, you can notice the female employees are dress in different level of explicitness. First, female models that are dress in jeans and polo tee. Second, female employees that are dress in tube dress, miniskirts or shorts. In this research, females in jeans and polo tee are considered non-sexual appeal, whereas females in tube dresses, miniskirts or shorts are considered as sexual appeal. The females are considered as in-store sexual stimuli, also known as decorative female models.

Interviewer: Have you visited or come across any fashion retail store that uses sexual appeal in the store environment?

Respondent: Yes, such as the poster.

Interviewer: Which retail store did you see the poster in?

Respondent: La senza have two big poster on the storefront.

Interviewer: What elements in the store do you consider it as sexual?

Respondent: As I said earlier, it can be the overall looking of the model wearing the product. I assume sexual is not limited to sexy only. Such as a poster with a model wearing the business attire, it shows how good looking you are if wearing it. Other elements of sexual appeal can be attitude, feeling or the body language. As for sexual (intimacy), I think only apply in lingerie store.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about this store concept or theme? How do you feel about it?

Respondent: I think the tube dress and mini skirt is too over.

Interviewer: Do you perceive it as creative, offending or both?

Respondent: Offending, unhealthy for the society.

Interviewer: Can you remember any fashion retail stores that use non-sexual appeal concept?

Respondent: Zara.

Interviewer: Comparing the stores that use a sexual appeal concept and a non-sexual concept, which type of store would gain your attention?

Respondent: I know my purpose of visiting the store is for the clothes. Therefore, I don't think it will affect my frequency to the store.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: My purpose of visiting is for the cloth, the poster may attract but not the employee.

Interviewer: Will you visit the sexual appeal concept store if it is new in town?

Respondent: Won't boycott it, but won't visit just for the purpose of sexual appeal.

Interviewer: What type of product category do you think is suitable to use sexual appeal in advertising?

Respondent: Fashion, if you are talking about the broader range of sexual appeal. As for explicit, I think only suitable for lingerie or related product.

Interviewer: Does the relationship between the use of sexual appeal and product advertised matters to you? For example, using sexual illustrations to advertise rice or a corporation.

Respondent: Yes, I think this is immoral. I can say more than 90% of forbes 100 companies do not use sexual appeal except fashion.

Interviewer: How do you feel when you see female sexual stimuli or in another term, decorative female models used in-store? (Example: excited, arouse, skeptical, etc.)

Respondent: Somehow will get excited, it's the hormone.

Interviewer: What do you think of the store that uses decorative female models that serve as attention-attracting stimuli?

Respondent: Immoral, unethical.

Interviewer: What do you think of the brand that uses decorative female models?

Respondent: Lousy marketing idea, it shows they have bad product quality. Wrong way of branding.

Interviewer: Will you purchase goods from the store using decorative female models?

Respondent: I will if the goods are good.

Interviewer: Will you revisit the store in your next shopping trip?

Respondent: I will if I prefer their product.

Interviewer: Do you think you are able to recognize the store in the near future?

Respondent: Not sure.

Interviewer: Do you think you are able to remember and recall the store name?

Respondent: Not sure.

Interviewer: Do you think this type of in-store marketing strategy is effective?

Respondent: I don't think so. After all, consumers still decide based on the product's quality.

Interviewer: Should it be use more or less in the fashion retail marketplace?

Respondent: It can be use but ethically, marketing personnel should have considered the impact to the society instead of just the business. A good company should not leave a bad impact to the society. Think of this, CSR.

## 9.6 Appendix F: Interview Data #2 (Female Interviewee 1)

- Interviewer: How often do you shop for clothes in the UK?
- Respondent: Once every 2 weeks.
- Interviewer: What motivates you to shop for clothes? For example, just for the clothes, clothing and some in-store experience or just for pleasure of browsing and shopping.
- Respondent: For the pleasure of viewing and to keep up with the current trend.
- Interviewer: What are the fashion retail stores that you usually visit?
- Respondent: Topshop, Miss Selfridge, H&M.
- Interviewer: In consumers' viewpoint, what do you expect to see or experience in a fashion retail store environment? Examples, store atmospherics like lighting, music; or convenience like faster till service; customer service.
- Respondent: Properly and neatly organized arrangement of apparels, friendly and cheerful staff, clean fitting room.
- Interviewer: Can you name me a fashion retail store where you have had a good experience in-store?
- Respondent: Boutique in Singapore.
- Interviewer: Can you tell me as much as possible about that experience?
- Respondent: I was greeted with a cheerful welcome by the staffs and they were helpful in terms of getting the correct size. Besides that, the store provided alteration services for clothes that did not fit well.
- Interviewer: What did you like in that store and why?
- Respondent: The cheerful vibes that the staff gave out.
- Interviewer: Do you know what sexual appeal is?
- Respondent: Yes.
- Interviewer: In your understanding, what would be a sexual appeal?

