

# The impact of sexuality in advertisements on consumers purchase behaviour: A social media perspective

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## Key words

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## Abstract

*In every corner of our daily life the appearance of advertisements has a significant impact in our purchase decisions. Further on that the sexual aspects are playing an even bigger role while is not only that shape the customer's purchase behaviour. This paper purpose is to analyse the impact of the sexual content of advertisements has on both genders and further to identify the effect on their purchase decision. In other words, this study aimed to explore the real attitudes of the consumers when they are exposed in advertisements with sex appeals. This study followed the qualitative method and participated 12 people took part, 6 male and 6 female respondents. The research was in the form of tape recorded interviews. The outcome of the analysis that has emerged showing that the influence on the sex appeals to the customer purchase behaviour was not the one that used to be. The customers emphasize now on the product and make their purchases in conscious. However, everyone agreed that the sexual appeal in adverts still sells. It used to, and it will continue to do it. Especially in the field of Social media and digital marketing.*

## 1. Introduction

The messiness that an advertising leave on the customers either in a traditional or online platform still has concern many advertisers. More specifically that confusion leads the customers to a "selective attention" (Pilotta and Schultz 2005; Nimeh, 2007) or even worse, to avoid the advertisements (Ha & McCann 2008; Elliott and Speck 1998). For that reason, the advertisers, since the earlier ages, controversial tools such as the sexual content in advertising. Just turn the channels on TV, make a walk in the neighbourhood or enter the social media world and instantly you will feel surrounded by a world which called a product world, and subsequently or not has been dominated to sex. As the male fly, which is trying to spot another fly, uses its nose along with sense, the same happened with the advertisers. In order to spot the potential customer for their brands they are following more sexual and erotic's design tools to do that. The question now is how effective it is anymore in our days.

### 1.1 Background of the study

Advertisements are most of the times flirting with their forbidden content by accentuate erotic tools to catch up the attention (Heckler et. Al, 2001). In many countries the sexual aspects in adverts are used to awaken the fantasies of the potential customers (Gould, 1994). Going deeper of the forms that the sexuality in the adverts might have, these could be messages which are depicted through the brands adverts or more commonly through the fashion brands.

The research of this paper is targeted to discover the impact of Sexuality in Advertisements on Consumers Purchase Behaviour. A reference has been made on social media as well but with limited findings. Multiple variables will be discussed as potential impacts on the customer's behaviour. The role of the two genders in advertising is highly analysed because the different perception of the marketers towards the genders shapes also the attitude of the genders. Fashion Brands are highlighted in this study, which are the key to bring moral issues to the surface.

It is well known that sex in adverts sells, BUT does it anymore? That is the reason why this study is important for further studies across the consumer behaviour and not only. The Advertisements companies and subsequently the brands will also be benefited from this study, for their further

consideration on adverts. To keep having the sexual appeals for their clients adverts or should not? Hence, this will measure the responses of the participants and finally to conclude with the main research question of whether or not the sexual aspects in the adverts have an impact to the customer's purchase behaviour and eventually to their decision in a more indirect way. The ethical perspective during the study and according to the respondents will also be crucial to the outcome of the study. Afterwards, and according to Gould (1994), the ethical issues that arise from the sexual content of the adverts, is keep challenging and the history has proven that. That also links of whether or not the role of the women in adverts transforms, the two genders, behaviour.

This study is a qualitative study and the findings will come through the interviews. By using the interview method, rather than using a simple questionnaire, gives to the researcher the opportunity to get deeper into the mind of the respondent and highlight issues that might no one before has ever consider of them.

## 2. Advertising Processing

Advertisements, can change the whole perspective and buying behaviour of an individual (Ferrier and Fleming, 2014). Advertising has the power to create a fortune to a country's income, has the power to shape and shift the public opinion while it can raise governments or demolishes them at the same time (Saunders, 1999). Advertising has started centuries ago. Rough adverts started to appear on Egyptian graves at 3000 BC while in 500 BC, were found engraved on theatrical ads made from stone by the Greeks. Only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century started have an image more familiar to what as we know it today (Saunders, 1999).

William Bernbach compared the advertising as a beautiful art who has the power to convince the people (Fox, S. 1984 p. 251). However, and according to statistics, the percentage of the customers few are the customers who are engaged with advertisements is insignificant.

According to Clow & Baack, 2007 there are seven appeals in adverts. Those are 'fear', 'humour', 'sex', 'music', 'rationality', 'emotion' and 'sacristy' (Clow & Baack, 2007). Many advertisers are those who are pleased to promote a product through sexual aspects. Hence, the sex remains the most effective appeal until today, while the line between the forbidden and the attractive have crossed several times (Heckler et. Al., 2001).

### 2.1 The Role of Social Media in Advertisements

While the advertisements have entered the life of the customers once for all, through the television, the billboards and radio, the customers started to lose their interest. A new and fresh marketing strategy must be created which is not other from the world of social media. The concept behind this was to "build mutually satisfying long-term relationships with key constituents in order to earn and retain their business" (Keller & Kotier, 2009, p. 20). In order to make this relationship work, must be created an intense desire of the marketers to deeply understand the customer's needs. The experience of an advert that a customer will come across with it depends on several external and internal factors (Belch et al. 2007). The same applies for the adverts on online platforms as well. Those factors could be ethical judgments or religious matters which we will be discussed later in the paper.

According to scholars the sexual content in advertisements through the social media seems to affect mostly the adolescents. However, in social media the role of sexual content as a persuasive consuming tool has been moderate regarding the new trend of influencers. Individuals or group of people who have their "word" of customers decision they can easily affect customers buying decisions (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard & Hogg, 2010). Popular social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram it allows the social interaction between many users and so can shape their opinion. In nowadays, many of the consumers chase for other's people advises (Evans et.al, 2009). That is why no many researches have shown the necessity of the sexual content in the social media platforms. Customers who are using those platforms are looking to be impacted in different and various ways rather than to be affected from a beautiful model on an advertisement.

## 2.2 Sexuality in Advertisements

Reichert (2003), has pointed out that the usage of sexual aspects with words and pictures, is a relatively modern phenomenon. Therefore, the sexual aspects can be presented in many types on an advert. They are positioned in visual elements, such as the models, nudity and attractiveness (Severn, Belch and Belch, 1990) while can also positioned as verbal elements (Severn et al. 1990) such as words, and music. The hidden meaning is that even the simplest sentence is enough to create a sexual buzz in the customer's head. Gould (1994) concluded that in some 'sexy' products ex. Perfumes, the advertisers can enhance sexuality in its depth while the products which are not 'sexy' in the mind of consumers, advertisers can return them into sexy by using words or images. Therefore, the sexual elements are crucial to the success of an advert because they will define the attitude of the audience towards the specific advert and its ethical issues (Gould, 1994). Because of the fact that most of the adverts with sexual aspects considered as controversial, therefore the efficiency of the adverts with sexual appeal to remain non-clear (Gould, 1994). A common clue between all of the sexual appeals that are used in the online or traditional advertisement, is that the advertiser is trying to build the desire of a customer to purchase the product through a lifestyle.

The audience can perceive an advert with sexual aspects more intense (Treise et. Al, 1994), and subsequently not keen to buy the product, but when the sex appeal in advertising is used with relevance and conscience, the audience considered themselves more prone to purchase the product (Gould, 1994; Treise and Weigold, 1994).

