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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Challenging the Male Gaze: A Critical Analysis of Gender Representation in Contemporary Print Advertisements

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | In the synchronic panorama of advertisements, the 'male gaze,' a notion advanced by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey in her seminal 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" continues to exert a hermetic ascendency on gender portrayal. Originally formulated to critique the commodification of women in cinema, the 'male gaze' has since been applied to various media forms, including print advertisements. The research paper highlights how visual culture often portrays women through a patriarchal lens, reducing them to commodities of male fantasy and reinforce the conventional gender hierarchies. The study critically examines the concept of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements, exploring how gender is portrayed and constructed through visual representation. Rooted in Laura Mulvey's seminal theory, the male gaze is understood as the framing of women through a patriarchal lens that objectifies and sexualizes them for the pleasure of the male viewer. The analysis of the study delves into how modern advertising both perpetuates and challenges this dynamic. By deconstructing selected advertisements across fashion, beauty, and lifestyle sectors, the study highlights patterns of gendered power relations, objectification, and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. It also considers shifts in visual rhetoric that attempt to subvert the male gaze by promoting female agency, empowerment, and body positivity. The paper further examines how intersectionality influences these portrayals, particularly focusing on race, body image, and sexual orientation. Through semiotic analysis and critical theory, the research aims to unpack the evolving complexities of gender representation in print media. Also, assess the changes signify gender equality or are merely superficial trends designed to appeal to feminist ideals without addressing underlying structural inequalities. |

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of the 'male gaze' in print advertisements represents more than just the visual positioning of women as commodities of desire, but portrays the deep-rooted patriarchal structures inherent within advertising agencies and consumer culture (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000). Advertisements, being a ubiquitous and influential form of medium and it's applied imageries both reflect and shape the societal attitudes, particularly regarding gender roles and power dynamics In print advertisements, the 'male gaze' operates in similar ways. Women are presented as commodities to be looked at, corresponding the perspective of the advertisement with an implicit heterosexual male viewer (Mc Lean, P. James, and Sheila W. Davidson 2000). This creates a structure where visual pleasure is derived from women's bodies, reinforcing the notion that a woman's value lies in her

physical appearance. Per contra, beyond the sexual commodification, the male gaze in advertising also serves to emphasize the broader 'symbolic structure' in which men are active agents and women are passive receivers.

The uni- dimensional positioning of men and women within advertisement campaigns often portray a power imbalance. Men are frequently placed in dominant, active roles, standing, striding forward, engaging with the world, while women are positioned passively, often depicted sitting, lying down, or looking at the camera in a way that invites the viewer's gaze. (Malson, Helen, & Tania McMahon 2005) This spatial dynamic portrays a broader narrative about gendered power relations: men as subjects of active perpetrators, and women as subjects of the 'gaze.' In some advertisements, the gaze of a male character within the image may also be directed at the woman, reinforcing the idea that women exist primarily as objects of fascination for male pleasure. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000) The 'male gaze' in print advertisements extends beyond individual advertisements; it forms a part of a larger societal pattern that influences how women perceive themselves and how men perceive women. When women are repeatedly shown as sexual objects in advertisements, there is a risk of internalized objectification. (Malson, Helen, & Tania McMahon 2005) This occurs when women begin to see themselves through the lens of the male gaze, evaluating their worth based on their ability to conform to societal standards of beauty and desirability. This phenomenon is tied to self-objectification, where women measure their value by how they appear to others rather than their capabilities or character. Studies in feminist psychology have shown that self-objectification is linked to a host of negative outcomes, including body dysmorphia, eating disorders, and decreased self-esteem. Print advertisements contribute significantly to the media landscape that promotes these harmful ideals. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000)

The 'male gaze' reinforces traditional gender roles by consistently depicting women in submissive or decorative roles. Men are shown as decision-makers, achievers, or adventurers, while women are passive, ornamental, or subordinate. (Mc Lean, P. James, and Sheila W. Davidson 2000) This binary representation not only reflects but also perpetuates gender inequality in the broader culture. The continual commodification of women in advertising results in the objectification of women in mundane life. This leads to the treatment of women not as complete human beings but as objects whose value is determined by their appearance and sexual appeal. This normativity has been linked to rape culture, where sexual violence is trivialized, and women's autonomy is undermined. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000)

In response to feminist critiques and changing societal attitudes, there has been a noticeable shift in some advertising practices, with an increasing focus on diversity, empowerment, and subversion of traditional gender roles. (Mc Lean, P. James, and Sheila W. Davidson 2000).However, these shifts are complex and often fraught with contradictions. A growing number of brands are engaging in what has been termed 'femvertising,' conveying feminist messages to sell products. Some advertisements have attempted to reverse the dynamics of the male gaze, depicting men in traditionally feminine roles or subjecting them to the same objectification that women experience. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000) While this can serve as a critique of traditional gender power dynamics, it may also risk trivializing the problem by flipping the script without addressing the underlying structures of commodification of women.

