

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN RESPONSE TO EROTIC ADVERTISING

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Abstract: Companies make use of sexual appeal in advertising more now than ever. The purpose of this article is to gain a better understanding of how men and women perceive sex in advertising. Articles suggest that young men are not as affected as young women concerning buying behavior and self-confidence by the sexual appeals in advertisements.

Keywords: EROTIC STIMULI, ADVERTISING, GENDER, GENDER DIFFERENCES

1. Introduction

People all over the world are bombarded every day with an increasing number of advertising messages on different channels such as television, radio, print, posters, internet and social media channels. Advertising can be defined as any paid form of non-personal promotion transmitted through a mass medium. The key difference between advertising and other forms of promotion, such as personal selling, sales promotion and publicity is that advertising communicates with large numbers of people. That is why advertising is of interest both to marketers and psychologists.

Humor, fear, guilt and sex are the most commonly used techniques for presenting and delivering a message to the recipients of the advertisement. Humor evokes positive emotions and smiles across the recipients. Fear is especially effective as a tool of enhancing motivation. Guilt is powerful since it motivates emotionally mature individuals to undertake responsible action leading to a reduction in the level of guilt. Through all of the techniques, sex is considered to be one of the most influential tools for influencing the recipients in order to buy the items that are advertised.

The use of sexual information in messages has maintained a presence since the very beginning of advertising. Images of sexual marketing content range from faint suggestions to provocative behavior to outright nudity. Undoubtedly erotic stimuli act as an initial attention lure and retain awareness for a longer period. They improve recall of message points when there is a suitable relationship with the advertised product. They evoke emotional responses, such as feelings of arousal and even lust.

But erotic stimuli must not be considered as panacea for selling products and items. In some recipients erotic stimuli can elicit negative feelings such as embarrassment, disgust, or uneasiness. That is why it is of high importance advertisers to think wisely how to present the erotics to the audience.

2. Erotic stimuli in advertising

There are a lot of theories and definitions regarding the usage of erotic stimuli in advertising. But mostly common used are the definitions made by Lambiase and Reichert (2003). According to the authors there are five different types of sexual information in advertising: nudity, sexual behavior, psychical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds.

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) state that displays of bodies constitute a crucial source of sexual information. The term nudity does not imply that models are completely unclothed, a suggestive dress is often represented by open blouses with partially exposed cleavage, tight fitting clothing that highlight the body.

Lambiase and Reichert (2003) believe that although sexual content in mainstream advertising leaves out the sex act, it does include sexually provocative behavioral displays. Sexual behavior can be diversified into advertisements in two ways: as individual behavior or interpersonal interaction. In the first form models can behave sexually in advertisements by making eye contact, using different facial expression and inviting smiles with the viewer, flirting, and moving provocatively. In these ways the authors further claim that models can communicate sexual interest with the

viewer or simply try to bring out sexual arousal. The second form of sexual behavior involves two models (or more) engaging each other in sexual contact. The degree of explicitness of the encounter can vary from simple displays of affection, to inferred intercourse.

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

Images and words that refer to sex or activate sexual thoughts, can be considered examples of sex in advertising. According to the researchers sexual referents in advertising can be defined as message elements, visual or verbal, that serve to bring forth or develop sexual thoughts.

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

That is why marketers and psychologist must use different tools for segmentation and for choosing the right images and messages according to the specifics of the auditorium they are reaching out.

In this train of thoughts, gender - or the social and cultural meanings, associated with the maleness and femaleness imposed and expected by society - is crucial factor in developing marketing strategy and in building an advertising campaign.

3. Gender in Psychology

Gender has been studied from many perspectives in the psychological literature but we are going to discuss the major factors that drive the behavior of males and females.

The first dichotomy between the genders is the so-called achievement – affiliation orientation (Dahl, Vonhs, 2014)

Achievements orientation involves the drive to accomplish external goals. To be successful, assertive, independent and most of all, self-centered. On the other hand, affiliation involves concerns for other people's feeling, seeking approval from others, creating nurturing relationships with others and interpersonal harmony.

Men are more self-focused which is expressed in such traits as aggressiveness and orientation towards achievements. Men put their pleasures and their activities in the center of their world. Communal orientation is expressed in being oriented towards the others, concerned with social acceptability, and being altero-centrist Women center their feelings, their enjoyment, and their ambitions on something outside themselves (Chivers, et. al, 2004).

McClelland et al. found that women were unmoved by references to leadership and intelligence but if they were socially

rejected, their achievement motivation increased as measured in the standard way. By the opposite, men were unaffected by social rejection on the achievement dimension. (McClelland, 2004)

Also there are gender differences in interests, preferences, and attitudes. Anastasi summarized these findings. According to the author males tend to excel in speed and coordination of bodily movements, spatial orientation and other special orientation and mechanical comprehension. Females tend to surpass males in manual dexterity, perceptual speed and accuracy, memory, numerical computation and verbal fluency (Anastasi, 1997).

