

Journal of International Consumer Marketing

ISSN: 0896-1530 (Print) 1528-7068 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wicm20

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To cite this article: Nezahat Ekici, Bayram Zafer Erdogan & Michael Basil (2020): The Third-Person Perception of Sex Appeals in Hedonic and Utilitarian Product Ads, Journal of International Consumer Marketing, DOI: 10.1080/08961530.2020.1712294

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2020.1712294

Published online: 13 Jan 2020.

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JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL CONSUMER MARKETING
https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2020.1712294

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The Third-Person Perception of Sex Appeals in Hedonic and Utilitarian Product Ads

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ABSTRACT

Ads making use of sexual appeals have the potential to attract attention, but they also run the risk of offending viewers. In this paper, two studies were performed to explore consumers' third-person perceptions of sexual appeals in advertising for hedonic and utilitarian products. This research examined whether the third-person perception mediates the relationship between attitude toward the ad and purchase intention. We also examined whether these relationships are contingent on attitude toward sexual stimuli (positive vs. negative). Canadian (N = 400) and Turkish (N = 400) undergraduate students participated in each study. Findings consistently demonstrate that third-person phenomenon was supported in each study. The exact form of the third-person perception, however, differs across product types and cultural contexts. Also, attitude toward ads significantly affects third-person perception. In turn, third-person perception significantly affects both purchase intention on self and purchase intention on others. Furthermore, these relationships are contingent on the attitude toward sexual stimuli.

KEYWORDS

Third-person perception; sexual appeals; hedonic and utilitarian products; attitude toward sexual stimuli; purchase intention

Introduction

The use of sexual appeals is a popular advertising strategy. One reason for this is the common belief that 'sex sells' (Chang and Tseng 2013). Research on sexual appeals has identified many factors that affect perception of advertising and processing of persuasive information. These factors include gender of the model in the ads (Reichert, La Tour, and Kim 2007), the viewer's gender (Putrevu 2008; Sengupta and Dahl 2008), the product type (Reichert, Childers, and Reid 2012; Chang and Tseng 2013), and the local culture (Garcia and Yang 2006; Liu, Cheng, and Li 2009; Ismail and Melewar 2014). Although favorable behavioral intention (i.e., intent of purchase) ratings are usually only found when the product and sexual appeals are congruent (Soley and Kurzbard 1986), sexual appeals are still used for various types of products, regardless of whether or not there is a direct relation between the nature of the product and sexuality (Reichert 2003). Moreover, except for the congruency issue, little is known about the reactions of consumers from different cultural backgrounds to these appeals. When assessing the influence of sexual appeals, the fields of psychology and advertising have insights that can benefit both practitioners and theorists.

This study proposes that attitude toward sexual stimuli determines the effect of sexual appeals in advertising on oneself and its perceived influence on others. These perceived influences on self and others can be explained by the third-person perception. According to this theory (Davison 1983), people believe that media messages have an influence on others more than on themselves, and these perceptions shape behavior. As can be understood from this definition, third-person phenomenon has two components, one perceptual and the other behavioral. Since its first conceptualization by Davison (1983), the third-person theory has been applied in different contexts, generating a considerable body of literature over the last thirty years. Moreover, while the

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This paper is an extended version of the paper presented in 2018 Global Marketing Conference at Tokyo.
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robustness of the third-person phenomenon has been strongly confirmed by several meta-analyses (Paul, Salwen, and Dupagne 2000; Sun, Pan, and Shen 2008; Xu and Gonzenbach 2008; Eisend 2017), there are still mixed and limited results regarding the connections between the third-person perception and its behavioral outcomes (Salwen and Dupagne 1999; Sun, Pan, and Shen 2008; Xu and Gonzenbach 2008).

Many theories and cognitive and motivational factors have been used to explain the third-person phenomenon, including attribution theory (Chia, Lu, and McLeod 2004), social comparison theory (Duck, Terry, and Hogg 1995; Eisend 2015) self-enhancement theory (Perloff 2002; Reid and Hogg 2005), optimistic bias (Chapin 2000; Salwen and Dupagne 2003), social distance (Duck, Terry, and Hogg1995; Eveland et al. 1999; Meirick 2005; Paek et al. 2005), desirability of the message, and social desirability (Henriksen and Flora 1999; Peiser and Peter 2001; Xie 2016). However, there are still unexplored areas of the third-person phenomenon that may have multiple causes and behavioral outcomes. Sun, Pan, and Shen (2008) found that the perceived desirability of the message is one of the key factors. Based on this, when the message is more undesirable, the self–other asymmetry will be greater (Gunther and Storey 2003). When literature on the perceptual component of third-person was reviewed, the studies found focused on, among other topics, violent content (McLeod, Eveland, and Nathanson 1997; Rojas, Shah, and Faber 1996), pornography (Lee and Tamborini 2005; Lo and Wei 2002), persuasive and commercial messages (Duck, Terry, and Hogg 1995; Wan, Faber, and Fung 2003), perceived effects of direct-to-consumer prescription drug advertising (Huh, Delorme, and Reid 2004), political advertising (Paek et al. 2005), and sexual advertising (Pan, Meng, and Zhou 2012). The studies focusing on the behavioral component of third-person were limited to support for censorship for certain types of media messages and some restrictive regulations (Rojas, Shah, and Faber 1996; Salwen and Dupagne 1999; Youn, Faber, and Shah 2000; Lee and Tamborini 2005).

