THE EFFECTS OF SEX APPEAL ADVERTISING ON THAI CONSUMERS' EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES

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Abstract

The study aimed to investigate the gender differences in Thai consumers' emotional and behavioral responses to sex appeal advertising. This study employed an experimental design with a sample of 623 Thai young adults. The sampling frame of this study was Thai undergraduate university students from one private university. Respondents were shown sex appeal print ads with three nudity levels (low, moderate and high). It was found that gender of respondents proved to be a key determinant of the evaluation of sex appeal advertising. The use of strong and overt nudity in advertising can generate tension among females. Hence, it is up to marketers to downplay the degree of nudity of advertising on Thai female target audience as a possible way to reduce negative arousal-tension. The present study provides a better understanding of the way in which Thai male and female young adults respond to the use of sex appeal advertising, as well as provides useful managerial applications for advertisers in Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

'Sex' is one of the creative strategies employed by advertisers to gain consumers' attention in the competitive and cluttered advertising environment. Since sex is viewed by advertisers to have the ability to grab and maintain audience attention, which can in turn increase ratings and circulation and thereby generate greater revenue for the company, the use of sex appeal in advertising is on the upward trend. A number of studies have suggested that the use of sex appeal in TV and magazine advertising is prevalent (Henthorne & LaTour, 1995) and is increasing worldwide (Paek & Nelson, 2007; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Sciglimpaglia, Belch, & Cain, 1978; Soley & Kurzbard, 1986). Importantly, the sexual content and imagery in women's and men's magazines today are more explicit and overt than in the past (Soley & Kurzbard, 1986). Moreover, it is common for advertisers nowadays to use global or standardized advertising with similar themes and even the same advertising across borders, for cost savings benefits and for controlling the brand's global image. With the increased use of standardized advertising, it is crucial for global advertisers to consider the boundaries of sexual content in the advertising of each country. This study aims to understand how Thai young adults' respond to the use of sex appeal advertising. Based on the literature reviewed, there are key problems that need to be further investigated.

1. **The use of sex appeal stimuli has mixed responses results.** Researchers report mixed results with respect to sex appeal advertising effectiveness (Putrevu, 2008). Prior empirical studies have shown both positive reactions and negative reactions from viewers of sexual (or erotic) advertising. Given these mixed results and unanswered questions, the study examines the effect levels of nudity in advertising on Thai young adults so that advertisers will have a better understanding of how to utilize appropriate levels of nudity in Thai advertising.

2. **There have been limited studies on sex appeal ads in the Asian context.** The aim of the study is to investigate consumers' responses to sex appeal advertising in the previously overlooked Thai context. Most of the sex-in-advertising research has been conducted in the U.S. context (Beetles & Harris, 2005; Paek & Nelson, 2007; Reichert, 2002). However, there appears to be limited studies on sex appeal advertising in Asian countries (Liu, Li, & Cheng, 2006).

This study aims to address this gap by investigating Thai young adults' responses to different nudity levels in advertising. As advertising nudity increases, how will Thai young adults respond in terms of arousal, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention? The underlying assumption is that differences in gender will have an effect on how young Thai adults' respond to nudity level in advertising. This study aims at contributing pragmatic suggestions for practitioners, who should find the results useful for planning advertising strategies for brands and products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Arousal as Emotional Responses Effects of Sex Appeal Advertising

Arousal is defined as responses, which range from energized to tiredness and from tension to placidity (Thayer, 1978). Prior studies have indicated that once exposed to sexual content, individuals experience these reactions (LaTour, 1990). The LaTour study supports the notion that sexual visuals evoke affective responses, generally characterized by positively-valenced arousal. Arousal proved to be a key mediator of ad response. Energized arousal (arousal that generates positive valence) proved to be the key driver of positive attitudinal responses (LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Pitts, 1990). If participants experienced a positively valenced arousal (energy and calmness), they also had more favorable attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}). Specifically, male respondents experienced more general activation (energy) as female nudity increased. On the other hand, females experienced tension activation (negatively valenced arousal) (Ford, LaTour, & Honeycutt, 1997; LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Pitts, 1990). Thus, arousal generated by nudity was a key determinant in subjects' responses to the ad and the product advertised.

