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Crazy Little Thing Called Lust

Sex.

I bet that word caught your attention, didn’t it? If I were to use another word like “burgers,” this paper would probably get no attention at all. You see, this is a method some companies use to their advantage. Simply put, sex sells because it is human nature that we feel the need to relieve our primitive instincts. Great marketing strategy in my opinion, but obviously there are some consequences. Any psychological impacts when we are exposed to sexualized advertisements? Is it enhancing obesity rates? What is “too far?”

If I were to run a restaurant chain, I wouldn’t mind having a few explicit advertisements if it means I can make people remember my business. Any fame is better than no fame. On a psychological level, sexual advertisements are more likely to be remembered than non-sexual advertisements. According to James King’s experiment as described in his journal article “Sex Really Does Sell: The Recall of Sexual and Non-sexual Television Advertisements in Sexual and Non-sexual Programmes*,”* “Sexual advertisements (M=4.66, SD=2.26) [are] being recalled better than non-sexual advertisements (M=2.64, SD=2.06)” (214). Statistically, the numbers mean that advertisements are being recalled almost twice as much than non-sexualized advertisements. In this experiment, a sample of 25 men and 25 women watch ten sexualized advertisements and ten non-sexualized advertisements. After the viewings, each person is given a questionnaire testing their memory on certain brands (King 216). As you can see, this experiment shows how sexualized advertisements can help companies and last longer in consumers’ memories.

Although sexualized food advertisements are primarily aimed at male audiences, food advertisements in general can be detrimental to one’s health. In Kemps, Tiggermann, and Hollitt’s study, “Exposure to Television Food Advertising Primes Food-Related Cognitions and Triggers Motivation to Eat,” after testing a sample of 160 female undergraduate students and a sample of “124 overweight community-dwelling women,” results conclude that food advertisements do increase the desire to eat, a broad factor leading to obesity, high cholesterol, diabetes and other health problems of the sort. In this study, these women are split evenly into two groups (per sample) where one group will watch non-food advertisements and the latter will watch food advertisements. The sample of 160 female undergraduate students were to be tested on formation of words; three letters would be given to each person and would have to complete the word. Data is collected by seeing if the word is a food-related word or a non-food-related word (this is how Kemps will measure the desire to eat). On a standard normal distribution graph, the differences between food related words and non-food related words is about one standard deviation from each other, making the difference not significant. However, in the sample of overweight women, on a standard normal distribution graph, the difference is about four standard deviations apart, making the difference significant. In both studies, the “desire to eat” has a greater frequency than to feel neutral (specifically, the sample of overweight women had a significantly greater frequency).

In addition to psychological capabilities, sex advertisements are “primarily used to sell low-risk product impulse purchases,” according to Jeanette Mulvey, a business writer. Despite its detrimental effects, selling sex has great results in terms of business. “It’s all about perception,” according to Tom Reichart, an advertisement professor in UGA. What if one were to tell you that Hanes underwear and Calvin Klein underwear are made with the same quality and material? You can save plenty of money! However, when Calvin Klein advertisements showcase Mark Wahlberg in a photoshoot, in an ideal situation, Calvin Klein underwear would become more desirable than Hanes’. Axe body spray is a similar story. Because of the brand impressions that Axe body spray can get men surrounded by beautiful women, as well as enhancing sexual appeal, people would still buy the product despite its debatably pungent odor. Another example is Carl’s Junior. Sure, a two-thousand calorie burger sounds disgusting, but it becomes (even the slightest bit) desirable when Kate Upton goes tête-à-tête with a double western cheeseburger.

Children are also potential victims of sexualized advertising. It is not uncommon to see a Venus body razor commercial of Cartoon Network nowadays. Why? Simply because the more coverage an advertisement gets, the more publicity it will get. “The mood of the country is slightly more relaxed about sexual matters,” says Dan Neil, an automotive columnist of the *LA Times*. “Global economic crisis tends to put provincialism on the back burner,” he said. Although it is morally inappropriate to have such explicit advertisements on children’s television stations, it is not that important. How would you feel if you caught your child or younger sibling watching an “oddly sexualized ad promoting its 99-cent SpongeBob SquarePants Kids Meal (Crispin Porter + Bogusky), which involves the King riffing to Sir Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back" while a bunch of orthogonallyrumped hotties dance around” (Neil). That’s right: a Burger King Kids Meal advertisement with a (not-so-little) twist.

As stated before: any fame is better than no fame, and advertisers take that very seriously. Unsexy things are being promoted in a way that catches attention in any way and forces anyone to view these things as socially acceptable. I believe that there should be a threshold to sexualized food advertisements. I agree that it is an excellent marketing strategy because sex sells; however, it can go way too far. So far, I’ve discussed the seduction effect from sexualized advertisements where people think they can get all the women they want or feel beautiful, as well as the hilarity of sexualized advertisements featuring SpongeBob and Sir Mix-a-Lot. I believe the crossing line would be the usage of crude, awkward, and offensive humor in sexualized advertising. Remember the *GoDaddy.com* commercial during the 2013 Super Bowl where a model and a not-so model were making out on the screen for about 12 seconds? I’d draw the line there. Exceeding this advertisement would be Hardee’s (Carl’s Jr.) Biscuit Holes. It goes like this: a surveyor samples Biscuit Holes to supposedly random people and asks them what they should be called. Some of the responses include, “goodie balls, creamy sweet holes, cinni-nuts, yay-holes, tasty-nuts, sweet balls.” The commercial ends when the surveyor comes up with his own name, “Bisticles,” (dangerously close to a male reproductive organ) as the random people ironically give him a look of disgust.

Someone is bound to be offended by “ball” jokes.

Yet, these advertisements are everywhere because “it's the [metaphorical] Laffer curve of the marketing industry,” according to Derek Thompson, a senior editor of *The Atlantic.* Why marketers do it is “for the same reasons dogs chase their tail and Republicans call for tax cuts. It's what they do, so it's got to be right,” says Thompson.

As you can see, sexualized advertisements can be a psychological, physiological, and moral issue in this day and age. It is an impeccable marketing strategy, I suppose, but its detrimental effects says it all. “The economy is a problem and needs to be prioritized,” is what some people may think. However, we cannot let the power of “sex sells” be the solution to the economic crisis. Think about the unhealthy. Think about the children. Think about the unconfident. After all, if I can’t get a date after spraying chocolate AXE body spray on me, then I condemn Unilever to Dante’s eighth circle of hell.

Works cited

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**Note**: In MLA the Works Cited page would be on its own separate page, but to save a little paper, let’s do it this way. Remember to cite *only* the works you actually refer to or quote from in the paper. Also, the newspaper & magazine sources should have the publisher and the section, page #, but I’m too tired to look them up. Also, page numbers should be added where possible, e.g. with the academic journal articles. Still, this is a *very* strong draft, especially considering he isn’t finished quite yet. Thanks, Sean, for letting me use this!

Here, once again, is a link to the OWL Purdue site for the details: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>