Respondent: Attracted to one's outer beauty, good looks or body, or how one carries herself or himself.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about using sexual appeal in advertising in print media and television?

Respondent: It entices customers as it could portray that wearing or using that certain brand could make you look good.

Interviewer: Do you remember any examples of sexual appeal advertising?

Respondent: Staffs dressing up fashionably up-to-date clothes in Topshop, hot "models" to greet customers entering their stores in A&F.

Interviewer: Could you tell me more about the examples you remember?

Respondent: Like in A&F, the models at the door who greet customers are really good-looking and they have good physique. At the front door, there's a half-naked guy who stands there and allow customers to take pictures with him. Also, there's pretty girls in the store that greets you with warm smile.

Interviewer: The following questions are based on in-store sexual appeal where sexual stimuli are brought into the physical store environment. Herein after, sexual appeal refers to both nudity and physical attractiveness of female models.

Nudity refers to amount and style of clothing worn by the models (example: clothing ranging from tight-fitting, to lingerie and underwear). Physical Attractiveness refers to the model's physical beauty which includes facial beauty, complexion and physique.

In this research, the brand Abercrombie and Fitch will be used as one of the main example. When you enter the store, you can notice the female employees are dress in different level of explicitness. First, female models that are dress in jeans and polo tee. Second, female employees that are dress in tube dress, miniskirts or shorts.

In this research, females in jeans and polo tee are considered non-sexual appeal, whereas females in tube dresses, miniskirts or shorts are considered as sexual appeal. The females are considered as in-store sexual stimuli, also known as decorative female models.

Interviewer: Have you visited or come across any fashion retail store that uses sexual appeal in the store environment?

Respondent: A&F, Hollister.



Interviewer: What elements in the store do you consider it as sexual?

Respondent: Using good-looking models as the staffs in the store.

Interviewer: What is your opinion about this store concept or theme? How do you feel about it?

Respondent: I find it unique and it brings out the curiosity in me to check out the store.

Interviewer: Do you perceive it as creative, offending or both?

Respondent: Both. It is a creative advertising technique to attract customers but it could also be offending to some as it portrays that only girls or boys with hot or good body can fit into their clothes.

Interviewer: Can you remember any fashion retail stores that use non-sexual appeal concept?

Respondent: Primark

Interviewer: Comparing the stores that use a sexual appeal concept and a non-sexual concept, which type of store would gain your attention?

Respondent: The sexual appeal.

Interviewer: Why?

Respondent: It's interesting to observe and see how the store uses sexual appeal to attract customers.

Interviewer: Will you visit the sexual appeal concept store if it is new in town?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: What type of product category do you think is suitable to use sexual appeal in advertising?

Respondent: Beauty products such as cosmetics and facial products.

Interviewer: Does the relationship between the use of sexual appeal and product advertised matters to you? For example, using sexual illustrations to advertise rice or a corporation.

Respondent: Not really.

Interviewer: How do you feel when you see female sexual stimuli or in another term, decorative female models used in-store? (Example: excited, arouse, skeptical, etc.)

Respondent: I won't feel skeptical of seeing females wearing mini-skirts in-store. They don't offend or make me feel discomfort as long as they are not wearing lingerie in-store.

Interviewer: What do you think of the store that uses decorative female models that serve as attention-attracting stimuli?

Respondent: A creative way of attracting customers.

Interviewer: What do you think of the brand that uses decorative female models?

Respondent: Good marketing strategy.

Interviewer: Will you purchase goods from the store using decorative female models?

Respondent: Depends on what the products are.

Interviewer: Will you revisit the store in your next shopping trip?

Respondent: Probably.

Interviewer: Do you think you are able to recognize the store in the near future?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think you are able to remember and recall the store name?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think this type of in-store marketing strategy is effective?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Should it be use more or less in the fashion retail marketplace?

Respondent: More.