The inclusion of non-binary and gender-nonconforming individuals in advertisements represents a more abstruse challenge to the male gaze. (Benwell, Bethan, & Elizabeth Stokoe 2006) By decentring the male heterosexual viewer and offering alternative ways of seeing gender and identity, these advertisements disrupt the traditional logic of commodification and broaden the conversation around representation of women in the advertisement media. The male gaze in print advertisements remains an influencing phenomenon, shaping how women are perceived and how they perceive themselves. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000) The increasing awareness of its impact, driven by feminist

scholarship and activism, is encouraging a slow transformation in advertising practices. As more brands embrace diverse and inclusive representations, there is potential to move beyond the restrictive boundaries of the male gaze and toward a more equitable and authentic visual culture. Yet, this shift requires not just cosmetic changes in how women are depicted, but a deeper interrogation of the power dynamics that have historically shaped media representations. (Benwell, Bethan, & Elizabeth Stokoe 2006) The commercialization of feminist ideals through the rise of 'commodity feminism,' where brands integrate empowerment narratives to appeal to a growing market of socially-conscious consumers, proves detrimental. However, these portrayals frequently remain superficial, reinforcing rather than dismantling patriarchal structures. (Levin, Michael P., & Judith C. Murnen 2004) Applying the semiotic analysis and feminist theory, the study examines the intersections of race, class, body diversity, and sexuality, exploring how women of colour, plus-size bodies, and queer identities are either sidelined or fetishized. The paper questions whether the evolution of visual culture in advertising represents genuine shifts toward gender equality or just re-configures the male gaze under a gloss of inclusivity.

The study aims to deconstruct the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements by analysing visual and semiotic techniques used to portray gender. It explores how traditional objectifying practices persist alongside efforts to present more progressive representations. The research also examines the intersectionality of gender portrayals, considering how race, body size, and sexuality intersect with the male gaze in advertisements. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced discourse on gender representation in media and to assess the potential for meaningful change within the advertising industry. The male gaze, a concept coined by feminist theorist Laura Mulvey in her groundbreaking 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," has become a critical lens for examining the portrayal of gender in the advertising campaigns. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000) Originally used to critique the objectification of women in cinema, the male gaze has since been applied to a broader spectrum of visual culture, including print advertisements. This theoretical framework highlights how media often presents women through a patriarchal perspective, reducing them to mere objects of male desire and reinforcing traditional power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality. In contemporary print advertisements, the male gaze manifests through a range of visual techniques that objectify and fragment women's bodies. (Levin, Michael P., & Judith C. Murnen 2004)

Advertisers frequently employ strategies such as sexualization, idealization, and passive representation to appeal to a predominantly male audience. objectification of women not only reinforces stereotypical gender roles but also restores the pervasive power dynamics that have long characterized media representations of women. (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000) Despite the growing awareness of feminist issues and increasing societal pressures for gender equality, many advertisements continue to perpetuate these patriarchal norms through the media representations of women (Benwell, Bethan, & Elizabeth Stokoe 2006).

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By critically evaluating the portrayal of women in print advertisements, the study examines the underlying gendered biases and power dynamics integrated in visual culture of advertisements. It reveals how advertisements, as a pervasive cultural force, shape and perpetuate specific norms around femininity, beauty, sexuality, and gender roles This study highlights how print media often depend on hazardous gender stereotypes, presenting women in passive, sexualized, or commodified roles, while perpetuating traditional masculinity. By uncovering these stereotypes, the research may foster greater awareness of their social impact, and offer a foundation for more gender-equitable representations.

The study advances feminist scholarship by applying Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory to print advertisements, demonstrating that objectification isn't limited to film but is also deeply rooted in

advertising. This not only broadens the scope of Mulvey's work but also provides a relevant critique of how women's bodies are manipulated for male consumption across various media forms. It introduces an intersectional approach to media studies, investigating how race, class, and sexuality intersect with the male gaze This contributes to a more meticulous understanding of how marginalized groups are represented in advertising, adding depth to feminist media critiques. The study examines how the male gaze in advertisements creates self-perception, particularly among women and young girls, leading to issues like self-objectification, body dissatisfaction, and unreal beauty standards. By analysing these psychological impacts, it calls for more socially responsible advertising that prioritizes the well-being of its audience. The study can influence the advertising industry by emphasizing the need for ethical representations of women that move beyond objectification. Brands, aware of the growing social consciousness and demands for inclusivity, may be inspired to adopt more equitable and diverse advertising strategies that reflect a broader range of identities and experiences. In a time where consumers increasingly value brands with socially responsible practices, the study can provide insights for companies to reshape their branding strategies, moving toward more empowered, authentic representations of women (Naomi Wolf 1990).

Academically, the study contributes to fields like feminist theory, cultural studies, and semiotics, offering a well-rounded analysis of how visual media perpetuates patriarchal norms. Its interdisciplinary approach could open avenues for further research, particularly in media ethics, psychology, and gender studies. The findings could potentially influence media regulation policies and advertising standards, encouraging governing bodies to take a closer look at how gender is represented in print and visual media. It can also contribute to policy discussions around advertising ethics, particularly concerning the psychological impact of objectification on diverse audiences. The study of male gaze in the context of print advertisements may support feminist movements that call for gender-equitable representation in media. By providing academic backing and data, it empowers advocacy groups and activists to engage with brands, pushing for changes in the way women are depicted. The research can serve as a foundation for creating new frameworks for inclusive, feminist-friendly advertising. It may inspire brands and advertisers to consciously incorporate diversity, inclusivity, and anti-objectification principles, reshaping how women and other marginalized identities are portrayed. With consumers becoming increasingly socially conscious, this study provides insight into the shift in consumer preferences toward brands that promote ethical and inclusive messaging. The research may show that audiences, particularly younger generations, are rejecting brands that reinforce the male gaze, prompting advertisers to rethink their approaches. The study can offer alternatives to the male gaze by showcasing examples of counter-advertising or feminist media that subverts traditional gender norms. This promotes a redefinition of femininity that focuses on empowerment, diversity, and autonomy, contributing to consumer-led demands for better representation in advertisements.