Academic interest in the behavioral component of third-person is relatively limited, although some studies were found that focused on both components of third-person. According to those studies, while some have identified no relation between perceptual bias and behavioral intention (Wan, Faber, and Fung 2003), some have found moderate or partial relations (Tewksbury, Moy, and Weis 2004) or strong relations (Golan and Banning 2008). On the other hand, in the latest studies, both components are handled together, and researchers are examining other types of behavioral outcomes of third-person phenomenon beyond that of media censorship, such as perceived effects of scarcity appeals in advertising and purchase intention (Sharma and Roy 2016) intentions to donate (Kim 2013), online marketing and word-of-mouth behaviors (Zhang and Daugherty 2009), persuasion knowledge and willingness to recommend a product (Eisend 2015), suspicion of deceptive advertising and purchase intention (Xie 2016). As a result, because the practical applications of the theory are increasing, a number of factors may determine the perceived effects of marketing communications, with some of these factors having not yet been tested. This research contributes to a broader theoretical foundation of the third-person phenomenon and attempts to explain the effects of sexual appeals in marketing communication. Furthermore, this study highlights the relationship between the third-person perception and its behavioral outcomes (consumer behavior variables such as purchase intention) as a worthwhile research area in marketing communications.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

People believe that media messages have an influence on others more than on themselves (Davison 1983; Salwen and Dupagne 1999; Sun, Pan, and Shen 2008; Xu and Gonzenbach 2008). As we stated previously, message desirability is one of the key factors in accepting or refusing the message effect on the self or on others. In general, individuals have been found to be likely to perceive advertising as socially undesirable due to its persuasive nature (Gunther and Thorson 1992). To test the classic third-person perception in the context of sexual appeals, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H1 = Individuals will believe that sexual appeals in ads have a greater influence on others than on themselves.

The third-person phenomenon is a context-specific phenomenon that differs across message types (i.e., product advertising, public service advertising, etc.). While product advertising generally generates the third-person perception, public service announcements generally generate a reverse third-person (i.e., first-person) perception (Eisend 2017). Product type is another contextual factor—which has not been fully explored—that influences how consumers perceive and respond to advertising appeals in general, and sexual appeals in particular, in the context of third-person perception. A product type is formed by associative networks that include category brands, product attributes, usage situations, and consumption experiences (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Sexual appeals in certain product categories may be viewed as more acceptable or more unacceptable. According to Lim, Chock, and Golan (2018), social norms also influence the extent and nature of third-person perception. Thus, it is predicted that if people believe that the use of sexual appeals is widespread for some product categories, they may also be more likely to believe that others will be more influenced by these ads. In this sense, product type may influence consumers' estimation of self–other perceptual differences because of the congruency issue referred to in the introduction. Based on these points of view, and because no research has been conducted previously to examine differences in the third-person perception with regard to sexual appeals on different product types, we intend to fill this gap. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H2 = Third-person perceptions will differ significantly across product type (hedonic vs utilitarian).

In addition to the hypotheses above, we propose a comprehensive model in which third-person perception plays a meditational role between attitude toward the ad and purchase intention. Specifically, we tested whether these relationships are contingent on attitude toward sexual stimuli.

Attitude toward sexual stimuli refers to the willingness of the self and others to accept sexual content (Crawford and Crawford 1978). Evaluations of ethical or unethical concerns may have an effect on this willingness. Mittal and Lassar (2000, 113) emphasized that reactions to sexual content in a message depend on the sexual attitudes of the individual. Additionally, Fisher et al. (1988) have categorized individuals showing positive or negative emotional responses to sexual contents as erotophilic or erotophobic, respectively. According to this categorization, erotophilic individuals tend to talk about sex, learn sexual information and understand messages related to sex from the media. In contrast, erotophobic individuals tend to show conservative attitudes toward sexual stimuli and to be unreceptive to sexual information in the media (Fisher et al. 1988; Pan, Meng, and Zhou 2012, 136). In light of this research, our model includes individuals' beliefs and attitudes toward sexuality, as well as attitudes toward ads that contain sexuality. Despite being subject to individuals' normative evaluation, however, an advertisement is a product of the mass media and, as such, is a public object. Many people who are privately comfortable with certain types of messages in the media might be uncomfortable with being exposed to those messages in public. Media messages that contain sexuality are commonly embedded in people's daily lives. Thus, it is expected that individuals' attitudes toward sexual stimuli will affect their responses to ad messages that contain sexuality. With this approach, in this study, individuals' attitudes toward sexual stimuli (negative vs. positive) will be considered as a moderating variable. Factors that shape the third-person perception and its relationships to purchase intentions will be compared for individuals with positive and negative attitude levels. Here, a positive attitude refers to relatively liberal individuals who are comfortable with sexual stimuli, whereas a negative attitude refers to relatively conservative individuals who are uncomfortable with sexual stimuli. Further, people's current beliefs and perceptions about the influence of communication are predicted to be an important determinant of their perception of these media messages (Pan, Meng, and Zhou 2012). Current beliefs and biases toward an ad will influence the perception

of the ad. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H3 = The effect of an individual's attitude toward an ad on third-person perception is contingent on his or her attitude toward sexual stimuli.

