

**PREDICTORS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS  
ADVERTISEMENTS AMONG URBAN  
CONSUMERS IN MALAYSIA**

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PREDICTORS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS ADVERTISEMENTS AMONG  
URBAN CONSUMERS IN MALAYSIA

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to understand how Malaysian consumers respond in terms of attitude to advertisement to advertisements using sexual content or nudity. Past studies drew mixed results in terms of favourable and unfavourable response to attitude to advertisement, gender and culture when advertisements used sexual content. Content analysis to advertisement with sexual content or nudity is important to determine to what extent this effects consumer response in terms of attitude to advertisement. If the nudity or sex appeal used evokes positive attitude to advertisement than such use should be adopted. In adopting this approach marketer increase the opportunity in evoking positive attitude that subsequently results in more positive perception of brand and purchase intent. This study examination of factors influencing consumer evaluation in terms of attitude to advertisement using sexual content or nudity, by employing three factor theory of emotion or stimulus organism response theory, basic human value theory, evolutionary theory and bioinformational theory. This study employed a quantitative approach to examine consumer response and data was collected via questionnaire survey from working adults living in the Klang Valley. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software and Smart PLS version 4. According to the study's findings, attitudes towards advertisements and perceived nudity are negatively correlated. Only arousal mediated between perceived nudity and attitude to advertisement while the association between perceived nudity and attitude towards advertisements was not mediated by pleasure. Additionally, gender moderated the paths between perceived nudity and arousal, between perceived nudity and pleasure; between arousal and attitude; and between pleasure and attitude. From the 14 hypothesis developed for this study, a total of 10 hypotheses were supported, resulting in a number of theoretical and practical contributions.

**Keywords:** Attitude to advertisement, perceived nudity, arousal, pleasure, ethnicity and religiosity

## **APPROVAL**

This is to certify that this thesis conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in quality and scope, for the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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This thesis was submitted to Asia e University and is accepted as fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



**Professor Dr Siow Heng Loke**  
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Chairman, Examination Committee  
(26 July 2023)

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the thesis submitted in fulfilment of the PhD degree is my own work and that all contributions from any other persons or sources are properly and duly cited. I further declare that the material has not been submitted either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university. In making this declaration, I understand and acknowledge any breaches in this declaration constitute academic misconduct, which may result in my expulsion from the programme and/or exclusion from the award of the degree.

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**Date: 26 July 2023**



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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BHV	Basic Human Value
CR	Composite Reliability
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
PAD	Pleasure, Arousal and Dominance emotional states
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modelling
RPPG	Rossiter – Percy Planning Grid

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter will introduce the background, research questions and scope of the study related to the issue of nudity used in advertisements in Malaysia and its corresponding consumer response. It will discuss how emotions can play a role in mediating perceived nudity, the moderating effect of gender and the influence of ethnicity and religiosity on consumer response. The lack of research in the area for these factors and its subsequent research significance towards theory and marketing.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The study historical context or background is related to the use of sex appeal in advertisements from the perfume or fragrant industry and its response in terms of attitude to advertisement. The use of sex appeal as an execution technique is popular among advertisers especially for products related to the fragrant and perfume industry (Gramazio et al., 2020; Wirtz et al., 2018; Black & Morton, 2017; Black et al., 2010). Marketers using execution techniques that includes sexual content or nudity are most concern about consumers immediate response in terms of attitude to advertisement which determine its advertising campaign likability, effectiveness, acceptance and perception towards a company product.

Based on a report by Deloitte, (2020) from the total luxury goods sales of US281 billion in year 2019, the product category of cosmetic and fragrance contributed 17.2% of making it the largest luxury market by product category. Past studies (Figueiredo & Eiriz, 2020; Díaz-Bustamante et al., 2015) have also cited how



the perfume or fragrant category acts as a gateway into the world of luxury consumption or affordable luxury and part of their brand extension strategy.

Based on publically available data the size of market for luxury perfume worldwide is valued at US11.7 billion in 2018 and expected to achieve US16.8 billion in 2026 with Asia Pacific region accounting for 30 % market share (Allied Market Research, 2020). The perfume or fragrant industry is witnessing growth in emerging markets and highly competitive with many key players such as Luxury L&L Ltd, Phoenix Fragrance Ltd, Guccio Gucci S.p.A, Louise Vitton, Clive Christian, Floris London, Giorgio Armani S.p.A, Estee Lourder, Hermes International and Christin Dior (Allied Market Reseach, 2020). This indicates the perfume industry is very competitive, complex and profitable thus its worthwhile to study (Jain & Khan, 2017; Regulatory Compliance Associates, 2015).

