

OBJECTIFYING WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS AND ITS IMPLICATION ON GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study titled explores the persistent issue of women's objectification in advertisements and its broader impact on governance and leadership roles, particularly within academia. Grounded in Male Gaze Theory and Framing Theory, the research critically examines how media representations reinforce traditional gender norms by depicting women as sexualised objects, which in turn affects their participation in governance. The study highlights that such depictions, focused predominantly on women's physical appeal rather than their intellectual or leadership abilities, contribute to societal attitudes that undermine women's roles in public life, including academic leadership. The findings reveal that these portrayals perpetuate entrenched patriarchal norms, limiting women's professional opportunities and discouraging their involvement in leadership positions. Furthermore, the study finds that the persistent framing of women in stereotypical roles reinforces the notion that women are less suitable for leadership, a perception that extends to their participation in political and academic governance. The conclusions drawn from this research underscore the critical need for policy reforms in media representations, particularly in advertising, where objectifying portrayals continue to shape societal perceptions of gender roles. The study recommends the implementation of comprehensive media literacy programs aimed at fostering critical engagement with media content, alongside advocacy for responsible advertising practices that promote diverse and inclusive representations of women.

Key Words: Advertisement, Objectification, Gender roles, Media representations, Patriarchal structures

Introduction

The traditional African perception of women has long been anchored in cultural constructs that limit their sphere of influence to domestic roles such as managing the household, cooking, childbearing, and childrearing. As Janssens (1997) notes, these responsibilities are often considered exclusive to women, while men typically assume the role of breadwinners. This gendered division of labour confines women to the private sphere, with men dominating public life. The reinforcement of such societal structures, which prioritise men's economic contributions, has been observed by Amadiume (2015), who argues that colonialism and modernity institutionalised women's exclusion from the formal economy, further marginalising them. Likewise, Oyèwùmí (1997) examines how pre-colonial African societies afforded women greater economic and political autonomy, which was curtailed by colonial and post-colonial forces. However, the growing educational empowerment of women, particularly through increased access to education for the girl-child, is challenging these long-standing cultural norms and creating a tension between traditional and modern expectations of gender roles. This shift has been explored by Abuya, Onsomu, and Moore (2012), who highlight how the rise in educational opportunities for girls has reshaped societal attitudes towards women's roles both in private and public domains. One prominent arena in which this tension is manifested is advertising and social media, which play crucial roles in shaping perceptions of women's place in society.

The media, particularly through advertising, has increasingly portrayed women in ways that suggest greater equality in public spaces. Female models are frequently featured to promote a range of products, some of which bear little or no direct relevance to them. However, this representation often reinforces a narrow and problematic view of women, centring on their sexual appeal. As Katharina (2004) argues, women are frequently objectified in advertisements, presented as "sex objects" whose primary role is to attract male attention. This phenomenon has been well documented in both African and global contexts. Kilbourne (2010) criticises the advertising industry for systematically portraying women as objects of desire, noting the long-term consequences on gender perceptions and self-esteem. Similarly, Goffman (1979) examines how advertisements reinforce gender stereotypes by depicting women as passive, submissive, and primarily valued for their appearance. In African contexts, these portrayals tend to reinforce traditional gender roles, confining women to the private sphere and limiting their opportunities in the public labour market. These representations contribute to a broader societal framework that objectifies women rather than recognising them as autonomous individuals.

The use of sexual imagery in advertising is often justified by the belief that such content effectively captures attention and stimulates subconscious desires, ultimately influencing consumer behaviour. Psychologists suggest that sexual appeals can be a powerful tool in shaping purchasing decisions, though the success of these strategies varies significantly depending on the audience and cultural context (Stern, 1999). In many instances, these advertisements fail to achieve their desired outcomes and instead reinforce damaging stereotypes regarding women's societal roles. Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson (2001) found that while sexual appeals may garner attention, they are often less effective at driving purchasing intent if the product being sold is unrelated to the sexual imagery employed. Moreover, Vohs, Sengupta, and Dahl (2015) argue that sexualised advertising tends to backfire in more conservative cultures, as consumers may perceive such portrayals as offensive or incongruent with their values. Therefore, although sexual appeals may capture attention, they also risk alienating certain demographics, particularly in societies like those found in many African regions, where traditional values remain strong.