Although ads primarily influence emotions and thoughts, the ultimate goal of an ad is to influence consumers' purchase intentions (Peter and Olson 2005, 426). In this sense, purchase intention may be considered one of the behavioral goals of the ad. However, the effect of sexual appeals in ads may depend on whether the product is primarily hedonic or utilitarian. We propose that individuals with strong third-person perceptions may have a weaker purchase intention for themselves but perceive a stronger purchase intention for others. Thus, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H4 = Third-person perception significantly mediates the relationship between an individual's attitude toward an ad and purchase intention.

A given culture determines how its members view themselves, their social environment, and their relationship with others (Marcus and Kitayama 1991). According to the literature, third-person phenomenon is robust across cultures. However, the magnitude of the perceived effect may be different, especially with regard to the perceived effect on others (Wan, Faber, and Fung 2003). In parallel with the cultural psychology literature, because of differences between self-construal in Eastern versus Western culture, it is expected that third-person perception may be less pronounced in Eastern cultures (Perloff 1999). On the other hand, when the level of exposure to sexual appeals in advertising is considered, third-person perception may be more pronounced in Eastern cultures. Westerners may be more favorable toward sexual appeals than their Eastern counterparts, which in turn may lead to greater third-person perception in Easterners compared to Westerners. For this reason, study 2 was conducted. Importantly, however, this was not designed as a cross-cultural study, so we have not measured the culture variable in the experimental design. However, we believe that the cultural context is important, because social and cultural factors within different countries may affect not only individuals' perception of the self (Wan, Faber, and Fung 2003) and others but also responses to sexual stimuli (Marcus and Kitayama 1991; Scherer 1997). For that reason, all hypotheses above were tested via data gathered from two different countries.

Canada and Turkey were chosen because Canadian society is a democratic and capitalist community with strong individualist attitudes, whereas Turkish society is a democratic and capitalist community with strong collectivist attitudes (Waller, Deshpande, and Erdogan 2013). Because of these differences, perceived influences of the appeals on the self and others may differ.

Materials and method

A 2×2 factorial design was used. Four fictitious ads were designed based on two different countries (Canada and Turkey) and two different product types (hedonic and utilitarian) in English and in Turkish (see the appendix for ads used in the studies). The product type is a within-subjects factor. Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual model, which is tested according to data gathered from the two countries.

Design, sampling, and data collection

To test the hypotheses and answer the research questions, study 1 and study 2 were conducted. Booklets containing the four fictitious ads were administered to two samples, one in Canada and the other in Turkey. Sample sizes in both studies were equal, 400 (50% female and 50% male) in study 1 and 400 (50% female and 50% male) in study 2. Convenience sampling was used in both studies. The researcher made a brief introduction to the participants. Interested individuals were invited to complete the questionnaires in a classroom setting. Participants were instructed that they were not allowed to interact with others during the participation. A debriefing information was shared with the participants after a month.

Pretest and focus group

This study used a methodological triangulation. First, a survey was conducted on undergraduate

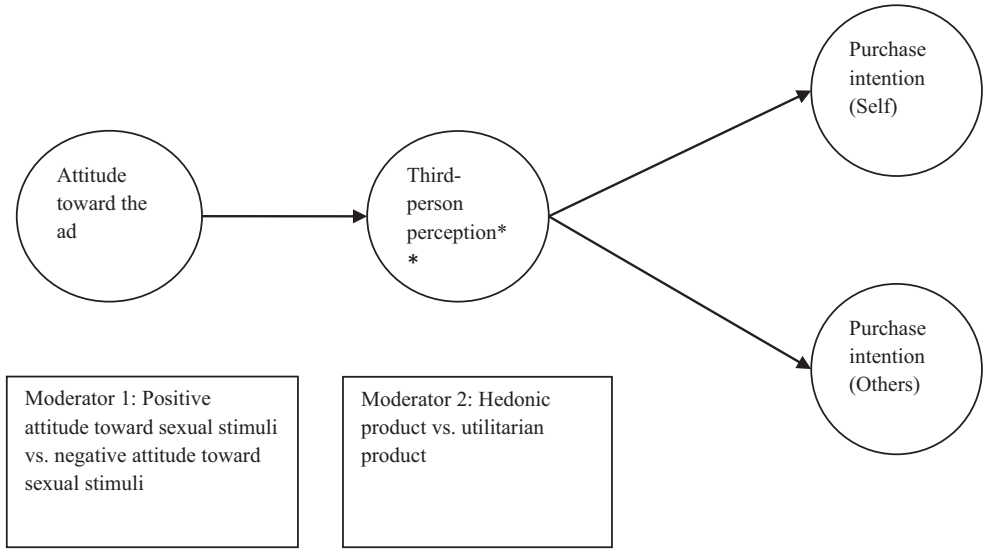

Figure 1. Conceptual model. **Note:* Third-person perception formula: Perceived influence on others – Perceived influence on self.

students to determine which products were considered hedonic and utilitarian. For that purpose, data were collected from undergraduate students in Turkey. Convenience sampling was used, and extra credit was offered for participation. To determine product types, a product index was prepared by the researcher based on the Turkish Statistical Institute's Consumer Price Index product groups. Thereafter, four utilitarian and four hedonic products were chosen by four marketing academicians. The hedonic products were perfume, chocolate, sunglasses, and jeans, and the utilitarian products were toothpaste, biscuits, flash drives/memory cards, and macaroni/pasta. Next, a manipulation check adapted from Coelho doVale and Duarte (2013) was conducted.

