



To what extent does the advertising of LVMH fragrance brands mimic the norms of the industry?

Shyraa Luthra

Abstract

Media has a great influence on the majority of the population. For brands present globally, advertising media is of the essence as it is one of the main ways in which they are able to inform their existing and prospective consumers of their products and services. Of the many industries that exist in the world, one which is popular, has a long history and is competitive is the fragrance industry. Unfortunately, in a bid to sell products in the competitive landscape, most adverts produced in this industry have started to abide by specific criteria that rely greatly on reiterating what may be classified as outdated stereotypes enforced on the binary gender groups. This paper carries out an in-depth analysis of the advertising media produced in the fragrance industry with a specific focus on LVMH brands - Christian Dior and Guerlain - to prove the evident hyper sexualisation and objectification of women. Towards the latter half of the paper, there is an analysis of the psychological impact of such depictions on both men and women.

Keywords: Brand Management, LVMH, Objectifying women

Introduction

Media entails everything from printed paper to digital data and covers information in the forms of art, news, education, brands and a wide range of other things. A kind of media is anything that has the ability to reach or sway people. Our understanding of the world has changed as a result of the media's progression from old to modern. Old media, which includes things like television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and books, is a more conventional manner of communication while new media is interactive, and user generated. By enabling us to communicate with one another online, new media offers us a fresh viewpoint. Due to everyone using digital media, the personal and diverse nature of media has greatly increased, and user-generated material has grown increasingly prevalent in our lives (Stoltzfus, 2020).

Mass media is one of the most influential entities in influencing how someone views gender and gender debate. The media emphasizes traditional gender roles, avoids others, and interpolates them to the public through its frequent and persistent repeating of gendered issues. In general, stereotyped portrayals of both men and women in the media hinder our understanding of human potential. Men are typically represented as powerful, sexually aggressive and energetic whereas Images of women as sex objects are congruent with cultural notions of gender. The idea that women are ultimately dependent on males is propagated by media goods. Similar to personality traits, stereotyping can be seen in personal and societal attitudes and behaviours (Muhammed, 2020).

As established previously, media comes in many shapes and forms. One of the forms of media is generated by brands - small or big. Big brands particularly use media for the purpose of advertising and promoting their offerings to both their target and prospective clientele. One of the most prominent big brands in today's world is the greatest luxury business in the world i.e., the French retail empire LVMH (LVMH Mot Hennessy - Louis Vuitton). In six industries—fashion and leather products, watches and jewellery, wines and spirits, fragrances and cosmetics, selective retailing, and other activities—the organization includes 75 illustrious brands (or houses). The LVMH universe includes subsidiaries in addition to Louis Vuitton, including Dior (which is also the primary holding company), FENTY, Kenzo, Fendi etc. (Highsnobiety, 2022).

Of all the industries LVMH has subsidiaries, this paper focuses on the brands in the fragrance industry. In doing so, the aim of the paper is to argue that the media produced by LVMH brands in the fragrance industry are in line with the norms of advertising in the industry i.e., with the tendency to objectify and hypersexualise women. this is done while giving an overview of the impact that this has on the psychology of both men and women. The research question for this paper, therefore, is, **“To what extent does the advertising of LVMH fragrance brands mimic the norms of the industry?”**

The fragrance industry and LVMH's position

As per a report, the global perfume market was valued at USD 29.8 billion in 2020. Whilst the pandemic caused a certain degree of negative demand for these products, the market bounced back greatly in 2021 and is expected to increase in valuation to USD 43.2 billion in 2028 at a CAGR of 5.0% in the 2021-2028 period (Fortune Business Insights, 2022). Whilst there are many different perfumes available for consumers to buy worldwide, there are a few parent companies that own the majority of fragrance-producing brands with LVMH being one of them. The Perfumes division of LVMH enjoys outstanding dynamism that depends on both the persistence and growth of important lines and the audacity of new inventions. Finding the correct mix between prestigious historic Houses like Parfums Christian Dior, Parfums Givenchy, and Guerlain and emerging businesses with great potential is, therefore, crucial for the success of the perfumes section (LVMH, 2020). In recent times, the parent company has seen success with

many of its subsidiaries in the perfume industry. For instance, profiting from the development of its renowned fragrances Sauvage, Miss Dior, and J'Adore as well as its makeup, Christian Dior had tremendous growth and increased market share. Moreover, Guerlain launched its Aqua Allegoria line and its newest range of high-end fragrances, l'Art et la Matière, with great success. The new Fraîche Irresistible eau de toilette from Parfums Givenchy was also introduced (Beauty Packaging, 2022).

