

Sex Appeal in Advertising: A Critical Evaluation

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Submission : 05.06.2024
Revision : 23.02.2025
Acceptance : 06.03.2025

Abstract

This qualitative research study thoroughly evaluates the concept of 'sex appeal' in advertising, with a view to revealing its critical implications in marketing communication practice by incorporating views of different scholars and professionals. The research delineates that use of sex appeal messages in advertising is a relatively common practice around the world. After realizing the psychological chemistry of human beings the advertising practitioners consider appropriate sexual stimuli or erotic imagery as a crucial motivating appeal required to draw attention, create awareness among target customers, increase the persuasive impact of promotional messages and stand out in the cluttered media environment. However, findings of this study reveal that sex appeal in advertising can be both positive in terms of originality and effectiveness and negative in terms of ethics and public sentiments from constructing cultural perspectives. Basically, this research provides a clear picture of multidimensional aspects of sex appeal in advertising from both theoretical and practical points of view, thereby, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Key Words: Sex appeal, Advertising, Psychology, and Ethics.



The Chittagong University
Journal of Business Administration
Volume 35, 2021, pp. 361 - 400
© Faculty of Business Administration
University of Chittagong
ISSN : 2231 - 4843

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1. Introduction

Advertising is the non-personal communication of information usually paid for that attempt to inform, persuade, and remind customers in a positive way to influence their buying behavior with a meaningful, attractive and persuasive message regarding specific products, services or ideas offered by a specific company through different selected media (Stanton, 1984; Bovee and Arens, 1992; Richards and Curran, 2002; Kotler and Keller, 2012; Dahlen and Rosengren, 2016). It is practically true that “doing business without advertising is like winking at a girl in the dark. You know what you are doing but nobody else does” (Britt, 1956). From advertising strategy perspective different messages play a vital role in persuading the target consumers for promoting a bundle of benefits associated with the product or service that was intended to offer. The message could be in the form of a jingle or an anthem, which is played every time to promote the brand or logo on TV/Radio or displayed in below the line (BTL) activities. A harmonious and catchy tune ensures that the product offered remains synonymous with the consumers’ wishes and desires, helps in creating strong associations with the brand. It has been observed that sex, fear, humor, music, emotion, rationality and scarcity appeals used successfully in advertising (Clow and Baack, 2007) that are very much associated with human beings and social life. Evidences suggest that effectiveness of various types of advertisement appeals have evoked research interest among academicians in the recent decade (Lee, 2018; Yousef, 2023). From a consumer psychology perspective, professional advertisers are taking the innovative opportunity to consider sex appeal as strategic tools for designing attractive messages that aim to draw attention, inform, create awareness, persuade in a way to modify and change customer behaviors as per their promotional intention (Reichert, 2002; Chang and Tseng, 2013). Sex appeal in advertisement can draw more attention, create interest with long lasting memorability among target customers as compared to the common type of non-sex appeal advertisements (Samson, 2016). It has been noticed that in some advertisements when sexuality is integrated with the message, specific values and attitudes linked with sex are usually sold out together with products (Klug and Ellis, 2012). Sex appeal tactics are commonly found in promoting and building brand of luxurious

products (Zhurgenova, et-al; 2014), beauty products (Jung and Lee, 2009), fragrances (Toncar and Fetscherin, 2012), fashionable clothing (Kiong et al., 2015), alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks (Friedman et al., 2018), birth control elements (Sengupta and Dahl, 2008), high-tech automobiles (Wang and Praet, 2013), fast foods (Poon, 2016), service products (Pritchard and Morgan, 1996) such as - hotel, airline, tourism and entertainment services and many others. Designing advertising messages by applying sexual passion can have an incredible psychological effects on the consumer behavior (Sawang, 2010). Significant amount of researches documented that sexual passion played a positive role in determining effectiveness of marketing communication in the diverse and competitive market (Thiyagarajan, et-al; 2012; Sari, et-al; 2015; Lascu, et-al; 2016). Sex appeal evokes emotional and persuasive responses among customers in a distinctive way for taking purchase decisions, practically, sexually attractive persons are usually more desirable by a group of specific type of general public (Debevec, et-al; 1986).

