

A Study on Luxury and Non Luxury Product Purchasing Intention by Sexual and Non Sexual Appeal Marketing Strategies

Dana Zhurgenova¹, Benjamin Yin Fah Chan^{2*}, Wong huey Wern³

¹Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU), Malaysia

^{2*}Faculty of Business and Management, APU, Malaysia
Research Fellow, Centre for the Study of the Economics of Ageing (CSEA), APU, Malaysia
Email: benjamin_chan {at} apu.edu.my

³Faculty of Business and Management
Asia Pacific University of Technology & Innovation (APU), Malaysia

ABSTRACT--*The purpose of the study was to investigate undergraduates' responses towards sexual and non-sexual appeal marketing strategies in advertising. Earlier researchers suggest that responses differ based on respondent's gender, age group, and ethnicity. Data for this study was collected through self-administered questionnaire, and were distributed through a convenient non-probability random sampling method. A total of 120 students were interviewed in order to understand their reactions that may affect customers' purchasing intention. The questionnaire consists of three sections in order to undergraduates' background, the ability to recall the brand, and their attitude towards luxury and non-luxury products' advertisements. The final result revealed that there is only one significant difference by gender in non-luxury product's advertisement that does not feature any sexual element. Finding of the study are limited by the number of respondents, allotted time, and the area and location that the research had covered. This study suggests that marketers need to consider testing sexual appeal marketing strategy with members of a target audience if they plan to use advertisements with sexual content. It is also hoped that this review will provide a stepping stone for those who interested in this area, thus developing this topic further.*

Keywords--- sexual appeal; purchase intention; brand recall; attitude toward the ad

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

“In the consumer behavior context, localization and standardization are two conflicting forces most clearly manifested in the cross-cultural research on global branding and advertising.” (Liu, et al., 2009) Companies, acting in different parts of the world, face the challenge to be resisted with different value and culture systems of their customers and stakeholders. Therefore, it is important for marketers to know whether they can use standard advertisements at any places or whether they need to “localize” the advertisements by modifying them to reflect the local culture, value and language. Following from this, marketers are constantly looking for the technique that will satisfy its customers' values and will allow them to attract more attention.

As the competition is getting tougher, marketers rapidly started to implement sex appeal marketing strategies throughout the world with the intention to reach the market and increase brand awareness. However, a very little study had been undertaken in order to understand the outcome it has on the market. While advertisers appear increasingly reliant upon the use of overt sexual appeal, the question of whether sex appeal is effective is becoming less relevant, a more appropriate question is how making it more effective in the global marketplace. Given the huge cultural diversity in the world, it is not a surprise that advertisements in one country can be perceived in another country in an extremely different way. According to Bochner, (1994) Asian cultures tend to be more conservative and collective than Western. For this reason, this research intends to understand the reaction of respondents studying in Malaysia, how this kind of advertisement can affect their purchase intention, how far they can accept it, and how to make this advertisers' strategy more effective. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the communication effectiveness of visually explicit sexual appeal (in general, and in combination with different levels of verbal information) and the impact of the identified factors on traditional effectiveness measures, such as brand recall, attitude toward the ad, and purchase intention. Being an important part of an average person's life, watches, and shampoo had been chosen to be the major product of this study. More precisely, Chaumet Company's “A Moment in Time” and Pantene Pro-V advertising campaigns, are used as

a fundament for the following experiments. By providing two advertisements of one product (one with sexual content, one without), gender-, cultural- and age-based reactions are compared as well.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY & RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Since the use of sex in advertising is extremely common, it is surprisingly little theoretical research has been undertaken by consumer scientists in this area. As Reichert, (2002, p.269) states, “it is unfortunate that understanding of such an ubiquitous appeal as sex in advertising has not progressed further...” Therefore, this research was designed to partially address this gap by examining sex appeal and products’ purchasing intention among the Malaysian private university undergraduates. To be more specific, this study aims to profile respondents’ characteristics, to determine the perceived sex appeals towards products’ purchasing intention, as well as to determine the perceived products’ purchasing intention. By focusing on consumer attitudes toward the advertisement, the advertised brand and consumers’ buying intentions toward the brand will be analyzed. Furthermore, this research is also adding on recommendations on how properly uses this kind of technique, which factors to include while choosing the country for advertisement, how to minimize negative reactions and how to decide use or not to use it at all.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Luxury brands provide consumers with a sense of indulgence and are expensive for the individual. (Nueno, and Quelch, 1998) They also possess characteristics of premium price and quality, recognizable style, a heritage of craftsmanship, uniqueness, and global reputation. Additionally, it was found that a consumer’s intention is settled by attitude toward the brands, which are presented in his/her consideration set. However, this attitude can be easily changed in an extremely different way, and as a result, it is important to briefly define factors that can affect it in order to exploit or correct them.

