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COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE REACTIONS TO NUDITY IN ADVERTISING IN SERBIA*

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***Abstract:** The paper aims at providing a deeper insight into the issue of impact of nudity on attitudes to advertisements. Affective and cognitive reactions to display of nude advertising models were examined using the methodology of Dianoux, Linhart, and Kettnerova (2007). The study previously conducted in France, Spain, and the Check Republic was replicated in Serbia for comparability of results. Students were exposed to a folder containing a 12 page mock-up of a magazine, that included an advertisement for a mobile phone where one could see a woman showing either her face, or being topless. The evidence from Serbia reveals moderately negative attitudes toward an ad displaying a nude model with no impact on product recall, and brand recall. Affective reactions of men and women differ significantly therefore influencing their different attitudes toward ads (Aad) depending on whether a picture of nude or a not nude model is displayed.*

***Keywords:** Nudity, attitudes, advertising, print media, Serbia.*

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1. Theoretical Background

Depending on the accepted social values of the times, sex has always been more or less present in various forms of social communications including advertising. For being a rather controversial issue, sex has been considered an interesting topic both for advertising practitioners and researchers. Use of sexual appeals in advertising is therefore not a new topic either in professional or in academic marketing literature. The first studies addressing this issue are almost a century old. In such a long period, a number of studies on the use of sexual appeals in advertising were conducted. These all focused on three major issues: 1) emergence of sex in advertising [eg. 28]; 2) consumer's attitudes toward sex appeals in advertising [eg. 9; 15]; 3) effects of communication of sexual appeals in advertising [eg. 12; 26]. However, the research interest dedicated to each of the three major issues is very diverse.

This field of research is characterized by highly contradictory conclusions on the effectiveness of use of sexual appeals in advertising. All through seventies and eighties the researchers mostly agreed with what Steadman concluded in his 1969 study that nonsexual illustrations were more effective than sexual in achieving brand recall [30]. This was further supported by a study by Alexander and Judd [1] who however failed to prove that the brand recall is decreasing as the amount of sexual stimuli (i.e. nudity) in advertising increases.

Many authors also supported the findings of Perterson and Kerin [23, p.61] that "the advertisements containing nude model was perceived as least appealing while the product and the producing company were perceived as possessing least quality and being the least reputable." Questioning this in a way, the eighties brought product nature as yet another important factor to be taken into consideration when deciding to use sexual appeals in advertising. Namely, the authors of two studies [referenced by 26] found that higher recall levels were generated for those products that were naturally congruent with the type of sex stimuli used in an ad. In the nineties generally negative attitudes of the researchers toward the use of sexual stimuli in advertising started to change. After a thorough review of all previous studies, Grazer and Keesling [12, p.48] suggested that earlier conclusions on the cognitive effects of the use of sex appeals in advertising (recall and recognition) should be tested while "matching physically attractive models and the extent of sexual stimuli with the type of product being advertised." Additionally, they studied effects of the use of sexual appeals in advertising on cognitive response such as purchase intention. Finally, at the end of the last century, the attitude toward the advertised

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brand was also taken into consideration when measuring effectiveness of the use of nudity in advertising, revealing “that a brand using the nude model was seen as the most distinctive” and leading to “a higher interest in purchasing of the brand” [9, p. 92].

The main conclusions which however remain valid through time are: a) sex in advertising triggers attention [eg. 9; 15] b) sex is becoming more explicit, the models are becoming more clad, and more nude female models is being used in advertising [eg. 23; 28; 11; 13]; c) men react more positively on sexual appeals in advertising than women [27; 18], d) sexual appeals related to models of opposite sex are more positively evaluated by both male and female, men react more positively to nudity when watching a female model, while women’s reaction is more positive toward sexual appeals related to male models [26, 27].

Contrary to the above, there is still a lack of theoretical consent concerning the effects of the use of explicit sexual appeals in advertising to ad, product ,and brand recall and recognition. Additionally, it is still not certain whether its effect to purchasing intention is positive or negative although the most recent studies indicate a positive effect on both recall and purchasing intention [eg. 9; 6; 12].