The study provides a critical understanding of how patriarchy operates within the media industry, specifically through advertising. By examining the ways in which the male gaze is both constructed and maintained, the research highlights the gendered power structures embedded in consumer culture, helping scholars and audiences alike to understand media's role in sustaining patriarchy. The study is significant in its potential to challenge and subvert dominant narratives about femininity and the portrayal of women in media. It emphasizes the importance of diversifying media representation to ensure that women are not solely represented as objects of male desire, but as active agents in control of their own narratives. The study has far-reaching significance in shaping critical discourse around gender representation, influencing both the advertising industry and broader societal attitudes toward women. It holds the potential to inspire more responsible and inclusive portrayals of gender, contributing to the ongoing movement toward equality in media representation.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1.To arbitrate the visual and semiotic strategies practised in print advertisements to underpin the male gaze and commodification of women.

2.To determine the impact of 'commodity feminism' on advertising, evaluating brands' manipulation of feminist ideals.

3.To study the broader cultural and societal implications of gender portrayals in print advertisements, in relation to changing concepts of gender equality and female empowerment.

4.To critically re-assess how contemporary advertisements either challenge or perpetuate conventional gender roles through their portrayal of the gender binaries of femininity and masculinity.

5.To examine the portrayal of women in print advertisements, highlighting patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and fetishization.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. In what ways the 'male gaze' is explicit in contemporary print advertisements through visual and semiotic strategies ?

2. How does the digital advertisements perpetuate or challenge traditional gender roles and objectification of women?

3. How does 'commodity-feminism' leverage the representation of gender in advertising, and does that adequately subvert or reinforce the 'male gaze'?

4. What is the function of 'intersectionality,' in the portrayal of women in print advertisements, specifically regarding race, body type, and sexuality?

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopts the qualitative methodology to deeply analyse the presence and persistence of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements. The focus is on comprehending how gender is constructed through visual and semiotic techniques, and how these representations intersect with other aspects of identity such as race, body size, and sexuality. The methodology combines semiotic analysis with a critical examination of the relevant theories to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender portrayal in the area of visual advertising. Relevant theories pertaining to the advertisements, intersectional studies, feminism, and male gaze have been examined in relation to the main argument of the paper.

Qualitative research is chosen for its ability to provide a detailed and nuanced insights into complex phenomena such as gender representation. It allows for an in-depth exploration of how advertisements perpetuate gender roles and how these roles in turn reflect or resist existing patriarchal norms. This approach is well-suited for analysing visual and textual data, enabling the study to interpret the subtle ways in which the male gaze operates and to assess the broader implications of these representations. A purposive sampling approach is used to select a diverse range of print advertisements from various sources, including fashion magazines, lifestyle magazines, and consumer product advertisements. The sample include advertisements from different industries to capture a broad spectrum of gender portrayals. Advertisements are selected based on their prominence, frequency of publication, and relevance to current trends in advertising. Special focus is given to advertisements that feature feminist rhetoric or claim to promote gender empowerment.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**1.** Laura Mulvey's seminal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), introduced the concept of the 'male gaze,' which posits that visual culture often frames women through a patriarchal lens, reducing them to objects of male desire. Mulvey argues that this gaze is a key mechanism through which women are objectified in cinema, creating a dynamic where the male viewer's pleasure and perspective dominate visual representation. This theoretical framework has since been applied to various media forms, including print advertisements, to analyse how women are portrayed and objectified.

Since Mulvey's work, scholars have expanded the concept of the male gaze to encompass various forms of media beyond film. For instance, Berger's "Ways of Seeing" (1972) examines how traditional art and advertising perpetuate the male gaze by depicting women as passive objects of visual pleasure. Berger's insights into how women are represented through the male lens offer a foundational understanding of gendered visual culture that informs contemporary critiques of advertising. In recent years, feminist scholars like Gill (2007) and Tasker and Negra (2007) have critiqued the persistence of the male gaze in modern media, including advertisements. Gill's "Gender and the Media" (2007) explores how contemporary media perpetuates gender stereotypes through visual and textual representations, while Tasker and Negra's "Interrogating Post feminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture" (2007) addresses how neoliberal and postfeminist frameworks integrate feminist rhetoric without challenging underlying patriarchal norms.

**2.** The concept of 'commodity-feminism' where feminist ideals are commodified for commercial gain has been extensively discussed in relation to advertising. McRobbie's "The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change" (2009) explores the contemporary advertising manipulations of feminist language and imageries to appeal to cosmopolitan consumers. McRobbie opines that while these representations appear progressive, they often perpetuate traditional gender norms by presenting feminist ideals as marketable products rather than bona fide social change.

**3.** Intersectional analyses have become crucial in understanding how gender representation in advertisements intersects with other identities such as race, body size, and sexuality. Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality (1991) provides a framework for analysing how multiple forms of discrimination intersect, offering insights into how advertisements may marginalize or fetishize women from diverse backgrounds.

Research by Goffman (1979) on gender advertisements also contributes to understanding how gender roles and stereotypes are perpetuated in advertising. Goffman's analysis of visual and textual cues in ads provides a basis for examining how intersecting identities are represented and how these representations may reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes.

