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Influence Of Physically Attractive People On Consumers In Advertising

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INFLUENCE OF PHYSICALLY ATTRACTIVE
PEOPLE ON CONSUMERS IN ADVERTISING

By

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Bachelor of Science, Business Management

Indiana Central University, 1979

An Independent Study

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

the University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Business Administration

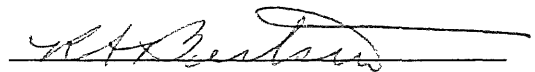
The University of North Dakota Graduate Center

December

1984

APPROVAL

This independent study submitted by Rick W. Caylor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Business Administration from the University of North Dakota is hereby approved by the Faculty Advisor under whom the work has been done. This independent study meets the standard for appearance and conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. A. Bertsch", is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. R. A. Bertsch

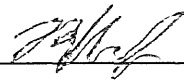
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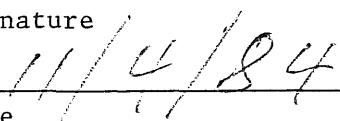
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ABSTRACT

When meeting another person for the first time, the most prominent factor in formulating an impression is the person's physical attractiveness. It has been stated that "A person's physical appearance, along with his sexual identity, is the personal characteristic most obvious and accessible to others in the social interaction" (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972). There are numerous studies in this area and they will be examined and analyzed with respect to their immediate and long-term implications within the marketing and advertising arenas of the business world.

INTRODUCTION

As a number of studies have indicated, along with being physically attractive, there are certain social stereotypes that are a part of that attractiveness. Generally speaking, social stereotypes can guide a perceiver's information processing and his/her subsequent interaction with an actor even though people are not aware or are not willing to admit the influence of appearance on their responses. Societies' habit of harboring the physical attractiveness stereotype seems to have a very big role in the communicative mix of the advertising world. The desire of companies to have physically attractive people representing and endorsing their products seems to be of great importance.

In some instances, physical attractiveness is not used in the traditional sense. Physical attractiveness and how certain companies use it to sell their products is totally different from the type of physical attractiveness used by other companies. For instance, a perfume company would utilize a totally different type of physically attractive person than the one used by a high-tech firm from Silicon Valley out in California. Image plays an important role in the decision-making process and will be discussed in concert with physical attractiveness in this paper.

The marketer is interested in understanding the perceptual process of his or her audience. Whatever his or her particular target market is, that will be the focus of his or her efforts in persuading or influencing them to buy his or her product.

Obviously, different target markets or audiences will respond differently to various marketing stimuli. Once the marketer establishes what marketing stimuli makes his or her audience respond, he or she will then have to decide on the image he or she wants to project to that audience. The image one projects is paramount in the decision-making process of constructing a successful advertising campaign.

METHODOLOGY

In gathering the data, most of it came from various articles from marketing and advertising journals. A major source in supplying articles and places to look for them was an expert in this particular field who is a professor at the University of North Dakota. Bibliographies from some articles were used in tracking down other articles which might pertain to this area. The most current articles were used, the last 5 to 7 years, but these articles cited work done in the area as far back as 1970.

In deciding what articles to use, those pertaining specifically to physical attractiveness and how that quality interacts with other people were used. Articles which connected physical attractiveness and a solicited response were deemed most appropriate. Articles which demonstrated both a positive and negative response to being physically attractive were utilized thoroughly. Total objectivity in the discussion of this topic was sought. Some articles were found to contain certain biases towards one viewpoint or another involving the affectiveness of physically attractive people in persuading their audience into believing what they had to say.

Bruce Dorskind, executive vice president of Donahue and Associates, an advertising agency from New York, was interviewed in order to obtain the opinion of advertising agencies concerning the utilization of physically attractive people in promoting certain products. Note was made of the fact that his firm's opinion does not necessarily represent an accurate sample of the industry's opinion on the subject.

