

Effectiveness of Sexual Imagery in Advertisements and Influence on Purchasing Behaviour of Consumers in Mumbai : A Study Across Genders and Generations

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Abstract

In today's world of advertising and consumerism, use of sexual imagery is no longer considered a taboo, a trend fast catching-up in India too. The present study focused on understanding the effectiveness of use of sexual imagery in advertisements and how it influences consumer purchase intention. The study was conducted across genders and generations to examine variations, if any, in the results of the research. A brief introduction to the concept of sexual advertising is presented along with a review of existing literature in the area. The study used both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were obtained from a survey conducted with 460 respondents across genders and generations in Greater Mumbai Metropolitan Region using a structured questionnaire. Data analysis was done by using correlation and simple linear regression methods. The results suggested that the use of sexual imagery had a positive influence on consumer purchase decisions, irrespective of gender or generation. This could imply that the use of sexual imagery by advertisers is a popular as well as successful strategy in grabbing audience's attention and affects their decision-making process, thereby inducing them to purchase the advertised product.

Keywords : sexual imagery, advertising, consumer behaviour, purchase intention

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Advertising, as a form of marketing communication, is used to persuade the target audience to continue to take part in the proceedings, usually with respect to a commercial offering, or an ideological or political support. Sexual advertising is the use of sexual appeal in advertising, to help sell a particular product or service, and the sexual imageries thereby used may not even pertain to the product or service being advertised. A few noticeable examples of sexually appealing imagery include semi-nude or scantily clad male and/or female models, pinup girls, and muscular men. The use of sexually suggestive content in advertisements could be overt or subtle. Sexuality and sexually appealing imagery has been used in advertising since the 19th century AD, but the kind of appeal used and message implied has changed over the years. Today, a noticeable number of brands use sexual imagery to advertise their products and/or services. The field of advertising is perhaps the most demanding, in terms of creativity, artistry, and research. Thousands of products and services compete with one another for a dominant share in the market. If the potential consumer does not hear, see, touch, and/or feel your products and services, you do not exist. Technology has brought forth a revolution in sounds, images, vibes and texts, which swirl around us day and night, grabbing our interest and attention. Placards, posters, gestures, words, and such

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stimuli can be used to attract attention. Amongst all the techniques employed in the domain of advertising today, sexuality and related content are one of the most widely used ones.

Sexual imagery can be moderate, wild, or mild and moderate sexual imagery is found to be more effective than the wild or mild ones (Shanthi & Thiyagarajan, 2012). The rationale for using sexual imagery can be articulated in a number of ways. Essentially, it is about gaining consumer attention through various media channels like television, magazines, newspapers, hoardings, etc. The Indian audience, largely comprising of a young-to-middle aged crowd, have a mixed feeling of conservative mentality and liberal perceptions simultaneously.

Review of Literature

Reichert and Ramirez (2000) stated that advertisements can be said to use elements that are sexual in nature, if any of the following characteristics are included, that is, behavior or movement of the actor-model and intimacy between actor-models ; physical attractiveness through the exposure of physique, clothing, or in general ; and or contextual features (camera effects). Product categories that use sexual imagery in advertising vary from deodorant advertisements to advertisements for beverages, and even confectionery. The advertising industry cannot seem to get enough of sexually suggestive content. Most of the ad companies carry so much of sexual content to show through their advertisements, which suggests that they are focusing more on attracting people psychologically rather than focusing on their products and their features. It seems that grabbing consumer attention is the prime goal, which they largely succeed in doing, and the ads also generate enough word of mouth, and many a times, both positive and negative reactions from the media and the general public as stated by Tellis (2003). It also adds to consumer anxiety level and raises the product value in their subconscious mind, which, in turn, gains attention and increases popularity. For this reason, organizations are willing to invest more in such ads to directly or indirectly influence consumer purchasing behaviour through ad and brand recall.

The key drivers of sexual imagery is gaining much attention due to provocative dressing manner, seductive body language, and exposure of sensitive body parts (Lambiase & Reichert, 2003). Advertisement appeal is intended to grab the viewer's attention on aspects such as age, gender, cultural background, etc., and when it comes to sexual advertising, advertisers strongly believe that it can grab attention instantly (Lambiase & Reichert, 2003). According to Lambiase and Reichert (2003), sexually suggestive advertisements have five types of information, that is, nudity, sexual behaviour, sexual referents, sexual embeds, and physical attractiveness. There are numerous sexual embeds that are integrated into other images by ad-makers and are intended to go undetected by people who view the ads. Sexual imagery also plays three major roles in advertising, that is, acting as an initial attention grabber, retaining awareness for a longer period, and helping to improve recall of message points to evoke emotional responses (Lombardot, 2007 ; Reichert, Heckler, & Jackson, 2001).

