

# How do beauty product ads affect consumer self esteem and purchasing?

October 18 2010

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A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* found that ads featuring beauty products actually lower female consumers' self-esteem.

"One of the signature strengths of the advertising industry lies in its ability to transform seemingly mundane objects into highly desirable products," write authors Debra Trampe (University of Groningen, the Netherlands), Diederik A. Stapel (Tilburg University), and Frans W. Siero (University of Groningen). In an advertisement, a lipstick situated next to a stiletto heel represents glamour and a teddy bear in an ad for fabric softener signals softness.

The authors conducted four experiments to examine the different meanings [consumers](#) gleaned from products that were advertised versus not advertised. In one study, the authors exposed female study participants to either a beauty-enhancing product (eye shadow, perfume) or a problem-solving product (acne concealer, deodorant). The product was either embedded in an advertisement (with a shiny background and a fake brand name) or it was depicted against a neutral white background. "After exposure to the advertised beauty-enhancing products consumers were more likely to think about themselves than when they viewed the same products outside of their advertisements."

What's more, those advertisements affected how consumers thought about themselves. "After viewing an advertisement featuring an enhancing product consumers evaluated themselves less positively than after seeing these products when they appeared without the [advertising](#)

context," the authors write. The same effect did not show up when the items were problem-solving products.

Ads for beauty-enhancing products seem to make consumers feel that their current attractiveness levels are different from what they would ideally be. "Consumers seem to 'compare' themselves to the product images in advertisements, even though the advertisement does not include a human model," the authors write.

"Exposure to beauty-enhancing products in advertisements lowered consumers' self-evaluations, in much the same way as exposure to thin and [attractive](#) models in advertisements has been found to lower self-evaluations," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Debra Trampe, Diederik A. Stapel, and Frans W. Siero. "The Self-Activation Effect of Advertisements: Ads Can Affect Whether and How Consumers Think About the Self." *Journal of Consumer Research*.

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: How do beauty product ads affect consumer self esteem and purchasing? (2010, October 18) retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-beauty-product-ads-affect-consumer.html>

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