The researchers today are also more interested in the use of sexual appeals in different cultural contexts. De Mooij [4], for example, questions if the Anglo-American values that are mostly built in advertising produced in London and New York could easily be transferred to other cultural contexts. The vast majority of the studies covering the use of sexual appeals in advertising were conducted in the U.S. It seems questionable whether the research findings related to the effectiveness of use of sex and nudity in advertising may be considered *universal* i.e. not depend on cultural context. In the last two decades, more research studies were addressing the issue of using sexual appeals in advertising in other cultural context including Eastern Asian countries – Singapore, China, and India [11] and the most developed European countries – France [18], UK, Germany, and Italy [16]. Additionally, studies addressing the use of sexual appeals in advertising in transition countries (the Czech Republic and Poland) in comparison with more developed European countries (the UK and Belgium, respectively) were also published [14; 5].

2. Nudity in Advertising: the Case of Serbia

Based on all the above, our research interest was derived from the fact that, though recall and recognition have been often addressed by a number of authors, there is still a lack of knowledge whether the effect of

use of such stimuli is actually positive especially in various cultural context presently in Serbia, a South Eastern European country in transition.

Questioning whether sex is still capable of triggering attention to the same extent seems to be a challenging topic in the times when display of sex in advertisement has become omnipresent even in the mainstream media. Our study focuses primarily on measuring product and brand recall (i.e. cognitive response to sex appeals) as well as consumers's attitudes toward nudity in advertising (which may have both affective and cognitive components). Literature on marketing theory in Serbia well recognizes the ABC model of attitudes [19, p.218; 20, p.330] and advocates that brand itself is a cognitive construction [29, p.127].

On the other hand, research studies addressing the use of nudity in advertising in Serbia are scarce. On the other hand, if judged by the attitudes of local advertising professionals the use of sex appeals in advertising seems to be a rather triggering topic. The perception of the local marketing professionals is that women are very much abused in Serbian advertising messages [31]. While these attitudes are mostly built on particular cases (typically ads shown on local TV networks or displayed on billboards) a content analysis of Serbian print media [21, p.192] has revealed no empirical proof to support the professional discourse of "women treated as merely sexual objects" by the local advertisers in Serbia. Furthermore, Ognjanov [22] claims that the study findings support the gender equality principle promoted by the Serbian Advertising Law passed in 2005. Such a conclusion was based on the three measures of potential discrimination applied in the study - frequency of appearance of male and female modes, their position and role played in ads, as well as the use of sexual appeals.

The above mentioned study and articles revealing professional discourse on the use of female nudity in ads in Serbian media belong to the first group of those focusing on the emergence of sex in advertising. Any other reports on the attitudes of local consumers toward nudity in advertising as well as the effects of such appeals on their behavior were not at the authors' disposal when initiating our research study. Consequently, we aimed at providing an insight into the effectiveness of the use of nudity in advertising among local consumers as well as to promote the necessity for further research of this issue.

3. Research Study

3.1. Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, the use of sex appeals in advertising was limited to displaying a nude model in advertisement. Therefore, only

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visual aspects of the message were taken into consideration, while the advertising copy (verbal message) was not analyzed.

Use of nudity in advertising and its effects on brand recall and recognition

As explained above, previous research of the use of sexual appeals in advertising was claiming its negative effect on ad/product/brand recall and recognition. Later research revealed that the use of sexual appeals while constantly been proved to be provoking immediate arousal may also have both negative and positive effects on recall and recognition depending on various dimensions [27]. Among those dimensions are, for example, product category, attitudes toward sex in general, acquired ethical values, gender, age, social class, etc.