From 1993 to 2003 the appearance on sex in advertisements remains stable, as Reichert and Carpenter (2004) stated, and the only thing that it has changed was, the increase of the female portray with sexier appearance. Indeed, several analyses have been conducted from 2003 until recent times, and they presented a remarkable raise of the women image on adverts with the minimum coding dress. Sex therefore on advertising, remain omnipresent. The usage of sex, though, has been used to sell products, but at the same time has weakened the human sexuality.

## 2.3 The Relevance

One of the biggest advertisement agencies called Ogilvy, in their first attempt to promote an advert depicted a naked woman, had failed. That happened because the correlation between the lifestyle of the advert and the product, was missing. The experimental research of some researchers, highlighted that the sexual appeals in an advert, are having a more positive impact to the customers when the product is aligned with the sexual content of the ad. Similarly, the researchers Severn et al. (1990) agreed that an advert is successful when the sexual elements are accurate towards the ad. For example, a body oil product suit better if it advertised with a model rather than any other element. The functional use of the sex in adverts must be explicit in the whole duration of the advert. The relevance, therefore, plays the main role in the final formation on consumer purchase behaviour. In an opposite direction where the sexual appeals do not link directly to the product, can lead to the ineffectiveness of the product (Severn et al., 1990). This statement has been approved right. The sexual appeal when do not represent the product could be seen to have a vulgar content or to reduce the consumer's attention. A significant number of authors and researchers stated that towards the advertised product and the sexual appeal the connection must be clear (e.g. Veloutsou & Ahmed, 2005; Ouwersloot & Duncan, 2008). Images with sexual content attracts the attention of the customers, the message is clearly transmitted to their minds, and can affect their purchase behaviour of the certain advertised product (Gunter, 2001).

Subsequent to the relevance of an ad, the customers can choose how they recreate memories (Scott, 1994) full of feelings and emotions and how they react to the diversion of messages by using a different appeal such as the humour (Zhang, 1996). In all these years the human's mind had undergone a brainwash from the advertisement which make it normal to hide deeper wishes in the subconscious. Freud (1965), the father of psychoanalytic theory, followed the same path and stated that the unconscious mind is the main source of human behaviour. He claimed that the individual's emotions, incentives, and judgement are strongly affected by former experiences which has been displayed to the human's subconscious (Freud, 1965). Wisely, many advertisers, in modern times, use this notion of sex appeals to convince the customers to purchase the products. Furthermore, the unconscious of the consumer's mind

leads to the creation of a lifestyle which states that by purchasing the specific product, the consumer will also acquire the beautiful model in the advertisement or similar to this, will gain the attention of a beautiful women/men. Lifestyle, consequently referred as a mental construction which explicate the human behaviour and at the same time can clarify in what way the customers operate within their lifestyle (Lass and Hart, 2004). Living in an era with a massive development, the sexual aspects sooner or later it was about to be dominated by the world of advertisements (Berger, 2015). However, that also could have the entirely opposite results of what the advertisers want. An advert with a 'bad' sexual content is very easy to stay in the customer sub-conscious and later on impact its purchase behaviour. Multiple variable is presenting on how the consumers may respond on an advert with sex appeals. The religion, the political situation and the educational level would also can remain crucial variables.

#### **2.4 The Cultural Perception of the Sexuality in Advertisements**

The advertisers find a gap between sex in adverts and how the customers in closed societies are impacted by them. The purchase habits of the consumers are highly connected with the culture of where have been born in and the person's values (Kalliny et al., 2008). An example is that in Western Culture, the societies differ from shared images and vocabulary (Scott, 1994). There are likewise different sex contrasts, as male and females have a tendency to vary methodically by the way they handle and translate a given advertisement (Bhat et al., 1998). Besides the Western Civilization, the Middle-East civilization are covered by a great range of advertisements (Kalliny et al., 2008). Many studies have demonstrated that there is a bigger possibility a customer to purchase a product which is according to his beliefs and his culture. For that reason, countries where the sex as a term is not existed in public, it is reasonable the citizens of this culture not to be open- minded when it comes to sex in adverts. The impact of these cultures has greatly been reduced. Their purchase behaviour formed accordingly to the value and ethics of their country.

#### **2.5 Gender's Reaction Towards the Sexuality in Advertising**

The more sexuality an advert may have, the more attention will be given to the sexual aspects rather than the product itself. However, this automatically leads to a low brand recall (Clow & Baack, 2007). Leigh, & Wardlow (1996), stated that the consumers always perceive the sexual aspects in advertisements in a different way depending on their experiences, their motives and their social and ethnic background. According to studies, the women who acquired a high educational level and are having a good standard of living are more against to that kind of sexual aspects in adverts opposite with those with a low education level. Therefore, is not the success guaranteed when a brand advertised by using sexual content. The two researchers, LaTour and Henthorne's (1994), came at the conclusion that the extensive sexuality in adverts appears a negative impact on both genders.

Both genders appear to have different behaviours towards sexual content of adverts. Previous researchers have demonstrated that men indeed give more attention to the advertisements, including female sexual symbolism (Berger, 2015). Findings revealed that breasts, legs and exposed skin served to increase a man's intention to purchase products that appear in ads exhausting female lung. The male model that appears in the advert with a limited sexual content, have a more positive impact on women (Israel and Strasberg's, 2009). On the other hand, the two studies of the Liu, Cheng and Li (2009). A reasonable outcome considered the fact that the men from its nature get attracted by the female presence. And it is in both of genders nature to get attracted from each other. The individuals, as costumers are influenced, by ads with sexual content, but at the end of the day they come up with values which are related to their self- image, self-esteem and self- confidence (J. O'Shaughnessy & N. J. O'Shaughnessy, 2004). The values in the advertisements with sexual content mostly depicted through images as 'healthy', 'beautiful', or 'slim' (J. O'Shaughnessy & N. J. O'Shaughnessy, 2004).

#### **2.6 The Fifty Shades of Brands**

Through the years the customers have come across with a high number of fashion adverts offline and on social media line, with sexual content. As it is appeared from researches if sex in adverts would not sell in the fashion sector, then the biggest fashion industries would never have promoted their products by using the sexual appeal or would never gain the reputation that they have now. Maddy Coy

et al. (2010) claimed that charm incorporates confidence in communication and effectively attracts the public. Some examples of sexual adverts in the fashion Industry can be found below.

On the other hand, limited researches have shown that the sexual aspects used by a fashion brand in a long term can possibly harm the brand. Because the advertisements with sexual content provoke the roles of the both genders into the society, their efficiency, is never guaranteed.

At this point, it's worth to mention one characteristic example of Dolce & Gabbana, fashion brand. In 2007, the brand released a print advertisement, which considered by the majority as controversial. The theme of the advertisement was the spring/summer collection 2007, of the fashion house (Correspondents, 2009). The Advertising Self-Discipline Institute (IAP), identify the passive position of the women and how this representation could lead in more violence paths. The specific ad was characterized as a "Gang Rape" and has revolutionized reaction storms in many countries.

