VICTORIA'S SECRET SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION:

Exploring the Connections Between Brand Images, Organizational Identification, and Job Satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The effect of advertising on consumer attitudes and behavior has been studied (Yaniv & Farkas, 2005), but less is known about how advertising may impact employees. Past research has shown that focal organizational attributes that are consistent with a members' attitudes lead to higher perceived levels of organizational identification and job satisfaction. However, limited research has been conducted examining potentially controversial organizational images as well as how failure to identify with core values (images) of an organization may contribute to lower levels of job satisfaction and organizational identification. This study examined associations between the symbolic communication of Victoria's Secret, employee perceptions of similarities with representative models used in brand advertising, and important individual and organizational outcomes.

LITERATURE

- Images of an organization shape how members define themselves and their attributes (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994).
- Identification with a company that has a prestigious identity enables them to view themselves in the reflected glory of the company, which enhances their sense of self-worth (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003)
- Employees evaluate ads directly, considering how ads are interpreted by outsiders, including friends, families, and customers because these outsiders make judgments about the character of the organization and by extension, about employees of the organization (Celsi, 2010).
- Members assess the attractiveness of representative organizational images by how well the images preserve the continuity of their self-concept, provide distinctiveness, and enhance self-esteem (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994).
- According to the theory of symbolic interactionism (Ligas & Cotte, 1999), meaning for an object is given when individuals communicate and interact to give that object a unified meaning understood by all associated with it.

METHODS

- A total of 45 Victoria's Secret employees participated in anonymous online surveys distributed to employees through the use of social networking websites. Researchers publically posted the survey link, inviting employees to take the survey. Qualitative data was gathered to supplement findings.
- Participants of our study were primarily female (91.1%) and Caucasian (86.4%). 95.6% of the participants were between the ages of 18-25. 66.7% of the participants were sales floor associates and 48.8% of participants have worked for Victoria's Secret for a year or more.
- Using research on color, text usage, sex appeal, brand name, and model selection (Monk-Turner, Wren, McGill, Matthiae, & Brown, 2008, Miller & Kahn, 2005), researchers selected five widely representative images from Victoria's Secret advertising, and compiled them into a single collaged image representation. Participants rated their perceived similarities with models in selected images.
- Instruments

  Perceived Homophily Scale (McCroskey, Richmond & Daly, 1975). This scale measures how similar one perceives themselves to be with a selected image using a 7-point likert scale.

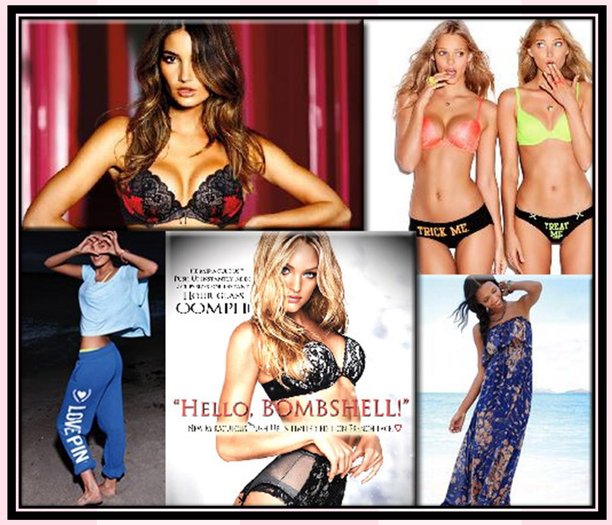
  Sample items include: Is similar to me (1) is different from me (7)
  Background is different from mine(1) background is similar to mine(7)
  This scale was reliable(α = .75, M = 34.11, SD = 8.78).

  Shortened Organizational Communication Scale (Cheney, 1983). This scale is a 7-point likert scale, which ranges from YES!, to NO! The questions ask the employees about their identification with the Victoria's Secret organization.

  Sample items include: I am proud to be a Victoria's Secret employee
  This scale was reliable(α = .28, M = 21.42, SD = 10.70).

  Job in General Scale (Smith, Kendall and Hulin, 1969). The scale lists 8 descriptors, and the employees were asked to select yes, no, or ? on a 3-point likert scale depending on their feelings toward the descriptors.

