The Effectiveness of Sex Appeal in Print Ads in Relation to a Visual Register of the Message: Articulating A New Framework

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Summary: The role of imagery in advertising is in shaping consumers' response. They convey certain connotations which could be used to appeal to our innate instincts, the prominent one being our sexual instinct. The purpose of this research is to analyse the semiotic codes of the types of sexual appeal and to measure the consumer's emotional response to such stimuli. The emotional response was measured to ads with sex appeal where the iconic, iconographic and tropological content were applied. The findings indicate that both genders respond similarly to the iconic level but differently to the iconographic and tropological levels of the visual code.

Key words: Sex appeal, advertising, semiotic, emotional response, nudity, visual rhetoric

INTRODUCTION

Images and various signs are utilised in our everyday life for the purposes of communication. Transmitting information from a source to a destination is made possible by the existence of a code. According to Eco, a code or a system of signification presents us with a set of rules by which to determine how the expression of signs correlates with their content (Eco, 1976). Communicating ideas in the field of visual communication depends on a shared visual vocabulary and a learned system of pictorial conventions (McCracken 1986; 1987). Consequently, communicated imagery in advertising has the role of sharpening consumers' response by conveying certain connotations which could be used to appeal to our instincts. From the sociopsychological point of view, consumer as a subject is a complex system of motor and psycho-physical variables that all account to his/hers behaviour and are largely affected by external stimuli (McDougall, 1926; Rot & Ralević, 1968). The consumer's behavioural apparatus is, in part, a system of interconnected sensors that lead to formation of impressions, decisions, conclusions and an emotional response. The sensors are constantly receiving stimuli from the outside world, which in turn stimulate the subject to react or feel in a certain way by switching on our innate instincts and urges, either consciously or unconsciously. According to McDougall the starting point of the analysis of human behaviour should be the study of human tendencies and goals and discovering the basal and innate human drives that stimulate people to act in this or that way (McDougall, 1926). This paper considers only one of these innate tendencies, the sexual desire, as the basis for analytical approach to advertisements that utilise sex appeal. McDougall considers this instinct very important for social life primarily because of its great strength and emotional excitement yet indicates its excitement doesn't yield the most definite of the primary emotions. Similarly, Maslow (Maslow, 1943) finds that sexual behaviour in relation to motivated behaviour is a complex concept, one where the human sexual drive is given by heredity and the choice of behaviour is a matter that must be acquired (learned) through life's experience. Nonetheless, advertisers find this a fruitful spring of inspiration for motivating consumers.

Previous research on sex in advertising has been based on exploration of numerous psychological and cognitive responses (M. A. Belch, Holgerson, Belch, & Koppman, 1982; Reichert, Heckler, & Jackson, 2001;

Severn, Belch, & Belch, 1990), gender differences concerning social confirmation and purpose, as well as cultural aspects of nudity in advertising (Beetles & Harris, 2005; Goffman, 1979; Kilbourne, 1999; Liu, Cheng, & Li, 2009; Williamson, 1986), the role of personality in the consumer response to sexual appeals (Black, Organ, & Morton, 2010; Maričić & Radulović, 2013) morality of sexual appeals (Gould, 1994; LaTour & Henthorne, 1994), sexual imagery and portrayal of women in magazine ads (Kang, 1997; Reichert, 2003; Thompson, 2000), emotional response to male nudity (Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999; Simpson, Horton, & Brown, 1996) and male responses only to the use of sexual themes (Grazer & Kessling, 2011). Based on the existing types of sexual content in advertising (nudity, sexual behaviour, physical attractiveness, sexual reference and sexual embeds) this research builds on previous paper (see Autor, 2012) to explore the effects of sexual appeal in print ads related to semiotic codes. Therefore, advertising images and consumer response are analysed to support the assumption that the effectiveness of the commercial use of the sexual appeal is dependent on the consumer response to a certain type of visual register.

Following the canons of Bonsiepe and Eco (with sole regard of the visual register, favoured by Eco) it is possible to recognise different types of sexual appeal in advertisements (Eco, 1976). Therefore, by analyzing different types of sex appeal i.e. sexual information according to this kind of semiotic canon, it is possible to determine their effectiveness which suggests that the dominant level of visual register can be considered as a variable by which we are able to measure or compare the effectiveness of an advertisement. This study develops and tests a conceptual framework for measuring consumer's affective response to sexual information in advertising defined by Reichert and Lambiase (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003c). This study aims to address structural aspect of the persuasive message and its pragmatic effects within the context of advertising effectiveness. This study was conducted in order to provide beneficial information for advertiser as to how this type of information is used in relation to certain level of visual register and what are the effects of its application.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer research and semiotics

Our cognitive process of interpreting symbols is based on our general understanding of the culture i.e. context and discourse they are produced by. Eco has postulated a number of theories that try to explain how signs are processed and their message conveyed to the receiver. He argues that for any communication to take place or be made possible, it is essential that a system of signification must be established (Eco, 1973). His favour of the visual canon prompted further theories to try and explain how the visual communication operates on a semiotic level. The importance of semiotics, its applications and implications in advertising, has been widely recognised in scholarly research (Bell & Milic, 2002; Forceville, 1999; Kress & Leeuwen, 1996; Mick, 1986; Scott, 1994) as well as the visual rhetoric (Bonsiepe, 1965; Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011; Maes & Schilperoord, 2007; Scott, 1994). The phenomenon of communication is not apparent without the ability of the human species to obtain knowledgeable system of information (Boulding, 1956) and bring it down to a system of communicational conventions (Eco, 1973; McCracken, 1986, 1987). In order to interpret narrative information the system of knowledge must be transformed into a system of codes (Eco, 1976). The information we aim at the consumer influences consumer's behaviour extensively, therefore it is of great importance to understand how this information is interpreted particularly in terms of pre-existing concepts (Cline, Kardes, & Cronley, 2011; Mick & Politi, 1989). Eco concentrates primarily on the visual sign and code as a means of communication in a system of shared visual vocabulary. According to his theory visual codes are in a constant process of change whereas semiotic research provides us with considerate understanding of how these codes are changed and updated within information message.

