

# Sexualization of Women in Nigerian Magazine Advertisements

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**Abstract**—This study examines the portrayal of women in Nigerian magazine advertisements, with the aim to investigate whether there is sexualization of women in the advertisements. To achieve this aim, content analyses of 61 magazine advertisements from 5 different categories of magazines; a general interest magazine (Genevieve), fashion magazine (Hints Complete Fashion), men's magazine (Mode), women's magazine (Totally Whole) and a relationship magazine (Forever) were carried out. Erving Goffman's 1979 frame analysis and Kang's two additional coding categories were used to investigate the sexualization of women. Findings show that women are used for decorative purposes and objectified in over 70 per cent of the advertisements analyzed. Also, there is sexualization of women in magazine advertisements because women are nude 57.4 percent of the magazine advertisements.

**Keywords**—Advertisements, magazine, sexualization, women.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IT has been established in previous research that advertising messages about women are often stereotypical such that they show that a woman's place is in the kitchen, she is dependent and needs a man's protection and is regarded primarily as sex objects [1]. In an attempt to make advertisements 'desirable', advertisers associate their product with an 'attractive' image, which is usually a woman that provides the desirable image for the advertisement, irrespective of her relevance to the advertisement.

Every day, people are bombarded with visual advertisements that encourage them to buy particular products or services and these advertisements are believed to shape the status and roles of the target audiences as they also influence the values and attitudes of the society as a whole. Since advertisements reach millions of individuals daily, it has become targets for heavy scrutiny by researchers interested in the 'image' portrayal of women in different advertising media. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the way women are portrayed in Nigerian magazine advertisements in order to provide insight to how women are viewed in the Nigerian society.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of literature on female stereotypes in advertising has been developed, using content analysis as an instrument for the elucidation of stereotypical depictions [2]. Print advertisement in particular has been excessively investigated because magazine advertisements provide a frame that

facilitates thorough visual examination through the application of code schemes [3].

The earliest studies on the portrayal of women were inspired by women's movement in the early 1970s, which constantly showed that advertisements confined women primarily to traditional mother-home or beauty/sexualized roles, which are not representatives of women's diverse roles in the society [4]. Historically, studies on the portrayal of women in magazine advertisements often use two content analysis coding schemes. They are the [5] and [6] coding schemes.

Reference [5] carried out one of the earliest studies on the role of women in magazine advertising in 1971. The methodology used by them has been replicated and extended over the years by many other researchers, such as [7]-[9]. Reference [5] conducted a content analysis study to examine the image of women in magazine advertisements. This study, "A Woman's Place: An Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements", analyzed 8 general interest magazines and found out that women were predominantly portrayed as low-income earners and those not employed were used as 'decorations' or background for male activities. Also, women were mostly associated with beauty products, while men were primarily associated with financial and industrial products.

Similarly, [7] did a follow-up study of [5] research methodology and found out that was an improvement in the roles assigned to women in magazine advertisements. Though there was an increase in the professional roles and mid-level management career in the portrayal of women, there was also an increase of women as decorative elements for non-working women in the magazine advertisements. In addition, [10] made a methodological contribution by employing traditional measures of manifest content to derive denotative meaning and interpretative measures to gain access to the latent content of advertising messages. They found out that women were portrayed to be subordinate to men and were portrayed as sex objects.

Asides [5] methodology, [6], a sociologist, developed a technique called "Frame Analysis" to investigate gender stereotypes in advertisements. His methodology focuses on the subtle clues that provide important messages about gender relations. Though Goffman's sampling technique has been critiqued because he does purposive sampling, a number of studies have been conducted by researchers like [1], [11] and [4], using his coding scheme and more representative samples.

Reference [11] conducted a study on the depiction of women in magazine advertisements using Goffman's five

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coding categories, which are relative size, function ranking, psychological withdrawal, ritualization of subordination and feminine touch. In addition, he created three coding categories, which are location (domestic versus public setting), movement (ability to move fast and far) and risk-taking (involvement in high-risk activities) and argues that control over space and ability to block and control others' movement is associated with social power and control. In this study, he concludes that there though there is a shift in terms of gender roles, the changes is superficial because the underlying messages remained the same. For instance, there is less portrayal of women in traditional home setting. However, the shift is minor compared to the way women are portrayed as unable to exhibit the same amount of control over their environment as men do in the magazine advertisements. This is because in terms of relative size, women tend to take up less space than men did as they had either thin or ectomorphic body type, whereas men were large and muscular. Also, men tend to be taller than women, with men looking down at the women [11].

