ETHICAL JUDGMENT OF FEMININE EROTIC IMAGES IN ADVERTISEMENT: THE ROLE OF ARCHETYPAL REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMININITY

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Abstract: The objective of this study is to examine what determines women's ethical judgments of advertisements portraying feminine erotic images. The findings demonstrate that women ethical judgment is negatively correlated to perception of male dominance in the advertisement. The role of perceived male dominance on ad ethic judgments depend on self-identified archetypal representations of femininity about women social identities (e.g. Lover, Hero or Explorer social identities) and on women's social image (e.g. intense vs neutral make-up). Our hypotheses find support in a survey of 84 women evaluating a fashion advertisement portraying a feminine erotic image.

Keywords : Advertising, Ethics, Femininity, Archetypes, Make-Up

PERCEPTION DE L'ETHIQUE DES IMAGES FEMININES EROTIQUES EN PUBLICITE : LE ROLE DES REPRESENTATIONS FEMININES ARCHETYPALES

Abstract: L'objectif de cette étude est d'examiner les facteurs déterminants la perception de l'éthique des publicités mettant en scène des images érotiques féminines. Les résultats montrent que plus les femmes perçoivent une domination masculine dans la publicité, moins elles jugent la publicité éthique. L'impact de la perception de domination masculine sur l'éthique de la publicité dépend de la représentation archétypale de la féminité à laquelle les femmes s'identifient : l'identité sociale féminine (Amoureuse, Dirigeante ou Exploratrice) et l'image sociale féminine (maquillage intense ou naturel). Notre étude s'appuie sur une étude quantitative en ligne auprès d'un panel de 84 femmes françaises évaluant une publicité de mode mettant en scène une image érotique féminine.

Keywords : Publicité, Ethique, Féminité, Archetypes, Maquillage

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Introduction

In March 2017, French Advertising Standards Authority requested Yves Saint Laurent to stop its advertising campaign showing a woman in a leotard and stilettos bending over a stool[1]. The authority argued that it deviated from the deontology code, because the erotic postures encouraged sexist stereotypes and ideas of women as sexual objects. While such negative judgment of erotic representations seems to be the dominant perspective, some women might have different opinions. Indeed, in January 2018, a hundred French women – including movie star Catherine Deneuve - signed an open letter calling for 'the freedom to be importuned by males'. Such conflicting views trigger questions on what is ethically acceptable in terms of public feminine eroticism and sensuality. We aim to clarify determinants of women's ethical judgments of erotic feminine images in advertisement. We suggest that identification to a specific feminine archetype (Lover, Hero or Explorer) influences ethical judgment through perceived male dominance. Women identifying with a lover archetype –typically associated with seduction - perceive less male dominance (compared to the ones who identify with other archetypes) and therefore have more positive ethical judgment of an erotic feminine image. Also, we propose that the relationship between perceived male dominance and ethical judgment is moderated by woman make-up preference. Our hypotheses find support in a survey of 84 French women evaluating an advertisement portraying an erotic image.

Theoretical background

Identification with a feminine archetype and ethical judgment

Past researches find negative ethical reactions to advertising when self-objectification of women is portrayed (Zurbriggen et al., 2007). Ethical judgments can be defined as the degree to which an individual perceives that something is aligned with justice (moral equity) and with what is right (relativism) based on guidelines embedded in one's culture (Reidenbach and Robin, 1990). When making ethical judgments, women refer to internalized values and beliefs on femininity. One of the sources of such inner view of femininity is the archetype women identify with.

Archetypes can be considered as components of the "collective unconscious, deeply embedded personality patterns that resonate within us and serve to give direction to human thought and action" (Guzie and Guzie, 1984). Lover, Hero and Explorer are three main archetypes of femininity. Lovers are companions, guided by emotions and pleasure, who like to be perceived as sexy. Heroes are independent achievers who reject domination and role hierarchies. Explorers are focused on their inner world rather on interpersonal relationships (Guzie and Guzie, 1984). We suggest that when a representation is aligned with their inner view of femininity, women tend to judge it as ethically acceptable. Therefore, women identifying with the Lover are comfortable with sexy representations of women and consider erotic images as ethically acceptable, as they do not interpret such representations as an answer to male desire. Differently, women identifying with the Hero believe that they are

independent from men, thereby developing a negative ethical judgment. Finally, women identifying with the Explorer, are individualistic, self-oriented and free. Thus, they do not develop a strong polarized judgment of erotic representation.