Sexual Appeal in advertising

Although sexual appeal in mainstream advertising is a prevalent concept and is used to sell more products, many scholars struggle to describe whether sex sells and in what way (Reichert, 2003). Researchers tend to investigate sexual information in advertising by focusing on nudity even though there is a whole spectrum of appeals in which overt sexual imagery is used. This idea is probably consequential to the work in psychology and sexology where it is considered that information must be labelled as sexual before it can evoke a

sexual response (Fisher, Byrne, & Kelley, 1986). However, if the concepts are defined inadequately, the researchers are faced with a problem of comparing findings across studies (Teas & Palan, 1997). As a result, definitions (i.e. claims) of the effects of sexual appeals may appear uncertain or limiting. According to Reichert and Ramirez (2000) it is very important to look beyond certain researcher-supplied definitions to obtain a more precise understanding of this concept. To address this issue, they employed a grounded theory in order to explore what consumers perceive as sexy in advertising. Their analysis revealed four overarching characteristics of 'sexy' ads. In later review of Reichert's studies, these characteristics helped build categorization of types of sexual information which will be discussed later on in this paper.

One study (Fetto, 2001) shows that most Americans are not stimulated by 'sexy' ads and are not likely to make a purchase of the advertised product. Ad week poll shows that more than 70% of respondents think that advertisements make too much use of sexual information (Dolliver, 1999; Ogilvy, 1984). Also, advertising analyses inform us that advertisements are more sexual than ever before (Lin, 1998). Nevertheless, marketers persistently use this kind of an appeal in advertising for a greater range of products. Their interest lays in consumers' reactions to sexual appeal. For this reason, we can sometimes see advertisements for a brand not traditionally linked to sex to carry sexual information. Messaris (1997) argues that if an ad image is gratuitously used and does not in any way depict what it is the ad is selling, the viewer may not recall anything but the image itself. Furthermore, brands that are traditionally associated with sex appeal (designer clothing and accessories, alcohol) appear to be using more explicit imagery (Reichert et al., 1999). Unlike marketers, scholars' main concern is the interpretation of the meaning and what effect that meaning has on contemporary culture.

In their study, Reichert and Lambiase (2003a) propose possible limiting aspects for the development of sex appeal in scholarly research. Primarily, academic research is unable to keep up with the mainstream advertising regarding sexual imagery considering their somewhat conservative standpoint (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003c). The disciplinary boundaries that envelop knowledge, as well as methodological school of thought, may be considered as the second limiting factor according to these authors. We can see why such stream of thought is preventing progress of scholarly research. Yet, advertisers and marketers recognise

sexual indispensability in our everyday lives and how it influences our thoughts and behaviour.

Types of sexual themes and information in advertising

Sexual content can have various forms and meanings and what can appear sexy to some may not appear so to others. Reichert suggests that we move beyond individual-level interpretations to concepts which would be recognizable to a wider group of people. According to his research, an instance of sex in advertising can be thought of as a sexual appeal and, therefore, could be used as persuasive appeal. Referring to definition by Harris (1994), he concludes that sexual information implying sexual interest, behaviour or motivation, is often integrated within the advertisement as images, verbal elements, or both. Namely, ads can contain pictures of models clothed in revelling or tight-fitting clothing, or incorporate verbal elements such as sexually suggestive words and phrases. Furthermore, in their study Reichert and Lambiase (2003b) define visual codes for three sexual themes: sexual attractiveness, sexual behaviour and sex-esteem and consider these themes for coding narrative scenes that were tested in the ads of the male and female magazines.

Advertisements with sexual content could be broken down into categories according to the level of integration of sexual information (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003a, 2003b; Reichert & Ramirez, 2000). Taking the types of sexual content in advertisements into account can help us better understand the effects of sexual information.

Nudity. Nudity in advertising refers to the amount and style of clothing worn by models. Needless to say the nudity of the human body presents an essential source of sexual information. As other sorts of sexual content also make use of the nudity of the human body, we may conclude that different levels of nudity of a model represent a fundamental type of sex in advertising.

Sexual behaviour. This type of sexual information distinguishes two ways of representing, individual and interpersonal sexual behaviour. Examples include flirting, eye contact, posturing, and movement (body language, nonverbal and verbal communication). Sexual interaction between two or more people typically includes hugging, kissing, voyeurism, and more intimate forms of sexual behaviour.

Physical attractiveness. Physical attractiveness refers to general level of model's physical beauty. It of-

ten incorporates facial beauty, complexion, hair, and physique.

Sexual referents. Allusions and references to objects and events that have sexual meaning by means of double entendre and innuendo are defined as sexual referents. Also includes facilitating factors that enhance or contribute to sexual meaning, such as setting, music, lighting, design elements, camera techniques, and editing.

Sexual embeds. Often referred to as subliminal advertising, this content is designed to be interpreted as sexual at the subconscious level. It includes words like sex, nonsexual perceptible objects that can connote sexual body parts and sexual actions, and small images of genitalia, body parts, and people.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESIS

The goal we wanted to achieve with this conceptual framework was to see whether there is stronger prediction in regards to consumer's behavior when the affective advertising is used. Furthermore, we wanted to test different visual codes and see which code is the most effective. Our assumptions are grounded in the semiotic canon of Eco and this allowed us to hypothesize that different visual codification will have different impact to advertising effectiveness. According to semiotic approach favored by Barthes (1981), Eco (1973) and Scott (1994) the object of investigation is the message itself with no reference to the consumer. In contrast, psychological approach pays more attention to the consumer as the receiver of the message, investigating the behaviour and the motivation of the consumer. Our paper considers both approaches seeing that advertisers, in order to accomplish effective advertising, need to develop a message in accordance with semiotic canons while taking consumer's behavioral patterns into consideration.

Practitioners have used several models in order to investigate the way visual elements in advertisements affect consumer response. However, these models have been investigated in overlapping ways, making it difficult to distinguish theoretical boundaries. Analyzing the experimental studies, Scott (1994) groups these models into two broad orientations: affective response (classical conditioning) and information processing. In the first model, comprehension of the visual code is automatic, affective, or unconscious act (or all of these at once). Images in use here are

"iconic" and they simply point to the objects or experiences. The second model explores visuals as complex semantic content with a possibility to develop a guided approach, one that will engage the viewer into cognitive tasks. Applying this knowledge to semiotic canons, more precisely to Eco's five levels of a message visual register, we can discuss the impact of these visual codes in relation to these two models.