Recent industry reports on luxury perfume or fragrant industry indicate a waning American and European market in terms of growth and an increase in growing markets including Malaysia, China, and Russia (Deloitte, 2020; Nurfareena Zahari, 2019) and pivoting towards Asia (Bain and Company, 2020). The fragrances industry in Malaysia achieved annual sales of MYR 622 million in 2018, and is forecasted to grow by 7% to MYR 863 million in 2023 (A. Lim, 2020) making it a highly lucrative and profitable product category. Due to the highly competitive industry with many luxury perfume companies it is important for companies to utilize effective advertisements to compete successfully and adapt to changing consumer trends and preferences.

In luxury perfume or fragrance goods the most common appeal used is sex appeal or advertisements with sexual content or nudity to entice consumers to consume such luxury perfume of fragrant brands (Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Krisnan & de Run,

2016; Ismail & Melewar, 2014). A contributing reason to this is because advertisements using sexual stimuli gets attention (Wirtz et al., 2018; Sarpal et al., 2015; Reichert & Alvaro, 2001; Dudley, 1999; Belch et al., 1981) and stimulates consumer consumption desire (Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Wirtz et al., 2018). Thus the degree of sexual content or nudity used should be attractive enough to draw interest and attention and it's important to marketers of luxury perfume or fragrant products to manipulate this degree in sexual content or nudity (Nurfareena Zahari, 2019) to get the optimal effect desired from consumer response in terms of attitude to advertisement.

The background of the study is related to usage of sexual theme advertisements. Generally past studies also refer to use of sex appeal or sex theme in advertising as sexual content (Reichert & Fosu, 2005; Reichert et al., 2012; Sawang, 2010) or nudity (Sugiarto & de Barnier, 2019; Sarpal et al., 2018; Huang & Lowry, 2012) in advertisement.

This study is focused on consumer response in terms of attitude to advertisement using sexual content or nudity. The current study at hand purpose is to investigate advertisements using sexual content or nudity and how this effects response in terms of attitude to advertisement, thus the study relates to content analysis of the use of nudity in advertisements.

Content analysis to the application of sexual content or nudity in marketing stimuli such as advertisements is important as its use is popular across multiple platforms such as print, digital, in store signage, billboards and other electronic media and such analysis will determine how this effects consumer response in terms of attitude to advertisement as studies in the past drew mixed results with some finding drawing favourable while others unfavourable response in terms of sexual content (Sameer, 2018; Sarpal et al., 2018; Chuan, 2012; Sawang, 2010).

Sex appeal in print media such as magazines and in electronic media such as television has been on the upward trend and prevalent (Cummins et al., 2020; Wirtz, et al., 2018; Henthorne & LaTour, 1995) and the levels of nudity is more overt and explicit when compared to the past (Wirtz, et al., 2018; Soley & Kurzbard, 1986). Such trends have received increase attention from researches to explore advertisements using sexual content or nudity and consumer response towards it.

Research in the field of advertisement using sex appeal has in the past use different terms to express the same area such as eroticism in advertisement (Thomas & Gierl, 2015) or nudity in advertisement (Huang & Lowry, 2012). Research in this area can also be distinguish by the fact that researches either use the advertisement itself as unit of samples (Holbrook & Batra, 1987; Biswas et al., 1992) or people as unit of sample (Thiyagarajan et al., 2012). This research will focus on the latter where people are the units of sample.

Generally, research in western countries has evolved from merely observing trends in the use of sexual content or nudity in advertisement to research studying consumer response to such advertisement (Law et al., 2020; Cummins et al., 2020; Reichert, 2002; Putrevu, 2008). The most popular of the elements studied are attitudes to advertisement, attitude to brand and intentions related to purchase as it has direct marketing implications (Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Black & Morton, 2017; Wyllie et al., 2014; Black et al. 2010).

