Revisiting Femvertising - Analysing through Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The depiction of Women in advertising gained considerable academic attention, fuelled by the feminist movements and progression of women's role in society. Early studies reported the depiction of women stereotyped with domestic work, dependent to men and sexually objectified grounding with gender roles. In 2015, SheKnows Media, a digital lifestylecompany introduced the term Femvertising Awards to feature brands who break down the gender stereotypes by empowering women in advertising campaigns. This paper intends to examine the impression of Femvertisingon the representation of women in relation with Feminism as a growing social movement and social responsibility of brand in advertising. The study investigates through Multimodal discourse analysis in terms of representation, interactive and compositional whole.

Keywords: Femvertising, Gender roles, Feminism, Multimodal discourse

INTRODUCTION

Advertising plays as a powerful marketing tool since last century. American Marketing Association (AMA) describes Marketing as "The process of planning, executing, pricing, promoting and distribution of goods, ideas and services to satisfy individual and objectives of Organisation. In Marketing Endeavour's, Advertising is one of the "promotional tools" used as a means of communication between the seller and buyer. Advertising Influences persuades the consumers.

SOCIETY AND GENDER ROLES

Scholars will agree that sex is a biological term referring 'male' and 'female' and the term gender relates with sociology and oriented with 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. (Nixon,1997) Gender identities are invented as a product of cultural meanings with attributes and dispositions in context with historical moments. (Devor, 1993) Cognitive Framework of gender and sex begin to form at young age reinforced and established through interaction with family, friends and peers or representation through media outlets such as television and advertisements. As sketched by Sandra Lipsitz in her book titled, 'The lens of Gender' the society treats boys and girls on a preconceived notion, heavily laden with gendered stereotypes. This treatment makes the boys and girls to become as expected. One must understand this ideological constructs that dictate how it means to be feminine and what it means to be masculine.

GENDER IN ADVERTISING

Laura Mulvey developed the male gaze concept which describes the role of camera plays in making the audience members in the role of hegemonic - both male and female. This male gaze can be observed in three different levels: i) By the characters within the film, ii) by the camera i.e. the director's gaze and iii) by the audience. The audience is both male and female. So women as a receiver on the other end is portrayed as sexualised objects for all these three perspectives. (Shield &Heinecken, 2002) So female audience over a period of time ritualize to the gendered language, and

adopt to view in the perspective of male gaze as their own body. On economic view it is practical to exhibit exaggerated and unrealistic female as a icon of beauty especially in beauty and fashion industry, which makes women determined to look more "perfect" (defined by media). (Andersen, 2002) In advertising, glamor and skinny bodies get the promised results of the products as expectedin consumer culture. So by using the beauty products they personally transform into objects of beauty and become the cultural ideal to be gazed. (Rajagopal& Gales, 2002) The consumers without realizing the advertisements are result of computer graphics, Men strive to attain the toned metal body and women aim to eliminate stretch marks, lose weight, increase the complexion and hide imperfections.

FEMVERTISING

The word 'Femvertising' was first introduced by 'SheKnows Media', a media company focused on digital lifestyle and Women. It was introduced as #Femvertising Awards to highlight the brands who worked to dismantle gender stereotypes through creative advertising campaign and try to empower women. The word 'Femvertising' has grown significantly in the recent years by appearing frequently in publications like Fortunes, Forbes, Adweeks and The Huffington Post. According to SheKnows Media which introduced Femvertising defined it as a phenomenon in which advertising employs pro female messages, Talent and imagery to empower women. Considering 70% to 80% of women act as a control force as decision makers of household purchasing. (Becker-Herby, 2016) So a campaign can be considered Femvertising if it adheres the following five principles: i) Utilizing diverse female talent; ii) pushing the gender stereotypes and challenging the gender roles; iii) campaigning with messages that is inherently pro-female; iv) downplaying sexuality and male gaze; and v) portraying female in an authentic manner.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

(Dominick and Rauch, 1972; McArthur and Resko, 1975) Research on gender role was started first in U.S. Television advertisements from 1970, later followed by Great Britain and Europe in 1980's and started in Asia in 1990's (Eisend, 2010) These researches in early days stated that in advertisements gender roles are highly stereotyped and frequently explored in three variables: i) the gender and age of primary character; ii) gender of voiceover; and iii) the setting implied with primary character.

