



How Fashion Brands Can Benefit from the Power of Eroticism

Marc Paternot**International Business School, University of Applied Sciences Fresenius, Germany*

***Corresponding author:** Marc Paternot, Department of Marketing, International Business School, University of Applied Sciences Fresenius, Cologne, Germany.

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Abstract

Eroticism has been affecting personal relationships for thousands of years and it still has a bad reputation. This article introduces eroticism to the field of management, in particular to brand management. In order to reveal what eroticism signifies a quantitative study using exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The findings have shown that eroticism is a multidimensional construct consisting of six distinct factors. It relies on a balanced attitudes model consisting equally of cognitive, affective and behavioral characteristics and enjoys significant differences with regards to gender and age. The developed erotic-based marketing strategy following a five-building block process should assist Fashion Marketing/General Managers in affirming their belief in the strength of turning their brand into an erotic brand.

Keywords: Fashion; Eroticism; Branding; Marketing mix; Construct measurement

Introduction

Eroticism enjoys a bad reputation. The aim of this article is to give this construct respectability within social sciences and to introduce it to the field of management. To consider eroticism as a new avenue for brands and for brand management. Much has been written on eroticism but mostly through definitions and typologies. Though, in the last decade there has been three attempts to consider this construct in a scientific manner. Hakim [1] published an article named "Erotic Capital" in which she highlights six elements of erotic capital: beauty, sexual attractiveness, social liveliness, social presentation and sexuality. Sarpila [2] developed a scale of erotic capital and extracted four factors: Identity, Fashion, Awareness and Vanity. Last, Requena [3] questioned eroticism's impact on individuals' well-being but restricted eroticism solely to beauty and attractiveness. The present paper's research questions are twofold: How could eroticism be quantitatively measured? How could eroticism transform its power into business proposals for the fashion industry? In terms of methodology for the empirical

study, an Exploratory Factor Analysis technique is employed to reveal the facets of the construct eroticism. This paper is divided in four sections. The first section presents the research design and the steps used to discover the facets of eroticism. The second section displays the empirical findings of the analysis. The third section highlights the recommendations for fashion brands to benefit from the power of eroticism. Finally, the last section critically analyses the limitations of the present paper and indicates directions for further research.

Research Design and Methods Leading to the Hexagonal Eroticism Scale

To answer the first research question, eroticism was taken without any prejudice from two main angles: a construct based-view and a theoretical-based view. Within a conceptual framework consisting of eleven dimensions (arousal, desire, sexual desire, sex, love, controversy, beauty, sensuality, mystery, pleasure and excess), apparently related to eroticism but still distinct, eroticism was put

into context. A theoretical framework encompassing nine theories (sociology, sexology, religion, biology, psychology, anthropology, morality, philosophy and architecture) helped to assess eroticism's interrelationships with these theories. Combined these two frameworks form the "Eroticism Framework" [4], which provides a simple and complete structure to understand the construct.

In order to quantitatively measure the construct, a seven-step method was employed.

Step 1: Based on an extensive literature review linked to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks 143 items were generated and then purified resulting in 116 items across the above-mentioned eleven dimensions to best describe eroticism.

Step 2: A survey about eroticism based on the 116 items was designed and pre-tested with 28 students from the University of Mainz. It was successfully assessed on five criteria: danger of social desirability, fear of extreme scale, primary-recency effect, danger of quick answer and fear of discontinuation rate. Corrective actions on the items were put in place.

Step 3: The final eroticism scale was reduced to 93 items (across the eleven dimensions from the conceptual framework) and was developed and translated into a questionnaire.

Step 4: 167 valid questionnaires were collected between March and June 2019 resulting in a mixed-sample (student and non-student). This sample covers age groups from 20 to 69 years old, has a balanced split between women and men (60% and 40% respectively) and participants are predominantly German. To the author, it was important to cover multiple age groups. It was expected that the engagement towards eroticism changes throughout life and thus impacts people's understanding of the latent construct. To be noted: all questions could be answered regardless of any kind knowledge or experience in eroticism.