Sexual appeals are interpreted differently across cultures and individual experiences, making their effectiveness unpredictable and context-dependent. For instance, Indian society, like African society, is traditionally conservative, but both have undergone cultural shifts due to Western influences, altering the portrayal of women in advertisements (Narang & Kumar, 2016). Studies by Sengupta (2014) highlight the rapid transformation of gender roles in Indian media as a result of globalisation, drawing parallels to similar changes in African media portrayals. The influence of globalisation and Western media in reshaping local gender norms is further explored by Nyamnjoh (2017), who documents how African cultures have absorbed Western ideals of beauty and femininity, often at the expense of traditional values. These cultural shifts not only affect how women are represented in advertisements but also influence how they are perceived in the public sphere. The Westernisation of African and Indian advertising spaces has created a dichotomy in which women are expected to embody traditional roles while simultaneously adopting modern, often sexualised, personas in media representations.

As McRobbie (2009) notes, the media plays a dual role in both challenging and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Similarly, van Zoonen (1994) argues that while the media has the potential to subvert traditional gender norms, it often resorts to familiar stereotypes that limit women's roles. In the context of African advertising, this tension is particularly evident, as the media negotiates the competing influences of tradition and modernity. Consequently, this paper examines how advertising and social media have contributed to shaping, reinforcing, or challenging traditional perceptions of women in African society, particularly within the labour market. By exploring the intersection of culture, media representation, and gender roles, this paper seeks to determine whether these platforms have facilitated a more egalitarian space for women or whether they have reinforced existing inequalities.

Objectives of the Study

1. To critically examine the role of advertising and social media in reinforcing or challenging traditional African gender norms, particularly the objectification of women.
2. To explore the cultural implications of using sexualised imagery in African advertising and its effectiveness in promoting gender equality or perpetuating traditional gender roles.

Theoretical Foundation

This study is grounded in male gaze theory and framing theory.

Male Gaze Theory

The Male Gaze Theory, articulated by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, posits that media is often constructed from a heterosexual male perspective, reducing women to objects of male desire. In advertising, this manifests through the depiction of women as passive, sexualised figures, emphasising physical attractiveness over intellectual or leadership qualities. As Goffman (1979) observed, advertisements often portray women as decorative objects, a practice that reinforces traditional gender roles by framing women as being valued primarily for their physical appearance. This objectification normalises the commodification of women's bodies in everyday culture, creating an environment where women's identities are secondary to male desires.

The implications of this theory on governance are significant. According to Ross (2017), media representations that sexualise and objectify women shape societal attitudes toward gender roles, thereby affecting women's participation in leadership. This objectification contributes to the perpetuation of patriarchal norms, which can undermine the political and public engagement of women. Women leaders often face heightened scrutiny of their appearance rather than their competencies, which can marginalise their contributions and discourage others from entering the political sphere. When governance is perceived through this lens, gender equality in leadership roles becomes difficult to achieve. Moreover, the objectification of women in media and advertising fosters a culture where women's voices are less respected, making it challenging for them to assert influence in policy-making processes (Collins, 2011).

Framing Theory

Framing Theory, proposed by Erving Goffman in 1974, suggests that how media frames issues influences public perception and behaviour. In the context of advertising, the persistent framing of women as secondary characters or as sexual objects within domestic or decorative roles perpetuates societal perceptions of women as inferior to men. This framing often suggests that women's worth is tied to their beauty or ability to conform to traditional feminine roles (McRobbie, 2009). Such limited portrayals of women in the media directly impact how society views women's capabilities in broader social roles, including governance.

