

Representation of Race and Ethnicity in Mainstream Advertising: A Critical Analysis of Racial Stereotypes in Global Advertising Campaigns

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Abstract

This discussion examines the impact of racial stereotypes in advertising, focusing on the psychological effects on marginalized communities and the reinforcement of racial biases and discrimination. Racial stereotypes in advertising can have detrimental psychological effects on individuals, leading to feelings of invisibility, self-doubt, and low self-esteem. It can also reinforce internalized racism and create a sense of otherness or alienation. Furthermore, these stereotypes can perpetuate existing racial biases and contribute to discrimination in various domains of life, hindering progress towards equality and social justice. Advertisers have a responsibility to challenge and dismantle these stereotypes, promoting inclusive representations and actively working towards a more equitable society.

Keywords: racial stereotypes, advertising, marginalized communities, psychological effects, racial biases, discrimination

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The representation of race and ethnicity in mainstream advertising has long been a topic of debate and critique. Advertising plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and perceptions, including those related to race and ethnicity. Historically, advertising has perpetuated racial stereotypes, contributing to the marginalization and discrimination of certain racial and ethnic groups. As society becomes more diverse and inclusive, it is important to critically analyze and challenge these stereotypes to promote equality and

inclusivity.

1.2 Importance of Examining Racial Stereotypes in Advertising

Advertising has a powerful influence on consumer behavior and societal attitudes. By examining racial stereotypes in advertising, we can identify and understand the ways in which certain racial and ethnic groups are misrepresented or underrepresented. This examination allows us to uncover the harmful effects of these stereotypes on marginalized communities and work towards creating more inclusive and equitable advertising practices.

1.3 Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze racial stereotypes in global advertising campaigns. By conducting a comprehensive examination of these stereotypes, we aim to shed light on the negative implications they have on marginalized communities and society as a whole. Furthermore, we will explore strategies and initiatives that can foster more inclusive and representative advertising practices. Through this research, we hope to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on race, ethnicity, and representation in advertising, and promote positive change in the industry.

2. Definition and Concepts

2.1 Race and Ethnicity

Race refers to a social construct that categorizes people into groups based on perceived physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features. It is important to note that race is not biologically determined but is instead a product of societal categorization. Ethnicity, on the other hand, refers to a shared cultural heritage, including traditions, customs, language, and beliefs. Ethnicity is often based on common ancestry or geographical origin. Both race and ethnicity are complex and multifaceted concepts that influence individual and group identities, and they play a significant role in shaping experiences and opportunities within society.

2.2 Stereotypes in Advertising

Stereotypes in advertising are simplified and generalized representations of certain racial and ethnic groups. These representations often rely on preconceived notions and assumptions, perpetuating biases and reinforcing societal hierarchies. Stereotypes can manifest in various ways, such as through characterizations, roles, and narratives portrayed in advertising campaigns. They can reinforce negative perceptions, reinforce harmful biases, and contribute to the marginalization and discrimination of certain racial and ethnic groups.

2.3 Mainstream Advertising and Its Impact on Society

Mainstream advertising refers to the dominant and widely consumed advertising content that is produced and distributed by large corporations and media outlets. It has a significant impact on shaping societal norms, values, and attitudes. Mainstream advertising can influence consumer

behavior, perpetuate cultural stereotypes, and reinforce existing power dynamics. It plays a role in shaping public perceptions of race and ethnicity, and can either contribute to social inequality or promote inclusivity and diversity. As a powerful medium of communication, mainstream advertising has the potential to both reflect and influence societal attitudes and beliefs about race and ethnicity.

3. Historical Overview of Racial Representation in Advertising

3.1 Early Advertising Portrayals of Race and Ethnicity

In the early days of advertising, racial representation was often characterized by stereotypes and caricatures that reflected prevalent racial biases and discriminatory attitudes of the time. African Americans, for example, were often depicted in derogatory and demeaning ways, reinforcing negative stereotypes of being subservient or unintelligent. They were often portrayed as servants, entertainers, or exoticized figures, perpetuating harmful racial hierarchies.