Step 5: Prior to the use of an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) technique, the results' basic statistics were analyzed. The eroticism scale's reliability based on Cronbach's Alpha

was computed and reached 0.929 (on standardized items), that greatly support the consistency of these 93 variables to reveal the latent construct. The item-to-total correlations were satisfactory as 88 variables out of 93 had a correlation between the optimal range of 0.1 and 0.6 supporting that they explain the latent variable well but without being redundant. Normality was assessed through two tests (Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk) and both tests were significant for each variable. It means that the data diverts from normal distribution. This obstacle for running an EFA can be overcome by selecting a specific factors' extraction method. Finally, multicollinearity was successfully assessed based on three indicators. Variance inflation factor, condition index and inter-item correlations showed moderate sign of multicollinearity. Overall, the data gathered displayed robust results and confirmed good psychometrics properties.

Step 6: An EFA has been conducted on the data gathered in step 4 using SPSS (version 25). Suitability tests (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin and Bartlett) were incorporated and yielded satisfactory results to pursue an EFA. Following Fabrigar's guidance [5], it is recommended in the case of data violating normal distribution to use a principal factor method (Principal Axis Factoring). In order to retain the appropriate number of factors, four methods were analyzed: Kaiser criterion, Scree test, Minimum Average Partial and Parallel analysis. As expected, the four methods do not lead to the retention of the same number of factors. Most probably, the final number lies between four and eight. It is assumed, as in most social sciences research, that the dimensions will be somehow correlated. Therefore, an oblique rotation (Promax) was chosen to maximize the number of variables loading onto each factor. The adequate rotation method should portray the cleanest factor structure or the "simple structure" as Thurstone LL [6] put it. The six final factors and associated 28 variables retained are displayed in Table 1. Three indicators (Variables' loadings, communalities and factor scores) support the strongness of the data gathered. Each of the six subscales shows high internal consistency as their Cronbach's Alpha are higher than the 0.7 threshold.

Table 1: Eroticism's six factors and associated items.

Factor's rank	Ranking based on variables' loadings on each factor (Pattern Matrix)	Variables' Loadings (Pattern matrix)	Communalities (after Extraction)	Factor Scores (Regression method)
1	seduction - I will show the best side of mine in order to please him her - Desire	0,731	0,702	0,164
	admiration - I am impressed by him her - Desire	0,702	0,673	0,217
	hot - I have strong feelings for him her - Sexual Desire	0,681	0,585	0,117
	imagination - I say to myself that I want to spend time with him her - Desire	0,615	0,631	0,139
	craving - I could do anything to see him her soon again - Desire	0,436	0,725	0,117
	erogenous - It gives me pleasure to touch him her - Sexual Desire	0,409	0,719	0,168

2	danger - When I see a car driving very fast in the city Centre - Excess	0,837	0,712	0,320
	perversion - When I read about the actual diesel scandal in the German automotive industry - Excess	0,739	0,755	0,244
	self-abandonment - When I see someone taking hard drugs - Excess	0,603	0,661	0,147
	irrational - When a politician wants to ban immediately without notice all types of cars for environmental concerns - Excess	0,600	0,494	0,068
	immoderacy - When I see someone drinking till unconsciousness - Excess	0,563	0,752	0,222
	incongruity - When I am aware of the yearly salaries in millions of euros of average football players in the German Bundesliga - Excess	0,537	0,517	0,022
	harmful - When I see corporate activities endangering essential environmental standards for the wellbeing of our children - Excess	0,442	0,754	0,148
3	genitals - I am interested in her sexual organs - Sex	0,833	0,760	0,405
	orgasm - I want at last to experience orgasm - Sex	0,752	0,540	0,123
	carnal - I have a fleshly appetite for him her - Sex	0,659	0,629	0,171
	nudity - I appreciate her unclothed appearance - Sex	0,552	0,512	0,047
4	positive - How do you feel when you are pleased - Pleasure	0,951	0,753	0,374
	joyful - How do you feel when you are pleased - Pleasure	0,726	0,745	0,223
	outgoing - How do you feel when you are pleased - Pleasure	0,487	0,612	0,089
5	sublimation - The striking dress of a movie star on the red carpet at Cannes film festival - Beauty	0,694	0,720	0,294
	appearance - Most of the models on cosmetics fragrances commercials - Beauty	0,670	0,599	0,159
	multisensory - When I enjoy the look and feel of a luxurious leather bag - Sensuality	0,613	0,540	0,128
	possession - I sometimes enjoy taking my partner's life into control - Love	0,455	0,548	0,106
	visual - When people look at me when I dance - Sensuality	0,445	0,527	0,088
6	free - How do you usually feel after you have had sexual intercourse with someone - Sex	0,946	0,719	0,224
	relaxed - How do you usually feel after you've had sexual intercourse with someone - Sex	0,726	0,739	0,309
	openminded - How do you usually feel after you have had sexual intercourse with someone - Sex	0,606	0,765	0,269