Attitude toward the Ad (A_{ad}) and Attitude toward the Brand (A_b) as Emotional Response Effects of Sex Appeal Advertising

Attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) and attitude toward the brand (A_b) are also key variables that researchers have studied in relation to sex appeal advertising and emotional response effects (Muehling & McCann, 1993). **Attitude toward the ad (A_{ad})** is defined as 'a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion' (Mackenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986, pp.130-131). Studies have shown that sexual ads generate a positive attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) more than non-sexual ads (Reichert, Heckler, & Jackson, 2001; Severn & Belch, 1990). Another study indicated that a mild female sex appeal ad generated a more favorable attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) than an overt female sex appeal ad (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). **Attitude toward the brand (A_b)** is defined as 'an individual's evaluation of a branded product' (Mitchell & Olson, 1981, p.318).

One study supported the notion that nudity in advertising positively influences consumers' attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) (Dudley, 1999). Dudley (1999) studied young consumers' attitude toward different degrees of nudity level depicted in sun tan lotion ads. The results showed that the advertisement featuring the product only was significantly less appealing than ads using models and that increasing nudity resulted in a more appealing ad. Thus, the results confirmed that the amount of nudity level has a strong influence on the respondents' response in terms of attention getting and that an increase in nudity level resulted in higher evaluations of the advertisement. The nude ad was seen as more significantly distinctive than either the swimsuit or product-only advertisements. Other studies have also indicated similar results, whereby sex appeal advertising generated positive reactions (Bello, Pitts, & Etzel, 1983; Severn & Belch, 1990)

On the other hand, there is empirical evidence that suggests that sex appeal advertising generates negative reactions on the part of the consumer. A previous study found that the ad containing a nude model was viewed as the least appealing (attitude toward the ad), and the product (attitude toward the brand) and company (attitude toward the advertiser) were perceived as having the lowest quality and as the least reputable (Peterson & Kerin, 1977). Another study indicated similar results—that a strong and overt sex appeal advertisement results in a significantly less favorable attitude toward the

ad (A_{ad}), attitude toward the brand (A_b), and purchase intention (PI) than a non-sexual advertisement (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). Thus, it is still inconclusive whether sex appeal advertising generates positive or negative attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) or attitude toward the brand (A_b).

Purchase Intention as Behavioral Response of Sex Appeal Advertising

Purchase intention is defined as 'an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand' (Spears & Singh, 2004, p.56). Purchase intention is an acceptable and widespread measurement of behavioral intention in the marketing literature (Reichert, 2002). A number of studies have found that advertising with sexual content generated higher levels of purchase intention than those with no sexual content (Dudley, 1999; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Severn & Belch, 1990). A study by Severn and Belch (1990) found that sexual ads generate significantly higher purchase intention than nonsexual advertisements. LaTour and Henthorne (1994) found that a mild sex appeal advertisement generates significantly higher purchase intention than an overt sex appeal advertisement. Hence, the level and variation of sexual explicitness also appear to have an effect on purchase intention (Grazer & Keesling, 1995; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994).

Gender Differences

Studies have shown that the gender of respondents is a key determinant in the consumers' reaction to sex in advertising (LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Pitts, 1990; Sciglimpaglia, et al., 1978). Past literature has suggested that gender is one of the key variables in consumer behavior, since gender affects buying behavior, response to advertisements, product judgment, and information processing and the learning process (Till & Priluck, 2001). While men are mostly aroused when viewing nudity and sexual content sources, women are affected by romantic content sources (Anne 1971 cited in Liu et al., 2006, p.21). A number of researchers believe that men and women react differently to varying forms of sexual content in advertising due to gender differences in terms of sexual and personal motivations and desires (Liu, et al., 2006). An explanation can be that women are more easily influenced than men (Darley & Smith, 1995) and it appears that women's capacity for elaborative processing is greater than that of men (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Meyers-Levy & Sternthal, 1991).

