INSTITUTE OF BUSINESS RESEARCH
WORKING PAPER SERIES

W15:02 June 2015

Sexual appeals in advertisements

Auður Hermannsdóttir and Sólveig Gunnarsdóttir

Auður Hermannsdóttir
Háskóli Íslands
Gimli by Sæmundargata
101 Reykjavík
Iceland
Tel.: +354 525 4500
E-mail: audurhermannsdottir@hi.is

Sólveig Gunnarsdóttir
Háskóli Íslands
Gimli by Sæmundargata
101 Reykjavík
Iceland
Tel.: +354 525 4500
E-mail: solveig@rorocare.com

Institute of Business Research
School of Business University of Iceland
Gimli by Sæmundargata
101 Reykjavík
Iceland
www.ibr.hi.is
ABSTRACT
Companies need to be creative in finding ways to get the attention of consumers, who experience constant stimuli. One of the means companies use is sex or sexual appeal, often even though the product being advertised has no relation to sex or sexuality. The purpose of this study was to examine if using sexually oriented appeal in advertising when the product itself is not sexual, could affect attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand and buying intentions. A fictitious brand of soap, called Clean, was featured in experimental ads. Two print ads were used, one with sexual appeal and the other with no sexual appeal, showing a beautiful clean nature. The findings showed that the use of sexual appeal does affect attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand and buying intentions, but that the effect is negative. The findings suggest that it can in fact have negative consequences to use sexual appeal when the advertised product is not related to sex or sexuality. The attitude towards the ad is more negative, the attitude towards the brand is more negative and consumers are less likely to buy the product. The findings have important implications for advertisers, implying that they should not use sexual appeal when advertising products that have no relations to sex or sexuality.

Keywords: Sexual appeal, advertisements, buying intentions
1 INTRODUCTION

Getting consumers’ attention that will influence and lead to positive behavior for companies through advertisements is a challenging task. Consumers are exposed to constant stimuli and noise, so finding a way to get through with a message that a company wants to get to the market has called for creative ways to succeed. Means used to get attention are for example humor, contrast, fear and sex (Putrevu, 2008). Advertisers have been using sex to advertise their products and brands for decades, even though at all times it has been controverted and criticized by some groups (LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; Putrevu, 2008). It is very common to see provocative material and sexual appeals in advertising from various brands, for example from Calvin Klein and Obsession perfume. Over the past decades the use of such appeals in advertisements has been increasing (Mager & Helgeson, 2011; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). Advertisers knowingly sexualize the products and brands in advertisements to make them more attractive to consumers (Gould, 1994) and to influence their behavior. Products that already have sexual connections, such as condoms or sex toys, may have them enhanced by additional eroticism while products that have few or even non sexual connections are being sexualized through the use of erotic images and other features in the ad (Gould, 1994).

Studies have shown positive effect of using sexual appeal in advertisements when the product itself is related to sexuality (Pope, Vogues & Brown, 2004; Severn, Belch & Belch, 1990). There is evidence that there is no effect when no such relationship is present (Pope et al., 2004) but findings have been mixed (see e.g. Bello, Pitts & Etzel, 1983; Dudley, 1999; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Severn et al., 1990).
When considering the numerous ads on products or brands that have little or no connection to sexuality, it is reasonable to call for further studies on that subject. This study is meant to shed some clearer light on the effects when advertising a product that in itself is not connected to sex or sexuality but is advertised using sexual appeal. The purpose of this study is to examine if using a sexually oriented appeals in advertising when the product itself is not sexual, affects (a) attitude towards the advertisement, (b) attitude towards the brand and (c) buying intentions. The advertised product used in this study is soap, which is normally not connected to sexuality. In most studies only one model has been used, most of the time women but sometimes also men. In this study both genders are used in the same advertisement in a sexual posture. The ad can therefore be seen as targeting both women and men.

The findings should enhance the scientific knowledge of the usage of sexual appeal in advertising, since findings from previous studies have been mixed. It should also have managerial implications by giving advertisers information on whether it can be successful to use sex and sexual appeals in ads even though the product itself has little or no connection to sexuality.