There has been a change in the way women's bodies have been portrayed on-screen. Earlier, advertisements broadly showed women as subordinate beings, whereas nowadays, they are being portrayed as sexual objects (Vohs, Sengupta, & Dahl, 2014). Sexual imagery or nudity in an ad increases recognition of the said advertisement, but at the same time, it decreases the memory of the brand, thereby affecting brand recall (Steadman, 1969). Available theory and research studies suggest that advertisements with sexualized content may be tuned out as arousal inhibits the impact of irrelevant information (Howard, 1977). Especially in a routine buying decision, such an advertising message would not suggest that the advertised product would comply with the consumer's well-defined set of choice criteria. Therefore, the effectiveness of the advertisement, both in terms of cognitive effect and search motivation may be much less than for an advertisement which depicts the brand in a much more product-relevant and meaningful manner.

LaTour (1990) stated that men tend to focus less on nutritional value, information, and other related subjects as that does not interest them much. Males have more favorable reaction of arousal than females. Female arousal was only on male nudity, but the male arousal was on both nudity of females and on couple nudity (LaTour, 1990).

Wilson and Moore (1979), based on research studies conducted, concluded that male and female subjects have similar physical reactions to sexual stimuli, wherein both respond to sexual content with arousal, and both respond generally more strongly to stimuli involving the opposite sex. They stated that females have a higher tendency to perceive and evaluate erotic stimuli negatively than males, with possible adverse implications for product advertising.

The study of distraction effect plays a key role in understanding the influence of persuasive messages. This study originally stems from early research in communications carried out in conjunction with the Yale Communication and Attitude Change Program. While experimental evidence seems contradictory (Karlins & Abelson, 1970), few research results suggest strong implications for the role of sexual content in advertising. Based upon the findings by Haaland and Venkatesan (1968) and Zimbardo, Ebbesen, and Fraser (1968), communication messages employing moderately distracting stimuli like sexually suggestive content in ads positively reinforce that the consumer will possibly be much more persuasive than other types of distraction or no distraction at all. Thus, considering sexually-oriented advertising, the available research seems to indicate that sexual content in ads, even if it is perceived to be irrelevant to the product being advertised, could play a positive role in the communications process. Though distraction hypotheses do not form the theoretical basis for the reported research on the use of sexual imagery in advertising, there is reported to be sufficient evidence that the distraction by itself provides the rationale for its practical use (Wilson & Moore, 1979).

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To study if advertisements with sexual content are more effective in gaining attention of viewers.
- (2) To study the influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on different age groups (Gen X and Gen Y) as defined in the study.
- (3) To study the influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on the two genders.
- (4) To study the influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on consumer purchase intentions.

Scope of Study

The purpose of the study is to understand the impact of sexual imagery in advertising with respect to Indian adult consumers across genders and generations (age groups). The present study focuses on consumers in the Greater Mumbai Metropolitan region. This will help to understand how consumers in a metropolitan city like Mumbai respond to sex appeal in advertisements. The study will also help to understand the effectiveness of such ads by providing insights to ad-makers and marketers in this lesser studied area in advertising in the country. The results of the research can be used for decision-making processes by marketers and advertising agencies. The study can then be extended to consumers (target audience) from other cities and towns of India for further insights.

Research Methodology

- (1) **Research Design** : Exploratory and descriptive.
- (2) **Primary Sources** : Probability based stratified random sampling technique was used for this study. A structured questionnaire was designed and used for the survey. Sample size consisted of 460 respondents across genders and generations. Generational stratification was done based on two different age groups, that is, 18 -30 year olds (Gen Y) and the other, 31-50 year olds (Gen X). Respondents were located in the Greater Mumbai

Metropolitan region. The research was conducted during the period of January -March 2016.