A total of 103 respondents participated. Participants evaluated a set of product types regarding utilitarian vs. hedonic attributes. The given product categories were rated on a seven-point scale anchored by the responses "very utilitarian" and "very hedonic". Perfume ($M = 5.04$) and chocolate ($M = 4.68$) were chosen as more hedonic, and toothpaste ($M = 2.50$) and flash drives/memory cards ($M = 2.50$) were chosen as more utilitarian relative to the other options. Next, another manipulation check, adapted from Spangenberg, Voss, and Crowley (1997) hed/ut semantic differential scale, was conducted to determine the hedonic and utilitarian dimensions of product attitude. A total of 161 respondents participated in this study. After exploratory factor analysis, a paired sample t-test was conducted to compare hedonic component means for hedonic products and utilitarian component means for utilitarian products ($M_{\text{perfume}} = 3.69$, $SD = 1.16$, $M_{\text{chocolate}} = 3.26$, $SD = 1.41$, $t_{(160)} = 4.038$, $p < 0.001$, $M_{\text{toothpaste}} = 1.52$, $SD = 0.63$ $M_{\text{memorycard}} = 1.43$, $SD = 0.68$, $t_{(160)} = 2.140$, $p < 0.005$). Taken together, considering similarities between two product types, toothpaste was determined to be functional, and perfume was determined to be hedonic. To what extent those product groups are perceived as hedonic or utilitarian was confirmed in the focus groups for the Canadians as well. Also, the fictitious brand name "AURO" was used to remove any possible confounds due to prior brand evaluation or brand knowledge. Finally, four-colored printed advertisements were developed. The sex of the models and message were varied in the ads.

Second, several focus groups were conducted to establish the ecological validity of the stimuli used. These focus groups aimed at understanding individuals' views about sexuality in the ads in general, examining the level of sexuality in the fictitious ads in the two different countries, and checking other issues related to designed ads, such as graphic design, realistic nature, reliability, familiarity, brand name, slogans, and so on. Six different focus groups were conducted, three with Canadian undergraduate students and three with

Turkish undergraduate students. In each country, three groups were organized according to gender: female-only, male-only, and mixed. Ten Canadian and ten Turkish participants were recruited with the help of notice boards offering extra credit and a pizza party for participation. To avoid a possible bias, participants were told that this research was being conducted for a new product in the market. Participants were asked some questions (adapted from Pan, Meng, and Zhou 2012) such as: What kind of signs do you look for when assessing the sexual nature of an advertisement? Does the advertisement include sexual cues like images, words, etc.? How clear are these sexual cues? How realistic and powerful is this content? Does the advertisement make people think about sex? Does this ad need sexual content (considering the product category)? Is the level of sexual content acceptable? Does the sexual content encourage product purchase? Some focus group results will be presented in the general discussion section.

Lastly, to confirm the findings of the focus groups, quantitative research was conducted. A total of 96 Canadian respondents ($N_{male} = 48$, $N_{female} = 48$) and 96 Turkish respondents ($N_{male} = 48$, $N_{female} = 48$) participated. A chocolate bar was offered in exchange for participation. First, participants were asked to what extent the related ad contains sexuality. According to the results, there was a significant difference between Canadian and Turkish samples' responses to a toothpaste ad with a male model ($M_{Canada} = 4.46$, $SD = 0.72$, $M_{Turkey} = 3.58$, $SD = 1.24$, $t_{(46)} = 2.974$, $p < 0.005$). Specifically, the level of sexuality in this ad was perceived as significantly higher by the Canadian than by the Turkish audience. When the results were examined by the respondents' gender, it was found that the responses to the ad differed specifically between Canadian and Turkish females ($M_{Canada} = 4.67$, $SD = 0.49$, $M_{Turkey} = 3.50$, $SD = 1.50$, $t_{(22)} = 2.548$, $p < 0.005$), with the former considering the level of sexuality to be significantly higher compared to the latter. Additionally, participants were asked about the congruency between the product and the sexual appeal. According to the results, sexual appeals were found to be more congruent with perfume ($M_{CA\ (48)} = 2.94$, $SD = 1.24$; $M_{TR\ (48)} = 2.83$, $SD = 1.43$) than with toothpaste ($M_{CA\ (48)} = 1.52$, $SD = 1.01$; $M_{TR\ (48)} = 1.60$, $SD = 0.81$) in both cultures ($F_{(1,188)} = 63.442$; $p < 0.005$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.252$). Also, Canadian participants ($M_{perfume\ ad\ with\ male\ model} = 4.00$, $SD = 1.14$; $M_{perfume\ ad\ with\ female\ model} = 4.04$, $SD = 0.80$; $M_{toothpaste\ ad\ with\ male\ model} = 4.08$, $SD = 1.28$; $M_{toothpaste\ ad\ with\ female\ model} = 3.42$, $SD = 1.34$) found those ads to be more culturally acceptable than did the Turks ($M_{perfume\ ad\ with\ male\ model} = 2.50$, SD = 1.10; $M_{perfume\ ad\ with\ female\ model} = 2.42$, $SD = 1.24$; $M_{toothpaste\ ad\ with\ male\ model} = 2.46$, $SD = 0.97$; $M_{toothpaste\ ad\ with\ female\ model} = 2.46$, $SD = 1.21$; ($F_{(1,184)} = 73.604$; $p < 0.005$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.286$).