Source: Author's representation.

Step 7: convergent and discriminant validity were demonstrated. Convergent validity refers to what extent are the variables studied correlated and was supported by Average variance extracted (AVE) and Composite reliability. Discriminant validity finds out to what extent the factors retained are unique, as they should truly be distinct from other constructs. For each construct, the AVE was greater than the squared correlation of inter-construct showing that the factors obtained are somehow conceptually similar but still clearly distinct. Therefore, discriminant validity was also well

supported.

Empirical Findings

Four main findings are revealed by the empirical study on eroticism.

- Eroticism is a multidimensional construct. From the EFA, six factors were retained and were labelled in order of decreasing importance: Urging impulse, Inappropriate conduct, Sexual fascination, Delighted mood, Glamorous touch and Liberated self (Figure 1). The geometric representation in the

form of a hexagon refers to Sternberg's Theory of Love [7], which was pictured by triangles. By far, the most prominent factor that explains eroticism is "Urging impulse". This factor

is exemplified by items coming exclusively from the desire and sexual desire dimensions. Therefore, desire and sexual desire drive the construct eroticism .

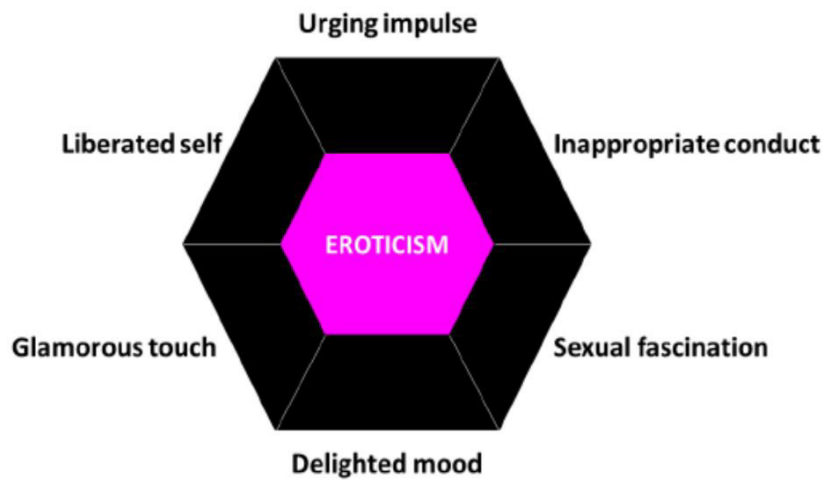


Figure 1: The 93-item Hexagonal Eroticism Scale (THES).
Source: Author's representation.

• Eroticism has a very balanced structure of attitudes relying on the Tripartite model of attitudes [8]: cognitive, affective and behavioral. Both for the 93-item scale as for the

six-factor structure (Figure 2) each attitude type accounts for one third of the total.