Similarly, other racial and ethnic groups were also subjected to stereotypical portrayals. Asian Americans were often depicted as exotic, mysterious, or sinister figures, reinforcing the notion of the "Yellow Peril" or perpetuating the model minority myth. Indigenous people were often portrayed as savage or primitive, reinforcing colonialist narratives and erasing their rich cultures and histories.

These early advertising portrayals not only reinforced existing racial prejudices but also contributed to the marginalization and discrimination faced by these communities. It is important to recognize and understand the historical context of these portrayals in order to critically analyze and challenge the perpetuation of racial stereotypes in contemporary advertising.

3.2 Evolution of Racial Representation in Advertising

Over time, there has been a gradual shift in the portrayal of race and ethnicity in advertising. As society became more aware of the negative impacts of racial stereotypes, there have been efforts to challenge and subvert these portrayals.

In the mid to late 20th century, there was a growing recognition of the need for more diverse and inclusive advertising. Advertisers

began to feature people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in their campaigns, although these representations were often limited and still influenced by stereotypes. This period saw an increase in tokenism, where one person from a minority group would be included in an ad to create an illusion of diversity, without addressing the underlying systemic issues.

As social movements advocating for racial equality gained momentum, advertising started to reflect these changing attitudes. In the late 20th and early 21st century, there was a push for more authentic representations of race and ethnicity in advertising. Advertisers began to showcase a wider range of experiences, identities, and body types within racial and ethnic communities. These efforts aimed to challenge stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and realistic portrayal of diverse populations.

However, it is important to note that while progress has been made, there is still work to be done. Stereotypes and biases can still persist in advertising, even if they are more subtle or implicit. It is crucial to continue critically analyzing and challenging racial representations in advertising to ensure that they accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of the communities they seek to represent.

3.3 Impact of Historical Portrayals on Current Advertising Practices

The historical portrayals of race and ethnicity in advertising have had a lasting impact on current advertising practices. The stereotypes and biases perpetuated in the past continue to influence how racial and ethnic groups are represented today.

One significant impact is the persistence of harmful stereotypes. Historical portrayals have reinforced negative stereotypes, which can still be found in contemporary advertising. For example, African Americans may still be depicted as hypersexualized or as athletes, perpetuating stereotypes of physical prowess. Asian Americans may be portrayed as exotic or as the perpetual foreigner, reinforcing the model minority myth or the idea that they are perpetual outsiders. These stereotypes not only limit the representation of these communities but also contribute to the marginalization and discrimination they face in society.

Another impact is the underrepresentation and

tokenism of racial and ethnic groups. Historical portrayals often relegated minority communities to secondary roles or completely excluded them from advertising. While there has been progress in including more diverse faces, there is still a tendency to tokenize or feature only one representative from a particular racial or ethnic group. This tokenism can create the illusion of diversity without addressing the deeper issues of systemic inequality and the need for authentic representation.

Moreover, the historical portrayals have also shaped consumer perceptions and expectations. Consumers have been exposed to these stereotypes for generations, which can influence their attitudes and beliefs about race and ethnicity. This can impact their purchasing decisions and reinforce biases and discrimination.

To overcome the impact of historical portrayals, advertisers need to actively challenge and dismantle stereotypes, prioritize authentic representation, and strive for equitable and inclusive advertising practices. It is crucial to recognize the power and responsibility that advertising holds in shaping societal perceptions and work towards promoting positive and accurate representations of all racial and ethnic communities.

4. Analysis of Racial Stereotypes in Global Advertising Campaigns

4.1 Case Studies of Global Advertising Campaigns

In order to analyze racial stereotypes in global advertising campaigns, it is important to examine specific examples that highlight the perpetuation of these stereotypes. Here are some case studies that illustrate the presence of racial stereotypes in advertising:

4.1.1 "The Unintelligent Sidekick"

In this case study, we examine advertisements that portray racial and ethnic minorities as unintelligent sidekicks to white protagonists. This stereotype diminishes the intelligence and capabilities of minority characters and reinforces the notion of white superiority. Examples of such portrayals include the use of African American actors as comedic relief or subservient characters in commercials.

4.1.2 "Exoticization and Fetishization"

This case study focuses on advertisements that exoticize and fetishize certain racial and ethnic groups. These campaigns often present

individuals from these communities as objects of desire or fascination, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and reducing them to mere stereotypes. Examples include the portrayal of Asian women as submissive and hypersexualized, perpetuating the fetishization of Asian culture.