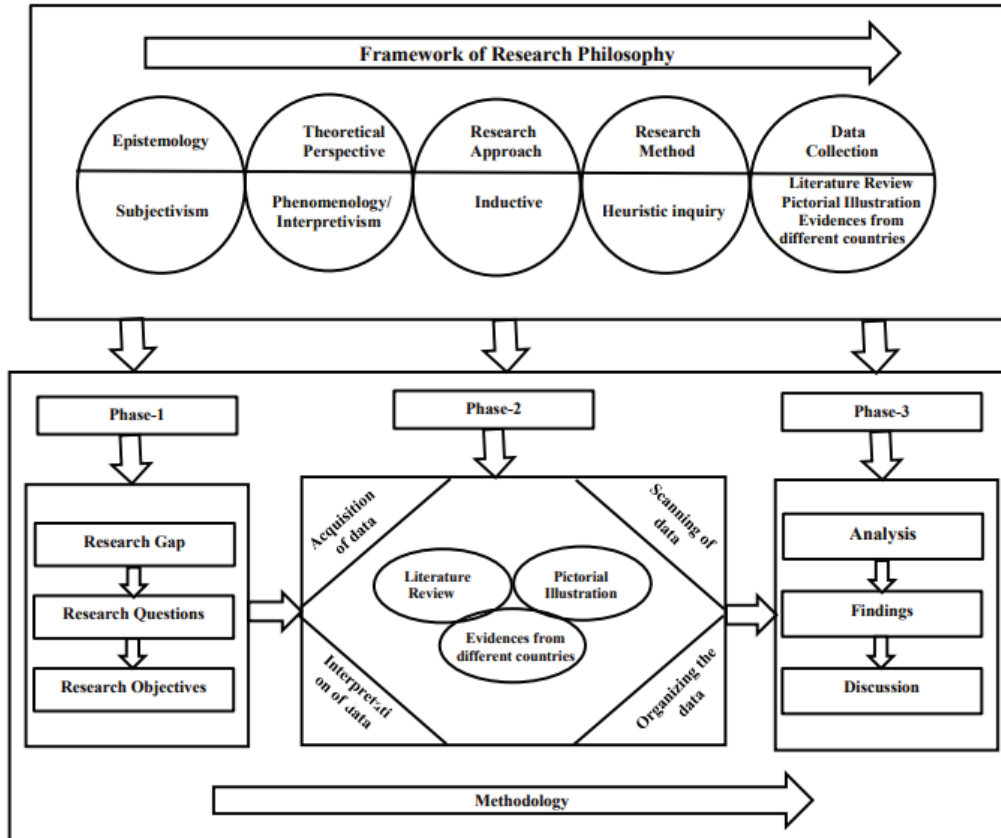
In this competitive market situation along with the advancement of innovative information technology, customers are bombarded with diverse type of information through various channels such as TV, Radio, Newspaper, Internet and other Social media. Therefore, marketers need to think strategically to promote their products in such a complex market by designing pragmatic message strategy with appropriate appeals. It is practically true that advertisers are using various types of appeals to promote products from different perspectives. Each appeal has its own merits and demerits from applications, effectiveness, psychological, ethical and cultural standpoint. It is also true that advertisements with sexual contents have been frequently debated among academicians (Wirtz, *et-al.*, (2018) and media professionals (Westenberg, *et-al.*, 2017). Some research scholars codify that effectiveness of sexual appeals ad has mixed results (Wietz, *et-al.*, 2018). On the other hand there is a gap between advertising theory and practice (Nyilasy and Reid, 2007) and the fundamental problem is that marketers are in dilemma to what extent sex appeal can be applied in advertising for arousing attention of audience in an acceptable manner.

On the basis of the research problem this study has a number of specific objectives: (a) to examine the effect of sex appeal in advertising messages and the way 'sex' is used as an arousal technique for persuading the target customers from the real world market situation; (b) to evaluate the critical aspects of sex appeal from customers' psychology point of view through the illustration of models and to find out the possible links between consumer attitudes and perceptions of sex appeal in advertising; and (c) to identify ethical and moral issues regarding sex appeal advertising from socio-cultural point of view.

2. Research Methodology

A qualitative method has been considered in this study to achieve predetermined research objectives and to have in depth understanding of the critical issues regarding sex appeals in advertising. This is a desk-based research by nature which is one of the most cost effective methods to integrate, evaluate and generate new insights in a synergetic manner from previous multidimensional analysis (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2010; Lopez, 2017). From research philosophy point of view priority has been given to phenomenological paradigm (Gray, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2011) with inductive approach (Gary, 2014)). A framework of research philosophy along with methodology for this study is illustrated below (**Figure-1**). Due to broad scope and critical nature of the topic, quantitative data is difficult to organize in a systematic fashion and there is no research intention to test any specific theory by formulating specific hypotheses. Considering the practical and complex situation along with resource constraints, this research study concentrated on a well established model and academic literatures rather than quantitative interpretation based on primary data. Relevant data have been collected from multiple authentic secondary sources, such as international indexed journals, internet, text books, seminar papers etc. for systematic critical interpretation (Gray, 2014) and comprehensive analysis on the crucial issues regarding sex appeals in advertising. A significant number of research papers related to the topic have been gone through and a number of pictorial evidences have (**Illustrations 1 to Illustration 9**) acquired from companies' websites, also been incorporated for thorough analysis in order to make the paper understandable and presentable.

Figure -1



3. Literature Review

3.1 Sex Appeal in Advertising

Sex appeal messages are considered as creative strategies developed by accommodating display of vigorous nudity features along with sexual attractiveness or suggestiveness (Bello, et-al; 1983) that reveals brand related information from advertising perspective or persuasive appeals in marketing perspective (Reichert et al., 2001). The approach of sex appeal in advertising intend to deliver any message regarding either product or brand information with a belief that for promoting certain types of products such technique is comparatively effective than other appeals to drive consumer behavior

towards taking purchase decisions (Dahl, Sengupta and Vohs, 2009). The fundamental aim of using sex appeal in advertisement are to gain a number of specific advantages: (i) to draw attention (Reichart et al., 2001); (ii) to hold attention for longer periods of time (Grossman and Till, 1998); (iii) to ensure higher level of persuasion (LaTour, et-al., 1990); (iv) to create purchase intentions (Dudley, 1999); (v) to drive emotional response in a positive way (Meade and Zhou, 2017); and (v) to remind in a better way (Reid and Soley, 1983) in comparison to other appeals.

It is not wise to consider that the terms ‘nudity’ and ‘sexual stimuli’ are synonymous. Rather sexual stimuli can be expressed in explicit or implicit ways (Wilson and Moore, 1979). Nudity is one of the explicit elements (display of body along with stimulating actions of the models in ads) of sexual stimuli but there are some other implicit elements cannot be ignored such as – sounds, lights, colors etc. that are also used individually or combinedly with explicit stimuli in sex appeal advertisements. In a true sense, the application of sex appeals in advertising can be extremely ‘overt’ or ‘subtle’ and to some extent ‘subliminal’ (Reichert, 2003). Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008) postulated that there are three specific categories of sexual appeals used in advertising messages, such as - subliminal, nudity and eroticism. Subliminal sex appeal portrayed sexual stimuli that subconsciously affect the audience, as a result the viewers are not in a position to truly receiving and acknowledging the message (Shimp, 2008). It has different forms such as - biological shapes and sexual acts or positions (Reichert, 2003). Subliminal sex appeal advertisements are extremely vague, as a result consumers usually pay less attention to this type of advertising and thus it is practically not effective (Clow and Baack, 2007). Nudity and partial nudity is the second category of sex appeal where naked bodies are portrayed in advertisements (Ouwersloot and Duncan, 2008). This type of appeal is frequently used to sell products with extreme sexual link such as perfumes, undergarments, birth control products (Clow and Baack, 2007) but it is similarly used to sell products that are not related to sex such as automobiles, fast food (Ouwersloot and Duncan, 2008). Practically, such type of advertisements expect a positive sexual response rather than highlighting the product to the target consumer (Clow and Baack, 2007). Eroticism is the third and intense type of sex appeal