Study 1

Stimuli and procedure

To test the hypotheses, Study 1 was conducted. Six-page booklets containing two fictitious ads were administered. Participants were informed about the procedure via a written consent form and were randomly assigned one of the two different booklets. Participants included 400 undergraduate students in a Faculty of Management. All ethical procedures were ensured according to the university's human subject research procedures. A convenience sampling method was used in this study.

Measures, validity, and reliability

Before addressing the hypotheses, reliability and validity tests were performed (see Table 1). To test reliability, a Cronbach's α test was used. To test validity, exploratory factor analysis was performed using the maximum likelihood extraction and promax rotation method. To measure third-person perception, participants were asked to respond to two sets of statements (Pan, Meng, and Zhou 2012) regarding the self and others (defined as "other students at the university"). Perceived effects on the self and others were measured separately. Respondents were first asked to rate perceived effects of the ad on self and then to rate perceived effects of the ad on others. Statements were answered on a five-point scale anchored by the responses "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree."

Table 1. Validity and reliability (Study 1 and Study 2).

		Study 1				Study 2			
Product category		Hedonic		Utilitarian		Hedonic		Utilitarian	
Scales		Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others	Self	Others
TPP	α	0.79	0.85	0.75	0.76	0.83	0.87	0.79	0.85
	TVE (%)	70.2	76.4	66.4	65.4	75.1	79.3	71.6	76.8
PI	α	0.90	0.91	0.89	0.92	0.90	0.92	0.90	0.92
	TVE (%)	84.6	85.3	82.5	86.5	84.8	86.7	84.2	86.5
		Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
ATADs	α_{Sexy}	0.83	0.84	0.78	0.81	0.85	0.84	0.85	0.87
	$\alpha_{Non\text{-}sexy}$	0.84	0.85	0.81	0.82	0.89	0.84	0.81	0.82
	TVE (%)	71.4	72.6	67.4	68.9	76.4	72.4	71.0	72.1
ATSS	α	0.89				0.90			
	TVE (%)	56.7				60.0			

TPP: Third-person perception
PI: Purchase Intention
ATADs: Attitude toward advertising
ATSS: Attitude toward sexual stimuli
TVE: Total variance explained
α: Cronbach's Alpha

In the study, for the difference between the self and others, a score for third-person perception concept was used. To measure the third-person perception, the formula used was the score of advertising influence on others minus the score of advertising influence on the self. To measure purchase intention, participants were asked to rate purchase intention statements (Shiv, Edell, and Payne 1997) on a five-point scale anchored by the responses "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree." As an independent variable, attitude toward the related ads was measured with seven five-point scales (believable, sexy, credible, sexually arousing, relevant, erotic, and appropriate) (Reichert 1997). There were two components of this scale, sexy and non-sexy. The coefficient was reported separately for the advertisements containing female vs. male models. Based on the eigenvalue, as a result of exploratory factor analysis, a two-factor solution emerged from the data. Two items—"sexually interesting" and "offensive"—were excluded because they were unrelated to any of the factors. Lastly, as a moderator variable, a measure of attitudes toward sexual stimuli was adopted from Crawford and Crawford (1978). Statements were rated on a five-point scale anchored by the responses "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree."

Before testing the structured model, multigroup confirmatory factor analysis was performed with AMOS 21 to assess the factor structure for the models. Chi-square value for the overall model fit was significant for both models. Also, models show a close fit with all fit indices (Indices for the utilitarian product: $x^2/df = 1.891$, $CFI = 0.948$, $GFI = 0.902$, $NFI = 0.896$, $RMSEA = 0.047$; indices for the hedonic product: $x^2/df = 1.857$, $CFI = 0.957$, $GFI = 0.904$, $NFI = 0.912$, $RMSEA = 0.046$), with all values better than recommended cutoff values.

Results

First, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were tested. According to the results, Canadian respondents believe that sexual appeals in utilitarian product ads have a greater influence ($t_{(399)} = 15.852$, $p < 0.001$) on others ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.82$) than on themselves ($M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.01$). Also, Canadian respondents believe that sexual appeals in hedonic product ads have a greater influence ($t_{(399)} = 18.814$ $p < 0.001$) on others ($M = 3.17$, $SD = 0.89$) than on themselves ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.02$). This supports H1. Moreover, there were significant third-person perception differences ($t_{(399)} = -4.054$ $p < 0.001$) between utilitarian ($M = 0.64$) and hedonic ($M = 0.84$) products. Thus, the third-person perception of the hedonic product is greater than that of the utilitarian product. This supports H2.

After testing hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2, a structural models test was conducted. All respondents were divided into two groups according to their attitudes toward sexual stimuli using the median split method (i.e., positive vs. negative attitude). The median split mean value used in grouping was 2.25. The sample sizes for

Table 2. Path results for Canadian sample (Study 1).