(Lockeretz, 1971) States that women's place is home,Dependent towards men and under protection of men. (Belkaoui, 1976) Through longitudinal study from 1958 to 1970 argued that women are on tradional role and decorative roles on screen and fails to mirror the change in society that the women step in. (Lysonski, 1985) predominantlywomen are portrayed for their physical attractiveness, and for sexual gratification.

(Gill, 2008) The progress of second wave feminism movement between 1960s to 1970s made the advertisers to recognise that women are financially independent and influence on purchase decisions at home. So Advertisers began to rethink to engage female audience as modern working women and not to attract men. The term Commodity feminism was first coined by Robert Goldman in his book 'Reading ads socially' in 1992. This term incorporated energy and cultural power of feminism by neutralizing the force of political and social critique. According to (Sarah Jaffe, 2016) Feminism in commodity world is a big Business.

(Abitbol&Sternadori, 2016) In Femvertising gender equality is promoted both visually and rhetorically; making the third wave feminist jargons more accessible to the mass. However, Femvertising encourages consumption and creates tension between capitalism and third wave feminism. (Johnston & Taylor, 2008) According to cultural studies both feminism and Capitalism are odds and commodity feminism makes the movement to dilute and manipulate within it. (Weusten, 2008) Women on rhetoric view feel empowered when they consume well-crafted advertising campaigns. The both the capitalist world and feminist world, the word Femvertising is seen as a way for third wave feminist movement to positively influenced by messages in media to shape society 's values.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

(Holbrook, 1987; Pollay, 1986) The relationship between the gender stereotyping in advertising and gender related values of society are two longstanding uncleared debate which can be well articulated with "mirror" versus the "mold" argument. According to "mirror" advertising reflects the prevailing cultural values of the society, along with socioeconomic and political influence. So the impact of advertising is minimal. In Mirror concept the men and women in advertising are showcased with gender roles. Contrarily, the "mold" argument theorizes that advertising molds the target audience and impacts the values.

(Gerbner and Gross, 1973) Cultivation Theory states that people's view on society and reality is shaped by Media. The stereotypes presented in media are incorporated and changes the individual behaviour in a way that relationship between humans and their bodies are influenced by advertising. (Wolf, 1991) Gender identities are socially constructed and lifestyles are reflected by advertising. Ad campaigns invoke gender identity by stereotyping the masculinity and femininity. From the above arguments it is suggested that the reality lies between the "mirror" and the "mold"

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How do the advertisements reflect a sustained effort to develop and empowering representing women in the media?

RQ2: How is the interactive meaning constructed through verbal and visual mode in advertising and construct Femvertising?

RQ3: How does Femvertising is addressed along with Feminism concepts like intersectionality and female agency and empowers women outside media?

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the studyis to analyse how multimodal discourses of advertising interact the effectiveness in women empowerment and whether the advertisements is tagged under the banner 'Femvertising'

In the term of Data Collection three television advertisements namely The Hamam soap, Continental Coffee, Horlicks Malt Drinks are chosen to have multimodal discourse analysis. Out of television advertisements telecasted Tamil channels like SunTV, Vijay Tv and Zee Tamil. Most of the advertisements are stereotyped and the above mentioned Three advertisements serve the purpose depicting women as primary characters.

MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Multimodal discourse Analysis (MDA) is an approach used to analyse multiple modes of communication such as text, colour and images, and how they interact with one another. It is a method of discursive analysis used to create semiotic meaning by studying the connotation and obtain the best advertising effect. Halliday in 1990 started to apply Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a theoretical basis in research, later inspired by Halliday SFL in social Semiotics, Kress and Van Leeuwen put forward a theory of MDA in Visual Grammar (VG) to analyse Visual images and established a descriptive framework of Multimodality. From SFL three Meta functions of language – ideational, interpersonal and Textual meaning Kress and Van Leeuwan made Meta functions for images as representational, interactive, and compositional meaning.

