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Female Body's in Advertisements: A Foucauldian Analysis

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Abstract

This research study examines the articulation of the female body in advertisements through the intersecting lenses of Foucauldian perspectives. In the context of contemporary consumer culture where advertisements play a pivotal role in shaping social perceptions of gender and beauty, this research seeks to unravel the complex web of power, discourse, and commodification regarding the portrayal of women's bodies. The analysis delves into how capitalism commodifies the female body, turning it into a product to circulate in the market. The study investigates the economic relations and labor conditions involved in the production of these images, shedding light on the exploitative mechanisms within the advertising industry. It also explores how consumerism and the pursuit of profit contribute to the perpetuation of idealized beauty standards. Simultaneously, drawing from Foucault's theories, the research investigates the ways in which power operates within the discourse of advertisements. It uncovers how advertising normalizes specific beauty ideals, imposes disciplinary domains regimes, and invites viewers to engage in a surveillance-based gaze that judges and categorizes female bodies. This study revealed that advertisements commodify the female body, reducing women to objects that can be bought and sold, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards and creating a culture where women feel alienated from their own bodies, all driven by the profit motive of corporations and reinforcing the capitalist notion that everything, including beauty, has a price. By elucidating these dynamics, the research contributes to a critical discourse on the role of advertising in reinforcing or challenging gender norms and the broader socio-economic system.

Keywords: female body, advertising, gender representation, sexualization and objectification

Introduction

The articulation of the female body in advertisements, analyzed through a Foucauldian lens and reveals a commodification process where women are objectified and subjected to constant surveillance, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards, and reinforcing societal norms for profit-driven purposes. Advertisements often play a significant role in shaping cultural norms and ideals, and the portrayal of the female body in these advertisements can both reflect and reinforce these norms. Over the years, the representation of the female body in advertisements has evolved, influenced by changing social attitudes, feminist movements, and broader cultural shifts (Toffoletti & Thorpe, 2018). The female body in advertisements is subjected to Foucauldian analysis, revealing the commodification, objectification, and surveillance perpetuated through visual and textual cues, shaping cultural ideals and reinforcing societal norms.

During the 20th century, women shifted their roles from isolated domestic figures to business, potential and social players, and advertising served as a recorder of the century's cultural revolution in the external and internal lives of women (Aagerup, 2011; Czarnecka et al., 2018). This approach often focuses on sexualized images that prioritize certain body types and beauty standards (Czarnecka et al., 2018). However, in recent years, there has been a growing effort to portray women in advertisements as empowered individuals with agency and diverse body types. Advertisements historically favored a narrow and unrealistic depiction of the "ideal" female body, promoting thinness and specific physical attributes (Xie & Zhang, 2013). This unrealistic portrayal has been linked to body image issues and low self-esteem among women and girls. In response, some brands and campaigns have started featuring women of various sizes, ethnicities, and ages to promote body positivity and diversity (Szymanski et al., 2011).

Feminist scholars and activists have long critiqued the way the female body is presented in advertisements. They argue that objectification and unrealistic portrayals contribute to the reinforcement of gender inequality and stereotypes of patriarchy (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2009). They call for more responsible and inclusive representations that challenge traditional norms. The articulation of the female body in advertisements has been a subject of considerable discussion and analysis within the fields of gender studies, media studies, and advertising (Augustus-Horvath & Tylka, 2009). The portrayal of women's bodies in advertisements reflects and perpetuates the women's strength with challenging the prevalent societal norms, values, and attitudes towards gender and beauty (Xie & Zhang, 2013). However, the exposition of the delicate and smooth female body via advertisement for the production is possible. The female in general should not be underestimated and devalued in the society. Rather, it is their talent and skill which compels the entrepreneurs to appeal them for advertisement of their production so that the entrepreneurs can earn lots of money. It shows that such glammers' appearance on the newspaper cracks the patriarchal

norms, values and assumption by their confident mindset with charm skin. From a Marxist perspective, the articulation of the female body in advertisements can be understood as a reflection of broader capitalist structures and power dynamics (MacKinnon, 1982).

