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Abstract - The use of sex appeal in advertisements is widely preferred by marketers around the globe as they believe 'sex sells'. Less Academic attention is devoted to explain how an appeal like sex works among Indian audience and what are the mediating variables aid in the process of persuasion. This study aims at empirically investigating the complex relationship as well as the sequential effect of 'Sex appeal → Attitudes toward the Ad → Ethical Judgment toward the Ad → Purchase intention'. The research was executed on a sample of 560 respondents from in and around Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry using non-probability Convenience sampling method. Structural Equation Modeling technique (SEM) was employed to examine the complex relationship between variables and Hypotheses. Results indicate Sex appeal advertisements lead to favourable attitude, which in turn influence Ethical Judgment and Purchase Intention.

Keywords : *sex appeal, attitude, ethical judgment, purchase intention, SEM.*

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Research Sequential Relationship of Appeal, Attitude, Ethical Judgement and Purchase Intention – A SEM Analysis

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Abstract - The use of sex appeal in advertisements is widely preferred by marketers around the globe as they believe 'sex sells'. Less Academic attention is devoted to explain how an appeal like sex works among Indian audience and what are the mediating variables aid in the process of persuasion. This study aims at empirically investigating the complex relationship as well as the sequential effect of 'Sex appeal → Attitudes toward the Ad → Ethical Judgment toward the Ad → Purchase intention'. The research was executed on a sample of 560 respondents from in and around Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry using non-probability Convenience sampling method. Structural Equation Modeling technique (SEM) was employed to examine the complex relationship between variables and Hypotheses. Results indicate Sex appeal advertisements lead to favourable attitude, which in turn influence Ethical Judgment and Purchase Intention.

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I. Introduction

India is all set to emerge as one of the leading economies and now is in the limelight as a potential market for global marketers in terms of its population, disposable income and purchasing power. Television has become an indispensable medium of entertainment in Indian households and thus qualifies as a preferred medium for marketers to connect with the target audience. Advertisers started pushing the boundaries of advertising by incorporating sex appeal in their message strategy to achieve an edge in the cluttered media environment. Such an attempt might prove to be unduly a risky assumption in countries like India, as one could observe many commercials facing bans and controversies. Though overt sexuality, obscenity and growing number of complaint filed were being cited as reasons by the regulatory authorities for dropping down of commercials from air, it was described by the media as an attempt which is as futile as King Canute ordering the waves to turn back. Furthermore, it is worth noting that all over the social networking websites the opinion of the general public is found to be mixed. All these reinforce one thing that no country in the world will have a society with intact ethics and morals. As the society grows, what is appropriate and acceptable in Advertisement content also changes. All these attract scholarly attention and the present study probed into the sequential effect of 'Sex appeal - Attitudes toward the Ad - Ethical Judgment toward the Ad - Purchase intention'.

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II. Literature Review

Sexual themes in advertisements are attention grabbing, engaging, involving, interesting, entertaining, favourable and original than non sexual ads (Bello et al., 1983, Jude & Alexander, 1983, Belch & Belch, 1990, Reichert et al., 2001). Over a period, researchers have confirmed the positive effect of nudity on attention grabbing (De Pelsmacker & Geuens, 1998 & Manceau & Tissier, 2006). (Chestnut et al., 1977 & Reid & Soley, 1983) have reported that ads with sexual stimuli are more effective than the non sexual ones. Though, it was identified that sexy illustration in advertisements attracts initial attention (Reid & Soley ,1983) enhances recall (Steadman, 1969) evokes emotional responses (Courtney & Whipple.,1983, Hoyer & MacInnis, 2001) increases persuasion (LaTour et al., 1990, Saunders, 1996) as well as buying intention (Grazer & Keesling, 1995) but it was not free from serious limitations. Sex appeal might increase attention but not necessarily enhance recall or positive attitude towards a brand (Stewart, D. W., & Furse, 2000) moreover excessive and inappropriate sexual content might lead to negative association of the advertised brand (Bumler, 1999). Recently (Brown, 2002) warned that blatant applications of sex as an attention grabber can be counter-productive. Copy recall was lower for sexual ads than non sexual ads, containing high level of information (Belch & Belch 1990) and sexual ads sponsors are less likely to be remembered than the non sexual ad sponsors implying these ads are less effective (Alexander & Judd, 1978, 1983, Weller at al., 1979, Keesling, 1995 & Reichert and Alvaro 2001). Sex appeal is not only used in advertising to attract attention toward the advertisements but also to create positive emotions that might translate into positive brand attitudes and, hence, sales (Endres & Hug, 2004; Schroeder, 2000). Sex role portrayal evokes emotions and in turn shapes