The role of affect in advertising

One of the components that has an impact on persuasion of the consumer is the affective attitude. Studies examining the role of affect in advertising connect this component to conative and cognitive attitude. Some researchers believe that cognition always mediates affective reaction (Fishbein & Middlestadt, 1995; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984) and others suggest that affect in large influence consumer's response (Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Morris, Woo, Geason, & Kim, 2002). They believe that better prediction of behaviour can be achieved if we concentrate more on analysing consumer's emotional response and its influence on conative attitude i.e. purchase intention.

Considering that emotions are a component of affect (Batra & Ray, 1986; Edell & Burke, 1987; Stayman & Aaker, 1988) it is very popular among researchers to use this component when testing subjects to an ad content. An emotion can be used as the mediator of responses to advertising, however, we cannot exclude the findings where cognition can drive affect (Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987). Additionally, some researchers argue that affect can directly influence attitude (S. Brown & Stayman, 1992; Cohen & Areni, 1991). Morris et al. (2002) analyze the relationship among measures of cognitive, affective and conative attitude in response to various advertisements. They found that affective-conative (feeling-planned action) attitude the relationship is much stronger than cognitive-affective (thought-planned action) attitude. They disagree with many studies which insist on cognition predominating over affective processing. In their opinion, cognition and affect are interdependent and emphasise the role of emotional response for affective elaboration.

First research studies in advertising effectiveness used ad liking scale which has proven very useful in predicting consumer's intentions toward advertised goods (S. Brown & Stayman, 1992). However, later studies show that better results about affective response can be achieved if the measurement is expanded

ed to emotional response (Allen, Machleit, & Kleine, 1992). Exploring the findings of Morris et al. (2002) we excluded cognitive attitude and tested subject's affective attitude i.e. emotional response. These findings encouraged us to test variables that might affect more positive emotional response. In the case of unfamiliar brands, similarly to Machleit and Wilson study (K. a. Machleit & Wilson, 1988), cognitive variables were not tested toward the visual coding used in advertisements.

Semiotic theories of codes

Semiotic theories of codes are the groundwork of numerous advertising studies (Chandler, 1994; Messaris, 1997; Scott, 1994). Since codes present systems for knowledge management and the basis of all cultural communications, semiotic theories of codes are regarded as an additional key for deciphering the hidden messages of ads. Umberto Eco in his work *La Struttura Assente (The Absent Structure)* (Eco, 1973) discusses double-layered registers within advertising codes in the same way as Barthes does (Barthes, 1981), and he differentiates verbal and visual register of the message. However, contrary to Barthes, he detects five levels of visual codification which will be discussed further in the paper.

Basically, every message, including the ones within the market communications systems, functions by means of its two codes or registers: verbal and visual (Eco, 1973). The aim of each and every message from the market communications system is to motivate as many potential customers to buy a product or a service with minimum financial investments. The messages in the market communications systems, just like other types of messages, abide by the overall information system and the rules of the information theory and those of the semiotic codes (Nedeljković, 2001). Nedeljkovic further explains that in order to correctly evaluate the quality and the impact of the conveyed message, we must first analyze the impact of its visual and verbal code, and then the quality of the result (of the message in whole) on the „attacked“ basal instincts, tendencies and the sentiments of the customer.

Sexual information in relation to the visual register of the print ads

The spiritual and material life of the consumer is not possible to comprehend solely by the semiotic analysis. However, we can learn more about the consumer

and his/her needs once he/she communicates them, when his/her thoughts, feelings and desires become common, that is, when we process his/her thoughts, wishes and feelings according to the conventions of communication. To achieve this, we need to convert the system of information into the system of signs, the content of the advertisements into codes, i.e. the visual and verbal registers that we can observe as isolated variables. Thus, we have semiotically classified such types of sexual information in print advertisements according to the type of the code used, that is to say, according to the level of the visual register.

The Iconic level. Eco points out that the encoding of iconic signs does not entice the rhetoric analysis of the ad. At the iconic level, he emphasises the type of icons with a 'strong emotional value' which he names 'the gastronomic icons' (*icone gastronomica*). Eco refers to the images in which 'a specific trait of the object directly stimulates our desire', giving the examples of tasty food or refreshing drinks as well as images of the 'lush female skin' (Eco, 1973). Therefore, the visual encoding at the iconic level is most prominent within the image that represents the physical value of the subject, but also within an image whose special or indirect qualities can be determined. This represents the method in which the discovering of the characteristic traits of a certain object or theme points to their 'alternative' sides (Nedeljković, 2001). At the iconic level of ads with sexual and erotic appeal, the signs are encoded at a high degree of iconicity. Types of sexual information such as nudity and subliminal messaging are often encoded at this level. Nudity is ideal for this type of semiotic content, since a fully nude body is rarely implied in visual communication. A certain part of the body is used more often, depending on the type of product advertised. In the health and beauty category, advertisers often encode the sexual appeal through nudity using the macro iconic image of the abdominal skin, the neck, the back, the legs or the cleavage, depending on the type of product or service. Subliminal erotic information at the iconic level is most often encoded by macro photography of facial expressions with slightly open mouth which denotes products such as lipstick, lip gloss or sensational tastes of food or beverages while connoting passion and desire (Cline et al., 2011). Figure 1 depicts a close-up shot of a model wearing the brand's sunglasses while biting down a man's middle finger which position latently suggests a phallus.

The iconographic level. The iconographic level is represented by a dualistic type of encoding, the his-

FIGURE 1. Tom Ford Eyewear advertisement, Spring/Summer 2008 eyewear © www.tomford.com, photographed by Terry Richardson

toric and the advertising one. The affiliation to something or someone is being encoded with the use of classic iconographic representations. A subject is tied to the conventional signs that lead to a conclusion about a certain notion, object or person. In ads with sexual and erotic appeal, sexual information is being encoded with the use of an advertising type at the iconographic level. Models within the ads that exhibit sexual behaviour or physical attraction intentionally raise the desire for possession of the advertised object within the consumer. The intention is to stimulate identification with the observed antonomasia figure within the consumer, by psychological focusing on the consumer profile. If the consumer, or rather the viewer, identifies with the model, they will want to emulate the model in an attempt to be as sexually attractive as the model. Therefore, if the viewer becomes the consumer and acquires the advertised object or service, they will possess the attributes of the model (physical attractiveness and sex appeal) i.e. they will be convinced that they possess them.

