

Women Portrayal in Magazine Advertisement: An Audience Perception in Maiduguri, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examined audience perception of portrayal of women in magazine advertisements, with a focus on Maiduguri residence. The study sought to find out audience perception on how women are depicted in magazine advertisement and whether audience perception on the portrayal of women in magazine advertisement is viewed as positive or negative. A survey was conducted to gather and generate data for the study. It used purposive sampling to select 100 respondent individuals relevant to the study. The study found that the respondent perceive that women are depicted predominantly as subjects for sexual appeal in magazine advertisement and women are perceive as being portrayed negatively in magazine advertisement. The study concludes respondent perceive women portrayal in magazine advertisement is tilted towards the negative perspective and the depiction is predominantly as object for sexual appeal.

Keyword: Women, magazine advertisement, Nigeria, portrayal

Introduction

The advertising industry is one vibrant industry with its impact cutting across various media platforms and involving people from heterogeneous background. It is a popular and important part of the marketing world for any business. Companies in the industry spend whopping sum of money in the range of millions dollars annually to put up befitting selling campaigns for goods and services. Cuneen et al (2007) noted that resource (human and material) expended in developing each print advert displayed in the pages of magazines, billboards and television. These efforts are primarily to make paid form of publicity meaningful and attractive to viewers so that they can relate to these adverts and possibly purchase the goods and services being sold.

This advertising efforts work best when members of the audience can relate with the people in the advertisements such as celebrities, athletes, politicians, actors etc. (Cuneen et al, 2007). These personalities are placed in various forms of adverts suitable for specific media.

The media as a key component of the advertising industry plays an important role of serving as channels and people rely on them to see what is in vogue. Slater et al(2012) noted that Advertisement has been one of the central components of media. The magazine, for instance have been considered a powerful and persuasive medium for shaping ideals about looks, appearance and body image (Jones, Vigfusdottir, & Lee, 2004).

According to Hendriks&Burgoon, (2003), the media and advertisements adopt methods to improve the physical appearance and attractiveness of the actors. They are portrayed in the media: in magazine images and other advertising platforms and perceived by the audience in diverse ways.

The fundamental role of advertisement is to persuade consumers to buy, whether it is a product or service and further plays a critical role in the perception of ideals in respect of beauty, good looks, affluence among other. It injects emotions to sell products and sexual appeal is included in those emotions. Sexual appeal helps to promote several products such as perfumes, alcohol, watches, personal product, cars and services. The skilled manipulation of sexual appeals in visual images may arouse subconscious desire that manifest themselves in the purchase of a product or service (Grover &Hundal, 2014).

These advertisements usually showcase actors cutting across gender and demographic characteristics. Women, men and children are showcased or portrayed in different ways to most importantly appeal to the audience and subsequently persuade them to patronise a product or service. Women have always been in the eyes of the storm as audience often see them used as sexual magnets. Grover &Hundal, (2014) pointed out that, objectivization of women is one popular perception of people, For example some people believe that the objectification of women in advertisement dehumanizes them, which may lead to violence being forced on them. They noted that males who see print media advertisements in which women are presented as sex objects are more likely to evidence increased sex role stereotypic and rape myth beliefs. According to Carpenter and Edison (2004) the use of sexual imagery in advertising is nothing new. Past studies suggest that the level of sex in advertising has grown more prevalent, more explicit, and more diverse over time. Much of the power of stereotypes in advertisement lies in their visual impact.

Goffman's (1979) analysis of visual images of men and women in advertisement shows how gender roles are reproduced in pictures, relative positions and expressions of men and women arranged advert agencies. Such images may appear natural but they are strong indications of stereotype and by extension the power of ideology and its ability to shape the thoughts of members of the audience without being aware of it. Such stereotypes portrayals will influence people's perception and in turn their attitudes and behaviours.

These advertisement and the various techniques deployed are often interpreted by members of the audience in different perspective, based on their perceptions. A number of studies have examine these perception of how women are portrayed in the media

(DiSalvatore, 2010; Patti, 1995; Soley & Reid, 1988; Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen and Zavoina, 1999; Carpenter and Edison, 2004). However, there is no documented work on audience perception of the same issue in Maiduguri, Nigeria.

Therefore, this paper is an effort to examine these perceptions by members of the audience, specifically residents of Maiduguri, Nigeria on the portrayal of women in magazine advertisement. The work has the following objectives:

- i. to find out audience perception on how women are depicted in magazine advertisement;
- ii. to examine whether audience perception on the portrayal of women in magazine advertisement is viewed as positive or negative.

This study would hopefully advance feminist scholarship through the thorough documentation of the audience perception of trend of inequality in the portrayal of sexuality and gender roles of females in magazine advertisement.

Literature Review

Advertisement transmits different kinds of marketing information aimed at meeting the needs of both buyers and sellers, in the process of informing the public about a product or service; advertisement creates an image of the same that goes beyond the straightforward facts presented in the message. Most often, the image statement is highlighted by the roles assigned to women in the advertisement.

