



Media's Role in Gender Bifurcation: A Distinctive Focus on the Advertisements of the Automobile Industry.

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ABSTRACT

Now why would they compare the Car to a woman? Why is the external appearance (looks, beauty, etc) of the car compared to a woman? Is this some sort of a tag that the automobile industry has given to its consumers, through their advertisements? This paper will study European and American automobile advertisements to expose the gender bias and objectification of women to sell the product

Key words: gender, advertisements, media, gender stereotypes

“Oh my god isn't she a beauty?” Sounds very familiar right? Well of course it does, because this probably could be used to describe a woman or a car that zoomed past on an empty street. Now why would they compare the Car to a woman? Why is the external appearance (looks, beauty, etc) of the car compared to a woman? Is this some sort of a tag that the automobile industry has given to its consumers, through their advertisements?



Take a look at the print ad of the Lexus-GS, a proclaimed futuristic design that would tend to the needs of the consumers. If we take a closer look at the advert, we would be wondering as to why there is a woman in a bikini beside the car. Well for obvious reasons the external appearance of the car is compared to the woman.

A comparative advertisement that features John Francis Dodge and Horace Elgin Dodge, the founders of the Dodge Car Manufacturers launching their new series of Dodge challenger is compared to the legacy left behind by these tycoons. “Men have been presented as knowledgeable, powerful and pioneers at their workplaces. They are generally highlighted by a variety of locations, situations and occupations”(Stephen K. Koernig, 2006). So when it comes to the appearance of an automobile it somehow, is connected to the looks of a woman and that kind off seems to stop there, but imagine comparing the stability of a car to the legacy of men. This probably



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is a thought that pushes forward to analyze if there is some sort of a bifurcation in the advertising stream of automobile industry with respect to gender.

As put forward by Douglas Kellner in his article the 'Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern', advertising, is a form of communication and cultural record that, reflects the social condition and also serving as a constructor of those who view the advertisements (Kellner, 1995). But in real life terms advertising has more or less been a strategy to promote a product, keeping in mind what the consumers expect. Probably this could have been the root cause to stereotyping of gender in the advertising industry. Lazarsfeld and Merton mention how advertising in rare scenarios tend to create significantly new behavior patterns, because it is generally directed to the canalizing of preexisting behavior patterns or attitudes. In many of the cases media is the reflection of the society, instead of leading from upfront. (Belkaoui, 1976).

Stereotyping of gender in the advertising industry has been prevalent from decades ago and as times have evolved, the concept of stereotyping has been taken to a whole new level that is so evidently seen in our everyday advertisements. Be it the print advertisements or the motion commercials, the branding and portrayal of commodities by personifying them to a particular gender is very widely seen. A major impact of the advertisements and media image would be the shaping of gender images in comparison to books on feminism and scholarly experiments on gender equality (Rajagopal & Gales, 2002).

Stereotypes and generalization in ads continue to objectify women and place stress solely on their appearance, thus devaluating their innate worth (Rajagopal & Gales, 2002) but when you take a look at the depiction of men in the advertisements it is quite different as the focus deviates from mere looks to other factors that make him a 'Man'. Women and men are represented differently; women's bodies are used differently from men's body in the advertisements. With the ability to rephrase the mindset of the people with a technologically modified image the advertisements hold on, as the advertisers choose what would be perfect in the eyes of a viewer (Rajagopal & Gales, 2002).

Women are portrayed at a very sexual or vulnerable position to market a product and advertisements have been confining women to a stereotypic representation as beauty or sex symbols which does not represent the diversity of women (Kang, 1997). Women are seen as objects more than being humans and advertising has pushed to create in a reader's mind an obsession with a woman's physical appearance (Rajagopal & Gales, 2002).

Throughout the society there has been evident gender differentiation when it came to describing femininity and masculinity and the dispute carries forward about to the assertion of how mass media plays a vital role in broadcasting dominant cultural values, especially in the perpetuation of images of gender difference and gender inequality. Men are often portrayed in the popular media in terms of their Physicality, masculinity and superiority and women are feminized and their abilities are often trivialized (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). Women are more or less considered for their physical attractiveness in comparison to their abilities. Of the different levels of female stereotyping, women take the decorative roles and promote an unattainable ideal of beauty in the modern day media and they add to the beauty of literature that document the form of sexism in female roles in traditional media.

As Stephen K. Koernig and Neil Granitz mention about how Essentialism focuses on the biological differences between men and women as the source of variation in the use and

acceptance of technology. According to the perspective of social construction argument, information technology according to the society is masculine. The liberal feminist view holds that inequality between men and women derives from the creation of separate spheres of activity for men and women, thereby giving room for direct comparison of the sexes.

The best way to analyze if there is some sort of a gender bifurcation by the Media in the advertisements of the automobile industry would be, to conduct a content analysis on the print advertisements and motion commercials launched by the automobile industries.



When it comes to describing the appearance of the car, be it the curved edges, elegantly sleek looking design, appearance, etc., it somehow is connected to a woman by the advertisers, but when it comes to the specs of the car and its performance it always is compared to a man or masculinity. Some of well renowned brands of Cars that have made a huge impact in the automobile industry could be the BMW, Audi, Mercedes Benz, Rolls Royce, Lamborghini, Ferrari, Maserati and the list goes on. Be it from being a brand ambassador to a model, who is going to promote the car, the automobile industries take into consideration a lot of factors before choosing the right person.