Representational Meaning – A semiotic system has to represent objects and its relation with the world. In visual images the representational meaning happens in two categories: Narrative and Conceptual. Where Narrative is dynamic and has development of actions and events; whereas

Conceptual is stable and represent participants in terms of types, structure and meaning and classified as taxonomy, analytical and symbolic.

Compositional Meaning– In semiotics, compositional meaning refers to the capacity to form texts, sign and context. The visual and verbal elements in MDA form a compositional whole both in horizontal and vertical structure.

Interactive Meaning–A semiotic system should able to project the social relation between the producer of signs and the receiver.

According to Kress and Van Leeuwan there are two kinds of participants in Multimodal discourse involved in an image : i) Represented Participants – The place, people and things depicted in the image and ii) Interactive Participants – The people who communicate through images , the producer of signs and receiver.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this section three advertisements will be analysed respectively in detail on various modalities together to learn the interactive meaning and how it persuades the public in advertising discourses.

Analysis of "Continental Coffee"

The concept of the ad is showing Indian actress NityaMenon who sings a song and have a conversation with 1st recipient of National Award for female playback singer Ms.P.Susheela and both have coffee. Where the singer tells how hard it was to introduce the category for singers in National Award. The participants in the advertisements are interactive who communicate with each other. The representational meaning here is 'conceptual' where the singer is female and shown as a role model. The compositional elements are vertical in structure presenting the visuals as ideal and real as showing the celebrities as they are. The verbal elements, the dialogue of P.Susheela "NeengaVirumbiyathaadayanumna;poradanum, athukuneenga strong uh irukanum" means 'to achieve what you desire you have to struggle, for that you have to be strong' is a complete interactive statement for women and relates to feminism and women empowerment. The next dialogue "KadinamaanaTharunangalil strong aana coffee" which means on 'have coffee on difficult situation'advertises the continental Brand in represented way. The advertisement is compositional in whole.

Analysis of " Hamam Soap"
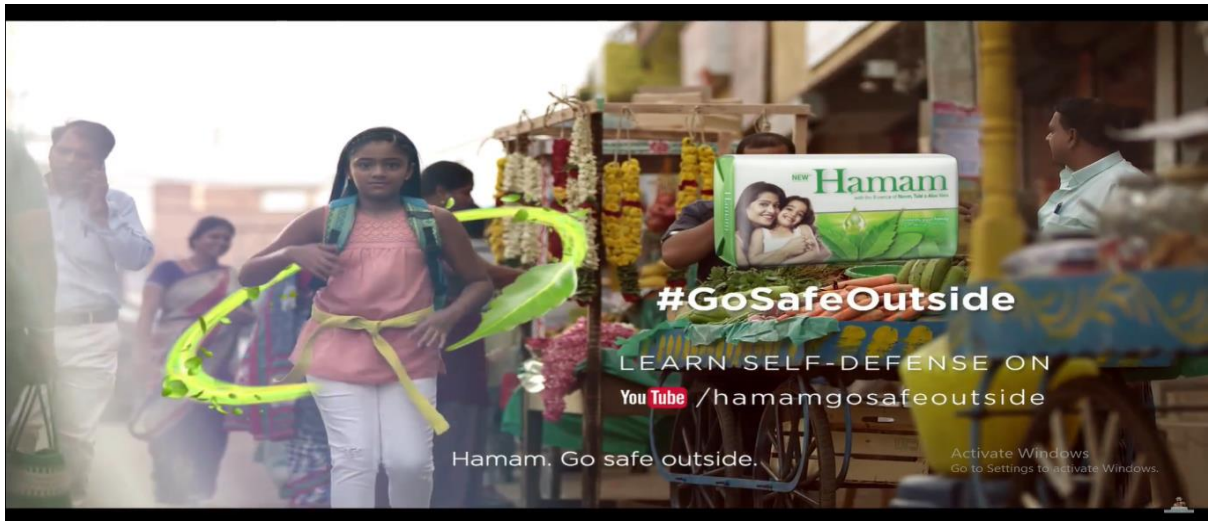
The concept of the ad is showing a mother and daughter, Here in the advertisement the a adolescent daughter is getting ready to go to a study center alone as her father is not in home, Instead the mother says she will drop and takes the daughter to a self-defence class. Initially the daughter is little hesitant and gets defeated in defence. Later she asks her mother why? The mother washes the dirt with haman soap, Later the girl learns and excels in self-defence and the mother allows her to go out alone.

