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Trust to Brand and Eroticism in Case of Car Accessories

Summary

The purpose of this paper is to determine the relationship between the sexual stimuli used in advertising and the trust towards advertiser's brand. The validity of the subject matter is based on the fragmentary knowledge of the relation of eroticism and trust in the context of business. In particular in the market of car parts and accessories, the use of erotic aspects in building a marketing message is on the agenda.

An eye-tracker and questionnaire were used to measure attention in our research. The results obtained show that eroticism is only an aesthetic element of promotional materials of the advertiser. Its use does not affect, either positively or negatively, brand building.

Key words: erotica, eroticism in advertising, brand image, specialty products, brand trust.

JEL codes: L14

Introduction

Erotica in advertisement leads to sexual thoughts and/or sexual feelings (Reichert, Heckler & Jackson 2001). Researchers point out that sexual content can be nudity as well as specific behaviour, sex-appeal or double entendre. Advertisers may use erotica even in situations when it will not be correlated with marketing message (Reichert et al. 2012).

The decision to use erotica in the advertisement is not always made freely - some industries are known for the use of sexual content in marketing and its use is expected by customers. For obvious reasons it applies to products and services directly connected to sex, but also other industries, like car parts and accessories. That industry target group are mainly workshops usually filled with men that are used to marketing content with very strong sexual stimuli so there is a long tradition of using erotic content in their marketing message. Advertisers on that market can follow market rules and his consumers' expectations or risk rejection. One of the critical dilemmas in using erotica can be an influence of erotica on brand perception.

This context determines our research problem: erotica and its influence on brand perception. The literature on the subject usually concentrates on effects of erotica on consumers in case of convenience or shopping goods but this study is focused on chemical car accessories as specialty goods which have particularly unique characteristics. Usually, it is crucial for companies offering such products to create an image of reliance. Our primary objective is to analyze the relationships between before mentioned features. It will be accomplished by literature review and an experiment.

Previous research on erotica in advertisement

The literature review on the influence of erotica in advertisement points out researcher's different approaches to the subject. There are two main issues tackled in research: influence of culture/personality on the perception of sexual stimuli in advertising and types of sexual stimuli with its intensity. Two articles stand out from the rest – Davies et al. (2007) investigated the effect of erotica on the costumer and Reichert et al. (2012) analysed sex in magazine advertising during the last three decades.

Table 1

Overview of selected studies on erotica in advertising published from 2007 to 2017

Author	Field	Method	Results
Reichert, Latour, Kim (2007)	Gender and sexual self-schema on affective responses to sexual content in advertising.	E	Reactions are stronger to opposite-sex stimuli. Perception of one's own sexuality has little effect on reaction to sexual stimuli.
Paek, Nelson (2007)	Erotica in advertising for different product's categories, countries and medium.	DR	Erotica in advertising is more present in Thailand and USA than in China. Magazines more often publish advertisements with sexual stimuli than TV.
Sengupta, Dahl (2008)	Perception of gratuitous sexual stimuli in advertising according to gender	E	Those with more masculine personality react more favourably to sexual stimuli in advertising.
Liu, Cheng, Li (2009)	Reactions on sexual stimuli in advertising in China, USA and Australia.	E	There are significant differences among different nationalities in reactions to sexual stimuli.
Dahl, Sengupta, Vohs (2009)	Perception of sexual stimuli in advertising depending on gender.	E	Women's reaction to sexual stimuli is more correlated with advertisement's context.
Sawang (2010)	Perception of sexual stimuli among different cultural groups.	S	Those originating from more collective cultures have more negative attitude towards sex in advertising than those originating from individualistic cultures.
Black, Organ, Morton (2010)	Role of personality on the reaction to sexual stimuli in advertising	E	Extraverts have more positive attitude towards sex in advertising than introverts.
Reichert, Childers, Reid (2012)	Sex in advertising depending on product's category.	DR	Use of sexual stimuli has increased over the course of three decades. Use of sexual stimuli differs depending on product's category and buyer's risk.
Wyllie, Carlson, Rosenberger (2014)	Effectiveness of advertisement in accordance to sexual stimuli intensity	E	Mild intensity sexual stimuli have greater impact on advertisement's effectiveness.