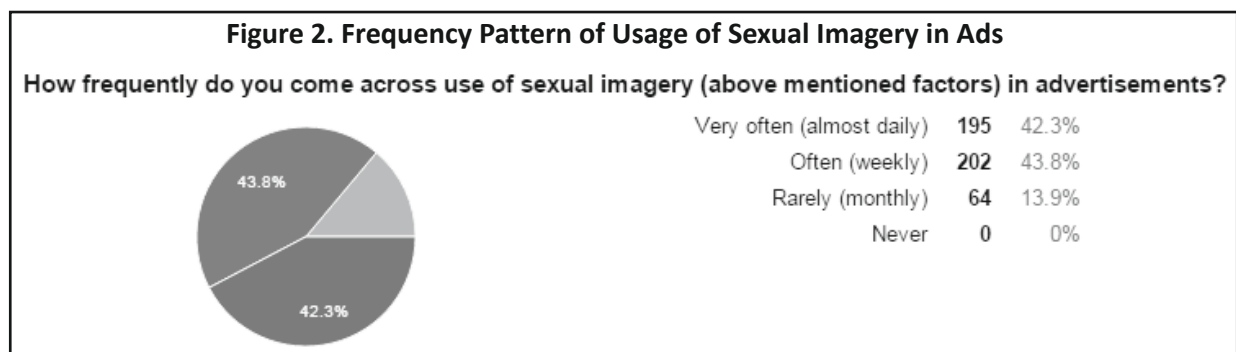
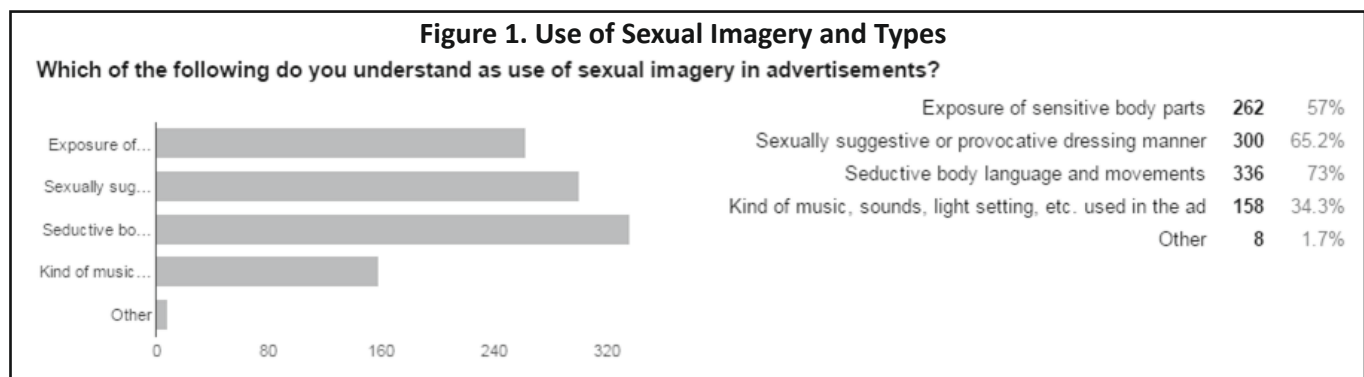
(3) Secondary Sources : Journal articles, research papers, reference books.