DATA

What are the positive and negative affects of physically attractive people on consumers in the advertising arena? Specifically, this paper will focus on when and why the advertising and marketing personnel utilize physically attractive people to sell alot of their products. One thing to keep in mind is that a person's physical appearance, along with one's gender, are the personal characteristics most obvious and accessible to others in social interaction. There are instances where it would be best not to use physically attractive people because of the negative affects they convey on consumers when the physically attractive are attempting to sell certain types of products. An example would be in an advertiser's attempt to sell a product to clean kitchen floors. In looking at the target market, it would generally be the housewife. Now a housewife might have difficulty identifying with or taking seriously someone who is very attractive and who has a very neat appearance. A housewife might need someone more realistic and "down to earth" to convince her that this particular floor cleaning product is worthy of her dollars. A housewife needs to believe that that person selling the product has actually got down and scrubbed the floor herself. One cannot very well give that impression wearing a silk dress, high heels and a brand new hairdo.

Of primary concern in determining physical attractiveness will be facial features and a secondary criterion will be the body; i.e. the body will not be too fat or too slender. As

stated earlier, in some instances beauty is not always effective in selling products but there are times when the power of persuasion by a physically attractive person is very helpful in getting the consumer to buy a certain product. There are many ways in which physically attractive people influence others and this paper will begin by examining these affects on different people.

Social stereotypes often serve as a basis in influencing one's impressions of others or what they represent. When dealing with others, the two most powerful and obvious characteristics which serve as a basis for opinions are one's gender and physical appearance. This section of the paper will discuss the positive affects that a physically attractive person has on others when they first meet.

One of the earlier studies was done by Dion, Bercheid, and Walster (1972) and Miller (1970) who discovered that desirable personality characteristics such as friendliness, confidence, sensitivity, and happiness (Miller, 1970) were attributed to the more physically attractive people.¹

To support these conclusions, Baker and Churchill (1977) conducted a study where results indicated that physically attractive individuals of both sexes were perceived to be more sensitive, strong, sociable, poised and outgoing, and to be of a better character than individuals of lesser attractiveness.² Subjects were asked to indicate their perception of personality traits of people by looking at their photograph and were told that their answers would be scored on accuracy.

"The research cited indicates that people, when given just a simple visual stimulus of an individual, will readily associate socially desirable traits and character with attractive individuals and negative aspects of personality with unattractive individuals. The findings suggest that the use of attractive individuals in advertisements potentially could increase the effectiveness of an ad either by increasing the perceived credibility of the communicator, and thus his persuasibility or by creating a "halo effect" and increasing the credibility and acceptance of the communication message itself."³

It stands to reason that a message stimulated with positive reinforcement will be more persuasive than one that does not. It follows then that advertising people would want their advertisements to contain positive stimuli, i.e., positive reinforcement which in this case is referring to physically attractive communicators of a particular message.

In a personal selling situation, i.e., salesperson, physically attractive salespersons were perceived more favorably than less attractive salespersons on traits typically associated with selling effectiveness.⁴

As previously mentioned, this "halo effect" exists when the credibility and acceptance of the message is enhanced because of the perceived attractiveness and therefore credibility of the communicator. Advertisers must be aware of this effect so as not to abuse it. In other words, they must not jeopardize their credibility by making false statements that the product cannot live up to thereby ruining the credibility of the

communicator for future ads.

Another phenomenon which exists when utilizing physically attractive communicators is the "associative law." In 1973, H. Sigall and D. Landy conducted a study to analyze society's perception of one individual who is associated with another, more attractive individual. They found that the perception of an individual and his or her characteristics were enhanced by the fact that he or she was associated with an attractive individual.⁵ The observers of these two people took their perceptions of the attractive individual; sensitive, strong, sociable, poised and outgoing (Baker and Churchill, 1977), and transferred them to the less attractive individual just because that individual was associated with the more attractive person. This "associative law" could be used in institutional advertising to improve the image of the firm by using attractive people as spokespersons for the firm. Although in institutional advertising one must be careful to choose a person who possesses not only good looks but some intelligence and speaking ability also to aid in social interaction which is so important in the corporate world. Physical attractiveness has been discussed in this paper in regards to perceptions that other individuals have of the physically attractive person. But one must keep in mind that their "perception" only goes so far and true characteristics will take over after a period of time, but as far as advertisers and the general public viewing the advertisements are concerned, their initial impressions will override any true characteristics shortcomings the communicator might display after knowing them for sometime.