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the attitude of the consumer (Batra and Ray 1986). According to (Bumler, 1999) sex appeal evokes emotions and arouses feelings which in turn can create a desire for the product.

In the arena of theory and research in social and behavioral sciences, the construct of attitude continues to be a focal point (Ajzen, 2001) and thus heightened the importance of understanding the consumer attitude within the domain of media. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) define the attitude as "an individual's positive or negative feelings about performing the target behavior". It is an individual's evaluative judgments of an object (Crites, Fabrigar & Petty, 1994). In the words of (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998) Attitude towards an object is "a psychological tendency that an individual expresses by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor". Advertisers and marketing researchers are of the opinion that "attitude toward the advertisement" (Aad) is an affective construct representing consumers' general feelings of liking an advertisement, has a favorable influence on brand attitudes and purchase intention (PI) (Lutz, MacKenzie & Belch, 1983; Mac-Kenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986). Consumers could unconsciously develop positive or negative feelings towards the advertisement and consequently towards that advertised brand (Gardner, 1985). The experience of a positive attitude towards advertisement (Aad) may communicate expectations about the experience of using the advertised brand (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Initially attitude towards Ad was identified as a mediator for consumers' brand choice (Shimp, 1981), and then, the linkage between Aad and Ab (Attitude towards brand) emerged and was empirically proved (Mitchell & Olson, 1981).This relationship gained research support over a period (Gardner, 1985, Park & Young, 1986, Homer, 1990). Researchers (Bagozzi & Burnkrant, 1979 and Bagozzi, 1981) went a head and explored the extension of the above mentioned relationship (i.e) the effect of Ab on Purchase intention. MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch (1989) conceived a direct causation from attitudes toward the ads to attitude toward brand, as well as a direct causal link between attitudes toward the ads and purchase intention in the dual mediation model proposed by them. Subsequent researchers (Brown & Stayman, 1992; MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986) have found a strong support for the "attitudes toward the ads → attitudes toward the brand → purchase intention" relationships. Few researchers took a different dimension and investigated the relationship between attitude and Purchase intention under conditions like low/high involvement, low/high Need for cognitions (Severn et al., 1990, Putrevu, S., 2008), low/high arousal (La Tour, Pitts & Snook-Luther, 1990). Though the use of a visual sexual appeal result in more favorable attitude towards the ad and greater purchase intentions in general (Severn, et al., 1990) the effect is not consistent in the studies when the degree of sexual stimuli was moderated. Despite the fact that men and women differed in their attitudinal responses in terms of Attitude towards Advertisement (Aad), Attitude towards brand (Ab) and Purchase Intention (PI) (Orth & Halancova, 2004). Strong overt sex appeal was not well received and would produce significantly more negative attitudes toward the Ad, Brand and Purchase intentions (Steadman, 1969, Alexander & Judd, 1978) as it was viewed as less ethically 'correct' than mild sexual version of the ad (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994). Similar to LaTour and Henthorne's findings, regardless of respondent's gender, the use of a strong overt sexual appeal was not well received by Chinese consumers and resulted in less favorable attitude toward the ad itself and the purchase intention than using mild sexual themes (Tai, H.C. Susan, 1999). Alexander & Judd (1983) contend that ad creators must be acutely aware of the reactions (both positive and negative) of their target audience to the use of potentially controversial sexual appeals as ad stimuli. Soley & Reid (1988) stated that general changes in a society's sexual attitudes are often mirrored in print advertising.

