

**Advertising Appeals on Global Cultural Spectrum**

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**Abstract:** The research focuses on consumer advertising appeals on a cross cultural spectrum. It is imperative for advertising agencies to understand that each culture is not only different on a global cultural spectrum but also unique in different sub-cultures. The perceptions of advertising appeals are ever changing and this research study discusses the different appeals used to target consumers across the global cultural spectrum. This study addresses the following questions:

- Which emotional appeals to use when targeting different cultures?
- How appeals differ in different cultures and subcultures across the globe?
- How do males and females react to different hard-sell and soft-sell (warmth, humor and eroticism) advertising appeals?

The research paper proposes the AD Hard-Soft conceptual framework which focuses on attitudes toward the ad, brand and purchase intentions through the usage of hard-sell and soft-sell advertising appeals. The paper uses qualitative research wherein different ads with varying advertising appeals were utilized and their findings are recorded. The differences between hard-sell and soft-sell are highlighted through this research.

Key Words: Advertising Appeals, Global Cultural Spectrum, Hard-Sell, Soft- Sell, Sex Appeals

## **I. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW**

As globalization continues to develop at a fast pace, many consumers are being able to view advertisements of products from regions they could not view a few years ago. According to (Kalliny & Gentry, 2007), the diminishing of national boundaries has increased more than ever the selection of products and brand names from which customers can choose. Many of the top 100 brands have worldwide presence in more than 100 countries (Mueller, Okazaki, & Taylor, 2010).

Hard sell refers to a more direct approach to selling which in contrast soft-sell approaches are more subtle and indirect (Okazaki, Mueller, & Taylor, 2010 a). The approach is also viewed as the difference of video advertising between commercials (soft-sell) and infomercials (hard-sell). These hard-sell appeals exploit the values of having more words and fewer pictures or more pictures and fewer words which can make a major impact on the effectiveness of certain. In Figure 1 below (Okazaki, Mueller, & Taylor, 2010 a) the comparison of hard sell and soft sell are illustrated below through the two different automobile ads. The picture on the left has a soft sell approach to selling this car. There are two headlines about the approach that is completely irrelevant to the car. The second picture to the right is a more hard sell direct approach. There are less pictures and they go on to say that there is no equal comparing them to other companies.



**Figure 1: Soft Sell versus Hard Sell Ads**

In this research study, hard-sell and soft-approaches are compared and contrasted. The soft-sell approach is more suitable when it is based on image-oriented content that does not emphasize specific reasons to buy but rather conveys general association with the brand (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor, 2010 a). This is why Japan, China, India, and other Eastern nations favorably use soft-sell approaches that will not offend consumers by using a direct aggressive approach. It is culturally offensive and even disrespectful to directly approach consumers with the benefits and features of a product or service without first luring them in with a favorable image, perhaps through sensitivity of emotions which are culturally significant and relevant. In contrast, the hard-sell approach is based on distinct and explicit content that emphasizes product advantages, performance (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor, 2010 b) and the factual information may be mixed easily with soft-sell by way of imagery and animation.

In contrast to the many definitions that have been provided for hard-sell and soft-sell in the advertising literature, there is no common definition or specific device that can be used to measure either type of appeal.

The research goal is to compare and contrast the effectiveness of hard-sell and soft-sell approaches vis-à-vis different cultures. This research addresses the following questions.

- Why is soft-sell appeal more effective for brand awareness, while hard-sell is more effective to persuade a consumer to make an immediate purchase;

- Why culture is the reason advertising appeals must differ to be effective in target markets of various geographic locations; and
- How modern trends are influencing people of different cultures to be more acceptant of advertising appeals that would otherwise be rejected.

The research proposes the AD Hard-Soft conceptual framework highlighting the attitudes toward the advertising, brand and purchase intentions with the usage of hard-sell and soft-sell advertising appeals.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010 b) notes that the hard-sell and soft-sell advertising concepts have been researched and provided with definitions since 1911. Through intensive research, reviews, and discussions they “proposed that three fundamental dimensions underlie soft-sell and hard-sell appeals: feeling vs. thinking, implicit versus explicit, and image versus fact” (Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor, 2010 b). Soft-sell approaches that displayed images, beautiful pictures and scenery, and other indirect methods were less annoying and aggressive.