An interview was conducted with Bruce Dorskind, executive vice president of Donahue and Associates, an advertising firm from New York, to discuss the topics of physical attractiveness in advertising. Mr. Dorskind eluded to the fact that advertisers look to portray certain "images" with their communicators. The intangible qualities of the product must be represented in the communicator. For instance, a very attractive person almost always does the advertisement for a bottle of perfume because a bottle of perfume has an intangible suggestion of looking good as well as smelling good. Mr. Dorskind also said that the attention span of one's audience must be maximized and in order to do that, advertisers look for something to keep the interest of the audience, something that will encourage them to actually listen to what is being said or to read what is printed. In most cases, he stated that the communicator was the most flexible variable to work with in keeping the attention span of the audience; consequently, advertisers will pick someone they think best fits their product image.

When interviewing applicants for a job, physical attractiveness plays a big role in determining whether or not one gets a job or not, assuming other qualifications are relatively the same. There have been many studies in this area. One such study examined interviewer biases and attributed the findings to sex-role and physical attractiveness stereotyping. Male applicants, as was hypothesized, were preferred over female applicants, and attractive prospects were preferred over unattractive prospects. The bias against

TABLE 1
 TRAITS ATTRIBUTED TO VARIOUS STIMULUS OTHERS

Trait ascription ^a	<u>Unattractive stimulus person</u>	<u>Average stimulus person</u>	<u>Attractive stimulus person</u>
Social desirability of the stimulus person's personality	56.31	62.42	65.39
Occupational status of the stimulus person	1.70	2.02	2.25
Marital competence of the stimulus person	.37	.71	1.70
Parental competence of the stimulus person	3.91	4.55	3.54
Social and professional happiness of the stimulus person	5.28	6.34	6.37
Total happiness of the stimulus person	8.83	11.60	11.60
Likelihood of marriage	1.52	1.82	2.17

^aThe higher the number, the more socially desirable, the more prestigious an occupation, etc., the stimulus person is expected to possess.

unattractive candidates was found to be most pronounced when the candidates had low qualifications.⁶

These particular prejudices are being pointed out to further give evidence to the positive initial impression a physically attractive person gives to others.

A study conducted by Dion, Berscheid, and Walster gives documented results to support evidence already presented to substantiate the hypothesis that being "beautiful is good."⁷ Students at the University of Minnesota were used in an experiment where they were asked to judge photographs and to determine the degree of success each person in the photograph would achieve in each of 7 different categories. Three different types of photographs were used; attractive, average, unattractive people of both sexes based on facial qualities.⁸ Refer to Table 1 for the results.

So far all that has been discussed are the positive aspects to being physically attractive but there are many instances where being physically attractive is a hinderance.

For instance, when a physically attractive person is encountered by someone of the same sex, that person might be jealous of the physically attractive person and that jealousy might have an affect on how the observer perceives the physically attractive person. In several studies, favorability increases as attractiveness increases from low to moderately high levels, and then decreases at exceptionally high levels of physical attractiveness. Thus in contrast to the tentative hypothesis of Berscheid and Walster (1972), exceptionally attractive women may evoke images more congruent with Pandora

than with goodness.⁹

A major study was conducted by Dr. Gordon Patzer which offers an explanation for the results of other studies in physical attractiveness done by Baker and Churchill (1977). Dr. Patzer's study attempted to determine if indeed communicator physical attractiveness influenced audience attitudes. The study also attempted to examine the perception the audience had for the communicator in terms of trustworthiness and expertise.