	Utilitarian product				Hedonic product			
	Positive Attd.		Negative Attd.		Positive Attd.		Negative Attd.	
Paths	β	S. E	β	S. E	β	S. E	β	S. E
Attitude toward the ad ➔ Third-person perception	−0.165***	0.055	−0.113**	0.043	−0.217***	0.048	−0.198***	0.059
Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on self	−0.646***	0.142	−0.758***	0.178	−1.073***	0.190	−0.983***	0.247
Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on others	0.440**	0.190	0.403**	0.182	0.233	0.180	0.152	0.202
Attitude toward the ad ➔ Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on self	0.106**	0.007	0.085**	0.007	0.232**	0.009	0.194**	0.014
Attitude toward the ad ➔ Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on others	−0.726**	0.010	−0.045**	0.007	−0.050**	0.008	−0.030**	0.011

**$p < 0.05$;
***$p < 0.01$.

positive and negative groups were 214 and 186, respectively. As mentioned earlier, positive attitude here refers to relatively liberal individuals who are comfortable with exposure to sexual stimuli, whereas negative attitude refers to relatively conservative individuals who are uncomfortable with exposure to sexual stimuli.

Table 2 illustrates the path results for the utilitarian and hedonic products.

When we examine fit indices for the utilitarian product, results indicate that the model shows a close fit with all fit indices ($x^2/df = 2.297$, $CFI = 0.920$, $GFI = 0.880$, $NFI = 0.869$, $RMSEA = 0.057$), as all values are better than the recommended cutoff values. Results on the utilitarian product indicate a significant negative effect between third-person perception and attitude toward the related ad on individuals in both attitude groups. When the magnitude of the effect is considered, this effect is stronger on individuals in the negative attitude group than individuals in the positive attitude group. For purchase intention, as expected, a significant negative effect was found between third-person perception and purchase intention on self in both attitude groups. When the magnitude of the effect is considered, purchase intention on self, on individuals in negative attitude is stronger, relative to individuals on positive attitude. Also, a significant positive effect is seen between third-person perception and purchase intention on others on individuals in the positive attitude group, whereas this effect is not seen on individuals in the negative attitude group. Lastly, significant indirect effects are seen between attitude toward the ad, third-person perception and purchase intention on self and on others in both attitude groups.

When we examine fit indices for the hedonic product, results indicate that the model shows a close fit with all fit indices ($x^2/df = 2.627$, $CFI = 0.915$, $GFI = 0.874$, $NFI = 0.871$, $RMSEA = 0.064$), with all values better than recommended cutoff values. Results on the hedonic product indicate a significant negative effect of third-person perception and attitude toward the related ad on individuals in both attitude groups. When the magnitude of the effect is considered, this effect is stronger on individuals with negative attitudes than on individuals with positive attitudes. For purchase intention, as expected, a significant negative effect of third-person perception and purchase intention on self was observed in both attitude scales. When the magnitude of the effect is considered, purchase intention on self, on individuals in negative attitude is stronger, relative to individuals in the positive attitude group. Also, a significant positive effect is seen between third-person perception and purchase intention on others, on individuals in the positive attitude group, while this effect is not seen on individuals in the negative attitude group. Lastly, significant indirect effects are seen between attitude toward the ad, third-person perception and purchase intention on self and on others in both attitudes. As a result, H3 and H4 were supported.

Study 2

To test hypotheses in a different country context, the same procedure as in Study 1 was employed in Study 2.

Stimuli and procedure

To test the hypotheses, Study 2 was conducted in Turkey. Participants included 400 undergraduate students of a Faculty of Economics and

Table 3. Paths results for Turkish sample (Study 2).

	Utilitarian product				Hedonic product			
	Positive Attd.		Negative Attd.		Positive Attd.		Negative Attd.	
Paths	β	S. E	β	S. E	β	S. E	β	S. E
Attitude toward the ad ➔ Third-person perception	−0.196**	0.079	−0.166***	0.042	−0.078	0.099	−0.043	0.316
Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on self	−0.971***	0.184	−1.714***	0.332	−0577***	0.163	−0.905***	0.227
Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on others	0.734***	0.189	0.577**	0.234	0.565**	0.171	0,994***	0.247
Attitude toward the ad ➔ Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on self	0.019	0.014	0.284**	0.013	0.045**	0.016	0.041	0.071
Attitude toward the ad ➔ Third-person perception➔ Purchase intention on others	−0.143**	0.014	−0.095**	0.009	−0.044	0.169	−0.042	0.078

**$p < 0.05$;
***$p < 0.01$.

Administrative Sciences. All ethical procedures were ensured according to the university's human subject research procedures. A convenience sampling method was used in this study.

Measures, validity, and reliability

The same measures as in Study 1 were used. Also, the same processes were followed for the reliability and validity tests (See Table 1).

All measures were translated by two bilingual language experts into Turkish and then back-translated into English. After this procedure, a pilot study was conducted on a group of 20 targeted respondents selected from a marketing principles class to detect any possible wording or measurement problems and also to time how long it would take to complete the questionnaire. After the pilot study, some minor wording changes were made. Lastly, before testing the structured model, a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis was performed with AMOS 21 to assess the factor structure for the models. Chi-square value for the overall model fit was significant for both models. Also, models show a close fit with all fit indices (Indices for the utilitarian product: $x^2/df = 1.724$, $CFI = 0.963$, $GFI = 0.912$, $NFI = 0.918$, $RMSEA = 0.043$; indices for the hedonic product: $x^2/df = 1.699$, $CFI = 0.966$, $GFI = 0.915$, $NFI = 0.923$, $RMSEA = 0.042$), with all values better than recommended cutoff values.

