

# Decoding Consumer Reactions: An Empirical Study on the Effectiveness of Sexual Appeals in Contemporary Indian Advertising.

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study examined the relationship between Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA), Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC), and Behavioral Responses (BHR) in Indian advertising. It explored both the direct and mediated effects of PAA on BHR through ATC, while also considering gender differences.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The study used a quantitative research design, gathering data through a survey from a sample of Indian consumers. A multi-group analysis was conducted to examine potential gender differences in responses to sexualized advertising content. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to analyze the relationships between the variables.

**Findings:** This study explores the influence of perceived advertising appeal (PAA) and attitudes toward sexualized content (ATC) on consumer behavioral responses (BHR) in Indian advertising. The results show that PAA positively impacts both BHR and ATC, while ATC negatively affects BHR. Additionally, ATC partially mediates the relationship between PAA and BHR. The study also reveals no significant gender differences in these relationships, suggesting that both men and women respond similarly to sexualized content in Indian advertising.

**Originality/Value:** This study challenges traditional gender-based assumptions in sexualized advertising, highlighting that cultural context, rather than gender, influences consumer attitudes and behaviors in India. It underscores the importance for advertisers to focus on cultural sensitivity and audience segmentation based on values, demographics, and media exposure, rather than relying on gender, to create more effective and socially relevant campaigns..

**Keywords:** Perceived Advertising Appeal, Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, Consumer Behavior, Gender Differences, Cultural Sensitivity, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The use of sexual appeals in advertising has long sparked debate among marketers and researchers. Some argue that these tactics effectively capture consumers' attention and enhance brand recognition, while others believe they can be off-putting and alienating. Despite this controversy, sexual appeals continue to be prevalent in modern advertising, with many brands incorporating suggestive imagery and language into their campaigns (Reichert et al., 2011). By leveraging fundamental human desires, sexual content in advertising aims to create memorable and persuasive messages that promise attractiveness, romance and pleasure.

Research has shown that sexual appeals can influence consumer purchase decisions, especially in the context

of social media and digital marketing (Zachari et al., 2018). However, the effectiveness of these appeals may be declining as consumers become more conscious of their purchasing decisions and less susceptible to emotional manipulation. Studies have also explored how sexual appeals impact consumer reactions across different cultures and contexts, underscoring the importance of considering cultural and social norms when using sexual content in advertising (Nusantara & Haryanto, 2018; Trivedi & Teichert, 2021). The use of sexual appeals in advertising raises ethical concerns about objectification and potential negative impacts on women's self-esteem and body image (Hamilton & Kirshen, 2023; Trivedi & Teichert, 2021). While sexual appeals can enhance memory for the advertisements themselves, they can also distract viewers from processing brand-related information. Studies have found .

that such appeals can weaken consumers' willingness to buy the products and reduce their memory of the brand (Ciuvat et al., 2023). However, other research indicates that sexual appeals can increase attention and arousal, leading to longer viewing times and higher buying intentions. The surrounding context, such as the type of program in which the ad appears, can also moderate the effects of sexual appeals on memory and attitudes (Reichert et al., 2001). Overall, the evidence suggests that while sexual appeals may capture initial attention, they do not necessarily translate to improved advertising effectiveness in terms of brand recall, attitudes, and purchase intent. The impact appears to depend on factors like gender, product type, cultural background and the specific measures used (Samson, 2016; Hu et al., 2020). Research indicates that men generally respond more positively to sexual advertising, whereas women's adverse reactions are linked to perceived threats to their reproductive potential, social status, and cultural influences (Zachari et al., 2018).

### 1.1. Gap of the Study

While advertising appeals and consumer behavior have been extensively studied, critical gaps remain, particularly in understanding attitudes toward sexualized content and the role of gender differences within the Indian context. Existing literature has established that perceived advertising appeal can positively influence consumer behavior (Keller et al., 2020; Ekici et al., 2020). However, the specific role of attitudes toward sexualized content as a mediator in this relationship remains underexplored. While numerous studies have explored advertising appeals in various cultural contexts, there is a notable scarcity of research focusing on the Indian market, where cultural nuances significantly shape consumer responses (Datta & De, 2022; Klug & Vigar-Ellis, 2012). Most of the research has been conducted in Western countries and other parts of Asia, leaving a substantial gap in understanding how Indian consumers, particularly across genders, perceive and respond to sexual appeals in advertising (Coyne et al., 2019; Visetbhakdi, 2011). This gap highlights the need for localized studies to better understand gender-based reactions and cultural influences on advertising effectiveness in the Indian context.

### 1.2. Significance of the Study

Understanding how attitudes toward sexualized content mediate the impact of perceived advertising appeal on consumer behavior will provide deeper insights into the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer responses to advertisements. This knowledge is essential for developing more effective advertising strategies that align with consumer perceptions and enhance engagement. Exploring these dynamics within the Indian cultural context is of paramount importance given India's diverse and burgeoning consumer market. Research focusing on gender differences in advertising responses within this unique cultural setting will offer valuable insights for marketers aiming to tailor their strategies to the specific preferences and societal norms of Indian consumers.

### 1.3. Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore the effectiveness of sexual appeals in modern advertising by

examining several dimensions of consumer reactions. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- To examine the influence of perceived advertising appeal on consumer behavioral responses toward sexualized content in contemporary Indian advertisements.
- To assess the impact of perceived advertising appeal on consumer attitudes toward sexualized content in contemporary Indian advertisements.
- To examine the mediating role of attitudes toward sexualized content in the relationship between perceived advertising appeal and consumer behavioral responses.
- To analyze gender-based differences in consumer responses to sexual appeals in Indian advertising, comparing how male and female consumers perceive and react to such appeals.