According to Jacobsen & Mazur (1995), the man mostly is depicted to acquire the predominant role, being rich, having confidence while the women the only thing that she must serve is to be 'Beautiful'. This phrase serves perfectly the meaning of the Dolce & Gabbana ad. In the advert besides any subliminal meaning, the emphasis has been given to the 'Beautiful' bodies of the model. However, this depiction actively encourages the creation of a stereotype in how the consumers seeing their bodies through those adverts. Is impacting to purchase the product? Or this depiction unexpectedly influenced the violence for the women the society? In Spain for example, according to the 'self-regulatory advertising body' (IAP), this image has been banned (Hofer, 2016).

Recent advertisements show the violence as a part of their masculinity. This statement, however, creates a gap, since in the 21st century the role of the sexes is equal, and, in no any circumstance, it does not accept any abuse of women. In terms of marketing, though, a negative publicity from an intense content of sexual advertisements possible can harm a company's sale and, afterwards, cost their reputation (Belch, 2007). Even so, a bad reputation is always a reputation. It is not coincidence that the most exceedingly advertisements with sexual appeals are coming from fashion brands. It is better to talk about you with negative comments rather than not talking about you at all. It is a way of marketing, it is a way of advertising.

## 2.7 The Ethical Judgement

Advertisements with sexual appeals are one of the most controversial adverts (Waller, 2006). Reidenbach and Robin (1990, p. 634) determined the term 'ethical judgement' as the level that something is perceived as moral from someone else. Adverts, with an extensive nudity and sex appeals, are mostly characterised as 'unethical judgement' (La Tour and Henthorne, 1994). A significant linking exists between the ethical judgement and religious commitment. Many authors agreed that people with a high sense of their religion are finding the adverts with sexual aspects, reprehensible and acquire that they are affected negatively (Putrevu and Swimberghek, 2013). The lack of education could be a factor that pushes a person to the religious commitment, as well. Concentrating on the female gender an ethical issue that rises up is to depict the women as victims, acquired a vulnerable position. This pattern has been promoted to the general public and many women either identify their selves in this role or trying to adopt a lifestyle as a woman susceptible within the society. Moreover, 'the ideal sense' is an ethical issue that many women come up against. Models are depicted flawless, with perfect skin, perfect faces proportion, perfect hair, body and general with a perfect lifestyle. The 'next door girl' would not be sufficient enough to support this kind of projection. Again the 'plastic' stereotype born, where the woman must be beautiful in all the times of the day. Most of the advertisements are so very-well-structured that if this adaptation of the women remain unsuccessful, they will feel frustrated during their efforts and they will feel that they miss their chance for happiness. Jacob & Mazur (1995) said that many sexual scenes in advertisements, are out of private, consensual sex, which can lead to a more 'erotica' term. The adverts are covered with bodies, or parts of it, with the cool alienation of products. Many fashion, houses times to times, have exploited the woman as an object to highlight their new clothing line. No pain, no gain, right? So, the emphasis has been given to the women because she sells more than the man.

The recent example was the advert of the fashion house of Dolce & Gabbana, but many others are in his routes such as Calvin Klein. As long as, the advertising industry remains a powerful and profitable

tool of a country's economy there will never be the possibility of a broad governmental arrangement, encouraging the advertising industry to incite self-restraint in the advertising industry. The recent years have shown that the 'sex sells' and mostly by portraying women. So, no intense to offend anyone, rather than to sell. Advertisers, therefore, seem to sacrifice a lot on the altar of money.

### 3: The Methodology Journey

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study will follow and present the stages of the research onion which has been conducted by Saunders et al. (2009). The research onion exemplifies in depth all the procedure that must be taken during in the methodology chapter of the research. The best way to clarify and understand the research onion is by viewing it from the outside levels to inside levels (Saunders et al., 2009). In that way, the stages are described in more details. The research onion can be used for any type and content of research (Bryman, 2012).

#### 3.2 The Research Onion Process

As have mentioned earlier the research the purpose of the research onion by Saunders et al. (2009) is to describe in detail the stages that the research will go through in order the study to achieve a successful methodology. The first stage of the research onion is the research philosophy. Going deeper, in the research onion, is the stage where the research philosophy will be defined. The stage number three, goes into the research strategy while in the fourth stage the time horizon has been identified. The fifth layer introduces the stage in which the data collection methodology is determined. The advantages of the research onion are that it can describe step by step the stages of the research study.

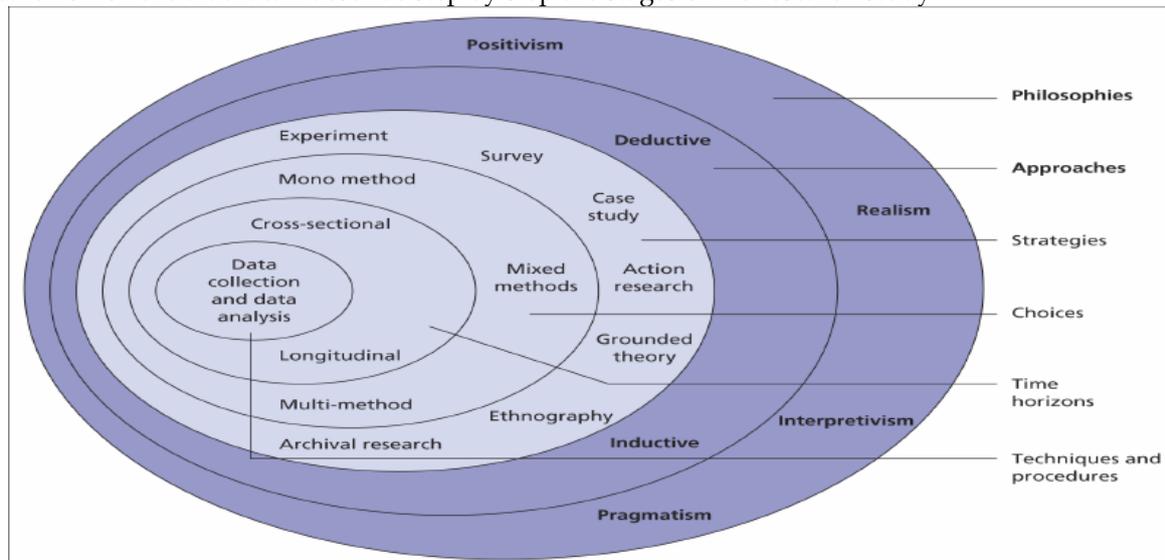


Figure 1: The research 'onion' / Source: Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill (2008)

#### 3.3 The Research Philosophy

The research philosophy is about the building and construction of knowledge and the nature of it (Saunders et al., 2009). The conclusion of the research philosophy testifies how the research will move forward (Flick, 2011). This study's research philosophy is about to identify the differences between the both genders of how perceiving the sex in ads and guide their decision to act in a specific way (Neuman, 2006). A circle of deep examination of data which held from conversational between each, will lead to discovering the meaning of the research. Every participant is a crucial member of the procedure because it will be a stone of individual points of view as consumers to the whole idea (Newman, 2006).

Two are the main frameworks of the research process: the positivism and the constructionism or interpretivism (Monette et al. 2005). This research and therefore the methodology of the research will be

conducted based on the interpretivism approach. The researcher aims to underline the behaviour of the respondents and how they, as customers, are impacting from the sexuality in the adverts.