H1: *Identification with a feminine archetype influences ethical judgment of an erotic advertisement in a way that ethical judgment is more positive for women identifying with the Lover compared to ones identifying with the Hero and the Explorer.*

Perceived Male Dominance and ethical judgment

We suggest that perceived male dominance mediates the link between identification with archetypes and ethical judgments. Identification with feminine archetypes determines women's view of gender relationships and their subsequent acceptance of male dominance. The concept of dominance has been defined by Dillard et al. (1996) as the degree to which an interaction is guided by establishing authority or power. Erotic feminine representation may be perceived as an objectification of women. However, depending on one's archetype, women perceive such erotic images differently. Women identifying with the Lover may interpret them as presenting feminine capacity to attract male, while the Hero and Explorer may consider them as presenting a submission to male desires.

H2: *Perceived male dominance in the advertisement mediates the link between identification with an archetype and ethical judgment in a way that the Lover makes more positive judgments than the Hero and the Explorer.*

Make-up preference and ethical judgment

We argue that the link between perception of male dominance and ethical judgment is moderated by make-up preference. Recent literature shows that make-up allows women to express their beauty style and exert control on their socialized image (Netchaeva and Rees, 2016). Symbols of beauty such as make-up and sexy allure can be an empowering personal choice. Therefore, we suggest that women's choice for intense color make-up highlights their willingness to refuse women submission. Thus, when such women are faced with an image representing male dominance, their negative ethical reaction towards the advertisement will be stronger.

H3: *Make-up preference moderates the impact of perceived male dominance on ethical judgment in a way that the stronger the preference for intense color make-up, the stronger the negative impact of perceived male dominance on ethical judgments.*

Empirical setting

Study. The research relies on an online study on female consumers, conducted on feminine members of the French fashion and cosmetic survey panel, which is representative of the French population. Respondents discovered an erotic picture portraying a women (see appendix) and they were asked to rate the picture by evaluating how dominated they thought the woman was, and to evaluate how ethic this advertisement was. There was no brand on the advertising picture. For the need of the study, we created a fake fashion advertisement where the position of the woman portrayed is quite ambiguous.

Figure 1: Fake erotic advertising created for the study

Sample. 84 women from 16 to 64 years old accepted to participate to the study (31 lover, 26 explorer and 27 hero). In each archetypal group (lover, hero and explorer), the average age was around 43 years old (M*lover* = 41,3; M*explorer* = 44,6; M*lover* = 46,0; F=1,192; p>0,309). There is no difference in professions between the three groups (Chi Square > 0,335). There are also no difference in habitats between the three groups (Chi Square > 0,143).

Measures. To measure the intensity of the male dominance in the advertisement, we used the items of dominance of the Pleasure Arousal Dominance scale, developed by Mehrabian, and Russell, J. A. (1974), on 7 points scales, in a slightly modified version to adjust it to our context of an advertising campaign. We calculated a mean score of these items that reflects how the women portrayed is perceived under male dominance.
To measure the Ethical judgement of the advertisement, we used the relativistic items of the Reidenbach and Robin (1980) Ethics scale. We calculated a mean score of the three items that reflects the negative ethical judgements of the advertisement. Higher scores reflects higher negative judgements.
To measure self-identification with archetypes of femininity, twelve pictures representing the archetypal femininity identities are proposed, on the basis of Mark (2001) work (see appendix). Women are asked to choose and to rank three feminine archetypes. Women are classified in the three different archetype categories (lover, explorer, hero) following their first choice. Make-up preference is measured by presenting pictures of 16 lipstick colors and 5 eyeshadow colors, which are popular colors existing on the French market. Women are asked to choose the lipstick and the eyeshadows colors they prefer (appendix with make up colours images). A score is then calculated, through an optimal scaling dimension reduction, on the 21 binary variables obtained. This score reflects intense color vs natural color make-up preference.
To check the validity of this make-up preference score, we presented to the respondents a picture of a woman face wearing a very intense make-up. Women were asked to say, through a binary question ("yes" / "no") if the face was representative of feminine beauty. 22 women sayed "yes" and 62 women sayed "no". Results show that women for whom the face is representative of feminine beauty have a lower score on natural make-up preference score

than woman that think this face is not representative of feminine beauty (M*yes* = -0,16; M*no* = 0,25; F=5,241; p=0,025).