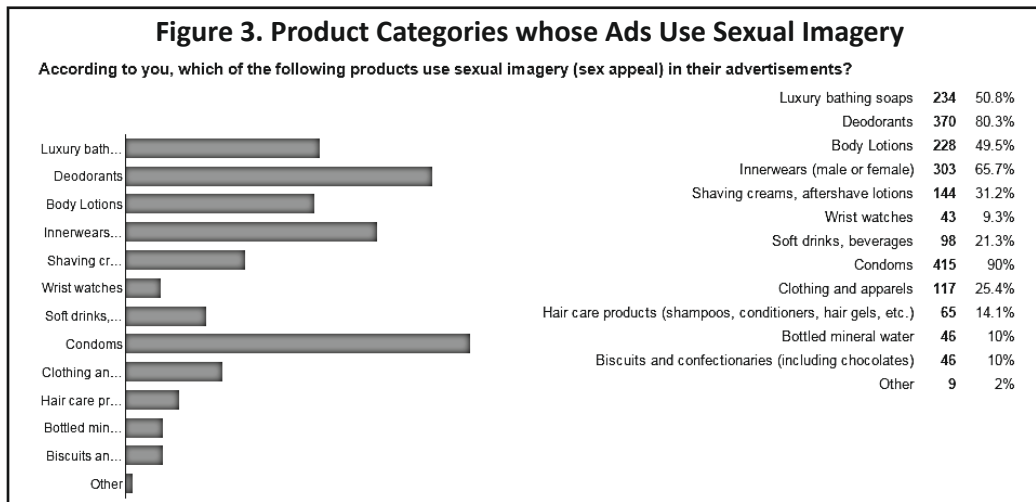
Data Analysis and Results

(1) Findings and Interpretation : Respondents were asked whether they understood what sexual imagery is and if they could identify the use of sexual imagery while viewing the advertisements. The answers are used to give an accurate measure of whether or not the consumers knew about sexual appeal shown in advertisements. The results are interesting, with each and every respondent mentioning that they could recall such advertisements. The survey gathered 460 respondents, out of which 48.8% responded from Gen X (constituting people between the age group of 31 - 50 years) and 51.2% responded from Gen Y (constituting people between the age group of 18 - 30 years). The survey was taken across genders and generations to know what was their opinion about sexual imagery in advertisements and does this lead to purchase behaviour. The percentage of males taking the survey was about 47.9% and females were 52.1%.

From the total respondents surveyed (see Figure 1), 73% understood the use of sexual imagery in ads to be “seductive body language and movements,” followed by 65% understanding it to be “sexually suggestive or provocative dressing manner.” Only 57% said “exposure of sensitive body parts” constitutes sexual imagery in ads, which is surprising. These figures possibly suggest that consumers consider provocative dressing and seductive themes in ads to be explicit in nature. Similarly, exposure of sensitive body parts seemed to be slightly more acceptable to the consumers, or went unnoticed. These are possible indicators of cultural changes in society brought about by media influences. With respect to the frequency (Figure 2) of coming across such advertisements, most of the respondents replied with “very often” (42%) and “often” (43%).

From the data collected, it is evident (Figure 3) that the products using sexual imagery in their advertisements the





most are condoms (90%), deodorants (80%), inner wear (66%), and bathing soaps and body lotions (50% each) based on the frequency of respondents choosing the said options. This selection was based on the respondents' personal opinions to choose from a list of given product categories.

(2) Hypotheses Development and Testing : Hypotheses developed have been numbered accordingly. Null hypotheses are numbered as H01, H02, H03, and H04. The corresponding alternate hypotheses are numbered as Ha1, Ha2, Ha3, Ha4, respectively. For testing the hypotheses, correlation analysis followed by simple linear regression was done on the data obtained from the survey, and 95% confidence interval was used for all tests.

Independent Variable (X): Attractiveness of sexual imagery in advertisements.

Dependent Variable (Y): Purchase intention of consumers.

Hypothesis 1

☞ **H01 :** There is no significant influence of use of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of consumers, irrespective of gender or generation.

☞ **Ha1 :** There is a significant influence of use of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of consumers, irrespective of gender or generation.

As per the Table 1, correlation value of 0.4802 signifies neither very strong nor very weak correlation between the two variables X and Y for the entire population of 460 respondents. In Table 2, Since p -value (Significance F) for the variable is 6.56E-28, which is lesser than $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. We thus reject H01 and accept Ha1. Hence, there is a significant influence of use of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of consumers, irrespective of gender or generations.

Hypothesis 2

☞ **H02 :** There is no significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of male consumers.

☞ **Ha2 :** There is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of male consumers.

Table 1. Correlation Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 1

Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree? (X)	Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree? (X)	When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree? (Y)
	1	
When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree? (Y)	0.48019541	1

Table 2. Simple Linear Regression Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 1**SUMMARY OUTPUT**

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.48019541
R Square	0.23058763
Adjusted R Square	0.22890769
Standard Error	1.02374246
Observations	460

ANOVA

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	1	143.8546007	143.8546	137.2595	6.56E-28
Residual	458	480.0062688	1.048049		
Total	459	623.8608696			

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	1.07423141	0.124185061	8.650247	8.75E-17	0.830188	1.318275	0.8301883	1.3182746
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree? (X)	0.45497316	0.038834223	11.71578	6.56E-28	0.378658	0.531289	0.3786578	0.5312885

Table 3. Correlation Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 2

Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?
	1	
When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.513178652	1

As per the Table 3, correlation value of 0.5132 signifies neither very strong nor very weak correlation between the two variables *X* and *Y* for only the male consumers. In Table 4, since the *p* - value (Significance *F*) for the variable is 3.531E-16, which is lesser than $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. We thus reject *H*02 and accept *H*a2. Hence, there is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of male consumers.