In terms of intellectual capability females tend to do well in verbal parts, communication, speech and literature. Males by implication tend to do well in quantitative aspects of learning skills. Males also do much less of self-disclosure while women are also the bigger recipients of self-disclosure by others (Dasgupta et al., 2004).

In most forms of aggression tests men score higher than women. Researchers state that males display more physical and verbal aggression while women tend to repress their anger and hostility. They tend to express it through masochistic behavior, by inhibiting aggression and by developing anxieties about aggression (Enbom, 2005).

According to studies men and women also have different beliefs about the purpose of sexual activity and base their decisions for engaging in it on different motives.

The premise that women and men have different motives regarding sex receives theoretical backing from both evolutionary and socialization models of human sexuality.

The evolutionary view of sexual motives is based on the model of differential parental investment. That theory states that because females in the human species must invest far greater resources to produce offspring than do men, they tend to be correspondingly more selective in their choice of sexual partners. Rather than engaging in casual sex with a large number of men, women select mates who are likely to commit long-term resources to help with the nurturing of offspring. Men, on the other hand, benefit reproductively by taking advantage of opportunities to engage in sexual intercourse with a large number of women, with little regard to long-term consequences (Prakash, 1992).

Men tend to emphasize physical gratification and views sex as an end in itself. Their attitude towards sex is recreational. In contrast, women tend to adopt a relationship-based orientation to sexuality, an approach that emphasizes the importance of intimacy and commitment in a sexual relationship (Hill, 2002).

4. Gender in Advertising

Advertisers are interested in similarities and differences in how men and women receive and evaluate information. One difference involves the actual creation of meaning from a given advertisement. Men look directly at the primary message of a given advertisement. Women not only evaluate the primary message, but they also pick up multiple clues from the message and weave together threads to intuit and infer the inner meaning of the message (Popcorn & Marigold, 2000).

Once the meaning from an advertisement has been determined, men and women differ in how that meaning is used. These different decision-making processes are related to whether the process is linear or more nonlinear in nature. Men process messages and make decisions more quickly than women do, perhaps because men focus on the primary message of a given advertisement and take in little other information during the process. This is due to the observation that men have a linear thinking and reasoning style, and men tend to have a more task-oriented focus than women have. Women, on the other hand, process the information in an advertisement quickly and from many levels and sources, including music, visuals, voice-over, and text. Women also tend to evaluate and weigh the various

sources to process the message and determine what steps to take next. Women's reasoning processes are less task-oriented and more compartmentalized than men's are. Women's decision-making processes are characterized as being incremental reasoning processes, where each piece of information builds on the previous information that is taken in. This non-linear approach to reasoning allows women to think in terms of interrelated factors, not straight lines. The observation that women evaluate multiple sources supports this reasoning style (Sheehan, K., 2004).

Women and men respond to entirely different stimuli when viewing and evaluating advertising messages (Popcorn & Marigold, 2000). Men respond positively to male imagery, and women respond positively to female imagery.

Given that men and women differ in many ways, it should not be surprising that advertisements portray men and women differently.

Women are much more likely to be pictured as dependent in advertising, and much more likely to be pictured at home than males (Paek, Nelson, & Viella, 2011)

Women tend to be portrayed in decorative roles much more often than men suggests that advertisements do not render a realistic depiction of the female gender role (LaTour, 1990). Specifically, many decorative depictions of women tend to show women in sexual or alluring positions. A sexual depiction is often an explicitly aggressive image of a woman that focuses on her lips, breasts, or groin area. An alluring depiction is less explicit and might feature a woman reclining submissively on a piece of furniture or on the floor or looking at the camera with her lips suggestively parted.

Decorative roles are seen as arguably representing society's view of the appropriate place for women in society: taking a passive position (LaTour, 1990).

When decorative and sexual imagery is used, advertisements often include nonverbal cues as an indication that women lack authority and possess less power than men (Simmons, 1986). Probably the most important scholar in the area of nonverbal cues is Erving Goffman, whose book *Gender Advertisements* (1979) explored a range of portrayals of women and men in terms of power. Goffman's findings include that women are generally pictured at a smaller relative size, especially height. Men tend to be pictured as taller than women, putting them in a position of power, authority, and rank. Body language often suggests that women are submissive toward products, such as the woman lying on the floor with her Burberry trench barely covering her body, whereas men are dominant over products.