Consumers' ethical orientation has emerged as an important construct in mediating consumer behaviour (Vitell et al., 1991 & Pitts et al., 1991) which prompted (LaTour & Henthorne, 1994, Tansey, Hyman & Brown, 1992, Tinkham & Weaver-Lariscy, 1994 & Simpson et al., 1998) to investigate the ethical perce-ptions of consumers and its impact on consumer evaluations of ads and their results consistently supported it. Though few studies assumed ethical judgment of an Ad as a causal variable and explored its impact on attitude toward the Ad, attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, justification for such assumption lacks clarity in literature. Important observation should be made here as it was clearly stated that attitude is something situation bound emotional reaction (Lutz, 1985) which is automatic requiring minimal processing (Zajonc & Markus, 1982). On the light of the above points, one can safely conclude that it is the Attitude which will be formed or generated first by a person when exposed to an advertisement and it is subject to change. Furthermore, (Baker & Lutz, 1988) clarified the various components of the advertisement stimulus upon which Attitude towards the ad is formed. The content of the advertisement copy (information on brand attributes), the headline, the creative platform (appeals such as humor, fear and others used to support delivery of message), and pictures or images appearing in advertisements may be assumed to collectively form attitude towards the advertisement (ibid). Besides theory of 'reasoned action' a laboratory study (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and many field studies dealing with diverse topics such as green energy (Bang, Ellinger, Hadjimarcou, & Traichal, 2000),

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ethically questionable behavior (Fukukawa, 2002), ethics on digital rights (Chiang & Lee ,2011) and software piracy (Trevor T. Moores & Vatcharaporn Esichaikul, 2011) extended support for the argument that attitude is the causal variable will have an impact on ethical judgment, ethical behaviour and purchase intention. Research as well as experimental Interest toward Aad has increased because advertisers believe that a "likable" advertisement could create a favorable impression on consumers which in turn could give that advertised brand a competitive edge in the long run (Gardner, 1985, Gresham & Shimp, 1985 & Mitchell, 1986). It is the individual's character ethical values, beliefs and attitudes shape a persons' ethical judgement not only towards AD but also towards other forms of dishonesty, i.e. dishonesty in the workplace (Lysonski & Gaidis, 1991).

In this context, the present study tries to fill the gap identified and attempts to make some incremental contribution in Sex Appeal Effectiveness Literature by exploring the effect of sex appeal advertisements on attitude and other key consumer response variables such as ethical judgment and purchase intention by incorporating the Full length TV commercials as stimuli in the following sequential manner "Sex appeal → Attitudes toward the Ad → Ethical Judgment toward the Ad → Purchase intention". Attitude towards the brand as variable was not considered because degree of sexual content used in advertising had no direct influence on it (Tai, H.C. Susan, 1999).

III. Methodology

The Paper aims at looking at the sequential effect of "Sex appeal → Attitudes toward the Ad → Ethical Judgment toward the Ad → Purchase intention" by applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Attitude towards an advertisement is a situation bound emotional reaction in a favorable or unfavorable manner generated at the time of exposure to that particular advertisement (Lutz, 1985). Ethical Judgment is nothing but an expression of an individual about a given object after a careful evaluation based on one's Culture, (Values, beliefs, Attitude and Morals) Social Values and Individual Personality. Purchase intention is a plan or intention or willingness to purchase the brand promoted in an Ad in the future. SEM was used because the relationships were not one to one (Bivariate) and a few Hypotheses were to be tested based on the literature reviewed. The sample size for the study was 560 respondents from in and around Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, non-probability Convenience sampling method was adopted because of representation and it was an experimental study. The respondents, in small number, were assembled at a common venue and were shown the Advertisement clippings of Sexual and Non Sexual Appeals. Latter they were administered a questionnaire, which had questions on Attitude, Ethical Judgment, Purchase Intention and Personal profiles. Attitude, Ethical Judgment, Purchase Intention were measured on a five Point Likert Scale, (LaTour et al., 1990, Henthrone, 1993 & Tai, H.C Susan, 1999 and Thiyagarajan, S. & Shanthi, P., 2011) these scales were revised for the current study and were tested for reliability from a pilot study on a sample of 30 respondents. Attitude with 10 questions/statements had a ratability of 0.783, Ethical Judgment with 12 questions/statements had 0.791 and Purchase Intention with 5 questions/statements had 0.729.

