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## **Influence of Advertising Sex Appeal on Product Consumption and Service Patronage Behaviours of Consumers in Lagos State, Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The growing need for profitability through consumer patronage has made advertisers to increasingly use sex appeal for catching the attention of consumers. Sex appeal is mostly used in television commercials to advertise products like clothing, cosmetics and alcohol. Hence, the frequent and overt use of sex appeal in television advertisements especially for promoting products that have no relationship with sex, as well as the untested hypothesis that sex appeal has negative influence on consumers, have necessitated empirical investigation. Empirical works abound on the use of sex appeal in advertising, but not much effort has been directed at the influence of the said appeal on product consumption and service patronage behaviours of university undergraduates. This study therefore examined the influence which sex appeal, used in television advertising messages have on university undergraduates in Lagos State, Nigeria. The survey research method was used for this study with the questionnaire and oral interview as instruments. One hundred and fifty copies of a questionnaire were administered in University of Lagos and Lagos State University using the purposive sampling method while oral interview was conducted with 20 respondents drawn from the 150 that filled the questionnaire. Data collected and analyzed showed that television sex appeal has no effect on majority of the respondents. And, for others on which the appeal has effect; the effect on actual consumption behavior, as may be desired by advertisers is unsubstantiated and mostly negligible. Consumers, who are university undergraduates in this study established an insignificantly skewed cause and effect relationship between exposure to sex appeal in television commercials and stimulated sexual desire, adoption of personalities used in the advertisements as role models, as well as cultivation of sexually attractive lifestyles as depicted in televised advertisements for which sex appeal is used. Product significance is an important factor in the use of sex appeal for advertisements. The study also revealed that the use of sex appeal in television advertising does not largely characterize female models as sex workers, but rather as celebrities, and as good product and service testifiers. Based on the outcome of this study, it is hereby recommended that advertisers and advertising professionals should play down the use of sex appeal in advertising messages since sex appeal is not a sufficient factor that sells product or that draws service patronage. Sex appeal should only be used for products with which the appeal has relationship. By so doing, any negative influence, which a use of any appeal may have on advertising audience, will be reduced or possibly eliminated.

**Key words:** Influence, Television advertisement, Sex appeal, University undergraduates.

### **Introduction and Statement of Problem**

With a view to achieving various communication objectives and getting the target market subscribe to whatever product or service or idea being advocated, advertisers make use of different kinds of appeal when reaching out to their audience. Advertising appeals aim to influence the way consumers view themselves and how buying certain products can prove to be beneficial for them. The message conveyed through advertising appeals influences the purchasing decisions of consumers (Ashwini; 2009, p.52). The following are some of the various kinds of advertising appeals that are used in the Nigerian advertising industry today: Emotional appeal, Rational appeal, Sex appeal, Scarcity appeal, Music appeal, Masculine feminine appeal, Brand appeal, Snob appeal, Adventure appeal, Less than perfect appeal, Romance appeal, Youth appeal, Endorsement appeal, Play on words appeal, Statistics appeal, Plain appeal, Bandwagon appeal, humour appeal, guilt appeal, fear appeal, among others.

However, the advertising appeal which has generated worldwide criticism, and which has been referred to as mostly unethical, is sex appeal. On this, Belch and Belch (2004) note:

the advertising appeals that have received the most criticism for being in poor taste are those using sexual appeals and/or nudity. These techniques are often used to gain consumers' attention and may not even be appropriate to the product being advertised. Even if the sexual appeal relates to the product, people may be offended

with advertising messages consisting of different kinds of appeal; hence, it is a good place to think of in studying advertising appeal. This study therefore focused on university undergraduates in Lagos state metropolis.

#### Methodology

Based on the purpose of this study (which is to determine the influence that sex appeal in advertising has on university undergraduates in Lagos state), the survey research method of data gathering and analysis was used. This is because survey is a very useful, reliable and effective tool or means of ascertaining and eliciting the feelings, opinion, tastes, perception, attitudes interest as well as views of individuals. More so, it is the most adequate way of determining and obtaining the feelings and attitude of the research population regarding the study. Traudt (2005, p.26) posits: "survey is a data collection device where respondents answer one or more questions posed by the researcher". This research method also presents opportunity for the researcher to ask specific and relevant questions that are germane to the attainment of the purpose of this study. Traudt (2005, p.27), further points out that survey taps in to the collective sense of knowledge, attitudes, or experiences of respondents.

The population of this study consisted of all the university undergraduates in Lagos state. This is because; Lagos state is an urbanized area consisting of large population. Being the former capital of the nation, Lagos is a centre of commercial activities as well as a centre for business competition in Nigeria. Apparently, it is an area with the highest concentration of advertisements. Also, most advertisements are targeted to the youths and these advertisements are packaged in irresistible forms Also, the university is a place where a big chunk of sex driven youths and consumers can be accessed easily

The sample size for the study was 150 undergraduate students of the University of Lagos (UNILAG) the Lagos State University (LASU). The purposive sampling technique was used to select the two universities because other universities in Lagos state such as National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) and Lagos Business School do not have well structured campuses like the UNILAG and LASU. A sample of 75 students was drawn from each university, making a total sample of 150.