Figure 2: Make-up preference projective test

**Figure 3: Feminine archetype projective test**

Results

A linear regression between the two variables confirm that higher perceived male dominance in the ad leads to lower ethical judgment (B=-0,4299; F=-3,0741; p=,0029). **H1 is validated.**

An Anova on the data collected show that identification with an archetype significantly impacts ethical judgements. Lovers have significantly more positive ethical judgment than Heroes and Explorers (Methics*lover*=3,83; Methics*hero*=2,44; Methics*explorer*=2;82 F=5,560; p=0,005). Explorers' mean is different from Lovers' (p=0,024) but not from Heroes' (p=0,407). **H1 is partially validated.**

Mediation analysis was made with model 4 of SPSS. Regression of the perceived dominance on the two binary independent variables shows that identification with the lover archetype (compared to hero) significantly decreases perceived male dominance ($a = -0,62$; $t = -1,91$; $p = ,05$). The effect of perceived male dominance on ethical judgment is significant and negative ($b = -0,4299$; $t = -3,0741$; $p < 0,05$). Perceived male dominance mediates the effect of the archetype identification on ethical judgment such that Lover makes more positive ethical judgments than Heroes because of lower perceived male dominance (b=0,2684; SE=0,1638; Cl = [0,0265; 0,6895]. The mediation is partial as direct effect remains significant (t=2,6515; SE=0,4206; p=0,0097; Cl = [0,2782; 1,9520]). Note that mediation of perceived male domination is not significant for the explorers as compared to the Lovers (b=0,1217; SE=,1563; Cl = [-0,1280; 0,5114]. **H2 is partially validated.**

Moderation analysis was done with model 1 of SPSS. A regression of ethical judgement on perceived male dominance, make-up preference ($M = 0,00$; $\sigma = 1$; $min = -3,55$; $max = 1,41$) and their interaction shows a significant interaction effect between preference for makeup and perceived dominance ($\beta = 0,5362$; $t = 2,7804$; $p < 0,05$). Note that make-up preference is an independent variable from identification with an archetype (F=1,148; p=0,322). Conditional analysis with Johnson-Neyman method (Hayes 2013, PROCESS Model 1) shows that perceived male dominance significantly increases ethical judgment for women who chose intense color make up ($\beta JN = -0,3713$; s. e. = 0,1454; $p = 0 ,01$). **H3 is validated.**

Figure 4: Results of the study

Ad ethical judgements, ad perceived male dominance, and feminine archetype

Ad ethical judgements, ad perceived male dominance, and make-up preference
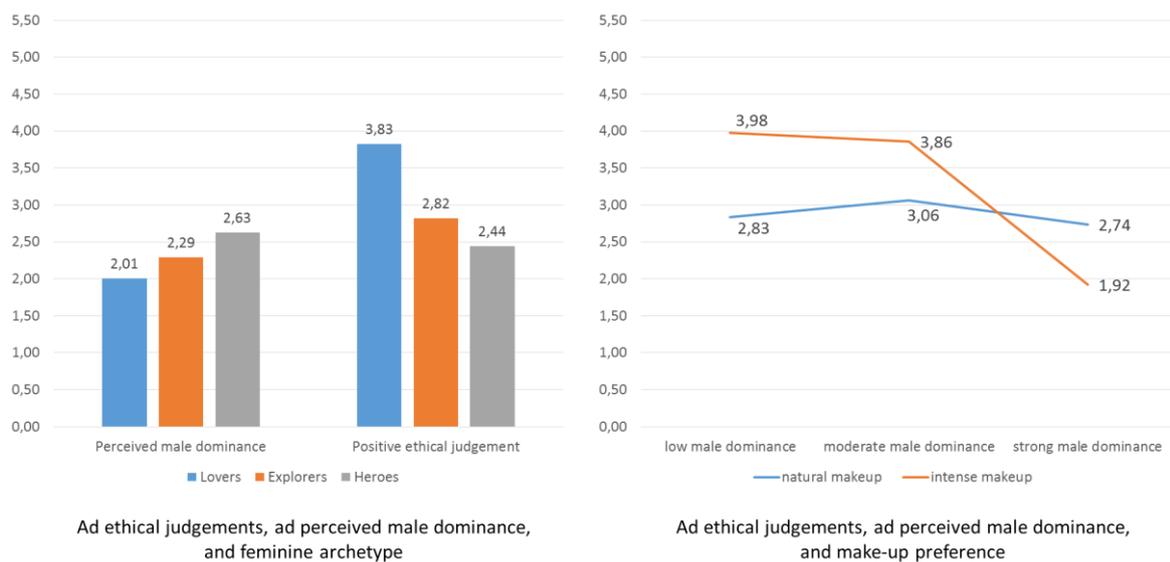
Conclusion.

Our counter-intuitive findings that erotic representation can be judged as ethically acceptable by some women contribute to ethical judgments' studies by highlighting the importance of feminine archetypes, a neglected dimension in prior research. Our results lead to interesting implications for marketers. Brand managers may adjust their communication strategy depending on their female target. If the products target women that use feminine

symbols to exert their power, then portraying an erotic woman could be efficient. However, if the items are bought as means to express one's independence and self-reliance, then usage of erotic feminine representations should be restrained.

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