(Chu, Gerstner, and Hess, 1995) concluded that hard-sell approaches had a better chance of surviving in a more competitive environment, consumers are negatively affected, and sellers gain more from making their products better (to make features more appealing than competitors). In fact, telemarketers are taught not to use hard-sell approaches at all, but to simply use a script that detects interested consumers (Jolson, 1986). Soft-sell approaches may be more effective when selling products that provide pleasure, whereas technological and functional products and services sell best with a hard-sell approach that can promote the features and benefits. However, simply using a hard-sell approach may fail if good customer service and satisfaction is not provided for the consumer (Marr and Prendergast, 1990).

To further distinguish between hard-sell and soft-sell, “...three primary dimensions of soft-sell appeals: feeling (creative, instinctive, imaginative, and abstract), implicitness (insinuation, appealing, subjective, and expressive), image (entertaining, interpretive, playful, and impression based)” were provided by

Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010 b). On the other hand, Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010 a) stated that hard-sell appeals consist of three dimensions: thinking (rational, logical, analytic, factual, and concrete), explicitness (precise, explanation, convincing, persuasion, and instructive), and fact (educational, descriptive, realistic, informative, and evidence-based).

Bülül and Menon (2010) provided distinctions of how hard-sell appeals are more concrete and they may generate behavioral responses instantly. Their research suggested that hard-sell advertisements influence the consumer to make a decision immediately, but loyalty will not be established as it would through the feelings that are generated through soft-sell advertisements that produce emotions. Chandy, Tellis, Macinnis, and Thaivanich (2001) provide a framework for determining why certain appeals work better in different markets and cultures. Chinese commercials use more soft-sell approaches because it is not polite to be direct in the Chinese culture (Lin, 2001).

Most modern, Western nations use more hard-sell approaches, with the exception of Britain. Britain uses soft-sell approach widely and effectively due to the presence of multi-cultural diverse population, differences in the social-cultural contexts, advertising industry environment variances, and differences in philosophy and execution that may be controlled by government and political structure (Nevett, 1992).

### ***Sexual Appeals in Advertising***

“Sexual appeals in advertising often are composed of a variety of execution elements, including visual elements (e.g., attractive models and nudity), suggestive verbal elements and music, or “scent-strip” advertising (Garcia & Yang, 2006). It can be stated that different regulations in different countries play a major role in what is advertised and what is not. “Such restrictions may also be applied to advertising codes in China, for our findings also indicated Chinese ads in both TV and magazine showed the lowest degrees of nudity across all countries” (Paek & Nelson, 2007). Due to China’s strong regulations on nudity on television, the culture in China can be perceived as one who does not agree with the sexual appeals of advertising. Many advertisers would have to create a new

campaign to target their product to a Chinese consumer if their product had any signs of sexual appeals in the advertisement.



**Figure 2: Sexual Appeal used in Axe Body Spray – Banned in some countries**

In the Figure 2 above is a popular commercial from Axe Body Spray being advertised in many countries. The commercial starts by showing a man that turn into a chocolate figurine after dousing himself in Axe Dark Temptation body spray. While wandering the streets and through different areas of his city he is licked and at the end a woman takes a bite out of his butt. This commercial is considered very risqué in parts of the world such as India where this advertisement has been banned by the government. This is a very prime example on the importance of knowing your region and making sure your advertisements are adaptable.

Figures 3 and 4 are both Levi's advertisements using different methods to appeal to different crowds. Figure 3 is an advertisement where everyone is fully clothed and there is a simple tagline. Figure 4 uses more of a sexual appeal by using a topless male actor and a female feeling on his genital area. When a small focus group was asked to select the best way to convey the message, the views were split 50% by 50%. Many of the students in the focus group felt the clothed models were more decent and more interesting. One student wrote, "Great message and tagline; it was not sexist or bias." Some female students felt that the shirtless model in Figure 4 was a lot better because they viewed the model as sexy.

