

A Visual Analysis of Advertisements in Feminism: Logics and Illogicality



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ABSTRACT: This article discusses about the logics and illogicality in advertisements, most of the retailers are comfortable in manufacturing but they find it difficult to sell it in the market. In this juncture, advertisement comes with logics and illogicality just to grab attention of the consumers. Almost, in all field female models are being used for advertising to set a strong image in the market amidst the huge competition among the products. This paper comprises of three feminine advertisements under the category soft drink beverage, washing detergent and chocolate respectively. Women are mostly chosen by advertising agency to convey strong message or seek attraction from the consumers. This article unfolds the logics and illogicality on gender advertising particularly feminism and advertising together.

KEYWORDS- Advertisements, Logics, Illogicality, Consumers , Gender, Feminine, Stereotypes .

I. INTRODUCTION

Today, the advertisements do not only stand for a single message alone. It has crept into multiple meanings and when these meanings get into ambiguities, it moves to a controversial position. The study of meanings at the level of words, phrases and sentences can be linguistically identified as semantics. This chapter focuses on the semantic disturbances caused by the illogical spheres of advertisements in relation to feminist perspective and the logics behind cultural themes in modern advertising trends. Advertisers present themselves creative in front of their customers by innovative and more value-added themes along with the products they actually commercialize. It is not always an advertiser can be error-free in creating commercials for their product. When the meanings of the words are introspected with the layers of themes, the advertisers either receive commendation or get into trouble. The actual problem in understanding the meaning lies between the actual denotative sense of the advertisement and perception of the viewers. In this context, this chapter attempts to locate the problems in understanding the meaning behind the slogans, captions and images found in the advertisements with respect to the feminist and the logics patterned behind the cultural perceptions of modern advertisements.

At the level of dissecting meanings, the text in the advertisements plays a vital role. The texts can be in the form of slogans, captions or even a sentence describing the product. The promotion of the products depends upon the catchy captions that attract customers. When these texts go beyond the denotative signified, it turns into a contradictory element where the issues like feministic approach begin to apply in the domain of advertising. Analyzing with a feministic viewpoint as the surface is not something new to the realm of advertising. The representation of women in advertisements multiplies in this mass-media age which parallels to the portrayal of women in the recently developed phenomenon of visual culture. An electronic copy can be downloaded from the conference website. For questions on paper guidelines, please contact the conference publications committee as indicated on the conference website. Information about final paper submission is available from the conference website.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender advertising is a broad criterion where the images used in the advertisements are largely based on gender-based marketing. Advertisers create a strong connection between the product and the gender by associating certain products with corresponding gender thereby stereotyping the Gender-Product relationship. For instance, men are used to commercialize certain products like shaving lotion that are exclusively used by male. Similarly, women are used as a pictorial representation for almost all the products of cosmetics. The reason behind the formulae of associating products with gender is that people define themselves with

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gender. Therefore, based on the gender as the surface, the advertisements are categorized and the products are identified with the gender as a mark.

Huhman and Limbu has discussed a similar approach in gender stereotypes are illustrated in this paper. The offensiveness and illogicality based on the gender grabs the consumer to have a look on the advertisements. The inaccuracy in portraying the gender, sexism, nudity, sex appeals all of these sectors come under the section for illogicality in the advertisements. (Huhman and Limbu 2016).

In contrast to this LM Case reports that femvertising has enabled women empowerment. This research articulates the typography, photography and themes of communications used for advertisements in the year 1960s,70s,80s respectively. It also discusses the success of brand positioning over the last five years through the label femvertising. (LM Case 2019).

Grau and Zotos puts forth their research work as gender stereotypes remain extensively important in last five decades still prevails the same. Women were used in the inferior comparatively to men, but femvertising brings a change in the society as well as improvement in women empowerment.

III. METHODS

The present article sought to examine how branding as changed as a result of social trends towards illogicality of the feminine used in the advertisements. The methodology consisted of qualitative analysis to examine the connotations in graphic and textual components of advertisements especially featuring female models. The paper also includes content analysis using the Erving Goffman's Gender Advertising theory have been implied in analysing the feminine portrayal in select advertisements. Though, it directs not only female consumers but also targets all consumers in general. Three feminine perspective advertisements were used to directly compare and explore meaning of signs and symbols, linguistic message as featured in the advertisements

IV. FINDINGS

For the beauty industry and its advertising agency, the beauty dilemma offered a weak seam in feminism that they quickly exploited. By the 1970's advertisers began to co-opt the accomplishments of the women's movement and redirect them for their own ends. In this, they were willingly assisted by many popular women's magazines, which were themselves economically threatened by a decline in the fashion and cosmetics business. The "beauty dilemma" -- whether or not a woman should buy and use fashion and beauty products -- is not a trivial issue. Not only does the issue of sexual objectification remain, but pressures on women to become more "beautiful" have led many to courses of actions that can create health problems.

