FEMINISM AS A MARKETING STRATEGY

ФЕМИНИЗМ КАК МАРКЕТИНГОВАЯ СТРАТЕГИЯ

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Аннотация

В статье рассматривается появление и становления такого маркетингового инструмента, как фемвертайзинг. Фемвертайзинг – реклама, основанная на идеях феминизма, обращенная к женщинам и бросающая вызов устоявшимся гендерным стереотипам. Статья повествует о методах использования такой острой темы, как феминизм, в качестве продающей рекламной стратегии. Описываются механизмы влияния рекламы, ориентированной на женщин, на повышение прибыли и продаж.

Annotation

The article investigates the rise and development of femvertising as a marketing tool. Femvertising is a form of advertising that is focused on feminism's concepts, targeted at women, and challenges gender norms. The article discusses how to use a

controversial subject like feminism as a selling advertisement technique. The mechanisms of female-targeted advertising's impact on profit and sales are defined.

Ключевые слова: Фемвертайзинг, феминизм, advertising, гендерные стереотипы, образ женщины в рекламе

Key words: Femvertising, feminism, advertising, gender stereotypes, woman's portrayal in ads

The controversy around gender representation is one of the most striking manifestations in 21st century. The roles of men and women we quite clearly outlined before as each of the historical periods presented its own requirement to both genders. However, the social status and social roles of a man and a woman have drastically changed and evolved since then.

There is no doubt that the role of a female has radically transformed from presenting an housewife archetype in 60s to an active, independent and strong woman image nowadays. In other words, today society is witnessing an active process of feminization, i.e. the shift in gender roles and sex roles in a society, group, or organization towards a focus upon the feminine. It can also mean the incorporation of women into a group or a profession that was once dominated by men [1].

The growing influence of feminization process can be explained by the fact that the relationships between sexes are changing, as well as the understanding of the role of each individual person in society, regardless of gender.

These factors heavily influence the socio-cultural background of the twenty-first century, which is reflected in the public's strong reaction to this subject. In this sense, it's worth noting that feminism as a social (and, in some cases, a socio-political) movement today manifests itself first and foremost as a social phenomenon, i.e. as a result of human life. Secondly, feminism can be seen as a historical phenomenon, since individual examples of the movement for women's rights and liberation can be found not just in our immediate surroundings (XX-XXI centuries), but throughout history, beginning with antiquity.

Rethinking women's place and role in the modern world is a difficult issue to tackle: agendas, beauty norms, and communication formats are all evolving all the time. Naturally, these gender and feminist issues find a huge response among the public, which is taken up by commercial structures. The consequence of this is the emergence of the so-called market feminism. In other words, feminism is becoming the main trend of the XXI century. According to that, feminism can be used as a convenient marketing strategy to manipulate societal sentiment.

Feminism today mostly focuses on topics such as women's health and appearance (body positive movement), sexual harassment and domestic violence kind of issues.

Advertising, fashion and other cultural phenomena had always served as an actual indicator, as a litmus test, reflecting the constant innovations as the world changes. According to that, the appearance of special term "femvertising" is a clear evidence that the place and the role of women in the modern world is being rethought.

Femvertising is a form of female-centric advertising. This term is a mix of two words – female (or feminism) and advertising. As it is defined in a SheKnows Media, women's lifestyle and digital media company, *femvertising* is an "advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls" [9]. The SheKnows Media platform also hosts #TheFemvertisingAwards competition since 2015, where advertisements that promote the idea of female empowerment and shift gender norms through breaking gender stereotypes are acknowledged. Over the next several years, about three hundred brands and advertising agencies applied for participation.

Since then, the Femvertising trend has received significant attention throughout the advertising community. Starting with the Dove's Real Beauty campaign held in 2004, which is considered to be the first campaign of that kind, the strategy of using feminism marketing has been employed my many brands and its popularity continues to increase each year. [2].

The popularity of the femvertising trend can be explained by the cultivation theory, firstly advanced by professor George Gerbner in the 1960. In accordance to that

theory, people who are regularly exposed to media for long periods of time are more likely to perceive the world's social realities as they are presented by the media they consume, which in turn affects their attitudes and behaviors. [7]. Similarly, Knoll, S., Eisend, M., & Steinhagen, J. found the gender stereotypes in advertising can have a long impact on the way consumers perceive themselves and the way of life they lead, they may even act in a different manner to mirror what they see in media [6]. This experiment showed that representation of gender roles, gender stereotypes and the way men and women are portrayed in the media can have a long, real life impact on the behavior of the customers.

Femvertising challenges many of the gender stereotypes that people have come to expect in advertisements, and it has the potential to transform social thoughts and attitudes — all while giving marketers a different way to reach female consumers. The problem with this approach, according to Sarah Banet-Weiser, author of Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny, is that it is only interested in women as customers. “The biggest issue with femvertising is that it only appeals to women as customers, and consumers are individuals — it only appeals to us in our individual consumer choices,” says the author.

Many studies, on the other hand, see femvertising as a way for businesses to benefit from the feminist movement. As Banet-Weiser stated, feminist advertisment appeal to an individual woman rather than to a mass, hence it does not help with feminism’s exposure [5] . Furthermore, some businesses not only run contradicting marketing campaigns, but they also encourage feminism in marketing while exemplifying the opposite.

Thus, it is important to note that the phenomenon of femvertising is highly controversial. While some view feminist marketing as a way to exploit and dilute the major principles of feminism, others view it as a powerful tool to bring attention and to emphasize the issues of women’s portrayal in media, gender stereotypes and gender inequality as general. However, it goes without saying that this hot topic aids businesses in raising brand awareness and finding a unique way to engage with female customers.

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