Similarly, [1] conducted a study on the gender stereotypes in magazine advertisements from Vogue, Mademoiselle, and McCall's from 1979 and 1991, using Goffman's frame analysis. She also extended the framework by adding two more categories named *body display* (degree of nudity) and *self-assertiveness* (women's level of independence). The results of her study revealed that very few changes have occurred in the stereotypical portrayal of women. The findings indicate that there was no significant change in the images of women in 1991 advertisements to the ones found in the 1979 advertisements. However, the types of stereotyping changed because though women were not exclusively portrayed in the stereotypical mother and housewife roles and were portrayed more often as professionals, there was also an increase in sexualized images of women because women mentally removed from the situation at large as regard license withdrawal (removing self psychologically from the situation at hand), which signifies vulnerability and reliance on male protection [1].

Also, Lindner (2004) conducted a longitudinal study on the images of women in general interest magazine (Time) and fashion magazine (Vogue) advertisements from 1955 to 2002, using [6] five coding schemes, [11] coding categories of movement and location, as well as [1] coding categories of body display. In addition, she added objectification. In this study, the first four weeks of January and June of the years 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, 1995 and 2002 were sampled and he found out the women were portrayed stereotypically in 78 per cent of the advertisements analyzed with regards to at least one of the coding categories used.

### III. SEXUALIZATION OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

Advertising has become an integral part of our society occupying a special position within the economic organization of a modern society. It deals with ideas, attitudes and values, giving them cultural form through its images. It serves as a form of communication and cultural record that can reflect the

social condition in a society and be a constructor of those who view the advertisements [12]. However, this cultural record may not always reflect reality; instead it may create and perpetuate cultural stereotypes.

Over the years, advertising has been accused of debasing culture and reinforcing stereotypes, particularly in the images of women, which are contrary to the prevailing culture of the people and has become a target of many studies. The investigation of gender stereotypes in advertising is counting five decades of research, resulting in a significant body of knowledge, which makes feminists conclude that advertising in popular media can be viewed as a primary means for introducing and promoting female role stereotypes [2].

According to [13], women are often portrayed in scantily clad clothing, nude with simply the product covering them or the female body is dismembered in order to show only a leg or cleavage and argues that it not just a sexual problem, but the problem *objectification*. Similarly, [13] posits that men are also portrayed sexually in advertising but are often found to actively engage with their environment and are the *subjects*. Whereas, women often have things placed upon them and around them and are sub sequentially made into *objects* rather than subjects [14]. Reference [15] concedes to this by arguing that for as long as there has been mankind, the female body has been objectified. In addition, [16] states that while men are remembered and immortalized for their bravery and war achievements, women, such as Marilyn Monroe are immortalized for their beauty and for their control over others through the objectification of their bodies.

With this in mind, [17] developed Objectification Theory, which postulates that women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by the male gender and the media [16].

### IV. SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION THEORY

Reference [17] coined the term *objectification theory* which states "women exist in a culture in which their bodies are looked at, evaluated, and always potentially objectified. This theory postulates that many women are treated as an object to be valued for its use by others [18] and aims to illustrate the consequences of the constant sexual objectification of women [13].

This theory that describes the process by which girls internalize the sexualizing messages of culture and the impact of the sexual objectification of female bodies as the cultural milieu in which girls exist and develop. Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's body parts are singled out and separated from her as a person and she is viewed as a physical object for male gaze [19].

According to [17] objectification occurs in three related arenas. First arena is within actual interpersonal and social encounters. The second is in visual media that depict sexual and interpersonal encounters. Reference [6] and [11] analyses of advertisements have shown that males are usually pictured looking directly at their female partners far more often than the reverse. The third arena is the manner in the media influences people on their encounter with visual media which highlights

women's bodies and body parts and in turn aligns viewers with implicit sexualizing gaze [20].

The basic understanding of this theory is that the media is crucial in shaping women's thoughts on how they should or should not be looked upon in the public [16]. This often leads to self-objectification, which is a situation whereby girls internalize and reproduce within their own self-image from an objectified perspective.

In summary, this theory attempts to explain the tendency to equate women with their bodies and it can have negative consequences for women's body image and beyond. Therefore, this study seeks to verify whether there is sexualization of women in Nigerian magazine advertisements.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

This study is exploratory in nature, using quantitative content analysis method to investigate sexualization of women in Nigerian magazine advertisements. Content analysis is a research method for making valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights and a representation of facts [21]. Therefore, [2] posits that the purposes of content analysis are to describe communication content, compare media content to reality, assess the image of a particular group in a society, test hypothesis of message characteristics and establish a starting point for studies.

