

Femvertising: A study of the idea that moved culture forward for women

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Abstract:

Femvertising/ female empowerment advertising is a solidarity movement lived out through social media. The present paper shall affirm that 'femvertising' is no longer a new expression but an absolutely struggling chapter in feminism's fourth wave. In a male dominated society, the condition of inferiority of the female gender has been obviously reflected in the advertising sector too. The bridging of this gender gap, the gradual improvement of the condition of women at a societal level, has also been documented at the marketing and communicational level. In the light of the same the paper shall hope to identify that the practices of appropriating this feminism discourse is meant for profit gains.

The paper shall discuss that 'femvertising' apart from marketing the brand is a medium to promote the self-esteem, confidence and aspirations of the women. It is a communicational strategy to liberate a woman, to delimit a woman. In order to contextualize the ongoing argument, I shall bring to focus certain selected advertisements that attempt to shatter the perpetuated stereotypes about women. Furthermore, the paper shall question the extent to which the growing activism has

boosted the fourth wave feminism into the technological age and how successfully it has been emphasising and including the questions of empowerment, freedom and equality.

The paper shall accommodate necessary implications about how 'femvertising' is struggling hard to combat the two forms of exclusion: firstly, the white feminism ignored the isolated struggle of the women of colour, secondly, feminism had an unacceptable and aggressive attitude towards the trans women. Therefore, keeping in mind the complexity of the topic and the controversy surrounding the subject, the paper shall examine and establish the needful.

Keywords: *Femvertising, Commodity feminism, Activism, White feminism, Trans-woman*

Introduction

The popular culture has accepted advertising to be an inevitable part of their existence. It has always been observed that the content or storyline of each advertisement either portrays or represents the ideas, thoughts and messages of the present-day reality. Since a long time, women have always received the identity of a marginalised and subordinate class in a patriarchal society. Undoubtedly, this state of subjugation of the fair sex has been recorded by the advertising industry. It was a matter of utmost necessity to rethink the stereotypical representation of women/female bodies in the advertisements. This gender gap having undergone gradual improvement had eventually benefitted the situation of women at the societal level and consequently at a communication (marketing) level.

The decades following the second World War when women practised unquestionable subservience to the patriarchal dominion, the times when a woman in advertisements were modelled as housewives to promote the household goods like,

floor cleaners, brooms, shoe shiners, electrical appliances, food items etc. had upgraded the notion that a brighter, cleaner and shinier indoor made a housewife happier.

Evidence suggests that the 1970s framed women from a different point of view in advertisements. The female body was used as a 'sexy' icon that was purposed to gain the attention of the male audience. The masculine gaze was gratified through the alluring glances or the partial naked bodies or the sensual poses of the female protagonist in the advertisements. A product was marketed by portraying a woman as a 'real sex object'. Weyenberg Massagic Shoes in the year 1974 advertised a naked woman lying on the floor with a flirtatious look at the brand's shoe with a tag-line "Keep where she belongs". The line indicates a woman is born to be under a man's dictation, at his toe. A woman was nothing but an embodiment of sexual pleasure.

The 1980s and 90s saw the increase of the commercialization of consumer goods required for personal use; like make up kits, fashion utilities, gyms and other slimming products. The new version of beauty targeted towards a slim, slender and flawless female body. This concept of beauty was depicted in the ad featuring a woman by Calvin Klein Jeans.

The beginning of the 1990s observed the initial step towards emancipating the female. The woman was then identified as a self-governing and sturdy individual who is eligible to decide for herself, accomplished to become resourceful, capable to experience sexual liberty and efficient to grow a professional career. The advertisement released by Yves Saint Laurent's pictured a woman with jacket and formal trousers (previously used by working men) sitting at her office desk. With the economic recession hitting every section of the society in the 90s, social differences began to increase making way for the advertising sector to frame women a flexible personality with the efficiency of a multi tasker.

The 21st century introduced a better and anew turn in the advertising industry. It no longer represented the goals and ideals of the society or the personal choices target audience instead the brands created and communicated efficient ways to inspire the thoughts and ideas, modulate the choice and reform the practices of the general public. The audience towards the end of the first decade of the century began to acculturate themselves with the new definitions of beauty. The brands intended to promote and celebrate physical peculiarities, imperfections and differences all of which targeted to focus the positive portrayal of the female body untainted by the male gaze and not responsible to satisfy the desires of the opposite sex.

In order to respect the need of the hour, guided by the chief tenants of the fourth wave feminism, the year 2014 had witnessed the introduction of the “pro-female” trend. The “pro-female” style through the channels of digital communication intended to practise gender equality by giving up the cliched depiction of the female body and enhancing a sense of inclusiveness where the society will be motivated to stop discriminating the female body as an object of desire. These thoughts of ‘feminism’ and the purpose of ‘advertising’ gave birth to “Femvertising”.

