

How do gender stereotypes solidify body image in social media advertisements?

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Abstract: Social media platforms are important information conduits and often considered as important gatekeepers for influencing, reinforcing and reflecting various gender-based stereotypes which reflect existing gendered qualities and traits. With the growth of social media ads, it is sad to see a rather thin body image of women portrayed while actually, women across the globe are becoming fatter and heavier.

1. Introduction

Media ads and social media promotions have played an important role in presenting an ideally slim, tall, fair-skinned women who are undoubtedly stemmed from the age-old cultural views about women's ideal body size. Perloff [1], states that the growing dissatisfaction among women and girls about their body size is the result of increasingly thin body images, likening perfection and beauty with thinness by social media. The essay aims to explore gender stereotypes solidifying body image portrayed in social media ads. The essay firstly discuss a brief history on the topic followed by firstly discusses the portrayal of distorted beauty standards for women and its role in promoting male chauvinism. Further objectification of women's body and promoting unhealthy eating habits is also discussed.

2. The misleading nature of social media advertising

Social media ads are important information conduits that disseminate information to masses however, it has been largely criticized for promoting unrealistic body images that reinstate gender stereotypes. Media ads play a crucial role in shaping people's perception of body sizes by popularizing thin bodies to be more attractive and beautiful while fat people are considered ugly. Brands nowadays use gender stereotypes and unrealistic body sizes to sell their products which is simply unethical. Across social media ads, thin body is celebrated as women portrayed in these ads are unhealthily thin while the overweight women in these ads are often underrepresented [2]. Incidents of body shaming are more common with women and girls in ads and the media representation of women's body size in ads is more skewed and is far from real body sizes of majority women population in the world. The advertisements are mostly appearance-centred and the ads cast ultra-thin models that serve as host to potentially determinantal effects on body image related perceptions and attitudes.

In 2016, several social media campaigns were raised that demanded ban of ads that promoted gender stereotypes. Gucci in 2016 was penalized for showcasing unhealthily thin models in their ads as it could lead to uneasy feelings and dissatisfaction with personal body sizes among women and girls [3]. Most ads displayed in social media platforms have women with unrealistic body sizes as they are super slim, toned body with spotless skin. Thus, unrealistic body image portrayed in social media ads makes both genders more concerned about their diets, weight and appearances making them prone to mental and physical risks. Contrarily, a large portion of social media users are aware of the image manipulation tricks used over social media to get that perfect body size, people are still falling foul to these ad stereotypes. Thus, people resort to practices such as controlling diets and using unhealthy practices to become slim. Thinness is simply displayed in these ads to be beautiful and desirable while overweight people are considered ugly, unsuccessful and are often ridiculed and fat

shamed.

3. Gender Bias on Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms are important information conduits and often considered as important gatekeepers for influencing, reinforcing and reflecting various gender-based stereotypes which reflect existing gendered qualities and traits. With the growth of social media ads, it is sad to see a rather thin body image of women portrayed while actually, women across the globe are becoming fatter and heavier [4]. Media ads and social media promotions have played an important role in presenting an ideally slim, tall, fair-skinned women which are undoubtedly stemmed from the age-old cultural views about women's ideal body size. Women showcased over media are much thinner than the average body size of the majority of women population globally which makes them dissatisfied with their body size taking a toll on their mental and physical health. It is because gender biases popularized by mass media shape people's perception about ideal body size and people strive hard to be gain right body size for social acceptance. This perfect body form's typical approach is a woman who owns a lean, very scrawny physique with a skinny waist and no body fat. The sad part is that the mass has been willingly ignoring the need to find out what these so-called 'thin ideal' women have gone through and the health consequences they face to achieve the 'thin ideal' tag.

