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Consumer's attitude towards Advertisement, Brand Attitude and Purchase Intention on Sex Appeal Advertisements

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Abstract

Among the many channels of mass media, advertisement is obviously affecting the public. In contemporary society, people are constantly exposed to countless product advertisements through various media. Companies are making their best effort to draw customers' attention, and empathic methodologies are becoming a mainstream of many. Sex appeal methodologies are mainly used among empathic ones, and even sex-neutral products are advertised using this particular method. Therefore, this research analyzes sex appeal advertisements and categorizes those advertisements by five types of Richmond & Hartman's advertising appeals (functional, fantastic, inappropriate, symbolic, and gender-oriented). Moreover the study inquires the influence of sex appeal advertisement on customers' attitude toward advertisement, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention.

Keyword

Sex Appeal Advertisements, Richmond & Hartman's Advertising Appeals, Consumers' Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

In contemporary society, people are constantly exposed to countless product advertisements through various media, from billboards on the street to website banners and cellphone text messages. Advertisement not only has become an extrinsic part of everyday life, but also has begun to reflect contemporary thought processes, sentiments, value systems, and character, and has the capacity to establish new cultural trends. The goal of these advertisements is to draw consumers' attention, to make the product's presence well-known, and to eventually affect purchase decisions. As technological developments enabled companies to produce products of similar quality, manufacturers began to use advertisements not only to make their products familiar, but also to distinguish their products from similar products in the marketplace. Advertisers began to use more stimulating ways of getting consumers' attention by using visual stimuli which do not describe the features of a product, but rather compete for viewers' attention by seeking to attach the product to incidental, arbitrary concepts or values. The present research examines the effect of using sex appeal as an incidental concept to affect consumer reactions.

2. Purpose of Research

Preceding research shows that sex appeal in advertisements affects consumers' attitudes towards brands and products, as well as consumers' purchase behavior. Concurrent with social trends toward more liberalized sexual values, advertising started more freely to use content and images which were more sexually daring.(Lee Hwa Ja, 2001) Researchers have been claiming for decades that the use of sexual appeals has become more common and that they are now used very often in advertising (Peterson and Kerin, 1977, Richmond and Hartman, 1982). Advertisers, constantly seeking ways to increase the attention and concentration level of viewers, have found sex

appeal to be a convenient tool.

Metaphorical expressions in sex appeal advertisements increases the possibility of recollecting the advertisement when the expression is supported by the features of the advertised product and creative expressions. Especially, humor in sex appeal advertisements relieves stress, leads to positive reaction, and stimulates viewers' imagination to concentrate on the advertisement. Using the parameters Richmond & Hartman established, the present research challenges the reigning assumption that sex appeal has a positive effect on consumer attitudes toward products. It can also be shown that excessively explicit sex appeal not only can harm the brand identity but also can be ignored by consumers or raise negative associations with social trends considered harmful by the consumers.(Park Young Won & No Hyun Ji, 2013)

This research categorizes sex appeal advertisements using four of Richmond & Hartman's five types of advertising appeals, in order to discover the influence of sex appeal advertisement on consumers' advertisement attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention.

3. Preceding Research

3.1.1 Definition of Advertisement

Advertisement is a way of stimulating a certain product(including service, concept, individual, organization) to be presented or sold, via channels other than human connections, which is purchased by advertisers. (Kotler, 1988) However, advertisements adapt to the society in which they are exposed, reflecting society's role and environmental change. Advertisement includes mass media such as newspaper, magazines, television advertisement, radio advertisement, outdoor advertisement or direct mail, or new media such as blogs, websites or text messages."

3.1.2 Role of Advertisement

According to the Samsung Economy Research

Institute (SERI), the fundamental purpose of advertising is to understand consumers' needs and wants, draw consumers' attention, and lead them to purchase, thus making advertisement highly influential in buying decisions.(Park Seungbae, 2008) The Korea Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KORCHAM), conducted a survey of advertisements effects on consumers' purchase decision. 73.3% of viewers said that "media source advertisements affect purchase decision of products."(SERI, 2009) Consumers received product information advertisements through media sources such as newspapers, television, and radio [Table 1]. 51.2% of the respondents considered media source advertisements as credible channels of product information, and 37.4% considered word-of-mouth advertisements credible.

