

Artificial Look: Body Narcissism in the Fashion and Cosmetic Industry

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ABSTRACT

Consumers universally engage with cosmetic products in pursuit of bodily perfection, often influenced by prevailing fashion trends dictating societal beauty standards through advertising. Consequently, a woman's body serves as a cornerstone of identity, its alignment with these standards transforming it into a commodified entity. While the fashion industry ostensibly champions feminist ideals of empowerment, its underlying motive remains profit generation. This paper endeavors to explore the commodification of women's bodies within the fashion and cosmetic industries, illuminating its enduring implications. Through a historical analysis spanning from the colonial era to contemporary society, we examine the evolution of the body as a commodity, drawing on secondary sources and available data on beauty standards. Grounded in Saussure's structuralist framework, this study aims to unravel the intricate dynamics underpinning the commodification process and its broader societal ramifications.

Keywords: commodification, fashion and cosmetic industry, woman's body, identity, advertisement

Introduction

Once in conversation, my sister expressed her wishes to have big eyes, full lips, long curly hair, a slim and tall body. What makes her think of the body as a commodity? This myth of beauty is created by capitalist society, using media to make us consume unnecessary products. It is constructed by consumer culture in our society. There were 14.9 billion videos related to beauty products on YouTube, with 700 million videos being watched monthly. However, only 3% were uploaded or controlled by actual brands, while the remaining 97% were uploaded and reviewed by vloggers (Parajuli et al., 2021). We can see how the passion to be beautiful helps to manipulate preexisting notions of natural beauty. Traditional

rituals, souvenirs, arts, and festivals become commodities when they are used to market experiences to visitors while losing their cultural significance.

Female bodies have been subjected to a variety of political, economic, and historical events over the years that have transformed them into a commodity that may be used. It raises the issue of whether women have ever owned their bodies or who has the greatest ownership of a woman's body when we consider ancient history and modern culture. How the bodies of women become a commodity is the issue to answer in this article by traveling to both the distant and recent past. Women's bodies were used for a variety of purposes depending on the demands of

the time, including producing labor, child slaves, sexual desire, demonstrating a nation's economic development and modernity on a national and international level, symbolizing idealized feminist beauty, assimilating colonial values and culture into colonized countries, facilitating intercultural interactions, preserving national identity, and motivating people to move.

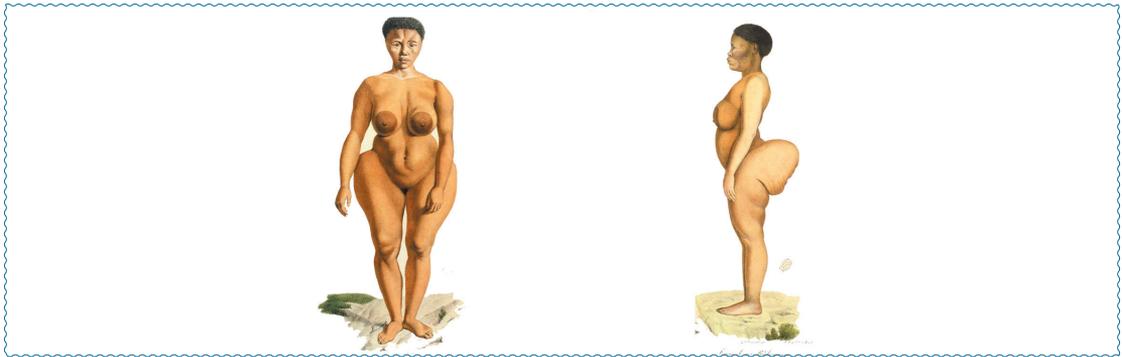
Additionally, women's bodies represent beauty. It is impossible to limit measurement. If there is a limited standard meaning of beauty, it becomes unnatural. It rarely covers the broader meaning of natural beauty. If the meaning of beauty is measured with few standards, people are easily manipulated by the fashion industry run by a few groups. According to Wendy Harcourt (2009, p.23), "bodies are not external to political processes but firmly enmeshed in them." Women's bodies' femininity, sexuality, and reproductive capacity have always been and will

continue to be crucial for utilization by capitalist industries, disciplinary practices, and political powers. Beauty products are mainly imported from abroad. Nepal gets cosmetic products from various brands from several countries. Needless to say, like other imports, a significant share of cosmetic products available in Nepal is manufactured in India (Parajuli et al., 2021).