Research shows that the framing of women in advertisements as objects or as confined to domestic roles has long-term effects on societal attitudes towards gender equality (Entman, 1993). These portrayals contribute to the entrenchment of gender bias in governance structures, where women are seen as less suitable for leadership roles. A study by Huber and Perez (2015) on media framing and political participation found that women were less likely to be viewed as competent political actors when media predominantly framed them within stereotypical domestic or sexualised roles. Such frames reinforce the notion that leadership is a male domain, ultimately limiting the potential for women to influence governance and policymaking.

Furthermore, the repeated framing of women as objects in advertising devalues the significance of their participation in governance by prioritising beauty and femininity over intellect and capability (Kilbourne, 2010). This diminishes the diversity of voices in political leadership and can skew policy discussions on gender-sensitive issues. For instance, media-driven biases can lead to the neglect of policies addressing women's rights and gender equality, as the framing of women in objectifying ways in advertisements continues to influence public perceptions of their societal roles.

Review of Related Literature

Objectification of Women in Advertising: 1976 to 2006

The portrayal of women in advertising has been a long-standing topic of analysis within the fields of media studies, sociology, and gender studies. Several scholars have examined how advertisements perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce traditional gender roles, and contribute to the objectification of women. Through time, these portrayals have consistently reduced women to either domestic roles or decorative figures, with minimal acknowledgement of their professional or intellectual capabilities.

Early Studies and the Housewife Image

Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) conducted a foundational study on the portrayal of women in eight general interest magazines between 1958 and 1976. Their findings indicated that women were often portrayed in domestic, decorative roles, or as low-income earners, reflecting the cultural norms of the time. Women were rarely shown in positions of power or authority, and their purchasing power was largely underestimated. This reflects a period when media reinforced the idea that a woman's primary function was within the home, contributing to the notion of domesticity as the ideal role for women.

Gender and Role Portrayal in Advertising

Building on this, **Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1977)** investigated consumer attitudes towards gender roles in advertising. Their study revealed a significant difference between how men and women perceived the portrayal of women. Women were more critical of advertisements that depicted them in passive or domestic roles. Interestingly, the study also showed that women who viewed advertisements portraying them offensively often associated these portrayals with discriminatory practices in other areas, such as employment. This indicates that the objectification and stereotyping in advertising have broader societal implications, as they reinforce inequalities in both social and professional domains.

Goffman's "Pseudo-Reality"

The visual representation of gender in advertising was further explored by **Goffman (1979)**, whose analysis of 400 advertisements revealed that advertisements created a "pseudo-reality" where gender roles were hyper-stylised. Goffman argued that advertising functions as a visual display of societal norms, with gender differences being exaggerated and portrayed more prominently than in everyday life. His work illuminated how advertisements often displayed women as passive or inferior, reinforcing their subordinate status in both the public and private spheres.

Stereotyping in the 1990s and Beyond

Although societal attitudes towards women's roles have evolved since the 1950s, the stereotyping in advertisements persisted into the 1990s and beyond, as evidenced by **Kang's (1997)** study. Kang used Goffman's five coding categories and added two new ones—body display and independence/self-assertiveness—to investigate the portrayal of women in 1979 and 1991. Her findings suggested that while there was some shift in the roles women occupied, such as more depictions of women as professionals, there was also an increase in sexualised images. This underscores a trend where the portrayal of women may have moved beyond the housewife stereotype but continued to reduce them to their physical appearance, thus perpetuating their objectification.

Longitudinal Studies and the Persistence of Stereotypes

Similarly, **Lindner (2004)** conducted a longitudinal study on magazine advertisements from 1955 to 2002 and found that the stereotypical portrayal of women remained largely unchanged. Women were still shown as subordinate to men, depicted in roles of "licensed withdrawal" or as

mentally removed from the scene, which reinforces the notion of women being passive and lacking control. This ongoing objectification plays a significant role in maintaining gender hierarchies and undermining women's progress in other areas, such as business and governance.