In the context of advertisements, Foucault might analyze how the female body is used as a tool for both power and control. Advertisements often contribute to the formation of societal norms and expectations, and they play a role in shaping our perceptions of beauty and femininity. Foucault's concept of "bio-power" could be relevant here. Bio-power refers to the ways in which institutions, including the media, exert control over individuals' bodies and lives. Foucault also explores how the gaze operates in advertisements. The male gaze, for instance, positions women as objects, reinforcing power dynamics and societal expectations. Advertisements, through visual representation, contribute to the construction of this gaze and its impact on the perception of the female body (Weeks, 2011).

Exploring the articulation of the female body in advertisements from both Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives can yield valuable insights into the intersections of gender, capitalism, power, and discourse. The research gap lies in the need for a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach that combines Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives considers historical contexts, embraces intersectionality, explores resistance and agency, includes global perspectives, delves into consumer responses, adapts to changing advertising platforms, and discusses policy implications in terms of gender. Yet, the corporate world would like to exploit the body of female as a mirror in the business for earning sake. Similarly, even the ladies seem to be showing interest in this domain willingly or un willingly. However, it seems to be that the lady has lost the quality of resistance and on agency within herself. Addressing these gaps could provide a richer understanding of the complexities surrounding the female body in advertisements from both theoretical lenses.

Research Methodology

In this research, qualitative research methods have been adopted and given the critical and interpretive nature of both Marxist and Foucauldian perspectives. Content of advertisements has been analyzed with indepth interpretation. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a methodology of this research that aligns well with both Marxist and Foucauldian approaches. It allows for the examination of language, power relations, and ideologies in texts, including advertisements.

The sample of advertisements has been selected as the feature of the female body. Sources of advertisements were the magazines. This research encompasses a diverse range of product types, industries, and time periods, examining the portrayal of the female body in advertisements from Foucauldian perspectives. The analysis delves into commodity fetishism, exploring how the female body has been commodified, transformed into an object of desire and consumption. It

investigates class relations, studying the role of social class in constructing the female body in advertisements, examining whether there are indications of perpetuating class distinctions or class-based appeals. Additionally, the paper reach into capitalism and exploitation, aiming to ascertain whether advertisements reflect labor exploitation, economic inequality, or capitalist values. Furthermore, it critically evaluates how the female body has been utilized to promote consumerism. The analysis adopts a formal tone, providing a comprehensive exploration of these themes within the context of advertising.

From Foucauldian perspective, this research has analyzed power relations, which has analyze the power dynamics at play in the advertisements and identify who holds power and how it is exercised over the female body, discourse analysis which has examined the language and discourse used in advertisements to describe and represent the female body and look for instances of normalization, discipline, or surveillance, and sexuality and knowledge which has been investigated how the advertisements construct notions of sexuality and knowledge regarding the female body and analyze whether they encourage specific modes of understanding and controlling the body.

Female Body in Advertisements

Foucault, a prominent French philosopher and social theorist, offers a different perspective on the articulation of the female body in advertisements. Foucault's theories center on power, knowledge, and discourse, and he is known for his analysis of how societal norms and institutions shape and control individuals. When applying Foucauldian concepts to the portrayal of the female body in advertisements, several key ideas come into play (Miguel-Alfonso & Caporale-Bizzini, 1994).

Both printed and visual advertisements contribute to the construction of discourse by presenting specific images, narratives, and ideas about femininity and the female body. These images are not neutral; they are imbued with power and the ability to shape societal norms and individual perceptions. Foucault introduced the concept of the "panopticon," a metaphorical structure of surveillance and control. In the context of advertisements, the idealized images of the female body serve as a type of panopticon. These images create a standard of beauty and behavior that women are encouraged to be conformed to, even though this standard is often unattainable or unrealistic. This normalization exerts a form of control over individuals by making them feel perpetually observed and judged (Hekman, 2009).