The recent launch of the BMW i8 was globally recognized for being the world's most advanced electric sports car and the cricketer Sachin Tendulkar as its brand ambassador. If you take a closer look as to why Sachin was chosen as the brand ambassador for the BMW Cars a few of the reasons were his passion for BMW cars and more prominently "as steady and stable with the exceptional performance and achievement which Sachin has shown in his cricketer career, BMW also seems to be parallel when it come to Automobiles. BMW is also a globally known brand with high quality and premium cars which are not only great in performance and features, but also deliver decent fuel efficiency and reliability. This endorsement by Sachin would help the premium brand like BMW increase its fan following and Sachin's face on the BMW brand will prove to be a fruitful deal to promote the brand name"(Khurana, 2012).

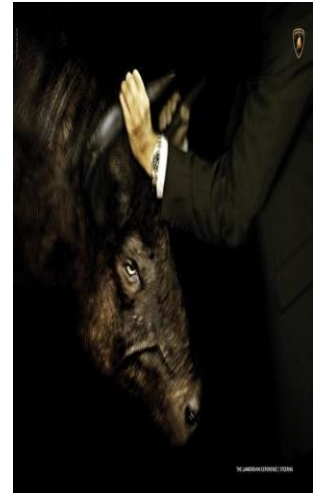
However, the ads that BMW uses to promote its brand are voyeuristic and sexually appealing. The tag line that says "You know that you're not the first" could have various interpretations. When it comes to promoting a product the automobile industry switches the gear to more of a sensuous approach. Is this because of what the consumers expect out of an automobile advertisement? Or is that the automobile brands choose this form to grab their consumers.

Yet another advertisement that is voyeuristic in nature would be the motion commercial of the Fiat 500 Abarth with the tag line - You will never forget the first time you see one. Which compares the beauty of woman to that of the car and men would take an extra mile to own the car. The ad begins with a man stalking a woman who is bent over adjusting her shoes, her attention is drawn to the stalker and she immediately walks up to him and slaps him, but in the end begins to seduce him by licking the froth of the cappuccino that accidentally falls on her cleavage region. The ad doesn't seem to have any relation to the promotion of the car, all it conveys is that the car can seduce you to acquire it. The car is personified as a woman who is too hard to get away from.



The promotion of the BMW Z4, a revolutionized convertible car which shows a woman standing, facing a tree and the tag line reads – Brings out the boy in you. The advertisement focuses on the masculinity of the car and how getting behind the wheels of a car could bring out an instinct of a man into whoever is driving it. The speed and performance of the car is masculine in nature and there by the advertisements show

a woman who is driven to pee like a man.



The automobile industry has somehow assigned a gender to their cars and thereby they have begun to design and manufacture cars more on a gender basis as well. The bifurcation of gender in the automobile industry is widely and more evidently seen through these advertisements. Yet another example of how a car describes its masculine features would be that of the Lamborghini Print ad which shows a man trying to tame a bull. The ad was designed to show the steering abilities of the car. The list of examples could be endless and carry on to pages.

A classic advertisement of the Fisher body works, which basically is to promote the customized body work for the vintage cars. The advertisement somehow is provocative in nature where the back of the woman's dress, mimics the shape of the body logo used by Fisher. Her buttocks highlighted to emphasize the shape of the body work and her shirt that gathers up unnaturally between her legs. Though her dress seems to be fluttering in the wind the man facing her seems to have no such effects. It seems pretty unsure which object of style the word body refers to; the car or the woman's body. It somehow conveys an idea to its consumers that the car, the style and probably the woman's body are interconnected and easily accessible.



The female body from time in to time out, be it the past, present or the future has always and will always be used to sell goods, for the mere fact of emphasizing on modernity, beauty and sensuality along with their ease and convenience. Women's bodies have been trouped and traced to make the automobiles sensuous and desirable as well as fast, smooth and efficient. As the modern day women are being portrayed more sensuously, the automobile advertisements have been taking it's liberty to use sensuous ads to promote their brand.



There is a bifurcation of gender is evidently seen in the advertising strategies of the automobile industry. The appearance of the car is somehow connected to the looks of a woman who is generally portrayed in a voyeuristic and sexually pleasing form which could attract the consumers, where by setting a trend and manipulating the mindset of the consumers to be able to acquire a woman by just owning these phenomenal cars.

However; when it comes to the performance, speed, on road control and other specifications of the car, it is always masculine centered. Just by riding the car it would bring out the masculinity in you.

From a post modernism perspective, the masculine – feminine dichotomy should be abandoned to avoid promoting images of superiority or inferiority (Firat & Venkatesh, 1993). As the world advances to a more technology driven phase it only seems apt to avoid gender bifurcation, because ultimately this seems to have an impact on the psyche of the minds of the people who access these advertisements which could instill negative effects into the society.



As the world runs towards a technology boom phase, we could only wait and watch as to where the field of advertising is heading towards when it comes to promoting and branding of products especially in the field of automobiles. Would there be similar bifurcation of gender or would it move on to a whole new level? Only time would be the best judge.

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