## 2. Development of Hypotheses

### 2.1. Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA) and Behavioral Responses (BHR)

The relationship between perceived advertising appeal and behavioral responses can be understood through several theoretical lenses. The **Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)** (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) posits that consumers process persuasive messages either through a central or peripheral route, depending on the appeal's strength and personal relevance. A strongly perceived advertising appeal, such as a well-integrated sexual message, can prompt deeper cognitive engagement, leading to more stable and intentional behavioral outcomes. On the other hand, weaker or misaligned appeals may trigger peripheral processing, resulting in less thoughtful and possibly transient behavioral reactions. The **Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** (Ajzen, 1991) further emphasizes that perceptions of appeal influence attitudes, which then shape behavioral intentions and actual behaviors. Additionally, **Emotional Response Theory** (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999) suggests that emotionally evocative advertisements—especially those eliciting arousal, curiosity, or desire—can serve as powerful motivators for consumer behavior, reinforcing the importance of how appeal is perceived. Empirical studies have reinforced these theoretical assertions by showing that the effectiveness of advertising appeal—particularly sexual appeal—varies significantly based on intensity, context, and audience characteristics. Research by Pham Thi Be et al. (2024) found that moderate levels of sexual appeal can positively influence purchase intentions, especially among adolescents, whereas excessively provocative content may backfire, as highlighted by Raza et al. (2017), who noted its tendency to evoke negative brand attitudes, particularly among women. The perceived appropriateness and contextual relevance of the appeal are key mediators in this process (Soti, 2022). Furthermore, factors such as cognitive load, cultural sensitivity, and psychological distance can shape how consumers interpret and act upon these appeals (Theodorakis & Painesis, 2020; Choi et al., 2022; Datta & De, 2022). Collectively, these insights underscore that consumer behavioral responses are not merely reactions to visual stimuli but are deeply influenced by how

advertising appeal is perceived, interpreted, and emotionally processed.

**H1: Perceived advertising appeal positively influences consumers' behavioral responses in the context of sexual appeals in contemporary Indian advertising.**

## **2.2. Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA) and Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC)**

The connection between perceived advertising appeal and attitudes toward sexualized content can be grounded in multiple psychological theories. **Social Learning Theory** (Bandura, 1977) suggests that individuals develop and adapt their attitudes by observing modeled behaviors in their environment. Advertisements that employ sexual imagery often serve as such behavioral models, especially when they are perceived as appealing, leading consumers to form more accepting attitudes toward such content. **Priming Theory** (Bargh, 2006) extends this understanding by positing that repeated exposure to sexually charged messages activates related cognitive associations, gradually shaping how consumers think and feel about such content. Furthermore, **Self-Perception Theory** (Bem, 1972) argues that individuals infer their attitudes from their own behaviors—suggesting that repeated interaction with, or attention to, perceived appealing sexual content can lead consumers to conclude that they have favorable attitudes toward it. These theories collectively highlight how the perceived appeal of sexualized advertisements can play a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes over time.

Empirical evidence reinforces the theoretical linkage between perceived advertising appeal and consumer attitudes toward sexualized content. Nusantara and Haryanto (2018) found that under high cognitive load, consumers were more likely to develop favorable attitudes toward sexualized ads, especially when contextual cues suggested relational or emotional commitment. However, this relationship is nuanced—**product category** significantly moderates consumer responses. While sexual appeals may enhance attitudes for hedonic products, their use in utilitarian product ads often leads to negative consumer reactions (Lanseng, 2016). Hu et al. (2020) observed that although consumers may initially prefer high-sex-appeal ads, they often revert to favoring low-sex-appeal content when making actual purchase decisions. Social norms further complicate this relationship; individuals may outwardly reject sexualized advertising to align with societal expectations, even if their private attitudes are more favorable—a phenomenon known as **social expectation bias**. Moreover, long-term exposure to sexualized content has been linked with undesirable outcomes such as increased tolerance toward sexual aggression and erosion of brand equity, particularly among younger audiences (Hermannsdóttir & Gunnarsdóttir, 2015). Cultural values, gender, and visual execution styles also influence the extent to which perceived appeal translates into favorable or unfavorable attitudes (Ekici, 2020; Luk, 2017; Sharma, 2012).

**H2: Perceived advertising appeal positively influences consumer attitudes toward sexualized content in the context of contemporary Indian advertising.**

## **2.3. Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC) and Behavioral Responses (BHR)**

The relationship between attitudes toward sexualized

content and behavioral responses can be conceptually explained through several foundational psychological theories. **The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)** (Ajzen, 1991) posits that individual behavior is directly influenced by behavioral intentions, which are in turn shaped by attitudes. In the context of advertising, a favorable attitude toward sexualized content is likely to strengthen consumers' intent to engage in behavior aligned with those attitudes—such as product purchase, brand engagement, or adopting lifestyle cues reflected in the advertisements. **Cognitive Dissonance Theory** (Festinger, 1957) complements this by emphasizing the human drive for internal consistency. When consumers hold positive attitudes toward sexualized advertising yet encounter opposing cultural or personal beliefs, they may alter their behaviors to reduce dissonance and maintain congruence with their favorable attitudes. Additionally, **Normative Social Influence Theory** (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) suggests that individuals often conform to what is perceived as socially acceptable. In this light, if sexualized advertising becomes normalized or valued in a particular social or cultural context, individuals with positive attitudes are more likely to exhibit behavioral responses that reflect this norm—such as purchasing the advertised products or imitating the portrayed behaviors. Empirical studies reinforce this theoretical connection by demonstrating how attitudes toward sexualized content can shape consumer behavior. For instance, exposure to sexualized advertising has been shown to lead to behavioral outcomes such as increased product interest or altered lifestyle preferences, especially when the content aligns with consumer attitudes and perceived social norms (Khalid et al., 2023). The **perceived offensiveness** of such ads also mediates this relationship—ads with nudity, when presented in a less offensive or more artistic manner, tend to generate more positive behavioral responses (Keller et al., 2020). Demographic variables such as **gender and age** further modulate this dynamic. Research indicates that men are generally more responsive to sexual appeals, while women's responses are more favorable when the appeal is contextually relevant and relationship-centered (Lanseng, 2016). Moreover, cultural openness and value systems influence how consumers interpret sexualized advertising and act upon it. In culturally conservative contexts like India, behavioral responses are often filtered through both personal attitudes and broader societal expectations. Nonetheless, when the perceived appropriateness aligns with internal attitudes, behavioral outcomes such as increased brand interaction, product trial, or even social sharing of the advertisement become more likely.

