

Unraveling Sex Advertisements' Effects by Considering Consumers' Psychological Distance Level, Construal Level, and Gender

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Abstract

Sex is frequently used in advertising while research on its effects has produced mixed results. Based on psychological distance and construal level theory, this paper focuses on sex ads' impact on consumers' ethical, attitudinal and behavioural reactions. An experiment grounded in the use of temporal psychological distance inducing variant construal levels (low, high) while promoting a sex-relevant product (perfume) across different sex intensity levels of the ad, shows that as psychological distance or construal level increases (decreases), individuals' reactions become less (more) unfavourable regardless of the ad's sex intensity level. Also, as the ad's sex intensity level increases, and especially under a low psychological distance regime, there is an accentuation of ethical judgements' mediating role upon consumers' attitudes and behaviours. Last, gender is important such that females denote stronger objections especially when the sex intensity level ranges from moderate to high.

Keywords: *Sex appeal advertising; Construal level theory; Consumer responses*

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications