How Sex in Marketing Affects Teens

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Marketing is seen in every aspect in society. You see it on billboards, television, magazines and even on your mobile device. Therefore, there is no escaping some of the sexual advertisements that companies promote. It doesn’t matter who the target market is because advertisement are not restricted to a specific group in the media. Not everyone is going to agree with an ad or think its okay to promote to a public using sexual methods. In addition, it takes away from the product. Many become too focused in on the model that they forget what brand is being advertised. It could also give a bad reflection on the company and what they stand for. Most importantly, the mainstream media of today’s culture has a major impact in how women are portrayed to society. A young developing teenager is going to analyze these advertisements in a different way than an adult would. The point of marketing is to promote to the public, but there should be restrictions has to how sexual an ad can be. A young developing teenager is going to analyze these advertisements in a different way than an adult would.

Companies want to be able to make their brand stand out from others. As McAuely wrote in his Journal of Social Marketing, “Social marketing has to be more than just communications, has to be more than a definitional toy, has to break free from the straightjacket of the 4Ps and must reach beyond the well-trodden path of services marketing and be prepared to work with industry. (McAuley)” An advertisement should be able to impact a consumer enough to remember the product the next time they go shopping. Sex was not always used in marketing. There are other older techniques that aren’t used as often, but still exist and make an effect. While I was doing my research, I had the opportunity to interview my cousin, Maira Diaz. She is the product coordinator for an eyewear company. Her job is to coordinate the development of a new product in the marketing department and she agrees with this statement. She comments that her eyewear product sells itself perfectly fine with techniques that do not include sexual content. In Forbs’ article, they presented traditional techniques. Giving promotional gifts has been around ever since mankind discovered trade. Promotional gifts are given when the customer takes part in one or your events or they buy one of your products. It’s a way to show your appreciation on a personal level. Coupons are popular since you can narrow down your market to a specific reach audience and you are able to send out these coupons in many ways including: text message, email and through the mail. A classic way to stand out from the crowd and make the consumer remember your product is to come up with an original and catchy jingle to go along with your product or service. This kind of method relies on human psychology and people’s ability to be able to grasp the kind of language that is being used. If it’s good enough, it can stick in people’s minds and may even be considered a classic. A good example of a classic would be the tune made for the candy product called “Baby Bottle Pop”. Even though there aren’t commercials running for this product now, the jingle is imbedded in any person who grew up during the 90’s.

Now it seems like those techniques aren’t enough or quite as affective as these new methods. People say a picture is worth a thousand words. That is why in marketing, visuals are imperative. Detail is everything. It is key for the marketer to not allow the product to get lost in its own advertisement. For example, when a guy has dry skin, he is going to think of the lotion brand that most stood out to him. It would be hard for a consumer to remember what the name of your product is if they are only concentrating on the model who is posing sexually while applying lotion on her body. It does call attention, but it gets the wrong kind attention. During my interview with Maira, I asked her if models take away from the product. She responded saying, “ Yes, when you are flipping through a magazine or walking by, what catches your attention is the model or a body part, not the product. That is what stays with you, not what is trying to be sold”. She goes on by saying how when she was going through a magazine, she took a second look because she saw a model with her legs open and a perfume bottle covering a private part. All my cousin remembers is that the magazine was advertising a brand of perfume, but she has no recollection on the specific brand. This kind of technique is used by many prestige brands, which means that they will use any location to promote their product. Another example would be the infamous billboard advertisement of Calvin Klein. As you can see from the picture, there is a young woman that seems to be part taking in an orgy with a few other men laying by her side. This unquestionably does catch one’s attention, but the only reason you know the advertisement is promotion Calvin Klein is because the brand’s name is included on the bottom right hand corner of the page. Dolce and Gabbana also made a statement with an advertisement that shows two men gawking at another man’s nakedness. Even though the man is not fully shown naked, it’s enough to make an impact on someone who walks by this ad. More examples of these types of advertisements are given on businessnews.howzit.msn.com.

In addition, if a brand continuously uses sexual themes in their ads, this may affect the way the public views the company in its entirety. A good example would be Sports Illustrated. It is known that sports illustrated exploits young hot models to market their magazines, even though the magazine is supposed to be on sports, not playboy looking models. If you look at their first magazine that the published, the cover is strictly related to sports. Now you see girls in string bikinis, which has nothing to do with sports. What does that say about sports illustrated? That women are only good for looks and pleasure? The scandal regarding the toy doll Barbie being on the front cover of Sports Illustrated had more of a negative effect then a positive one. New York Times wrote, “The alliance of the two brands ignited an online debate on Tuesday over the images of both Barbie and the swimsuit issue. Mattel has long contended with complaints that Barbie, with her lithesome figure and focus on fashion, is not a positive role model for girls. At the same time, Sports Illustrated is no favorite of some critics who believe that the swimsuit issue objectifies women. (Grinberg)” The magazine may still have men buy it, but they have upset part of the public, which is never good for business.

It’s like Maira mentions in her interview, if the product you are selling has nothing to do with sexuality, don’t use it. If your product is as good as you say it is, the product’s consumer benefits should sell itself. By using sexual content to sell a product, it gives society the idea to relate that product with sex. Even though everyone sees these ads, teens are they ones who are mainly targeted, whether it’s intentional or not. “Five years ago, the average child or teen consumed six and a half hours of media per day, which included watching television, surfing the net to frequent chat rooms, downloading videos on YouTube, and listening to music. Since that time, there has been a huge increase in media consumption among youth. Today, through multitasking, youth pack in almost eleven hours of media content into the seven and a half hours they spend consuming media each day. This popular media includes a high level of sexual content. (Anderson)” Teenagers are absorbing all of these images and information, but do not know how much it is actually affecting their mental development. Teens are described as lively people, making them aware and analytical of everything they see. They can also be immature, making it easy for them to analyze these marketing messages in an inappropriate way. Along with being immature, they are also impetuous, making their actions very impulsive and sometimes incorrect.

Just as easy it is for a young teen to be exposed to drugs, they are exposed to sex. This may happen at an age in which it is still not appropriate to know what sex even is. A teenager’s brain is still developing, so they absorb everything they see. Parents can’t control it and the media does nothing to hide it. When a young teen sees the sexual advertisements, million of thoughts are going through their heads. It leaves a lasting impression on them. It causes both boys and girls more curious about sex. This could lead to children wanting to search for more information and maybe even become sexually active, just because they see it as a causal action of behaving.

Adolescence is a very hard time for any teenage girl. It is a time when their body is changing and their hormones are racing. Which means that their priorities change. Instead of being worried about Barbie dolls, having the time to play outside, and believing that boys have coodies, they are now focused on attracting the opposite sex and fitting in along with their peers. They do this by keeping up with the current trends. The typical teenager is going to be looking at magazines, commercials, and other media as a guide to know what is “in” and what is not. When a young girl comes across advertisement like Calvin Klein, she may want to buy their jeans, but for the wrong reasons. They see the ad and get the idea that if she wears Calvin Klein jeans she will be admired by men. The body language of the models also makes an impact as to how a teenager may act with boys. Teenage boys sometimes do not hide how attracted they really are toward promiscuous women at their age. By ads always showing women being portrayed as a sex icon, it gives young girls the impression that they are also just eye candy for the opposite sex. As Maira states in her interview, ads could make her feel inferior because of how the ad is presenting the model (naked, half clothed) and it personally offended her. She knows that women are being used, and not taken seriously. But she an adult and can come up with that kind of conclusion. Unlike teenage girls, she is not as pressured to address this style of fashion or action. A teenage girl is not going to know any better.

A teenage boy is not going to know any better either. When he sees an advertisement for a BMW, the part that is going to catch his eye is going to be the hot model who is sexually laying on top of the hood of the car. As a parent, Maira commented that she does not want her son to think that in order to get girls, he has to purchase the car. Even though, that is what the brand wants the consumer to think, in order for them to sell cars and make profit. But I’m pretty sure a parent is not going to want his or her daughter to think that in order to get a guy’s attention, she has to dress provocatively or let a man take advantage of her body, the way the Calvin Klein ads make it seem. “Analyses of photographs from Maxim and Stuff (two popular men's magazines) revealed that 80.5% of the women were depicted as sex objects. Popular media contain messages about sex and gender that are unhealthy. The bottom line is that corporations "project rigid and stereotyped ideas of femininity and sexuality onto children who are not able to analyze or reject" them. (Anderson)”

A young girl is naturally going to be shy, but by seeing how women in advertisements are popular by acting and dressing a certain way, she is going to try to do the same to fill her need of being wanted and accepted by others. They are going to use these models and celebrities as role models to get want they want and raise their self-esteem. As is may seem in today’s day in age, good girls finish last. “ In the current environment, teen girls are encouraged to look sexy, yet they know little about what it means to be sexual, to have sexual desires, and to make rational and responsible decisions about pleasure and risk within intimate relationships that acknowledge their own desires. (Anderson)” All of these messages are the cause for early teen pregnancy. Young girls do not see the big picture and realize that by following what the media shows them, they are putting themselves in a bad situation. By seeming more promiscuous, men, their own age or even a little older, are going to be attracted to them, but for the wrong reasons. Therefore, these men are going to have bad intentions. Many girls express their sexuality before they know what sex really is. Teenage boys are not going to know this. For them, it’s what you see is what you get. That is why many girls do get pregnant at a young age. They are encouraged to have sex by a guy before they are properly prepared or know how to be protected. Most likely, the guy himself knows very little as well.

