



Are Women in Ads Really Empowered? What Hair Tells Us

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Introduction

It is estimated that an average person is confronted with 6,000 to 10,000 advertisements a day and while it might not be outright influential, the portrayals of society through advertisements can shape the lens that our world is viewed through. The women featured in advertisements and specifically their portrayals influence the way society views women. When taking a closer look the woman's hair, thematic elements of advertisements can be conveyed, which leads us to believe that the styling of hair in advertisements can help us better understand the role that women play in different scenarios and how they are seen in society.

References



Abstract

This qualitative textual analysis questions the “empowered female” discourse suggested in “femvertising” specifically focusing on the development of hair representation amongst women of color in comparison to their White counterparts. Using Goffman’s Gender Advertisements as the theoretical framework for coding female adverts’ non-verbal communication cues over time, it can be inquired whether or not women are more empowered in the current state of contemporary commercialism in terms of their roles and non-verbal behaviors. Our preliminary findings show that there has been progress made in the depiction of females’ nonverbal behaviors that has revealed more independence than what Goffman did in 1988. However, the analysis found that Black females’ hair portrayals still demonstrate stereotypes of Black women’s natural hair and its negative connotations embedded in western culture.

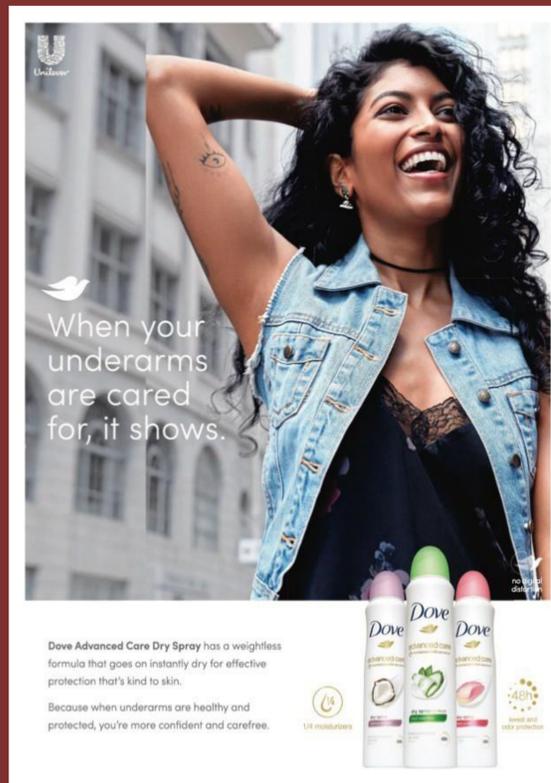


Figure 1: Example of data used.

Method

- Data were collected from electronic copies of *People* Magazine via Florida State University’s library journal database.
 - Images of ads featured female models were screen captured, and the image files were stored in a shared cloud folder.
1. Nonverbal behaviors of females are first coded by Goffman’s framework of gender advertisements: Relative size, the feminine touch, function ranking, the family, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal.
 2. Then the models’ race/ethnicity and hair styles are coded by color and texture. We especially focus on Black women’s hair texture, based on the prior literature that shows the natural hair of Black women has political meanings. The inter-coder reliability will be calculated.

Discussion and Findings

Our preliminary findings yielded by coding 150 ads in *People* magazine, show that Goffman’s framework still applies to females’ subordinated depictions in contemporary advertisements. The top three most frequent non-verbal behavior categories were licensed withdrawal, family, and feminine touch. The textual analysis of the female models’ nonverbal behaviors with respect to their hair, found that certain characteristics are associated with certain hair types. For instance, when historically marginalized group members such as Black women appear seemingly empowered in terms of their nonverbal behaviors, the majority of the Black models did not have natural hair, but straightened hair texture. On the contrary, when such models seem needy, they have natural hair. We plan to collect more data from print copies to develop these findings. This research would serve as a cross-cultural analysis on the female empowerment discourse within the realm of “femvertising” specifically focusing on the development of hair representation amongst women of color in comparison to their White counterparts. Using Goffman’s Gender Advertisements as the theoretical framework for coding female advertisements throughout several decades, it can be inquired whether or not women are more empowered in the current state of modern commercialism in terms of their roles and non-verbal behaviors.