At least since colonial times, women's bodies have been used for various purposes. In European colonial stories, we first learned about the monetization of women's bodies. In Sarah Bartmann's illustration, colonialism creates knowledge via the body of a black woman. While her buttocks are on exhibit in museums to attract Europeans as the object of sexuality and sexual deviance, the female body, especially her genitalia, functions as a scientific object for researchers in Europe (Ahmed, 2002).

Figure 1

Sarah Baartman as "Hottentot Venus (1789-1815)"



Sarah Baartman's large buttocks were an erotic symbol to Western people, and they mocked her as an unusual specimen. Her oversexed image was the chief attraction of the nineteenth century, investing in the power of gender and racial politics. The Encyclopedia of Race and Realism, states, "'Hottentot Venus' was the moniker given to a series of women exhibited in sexually suggestive, ethnic curiosity shows in England and France in the early nineteenth century". What is

remarkable about Baartman's case is how recently, in 2002, the rest of her body was finally returned to South Africa, where she was born, even though at the time there were numerous laws, international conventions, acts, feminist studies, and activism that forbade the exploitation and commodification of female bodies. In the writings of English explorer Richard Ligon, who lived during the era of European colonization in the 17th century, we find another instance of the monetization of black

women's bodies. His first meeting with the black ladies laboring on the farm, with their breasts hanging down to the ground as though they had "six legs," is described in his trip journals. Ligon believed that the size of the two women's bodies and their ability to reproduce was a sign that they were productive workers who could both produce crops and give birth to additional slave children. The strength and procreative prowess of African women as mothers astounded and amazed the invaders. A colonial travel writer identified black women's "monstrous" physique and their ability to reproduce as the primary justifications for widespread enslavement and exploitation (Morgan, 2006). Stereotypes and unrealistic images of Sarah Baartman and black women become matters of entertainment for people. The use of women's bodies during the Chinese colonization of Taiwan Island is also discussed in the book *Bodies in Contact*. Chinese travelers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries stress Taiwanese women's bodies in their travel narratives as a source of contention since they are both a problem for colonists and a target for colonization. As a result of a reciprocal process of acculturation, indigenous women's bodies in colonial Taiwan serve as an essential medium for transcultural interchange. The chapter describes how a courtesan's body in Taiwan contributed to the development of an assimilation culture between her tribe and the Chinese invaders (Teng, 2006). The bodies of indigenous women were described as serving very distinct purposes in the travelogues of Portuguese colonization in Mozambique. Women's bodies were marked with tattoos to maintain the bloodline and to communicate messages about the historical and social significance of women in society. Additionally, the scars on the women's bodies helped to arouse their spouses, making them satisfied with their wives (Gengenback, 2006). For women, beauty and fashion are practically synonyms. The world has changed significantly for women during the past fifty years. They have integrated themselves into every industry and are

demonstrating their value by striving for success. Fashion and beauty sectors also go through substantial transformations. Instead of focusing primarily on profit, they now prioritize the needs of the customer. They contribute to the lives of women by enhancing their self-esteem and generating new employment and entrepreneurial prospects. This paper examines structuralism; as a theoretical framework, to dig out the underlying structures and systems of the fashion industry that govern human behavior, language, and culture to relay on the fashion industry. For Saussure, language gives meaning and to get the meaning we need a sign. Sign functions only function because they are culturally constructed, not natural or organically pre-existent concepts or names (Lane, 2013). According to Saussure, there are three propositions, the first one being that the sign is composed of a signified (a concept) and a signifier (the sound pattern or form of the sign, be it mentally or physically expressed). He begins by rejecting the notion that language is a collection of pre-existent names for things, what he calls "nomenclature" – which means to "call names" (Lane, 2013). It means language does not represent meaning rather it creates or produces. To prove his point, Saussure shows how signs are not links between names and things but are composed of concepts and sound patterns. Consequently, Fashion as a part of society becomes the sign that shapes the perception as well as represents the female body. Similarly, societal expectations, desires, and power dynamics offer insights into how societal norms and cultural codes limit the meaning of the female body as a commodity. Fashion trends and representations recount the prevalent power structures and marginalize the idea of identity and beauty. It examined how the socially constructed values of the fashion world, the vestimentary code, efface its artificiality and arbitrariness in a highly successful process of making overconsumption appear natural. The result is that consumers buy more products than they need