	Media Advertisement	Word of Mouth	Internet Advertisement	Home shopping Network	Etc.	Sum
20's	43.1	32.8	14.0	10.1	-	100.0
30's	50.2	37.6	7.8	3.5	0.9	100.0
40's	57.9	37.0	2.5	1.8	0.8	100.0
50's	55.5	41.0	3.2	0.3	-	100.0
60's	51.0	43.0	3.5	0.5	2.0	100.0
Sum	51.2	37.4	7.0	3.8	0.6	100.0

[Table 1] Advertisements effects on consumers' purchase decision

The KORCHAM survey also showed viewers often recollect sensual and humorous advertisements [Table 2]. It is shown that sensual advertisements were affecting all age group's purchase decision, but had a greater effect on viewers in their 20s. Relatively, humorous advertisement had a greater effect for viewers in their 40s (34.2%), while informative advertisements affected viewers in their 60s (19.9%), and emotive advertisements affected viewers in their 50s (17.3%).¹⁾

1) Sex appeal can be defined as a means to stimulate customer reaction with a sexual stimuli, and it is categorized as an emotional appeal among Kotler's three categories, which include rational, emotional, and moral appeals.

	Sensual	Humorous	Informative	Emotive	Sum
20's	66.3	29.5	3.5	0.7	100.0
30's	63.0	26.4	9.0	1.6	100.0
40's	46.1	34.2	13.3	6.4	100.0
50's	47.3	24.9	10.5	17.3	100.0
60's	37.9	28.0	19.9	14.2	100.0
Sum	56.2	29.1	9.3	5.4	100.0

[Table 2] Memorable Advertisements Classified by Forms of Advertising

3.1.3 Advertisement Effect

The present research considers three major effects of advertisements: attitude towards the advertisement, brand attitude, and purchase intention.(Kim Wan Soeck, 1995) Mitchell and Olson(1981) examine the link between emotional structure and consumer attitude. They found that the emotional attitude toward the advertisement itself is a crucial factor in the attitude toward the brand. This means that when viewers experience positive feelings toward an advertisement, they are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the brand. Furthermore, attitude towards advertisements affects not only the attitude toward the brand, but also the resulting purchasing intention, which is a practical variable.(Mackenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986)

3.2.1 Definition of sex appeal advertisement

Sex appeal advertisement is defined here as an advertisement which tries to induce customer reaction through sexual stimulation, often expressed by explicit exposure of a man or woman's body or by reminding viewers of a sexual concept. By using sex appeal in advertisements, advertisers expect to affect positively consumer attitude toward the product as well as to induce purchase.

Sigmund Freud defined sexual desires as one of the motivating elements in human life. His research focused on people's actions as motivated by their subconscious drives. He highlights the inability of humans to resist subconscious motives, and locates sexual drives in the subconscious. If

Freud is correct in asserting that human beings are controlled by their subconscious rather than their conscious desires, then it follows that sexual desire would be among the largest factors that lead people's actions. Therefore, sex appeal advertisements which correspond to viewers' sexual desires would be more likely to draw their attention.(Freud, 1978)

I.P. Pavlov's conditioned reflex theory is also relevant, as it demonstrates the reflexive rather than conscious reaction to certain stimuli. A reflexive reaction may be learned and sustained, even though there may be little connection between the reaction and the stimulus. Pavlov's well-known psychological concept is particularly useful when considering sex appeal in advertisement, because it helps us to consider two aspects of advertisement appeal. First, conditioned reflex is a learned response to continual and repeated exposure to a stimulus. Continual and repetitive exposure to sex appeal advertisements may induce viewers both to recollect the advertisement and to have a reaction when they look at the advertised product. Second, since the conditioned reflex may be generated by a specific stimulus, sex appeal advertisements may be effective whether or not the product itself has any relevance to sexuality. Thus, sex appeal may be used to generate brand reaction to condoms or cars, lingerie or cellphones, prophylactics or soft drinks.