**H3: Attitudes toward sexualized content positively influence consumer behavioral responses in the context of contemporary Indian advertising.**

## **2.4. Mediating Role of Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC)**

The mediating role of **attitudes toward sexualized content** can be conceptually framed through cognitive and media-effect theories that explain how exposure leads to internalized beliefs, which in turn shape behavior. **Script Theory** and **Sexual Script Theory** (Gagnon & Simon, 1973) posit that individuals develop behavioral expectations based on repeated media exposure. When



consumers are exposed to sexual appeals in advertising, they form cognitive scripts about sexual norms, which are internalized as attitudes. These attitudes then become the lens through which subsequent messages are processed and acted upon. **Priming Theory** (Bargh, 2006) supports this mechanism by suggesting that frequent exposure to sexualized content activates associated cognitive constructs, thereby influencing how individuals respond to similar stimuli in the future. Within this framework, **attitudes** serve as a cognitive filter that mediates the relationship between advertising appeal (independent variable) and behavioral responses (dependent variable), converting abstract exposure into concrete consumer action.

Empirical literature underscores the pivotal mediating role that attitudes toward sexualized content play in translating advertising exposure into consumer behavior. For instance, studies reveal that the perceived appeal, realism, and relevance of sexual content in media strongly influence the development of sexual attitudes, which in turn guide behavioral intentions such as purchase decisions, brand loyalty, or social sharing (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Wright, 2020; Raza et al., 2017). Moreover, **Blanc (2024)** and **Grigoropoulos (2023)** highlight how continuous exposure to sexualized messaging shapes cultural scripts and social norms, reinforcing specific attitudes that become predictors of behavior. The strength of this mediation is influenced by contextual and cultural factors—particularly in conservative societies like India—where internal attitudes might conflict with public norms, leading to nuanced behavioral responses. Additionally, the **perceived realism** of the content amplifies this mediating effect, as consumers are more likely to act on content they find believable or personally relatable. Therefore, the effectiveness of sexualized appeals in Indian advertising is not direct but is largely shaped by the intervening role of consumer attitudes.

**H4: Attitudes toward sexualized content mediate the relationship between perceived advertising appeal and consumer behavioral responses.**

## 2.5. Gender Differences in Responses to Sexual Advertising Appeals

Gender differences in consumer responses to sexual advertising appeals can be conceptually explained through Evolutionary Psychology and Selective Processing Theory. Evolutionary Psychology posits that men and women have distinct motivational frameworks shaped by reproductive roles: while men are generally more receptive to sexual cues due to mating-related motivations, women tend to be more cautious and evaluative, prioritizing relational and social implications (Barkow et al., 1995; Lanseng, 2016). Selective Processing Theory (Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991) complements this view by suggesting that men often rely on heuristic, surface-level cues like physical attractiveness in advertisements, while women process such content more systematically and critically, particularly when it challenges their values or societal expectations. These theories provide a strong conceptual basis for expecting gender-based moderation at different stages of the advertising response process. Empirical studies reinforce the idea that gender

moderates consumer responses to sexual advertising at multiple points. Research indicates that men tend to view sexualized advertisements more favorably and are more likely to respond with positive attitudes and purchase intentions, as such appeals align with traditional male-oriented media representations and evolutionary predispositions (Putrevu, 2008; Hamilton & Kirshen, 2023). Conversely, women often reject or scrutinize such content, particularly when it is perceived as objectifying or misaligned with cultural norms (Dahl et al., 2009; Klug & Vigar-Ellis, 2012). In the Indian context, cultural conservatism further amplifies this divergence—Indian women are more likely to disapprove of sexualized content, whereas Indian men may respond more permissively, particularly when exposed to liberalized media (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2015). These findings suggest that gender moderates not only the direct relationship between advertising appeals and behavioral responses but also the underlying attitudes that mediate these effects.

- **H5a:** The effect of perceived advertising appeal on behavioral responses differs significantly between male and female consumers in India.
- **H5b:** The effect of perceived advertising appeal on attitudes toward sexualized content differs significantly between male and female consumers in India.
- **H5c:** The effect of attitudes toward sexualized content on behavioral responses differs significantly between male and female consumers in India.

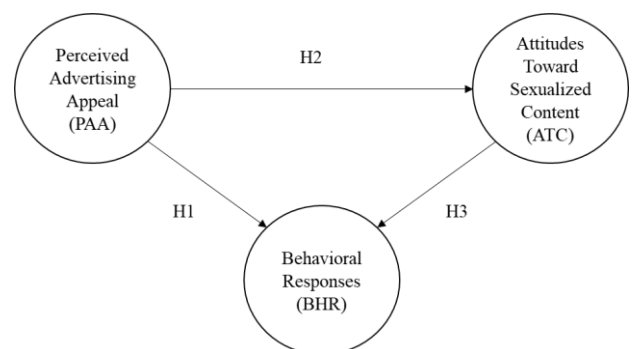


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## 3. Methodological Approach

The research adopted a **quantitative approach** to examine the relationships between perceived advertising appeal, attitudes toward sexualized content, and behavioral responses in the context of contemporary Indian advertising. This approach was chosen to gather measurable data that can provide empirical evidence regarding how gender differences influence consumer reactions to sexual appeals in advertisements.

