



## Attitudes and Behaviors Related to Provocative Clothing Advertisements

Nancy J. Rabolt, Kaley Rider, Shawn Haley, Amanda De Guzman, and Megan Jee  
San Francisco State University, USA

Keywords: provocative, advertisement, fashion involvement, religion

Today's apparel market is characterized by fierce competition and consumers are exposed to a multitude of advertising stimuli each day. Some apparel companies develop provocative advertising campaigns as a way to gain public attention. Provocative images pervade every facet of mass communications and it is such a common component in advertising that often its existence goes without saying (Heller, 2000). Sexual imagery is an effective way of attracting the attention of consumers (Vezina & Paul, 1997) and implementing sexual appeals leads to better memory, attitudes, and purchase intentions (Putrevu, 2008). Researchers found seeing a sexually attractive man or woman in an advertisement excites the areas of the brain that makes consumers buy on impulse, bypassing the area that controls rational thought ("Sex does sell," 2011). And while sex in advertising continues to stir controversy, the toleration of its usage continues to increase. This seems to parallel today's more revealing accepted fashion. Women and younger consumers are more involved with fashionable clothing. Social needs lead consumers to the involvement with fashion. Consumers who identify with the social meaning of fashion usually have high fashion involvement and are a valued target market due to their fashion leadership influence (Meneses & Rodriguez, 2010). It was hypothesized that high fashion involvement would relate to positive attitudes about advertising in the present study.

The type of clothing worn has a connection to multiple sociodemographic factors. Little research has been done on religion's influence on a consumer's purchase decisions; however, Evans, Sutterfield, Morgan, and Mandella (2012) found that an individual's religious beliefs does have an influence on purchasing decisions especially with controversial products. This influence was hypothesized to relate to attitudes and behaviors related to advertising.

The purpose of this study was to measure consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior related to provocative clothing advertisements and to determine differences in them among respondents' fashion involvement in addition to religious affiliation and demographics of age, ethnicity, and education. Zaichkowsky's (1986) framework of conceptualizing involvement was used to develop this study using personal factors (religion and demographics) related to fashion involvement leading to a reaction to advertisements (attitudes and intended purchasing behavior).

Method. A survey was developed measuring behavioral intentions related to a particular provocative ad shown in the survey. Six attitudes questions were asked on a five-point Likert-type scale relating to general provocative advertising and to the image shown. Fashion Involvement was measured by adding scores on three items: I consider myself fashionable, I keep up with the fashion trends, and I read fashion magazines, blogs, and websites. Scores on a five-point Likert-type scale were totaled. High item-total correlations showed strong reliability.

A female-only convenience sample of 240 consumers in a Western urban city was used. Respondents were mostly Millennials with a Bachelor's degree or some higher education; just

over half indicated they adhered to a religion; and 40% were Caucasian, followed by Asian, Hispanic, and African-American ethnicity. About half identified themselves as fashion involved. SPSS correlations, chi-squares, and *t*-tests were used to analyze relationships across variables.

Results and Implications. Fashion involvement significantly correlated with all attitude statements. Those more fashion-involved were drawn to clothing ads portraying sexy women, disagreed that they would not purchase a brand due to a provocative ad, nor did they feel that sex should not be associated with clothing ads. Relating to the suggestive ad depicted in the survey, they found it appealing, not offensive, thought the woman was portrayed realistically, would buy the item depicted, and indicated in general they buy revealing clothing. Hypothesis was accepted. Retailers could encourage consumers to interact with their products through magazines, blogs, or social media as a way of becoming more fashion-involved.

No relationship with these attitudes and behaviors were found with ethnicity and education. However, there were some relationships with age and religion. Younger respondents stated they buy revealing clothing and were drawn to ads portraying sexy women, while older respondents did not purchase from a brand due to a provocative ad, felt that clothing ads should not be associated with “sex sells” concept, and found the depicted ad offensive. Those with no religious affiliation were more fashion involved and were drawn more to ads portraying sexy women, found the depicted ad more appealing, and indicated they buy revealing clothing more than those with stated religious affiliation. This supports Evans et al.’s (2012) findings that religious beliefs can affect consumer decisions. Hypothesis was accepted. Those with religious affiliations may be less likely to purchase provocative clothing than those with no affiliation despite what is currently fashionable; this may be due to their religion or their lower fashion involvement. More research is recommended.

## References

- Evans, C., Sutterfield, J., Morgan, S., & Mandella, M. (2012). The effect of religion upon consumer behavior. In Yousef, N. (Ed.). *Proceedings from the International Conference on Industry, Engineering, and Management Systems*, March 25-28, 2012 (pp. 94-103).
- Heller, S. (2000). *Sex Appeal: The Art of Allure in Graphic and Advertising Design*. New York, NY: Allworth Press.
- Meneses, G., & Rodríguez, J. (2010). A synchronic understanding of involvement with fashion: A promise of freedom and happiness. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 14(1), 72-87.
- Putrevu, S. (2008). Consumer responses toward sexual and nonsexual appeals: The influence of involvement, need for cognition (NFC), and gender. *Journal of Advertising*, 37(2), 57-69.
- Sex DOES Sell. (2011, September 11). *Daily Mail*. Retrieved December 11, 2013, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2040218/Sex-DOES-sell-Attractive-men-women-ads-affect-capacity-rational-thought.html>
- Vézina, R., & Paul, O. (1997). Provocation in advertising: A conceptualization and an empirical assessment. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 14(2), 177-192.
- Zaichkowsky, J. (1986). Conceptualizing involvement. *Journal of Advertising*, 15(2), 4-14.