### 3.4 Research Approaches

Two are the main types of the research approach: The Deductive research approach and the Inductive research approach (Saunders et. Al., 2009). Because of the topic of this research does not include any initial hypothesis, therefore the Inductive research approach is the most suitable for the thesis.

#### 3.4.1 The Inductive Theory

According to Lodico, et. Al. (2010) "*Inductive reasoning is often referred to as a "bottom-up" approach to knowing, in which the researcher uses observations to build an abstraction or to describe a picture of the phenomenon that is being studied*".

In the inductive theory through observations and test, the study will lead to the theory. In other words, the aim of the inductive approach is to lead the research from the specific to a general theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The patterns will help this procedure to be achieved. Through the researcher observation in the study of "what is the impact of sexuality in social media advertisements on the consumer purchase behaviour", the study is targeted to generate a new theory. It is unlikely, though, that the data that will be examined to suit an already existing theory (Bryman & Bell, 2011). As mentioned above, the interviews during this method will lead from the specific to a broader theory passing through the patterns that was exerted from the respondents (Flick, 2011).

### 3.5 Research Strategy

According to Saunders et al., (2007), the research strategy aims to implement the study. Many forms of the research strategy exist. Within others are the '*experimental research*', '*action research*', '*case study research*', '*interviews*', '*surveys*', or a '*systematic literature review*', '*grounded theory*', and '*ethnography*' (Saunders et. Al., 2009).

On the other hand, the grounded theory is a qualitative methodology based on an inductive approach (Glaser and Straus, 1967), according to which the standards/patterns are derived from the data as a prerequisite for the study (May 2011). The Interview data of the study will be (1) transcribed, (2) coded and (3) grouped according to the common patterns that the respondent have created during the analysis. This theory will also take part of this study.

Moreover, this study will follow the 'road' of the Interviews. The Interviews can be extremely standardized and structured, using standard questions for every participant in the survey. On the other hand, the questions might be in as unstructured questions.

### 3.6 Choices

Unfolding the research onion, in the layer of Choices, is concluded, the Mono-Method, the mixed Methods and the Multi-Method. This study will follow only the Mono- method which means the qualitative approach.

### 3.7 Time Horizons

According to Saunders et. Al (2009), two Time Horizons is identifying the '*cross-sectional*' and the '*longitudinal*'. Because of its nature, this study fits better to the longitudinal studies, with the only difference is that the time will not be wide, but more specifically the data that will be collected, after the end of this study will remain and ready in the near future probably to be reexamined (Saunders et.al., 2009).

### 3.8 Techniques & Procedures: Data Collection and Analysis

By using the qualitative method for this study, the primary data will be used. This study will use primary data instead of secondary data because the data will come from the respondents through the interviews (Bryman, 2012) and not from already existed article or researcher's opinions (Newman, 1998).

#### 3.8.1 Research design: The Qualitative approach

There are several research designs which are separated into two categories. The qualitative and the quantitative research. While the quantitative analysis is known as a more reliable research because it delivers a wide range of collecting data, it might not be clearly understandable from the respondents.

Because of the significance of the research topic, the respondents must have a clear overview of the questions in order to move on to efficient results. The interviews duration was 30 to 40 minutes, and as Margaret A. et. Al., (2012) stated, a sufficient interview by using the qualitative method, is between 30 minutes to 2 hours.

According to Gray, 2017, (p. 171) 'the qualitative data can be a powerful source for analysis'. Therefore, this study will use the qualitative approach. It is needed for the research to analyse and comprehend the reasons behind the respondents' point of view (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). This research aims to comprehend the nature of the responses of the interviewed and therefore the gathered data will be identified as crucial in the further analysis. Felizer (2010) said, that the qualitative research is which are commonly used to peer the importance of social phenomena. Any personal involvement of the researcher upon the respondent's nature perspective is not allowed, otherwise the data will be biased (Banister et al., 2011). The goal is, the researcher, to leave the respondents to define their own truths (Banister et al., 2011). This goal will be succeeded it through out open-ended interviews (Felizer, 2010).

### 3.8.2 Sampling

In the qualitative research, smaller samples will be used in contrast to the quantitative research. This sample, though, will represent a bigger amount of people (Bryman, 2012). The sample in the study will be conducted by 6 female and 6 male, citizens, heart quartered in the United Kingdom. The sample in total will be derived from twelve people. The idea behind the election of the candidates is to have a sufficient perspective by using an equal number of male and female, and the number 12 of the respondents, according to G. Guest et.al (2006) is sufficient to provide detailed data. Thus, between the same patterns that have been created during the answers of the participants, the research ensures that the sample of the participants was enough and efficient (Margaret A. et. Al., 2012). The range of ages will be between 23-35. That is because a 21-year-old boy or girl has not already acquired a solid perception on the sexual aspect in adverts or at least it is not in the position to have. Moreover, relevant documents and explanations will be given to the candidates before the start of the interview.

### 3.8.3 Data Collection Methods

Because the nature of the interviews poses risks, a detailed preparation must be held. The interview will be held in a quiet place. Otherwise, the collected data might be influenced by the environment next to the respondent (Saunders, 2005). Regarding the place and the time must be the same for all the participants. For example, if the first interview will be held at 06:00 o'clock in the afternoon, then the rest interviews must be held under the same time and place. Last but not least, is the outfit of the interviewer. No matter if the interviewer responding to friends or strangers, the outfit must be smart in order to underline the severity of the research. Robson (2002) proposes to researcher to adapt their style to the candidate's style. Healey & Rawlinson (1994), stated that the interviewer must re-assure the candidates about the confidentiality of the research, and in that way the respondents will be more open and willing to ask questions. Anonymity is the number one priority for the interviewer, because it will raise the degree of reliance and trust and will limit any potential misleading to the questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The respondents will have also the re-assurance that this research have successfully passed through the Ethics Board of the University of West London where this thesis has been conducted. Plus, a consent form will be given to the participants before agreeing to take part of the research. All forms signed by the interviewees, first have been approved by the supervisor.

The questionnaires are in both structure and semi-structured interviews play a vital role in the research. The way of how the semi-structured and in-depth questions are held is because the interviewer what needs to discover is what exists under the surface. The data that will be gathered will help the research to give a response to questions as 'what' and 'how' but also to investigate the 'why'.

Because of the significance of the research topic, the most appropriate type of interviews, is the recorded semi-structured and in-depth interview. Because the nature of the issue, 'sex in social media advertising', deserves greater explanation, it is crucial to 'built' questions during the interview that it was not planned, in order to lead the research interview into paths which was not previously included to the questionnaire and direct the conversation into greater subjects (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). By

affiliating also, an 'interpretivist epistemology' emphasizes will be given to understand the concepts that participants attribute to different phenomena (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). A wide range of data will be collected and therefore lead to sufficient research results.

#### 4: The Process of the Research

##### 4.1 The Analysis

The analysis formed based on the answers of the respondents. The respondents have created patterns between their responses in which the analysis will be based in order to provide an overall view. Beginning with, the outcome of the research, in some points will be presented as a pie chart in order to be clearer and depict more efficient results throughout the analysis. Therefore, starting from the beginning, males and females who took part in the research, were equal in number. That is to assure that the sample was taken equally for the both genders. The equal sample helped to the credibility of the data while the names of the respondents will be reported anonymous in the analysis section as R1, R2 etc. This is due to the Data Protection Act. As this study is referenced to the 'impact of sexuality in social media adverts on consumer behaviour', males and females of varying ages was the most suitable target for that topic of the research.