3.2.2 Sex appeal Advertisement Effect

Some scholars claim that erotic expressions in sex appeal advertisements increases awareness of the advertisement and purchase intention.(Lee Hwa Ja, 2007) This claim can also be related to Freud's theory, which defined sexual desire as a significant motivation in human life.(Freud, 1978) Sex appeal in advertisements stimulates peoples' curiosity, draws their attention, and is one of the most certain methods to catch the eyes of consumers. Advertisements showing sexy models erotically posed stimulate sexual attraction in some viewers. In other viewers, erotically posed models

may stimulate a desire to be sexually attractive, similar to the model. A prominent example is Abercrombie & Fitch, the clothing retailer which generated much public discussion of its sex appeal advertisement campaigns. During the public debates, Abercrombie & Fitch was accelerating its franchise expansion, putting explicit bodily exposures and sexual poses ever more rapidly in the public eye.(fashion insight, 2002) The success of their marketing model bolsters the claim that sex appeal advertisements helps viewers to remember the message the product or the brand wants to deliver longer.

However, While sex appeal advertising has traditionally be associated with the fashion industry, sex appeal has been increasingly used to sell products which are unrelated to fashion, cosmetics, or products for personal beauty. Moreover, erotic imagery which exceeds contemporary mores may adversely affect the market perception of the company or the product's quality. Because sex appeal focuses consumer attention on the advertisement itself, it may subtly distract from the qualities of the product, resulting in a relatively less positive consumer attitude toward the product and the brand image.

3.2.3 Types of Sex appeal Advertisement

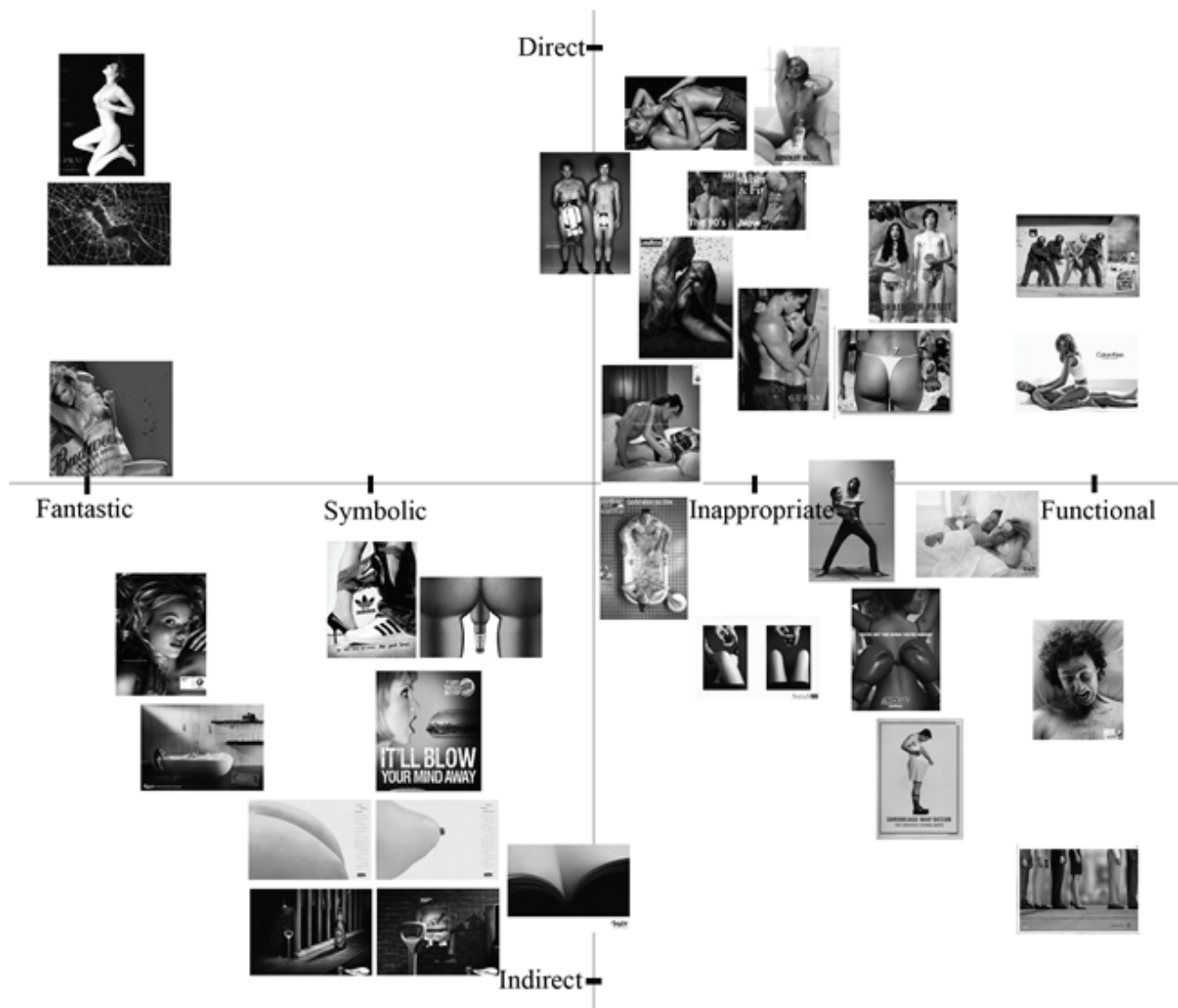
Sex appeal advertisement can be broadly categorized into direct sex appeal advertisement and indirect sex appeal advertisement.(Park Young Won & No Hyun Ji, 2013) Direct Sex Appeal advertisement is an explicit sex appeal advertisement which relates sex to a totally irrelevant product using direct expressions. Indirect sex appeal on the other hand, is a metaphorical and symbolic sex appeal advertisement, which stimulates sexual stimulation through symbols and metaphors that stimulate human psychology.