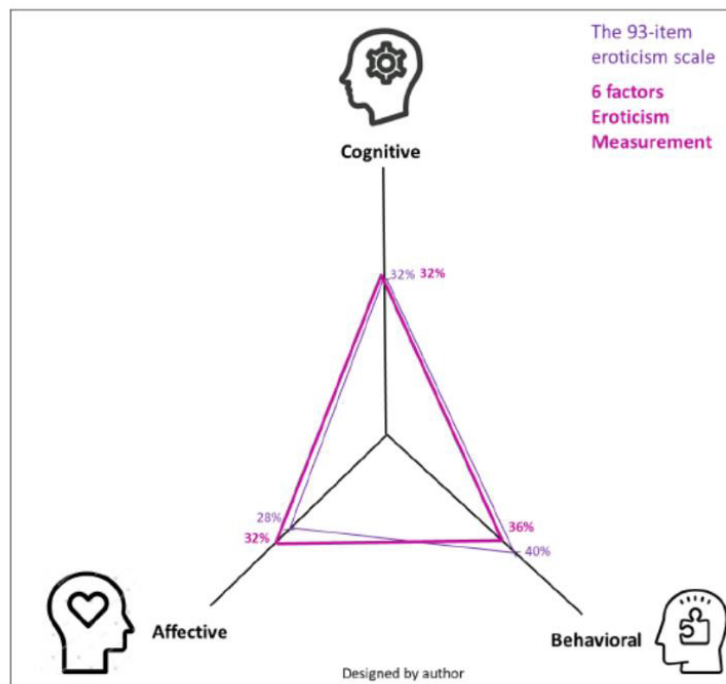


Figure 2: Eroticism balanced model of attitudes.
Source: Author's representation.

- Based on an independent samples t-test, at p value < 0.01, women and men differ on their appreciation of eroticism's two dimensions. For the dimension "Delighted mood", women assess eroticism with even more pleasurable and positive aspects than men do. For "Glamorous touch", women associate eroticism significantly more than men with beautiful and sensual aspects. Interestingly, for the two dimensions ("Urging impulse" and "Sexual fascination") related to desire, sexual desire and sex, no significant differences between women and men were observed.
- Based on an independent samples t-test, at p value < 0.05, the older the people are, the more different their perceptions on eroticism's three dimensions. For the "Inappropriate conduct" dimension: as expected older people (here between 40 and 69 years old) see, when linked to eroticism, a more reprehensible behavior than younger people (here between 20 and 39 years old). For the "Sexual fascination" dimension: older people associate eroticism more with sexual aspects than younger people would do. For the "Glamorous touch" dimension: younger people link eroticism with more flamboyance or stunning look than older people.

Recommendations for Fashion Brands to Benefit from the Power of Eroticism

Desire, eroticism's strongest factor, underpins most consumption patterns and addresses a very broad spectrum of sectors. Intuitively one thinks of the luxury, fashion or beauty industries but this is not limited to them. From a managerial perspective, translating this theory on eroticism into today's world of fashion brands is equivalent to answering the present paper's second research question.

The erotic-based marketing strategy enables to shift from the classic macroeconomic approach of "Supply and Demand of Goods" to the "Supply and Demand of Desire". The latter consists of the relationship between a brand and consumers both driven by desire. The brand, acting as supply, attracts consumers with its product or service offer. Conversely, the consumers, as demand, signal their consumption through their willingness to buy the brand.

This strategy is a two-way mutually reinforcing process between an erotic brand and the consumer. The brand has an erotic power over the consumer by seducing, attracting and touching him/her. At the same time, the consumer through his/her desire values erotic characteristics of the brand - in particular its brand's personality [9] such as charming, successful, imaginative, cheerful, spirited, daring - and wants to be connected to the brand. Consequently, a cocktail of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements is mixed and contributes to a global and fast-growing branded fashion industry.

Similar to the well-known and respected concept of "Brand Love" [10], which has spread globally across sectors in the last decade, there might be an opportunity for marketers to turn their brand into an erotic brand. According to the erotic-based marketing strategy, this can be achieved by following a five-building blocks process.

First, by implementing the Brand Erotic Index as a first step. This strategy's starting point is the implementation of the newly developed Brand Erotic Index (BEI - see Figure 3). This index assesses the brand's erotic appeal (on a scale from 1 to 7) along the construct's six dimensions. From that process results a spider web that visually displays the brand's erotic appeal ratings. In order to track the fashion brand's erotic appeal and to maintain this relationship over time, this index can be repeated on a regular basis.

Second, by taking advantage of an increasing understanding of consumers' decision making and customer journey. Based on the empirical results stated above regarding the balanced model of attitudes of the construct (approximately each of the three attitude accounts for one third of the total), eroticism has the ability to significantly lift the consumer-brand interaction that takes place in the consumers' decision making process and along the customer journey.