Cultural Variations in Advertising

The objectification of women in advertising is not confined to Western societies. **Schaffter (2006)** explored the representation of women in Indian advertisements over a 12-year period and found similar patterns. Women were still largely confined to domestic roles or depicted as objects of male desire, despite the growing number of women participating in the workforce. Schaffter's study shows that advertising in India, much like in Western cultures, remains regressive and continues to objectify women, which in turn reinforces societal norms that restrict women's opportunities.

Tabular Analysis of Studies

Study	Time Frame	Key Findings	Implications
Belkaoui & Belkaoui (1976)	1958-1976	Women portrayed as housewives in decorative roles; limited purchasing power.	Reinforced domesticity as the primary role for women, limiting their representation in public roles.
Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia (1977)	1977	Women were critical of their portrayal; men less concerned; offensive portrayals linked to discrimination.	Gender portrayals in ads influence broader societal perceptions of women's roles.
Goffman (1979)	1979	Advertisements create "pseudo-reality" where gender roles are exaggerated.	Advertisements reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, contributing to women's subordinate status.
Kang (1997)	1979-1991	Some shifts in portrayal, but increase in sexualised images	Women continue to be objectified despite changes in their societal roles
Lindner (2004)	1955-2002	Stereotypical portrayals remained constant; women depicted as passive.	Gender stereotyping in advertisements persists, counteracting progress in women's empowerment.
Schaffter (2006)	1994-2005 (India)	Women still depicted in domestic roles or as objects of desire despite workforce participation.	Advertising reinforces gender norms, limiting women's opportunities in professional spheres.

Insights on the Discourse

From these studies, it becomes clear that the portrayal of women in advertising has shifted minimally over several decades, even in the face of societal changes that have seen women increasingly participate in the workforce and public life. While some advertisements depict women in more progressive roles, these are often overshadowed by their continued objectification, especially in terms of their sexualisation. This has broader implications, particularly concerning governance and social power dynamics.

Advertisements shape public perceptions and contribute to maintaining traditional gender hierarchies. By consistently portraying women as passive or as objects of desire, media outlets contribute to a narrative that undermines women's leadership and decision-making abilities. This objectification not only affects how women are viewed socially but also limits their opportunities in governance and leadership roles. The reduction of women to sexual objects or passive figures reinforces the belief that they are unsuited for positions of power, perpetuating gender inequality in both private and public spheres.

Objectification of Women in Advertising: 2006-2023

Although awareness of gender equality and women's rights has increased in recent years, the objectification of women in advertisements has persisted into the 21st century.

Longitudinal Analyses and Continuing Objectification

In a longitudinal study conducted by **Tiggemann (2014)**, the portrayal of women in fashion advertising was examined from 2000 to 2012. The research revealed that, despite some advancements in representation, women were still predominantly depicted in ways that emphasised their bodies. The study noted that while female empowerment themes were introduced, they were frequently accompanied by objectifying visuals, suggesting that the duality of empowerment and objectification complicates the narrative surrounding women's roles in media. This ongoing objectification is detrimental, as it contributes to the internalisation of unrealistic beauty standards among women.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Objectification

The objectification of women in advertising is a global issue, as highlighted by **Schmitt & Wagner (2015)**, who conducted a cross-cultural study on advertisements in both Western and non-Western contexts. Their findings indicated that objectifying portrayals of women were prevalent across various cultures, including Eastern Europe and Asia. Despite differing cultural norms, women were often depicted in ways that emphasised their desirability to men. This trend underscores how advertising can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to a global culture of objectification, limiting women's roles in society regardless of cultural context.

Impact of Media Literacy

Emerging research has focused on the potential for media literacy to combat the objectification of women in advertising. **Levine & Murnen (2009)** found that educational programmes aimed at increasing media literacy among young women could help mitigate the negative effects of objectifying imagery. These programmes encourage critical thinking about media messages and promote healthier self-perceptions. In a more recent study, **Dittmar et al. (2021)** reaffirmed the importance of media literacy, suggesting that exposure to critical media analysis can empower young women to resist objectifying messages and foster healthier body images.

