

The Effect of the Types of Sex-appeal Fashion POP on Attitude toward Advertising: Focusing on the Moderating Role of Gender and Sensation Seeking

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Abstract

This study empirically compares the influence of sex-appeal fashion Point-of-Purchase (POP) types on attitude towards advertising. It also highlights the moderating roles of gender and the level of sensation seeking. Three sex-appeal fashion POP types (nude/semi-nude/body conscious) were developed for this study and the interaction effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising and gender was tested. In addition, interaction effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising and the level of sensation seeking (high/low) was tested. The results found that gender influenced consumer attitudes toward sex-appeal fashion POP advertising type. Male consumers showed a more favorable attitude toward advertising for the nude type than others; however, female consumers showed a more favorable attitude toward advertising for semi-nude and body conscious type than the nude type. The results also found a significant two-way interaction effect of sexual POP advertising types and sensation seeking on attitude toward POP advertising. High sensation seekers preferred nude and semi-nude type POP advertising to body conscious POP advertising. It is useful to investigate how various marketing factors support attitude toward POP advertising in the context of sexual fashion POP advertising and which factors exert the strongest influence within different degrees of nudity.

Keywords

Type of sex-appeal fashion POP, gender difference, sensation seeking, attitude toward POP advertising

The recent usage of sex appeal in advertising is increasing. Sex appeal in advertising has the ability to grab the attention of consumers (Ouwensloot & Duncan, 2008). According to Putrevu (2008) the cliché 'sex sells' is apparently held in high esteem by advertisers who continue to rely on the use of sex appeal as a marketing strategy. In response to the worldwide growth and acceptance of this trend, research on sex appeal has expanded and increased in popularity (Chang & Tseng, 2013; Nelson & Paek, 2008). However, limited research has been conducted on sex appeal advertising in the context of POP advertising even though POP advertising is one of the most popular forms of sales promotion tools among retailers in general. Consumers can get diverse benefits from sales promotion such as POP advertising (Park & Jeon, 2009). Sex appeal POPs are often observed easily in fashion retail stores due to the uniqueness of fashion products.

This study investigates the effects of visual images according to the degree of nudity in the context of POP advertising in fashion retail stores. Three sub-types of sexual image are proposed based on how

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the bodies of the models are presented in the ad's visual elements: nude, semi-nude, and body conscious. The ad features naked body in a nude and semi-nude sexual appeal; in addition, the ad features directly express body shape by clinging clothes to body line in a body conscious sex appeal. Given the prevalence of such ads, an understanding of how different types of sexual appeal influence consumer reactions can provide marketers with an effective tool to strategically manage POP ad campaigns. Furthermore, a central focus of this study is to identify the moderating role of gender and the level of sensation seeking in consumer attitudes toward sex-appeal fashion POP advertising. Compared with low sensation seekers, high sensation seekers are more responsive to sex appeal (Reichert *et al.*, 2011). Most fashion retail stores currently use sex-appeal advertising; however, the relationship among sex-appeal types according to the degree of nudity, gender and sensation seeking remains unexplored in the context of fashion POP advertising.

This study explores the relative effectiveness of sex-appeal POP types on consumer attitudes toward POP advertising. It examines the moderating roles of gender and the level of sensation seeking, within which the impact of sex-appeal POP types on attitude toward POP advertising operates.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

The Effectiveness of Sex-appeal Advertising

Sex appeal can be defined as messages, whether as brand information in an advertising context or as a persuasive appeal in a marketing context, which are associated with sexual information (Reichert *et al.*, 2001). There is a lot of contradictory literature on the effectiveness of sex appeal in advertising. Reichert *et al.* (2001) identified sex appeal as serving a number of important roles in advertising including grabbing attention, augmenting recognition, bolstering brand image, increasing the receiver's interest in processing the ad, enhancing persuasion, and evoking emotional responses. Wells *et al.* (2003) suggested that advertisements with a more explicit or controversial sex appeal was more interesting to consumers (both male and female); however, Stewart and Furse (2000) contended that sex appeal might increase attention to the

ad, but not necessarily enhance recall or positive attitudes towards a brand.