3.1 Sex Appeal in Advertising

Advertisement is an effective communication tool used by the marketers to attract potential customers. Nowadays, people are bombarded with different sort of advertisement and continuously faced with mass media advertisements from the television, Internet, newspapers. (Wazir, et al., 2012) The exposure of viewers and customers to such sort of mass media has great impact upon values, decision-making, and purchases. To attract potential customers, marketers use sex appeal practices in advertisements. In broad sense sex appeals are indicated as brand information or messages in advertisement, which exposed sexuality. (Reichert, et al., 2001) Sex appeals in advertisements may be found in visual, verbal, and sound elements, as well as portray varying degrees of nudity. (Gould, 1994) The advertisements with sex appeals attract more attention with lasting interest and memorability, as compared to the non-sex appeals in the advertisement. Price, H., (2002) even claimed that sex appeal has become one of the most effective and popular tactics used in advertising. Therefore, most of the non-profit organizations use sex appeals for different awareness purposes.

An extensive review of the advertising communication literature (Belch, Belch, and Villareal, 1987) noted that the effectiveness of using sexual imagery in advertising seems to vary depending upon the dependent measures used, the product advertised, and the age, gender, and the ethnicity of the receiver. As an example, Baker (1961) revealed that sex appeal may increase attention, but different studies (Steadman, 1969; Severn, et al., 1990) concluded that it is less effective than nonsexual illustrations in achieving brand recall or inducing positive attitudes towards a brand.

The effectiveness of sex appeal in advertisements also depends on its appropriateness to the advertised product. Richmond, and Timothy, (1982) in their study indicated that sexual stimuli might enhance brand recall only if an appropriate relationship remains between the advertising execution and product category. Simpson, et al. (1996) confirmed this statement, by claiming that the positive reactions may be induced by utilizing strategy only if there is a relevance of the sex appeal to the advertised product. However, since sex appeal is widely used to sell all kinds of products and services, it becomes difficult to differentiate products appropriate for this strategy and those that are inappropriate for it. (Reichert, et al., 2001)

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The total of 120 questionnaires were distributed to 120 undergraduate students at one private university in Malaysia. Students from different courses, representing different age groups, genders, and regions were interviewed during their classes. The reason of interview's place is considered to be good equipment of the classes.

The instrumentation consists of two parts: first one is related to brand recall and were projected on the screen, when the second one is designed in the form of the questionnaire and is used in order to understand respondents’ attitudes

toward the ad and purchasing intention. During the first sections, respondents were asked to look through eleven (11) images (eleven (11) brands) seven (7) seconds per each and list down the brands they can recall. Respondents will fulfill this section in the provided questionnaire, which was described above as the second part of the instrumentation. Second part include in itself three (3) sections, namely Section A: Background of Respondents, Section B: Brand Name Recall, and Section C: Attitude towards Luxury and Non-luxury Products' Advertising. All questions are designed using English, which is simple and understandable for all respondents. The questions asked are directly linked to the objectives of the research.

Section A consists of total six (6) questions, which covers basic information about respondents' profiles. It contains both optional and non-optional questions. Section B, as was mentioned above, asks respondents to list down the brands used in the presentation that they can recall. Section C, which is the last section of the questionnaire, is divided into two (2) parts – luxury products and non-luxury products, and asks respondents to answer the four (4) questions related to the reaction they have toward sexual imagery and how it affect their purchasing intention. All designed questions were measured by five-point Likert scale. The questions will ask respondents' opinion about the offensiveness of the advertisement, originality (creativity), usefulness towards next purchasing considerations, as well as level of purchasing intention. Both parts consist of two (2) advertisements, each with and without sexual imagery.