Based on the socially constructed definition of masculinity and femininity, Men and Women are portrayed in advertisements. There are some unconventional attempts too that broke the stereotypical idea of using gender roles in advertisements. One such never forgotten advertisement that breaks the typecast is an advertisement created by Slice the popular mango soft drink where a woman is used in the poster to market a soft drink which is totally annoying. The first thing that is annoying and illogical is woman used in the advertisement, second why there is sexism needed for just a mango soft beverage? The visual gesture used in the advertisement the hand that is molded to hold the object mango slice in a sexist manner, the mango juice that drips from her hand, the sexy costume and the powerful eyes; it all portrays sexism. This is how the concept of illogicality logs into the presentation of advertisements.



Figure 1: SliceKiPeti MakesAam Ka Mausam Khaas

The illogicality behind the gender advertising can be sorted only if the stereotyping habit of associating products with unnecessary gender qualifiers comes to an end. The illogicality functions in the form of language used, abusive manner of content, irrelevant attire, and the portrayal of women under patriarchal helmets. The texts used to advertise a product may sometimes end

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up in screwing the advertisers with its ambiguous nature at the level of language. The consequence of such illogicality can be identified as the sexist writing or the sexist charge on the advertisers who are subjected to demoralize any gender by using any awkward pictorial or lingual representations in their advertisements.

The companies face hardship to find a balance between what will sell their product, and what is socially acceptable. It is here where the gender functions as a medium in blending the stereotype between the product and the concepts of gender. This has developed into a new marketing technique that blends both feminism and advertising, thereby building stronger relations with women. In short, *femvertising* (2014) is all about advertising with a feminist focus.

Most advertisements for cleaning products feature women using them, and some even romanticize women's relationship with cleaning and housekeeping (Tide advertisement in Figure 3). In the Tide advertisement, the picture along with the linguistic message explains how the woman is holding or even we can assume as hugging the box of washing powder. The linguistic message comes under the sexist writing as it associates the feminine gender with cleaning as the caption says "Tide's got what women want!" and proves the patriarchal spectacle of portraying women in advertisements.



Figure 2: Tide- Washing Powder

Does advertising only reinforce stereotypical gender roles? No, it moreover it belittles women. A significant work by Goffman (1979) found that advertising weakens women via five mechanisms: by portraying them as smaller or lower than men (relative size), having them constantly touching themselves (feminine touch), showing them laying down or in vulnerable positions (ritualization of subordination), placing them in five stereotypical occupations (function ranking), and removing them from a scene by focusing their gaze into the distance (licensed withdrawal). In his study, Goffman concluded that in advertising, "women were to men as children are to adults of both genders". This further promotes the belief that women are lesser than men.

When it comes to the marketing indicators that commercialize a product, Gender role-plays are used along with its unique characteristic features such as gender behaviors. Erving Goffman (1979), a Canadian-American Sociologist, in his *Gender Advertisements*, suggests that these so-called gender behaviors interpret social reality and can be identified with certain codes that identify gender. According to him, the four categories under which these codes of gender can be perceived are: the family, the feminine touch, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal.

Among the four codes, the concept of "Feminine touch" adapted from Erving Goffman's (1979) theory can be stated used to study the advertisement in a feministic viewpoint. The concept 'Feminine Touch' indicates that women are often portrayed with a 'touching' image. "Women, more than men are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface or to effect a 'just barely touching' of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies". This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates and holds" (1979). Therefore, a woman will barely touch or make any form of contact with surfaces or objects.

In advertisements, women are often seen touching objects that are related to the products or sometimes the products itself. The touch not only confines itself with the product alone, but it also includes one's personal touch of themselves that indicate delicacy. The delicate touch is most commonly associated with women, portraying the female characterization of touch as delicate and gentle. In addition, the actions like biting of the finger have similar but slightly more sexually suggestive socio-cultural and situational conditions. The hand that holds the detergent lends to symbolizing that it only represents it's their type of work, which further perpetuates the idea that women are submissive and in need of protection. In this context, Goffman's theory of 'Feminine Touch' can be used to analyze the Dairy Milk Silk advertisement that is displayed in Figure 3 (1979).

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Figure 3: Dairy milk silk – have you felt Silk lately?

As suggested in the Goffman's theory, the women portrayed in this advertisement seem to have a delicate touch with the chocolate that she advertises. The visual gestures used in the advertisement can be commented based on the aforementioned capsule of theory that suggests the feminine touch as delicate touch. The very usage of women in a chocolate advertisement itself can be questioned as illogicality in this case.

Besides these illogical spheres, this advertisement can also be examined further with reference to the figurative representation of the woman. The woman is holding the chocolate in her hand and the traces of melted leftovers of the chocolate seems to be leaking in her hands and down from her lips. As Goffman argued the representation of the woman in this advertisement is no doubt a perfect example of feminine touch that absolutely stands for delicacy and sensuousness. The actions of the girl presented in the advertisement is clearly the aftermath of biting the chocolate, licking her right-hand thumb additionally, bright eyes stare look with eyebrows risen upwards which adds the sensuous implications in the advertisement as suggested in the Goffman's theory (1979). The word 'felt' in the linguistic message 'have you felt silk lately?' too brings the sensual connotation when connected with the girl portrayed in the advertisement. However, the denotation objective of the advertisement need not be the sensual interpretation, but merely confines itself with commercializing the chocolate.

