

One night brand: Sexy snaps lead to clean buys

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Sex sells—but not always what we think.

New research by Australia's Monash University shows that highly

sexualised imagery in advertising causes some consumers to feel "physically [dirty](#)" and motivates them to buy products such as toothpaste, soap and face wash.

This international three-part study involving more than 1600 participants from the USA has found that reminders of [casual sex](#), perpetuated through advertisements for merchandise such as perfume and lingerie, might have an unintended effect of turning people to buy personal hygiene products.

Dr. Eugene Chan, senior lecturer in the Department of Marketing at the Monash Business School, said the study had broader implications for marketers who might not be creating effective advertisements for their clients if they used overly sexualised content.

The study titled "Dirty weekends and personal hygiene products: The embodiment of casual sex in marketing" was made available online in February 2019 ahead of final publication in print in June 2019.

"If you're an advertiser who is using sexualised images to sell your products, what we've found is that these images may actually lead people to buy different items than originally intended," Dr. Chan said.

"Our research shows that if a consumer sees a sexualised advertisement—say, for lingerie or perfume—it can actually make certain consumers head out to buy products like soap and face wash. Consumers' physical experiences can really shape their judgement and choices."

In the first study, participants were asked to visualise either having casual sex or being in a committed relationship, and rate their liking for products such as toothpaste, soap and face wash.

Another study involved participants being shown an image of a plain soap bar after visualising a casual sex encounter. They then expressed how much they wanted to take a walk, go shopping or take a shower.

Finally, participants were measured on their willingness to pay for a non-branded face wash compared to branded highlighters. The aim of this was to see whether participants were more drawn to brands or products after being influenced by casual sex cues.

"In the three studies, we obtained evidence that because of everyday sayings associating casual sex with contamination, impurity or dirt can lead to one feeling physically dirtier. This motivates them to seek out [consumer products](#) that would help themselves get physically clean," Dr. Chan said.

"We also highlighted that brands were irrelevant in the decision-making process. The behavioural desire by people to rid themselves of impurity was the prevailing factor."

This study also extends Dr. Chan's research into the concept of disgust, and how it drives behaviour. His previous work looked at how mindfulness affected an individual's willingness to eat insects.

"Disgust is an emotion that is so powerful—human behaviour is guided to avoid those feelings at all costs," Dr. Chan said.

"For example, research shows that if chocolate is in the shape of a cockroach, people are less likely to eat it. Feeling physically unclean is a similar psychological experience.

"I hope that this work will not only document a new type of embodiment, but also suggest intriguing implications for research and practice at the intersection of sex, sexuality and marketing."

More information: Eugene Y. Chan, Dirty weekends and personal hygiene products: The embodiment of casual sex in marketing, *Psychology & Marketing* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/mar.21198](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21198)

Provided by Monash University

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