The instruments that were used for gathering data were the questionnaire and in-depth interview. This is because the questionnaire and in-depth interview are very important and useful instruments for eliciting information from people about their ideas, beliefs, views, experiences, interests, opinions, attitudes, behaviours, likes and dislikes in survey research. According to Sobowale (2008, p.47) using questionnaire provides for the researcher an opportunity for a deliberate and careful operationalisation of concepts; makes perfectly clear what the operationalisation is; ensure that the same structure is used to observe all the respondents, i.e. all respondents will be answering the same questions. The questionnaire was used with the aim of educating information about the respondent's demographics, their exposure to advertising messages, their awareness of sex appeal in advertising messages and the effects of such appeal on their behaviours. The questionnaire consisted of both close-ended and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were drawn to enable the respondents answer some critical and sensitive questions, freely, with little or no restriction, while the close-ended questions were asked in order to receive uniformity of responses from the respondents.

#### Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

##### ITEM 4: DO YOU RECOGNISE SEX APPEAL IN TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENT?

Table 1: Respondents' recognition of sex appeal in television advertisement?

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
Yes	124	85%
No	21	15%
Total	145	100%

Table 1 above shows that 124 respondents, which constitute 85% of the total sample recognize sex appeal in television advertisements while 21 respondents, which constitute 15% do not recognize sex appeal in television advertisements.

##### ITEM 5: IF YES, WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND BY SEX APPEAL?

Table 2: Respondents' understanding of sex appeal

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
seduction or sexual body language	36	25%
exposure of sensitive body parts that arouse the opposite sex	59	41%
sexually suggestive or provocative dressing manner	29	20%
Nil	21	14%
Total	145	100%

Table above indicates that 36 respondents which make 25% of the total sample understand sex appeal to be seduction or sexual body language, 59 respondents, which constitute 41% understand sex appeal to be exposure of sensitive body parts that arouse the opposite sex, 29 respondents which make 20% understand the appeal to be sexually suggestive or provocative dressing manner while the remaining 21 respondents, which constitute 14% are those who do not recognize sex appeal in television advertisement.

##### ITEM 6: IF NO, WHY?

Table 3: reason why respondents do not recognize sex appeal

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
the advertisements I see are not sexually appealing	10	7%
I rarely watch television advertisements	6	4%
Nil	124	86%
it is indecent or ungodly	5	3%
Total	145	100%

From this table, it is clear that, 10 respondents, which constitute 7% of total sample do not recognize sex appeal in television advertisements because the advertisements they see are not sexually appealing, 6 respondents, making 4% do not recognize sex appeal in television advertisement because they rarely watch television advertisement, also, 5 respondents, which makes 3% do not recognize the appeal because it is indecent and ungodly, while the remaining 125 respondents, which constitutes 86% of the total percentage are those who recognize sex appeal in television advertisement.

##### ITEM 7: HOW OFTEN DO YOU WATCH SEX APPEAL ON TELEVISION?

Table 4: Respondents' frequency of watching sex appeal on television

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
Daily	37	25%
Twice a week	19	13%
3times a week	10	7%
Weekly	19	13%
Monthly	39	27%
not at all	21	15%
Total	145	100%

Table above shows that, 37 respondents, which correspond to 25% of the total sample watch sex appeal on television daily, 19 respondents, which constitute 13% watch sex appeal on television twice a week, 10 respondents, which correspond to 7% watch sex appeal on television 3 times in a week, 19 respondents, which correspond to 13% watch the appeal on television weekly, 39 respondents, which constitute 27% watch the appeal on television monthly while the remaining 21 respondents, which constitute 15% of the total sample are those who do not watch the appeal at all.

Table above indicates that 60 respondents corresponding to 41% get attracted to the advertised product/service by the sex appeal used in the television advertisement while 85 respondents, corresponding to 59% do not get attracted to the advertised product/service by the sex appeal used in the television advertisement.

**ITEM 14: DO YOU BUY OR SUBSCRIBE TO SUCH PRODUCT OR SERVICE THAT HAS BEEN ADVERTISED WITH SEX APPEAL?**

**Table 10: Respondents' purchase of the advertised sex appealing product/service**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
Yes	60	41%
No	85	59%
Total	145	100%

This table shows that 60 respondents, which correspond to 41% buy or subscribe to the products or services that have been advertised with sex appeal, while 85 respondents, which represent 59% do not buy or subscribe to such products or services.