However, there remains no doubt that in an extremely cutthroat global market, brands cultivate what makes them distinctive and will make them stand out to their fans. This is no different for LVMH brands for whom the perfumes and cosmetics business are incredibly important as it brought in 6.6 billion euros in sales in 2021, an increase of more than 1.5 billion euros from the year before (Sabanoglu, 2022). From a product perspective, there is enough evidence to suggest the brand's commitment to continuously innovating and providing consumers with what they desire. For instance, on November 18, 2013, LVMH opened its own fragrance and cosmetics research facility, known as the Helios. According to their strategies and commitments, the campus was constructed with high environmental quality standards and is intended to foster creativity by concentrating the entire LVMH research team on three key areas, namely research, development, and expertise, in order to produce a product of the highest calibre (Wihardja, 2021). That being said, innovation of products is nothing without the marketing of them i.e., a product is of no use until the target audience knows of it. The competition in the fragrance industry, therefore, puts a lot of pressure on brands to advertise and market their products to ensure that they are reaching an audience as wide as possible. This is predominately why the world has witnessed and continues to witness an influx of media attempting to sell fragrances - unfortunately, most commonly in an incorrect manner, as elaborated below.

The portrayal of women in the fragrance industry - a case study of adverts by LVMH brands

Given that fragrances themselves are typically targeted specifically at either men or women, as is frequently the case with marketing for cosmetics and apparel, perfume commercials frequently rely on such binary gender categorizations. Advertisers frequently offer experiences, goals, and emotions that are then connected to the product across companies and industries; perfume advertising is a prime example of this strategy because of the intangible nature of perfumes. These experiences in perfume advertisements centre on the connections between perfume, sex, and romance, and they are created through a variety of cinematic methods, including enticing colour palettes, seductive voiceovers, framing, and shot editing. A sensation similar to that of inhaling scent is created in large part by music and sound. However, in portraying these connections, a trend has become evident wherein women are frequently objectified, reduced to their physical attributes, and presented to adhere to pre-existing gender standards in perfume advertising (Payne, 2020). For example, according to research by the European Parliament, media representations of women "too frequently conform to stale clichés" and focus on "stereotypical sexualized, or auxiliary roles." The idea of gender socialization, which holds that "the media supply accepted ideals of masculinity and femininity," is crucial to concerns about such constrictive depictions. Viewers "observe, reflect upon, and mimic"

these limiting gender norms in daily life. This binary categorization of sex based on a "limited spectrum of biological variations" gives rise to these "acceptable" versions of masculinity and femininity. Due to their purported connection to biological sex, the resulting rules for the normative expression of "masculine" and "feminine," which cover look, voice, behaviour, and sexuality, come to be viewed as "natural" (Payne, 2020).

The media produced by LVMH brands in the fragrance industry are no exception to follow these norms. This can be seen in the adverts analysed below.



Figure 1: *Shalimar* by Guerlain (Advert 1)

placed, i.e., right above the breast being covered, it is almost implied that the opening of this bottle is equivalent to one's access to women in their most sexual form. This implication becomes even more dangerous when analysed from the perspective of real life because it has the ability to make men believe that women are as 'easy' as opening a perfume bottle. The urge to buy into this created feeling is even further amplified as a result of the manner in which the model has been made to look at the camera - inviting, awaiting and tempting.



Figure 2: *Insolence* by Guerlain (Advert 2)

Interestingly, *Shalimar* is not the only advert created by Guerlain that screams objectifying and hypersexualising. Instead, even advert 2 follows the same themes when marketing a different product of the brand i.e., *Insolence*. Whilst this advert may not be as obviously sexualized as the previous one, the use of colours and the positioning of the model still holds great importance. To start with, there is a lot of use of the colour black in this advert - evident in both the colour of the woman's dress as well as the background.