4. Negative body image

Body image showcased in advertisements running over social media has led to creating a negative body image that presents an unrealistic view of self-body images. Media's projections of ultra-thin body sizes and unrealistic beauty standards has led to its audiences develop perceptions about attractiveness, body weight, body size and skin colour which is completely distorted and unreal [5]. As a result, people have become too conscious about their looks. People are nowadays more negative about their body image and have unrealistic views about their self-image. Consequently, people indulge in self-criticism and develop negative internalize body image which is completely unhealthy in every sense. People of all age group are self-obsessed with their body images and they frequently check themselves out in the mirror. Public washrooms in malls, offices and train stations are filled with people checking themselves out from every angle and wasting too much time Infront of mirrors. Besides, people are too conscious about their body image and use many camera filters and photoshop software to look thin and attractive in pictures as people fear of despairing comments about their body by their peers [10]. Moreover, people also indulge too often in comparing their body sizes with their peers and develop negative feelings of envy and hatred if they feel that their body sizes are better their own. The perception of beauty showcased in ads is completely distorted and glorifies only thin bodies for women that makes people develop negative body images thus ending up self-criticizing their own appearances.

5. The pitfalls of photo editing software

The proliferation of photo editing software available online has created unrealistic beauty standards for women which is simply impossible. The social media ads have led to popularizing unrealistic looks for women calling it simply a 'barbie doll look' which has certain recognizable features [6]. The body shapes displayed in the typical barbie doll look has a small waist, accentuated breasts and buttocks, long legs, toned belly, chiselled face and perfectly radiant skin. Such recognizable features of women's body are shown in ads makes women globally crave for such unattainable body size and makes them dissatisfied about their own body [9]. Moreover, the models and the actresses are seen to reinforces such unrealistic body sizes and makes people believe that it is attainable. Kylie Jenner the supermodel and actor has received huge public backlash for retouching her selfies to look more toned and thinner. Her photos use many layers of photo editing making thin body as life goals which creates a wrong perception about perfect body size and promotes obsession with looks [7]. Such consistent depiction of unrealistic body sizes over social media has made thin

body sizes for women to be normative and expected to look attractive and feel beautiful. These altered images are commonly used in social media advertisements pushes women to believe that such body size is achievable and therefore make them fall victim to false notions about body size. Such manipulations play with people's emotions and make them feel vulnerable leading to indulgence in self-criticism and dissatisfaction with their own body.

6. Cultural stereotypes

Media content in advertising reinforces existing cultural stereotypes has led to normalizing male chauvinism which deeply goes against the idea of gender equality. The ad contents in social media platforms have biased content towards men and it has worked towards normalizing sexist behaviour and male gaze which otherwise would have been frowned upon by public [8]. Many of these ads portray men who wouldn't bat their eyelids while gazing women and often objectify women's body which is problematic. The Dolce & Gabbana brand in 2007 received huge public backlash where its social media ads glorified gang rape and objectified female's body. Moreover, the ad normalizes male gaze and sexist behaviour which is abusive and humiliating to women's images. These ads promote male chauvinism where women simply object to fulfil men's desires. Thus, male superiority and prejudice are promoted largely. Additionally, also dehumanizes men and normalizes problematic behaviour by conveying that it is ok for men to be possessive, greedy, materialistic, and full of lust. The ads, therefore, promote a very narrow and orthodoxically perspective about gender where men are considered superior and women simply object of pleasure. Women's image is simply reduced to a mere thing of pleasure and her sexuality is used to sell in ads while men are considered higher in status that reflects stereotypical gender ideologies and promotes unequal male-female relations. Male chauvinism is commonly evident in most ads which normalizes sexist behaviour and encourages asymmetrical gender roles with male superiority and prejudice consistently emphasized in the content.

7. Anxious and negative self-image

Social media ads emphasis on body size and makes people believe that physical appearance is most important which is affecting people's health and well-being. Ads are criticized for creating distorted body image and popularizing unhealthy food and eating habits among both men and women to look attractive. These ads promote unrealistic body size and gender hierarchies and also lead to clinical eating disorders. Food ads in social media act as a toxic environment where they support unhealthy eating behaviour. Food ads reinforce gender stereotypes where men are often seen on having huge sinful bites and binging their favourite fast food while women are made to feel guilty for overeating and having an appetite for fast food [8]. This leads to dieting and skipping meals behaviour among women. The ambivalent relationship between females and food is showcased in ads where women are shown to indulge in sweets and chocolates to vent her emotional distress that is triggered by her failed romantic relationships [9]. Thus, women are seen to overindulge in chocolates is a stereotypical way of idealizing gender norms. As a result, the woman is seen to have unhealthy eating habits as their food behaviour is focused not at staying healthy but to remain unhealthily slim. These food ads reinforce the idea that a woman should not indulge in unhealthy food to stay slim thus portray a mystified relation with women and food that promotes acceptance of gender stereotypes created by contemporary cultures.