focused on the sexual desire between opposite or same sex partners (Ouwensloot and Duncan, 2008). Clow and Baack (2007) argued that sexual behavior or explicit sexuality can be found in the form of individual or interpersonal. Advertising adopting this type of appeal, demonstrating poses or positions performed by a person or pairs (Reichert, 2003), may focus on sexually aggressive behavior with, or without, the action of sexual presentation. Reichert (2003) provides clear distinctions between the overt sexual appeal and sexually suggestive appeal. Basically, in sexually suggestive technique, the sexuality is more exquisite, but the sexual appellation is still active and apparent (Reichert, 2003). Sexual suggestiveness, that triggered sexual thoughts and make sexual references, is less controversial compared to overt sexual approach because it does not apply sex explicitly at high stream (Clow and Baack, 2007). Advertisers often apply this appeal through allusion and delusion (Reichert, 2003).

From psychological perspective, sexual stimuli positively create excitements, charms, emotions, erotic feelings in the human mind; as a result people will think positively and relate advertising message with their lifestyle (Wilson and Moore, 1979). Socio-culture is another important factor that drive consumer responses towards advertisements that incorporates explicit or implicit elements of sexual stimuli (Boddewyn and Kunz, 1991) and it varies between collectivism/individualism and low/high context geographical territory (Herrmann and Heitmann, 2006). Gregory and Munch (1996) delineated that people in individualistic countries prefer variety and stimulation compared to the people in collectivistic countries. Collectivism or individualism in the cultural setting of different countries play a significant role regarding consumers' positive or negative perceptions towards representation of the sexual stimuli in the advertisement for economic gain.

3.2 Theories and Models Related to Sex Appeal

3.2.1 The Evolutionary Theory

To have a solid understanding, researchers find it worthwhile to evaluate the evolutionary theory from the perspective of sex appeals in advertising and gender differences due to various mating strategies. Basically, sex is related to biological system and need of human being. The biological privilege of the

male to reproduce with his counterpart (opposite gender) as many as possible, as this enhances his possibility of sexual reproduction (Crosby et al., 2021). Due to this specific reason, males eagerly and emotionally search for cues which indicate opposite sex are available, accessible, and achievable (such as - provocative behavior), as well as other cues that are meaningful from the viewpoint of good health, gorgeous body shape, facial erotic expression, shiny hair and attractive boobs (Gallup and Frederick, 2010). Advertisers are using the theme of evolutionary theory that help them to create an association between their product features and sex appeal in order to psychologically persuade men. On the other hand evolutionary research into female sex strategies revealed that women are giving more importance to long term prospects, comfortable lifestyle and mates' resources rather showing less importance in good health, body structure, facial expression and other typical male requirements (Gallup and Frederick, 2010). The root of this theory has strategic importance because it reveals the role of different gender on the effectiveness of sex appeal advertisements (Klug and Ellis, 2012). From physiological and psychological perspective, this theory established the fact that sex appeal advertisements are more effective to persuade male customers, on the other hand, advertisements showing romantic imagery, wealth, intelligence and power of male are more preferable to persuade female customers (Lanseng, 2016).

3.2.2 The Arousal Model

The arousal model in Figure-1, adopted from Thayer (1978), illustrates that arousal plays an important role in generating feelings and thoughts. The model reveals that arousal involves the interactions of two dimensions: the first (A) is a continuum ranging from an energized feeling to an object, the second (B) ranges from inner tension to a feeling of placidity. The dimension 'A' is associated with positive feelings; whereas dimension 'B' corresponds to negative ones. The model proposes that the dominating dimension of arousal (energy versus tension) depends on the individual. Consequently, arousing advertising messages lead to no feeling of tension in some people and energy in others. The interesting finding here is that, a strong correlation between energized feeling and product awareness that are associated with the advertising message. Hence, marketers should place a particular emphasis on

creating energy stimulating messages rather than tension stimulating ones (Thayer, 1978).

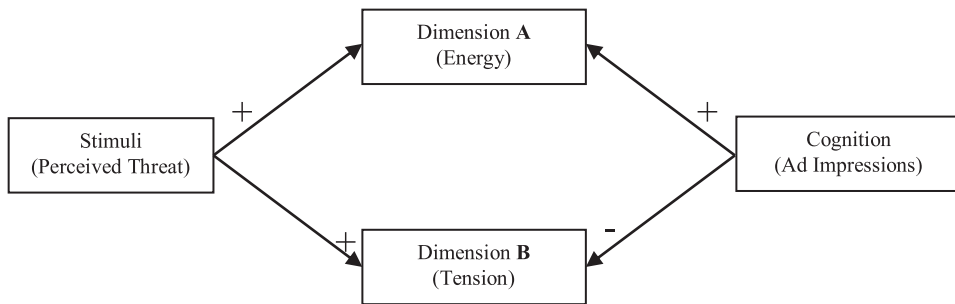


Figure-1: The Arousal Model

Source: Adopted from Thayer (1978)

