



Brand Personalities and Sexuality in Luxury Fashion Advertisements

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Significance, Relevant Theory, and Pertinent Literature Review: According to Shields and Heineken (2002, p. 34) “images of ideal bodies, most often female bodies, are some of the most dominant and consistent images produced by advertisers.” Playing on individuals’ emotions when they view advertisements will affect their hedonic or pleasure attitudes. Retailers produce hedonic advertisements to appeal to the consumers’ emotions, in order for the consumer to purchase their products (e.g., Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2007). Luxury brands are known to produce such advertisements to market their companies. These name brands are already synonymous with prestige and high quality, but also sex and pleasure (Thomas, 2007). Whatever the behavioral response, the individual will react to the advertisement causing them to make a decision about the brand. Reactions to sexuality in advertisements are important to understand to determine its impact on consumers.

Brand identity, refers to how the company presents its brand to consumers (Keller, 2008). The identity of the brand, which includes reflection on consumer image and self-image or how the consumer feels, is depicted to a receiver within the context of a culture. Researchers have noted that consumers place human personality characteristics on brands (Fournier, 1998) such as the “Big Five” dimensions that include emotionality, openness and intellect, culture, rebelliousness, and unconventionality (e.g. John & Srivastava, 1999). Aaker’s (1997; 2000) model incorporates all of the above ideas related to brand personality: receiver, sender, and brand as a human personality. Geurens, Weijters and DeWulf (2015) developed a new measure from Aaker’s work focused on the following five personalities: 1) responsibility/ stable; 2) active, innovative, and dynamic; 3) aggressiveness/ oldness; 4) simplicity/simple; and 5) emotionality/sentimental (p. 103).

Differences in responses to advertisements have been found among males and females. Men sexually objectify women in luxury advertisements because men have primal instincts to fulfill their desires. However, when women are shown in an objectifying manner in advertising, women consider the advertisement unappealing (Vaes, et al., 2011). Both genders generally respond positively to advertisements with sexual messages featuring nude models of the opposite sex and negatively with models of their own gender (e.g. Dahl, et al., 2009). *The purpose of this research* was to determine the perceived personality of brands featuring different levels of sexuality in luxury fashion advertisements. The primary research question was: *How do varying levels of sexuality in luxury fashion advertisements influence males and females perceived personality of a brand?*

Method: In this study, the stimuli were luxury fashion advertisements categorized at different sexuality levels: 1) demure (L1), 2) suggestive (L2), 3) partially clad (L3), and 4) nude (L4) (e.g. Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). The survey had 25 brand personality items (Geurens, Weijters, & De Wulf, 2007) grouped to represent five personalities: 1) Consciences/ Responsibility (C/R), 2)

Extraversion/Activity (E/A), 3) Emotional Stability/Emotionality (ES/E), 4) Agreeableness/Aggressiveness (A/A), 5) Openness/Simplicity (O/S). Each brand personality was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from not (1) to very (5) characteristic of this brand. The survey was piloted with 56 university students who also assessed level of sexuality of two sets of advertisements (8 images). The results revealed the brand personality items were internally consistent ($\alpha=.818$ to $.927$). The pilot results were examined to select one set of advertisements best representative of each sexuality level for each gender (4 per gender). Upon approval from the University's IRB, the survey was available on Amazon Turk for two weeks. Each participant responded to one advertisement with a model of his/her gender. Using IBM SPSS, descriptive statistics, a Two-Way Multivariate Analysis of Variance, and an Analysis of Variance were performed with significance at $p \leq .05$

Results: From the 1266 participants, 701(55.4%) were female and 565 (44.6%) were male. Participants resided in the United States: SE (n = 338; 26.7%), MW (n = 265; 20.9%); NE (n = 232; 18.3%), W (n = 200; 15.8%) and SW (n = 153;12.1%). The majority identified as heterosexual (n = 996; 78.7%) or bisexual (n = 139; 11.0%). Advertisements were randomly selected for females (L1, n = 176, L2, n = 176; L3, n = 177, and L4, n = 171) and males (L1, n = 143; L2, n = 141; L3, n= 142; L4, n=1 39). There was a gender by sexuality level interaction effect (*Pillai's Trace* = .035, $F(15,3768) = 2.995, p \leq .001$). There were main effects for gender (*Pillai's Trace* = .026, $F(5,1254) = 6.787, p \leq .001$) and sexuality level (*Pillai's Trace* = .139, $F(15,3768) = 12.241, p \leq .001$).

