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**Taiwanese Men's Perception of Male Nudity in
Advertising——Using Sexual Orientation as Variable**

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ABSTRACT

To examine whether sexual orientation affects men's perception for male nude advertising, a questionnaire was designed to collect their responses to advertisements featuring different levels of male-model nudity. The respondents evaluated the advertisements from the aspects of the presentation of the advertisements, brands and companies producing the ads, appropriateness of ethics and morality, and purchase intentions after viewing the advertisement. The result of this research may help advertising practitioners win favor of heterosexual and bisexual male consumers by using appropriate amount of nudity appeal in advertisements.

INTRODUCTION

As a viewer who is exposed with various advertisements on a daily basis, seeing a nude model in a print advertisement must not be a new thing. Nowadays, nudity appeal has become a common technique that advertising practitioners employ to promote a wide range of products, such as body oil, jeans, perfume, bottle water, and sugar. In the context of discussing nudity in advertising, nudity means "the amount and style of clothing worn by the models in the ad" and "it is operationalized with models (usually female) wearing progressively less clothing, from demure to suggestive to partially revealing to nude" (Putrevu, 2008, p.58). The purpose of this approach is to let audience feel sensual excitement through watching the ad while no high degree of apprehension and distress will be evoked (La Tour & Henthorne, 1993). With nudity becoming a popular advertising practice, female models appear as the provocatively dressed role on the mainstream media more frequently than male models. Likewise, in the academic field, numerous studies have been focused on female nudity advertising. The empirical research examined the effect of female nudity, and discovered that consumers' responses for such

advertisements varied based on the respondent's gender, nudity levels, and the congruence between the product and the use of nudity appeal. Nevertheless, there seems to be quite limited amount of research examining male nudity advertising. In addition, except gender, previous researchers failed to take respondents' other demographic variables into consideration. For example, sexual orientation may be a compelling factor that is likely to affect the way viewers perceive the nudity advertisement showing a particular sex's sexual characteristics. These two gaps in advertising study inspired me to undertake the research on the interaction between sexual orientation and the nudity stimuli.

This research looked into how males with different sexual orientations responded to advertising of different levels of male nudity. It was surmised that because of the universal phenomenon of homosexual men's attraction to muscular bodies, compared with heterosexual men, homosexual men may express more favorable attitudes toward advertising with the presence of the male muscular image. To verify this hypothesis, a quantitative experiment was carried out to see whether sexuality is a variable affecting male respondents' evaluation of male nudity advertising. Furthermore, if sexuality was proved to be an influential variable, another question needed to be asked was—in what way would these men respond differently to male nudity advertising?

The following section is going to review the preceding literature relevant to my research, which covers the effects of using provocatively dressed models in advertising, and homosexual men's obsession with muscularity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effects of Nudity Advertising

Previous research studying on people's reactions to the advertisements featuring nude models indicates that this advertising technique is a two-edged sword. Some studies argue that nudity appeal is helpful in creating positive experiences among viewers and influencing

purchase intentions, while others show that it leaves negative impacts on the effectiveness of the advertisements. According to Dudley's research (1999), placing the nude model in the advertisement could grab more attention, and made the advertisement more interesting and memorable. The brand producing the nudity advertisement was viewed as more "distinctive". In addition, the emotional arousal provoked by such advertisement can also lead to better brand recall (Lombardot, 2007). On the other hand, in terms of the disadvantages, Moser states that nudity may be a distraction for the audience, so that they cannot focus on processing the key message/information the advertiser wants to deliver (as cited in Lombardot, 2007). Scarcely dressed models in advertising may also raise moral concerns and controversy (Henthorne & LaTour, 1995). Another major concern supported by Boddewyn and Kunz's research is that it is likely to perpetuate the gender stereotype, especially the stereotype of women (as cited in Henthorne and LaTour, 1995). For a long time, female models in advertising are often portrayed as suggestive sex objects, and such female objectification limits people's perception of women's social role (Schneider & Schneider, 1979).