Women are also seen as more tactile than men; that is, they more often are touching, cradling, and caressing objects. Goffman sees this type of touching as ritualistic, as opposed to more utilitarian aspects of touching such as touch that grasps, manipulates or holds. Again, this suggests the more passive nature of women in advertising.

Similarly, women tend to appear removed from the social situation of the activity pictured in the ads. Often, their gaze is averted. Goffman (1979) refers to this as licensed withdrawal.

The overarching concern with decorative and sexual portrayals is that the individuals involved in such portrayals may become objects, similar to the objects that the people are trying to sell. With passive portrayals, there is a disconnection between the person and the object and possibly even between people. Such feelings may pass on from the advertisement to the world, creating general feelings of disconnectedness among those who see the ad (Wollin, 2003).

5. Gender Differences in Response to Erotic Stimuli in Advertising

There are a lot of empirical evidences that support the notion of a gender differences in motivations regarding sex and in responses towards erotic in advertising.

Sexual appeal is a strong psychological appeal, second only to self-preservation. In humans, as in all animals, sexual desire is an instinctive reaction as we search for the perfect mate (Reichert, 2003). Sexual imagery has been shown to have a stronger persuasive ability for men than for women.

When exposed to erotic stimuli males report a greater overall arousal towards the ad while women are aroused by romantic, emotional stimuli.

Sexual imagery has been shown to have a stronger persuasive ability for men than for women. It may be because men have a different set of criteria for selecting a mate than women do: Men traditionally tend to recognize that a woman who is young, healthy, and beautiful will be a good mate. Therefore, many advertisers use sexual imagery to get a man's attention and then associate buying the product with getting a mate (Reichert, 2003). These types of messages focus on instinctual or physical types of meaning in messages.

For women, the persuasive power of sexual imagery works on a somewhat different level. A healthy, fit male model will attract the attention of many women and may even create desire for the product. Women, though, also pay attention to the long-term potential of a man—for example, his ability to be a good father and to provide them with money, power, and prestige. All these factors are almost impossible to put into any single advertisement (Reichert, 2003).

Arguably, then, it is difficult for advertisers to use sex successfully to sell to women. Instead, advertising uses romance to make a sexual connection with women. Romantic images are less blatant and more ambiguous than traditional sexual messages: They provide images of courtship, relationships, and the process of falling in love. Sexual imagery in advertisements directed toward women becomes much more intellectual than physical (Reichert, 2003).

Females are more likely than males to label the stimuli as pornographic and give ratings of disgust and disapproval of the images that are used. Women also tended to evaluate erotic stimuli more favorably and erotica depicting less conventional sexual acts less favorably than males.

Heterosexual males prefer female nudity and vice versa.

Regarding provocative advertising, men believe that they do not see a major problem with it. Most men are not specially affected since they are used to provocative advertising. They believe that it is acceptable to a certain limit but if it exaggerated they can experience it as slimy and meaningless (Lanseng, 2016). Based on that data we can conclude that men have a more positive attitude toward a mild sexual appeal ad than a strong sexual appeal ad. That data showed that most men are affected by idealized models in advertising, but men do not compare themselves with models in ads as much as women do. Men understand that the models in the ads are not realistic in the way that they are not representative to the public. Due to this fact, men are able to enjoy ads in the same way as they enjoy movies and television. Men believe that people in general do not look like models in ads and models are only exceptions. Men perceive idealized models as role models and goals more than threats. The ideals seem to possess something that men are striving for.

Idealized models affect men in the way that they encourage them to go the gym and become more fit. Although men sometimes compare themselves with models, they mainly relate to the feeling and situation in the ad (Davis, 1990). Men show positive attitudes

towards idealized female models in ads since they prefer to look at beautiful and fit models. Idealized models do not affect their perceptions of women in general. Even if they think that the models in the ads are looking good they do not compare them

Researches show that the effect of sexual stimuli in print advertising often create more favorable responses on the brand recall and intention to purchase. One risk with provocative advertising is that men would care more about the models in the ads than the actual product or brand advertised.

Advertising involving idealized models leads to more attention and increase men's liking of the products. In contrast, advertising using less attractive models could make the products feel less serious. The importance of using idealizing models differs depending on the products, for example it is more important to use an attractive model for an underwear ad.

Men's attitude toward products is influenced by the ad. Products that are advertised by more sophisticated and classy ads create a higher value for men, and will lead to that they experience the products as more expensive. One risk with sexual appeal ads is that men focus too much on the sexual nudity so that they miss the product.

5. Conclusion

Gender is increasingly implicated in consumer and market behavior.

Differential response by males and females to erotic stimuli imply that effective use of this device is dependent on the ad's targeted audience. Addressing these differing reactions, erotic ads should be part of the overall strategy built by the professionals in the fields of marketing and psychology and not an end of itself.

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