Table 4. Simple Linear Regression Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 2

SUMMARY OUTPUT

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.513178652
R Square	0.263352329
Adjusted R Square	0.259973211
Standard Error	1.037172492
Observations	220

ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	1	83.83701686	83.837017	77.935233	3.53108E-16
Residual	218	234.5084377	1.0757268		
Total	219	318.3454545			

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	0.962946747	0.181907623	5.293603	2.919E-07	0.604423994	1.3214695	0.604424	1.321469
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.48034126	0.054410532	8.8280934	3.531E-16	0.373103237	0.5875793	0.3731032	0.587579

Hypothesis 3

✎ **H03** : There is no significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of female consumers.

✎ **Ha3** : There is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of female consumers.

As per the Table 5, the correlation value of 0.4454 signifies neither very strong nor very weak correlation between the two variables *X* and *Y* for only the female consumers. In Table 6, since the *p* - value (Significance *F*) for the variable is 4.26E-13, which is lesser than $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. We thus reject H03 and accept Ha3. Hence, there is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intentions of female consumers.

Table 5. Correlation Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 3

	Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	1	
When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.445408843	1

Hypothesis 4

✎ **H04** : There is no significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intention of the two generations (Gen X and Gen Y).

Table 6. Simple Linear Regression Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 3

SUMMARY OUTPUT								
Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.44540884							
R Square	0.19838904							
Adjusted R Square	0.19502092							
Standard Error	1.01385011							
Observations	240							
ANOVA								
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
Regression	1	60.5450278	60.545028	58.90213	4.26E-13			
Residual	238	244.6383055	1.027892					
Total	239	305.1833333						
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	1.16866215	0.172268785	6.7839461	9.19E-11	0.829296	1.508028	0.8292958	1.5080285
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.43228437	0.056325368	7.6747721	4.26E-13	0.321324	0.543244	0.3213244	0.5432443

Table 7. Correlation Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 4

	Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	1	
When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.454035393	1

➤ **Ha4 :** There is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on purchase intention of the two generations (Gen X and Gen Y).

For Gen X (31 - 50 years) Sub Group

As per the Table 7, the correlation value of 0.4540 signifies neither very strong nor very weak correlation between the two variables *X* and *Y* for only Gen X. In Table 8, since the *p* - value (Significance *F*) for the variable is 4.78E-13, which is lesser than $\alpha = 0.05$, there is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on the purchase intention of Gen X.

For Gen Y (18 - 30 years) Sub Group

As per the Table 9, the correlation value of 0.5097 signifies neither very strong nor very weak correlation between the two variables *X* and *Y* for only Gen Y. In the Table 10, since the *p* - value (Significance *F*) for the variable is 1.12E-16, which is lesser than $\alpha = 0.05$, there is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on the purchase intention of Gen Y.

Table 8. Simple Linear Regression Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 4

SUMMARY OUTPUT								
Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.45403539							
R Square	0.20614814							
Adjusted R Square	0.20265099							
Standard Error	1.01753066							
Observations	229							
ANOVA								
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
Regression	1	61.0324519	61.0325	58.94756	4.78E-13			
Residual	227	235.0286835	1.03537					
Total	228	296.0611354						
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	1.22103368	0.170973855	7.14164	1.24E-11	0.884135	1.557932	0.8841349	1.55793245
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.42390075	0.05521172	7.67773	4.78E-13	0.315108	0.532694	0.3151077	0.53269376

Table 9. Correlation Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 4

	Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	1	
When a brand uses sexual imagery in their ads (i.e "sexy ads"), it makes you want to purchase the product. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.509737124	1

We thus reject the null hypothesis H04 and accept the alternate hypothesis Ha4, since significance F is lesser than $\alpha = 0.05$ for both Gen X and Gen Y, as tested separately. Hence, there is a significant influence of sexual imagery in advertisements on the purchase intention of Gen X and Gen Y.

It is to be noted that the data analyzed for the said hypotheses have both low R -square and low p - values. One reason for this contradiction could be that the present study may need additional predictors, which could increase the explanatory power of the results. This could be a future scope of the area researched. Another reason could be that the data contains an inherently higher amount of unexplainable variability. The latter case seems to be more appropriate to this study as it is a human behavioural and psychology based study aiming to understand consumer perception about the use of sexual imagery in ads. According to Itaoka (2012), it is not unusual for psychology, behavioural, and social science-based studies to have R - square values less than 50% because people, their behaviours, and thus their perceptions and responses are fairly unpredictable, varying with time and situations. However, the low p - values still indicate a real relationship between the significant predictors and the response variables in this study.