**ITEM 15: IF NO, WHY?**

**Table 11: Reasons why respondents don't purchase the advertised sex appealing product/service**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
I don't need the product/service	5	36%
I feel the advertisement is indecent	1	10%
I am not fascinated by the advertisement		5%
Nil	7	49%
Total	14	100.0

From this table, 53 respondents, constituting 36% do not buy or subscribe to advertised sex appealing product or service because they don't need the product/service, 14 respondents, constituting 10% do not buy or subscribe to such product or service because they feel the advertisement is indecent, 7 respondents, constituting 5% do not buy or subscribe to such product or service because they are not fascinated by the advertisement while the remaining 71 respondents, constituting 49% are those who buy/subscribe to such product/service and those who do not watch television sex appeal.

**ITEM 16: IF YES, WHY?**

**Table 12: Reasons why respondents don't purchase the advertised sex appealing product/service**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
the advertisement attracted me to the product	24	17%
I need the product	30	21%
I want to look like the model in the advertisement	6	4%
Nil	85	58%
Total	145	100%

Table above shows that 24 respondents, constituting 17% buy or subscribe to advertised sex appealing products or services because the advertisements attracted them to the product, 30 respondents, constituting 21% buy or subscribe to such products or services because they need the product, 6 respondents, constituting 4% buy or subscribe to such products or services because they want to look like the model in the advertisement, while the remaining 85 respondents, constituting 58% are those who do not buy/subscribe to such product/service and those who do not watch television sex appeal.

**ITEM 17: PLEASE, COULD YOU GIVE 1, 2, OR 3 EXAMPLES OF PRODUCTS YOU HAVE BOUGHT OR SERVICE YOU HAVE SUBSCRIBED TO AFTER SEEING THE ADVERTISEMENT?**

**Table 13: Sex appealing products/services which respondents have bought/subscribed to**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
Gold circle	9	6.2%
Vita milk	8	5.5%
Delta soap	10	6.9%
Close-up tooth paste	11	7.6%
Lux soap	14	9.7%
Nollywood movies	5	3.4%
Nivea cream	10	6.9%
Dettol soap	8	5.5%
Maltina drink	3	2.1%
Sure deodorant	1	0.7%
Airwick	1	0.7%
Henessy alcoholic drink	7	4.8%
Tetmosol soap	2	1.4%
None	84	57.9%
Total	173	

Table above shows that 9 respondents, which constitute 6.2% have purchased gold circle, 8 respondents, corresponding to 5.5% have purchased vita milk 10 respondents constituting 6.9% have purchased delta soap, 11 respondents, constituting 7.6% have purchased close-up toothpaste, 14 respondents, constituting 9.7% have purchased lux soap, 5 respondents, constituting 3.4% have purchased nollywood movies, 10 respondents, corresponding to 6.9% have purchased nivea cream, 8 respondents, corresponding to 5.5% have purchased dettol soap, 3 respondents, corresponding to 2.1% have purchased maltina drink, 1 respondents, corresponding to 0.7% have purchased sure deodorant, 1 respondents, making 0.7% have purchased airwick, 7 respondents, making 4.8% have purchased henessy alcoholic drink, 2 respondents, making 1.4% have purchased tetmosol soap, while 84 respondents which amount to 57.9% are those who do not purchase products that have been advertised with sex appeal and those who do not watch sex appeal in television advertisement.

**ITEM 18: DOES SEX APPEAL IN ADVERTISING HAVE ANY EFFECT ON YOUR BEHAVIOUR WHEN YOU COME BY IT?**

**Table 14: Effect of sex appeal on respondents' behaviour**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
Yes	53	37%
No	92	63%
Total	145	100.0

Table above indicates that 53 respondents which represent 37% affirmed that sex appeal in television advertisement have effects on their behavior, while 92 respondents, which constitute 63% of the total percentage responded "No" that sex appeal has no effect on their behavior.

**ITEM 19: IF YES, WHAT KIND OF EFFECT DOES IT HAVE ON YOU?**

**Table 23: types of sex appeal effect**

RESPONSES	FREQUENCIES	PERCENTAGES
it makes me look or act sexily	15	10%
it makes me want to look like the model in the advertisement	21	15%
it makes me want the product being advertised	2	1%
it makes me despise the product being advertised	3	2%
it makes me happy	4	3%
it makes me feel ashamed and sad	8	5%
None	92	63%
Total	145	100%

Table above shows that 15 respondents, representing 10% of the sample said sex appeal makes them want to look or act in a sexually suggestive manner, 21 respondents, representing 15% said it makes them want to look like the models in the advertisement, 2 respondents, representing 1% said it makes them like or want the product

Product significance is an important factor in the use of sex appeal for advertisements. The study also revealed that the use of sex appeal in television advertising does not largely characterize female models as sex workers, but rather as celebrities and as good product and service testifiers. Based on the outcome of this study, it is hereby recommended that advertisers and advertising professionals should play down the use of sex appeal in advertising messages since sex appeal is not a sufficient factor that sells product or that draws service patronage. Sex appeal should only be used for products with which the appeal has relationship. By so doing, any negative influence which a use of any appeal may have on advertising audience will be reduced or possibly eliminated.

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