* E - experiment, S – survey, DR – desk research

Source: analysis of most cited papers, published 2007-2017, searched in "Business, management and accounting" category of Scopus database, containing at least one word from each following groups: A: „erotic”; „sexuality”; „sex”; B: „advertisement”; „advertising”; „marketing”.

Brand Trust and Erotica

Trust requires two sides of a relationship: trustor and trustee. Most commonly literature assumes that customer trust his supplier. Customer in an uncertain situation, having an insufficient amount of information, has to take into the account the supplier and has to judge his credibility in order to create the state of trust between them. This decision can be on a cognitive basis as well as affective (Dowell et al. 2015). It is desirable to minimise the perceived risk of interaction by building a proper brand image.

Opinions, judgements and images about a company are creating a brand image. It is created by all the pieces of information generated by the brand (Kall 2005). Available information and tools to create brand's or company's image are determining buyers' trust who assesses personality, motives, abilities and supplier's behaviour. Most often it involves three areas: competences, benevolence and integrity (Seppänen et al. 2007). These propositions are basing on an assumption of existing history of interactions with a specific brand. They are not taking into account situations when someone is making a judgment on the first encounter with a brand. What role does erotica play in that situation? Especially when a brand is has to represent the quality of the product and additional services.

The main advantage of using sexual content in a brand advertising is attracting receiver's attention and prolonging time in which someone is interested in the advertisement (Sawang 2010). Thus erotica in advertising has two roles: grabbing receiver's attention and/or transmission of information (Reichert et al. 2012). The second task is possible only when the product itself is sexually-relevant, which means it has sex-based connotations. Presence of sexual stimuli in advertisements of products that are not sexually-relevant can create cognitive dissonance and negative feelings with the brand (Paek & Nelson 2007). So it is essential to know how erotica is influencing the promoted brand. In car parts and accessories industry sexual stimuli was used in early advertisements and it is used today. Its use became an industry standard and is expected by the target group of marketing messages (Reichert et al. 2012), which mostly is made by men.

Research shows that use of erotica in advertising is a way to get customer's attention, but it can have unwanted consequences for the advertised brand. A sexual stimulus, especially when it is strong, activates one of our most primal instincts (Dahl et al. 2009). It creates the effect of high arousal and can lead to undesirable effects (La Tour et al. 1990). Strong sex stimuli can lead to dissonant feelings (Sengupta & Dahl 2008; Black & Morton 2017) and can cause cognitive fatigue (La Tour et al. 1990). Erotica increases a risk of marketing message omission by the receiver (Reichert et al. 2001). Thus erotica can have an adverse effect on the advertised brand.

Research problem

Literature review leads to a question of erotica influence on a brand and trust towards it. The context in which company is creating a marketing message may require the use of

sexual stimuli in the advertisement. The decision to use erotica is made believing that the positive aspects (attracting attention and prolonging receiver's interest) will be higher than the adverse effects (negative feelings, cognitive fatigue and message omission).

In order to research this dilemma, it is needed to take into the account the context of a specific industry. That is the reason why the research was conducted on the market of car parts and accessories and the real advertisement from that market - a page from a calendar made by NOVOL was used. NOVOL is an international brand of company producing car varnish - over 90% of its production are chemical specifics designed for car varnish repairs, being complex solution for a professional workshop. Each year NOVOL is creating for its customers - mostly workshops - a calendar that contains sexual stimuli and also a logotype.

Promotional activities of NOVOL are targeted to workshops (business customers) but are also exposed to their customers (consumers). In the context of literature review leads to two hypotheses:

H1: Erotic stimuli will draw away receiver's attention from the logotype, so it will not be noticed.

H2: Presence of erotic stimuli alongside the logotype will reduce the trust toward the advertised brand.