A female student wrote, “He’s cute and it’s a sexy ad that I would like to see my boyfriend in.” It is safe to say that sexual appeals can be used and be effective but often if the message is conveyed correctly through words, it can be just as effective.



Figure 3: Non-Sexual

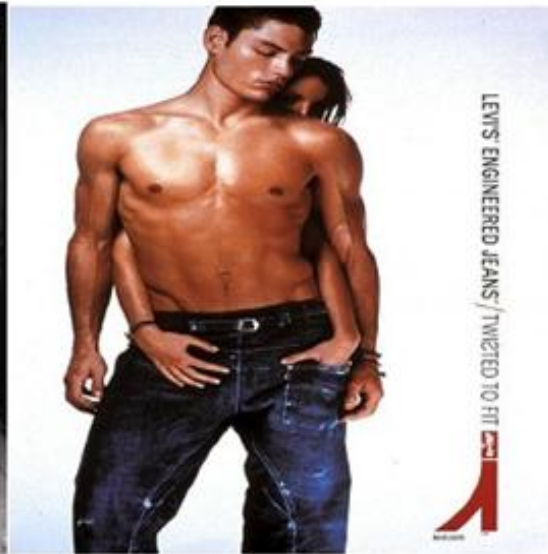


Figure 4: Sex Appeal

### ***Brand and Ad Attitudes***

Mitchell and Olson (1981) highlighted the major influence of the attitude towards the ad ( $A_{ad}$ ) by demonstrating that the effect of visual and emotional elements on the attitude towards the brand ( $A_b$ ) is mediated by  $A_{ad}$ . This theory assumes a direct link between  $A_{ad}$  and  $A_b$  and implies that a positive attitude towards the ad is directly carried over to a positive attitude towards the brand (Geuens and Pelsmacker, 1998). Research has concluded that ad evaluations were debilitated by negative affect and stimulated by positive affect (Goldberg and Gorn 1987; Mitchell 1986; Russo, Shah, and Park 1994; Scrull 1983).

Figure 5 illustrates the Dual Mediation Hypothesis Model. This model has received most support as a means of representing the interrelationships between  $A_{ad}$ , brand and ad cognitions,  $A_b$  and  $PI$  (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989; Brown and Stayman 1992).



