

THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

Images which are totally divorced from reality are still common in advertising and this applies to many stereotypes concerning the role and functions of women and men in society. It is chiefly women who are vulgarised in advertisements and commodified or presented as sex objects – usually in ways which have nothing to do with the actual product. Advertisers bear a heavy responsibility, since they exercise a decisive influence on the public and particularly the young – often, indeed, with lasting effects on their vision of themselves and others [3].

In recent years, advertisers and their agencies have received criticism from a wide variety of sources concerning the manner in which women are portrayed in advertisements [8]. The critics state that the women shown in ads are too often “only housewives”, stupid or incompetent, dependent on men, decorative or sex objects, passive, and not involved in making major decisions.

Amid common themes in the representation of females, there are the following:

1. The artificial look.

The idealized image of female beauty means women must transform themselves, to be who they are naturally is not OK. In the media images, she is often transformed into a doll, a puppet or a mask, a thing rather than a human being.

2. Commodification.

Women are frequently presented as a product for male pleasure and consumption. A visual association may be made between some product, often alcohol, and the female form. The female and the product become equivalent and interchangeable, and both are promoted as a pleasure object. Females are presented as a thing, a commodity, and in doing so their humanity and subjectivity is denied.

3. Relative size.

When females and males are shown together, males are mostly shown as taller than females, even though if females and males were randomly paired together, in one in six pairs the woman would be taller. However, the tall female with the short male displays a relationship in which the female has power, according to conventional indicative codes, and so the reverse is preferred, since the cultural ideal is the male “should wear the pants”.

4. Ritualization of subordination.

Women are commonly pictured in a childlike role, sitting on a male’s knee, or being shielded and protected by the male. Females may also be shown being lifted up in the air just as adults toss little children around. Women may also be shown infantilized, putting their finger coyly in their mouth, standing pigeon-toed, wearing little girl clothes, sucking on lollipops [1].

There is another classification of images of women in commercials, which reveals in more detail the nuances of the image of women in modern advertising:

1. The exploited woman (she is only the background for advertising certain products; frequently there are three, five or more women in the frame of such advertising, mostly they are almost naked).

2. Devoid of intelligence (such a woman is only interested in stains on the tablecloth or clothing or toilet cleaning products; she is not used as an expert in high-tech products, in the field of Finance or the latest technologies).

3. Dependent on her husband, it makes no sense to live differently (in every second ad, a woman does something for her husband, in front of him, for him, or his voice is present behind the scenes, his assessment or approval is the meaning of such a woman's life).

4. "Berehynya" with a monopolized function of caring for children and performing household duties (a woman who constantly washes something, cleans, irons, bleaches, cleans dirt, prepares food and "serves" her husband and children).

5. Likened to certain things or goods (a woman is depicted only in order to "excite" the imagination of the male viewer and encourage him to buy a certain product).

6. It is deprived of being a person (the image of a woman is simplified, primitivized, becomes fictional and unreal; the woman appears as a mythical person who flies or lives under water (fairy, sorceress, little mermaid)).

Women face overwhelming pressure to meet an often unrealizable "beauty" ideal. The result is that 80% of women report being unhappy with their appearance, and three-quarters of all women engage in some form of disordered eating such as crash dieting or skipping meals. Many companies have capitalized on this trend, offering a veritable cornucopia of products designed to "fix" women's perceived flaws [2].

The advertisements for these products, however, frequently leave women feeling bad about themselves, particularly when images in these ads contain unrealistically "perfect" women. The overwhelming majority of cosmetic and clothing advertisements are digitally enhanced [5].

Nevertheless, women are increasingly aware of the effects of digitally manipulated advertisements, and some retailers are abandoning the practice of presenting women with unrealistic images. This means if the stereotypes can be recognized, firstly, they have less impact on us as consumers (willing or unwilling) of media images, and, secondly, we can educate both producers of these images, and other consumers [6]. That gives us hope that by changing the narrative, the images we use, the stories we tell about women, we can dramatically change the way the world values women and how women and girls see themselves [4].

In Ukraine, there is much to complain about the sexist subtext of advertising too. Among the state institutions that are working to combat discriminatory advertising are the State service of Ukraine for food safety, the Industrial gender Committee for advertising, the national Council for television and radio broadcasting, the Office for child rights, non-discrimination and gender equality of the Secretariat of the Commissioner for human rights of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine [9].

Public organizations, such as the Harmony of equal women's rights League, are also working to reduce sexist content. The organization has launched a service through which people can complain online about those who, in their opinion, replicate sexist messages in advertising.

Current Ukrainian legislation explicitly prohibits discrimination in advertising based on gender. This is stated in article 8 of the law "on advertising". The law also stipulates that ads must not contain information or images that violate ethical, humanistic, or moral norms or violate the rules of decency.

The Verkhovna Rada has registered draft No. 8558 on amendments to the Law of Ukraine "on advertising" on countering discrimination. The author of the bill proposes to understand the term "discriminatory advertising by gender" as the content that demeans the dignity of people on the basis of sex, broadcasts stereotypes about the intellectual, physical, social or other benefits of one sex over the other, replicates the stereotypical roles limiting freedom of life choices, uses a person solely as a sexual object in order to attract the attention of consumers, demonstrates physical violence of members of one sex over the other, or is based on ambiguous expressions with hints of sexual relations.

It should be noted that only producers of discriminatory messages degrading the dignity of women or portraying men as helpless face penalties in the form of fines.

Thus, we can conclude that television commercials often use the following modern image of women: the woman-housewife, woman-mother, woman chef, woman doctor, woman-vamp [7]. The most relevant today is the image of a woman as a desired sexual object, it is quite dangerous though, because it deprives a woman of inner freedom in advertising, levels her value, spiritual beauty, and her own desires. It is assigned the function of a catalyst for buyers' needs and an incentive to buy goods or services. However, there are new trends and images that require further research.

So, women's images are very actively exploited in modern advertising, it is worth noting that most often the image of a woman is used for pragmatic purposes. Stereotypes, both male and female, have a great influence on the formation of a person as a personality. It is through established stereotypes that norms of behavior, occupation, profession, etc. are attributed to people. Strict restrictions and stereotypes are imposed on women, which often leads to stress and failure. It can be concluded that advertising has a great influence on the human subconscious and thus creates gender stereotypes, a certain perception of the world, and an attitude to the place of women in this world. Unfortunately, based on advertising images, this place is subordinate, secondary.

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