A prior study found that the gender of the respondents had an effect on the reactions to the use of sex in advertising, with female respondents reacting more strongly to suggestive ads than men (Belch, Holgerson, Belch, & Koppman, 1982). As the level of suggestiveness increases, female respondents find the ads more offensive, less appealing, and less interesting than male respondents (Belch, et al., 1982). A study by Pope, Voges and Brown (2004) reported that women had more positive attitudes toward corporate image when exposed to sex appeal advertising for a cause. Another study indicated that men tended to respond favorably to sex appeal advertising in general (LaTour & Henthorne, 1993). It can be said that the gender of participants is a key determinant of the evaluations and interpretations of sexual content in advertising (Reichert, 2002).

Numerous studies support the idea that both male and female respondents evaluate the depiction of the opposite sex more favorably (Belch, et al., 1982; Jones, Stanaland, & Gelb, 1998; Judd & Alexander, 1983; LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Sciglimpaglia, et al., 1978; Sengupta & Dahl, 2008; Simpson, Horton, & Brown, 1996). An early study by Judd and Alexander (1983) showed that male respondents recalled advertising messages better than female respondents for advertising that depicted different female nudity levels. Similarly, Sciglimpaglia et al. (1978) found that men and women varied greatly in their evaluation of erotic ad stimuli.

Previous studies have shown that females evaluated the male-female nude suggestive ad negatively while the males evaluated were generally positive (Aboukalam, 2005; Sciglimpaglia, et al., 1978). A more recent study found that female respondents had less favorable attitudes than men toward sexy female ads and male respondents rated female nudity as more attention drawing than other visuals (Jones, et al., 1998). Moreover, male respondents had more favorable attitudes toward sexy female

advertising than to sexy male advertising (Jones, et al., 1998). A recent study indicated that female respondents had less favorable attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}) than male respondents when exposed to a sexually explicit ad (Sengupta & Dahl, 2008). In conclusion, a number of previous studies in sex-in-advertising effects research have investigated gender differences in advertising responses.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

This study aims at investigating how males and females respond to sex appeal ads and how individual differences interact with their responses. Referring to the conceptual framework (see figure 1), there are four dependent variables: 1) arousal, 2) attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), 3) attitude toward the brand (A_b), and 4) purchase intention (PI). There are two independent variables: 1) advertising nudity levels and 2) gender of respondents.

Gender Differences in Responses to Sex Appeal Advertising

Gender is a significant predictor of arousal–males show more positive attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}) and attitudes toward the brand (A_b) when viewing nude ads than viewing a demure ad (LaTour et al., 1993). Thus, past literature suggests that the gender of participants is the moderator of sex appeal advertising and of consumers' responses (Beetles & Harris, 2005; Belch, et al., 1982; Jones, et al., 1998; LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; LaTour & Pitts, 1990; Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Pope, Voges, & Brown, 2004; Reichert, 2002; Sengupta & Dahl, 2008; Simpson, et al., 1996; Smith, Haugtvedt, Jardrich, & Anton, 1995).

This study predicts that males and females will experience differently arousal, attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), attitude toward the brand (A_b), and purchase intention (PI) when they are exposed to different advertising nudity levels.