Table 10. Simple Linear Regression Results for X and Y Variables for Hypothesis 4

SUMMARY OUTPUT

Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.509737124							
R Square	0.259831935							
Adjusted R Square	0.25659976							
Standard Error	1.029243335							
Observations	231							
ANOVA								
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F			
Regression	1	85.15963557	85.15964	80.38919	1.12E-16			
Residual	229	242.5892822	1.059342					
Total	230	327.7489177						
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	0.899940676	0.181207163	4.966364	1.33E-06	0.542894	1.256987	0.5428942	1.25698715
Use of sexual imagery (sex appeal) makes products and ads attractive and interesting. How strongly do you agree or disagree?	0.493078901	0.054994288	8.966002	1.12E-16	0.384719	0.601438	0.3847194	0.6014384

Discussion

In a study conducted by Raghuram, Mahajan, and Poddar (2015) with a sample size of 83, the results concluded that majority of the respondents were uninfluenced by sexual advertising ; whereas, the others were strictly against its use in ads and found the ads uncomfortable to view. The study also noted that a very large percentage of the audience is thus immune to any kind of sexual content in advertising, and therefore, this strategy in advertising is essentially ineffective in generating a positive response from the audience from the point of view of stimulating sales of the brand/product advertised. Contradicting the above findings, an earlier study conducted by Shanthi and Thiyagarajan (2012), with 280 respondents in Chennai region, stated that a majority of the respondents had a favourable perception towards sexual stimuli in advertisements, especially stimuli that was moderate in nature, instead of content that is too explicit or mild. Another study conducted by Shimpi (2016) with 563 male respondents in Pune region on consumer behavior in the men's cosmetic segment identified that self-image, self-esteem, conformity, and normative influences like the brand/product endorsers/presenters and related images - that identify with the consumer's portrayal of the 'self' - positively affected their attitude towards cosmetics purchases. However, a study conducted by Srivastava (2016) with 597 female respondents in Pune city stated that the brand endorser plays a major role in influencing brand loyalty among women consumers in the cosmetics segment. The researcher pointed to the fact that cosmetics giants persuade their female audience to purchase their products by associating their products/brand with 'sexy celebrities and spokeswomen.' This creates a desirable image in the consumers' minds, which positively influences their brand loyalty.

In the light of the above studies and results, the findings of the present study are in contradiction to those found by Raghuram et al. (2015) ; whereas, the results are in congruence with the findings of Shanthi and Thiyagarajan (2012), Shimpi (2016), and Srivastava (2016). The reason could be that the study which contradicts the present study's findings had a very limited sample size ; whereas, the latter studies' findings that are consistent with the present study had more elaborate sample sizes. Also, the study done by Raghuram et al. (2015) did not conduct statistical analysis, and hence, it is difficult to understand how dissimilar the findings are and validate the results for thorough comparison.

From a superficial perspective, it seems that viewers and the public, in general, mostly refuse to acknowledge the influence of advertisements and their results on their behaviour and decisions. They are hesitant to admit the fact that they are influenced in varying degrees, consciously or sub-consciously, by different advertisements via magazines, newspapers, TV, or any other media. However, this cannot be the case, as a large number of companies, in various sectors, spend much of their budget on advertisements. This possibly suggests that viewers, and thus consumers, have been conditioned to accept advertisements as a part of daily life. Advertising may assume that people focus more on the desire to possess a product or its material value, and they are less concerned on whether it really improves the way of living or not. This assumption of the advertising industry is possibly based upon a belief that consumers do not necessarily adhere to moral, societal, or ethical values (Blair, Stephenson, Hill, & Green, 2006). Thus, they tend to encourage through media channels, including through advertisements, what they assume to be appealing and attractive in order to woo their target markets. They do not care whether the beliefs and values that they promote through their advertisements have a positive or harmful effect on not only the consumers, but also on the society at large (Blair et al., 2006). This especially is a matter to be considered in the Indian socio-cultural context, which is no less conservative, as much as it seeks to be liberal and modern, which is indeed a paradox. It is not surprising thus that the advertising industry is increasingly using techniques like sexualizing content in ads to make the audiences more and more susceptible to persuasion. The consumer is perhaps assumed to be gullible or to say the least, accepting of such content. Here, another point worth mentioning is that marketers tend to promote their products and their features sometimes through over-exaggeration to the point of fatigue. This, though not morally correct as per social norms, but still, is seemingly acceptable, possibly due to cultural shifts, liberal attitudes, and lifestyles, which could be the reason this study finds through its results, a positive influence of sexual content in ads on viewers with respect to purchase behaviour. This could be true for a viewer who is a consumer in a metropolitan city like Mumbai. It is a matter of debate, the fleeting success of advertising inclining towards using sexual content, to capture the attention of the audience. This can be interpreted as exploiting viewers psychologically, and to some extent, encouraging the pursuit of pleasure through unrealistic fantasies. This is not subjective to only one gender but equally both and across generations, as reflected in the results of this study.