Based on previous research results, some factors can affect how consumers rate the sexual advertisements; for example, gender of respondents (Belch, 1981; Simpson, Horton, and Brown 1996), the level of nudity (Dudley, 1999) and the congruence between product type and nudity (Simpson, Horton, and Brown 1996; Sherman & Quester, 2006). Simpson, Horton and Brown (1996) corroborated "opposite-sex effects" in their research on male naked models in advertising. As the results showed, advertisements featuring male models gained more favorability from females than men. Contrarily, compared with women, male respondents evaluated advertisements containing female nudity more positively (as cited in Belch et. al, 1981). As for the influence of various nudity levels, it was found that as the level of nudity went up, the respondents' attitudes toward the advertisement itself, the company, and interest in trying/considering purchasing the product were affected (Dudley, 1999). Dudley (1999) even suggested that instead of "adding a little" by using half-naked models, "going all the way" with

fully naked models may be a wiser choice. Last but not least, product/nudity congruence, which refers to the relatedness of utilizing nudity appeals in advertising to promote a product, plays an important role in determining the effectiveness of the advertising. The presence of model nudity becomes more acceptable if the use is justifiable and logical for the product advertised (Simpson et. al. 1996). Furthermore, the congruence can assist in enhancing positive attitudes and purchase intentions (Sherman & Quester, 2006).

Homosexual Men's Attraction to Muscularity

“Muscularity” is a dominant physical aesthetic within gay community. Homosexual men’s obsession with the muscular/athletic physique can be seen from a study conducted by Bergling (2001) (as cited in Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). In his investigation into men-seeking-men advertisements, he found that virtually 40% of users included masculine-related terms as the code words to find potential mates. This attraction to muscularity stems from the “hegemonic masculinity” in the mainstream sociocultural background (Lanzieri & Hildebrandt, 2011). According to Connell (1992), homosexual men are considered lacking masculinity and absolutely being feminine. To conform to the traditional masculinity upheld by heterosexual men, homosexual men develop the stereotyped macho image by building up muscular figures (Miller, 1998). Other than behaviors, their physical appearance is also a way to demonstrate man power (Higgins, 2006). When choosing partners, some gay men choose men with muscular characteristics, as a way of avoiding from being connected with effeminacy (Miller, 1998). Additionally, Levesque and Vichesky (2006) propose that when the gay community is under attack from contagious venereal diseases such as HIV and AIDS, the muscular physique also serves as an indication of health (as cited in Swami & Tovée, 2006).

Previous studies comparing heterosexual and homosexual men’s body image/aesthetics reveal the difference of how they perceive their own and others’ bodies. Swami and Tovée (2008) found that compared with heterosexual men, homosexual men are more attracted to upper-body muscularity. Moreover, Sergios and Cody (as cited in Kozak & Frankenhauser,

2009) point out that gay men are deeply conscious of their own and potential partners' physical look, which can be related to another study suggesting that gay men display a stronger tendency to objectify themselves and other men (Kozak & Frankenhauser, 2009). Their finding indicated that when it comes to inspecting their own or other men's bodies, homosexual men place more emphasis on external appearance; however, the dimension heterosexual men value is the "functioning of the body", such as "physical fitness, strength, and health".

METHODOLOGY

The Experiment

The product tested in this experiment was male perfume. Given the fact that perfume is applied to human's body, and one can apply it with either clothes on or skin showing, it is suitable to choose this product category for examining the effect of nudity appeal on men's perception.

For the purpose of gathering male participants' responses to male nudity advertising, a quantitative approach was adopted to distribute the questionnaire online.

Instrument

The questionnaire was designed based on Peterson and Kerin's (1977) experiment, which investigated consumers' reactions to advertisements from the aspects of the presentation of the advertisements, brands and companies producing the advertisements, appropriateness of ethics and morality, and purchase intentions. After viewing the advertisement, the respondents should grade each test item on the 7-point grading scale based on intuitive feelings. However, the originally 18 questions in Peterson and Kerin's (1999) experiment were reduced to 11 for fear of too many questions likely lowering people's willingness to complete the questionnaire. Meanwhile, the reduction of the questions could make the data analysis more manageable for this one-researcher project.

The first part of the questionnaire was to identify the respondent's gender and age. In the

second part, the respondents were required to evaluate four advertisements characterizing varied degrees of male-model nudity, which were product only, formally dressed model, topless model, and fully naked model. These were actual advertisements that had been launched by the perfume brands— Dior, Bvlgari, Calvin Klein, Saint Yves Laurent. These advertisements originally had the names of the brands; in consideration of the possibility that some respondents may have preference for any of the four brands, the names of the brands were removed with the aid of the photo editing software. In addition, the official Saint Yves Laurent's fully naked advertisement was using a rather lean model as decoration. Compared with Calvin Klein's muscular topless model and the hunky suit guy in Bvlgari's advertisement, this model's body figure was apparently less muscular. Therefore, the model in Saint Yves Laurent was replaced with a well-built naked male model found online.

Participants

There were 217 males that completed the questionnaire. Since most of the subjects (94%) were aged from 18 to 24, the responses outside this age range were excluded from further analysis. After the data elimination, there were 203 responses left. Among these people, 89(44%) subjects were homosexual, 83(41%) were heterosexual, and 31(15%) were bisexual.