2 DISTINCTION OF SEXUAL APPEALS IN ADS

Sexually oriented appeals would be a constituent of sexually explicit material. In a narrow range, Gould (1992) viewed such material “as including sexually arousing nudity and/or portrayals or enactments of various types and forms of the sex act” (p. 135). When viewed in a broader range, sexually explicit material contains material that is sexually suggestive and arousing to some people (Gould, 1992; Putrevu, 2008). Such material is common in for example music videos and
advertisements, where the singers, dancers or models often are scantily clad, move seductively and/or are in sexual postures. The broader definition of sexually explicit material is in line with definitions of sexually oriented appeals. Sexually oriented appeal is a message that is associated with sexual information (Reichert, Hekler & Jackson, 2001). It is based around the appearance of nudity and the use of sexual attractiveness or suggestiveness (Bello et al, 1983). Reichert and Ramirez (2000) put forth a receiver-based definition, or “appeals perceived as sexual by the receiver” (p. 271). In their study Reichert and Ramirez (2000) identified four characteristics of sexy ads; (1) physical features of models, (2) behavior/movement, (3) contextual features such as using cameras to roam over the models, the settings, music and lightning, and (4) intimacy between models.

3 POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF USING SEXUAL APPEALS IN ADS

Attitude towards an ad affects attitude towards a brand (Batra & Ray, 1986; Muehling & Lacznia, 1988), which affects purchase intentions (Batra & Ray, 1986). Therefore it is important what the market thinks of a particular ad. In spite of very different views on the subject, using nudity in advertising has overall been found to lead to a positive attitude towards the ad (Pope et al., 2004; Severn et al., 1990). Findings on the effects of usage of sexual stimuli on ad recall have been mixed, but ad recall is important since ad recall has a positive effect on brand recall (Parker and Furnham, 2007). In an early study by Chestnut, LaChance and Lubitz (1977) findings showed that sexual content seemed to reduce recall and recognition of the ad. Findings from a study done by Judd and Alexander (1983) a few years later showed no difference in recall whether the ad had sexual content or not. However, later studies have
given reason to believe that sexual appeals can improve recognition and recall of the ad (Furnham & Mainaud, 2011; Jones, Stanaland & Gelb, 1998).

Recognition and recall of the ad is one thing; another, and more important, is the recognition and recall of the advertised product or brand. Earlier studies give reason to believe that using sexual appeals has little influence on the recognition of the brand name (Chestnut et al., 1977; Severn et al., 1990), but according to Severn et al. (1990) it has a negative effect on copy-point recall. According to Grazer and Keesling (1995) the effect is dependent on the level of sexual stimuli, where asexual stimuli resulted in higher recall of the brand than high level of sexual stimuli. Grazer and Keesling (1995) concluded the reason might be that higher level of sexual stimuli might divert the viewer’s attention from the brand name to the advertisement’s sexual content. But using high level of stimuli might not just divert the attention; it might simply have a negative effect compared to using mild sexual appeals (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). It appears that as the level of nudity and eroticism increases the intended communication effects either become negative or dissipated (LaTour, Pitts & Snook-Luther, 1990).

Regarding attitude towards the advertised brand, findings are mixed. Some give reason to believe that sexual appeal results in more interest in the topic being advertised (Dudley, 1999; Reichert et al., 2001). The arousal evoked by sexual appeal has been shown to have positive effect on the evaluation and the liking of the brand (Dudley, 1999; LaTour et al., 1990; Reichert et al., 2001). Still, findings from Jones and associates (1998) contradict this as they found no support for effect on attitude towards the brand when sexual appeal is used.
Using sexually oriented appeals in advertising attracts attention (Dudley, 1999; Reichart et al., 2001; Reid & Soley, 1983) and leads to positive thoughts, which is vital in today’s saturated media environment (Reichert et al., 2001). Furthermore, using such appeals not only grabs attention but also holds it for longer periods of time than ads without such appeal (Grossman & Till, 1998). The sexual images used in such ads and the messages they send get associated with the brand and the associations do not seem to require significant reinforcement (Grossman & Till, 1998).