Foucault's notion of "biopower" refers to the mechanisms through which societies manage and control populations, often through institutions and norms related to health, sexuality, and the body. Advertisements, by promoting particular beauty standards and lifestyle choices, contribute

to the bio political control of bodies. Women may internalize these standards and engage in self-disciplining behaviors, such as dieting or cosmetic procedures, to conform to societal expectations. Foucault's work also examines the historical construction of sexuality and the ways in which it is regulated by societal norms. Advertisements often use the female body to evoke desire and pleasure, but these representations are often shaped by dominant power structures. Women's bodies become objects of consumption and enjoyment for the male gaze, reinforcing traditional gender dynamics and sexual norms (Alcoff, 1988)

Foucault's theories also acknowledge the potential for resistance within power structures. People can challenge and subvert dominant discourses by reinterpreting or rejecting societal norms. Linking Foucauldian theory to the articulation of the female body in advertisements involves applying Foucault's concepts and methodologies to understand how power, discourse, and knowledge shape the representation of gender and the body in advertising. In other word, by integrating Foucauldian theory in articulation of the female body in advertisements it can provide a nuanced understanding of how power, discourse, and knowledge intersect in shaping gender representations in the advertising industry. This approach can help uncover hidden power dynamics and provide critical insights into the ways in which advertising constructs and reinforces societal norms related to the female body. Some feminist movements have sought to reclaim agency over the female body, critiquing and challenging the ways it is represented in advertisements and media. Foucault's work also examines the historical construction of sexuality and the ways in which it is regulated by societal norms. Advertisements often use the female body to evoke desire and pleasure, but these representations are often shaped by dominant power structures. Women's bodies become objects of consumption and enjoyment for the male gaze, reinforcing traditional gender dynamics and sexual norms (Meehan, 2014).

Foucault's perspective on the articulation of the female body in advertisements emphasizes the role of power, discourse, and societal norms in shaping how women are represented and understood. Advertisements contribute to the normalization of specific beauty ideals, control over bodies, and the regulation of sexuality. However, Foucault's theories also point to the potential for resistance and the reshaping of discourse through individual and collective efforts.

The Articulation of Female Body in Advertisements from Marxism Perspective

From a Marxist perspective, the articulation of the female body in advertisements can be understood as a reflection of broader capitalist structures and power dynamics. Marxism views society through the lens of class struggle and the exploitation of labor by the bourgeoisie (capitalist

class) over the proletariat (working class). The articulation of the female body in advertisements can be understood in terms of the capitalist mode of production, class struggle, and the commodification of both labor and desires (Agerup, 2011).

In a capitalist system, commodities (products) are produced for exchange and profit. Advertisements play a crucial role in promoting commodities and creating a sense of desire for them. The female body is often used as a tool to fetishize products, associating them with ideals of beauty, desirability, and success. This practice further reinforces the capitalist notion that happiness and fulfillment can be achieved through consumption. Advertisements frequently objectify the female body, reducing it to a mere commodity to be consumed. This objectification reinforces the alienation experienced by both the women being depicted and the audience. Women are distanced from their own bodies, reduced to parts to be evaluated for their marketability. Simultaneously, consumers are encouraged to view these bodies as objects of desire, rather than as fellow human beings (McKay, 2013).

In a Marxist analysis, the reproduction of the labor force is crucial to maintaining the capitalist system. The portrayal of the female body in advertisements often aligns with traditional gender roles, depicting women as care givers, homemakers, and sexual objects. These depictions can perpetuate the unequal division of labor between genders, with women expected to fulfill these roles while also participating in wage labor. Advertisements contribute to the dissemination of capitalist ideology, reinforcing the idea that individual happiness is attainable through consumption. The use of the female body in these ads promotes a particular beauty standard and lifestyle, encouraging women to invest in products that promise to bring them closer to that ideal. This cycle of consumption and aspiration maintains a capitalist system that benefits from ongoing purchases. It is important to note that the impact of these advertisements is not uniform across all women. Intersectionality, which considers how different aspects of identity (such as race, class, and gender) intersect and interact, complicates the analysis. Working-class women, women of color, and other marginalized groups may experience these advertisements differently due to the additional layers of oppression they face (Roberts, 2012).