Data Collection Procedure

The link to the questionnaire was posted to Facebook to ask male users for filling out. Later on, due to the inadequate number of homosexual and bisexual participants, I posted my questionnaire to the gay board of Dcard, a Taiwanese social media for college students, where the homosexual and bisexual responses successfully filled in the data gap.

Analysis

The data collected was input to SPSS and analyzed through one-way analysis of variance. It helped me generate the significance level of the responses to each test item. If the significance level of an item was lower than 0.05, it indicated that the responses from three respondent groups do have a significant difference. For the item whose significance level was lower than

0.05, further analysis was to compare how the three groups' responses were different from each other. The second part of analysis was focused on observing the way each respondent group evaluated the four advertisements and how different nudity levels influenced their scoring.

RESULTS

Comparison Between Heterosexual, Homosexual and Bisexual Groups

Table 1(see **APPENDIX**) displays the average scores of three respondent groups' evaluation of the 11 items after they viewed the product-only advertisement (Advertisement 1), and the significance level of each item. Among all the 11 items, only the significance level of "Moral/Ethical" is lower than 0.05. Homosexual and bisexual men rated this aspect similarly, and slightly higher than heterosexual men. The three groups of men all gave the score above the midpoint (4), and this means that the product-only was perceived to be morally and ethically acceptable regardless the respondent's sexuality.

Table 2(see **APPENDIX**) shows the respondent groups' evaluation results after they viewed the well-dressed model advertisement (Advertisement 2). Like Table 1, "Moral/Ethical" is the only item with the significance level falling below 0.05, and the three groups all gave the scores above midpoint. Overall, the well-dressed male model advertisement was not considered violating moral/ethical values as well.

Table 3(see **APPENDIX**) exhibits the respondent groups' evaluation results after they viewed the topless model advertisement (Advertisement 3). There is a dramatic and noticeable change in Table 3—the significance levels of the eleven items all dropped below 0.05, which can be inferred that sexual orientation was a deciding variable that determined how gay men, straight men and bisexual men evaluated the advertisement with the half-naked men image. Another thing worth mentioning is that on the whole, the means of homosexual group were close to that of bisexual group, while mean differences between heterosexual group and the other two groups were significant.

With regard to the evaluation on the presentation of advertisement 3, homosexual and bisexual group rated this advertisement more appealing, interesting and memorable than heterosexual group. When grading the interestingness of advertisement 3, heterosexual group generated the score lower than the midpoint, which reveals that heterosexual men did not think the effect of male half-nudity was interesting.

As for the evaluation of the brand, in contrast with heterosexual men, homosexual and bisexual subjects thought the brand featuring topless model displayed better quality and higher distinctiveness. In the company evaluation section, homosexual group gave the scores of reputability and superiority prominently higher than the other two groups.

Considering the degree of offensiveness, heterosexual group showed the most negative reaction by the highest score. In spite of their comparatively negative reaction, because the scores from the three groups were altogether below the midpoint, the use of half-nudity could be proved that it had little possibility of offending male consumers. Similarly, heterosexual men did not find this advertisement morally acceptable as much as gay and bisexual men; nevertheless, the three groups all agreed that advertisement 3 did not go against moral/ethical standards.

Lastly, advertisement 3 interested homosexual and bisexual respondents in trying and considering buying the perfume, with homosexual group expressing the greatest buying intention. On the other hand, heterosexual group was slightly reluctant to try and purchase the perfume.

Table 4(see **APPENDIX**) showcases the respondent groups' evaluation results after they viewed the naked model advertisement (Advertisement 4). In Table 4, only the significance level of the item asking the distinctiveness of the brand was higher than 0.05. Besides, the mean gaps among three groups became distinctly wider.

In the assessment of the effect of the naked model, advertisement 4 was rated to be highly appealing and interesting by homosexual group. In contrast, heterosexual group held the

opposite view, thinking advertisement 4 possessed no interesting and appealing qualities. The scores of bisexual group's evaluation fell between them, but more inclined to view it as fun and attractive. Even though there were considerable discrepancies in the results of the previous two items, the three groups uniformly graded the memorability above 5 point, and all agreed upon that male-nudity advertisement was easily remembered.

As to assessing brand quality, homosexual men was the only group that still perceived the producer brand to be of great quality, while heterosexual deeply questioned the brand quality. Although bisexual group's score was merely a little lower than midpoint, it indicates that the presentation of the does made them doubt about the brand quality.