Women's bodies are often objectified in common ways and depicted with parts of their bodies, like their legs or their chests which usually tilts thought towards sexual appeal. Another common way they are depicted is as weaker than the male, either through composition of the advertisement or a particular situation in the scene. Women often have their mouths closed most of the time, while males have them open. The more obvious objectification is apparent when women's bodies are representing a product. An example of this depiction would be a bottle of perfume or beer in the shape of a woman's body (Grover & Hundal, 2014, p. 30). Kemp (2017) pointed out in this regards that there are six popular stereotypes of women in advertising. This includes portrayal as Domestic obsessive, Selfless nurturer, Sex object, Unattainable goddess, the fraught juggler and the bit part.

Carpenter and Edison (2004) in their study that examined how the portrayal of women in magazine advertisement has changed over the past decades. Preliminary data analysis showed that across all magazine genres, in 2004, males appeared demurely dressed 83.5 percent of the time, while women are only shown as demurely dressed a third of the time, which indicates that women are portrayed much more often as sexual objects than are men.

Folkerts & Lacy, (2004) Since the 1850s, sexual imagery has been widely used in advertising to attract to sales of products, services, and ideas. At that time, the advances affordable enhanced printing technologies made using illustrations in magazines more affordable, and therefore more accessible to advertisers and to the public. These development spurred the use of suggestive images and sometimes even nude images by

especially tobacco companies in the united states. However, today, The level of dress in advertising content cuts across trend in the past from mere sexual suggestion to full nudity and depiction of intercourse (Folkerts& Lacy, 2004; Reichert, 2003). What Courtney and Whipple, (1983, p. 103) described as include “sexual imagery, innuendo, and double entendre”.



Source: meghancorte (2014)

These developments that have lived through times have generated arguments and criticism over time, especially among feminists who describe such advertisement as pervasive, because of the continuous representation of women in a problematic and often unacceptable way (Kates et al, 1999). Similarly Russell and Lane (1999) advertisement is both a mirror and shaper of public opinions, morals and social standards. This has compelled people to claim that the manner in which advertisement portrays various segments of the society determines in some measure, how these people will be treated by others. In other words the way women are portrayed in advertisement are the way members of the audience are likely to perceive them and possibly treat them. Just as Courtney and Whipple (1985:45) noted that “there is still overwhelming evidence that an advertisement represents tradition limitation and often demeaning stereotypes of women”. Scenarios of sexual dress in magazine advertisements has increased over the years. In addition to the level of dress, contact between models became more sexual over time more likely in recent times to be explicitly dressed or in sexual contact than they were in the past (Reichert and Carpenter, 1999).

Similarly, Compbell (2000) posited in advertisement the portrayal of women, which usually stereotypical has spurred controversy, especially from the perspective of advertisement stereotyping women as “brainless and helpless or offered them as man’s reward”. The sexiest portrayal of women is sometimes followed by inferiority placement of women relative to their capabilities and skills (Lysonski, 1985).

Courtney and Lockeretz in their 1971 study of the portrayal of women in magazine advert found in that magazine advertisements depicted four major stereotypes; 1. A woman's place is in the home. 2. Women do not make important decisions or do important things. 3. Women are dependent and need men's protection. 4. Men regard women primarily as sex objects; they are not interested in women as people.

This stereotype or portrayal is often showcased in different media genres. For example, sexual advert content differs between magazine genres. Most often Sex in advertising is apt to appear in 5 women's and men's magazines compared to general-interest magazines (Carpenter and Edison, 2004; Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). Similarly, overtime, sex appeals in magazine exhibited through sexual elements were becoming visual, with female nudity and erotic content becoming quite commonplace in contemporary U.S advertisements. Which also means an increased representation of women as sexual objects. There is a high degree of sexism toward women in magazine and television advertisement; portraying women either in a degrading or demeaning fashion or sex role stereotypic behaviours (Peterson and Kerin, 1977).



Source: meghancorte (2014)

Meghancorte (2014) noted that in advertisements “women are bodies and these bodies are objects and sexual objects. All the most famous luxury brands use these kind of images of women bodies to sell their products. Women are arguments to sell, they are marketing objects”.

This portrayal often moulds perception among audience. According to Peterson and Kerin (1977) the portrayal usually suggests reaction to sex in advertisement among audience is gende-based. Gender stereotyping suggest that advertisements profoundly

influence how people perceive and relate to one another Men generally view sexual advertisement more favourable than women.

Meghancorte (2014) pointed out that

The main problems in advertisement and women representation are that they have always been or mainly put in macho stereotypes like housewife, submissive women to their husband, women are not as smart as men, then the sexualisation of their bodies, perfect women have to look like a Barbie Doll, advertisements show them naked, with sexual position, often dominated by men or with the aim of attracting men. (Paragraph 3)

The images sometimes degrading images of women which lead people to maintain these stereotypes in real life because advertisement is one of the most important way of communication in the society and everybody is confronted by its obiquitousnes in the daily life, in the various media channels (meghancorte,2014).