Advertising is about two things: attention and decision-making. It is clear that sex attracts attention. Naked men, women, suggestive poses, implied sex - all of it. Arousal - the ideal reaction to sexual ads - influences our decision-making. The arousal theory of motivation proposed by Thayer (1978) is closely associated with central states of general bodily arousal, and involves conscious components of energy (vs. tiredness) and tension (vs. calmness). The theory suggests that people are driven to perform actions in order to maintain an optimum level of physiological arousal. For example, when we feel bored, we seek activities that will increase our level of arousal. When we are too tense and anxious, we seek activities that will decrease our level of arousal. In neurological terms, the arousal theory states that part of our motivation is influenced by the mesolimbic dopamine system, responsible for our reward sensitivity. This reward system influences our physiological craving for more stimuli, which in turn makes us behave in a certain way, in the direction of a goal. And here it's important to note that each person has a different optimum level of arousal, or in other words, a different level of excitement in which a person feels comfortable and performs better. When we are at the optimum level of arousal, we feel neither overly bored nor stressed and are thus able to perform tasks better]

3.2.2.1 Sex Arousal and Persuasion in Advertising

Severin and Tankard (2001) revealed that persuasion is one of the basic forms of communication, which influences people into an attitude change. LaTour (1990) argued that sex appeal is widely used by the marketer to change behavioral components evoke affective responses of consumers due to the fact that it has psychological implications. Arousal can be considered as critical mediator of advertisement response. Arousal that drive positive valence will result in positive behavioral responses (LaTour, Pitts and Snook-Luther, 1990). Tuerck (1978) states that persuasion and influence in the world of advertising is heavily dependent upon how and what the message actually says. Leigh (1994) argued that persuasion depends on several factors, which may range from the actual duration of the advertising message to the number of visual shots that are changed in it. Lighting, direction and the eventual follow up of the ad are also very significant here. When one talk about the print media, typography, colors, graphics and other features are essential in creating a single unified message that persuades the consumer for buying a particular product (Leigh, 1994). Apart from the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ factors, the number of times the actual message is run on television or radio is crucial in persuading the public. Furthermore, the size of the print ads in newspapers and magazines, as well as the placement of the billboard or shop sign in the outdoor medium may be critical in determining the favorable or unfavorable response from the audience. Sex stimuli containing messages as a way of influencing people are no exception to these rules (Leigh, 1994). When the persuasion has taken place, a person will move on to the next step of purchasing the product. This could happen on a relevant stage for the high involvement product compared to low involvement ones. According to O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2003), it is necessary to understand the psyche of the consumers as well as their buying/spending patterns on a consistent basis, to avoid straying away from the already drawn out strategy and misunderstanding the target market. Cook (2001) logically argued that persuasion and influence in advertising world is an art rather than science itself. These research findings support the idea that accommodating sex appeal with product information are generally connected with changes in behavior, attitudes and intentions. If the intensity of the sex appeal becomes too high,

some consumers may feel embarrassed, and as a consequence will try to avoid the ad instead of following the recommendations proposed.

3.3 Constructing Views on the Use of Sex Appeals

Marketing communication play a very vital role in promoting products, services and ideas by applying various types of appeals in the ever changing competitive market. Among these appeals, the use of sex appeal can be considered as an effective technique. It can be individually or collectively used to a greater or lesser degree by advertisers (Reichert, 2002) in the form of persuasive mediated message to grab the attention of customers emotionally, such as – visual sexual cues, verbal expression, display of nude body, sexual imagery and innuendo (Reichert, 2005). Customers are psychologically more attracted to those advertisements that are sexually entreating, interesting, meaningful and arouse inner feelings (Thiyagarajan, *et-al*; 2012; Sugiarto and Barnier, 2013; Lascu, *et-al*; 2016). Sex appeal has been applied by the marketers aim to achieve predetermined advertising objectives because it has several level of marketing communication effect, such as (i) emotional effects of customers on message exposure, (ii) sex effects on attracting and persuading customers to brand recall (Bax, 2015), and (iii) sex effects on purchase action of customers (Lascu, *et-al*; 2016). Previous research findings revealed that using sex appeal in advertisement have both positive and negative effects on customer behavior from national culture, demography and ethical standpoint. The following Table - 1(A) summarizes the research findings that conclude on the positive effects of sex appeal on customer behavior; whereas, Table - 1(B) presents the research summaries that find the same to have a negative influence on customers.

Table- 1(A): The Research Findings that Conclude on the Positive Effects of Sex Appeal

Authors and Area of Research	Findings
Yoo <i>et-al.</i>,(2022) , investigated the association of intrusive and sex appeal driven advertisements applied in mobile news in Korea in order to find out audience perception and reactive	The study reveals that the effectiveness of ads mostly depends on instructive manifestation and sexual contents.

behaviors.	
Lawrence, <i>et-al.</i>, (2021) , critically evaluate implicit and explicit memory effects of sex appeal related and non-sexual advertisements among female students (having different cultural background) of University College London (UCL) in the UK.	Findings reveal that sex appealing advertisements do increase memory of viewers at the cost of recalling the brand advertised.
Oniku and Joaquim, (2021) , investigate the relationship between sexual images of female in advertisements and customers purchase decisions in the fashion industry of Nigeria.	Result of the study suggest that purchasing behaviors of customers are significantly influenced by various dimensions of female sexuality. As a result such kind of behaviors have positive impact on market development.
Choi, et-al; (2020) , evaluate the complex philosophy of feminist attitude among Korean people who have distinct type of cultural origin in comparison to consumers of US.	Their study confirm that feminist consumers in the Korea responses positively to sexual image of females in advertisements. Though it was believed by group of people earlier that response will be negative towards such kind of advertising.
Kordrostami and Kordrostami (2020) , examine the effectiveness of advertisement incorporating female sexual images in the clothing industry of United States of America.	The study established the fact that in the US culture consumer show positive attitudes toward female sexual empowerment in the clothing industry.
Lascu, <i>et-al.</i>,(2016) evaluated the effectiveness of online fashion magazine advertisement in France and USA.	Sex appeal advertisement is effective in the USA but emotional appeal is effective in France.
Sari, <i>et-al</i>; (2015) investigated consumer perception of sex appeal	Sex appeal advertisement has significant positive relationship