The tropological level. The tropological level includes the usage of visual tropes as stylistic figures. Umberto Eco states that Giusi Bonsiepe categorised a great number of tropes as equivalents to the visual code (Bonsiepe, 1965; Eco, 1973). In the same way, the visualizations of hyperbolae, litotes, metaphors, metonymies, double metonymies with identification function, and visual antonomasia, have been integrated in visual communication messages. Types of information such as sexual connotation and subliminal sexual messages are encoded at the tropological level most often by the use of visual metaphor, personification, litotes, and

hyperbolae. Also, it is not rare to depict anthropomorphic figures in a sexual position, or to present an association to genitals. Unlike the subliminal messages, which often use the historic genre, iconographic presentations bathed in droplets of water, sea foam or the sunset, the sexual connotations at the tropological level are encoded by the use of indirect metonymy or metaphor with an explicit sexual theme.

In the context of visual communication, Eco differentiates three distinct types of encoding that can be independent from the verbal register: the iconic, the iconographic and the tropological. He emphasises that determining the message is the primary function of the verbal register, due to the fact that visual communication often seems ambiguous and in turn can be interpreted in different ways. The other two levels of the visual register, the topic level and the enthymematic, are encoded within the interaction of the visual and the verbal registers.

In order to explain the encoding at the topical and the enthymematic level, we shall briefly analyze the message of the ad shown in the Figure 2. The sexual appeal is represented using the following types of information: sexual behaviour, nudity and physical attraction, encoded at the iconographic level. We notice the denotations at the iconic level (woman, drapery, jewellery). However, the most powerful connotations are found at the iconographic level. The connotations: they succeed each other based on their complexity; the woman is beautiful, she has a prominently pale complexion which suggests Northern aristocratic roots (physical attraction); wealthy and sophisticated

FIGURE 2. Yves Saint Laurent Opium advertisement, photographed by Steven Meisel, art direction Tom Ford

(wears expensive jewellery, golden sandals, laying on a satin drapery). She lays naked (free), while her facial expression indicates her intoxication and excitement (sexual behaviour). It is implied that the iconographic presentations contain an antonomastic value ('every young and beautiful woman'). She becomes an example one should mimic because she presents the type of people considered desirable: beauty, sophistication, sexuality, freedom. The iconographic presentation is not preceded by the universal quantifier 'everyone', instead, it entices a more complex form of 'everyone who is like You' at the moment of the identifying (if it occurs), while the antonomasia backs up this realization further by stating 'this woman is exactly like You, or rather, like You could or would like to be'.

At the topic level and the enthymematic level, the same basic connotation branch out to create further fields of conclusions: 'beautiful, sexy, sophisticated, others should emulate'. However, the topic level and the enthymematic areas are explained only after the interaction between the visual and the verbal register.

The verbal register, purely referential, is present only in the form of the perfume title *Opium* and the name of the brand. It is, however, linked with the position and the connotations of the iconographic presentation of the woman, therefore, it determines the message pointing out to new subjects. The iconographic presentation of the nude woman initially connotes a single topic. The examination of the argument of the verbal register exposes new premises: 'the scent of Opium intoxicates and excites', 'the woman is excited because she feels sexy and uses Opium perfume'; finally the argumentative groups are connoted: 'If all young, beautiful and free women like You that use Opium look and feel sexy, why shouldn't You try it out as well'. Based on one such topic field, it is easy to reach the type of enthymeme that is: 'Opium, the perfume that is used by people of high status, its scent intoxicates and excites. Those who make use of it know why they do so'.

The enthymematic level has thereby enveloped the articulation of the proper visual and verbal argumentations. This content regulates the real relationships between the verbal and the visual register and the quality of their interaction. It ensures that certain iconograms that turn topic fields into enthymematic slide through the message effortlessly.

After deciphering five ads, Eco concludes that certain advertising communication is more functional than other but leaves questions open for debate: What is the role of persuasiveness of argumentation as well as the relevance of the extra-communicative factors

excluded from the analyses concerning someone who is solely interested in the effectiveness of the message. And is our desire for an object produced by the persuasion of communication, or have we simply given into the persuasive "push" for something we already wanted. Lead by the hypothesis in his research that the advertising communication is linked to referring to something already accepted and therefore use the encoded solutions Eco critically asks the question and points to the answer – yes, the latter. We can conclude that in his semiotic research of advertisements Eco was considering the appropriateness of this approach as well.

Effectiveness of sex appeal in print advertising

The importance of measuring advertising effectiveness lies in the fact that advertisers need to know whether their investments in advertising will return to them or not. Consumers today are overloaded with visual information and persuasive messages which makes it challenging for companies to compete for attention. Constant changes and advances in theory and methodology influence the way advertising effectiveness is considered. According to different paradigms, approaches vary in context. Our concern in this paper is oriented toward semiotic and affective response approach. In order to measure advertising effectiveness according to type of sexual information, we considered a conceptual framework by combining aspects from two different paradigms: semiotic approach (Eco, 1973; Scott, 1994), and conceptual models of affective response, i.e. emotional response as mediator of advertising effectiveness (Edell & Burke, 1987; Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Morris et al., 2002). Semiotic approach has the message itself as the object of investigation and if the advertising message is developed in accordance with semiotic canons then the advertisement is considered effective. Whereas in the affective response approach 'researchers have consistently used visuals to stand for stimuli that are processed automatically, without cognition or awareness, and that function to affect the emotions directly' (Scott, 1994). As stated before in the paper, this formulation is considered limiting. In this viewpoint visual perception is an automatic activity rather than guided approach. Therefore, our proposition is considering conceptual framework in the process of analysing how a message is encoded toward defining variables and measuring consumer's affective response according to codification level. If the advertisers use already accepted

visual encodings (Eco, 1973) and base their message on the notion of the pre-existing concepts and visual conventions than we can assume that consumers are familiar with a specific codification level where the affective response to the three main levels of visual register (iconic, iconographic, tropological) could vary and lead to advertising effectiveness for a specific product category (in this case products for women's health and beauty care).