Richmond & Hartman(1982) categorized sex appeal advertisements into five major groups: functional, fantastic, symbolism, gender-oriented, and inappropriate. Functional refers to the use of sexual imagery is necessary for explaining a

product's function, such as underwear or adult goods. 'Fantastic', one of the category in Richmond & Hartman's framework, refers to sex appeal that seeks connect products to seduction or romance, and it is commonly found in advertisements for perfume and alcoholic beverages. 'Symbolism' sex appeal advertisement is an advertisement using sexual metaphors and implications. Since the symbolism causes viewers to use their imaginations, this type of advertisement can be more suggestive than that of direct expression. Inappropriate sex appeal advertisement is an advertisement which uses sexual expression only to draw consumers' attention even though it has nothing to do with the features or functions of

the promoted product. Gender-oriented sex appeal advertisement is an advertisement which is distinctively male or female-oriented in its use of illustrations or copy. (Hartman, T.P., & Richmond, D., 1982)

Thirty random print advertisements, targeting twenty years olds were selected in various fields and categorized by direct sex appeal and indirect sex appeal. Again, they are categorized by four of Richmond & Hartman's five types of sex appeal shown in [Figure 1]. Among Richmond & Hartman's five types of sex appeal advertisements, gender-oriented sex appeal advertisement is not included in this research and survey, due to the inaccuracy results on particular gender.



[Figure 1] Thirty Sex appeal advertisements categorized by types

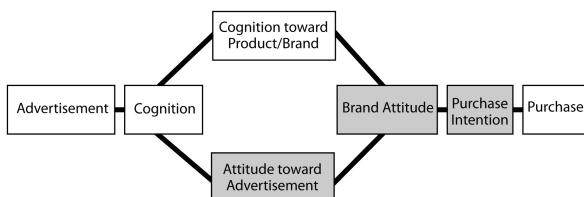
4. Structure and Component of Survey

4.1 Participants

In KORCHAM's survey [Table 1], "Memorable Advertisements Classified by Forms of Advertising," found that the age group containing the highest percentage of subjects most impacted by sensual advertisements in which includes sex appeal in advertising were students in their twenties (66.3%). Accordingly, the survey target in the present research was college students, male and female, in their twenty's. For objective data and results, one hundred college students from Seoul and Korean provincial regions were selected. The demographic includes forty-two male and fifty-eight female students studying various majors, which represents the actual buying public with a non-specialized understanding of advertisement. Out of one hundred surveys, seventeen questionnaires which were incomplete or ambiguous chose the thirty questionnaires were excluded from the analysis.

4.2 Composition of research tools

The advertisement processing model in [Figure 2] describes the three major phases of the response process occurring between a viewers' exposure to an advertisement and their eventual purchase decision. In the first phase upon exposure, viewers have an initial attitude toward the advertisement, and they also recognize the product and the brand. In the second phase, the attitude toward the advertisement becomes a component in forming an overall attitude toward the brand or the brand image. Finally, this brand image informs and shapes the consumers' purchase intention and purchase action.