advertisement and purchase decision in Indonesia.	with consumer purchase decision.
Khan and Munoz (2015) studied the influence of sex appeal advertisement on female consumer attitude and purchase decision.	Sex appeal advertisement can motivate female consumers in purchasing perfumes and other types of luxury products.
Sugiarto and Barnier (2013) investigated consumers' perception and thinking about sex appeal advertisement by taking 319 sample from various age group in Indonesia.	Indonesian customers are highly moderate in mild sex appeal advertisement than overt or aggressive sex appeal advertisement.
Thiyagaraja et-al; (2012) examined perception of Indian youth (male and female) towards sex appeal advertisement and its effect on consumers' purchase decision.	A significant number of respondent (61%) agreed that sexual stimuli in advertisement really play a vital role in promoting product.
Grazer and Kessling (2011) investigated the effect of sex appeal advertisement in print media on purchase intention using only male models.	A significant number of respondents (70%) reveal that moderate level of sex appeal in advertisement are preferable for recalling Jeans brand.
Sawang (2010) examined consumer intention and motive towards use of sex stimuli in advertisement among different ethnic group in Oklahoma City (USA).	Americans and North Americans shows more positive response towards sex appeal type of advertisements compared to culturally conservative Asians.
Dianoux and Linhart (2010) investigated the effect of nude advertisement in the print media in the context of three European countries (Czech Republic, Spain and France).	Male respondents prefer sex stimuli type advertisement in comparison to female counterpart. Furthermore, research finding also reveal that respondents from all these three countries have almost similar type of view.

Table-1(B): The Research Findings that Conclude on the Negative Effects of Sex Appeals

Authors and Area of Research	Findings
Adomaitis, et-al., (2024) , investigate, whether different levels of sexual contents in advertisements help to create brand attractiveness luxury fashion items among existing customers in the USA.	The result suggest that it is better to have less sexuality in advertisement for gaining attractiveness of luxury fashionable products among both men and women customers.
. Gramazio, et-al., (2020) , investigate mental reaction of men and women of Italy towards adverting having sexual images.	Their empirical research suggest that both men and women show lower level of buying intentions while sexualized adverting are used for any kind of product.
Cummins, et-al., (2020) , investigate to find out how sex appeals draw attention to surrounding advertising elements. Sample taken from 120 undergraduate students of Southwestern University, USA.	Their research evidence demonstrate the fact that advertisers who want to adopt overt sex appeals for attaining strategic messaging objectives should be cautious.
Fidelis et al. (2017) studied the role of sex appeal advertisement for recognizing brand in the media by applying quantitative techniques	Sex appeals have limited power to emotionally motivate customers for brand recall but in some cases such kind of ad should be used very cautiously
Li and Rodriguez (2015) investigated sex and humor stimuli type advertisements in Europe, Asia, North and South America.	Humor appeal in advertisement is more effective to attract customers and promote condom rather than sex stimuli type advertisement.
Lull and Bushman (2015) conducted a meta analysis review to examine the effectiveness of sex appeal advertisement from brand building perspective.	Findings revel that sex appeal ad is neither really effective for creating brand awareness nor in influencing purchase decision.

Raghuram et al. (2015) investigated consumer buying intention of Indian customers on a particular brand or product where sex appeal advertisement are used.	The purchase decisions of 90% customers are not influenced by advertising with sex stimuli and such ads have very less impact on customers purchase decision.
Ajay, (2014) investigated the perception of Indian customers from ethical point of view about advertisement in the print media and TV.	Finding reveals that 90% of the advertisement in various media are unethically demonstrated.
Nooh, et al. (2014) conducted a quantitative research in Malaysia to find out the relationship between religiosity and sensitive type of sex appeal advertisement.	Most of the customers are not in a position to accept offensive type of advertisements because their perceptions are driven by cultural conservativeness.
Ismail and Melewar (2014) investigated the behavior of Malaysian Muslim and non-Muslim consumers towards sex stimuli type advertisement.	The attitude of Muslim customers are less significant than non-Muslim customers.
Bayraktar (2012) examined the Muslim consumers' reactions towards sex appeal advertisement in New Jersey, USA.	Muslims in such developed country show negative attitude towards the brand and organizations that have adopted sex appeal in advertisement.
Klug and Ellis (2012) studied the effect of sex appeal advertisement on the basis of gender differences.	Sexual explicit elements in commercials do not create any positive repercussion among respondents.
Wazir and Ezaz (2012) evaluated Pakistani consumers' attitude towards advertisement with sex stimuli.	Respondents have negative perception about brand that have intended to promote through sex appeal advertisement.
Akhter, et-al; (2011) investigated whether cultural issues play critical	Respondents are culturally conservative and they think sexual

role in shaping consumer behavior through sex appeal advertisement in Pakistan.

image in advertisement can create offensive thoughts and social problems.

4. Pictorial Illustration of Sex Appeal in Advertisements

Sex appeal in advertisement is not only commonly used for sex related products but also in many cases used for non-sex types of products. Many innovative companies are applying sex appeal for their products/services to deliver message in a different way. To established the evidence from real world situation a number of commercial advertisements of different companies are accommodated and demonstrated below with rational explanation for in depth understanding.

Illustration 1



Giorgio Armani is an Italian luxury fashion house. One of its famous brands 'Armani Code' is an amber spicy fragrance for men. As a strategic approach

through the above ad of Armani Code, the company employed sexually erotic women by showing her physical attractiveness along with sensual poses and sexual gestures to draw attention and create awareness of their target customers. Though it is an effective ad to motivate customers towards purchase decision, it is criticized from gender stereotypes point of view.