Sexually oriented appeal in ads evokes emotional responses such as arousal, excitement or even lust, which in turn can create stimulation and desire for the product (LaTour, 1990; Reichert et al., 2001). There is also evidence to support that using sexual appeals in ads results in a higher level of persuasion than using nonsexual ads (Dudley, 1999; LaTour et al., 1990; Reichert et al., 2001). These attributes may be one reason marketers use sexually oriented appeals in their ads for a variety of brands, in many cases advertising products, service or events that don’t seem to be connected with sex, sexiness or sexually oriented appeal in any way (Reichert et al., 2001).

Findings regarding the effect of sexually oriented appeals on buying intentions have been mixed. Bello and associates (1983) found that even though sexually oriented appeal does seem to generate more interest than nonsexual ads, it does not affect purchase intentions. But other studies have shown the opposite results, where sexual stimuli have shown to have a positive effect on purchase intentions (e.g. Dudley, 1999; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Severn et al., 1990). But the effect might also be negative. According to Fetto (2001) it offends consumers
when sex is used in advertising and because of that they are less likely to buy a product if it is advertised using sexual imagery.

As previous discussion has shown, there are ambiguous findings as to whether sexual appeals have an effect on recall, attitude and buying intentions. But it seems that if any effect does exist, it depends upon and is constrained by the fit between the product category being advertised and the usages of sexual appeal (Simpson, Horton & Brown, 1996), especially when the target audience is female (Putrevu, 2008). Using sexual appeals seems to be most effective when sexuality is related to the product itself (Pope et al., 2004; Severn et al., 1990). Under those circumstances sexual appeals can result in favorable brand attitude and corporate image, while nothing seems to be gained when there is no such relationship (Pope et al., 2004). Severn and associates (1990) concluded that when there is no relationship, using sexual appeals might distract from the effectiveness of the ad by focusing processing away from key elements of the ad’s message.

4 GENDER DIFFERENCES AND CULTURAL ISSUES

As always, it is important to consider the target group for the ad’s message. When considering whether to use sexual appeal this is important since the feasibility and effectiveness seems to rest on who the audience is, especially the audience gender and culture.

In general there seems to be more positive effect on male audiences than female audiences when using sexual appeal in advertisements (Bello et al., 1983; Fetto, 2001; LaTour, 1990). Men seem to recall sexual advertisements better than women (Parker & Furnham, 2007). Men also seem to have a more favorable attitude
towards such ads (Judd & Alexander, 1983; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994; Putrevu, 2008) and towards the brands being advertised (LaTour & Henthorne, 1993). There have been limited studies on why this is, but Skorek and Dunham (2012) have found that exposure to idealized images of women increases men’s self-esteem. They therefore concluded that viewing ads where women are in a sexual posture can have self-enhancing effect on men.

When targeting women, using female nudity in the ad might not be as effective as when the targeted audience is male (Jones et al., 1998; LaTour, 1990; LaTour et al, 1990). It might even be harmful to use nudity when targeting women (Judd and Alexander, 1983; LaTour and Henthorne, 1993). When targeting men it will in general be more effective to show nudity of a female model than a male model (Jones et al., 1998).

But it is also important to go beyond the demographics of the target audience and look for example at the values that are important to the group. Even though sexuality in ads may not have a positive effect on women, it might be for various reasons. As discussed by LaTour (1990) feminists could for example be negatively affected by such ads for other reasons than women with conservative values.

Difference based on gender has been found in many Western studies, but a study by Liu, Li and Cheng (2006) in China, did not find this difference between women’s and men’s responses towards sexual appeals in ads, apart from when the model was of the same sex, then men had more negative attitude towards both the ad and the brand than women.

In general there are obvious advantages in using standardized advertising for organizations that are working in several countries,
especially regarding cost saving and the ability to create a unified image for the brand. Nevertheless cultural barriers might cause it to be impractical and even harmful (Biswas, Olsen & Carlet, 1992). In fact culture may be the most important factor that affects consumer responses to sexual appeal in ads (Boddewyn, 1991; Liu, Cheng & Li, 2009). Liu and associates (2009) found a significant difference between countries in consumers’ attitudes towards the brand in sexually appealing ads. Nevertheless they detected no significant difference between countries in buying intentions.