[Figure 2] Advertisement Processing Model

Number	Advertising Product/Brand	Number	Advertising Product/Brand	Number	Advertising Product/Brand
#1	Danone	#11	Ursus	#21	Condomi
#2	Hineken	#12	BMW(used car)	#22	Diamond.com
#3	Abercrombie&Fitch	#13	Carlsberg	#23	Levi's
#4	Absolut Hunk	#14	Calvin Klein Jeans	#24	Max
#5	Adidas	#15	Condom	#25	Opium
#6	Absolut Centerfold	#16	Dentyne Ice	#26	Perrier
#7	Altoids(mint)	#17	Altoids(fruit)	#27	Post-it
#8	Burgerking	#18	Natan	#28	Wonderbra
#9	Budweiser	#19	Lavazza	#29	Snickers
#10	BMW	#20	Guess	#30	Calvin Klein Underwear

[Table 3] Thirty Sex appeal advertisements

The present survey seeks to verify the effect of sex appeal advertisements by selecting 30 print advertisements [Table 3] in various fields. The questionnaire was designed to measure the effect of sex appeal in conjunction with the three phases outlined in [Figure 2].

Attitude toward the advertisement is the immediate generated feeling or thought after exposure to an advertisement. As such, the attitude toward the advertisement itself can affect the attitude toward the brand. In each of the three categories of sex appeal advertisements, criteria for measuring attitude toward advertisements were 'eye-catching', 'understandable', and 'impressive'. Respondents measured these criteria on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being very much).

Brand attitude is an overall positive feeling toward a general brand or trademark. Recent research in the United States shows that viewers who showed a positive attitude toward an advertisement also showed a positive attitude toward the brand. (Im Che Hyong, 2009) Therefore, emotions generated by an advertisement affects the brand attitude. Criteria for measuring the brand attitude toward advertisements in each category were 'can remember the product/brand', 'have positive feeling toward the product/brand', and 'like the product/brand'. These criteria were also measured on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being not at all, 5 being

very much).

Purchase intention includes purchase decision and purchase action. Criteria for measuring purchase intention are those used by Stafford, Stafford, and Chowdhury(1996); *'it is useful information for future purchase'*, *'the product in this advertisement is worth purchasing'*, and *'I will purchase the product in this advertisement'*. Participants measured these on a scale of 1 to 5(1 being not at all, 5 being very much).

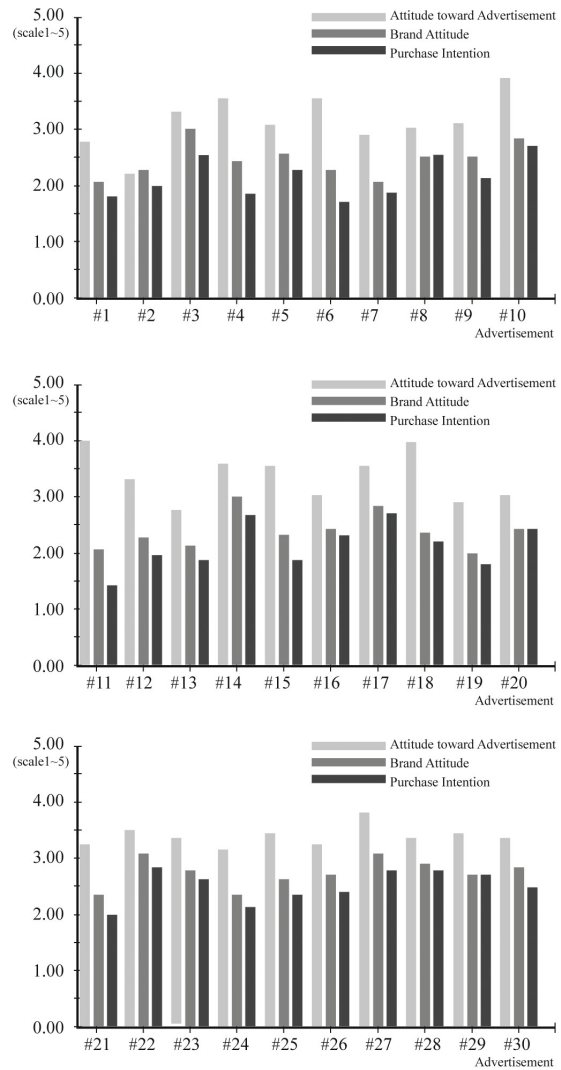
Participants were exposed to the print advertisement and its brand or product information with copy for thirty seconds. Then, they responded to the questionnaire measuring their attitude toward the advertisement, brand attitude, and purchase intention.