IV. Findings and Discussions

The first aspect of the results to be discussed is the Model fit for the data and the values to be considered are $\chi 2$ value and its significance. The $\chi 2$ value should be insignificant at 5% for absorbed variables of < 12 and sample size of > 250 (Barrett, 2007, Hair et al 2009). The significance value for the model tested is 0.963 for a df of 1 which is highly insignificant indication the model fits the data very well. The next Goodness of fit indices is Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), which should be less than .05 (MacCallum et al, 1996, Hu & Bentler, 1999, Steiger, 2007, Hair et al 2009) and the value for the model is 0.000 from this it can be concluded that the model exactly fits the data. The others Goodness of Fit indices are Goodness-of-fit statistic (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit statistic (AGFI) and Comparative fit index (CFI) values should be > 0.90 (Bentler, 1990, Fan et al, 1999 Hooper et al, 2008, Hair et al, 2009) and the values for the model are 1.000 from this it can be concluded that the model fits the data very well. Standardised Root mean square residual (SRMR) value should be < 0.05 (Byrne, 1998; Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000) and the value for the model is 0.000 which also stats that the model tested fits the data very well. Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Consistent Version of AIC (CAIC) should be least for the model tested (Akaike, 1974, Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000) and it is so in the case.

From all the Goodness of fit indices, it can be clearly concluded that the model fits the data very well so one can proceed with interpretation of Hypotheses testing. All the hypotheses studied were tested for a significance of 5%.

HO1: Advertisement Appeal has no influence on Purchase Intention.

The first hypothesis was supported and there is no influence of Advertisement appeal on Purchase intention. The appeal studied was Sex appeal and it has no direct influence on purchase intention of the customers. Customers do not make their purchases based on the appeal factor alone used in a promotion. May be these appeals have a role to play on the

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effectiveness of such advertisements (Thiyagarajan, S., Shanthi, P. & Naresh, G., 2012) but they have no direct role to play towards the Purchase decision made by the customers.

HO2: Advertisement Appeal has no influence on Attitude.

The second hypothesis was not supported and there is an influence of Advertisement Appeal on Attitude towards Advertisement, meaning respondents have a favourable attitude towards advertisements using sexual appeal, the coefficient is positive and significant implying that as sexual appeal is brought in there is a shift in attitude and it is a favourable shift.

HO3: Attitude has no influence on Purchase intention.

The third hypothesis was also supported. Attitude has no influence on Purchase Intention. The purchase intention of the customers is not made only by the attitude towards the advertisements. Whatever may be the attitude Positive or Negative, it has very less to do with Purchase intention directly.