The present generations instead of subscribing to the gendered reality utilise the digital media to contribute to the various movements that pave way towards woman empowerment. These ideas of expression volunteer the ‘modern woman’ towards a life of independence, integrity, resourcefulness and strength where discrimination walks down to obsolescence. ‘The Global Campaign for real beauty’, the advertising campaign by Dove honours the fact that a woman’s body is her choice, it marks an optimistic outlook and a better approach towards ethnicity and definition of beauty. The picture shows women of different nationalities, body shapes. They represent the females in general, the advertised product is made for every woman irrespective

of their imperfections and specific body conformations. The brand celebrates an idea of beauty free of all preconceived notions, they photograph any human being (woman and transgender) who identify themselves with as a female. They have progressively destroyed conformed notions of gender and have accommodated the revised version of a female body that naturally olds scars and flaws.

Similarly, the tagline; “For the bold, the bright and the beautiful” used by Gucci to advertise lipsticks thrives on the idea of celebrating a genuine, an authentic individual, one who surely survives imperfections.

Literature Review

The present paper has reckoned heavily upon book chapters and journals similar to Charlie Campbell’s, “Watch Emma Watson Explain Why She’s a Feminist”, Prudence Chamberlain’s, “Affective Temporality: Towards a Fourth Wave”, Heather Landy’s, “HP Pushed Ad Agencies to Do Better on Diversity – and Saw a Change in Ad Performance” Nancy Levit’s, “The “F” Word: Feminism and Its Detractors”, John Mackey’s and Rajendra S. Sisodia’s *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*. Paulin Maclaran’s, “Marketing and Feminism in Historic Perspective.”

Ealasaid Munro’s, “Feminism: A Fourth Wave?” Political Insight, Jack Neff’s “The UN Believes Ads Can Turn the Tide in Long-Losing War for Gender Equality”, Sara Ashley’s “Uber Is under a Federal Investigation for Gender Discrimination.” and Nina O’Neil’s, “Gold Eagle Brand: Building a Culture Where Everybody Matters,” have extensively researched on the identity, empowerment, and existence of women across timelines.

Methodology

This paper hopes to justify from a rational point of view the fifty to seventy years of woman subjugation in a male-dominated society that has been reflected in digital reality. The paper shall pertinently trace the portrayal of women in

advertisements through decades. It shall mark the evolution of “femvertising” as a much-needed activist movement in the history of advertisement. The paper shall identify and analyse a long line of advertisements that seek to frame diversity, and celebrate inclusiveness and woman empowerment. The paper shall prove the optimistic turn of the advertising industry toward inspiring the population to think in ways that the digital medium communicated. In a whole the paper shall accommodate the journey of the advertising industry from gender inequality towards gender equality.

Discussion/ Result Analysis

Advertisements that volunteered women towards dignity

“Who says, It’s A Man’s World?” - TWA

Time and again girls and women were portrayed as identities free from the patriarchal shackles of gender biases. Shattering of gender stereotypes is a movement that continuously needs to volunteer the thoughts and ideas of the people towards a gender inclusive culture. The Trans World Airlines in the 1950s released an advertisement that tried to voice for the fact that each woman should have complete access to the human rights. Advertisements that promote human rights are a beacon of hope in our media landscape. These powerful messages inspire us to embrace diversity, equality, and justice for all. Whether they champion gender equality, racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, or freedom of expression, such ads remind us of our collective responsibility to create a world where every individual’s rights are respected and upheld. They serve as a reminder that change begins with awareness and action, encouraging us to stand up for what is just and humane, making the world a better place for generations to come.

“Equal pay, Equal Time” - Bulova Accutron

Both men and women live a day of the same duration. This idea was revoked by the watch manufacturing company,

Bulova Accutron. The company was supportive of the Equal Rights Amendment which was launched in the year 1974. In response the manufacturer voiced for the equal pay scale of women in the work professional space through their advertisement. This advertisement features the hand of a man and a woman held together to highlight gender equality.

Advertisements that portray gender equality play a crucial role in reshaping societal norms and perceptions. These ads challenge traditional stereotypes and biases by presenting men and women as equals, both in their roles and aspirations. They send a powerful message that gender should not limit one's potential, and that diverse perspectives and talents should be celebrated without discrimination. Such advertisements not only promote gender inclusivity but also reflect a more accurate representation of the world we live in, where gender equality is a fundamental principle. By showcasing women in leadership positions, depicting men engaging in caregiving roles, and emphasizing collaboration and respect between genders, these ads contribute to fostering a more equitable and just society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive regardless of their gender.