### 3.1. Sampling Frame and Sample Selection

The **sampling frame** consisted of individuals who had encountered advertisements featuring sexualized content. The sample units were defined as individual consumers who met these criteria. To ensure the selection of relevant participants, a **purposive sampling** technique was employed. This approach deliberately selected participants who had relevant experiences and opinions concerning sexualized advertisements, which is especially crucial in exploring gender-based differences in attitudes and responses. This sampling method is in line

with previous studies that emphasize the importance of selecting participants with specific characteristics related to the research focus (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2002).

### 3.2. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected via a **survey** conducted between **December 2024 and March 2025** through **face-to-face interviews** across various districts in **Jharkhand, India**, including urban, suburban, and rural areas (Census of India, 2021). The survey used a **5-point Likert scale**, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," to assess respondents' levels of agreement with each survey item. The **perceived advertising appeal scale**, adapted from **Batra et al. (1986)**, was used to assess participants' emotional and affective responses to advertisements. This scale has been widely used in previous studies and was adjusted to suit the cultural context of India. **Attitudes toward sexualized content** were measured using **Reichert's (2002) scale**, which focuses on consumer perceptions and ethical considerations related to sexual imagery. This scale was selected for its established validity in assessing attitudes toward sexualized media, though it was carefully adapted to reflect the Indian socio-cultural context, where perceptions of sexual content may differ significantly from Western contexts. **Behavioral responses** were assessed using the framework from **Fishbein and Ajzen (1977)**, which evaluates consumer intentions and actions. This framework provides a robust method for measuring how attitudes influence behavior, making it appropriate for analyzing the outcomes of exposure to sexualized advertisements.

### 3.3. Pilot Study

A **pilot study** was conducted with 40 participants to validate the adapted instruments for assessing consumer behavior and reactions to sexualized content in Indian advertisements. The pilot study helped refine the wording of the survey items, improving clarity and contextual relevance. These adjustments were crucial to enhancing the **reliability and validity** of the instruments before the main data collection phase.

### 3.4. Data Cleaning and Final Sample

A total of **480 responses** were initially collected; however, **62 incomplete or outlier responses** using Mahalanobis Distance (Tabachnick & Fidel, 2013) were discarded during the data cleaning process, resulting in **418 valid responses** for further analysis (Hair et al., 2019). The data cleaning process also ensured that the sample represented the target population while minimizing the impact of invalid responses on the results.

### 3.5. Measurement Reliability

To further enhance the reliability of the measurement scales, **items with factor loadings** below **0.702** were excluded from the analysis (Kline, 2023). This threshold was set to ensure that only items with strong measurement properties were retained in the final analysis.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)** with **SmartPLS 4**. SEM was chosen for its ability to simultaneously evaluate both direct and indirect relationships within a unified model, allowing for a comprehensive examination of the hypothesized relationships between perceived advertising appeal, attitudes toward sexualized content, and behavioral responses. The use of SEM also enabled the testing of

multiple hypotheses, including those exploring the mediating role of attitudes and gender differences in consumer responses.

## 4. Analysis and Findings

### 4.1. Respondent Characteristics

Table 1: Sample Demographics

		Percent
Gender	Male	58.6
	Female	41.4
Age	18-24 years	12.0
	25-34 years	36.6
	35-44 years	34.4
	45-54 years	14.8
	55 and above	2.2
Education	High School or equivalent	22.5
	Bachelor's Degree	53.1
	Master's Degree	21.5
	Doctoral Degree	2.9
Occupation	Student	11.5
	Employed (Government Service)	37.6
	Employed (Private Service)	46.4
	Unemployed	4.5
Location	Urban	38.0
	Suburban	39.5
	Rural	22.5
Media Consumption Habits	Television	28.2
	Online platforms (social media, streaming services, etc.)	21.3
	Print media (newspapers, magazines, etc.)	24.4
	Other (please specify)	26.1
Note: Total Number of Respondents (N = 418)		

Table 1 presents the demographic profile and media consumption habits of the respondents. The sample consists predominantly of males (58.6%) compared to females (41.4%). Age-wise, the largest group is 25-34 years (36.6%), followed by 35-44 years (34.4%). Most respondents have a Bachelor's Degree (53.1%), with fewer holding a Master's (21.5%) or Doctoral Degree (2.9%). Occupationally, a significant portion is employed in private service (46.4%) or government service (37.6%), and 11.5% are students. Geographically, the respondents are fairly evenly distributed across urban (38.0%), suburban (39.5%), and rural areas (22.5%). Television remains the dominant medium for consumption, accounting for 28.2% of users. Other media formats collectively represent a substantial share at 26.1%, while print media (24.4%) and online platforms (21.3%) are relatively less prevalent in comparison.

#### 4.2. Common Method Bias

In assessing common method bias, this study employed Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values within the inner model. All VIF values (as displayed in Table 2) remained under 3.33, indicating the absence of common method bias in the model (Kock, 2015; Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006).