The aim of the study

The aim of this research was to measure the emotional reaction of the observer exposed to ads containing sexual appeal depicted in a form of the iconic, iconographic and tropological content. The primary purpose of the experiment is to research the effectiveness of the ad according to the type of sexual information by the use of a specific advertising code. The experiment, which will be analyzed in the following text, was conducted in order to establish a more thorough and adequate education for the designers of graphic communications about the proper use of the various types of sexual information by application of codes for the specified levels of the visual register.

The most commonly used visual code in beauty and health product advertising is the iconic and the iconographic. Advertisers of these types of products tend to provoke the basic human instincts, among which is the sexual instinct as the most prominent one. The consumers strive towards a beautiful, healthy and nourished body, as it represents a tool, an asset and ultimately a mean by which a future partner is to be attracted. Therefore, placing an image of a nude body in the ad, with the accent on the nourished, fresh, glistening and smooth skin, we evoke the basal human instincts.

Ads with a tropologic content might have a more attractive, visually challenging and less conventional content. However, they tend to lose the focus of the basic appeal usage and therefore fail to provoke the basal and innate human urges (Nedeljkovic et al. 2011). Umberto Eco defines the 'gastronomic icon' as a type of the icons that possess a 'powerful emotional value' by which he implies that those are the images in which one feature of an object directly stimulates our desire with its intensity. As an example, he uses a description of the images of tasty food and refreshing beverage and also describes the images of the lushness of the female skin.

Sexual appeal ads are directed toward the stimulation of the innate and primal sexual urge, as well as the food and beverage ads that stimulate the basal urge of

hunger and thirst (Nedeljkovic et al. 2011). Previous research led us to assume that the health and beauty ads have greater effectiveness if they employ a visual register—iconic visual content. Ads need to be directed at a predefined goal; therefore appeals that are in use need to be directed at the stimulation of the emotions, urges, and motives of the receiver of the message.

Hypothesis 1

The affective response of the participants of both genders will be dependent on the dominant level of visual register of the ad (iconic, iconographic or tropological).

Hypothesis 2

Ads with a dominant iconic content will result in a more positive valence and higher arousal in comparison to the ads with a more dominant iconographic and tropological level, in both male and female participants.

Hypothesis 3

Ads with a dominant iconic content will result in a more positive valence, higher arousal and positive attitude in all ratings, in comparison to the ads with a more dominant iconographic and tropological content, in female participants.

METHOD

Design

For the purposes of this experiment, we used female health and beauty advertisements for products/services: beauty cream, hair shampoo and conditioner, contraceptive products, perfume and spa. Identification of sexual ads involved one graduate student coder (female) who identified all sexual ads in online (advertising related websites) and off-line (magazines) portals. Prior to identification, the student coder read the literature related to sex in advertising. After the student tagged all the ads she perceived as sexual, the authors analysed semiotic codes of the advertisements and categorised them in three groups: ads with a dominant iconic, iconographic or tropological content. Ten ads were assigned to each group. For each of the product category the same number of ads was used. The total amount of the ads was 30 (out of the 148 selected). The booklet consisted of 30 ad examples, the computer-scorable attitude towards the ad (A_{ad}) and the purchase intention (PI). The observation time for each ad was limited to 7 seconds.

We programmed the booklet into a PDF file that randomised the display order of the ads, and the SAM, A_{ad} and PI scales after each ad. The SAM scales consisted of three scales: pleasure, arousal, domination. Each scale contained nine fields and the participants choose the one (manikin) that best identified their own emotional response to the observed ad.

The two scales regarding the attitude towards the ad and the purchase intention (*I like this ad*, and *I would by this product*) had a 10 field scale where the participants chose the field best describing their attitude towards the ad and the purchase intention.

Dependent Variables

The experiment conducted within this research encompasses the visual measurement of person's affective reaction to advertisement with a non-verbal pictorial assessment technique Self-Assessment Manikin (SAM), devised by Lang (1980), that directly measures the pleasure, arousal, and dominance (PAD)¹. SAM has been used effectively to measure emotional responses in a variety of situations, including reactions to pictures, images, sounds, advertisements etc (Bradley & Lang, 1994; Morris et al., 2002).

In order to obtain accurate affective responses as much as possible and the overall prediction of advertising effectiveness, alongside the self-reported emotional response scale we added the Attitude toward the AD scale (A_{ad}) as well as conative attitude scale of purchase intention (PI).

¹ The most widely accepted model of emotional response formulated by Mehrabian and Russell (1977)

Participants

The sample consisted of 67 participants of both gender (25 males and 42 females). The range of ages was between 19 and 50 (mean age 29,7). In this advertising effectiveness study our focus was on the affective response of female participants due to the chosen product category.

The participants were aware of the significance of the PDA scales while being unaware of the goal of this research. They were explained that the results would be used for strictly scientific purposes and are completely anonymous. Tests that didn't have all of the answers were eliminated from the data analysis, as well as the ones that were answered randomly, the conclusion made by witnessing a series of identical answers in succession.

Data Analysis

For the purposes of data analysis, we used a multivariate analysis of the covariance (MANCOVA) with a repeated measurement. The dependent variables were: pleasure, arousal and domination, the attitude towards the ad and the purchase intention, while the repeated measurements treated three groups of ads: the iconic, iconographic and tropological content.

The tests effect within subjects (when both genders are observed): the interaction effect of the type of the ad and the gender has a statistically significant effect (Wilks' Lambda ,889, $F=2,555$ $p=0.020$) for the experience of the ad in the domain of pleasure, arousal and domination (Table 1).