Recent Trends and Changes (2016-2023)

In the past few years, research has continued to explore the nuances of women's representation in advertising. A study by **Harrison & Fredrickson (2019)** examined the impact of social media on body image and found that influencer culture often replicates objectifying narratives, even while promoting body positivity. Their work illustrates a complex landscape where social media can both challenge and reinforce traditional objectification, as influencers sometimes adopt sexually suggestive imagery to gain attention, which can counteract empowerment messages.

The Role of Intersectionality

Rogers et al. (2020) conducted a study that examined how race and body size intersect with the objectification of women in advertising. Their analysis revealed that women of colour and those with non-normative body sizes are often subjected to even more intense forms of objectification and stereotyping. The study highlights how intersectionality plays a critical role in understanding the various ways women are represented and objectified, emphasising the need for more inclusive and diverse portrayals in advertising.

Psychological Impact of Objectification

Another significant study by **Bourke et al. (2021)** explored the psychological effects of exposure to objectifying advertisements on women's mental health. The researchers found a strong correlation between frequent exposure to such ads and increased levels of anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction among young women. This underscores the real-world consequences of objectification in media, reinforcing the need for change in advertising practices to protect women's mental well-being.

Study	Time Frame	Key Findings	Implications
Aubrey & Henson (2012)	2006-2012	Women frequently portrayed in sexually suggestive ways, emphasising physical appearance over competence.	Continued reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes, limiting women's representation in diverse roles.
Tiggemann (2014)	2000-2012	Despite some advancements, women primarily depicted through objectifying visuals.	The coexistence of empowerment themes with objectification complicates progress in women's representation.
Schmitt & Wagner (2015)	2006-2015	Objectifying portrayals prevalent across Western and non-Western cultures.	Highlights the global nature of objectification, necessitating a more inclusive approach in advertising.
Levine & Murnen (2009)	2006	Media literacy programmes can mitigate the effects of objectifying imagery on young women.	Emphasises the need for educational initiatives to promote critical engagement with media messages.
Dittmar et al. (2021)	2016-2021	Critical media analysis can empower women to resist objectifying messages.	Supports the implementation of media literacy in educational settings to foster healthier self-perceptions.
Harrison & Fredrickson (2019)	2016-2019	Social media influencers often replicate objectifying narratives while promoting body positivity.	Complex relationship between empowerment and objectification in influencer culture, requiring critical scrutiny.
Rogers et al. (2020)	2016-2020	Intersectionality affects how women of colour and non-normative body sizes are objectified.	Calls for more inclusive advertising practices that represent diverse women beyond traditional stereotypes.
Bourke et al. (2021)	2020-2021	Strong correlation between exposure to objectifying ads and increased anxiety, depression, and body dissatisfaction.	Reinforces the need for responsible advertising practices to protect women's mental well-being.

Insights on the Discourse

From these studies, it is evident that the portrayal of women in advertising has seen minimal progression over the years, despite significant societal changes that have seen women's roles evolve in the workforce and public life. While some advertisements attempt to depict women in more empowered roles, these instances are frequently overshadowed by pervasive objectification, particularly through sexualisation. This persistent trend has broader implications for governance and social power dynamics.

Advertisements play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and contribute to the maintenance of traditional gender hierarchies. By consistently presenting women as passive or as objects of desire, media outlets reinforce narratives that undermine women's leadership and decision-making capabilities. This objectification not only influences societal views of women but also restricts their access to opportunities in governance and leadership roles.

The reduction of women to mere sexual objects or passive figures perpetuates the belief that they are unfit for positions of power, thus entrenching gender inequality across both private and public spheres. Moreover, the intersectionality of race and body size further complicates these representations, highlighting the urgent need for more diverse and inclusive portrayals in advertising. As long as these outdated narratives persist, the struggle for genuine equality and representation in all facets of society will continue.

