

SEX IN ADVERTISING: WHO DISLIKES IT AND WHY?

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ABSTRACT

The use of sex in advertising continues unabated, public outcry against it notwithstanding. Although some sex in ads might sell, as advertisers obviously believe to be the case, the questions are, how much sex is too much, and what kind of consumer would like sexual content in advertisements? This research examines these two questions, with consumer data from a study where consumers were shown an ad with either low or high sexual content. Results show that while the ad with high sexual content was uniformly judged to be ethically more unjust (compared to ads with low sexual content), the adverse effect on attitude toward the ad is not obtained for all consumers. Our results show that it depends on the sexual liberalism of the audience and on whether or not the use of sex is considered manipulative. Our research suggests that advertising professionals should assess sexual liberalism of their target audience and use sex only within the requisites of the communication task.

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