  Sample items include: Good, Undesirable, Better than most
  This scale was reliable(α = .83, M = 14.44, SD = 3.06).



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http://www.footluxe.com/2011/10/victorias-secret-very-sexy-seduction-underwear-collection/

RESULTS

- RQ1: Is the perceived homophily of Victoria's Secret symbolic communication associated with employee job satisfaction?

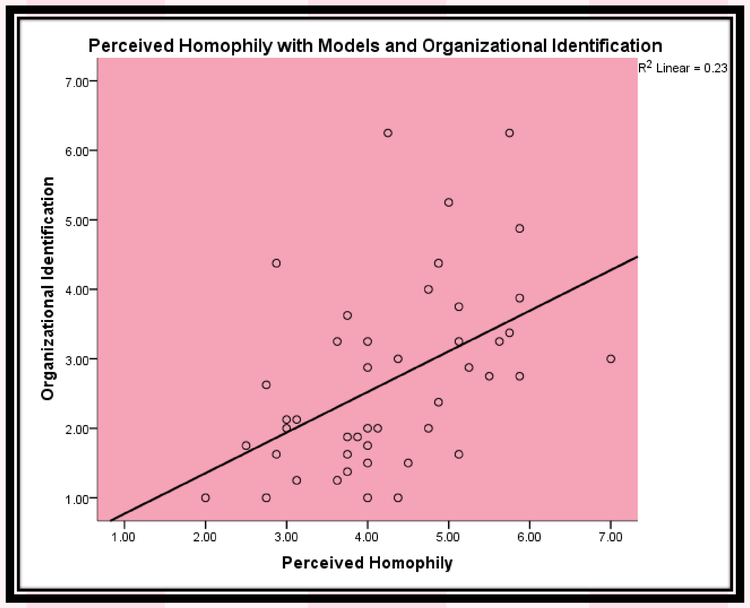
  To answer RQ1, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. There was not a significant correlation between job satisfaction and perceived homophily with Victoria's Secret advertisement symbols(r = .243, p = .107).

- RQ2: Is the perceived homophily of Victoria's Secret symbolic communication associated with employee organizational identification?

  To answer RQ2, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. There was a significant positive correlation between perceived organizational identification and perceived homophily with Victoria's Secret advertisement symbols(r = .48, p = .001)

Other findings:

- We also found a significant positive correlation between perceived organizational identification and perceived job satisfaction (r = .78, p < .001).



DISCUSSION

- The evidence from this study suggests that the perceived homophily of Victoria's Secret Symbolic communication, which includes color choice, canting, products, photographic images, logos, and product naming, correlates with the employees organizational identification.
- The results of this research support the idea that the symbolic communication used by Victoria's Secret has an impact on how employees feel they identify within the organization.
- Contradictory to past research, results suggest that job satisfaction was less related to the brand images that an organization chose to represent their overall identity. Past research shows that employees who found the store's image attractive were more satisfied with their job (Yurchism & Park, 2010).
- There were two primary weaknesses in this study: small sample size and image representativeness. Although images were carefully selected based on past research and analysis, it is not possible to create a sample that includes every type of image a company uses to represent itself. Future research could include a pilot study to test image selection and a future study to include additional participants.

Selected Interview Responses

- "The models represent confidence that each woman can possess."
- "I wanted to work there because it is a company that portrays a great deal of beauty, professionalism and confidence."
- "In fact, these sexy images make me feel more empowered than offended."
- "Knowing that I am helping customers fain self-confidence gives me a feeling of pride and confidence in myself."
- "I believe every woman should feel sexy in her own skin."
- "I always worry people will assume I am a slut."
- "It is frustrating that Victoria's Secret chooses to focus on the size 0 stick-thin models. Our society has associated beauty with being skinny, which I strongly disagree with."

IMPLICATIONS

- Our study showed that representative organizational images of workplace does significantly increase organizational identification, but has no effect on job satisfaction.
- Symbolic Interactionism states that objects have no fixed status except as their meaning is sustained through indications and definitions that people make of the objects (Ligas & Cotte, 1999).

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