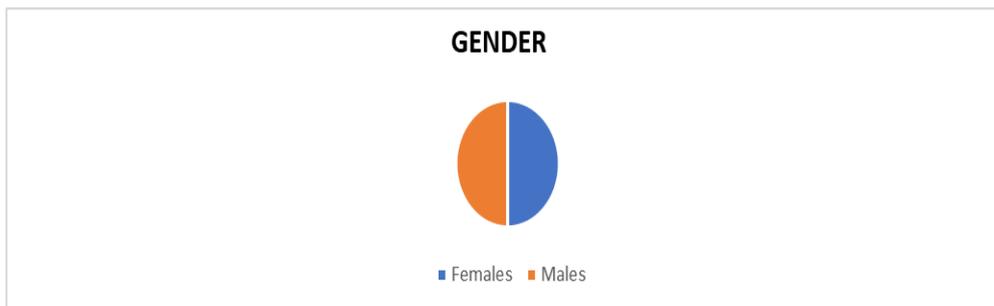


Table 1: Percentage of the genders as participants in the research. Source: Amended by the author (2017)

The next Table2 is presenting the differences between the respondents as it is concerned their personal background, such as an education and work level.

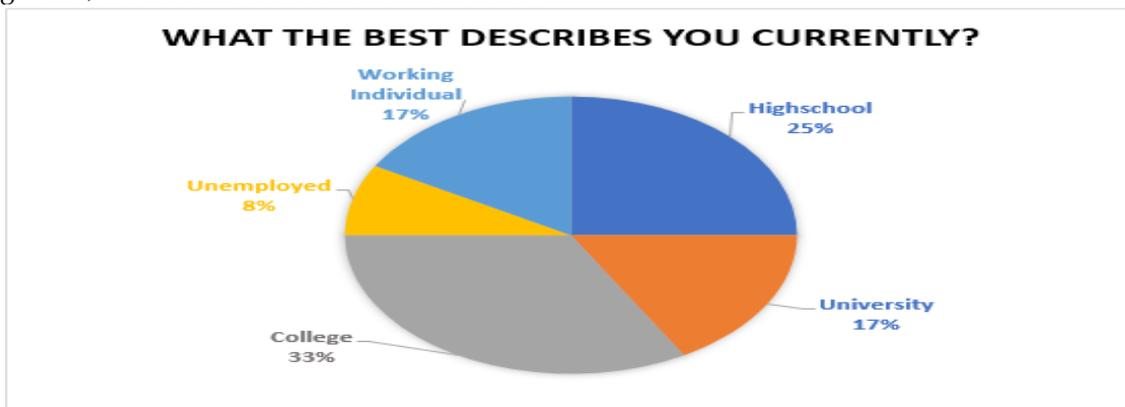


Table 2: The respondent's personal background/ Source: Amended by the author, (2017)

According to several studies, less UK residents acquire higher degrees than a first degree, as the Figure 2 below depicts.

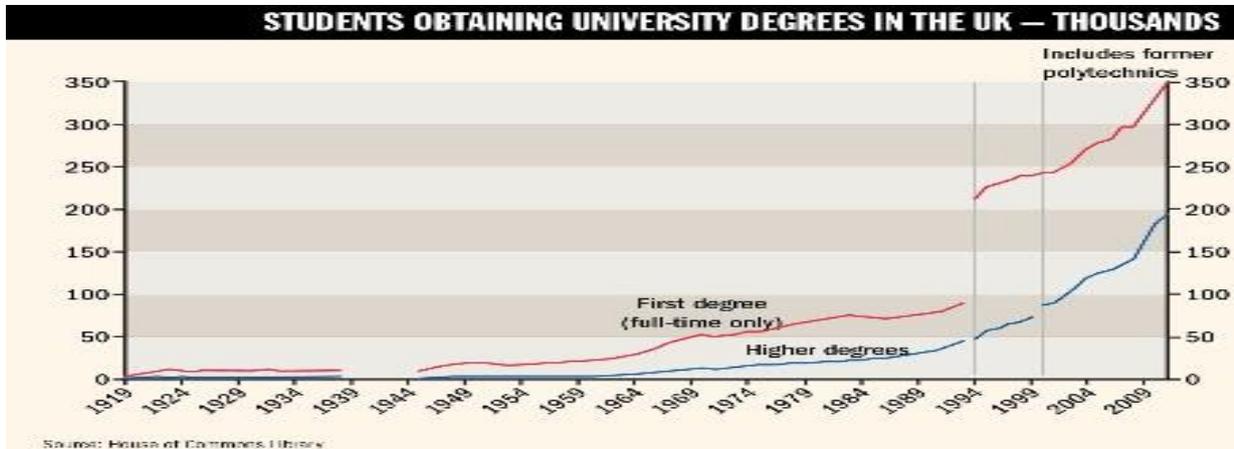


Figure 2: Students obtaining a University degree in the UK/

Subsequently, the lack of knowledge can make the people more persuaded new and unexplored phenomena. That is something that the sexual appeal trying to do. To lure the customers to purchase the product. Further into the research it will be identified that this lack of knowledge truly makes the customers think differently towards the adverts with sexual appeals.

Following the Figure 3 depicts the education level of the women and the men separately until 2011. This is to enforce the research on why the women appeared more conscious to the adverts with sexual content, unlike the men. The educational background therefore plays a vital role here

Students obtaining university degrees, 1930 - 2011 (UK)

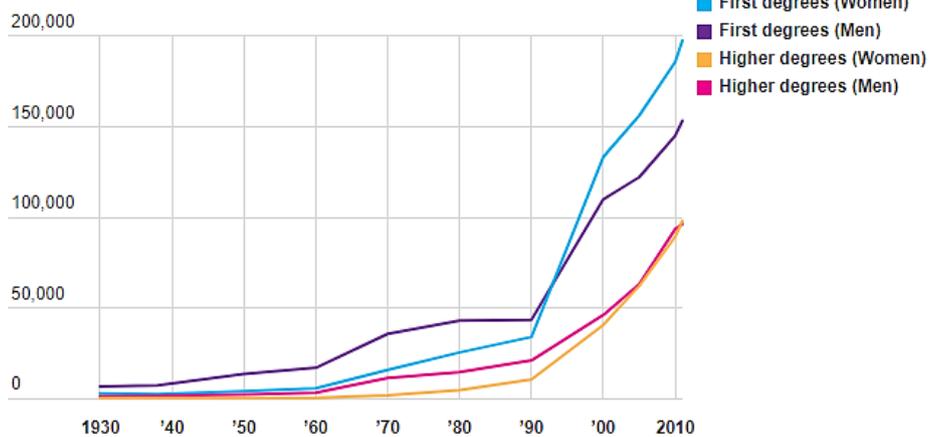


Figure 3: Degrees of males and females/ Source: Education: Historical statistics (Paul Bolton - 2012) Get the data

#### 4.1.1 The Impact of Advertisements towards the Respondents

Most of them said that they do not pay any attention to the adverts. That is linked to the percentage that Burnett & Moriarty (1998) wrote, that the print advertisements readers are only the 20% of the population. On the other hand, though, this is a part of the population who remain active customers and therefore they contribute to the profits of the advertisement world in one way or another. The women, though, seemed to have a more neutral position regarding whether or not are influenced from the adverts with sexual appeal.