The Role of Social Media in Objectifying Women in the 21st Century

Social media has emerged as a dominant force in shaping contemporary narratives around gender representation, particularly the objectification of women. In a significant report published in 2015, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women highlighted that media portrayals often depict women as thin and sexualised, with fewer opinions

and limited roles as leaders or professionals. This observation is crucial, as it underscores the pervasive nature of objectification across various media platforms. However, it is essential to note that these depictions are culturally mediated and vary significantly across different contexts.

In many Western societies, the idealised image of women often embodies a thin physique, leading to unhealthy dieting practices and a focus on body image. In contrast, as noted in discussions about African media representation, a fuller figure is often celebrated, emphasising different ideals of beauty that focus on attributes such as curves and body shape (Motshegwa, 2018). This cultural divergence illustrates how societal standards influence perceptions of femininity and body image, highlighting the complexities of objectification across different cultures.

Social Media as a Double-Edged Sword

Social media has indeed acted as a powerful tool for raising awareness about women's rights and galvanising action, leading to notable policy changes in various regions. Platforms like Twitter and Instagram have amplified feminist voices, allowing grassroots movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp to gain momentum (Gurrieri et al., 2018). However, this visibility often comes with a caveat: while social media can empower women, it also perpetuates objectification and reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Studies have shown that social media platforms often prioritise visual content that promotes an idealised, often sexualised image of women (Tiggemann & Slater, 2014). The phenomenon of "influencer culture" exemplifies this trend, where social media influencers curate their identities around attractiveness and desirability, frequently reinforcing narrow standards of beauty. These portrayals can lead to increased body dissatisfaction among young women, as they compare themselves to the seemingly flawless images presented online (Perloff, 2014).

While social media has the potential to challenge traditional narratives and promote awareness of women's issues, it often falls short of fostering genuine perceptual change. The focus tends to shift towards placating women's sensibilities rather than effecting deeper societal change. Women may find themselves caught in a cycle where they are encouraged to embrace empowerment messages but simultaneously bombarded with objectifying content that diminishes their autonomy and agency (Baker & Stringer, 2019).

The need for more enduring perceptual change is critical for advancing women's negotiating power in professional and social spheres. As discussed in the original discourse, the conversation surrounding women's representation in media must extend beyond mere visibility to encompass a broader understanding of women as complex individuals capable of leadership and influence.

Women in Governance

The participation of women in governance in Nigeria has garnered increasing attention, especially in light of the persistent gender inequality that defines both the public and private sectors. Women in Nigeria constitute a significant portion of the population and contribute substantially to various societal roles, including family and community leadership. However, their representation in political leadership remains starkly inadequate, hindered by entrenched cultural stereotypes, economic limitations, and patriarchal societal structures. For instance, Gbadamosi (2022) highlights the sociocultural barriers that restrict women's political engagement, while Ajemba (2023) discusses the importance of diversity in leadership roles, suggesting that increased representation of women could enhance decision-making processes. The persistence of discrimination against female candidates, noted by Nkereuwem (2023), further exacerbates the challenges they face in attaining political office, indicating a systemic resistance to gender parity within Nigeria's political landscape.

In contrast, the private sector in Nigeria has seen a gradual emergence of women in leadership positions, although challenges remain. Recent studies reveal that while some organisations have adopted policies aimed at promoting gender diversity, the implementation of

such frameworks is often inconsistent. Adewumi, Ekundayo, and Odusanya (2021) explore the significance of corporate governance and gender diversity, arguing that effective governance practices can lead to enhanced participation of women in corporate leadership roles. However, despite some progress, many women still encounter barriers such as wage disparities and limited opportunities for advancement, as indicated by Ushe (2012). This gap suggests that while the private sector may be more accommodating of women's leadership compared to the public sphere, systemic inequalities rooted in traditional gender roles continue to impede full participation.