**4.** Recent studies have explored how digital and social media platforms are reshaping gender representation in advertising. The rise of influencer culture and online marketing has introduced new dynamics in the portrayal of gender. Studies by Duffy and Hund (2019) on influencer marketing highlight how digital platforms offer both opportunities and challenges for gender representation, showing a shift from traditional advertising models to more interactive and participatory forms of media.

In addition, the work of media scholars like Foucault (1977) on the relationship between power and knowledge informs contemporary analyses of how digital media perpetuates or disrupts traditional gender norms. Foucault's ideas on power dynamics and surveillance are relevant for understanding how new media platforms might reinforce or challenge the male gaze. The literature on the male gaze in advertising reveals a complex interplay between traditional patriarchal norms and evolving feminist ideals. While contemporary advertisements increasingly incorporate feminist language and

diverse representations, these efforts often fall short of challenging the underlying objectifying dynamics of the male gaze.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The 'male gaze' was popularized by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). According to Mulvey, mainstream media (especially cinema, but applicable to advertisements) is concocted from a male, heterosexual perspective, where women are often presented as objects of male pleasure. In print advertisements, women are often portrayed through this lens, where their appearance, body, and sexuality are constructed to cater to male fantasies or ideals.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) explores how language and visuals contribute to maintaining power relations in society. Norman Fairclough focuses on how media texts shape ideologies. Print advertisements often portray and reproduce dominant ideologies, including patriarchal norms. CDA allows for an understanding of how gendered discourses are constructed, communicated, and challenged in advertisements. Through CDA, analyse the language used in print ads and the narrative constructed around gender. For instance, how are men and women described differently in terms of agency, power, or emotion?

Intersectionality looks at how various forms of social stratification, such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, intersect and contribute to unique experiences of oppression or privilege. The representation of women in advertisements is not homogeneous. They might depict idealized images of white, upper-class women while marginalizing women of colour, queer women, or working-class women. Hence, Kimberle Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality explores the world of visual advertisements to decode the gender portrayal.

Jacques Lacan's concept of the 'gaze' relates to the act of looking and being looked at, especially how individuals are subjected to the gaze of the Other. The power dynamics between the observer and the observed become central to understanding identity and desire. The viewer (often male) gazes upon women in advertisements which in turn shapes how women are expected to see themselves. Women are often depicted as being conscious of being watched, which reinforces certain behaviours and postures. Women in advertisements are placed as subjects of the 'gaze' and this influences their portrayal.

## DISCUSSION

The study critically deconstructs the presence and persistence of the male gaze in concurrent print advertisements, unmasking how visual techniques such as objectification, hyper-sexualization, and fragmentation, continue to dominate gender representations. The findings suggest that despite shifts in cultural attitudes toward gender equality, many advertisements still perpetuate conventional patriarchal norms by placing women as passive objects of male fantasy. These techniques, identified through semiotic analysis, highlight the subtle ways in which the 'male gaze' is apparent, such as through the portrayal of women's bodies, their poses, and the gaze of male characters within the advertisements themselves.

The research also reveals a distinguished trend toward the commodification of feminist ideals, particularly through 'commodity feminism,' where brands integrate feminist imagery and rhetoric to appeal to socially-conscious consumers. While some advertisements promote empowerment narratives, these portrayals are often superficial and fail to challenge deeper patriarchal structures. (Klein, N. 1999) Instead, they market empowerment as a product, reducing feminist values to aesthetics without addressing the objectifying dynamics at play (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000). This commodification raises questions about the authenticity of these representations and whether they contribute to the deconstruction of the male gaze or merely repackage it in a more fashionable form

for new-age audiences. An important aspect uncovered in this study is the intersectionality of gender portrayal, particularly regarding race, body type, and sexuality. The findings show that women of colour, plus-size models, and queer identities are either marginalized or fetishized in advertising, with limited attempts at genuine inclusivity. While there has been a rise in diversity in visual media, these representations often adhere to the same objectifying tendencies as those targeting traditional beauty ideals. (Lazarus, M. 2008) This suggests that the male gaze not only shapes the portrayal of women but also interacts with other systems of oppression, such as racism and body shaming, further complicating the relationship between gender and media representation (Baker, Christina, & Joanne Entwistle 2016).

The study's critical analysis also points to a growing tension within the advertising industry as brands grapple with the evolving demands of a more socially-aware audience. While some advertisements appear to subvert the male gaze by depicting women as active, empowered subjects, these portrayals are often framed within a commercial context, raising questions about their sincerity (Lazar, M. 2008). The study highlights the difficulty in determining whether these shifts in representation signify a genuine cultural transformation or are simply market-driven trends designed to appeal to feminist ideals without fundamentally altering patriarchal power structures. The exclusion of audience reception in this study limits the understanding of how consumers, particularly women, interpret and respond to these gendered representations. It remains unclear whether the subversion of the male gaze in some advertisements is adequately perceived by audiences or if it is obscured by the objectifying tendencies still concurrent in the broader advertising narrative (Riley, S. 2019).

The study highlights both the continuity of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements and the complexities involved in representing gender within a commercial framework. While there are attempts to challenge conventional portrayals, many advertisements continue to commodify feminist ideals rather than engage in meaningful subversion of patriarchal norms. (Riley, S. 2019) Future research could address these limitations by incorporating audience reception studies and expanding the scope to other media platforms and global contexts.