Table 2: Collinearity Statistics (Inner Model)

	VIF
PAA1	1.796
PAA3	1.314
PAA4	1.962
ATC3	1.891
ATC4	1.847
ATC5	1.795
BHR1	2.662
BHR2	2.589
BHR3	1.576
BHR4	2.02

**Note:** VIF = Variance Inflation Factor

#### 4.3. Measurement Model Analysis

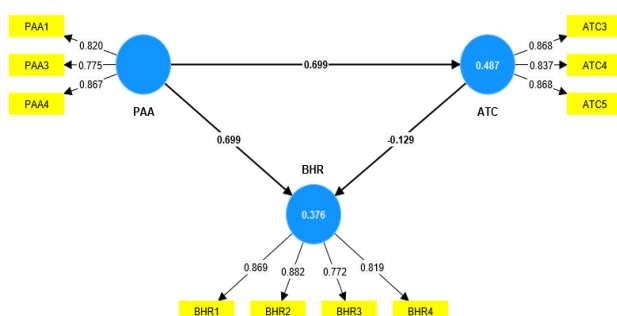


Figure 2: Measurement Model

The evaluation of the measurement model was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the constructs, as illustrated in Figure 2. All items within the model exhibited factor loadings exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.702 (Vinzi et al., 2010), indicating strong construct validity. Additionally, the analysis revealed no evidence of multicollinearity (see Table 4), with all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values remaining below 5 (Hair et al., 2011) and, more conservatively, below 3.3 (Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2006), further affirming the model's robustness.

Table 3: Constructs and Measurement Items

Construct	Statements (Items)	Code
<b>Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA)</b>	1. The advertising content is appealing to me.	PAA1
	2. I find the use of sexual appeals in advertising attention-grabbing.	PAA2 *
	3. The overall visual appeal of the advertising content is high.	PAA3
	4. The sexual elements in the advertisement make it more memorable.	PAA4
	5. I believe the advertising appeal effectively captures my interest.	PAA5 *
<b>Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC)</b>	1. I have positive attitudes towards the use of sexualized content in advertising.	ATC1 *
	2. The inclusion of sexual elements in advertisements is acceptable to me.	ATC2 *
	3. I find sexualized content in advertising to be tastefully executed.	ATC3
	4. My overall attitude towards sexual appeals in advertising is favorable.	ATC4
	5. I appreciate the artistic expression conveyed through sexualized content in advertisements.	ATC5
<b>Behavioral Responses (BHR)</b>	1. I am more likely to consider purchasing products featured in advertisements with sexual appeals.	BHR1
	2. The use of sexualized content in advertising influences my product choices positively.	BHR2
	3. Seeing sexual appeals in advertisements increases my likelihood of engaging with the brand.	BHR3
	4. I find myself more inclined to explore further information about products showcased in sexually appealing ads.	BHR4
	5. The presence of sexual	BHR5

	elements in advertising enhances my intention to make a purchase.	*
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**Note:** \* Items eliminated due to low factor loading less than 0.702 (Vinzi et al., 2010)

Table 4: Collinearity Statistics (Outer Model)

Measurement Items	VIF
PAA1	1.796
PAA3	1.314
PAA4	1.962
ATC3	1.891
ATC4	1.847
ATC5	1.795
BHR1	2.662
BHR2	2.589
BHR3	1.576
BHR4	2.020

**Note:** VIF = Variance Inflation Factor

#### 4.3.1. Construct Reliability and Validity

Table 5 presents a comprehensive evaluation of the reliability and validity of the measured constructs. The results indicate that the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for PAA (0.758), ATC (0.822), and BHR (0.856) meet the acceptable threshold, demonstrating adequate internal consistency across all constructs. Additionally, the composite reliability (pc) values of 0.861 (PAA), 0.893 (ATC), and 0.903 (BHR) exceed the recommended benchmark of 0.8 (Hair et al., 2021), further confirming the reliability of the measurement scales.

In terms of convergent validity, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were 0.675 for PAA, 0.736 for ATC, and 0.700 for BHR, all of which surpass the conventional threshold of 0.5. This suggests that a significant proportion of the variance within each construct is captured by its respective indicators, thereby supporting the adequacy of the measurement model (Hair et al., 2021).

Table 5: Construct Reliability and Validity

Const ruct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho c)	(A V E)
PAA	0.758	0.861	0.675
ATC	0.822	0.893	0.736
BHR	0.856	0.903	0.700

**Note:** PAA = Perceived Advertising Appeal, ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral Responses, AVE = Average Variance Extracted

#### 4.3.2. Discriminant Validity

The assessment of discriminant validity was conducted using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion, which is recognized for its superior reliability compared to the conventional Fornell–Larcker criterion (Neneh, 2019; Henseler et al., 2015). Following the recommended HTMT threshold of 0.90 (Voorhees et al., 2016), all HTMT values in the analysis, as presented in Table 6, were found to be well below this benchmark. These results confirm that the examined constructs exhibit

adequate discriminant validity, ensuring that they are conceptually distinct from one another in accordance with established methodological standards.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

	ATC	BHR
PAA	0.883	0.744
BHR	0.424	

**Note:** PAA = Perceived Advertising Appeal, ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral Responses, HTMT = Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio

#### 4.4. Structural Model Analysis

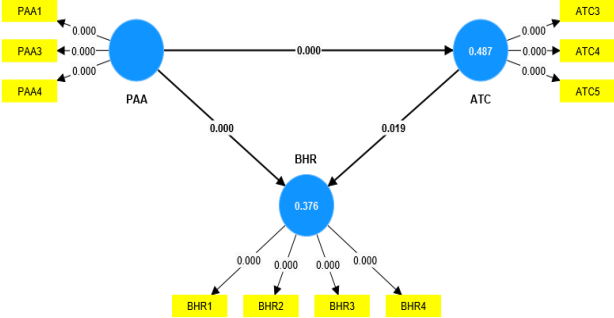


Figure 3: Structural Model

##### 4.4.1. Assessing R<sup>2</sup> Values

The coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) serves as a key indicator of the model's explanatory power by quantifying the variance accounted for within the endogenous constructs (Hair et al., 2019; Shmueli & Koppius, 2011). The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values for ATC and BHR were 0.487 and 0.376, respectively (Table 7), suggesting a moderate level of explanatory power (Chin, 1998). These findings reinforce the predictive relevance of the structural model, demonstrating its ability to account for a substantial proportion of variance within the examined constructs (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2011).

