

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FEMALE NUDITY IN ADVERTISING

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Today we are more aware of the "role of women" than at any other time. This awareness has called attention to the treatment of women in our society in general, and specifically, of the treatment of women in advertising. One criticism levied against advertisers is their use of partially nude females.

Although female nudity appears to be increasingly employed in advertising, little scientific evidence exists in regard to its effectiveness. Because huge amounts of money are expended by advertisers, a primary goal of advertising research must be to identify factors which influence advertising effectiveness. The lack of research on nudity-based advertising should be of utmost concern to advertisers, because as well as moral and philosophical questions, there is the reality of "financial consequences." The focus of this paper is not on the moralistic issues, but rather, the focus is on the test of these opposing hypotheses regarding advertising effectiveness as a function of female nudity.

CURRENT STUDY

This experiment investigates the influence of partially nude female communicators on advertisement effectiveness, as measured by attitudinal measures. The independent variables are (1) the partially nude and clothed condition of a female communicator, and (2) the sex of the receivers (male and female). The dependent variables are measures involving attitudes toward the advertisement, the product, and the communicator.

The basic hypothesis tested was:

An advertisement with a partially nude female communicator will be more effective (for each of the cognitive, affective, and conative attitude components) than with a clothed communicator.

The theoretical support for this hypothesis is Festinger's distraction theory. The partial nudity of the communicator is expected to serve as a distraction which reduces the ability of a receiver to generate internal counterarguments. Therefore, the persuasive attempt is more effective than when no such distraction (i.e., clothed communicator) is presented.

Manipulation of the appearance condition was achieved by use of two black-and-white photographs. These photographs involved a professional photographer and a professional model. The partially nude condition presented the communicator in a blouse which was open to her waist and which exposed a substantial portion of her breasts. The clothed condition presented the communicator in a buttoned blouse that in no way revealed any portion of her breasts.

Materials. The materials consisted of three pages: an introduction, an advertisement mock-up, and a response form. The introduction page thanked the subject for participating, gave instructions, and assured total anonymity of the subject's responses. The advertisement mock-up page presented a photo of the communicator combined with typical copy for a new body soap. The advertising copy was written by an advertising practitioner. The response page used a seven point semantic differential scale to assess affective, cognitive, and conative attitudinal effects of each advertisement condition.

Potential subjects (at a major university library) were randomly approached, and asked if they would mind taking a few minutes to participate in a marketing communications study. Upon approval the subject was handed the materials and instructed to read the first page. The data from a total of 60 randomly selected subjects (controlling for equal cell size) were used.

Analysis. Consistent with earlier studies, the data were subjected to factor analysis. The appropriate multiple measures for each attitudinal component were summed and averaged to attain a single score for each component. Analysis of variance was performed for each set of affective, cognitive, and conative component scores. T-tests were performed on each measure to investigate differences between groups.

RESULTS

The basic hypothesis that a partially nude female communicator will be more effective than a clothed female communicator received mixed support. The data for the male receivers are supportive of this hypothesis, but the data for the female receivers are not.

Cognitive. Analysis of variance indicated that the partially nude and clothed conditions were not significantly different, while the sex of the receivers was significant for the cognitive attitude component. The cognitive component for the partially nude condition was significantly higher for males than the clothed condition. The effect was opposite for females.

Affective. Analysis of variance performed with the affective component scores indicate significant main effects for the appearance conditions and the sex of the receivers. The affective measures of the males were significantly higher for the partially nude versus the clothed communicator. The affective scores for the females were in the same direction as the males but were not significant.

Conative. The results of the conative attitude component are comparable to the cognitive results. The appearance conditions were not significantly different while the difference between the sexes was significant. The partially nude condition produced significantly higher conative measures for the males and significantly lower measures for the females, than the clothed condition.