In the section of evaluating the company, gay group's scores of the reputability and superiority were apparently higher than the other two groups, and on average, their attitude toward the company still remained positive. The bisexual group's scores were around midpoint. However, heterosexual men's responses to both items fell below midpoint, manifesting that the advertisement with naked male model failed to convey a decent image to them.

Next, when assessing the offensiveness, heterosexual group gave the highest scores, viewing advertisement 4 to be offensive, but the other two groups felt otherwise. For the moral/ethical dimension, respondents with varied sexuality were on the same page, feeling that advertisement 4 caused moral/ethical concerns.

In the last section of advertisement 4 evaluation, homosexual males expressed higher interest in trying, and considering buying the perfume than either of the two groups. Meanwhile, heterosexual and bisexual males lost interest, especially heterosexual group who was significantly less willing to try out and purchase the perfume.

Individual Analysis of Each Group's Responses to Four Types of Advertisements

According to heterosexual subjects' responses, with the nudity level going up, they viewed the advertisement to be more interesting and memorable, and the fully naked advertisement was rated to be the most distinctive. The increasing level of nudity also led to higher scores in

the offensive dimension and lower scores in the moral/ethical assessment. Interestingly, in other items—the attention-getting of the advertisement, brand quality, the reputability and superiority of the company, willingness to try and consider buying the perfume, the highest points all happened in the evaluation of the well-dressed advertisement, and then the scores abruptly dropped lower and lower as the male models wore less and less. Out of the 11 items, only 3 were positively influenced by the use of male nudity. This result demonstrates that whereas male nudity appeal could assist in building up positive attitude toward some aspects of the advertisement, overall heterosexual men did not appreciate this advertising technique. Judging by the fact that advertisement 2 received the most positive evaluations and the product-only advertisement seemed too plain, placing a well-dressed model in the advertisement is probably a wise strategy to avoid repelling hetero-male consumers.

Regarding gay subjects' evaluation, one of the salient points is that the level of the nudity was positively correlated with the scores of the evaluation for attention getting, memorability, and interestingness of the advertisement, as well as distinctiveness of the brand. That is, the less the model dressed, the higher grades they gave. Moreover, the relation between scores and the offensive and moral degree corresponds to heterosexual group's reaction. Another noteworthy point is that topless advertisement reached the highest scores in the items associated with evaluating the company and brand quality, and the scores subsequently declined with the appearance of nude model. These findings suggest that nudity appeal could effectively elevate homosexual respondents' evaluation in many ways. Nevertheless, when it comes to designing an advertisement targeting at homosexual consumers, choosing a topless male model, rather than the naked one, is strongly recommended. As topless advertisement and naked advertisement created almost equally high purchase intentions, the naked model would have higher possibility to arouse moral/ethical controversy and make viewers feel offended. What is more, the provocative full nudity may exert adverse effects on consumers' perception for brand quality and company image.

To analyze bisexual group's evaluation results, first thing worth paying attention to is that generally speaking, nudity appeal was helpful in producing bisexual males' positive reactions. For example, the scores of the interestingness and the distinctiveness of the company ascended with the male model revealing more skin. In other respects, the extreme use of nudity could cause unwanted effects on bisexual men's perception. As the nudity level increased, the scores escalated in the evaluation of attention-getting, brand quality, company evaluation and interest in purchasing the brand, but the scores evidently descended when they assessed the naked model. The similar results also happened to the evaluation of the company. Negatively affected by overly nudity, the scores of offensiveness and moral/ethical dimension respectively soared and plummeted as the naked model appeared. Based on the observation above, we can draw the conclusion that the best way to win bisexual consumers' favor is to advertise the product with the topless model, for it could impress them without stirring up unpleasant feelings about the advertisement itself, the brand, and the company. Best of all, this practice may generate higher purchase intention.

DISCUSSION

This research explored whether sexual orientation affected how male consumers responded to advertising featuring male nudity appeal. Based on previous studies of homosexual men's attraction to muscularity, the hypothesis was that homosexual males would react more favorably to advertisements featuring muscular male bodies. The findings of the experiment are consistent with the hypothesis by showing that compared with heterosexual respondents, homosexual and bisexual men showed more favorable attitude toward topless and fully-naked advertisements. Furthermore, the individual group comparison illustrates that the increasing male nudity level led to higher overall evaluation in both homosexual and bisexual groups. These results extend the "opposite-sex effects" theory (Simpson, Horton and Brown, 1996) that when the male viewer is sexually attracted to men, his favorability for the male nudity advertisements is likely to grow higher than other men viewers. From the managerial

viewpoint, this paper provides advertising practitioners who are considering utilizing male nudity appeal in advertisements with suggestions as the following—if the product only appeals to homosexual consumers, advertising it with the muscular topless model is preferable, because it can achieve the effect of exciting them without provoking repulsion. On the other hand, if the purpose of your advertising is to retain heterosexual consumers, producing the advertisement featuring a well-appareled man is more recommended.