##### 4.4.2. Assessing Q<sup>2</sup> Values

The PLSpredict analysis (Shmueli et al., 2016), based on the Stone–Geisser Q<sup>2</sup> values (Geisser, 1974; Stone, 1974), confirms the predictive accuracy of the PLS-path model for ATC and BHR. The Q<sup>2</sup> values of 0.483 for ATC and 0.367 for BHR (Table 7) exceed the critical threshold of zero, indicating that the model effectively predicts the variance in these constructs. These results affirm the model's robustness in terms of predictive relevance, further supporting its applicability in the given research context.

Table 7: Explanatory Power

Construct	R-square adjusted	Q <sup>2</sup> predict
ATC	0.487	0.483
BHR	0.376	0.367

**Note:** ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral Responses

##### 4.4.3. Assessing f<sup>2</sup> Values

The f<sup>2</sup> effect size assesses the impact of an exogenous variable on the coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) by measuring the change that occurs when the variable is removed from the model. Table 8 presents the f<sup>2</sup> effect sizes, revealing distinct variations in the strength of relationships among the constructs. The results indicate a



large effect size ( $f^2=0.403$ ) for the influence of PAA on BHR and a large effect size ( $f^2=0.955$ ) for the relationship between PAA and ATC. In contrast, the effect of ATC on BHR is minimal, with a small effect size ( $f^2=0.014$ ). Following Cohen's (1988) classification, these findings underscore the varying degrees of influence exerted by different exogenous variables on the dependent constructs, providing further insight into the structural relationships within the model.

Table 8:  $f^2$  Values

	<b>f-square</b>	<b>Effect Size</b>
<b>PAA -&gt; BHR</b>	0.403	Large
<b>PAA -&gt; ATC</b>	0.955	Large
<b>ATC -&gt; BHR</b>	0.014	Small

**Note:** PAA = Perceived Advertising Appeal, ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral Responses

#### 4.4.4. Model fit

The Goodness of Fit (GoF) serves as an integrative measure for assessing model fit in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Among the various indices, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is commonly used to evaluate path model fit. In the current study, the SRMR value is 0.071, which falls below the threshold of 0.08, indicating a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Furthermore, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) is reported as 0.790, which falls within the acceptable range of  $0.80 \leq \text{NFI} < 0.90$  (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). The SRMR value, being below the recommended cutoff, suggests a satisfactory model fit (Sarstedt et al., 2021), while the NFI value, which is close to the ideal value of 1, further supports the robustness of the model and its strong fit (Henseler et al., 2016).

#### 4.5. Hypotheses Testing

Table 9 presents the results of the hypothesis testing, highlighting significant relationships among Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA), Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC), and Behavioral Responses (BHR). The findings indicate that PAA has a strong positive effect on BHR ( $\beta = 0.699$ ,  $t = 14.234$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting H1. Additionally, PAA significantly influences ATC ( $\beta = 0.699$ ,  $t = 26.678$ ,  $p < .001$ ), confirming H2. However, the relationship between ATC and BHR is negative yet statistically significant ( $\beta = -0.129$ ,  $t = 2.351$ ,  $p = .019$ ), suggesting an inverse association. These results validate all three hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3), emphasizing the pivotal role of perceived advertising appeal in shaping attitudes and behaviors, as well as the nuanced impact of attitudes toward sexualized content on behavioral responses.

Table 9: Direct Relationships

<b>Hypotheses</b>	<b>B</b>	<b><math>\sigma</math></b>	<b>T</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>H1: PAA -&gt; BHR</b>	0.699	0.049	14.234	0.000	Supported
<b>H2: PAA -&gt; ATC</b>	0.699	0.026	26.678	0.000	Supported
<b>H3: ATC -&gt; BHR</b>	-0.129	0.055	2.351	0.019	Supported

**Note:** PAA = Perceived Advertising Appeal, ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral

Responses,  $\beta$  = Beta Coefficient,  $t$  = T-Statistics,  $p$  = Probability Values

#### 4.6. Mediation

Table 10 presents the findings of a mediation analysis examining the influence of Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA) on Behavioral Responses (BHR), with Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC) serving as the mediating variable. The total effect of PAA on BHR is statistically significant ( $\beta = 0.609$ ,  $t = 16.427$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that PAA exerts a substantial positive influence on BHR. When controlling for ATC, the direct effect of PAA on BHR remains significant ( $\beta = 0.699$ ,  $t = 14.234$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that PAA independently enhances BHR, irrespective of ATC. Additionally, the indirect effect of PAA on BHR through ATC is significant ( $\beta = -0.090$ ,  $t = 2.325$ ,  $p < 0.020$ ), providing evidence that ATC mediates the relationship between PAA and BHR. These results support the presence of complementary partial mediation, indicating that PAA positively impacts BHR both directly and indirectly through ATC.