Results

First, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were tested. According to the results, Turkish respondents believe that sexual appeals in utilitarian product ads have a greater influence ($t_{(399)} = 16.055$, $p < 0.001$) on others ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.98$) than on themselves ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.01$). Also, Turkish respondents believe that sexual appeals in hedonic product ads have a greater influence ($t_{(399)} = 17.981$, $p < 0.001$) on others ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.95$) than on themselves ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.05$). This supports H1. Moreover, there are no significant third-person perception differences ($t_{(399)} = -1.375$ $p > 0.005$) between utilitarian ($M = 0.79$) and hedonic ($M = 0.85$) products. Thus, H2 is not supported in the Turkish sample.

After testing H1 and H2, a structural model test was conducted. All respondents were divided into two groups according to their attitudes toward sexual stimuli using the median split method (i.e., positive vs. negative attitude). The median split mean value that was used in grouping was 2.75. The sample sizes for positive and negative groups were 204 and 196, respectively. Table 3 illustrates path results for the utilitarian and hedonic product.

When we examined fit indices for utilitarian products, results indicated that the model shows a close fit with all fit indices ($x^2/df = 2.402$, $CFI = 0.926$, $GFI = 0.878$, $NFI = 0.880$, $RMSEA = 0.059$), with all values better than the recommended cutoff values. Results on the utilitarian product indicate a significant negative effect between third-person perception and attitude toward the ad on individuals in the positive attitude group, while this effect is not seen with individuals in the negative attitude group. Regarding purchase intention, as expected, a significant negative effect between third-person perception and purchase intention on self was found in both

attitude groups, while a significant positive effect is seen between third-person perception and purchase intention on others in both attitude groups. When the magnitude of the effect is considered, purchase intention on self, on individuals in positive attitude is stronger, relative to individuals on negative attitude. Also, as expected, the magnitude of the effect of purchase intention on others is stronger on individuals in the negative attitude relative to individuals in the positive attitude group. Lastly, a significant indirect effect is seen between attitude toward the ad, third-person perception and purchase intention on others in the positive attitude group.

When we examined fit indices for the hedonic product, results indicated that the model shows a close fit with all fit indices ($x^2/df = 2.117$, $CFI = 0.944$, $GFI = 0.897$, $NFI = 0.901$, $RMSEA = 0.053$), with all values better than recommended cutoff values. Results on the hedonic product indicate a significant negative effect between third-person perception and attitude toward the ad on individuals in the positive attitude group, while this effect is not seen with individuals in the negative attitude group. Regarding purchase intention, as expected, a significant negative effect between third-person perception and purchase intention on self was found in both attitude groups, while a significant positive effect is seen between third-person perception and purchase intention on others in both attitude groups. When the magnitude of the effect is considered, purchase intention on self, on individuals in positive attitude level is stronger, relative to individuals in negative attitude. Lastly, significant indirect effects are seen between attitude toward the ad, third-person perception and purchase intention on self and others in the positive attitude group. Thus, H3 and H4 were supported.

General discussion

The third-person phenomenon was supported in this study. Specifically, both Canadian and Turkish respondents thought that other people would be more influenced than themselves by these ads. This result support the third-person perception in two different cultures and in the context of sexual appeals in ads.

The exact form of the third-person perception, however, differs across product types and country contexts. The results demonstrated that the third-person perception may depend on whether the product is hedonic or functional. Specifically, although there was no significant difference between third-person perception regarding the hedonic product and third-person perception regarding the utilitarian product for the Turkish respondents, there was a significant difference between third-person perception regarding the hedonic product and third-person perception regarding the utilitarian product for the Canadian respondents. Specifically, Canadian respondents' third-person perception regarding the hedonic product is significantly greater than that of the utilitarian product. This result is thus dependent on both product type and country.

It is possible that the cause of different reactions between individuals in Canada and in Turkey is the result of different sexual attitudes in the two countries. Sexual attitudes appeared to be antecedents to the third-person perception, and this may explain why this effect differs across societies, in accordance with social cognition theory (Fiske and Taylor 2013). Social cognition is an approach that makes positive contributions on issues such as how an individual perceives, processes, and stores information and how it influences the individual's communication skills and perceptual skills. For Canadians and Turks, different social cognitive levels may play a role in perceiving and processing media messages that contain sexuality. There are evaluations about the dominance of analytical thoughts in American and European societies, whereas there are holistic thoughts in Eastern and Asian societies.