The tests of the effect between subjects while we observe the pleasure, arousal and domination separately

TABLE 1. Within subject variance

Within subject variance		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	p	Partial Eta Squared
Ad type	Pillai's Trace	,043	,930	6,000	254,000	,474	,021
	Wilks' Lambda	,957	,927^c	6,000	252,000	,476	,022
	Hotelling's Trace	,044	,924	6,000	250,000	,478	,022
	Roy's Largest Root	,037	1,555 ^d	3,000	127,000	,204	,035
Ad type / Age	Pillai's Trace	,030	,641	6,000	254,000	,697	,015
	Wilks' Lambda	,970	,639^c	6,000	252,000	,699	,015
	Hotelling's Trace	,031	,636	6,000	250,000	,701	,015
	Roy's Largest Root	,027	1,125 ^d	3,000	127,000	,341	,026
Ad type / Gender	Pillai's Trace	,114	2,549	6,000	254,000	,021	,057
	Wilks' Lambda	,889	2,555^c	6,000	252,000	,020	,057
	Hotelling's Trace	,123	2,561	6,000	250,000	,020	,058
	Roy's Largest Root	,098	4,153 ^d	3,000	127,000	,008	,089

TABLE 2. Between subject variance (a significant effect of age and gender on the pleasure response when concerning the average value for all three types of advertising)

Source	Measure	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	Pleasure	65751,871	1	65751,871	168,028	,000	,724
	Arousal	42110,200	1	42110,200	67,399	,000	,513
	Domination	38615,520	1	38615,520	76,863	,000	,546
Age	Pleasure	3034,046	1	3034,046	7,753	,007	,108
	Arousal	1300,228	1	1300,228	2,081	,154	,031
	Domination	1916,291	1	1916,291	3,814	,055	,056
Gender	Pleasure	2173,753	1	2173,753	5,555	,021	,080
	Arousal	1590,168	1	1590,168	2,545	,116	,038
	Domination	1111,608	1	1111,608	2,213	,142	,033
Error	Pleasure	25044,199	64	391,316			
	Arousal	39986,444	64	624,788			
	Domination	32153,229	64	502,394			

(Table 2) show that the age and gender variables have a significant influence on the pleasure aspect (gender / $F=5,555$, $p=0.021$, Partial Eta Squared= $0,080$ and age / $F=7,753$, $p=0.007$, Partial Eta Squared= $0,108$), if we observe an average for each of the three types of ads. The younger participants display a greater pleasure value.

Emotional Response. When we observe the pleasure, arousal and domination in relation to the type of the ad, the results show the following:

There is a significant difference in the levels of pleasure, arousal and domination between type *one* ads (the iconic ads i.e. gastronomic icons) and type *three* ads - the tropological ads ($p=0.000$ pleasure) ($p=0.000$ arousal) ($p=0.008$ domination) as shown in the Table 3.

TABLE 3. Pleasure, arousal and domination

Measure	(I) Ad type	(J) Ad type	Average mean (I-J)	Std. Error	p ^b	95% Confidence interval for Difference ^b	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pleasure	1	2	2,815	1,221	,071	-,178	5,808
		3	7,137*	1,246	,000	4,081	10,192
	2	1	-2,815	1,221	,071	-5,808	,178
		3	4,322*	1,196	,002	1,390	7,253
	3	1	-7,137*	1,246	,000	-10,192	-4,081
		2	-4,322*	1,196	,002	-7,253	-1,390
Arousal	1	2	1,262	1,161	,628	-1,583	4,108
		3	7,567*	1,227	,000	4,559	10,576
	2	1	-1,262	1,161	,628	-4,108	1,583
		3	6,305*	1,173	,000	3,429	9,181
	3	1	-7,567*	1,227	,000	-10,576	-4,559
		2	-6,305*	1,173	,000	-9,181	-3,429
Domination	1	2	,978	1,256	,824	-2,103	4,058
		3	3,943*	1,263	,008	,847	7,039
	2	1	-,978	1,256	,824	-4,058	2,103
		3	2,966	1,305	,077	-,235	6,166
	3	1	-3,943*	1,263	,008	-7,039	-,847
		2	-2,966	1,305	,077	-6,166	,235

TABLE 4. Ad type effect significance

Effect			Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Between Subjects	Intercept	Pillai's Trace	,937	193,005 ^a	3,000	39,000	,000	,937
		Wilks' Lambda	,063	193,005^a	3,000	39,000	,000	,937
		Hotelling's Trace	14,847	193,005 ^a	3,000	39,000	,000	,937
		Roy's Largest Root	14,847	193,005 ^a	3,000	39,000	,000	,937
Within Subjects	Ad type	Pillai's Trace	,469	5,289 ^a	6,000	36,000	,001	,469
		Wilks' Lambda	,531	5,289^a	6,000	36,000	,001	,469
		Hotelling's Trace	,882	5,289 ^a	6,000	36,000	,001	,469
		Roy's Largest Root	,882	5,289 ^a	6,000	36,000	,001	,469

There is no difference in the PDA levels between the type *one* ads (the iconic ads) and type *two* ads (the iconographic). The participants react to both types of ads. However, an increased efficiency of the iconic ads is evident.

Besides the difference in the arousal levels between types one and three of the ads, there is a significant difference between types two and three. The participants displayed an increased level of excitement when exposed to iconic and iconographic ads, as opposed to the tropological ones.

Attitudinal Ratings. Observation has shown that the type of the ad in relation to A_{ad} has no statistical significance when it comes to attitude formation. Also, neither does the age of the participant have any influence on ad attitude formation.

A statistically significant difference was discovered in purchase intention between type *one* ads and type *three* ads ($p=0.013$) where the tropological types negatively correlates to the iconic one.