By women being exposed as sexual icons, it sets back what women before tried to fight for: equality. By young teenage girls seeing the ads of men being in a position of power, it just makes women seem inferior to men. It is all in the body language and position the models are in the ads. In a typical ad, you see a beautiful model and the product. Most of the time she is half naked and most likely with a good-looking male model. When a male is in the picture, he is always in the position of empowerment. While the female is seen a position that makes her seem lower than him. A good example would be this ad by Dole and Gabbana. As noted in the picture, you see men surrounding another man holding down a woman by her wrist. This action alone says a lot about how far marketing passes the line of degrading women. A female doesn’t have to be in the picture to still make this statement. As mentioned before, Dolce and Gabbana promoted an ad that focused on the theme of homosexuality. And still, you do not see a female model in a position of power. By publicly showing this, marketers are promoting the idea that it’s perfectly fine to keep women on the bottom. Society as a whole is allowing this and our young teens are the ones who are most effected because they grow up with this mentality.

As marketers make it seem, it’s never too early to expose young teens, or even children, to this idea and world of advertising. French Vogue had a photo shoot that featured young girls. You would think that they would be presented as the young age children that they are… on the contrary. Vogue thought it would be a good publicity stunt to expose these children as if they were grown models. The main child is wearing a dress that an adult woman would wear, has heaving jewelry on, and has an extensive amount of makeup on her face. On top of that, this little girl is laying down in a flirtatious manner, making her seem way much older than she really is. The other girl models are revealed in the same manner. This sends out the wrong message to young girls who can potentially see this. It can put pressure on them to try to measure up to society’s beauty standards at a very young age.

It’s no surprise, why some young teens make it their priority to make them selves seem beautiful. Seeing size one models pose sexually on an ad is going to affect the way young girls criticize themselves and their body image. If marketing is only using size one models to promote their products, this must make a little chubby girl think that her body image is not acceptable by society because she never sees any models that look like her. This can take a toll on a girl that is going through puberty and sees her body changing. Nothing in their life, at this point, is reassuring or clear. They have friends telling them one thing, parents lecturing them another way, and advertisements showing them something else. By having young girls stress out, this has caused the population of children with eating disorders to go up. Young girls already have enough to worry about their bodies, why add more stress? Even though a girl’s body image is evaluated more at a younger age, this does not mean that older ladies don’t also get a low self-esteem from these ads. Older women may feel pressured to do whatever it takes to live up to the standards of the women that are used for marketing products. Some may even resort to plastic surgery so that they can be closer to what they believe is true beauty. People in marketing should focus more on what the consumer wants to see, rather than what they think will draw attention because for the most part, they may be getting the attention from the wrong group of people.

“What would be a realistic refraining of these advertisements? I suggest using girls in advertisements targeted toward girls and portraying them in healthy and realistic ways that have relevance to their lives. If the advertised product or brand is an article of clothing or fashion line, then it logically follows to show that item in a realistic way on realistic-looking examples of the intended target of the advertisement. (Merskin)” That is why Dove’s campaign should get praised for the message they promoted and the way they presented to the public. The general idea of the campaign was to promote the idea that women are beautiful, despite their age, looks, and body type. Every female should accept her physical features, despite what the media promotes and what advertisements illustrate is beauty to the industry. Dove does this by placing regular looking women in their campaign ads. Some are showed in their underwear, but it is not meant with sexual intentions. It is only to show how comfortable a lady can be in her own skin without worrying what other think. By doing this, it motivates women to stop the typical beauty trend that is currently in the media. It’s empowerment for women to show everyone else that despite what society tries to promote, a woman’s beauty is what it is. It’s more than how you dress and present yourself. It’s who you are on the inside.

In the past decades, marketing techniques have evolved to what we now see today. It is because of how our society is now that advertisements aren’t conservative. On the other hand, there are many examples that involve sexual methods, simply because it is a known fact that it’s what sells in the market. But along with the sales comes the impact it has on the public, especially on young teenage girls. Without them even knowing it, they are absorbing information that affects the way they develop mentally. Since society is so open to sexuality, it allows women to think that being advertised as a sex icon is acceptable. We have to take a step back and set standards to what should be acceptable to promote. This way, women are no longer degraded and young teens can grow up with a stronger sense of how a lady should be portrayed.

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