**Figure 5: Dual Mediation Hypothesis Model**

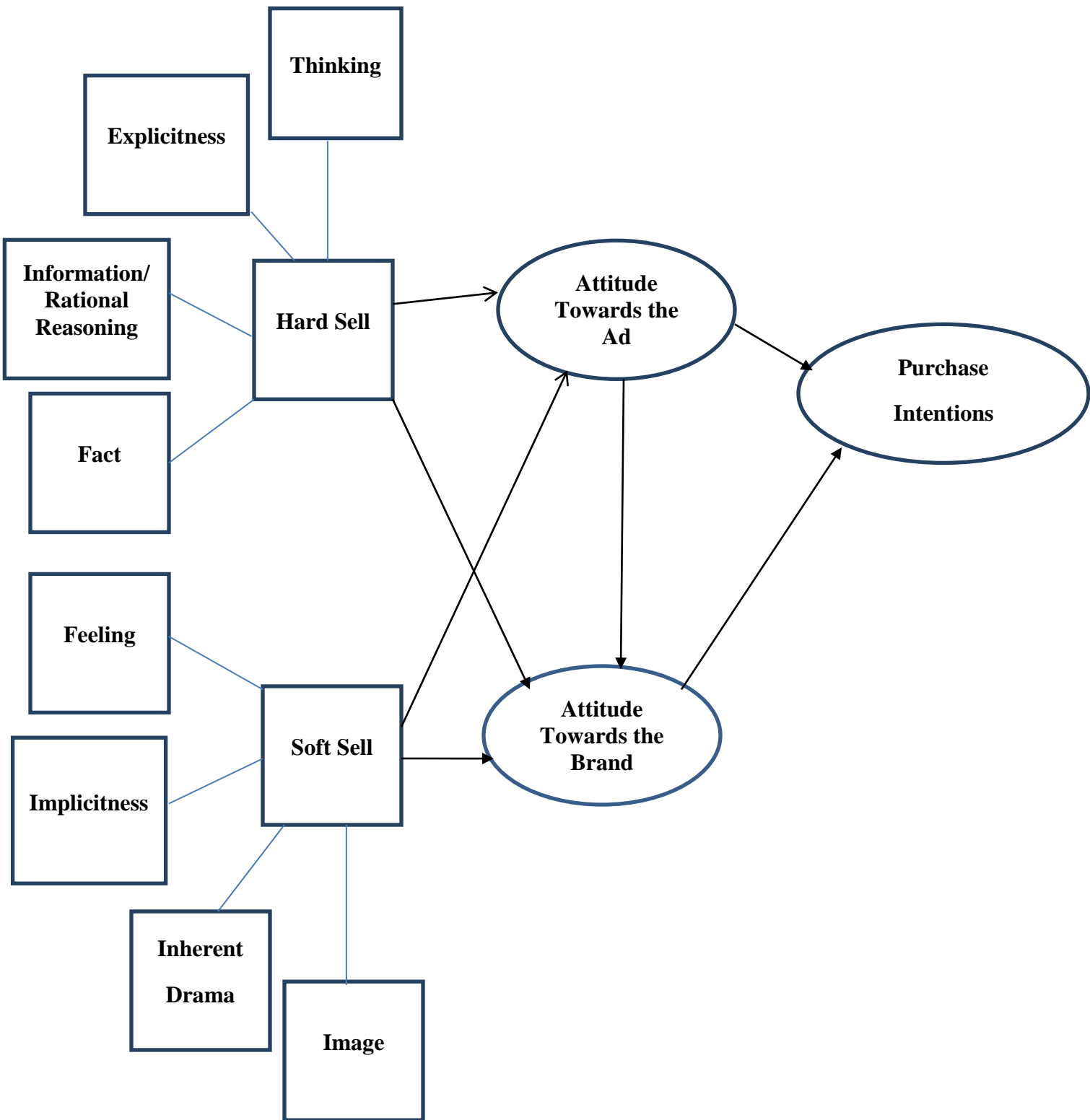
Figure 5 (Dual Mediation Hypothesis Model) supports models of Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010) in a way that there is no direct correlation between the dimensions and the advertising appeals, but they can be used as ad-measurements and consequences. Common feelings and other characteristics may be apparent in certain types of appeals, but there has been no proof of how brand and ad attitudes, purchase intention, purchase initiators, and other factors are directly correlated as a result of certain ads displaying specific appeals.

### **III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

Okazaki, Mueller, and Taylor (2010) provided with the models of hard-sell and soft-sell advertising appeals. Dual Mediation Hypothesis Model elaborated on the relationships between ad and brand cognitions, and ad and brand attitudes, leading to purchase intentions. A model called AD Hard-Soft Framework (Figure 6) is conceptualized, illustrating the hard-sell and soft-sell advertising appeals and their consequences on building ad and brand attitudes and purchase intentions. The model is created from the goals and objectives of a firm, which may actually determine which appeal is used, along with the cultural context of the firm / company.

The AD Hard-Soft model in Figure 6 illustrates the cause and effect relationship between the advertising appeals (hard-sell and soft-sell), attitudes (towards the advertisement and brand), and subsequently to purchase intentions.





**Figure 6: AD Hard-Soft Conceptual Framework and Drivers of Hard-Sell and Soft-Sell Appeals**

Figure 6 illustrates our conceptual framework - “AD Hard-Soft” model depicting the drivers of hard-sell and soft-sell appeals and their consequences. We conceptualize a direct relationship of hard sell and soft sell advertising appeals with attitude towards the advertisement, attitude towards the brand; which further affect the purchase intentions. Figure 6 shows four drivers for hard sell advertising appeal – thinking, explicitness, informational/rational reasoning and fact; and four drivers for soft sell advertising appeal – feeling, implicitness, inherent drama and image. These drivers lead to the attitude towards the ad, brand and purchase intentions.