This study examines the enduring influence of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements, uncovering how visual culture continues to be shaped by patriarchal power dynamics despite broader societal movements towards gender equality. Grounded in Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze, the research reveals that advertisements employ a variety of subtle yet prevalent techniques such as objectification, fragmentation, and sexualization of female bodies that perpetuate traditional gender hierarchies. These visual strategies, identified through semiotic analysis, often involve the abatement of women to passive objects for male consumption, rather than human beings with autonomy, and agency  (Baker, Christina, & Joanne Entwistle 2016).

The study demonstrates how such representations are normalized in the advertising industry, perpetuating the male gaze by framing women as aesthetic commodities designed to appeal to the heteronormative male viewer. The research also identifies growing complexities in how contemporary advertisements engage with gender representation. A significant finding is the emergence of 'commodity feminism,' where brands align feminist language and visuals in an attempt to appear progressive and socially responsible (Michelle Lazar 2008). Although this trend reflects a shift toward acknowledging feminist ideals, the study argues that these portrayals are often superficial, using feminist rhetoric as a marketing tool rather than a genuine effort to deconstruct patriarchal structures. Biggest brands place the 'female empowerment' as a product to be sold, packaging it in ways that adhere the objectifying tendencies of conventional advertising (Judith Dijkstra 2000).

For instance, advertisements may celebrate women's independence or strength, yet still frame their bodies through the male gaze, often sexualizing or idealizing them to fit conventional standards of

beauty. The commodification of feminism in advertising raises important questions about whether these shifts in gender portrayal represent real cultural change or simply reflect the market's desire to capitalize on feminist movements (Baker, Christina, & Joanne Entwistle 2016). The study suggests that, rather than challenging the male gaze, these advertisements reinforce it by framing empowerment as something to be consumed. In the process, they risk undermining the very feminist values they claim to support, reducing them to a surface-level trend that serves commercial interests rather than societal transformation.

Another key aspect of the discussion focuses on the intersectionality of gender portrayal. While the study reveals a greater diversity of women in contemporary advertisements, including women of colour, plus-size models, and LGBTQ+ individuals, it also positions the limitations of these representations. Women from marginalized groups are often depicted in ways that either erase their identities or subject them to further objectification and fetishization  (Judith Dijkstra 2000). For instance, women of colour may be hyper-sexualized or exoticized, while plus-size women may be tokenized without being fully integrated into mainstream beauty standards. This highlights the ways in which the male gaze operates not just along gender lines, but also through the intersections of race, body size, and sexuality. (Kilbourne, J. 2000). It underscores how the representation of women in advertising remains deeply entangled with broader systems of oppression, such as racism and body shaming, complicating any further endeavours to subvert the male gaze (Baker, Christina, & Joanne Entwistle 2016). While some advertisements do tramp toward portraying women with more agency, these portrayals often exist within narrow, commercialized frameworks that limit their subversive potential.

For instance, advertisements may portray women in positions of power or autonomy, but they frequently do so in ways that are fascinating to mainstream consumer culture, ensuring that these representations do not disrupt the status quo (Lazar, M. 2008). The study argues that, even when attempting to challenge the male gaze, these advertisements are constrained by the commercial incumbents of the advertising industry, which prioritizes profit over meaningful social change. The research also highlights a significant tension within the advertising industry as it navigates shifting cultural expectations around gender representation. On one hand, there is increasing pressure to reflect feminist ideals and embrace more inclusive, empowering representations of women. On the other hand, the advertising industry remains fundamentally tied to capitalist and patriarchal structures, which often lead to a reassertion of the male gaze in subtler forms (Riley, S. 2019). The study finds that this tension results in contradictory portrayals, where advertisements simultaneously engage with and resist the male gaze. This complexity reflects broader societal struggles over gender representation, particularly in a media landscape where progress is often ruled by commercial interests. A striking limitation of this study is its exclusion of audience reception, leaving questions about how different audiences, particularly women perceive and respond to these gendered representations. Without examining the ways in which viewers interpret these images, it remains unclear whether the subversive elements of certain advertisements are effectively communicated or overshadowed by the pervasive objectifying tendencies. (L, Michelle. 2008)

Understanding how consumers engage with these portrayals would provide crucial insight into the real-world impact of the male gaze in advertising and the extent to which subversive representations can influence public perceptions of gender roles. (Levine, M.  2004) The study sheds light on the persistence and evolution of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements, revealing how gender portrayal remains deeply enmeshed in patriarchal and capitalist frameworks. While there are efforts to challenge traditional gender roles and embrace feminist ideals, many advertisements fall short of truly dismantling the male gaze, opting instead to commercialize empowerment without confronting the deeper structures of inequality. (Katherine, Frith, & Barbara Mueller, 2012) The findings suggest that as long as advertisements operate within a profit-driven framework, the male gaze will continue to adapt, perpetuating itself even in spaces that imply to challenge it. Future

research could explore the reception of these advertisements among diverse audiences and extend the analysis to other forms of media to better understand the broader cultural implications of gender representation in advertising.