In this study, magazine advertisements are the units of analysis for obtaining information on the sexualization of women. Sixty-one magazine advertisements are coded from five different categories of magazines. They are Genevieve magazine (general interest), Hints Complete Fashion (fashion), Totally Whole (women), Mode (men) and Forever (relationship)

The criterion for selecting an advertisement is the presence of a female picture in it. Using purposive random sampling methodology, the month of November was picked to reflect current trends in the sexualization of women.

#### VI. DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis was carried out using [1] body display (wearing nothing or provocative and skimpy clothes, being nude, showing cleavage, see through clothing, wearing short clothes prominently showing buttocks) coding category and the researcher's coding category, which is 'Relevance'. Relevance is defined as importance of model to the products advertised; which includes whether the model is actively engaged or in the advertisement for decorative purposes.

TABLE I  
FREQUENCY OF GENDER APPEARANCE IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Gender	Magazines Used					T	%
	Gen	HC	TW	M	F		
F	21	6	11	2	11	51	83.6
F & M	0	1	5	1	3	10	16.4
Total	21	7	16	3	14	61	100

Table I shows that women were seen only with products is 51 (83.6%) advertisements, while men were present with women in the remaining 10 (16.4%) advertisements. In this analysis and the subsequent ones, Genevieve magazine will be represented with 'Gen'; Hints Complete Fashion with 'HC'; Totally Whole with 'TW'; Mode with 'M'; Forever with 'F' and City People with 'CP'.

#### VII. BODY DISPLAY

TABLE II  
WOMEN'S BODY DISPLAY BY MAGAZINE

Body Display	Magazines Used					T	%
	Gen	HC	TW	M	F		
Dressed	7	4	10	1	4	26	42.6
Nude	14	3	6	2	10	35	57.4
Total	21	7	16	3	14	61	100

Women are seen to be fully dressed in 26 (42.6%) magazine advertisements, while they are nude in the remaining 35 (57.4%) advertisements. However, 10 of the advertisements in which women are fully dressed were found in TW, a women's magazine. Whereas, highest no of advertisements came from Genevieve magazine, a general interest magazine what has 14 (66.7%) of its advertisements portraying women in nude cloth.

Though all advertisements analyzed have sexualized images of women, Mode magazine, men's magazine has 2 (66.7%) of its advertisements depicting a sexualized image of women. In addition, *Forever*, a relationship magazine has 14 advertisements analyzed and 10 (71.4%) of them portrayed sexualized images of women. This reveals that there is a high level of sexualization of women in Nigerian magazine advertisements.

TABLE III  
WOMEN'S RELEVANCE TO PRODUCTS BY MAGAZINE

Relevance	Magazines Used					T	%
	Gen	HC	TW	M	F		
Participating	2	3	11	1	1	18	29.5
Decorative	19	4	5	2	13	43	70.5
Total	21	7	16	3	14	61	100

Table III reveals that women were used for decorative purposes and objectified in over 70 per cent of the advertisements analyzed. They were not associated with the products and do not have any reason to be there in the first place. Women were actively engaged with the products advertised in only 18 (29.5%) of 61 magazine advertisements analyzed. This reveals that there is still high level of objectification of women in Nigerian advertising.

Among the magazines analyzed, all except Totally Whole (TW) portrayed women decoratively as objects to be 'gazed' at most of their advertisements. For instance, Genevieve magazine portrayed women as objects in 19 (90.5) of 21 advertisements analyzed. Similarly, *Forever*, a relationship magazine, portrayed women as objects in 13 (92.9) of 14 advertisements analyzed.

Therefore, Tables II and III reveals that there is still sexual objectification of women in Nigerian magazine advertisements. This goes a long way in revealing the way the Nigerian society view women.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

This study intended to investigate the way women are portrayed in Nigerian magazine advertisements and find out whether there is sexualization of women in them through the use of content analysis. After rigorous analysis, the findings reveal that there is sexualization or sexual objectification of women in Nigerian magazine advertisements.

For instance, Genevieve magazine, a general interest magazine portrays women as objects to be gazed at in 19 (90.5%) of its 21 advertisements analyzed and has 14 (66.7%) nude images of women in its advertisements. This is very surprising because the magazine was founded by a Nigerian woman named Betty Irabor in 2003, who stated that her vision was to “celebrate the achieving woman” [22]. Hence, there is a need for the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) to review of the ways women are portrayed in Nigerian magazine advertisements, to reflect the current status of Nigerian women.

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