#### **IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A focus group research was conducted where a sample size of 70 undergraduate students at a Historically Black College University (HBCU) was selected for the purpose of the research study, out of which 45 were women. The group was divided into 2 focus groups of 35 students each. The study was confined to alcoholic and automobile ads. There are several reasons for choosing these categories – all subjects were old enough to drink legally and responsibly, and they had a common preference for cars / automobiles. Seven Volumes of 5 business / fashion magazines and newspapers (Vanity Fair, Time, Cosmopolitan, Wall Street Journal, and People) were screened – the result was an initial set of 33 ads in three categories.

**First Qualitative Stage** – 33 ads / stimuli were presented to a jury of 15 students in order to judge the degree of humor, warmth, eroticism of each stimulus. The results of this qualitative stage were ordered category ranking of 33 stimuli – frequency counts were conducted and finally, 8 stimuli were selected – 2 stimuli with the highest number of assignments to the “humorous” category, 2 warm, 2 erotic, and 2 non-emotional/neutral hard-sell stimuli. The hard sell neutral stimulus was defined as the one often assigned as “not humorous”, “not erotic”, and “not warm”).

**Second Qualitative Stage** - These 8 stimuli were then presented to the two focus groups of 35 students each, in random order for each student. Randomization was used to avoid systematic measurement errors as a result of respondent wear-out. Since the population at a HBCU is homogenous with similar

socio-demographic characteristics; only gender was included as a classification question. Thereafter, the findings were recorded for these focus groups and generalized for males versus females.

## **V. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

After conducting the research, we obtain the results as shown in Appendix I. Women feel more cheerful than men when warm and soft sell ads are conveyed and the opposite is true for erotic stimuli – men feel more cheerful than women when exposed to erotic ads. Soft Sell emotional appeals of warmth, humor and eroticism lead to more positive feelings than the non-emotional hard sell appeals.

Brand interest, and positive emotion and impression about the brand and an ad, leads to positive purchase intention. Soft sell strategies make ads more interesting and likeable leading to positive intentions to buy, while hard-sell strategies ignite more likeability but do not strike interest in the target audience.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The research study revisits the concepts of advertising appeals, especially hard-sell and soft-sell appeals, and explains how there is not one widely accepted definition for an appeal. However, the fundamental dimensions to measure these appeals are widely accepted, as depicted in Figure 1a and 1b. Our proposed AD Hard-Soft conceptual model may be accepted with new dimensions of information/ rational reasoning dimension, inherent drama, and image, with theory and reasonable explanations. The information/rational reasoning dimension has been added because it is needed to explain the functional aspect of the hard-sell approach. Without information and reasoning, the functional perspective of the hard-sell approach is non-existent in an advertising strategy. Likewise, the inherent drama dimension has been added to the soft-sell model because emotions, feelings, and the other dimensions that measure a soft-sell appeal do not exist if the advertising strategy cannot emphasize the benefits of purchasing a product or service.

Our research findings are significant with respect to the use of warmth, humor and eroticism as soft-sell appeals and neutral stimulus as hard sell appeal. The limitations of the study are that only print ads were

used and analyzed, students alone were included and existing products' ads were used. It may be argued that for new brands and new products, emotional soft-sell advertising appeals may be less suited and informational hard-sell appeals will work better. Future research may focus on the new added dimensions of hard-sell and soft-sell advertising appeal drivers.