because the vestimentary code remains invisible. An example of the explicit signified is that of the vestimentary code in ensembles it is actualized, as a signified, through a material object (Barthes, 1983). Barthes examines how fashion operates as a system of signs and symbols to communicate various ideas to the consumer. In society, cosmetics and fashion, become a language to convey identity, status, and values. To decipher a word, no knowledge other than that of the language is necessary i.e. of the system of which it is a function, in the case of implicit signified the relation of signification is, one might say, necessary and sufficient (Barthes, 1983). Through the analysis, Barthes uncovers the underlying structure and code governed by the fashion industry. Fashion offers the idea of an artificial look that shapes the individual as well as collective identities. It shows how the fashion industry governs human behavior in a consumerism culture. It shows how the female body and cosmetic products outline the standards of the body unknowingly. Beauty norms are not only constructed, and propagated but also challenged within society. With analysis of semiotics, gendered codes, and power dynamics essential in the fashion industry and cosmetic products people gain underlying meaning of beauty standards, body ideals, identity, and representation. This paper also examines how the beauty and fashion industries have influenced women's empowerment. Few groups of women get an advantage in the name of empowerment and large numbers are excluded because of unfit beauty standards. Secondary data are collected from different samples of advertisements of beauty products and gathered surveys that were performed to determine the opinions of women on the subject. The research's conclusions showed that while the fashion business has contributed to women's emancipation in several ways, the same cannot be said for the cosmetics sector. The global fashion business has branches on every continent. They wear attire that embodies several ethnicities.

For instance, modest attire is aimed at ladies who feel at ease wearing covered clothing. Consequently, enabling people to accept their customs and feel self-assured in their clothing (Lewis, 2015). The fashion sector has also made strides toward diversity acceptance. The use of plus-size models in advertisements and on the catwalk has encouraged women and girls to accept their body types and to feel pleased and self-assured about them (Czerniaawski, 2011). In today's culture, there is a certain expectation that one must achieve the ideal appearance. People now have unreasonably high standards for themselves, which is particularly true of young women. The difficulty that occurs when people fall short of these expectations is a loss of confidence and a sense of social rejection, both of which frequently result in serious mental health problems including anxiety and despair (Thompson, 2017). Women have learned to compare themselves to one another throughout the majority of their lives, rather than recognizing and valuing their uniqueness. Thank goodness, both the fashion and cosmetics businesses are evolving along with the times. The emphasis is gradually turning to the embrace and celebration of women's inherent beauty as well as the usage of the products produced by these sectors to empower women (Black, 2009).

Review of Literature

Women who want their bodies to conform to beauty standards unknowingly become commodities for the fashion industry. Costumes and cosmetics are initially invented for comfort, but gradually they turn into compulsions, and artificial looks become the norm. As a result, women are pressured to be body-conscious, leading to mental stress in their pursuit to look good. The bitter truth is that we are hardly exempt from contemporary fashion trends. The study focuses on how the underlying structure and code of the fashion and cosmetic industries manipulate consumers, especially females, to conform to certain body standards.

Fashion Industry and Women's Body

The most attractive and undervalued but equally significant sector of the economy is the fashion industry. Almost everyone shops in stores or buys clothes at flea markets, making them direct consumers of fashion. Throughout the world, it creates work chances for qualified and unqualified, talented or unskilled individuals. The apparel business makes a significant economic contribution to the world. Imagine a world without Fifth Avenue or Champs-Élysées, and it is a viable counterargument. The fashion sector employs a variety of businesses, including stores, multinationals, production companies, and publishers. All of these businesses cater to more conventionally acknowledged industries like law, technology, or finance (Maloney, 2019). For many people, the fashion business now provides their primary source of income, particularly female users of social media. Fifty-point-nine percent of the bloggers who participated in the analysis of more than 100 million blogs were female. These bloggers publish new content every day that demonstrates how to dress clothing, reviews fashion products, or unboxes them. As a result of expanding their reach in this way, several businesses and merchants pay them to market their goods. By fostering their independence and confidence, the fashion industry has opened up new employment opportunities and is empowering many girls worldwide (Thornley, 2014). Through variety, fashion is also empowering women. Women from diverse walks of life feel more fully represented thanks to the modest design and the use of plus-size models. The fashion industry is heading toward a more diverse culture, as seen by several instances like Claudia Li's all-Asian model cast for SS19 or Sudanese megastar Anok Yai becoming the first black model to open for Prada in 20 years (Verma, Anand, Arora, & Rai, 2018).

Does the fashion industry's promotion of women's empowerment—which is highlighted in this paper—empower women, or is it only done for publicity's sake? Since encouraging a

positive body image has become important in the fashion industry, designers have suddenly started using plus-size models in their lineup of size 0–2 models. On the surface, it appears to be a positive step in the right direction, but when you see the models' outfits, you'll see that plus-size women are either forced to wear styles that weren't made for their curves or are sporting the only style in the entire collection that can be worn comfortably by someone larger than a size 2 (Dakhli, 2016).