Haman is in the market for a very long time and in recent years they started the campaign #GoSafeOutside in which a series of advertisements show girls to be strong and protect them if they face any struggle outside. On Multimodal discourse the advertisement is represented in narrative where the advertisement shows as a story. The composition symbolizes with context and every sign signifies with Femvertising. For instance, when the mother takes her daughter to silambam class the wall paintings in the road shows eminent Indian women and the teacher of self-defence is a female and the daughter get defeated and defeat a boy. The lyrics of the jingle "AchamillaiAchamillai nee vazhvilsadanaipadaithiduvai, thadaigalaivaazhvilthagarthiduvai" which plays in the background is interactive and signifies fearlessness and success through it. The soap signifies courage and removal of fear and giving confidence. The participants in the ad are interactive as they communicate with each other and have a compositional whole.

Analysis of "Horlicks drink Powder"

The concept of the ad shows a mother driving a car with her two daughters and faces a breakdown in the middle of night travel where the elder daughter takes the Stepney out of the car and tries to replace the punctured wheel. Initially the mother is little hesitant as she things what the daughter can do, later the mother and the younger daughter helps her to change the wheel successfully and they continue their travel. The Mother is amazed and proud to see the stamina and power of the girl as she is not depended on anyone and asks the daughter "Nee eppoValarntha?" the daughter replies she learnt by observing and ask the mother "polamaa?" which means "shall we leave?". This stands out from other ads of the same product showing it in a narrative style by representing participants as interactive as they have conversation within themselves. The composition shows in context with visual and verbal elements by having closeup shots of mother getting amazed and daughter working on the wheel with sweat drops. The composition is in horizontal structure showing the visuals new and has a compositional whole.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Using Multimodal discourse Analysis three advertisements have been analysed and interpreted that the three advertisements follow both conceptual and narrative structure. All the three advertisements are compositional in whole and the Participants are interactive. The visuals symbolize women as they are and look natural with minimum makeup. The primary characters are women. The advertisements break the stereotypes of women to look glamorous and beautiful and shows with dirt and sweat in Hamam and Horlicks advertisements. The text or verbal conversations in all the three advertisements are interactive making the women to stay strong, fearless and stand oneself with no dependency. The advertisements show high modality with reliability. In terms of representation and contextualization the images describes deeper impression on the viewers, Thus increasing the possibility of influencing the behaviour So the samples of the study belongs to the category Femvertising under the Multimodal discourse Analysis.

So the advertisements are clearly making statements of advertising the product in feminist perspective. Femvertising is a complex trend as it both championed for shifting the way women are portrayed in media and criticized for packaging and simplifying the third wave feminist movement and selling or commoditizing it back to women who created it. Overwhelmingly, inspite of ambiguous motives on behalf of the samples mentioned here. The other brands in the market is still stereotyped with female to be hyper sexualized, submissive to domestic role and make her tall, thin, flawless and fair who is 100% perfect as a mother or a wife. Femvertising is a recent strategy and continues research on effects, motives and success. My research has shown Femvertising perpetuate on positive representation of women. Ideally, Femvertising is viewed by women in all complexities of shifting the value of female representation and held accountable for supporting women empowerment beyond the 30 second television spots.

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