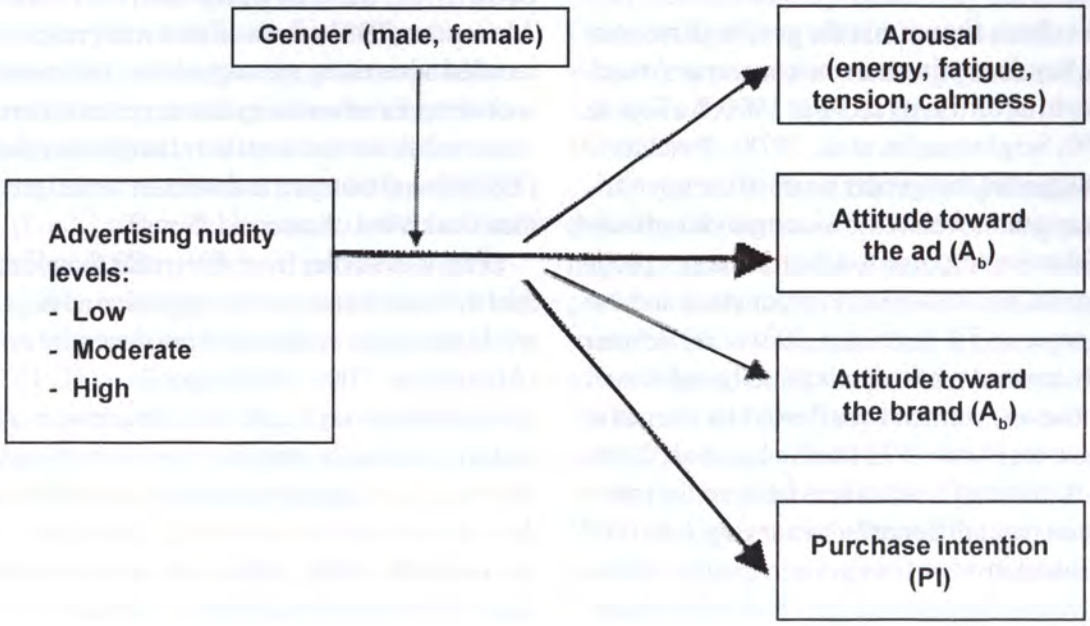
H1: When exposed to different nudity levels in advertisements, Thai males and females will experience differences in arousal (energy, calmness, fatigue, and tension).

H2: When exposed to different nudity levels in advertisements, Thai males and females will have different attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}).

H3: When exposed to different nudity levels in advertisements, Thai males and females will have different attitudes toward the brand advertised (A_b).

H4: When exposed to different nudity levels in advertisements, Thai males and females will have different intentions toward purchasing the brand advertised (PI).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



METHODOLOGY

Design and Stimuli

The hypotheses were tested in an experiment with three treatment levels (low nudity level, moderate nudity level, and high nudity level), resulting in a three (type of ad) by two (gender of respondent) between-subjects factorial design.

High quality mock-up magazine advertisements were used as stimuli. The ads, designed for the study, promoted Lancôme Miracle perfume because it is a well-known global brand with a luxurious image; thus, the brand itself is relevant to the college-age population. All ads were identical in terms of copy i.e. limited to Lancôme's logo and Miracle's logo and a single phrase 'The fragrance for women' in order to minimize text as a confounding variable.

Most studies on nudity have been carried out on single models, i.e. investigated either women only models or male only models, and there have been few studies on using mixed heterosexual models. Since there is still a gap in investigating the use of the sex appeal of heterosexual couples and its effects on male and female respondents, this study aims to extend the knowledge in this area by investigating Thai young adults' response to the use of female and male nudity in advertising. Images of female and male models in varying degrees of revealing clothes were used in experimental designs. There were three types of nudity levels in this study (adopted Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Belch et al., 1982). Nudity level:

1. Low nudity: fully clothed
2. Moderate nudity: exposing some midriff and cleavage
3. High nudity: undressed and exposing more back and cleavage.

Sample and Procedure

Convenience sampling was used for this research. The respondents of the experiment were 623 undergraduate students aged between 18-23 years old at one private university (286 male, 337 female). The students were recruited from a combination of different faculties and from second to fourth years, depending on student availability. The students were recruited from different subjects in order to obtain a good mix of students from different years of study.

The experiments were conducted in classrooms. The average time for conducting the experiment was around 30 minutes in each class. The students were randomly assigned to three different treatments. Once respondents viewed the stimuli i.e. one respondent viewed one magazine advertisement (the stimuli were not embedded in other materials), they were asked to fill out the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was designed to measure consumers' responses (arousal, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention) towards the advertising. Arousal was measured by adopting LaTour and Pitts' (1990) and Thayer's (1978) 18 items short form to measure arousal across four dimensions (energy, calmness, fatigue, and tension). Thayer's AD-ACL dimension scales consist of summing the four-point adjectival items each for General Activation (Energy), General Deactivation (Calm), Sleep (Fatigue), and High Activation (Tension).