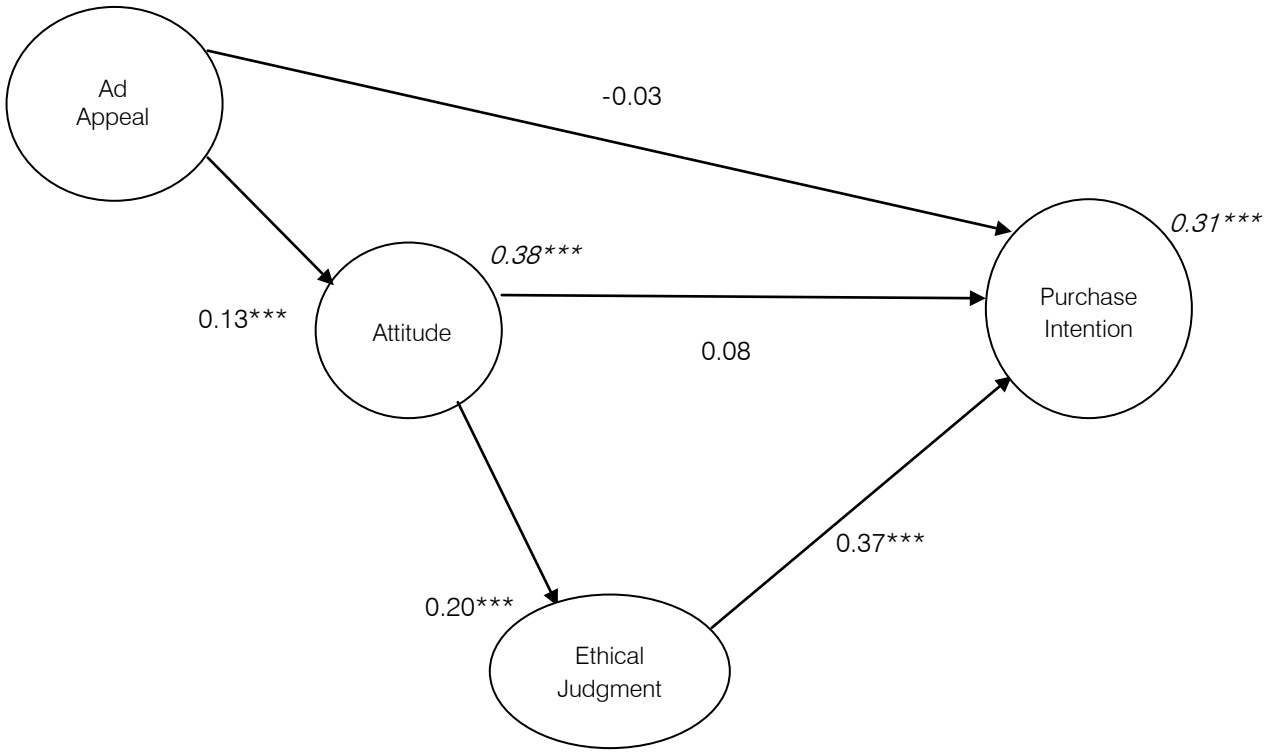

Figure 1 : D SEM Model Diagram

Table 1 : Model Fit

Chi	df	Sig	RMSEA	SRMR	GFI	AGFI	CFI	NFI	AIG	CAIC
0.002	1	0.963	0.000	0.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	18.002*	65.954*

** Default model and Lowest of the three models*

HO4: Attitude has no influence on Ethical Judgment.

Fourth hypothesis was not supported and it can be concluded that Attitude had an influence on Ethical Judgment. It is the Attitude towards Sexual Appeal advertisings that go about in making the Ethical Judgment towards those advertisements in terms of ones Culture, Social acceptance and Moral values surrounding it.

HO5: Ethical Judgment has no influence on Purchase Intention.

Fifth Hypothesis was also not supported from which it is clear that Ethical Judgment has a major influence on Purchase Intention. Therefore the intention to purchase a product or not is mainly influenced by the Ethical Judgment, which a customer has towards the appeal that is being used to promote a product, here it is the Sexual appeal and it acceptance in the Sociocultural Environment.

From the results discussed above it can be concluded that the whole structure is a snowballing effect, which starts from Advertisement appeal and moves towards Attitude with a standardized coefficient of 0.13, then towards Ethical Judgment with a standardized coefficient of 0.20 and finally end with Purchase Intention with a standardized coefficient of 0.37 and the magnitude of these effects are also increasing as they move from one variable to another.

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The values in italics are the intercepts for each endogenous variable and all the values are significant at 1% (***). The equation can be written as one SD unit change in Ethical Judgment will lead to a change in Purchase Intention by 0.37 SD of PI (PI = 0.37σPI). A Sexual appeal advertisement will lead to a favourable attitude that in turn will lead to a positive Ethical Judgment, which will finally lead to an increased Purchase Intention could be the penultimate towards the actual purchase.

V. Conclusion

The current study attempted to investigate the sequential effect of 'Sex appeal - Attitude towards the Ad - Ethical Judgment towards the Ad - Purchase intention'. This empirical study emerges as an important source of implications for marketers as well as academicians as its findings throw clarity over how an advertisement appeal like 'sex' will influence the audiences' purchase intention and what are all the mediating variables including the path via which the effect of those mediating variables pass through. Any judgment made on the basis of culture is prone to change over a period of time because culture is believed to be non static and it evolves over time/generation. This evolution can be attributed to a change in the outlook or perception or attitude towards an object or person or practice. Therefore, the focus of the marketers should be on targeting the attitude of the potential customers which will in turn pave the way for a favorable purchase decision towards the brand being promoted in an Advertisement.

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