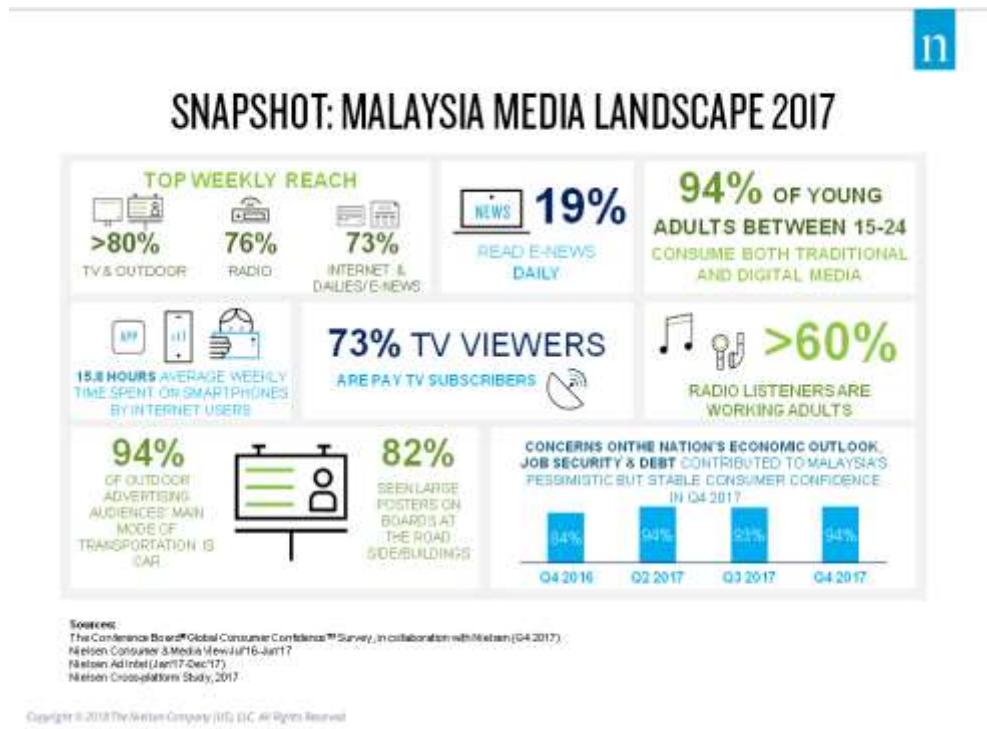
Levels of nudity has been used by researchers as means of manipulating the stimuli and initially two levels were used mild and explicit (Huang & Lowry, 2012; Wyllie et al., 2014) to at least three levels of nudity which consist of low, moderate and high (Hedström & Karlsson, 2017; Visetbhakdi, 2011; Paek & Nelson, 2007).

Previous studies (Wirtz et al., 2018; Reichert et al., 2012) found an increase of sexual imagery or sex appeal used in advertisements spanning over three decades driven by several category of products such as alcohol, entertainment and beauty. The fragrant or perfume industry has increased its usage of sexual imagery or sex appeal content in its advertisements (Sarpal et al., 2018; Reichert et al., 2012) with varying levels of nudity.

Content analysis for advertisement using sexual content or nudity, arguably can be borrowed from any medium as the focus of the study is not the type of medium example print advertisement, but the analysis of the content used and its subsequent impact on attitude to advertisement and such methods were also utilized in past studies (Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Leung Luk et al., 2017; Sawang, 2010).

A recent study on consumer and media consumption in Malaysia found that traditional media such as print advertisements still received a 70 % reach across all age groups and 90 % of teenagers between the age of 15 to 24 consumed both traditional and digital media while only 1 % from this same age group reported using digital media exclusively as seen in Figure 1.1. Although recent patterns in media consumption provides added justification to borrow advertisement stimuli from print media industry but the focus of the study is the content analysis towards usage of sexual content or nudity and not the medium used.

**Figure 1.1: Types of media consumption in Malaysia**



*Note: Retrieved From: Nielsen Malaysian Media Landscape Report 2017 (<https://www.nielsen.com/my>)*

In this study the advertisement stimuli used to analyse sexual content is borrowed from the print media to act as a stimuli as it is still used in recent studies (Sugiarto & de Barnier, 2019; Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Rakesh Sarpal, 2019; Sciulli et al., 2017; Black & Morton, 2017) and still regarded as a relevant and effective in measuring attitude to advertisements. This study focus includes investigating consumer attitude to advertisement using sexual content or nudity at an individual psychological level.

Additionally, majority of the past studies had used print advertisement when it studied sexual content or nudity in advertising thus the use of similar medium will allow comparing the results of this investigation to earlier research. Results derived will also be more relevant to marketing practise as the use of sexual content or nudity

is still prevalent in print media as oppose to other mediums (Sarpal et al., 2018; Sherman & Quester, 2005).