5. RESEARCH FINDINGS

A total of 120 respondents, 60 males (50%) and 60 females (50%) took a participation in this research. Since there is no difference between the number of males and females, it can be said that gender-related factors were collected with the highest possible accuracy. In terms of age group, this study failed to collect necessary data due to the nature of the study, however, the students were later grouped based on the year of study. According to this, 64.2% of second-level students, 31.7% of third-level students, and 4.2% of first-level students were interviewed. Referring to marital status, there are 90.8% of single, and 9.2% of married undergraduates. As the Asia Pacific University is a private university located in Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia, most of the university undergraduates are from different parts of Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Based on the data observed, most of the respondents (23.3%) are from South Asia region, followed by 21.7% from Central Asia, 15.0% from Africa and East Asia, 13.3% from Southeast Asia, and 11.7% from the Middle East. The results revealed that third-level males from Central Asia are more able to recall the brand.

Referring to the second objective of the study, which is the determination of perceived sex appeal towards product's purchasing intention, the results revealed that 61.7% of the respondents found luxury product's advertisement with the use of a sexual element to be offensive to their personal feeling and values, and only 38.3% responded negatively to non-luxury product's advertisement. In terms of non-sexual appeal marketing strategies, the offensive level of non-luxury product is higher than luxury's one at 5% (Pantene – 14.2%, Chaumet – 9.2%). Consistent with originality/creativity, non-luxury product's both sexual and non-sexual advertisements, had gained a higher rating, with the margin of 2.5% in the first situation (Pantene – 35.0%, Chaumet – 32.5%), and 21.7% in the second situation (Pantene – 47.5%, Chaumet – 25.8%). Finally, the respondents were tasted on their opinion of the usefulness of the provided advertisements to their next purchasing considerations. As a result, luxury product's campaign with the use of sexual element was found useful by 24.2%, when non-luxury product's campaign by 41.7%, thus composing the difference of 17.5%. In the situation with non-sexual element, Pantene got higher results as well by featuring 47.5% out of 100%, when luxury product's advertisement got 29.2% only.

In order to determine the perceived products' purchasing intention among Malaysian private university undergraduates, frequency tested were applied. The findings showed that 73.3% of the respondents are intended to buy Pantene's product after viewing its advertisement with the use of sexual, thus creating the gap of 21.6% between it's and Chaumet's advertisements. In the case with non-sexual appeal marketing strategy, the number of potential customers of both luxury and non-luxury brands had increased, thus composing the gap of 15%. To be more specific, the number of Chaumet's potential customers had increased about 16.6% and comprised 68.3%, whereas the number of Pantene's potential customers grew up to 83.3%.

The last, but not least, objective of the study is to define the differences of purchasing intention and sex appeal perception by gender, age, and respondents' region. The findings revealed that there is no difference by age and region of the respondents. However, the results obtained can further be used in order to understand "18-29" age groups' and different region's purchasing intention. Referring to the differences in purchasing intention and sex appeal perception by gender, only one difference has been revealed. The difference by gender in non-luxury product's advertisement without any sexual element has been observed. The test statistic value of Pearson's chi-square test is 6.000, with 1 degree of freedom, and p value, which is lower than 5%. Beside this, it has been noticed that males are more motivated than females in buying luxury products, and females are more favorable to buy non-luxury products. Therefore, it can be said that not only the picture of the product, but the price as well are affecting customers' purchasing intention.

6. CONCLUSION

Advertising is undoubtedly a “hot” topic in marketing that requires a lot of research, creativity, planning, and budget in order to get in touch with the customers. As the competition is getting tougher, and consumers are “bombed” with thousands of ads every day, marketers are faced with a lot of dilemmas in order to make important decisions about the creative and message strategies. That is the main reason why they are seeking for new and original techniques in order to make their persuasive messages successful, which does not always work. The findings provided in this research gives significant insight for companies that use or intended to use sex appeal in their international advertisement because they help build awareness of the sexual content used in the advertisements for products that intend to target undergraduates.