Method

To address the aim of that paper, an experiment was designed what is common method when it comes to research on erotica in advertisement (compare Table 1). The project, in which erotic elements and brand logotype were distinguished from each other was selected for the research. Each calendar sheet contains five elements: brand's logotype (or an empty space without a logotype), female model, car, calendar and the rest of the card.

The experiment was conducted in laboratory. At the beginning respondents were asked to agree to take part in the experiment. Afterwards they read a short introduction describing the company of NOVOL. Respondents were divided into two groups, which differentiated only by seeing different versions of the calendar – one with NOVOL's logotype and one without (Figure 1). Respondents were exposed to the calendar for 21 seconds when the eye movements were recorded using mobile eye tracking device SMI with the sampling rate of 60 Hz. This device detects the position of respondent's pupils, by lighting them with invisible to humans, infrared radiation thus it was possible to check which way and how long the participant looks. This study was designed according to Pernice and Nielsen (2009) suggestions.

Then participants were asked to evaluate the project calendar, their level of interest in motorisation and the trust to NOVOL's brand, by completing a survey. The evaluation of the project calendar was measured using a five-item scale, where 1 was the lowest rate, 5 was the highest rate, including statements like: "aesthetics", "brand promotion", „attracting attention", and „readability". The level of interest of motorisation was controlled on a five-item Likert scale (where 1 – I definitely disagree, 5 – I definitely agree).

Figure 1

The project calendar (the card on the left - with logotype, on the right - without logotype)



Source: promotional materials of Novol company.

In the second part of the experiment, three calendar sheets were presented to both groups, which contained the same elements – logotype, model, car and a calendar. So the first group had 4 touchpoints with the logotype and the second group 3 touchpoints.

Afterwards respondents were asked for their opinions of themselves: “I am perfect car driver”, “I am interested in motorisation”, “I try to be up to date with motorisation news”, “I like watching an car’s advertisements”. The questionnaire consisted of a series questions about brand positioning, which was measured using semantic differential scale consisting of terms like: “reliable/unreliable”, “solid/nonsolid”, “responsible/irresponsible”, “dependable/undependable”.

51 male 23 years old students participated in this study in academic year 2016/2017. Finally, 26 observations were included in the analysis due to device’s limitation and the rest was excluded because of technical difficulties of calibration of the device.

Results

Due to the division of respondents into two groups (G_L for group watching the calendar with logotype, G_NL for group watching it without the logotype) we checked if the selection pattern in this study allowed us to retain the same distribution of variables in both groups. Two variables were analysed to control of the distribution of participants: the evaluation of the calendar’s sheet and the level of interest in motorisation.

In each case, a multi-item scale was used for the measurement and then their reliability was examined (Alfa Cronbach 0.78 and 0.87 respectively). Afterwards those items were summed up to created an index of totalized rating. In both groups, the comparison of the measurements indicates that there were no statistically significant differences (Kolmogorov-Smirnov’s test for $p = .05$, Table 2).

Table 2
The comparison of research groups

Variable	Average		Standard deviation		p
	G_L	G_NL	G_L	G_NL	
The assessment of the calendar	17,69	18,54	3,57	2,88	> .05
The level of interest of motorisation	12,39	13,77	4,68	4,19	> .05

Source: own research.

Following eye movements data were analysed: fixation count and average fixation duration (time, in which they focus on a particular item), total dwell time and the number of revisits (comebacks to detailed information, e.g. brand logotype or the model). The results are illustrated by heat maps and in Table 3.

Figure 2

Heat maps (the card on the left - with logotype, on the right - without logotype)



Source: own research.

Data analysis verified the hypothesis H1. The G_L group, which saw the calendar project with NOVOL's logotype, paid attention to it - this group looked at logotype area more often and longer than the G_NL group, which were presented a poster without the brand logotype. There were no reported differences in case of the model's area, on which both groups looked the same amount concerning the analysed parameters. There were differences when looking at the calendar's area – average fixation duration was longer for a calendar project with NOVOL's logotype and a car – the number of revisits was higher for a calendar project without the brand logotype. In all other areas, there were no significant differences. The data points to a need to reject the H1 hypothesis and authors wish to underline that erotic elements do not divert attention from the brand logotype.