4.1.3 “Cultural Appropriation”

Cultural appropriation in advertising is another aspect to consider. This involves the adoption or borrowing of elements from a specific culture without proper understanding or respect. Examples include the use of Native American headdresses or traditional garments as fashion accessories in advertisements, which reduces sacred cultural symbols to mere fashion trends.

These case studies demonstrate the presence of racial stereotypes in global advertising campaigns and emphasize the need for critical analysis and awareness of these harmful portrayals. By examining these examples, we can better understand the ways in which racial stereotypes are perpetuated and take steps towards more inclusive and respectful advertising practices.

4.2 Identification and Examination of Racial Stereotypes

In order to analyze racial stereotypes in global advertising campaigns, it is important to identify and examine the specific stereotypes being perpetuated. Here are some steps to identify and examine racial stereotypes in advertising:

- 1) Visual cues and representations: Look for visual cues and representations that reinforce racial stereotypes. This could include the portrayal of certain racial or ethnic groups in specific roles or occupations, the use of exaggerated physical features or accents, or the depiction of cultural practices in a stereotypical or caricatured manner.
- 2) Narrative and messaging: Examine the narrative and messaging of the advertisement. Are certain racial or ethnic groups being portrayed as inferior, powerless, or submissive? Are they only shown in limited roles or as exotic objects of desire? Look for any messages that perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce harmful biases.
- 3) Language and dialogue: Analyze the

language and dialogue used in the advertisement. Are there any instances where racial or ethnic groups are spoken about in a demeaning or derogatory manner? Pay attention to any stereotypes being reinforced through language or dialogue.

- 4) Context and historical implications: Consider the historical context and implications of the stereotypes being portrayed. Are these stereotypes rooted in historical prejudices or discriminatory practices? Understanding the historical context can provide insights into the perpetuation of these stereotypes and their impact on marginalized communities.
- 5) Impact on marginalized communities: Assess the potential impact of these stereotypes on marginalized communities. Racial stereotypes in advertising can contribute to the marginalization, discrimination, and erasure of certain racial or ethnic groups. Examine how these stereotypes may reinforce biases and perpetuate inequalities in society.

By identifying and examining these racial stereotypes, we can gain a deeper understanding of their presence in advertising campaigns and work towards challenging and dismantling them. This critical analysis is essential in promoting more inclusive and equitable representations of race and ethnicity in advertising.

4.3 Effects of Racial Stereotypes in Advertising on Consumers

Racial stereotypes in advertising can have detrimental effects on consumers. One of the primary impacts is the reinforcement of biases and prejudices. When individuals are repeatedly exposed to advertising that perpetuates stereotypes about certain racial or ethnic groups, it can solidify existing negative perceptions and reinforce harmful biases. This can further contribute to the marginalization and discrimination of these groups in society. By constantly portraying certain races or ethnicities in limited or stereotypical roles, advertising can perpetuate harmful societal norms and hinder progress towards equality and inclusivity. Additionally, these stereotypes can shape consumer attitudes and behaviors, influencing

their purchasing decisions and perpetuating inequalities in the marketplace. The effects of racial stereotypes in advertising go beyond mere representation; they have real-world implications for social dynamics and individual experiences. It is crucial for advertisers to recognize the power they hold in shaping societal perceptions and actively work towards promoting more inclusive and accurate representations of race and ethnicity.

5. Impact of Racial Stereotypes in Advertising

5.1 Psychological Effects on Marginalized Communities

Racial stereotypes in advertising can have profound psychological effects on marginalized communities. When individuals from these communities are consistently exposed to advertising that portrays them in stereotypical or negative ways, it can lead to feelings of invisibility, self-doubt, and diminished self-esteem. It can also reinforce internalized racism, causing individuals to internalize and believe in negative stereotypes about themselves and their cultural identity. This can contribute to a sense of otherness or alienation, as individuals may feel like they do not fit societal norms or expectations. The psychological impacts of racial stereotypes in advertising can be long-lasting and detrimental to individuals' mental health and overall well-being. It is crucial for advertisers to be aware of these effects and strive to create inclusive and empowering representations that uplift marginalized communities.