Within this study, sexuality was not positioned as an undesirable advertising strategy, and positive statements were used to measure perceived influences. One of the primary moderators of the first- and third-person perception is message desirability (McLeod, Eveland, and Nathanson 1997; Salwen and Dupagne 1999; Hoffner et al. 2001; Lee and Tamborini 2005). When we consider the message desirability of the hedonic product ad, it can be said that the sexuality emphasis was more dominant because of hedonic promises and images relative to the utilitarian

product. Consequently, results from the hedonic product can be explained by the more frequent exposure to sexuality in such products in North American culture and the consumers' tendency to consider sexual messages undesirable. It is also possible that members of individualist societies are in search of diversity and pleasure more than collectivists (Herrmann and Heitmann 2006). Differences in individualistic and collectivistic values between these two cultures (Hofstede 1984) may also cause differences in self-construal (Marcus and Kitayama 1991). Thus, Turks, as members of a collectivist society (with a score of 37; see Hofstede 2001), may consider themselves more dependent. Conversely, Canadians, as members of an individualistic society (with a score of 80; see Hofstede 2001), may consider themselves more independent. In addition to individualistic vs. collectivist cultures, perceived social distance (Eveland et al. 1999; Meirick 2005) may be another factor that may contribute to explaining this result. The fact that students in this study were asked to compare themselves with other students at their university may have caused a greater perceived social gap for Canadians.

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the effect of product type on third-person perception. In focus group interviews, Canadians considered the use of sexuality in ads as an "easier" and "lazier" form of advertising. Moreover, when the given examples by respondents in focus group interviews were examined, it was revealed that the usage of sexuality in cosmetic products such as perfumes was generally not considered offensive. As a result, respondents' familiarity with the use of sexuality in perfume ads may have caused them to not be concerned about the effect on themselves yet still be concerned about the effect on others. In focus group interviews, Turks tended to concentrate more on visual stimuli such as images, colors, and the body of the model, whereas Canadians tended to concentrate on messages in the ad, such as slogans, text, and the face of the model. Promises of hedonic products were tied to sexuality directly (e.g., "Get ready to seduce!"). As a result, reactions to the hedonic product can be understood by taking together the sexuality-related promises in the ad and the perceptions of sexuality in ads as an "easier" and "lazier" form of advertising.

When the structural model results are reviewed, results show that attitude toward ads significantly affects third-person perception, which in turn significantly affects purchase intention. Furthermore, these relationships are contingent on product types and attitude toward the sexual stimuli. Specifically, the third-person perception in Turks caused behavioral outcomes as expected; however, surprisingly, the results for Canadians were different. For Turks, in both product types and in both attitude groups, there was a negative relationship between third-person perception and purchase intention on self; conversely, there was a positive correlation between third-person perception and purchase intention on others. On the other hand, for Canadians with negative attitudes, when purchase intention on others was considered, for both products, there was no significant effect between third-person perception and purchase intention. The effect of purchase intention on self on individuals in the negative attitude group was relatively greater than on individuals in the positive attitude group. Thus, for Canadian individuals with negative attitudes, the third-person perception had a stronger effect on purchase intention on self. There was no significant behavioral outcome on others for the individuals in the negative attitude group. The reason for this may be that the perceptual and behavioral dimension was moderated by different cultural structures and variables. For example, perceived exposure is a potential variable that may influence third-person perception and the behavioral outcome (Peiser and Peter 2001).

Within the third-person perception theory, our results suggest that there are content-related factors that affect individuals' perceptions of media influence. Our study has substantial theoretical implications, as it provides new empirical evidence in support of both the perceptual and behavioral components of the third-person phenomenon, when applied to the context of sexually-oriented ads. Also, there are some valuable implications for policymakers regarding the usage of sexual appeals in advertising.

Limitations and future research

The most important limitation of this research is the homogeneity of the sample. The use of a convenience sample means that the data were obtained from participants with similar profiles. Thus, the external validity of the study might be reduced. Furthermore, this limitation may also have affected third-person perception (Paul, Salwen, and Dupagne 2000). Third-person perception has been found to be greater in student-based samples than in non-student-based samples. Likewise, Eisend (2015, 62) expressed two more limitations: first, students are considered to be more well-informed than average consumers; second, attitudes that are dependent on skeptical beliefs of ads' convincing power would be observed more common. On the other hand, some cognitive skills are necessary to estimate the third-person perception based on the comparison targets, product category, and so on. For that reason, we thought that the use of a student sample could be justified in this kind of research.

Another limitation of the study is the restriction to one hedonic and one utilitarian product. It would be interesting to replicate this research in order to fully explore the third-person perception with a wider variety of products. Also, the brand effect may be taken into consideration by using current ads instead of hypothetical ads. In this study, the third-person perception in the ad was measured through print ads. However, people may react differently to ads in different media. Importantly, the media habits of today's digital generation are heavily oriented toward the small-screen, personal, private smartphone viewing experience, which may affect the public versus private consumption setting of sexual advertising; this factor should be considered in future studies. Finally, the physical and emotional mood of the respondents may affect the answers and should also be taken into consideration in future studies.

Lastly, although behavioral intentions are predictive of behavior (Ajzen 1991), it is possible that the respondents gave biased or socially desirable answers through the self-report method used here. Therefore, future studies may want to examine this effect with real demonstrable behaviors.

Finally, although we collected survey data from both Canada and Turkey, this was not intended as a cross-cultural analysis. A future cross-cultural analysis may benefit from conducting measurement invariance tests to explore these findings further.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by the Anadolu University Scientific Research Projects Commission under Grant [1410E404]. Nezahat Ekici was supported by The Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey to conduct this research under Grant [2214/A research fellowship program].

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Appendix

Fictitious ads used in the study (Samples in Turkish and English).