Types of Sex-appeal Fashion POP Advertising

The Point-of-Purchase Advertising Institute (POPAI) UK defined POP as "any form of advertising within a retail environment that is designed to influence the consumer to purchase a product or service" (POPAI UK Consumer Habits Study, 1998). Further, Alexander (2001) states that POP merchandising is used to draw attention to a product or a service, and may be a display, graphics, objects, or all of these that adds value to the shopping experience. Sensual persuasion can be more effective than rational persuasion in fashion POP advertising because of the uniqueness of fashion products (Kim & Kim, 2004).

However, nude and semi-nude use the naked body for advertising (Ouwensloot & Duncan, 2008). This type of sexual appeal is often used to sell products with strong sexual connection such as fragrances and lingerie (Clow & Baack, 2007) but has also been used to sell products that are unrelated or irrelevant to sex such as cars (Ouwensloot & Duncan, 2008). Moyer (2003) suggested that the use of sex appeal can sell anything from toothpaste to aluminium. This type of advertising usually seeks a sexual response to inform the consumer about the product (Clow & Baack, 2007). The body conscious type shows the body shape through clinging clothes on the body line that invokes a sexual feelings (Kim & Yoon, 2005). Therefore, body conscious type was included at the aspect of body line exposure in this study (Park & Jeon, 2009).

Gender Difference in Sex-appeal Advertising

The biological and psychological needs of males and females differ; consequently, the effectiveness of sex appeals is gender related (Jones & Reid, 2010; Klug & Vigar-Ellis, 2012; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Liu *et al.*, 2009; Lombardot, 2007).

LaTour and Henthorne (1994) found that both genders believe overly sexual advertisements raise ethical concerns. However, the research indicates the success it achieves at 'grabbing' the attention of both genders. Thus both men and women appear to react negatively at least to overt sexuality in advertising. However, research also indicates that there are differences between the

reaction of different genders to sex appeal. Lombardot (2007) found that advertisements with nudity or partial nudity containing the opposite sex increase attention-getting. This result was true for both men and women; therefore, it suggests that nudity is a valid method to gain the attention of both men and women. The findings also specified that the presence of nudity in an advertisement where the product is not related (according to the consumers) can create a negative response to the advertisement.

A study by Putrevu (2008) showed that males evaluated sex-appeal advertisements more favorably than nonsexual advertisements while the opposite result occurred in females. Women have been found to respond more positively towards sexual appeal when there was a good fit between the advertisement and the product versus a negative response when the fit was weak; however, males responded positively regardless of the product fit. Bird *et al.* (2008) found both men and women were unhappy with the overt sexuality of the male fragrance advertisements. This is interesting as fragrances are generally believed to be a product where there is a good fit with a sex appeal (Putrevu, 2008). In two cross-country studies by Liu *et al.* (2009) and Jones and Reid (2010), it was found that irrespective of the country, female consumers have significantly less-favorable attitudes towards advertisements containing high sex appeal and female models compared to male consumers. Klug and Vigar-Ellis (2012) found that males responded more negatively to advertisements that contained male models as opposed to female models; however, female responded the same regardless of the gender of the model. Reichert *et al.* (2001) warned that sex-appeal may be effective to one gender but may be offensive to the opposite gender due to gender differences in response to sex-appeal advertising.

Moderating Role of Sensation Seeking

Sensation seeking reflects the desire for new and exciting individual experiences in the physical, mental and social domain (Zuckerman, 1990, 2005). It also exists as a continuum which represents the response to intense and/or novel stimuli rather than a dichotomous category (Renfro *et al.*, 2013). Researchers apply it to segment the market and analyze sexual and risky consumer behavior (Zuckerman & Litle, 1986). Reichert *et al.* (2011) showed that sensation seekers are more likely to respond favorably to

sexual ads. High sensation seekers have a higher preference for motifs that depict sex or morbid events compared to low sensation seekers (Schierman & Rowland, 1985; Zuckerman & Litle, 1986). Chang and Tseng (2013) suggested that product type and sensation seeking simultaneously influence the selection of sex-appeal type. For high sensation seekers, an explicit sex appeal worked when the product was framed as sexually related. An implicit sex appeal worked while the product was framed as no relation to sexuality. For low sensation seekers, sex appeal was more effective than non-sex appeal regardless of sex-appeal type when the product was framed as sexually related.