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### Appendix I

**Table 1- Perceived Level of Warmth, Eroticism, Humor, and Fear in Ads (1=low, 7=high)**

| Level of | Warm | Erotic | Humor | Fear | Neutral |
|----------|------|--------|-------|------|---------|
| Warm     | 4.9  | 4.2    | 3.5   | 1.5  | 2.2     |
| Erotic   | 3.7  | 4.4    | 1.8   | 1.3  | 2.1     |
| Humor    | 3.3  | 2.7    | 5.1   | 2.3  | 1.5     |
| Fear     | 3.4  | 2.8    | 2.1   | 4.9  | 2.5     |

**Table 2 - Correlation Between Ad-Evoked Feelings  
(1=strongest negative feeling; 7=strongest positive feeling)**

Correlations

|                              |                 | Worried _<br>carefree | Depressed _<br>cheerful | Insulted _<br>honored | Indifferent _<br>interested | Irritated __<br>pleased | Regretful __<br>rejoicing |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| worried _ carefree           | Pearson         | 1                     | .634**                  | .553**                | .498**                      | .620**                  | .577**                    |
|                              | Correlation     |                       |                         |                       |                             |                         |                           |
|                              | Sig. (1-tailed) |                       | .000                    | .000                  | .000                        | .000                    | .000                      |
|                              | Covariance      | 2.835                 | 1.537                   | 1.261                 | 1.222                       | 1.529                   | 1.366                     |
| Depressed __<br>cheerful     | Pearson         | .634**                | 1                       | .628**                | .536**                      | .675**                  | .712**                    |
|                              | Correlation     |                       |                         |                       |                             |                         |                           |
|                              | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000                  |                         | .000                  | .000                        | .000                    | .000                      |
|                              | Covariance      | 1.537                 | 2.076                   | 1.225                 | 1.125                       | 1.425                   | 1.440                     |
| Insulted __ honored          | Pearson         | .553**                | .628**                  | 1                     | .569**                      | .620**                  | .604**                    |
|                              | Correlation     |                       |                         |                       |                             |                         |                           |
|                              | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000                  | .000                    |                       | .000                        | .000                    | .000                      |
|                              | Covariance      | 1.261                 | 1.225                   | 1.835                 | 1.123                       | 1.231                   | 1.150                     |
| Indifferent __<br>interested | Pearson         | .498**                | .536**                  | .569**                | 1                           | .616**                  | .563**                    |
|                              | Correlation     |                       |                         |                       |                             |                         |                           |
|                              | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000                  | .000                    | .000                  |                             | .000                    | .000                      |
|                              | Covariance      | 1.222                 | 1.125                   | 1.123                 | 2.125                       | 1.315                   | 1.152                     |
| Irritated __ pleased         | Pearson         | .620**                | .675**                  | .620**                | .616**                      | 1                       | .636**                    |
|                              | Correlation     |                       |                         |                       |                             |                         |                           |
|                              | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000                  | .000                    | .000                  | .000                        |                         | .000                      |
|                              | Covariance      | 1.529                 | 1.425                   | 1.231                 | 1.315                       | 2.146                   | 1.309                     |
| Regretful __ rejoicing       | Pearson         | .577**                | .712**                  | .604**                | .563**                      | .636**                  | 1                         |
|                              | Correlation     |                       |                         |                       |                             |                         |                           |
|                              | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000                  | .000                    | .000                  | .000                        | .000                    |                           |
|                              | Covariance      | 1.366                 | 1.440                   | 1.150                 | 1.152                       | 1.309                   | 1.973                     |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

**Table 3 – Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis results for Ad-Evoked Feelings**

|  | Rotated Factor Loadings |
|--|-------------------------|
|--|-------------------------|