Illustration 2



The brand 'Snickers' is a chocolate bar made by the American company Mars, Incorporated. The brand has achieved its popularity due to the advertising slogan "You're not you when you're hungry" in a commercial where a sexy female is demonstrated who is about to undress. The inner meaning of the slogan could be interpreted that male or female would act out of character and become violent when their hunger is not satisfied by a Snickers bar. Initially, Snickers chocolate bar is popular among children. By applying this ad the company may be actively trying to promote the chocolate bar among different

age groups. This advertisement has been criticized for a number of reasons, which are – (i) inappropriate for children and culturally sensitive consumers, (ii) applying mostly irrelevant and inappropriate contents and (iii) presenting women in a way that they are always be slick and alluring which is not rational from behavioral point of view.

Illustration 3



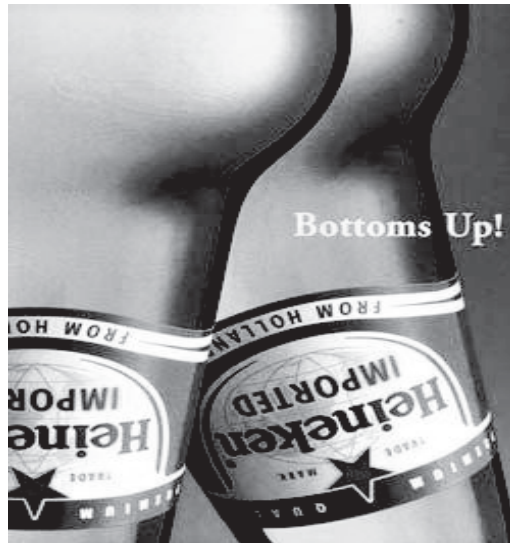
Calvin Klein has a remarkable history of sexy advertisements presenting both male and female in synergistic positions. The company has the intention to promote the product (Jeans) by applying provocative and aggressive advertisement that tend to be sexy and semi-controversial where world famous young hot models or celebrities are demonstrated in suggestive positions to acquire psychological acceptance of young generation that will drive their motive towards purchase intention. The company believes that modern generation uniquely approaches sexual association with product in the modern world. It is observed that by applying sex appeals in advertisements the company boost up their sales of Jeans, even though such campaign of Calvin Klein are criticized for its overt use of sex appeal, wherein male and female display nudity and suggestive sex (Kazmi and Batra, 2009).

Illustration 4



The advertisement of Levi's Jeans is quite appealing and promising, which intend to apply sex appeal to attract customers for buying denim products. The company intentionally adopted eye catching, highly inducing, overt sex appeals as polarizing technique in the competitive fashion and clothing market. Such kind of overt sex appeals in advertisements of denim products is highly provocative and supportive to demonstrate the product in a more dynamic and acceptable way even though it should be kept in mind that such type of appeal may have a high negative impact on the mind of the culturally sensitive generation.

Illustration 5



Heineken, the well reputed Dutch company, is aiming to attract its target audience, particularly the male that fall under the age between 21 to 40, by using sex in their advertisements in an intelligent manner. The above advertisement incorporated two bottles that revealed a portion of the female figure because the company believes that “Sex Sells”. Heineken is applying value proposition strategy by showing their product in the advertisement as sexy, young, and tempting. Around the centuries the beer industry has been facing tough competition as a result prominent companies are struggling to find out innovative ways to differentiate their products. At this stage, Heineken has adopted different approaches to differentiate their product by using sex in their advertisements by giving less importance on taste and physical attributes (such as calories) rather more on the experience of drinking it.

Illustration 6



Adidas is a German multinational corporation started its journey in 1949 that designs and manufactures shoes, clothing and accessories. Adidas usually apply value proposition strategy to create brand by focusing on teamwork and the value of sports. But recently the company slightly change their positioning strategy by incorporating sex appeal craze in their advertisement to promote Adidas shoes among younger men who feel interested to present themselves in a attractive manner through their style in the society. Through this advertisement Adidas tried to rebrand the product in the competitive market in a distinctive way but this ad is criticized in the social community due to representing a gender stereotype that women will strip their clothes as soon as they see a pair of elegant type of shoes.

Illustration 7



SKYY Vodka is a spirits brand company based in America. The company particularly focusing on suggestive advertisement by incorporating sex appeal to promote their product. It has been observed that the company's advertising approach is quite different and they repeatedly focusing slim, sexy, young and attractive women who usually used provocative dresses and most of the occasion the model usually has a sexual dominance over the psychology of male counterpart. The aim of such kind of sex appeal advertisement is to generate a sense of correlation between dominance and sexual stimuli associated with their SKYY Infusions Natural Coconut Vodka. The company applied various techniques in their advertisements, such as - distorted presentations, intriguing visual imagery, amped up usage of what it's like to drink their product, sexual innuendos, and above all to draw the attention of the audience with the intention of turning that audience into a prospective consumer.

Illustration 8



Carl's Jr. is an American fast food restaurant chain operated by CKE Restaurant Holdings, Inc. The company introduced famous TV star Paris Hilton as a model in their ad where somehow sex appeal is given priority with a slogan “She’ll tell you size doesn’t matter. She’s lying” to promote Spicy BBQ burger to male customers particularly. The ad message can also draw attention of female customers by creating the feeling that fit girls can still indulge in greasy cheeseburgers. This ad has been criticized for portraying female as sexual objects which is considered as disregarding the female in the society.

Illustration 9



Manforce condom is a recognized brand and captured large market share that has been launched by an Indian company 'Mankind Pharma Limited.' The company has the intension to position the product in a distinctive way by giving the flavor of appeal to enthusiastic male who wants to love and satisfy their counterpart as per their expected desire and ensure scintillating protected sex. Condom is a sexual type of product. There is a good reason from marketing point of view to use sex appeal in advertising message for persuading such kind of product among the target market. Even though from ethical perspective marketer should very much conscious to demonstrate such kind of ad in mass media. Adult customers will understand the reason behind using sex stimuli in advertising, but immature and innocent children will be badly affected psychologically. It is very common that loving children watch and enjoy TV programs with their parents. In such a situation parents will feel embarrassed if this kind of ad appears during any interval of TV programs. That's why time and situation need to be considered while showing such kind of advertisements.

