

Ethics and gender roles

[People](#)



In order for a particular product or service to be successful in the industry, it needs to be clearly positioned within its market. The positioning should reflect the needs of the customers as well as the position of the company in relation to competitors. Depending on the positioning, the marketing team can decide what attributes of the product to amplify in their campaigns and what steps will be required to form the proper connections to the customer.

Furthermore, the position adopted by a firm also impacts brand equity, as in, the kinds of associations customers make to the product, their level of loyalty, and brand awareness. The main ethical issue in advertising is the depiction of men and women in their stereotypical gender-roles. Men are usually depicted as powerful, successful, driven and dignified. Women on the other hand are increasingly being depicted as sexualized objects often dependent on men. One of the main ethical issues is that in many of the ads the women serve mainly as a “decoration” i. . they have no functional relationship to the product being advertised. For example, Axe is well known for its over sexualization of women in its ads to sell men’s personal care products. Another trend seems to be the use of only parts of a woman’s body in advertisements particularly a woman’s breasts and legs as stated by Jean Kilbourne in her movies “Killing Us Softly”. The implications of such practices are even greater because of the number of ads that consumers are exposed to daily through television, newspapers, magazines and billboards.

It is estimated that this number has grown from 500 ads daily in 1970 to 5000 ads a day in 2009 (Johnson, 2009). The messages imparted by ads, if they are repeated over long periods of time as in the case of gender roles in society, can distort perceptions of what is realistic as well as what is right

and wrong. Since women are repeatedly cast as submissive sexual objects whose place is primarily at home or in traditional occupations of nurses, teachers, secretaries the ads in a way are telling the society what to think.

The primary critical players are the consumers who are being marketed to and the secondary players are the firms marketing the product. The consumers and the society at large are deeply affected by the ethical implications of ads mainly because of the values, beliefs, attitudes, propagated by them. Implicit in these values and beliefs is some level of “standard setting”. For example: in many Vodka ads that primarily market to women, excessive drinking is glamorized and implied as a “standard” behavior wherein women alternate between “good girl vs bad girl” roles.

If (and it often is) this message is subconsciously or consciously understood and adopted as a lifestyle, it can have far from positive manifestations such as a binge-drinking culture that is widespread among college students which leads to other consequences such as alcohol poisoning, accidents, and ill physical health of people who try to simulate what they learn from ads, in real life. There is also a disturbing trend of ads romanticizing sexual assault and domestic violence to sell products (Capella, 2010). This can invariably lead to a spread in unhealthy social conditions.

Marketing personnel are critical players because they formulate the ads. Some campaign creators do not agree that their actions may be unethical. In fact, they state that the ads reflect consumer behavior and expectations. It is also argued that there is generally “positive” reaction to beautiful males and females placed in ads which not only increase the attractiveness of the product but also the chances of increased sales precisely because of the

employment of the same techniques that are being called unethical (Reichert, T. LaTour, M. S. , Lambiase, J. I. , & Adkins, M. 2007).. The decision alternative is to essentially rethink the kinds of messages that the firm wants to put forward. It is not unethical to use healthy and reasonably beautiful women and men in ads, rather, it is the wholesome vs derogatory manner in which they are shown that makes the ad questionable. Firms should avoid focusing on the sexually provocative body parts of women (and increasingly men) to sell an unrelated product.

They should avoid glamorizing undesirable social behaviors such as promiscuousness of both sexes, over-drinking, drugs, or unhealthy lifestyles. In contrast to superficial ads, they should actively seek out methods to connect with consumers on a deeper level than physical attractiveness or sexual gratification. An excellent example of this is Dove's efforts to touch on a more genuine vein. Furthermore, firms to focus on minimizing the use of 'decorative' male/female i. e. here should be a connection between the product being advertised and the person advertising it. The implications for the critical players are hard to quantify. Women and men have been depicted in their expected roles exhibiting their stereotypical traits for a very long time. One reason this has persisted, unfortunately, is that is a successful method. Everyone wants to beautiful, glamorous, and desired and the marketing industry has picked up these human traits to turn them into profits.

Therefore, for the marketing firms, adopting an alternative strategy to work as well as the unethical methods they have been using for so long will be very challenging. However, as Dove has proved, this is not impossible

especially in the face of increasing concern over how men and women are depicted by the media. In the long run, a more wholesome strategy can lead to stronger brand equity through increased brand loyalty and positive brand associations. For the consumers, a more ethical and realistic representation of men and women will lead to positive impacts.

People may stop exhibiting extreme behaviors to satisfy standards set by the marketing world and be more self-satisfied, have higher self-esteem and satisfaction with their identities. The objectification is not spread to children, particularly young girls, such as the Oh Lola! perfume by Marc Jacobs. Not only does the model look like an underage girl (which is perhaps intended) but she is sitting suggestively (Exhibit One). Therefore, it becomes necessary to clearly define what is acceptable and what isn't. Work Cited Capella, M. L. , Hill, R. , Rapp, J. M. & Kees, J. (2010). The impact of violence against women in advertisements. *Journal Of Advertising*, 39(4), 37-51. doi: 10.2753/JOA0091-3367390403 Johnson, C. (2009, February 11). Cutting through advertising clutter. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-3445_162-2015684.html Reichert, T. , LaTour, M. S. , Lambiase, J. I. , & Adkins, M. (2007). A Test of Media Literacy Effects and Sexual Objectification in Advertising. *Journal Of Current Issues & Research In Advertising* (CTC Press), 29(1), 81-92. Exhibit One—Picture of Marc Jacobs Ad