5. Analysis Results

In inquiring the attitude toward advertisement, regardless of the Richmond & Hartman's category, advertisements with direct sex appeal with explicit exposure , such as Absolute Vodka, Opium, Calvin Klein, Perrier, received the highest score in *'Eye-catching'* category. Among the *'inappropriate'* category inquiring the level of understandability, low sex-neutral products with an interesting storytelling or humorous copy, such as BMW or Post-it, received the highest score. Advertisements which received the highest score on *'Impressive'* category was ones which received high scores on *'Eye-catching'* and *'Understandable'* category.

Advertisements that received high scores on *'eye-catching'*, *'understandable'*, *'impressive'* categories in inquiring brand attitude also received high scores on *'can remember the product/brand'*, and these advertisements are categorized as *'inappropriate'* advertisements by Richmond & Hartman. However, in the sub category of *'have positive feeling toward the product/brand'*, advertisements with high scores on *'can remember the product/brand'*, advertisements with high scores from brand attitude, and overly explicit advertisements which had the lowest relevance with sexual expression among *'inappropriate'*

advertisements, such as Adidas, Absolut Vodka, Ursus, Lavazza, received the lowest score. Similarly, on *'like the product/brand'*, sex-neutral or overly explicit advertisements, such as Absolute Vodka, Altoids, Lavazza received the lowest score. Finally, questionnaires inquiring purchase intention, these types of advertisements received average 1-2 scores, showing low purchase intention regardless of high advertisement attitude and brand attitude. Danon, Ursus, Absolute Vodka received the lowest score on purchase intention, which was included in *'symbolic'* advertisements according to Richmond & Hartman, which metaphorically expressed certain part of the body. Diamond.com, post-it, wonderbra, snickers, altoids, calvin klein, BMW, Burgerking, Abercrombie & Fitch received



[Figure 3] Results on Attitude towards advertisement, Brand attitude, Purchase intention

the highest scores on purchase intention questionnaires. Advertisements with high purchase intention scores were among 'functional' and 'inappropriate' advertisements according to Richmond & Hartman, which most of them informed the function or the features of a product.

6. Conclusion and Limitation

Regardless of the Richmond & Hartman categorization, advertisements with direct sex appeal received high scores in general. Furthermore, 'can remember the product/brand' questionnaire inquiring brand attitude, sex appeal advertisements with high advertisement attitude using shocking or overly explicit images are also highly recollective as in its product and brand. However, these advertisements were not helpful in drawing purchase intention, receiving low scores on brand images and preference. In conclusion, 'functional' advertisements which emphasize the function and the features of a product, and 'inappropriate' advertisements which force a connection between the promoted product and sexual expressions or generate humor are effective to increase brand image or to draw customers' purchase,

Sex appeal advertisements are known for its high memorability (LaTour, Pitts, & Snook-Luthor, 1990). However, high memorability is only applied in the advertisement itself, not the product or the brand. Rather, the memorability of the product and the brand is lower than that of non-sex appeal advertisements. (mittal & Lassar, 2000) It is shown that functional sex appeal advertisements, such as clothes, fashion, underwear, hygienic products, and fantastic sex appeal advertisements, such as alcoholic drinks and perfumes, can lead to viewers' purchase, but irrelevant products can aggravate social criticism of sex commercialization. The blind use of sex appeal advertisements for differentiation from competition or promotion of a new brand can bring drawbacks.

The research results contain the following

limitations. First, this research limited the target of survey to college students in their 20's. Purchase intention toward sensual advertisements of the 20's are high, but they are also relatively more open to sexual expressions compared to other adult groups. Furthermore, among the selected brands, BMW or diamond.com can be inappropriate for college students as their main target, even though their target is 20s and 30s. Second, this research can draw relative results within the selected print advertisements rather than the absolute results. Third, the brand within the selected advertisements were well known, and through other channels the brand identity may have already been formed, therefore it is difficult to generalize the analysis.

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