A Marxist analysis of the articulation of the female body in advertisements reveals how capitalist structures exploit and perpetuate inequalities through the objectification, fetishization, and reinforcement of traditional gender roles. These advertisements serve to maintain consumerism, uphold class divisions, and contribute to the overall reproduction of the capitalist system.

Discussion of Objectification of Woman from Marxist and Foucault View Point

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) provides a paradigm for interpreting female experience in a social setting that sexually objectifies the female body (Aagerup, 2011). Objectification theory has become an important organizing perspective for a great deal of research within feminist and counseling psychology and fits well within the multicultural-feminist and social justice missions of counseling psychology diversity (Szymanski et al., 2011). According to Objectification theory, many women are sexually objectified and regarded as objects to be valued for their use by others. So, it happens that a woman's body or bodily parts are singled out and removed from her as a person, with her predominantly being perceived as a physical object of male sexual desire (Borland & Akram, 2007).

The procedure of representing or treating a human like an object is known as objectification and when that object is women then it is termed as objectification of woman. If we believe that women have human rights. The advertising industry, fashion industry, media, enterprises, and some in government and private agency use objectification as one of the tools to dehumanize, control and abuse women that leads to the denial of human rights and inequality (Del Rosso, 2017). Whenever society and culture transform women's bodies into objects, it creates atmosphere where violence and exploitation of women are both tolerated and tacitly encouraged (Kaur et al., 2013). This makes it simpler to abuse or maltreat women when we give women a status of objects instead of individuals or a person. Whether it is in a form of racism, sexism, and discrimination against transgender, terrorism, and objectification is quite often the initial move toward advocating brutality or violence against that person (Taylor & Costello, 2017). In the world of advertising, companies tend to use images which they believe will help to make their product sell. Such images are mostly of women as compared to men. The story doesn't end here. The women that are being shown by the advertising and make-up industry are not the women who really exist (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2011). This woman is scar free, unimaginably tall, with a Barbie waist, zero figure size, with the most glowing skin, etc. (Murphy & Jackson, 2011). The following advertisement shows the glamorous representation of female body:

Figure 1

Vaseline Advertisement

The advertisement features a woman in a blue dress posing against a blue background. To her left, a circular inset shows a city street with cars and a sign that reads "SUN + POLLUTION PROTECTION". The Vaseline logo is in the top right corner. Text on the right says "PROTECT YOUR SKIN. RESTORE ITS NATURAL GLOW." Below the woman, the product name "VASELINE SUN & POLLUTION PROTECTION LOTION" is written. To the left of the product name is a circular logo with "POLLUTION PROTECTION FORMULA" and "PPF". To the right is a box with "SPF 24 PA++". Below this box is the text: "SPF 24 PA++ blocks & protects your skin from UVA and UVB rays of the sun." On the far right is a bottle of the lotion.

In this advertisement, a white beautiful and lovely woman is presented as posing her body and smiles to allure the millions of consumers. No matter millions of customers are attracted with this advertisement. She does not stare at the audience; her eyes are lowered and her left hand touches her neck from the left side. Her naked left thigh can also be seen. She has her inner undergarment only because of which her most of the body parts are seen. She smiles and her both lips strengthen her sizzling beauty. Why have such sensuous female body been used as the advertisement of the Vaseline? And why has the costume been chosen as like that? The matter is simple because it is all for the selling of those products to the millions of purchasers. The purchaser is simply being cheated on the account that they in order to be the beautiful, soft and modest they prefer this Vaseline.