The scales measuring attitude toward the ad (Aad) were adopted from Mittal and Lassar's (2000) original 7-interval semantic differentials: boring/ interesting, good/bad, desirable/ undesirable, irritating/ pleasing, and like very much/ dislike very much. The original three semantic differential 7-interval items measuring attitude toward the brand (Ab) were adopted from Mittal and Lassar (2000): good/ bad, desirable/ undesirable, likable/ dislikable. The original two 7-point interval items of Bello, Pitts and Etzel (1983) measuring purchase intention (PI) were adopted. The two items were used to measure the intention to buy (I will actively seek out the product in the market, I will buy the product for self or as gift).

Manipulation Check

A manipulation check was done by having the respondents rate the nudity level of the magazine advertisement on LaTour's (1990) six-point single item scale, indicating the degree to which treatment ads displayed nudity. Results of the one-way ANOVA showed a significant difference between the low-nudity ad and moderate-nudity ad, with the moderate-nudity ad being perceived as displaying

more nudity (M = 3.05) than the low-nudity ad (M = 1.27), $F(2, 632) = 180.57$, $p < .001$. The results also showed a significant difference between the low-nudity ad and the high-nudity ad, with the high-nudity ad being perceived as displaying more nudity (M = 3.27) than the low-nudity ad (M = 1.27), $F(2, 620) = 180.57$, $p < .001$.

Although the ANOVA results showed no significant differences between the moderate-nudity ad and the high-nudity ad, the high-nudity ad indicated a higher mean than the moderate-nudity ad (M = 3.27 and M = 3.05 respectively). However, the open-ended question for the manipulation check of the level of sex appeal revealed that the high-nudity ad had a higher level of nudity than the moderate-nudity ad. A larger number of respondents described the sex appeal used in the ad of the moderate-nudity ad as 'not too much' or 'not too revealing' than for the high-nudity ad. Hence, the overall indication of the mean score and the open-ended question show that the high-nudity ad is perceived as displaying nudity more than the moderate-nudity ad.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 was assessed using MANOVA in order to investigate the effects of nudity levels in advertising on males' and females' arousal. The observed significance levels for Pillai's test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between different advertising nudity levels on the combined dependent variables, $F(8, 1230) = 8.38$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .052 (see table 1). The Ad Nudity Levels*Gender interaction was significant, $F(8, 1230) = 2.51$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .016.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that Thai males and females would experience arousal differently when exposed to different nudity levels. The results (see table 2) showed significant Ad nudity levels*Gender interaction for tension, $F(2, 617) = 8.02$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .025. This suggested that the tension generated was dependent on the joint effects of gender and the advertising nudity levels. The post hoc Tukey HSD tests of the interaction effect of advertising nudity levels and gender revealed that

Table 1: Multivariate Tests

Dependent variable: arousal

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ad nudity levels	Pillai's Trace	.103	8.379	8.000	1230.000	.000	.052
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.010	1.544a	4.000	614.000	.188	.010
Ad nudity levels*Gender	Pillai's Trace	.032	2.507	8.000	1230.000	.011	.016

a. Exact statistic

Table 2: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent variable: arousal