With its balanced attitudes model relying on cognitive, affective and behavioral characteristics, eroticism helps to uncover the consumers' five-step decision-making process [11]:

- The need (or desire) recognition step has the ability to assess the difference between the actual and desired state of affairs.
- The information search step consists of the knowledge, previous experience and the feedback of others on the offer.
- The evaluation of alternatives step helps to compare and evaluate the information necessary to make the right choice
- The purchase decision step includes the planning and execution of the buying act.
- The post-purchase evaluation step assesses the satisfaction of the offer and affects the next decision-making process.

Similarly, eroticism's balanced attitudes model enhances the customer experience, which is conceptualized in the seminal article from Lemon and Verhoef [12] as a "customer's journey with a firm over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touchpoints". This process is split into three phases: pre purchase, purchase, post purchase [12]. Along this customer journey, touchpoints are spread for the consumer to interact with the fashion brand. Those touchpoints prior, during and after the purchase can mostly relate to advertising, social media, online and offline experiences. The three attitudes at the core of eroticism are enablers of strong interaction between consumers and the fashion brand along the customer journey's touchpoints.

Third, by adding value to the classical 4P's Marketing Mix:

- Place: eroticism has the ability to foster imagination and to enhance affects and emotions. Implemented accordingly, the merchandising can re-enchant the customer experience in playing on a new atmosphere and in triggering customers' imagination. Consequently, the in-store experience both

through the adaptation of the fashion visual merchandising and a better trained sales staff should make customers' visit a memorable experience.

- **Product:** product development especially in fashion should be adapted to some key characteristics of eroticism, namely the emphasis on senses, which act as a link to connect brand experiences to the inner core of human beings. Especially, the selection of the products' raw materials is decisive as consumers place great emphasis on touch and smell when they intend to buy a product. The visual aspect is also critical both on the way the products are presented to the consumers and how they are wrapped once bought.

- **Promotion:** for an erotic brand, its communication should rely on eroticism's key dimensions. As this present research's findings have confirmed the multi-faceted aspect of eroticism should be reproducible in the brand's communication and not limited to sexual aspects. The communication should subtly and implicitly be decoded by the customers. It should be teasing, desirable but never explicit as explicit is a promise of sex.

- **Price:** thanks to the positive impact of eroticism on customer's experience and on their products' perceived value, erotic brands can legitimately be considered as a value driver in their respective fashion categories. Hence erotic brand's product offer can improve the average selling price of the brand's assortment.