High sensation seeking implies a more developed and differentiated knowledge schemata relative to sexual ad processing. It may increase the possibility that high sensation-seeking ad viewers will appreciate the meaning illustrated by the visual sexual images and experience the pleasure of sexual information elaboration (Chang & Tseng, 2013). Because of this appreciation and elaboration, it is expected that the level of sensation seeking will moderate the influence of sex-appeal fashion POP types on attitude toward POP advertising.

The above discussion leads to the formation of the following hypotheses:

H1. The effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising on attitude toward POP advertising will be different.

H2. The effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising on attitude toward POP advertising will differ between male and female consumers.

H3. The effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising on attitude toward POP advertising will differ between high sensation seekers and low sensation seekers.

METHOD

Ad Stimuli

This study adopted three sex-appeal fashion POP advertising types: nude, semi-nude, and body conscious. The sensation seeking developed from previous research was also categorized into low- and high-level groups to measure the interaction effect of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising types and the level of sensation seeking on attitude toward POP advertising.

Jeans were selected for the study since they are widely popular and familiar to consumers (particularly university students). Since jeans can be easily connected to sexual image, choosing jeans as a certain product category was appropriate for the exploratory study. For the brand of jeans, a fictitious name (Logan) was adopted to avoid any pre-existing attitudes toward the brand. Three colorful POP ads were also designed as experimental stimuli for the brand of jeans by advertising professionals. The ads were simply designed by including text, the logo on the jeans, and the brand name "Logan". A back shot of the model was utilized to control the influence of physical attraction, eye contact with viewer and facial expression of the model. Nude shows all nude of a back shot and semi-nude bares the upper body.

Measures

The key dependent variable was attitude toward advertising, which was measured using three items ("favorable", "intimate", and "liking") adapted from Mackenzie *et al.* (1986) and Homer (1990). It was measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

Sensation seeking was measured using three items adapted from Zuckerman *et al.* (1978). The items for sensation seeking included "I like bold and interesting designs and patterns," "I distinguish the texture of fabric well," and "Sometimes I like stimulation." Respondents rated their agreement with each item on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). The 3 items abbreviated one factor through exploratory factor analysis (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.695$). Subsequently, based on a mean split, participants were categorized into either a high group (with a mean higher than 3.6) or a low group (with a mean lower than 3.6).

Finally, demographic variables including gender, age, family household income per month, clothing cost per month, and personal expenses per month were measured.

Data Collections

A total of 90 questionnaires allocating thirty students to each group were distributed. They were required to complete the questions of attitude toward POP advertising after they were exposed to one of the three experimental POP advertising screens

for twenty seconds. In addition, they were required to complete the questions of sensation seeking and demographics.

Experimental Procedure

The samples were obtained during formal lectures in fashion marketing or fashion design. Respondents were told that the experimental instrument was a survey of consumer responses to POP advertising without any explanation of the sex-appeal issue to avoid any socially desirable bias. Participants were randomly assigned to three different groups. The questionnaires (which consisted of three steps) were distributed.

The first step provided the shopping scenario related with the introduction of "Logan". Respondents were encouraged to orient to a specific shopping goal (e.g., have to buy jeans) by reading the scenario. The use of scenarios in experimental settings has been found to be effective in understanding attitude and behavior toward fashion shopping, which assumes that subjects will project themselves in the scenario and exhibit realistic behavior (Rook & Fisher, 1995).

In the second step, participants were exposed to one of the three sex-appeal fashion POP advertisements that appeared on the computer screen for 20 seconds. Three POP advertisements provided the nude, semi-nude, and body conscious; subsequently, they completed a survey administered to gather data on the dependent variables, sensation seeking, and demographics. The participants were debriefed, thanked, and released at the end of the study session.

For the analysis, SPSS 20.0 was adopted to explore descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, reliability analysis, and ANOVA analysis.