Source	DV	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ad nudity levels	Energy	3.771	2	1.885	6.939	.001	.022
	Calmness	11.586	2	5.793	17.027	.000	.052
	Fatigue	1.504	2	.752	2.236	.108	.007
	Tension	.747	2	.374	1.621	.199	.005
Ad nudity levels*Gender	Energy	.312	2	.156	.574	.564	.002
	Calmness	.923	2	.462	1.357	.258	.004
	Fatigue	.811	2	.405	1.205	.300	.004
	Tension	3.698	2	1.849	8.018	.000	.025
Error	Energy	167.660	617	.272			
	Calmness	209.923	617	.340			
	Fatigue	207.554	617	.336			
	Tension	142.299	617	.231			

females were significantly more tensed (High Activation) than males in the high-nudity level condition (female tension: M = 0.51, male tension: M = 0.28, $p < .01$). Hence, hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 was assessed using a two-way ANOVA to investigate the effects of advertising nudity levels on males' and females' attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}). The results (see table 3) indicated that the Ad Nudity Levels*Gender interaction was not significant, $F(2, 617) = 0.78$, $p > .05$, partial eta squared = .003. The results showed that males and females did not differ significantly in their attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) when exposed to different advertising nudity levels. Hence, hypothesis 2 was not supported.

H3 was assessed using a two-way ANOVA to explore the effects of advertising nudity levels and gender on attitude toward the brand advertised (A_b). The results (see table 4) showed that the Ad Nudity Levels*Gender interaction was not significant, $F(2, 617) = 0.89$, $p > .05$, partial eta squared = .003. From the Estimated Marginal Mean, the attitude toward the brand (Ab) between males and females across the three nudity conditions was not significantly different (low nudity: male M = 5.04, female M = 5.44, moderate nudity: male M = 5.04, female M = 5.47, high nudity: male M = 4.87, female M = 5.52). Hence, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 was assessed using a two-way ANOVA in order to investigate the effects of advertising nudity levels on males' and females' purchase intentions (PI). The results (see table 5) showed that the Ad Nudity Levels*Gender interaction was not significant, $F(2, 617) = 0.21$, $p > .05$,

Table 3: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent variable: attitude toward the ad (A_{ad})

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ad nudity levels	11.586	2	5.793	5.233	.006	.017
Gender	.658	1	.658	.594	.441	.001
Ad nudity levels*Gender	1.725	2	.863	.779	.459	.003
Error	682.957	617	1.107			

Table 4: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent variable: attitude toward the brand (A_b)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ad nudity levels	.436	2	.218	.213	.809	.001
Gender	37.336	1	37.336	36.383	.000	.056
Ad nudity levels*Gender	1.818	2	.909	.886	.413	.003
Error	633.163	617	1.026			

Table 5: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent variable: purchase intention (PI)

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ad nudity levels	1.380	2	.690	.477	.621	.002
Gender	56.486	1	56.486	39.033	.000	.059
Ad nudity levels*Gender	.617 2	.309	.213	.808	.001	
Error	892.883	617	1.447			

partial eta squared = .001. From the Estimated Marginal Mean, the differences of purchase intentions between males and females across the three nudity conditions was not significantly different (low nudity: male M = 3.54, female M = 4.08, moderate nudity: male M = 3.58, female M = 4.27, high nudity: male M = 3.60, female M = 4.18). Hence, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

H1 investigated whether gender differences had any influence on consumers' arousal (energy, calmness, fatigue, and tension) when consumers were exposed to different advertising nudity levels. This hypothesis was supported. The results of H1 found that the tension generated was dependent on the joint effects of gender and the advertising nudity levels, and that females were significantly more tense than males in the high-nudity level condition. This suggests first, that gender is a key determinant of the evaluations of sex appeal advertising and second, the use of strong and overt nudity in advertising can generate tension among females. A number of empirical studies have reported consistent results, indicating that females reacted less favorably to high sex appeal advertising (Belch, et al., 1982; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993).

The pattern of tension (moderate nudity generated the lowest tension) among the females in this study is consistent with earlier empirical studies, which found that females' responses exhibited a curvilinear pattern such that both low and high sex appeal ads evoked lower evaluations than that of the moderate sex appeal ad (Belch, et al., 1982; Sciglimpaglia, et al., 1978). This pattern of tension is also supported by another study in which consumers' favorable responses were reduced as the level of nudity increased (LaTour & Pitts, 1990).

The research results, indicating higher tension of females than males under high-nudity conditions, are supported by a number of sex-in-advertising effects research studies, which contend that gender is the key determinant of consumers' responses to sex appeal advertising (LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Pitts, 1990; Liu, et al., 2006; Sciglimpaglia, et al., 1978).