The two-way ANOVA revealed an interaction effect for C/R ($F(3,1258) = 4.16, p = .003$) with A/A ($F(3,1258) = 3.22, p = .004$), and O/S ($F(3,1258) = 3.54, p = .049$). C/R pairwise comparisons for gender was statistical significant (M dif. = -0.12, SE =0.05, = .019). Mean scores for C/R for females were L1 (M/SD 3.32 \pm 0.85), L2 (M/SD 2.99 \pm 0.97), L3 (M/SD 2.73 \pm 0.90), and L4 (M/SD 2.60 \pm 1.08) with significant relationships between L1 to L2, L3, and L4. Among men C/R M scores were: L1 (M/SD 3.45 \pm 0.82), L2 (M/SD 2.78 \pm 0.96), L3 (M/SD 3.04 \pm 0.97), and L4 (M/SD 2.78 \pm 0.94). For men, L1 was also statistically significant to L2, L3, and L4, as well as, L2 to L3 and L2 to L4. Significant relationships between males and females responses were: L1 to L2 and to L3. For E/A, effects for levels of sexuality ($F(3,1258) = 3.51, p = .006$) were found among the entire sample The mean scores for E/A were L1 (M/SD 3.41 0.90,), L2 (M/SD 3.54 \pm 0.89), L3 (M/SD 3.48 \pm 0.90), and L4 (M/SD 3.29 \pm 0.99), with significance shown in L2 to L4, and L3 to N L.

With ES/E main effects were found ($F(3,1258) = 5.19, p = .002$). The combined male and female Ms were: L1 (M/SD 3.00 \pm 1.50), L2 (M/SD 3.20 \pm 0.99), L3 (M/SD 3.09 \pm 1.01), and L4 (M/SD 2.87 \pm 1.03, n =310). Significant relationships were between L1 and L2 , L2 and L4, and L3 and L4. Females ES/E ratings were L1 (M/SD 3.44 0.90), L2 (M/SD 3.60 \pm 0.89), L3(M/SD 3.52 \pm 0.89), and L4 (M/SD 3.31 \pm 1.06). Statistically significance was found with L1 and L2, L1 and L3, and L2 and L4. Scores for males were as follows: L1 (M/SD 3.18 \pm 0.98), L2 (M/SD 3.21 \pm 0.93), L3 (M/SD 3.10 \pm 1.06), and L4 (M/SD 2.91 \pm 1.00). For men, significant relationships were L1 and L4, and L2 and L4. Comparisons between males and females revealed L1 images were rated differently. There was an interaction effect for A/A ($F(3,1258) = 3.22, p = .004$), but statistically significant differences were not found for women and male totals (M dif. = 0.07, SE = 0.06, p = 0.18). For men significant relationships were with A/A and L1 and L2, L1 and L2 and L3, and L2 and L4 with Ms as follows: L1 (M/SD 3.60 \pm 0.86), L2 (M/SD 3.0- \pm 0.74), L3 (M/SD 3.60 \pm 0.87), and L4 (M/SD 3.58 \pm 0.92). The scores for females with regards to Agreeableness/Aggressiveness

were: Demure (M/SD 3.64 ± 0.84), Suggestive (M/SD 3.62 ± 0.85), Partially Clad (M/SD 3.67 ± 0.80), and Nude (M/SD 3.77 ± 0.92). Scores for males were as follows: Demure (M/SD 3.60 ± 0.86), Suggestive (M/SD 3.0 ± 0.74), Partially Clad (M/SD 3.60 ± 0.87), and Nude (M/SD 3.58 ± 0.92, n = 139). There was an interaction found for O/S ($F(3, 1258) = 2.62, p = .049$). The scores for females with regards to Openness/Simplicity were: L1 (M/SD 2.49, ±1.18), L2 (M/SD 2.30 ± 1.20), L3 (M/SD 2.29 ± 1.09), and L4 (M/SD 2.17 ± 1.18). Scores for males were as follows: L1 (M/SD 2.71), L2 (M/SD 2.30 ± 1.15), L3 (M/SD 2.77 ± 1.24), and L4 (M/SD 2.56 ± 1.11). Significant relationships were, L1 and L2; and L2 and L3. For males related to females L1, L3, and L4 were significant.

Discussion, Further Research: Different associations were made about luxury fashion brands given levels of sexuality, supporting theories related to identity and brand (e.g. Aaker, 1997; Geurens et al., 2015). For example, perceptions of C/R (“down-to-earth,” “responsible,” etc.) decreased as the level of sexuality increased. In another example, both genders perceived brands with more sexuality as less emotional. The findings also indicate ingrained stereotypes of women and men still exist. For example, when compared to women, men viewed the luxury advertisements as more simple and ordinary (O/S). Men may not be exposed to the extravagance of fashion as much as women. This research is useful to luxury brands in targeting different genders. Further research is warranted, such as examining sexuality levels in advertisements and purchasing behavior. In addition, education programs could be made to prevent negative stereotypes of nudity and the influence it in fashion advertising.

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