Table 10: Mediation Analysis

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Total effect</b>		<b>Direct effect</b>			<b>Indirect effect</b>			<b>Decision</b>
	PAA -> BHR		PAA -> BHR			PAA -> ATC -> BHR			Supported
<b>H4 :</b>	$\beta$	$t$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	(Complementary Partial Mediation)
	0.609	16.427	0.699	14.234	0.000	-0.090	2.325	0.020	
	0.609	16.427	0.699	14.234	0.000	-0.090	2.325	0.020	

**Note:** PAA = Perceived Advertising Appeal, ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral Responses,  $\beta$  = Beta Coefficient,  $t$  = T-Statistics,  $p$  = Probability Values

#### 4.7. Multi Group Analysis (MGA)

Table 11: MGA

	<b>Difference (Male - Female)</b>	<b>p value</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>H5a: PAA -&gt; BHR</b>	-0.021	0.821	Not Supported
<b>H5b: PAA -&gt; ATC</b>	0.026	0.626	Not Supported
<b>H5c: ATC -&gt; BHR</b>	0.071	0.530	Not Supported

**Note:** PAA = Perceived Advertising Appeal, ATC = Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content, BHR = Behavioral Responses,  $p$  = Probability Values

Table 11 presents the results of the multi-group analysis, which investigated gender-based differences in the relationships between Perceived Advertising Appeal (PAA), Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (ATC), and Behavioral Responses (BHR). The findings did not support the hypotheses regarding significant gender



differences in these relationships. Specifically, the path from PAA to BHR showed a negligible difference ( $\Delta = -0.021$ ) with a non-significant p-value of 0.821, indicating that the influence of advertising appeal on consumer behavior is consistent across genders. Similarly, the relationship between PAA and ATC revealed a minimal difference ( $\Delta = 0.026$ ) and a p-value of 0.626, suggesting that both male and female consumers exhibit similar attitudes toward sexualized content in response to advertising appeals. Lastly, the path from ATC to BHR presented a small difference ( $\Delta = 0.071$ ) with a non-significant p-value of 0.53, indicating that attitudes toward sexualized content influence behavioral responses comparably for both genders.

## 5. Discussion

This study offers a nuanced and contextually grounded exploration of how perceived advertising appeal (PAA)—particularly sexual appeal—influences consumer attitudes and behavioral responses in the Indian advertising landscape. By situating the findings within established theoretical paradigms and juxtaposing them against existing empirical work, the study advances both theoretical understanding and practical insight into the interplay between appeal, attitude, and behavior in culturally conservative markets.

### *Perceived Advertising Appeal and Behavioral Response (H1)*

Consistent with expectations, PAA emerged as a strong and significant predictor of behavioral responses, corroborating the core tenets of the **Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)** and the **Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991)**. This finding underscores the persuasive power of emotionally engaging and aesthetically compelling sexualized advertising in eliciting consumer actions such as product purchase, brand interaction, and content sharing. The result also aligns with **Emotional Response Theory (Bagozzi et al., 1999)**, which suggests that affective reactions—such as arousal or curiosity—serve as precursors to action. Furthermore, this outcome is congruent with recent literature highlighting the effectiveness of moderately sexualized and culturally attuned advertising in emerging markets (Pham Thi Be et al., 2024; Soti, 2022). However, in agreement with Raza et al. (2017), the study reinforces the caution that overt or culturally insensitive sexual appeals can undermine message effectiveness, signaling that perceived appropriateness moderates appeal effectiveness.

### *Perceived Advertising Appeal and Attitudes Toward Sexualized Content (H2)*

The positive relationship between PAA and attitudes toward sexualized content (ATC) confirms Hypothesis H2 and reinforces the notion that perceived creative quality and emotional resonance shape attitudinal acceptance. This relationship finds theoretical grounding in **Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)** and **Priming Theory (Bargh, 2006)**, both of which posit that media exposure reinforces cognitive schemas and influences attitude formation. Complementary perspectives from **Self-Perception Theory (Bem, 1972)** suggest that consumers' repeated engagement with appealing ads may lead them to infer favorable internal attitudes. However, this relationship is conditional. Prior

work (Lanseng, 2016; Hu et al., 2020) has demonstrated that such appeals are more persuasive in hedonic product categories, whereas they may backfire in utilitarian contexts, a distinction that deserves further empirical scrutiny.

In the Indian socio-cultural context, attitudes toward sexualized content remains ambivalent. While exposure may breed familiarity, entrenched cultural scripts still frame sexual appeal as socially contentious. Studies by Ekici (2020), Luk (2017), and Sharma (2012) illustrate the tension between private receptiveness and public disavowal, often driven by normative pressures. This duality complicates interpretation and suggests that favorable attitudes may be fragile or situationally constrained.

### *Attitudes and Behavioral Response (H3)*

Contrary to Hypothesis H3, ATC negatively influenced behavioral responses, highlighting a disjunction between attitude and action. This result challenges linear assumptions within the **Theory of Planned Behavior** and points to the relevance of **Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957)** and **Normative Social Influence Theory (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955)**. Consumers may harbor favorable attitudes toward sexualized ads but suppress corresponding behaviors to maintain social conformity and avoid reputational risk—particularly in settings where modesty, honor, and familial approval are paramount.

Empirical evidence supports this interpretation. Keller et al. (2020) and Lanseng (2016) found that cultural incongruence and moral discomfort can impede action, particularly among female consumers. Moreover, Khalid et al. (2023) observed that positive attitudinal responses in surveys often fail to predict real-world behavior, especially when mediated by internalized values and social visibility.

This finding is critical for marketers: favorable attitudes do not guarantee behavioral outcomes. Without alignment between consumer values, social norms, and brand messaging, behavioral inertia or backlash may result—even when the content is creatively compelling.