Gender differences in response to sex appeal advertising can be explained by the following differences in 1) sexuality and 2) socialization. First, men and women differ in many ways with regard to sexuality, that is, men have higher levels of sexual interest and activity than women, such as sexual fantasizing and exposure to pornography (Reichert, LaTour, & Kim, 2007). Second, it can be argued that the reason why men and women react differently in terms of arousal is because of differences in socialization or because of a 'double standard' (Reichert, et al., 2007). Socialization plays a significant role in sexual development (Fisher, White, Byrne, & Kelley, 1988) and socialization influences are biased toward encouraging male sexuality but discouraging female sexuality (Sengupta & Dahl, 2008). The socialization of human sexuality theory argues that affective responses (positive or negative) to sexual stimuli depend on the sexual socialization process during childhood when the child typically receives differing direct or indirect messages from influential sources such as parents, peers, and social institutions (Sengupta & Dahl, 2008). With regard to casual sex, men are rewarded or admired, while women are likely to receive negative messages and sanctioning from parents or peers (Sprecher, McKinney, & Orbuch, 1987). Another study reported that females generally perceived erotic stimuli as punishers, while males perceived erotic stimuli as rewards (Griffitt & Kaiser, 1978). Eventually, due to powerful and repeated conditioning, attitudes toward sex per se get transferred to sexual stimuli, causing men to generate positive affect while women generate negative affect toward sexual stimuli (Sengupta & Dahl, 2008). Thus, without the threat of restriction or sanctions, men are more impulsive in their responses, with little inhibitions (Reichert, et al., 2007). In conclusion, gender differences in terms of sexuality and socialization has an effect on females experiencing more tension than males in high-nudity condition and sustaining more conservative views toward the use of sex appeal in advertising.

Results of H2, suggests that when exposed to different nudity levels in advertisements, there were no gender differences on attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}). The results of this study are in contrast to a number of studies that indicated that males and females had different attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad})

when exposed to sex appeal advertising (Jones, et al., 1998; Judd & Alexander, 1983; Liu, et al., 2006; Sengupta & Dahl, 2008; Simpson, et al., 1996).

However, recent studies have yielded results similar to this study in that there were no gender differences in consumers' response to sex appeal advertising. A study investigating consumers' responses toward sexual and non-sexual appeals found that there were no gender differences in attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) (Putrevu, 2008). Another recent study also found that there were no significant gender differences in male and female responses to ads featuring male models with high sex appeal and ads featuring female models with low and high sex appeal (Liu, et al., 2006). The findings suggest that Chinese male and female undergraduates may hold quite similar attitudes toward sex appeal advertising (Liu, et al., 2006).

This implies that negative arousal-tension did not elicit a negative attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}). Past studies also have shown that tension did not exert a direct influence on ad impression (LaTour & Pitts, 1990). Another possible explanation can be that the high-nudity condition is not that strong or overt enough to elicit negative attitudinal responses, while past studies have employed strong and overt visuals, such as nude models or models engaging in sexual acts (Judd & Alexander, 1983; Sengupta & Dahl, 2008; Simpson, et al., 1996).

Another reason that explains why Thai males and females have similar ad attitudes (A_{ad}) toward sex appeal advertising is because the research sample exclusively consisted of students. It could be that this college segment has the fewest gender differences when compared to other age brackets. The college students might have greater homogeneity between the sexes because this group has a higher level of education (more than 12 years) than the general Thai population, which is on average 8.1 years (Thai news agency, 2005). Having a high education is associated with being more liberal (Ford, et al., 1997). Thus, having a higher education and a liberal attitude might contribute to males and females having similar attitudinal responses to sex appeal advertising.