Grazer and Keesling [12] studied the use of sexual stimuli in advertising for two product categories, revealing different levels of recall and recognition. The explanation for that may be found in general marketing communications theory, claiming that the product category involvement should also be taken into consideration. For example, as explained by De Pelsmacker [6] *“the more one is interested in a certain product, the more attention is paid to the ad and the better it is recalled.”*

In line with the above we hypothesized that the use of nudity in advertising may not have any different effect on product and brand recall than not use of nudity:

H1: *The use of nudity in advertising doesn't lead to significantly higher product/brand recall and recognition than the use of not nude models.*

However, any attempt to generalize this must take yet another factor into consideration. Serbia, the country in which our study was placed is a former communist country now in tradition sharing advertising industry background similar to that of other Eastern European countries. Therefore, our findings might be in line with those of other studies conducted in countries in transition, such as for example a study conducted by De Pelsmacker and Geuens [5] which revealed the overall high brand recognition based on different advertising appeals in Poland. Based on that, it is suggested that the consumers in former communist countries seem to be paying more attention to advertising than consumers in the countries which had a longer advertising tradition such are those in Western Europe. The explanation today may also be found in less intensive advertising clutter typical for less developed economies.

Gender reactions to the use of sexual appeals in advertising

Reaction to sexual appeals in advertising may have both an affective and cognitive component. Affective responses are connected to what the observers feel and cognitive to what they think of the advertisements. Affective reactions are measured by scales depicting different levels of specific positive (eg. tenderness and amusement) or negative feeling (eg. irritation and anger). On the other hand, cognitive responses are also measured by scales depicting different levels of agreement with specific statements such as for example *I like this ad very much* or *I find this ad to be offensive*. A broad part of advertising research was focused on the issue of how the affective reaction to advertising stimuli [7] or advertising context [2] may influence observers' attitudes toward the ad and the brand.

Sex as controversial issue still induces both negative affective and cognitive reactions when applied to advertising context. The intensity of these reactions differs among the observers. Some explanations to that may be looked for in the concept of sexual self schema as defined by Davis, Zhu and Brantley [3] or connected to the variables such as gender, age and social status and occupation as used by Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes [18]. As reported by authors, the negative sexual self-schema seems to have a stronger influence of processing sexual stimuli in advertising than the positive one. Consequently, the recipients opposing to the use of sexual stimuli may pay more attention to it and better recall the advertising message and the advertised brand regardless their strongly negative feelings toward it. On the other hand, Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes [18, p.21] reported that "*women are more hostile than men to nudity and sex in advertising*". A cross cultural study covering three countries (the UK, Germany and Italy) revealed that in all of these countries men had generally more positive feelings about the use of nudity in advertising [16]. Finally, a study focusing on analyzing the extent to which Generation Y college students evaluate the use of sex appeals in advertising ethical revealed significant differences between male and female students, with female students being strongly opposing to it regardless their personal ethical value system [17]. Based on such a theoretical background, we expected significantly different reaction between male and female in Serbia toward the nudity in advertising, thus hypothesizing the following:

H2: Affective reactions and attitudes toward ad (Aad) of males and females differ depending on the use or not use of nudity. Male observers' affective reactions and attitude toward the ad which use nudity is more positive than female and it is identical when the ad does not use nudity.

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The same concern was expressed by Manceau and Tissier-Desbordes [18] in interpreting the findings that women find sex a taboo in advertising to higher extent than men. Earlier studies of this issue (Baker and Churchil, 1977) [referenced by 26] reported that female and male were more positive to the portrayal of opposite sex in advertising. Similarly to this, latest studies report that the display of male models as sexual symbols may provoke homophobic feelings among male recipients [10].

3.2. Research Design

The research presented here is replicated using the same methodology previously applied by Dianoux, Linhart, and Kettnerova [8].

A number of studies in this field can be grouped according to the methodology they have applied into three broad categories: 1) applying a content analysis, 2) using an experimental research format and 3) based on consumers' attitudes survey. Our study belongs to the second category as it was based on an experimental magazine developed for the purposes of this study and distributed among college students with the additional use of a specially developed instrument used for surveying observers after they have been exposed to the experimental magazine. The methodology applied in this research was designed to control several factors, which were not fully controlled in previous research. The most important variables were the product category, brand, and advertising copy. Two photos of the same lady were applied in an identical advertising setting for a mobile phone - Nokia 6630. The display of nude model (topless women) was compared with the use of the same model while displaying only her face (head to shoulders). That allowed us to isolate nudity as the only factor which might influence product and brand recall, affective reactions and attitudes toward the ad.