Similar to the phenomenon of the feminine touch, the other actions such as licking the right-hand thumb finger, stare look and the eye brow risen of the woman can also be noted as an important factor for interpreting the advertisement. The overall imagery can be obtained by combining all the single actions together along with the linguistic message found in the advertisement. Thus, an attempt to blend Goffman's theory and Barthes' linguistic message is made to evaluate the consolidated meaning of the advertisement.

Every action used in the advertisement are intentionally used to signify some meaning or the other. It is in the viewers' hands to sort out the purpose behind the signifiers used in the advertisement in the form of images, texts or graphic icons. Even a logo of a company should be designed in such a symbolic way, so that people are easily able to identify the company as well as the product. Age factor is a significant factor next to gender in promoting any product. Therefore, it is necessary to sort out the advertisement based on which gender and age group is targeted over the product.

The illogicality in the semantic notion is very clear that the 'Dairy Milk Silk' advertisement has not only got the casual tone of marketing the product, but also carries the sensual image and the delicate image which overall sums up the concept of feminine touch. Another such fundamental illogicality can be accused with the necessary to use the woman in these kinds of advertisements that commercialize chocolates. It is known that next to kids, women like chocolates very much. Just because women like chocolate, it is not necessary to market the product using women. Kids might as well have been used in this type of advertisements instead of woman holding the melted chocolate in her hand. In a fancy sense, a chocolate commercialization can also be made with interesting graphic cartoon signifiers that grabs the attention of the children.

To raise a feministic argument, one can even pose the question "Is there any necessary to use the image of a girl to commercialize a chocolate?" There is absolutely no need to use a woman to advertise a chocolate that too with the unnecessary posture of the woman. Generally, if a woman alone is used to advertise any product, it is very evident that the primary target of the advertisers is women. In this case, by including women in the Dairy Milk advertisement, it cannot be stated that the advertisers did so, because they want to attract the women customers. Here arises the question of illogicality in the form of a reason behind using a woman for chocolate advertisement. Therefore, the analysis of the Dairy Milk advertisement with reference to Goffman's theory (1979) of 'Feminine Touch' helps us to connect the semantic illogicality with feminism as a basic spectacle.

The overt commodification and sexualization of women in advertisements are also to be concerned. Despite an increased awareness of negative media portrayals of women, studies show that the sexually exploitative use of women in advertising has increased since 1970. A content analysis study of 58 U.S. magazines showed that on average one out of every two advertisements that showed women depicted them as sex objects. It has become commonplace for half-dressed or naked women to be used as models in advertisements for products in which their appearance seems somewhat incongruous. Though sexually suggestive images of women often appear in advertisements for every day, non-appearance-related products, these images dominate in

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personal care and cosmetic advertisements. Not only do these advertisements convey an implicit message that women's appearance is of critical importance to their success, but this kind of commodification reinforces women's status as subordinate.

Women are used as commodity and more embarrassingly they are associated as mere sexual objects in the way of representing women in advertisements. The portrayal of women as sexual objectification turns out to be the immoral activity of displaying women under gender-biased lens. Advertisers make money out of women by using them according to their need. Apart from it, the most concerning part lies when a woman is objectified against her wishes in advertising any product or when a woman is presented in an awkward manner or when a woman is associated to a stereotypical advertisement such as washing utensils, cleaning clothes, and many other house-hold works.

By associating women with certain stereotypical advertisements, the sexist approach towards it arises and it becomes against women which finally leads into controversies. These sexist issues may function at the level of the slogans found in the advertisement and images or logo against any gender. However, today with the increase in problems faced by women, the sexist approach itself more or less reduced to a woman-based issue, rather than identifying it as a both gender aspects.

Modern advertisements not only restrict it with certain confined zones. It also dwells into other areas of human interests by including a public relation concept which comes along with the marketing of the product. One such significant area of human interest is to present the cultural flavor of different regions portraying all the ritualistic tradition that people follow. Many advertising agencies innovatively advertise their products by creating a rapport between their product and the people by including the cultural markers that resembles close to their product. It is these cultural markers that boost up the promotion of the product, provided it satisfies the people's need.

CONCLUSIONS

Advertising is a major cultural form, and is concerned with the promotion of the dominant value system of the culture. Advertisements are highly interdependent on the factors of gender, culture and nation. The products are advertised based on the cultural signs that create a strong customer-value and opinion on the product. The cultural signifiers that advertisers use in marketing their product acts an ethnic marketing technique with which they earn a greater number of customers as it creates an emotional bonding between the product and the customers. When it comes to the cultural indicators, the illogicality function becomes logical as people do not consider culture as an out-bound feature from the product. It is because the cultural signs used in advertising products reflect the traditional identity of people. Therefore, the concept of illogicality fails in the case of adapting cultural formulas to advertise a product.

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