

Patriarchal Toned Consumer Advertisement in Nigeria and the De-Basement of Nigerian Women: An Invitation to Constructive Feminism

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Abstract

This informed and painstaking work examines the history and understudies commercial advertisement(s) vis-a-vis the objectification of women in contemporary Nigeria. The Mass Media in Nigeria has become an unusual and an unsuspecting champion in sexism and debasement of women through commercial advertisement. Thus, to the extent that the male dominated Nigerian society seems to be suspicious of advertisement that is non-objectifying and non-demeaning of womenfolk in Nigeria. While Nigeria has great laws against proliferation of sexually induced advertisement, it lacks the will to properly enforce her laws.

Keywords: *Mass media, Feminism, Sexism, Advertisement, Women, Debasement*

Introduction

The definition and the re-definition of advertisement with respect to bias, sexism and feminism in Mass media in contemporary Nigerian society has not been fully understood, rectified, clarified and verified, this is because of numerous and ever changing ideological differences caused and due to different idiosyncrasies of a typical Nigerian man. It is worthy to note that the typical "Nigerian Man" is both the brain behind and the main reason for the objectification of women in the Nigerian advertisement industry. The Nigerian advertisement industry is a multibillion dollar industry. Due to the excess money that is involved and the typical behavior of a Nigerian man. To this end, the advertisers question whether or not their advertisement has satisfied the often insatiable erotic thirst of a typical "Nigerian Man" in Nigeria.

Again, the scrutiny of advertisement in Nigeria's Mass Media as a case study has nothing to do with the philosophical cum moral question of "what is" versus "what ought to be" with respect to the advertisements in a contemporary Nigerian Society. Again, such evaluation and assessment of "what is" versus "what ought to be" in the Nigerian advertisement revolves in the complex plane and realms of the applications of objectivism and subjectivism in this arena. This is why the former is beyond the scope of this work.

The complex age of Mass Media together with the unending technological advancement has altered advertisement in Nigeria.

With the saturation of markets with consumer goods in Nigeria. This coupled with the unending bait of media crafted for sale and consumption of goods. Advertisement in itself has of course developed in sophistication and complication. Thus, consumers rarely question the quality of goods as long as there is a gender violation with respect to the visual representations[1]. The emphasis here is on sex toned advertisement of which purpose is to satisfy the often male dominated Nigerian society.

The rampant in which sexism is explored in reaching audience, that is, targeted whereas little or no attention is paid to the suggestive sexual undertones [1] is underwhelming and lacks critical reasoning.

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A Brief History of Advertisement

From time immemorial, advertisement has been a key component of human evolution and history from our agrarian past to our industrialized society, the trend of advertisement changed radically [2]. Different cultures and globalization affected advertisement to its very fabric.

In Africa, traditional advertisement, was by nature basically oral. The only means at this stage was by undue reliance to “word of mouth” [2]. This is due to the evolution of man from homo-erectus to the homo-sapiens. This also happened to other parts of the world with recorded ancient and early civilization. This prior to the advent and invention of writing by the homo-sapiens. In pre-historic caves, advertisement may have emerged in visual form or paintings. Archaeological findings remains our guide [2].

The most common form of advertisement in ancient times was via the word of mouth; message that are commercially driven and campaigns that are political have been discovered in ancient ruins of Pompeii. On the African continent, the Egyptians applied papyrus to makes messages of sales and posters at wall. Papyrus found with advertisement was very peculiar in Greece, Rome etc [3]. Commercial Advertisements on wall rock with paintings are in different parts of Africa, Asia and South America [1] [3]. This tradition has been in existence in India rock or for over 4000 BCE [3] and according to [2], “there is persistence in Africa of oral advertisement.”

For instance in ancient Egypt, the papyrus depicted sales of slaves etc. The Babylonians employed dirt splits with salesman, shoemakers etc inscriptions. Whereas, the Greeks employed street callers whose job is to announce the arrival of ships etc [5].

In the peculiar case of Rome, something different happened here to the extent that they did the first tourist advertisement of a tavern; a stone wall said in Pompeii “Traveler, if you go from here to the twelve tower, there Sanislus have a tavern, with this we invite you to come in, bye”[5].

It is obvious to state categorically that these form of advertisement was not peculiar to Africa alone. Town criers were employed for advertisement purpose in France. To the extent that in the year 1258 AD, the King of France (Philip Augustus) made a decree that compelled a town crier must be employed by every shop keeper [4].

We known that the Chinese around 1000 AD invented the printing paper. Then the Europeans followed suit around 1275 AD[2]. In the middle ages, signs like Cobbler will go with the images etc [5][6].

Whereas in the modern age of advertising especially in the later part of century England, the great five of London newspaper in 1666 was used for advertisements. On the other side of the world, Benjamin Franklin in 1729 (USA) Pioneered the Gazette. The newspaper in chided advertisements of ships, tobacco etc. With the advancement of technology[5][6].

In the 19th century, manufacturers sought for those market(s) that is far from them or their factories. Because of this, there was a need for a creative advertisement(s) to brand their products etc. Newspapers help a lot and new technologies ensured that newspapers were cheap. Again, advertising became very cheap in the USA. This era was noted for penny press [5][6].