RESULTS

Validation Testing

Exploratory factor analyses with Varimax rotation found that this type of measurement showed similar results for all three POP ads. All three items provided one single significant factor for each ad. The derived factor had an average eigen-value of 1.931 and explained the total variances, which range from 58.362% to 69.797%. The standardized reliability coefficient (Cronbach's

Table 1. Validity and reliability testing

Measures	Ad. Type	N	Items	Factor	Eigen value	Variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha
Attitude toward POP advertising	Nude	24	3	1	1.751	58.362	0.630
	Semi-nude	20	3	1	1.948	64.937	0.679
	Body conscious	22	3	1	2.094	69.797	0.765

Table 2. Interaction effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising and gender

Dependent variable	Resource	Sum of square	d.f.	F	p	
Attitude toward POP advertising	Main effect	POP type (1)	4.841	2	9.467	0.000***
		gender (2)	0.147	1	0.287	0.594
	Interaction effect	(1) × (2)	1.682	2	3.290	0.044*
	Error		0.511			

* $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

alpha) for each ad was above 0.630 (see Table 1), which indicated an acceptable level of reliability (Hair *et al.*, 1998).

The Influence of the Types of Sex-appeal Fashion POP Advertising on Attitude toward POP Advertising

ANOVA test was conducted to check the subjects' response (attitude toward POP advertising) to the three different POP advertising. Results showed that consumers had significantly different attitude toward the three POP ads ($F=6.129, p=0.002$). Therefore, H1 was supported. POP ad type 1 (nude type) obtained the highest score ($M=3.43, S.D.=0.74$), while POP ad type 2 (semi-nude) obtained the lowest score ($M=2.66, S.D.=0.76$). POP ad type 3 (body conscious) obtained middle score ($M=2.84, S.D.=0.69$).

Interaction Effect of the Types of Sex-appeal Fashion POP Advertising and Gender

A two-way interaction between subjects via an ANOVA test was run to determine whether the interaction between sex-appeal fashion POP types and gender was significant in this measurement. As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, a significant interaction effect on attitude toward POP advertising was found ($F=3.290, p=0.044$). Therefore, H2 was supported. With regard to the interaction effect of sex-appeal fashion POP types and gender on attitude toward advertising, it appears that the effect of nude type on attitude toward advertising was stronger in male than in female ($M_{male}=4.00, M_{female}=3.32, t=2.557^*$). However, the effect of semi-nude and body conscious type on attitude toward advertising was more pronounced in female than in male (semi-nude: $M_{male}=2.00,$

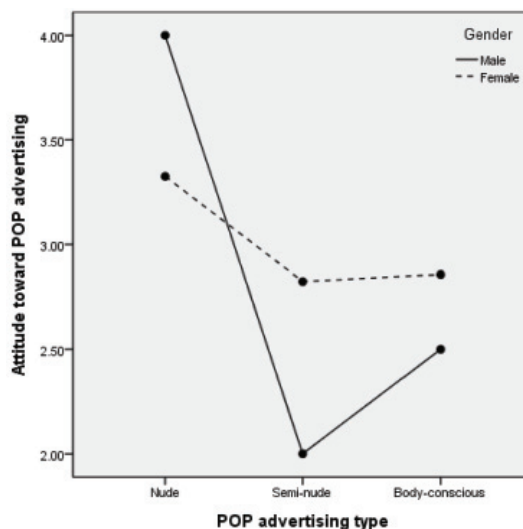


Figure 1. Interaction effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising and gender.

$M_{female}=2.82, t=-1.813$ / body conscious: $M_{male}=2.50, M_{female}=2.85, t=-0.492$).