The underlying evidence of the study showed that the communicator's physical attractiveness had a positive influence on the cognitive, affective, and conative attitude components of the audience.¹⁰ The study also pointed out that the physical attractiveness of the communicator had a direct "affect on the audiences' perception of that communicator." It appears that the degree to which a physically attractive communicator is successful in influencing others involves the intervening variables of perception of desirability for the communicator, perception of expertise, and perception of trustworthiness. Therefore, there is a direct correlation between the degree of physical attractiveness of the communicator and the degree of impact the intervening variables have on the audience.

CONCLUSION

Abstract advantages to being physically attractive are well studied. There are also disadvantages as were discussed in this paper. It is not the intention of this paper to state that beautiful is better. Rather, discussion of this topic merely is intended to point out that there are certain social and economic advantages to being physically attractive. It is important to realize; however, that these advantages are not automatic.

These social and economic advantages are not a function of being attractive, they are a function of societal opinions and impressions. Society has placed these values on physical attractiveness, and it is important to understand that. Advertisers and marketers are very concerned with the impressions and opinions society possesses when it comes to attractiveness. If societal opinions were to change, then advertisers and marketers would change their strategies also.

The decision on what kinds of people to use depends upon the image one wants to project. Advertisers base this decision on the kind of impression their model projects. Therefore, image desired dictates the degree of physical attractiveness of the model based on societal impressions of the particular look the model possesses.

One thing advertisers should be aware of is that when choosing a communicator, he or she must not be so attractive or unique as to take away from the product they are selling. The audience's attention must focus on the product more than the communicator.

Advertisers are sometimes guilty of placing so much emphasis on the communicator that they forget about the product and consequently, so does the audience. The communicator should enhance the desirability of the product with the persuasive qualities he or she possesses.

As stated earlier one can be too attractive for specific situations and it is the responsibility of the advertiser to identify these situations and react accordingly by choosing the most effective communicator for the specific product.

This discussion has been based on current societal views, not the views of this writer. Each individual has his or her own values and opinions and this paper is not intended to formulate the opinions of others, merely to describe certain phenomena that occurs when one encounters a physically attractive person and how that attractiveness may or may not influence certain impressions of the audience.

FOOTNOTES

¹M.J. Caballero and T.L. Ingram (1982), "The Physical Attractiveness Stereotype and Its Role in Advertising: An Overview," 1982 Proceedings Southwestern Marketing Association Conference, (March), 4-6.

²M.J. Baker and G.A. Churchill, Jr. (1977), "The Impact of Physically Attractive Models on Advertising Evaluation," Journal of Marketing Research, 14 (November), 538-555.

³Ibid

⁴M.J. Caballero and T.L. Ingram (1982), "The Physical Attractiveness Stereotype and Its Role in Advertising: An Overview," 1982 Proceedings Southwestern Marketing Association Conference, (March), 4-6.

⁵H. Sigall and D. Landy (1973), "Radiating Beauty: The Effects of Having a Physically Attractive Partner on Personal Perception," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 28 (November), 218-224.

⁶Robert L. Dipboye, Richard D. Arvey, and David E. Terpstra (1977), "Sex and Physical Attractiveness of Raters and Applicants as Determinants of Resume Evaluations," Journal of Applied Psychology, 62 (June), 288-294.

⁷K. Dion, E. Berscheid, and E. Walster (1972), "What is Beautiful is Good," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 24 (December), 285-290.

⁸Ibid

⁹J. Dermer and D.L. Thiel (1975), "When Beauty May Fail," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31 (June), 1168-1176.

¹⁰G.L. Patzer (1983), "An Experiment Investigating the Influence of Communicator Physical Attractiveness on Attitudes."

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid

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