Furthermore, the recent global trend towards promoting women in leadership positions reflects a growing recognition of their potential contributions. Studies by Ette and Akpan-Obong (2022) emphasise the necessity of negotiating access and privilege in political representation, which can offer insights into the broader challenges women face in both public and private sectors in Nigeria. The insights gained from the international discourse on gender equality highlight the importance of creating supportive environments that facilitate women's advancement. However, the practical application of such principles in Nigeria remains limited, as evidenced by the declining rates of women elected to political offices in recent elections (Nkereuwem, 2023). This trend underscores the need for comprehensive reforms that address the sociocultural and economic barriers hindering women's participation in governance.

The landscape of women in governance in Nigeria is marked by significant challenges, particularly within the public sector, while the private sector shows some signs of progress albeit with its own set of obstacles. The interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional factors creates a complex environment for women's political engagement. Meanwhile, the media, particularly through advertising, has increasingly played a significant role. Female models are frequently featured to promote a range of products, some of which bear little or no direct relevance to them. However, this representation often reinforces a narrow and problematic view of women, centring on their sexual appeal, rather on women achievement. This narrow representation, no doubt, exacerbate gender inequality in governance.

Discussion of Findings

The portrayal of women in advertising has been a critical focus of analysis within media studies, revealing a troubling persistence of objectification and stereotypes across decades. Historically, women have been depicted primarily in domestic roles, reinforcing the cultural norm that positions them as housewives or decorative figures. Such portrayals have effectively marginalized women's professional and intellectual capabilities, suggesting that their primary function lies within the home. This foundational representation laid the groundwork for ongoing scrutiny of how media influences societal perceptions of women's roles.

As research evolved, it became evident that consumer attitudes towards these portrayals varied significantly between genders. Women often expressed greater concern about being depicted in passive or domestic roles, linking these representations to broader discriminatory practices. This connection highlights the role of advertising not just as a reflection of societal norms, but as an active participant in shaping perceptions about women's empowerment and opportunities in various sectors.

The concept of "pseudo-reality" emerged as a crucial lens through which to understand advertising's impact on gender roles. Advertisements frequently exaggerate gender differences, reinforcing traditional hierarchies that position women as inferior or subordinate. Despite some shifts towards depicting women in professional roles, these advances are often accompanied by increased sexualisation, complicating the narrative surrounding women's representation. This duality reflects a persistent trend where progress is undermined by the overarching objectification of women, reducing their identities to mere physical attributes.

The stagnation in women's representation in advertising persists, despite societal changes advocating for gender equality. Studies have shown that even as women are increasingly portrayed in diverse roles, they often remain subject to objectifying imagery. This is not solely a

Western issue; similar patterns of objectification are evident across various cultures, reinforcing restrictive norms that limit women's opportunities and societal participation.

In recent years, the influence of social media has further complicated the discourse around women's representation. While social media platforms have the potential to challenge traditional narratives, they also perpetuate objectifying images through influencer culture. The intersectionality of race and body size adds another layer of complexity, revealing that women from diverse backgrounds often face heightened levels of objectification. This underscores the urgent need for advertising to embrace more inclusive portrayals that reflect the diversity and strength of women's experiences.

Overall, the literature on the objectification of women in advertising demonstrates a persistent struggle between representation and objectification. While there have been some advancements in depicting women in empowered roles, these are frequently overshadowed by enduring stereotypes that limit their representation and influence in society. Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering genuine gender equality and dismantling harmful narratives that continue to shape public perceptions of women.

The discussions surrounding the objectification of women in advertising are deeply intertwined with the Male Gaze Theory and Framing Theory, both of which elucidate the mechanisms through which women are depicted and perceived in media. The Male Gaze Theory, introduced by Laura Mulvey, asserts that media often reflects a heterosexual male perspective, reducing women to mere objects of desire. This perspective is evident in advertising, where women are frequently portrayed as passive, sexualised figures, prioritising their physical attributes over their intellectual or leadership capabilities. This reduction of women to decorative objects not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also normalises the commodification of women's bodies, creating a cultural environment where their identities are secondary to male desires. As observed by scholars, this objectification perpetuates patriarchal norms that discourage women's participation in leadership roles, leading to a culture where women leaders are judged more on their appearance than on their competencies. Consequently, such media representations significantly undermine women's political engagement and contributions, as they foster an environment where women's voices are less respected.

