

Public Abstract

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Title:Does sex really matter? The cognitive and emotional effects of sexual explicitness in video advertisements

The purpose of this study was to examine how variations in explicitness of sexual visual imagery in video ads impact the way young adults cognitively and emotionally process advertising. Experimentation included a psychophysiological assessment of skin conductance and heart rate, as well as self-report measures. Skin conductance was used to measure arousal while heart rate measured cognitive resources allocated to encoding, or attention. Self-report measures covered brand recognition, arousal, likeability, pleasantness and unpleasantness. Physiological results were significant for arousal and attention change over time, with moderate sexual explicitness earning the highest skin conductance and heart rate levels. Brand recognition, however, was greatest for low sexual explicitness. These results suggest to advertising industry specialists that, while sex has the ability to increase arousal and attention of consumers, it doesn't necessarily increase brand awareness.