

## Magazine trends study finds increase in advertisements using sex

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Sex sells, or at least that is what advertisers hope. A recent study from the University of Georgia looked at sexual ads appearing in magazines over 30 years and found that the numbers are up.

"Advertisers use sex because it can be very effective," said researcher Tom Reichert, professor and head of the department of advertising and public relations in the UGA Grady College of Journalism and [Mass Communication](#). "Sex sells because it attracts attention. People are hard wired to notice sexually relevant information so ads with sexual content get noticed."

People also succumb to the 'buy this, get this' imagery used in ads, he said.

"Some young men actually think Axe body spray will drive women crazy," he said. "But, brand impressions are shaped by images in advertising, too. Arguable, Calvin Klein and Victoria's Secret are not much different than Hanes or Vassarette, but perception studies show those brands are perceived as 'sexy,' and some customers want that."

Looking at 3,232 full-page ads published in 1983, 1993 and 2003 in popular magazines *Cosmopolitan*, *Redbook*, *Esquire*, *Playboy*, [Newsweek](#) and *Time*, researchers found sexual imagery in 20 percent of the ads. Using sex to sell everything from alcohol to banking services has increased over the years: 15 percent of ads used sex to sell in 1983; that percentage grew to 27 percent in 2003.

Ads were categorized based on the models' clothing, or lack thereof, and physical contact between models.

"Our findings show that the increase in visual sexual imagery over the three decades of analysis is attributable to products already featuring sexual content in ads, not necessarily widespread adoption by other product categories," Reichert said. "Specifically, alcohol, entertainment and beauty ads are responsible for much of the increase."

The study showed sex is primarily used to sell low-risk products purchased on impulse.

"Sex is not as effective when selling high-risk, informational products such as banking services, appliances and utility trucks," he said.

Much of the growth was seen in alcohol, entertainment and beauty advertising. Out of 18 product categories, those most often using sexual imagery in advertising were health and hygiene at 38 percent; beauty, 36 percent; drugs and medicine, 29 percent, clothing, 27 percent; travel, 23 percent; and entertainment, 21 percent.

"In almost every study I've seen, [sexual content](#) gives a purchase advantage in such instances," Reichert said.

Products not using sex in their ads were charitable organizations and computer companies.

Women are used to sell products most often when pitching sex. In ads sampled from 2003, 92 percent of beauty ads that contained models were female. Just under half the ads did not contain models.

With the exception of entertainment advertising, females overwhelming occupy the pages of sex-selling advertisements. Of the 38 percent of

provocative health and hygiene advertisements that feature models, 31 percent feature females and 7 percent feature males.

"Perhaps more important, this analysis shows that the proportion for alcohol ads in 2003 increased to about one sexual ad for every three ads (37 percent)," Reichert said. "Using [sex](#) to sell products such as alcohol and tobacco is a moral issue."

Reichert said this upward trend in erotic [ads](#) is a reflection of society.

"It takes more explicitness to grab our attention and arouse us than before," he said. "In the early 1900s, exposed arms and ankles of female models generated the same level of arousal as partially nude models do today. We can see during our lifetimes the changes in sexually explicit content on television, movies, books and other forms of media beyond just advertising."

Provided by University of Georgia

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