Framing Theory further complements this analysis by highlighting how the representation of women in advertising shapes public perception and behaviour. The persistent framing of women as secondary characters or sexual objects confines them to traditional domestic roles, reinforcing societal views of women as inferior to men. Research indicates that these limited portrayals significantly impact societal attitudes toward gender equality, influencing how women are perceived in broader roles, including governance. When women are framed predominantly in domestic or sexualised contexts, it contributes to a widespread belief that they are less suitable for leadership positions. This framing not only affects public perception but also entrenches gender biases within governance structures, where women's capabilities are often undervalued.

Moreover, the framing of women in advertising has long-term effects that extend into the political arena. Studies have shown that when media predominantly presents women within stereotypical roles, they are less likely to be regarded as competent political actors. This reinforces the notion that leadership is inherently a male domain, further limiting women's opportunities for influence in governance and policymaking. The objectification of women in media contributes to a culture where their participation in governance is devalued, overshadowed by an emphasis on beauty and femininity. As a result, critical discussions on gender-sensitive policies are often neglected, reflecting the broader societal implications of these biased portrayals.

In essence, the interplay between the Male Gaze Theory and Framing Theory elucidates the profound impact of media representations on women's roles in society. The objectification and stereotypical framing of women in advertising not only reinforce traditional gender norms but also inhibit progress towards gender equality in governance. The emphasis on physical

appearance over intellectual capability creates a barrier for women seeking leadership roles, perpetuating a cycle of underrepresentation and marginalisation. Addressing these theoretical frameworks is crucial for fostering a more equitable media landscape, which in turn can influence societal attitudes and encourage greater female representation in leadership and governance.

Ultimately, the combined insights from these theories underscore the necessity for more responsible and inclusive advertising practices. By challenging the prevailing narratives that objectify and stereotype women, it is possible to create a media environment that empowers women and enhances their visibility in both public and political spheres. Recognising and addressing the influences of the Male Gaze and framing in advertising can contribute to broader societal changes that support gender equality and foster a more balanced representation of women's capabilities and contributions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the objectification of women in advertising remains a pervasive issue that significantly impacts societal perceptions and governance structures. The interplay between the Male Gaze Theory and Framing Theory reveals how media representations reduce women to passive, decorative figures, prioritising their physical appearance over their intellectual and leadership potential. Such portrayals not only reinforce traditional gender norms but also contribute to the marginalisation of women in political and public spheres, limiting their opportunities for meaningful participation. As media continues to shape public attitudes, the need for responsible and inclusive advertising practices becomes increasingly critical. By challenging objectifying narratives and promoting diverse representations, society can move towards greater gender equality, ultimately empowering women to assert their voices and influence within governance and beyond. Addressing these issues in advertising is not merely an ethical imperative; it is essential for fostering a culture that values women's contributions across all domains of life.

Recommendations

To foster an egalitarian space for women in governance, we propose the following recommendations:

1. Implementing structured mentorship programmes that connect younger women with successful female leaders is essential. These programmes should focus on shifting the emphasis from self-image to personal and professional achievements, empowering younger women to pursue leadership roles and resist societal pressures that perpetuate objectification. By fostering a culture of achievement, women can negotiate more significant positions in governance.
2. Advocacy initiatives should be developed to highlight and celebrate the accomplishments of women across various fields. Creating platforms to showcase female achievements not only serves to challenge negative stereotypes but also helps to redefine societal perceptions of women's roles, positioning them as equal partners in public life rather than occasional participants. This shift in narrative can significantly impact how women are viewed and treated in governance.

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