It must be noted while the focus of the study is the content analysis towards usage of sexual content or nudity and its subsequent effect on attitude to advertisement, nonetheless this study will also serve an opportunity to test the relevancy of print media format in the present context. Limitations in terms of resources, money and time was another reason favouring the use of print media advertisement as a stimulus.

This study will borrow examples of print advertisements from the fragrant or perfume industry due to several reasons. Firstly, advertisements from the fragrant industry has traditionally included a both gender in its print advertisement reflecting society binary mode for gender and appealing to both genders simultaneously as its product has both the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ versions contain within it.

Secondly fragrance or perfume product advertisements are seen as a sexual related product and previous studies (Wirtz et al., 2018; Black & Morton, 2017; Chang & Tseng, 2013; Peterson & Kerin, 1977) have found that overt or direct sexual themes is more successful in helping promote sex-related products such as fragrance which ultimately is perceived by consumers to contribute to their sexual attraction. In general fragrance or perfume products are perceived as low involvement products because of its lower perceived risk and based on the elaboration likelihood model (Wirtz et al., 2018; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), it is worth noting that peripheral cues or information such as sexy images is more relevant and important in low involvement context as appose to high involvement products (Nusantara & Haryanto, 2018; Black et al., 2010).

In general, the background of the study suggests that there is a need to study the relationship between nudity and consumer response, mediating role of emotion, moderating role of gender, and the cultural influence in terms of religiosity and ethnicity in multi-ethnic background in Malaysia.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

The use of sex appeal or nudity in advertisement has been a strategy used by marketers to get the attention of consumers, however advertisements perceived to be high in nudity may cause dissonance and unfavourable attitude to advertisement (Law et al., 2020) to its recipient. Sex appeal or nudity in advertisement cannot have the same capacity in pleasing all recipients or consumers as individuals may live by different standards of morality or adhere to different values (Law et al., 2020; Krisnan & de Run, 2016). The main concern for advertisement with sexual content or nudity is the receptivity of such advertisement, where it could be perceived as offensive or unfavourable for a multicultural society such as Malaysia which is ethnically and religiously heterogeneous. The increase in quantity and intensity of nudity across different media observed in other studies raises concerns about its usage and appropriates for cultures with diverse ethnic and religious orientations (Law et al., 2020; Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Sarpal et al., 2018; Krisnan & de Run, 2016) which additionally brings into question its effectiveness (Wirtz, et al., 2018; Putrevu, 2008) to increase likability for product and company utilizing such an appeal.

Receptivity to advertisements are usually reflected and measured by attitudes formed towards the advertisement which can be favourable or unfavourable. Marketers need to know the receptivity to advertisement in different culture in terms of religiosity and ethnicity as they can increase their success with different target market using the most appropriate level of nudity and avoid wrong usage. Although global advertisers

tend to use similar themes such as sexual theme advertising across borders to save cost and control brand image, however incorrect usage results in lower evaluations which reduces marketing effectiveness and harm the company's reputation and image in a particular country (Kardes et al., 2008).

The main objective of advertisement is to create positive and favourable attitude towards advertisement which in turn reflects its effectiveness. However different levels of perceived nudity, religiosity and ethnicity can effect attitude to advertisement. Muslims living in Malaysia has stronger adherence to their faith, expresses difference in religiosity levels and have lower acceptance of advertisements with nudity (Law et al., 2020; Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Sarpal et al., 2018; Ismail & Melewar, 2014; Fam et al., 2004). Studies in Malaysia context investigating the use of sexual content or nudity in advertisement were looking at how different religions (static demographic tag) would influence attitude to advertisement (Rakesh Sarpal, 2019; Rakesh Sarpal et al., 2018; Ismail & Melewar, 2014) and not from the level or degree of religiosity which could have stronger effects on attitudes.

Receptivity towards advertisement with nudity for different races based on past studies (Law et al., 2020; Rakesh Sarpal, 2019; Nurfareena Zahari, 2019; Sarpal et al., 2018; Ismail & Melewar, 2014; Krisnan & de Run, 2016; Krisnan, 2011; Run, 2010) also revealed mixed responses which still cast doubt on its level of acceptance. However, prior studies suffered significant methodological limitations when testing static demographic variables such as race and religion which does not reflect accurately how individuals with different levels of religiosity and ethnicity could form different attitudes towards advertisement with sex appeal or nudity. Recent studies suggesting how future research should include such behavioural characteristics