

DOCTORAL THESIS

It depends on how you focus on the self: effects of attractive models in advertising

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**It Depends on How You Focus on the Self:
Effects of Attractive Models in Advertising**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

Advertising abounds in attractive female images. These images are typically intended to enhance advertising effectiveness. However, they may also be regarded as social comparison standards to influence how one evaluates the self in terms of attractiveness. Do attractive advertising models influence persuasion and self-evaluation simultaneously, and under what conditions?

The current study proposes a psychological mechanism that underlies the persuasion and self-evaluation effects associated with attractive advertising models. Specifically, it contends that the way self-concept is active in mind at the time individuals encounter attractive models in advertisements may lead to differential strategies of categorizing a model, prompting individuals to attend to similar (dissimilar) attributes of the objects of judgment, and to include (exclude) an attractive model into (from) product judgment and the self-view. Two experiments were conducted to provide empirical evidence.

Study 1 showed that when young female participants were exposed to physically attractive advertising models, a high level of self-focused attention lowered product evaluation and self-evaluation. High self-focused attention also increased participants' negative thoughts, suggesting that attractive models are being excluded from product judgment and the self-view.

Study 2 tested the effects of a temporal orientation of the self. Young female participants were led to think about their personal- versus possible-self. While different self-orientations did not produce effects on product evaluation, self-evaluation, or negative thoughts in the attractive model conditions, some effects were obtained in the average-looking model conditions. Further, the same model was rated differently in terms of physical attractiveness across personal- versus possible-self conditions, suggesting differential categorizing strategies. Theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

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