In this research, the test advertisements were obtained from the Internet, and the looks of the perfume bottles, appearances of the male models, and the backgrounds were not identical. Such differences might be the factors influencing respondents' perception in the test. Besides, the male models in the test advertisements all had muscular physiques. Future studies can look into whether the model's physique can affect consumers' perception by testing the respondents with models with different builds.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1
EVALUATION OF ADVERTISEMENT 1 (PRODUCT ONLY)

		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Significance Level
Evaluation of the	Appealing	3.84	3.68	3.74	.718
Effect of Product- Only	Interesting	2.98	2.58	2.67	.82
	Memorable	2.79	3.01	3.19	.723
Evaluation of the Brand	Distinctive	3.71	3.59	3.90	.619
	High Quality	4.74	4.89	4.64	.597
Evaluation of the Company	Reputable	4.37	4.57	4.25	.342
	Superior	4.19	4.44	4.09	.239
The Offensive and Moral/Ethical Dimension	Offensive	1.46	1.44	1.35	.836
	Moral/Ethical 1	5.00	5.68	5.64	.004
Interest	in Like to Try	3.72	3.79	3.80	.927
Purchasing Brand	the Consider Buying	3.40	3.33	3.51	.826

Note. 7=very strong response, 1=very weak response

TABLE2
EVALUATION OF ADVERTISEMENT 2 (WELL-DRESSED MODEL)

		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Significance Level
Evaluation of the	Appealing	4.10	4.08	4.22	.892
Effect of Product-	Interesting	3.63	3.37	3.51	.439
Only	Memorable	4.00	3.80	3.70	.564
Evaluation of the	Distinctive	4.10	3.96	4.09	.755
Brand	High Quality	4.46	4.55	4.45	.890
Evaluation of the	Reputable	4.55	4.68	4.58	.748
Company	Superior	4.44	4.50	4.41	.916
The Offensive and	Offensive	1.90	1.66	1.77	.426
Moral/Ethical	Moral/Ethical	5.08	5.65	5.45	.016
Dimension					
Interest	in Like to Try	3.87	3.84	4.03	.825
Purchasing	the Consider	3.71	3.58	3.61	.861
Brand	Buying				

Note. 7=very strong response, 1=very weak response

TABLE 3
EVALUATION OF ADVERTISEMENT 3 (TOPLESS MODEL)

		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Significance Level
Evaluation of the	Appealing	4.01	5.52	5.12	.000
Effect of Product-	Interesting	3.67	4.60	4.45	.001
Only	Memorable	4.45	5.31	5.16	.001
Evaluation of the	Distinctive	4.01	4.69	4.58	.007
Brand	High Quality	4.13	4.86	4.80	.001
Evaluation of the	Reputable	4.22	4.92	4.51	.001
Company	Superior	4.02	4.70	4.35	.004
The Offensive and	Offensive	2.50	1.88	1.74	.012
Moral/Ethical	Moral/Ethical	4.46	5.42	5.12	.000
Dimension					
Interest	in Like to Try	3.59	4.76	4.32	.000
Purchasing	the Consider	3.44	4.32	4.12	.002
Brand	Buying				

Note. 7=very strong response, 1=very weak response

TABLE 4
EVALUATION OF ADVERTISEMENT4 (NAKED MODEL)

		Heterosexual	Homosexual	Bisexual	Significance Level
Evaluation of the	Appealing	3.37	5.92	4.93	.000
Effect of Product-	Interesting	3.78	5.22	4.61	.000
Only	Memorable	5.80	6.64	6.19	.000
Evaluation of the	Distinctive	5.15	5.74	5.48	.071
Brand	High Quality	3.42	4.65	3.93	.000
Evaluation of the	Reputable	3.61	4.58	4.09	.000
Company	Superior	3.51	4.59	3.96	.000
The Offensive and	Offensive	4.44	2.79	3.03	.000
Moral/Ethical	Moral/Ethical	2.74	3.57	3.22	.005
Dimension					
Interest	in Like to Try	3.12	4.69	3.80	.000
Purchasing	the Consider	2.80	4.32	3.70	.000
Brand	Buying				

Note. 7=very strong response, 1=very weak response

Questionnaire