Managerial Implications

Advertisers seem to have specifically sensualized condom and deodorant ads, among the lot, as seen in this study. The core feature of condoms is to be used as a contraceptive measure to protect against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. However, advertisers have sensualized the ads to the extent of provocation in the minds of the consumers. Given the nature of the Indian audience, they are more likely to be psychologically repelled or even disgusted by such ads, given the family scenario in which television is viewed by most people. Similarly, even in deodorant ads, male deodorant ads are shown to be explicitly sexual, using scantily dressed male models. The sexualizing of advertisement intended for a male audience portrays women as sexual objects and hankering after men, which are glimpses of how chauvinism is encouraged on a wrong note. This makes women appear lusty and men as superior objects of desire.

This brings us to the ethical and moral side of such advertising techniques and provides an opportunity to study the area further. This study has helped to understand core facts about sexual imagery and its impact not only on consumers, but also the implications for advertisers. The advertisements showing explicit imagery and innuendoes drive the characters to a fantasy land, where their hidden sexualities appear on to the surface of the ads. When and where required, the characters get back to the normal mode of living, which constitutes of norms, rules, code of conduct, etc. (Raghuram et al., 2015). The limits of using such techniques need to be defined if companies are looking beyond grabbing temporary viewer attention or merely boosting sales (Gould, 1994 ; Raghuram et al., 2015). However, how long this strategy can be successfully used in boosting product sales needs to be studied, since it offers no inherent value to the product or marketing message. Similarly, it is not yet established if it offers a

unique competitive advantage or aids in better brand recall. Marketers, therefore, need to come up with advertising strategies that would lead to continuous brand-building by focusing more on the product and its benefits to consumers, and highlighting the same through better creativity.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that consumers, though openly unaccepting of their attraction to sexually provocative content in ads, seem to be influenced by such ads to purchase products, irrespective of age or gender. This suggests that sexual advertising may be a successful strategy in boosting product sales, having mass appeal, instead of a narrow target audience based on demographic factors. The prevalence of the use of sexual imagery in ads could increase in future, given the accepting nature of the Indian audience, as the results of this study indicate for those in Mumbai. However, the ethical and moral ramifications need to be considered by marketers and advertisers, though their target audience may be a young and liberal lot. Liberal and modern does not necessarily translate into being gullible and delusional - this is what needs to be understood.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study is limited to the region in and around Mumbai, that is, Greater Mumbai Metropolitan Region. Besides geographical constraints, the other constraints are time-frame, data collection mode, conceptual and statistical limitations. The sample size in the study may not be truly representative, therefore, the results cannot be generalized for the entire advertising industry or beyond the geographical area. The results, though only indicative, are not necessarily conclusive for any specific brand, product category, product, and/or company.

The research can be extended to other regions of the country, and a pan-India study can be conducted. A larger and more geographically diversified sample size can be studied for drawing generalized results and conclusions. This will further reveal if there are differences in opinions and, therefore, the results by comparing groups of respondents across various regions of the country. Also, additional variables could be used to understand the significance of the results in a more refined manner. An extensive study can also be done, which compares results obtained from such a pan-India study to a study conducted in various other parts of the world, example, European, American, African, other Asian consumers, etc. to understand how consumers behave in different cultures, geographical regions of the world, ethnicities and/or racial groups, and thereby respond to advertisements with explicit content, considering their purchase patterns. This could be of importance to MNCs, who are always concerned of such issues while reaching out to their consumers globally through advertisements.

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