Multivariate analyses (females only). The statistical analysis shows that the ad type effect is a significant factor for female participants ($p=.001$) (Table 4). The

TABLE 5. Pleasure, arousal and domination (Females only)

Measure	(I) Ad type	(J) Ad type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pleasure	1	2	4,952*	1,424	,004	1,409	8,496
		3	8,667*	1,626	,000	4,618	12,715
	2	1	-4,952*	1,424	,004	-8,496	-1,409
		3	3,714*	1,227	,013	,659	6,770
	3	1	-8,667*	1,626	,000	-12,715	-4,618
		2	-3,714*	1,227	,013	-6,770	-,659
Arousal	1	2	2,929	1,300	,086	-,307	6,164
		3	6,452*	1,605	,001	2,456	10,449
	2	1	-2,929	1,300	,086	-6,164	,307
		3	3,524*	1,305	,030	,277	6,771
	3	1	-6,452*	1,605	,001	-10,449	-2,456
		2	-3,524*	1,305	,030	-6,771	-,277
Domination	1	2	2,357	1,403	,273	-1,136	5,851
		3	5,000*	1,615	,011	,979	9,021
	2	1	-2,357	1,403	,273	-5,851	1,136
		3	2,643	1,102	,062	-,099	5,385
	3	1	-5,000*	1,615	,011	-9,021	-,979
		2	-2,643	1,102	,062	-5,385	,099

TABLE 6. Attitudinal Ratings(the effect of the ad type is significant for every variable separately)

Source	Measure	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Ad type	Ad Attitude	Sphericity Assumed	970,778	2	485,389	7,258	,001
		Greenhouse-Geisser	970,778	1,834	529,214	7,258	,002
		Huynh-Feldt	970,778	1,916	506,652	7,258	,001
		Lower-bound	970,778	1,000	970,778	7,258	,010
	Purchase intention	Sphericity Assumed	1235,349	2	617,675	12,057	,000
		Greenhouse-Geisser	1235,349	1,916	644,842	12,057	,000
		Huynh-Feldt	1235,349	2,000	617,675	12,057	,000
		Lower-bound	1235,349	1,000	1235,349	12,057	,001
Error (Ad type)	Ad Attitude	Sphericity Assumed	5483,889	82	66,877		
		Greenhouse-Geisser	5483,889	75,209	72,915		
		Huynh-Feldt	5483,889	78,559	69,806		
		Lower-bound	5483,889	41,000	133,753		
	Purchase intention	Sphericity Assumed	4200,651	82	51,227		
		Greenhouse-Geisser	4200,651	78,545	53,481		
		Huynh-Feldt	4200,651	82,000	51,227		
		Lower-bound	4200,651	41,000	102,455		

ad type has a significant effect on all three dimension scales – pleasure ($p=.000$), arousal ($p=.000$) and domination ($p=.002$).

Emotional Response. Pleasure value varies for each ad type, the most prominent one being the iconic, followed by the iconographic and it at its lowest degree for the tropological type (Table 5).

Pleasure differs significantly in the following instances: in type *one* ads, compared to type *two* ads ($p=.004$); in type *one* ads, compared to type *three* ads ($p=.000$) and in type *two* ads, compared to type *three* ads ($p=.013$).

Arousal differs significantly in the following instances: in type *one* ads, compared to type *three* ads ($p=.001$); in type *two* ads, compared to type *three* ads ($p=.030$).

Domination differs significantly only in the following instances: in type *one* ads, compared to type *three* ads ($p=.011$).

Attitudinal Ratings. The effect of the ad type displays a significant statistical difference in both ad attitude ($p=.001$) and purchase intention ($p=.000$) (Table 6).

Attitude toward the Ad. The iconic type differs significantly in comparison to the other two types in

TABLE 7. Attitude toward the Ad

Measure	(I) Ad type	(J) Ad type	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Attitude toward the Ad	1	2	5,595*	1,702	,006	1,360	9,831
		3	6,143*	2,030	,013	1,091	11,195
	2	1	-5,595*	1,702	,006	-9,831	-1,360
		3	,548	1,593	,981	-3,419	4,514
	3	1	-6,143*	2,030	,013	-11,195	-1,091
		2	-,548	1,593	,981	-4,514	3,419
Purchase intention	1	2	4,024*	1,534	,036	,206	7,842
		3	7,667*	1,709	,000	3,413	11,920
	2	1	-4,024*	1,534	,036	-7,842	-,206
		3	3,643*	1,430	,044	-,082	7,204
	3	1	-7,667*	1,709	,000	-11,920	-3,413
		2	-3,643*	1,430	,044	-7,204	-,082

regards to the values observed. The other two types show no significant difference. Type *one* ads also differs significantly than type *two* ads ($p=.006$), type one ads and type three ads show significant difference as well ($p=.013$) (Table 7).

Purchase intention. All three ad types differ among themselves. The difference is most significant when comparing the iconic type to tropological ad type ($p=.000$), then the iconographic ($p=.036$) and the least significant when comparing the iconographic ad type to the tropological ad type ($p=.044$).

DISCUSSION

Based on the results acquired, we reached the conclusion that the all three hypotheses have been confirmed. In the intent to stimulate certain innate human instincts, the most positive effects were reached with ads with the dominant iconic content i.e. gastronomic icon. The advertisers who rely on images of the gastronomic icons at the foreground, with the intent to provoke an innate instinct and a quick response in the consumers, have chosen the correct and most effective way to do so. Moreover, a contribution of this research is that the conceptual framework may be used to identify levels of visual register as a variable by which it is undoubtedly possible to measure consumers affective response over a type of sexual appeal in print advertisements.

Both genders display the greatest attraction towards ads with a pronounced iconic content. The product group we have selected for the analysis of the printed ads is the health and beauty products. In this product category sexual information, such as nudity as it was defined by Reichart, could be used in many ways and it could be more or less persuasive and emotional. As Umberto Eco discusses, the notion of the gastronomic icon is a concept that at its core implies an icon which pronounces the unique or subtle qualities of the selected theme by use of an image. With the health and beauty product ads the icon is a representation of healthy, lush and nourished hair or skin. Macro photography achieves certain closeness with the emphasised features. We are provoked, and a desire for possession is aroused within us, awakened by the pronounced and emphasised features at a palms reach. Ads with an iconic code focus on the skin, body and hair. These ads actively use the sex appeal; they are widely accepted and valued, since the nudity as a type of sexual information is completely justified in

this form. The focus is on a particular body part, so the completely nude model is rarely visible.