Followed the above belief, when the respondents asked what aspect will make them to see the product and eventually to purchase it none of their answers where the sexual content on it. Significant to that, words as creativity, slogan, loyalty, music and visual content were things which can make the respondents to notice the advert. Aspects as sexual content never mentioned by anyone in the first stage

of the questions. According to Severn, Belch and Belch (1990) an advert with sexual content might be positioned with elements such as visual content or music. In that case the respondents probably keep something for their selves. The music element that a respondent mentioned could highly correlate with a sexual appeal of the ad. This is not something insignificant because it explains several elements of their personalities as consumers within the market. Sexual appeal in an advert does not seem to add *value* as most of the participants thought it would. Consumers in general are looking for the adverts to have that 'something'. They are by ads which are funny or smart or depict the product with its functions and what it serves. Generally speaking might the most of correspondents not to pay much of attention in adverts, but still some specific adverts are those who might make the most 'hard' audience to notice the advert. If he or she will proceed with the purchase of the product, that is something that the next questions will help to identify.

#### 4.1.2 The First Impression

When the respondents asked if they will buy a product which is reflected in the mind the percentage of their responses, shaped as follow (Table 3):

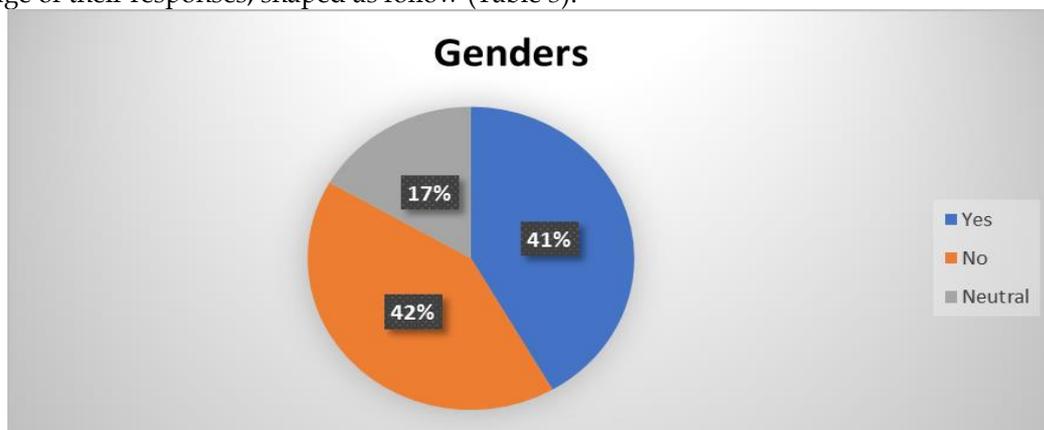


Table 3: For this study, research question 'Will you buy a product which is reflected in the mind as sexy?

Source: Amended by the author (2017)

However, the majority of the women (4 out of 6) appeared a negative behaviour towards this question. Characteristic was the R11 who said that: " No, because to me it does not matter.... for me it matters if I can use the product, and if it will last. " While the respondent R1 answered that " mainly not...because of its lack of substance and profound content." Two other respondents though, answered that: R4male "I would probably choose such a product because every man is interested in showing off to others as sexy." While the R7female said: "depending if I can imagine my-self wearing that product." So, it must be a link not only with the product and the sex appeals in ads but also with the sexy product and the consumers.

#### 4.1.3 Sexual aspects on the advert

Most of the respondents answered that the sexual aspects of the advertising do not necessarily have to do with the vulgar or a nudity content. On the other hand, though, the sexual aspects in the adverts are more likely to impact the customers if they have a form of sensual, aesthetic, and erotic content. The respondents of this research, presenting behaviour which is more familiarized to a specific sexual appeal, the 'sexual behaviour'. According to Lambaise and Reichert, 2003, in the advert the sexual appeals are presented in a more erotic, more provocative, and more seductive, form. LaTour and Henthorne's (1994) confirmed that when the sexual content of the adverts is not excessive, then the customers are more open to accept the sex on ads. As the female R5 said: "...connected at some point with erotic, but without the sexuality being vulgar." But this it does not necessarily answered the level of accepting the sexual appeals in adverts.

#### 4.1.4 The Impact of Sexuality, on genders

The male R6 has an example to give on about an advert in Italy, in which a women depicted, but only as her back, her underwear and her legs. The majority of the males in Italy as he mentioned, impacted a lot about the beautiful presence in the advert. Subsequently, when the male customers confronted with more excessive sexual contents in adverts, their attention has attracted more (Taflinger, 1996). On the other hand, the impact of a sexy advert in the customer eye influence by several factors during the day. On that based and the male respondent said that "It is inappropriate when you are seeing an advert on TV with tense sexual aspects while you are eating with your family". That is also confirmed by Dr. Rama Yelkur and Dr, Chuck Tomkovick, who said that the sexual contents of ads are not likeable from the audience especially during the family dinner. Therefore, the impact on sexual ads to the consumers purchase is not only consisted from the willingness of the person to accept them or not, but it is also the time and how ready the customer will be that instant to accept the sexuality in the advert.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model linked with the outcome of this question. As it depicted through the persuasion model, the women are following more the central route where they are trying to discover as much as more details they can from the advertised product so that is why they consider that a nude model or partially dressed model in the ad is mostly unnecessary (Gnepa, 2012). The women participants, towards the nudity or other intense sexual aspects, opposed against or indifferent to it. The women when it comes to nudity most of the times can enforce the impact of the violence in the society (Kilbourne, 1999) On the contrary, the male respondents seemed to be more opened when it comes to women sexualization. But what when it comes to males sexualization? The most of them will go against to those appeals. The R6male who said that: "...sexy is more like part of the personality, I think. For me sexy is more related to the woman." After all, the erogenous zone of both of the genders is very difficult to be hide or to be denied. But when it comes to car adverts the opinion of both genders it is worth of mentioning.

#### 4.1.5 The Sexual Lifestyle Pattern

In the question of which car image, the respondents prefer, the discoveries of the research were not linked from what it has been mentioned until now. The women chose the car without the model while the men chose the car without the model, too. Again, the tense of the advert played the major role on the first ad with the model only. As the R7female said: "...it's the product, that is dominant in the photo'. And a second participant said: "I like the colours, I like all the background.". An issue of the impact of the lifestyle rises in this question. A male respondent said that: " 'Instead I would prefer to see a man, having a good time, driving this car... I want to be in his position". Similarly, the female R12 answered that the male model in the advert brings to the surface a very professionalism attitude of the model which seemed to inspired the respondent and which it linked it with the country that she is living the London. The Lifestyle of an individual can possibly affect his/her opinion towards the adverts with sexual aspects (Gould, 1992b).