|                              | <b>Cheerful<br/>(reverse<br/>coded)</b> | <b>Insulted</b> | <b>Irritated</b> | <b>Interested</b> | <b>Carefree<br/>(reverse<br/>coded)</b> |
|------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|---|
| •Pessimistic ____ hopeful    | <b>.777</b>                             | .253            | .156             | .284              | .177                                    |
| •Callous ____ affectionate   | <b>.731</b>                             | .265            | .180             | .285              | .172                                    |
| •Dubious ____ confident      | <b>.662</b>                             | .258            | .335             | .229              | .236                                    |
| •Bad ____ good               | <b>.618</b>                             | .462            | .385             | .151              | .024                                    |
| •Cautious ____ adventurous   | <b>.549</b>                             | .353            | .339             | -.018             | .449                                    |
| •Critical ____ accepting     | <b>.458</b>                             | .376            | .394             | .125              | .455                                    |
| •Insulted ____ honored       | .237                                    | <b>.754</b>     | .194             | .246              | .153                                    |
| •Depressed ____ cheerful     | <b>.670</b>                             | .282            | .206             | .317              | .293                                    |
| •Regretful ____ rejoicing    | .368                                    | <b>.668</b>     | .187             | .219              | .253                                    |
| •Sad ____ happy              | .423                                    | <b>.607</b>     | .461             | .100              | .139                                    |
| •Irritated ____ pleased      | .252                                    | .224            | <b>.585</b>      | .339              | .224                                    |
| worried ____ carefree        | .258                                    | .326            | .284             | .141              | <b>.784</b>                             |
| nervous ____ calm            | .304                                    | .260            | <b>.764</b>      | .201              | .269                                    |
| •Unemotional __ sentimental  | .215                                    | .174            | .081             | <b>.861</b>       | .266                                    |
| •Indifferent ____ interested | .288                                    | .386            | .266             | <b>.612</b>       | .287                                    |
| •Contemplative __ impulsive  | .214                                    | .265            | .287             | .205              | <b>.807</b>                             |
| <b>Eigenvalues</b>           | <b>3.32</b>                             | <b>3.27</b>     | <b>2.46</b>      | <b>1.75</b>       | <b>1.60</b>                             |
| <b>% of variance</b>         | <b>20.77</b>                            | <b>20.49</b>    | <b>15.37</b>     | <b>10.92</b>      | <b>9.97</b>                             |
| <b>Cronbach alpha</b>        | <b>0.92</b>                             | <b>0.84</b>     | <b>0.80</b>      | <b>0.82</b>       | <b>0.82</b>                             |

**Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.**

**Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.**

**Rotation converged in 7 iterations.**

**KMO and Bartlett's Test**

|  |                    |           |
|--|--------------------|-----------|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. |                    | .967      |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity                    | Approx. Chi-Square | 19284.226 |
|  | Sig.               | .000      |

**Table 4 - Perceived Level of Warmth, Eroticism, Humor, and Fear in Ads (1=low, 7=high) for Males and Females**

| <b>Level of</b>            | <b>Warm</b> | <b>Erotic</b> | <b>Humor</b> | <b>Fear</b> | <b>Neutral</b> |
|----------------------------|-------------|---------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|
| <b>Cheerful (Male)</b>     | <b>3.5</b>  | <b>4.1</b>    | <b>3.5</b>   | <b>2.5</b>  | <b>4.2</b>     |
| <b>Cheerful (Female)</b>   | <b>3.9</b>  | <b>3.2</b>    | <b>3.9</b>   | <b>1.5</b>  | <b>3.2</b>     |
| <b>Insulted (Male)</b>     | <b>3.9</b>  | <b>3.4</b>    | <b>2.8</b>   | <b>4.0</b>  | <b>4.1</b>     |
| <b>Insulted (Female)</b>   | <b>3.7</b>  | <b>4.4</b>    | <b>3.8</b>   | <b>4.3</b>  | <b>3.9</b>     |
| <b>Irritated (Male)</b>    | <b>3.7</b>  | <b>3.7</b>    | <b>3.8</b>   | <b>4.3</b>  | <b>4.5</b>     |
| <b>Irritated (Female)</b>  | <b>3.3</b>  | <b>3.9</b>    | <b>3.5</b>   | <b>3.8</b>  | <b>4.1</b>     |
| <b>Interested (Male)</b>   | <b>3.8</b>  | <b>4.5</b>    | <b>3.6</b>   | <b>3.9</b>  | <b>3.5</b>     |
| <b>Interested (Female)</b> | <b>3.7</b>  | <b>4.0</b>    | <b>3.4</b>   | <b>4.3</b>  | <b>2.8</b>     |