The experimental magazines used in this research were distributed among the students of the Faculty of Economics, University of Belgrade in Serbia. Though the results of the study could hardly be generated on the whole population in Serbia, the overall conclusions seem relevant for one cohort – Generation Y - to which our respondents belong. Furthermore, as reported in marketing literature experimental studies based on similar methodology are mostly organized with students [eg. 16; 10; 25] which makes our results comparable to the main body of knowledge on this issue.

In total, 152 students of marketing participated in our experiment. The experimental plan is presented in the table below.

Experiment plan

	n
Nokia ad with naked woman (ad-Naked)	77
Nokia ad with face of woman (ad-Face)	75
	152

3.3. Research Findings

To test our H1 (The use of nudity in advertising doesn't lead to significantly higher product/brand recall and recognition than the use of not nude models) we measured our respondents' recognition (assisted) and recall (spontaneous) of the products and the brand advertised in our experimental magazines.

As regards memory traces (cognitive aspects, ie assisted and spontaneous recall) left by the Nokia ad, the results do not allow to assert that the experimental ad with the naked woman (Ad-Naked) results in more precise memory than the advertisement not using it with the only face of the woman (Ad-Face). Indeed, if we take into account the answers about assisted memory of advertised product (Table 1), spontaneous recall (Table 2), or the assisted recall of the name of the advertised brand (Table 3), no significant difference between both groups can be disclosed.

Table 1: Assisted recall of product advertised

Mann-Whitney Test	Group with Naked woman in Ad (Ad-Naked)		Group with Face woman in ad (Ad-Face)		p.	Means Ad-N/ Ad-F
	N	Mean Rank	N	Mean Rank		
Calculator (not in folder)	76	76	70	70	0.298	3.2/2.9
Perfume (not in folder)	72	74	71	69	0.504	1.9/1.8
Mobile phone	77	77	75	76	0.655	4.9/5.0
Air company	72	73	70	70	0.700	3.3/3.2
Trainings	76	80	72	69	0.088	4.1/3.7
Cars	75	77	74	72	0.436	3.8/3.7
Wearing	75	74	74	76	0.781	3.7/3.8
Drink	74	75	74	74	0.900	3.9/4.0
Film	75	80	73	69	0.107	4.1/3.8

Question (Q5): "Among the following products, some of them (mobile phone) were used as the object of an advertising, which ones?" with 5-points semantic scale with "I am sure seeing it (5)" vs. "I am sure not seeing it (1)".

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Table 2: Spontaneous recall of the name of the brand

		n	No name quoted	Brand advertised quoted	Fisher Test
Mobile phone (Nokia)	Naked	75	3%	97%	p.=0.16 6
	Face	75	9%	91%	
Calculator (not in folder)	Naked	77	75%	25% (wrong)	p.=0.01 7
	Face	75	91%	9% (wrong)	
Perfume (not in folder)	Naked	77	99%	1% (wrong)	p.=1.0
	Face	75	100%	0% (wrong)	
Air company (JatAirways)	Naked	73	81%	19%	p.=1.0
	Face	74	81%	19%	
Trainings	Naked	65	88%	12%	p.=0.35 3
	Face	73	81%	19%	
Cars (VW Polo)	Naked	76	50%	50%	p.=0.62 6
	Face	72	54%	46%	
Wearing (MaxMara)	Naked	75	48%	52%	p.=0.62 3
	Face	74	43%	57%	
Drink (Coca-Cola)	Naked	77	31%	69%	p.=0.86 3
	Face	75	33%	67%	
Film (Horton)	Naked	75	55%	45%	p.=0.04 1
	Face	70	71%	29%	

Question (Q6): “For the ads which you remember to have seen, write what brand they tried to promote”.

There is no difference between the two groups for assisted memory of product advertised. But, we can see two significant differences between Ad-Naked and Ad-Face concerning spontaneous recall of the brand. Paradoxically, these differences are not about the experimental ad, they relate to calculator and Film. The first was not an advertised product, yet people who were exposed to the Ad-Naked remembered much more than those exposed to the Ad-Face to had seen a calculator brand (p=0.017). The second (ad for film) was placed on the last page, and we could see the same