At this juncture, note that Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914 and became a republic in 1960. The town crier was still in vogue in Nigeria until the advent of the colonial masters in Nigeria[2].

The town criers later turned into hawkers shouting out their wares. Advertising orally was part and parcel of Nigeria before the advent of colonial masters in Nigeria. In order to prevent western influence on advertising, the Nigerian government promulgated the Nigerian enterprise promotion (Indigenization decree of 1972). The purpose is to prevent foreigners or non Nigerian citizens from directly ownership of these advertising agencies.

Due to this laws, so many agencies sprung up. Prompting the initial establishment of regulatory agencies such as the association of advertising practitioners of Nigeria in 1973 [2].

Feminism, Sexism and Advertisement

The consuming public have been presented with advertisements that are sexist driven. This is subtly presented in the realm of “behavioral normally”[1]. Unfortunately, the Nigerian society is enveloped with sex driven advertisement. Worst part is the fact that young women are not only targeted but are used indiscriminately and abused in the name of fame to satisfy the ever thirsting erotic mind of the so called patriarchal Nigerian society. The feminists have reacted to the fact that the deliberate naturalization is pushed as having been value free[1].

The agenda of this counter-response is to resurrect a political centered consciousness which sorts the issue of biased representation, not just in politics, positions in job/career, representation in politics but also discrimination and or disenfranchisement in the realm of advertising. The politics of representation is underlined by the issues of sexes[7] [8] [9] [10]. Gender inequality is a global problem, but undeveloped countries like Nigeria has a very big and wide margin when compared to other developed countries [10].

It is also instructive to point out that the issue of advertisement should also be viewed from feminist prism. The goal here is to question its visual agenda with respect to its sexist agenda. The patronizing nature of advertisements everywhere especially in Nigeria should be questioned. The rationale behind advertisement should be deconstructed. Is it geared to appeal to the male dominated [Nigerian] society[11][12][14]? The undeveloped countries and societies tend to be patriarchal in nature and thus one sees such in the realms of advertising. Women in are viewed to be second class citizens and only good for the kitchen[11][13][14]. In other words, it is easy for women to be abused in such a society as Nigerian society.

We look at another issue which is connected and deals with the aestheticism of advertisement. Aesthetic is inclusive of moral values, with its advantages or disadvantages, which are carefully hidden in the scheme of modern advertisement.

The questioning of strategies for modern advertisement is to review and evaluate the often sexually biased and deliberate packaging geared towards exploitation of women and in some cases minorities [15][16]. The major problem is the sexual objectification of women in other for the easy sale ability of consumer goods. It is very pertinent to analyze subjectively modern advertisements to in terms of visual aesthetics to feminist interrogation [16].

Unfortunately, women vis-à-vis advertisement are portrayed as objects of desire studies have found that women are usually presented as objects of sexual desire. Advertisements which have now become exploitative sexually are depicted using female bodies [17].

Bodies that are attractive are deployed to seize attention and of course stimulate desire. The idea is to transfer the sexual appeal into consumer product sale [16][17].

It may sound correct to state bodies are exploited for the sale of consumer goods[17]. This study is therefore very important due to the peculiar angle as it shows how advertisements in Nigeria exploits and debase feminine power so as to sell consumer products. It is found that unlike ever before that there is increase in the use of themes that are sexual and or erotic stimulation in recent years for advertisement.

Nigeria is largely a patriarchal society. Therefore the themes of advertisement in Nigeria is to serve and satisfy the dominant male society. This has not been vividly criticized on the basis of feminists’ critique. But lately, intellectuals and the emerging feminists in Nigeria has begun to subject often bias advertisement to scrutiny.

Without delving into cultural and religious exigencies, the moral and ethical issue of advertisement needs to be questioned. It is highly condemnable to imitate and import foreign advertisers without crosschecking the implication first with our own cultures.

The "Beauty of Beauty" of Advertisement versus the "Sexified Beauty" of Advertisement

"Advertisers employ sex due to the fact that it is very effective," according to an expert and Professor Tom Reichert, Departmental chair of Advertising and Public Relations [University of Georgia College of Journalism and Mass Communication]. "Sex sells owing to the attention it brings. People are prone to notice information that are sexually relevant, so advertisements with content of sexual nature get noticed"[18]. But that does not mean that sex literally means beauty nor vice versa.

There is rampant interchange of words such as sexy with beauty. These are two separate words per any dictionary. Again, the definitions are there for public consumptions. This work is not intended to deviate by delving into the two mentioned words above.

Unfortunately, sex brings attention. However it is usually a subject that is taboo. Studies have found that in order to create a memorable campaign that advertisers use sex in their marketing. For instance some brands like Victoria Secret and even GoDaddy.com have made ads that might not even mention about the product and yet gain attention of the viewers. Sales is centered on gaining the client's attention and potential consumers, this is regarded as winning half of the battle in sales [18].

The idea of advertisement is and should be geared towards creativity and beautifully sell a product without depraving of the mind of the consuming public. The depraving of the consumers mind because of females bodies as aesthetic images, the essence of its true communication is questioned [17][18].