But not only the consumer response seems to be different between countries, advertisers’ use of sexual appeal in advertisements, its magnitude and frequency, seems to be different as well. Nelson and Peak (2005) found that cultural values and political systems are related to degree of sexuality presented in advertisements. Their study implies that masculinity and the most restrictive political systems are negatively related to the use of nudity in advertisements and that sexual freedom measured at national level is positively related to degrees of sexuality. In countries that are more sexually liberated sexual appeal is used more frequently than in countries that are thought to be less sexually liberated (Biswas et al, 1992).

When thinking about possible effect of gender and different cultures it is also important to note that what is considered appropriate and acceptable in advertising can change over time (LaTour and Henthorne, 1994). Even though such changes are not likely to happen quickly, advertisers should be aware of a possible shift and scan for them.
5 ETHICAL ISSUES

Some might argue that advertisers should only be concerned with the effectiveness of ads; whether they have some positive effect on the brand and on purchases. Others might want to consider the role of ethics and put it in front of the hard-core focus on profit. Serious ethical and moral concerns have been raised as to whether the use of overtly sexual ads is acceptable (Gould, 1994; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994).

Studies have shown that a sexually oriented appeal will more likely improve ads’ effectiveness than harm it (Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Reichart et al., 2001). However, Jones and associates (1998) concluded that non-sexy ads might nevertheless be more feasible since they seem to do the most good with the least harm to effectiveness. Judd and Alexander (1983) conclude that sexually suggestive ads may be offensive to many and therefore they should be used with great caution. Non-sexy ads normally do not offend or call for negative responses from the audience, while responses to sexy ads seem to be connected to whether the audience is male or female and whether the model used is male or female.

The media and various pressure groups are often those who set and enforce the community standards when it comes to evaluating whether or not an ad is deemed decent or indecent (Gould, 1994). Ads can shed light on norms and values in the society since they are often thought to mirror those norms and values (Soley & Reid, 1988).

Advertisers considering the use of sexual appeals need to evaluate all potential social issues at stake (LaTour & Henthoren, 1994). Even though they try to target their market and message placement, their ads normally are also visible to some who are not part of the target group. Amongst others, children inevitably become exposed to such ads, even
though they may not be the target group. Children can therefore get affected and influenced by sexual ads, which is seen by Boddewyn (1991) as unwholesome. Adolescent girls are often sensitive about their looks and vulnerable to stereotypes that present how they should look and act. It is therefore worth speculating what possible effect it might have that women are often portrayed as sex objects in magazines targeted at adolescent girls (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008).

The use of sexuality in ads has been considered to display an unrealistic picture of women’s appearances and actions (Richins, 1991); and to foster an atmosphere of disrespect, degrading and objectification of women (Boddewyn, 1991; Gould, 1994). In magazine advertisements this unrealistic picture of women seems to be mainly targeted at two groups; men and adolescent girls (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). However, the presentation of women in sexual ads might not always be negative. Lin’s (1998) findings showed that in the TV ads covered in her study women were portrayed as being liberated and embracing their sexuality in order to express themselves, but not to please men. Nevertheless, studies have revealed a difference in how men and women are treated in advertisements, where women are more likely than men to be visually portrayed (Furnham & Mak, 1999; Mager & Helgeson, 2011) and shown in sexually appealing roles (Ibroscheva, 2007; Lin, 1998; Reichert, 2003). According to Mager and Helgeson´s (2011) review of 50 years of advertising it seems to have become even more prominent to present women as sexual objects for the male gaze. Increasingly, however, men are being portrayed in a decorative manner (Reichert, 2003; Rohlinger, 2002). According to Rohlinger’s (2002) study men are increasingly portrayed in sexual appeals, but with unknown sexuality. She connects this movement to the gay liberation movement, so by
showing the male model with an unknown sexuality, it can be targeted both towards heterosexual women and homosexual men. Nevertheless, females are still more often portrayed in sexually appealing roles and therefore it is fair to conclude that physical attractiveness plays a larger role for female models than for male models.

6 METHOD

A fictitious brand of soap was featured in experimental ads to avoid any pre-existing attitudes towards the brand. This product class was chosen because it is something every household buys and it is a gender free product category. The product itself should therefore be just as relevant and appealing to both men and women.