## ANALYSIS

In recent years, the concept of 'commodity feminism' has emerged highlighting a new dimension of how feminist ideals are integrated into advertising. Brands increasingly adopt feminist rhetoric and imagery to align with evolving consumer values and market demands (Lazar, & Michelle M. 2008). However, this commodification often results in superficial portrayals of feminism, where empowerment is reduced to a marketable product rather than a genuine challenge to patriarchal structures. This raises critical questions about the authenticity of feminist representations in advertising and the extent to which they contribute to or detract from meaningful social change. An intersectional approach is crucial for understanding how gender representations in print advertisements intersect with other identity markers such as race, body size, and sexuality (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000). Intersectionality, a concept introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, provides a framework for analysing how overlapping forms of discrimination and privilege shape media portrayals. Advertisements often sideline or objectify women from diverse backgrounds, reflecting broader societal inequalities and complicate the representation of gender in visual media (Benwell, Bethan, & Elizabeth Stokoe 2006).

In advertising, particularly in industries like fashion, cosmetics, and luxury brands, women's bodies are frequently commodified, transforming them into mediums through which products are channelled into consumer markets. The underlying connotation is that, by consuming the product, the (often female) consumer may aspire to the 'idealized' beauty, portrayed in the advertisement (Tuchman, Arlene, & James Benett 2005). This contraption manipulates women's precariousness and aspirations for self-improvement often tied to ethereal beauty standards. For instance, advertisements for luxury cosmetics or high-end fashion brands often show highly stylized and sexually provocative images of women. The gaze not only commodifies the 'female body but also turns the woman herself into a product, a desirable product, much like the clothes or cosmetic products being sold (Mc Lean, P. James, and Sheila W. Davidson 2000). The 'male gaze' in advertising doesn't operate in seclusion, but it draws on a larger intertextual network of visual and cultural codes that have been cultivated over centuries. From Renaissance paintings to Multi-National brands, women have conventionally been depicted in ways that emphasize beauty, vulnerability, and passivity (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000). These visual tropes are recycled and reimagined in modern print advertisements. For example, the repeated imageries of sophisticated, westernised women reclining in passive poses, half-nude, or gazing seductively into the camera draws from art conventional traditions, such as the odalisque image, where women are shown as fascinating objects of male desire (Bourdieu 1984). These cultural codes are ingrained, making the 'male gaze' seem natural or invisible to many viewers, despite its deeply contrived nature.

While the male gaze in advertisements primarily focuses on gender, it also intersects with other axes of identity, such as race, class, and sexuality (Goffman 1976). Women of different races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations are depicted in advertisements are often shaped by stereotypes that reinforce not only gender inequality but also racial and social inequalities. In many advertisements, women of colour, especially Black and Asian women, are depicted through an 'exoticizing' lens (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000). They are often portrayed as hypersexualized, mysterious, or submissive, tapping into long-standing colonial and Orientalist stereotypes. These depictions not only reduce women of colour to racialized fantasies but also compound their objectification by layering race onto the dynamics of the male gaze.

The contemporary advertising scenario has witnessed the rise of 'commodity feminism,' where feminist ideals are manipulated and commodified for commercial profits (Gibson, & Rosemary 2000).

Brands often employ feminist language and imageries to align with changing consumer values, yet these portrayals can be superficial, reducing feminist principles to saleable qualities rather than resulting in meaningful social change. This phenomenon raises questions about the authenticity of feminist representations in advertising and whether they challenge the male gaze or merely appropriate it to new commercial contexts (Benwell, Bethan, & Elizabeth Stokoe 2006).

The analysis extends beyond traditional notions of objectification to explore how subtle mechanisms, such as framing, body language, and the positioning of subjects, reinforce patriarchal power structures. This paper also examines the commodification of female empowerment and the rise of 'faux-feminism' in advertising, where brands adopt feminist rhetoric and imagery to attract consumers without fundamentally challenging the gaze that commodifies women. By employing semiotic analysis and feminist media theory, the paper dissects advertisements from sectors such as fashion, beauty, and lifestyle, revealing how gendered portrayals often adhere to conventional, heteronormative ideals. It explores the intersectionality of race, body type, and sexuality, questioning how marginalized identities are either hypersexualized or erased from mainstream media. This study assesses whether contemporary advertising has evolved to subvert the male gaze or superficially re-packaged it under a guise of inclusivity and advancement. Despite significant societal progress toward gender equality and increased awareness of feminist issues, print advertisements frequently perpetuate the male gaze through subtle yet pervasive techniques (Benwell, Bethan, & Elizabeth Stokoe 2006). Commodification, fragmentation, and sexualization are common visual strategies that frame women as passive commodities for male pleasure, thereby maintaining rooted power dynamics. This persistence of the male gaze in modern advertising underscores the need for a critical examination of how gender is portrayed and the inferences of these representations for both societal attitudes and individual perceptions. (Levin, Michael P., & Judith C. Murnen 2004)

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The implications of the study on deconstructing the male gaze in print advertisements are multifaceted, shaping both academic discourse and real-world practices within the advertising and media power houses. The study could challenge deep-seated cultural norms by emphasizing the male gaze perpetuating patriarchal values and gender objectification. By raising awareness of these issues, it can contribute to broader societal transitions toward gender equity, encouraging media accountability and critical engagement of advertisements. It also provides a premise for advocating more inclusive and diverse representations of gender.