Analyzing the results of the female participants we concluded that ads with the dominant iconographic content had lower affect ratings than the ones with the dominant iconic content. These ads use nudity and sexual behaviour to convey sexual connotation. With the use of iconographic content, it is possible to encode certain behaviour, in this case, sexual behaviour in a form of a particular pose or gesture. The models in these ads are usually shown nude or semi-nude in lover's embrace. The findings of Bradley and Lang (Bradley & Lang, 1994) show similar results. They found that women tend to rate same-sex erotic imagery with the negative affect (low pleasure and low arousal) and identified their feelings toward this imagery as bored and confused. According to type of visual codification the erotic imagery used as stimuli in their study is consistent with the stimuli categorised as the dominant iconographic content. Therefore, our findings have made a contribution to this domain of visual rhetoric. Comparing the results these two studies we find that the women had significant positive affective response to the ads with the dominant iconic content presumably because the nudity presented in the ads wasn't erotic in its nature but more intimate. One more reason the reasons why the iconographic content is less effective may be that the models are presented in the full figure which results in lack of identification with the model. These advertisements were analyzed in order to observe the role of anthonomasia on the iconographic level. Every model in the ad when seen as an *anthonomastic value* becomes the representative of its kind or its gender. The results show that men and women participants rate the ads differently as it was expected regarding the findings from numerous studies which confirm that there is negative affective response towards the same-sex imagery (M. A. Belch et al., 1982; Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 2008; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Sciglimpaglia, Belch, & Cain, 1979; Simpson et al., 1996). Most of the models in the ads were females (only few contained heterosexual couples) which resulted in lower ratings from the women compared to the men ratings (men rated both ads with the dominant iconographic and iconic content equally). The women participants have identified themselves with the models. The models and the connotations of the models were different. Some of them were nude and some semi-nude. The others were more aroused and some less aroused. There was no universality. Therefore, when identifying with the

models, which is hard not to do, the female participants responded differently according to their personality traits (see Maričić & Radulović, 2013).

The advertisements with the dominant tropological content have been rated as the least effective. The participants of both genders have produced lower ratings. The tropological level is the visual equivalent of the verbal tropes. We performed the experiment using the following tropes: metaphor, personification and hyperbola; and the following types of information: nudity, sexual behaviour, physical attractiveness, sexual referents and sexual embeds. We can conclude that the ads with dominant tropological content don't have the apparent identification model as the other two levels. In the case of the tropological level, is not confronted directly with the advertised product and its performance. The assumption that arises is that these results are such due to the observed product category and type of the appeal. The beauty and health products emphasised the effects and results of the product that can make us beautiful, nurtured and healthy. The tropes don't show the same visual strength as the icons themselves. The icons make close connection to the viewer. The customer is presented with the beauty which is right there within his reach and that automatically provokes our innate instincts.

Additionally, the analysis of Lambiase and Reichert (Lambiase & Reichert, 2003) suggest that we can classify sexual information into themes. However, a theme can hardly be considered as variable of visual content for testing ad's rhetorical effectiveness considering its narrative is determined by the topic level. Types of sexual information, on the other hand can become variables. Our findings indicate that types of sexual information can be categorised according to the visual code i.e. iconic, iconographic and tropological.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the experiment was to measure the affective response of the viewer to ads with sex appeal where the iconic, iconographic and tropological content were applied. The conducted experiment used ads for health and beauty products. The ads were classified into three groups depending on the content used (iconic, iconographic and tropological). The results confirmed the hypotheses. It was evident that the highest ratings in the attempt to provoke innate human instincts, in this case sexual desire, were given to the ads with the dominant iconic content.

Concerning the ads of health and beauty, the iconic representation was in a form of macro photography of

a healthy, beautiful and well cared for skin and hair. Presenting macro photographic shots of skin establishes a certain intimate connection with the highlighted features. This kind of advertisements has positive ratings even though they use sex appeal because the use of sexual information in this scenario is justified. The focus of the attention is on a certain part of the body while the full nude figure is not shown, therefore the communication 'noise'² is evaded.

When iconographic content is applied, sexual behaviour is encoded by a certain pose or gesture. One of the reasons why the iconographic code was proven less effective may be the apparent presentation of the model which would result in the appearance of the model's full figure. The results show that there are differences in ratings of male and female participants. The models in the ads were mostly females which as a result had negative effect on female participants which are opposite to the ratings of the male participants who rated the ads with iconic and iconographic content similarly. Furthermore, female participants probably identified themselves better with models whose identity hasn't been shown by presence of her face or details like hair type colour or race.

Ads with the dominant tropological content provoke the weakest affective response. This level of visual codification does not provide clear association with the content presented as opposed to the other two levels, iconic and iconographic. The viewer is not provoked enough to react with more positive effect, since there is no intimate connection to the product advertised.

We conclude that provoking innate instincts is an essential aspect of sex appeal advertisements in the category of health and beauty products regarding the effectiveness of the ad. Advertisers should aim at inducing immediate subconscious reaction in the viewer and preventing initiation of cognitive processing. Our findings indicate that the most effective visual codification level of sex appeal for provoking the innate instincts is found in advertisements with the dominant iconic content (within female and male ratings). The results were expected considering that the use of macro photography of skin and hair provides more intimate connection to the highlighted features – characteristics which can be obtained when using the advertised product. The viewer is tempted and builds a strong wish for possessing the product once it is displayed so bluntly.

² The noise can appear when the viewers don't identify themselves with the models shown in ads.

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Apstrakt:

Efektivnost seksepila u štampanim oglasima u odnosu na vizuelni registar poruke: artikulisanje novog okvira

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Uloga slika u oglašavanju je u oblikovanju odgovora potrošača. One prenose određene konotacije koje se mogu upotrebiti da bi se apelovalo na naše urođene instinkte, među kojima najčešće na naš seksualni instinkt. Cilj ovog istraživanja je da se analiziraju semiotički kodovi prema vrsti vizuelne manifestacije seksepila i da se izmere emotivne reakcije potrošača na takve stimuluse. Emocionalni odgovor je meren prema oglasima sa apelom na seksualni

nagon kategorisanih prema nivou vizuelnog registra na kojem su dominantno kodirani (ikonički, ikonografski i tropološki). Nalazi ove studije ukazuju na to da oba pola reaguju slično na ikonički nivo, ali različito na ikonografski i tropološki nivo vizuelnog koda.

Ključne reči: seks žalba, reklamiranje, semiotički, emocionalni odgovor, golotinja, vizuelna retorika

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