Cosmetics advertisement benefits more from using gender as personality traits. However, the cosmetic ads no doubt portray an idealized and even unrealistic looks for females that make its female viewers anxious and develop negative self-image as they stress too much on physical appearances. These ads promise to give hedonic benefits as using these cosmetics can make the skin look, younger spotless and radiant [10]. Although if these products promise such benefits it is no harm the issue is that the ads set unrealistic beauty standards and make women feel worse about the skin flaws. The growth of anti-ageing products which promises people to gain benefits of age-defying properties and led people to believe that ageing is bad and makes one look ugly and undesirable. However, these ads promoting anti-ageing formula have no scientific backing and therefore can have adverse health

impacts. Additionally, many beauty and cosmetics brands have actors as their brand ambassadors and female consumers are motivated to consume these products to look as beautiful as these female celebrities. Lady Gaga's cosmetic collection, Haus Laboratories launched a beauty line in 2019 that helps its consumers look to recreate her look [11]. The ad content is made to encourage female consumers to use these cosmetics to look younger and more attractive and therefore makes women uncomfortable in their own skin. Thus, these ads use many advertisements tricks to sell their products which makes female consumers obsessed with the looks and spend money to look like celebrities which is an idealized female image.

8. Sexist portrayal and objectification

The sexist portrayal and objectification of women media in ads has long-term consequences as the sexist representation of women makes them more vulnerable to discrimination. Ads use women's body as a selling proposition to gain commercial benefits. their body is dehumanized and reduced to mere objects which are used to capture the attention of its viewers. Coke's ad shared over social media in 2013 uses women sexualized hourglass body as a symbol and the product is considered to give the same satisfaction as women's sexuality [12] . The hourglass body of the women is used to represent the coke's bottle. According to the sexualization objectification theory, women's body is used as an object for her personality is completely ignored. The ad however does not display the product at all and women's sexuality is materialized and equated to the food. Moreover, the ad also creates an acceptance of gender inequality where women are shown to be eager and happy to be consumed. This consistent labelling of women's body and sexualizing her image has made women self-objectify themselves and desire for male's attention [13]. A women's body is idealized to have sex appeal and women are portrayed to long for man's attention thus they are seen seek approval and get accepted by males. Women's body is commercialized and completely dehumanized.

9. Conclusion

The social media and the big brands have created a dysfunctional relationship between the ideal body and the health consequences of the mass, which the social media denies publicizing. Media representation of women's body size in ads is more skewed and far from reality where the majority of women globally weight much more than ideal body weight showcased in these ads. These unhealthily thin models shown in ads make women dissatisfied with their own body and create negative body image. People as a result indulge in self-criticism and find it hard to feel comfortable in their own skin. The barbie doll-like body images of women used in ads are unrealistic. These ads use many photoshop tools to create fake images and portray body shapes that are unattainable. Moreover, social media ads also reinforce gender stereotypes and promote male chauvinism where women's body is objectified and male prejudices promoted by contemporary culture is celebrated largely. The cosmetic industry also uses gender stereotypes to create markets segmentation. They make people believe that ageing is ugly and use this wrong perception created in their ads to gain commercial success. Women in ads are made to become obsessed with their looks and consider body size an important factor to look attractive and acceptable body shamming has become common.

The current research helps in exploring the current issues related to gender stereotypes solidifying body images in social media ads. However, it is necessary to conduct primary research to understand how these body images showcased in ads only have a detrimental effect as it is proved from previous research that being overweight poses major health risks. Thus, it is necessary to understand that these sculpted bodies encourage people to avoid getting obese and not indulge in unhealthy eating habits which are good for masses and promote a healthy lifestyle.

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