The Effectiveness of Sex Appeal Advertising vs. Cause-related Advertising

David Michael M. Ledesma[1]

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to compare and measure the effectiveness of two common advertising strategies, cause-related advertising and the use of sex appeal, with respect to upper-middle and upper-class university students in Bangkok, Thailand. Convenience sampling was used. Questionnaires were given to students at a prestigious private university which exposed photographic advertising representing the two different types of advertising, after which the students were asked questions to measure their consumer response to the advertising. Amid the hype surrounding the use of sex on advertising, the findings of this study indicate that there is no significant difference between sex appeal advertising and cause-related advertising in the students' intent to visit, purchase from, and/or tell friends about an apparel retailer.

Key words*: Advertising, sex, cause-related, marketing, corporate social responsibility.*

Background

Turn on your television or stroll around almost any big city around the world, the likes of Paris, New York or Bangkok: references to sex and/or the exposition of sexually appealing and/or arousing images, videos, and/or other similar messages will invariably pop in on your TV screen or capture your attention on strategically-located bill boards (Clow & Baack 2007). This is referred to as *sex appeal advertising* and it is becoming very common in today's advertising (Hyllegard, Ogle, & Yan 2009).

Sex appeal advertising invokes any message, which, whether as brand information in advertising contexts or as persuasive appeals in marketing contexts, is associated with sexual information (Reichert *et. al*. 2001; as cited in Liu, Li, & Cheng 2006).

It has long been an accepted belief that this form of advertising is very effective at attention-grabbing, considered by some commentators as a powerful step in reaching one's target market, especially in the current clutter of 21st century marketing and communications (Levit, n.d.; Reichert & Lambiase, 2003; as cited in Dahl, Sengupta, & Vohs 2009). Believed to grab one's attention easily, it is therefore assumed to be more effective at generating sales; one of the main objectives of commercial marketing activities, including advertising (Harrel 2002).

Another common and increasing trend in today's commercial advertising efforts is *cause-related advertising* (Reese, 2010). This advertising strategy is premised on the belief that by preaching a morally beautiful message embraced by society in general, a good "aura" will befall on the brand and/or product involved in the message, thereby eventually increasing consumer response in the form of higher sales for that brand and/or product (Hou, Du & Li 2008).

Cause-related advertising can be defined as a program in which a firm ties an advertising campaign in with some type of charity or other good cause in order to generate goodwill (adapted from Clow & Baack 2007). One cogent example of this form of advertising is Wal-Mart's recent advertising campaign which showcased how the company helps raise money for the Children's Miracle Network. One of the ads features a healthy toddler who once was a three-and-a-half-month prematurely-born baby who has since been helped by this network (Clow & Baack 2010).

Theoretical Perspective and Review of Literature

Typically, sexual appeal in advertising is used for its "shock value." It is a strategy meant to break through the "clutter" of a

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1. David Michael M. Ledesma graduated from Assumption University, Graduate School of Business and is a recipient of the Rector's Award for Academic Excellence. He has been working in the advertising industry in both the Philippines and Thailand.