Table 3
Eye tracker results

Analysis area	Variable	Average		Standard deviation		p
		G_L	G_NL	G_L	G_NL	
The calendar	FC	12,31	11,23	10,25	7,49	> .05
	AFD	488,93	298,71	212,04	135,85	< .025
	TDT	5725,48	4372,35	3961,57	3644,95	> .05
	NoR	2,92	3,75	3,17	2,05	> .05
The Car	FC	20,46	26,77	7,62	7,83	> .05
	AFD	314,30	274,68	83,38	59,15	> .05
	TDT	7234,39	8023,43	3462,01	2053,82	> .05
	NoR	6,31	9,69	3,30	2,84	< .05
The female model	FC	13,62	15,00	5,46	5,29	> .05
	AFD	323,23	282,39	75,25	87,97	> .05
	TDT	4837,09	4815,42	2396,51	2411,04	> .05
	NoR	5,08	6,69	2,43	2,90	> .05
The logotype	FC	2,62	0,31	1,85	0,86	< .01
	AFD	296,58	27,24	172,53	68,89	< .01
	TDT	833,63	61,28	615,43	184,70	< .01
	NoR	1,33	1,00	1,37	1,41	> .05
Other area	FC	17,31	20,39	7,87	9,94	> .05
	AFD	312,82	287,08	67,65	93,89	> .05
	TDT	5951,30	6310,08	2848,36	3275,14	> .05
	NoR	8,08	10,31	3,64	3,45	> .05

Bold represent statistically significant differences between groups (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, $p > .05$).

AVD – FC - Fixation Count, AFD - Average Fixation Duration; TDT - Total Dwell Time; NoR - Number of Revisits.

Source: as in Table 2.

As mentioned before, the differences were related to the way respondents were looking at the calendar sheet. For that reason we checked if one additional touchpoint with the logotype could influence differences in perception of the brand. The reliability of the scale used here was satisfactory (Alfa Cronbach = .75). For both groups, average values are centred in the middle of the scale, which means that the brand does not have a clear image regarding credibility. This is not surprising since the participants did not had contact with the brand before the experiment other than 60 seconds in the group with 4 touchpoints, 40 seconds in the second group. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the groups for any of the dimensions of brand trust (Table 4, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test $p < .05$). Based on these results the hypothesis H2 was rejected.

The combination of sexual stimuli and brand's logotype does not influence negatively the trust towards the brand.

Table 4
Research results – brand’s perception

Variable*	Average		Standard deviation		P
	G_L	G_NL	G_L	G_NL	
Reliable/Unreliable	2,85	3,15	0,70	0,38	> .05
Solid/Nonsolid	2,92	3,00	0,86	0,58	> .05
Responsible/Irresponsible	2,77	2,80	0,83	0,60	> .05
Dependable/Undependable	2,92	2,69	0,76	0,63	> .05

* The answer indicating the maximum intensity of the features on the left side of the scale was coded as 1, features on the right of scale as 5.
 Source: as in Table 2.

Conclusions

Our research confirms some results of works of other researchers on erotica and advertisement but extends it by adapting different method, focusing on specialty goods and calendars as mean of advertisement. Erotica in advertising on car accessories market should be treated as an element of aesthetics. Participants in this study assessed the calendar relatively favourably. It attracted their attention and was perceived as readable. Erotica does not affect the brand’s image - either positively or negatively. In the first group (with 4 touchpoints), respondents paid attention to the brand logotype (H1), but the brand perception was the same in both groups (H2). Both groups could not define the brand’s image basing just on advertising message. Every brand’s image factor related to trust (credibility, reliability, responsibility and trustworthiness) were rated at an average level irrespective of the appearance of the logotype. It stands on the contrary of Paek and Nelson (2007) finding that there is a possibility of negative brand perceptions as a consequence of the use of sexual stimuli in advertising of sexually-irrelevant products.