Thus the idea in and of this work is to truly analyze objectively the way modern advertisements in Nigeria exploits females.

It is worthy of note to state that as a result of the consequence of these advertisement, most Nigerian men have failed to identify the difference between the beauty of beauty and the often exploitative sexualized beauty of advertisements' undertones. Most young men tend to be growing up in Nigeria with biased idea of the essence of what true beauty is i.e. the "beauty of beauty" in the realms of advertisements. This is in contrast to the question of the "formalized and sexualized beauty".

Again, these two issues raised are beyond the scope of this work. The Beauty of beauty versus the sexualized beauty (to some extent of the beauty of sex) and femininity. Again, to define and analyze the two term fully are beyond the scope of this work.

Most men in Nigeria tend to confuse these two terms as same. In fact, to them, the later is the former and vice versa. This is so, because, the essence of beauty "as is" has been reconstructed in the minds of Nigerian populace especially the dominant male population. Beauty can be constructed and reconstructed per society [19].

We found in [19] that beauty can be tampered with or constructed. The study defined what beauty "is" in the United States as constructed more with respect to "the body". However in Singapore and Taiwan, the definitive factor is geared toward a "pretty face"[18][19]. The study concluded that each culture maintains a certain belief of what femininity is and beauty is made up of. This is still in line to the fact that Nigerian Men may have been reconstructed beauty to mean sexy.

Also note that culturally the term "Feminine" varies with regards to its definition in the United States is to be attractive, deferential, unaggressive, emotional, murmuring, and concerned with people and relationships [20][21][22].

Whereas, "femininity in Confucian societies imply and is associated with modesty and virtue. The script of femininity is written and transmitted into a culture over a period of time via family, peers, teachers, and the media [23].

Likewise, beauty is a construct that changes from culture to culture over time. For instance emaciated twiggy of 1960s replaced the beauty icon (Marilyn Monroe) of the 1950s in the USA. We also know that Porcelain skin is highly valued in China but Tattooed skin is a beauty process in some parts of Africa. [24]. Advertisers are very notorious for the promotion of what they perceive as an “ideal beauty” [25].

This is due to the fact that the major research vis-à-vis images of women via advertising for the past 30 years has been conducted in the United States and Europe.

So many researches tend to show and reflect certain assumptions about females that are specific to cultures of the west. Of course with demented advertisements come the objectification of women. Worst part is the fact that most Nigerian women have accepted the objectification of women as a way of life or a new norm.

The objectification of women make women appear to be less powerful contributors to the society. Also, the construction or the reconstruction of women as sexual objects may also be synonymous to violence against women.

Western Feminist's scholars have always criticized advertisements as a tool for cultural institution that is pervasive and hence is representative of women in a problematic and ways that are unacceptable [26]. We also found in [27] that the positioning of women as objects of sex in advertising has evoked a great deal of discourse / discussion.

Attractive female bodies and stimulation of sex have been used to grab viewers attention and attempt to lead a targeted interest to a product or service [27][28][29].

Law and Influence of Sex in Advertisement Via Media

Most third world countries like Nigeria has strong laws against proliferation of sex in advertisements. However, making laws is not same as enforcing the laws. The nature of Nigerian State is that of corruption and the fact that the government lacks the moral will power to enforce her own laws and regulations. Unfortunately it is not the best laws that mattered but it's implementation. Here, in Nigeria, the implementation is altered due to pervasive and massive corruption in Nigeria.

Hence, most advertisements in Nigeria are out rightly unchecked. This is due to either financial inducement of regulatory bodies, lack of will or just absolute lack of technology to monitor and regulate advertisements. The fact remains that these advertisements advertently influences the youth [29] [30].

Take for instance, even if we assume and presume that such is not the case. We are equally face with the fact that Nigeria just like other third world countries lack the technological know-how and advancement to monitor and regulate the internet especially as it is targeting Nigerian consumers with advertisements depicting sex.

Worst part is the fact that children and minors [31] are rapidly bombarded with sexually explicit materials. It is pertinent to state that that it is recommendable that these children and minors first become adults and are able to make decisions with choices of their own. Studies conducted [29] makes it imperative that the sexual lifestyles of the youth were inadvertently influenced and are affected by the advertisements in the media.

Such decisions and choices cannot be enforced on children and minors by default or proxy in the realms of advertisements [29][30] [33].

Having said that, there is an absolute condemnation whereby females [32] are trivialized and objectified to sell products and for the selfish aggrandizement of the perverted patriarchal society such as in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Cases of series of commercial sexual exploitation and sexual abuse are currently on the high in Nigeria. The fact is that there is no studies to correlate the hike in sex and the sex

influenced advertisements. However, there seem to be a steady high in the abuse of women sexually with the unusual rise in sex induced advertisements. There is no reflective data of numerous sex abuse in Nigeria due to social stigma and cultures etc. Again, a relatively very small number of overall arrests for cyber crimes against children. This is because the Nigerian police and law enforcements are bothered and focused more on other issues such as financial crimes. There is this "silent understanding" among Nigerians that the sex crimes is less serious unlike economic crimes.

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