5. Ethical Issues in Using Sex Appeal:

Considerable amount of debates are found in interrelated literatures regarding sex appeals from socio-cultural, ethical, application and effectiveness point of view in particular and overall advertising strategy in general (Moses and Charles, 2014; Alam, Aliyu, and Shahriar, 2019; Jiménez, Dittmar, and Portillo, 2021). Sex stimuli is considered as a mainstay of advertising message which is kind of sexual harassment where male or female are disregarded. By doing this advertisers are violating social rules and values which is not acceptable from ethical point of view indeed (Boddewyn, 2013). Since last few decades a significant number of empirical studies revealed that the use of sex related stimuli in advertisements sometimes have kind of mixed consumer response in the form of evoking positive and negative reactions (Alexander and Judd, 1986; LaTour, 1990). Advertisers are in serious dilemma to what extent they can apply sex stimuli in their advertising messages to create attention, arouse interest, evoke desire among customers followed by purchase actions (Clow and Baack, 2007) without creating any serious controversy in the society. A number of evidences revealed that in some situation sex appeal can be considered as a persuasive technique, even though from strategic perspective marketers should be cautious while using such kind of techniques. The ethical consideration of advertisement is crucially important for restoration of particular culture, norms, values, ethics and heritage (Singal and Kamara, 2012). It should be noted here that there are a number of ethical questions about the implementation of sex appeal strategies. Akhter, Abassi, and Umar (2011) postulated that from the view point of ethical theory and professional codes there are potential dangers associated with the use of sex appeals in advertising message due to cultural sensibility and social conservativeness in different region of the world because cultural norms drive in shaping the behavior of customers. There must be measures, mechanisms and counter mechanisms to check for the violations in terms of ethical norms and routines (McCullough, 1996). Singal and Kamra (2012) pointed out some important ethical issues regarding advertising which are related to sex appeal message, such as (a) advertising message should not endanger the safety of children or reveal any sort of prevention or interest that insist them to adopt unhealthy or unsocial practices, (b) advertising should not create problems for those people who are

not in a position to accept sex in a particular time or situation (c) both men and women have their own ego, personality, prestige and status in the society, it is not ethically wise for advertiser to treat or use human being as a product by displaying their private parts or underestimate their inner feeling. (d) advertising appeals should not create harmful effect to innocent communities of the society.

6. Findings and Discussion

The basic theme of sex appeal in advertising derived from the ‘evolutionary theory’ and its cause and effect relationship logically illustrated through the ‘arousal model’. For promoting specific type of products, employing sex stimuli in advertising is somehow considered as innovative strategy applied to create awareness, gain attention of customers in the dynamic and cluttered market environment. Advertisers have the specific intention to drive the customer psychology in a positive way towards purchase decision of a product/ service that has already offered in the competitive market by incorporating sex image in the ad message along with the product. Every marketer has predetermined strategic marketing communication objectives. To achieve these objectives, marketers are planning to use sex stimuli in their advert to position the brand or logo in the mind of customer for long run. Whenever marketers intend to apply sex appeal they should have clear understanding about function of the brand/ product, competitive market mechanism, cultural constituents, gender variation, customer perception and preferences, moral issues and other stakeholders’ expectations.

It has been observed that male usually like to find sex stimuli in advertising compared to female counterpart (). Men not only show positive attitude than women towards a nude female model but also prefer the brand that is offered by integrating sex appeal (Sengupta and Vohs, 2009). Some types of sex appeals are really effective for man but may be offensive for women (Heckler and Jackson, 2001). Though female customers are usually less interested to sex appeal, in some specific cases, female accept sex appeal in advertisements that drive their purchase decisions of luxurious or fashionable products (Khan and Munoz, 2015).

From country perspective, it really does not have noticeable influence on advertisement that incorporate sex stimuli (Sharma and Gupta, 2015), but it is also true that cultural practices in different societies play an important role in the perception of male and female customers regarding nudity or sex models (Sawang, 2010). From socio-cultural perspective, Americans and European are mostly open-minded or non-conservative and Asians are conservative, that is the reason Americans and European are found more progressive and show more interest in sexual contents in advertisement than Asian counterpart (Lascu, *et-al*; 2016).

The culture that is driven by Islamic rules, regulations, and practices where particularly Muslim customers have very negative perception towards sex appeal in ad as well as brand. Again, many Muslims practicing in Indonesia are found to be quite moderate in accepting mild type of sex stimuli in advertisements (Sugiarto and Barrier, 2013). On the other hand non-Muslim customers' attitude towards sex appeal is significantly higher than Muslim customers. That means sex appeal cannot play significant role where customers are associated with a strong religious sentiment (Ismail and Melewar, 2014).

Ajay (2014) and Moses and Chartes (2014) postulated that in some situations sex appeal ads create negative repercussions or offensive thought in the mind of customers for products or brands offered in the markets. As a result, if customers have negative perception about particular ad, it is not possible to build sustainable brand in the markets. Many male and female customers have the strong mindset, that introducing sex appeals in ads is an unethical practice and such stimuli is not an effective technique in enhancing brands or image of the companies (Wazir and Ezaz, 2012). To some extent moderate level of sex appeal or mild type of sex stimuli in advertisement can gain acceptability among customers and drive them to select and buy products offered by the company due to the fact that certain types of audience realize the practical marketing situation and liberal towards accommodating these types of sex appeal in their mindset (Thiyagarajan, *et-al*; 2012). It is worth to add that when marketers have the intension to sell sex related products such as – condom, birth control pill, sex toys, they can apply explicit sex appeal to

promote those products successfully (Chang and Tseng, 2013).