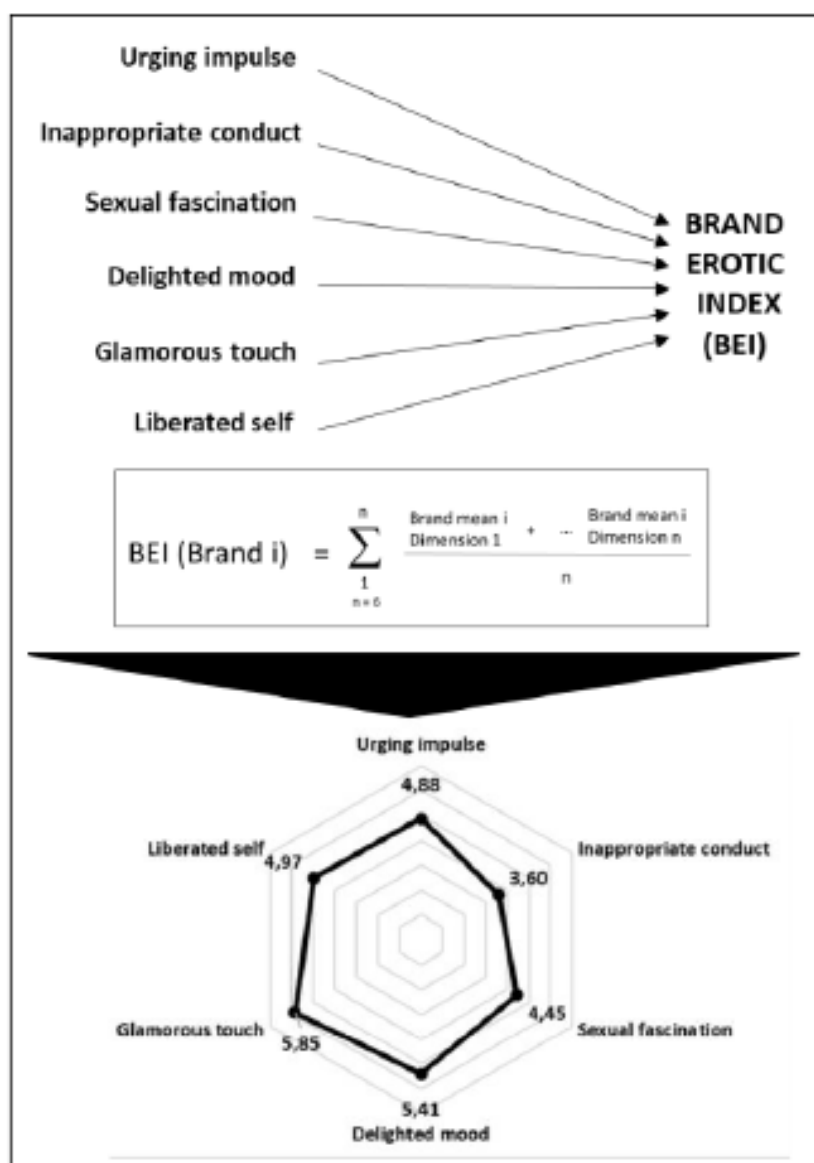


Figure 3: Brand Erotic Index and its application for brand's erotic appeal assessment.
Source: Author's representation.

Fourth, by acting as a booster of the fashion brand's intangibles. Eroticism is a decisive factor to raise and to nurture the brand's intangibles. As it is much more difficult to copy intangibles than tangibles, this represents a critical and sustainable competitive advantage for erotic-loaded brand. Eroticism can be considered as a determining factor to boost brands' intangibles. One can highlight its desirability, attractiveness, beauty, glamour, sex-appeal, transgressiveness, freedom, vanity and self-confidence. Thereby, eroticism impacts intangibles, which are prominent underlying drivers of both brand equity and brand identity, which ultimately affect the fashion brand's positioning.

Finally, by delivering incremental revenues and profitability. Analyzing the financial soundness of embracing such a an erotic-based marketing strategy is recommended. The goal is to deliver incremental revenues and an increased profitability. In particular, a significant investment in selling and marketing expenses and capital expenditures is a pre-condition for this strategy to pay off. The tracking of key financial statement, especially the fashion brands' P&L and cash flow statements, is mandatory. Turning a brand into an erotic brand is a process that might take time. The alignment of the brand's financial resources with the strategy's objectives (especially the investments at the POS, on communication and in people) is critical.

Limitations and Further Research

The present study has some limitations which should be amended by future research.

- The samples are rather small and homogeneous. Generality is achieved but generalizability is not complete. It would be helpful to incorporate to a new sample non-Western participant with additional socio-economic and cultural characteristics.
- Eroticism's measurement relies only on EFA. It would be useful to find a new sample and to run a Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Therefore, possibly confirming the results from the EFA.
- The quantitative studies are based on self-report questionnaire. This can provide flaws in terms of validity. It would make sense to corroborate the findings from self-report questionnaire with additional in-depth interviews with experts.
- Eroticism seems to enjoy more applications physically at the POS and at product level. Future studies could more carefully examine further applications in an online environment and for services.

Conclusion

The primary aims of this article were to measure eroticism as a construct and to detect its ability to positively influence fashion brands. This empirically-validated research has discovered six dimensions that make eroticism a strong and fascinating construct to handle. Thanks to eroticism, fashion companies have a new and

distinct avenue to pursue a differentiation strategy. As a starting point, companies can assess their brand's erotic appeal by using the Brand Erotic Index. Brands can benefit from the added-value eroticism brings to the classical 4P's Marketing mix. Furthermore, fashion brand's intangibles are boosted by eroticism and this adds to the brand's uniqueness. Companies have to align their financial resources with the erotic-based marketing strategy's objectives. This strategy, built up on the newly designed 93-item hexagonal eroticism scale, can pave the way for fashion brands to pursue a new and distinct avenue thanks to the power of eroticism. It is up to fashion marketers and general managers to consider turning their brand into an erotic brand.

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Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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