Beauty Industry and Women's Body

Women who practice self-care permit themselves to feel deserving, cherished, and cared for. Their sense of self-worth greatly influences all aspects of their lives, from the choices they make to their overall attitudes and sentiments about themselves. Self-care practices, such as getting a manicure, scheduling a massage or facial, or just meditating or doing yoga, are some of the finest methods to increase self-worth (Ruck, 2018). There are several multinational companies like L'Oréal and Dove that support women's empowerment and have become renowned. Companies like L'Oréal and Coty are ruling the cosmetic industry, producing brands like Armani, Yves Saint Laurent, and Gucci (Odoardi). Here are a few instances:

L'Oréal

L'Oréal, a renowned cosmetic product, holds a vital place in the world. Luxury cosmetics, such as Max Factor, L'Oréal, and Revlon, have a brand name image of high product class and broad recognition, and customers opt for products with a stronger brand name, which can be stated as true in this study as well, with 77.6% of customers choosing superior brand products over non-branded ones (Parajuli et al., 2021). It helps to empower women from different parts of the world. The L'Oréal-UNESCO initiative, launched in 1998 under the name "For Women in Science," seeks to promote the position of women in science by recognizing exceptional female researchers who have advanced the field. Each year, this partnership awards numerous winners

from different parts of the world, with rewards totaling USD 100,000. The cooperation between the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the French cosmetics company L'Oréal has produced these prizes. The primary goal of this effort is to encourage young women to pursue careers in science and to unlock their abilities (Lovas, 2017).

Dove-Real Beauty

The company has acquired its reputation as an honest and ethical advertising identity by utilizing "genuine women" to sell its products. Beauty companies have experience within the market, so they can easily launch new product lines. Luxury fashion companies, on the other hand, have a strong reputation that helps them create a loyal consumer base for their new ventures (Odoardi). With the debut of its "Real Beauty" campaign in 2004, Dove was one of the first, if not the first, to promote body confidence. They feature 32 genuine women in their most recent campaign, who range in age from 11 to 71 and come from 15 various nations and races, as they continue to fight for equality for all women. However, releasing adverts that are entirely unspoiled is the most crucial component of empowering women and promoting body confidence. They haven't been photoshopped. Each of the women included had the choice of which of her photographs they wanted to be used, giving them power over how the public would perceive them (Murray, 2012). But there is also a catch to this. Despite attempting to empower women through their advertising, the goal of the beauty industry is to boost its profits. In this ad, the motto is established like Dove nourishing secret healthy ritual for growing hair. It wants to suggest to common people if you want to grow your hair you need to use this hair shampoo (Rawal, 2019). The wording employed in these advertisements serves as evidence that the message is not one of women's empowerment through acceptance of who they are but rather via the usage of their goods, which will make them seem better by

covering up their defects (Carreon, 2017). This type of advertising aims to persuade women that altering their look, facial characteristics, hair color or texture, weight, or shape would make them feel better about themselves and serve as a form of self-care. Instead, other firms could promote pictures of more diversified beauty, with people of different skin tones, hair textures, sizes, and sometimes even abilities. Even still, the products that these businesses are marketing rely on the idea that the female body is valuable because of its attractiveness (Jha, 2016). From the various available literature, we can specify the objective of this paper which can include the commodification of the woman's body, sexuality, identity, and social and cultural norms to explore the aspects of women's commodification in the fashion and cosmetic world, to investigate various instances of misrepresentation and how it reinforces an artificial look in society, and to identify the major social costs associated with objectifying women as body narcissism through the fashion industry and cosmetic products in Nepal.

Methodology

Beauty is associated with women's bodies. If the meaning of beauty is limited to the mission of the fashion industry, only a minority benefit from it, and the majority of people remain outside the box. However, the limitation of the beauty standard is the underlying meaning that spreads the concept of beauty. It is an unnatural and tricky way for the fashion industry to earn a large amount of profit by creating beauty standards.

This research paper used structuralism to investigate how the fashion industry and cosmetic products limit the female body to an artificial look. This research includes secondary data. Data were collected from different advertisement samples of cosmetic products, and various journal articles and newspaper archives were read through to gain in-depth knowledge. The research is also based on various referred published and electronic sources to understand the views of

women on the topic and to try to answer the purpose of this paper, which is how the beauty and fashion industry have impacted women's bodies as commodification.