For advertisers, the study's findings could stimulate to re-design creative strategies and take a radical diversion from stereotypical portrayals of women and men in the print advertisements. This may lead to a more ethical and socially responsible approach to gender representation, focusing on narratives that empower rather than objectify. It could also influence the development of advertising standards, potentially prompting regulatory bodies to introduce stricter guidelines on gendered imagery in marketing. By deconstructing the male gaze, the study can reveal how gendered advertising influences consumer behaviour, particularly among women and marginalized groups. The study would contribute to feminist theory, particularly within media studies, visual culture, and advertising research. It expands on existing literature on the male gaze by analysing contemporary advertising practices and exploring how feminist movements have influenced changes. It could also lead to interdisciplinary research, bridging gender studies with psychology, sociology, and media studies to explore deeper implications of visual power dynamics.

The study can generate more nuanced discussions of how the male gaze intersects with other forms of marginalization, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. By shattering these layers, the research could challenge the advertising industry's tendency to homogenize gender roles and highlight the need for diverse and authentic representation. This has wider implications for media producers, encouraging them to account for the multiplicity of identities in their visual narratives. The study

would critically examine how the male gaze ingrain patriarchal gender roles, and the commodification of women across the media segments. By deconstructing these representations, it challenges recurring societal norms around femininity and masculinity, potentially leading to more fluid and equitable understandings of gender roles.

As the research emphasises the subconscious ways the male gaze manipulates audience's perception, it encourages critical media consumption. Educating the public about how gender stereotypes are embedded in visual culture would empower audience to question media narratives, fostering a more media-literate society. Media literacy programs could benefit from such studies drawing from the findings to deconstruct gender portrayals in media, not just advertising. The emergence of feminist and gender-rights movements like #MeToo and body positivity could draw upon the study's findings to advocate for change. By providing a critical framework to analyse and challenge objectification in media, activists can use the research to push for reform regarding the under-representations of marginalized genders.

As consumers increasingly gravitate toward brands that align with their values, including those that promote diversity and gender equality, companies that adopt gender-conscious advertising strategies could experience economic benefits. Advertisers might recognize that avoiding the male gaze not only contributes to social good but also appeals to a more socially conscious and diverse consumer base, ultimately leading to greater market share and brand loyalty. For women and marginalized gender groups, seeing themselves represented in ways that defy the male gaze can have profound psychological effects, boosting self-esteem and reducing the harmful impact of unrealistic beauty standards. When individuals see diverse, empowered portrayals that reflect their identities, it can foster a greater sense of belonging and validation, contributing to overall well-being. This study can reveal how dismantling the male gaze in advertisements reshapes consumer behaviour. Consumers are becoming more attuned to ethical marketing, and as advertisements begin to feature more gender-equitable portrayals, it could influence purchasing decisions. Brands that successfully deconstruct gender stereotypes may attract consumers seeking to align their buying power with values of gender equity and diversity. Understanding this shift in behaviour can guide advertisers in crafting campaigns that resonate deeply with modern audiences.

The study would significantly contribute to feminist theory, particularly in visual culture and media studies, by expanding the discourse around the male gaze beyond cinema to include print advertisements and visual marketing. It deepens the understanding of how gendered power relations are encoded in visual texts and how these codes perpetuate societal hierarchies. This research may vitalise feminist inquiries into media that intersect with issues like consumer culture, neo-liberalism, and digital spaces. In academia, this study can serve as a directional text for analysing the historical evolution of gender portrayal in media. By examining the changing standards in advertising and the phased dismantle of conventional gender portrayals, researchers could track the broader socio-cultural evolution of gender identities, exploring the impact of literary movements like post-feminism, queer theory, and intersectionality on visual media.

By exploring intersectionality, the study challenges not only the gender binary but also beauty ideals and normative standards of appearance that often accompany the male gaze. It encourages a more inclusive approach to representation that reflects real-world diversity in body size, age, race, and gender presentation. Over time, the findings from this research could contribute to a re=definition of beauty standards in media. As the male gaze is deconstructed, beauty would no longer be defined through a patriarchal lens but through a more inclusive, diverse understanding of appearance, personality, and identity. This can potentially shift power dynamics, allowing women and marginalized groups greater control over their own representation. If adopted widely, the study's conclusions could create a cultural shift in how visual rhetoric is employed, moving from exploitative or reductive portrayals of women to more empowering, multidimensional narratives. This shift

would reflect broader transformations in how society perceives and values gender, influencing art, media, literature, and public discourse.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1 Semiotic analysis, while valuable for examining visual codes, is inherently subjective. Different researchers may interpret the common image in varied ways, which could lead to differing conclusions about the presence of the male gaze or subversion attempts.

2 The study's findings may be limited by the restricted selection of advertisements. If only a small or specific set of advertisements are analysed (e.g., fashion or beauty industries), the results might not represent the complete spectrum of how the male gaze manifests across different sectors of print media.

3 Limiting the study to print advertisements might exclude significant developments in other forms of advertising, such as digital or social media, where gender representation and interactions with the male gaze could differ. This restricted focus could reduce the study's overall relevance to modern, multi-platform advertising.

4 The study focuses on contemporary advertisements, which might limit the findings to current trends in a specific cultural context. The portrayal of gender in advertisements may differ significantly across time periods and global regions, reducing the study's relevance to non-Western or historical contexts.

5 The media landscape, particularly regarding gender representation, is constantly evolving. Advertisements from the previous year may not reflect the current trends or shifts in visual culture, making the study's conclusions potentially irrelevant as new advertising practices emerge.

