

Executive Summary

Too Sexy for this Price? The Effectiveness of Erotic Advertising Depending on the Brand's Price Level

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The use of erotic advertising is one of the most frequently used strategies to promote brands. In practice, this strategy is used for brands from product categories with a high or low natural fit to eroticism and for low-price and high-price brands. Academic researchers have developed the presumption that erotic advertising is effective only in improving evaluations of brands from product categories with a high fit to eroticism but not in enhancing evaluations of brands from product categories with a low fit to eroticism. However, the previous empirical academic research has also shown that brands from product categories with a low fit to eroticism are effectively promoted with erotic advertising.

Thus, practitioners might benefit from insights into whether another aspect than the fit of the product category to eroticism should be considered when deciding on the use of erotic advertising and the level of such use. This question has gained importance as recent debates about eroticism (in society, in fine art, or in advertising) provide reasons for why advertisers should be cautious when using erotic advertising. Thus, we considered another factor that might determine the effectiveness of erotic advertising on brand evaluations: the brand's price level.

We conducted a series of studies and found that for high-price brands, erotic advertising is effective. For products with a high price and a high fit to eroticism (perfume), we found that a high level of eroticism is advantageous in creating positive evaluations in both female and male consumers. Watches have a lower fit to eroticism. For this type of product, we recommend a moderate degree of eroticism when a high price watch is promoted. Speakers and lighters have a low fit to eroticism. However, our findings indicate that a moderate level of eroticism is beneficial in enhancing the evaluation of these products if they belong to high-price brands.

On the contrary, for low-price brands, erotic advertising turned out to be ineffective in influencing brand evaluations. This finding resulted for all products, independent of their fit to eroticism. Thus, we recommend that suppliers of low-price brands refrain from using erotic advertising and choose another strategy to promote their products.