5.2 Reinforcement of Racial Biases and Discrimination

Racial stereotypes in advertising have the potential to reinforce and perpetuate existing racial biases and contribute to discrimination. When individuals are repeatedly exposed to advertising that portrays certain racial or ethnic groups in stereotypical or limited roles, it can reinforce negative stereotypes and prejudices held by viewers. This reinforcement of biases can have real-world consequences, affecting various aspects of individuals' lives, such as employment opportunities, housing options, and social interactions. By perpetuating these biases, advertising can hinder progress towards achieving equality and social justice, as it contributes to the marginalization and discrimination of certain racial or ethnic communities. It is essential for advertisers to

critically examine their portrayals and actively work towards challenging and dismantling racial stereotypes to promote a more inclusive and equitable society.

5.3 Implications for Social Equality and Inclusivity

Advertising plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and values. When racial stereotypes are perpetuated, it can hinder progress towards social equality and inclusivity. By presenting certain racial or ethnic groups in limited or stereotypical roles, advertising can contribute to the marginalization and erasure of these communities. It also perpetuates a power imbalance that privileges certain racial or ethnic groups over others. This lack of representation and diverse portrayals in advertising can further perpetuate social inequalities and hinder the creation of inclusive and equitable societies.

To mitigate these impacts, it is essential for advertisers to be mindful of the potential harm caused by racial stereotypes and actively work towards promoting more inclusive and accurate representations. This includes diversifying the perspectives and voices involved in the creation of advertisements and challenging existing biases and stereotypes. By doing so, advertising can become a powerful tool for promoting social equality, inclusivity, and positive societal change.

6. Steps Towards More Inclusive Advertising

6.1 Responsibility of Advertisers in Challenging Stereotypes

Advertisers have a crucial role to play in challenging and dismantling racial stereotypes in their campaigns. They should actively question and examine the portrayals of race and ethnicity in their advertisements, ensuring they do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Advertisers should prioritize accurate and authentic representations that reflect the diversity and complexity of racial and ethnic communities. This involves conducting thorough research, consulting with diverse communities, and seeking feedback to ensure that their campaigns are inclusive and respectful.

6.2 Importance of Diversity and Representation in Advertising Agencies

To create more inclusive advertising, it is essential for advertising agencies to prioritize diversity and representation within their teams. By having diverse voices and perspectives at the

table, agencies can better understand and challenge stereotypes, avoid cultural appropriation, and develop campaigns that resonate with a wider range of audiences. This includes hiring diverse talent, including individuals from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, and actively promoting and supporting their voices within the agency.

6.3 Examples of Successful Inclusive Advertising Campaigns

There have been several successful inclusive advertising campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote diversity. One example is the “Like a Girl” campaign by Always, which aimed to challenge gender stereotypes and empower young girls. Another example is the “Share the Load” campaign by Ariel, which addressed gender roles and stereotypes in household chores. These campaigns gained widespread attention and recognition for their efforts to challenge norms and promote inclusivity.

Additionally, the “Real Beauty” campaign by Dove challenged traditional beauty standards and featured women of different ages, sizes, and ethnic backgrounds, promoting a more inclusive definition of beauty. These campaigns demonstrate that inclusive advertising can be successful, resonating with audiences and driving positive change.

In conclusion, achieving more inclusive advertising requires a collective effort from advertisers, agencies, and society as a whole. By taking responsibility for challenging stereotypes, prioritizing diversity within agencies, and creating inclusive campaigns, we can work towards a more equitable and representative advertising landscape that celebrates the diversity of our world.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, racial stereotypes in advertising have long-lasting effects on individuals and communities. They reinforce biases, perpetuate discrimination, and hinder progress towards social equality and inclusivity. It is the responsibility of advertisers to challenge and dismantle these stereotypes by prioritizing accurate and authentic representations of racial and ethnic groups. This involves conducting thorough research, seeking diverse perspectives, and actively promoting diversity within advertising agencies. Successful inclusive campaigns have shown that challenging

stereotypes and promoting diversity can resonate with audiences and drive positive change. By working towards more inclusive advertising practices, we can create a more equitable and representative advertising landscape that celebrates the diversity of our world.

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