Thus, it can be concluded that the erotica overshadows the brand (although it does not affect the noticeability of the logotype). Respondents focus mostly on the evaluation of the erotic aspects of the advertisement, not the brand’s image, as confirmed by the Reichert et al. (2001) conclusions about the potential risk of skipping marketing message by the customer. From brand management perspective in case of specialty goods, this can be an undesirable effect. The attention-grabbing element is not building brand’s image – it works just as an aesthetic element. The brand, that supposedly should be a sign of company’s value and a guarantee of quality when it comes to chemical specialty goods, is overshadowed by erotic content.

This study has several limitations. We made an assumption of zero previous interaction with a brand, and by that premise we determined the character of the participants. Workshop employees, who are characterized by already established relationship with the brand, can have a different view on brand’s image, because they may take into account whole length of the relationship. Calendar containing sexual stimuli will complement the supplier’s brand’s

image. Still, car workshops are places, where different people, like consumers, appear and may potentially interact with the brand. In their case, the use of eroticism in advertising will not result in building brand's image.

Participants of the experiment had expressed interest in motorization and by that knew the context of the study. Still they did not have any contact with the brand beforehand, so their first contact with the brand's logotype in combination with sexual stimuli could determine their assessment. Additionally – the experiment was conducted in the laboratory so for obvious reasons it could influence the results, but the subject of the research was one calendar sheet, which was not modified (we did not change the location of the logotype on the calendar).

Future research should allow broadening the results of this study. Respondents should be people, who have already a relationship with the brand. The use of mobile eye tracking device allows to conduct next research in natural environment. Group of respondents could be larger to better meet requirements of eyetracking studies (Pernice, Nielsen, 2009). Larger group would also allow to examine several variants of the graphic design and make comparisons not only between designs with or without brand's logotype, but also between posters with different localisation of the logotype. It could lead more general managerial implications.

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Zaufanie do marki a erotyka w przypadku akcesoriów samochodowych

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest określenie zależności występujących między bodźcami erotycznymi wykorzystywanymi w reklamie a zaufaniem do marki reklamodawcy. Zasadność podjętego tematu wynika z fragmentarycznej wiedzy dotyczącej relacji erotyka-zaufanie. W szczególności na rynku części i akcesoriów samochodowych wykorzystanie aspektów erotycznych w budowaniu przekazu marketingowego jest na porządku dziennym.

Do analizy obszarów zwracających uwagę konsumentów wykorzystano mobilny okulograf i kwestionariusz ankietowy. Uzyskane wyniki badań wskazują, iż erotyka stanowi jedynie element estetyczny materiałów promocyjnych reklamodawcy. Jej wykorzystanie nie wpływa - ani w sposób pozytywny, ani negatywny - na budowanie zaufania do marki.

Słowa kluczowe: erotyka, erotyka w reklamie, wizerunek marki, produkty specjalistyczne, zaufanie do marki.

Kody JEL: L14

Доверие к марке и эротика в случае автомобильных аксессуаров

Резюме

Цель статьи – определить зависимости, выступающие между эротическими стимулами, используемыми в рекламе, и доверием к марке рекламодателя.

Целесообразность рассмотрения темы вытекает из фрагментарных знаний насчет отношений: эротика и доверие. В особенности на рынке автомобильных частей и аксессуаров использование эротических аспектов в построении маркетингового сообщения – обыденное дело.

Для анализа сфер, обращающих внимание потребителей, использовали мобильный окулограф и вопросник анкеты. Полученные результаты изучения указывают, что эротика – лишь эстетический элемент материалов рекламодателя по продвижению. Использование ее не влияет – ни положительным, ни отрицательным образом – на формирование доверия к марке.

Ключевые слова: эротика, эротика в рекламе, имидж бренда, специальные продукты, доверие к марке.

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