This research also contributes to the psychology literature on reactions to and evaluations of sexual stimuli. Firstly, this literature has provided the assumptions why personal values and feelings are not the only factors affecting on customers purchasing intention. Second, the current investigation reveals that sometimes it is better not to use sexual appeal marketing strategy, but to use standardized strategy, as it comes with better results. Finally, although agreeing with earlier works that has documented the significant difference between genders, this study extend the literature by showing that very different results can be obtained under constrained capacity, for men as well as for women with liberal sexual attitudes.

Sexual appeal does exist and will be used by marketers in their advertising campaigns. The questions, such as why, from where did it came, who are the most favorable market for such types of advertisements, etc., continue to rise. Answers to these and many other upcoming related questions would furnish humanity with increased theoretical and practical knowledge in an area of consumer research that has not received adequate attention over the years.

7. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As the study just focused on Asia Pacific University only, future researchers should emphasize on all private and/or public universities throughout Malaysia, or whether the research is intended to be undertaken. This may ensure the researcher to get more accurate results that show the real scenario as to the effect sexual appeal marketing strategy has on purchasing intention. Based on the other limitation in this study, which is the coverage of only few worlds’ regions, namely Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, Africa, and Middle East, it is recommended for future researchers to ensure that all regions, including South and North America, Europe, and others, are participating in the study. In addition, as the scope of respondents in this study just focused on undergraduates in “18-29” age group, the analysis of other age group, or probably a future division of the current age groups into different sub-groups, such as “below 18”, “18-22”, “22-25”, etc., could lead to the understanding of the different various age groups exert on product’s purchasing intention.

Marketers must understand that sexual appeal marketing strategy is a risky approach, which could be very successful while used in the right way or could lead to campaign’s failure or even damage a company’s name. Therefore, it is important for the company to define the target market carefully, understand their needs, wants, as well as personal and cultural values. The image used in the campaigns is required to fully correspond the above-mentioned factors and match with the product being advertised. Finally, it is suggested to marketers to conduct a pilot testing before advertising the campaign to the market. Few individuals from the target market can be selected in order to understand their opinion, as well as purchasing intention to the advertised product. Whereas sex in advertising research has contributed substantially to the understanding of how sexual information affects consumers, much still remains to be known. Further investigation that considers conceptual issues has the potential to advance knowledge of sexual appeal effects beyond the findings reviewed in this study. In addition, attention to the methodology can improve the generalizability and congruity of findings with advertising practice.

8. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This study is not without limitations, in fact, there are several limitations, which should be noted. Firstly, the reliability of this study depends on the honesty of the respondents in giving the information needed: for some students this advertisement will seem funny and they will not provide required attention and answers to the questionnaire, for some it will be uncomfortable to answer, etc. Furthermore, the findings from this exploratory study should not be generalized as whole as it only consist a small number of private university undergraduates in Malaysia and the results obtained from this study could be unique to this particular sample. Time and cost constraints are also part of the limitation of this study.

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Table 1: Mean Score of Brand Recall with Selected Variables

No	Variable	Means	
1	Gender	Female	3.47
		Male	3.68
2	Year of Study	First Year	1.80
		Second Year	3.12
		Third Year	4.74
3	Region	Southeast Asia	2.88
		East Asia	4.33
		South Asia	3.00
		Central Asia	5.15
		Africa	2.72
		Middle East	2.71
4	Age Group	Younger Age Group (18-29)	3.57
		Older Age Group (30 and above)	4.00
5	Marital Status	Single	3.67
		Married	2.64
6	Total:	3.58	

Table 2: Gender Differences Towards Purchasing Intention

No	Variables	Coding	Responses		Results
			No	Yes	
Luxury Product	With Sex Appeal Marketing Strategy	Male	40.0%	60.0%	not sig.
		Female	56.7%	43.3%	
	Without Sex Appeal Marketing Strategy	Male	30.0%	70.0%	not sig.
		Female	33.3%	66.7%	
Non-Luxury Product	With Sex Appeal Marketing Strategy	Male	28.3%	71.7%	not sig.
		Female	25.0%	75.0%	
	Without Sex Appeal Marketing Strategy	Male	25.0%	75.0%	$\chi^2 = 6.00$ df=1 p<0.05
		Female	8.3%	91.7%	