Interaction Effect of the Types of Sex-appeal Fashion POP Advertising and the Level of Sensation Seeking

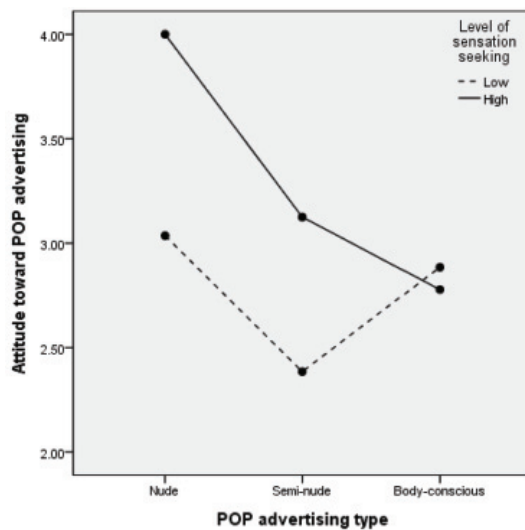
ANOVA tests were conducted to examine the interaction effect of sex-appeal fashion POP types and the level of sensation seeking on attitude toward advertising. As shown in Table 3 and Figure 2, the two-way interaction was significant ($F=0.426, p=0.023$). Therefore, H3 was supported.

In particular, the high sensation seeking group experienced higher attitude toward advertising with regard to nude and semi-

Table 3. Interaction effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising and the level of sensation seeking

Dependent variable	Resource	Sum of square	d.f.	F	p	
Attitude toward POP advertising	Main effect	POP type (1)	3.925	2	9.097	0.000***
		Sensation seeking (2)	4.548	1	10.541	0.002**
	Interaction effect	(1) × (2)	1.737	2	4.026	0.023*
	Error	0.431				

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

**Figure 2.** Interaction effect of the types of sex-appeal fashion POP advertising and the level of sensation seeking

nude than low sensation seeking group whereas the high and low sensation seeking group experienced similar attitude toward POP advertising with regard to body conscious type (High sensation seeking group: $M_{\text{nude}}=4.00$, $M_{\text{semi-nude}}=3.12$, $M_{\text{body conscious}}=2.77$, $F=7.947^{**}$ /Low sensation seeking group: $M_{\text{nude}}=3.03$, $M_{\text{semi-nude}}=2.38$, $M_{\text{body conscious}}=2.88$, $F=3.839^{**}$).

Conclusions and Discussion

This study empirically compared the influence of sex-appeal fashion POP type on attitude toward advertising. In addition, it highlighted the moderating roles of gender and sensation seeking. For this study, three sex-appeal fashion POP types (nude/semi-nude/body conscious) were developed.

The results are as follows. First, the influence of sex-appeal fashion POP types on attitude toward POP advertising was significant. Consumer attitudes toward POP advertising was the highest in the nude type and the lowest in semi-nude type. Second,

this study found that consumer attitudes towards sex-appeal fashion POP advertising types was influenced by gender. Male consumers showed a more favorable attitude toward POP advertising for nude type than others; however, female consumers showed a more favorable attitude toward POP advertising for semi-nude and body conscious type than nude type. It provides significant insight into gender differences among consumers in regards to different sex-appeal advertising strategies. This result is supported by Liu *et al.* (2009) and Jones and Reid (2010). In their studies, female consumers have significantly less-favorable attitudes toward advertisements containing high sex appeal and female models compared to male consumers. These results provide information for fashion retailers to choose effective types of sexual fashion POP according to the gender of the target customer. Third, this study also found a significant two-way interaction effect of sex-appeal POP advertising type and the level of sensation seeking on attitude toward advertising. High sensation seekers preferred nude and semi-nude type advertising to body conscious type. Sensation seekers are more likely to respond favorably to sexual ads (Reichert *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, it is inferred that consumers perceive more sexually for the exposure of body than for the exposure of body-line. The body-conscious look has inspired fashion designers to explore a more progressive and innovative design by using new materials; however, exposing body lines is less sexual than exposure of body in the aspect of sexuality. The study results are helpful when fashion retailers employ appropriate fashion POP advertising in their brand. If fashion retailers want to appeal to high sensation seeking consumers (instead of using a body conscious type) they may adopt nude and semi-nude types in the context of fashion POP advertising.

It would be useful to investigate how various marketing factors support attitudes toward advertising in the context of sexual fashion POP advertising and which ones exert the strongest influence

within different degrees of nudity.

This study has a few limitations such as the use of a convenience sample and testing only one product category. Future studies may use a more representative sample and include more product categories that would add value and improve the generalizability of this exploratory research. Besides attitudinal measurements, future studies can also examine some memory measurements such as recall and recognition.

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