Two print ads were used introducing a fictitious soap brand called Clean. The survey was done among Icelanders and was therefore in Icelandic. The same text was used in both ads; the ad with sexual appeal and the ad without sexual appeal. The text translated into English was “A gentle soap that cleans and protects the skin from impurity”. The text itself does not imply any sexual connection.

The non-sexual ad (Figure 1) was colorful and showed an Icelandic nature scene and had no models in it¹.

---

¹ Visit South Iceland granted permission to use the photo that is available on the website www.winterwonderland.is
The sexual ad (Figure 2) showed a man and a woman in a sexual position. As Ramirez and Reichert (2000) stated, most researchers have defined sexually oriented appeals very narrowly. They have primarily focused on nudity and excluded other features that contribute to the sexual nature of the message. When choosing the sexually oriented appeal for this study, Ramirez and Reichert’s (2000) findings regarding what is sexually appealing were taken into consideration; the models have very few clothes on (physical features), their behavior in the image is sexual (behavior/movement), the lightning in the photo is dimmed (contextual features) and the models are shown being intimate (intimacy of the models).

In total 392 participated and were randomly assigned to the two ads; 194 were exposed to the non-sexual ad and 198 to the sexual ad.

---

2 The photo is from the website www.radiobigboy.com
Unfortunately the gender distribution of the sample was very unequal where 76.9% were female. The average age of participants was 32 years. The two groups were similar concerning gender and age. The average age of those receiving the questionnaire with the sexual ad was 34 and 75.9% of them were women. The average age of those receiving the questionnaire with the non-sexual ad was 31 and 77.9% of them were women.

6.1 MEASUREMENT

In the beginning the participants were exposed to an ad, either the sexual or non-sexual ad. On the following page of the online questionnaire they were asked to answer statements and questions concerning the attitude towards the ad, attitude towards the brand and buying intentions. The items in the questionnaire were mostly based on previous studies (Batra and Ray, 1987; Grossman and Till, 1998; Muehling and Lacziak, 1988) but adjusted to the purpose of this study.

Seven items measured attitude towards the ad and their reliability was acceptable (Cronbach’s Alpha = .864). A five-point Likert scale was used where 1 meant the participants strongly disagreed with the statement and 5 meant they strongly agreed with the statement.

Measuring attitude towards the brand four items were used with acceptable reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha = .848). The same five-point Likert scale was used as before where 1 meant the participants strongly disagreed with the statement and 5 meant they strongly agreed with the statement.

Two items measured buying intentions, one measuring if the participants were willing to try out the brand and one measuring if they
would buy the brand if they were shopping for soap. The reliability of the factor was acceptable (Cronbach’s Alpha = .873). A five-point Likert scale was used were 1 meant the participants were very unlikely to try out/buy the brand and 5 meant they were very likely to try out/buy the brand.

7 FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of each of the items measured in the questionnaire. The left side of the table shows the findings from the sexual ad and the right side shows the findings from the non-sexual ad.

Table 1. Descriptive findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sexual ad Mean</th>
<th>Sexual ad std.</th>
<th>Non-sexual ad Mean</th>
<th>Non-sexual ad std.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the ad</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>.844</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>.833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advertisement is interesting</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.225</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>1.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not like the advertisement*</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.389</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advertisement grabs my attention</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>1.204</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advertisement is inappropriate*</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.418</td>
<td>4.21</td>
<td>1.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advertisement is appealing</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The advertisement is good</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.062</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My attitude towards the advertisement is positive</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>1.113</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.948</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards the brand</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.777</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My attitude towards the brand is positive</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.986</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>.724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand is of high quality</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>.960</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>.671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand is trustworthy</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>1.004</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>.797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The brand is good</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying intentions</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.132</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How likely is it that you would want to try out the advertised brand?</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.295</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All things considered, if you were to purchase soap on one of your next trips to the store, how likely is it that you would purchase Clean?</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.143</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.056</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Item turned
Findings revealed significant difference in responses ($p < 0.001$) to all items of the questionnaire based on whether participants viewed the sexual ad or non-sexual ad, apart from the statement „*The advertisement grabs my attention*“. In all cases, the responses were more positive among the participants that viewed the non-sexual ad. Their attitude towards the ad was more positive ($t(389) = -9.23; p < 0.001$), their attitude towards the brand was more positive ($t(348) = -8.32; p < 0.001$) and they were more likely to buy the brand ($t(362) = -6.75; p < 0.001$).

