

Does Sexual Orientation Sell?

A STUDY OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN ADVERTISING

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INTRODUCTION

This project looks at consumers' thoughts on advertising by incorporating characteristics of diversity within advertisements. The intention is to determine the effect of sexual orientation on consumers. The need to adapt to diverse populations is critical; however, clarity is needed on how to attract and adapt. Once understood, marketers can target this valuable market more easily and successfully.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sexual orientation encompasses emotions, sexual attractions, identities and group membership with others who have similar attractions (APA, 2008). In advertising, people tend to perceive ads through their own life experiences and backgrounds. Their responses to ads presenting homosexuals is dependent on their attitude toward homosexuality. Bhat et.al. (1998) have investigated how the heterosexual majority responds to ads that portray the homosexual minority. Findings indicate "tolerant" heterosexuals are not turned away by stereotypes and homosexual imagery. Therefore, including gay presenters in print advertising may be helpful in reaching multiple markets.

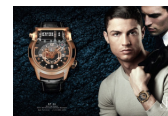
Products and services can be categorized as luxurious or utilitarian. Luxurious products symbolize extravagance, fun, and emotional appeal, while utilitarian products are viewed as functional and useful everyday products (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). In respect to sexual orientation and product type, the gay market's reputation for affluent lifestyles lends itself toward the use of luxurious products (Sender, 2006).

This project investigates the interaction between sexual orientation and type of products advertised. We use heterosexual subjects perceiving images of presenters of different sexual orientations.

References
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Holbrook, M.B., & ve Hirschman, E.C., (1982). The experiential aspects of consumption: Customer fantasies, feelings, and fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, 132-140.
Sender, K. (2006). Gay Readers, Consumers, and a dominant gay habitus: 25 years of the Advocate Magazine. *Journal of Communication*, (51)1. 1982
Bhat, S., Leigh, T., & Wardlow, D. (1998). The effect of consumer prejudices on ad processing: Heterosexual consumers' responses to homosexual Imagery in Ads, *Journal of Advertising*, 27:4, 9-28.

STUDY MATERIALS

Fictitious advertisements were created for a variety of luxurious and utilitarian products. Each product had a heterosexual ad and a homosexual ad, making four conditions. The following pictures are examples of some ads used in the study*.



The above watch and fountain pen advertisements were used as luxurious stimuli in the initial study.



The above dishware and yogurt advertisements were used as utilitarian stimuli in the initial study.

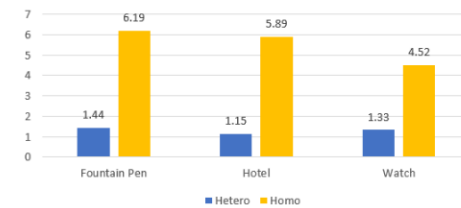
*images were modified from Google.com

PRETEST STUDY

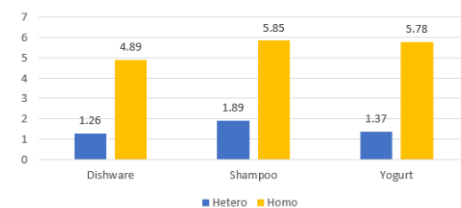
A pretest study was conducted to confirm that the stimuli worked as intended. Twenty-seven undergraduate students were shown the ads and answered the following question: **"This advertisement's content is explicitly (specifically/clearly) homosexual."** on a scale 1 to 7 (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Luxurious Product Means



Utilitarian Product Means



FUTURE RESEARCH

In the actual study, these advertisements will be used to gauge consumers' evaluation of the products. The study will be conducted in a 2(homosexual vs. heterosexual presenter) x 2(utilitarian vs. luxurious product) between subjects design. We expect consumers to have higher evaluations towards luxurious products with homosexual presenters rather than with utilitarian products.

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