The models impacted the customers, through their lifestyles. Brunso and Frimert (1998), researchers said that the lifestyle referred as a mental construction which explicate the human behaviour and at the same time can clarify in what way the customers operate within their lifestyle. That liked also to the perspective that the female needs to see their selves through them. An example came from a female R6: "The models are very important because you see how they wear it and that you want to wear it as well". Therefore, the female and male in their majority expressed a positive attitude of adverts with sex appeal which promote a lifestyle. The input of Gould (1994) at this stage, strengthen the above observations. He stated that in many countries and the sexual aspects in adverts are used to awaken the fantasies of the potential customers.

The male R4 said several times in his responses: " I might have thought some adverts, which can make a person beautiful and sometimes you may think 'Oh, nice I could have this (model) or lifestyle'." That means that the advertisers in our days tried more appeal through the sex in order to lure customers such as the lifestyle through the sex appeal.

#### 4.1.6 The Culture Impact on the Consumers

Consequently, a major role of the respondents in order to shape a positive or negative attitude on sexual adverts, is the cultural level of the customers. In the question of what is the role of Culture in the

sexual aspects of the ads, the male R2, answered that: "... plays a significant role, but sometimes it can restrict a customer of knowing the product." Culture is the homogeneity of the attributes isolating a human group from the other (Griffith et al., 2000, p.304). The Arabic countries are faced many prohibitions when it comes to the sexuality of the adverts and that is why the impair on the consumers in those countries, towards their purchase habits is not positive.

#### 4.1.7 The Objectification of the Gender

Previously, in the question of the car there was one respondent who answered that none of the ad cars was in his/her interests. In the question why, she/he just explain that the woman is objectified in that case. No matter the evolution of the society and the equality of the both genders some stereotypes are still holding. However, some of the researchers during the years have presented the males in a dominant role on the adverts, or acquire a higher hierarchical position (Linder, 2004). Today, some of the respondents stated against that perspective. The female R7 said that "...in our days I think females are dominant depending on which product..." while another respondent in the question of whether or not the position of the women is now objectified she said that "I would not really blame the man, I think that the women have allowed that to happen too" while a male respondent continued as: "...the role of the woman in the advertisement it became more and more objectified and it is not only because of men but also because women want to be like that" and another argued that: "I think the women is aware of it is using her beauty and her sexiness to transmit some messages".

There is a clear decision in the majority of whether or not the women are seeing themselves as sex objects in the adverts. As respondent R5 said: "...it is more likely people would be attracted to beautiful faces and beautiful body.." and this is what exactly Jacobsen & Mazur (1995) have stated that the only thing that people must be in advert are to be 'Beautiful'. Many studies came to the surface times to times, agreed that the woman is truly depicted in adverts, as a product. One of the respondents (R3) clearly agreed to that: "By presenting just a nice body or a nice woman basically make her an object, that you use next to something else just to make this something else to be seen." Maybe are the body parts of the woman who can make her seen as an object. Only parts without a face is something that Millard & Grant (2006) noticed when they were searching the women as a sex object. The respondent opposed to that state by using a simple example of an advert of Bennigans. In this advert the main focus is in the woman's body parts. That strengthens the studies of Liu, Cheng and Li (2009) and Jones and Reid (2010), who stated that the women are against those adverts where the sexuality is intense unlike the men. According to Courtney and Whipple (1983) the sexual scenes of an advert of course it will raise the attention of the audience bit without this especially lead to the purchase of the product. The opposite, it will reduce the brand awareness and it will diminish the product (Courtney and Whipple, 1983). On the hand, though, it might raise a bad reputation.. "but a bad reputation is still a reputation."

#### 4.1.8 The Impact Sexuality of advert on Fashion Brands

Coming to the Fashion Brands, the respondents called to see an advert of the fashion brand Dolce & Gabbana and express their feelings. According to Peterson & Kerin, (1977) the sexual aspects in an advert when are aligned with the product are having a more positive than negative impact to the customers. This advert creates neutral, and negative feelings to respondents. The majority of the respondents was fighting to see what the advert wants to promote. As some said: "I have no idea what is this ad about.", "I do not really like the concept", "To be honest, this ad it does not persuade me to buy anything... it does not say why I should buy the product or it does not show the product." **Severn et al.** (1990), therefore, found out that an advert is successful when the sexual elements are accurate towards the product during the advert.

Continuing with the brand, according to Belch & Belch, (2007) a negative publicity from an intense sexual content on an advert can reduce the sales of a brand and impact its reputation. Additionally, the respondent answered to that, but even it is a bad reputation is still remaining a reputation as R4 clearly stated. So, the advertisements have always an upper reason to use the sexual appeals in the adverts.

#### 4.1.9 'Have you ever felt offended by an advert?'

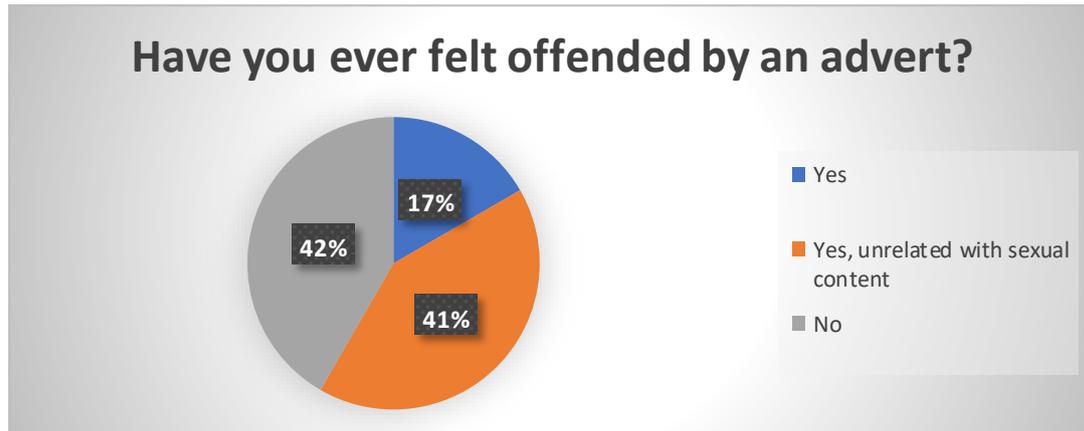


Table 4: Research question: 'Have you ever felt offended by an advert?' /Source: Amended by the author (2017)

As the Table 4 above most of the participants felt offended by an advert with a total different context from the sexual aspects and the other half does not even felt offended. Only a 17% appeared to be offended by an advert with sexual content. As La Tour and Henthorne (1994) discovered that an intense phenomenon of nudity and sex appeal during the advert is mostly characterised as unethical matter. Conflicted though to this opinion come the responses of two respondents who presenting two examples of how they felt offended by an advert with entirely different content. Those ads hurt the feelings of the customers and lead them to oppose with the certain product, as said R6male: "YOU CANNOT REPRESENT DEAD PEOPLE LIKE THAT.....I never gonna implement the profits of the newspaper. I do not want to give my money in that." Bad feelings created to these customers. The key words that are creating here are 'feelings', and 'emotions'. If you hurt them, then you lost them. The same is happening with the sexual appeal. The sexual appeals may have an impact on the consumers, but (!) if the advertisers use it in a not ethical way, they will have opposite results. To the best of my knowledge from the instant that the ethical and unethical is everywhere around us less attention will be given to an unethical advert.