Findings showed that attitude towards the ad was influenced by which ad was used; sexual or non-sexual ($\beta = .424$). It also influenced the attitude towards the brand ($\beta = .393$) and buying intentions ($\beta = .334$). Furthermore, the findings showed that the attitude towards the ad influenced the attitude towards the brand ($\beta = .589$) and that the attitude towards the brand influenced buying intentions ($\beta = .641$).

To check for differences based on gender the sample was balanced to adjust for the gender inequality among the participants. Women were randomly selected from the sample to equal the number of men answering each questionnaire. When considering the sexual ad, findings showed that women were more negative than men were in their attitude towards the ad ($t(82) = 3.35; p = 0.001$). Interestingly, both genders tended towards negative attitude towards the sexual ad, the mean for women being 2.29 (std. = .711) and for men being 2.87 (std. = .928). Both men and women also leaned towards negative attitude towards the brand, the buying intentions of neither were high, and no difference based on gender appeared in the attitude towards the brand nor the buying intentions ($p > 0.05$). Among participants who viewed the non-sexual ad, no difference was found between the genders on attitude
towards the ad, attitude towards the brand or buying intentions ($p > 0.05$).

8 DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to examine whether using sexually oriented appeals in advertising, when the product itself is not sexual, affects attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand, and buying intentions. Previous studies have shown mixed findings (see e.g. Bello et al., 1983; Dudley, 1999; Grazer & Keesling, 1995; Pope et al., 2004; Severn et al., 1990), but the frequent use of sexual appeal in advertisements even though the product or service are not in themselves related to sex or sexuality, gives rise to studying the subject further.

The findings show that the use of sexual appeal does in fact affect attitude towards the advertisement and towards the brand, and most importantly; it seems to affect buying intentions. Notably, the effect is negative. When using an ad with sexual appeal to advertise a product, soap in this case, the attitude towards the ad is more negative than when using a non-sexual ad. The attitude towards the brand is also more negative when the ad with sexual appeal is used and it is less likely that customers will buy the advertised product. The findings are in line with some of previous studies. Pope et al. (2004) concluded nothing could be gained by using sexuality when the product was not related to sexuality, but our findings concluded that it may in fact be harmful. Fetto (2001) found that using sexual appeal could have a negative effect on buying intentions since it offended consumers.

The findings reveal important information for marketing managers and advertisers: When advertising a product that has no connection to
sex or sexuality it can have negative effect to use sexual appeals to advertise the product. Advertisers should therefore not use such methods to gain attention, but rather find other means to get through to the market. This holds irrespective of the target market’s gender, according to this study on Icelandic customers. It is worth noting that culture plays an important role regarding the effects of using sexual appeals in advertising, in fact it may be the most important factor (Boddewyn, 1991; Liu et al., 2009). It is therefore important that advertisers study their target market’s culture and take notice of their values when designing their advertisements.

8.1 LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH
The main limitation of the study is the sample. Unfortunately, there were not as many men that participated, resulting in a majority of participants being women. But when the sample was balanced based on gender, no difference was detected regarding attitude towards the brand or buying intentions. It was only in the case of attitude towards the sexual ad that women were slightly more negative, but both genders leaned toward negative attitude towards the sexual ad.

In further studies on the subject it would be interesting delve deeper into the difference between cultures. Both based on national culture and other cultural values like conservatism, liberalism, feminism and more. The culture and values of the target market may very well be the most important influencing factor regarding what kind of advertisements can be most effective. It is becoming increasingly difficult for advertisers to get through to consumers, because of the constant stimuli they experience every day. It is therefore very important to be able to design ads that not only grab the attention, but also lead to
positive results, and in that effort culture and cultural values may be the most important factor.
REFERENCES