Analysis and Discussion

Women's Commodification as a Line Between the Entertainment and Body Narcissism

The beauty industry sets standards of appearance

that may exclude or marginalize certain body types, skin tones, and features according to beauty standards. In general, the fashion system is where the world invests meaning because it is reality, through the feature, which dictates the chances for meaning to appear (Barthes, 1983). It examines how the fashion industry helps in the creation, dissemination, and interpretation of body ideals.

Figure 2

Entertainment and Body Narcissism



To sustain a sexually repressive society, Nepalese society employs alienation and power strategies to commodify and exploit women to create body standards. This paper examines these strategies to appreciate how capitalism, elitism, and patriarchy are at the root of gender

inequality both locally and internationally. In the entertainment industry, women are presented with charm, directly linked with people, and share the message of measured beauty. Common people hardly understand it is only for commodification.

Figure 3

The Beauty Myth



If the advertising for Fair & Lovely or any of the other countless fairness creams does not make you gag. There is always Clean & Dry Intimate Wash. Taking the idea of cleanliness a

step further, these ads want to tell women that the key to happiness is to whitewash their privates since only then is the ultimate aim of becoming the object of a man's desire attainable.

Figure 4

Women cosmetic as a Fashion



Through the use of artificial looks, the marketing of skimpy apparel, and beauty boosters, and the publication of flesh-revealing trends

through on-trend campaigns and popular designs, the fashion media is continually extending the gender gap.

Figure 5

Objectification of Women by Robots Fashion



For at least 30 years, realistic-looking humanoid love and sex dolls have been sold in a rather covert manner. However, mass customization is now widely used by North American, European, and Asian manufacturers who compete based on features, realism, pricing, and the breadth of their product lines. Because of

this, realistic life-size artificial companions have become easier to buy and more practical to use as a service. In terms of emotional closeness, sexual connections could be unmatched. The more talkative and active artificial variants of these dolls, however, show no emotion. Nevertheless, they may cause users to feel things that may be

more enjoyable than human-to-human sexual interactions. The most sophisticated love and sex robots are predicted to be able to detect human

emotions and adjust their empathy, dialogue, and sexual activity accordingly.

Figure 6

Objectification of Women by the Mass Media as Fashion



For patriarchal civilizations, women and their bodies have always been commodities, sources of pleasure, and objects of exploitation. Since the turn of the 20th century, women have progressively been sexualized and objectified in media, including television, movies, ads, and music videos. The physical appearance, body image, social norms, and attractiveness of women have always been portrayed falsely and unrealistically in mainstream media. We can observe hypersexualized and excessively flawless female shapes in today's media, including television, billboards, glossy magazine pages, and social media. Women are shown as commodities in advertisements, music videos, and movies, and their humanity is reduced. Everything from automobile tires to entertainment is promoted via body narcissism.

Conclusion

This paper establishes how female consumers are gradually adopting the commercial definition of beauty and viewing the body as a commodity.

The trend of fashion has undergone significant changes over the last decades. Fashion media plays a vital role in designing artificial looks to sell skimpy clothing and beauty enhancers, promoting flesh-revealing fashions through on-trend campaigns and popular designs. Manufacturers from North America, Europe, and Asia are increasingly adopting this trend in Nepal, creating beauty standards as a vestimentary code to sell their products. It may be unparalleled in terms of emotional intimacy because people seek similar standards presented through media.

The study demonstrates how the fashion industry ensures women's empowerment. It contributes to the lives of women by enhancing their self-esteem and generating new employment and entrepreneurial prospects. Women have integrated themselves into the fashion industry and are demonstrating their value by striving for success. Fashion and beauty sectors also undergo substantial transformations. Instead of focusing primarily on profit, they now prioritize the needs of the customer.

This paper examines how the media sector, along with the fashion and beauty sectors, attempts to create artificial looks of women's attractiveness and fashion. These sectors are developing methods to empower women by either enhancing their self-confidence or by supporting and providing opportunities to women of all sizes. They are working to change attitudes towards natural beauty standards over body narcissism.

The globalization of consumer culture creates stereotypes of body and beauty for women. Without interest, they waste time trying to look good. However, there is a need to show no tolerance and leniency toward the commodification of women via branding. Endorsing it will lead to an extravagant culture in society. It is the ethical duty of every community to come up with antidotes for such fraudulent activities before we find ourselves neck-deep in such unfair practices. We hardly exclude ourselves from fashion trends. However, consumer consciousness is mostly a result of industrial manipulation. Consequently, a woman's body is her identity. It is not a commodity for sale.

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