From a Marxist standpoint, advertisements commodify the female body. They reduce women to objects that can be bought and sold. The female body becomes a commodity that is used to sell other commodities, reinforcing the capitalist notion that everything has a price. Michel

Foucault's work emphasizes the role of discourse in the construction of power and knowledge. Advertisements contribute to the discourse of the ideal female body, creating a regime of truth wherein certain beauty standards are accepted as normative, thereby exerting power over individuals who internalize these norms (Himmelweit, 1995).

They are furthermore being allured with the female model of the advertisement. In the very advertisement, beauty has been defined in term of fairness and smoothness. The more one becomes fair the more s/he is considered to be beauty. Therefore mostly, white females are considered to be the soft and sweet by the people. The advertisers in the advertisement use female body not only to drag the attention but also to convey his discourse, which in turn function by leaving an impact on the observer, thereby compelling them to look at the other details in the advertisement. Advertisements often depict women as hypersexualized, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards. This creates a culture where women feel alienated from their own bodies and are compelled to purchase products to conform to these standards. This exploitation is driven by the profit motive of corporations (Kaur et al., 2013).

Foucault's concept of the panopticon, a prison where inmates are under constant surveillance, can be applied to the scrutiny and surveillance of women's bodies in advertisements. Women are subjected to a constant gaze that regulates their behavior and self-perception. This surveillance, even if not overtly oppressive, leads to self-discipline and conformity to societal norms (Duncan, 1994). The given advertisement depicts the glamorous representation of female body:

Figure 2

Fair & Lovely Advertisement



The second advertisement of Fair& Lovely taken from the Kantipur had also got the female model in it. She has got her white woolen high neck and white hair band as well. There we see the price tag too. Price is different in different quantity. The amazing thing in the advertisement is that the left portion of the lady is black, and the right portion of the lady is white. It says if we use and apply this cream slowly changes our skin from this black to white and we become fair. Here, the advertisement teaches us that fairness means whiteness. Can't the black ones who are by birth black be fair, soft and beautiful? Is beauty and fairness synonymous to whiteness? Can any black become white as shown in the advertisement? Thus the advertisement manipulates female body to achieve the financial success and promote consumer culture there are by devaluing female body.

The Marxist perspective also highlights how the portrayal of women in advertisements often reinforces class divisions. Luxury brands, for instance, use images of idealized, affluent women to appeal to an elite market, further stratifying society (Havens et al., 2009). Foucault also introduced the concept of bio-power, which relates to the control and regulation of populations (Perron et al., 2005). Advertisements play a role in shaping cultural norms around femininity and the female body, contributing to the bio-political control of women's bodies and influence decisions related to health, reproduction, and lifestyle (Perron et al., 2005).

Conclusion

The Foucauldian perspectives in our analysis of women's bodies in advertisements reveals a multifaceted and intricate portrayal of gender, power, and consumer culture within the advertising industry. Through Marxist lenses, it is analyzed how women's bodies are commodified, transformed into objects for consumption, and harnessed for the enjoyment of the male gaze. This process reinforces traditional gender dynamics and sexual norms that have persisted for generations, perpetuating a cycle of objectification and exploitation.

Foucault's concepts of power, discourse, and knowledge, this research gained insight into the intricate ways in which the representation of gender and the female body in advertising is shaped and constructed. These representations are not mere reflections of culture but are powerful mechanisms which construct and regulate societal norms. Foucault's insights into the normalization of specific beauty ideals, the disciplining of individuals into conformity, and the operation of the gaze as a tool of surveillance offer a lens through which the research holds how power subtly and pervasively operates within advertising.

The paper comes to the point that the underscores of the intricate relationship between capitalism's commodification and the women's bodies as the reinforcement of traditional gender roles, and the exertion of power through the discourse of advertising in the corporate world. Advertisements are far reaching services that limit between the model lady and commercial sectors connecting with both economic and cultural forces. These forces converge to construct and reinforce certain narratives about the female body, sexuality and social roles.

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