“More installers Like Alana MacFarlane” - AT & T

The advertisement released in 1972 featured Alana MacFarlane as the telephone installer. The ad hopes to focus on the versatility of the women and how independently they achieve the nerves to tackle intricate tasks confidently. They had also begun to overcome the assumed vulnerability of their limbs.

“Power Suit” - Ralph Lauren

The advertisement from the 1980s depicts for perhaps the first time the power accessed, celebrated and experienced by women. The ad features a woman in a formal attire (a jacket and trousers) which was a part of the pop culture. This ad has been assumed to have introduced an image of the woman that even in the present century is yet to be realised by many.

“Like A Girl” – Always

Femvertising consciously addressed the inherent discrimination in a patriarchal society. It raised the phrase “Like a Girl” which undoubtedly revisits the gender gap. This ad intended to remind the population about following ways that instead of segregating the woman as another should perpetuate the idea of inclusiveness.

Gender inclusiveness is the antidote to the persistent gender gap that has plagued societies for far too long. It signifies a commitment to creating environments where people of all genders are treated with equal respect, dignity, and opportunities. Inclusive societies recognize that the gender gap, whether in education, employment, or leadership, not only perpetuates injustice but also stifles human potential and economic progress. By actively dismantling the barriers that have historically disadvantaged women and marginalized gender identities, gender inclusiveness strives to level the playing field. It promotes policies, practices, and attitudes that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion, paving the way for a future where everyone, regardless of gender, can fully participate and thrive in all aspects of life. Achieving gender inclusiveness is an essential step towards closing the gender gap and creating a more just and equitable world for all.

“Imagine the Possibilities” – Barbie

The ad was released to allow people to rethink the woman’s version of success. The advertisement allowed the society to realize that it was not a compartmentalised space but one that can be accessed by all.

Femvertising has emerged as a transformative force in redefining the success statement of a woman. Traditionally, societal expectations often limited women’s definitions of success to conventional roles and achievements. However, femvertising campaigns have challenged these constraints by portraying women as multi-faceted individuals with diverse ambitions and aspirations. They celebrate women who break

barriers, shatter stereotypes, and excel in fields that were once considered male-dominated. Femvertising encourages women to aspire to greatness on their own terms, whether that's in business, leadership, sports, arts, or any other area of interest. By highlighting the stories of women who have defied conventional norms and reimagined success, femvertising has helped shift the narrative surrounding women's potential, inspiring women of all backgrounds to pursue their dreams and redefine success on their own empowering terms.

"Stress Test: Dana" – Secret

Secret released a sensitive and thought-provoking advertisement that featured a transgender woman named Dana who gains the required guts to walk out of the washroom to face along line of females waiting outside. The viewers were hoped to have empathised with her condition as the tagline reads; "no right way to be a woman". The ad holds together the challenges experienced by a woman and a transgender as well. Furthermore, the ad recalls the fact that the fragile 'other' requires inner-strength not only to overcome tough hurdles but usual and obvious circumstances in their lives also require their confidence and courage.

Conclusion

"Femvertising: The Study of Ideas that Moved Culture Forward for Women" has delved into the dynamic realm of advertising that champions women's empowerment, equality, and social progress. Throughout our exploration, we have witnessed how femvertising campaigns have transcended traditional marketing strategies and evolved into powerful agents of change, reshaping societal norms and perceptions. These campaigns have not only showcased the power of branding to influence cultural narratives but have also underscored the importance of authenticity and genuine commitment to women's causes in resonating with audiences. As the advertising industry continues to evolve, it is evident that femvertising will remain a critical force in

driving positive change for women and society at large. By amplifying women's voices and experiences, these campaigns are not only shaping consumer choices but also advancing the global agenda for gender equality. As we look to the future, it is imperative that advertisers, consumers, and policymakers alike recognize the potential of femvertising to foster a more inclusive and equitable world. The journey towards progress is ongoing, and femvertising stands as a testament to the enduring power of advertising to shape the world we want to see.

Femvertising stands as a powerful catalyst for both inclusiveness and women's empowerment in the world of advertising. Through creative and impactful campaigns, it has successfully challenged and reshaped conventional gender narratives, fostering a more inclusive and equitable representation of women in media. By showcasing women from diverse backgrounds and emphasizing their strengths, achievements, and resilience, femvertising not only promotes a more balanced and accurate reflection of society but also empowers women to break free from limiting stereotypes. It has played a pivotal role in advancing the cause of gender equality, encouraging women to pursue their dreams and ambitions, and inspiring society as a whole to recognize and celebrate the immense contributions of women in all spheres of life. As femvertising continues to evolve and expand, it holds the potential to drive lasting social change, furthering the journey towards a world where inclusiveness and women's empowerment are not just marketing strategies but integral values deeply ingrained in our cultural fabric.

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