H3 and H4 tested the influence of advertising nudity levels and gender differences on consumers' attitude toward the brand (A_b) and purchase intention (PI). These hypotheses were not supported. This suggests that males and females did not have significant differences in attitude toward the brand (A_b) or purchase intention (PI) when exposed to different advertising nudity levels. The results are in contrast with some studies suggesting there were gender differences in attitude toward the brand (A_b) and purchase intention (PI) when respondents were exposed to sex appeal advertising (Peterson & Kerin, 1977; Reidenbach & McCleary, 1983). The possible explanation could be that first, the moderate and high nudity conditions are not that strong or overt enough to elicit negative emotional and behavioral responses. Second, the research sample is mainly college students which might have the fewest gender differences compared to other age groups.

IMPLICATIONS

Practical Implications

Advertising researchers and practitioners are concerned about advertising effectiveness and how the brand message is getting across to their target audience. In today's cluttered media environment, sex appeal advertising is one way to grab target audiences' attention and is believed to help break through the cognitive defense mechanism (Putrevu, 2008). Insights into how Thai consumers respond to different degrees of sex appeal advertising can help marketers understand the extent to which degrees of sex appeal advertising, the influence of sex appeal advertising on certain types of target audiences and, how to avoid offending target audiences by using explicit sex appeal advertising. These research findings provide a better understanding of the way in which Thai male and female young adults respond to the use of sex appeal advertising. The results provide several implications for advertisers and their development of advertising strategies and executions, as discussed below:

1) *Degrees of sex appeal*

As demonstrated in this research, gender difference plays a role in moderating the effects of sex appeal advertising on arousal. The results showed that females experienced more tension than males

under the high-nudity condition. The use of nudity in print ads certainly has the potential of generating significant levels of tension among Thai females. Hence, it is left to the discretion of advertisers to downplay the amount of nudity in the ads that target Thai female audiences as a possible way to reduce negative arousal-tension. In addition, high sex appeal advertising should be avoided for female products.

2. *Implications for media placement*

Since the results showed that females experienced more tension than males under high-nudity condition, the findings are important for advertisers so they can contribute to forming certain guidelines as to where to place sex appeal advertising. A related managerial implication is that high sex appeal advertising should not be placed in media vehicles whose target audiences are predominantly female. High sex appeal advertising should be placed only in men's magazines like FHM and Maxim so as not to offend the sensitive female audiences.

3. *Avoid risk for well-established brands*

The research results demonstrated that sex appeal advertising did not generate significantly different attitudes toward the brand (A_b) or purchase intentions (PI) because of prior brand familiarity with Lancôme Miracle perfume. In this study, prior brand familiarity reduces the influence of sex appeal advertising. Launching sex appeal advertising also can run the risk of generating negative responses. Employing sex appeal advertising is more beneficial to a new brand launch than a well-established brand when weighing between the benefit of capturing the audiences' attention and considering the risk of offending certain groups of consumers.

Theoretical Implications

This research makes contributions to the existing literature on sex-in-advertising effects research. Although the research results confirmed earlier empirical research that demonstrated gender differences in arousal toward sex appeal advertising (LaTour, 1990; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; LaTour & Pitts, 1990), this research extends the literature by showing very different results, i.e. when consumers are exposed to different advertising nudity levels, males and females have similar attitudes toward the ad (A_{ad}).

LIMITATIONS

The first limitation of this study is the use of convenience sampling. The sample of this research was drawn from undergraduate students at one private university in Bangkok; thus, this limits the findings' generalizability to other groups of consumers. Another limitation of this research is that the viewing experience was not realistic since the respondents viewed the print ads in classrooms and each respondent viewed only one print ad. Hence, the classroom setting does not represent a naturalistic situation, where they are exposed to many adverts. Since Lancôme Miracle perfume print ads were used, the respondents might be aware of the brand and might hold prior attitude toward the brand (A_b) before seeing the print ads. The respondents' attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}) generated from different advertising nudity levels might not be strong enough to influence attitude toward the brand (A_b).

Due to budget constraints, the research tested only feminine perfume brand Lancôme print ads with only one type of sex appeal, that is, nudity level. The research results from print ads might be different from the results of other media vehicles, such as TV stimuli.

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