## CONCLUSION

This study critically dismantles the persistent presence of the male gaze in concurrent print advertisements, offering a nuanced understanding of how gender representation is portrayed through patriarchal visual strategies. By analysing how objectification, sexualization, and fragmentation, are embedded in the portrayal of women, the research reveals that despite progress in feminist thought and social shifts toward gender equality, multiple advertisements continue to reinforce traditional gender power dynamics. Women, in these portrayals, are often reduced to passive objects of desire, a hallmark of the male gaze that has endured across decades of visual culture of advertisements. At the same time, the study highlights the complexity of modern advertising's engagement with gender, particularly through the rise of 'commodity-feminism.' While many brands have adopted feminist language and imagery, the research finds that such representations are frequently superficial, using empowerment as a marketing tool without challenging the deeper structures of objectification. These advertisements often re-configure feminist ideals into commercialized forms that maintain the same male-centred perspectives, suggesting that the male gaze has adapted to contemporary demands for social awareness, but without fundamentally altering the gendered dynamics that sustain it. An important contribution of this study is its examination of intersectionality, revealing that the male gaze is not limited to gender but is also shaped by race, body type, and sexuality. Women from marginalized communities are often either erased from advertisements or subjected to fetishization, highlighting the exclusionary nature of mainstream beauty standards. This intersectional analysis underscores the broader societal systems of oppression that intersect with patriarchal norms in advertising, complicating the task of truly dismantling the male gaze. The study concludes that while there are efforts to challenge patriarchal visual codes, these efforts are often restricted by the commercial incumbents of the advertising industry, which prioritize commercial profits over social responsibility. As a result, many advertisements offer only a superficial disruption of the male gaze, re-packaging old gender

dynamics in new, more marketable forms. The tension between feminist ideals and capitalist motivations creates a significant obstacle to achieve progress in gender representation. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements, revealing the ongoing prevalence of patriarchal visual strategies that shape gender representation. Through a detailed semiotic analysis, the research demonstrates that many modern advertisements continue to uphold the male gaze by employing techniques of objectification, fragmentation, and sexualization. Despite societal progress toward gender equality, these advertisements often portray women as passive objects for male consumption, perpetuating traditional gender hierarchies and reinforcing the objectifying dynamics identified by Laura Mulvey.

The study of the 'commodity-feminism' exhibits a significant trend in modern advertising where feminist ideals are manipulated for commercial purposes. While there is a noticeable increase in advertisements that incorporate feminist language and imagery, these representations are frequently superficial and fail to address the underlying structures of objectification. Instead of subverting the male gaze, these advertisements often commodify empowerment, presenting it as a marketable attribute rather than a genuine challenge to patriarchal norms. This commodification not only dilutes the impact of feminist messages but also reveals how capitalist imperatives can appropriate social movements for profit, maintaining the status quo of gender representation. A critical contribution of this study is its examination of intersectionality in gender portrayal. The analysis highlights how the male gaze intersects with other systems of oppression, such as race, body size, and sexuality. Advertisements often marginalize or fetishize women from diverse backgrounds, reflecting broader societal inequalities. For instance, women of colour may be subjected to exoticization, while plus-size women might be tokenized in ways that reinforce rather than disrupt existing beauty standards. This intersectional approach underscores the complexity of gender representation in advertising and reveals how the male gaze is intricately linked with other forms of discrimination.

The research also identifies a tension within the advertising industry as it grapples with evolving cultural norms. While some advertisements attempt to challenge traditional gender roles by depicting women with agency and empowerment, these portrayals are often constrained by commercial interests. The study finds that such depictions are frequently framed within a narrow, market-driven context, which limits their ability to effect meaningful change. This tension highlights the difficulties of achieving genuine progress in gender representation when commercial motivations are at play. In addition, the study's exclusion of audience reception leaves a gap in understanding how different demographic groups perceive and respond to gender portrayals in advertisements. Investigating audience interpretations could provide valuable insights into the real-world impact of these representations and whether subversive elements in advertisements are effectively communicated to viewers or overshadowed by dominant objectifying tendencies. In summary, this study underscores the persistent influence of the male gaze in contemporary print advertisements and the complex interplay between feminist ideals and commercial interests. While there are efforts to present more empowering and inclusive representations, these are often limited by the constraints of the advertising industry and its commitment to profit. The findings call for a deeper exploration of how advertisements can authentically challenge patriarchal norms, as well as a broader examination of gender representation across different media platforms.

## FUTURE SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The future scope of studying the deconstruction of the male gaze in print advertisements opens up several avenues for deeper exploration. With the rise of digital media and shifting gender dynamics, future research could focus on how the male gaze persists or evolves across platforms such as social media, influencer marketing, and targeted digital ads. This study could examine how emerging technologies, like AI-generated imagery, may reinforce or challenge traditional portrayals of women

and gender nonconformity. Another key area involves exploring intersectionality, investigating how race, class, and sexuality intersect with the male gaze to produce complex layers of representation.

Additionally, as gender-neutral and inclusive advertising becomes more prominent, researchers can investigate the role of consumer activism and feminist critique in shaping industry trends. This could involve case studies on campaigns that successfully subvert traditional gender roles, comparing them with those that fall into stereotypical portrayals. Further, studying the role of visual semiotics and narrative in dismantling objectification within contemporary advertising could offer insights into how brands adapt to a more socially conscious audience. Longitudinal studies could track whether shifts in representation affect societal perceptions of gender and influence broader cultural attitudes toward objectification and body politics.

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