Source: Kemp, (2017)

Theoretical Frameworks

This study adopts the Cultivation theory as a framework. Cultivation theory developed by Gerbner (1976) postulates that repeated exposures to consistent media portrayal and themes influence our perceptions of these items in the direction of the portrayals. Cultivation “implies long-term, cumulative consequences of exposure to an essentially repetitive and stable system of messages” (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990, p. 18) In effect, learning from the media environment is generalized, sometimes incorrectly to the social environment.

Media portrayals of certain topic could have an impact on audience perceptions, particularly if the media were the main information sources.

The basic hypothesis of cultivation analysis is that the more time one spends living in the world of particular media, the more likely one is to report conceptions of social reality that can be traced to media portrayals. Its most basic form suggests that the media is responsible for shaping conceptions of social reality. The combined effect of massive media exposure by the audience overtime subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and ultimately, for their culture as a whole.

This theory is selected for the study because from the cultivation analysis, social construction of reality, can largely predict the likely outcome of repeated and frequent exposure of magazine adverts audience to the limited and limiting representations of the images portrayed.

A 1995 study by Boyd-Barrett and Newbold found a strong correlation between the kinds of female images respondents were exposed to and their perception of women in real life. This point out that with constant exposure to media content audience bring considerable knowledge of gender behaviour to their listening, viewing and reading habits. This in turn will affect the interpretation they give to the media contents to which they are exposed.

Method

The study was conducted in 2017 and focused on residents of Maiduguri, Borno state Nigeria, to fill a gap in knowledge as to how they perceive portrayal of women in magazine advertisement, as is the case with other studies in parts of the world. 100 questionnaires were administered to residents of Maiduguri who were purposively selected based on the criteria that they are exposed to magazine advertisement that especially showcased women.

Findings and Discussion

A total of 100 questionnaires were administered and retrieved. 99 were found usable for the study

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
Male	45	44.55%
Female	54	53.46%
Total	99	100%

Table 1 above indicates the category of the respondents. There were more female respondents than male.

Table 2: Depiction of Women in magazine advertisement

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Weaker sex	20	19.8%
Dependent on men	24	23.76%
Object for sexual appeal	29	28.71%
Professionals	12	11.88%
House wives	14	13.86%
Others	0	0%
Total	99	100%

Table 2 shows the perception of how women are depicted in magazine advertisement. 20 respondents (19.8%) perceive the depiction of women as weaker sex. 24 respondents (23.76%) see them as dependent on the men folks. 29 respondents (28.71%) see them as objects of sexual appeal. 12 respondents (11.88%) see them as professionals, and 14 respondents (13.86%) see them as housewives. This study toes the part of previous studies that women are predominantly perceived and depicted as sex objects. Carpenter and Edison (2004); Grover & Hundal, (2014); Compbell (2000); Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) that pointed out that the objectivization of women for sexual appeal with a stereotype of women helpless or offered them as man's reward and primarily as sexual objects. Meghancorte (2014) noted that macho stereotypes like housewife, submissive women to their husband, women are not as smart as men, then the sexualisation of their bodies, perfect women have to look like a Barbie Doll

Table 3: Positive or Negative Portrayal of Women in Magazine Advertisement

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Negative	28	27.72%
Positive	26	25.74%
Both	45	44.55%
Total	99	100%

Table 3 shows respondent perception of whether women are portrayed positively and negatively or both positively and negatively. 28 respondents (27.72%) see the portrayal of women as negative. Meaning, women are not portrayed in good light but in a disadvantaged position as sex object for men, sexual appeal, and dependent on men among other things. 26 respondents (25.74%) see portrayal of women in magazine adverts as positive. Meaning as professionals, dependable and reliable as well as leaders. 45 respondents (44.55%) see it as both negative and positive. This is not the usual case with most studies. This is an important gap in portrayal studies that shows that the portrayal of women is predominately positively and negatively. That is to say the perception sometimes tilts to the positive and sometime to the negative.

Table 4: Gender often portrayed negatively

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage
Men often Negatively portrayal	15	14.85%
Women often Negatively Portrayal	84	83.16%
Total	99	100%

The study sought to know which of the gender is often portrayed negatively. table 4 shows that 15 respondents(14.855%) perceive that men are the gender that are often portrayed negatively in magazine advertisements, while 84 respondents (83.16%) perceive that women are the gender often portrayed negatively.

Conclusion

The study concludes that magazine advertisement have impact on audience perception. This is so, considering the fact that all the respondents sampled have exhibited through their responses that they perceive women differently. Negatively, positively and both positive and negative. Predominantly, their perception about depiction is on stereotype that women are depicted as sex object or objects for sexual appeal. This stereotype like most studies cited in the work is a popular and a long standing position that have spanned decades. As the media continue to showcase advert that portray women on sexual light, weaker sex, house wives etc, so will the perception, as indicated in Cultivation theory, will continue to be moulded towards what is portrayed.

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