When sex appeal is applied in advertisement, certain types of values and attitudes are particularly 'sold' associated with the product. A well decorated meaningful sex appeal advertisement creates positive interest or emotional response (Meade and Zhou, 2017) and ensures brand recall and recognition in the ever changing competitive market structure (Bax, 2015). Due to the conservative culture and complex customer behavior some of sex appeal based adverts become prohibited in the society, even though the ad message and products will still be discussed with interest among inquisitive customers. It is believed that sexual stimuli in advertisement has the sharp and sweeping effect on consumer purchasing behavior (Sarpal et al., 2018). It is also been argued that customers attention can be drawn by prolific use of sex appeal, even though it is less effective than non sex appeal ad in gaining brand recall and reinforce existing consumption pattern as per expectation of advertiser (Sarpal *et- al*; 2018).

Putrevu (2008) postulated that when advertiser apply sex appeals, that can effectively attract and change purchase intention of low involvement customer. Severn, et-al; (1990) argued that more sexual explicit stimuli can drive the attitudes of customers toward the adverts and greater buying intentions, but it does not mean that it will create favorable brand attitudes. Bello, *et-al*; (1983) mentioned that effectiveness of sex appeal ads depend on recipients perception, product advertised and the use of different measurement techniques such as sexual attractiveness, or suggestiveness, nudity etc.

So it can be concluded that the effectiveness of sex appeal advertisements depend on many micro and macro factors such as types of products, companies' ad objectives, cultural heritages, gender variation, geographical territory, demographic constituents, customers' perceptions' communication channels, synergy between message and appeals etc.

7. Implications of the study

7.1 Theoretical Implications

Though there a good number of theories regarding applications of different types of advertising appeals from marketing approaches, consumer

perceptions and various countries' cultural perspectives. Sophisticated theories are developed through continuous innovative academic researches. This qualitative research with indeed add further value in the academic literature. The critical analysis supported by pictorial illustration will enrich the theory regarding advertising in particular and marketing communication in general. Readers in the academia can gain clear conceptual ideas from this research and interpret findings of this research with existing advertising theories.

7.2 Managerial Implications

The use of sex appeals in advertisement may be tentatively proven in academic researches, but considering the real world situation there is a big question mark about the use of sex which remains unexplored. It is necessary to thoroughly evaluate the cause and effect of sex appeal messages on actual target consumer, in natural settings (Zachari, *et-al*; 2018). To ensure effectiveness of the advertisement by incorporating sex stimuli, the marketers must strive to find the perfect balance between 'exposing' and 'educating' the target customers in their advertising messages. When using sex appeals marketing managers must aim at designing excitement evoking advertising messages rather than irritation evoking ones. Marketers should periodically evaluate the effectiveness of advertising strategies along with appeals used and finally come up with an innovative well accepted techniques that will not create controversy in society or bring disaster in the resourceful cultural heritage. Moreover, the focus of adverts may shift to more appealing images rather than over exposing ones. Over exposed sex appeals may undermine consumers' sense of cultural values and cause a negative perception of the advert. To mitigate negative perceptions of consumers regarding the use of sex appeals in advertisements, all stakeholders in the industry should think strategically to introduce a best practice by following standard code of ethics. Both commercial and social marketers should exercise caution and discretion over the use of persuasive sex appeals. Marketers should apply appropriate techniques for segmenting the market and find groups for which relatively high sex appeal is effective. There are two key success factors that drive the effectiveness of sex appeal advertisement: (i) designing advertising message in such a manner that can motivate the audience in a positive way to bring

change in their behavior, (ii) channeling the advert message to appropriate target audience at the right time, at the right place for the right purpose by applying effective communication media and techniques.

8. Conclusions and Limitations

In a nutshell, it can be concluded by saying that in order to make the product preferable, presentable and lucrative compare to competitors' products, advertisers have the predetermined intention to persuade the target consumers in the form of sexual excitement, sexual attractiveness and sex esteem. Nudity, sexual embeds and decorative model are fundamental constituents of sex appeal advertising. Whether the sexual stimuli in advertisement is very significant or not depends on interrelated multiple factors such as – company's objectives, product types, culture of the particular territory, market dynamic, changes in competitive market structure, consumer demography and consumer psychology etc. From advertising strategy perspective, the value and effectiveness of an advertisement is not judged on the basis of how frequently it appears in the media, rather it can only be judged on the basis of constructive appealing advertising message that can attract viewers and psychologically encourage them to accept and follow action as recommended by the advertiser.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that this purely qualitative research has a number of limitations. No predetermine hypotheses have been tested by applying quantitative tools and techniques. While existing academic research delivers a good quality source of readily available secondary information, they are geared towards a specific purpose based on sex appeals in advertising, which may vary from situation to situation and culture to culture, thus offer an incomplete picture of real world marketing situation. The nature of the subject under investigation is such that confirmatory or causal conclusions are difficult to be drawn. The theoretical orientation based on an individual paper is neither mutually exclusive nor universally generalizable. Although extensive research has been carried out based on the qualitative interpretations on this subject area but it is preferable to apply quantitative analysis for valid and meaningful conclusions which was not possible due to resource constraints.

9. Future Research Avenues

To achieve research objectives, qualitative method has been applied to critically evaluate the effects of sex appeal in advertising. It is worth to mention here that evidences from a few developed and developing countries within four continents (North American, European, Asian and Africa) have been incorporated for through investigation. Therefore, there is huge scope for further research on this topic by considering other countries of the world such as Bangladesh, Japan, United Arab Emirate, France, Spain, Brazil, Egypt and many others.

As mentioned earlier this is purely a qualitative research without having critical quantitative analysis. In the future there is a scope for further research to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of sex appeals in advertisements by formulating a number of hypotheses and testing those by applying sophisticated statistical tools and techniques for quantitative evaluation. A rigorous systematic quantitative interpretation could obviously enhance the strength of further studies.

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