As the female R5 said: "...attracts attention because it is something forbidden". But it is not only that. Now more people are more educated so the filtered everything that they are seen as consumers. The observation of another female participant linked to that point R3: "...at this stage of life where people are much more educated". After all, "Advertising is about the product or the service, not about the advertising" and not about the sexual content of the advert (Sawyer, 2006).

#### 4.1.10 Ethicality in Adverts with Sexual Contents

From the question if it is ethically right to use sexual aspect in the advert more information has been conducted concerning the participants. Three out of the twelve respondents responded that the advert in order to be ethically right must be linked with the product which promoted. What does the R3female said: "Maybe in a perfume you can use some kind of sexual content, but if you try to sell a sofa, for example, no it is not nice". The more connection has a sexual advert with the product the more positive impact will have to the customer seems to agree Peterson & Kerin (1977). Continuing with the answers of the respondents separately, the male from the female, appeared to have a leak in their perceptions. While the female considered many variables in order for an advert with sexual aspects to be ethically on the other hand the half of the men answered that it is good/or ethically right, without any hesitation. R6male: 'Yes, I think it is good. I think we have passed the period where sexual aspects in the adverts are seeing weird'. That period could easily have referred to how the society involved during the years and how now everybody has free access to the sexual content. People if not 100% agreed, then familiarized their selves with that kind of explosion. So, what comes next? Advertisements are most of the

times flirting with their forbidden content by accentuate erotic tools to catch the attention (Heckler et. al, 2001).

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

### 5.1 Discussion of Findings

Above all the analysis two are the factors that determined the consumer's purchase behaviour in a negative or positive way and this is the ethical and the unethical content of sexual appeal in adverts. The adverts promote the image of the perfect model in order to create a whole new lifestyle behind the product and to influence more customers to buy it. Both genders believe that the sex is everywhere around them in nowadays on adverts. The puzzle assembled by all the interview questions and led to the general truth. It is worth to mention that people in their sub-conscious will always want to acquire a lifestyle which is promoted better than their own. While the women are stricter due to the intense sexuality of the adverts the men on the other hand appear more neutral. Taking as example two phrases from the respondent "The people always will want the forbidden" and "even a bad reputation still remains a reputation" drive us to the conclusion that no matter the educational level, the ethnic background or preferences, the buying behaviour of the consumers will always depend on their psychological factors. Targeting the person's sentiments and be honest and clear when it comes to the product, it is more possible to gain their positive impact for the customers. Sex used to sell and still sells, but not with the same speed nor success as it used to. People ask for something that it will irritate their mind and not their body. The sexual aspects, in the advert, were once upon a time. Brands wants to create a buzz around their name and their appearance, but now it does not have the same reflection to the consumers purchase habits. What more?! Sex in nowadays is everywhere. For that reason, a consumer would not be impressed by watching an advert on the television. The sex is accessible and free to everyone so sexy women in adverts underlined by a repeating pattern with an overall result of the woman's degradation even in the 21st century.

In one of the interview questions, most of the respondents agreed that the sexual appeal increases the purchase of the product, but again that was a general opinion and did not come through their personalities. Another significant issue that emerged from the dissertation's analysis was that the adverts have helped to create a provocative attitude to the consumer behaviour and mostly against the women. Most of the women when they asked about that 'truth' they agreed to it, but some of them noticed that nowadays is the woman that allowed that to happen. That is why the sexual appeal in adverts does not have the bad 'guy' role and the impact on the customers most of the time is neutral. When the respondents asked to describe an advert that was offensive to them non of them (except by those who couldn't remember any) gave an example of an advert with sexual appeal. Why? Because they are so used to it that they do not pay any attention.

The focusing on the women in the dissertation mostly took place because every aspect of an advert has a female presence. So, women and men customers create a specific opinion based on if they like what they see or not. But, regarding on the candidates' individual opinion seems that the sex in adverts does not sell at all. The exact opposite, may lead the potential buyers of the brand in the abhorrence of the advertised product. The younger generation will try to imitate a more unmoral way of living by seeing that the unethical presentation of the advert is everywhere.

### 5.2 Conclusion

The advertisements are here to stay for well in our daily life. This thesis studied the impact of sexuality in advertisements on consumer purchase behaviour. This study addressed the types of sexual appeals that are existing in the advertisements and identify how a sexual appeal can be memorable in the customer's mind. The cultural endorsement on the literature review, played a significant role because it shows that the impact of the sexuality in ads differ from country to country and from culture to culture. So, it is important, the advertisers taking under consideration the public that they are targeting. Following to the study, the sexual appeals in the advert can appear as a new lifestyle in order to lure the potential customers. Before going any further to the analysis, it is crucial to mention the depiction of both genders through the adverts with sexual content. This is a crucial factor because it shapes the perception of the two genders during their purchase decisions. For example, because the role of the women appears in most of

the adverts most degrade than the men, the outcome of the impact on women tend to be more negative than positive. Fashion brands has entered the world of sexual appeals once and for all. The Dolce & Gabbana ad is a very specific example of how they position the women in front of the men. Again, the impact of the genders of their purchase behaviour can easily be affected by these factors. Therefore, an ethical judgement has oriented the way that the customer perceives the sexuality through the adverts. The main aim of this study was to provide to the reader an efficient understanding of how the sexuality in the adverts can impact their purchase behaviour.

As it is conducted through the analysis this method managed to catch up the eye of the consumer or be discussed. Unlikely, though, this method seemed to add no value to the add according to the respondents. Controversially, can shape their purchase behaviours ultimately in a negative way. All agree that the sex sells, but the findings that have emerged from the analysis, highlighted that not any more. The education level, the cultural factors and the lifestyle are factors which are playing a vital role in the customer's purchase experiences. The thesis followed the qualitative methods and the analysis has been conducted through the recorded interviews with the written approval from the candidates. The number of the participants was 12 people. As mentioned earlier this study followed patterns instead of moving deeper into each one of the questions in order to create a more sufficient perspective from the consumer side.

## 6. Limitations

This study examines the impact of sexuality in advertising to genders purchase behaviour with a little but crucial reference to the sexual content on social media advertising. The adverts that have been used, are mostly restricted to the appearance of a model, male and female, in the ad rather than using more verbal references to sex with a direct or indirect way. The analysis stated mostly on the traditional ads rather than the social media due to the interest of the researcher to try and find the routes of the sexual content and how this one started to influence the customers before the world of social media rise. Furthermore, the research on the sexual content on social media is not expanded on the researches as it should be. In the analysis has been used a big percentage of the question, which clearly seems to have an impact to the respondents/ customers, but not all of them, because of the limitation of the words. Furthermore, the questions appealed to be leading questions regarding the design of the thesis which was to ascertain personal perspective of each respondent.

### 6.1 Direction for Further Research

What should happen next? This research highlights new perspectives of the today's impact of sexual adverts of the consumer purchase decisions. The customers might notice an ad with sexual aspects, but again, it won't shape their purchase behaviour if the content is vulgar or too sexist. The secret for the advertisers is to listen and understand their audience. The image or a sexy image gain the eye, but it does not sell. In order to sell acquired a relevance between the product that is advertised and the sexual content of the ad. But it still remains a profitable way for the companies? Moreover, by examine the ethical issues, in what percentage the younger generation affected by the sexual aspects in the advertisements which can lead to a negative or positive impact in the society.

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