

Executive Summary

Can't Get Enough of Myself: The Return of Narcissus in Autoerotic Female Poses in Advertisements

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Numerous brands belong to product categories such as perfume, sexy underwear, other clothing, jewellery, and cosmetics that are naturally linked to sexiness. Including erotic cues in advertisements can transfer meanings to these products and brands and stress the products' erotic benefits. One particular advertising strategy is to combine eroticism with narcissism and use such kinds of motifs to promote the products.

The idea to include erotic-narcissistic motifs in advertisements is not new. We found the first examples of such motifs in campaigns that were launched approximately 15 years ago. Since that time, numerous companies adopted this strategy. However, to the best of our knowledge, nothing is known about the effectiveness of such motifs contained in commercials and print ads to promote products and brands.

If erotic-narcissistic motifs are merely interpreted as another kind of erotic ad cue, prior research would suggest refraining from the use of such motifs to promote products when the motifs show a female model and the targeted audience consists of females. However, erotic-narcissistic cues might have a different effect because they combine eroticism and narcissism.

The findings of our experiment indicate that erotic-narcissistic cues effectively influence attitudes towards the promoted product when the product is an extraordinary product and when the erotic-narcissistic motif shows a female in a self-kissing pose. For an ordinary product, we did not find effects of any erotic-narcissistic motif.

Our findings are based on a sample of young female students. For other groups such as older persons, our recommendations are different. For instance, in a city near Paris, the use of posters showing a female in a self-kissing pose (i. e., kissing her reflection) caused problems in the public and the company was forced to remove the posters. Thus, when older people are targeted or when families with children could get in contact with these motifs, marketers should generally refrain from employing erotic-narcissistic motifs in advertising.