### *Mediating Role of Attitudes (H4)*

The analysis revealed a complex mediating role of ATC in the PAA–BHR relationship. While PAA directly and significantly influenced BHR, the indirect path via ATC was negative and significant, indicating **complementary partial mediation**. This nuanced outcome aligns with **Sexual Script Theory (Gagnon & Simon, 1973)** and **Priming Theory**, which suggest that cultural taboos can produce conflicting scripts that both stimulate and suppress behavioral intent. The indirect dampening effect implies that although consumers find sexualized content aesthetically appealing, attitudinal conflict—rooted in cultural dissonance—may suppress action. These findings are consistent with research by Peter and Valkenburg (2006) and Wright (2020), who noted that media-generated attitudes often face friction from socialized norms that shape behavioral expression. Thus, ATC functions as a **regulatory gatekeeper** rather than a simple motivational conduit. In culturally conservative markets, even favorable appeal must overcome attitudinal ambivalence to translate into effective behavioral outcomes.

### **Gender-Based Differences (H5a–H5c)**

Unexpectedly, no statistically significant gender differences were found across the tested pathways, countering hypotheses grounded in **Evolutionary Psychology (Buss & Schmitt, 1993)** and **Selective Processing Theory (Lang, 2000)**. This finding signals a possible shift in the traditional gendered response to sexualized media, potentially reflecting the influence of globalization, digital exposure, and changing cultural norms among India's urban youth.

Scholars such as Nelson and Paek (2008) and Dheer et al. (2021) suggest that increased access to global media and the normalization of expressive content may be eroding traditional gender boundaries in advertising reception. Moreover, the content used in this study—moderate in tone and framed with humor or artistic intent—may have neutralized gender-based variation, a pattern observed by Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2012).

These results underscore the importance of considering **contextual, generational, and socio-demographic factors** over essentialist gender differences when evaluating ad effectiveness in modern India.

### **6. Practical Implications**

The study offers valuable practical insights for advertisers using sexual appeals in culturally conservative markets like India. First, marketers should design moderate, culturally relevant sexualized ads that evoke curiosity, humor, or sensuality in a socially acceptable manner. This approach will foster positive engagement without triggering backlash. While such appeals can influence consumer attitudes, these attitudes may not easily translate into action due to entrenched cultural norms. Therefore, advertisers should incorporate family-friendly values, empowerment narratives, or artistic storytelling to make the appeal more socially acceptable. Moreover, even positively perceived sexual appeals may fail to prompt behavior if they conflict with societal expectations. To mitigate this risk, pre-testing campaigns for cultural appropriateness and collaborating with trusted cultural influencers can ensure alignment with social norms. Since attitudes mediate the relationship between appeal and behavior, campaigns should incorporate social norm reinforcement, such as peer approval or community relevance, to reduce attitudinal conflict and encourage consumer action. The study also challenges traditional gender-based targeting, suggesting a shift toward psychographic segmentation that focuses on values and cultural adaptability rather than gender stereotypes. Additionally, ethical considerations are paramount; marketers must avoid objectification or misalignment of sexualized content to protect brand credibility. Lastly, the effectiveness of sexual appeals varies by product type—these strategies are more successful for hedonic products like fashion and entertainment, so aligning the product with the emotional tone of the ad is crucial for effectiveness. Ultimately, successful sexualized advertising in India requires cultural awareness, sensitivity to social norms, and ethical responsibility, alongside a deep understanding of consumer attitudes and behaviors.

### **8. Limitations**

The study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the use

of purposive sampling introduces the potential for selection bias, which may limit the generalizability of the results to a broader population. The research was conducted in Jharkhand, a region that may not fully represent consumer attitudes across India, where perceptions of sexualized content may vary significantly due to regional cultural differences. While the survey instruments were adapted to the Indian cultural context, they may not have captured all the nuances of consumer reactions, highlighting the need for further validation of these instruments. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to draw causal inferences, and longitudinal research would be valuable in examining how consumer responses to sexualized content evolve over time. The reliance on self-reported behavioral intentions presents another limitation, as it may not accurately reflect actual consumer behavior. Finally, while the pilot study helped refine the instruments, the complexity of consumer reactions to sexualized content may not have been fully captured, suggesting the need for more robust and comprehensive measurement tools in future studies.

### **9. Future Research Directions**

Future research could build on this study by exploring cross-cultural variations in consumer responses to sexualized advertising. Examining diverse regions or countries with different cultural norms would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural context shapes consumer attitudes and behaviors toward such content. Additionally, investigating individual differences—such as gender, age, and social values—would help refine advertising strategies by clarifying how these factors moderate the effects of perceived advertising appeal. Longitudinal studies are also necessary to assess the long-term impact of sexualized advertisements on brand trust, attitudes, and behavioral responses, as the cross-sectional design of this study limited the ability to examine these effects over time. Furthermore, future research should explore the influence of different types of sexual appeal—ranging from suggestive to explicit—on consumer trust and behavior, offering more nuanced insights into how to tailor advertising content effectively. Finally, with the growing prominence of digital and social media in advertising, further studies should investigate how these platforms amplify or moderate the effects of sexualized advertisements, particularly in the context of influencer marketing and online consumer engagement.

### **10. Conclusion**

This study explored how perceived advertising appeal—especially sexual appeal—affects consumer attitudes and behavior in India's culturally conservative context. Findings show that while sexualized ads can effectively drive behavioral responses and positive attitudes, these attitudes do not always lead to action due to cultural and social constraints. Attitudes were found to mediate the appeal-behavior link, but this mediation was negatively influenced by cultural dissonance. No significant gender-based differences were observed, suggesting shifting media perceptions among Indian youth. Overall, the study highlights the need for culturally sensitive, ethically responsible advertising strategies that align with social norms to effectively influence consumer behavior.

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