As per colour psychology, black helps to create a sense of

move close to it and find out more about what is being sold. The emotions communicated in this advert are further heightened as the model is sitting in a manner that could be considered ‘teasing’ as her legs are slightly spread apart. She looks directly at the viewer of the advert, almost ‘challenging’ them to come near her and fulfil her desires. Interestingly, the meaning of the word Insolence is rude and disrespectful behaviour. Once again, this gives two very incorrect connotations when attached to the positioning of the women in this advert i.e. either the woman has done something disrespectful and is awaiting punishment for the same or then that she desires for someone to be rude towards her. Both these connotations make the advert portray women as submissive, playing on the wants of many men.



Figure 3: Pure Poison by Dior (Advert 3)

Other than Guerlain, even adverts produced by Dior for their fragrances seem to convey controversial messages. Advert 3, for instance, is for a perfume known as *Pure Poison*. One may instantly find the name of the perfume quite interesting as it entails two contrasting words; “pure” means clean and “poison” is something which causes harm. However, when analysed further this advert is about so much more than the name of the perfume. The woman in the image seems to be unconscious after eating what can be considered a poisonous apple. When the similarities are drawn back to the popular story of Snow White, it can be evidenced that the advert tries to imply that the only way for this woman to be saved is by waiting for a prince to come and kiss her. The reason this implication is dangerous is that it plays on the stereotypical expectation’s society has for both genders to sell a product. For instance, in patriarchal societies it is very common for the identity of a man to be defined as that of a ‘saviour’ - his manhood is ridiculed if he is unable to become this (Choudhary, 2020). Therefore, on seeing this advert, it is very likely that men will want to play the role of the saviour that they have almost been conditioned by society to have to play. This once again makes the woman the ‘damsel in distress’ being able to survive only thanks to a man. On the whole, even though this advert isn’t hypersexualizing women in the manner in which the previous two did, it still misrepresents women and demeans their existence.

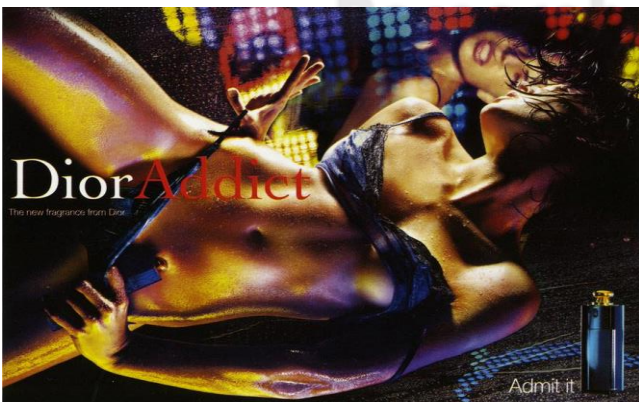


Figure 4: Dior Addict by Dior (Advert 4)

Pure poison is not the only Dior perfume advert to conform to the norms of the fragrance industry advertisements. Instead, advert 4, which is for *Dior Addict*, shows a model scantily dressed. Whilst the minimal clothing that she is seen to wear covers her private parts, even those seem to be ‘coming off’. However, what is interesting is the manner in which the possible removal of these garments is displayed. By placing the bottle of Dior Addict on her hip using one hand and teasingly removing her clothing using the

other, there seems to be a connotation conveyed to the viewer along the lines of the perfume giving access to someone to what is currently being covered. Similar to the advert for Insolence (advert 2), this also uses darker colours which could help with further heightening the mystery of what one could expect of this, or any other, woman if she was only presented with a bottle of the perfume. Moreover, the aforementioned combined with the sultry look she seems to be modelling as well as the oil on her body portrays her almost as a 'sex addict' connecting greatly with the game - Dior Addict (Shikongo, 2020). Once again, this makes men think that the perfume would make any woman "addicted" therefore luring them in.

The psychological impact of the fragrance industry's adverts

The representation of women seen in the adverts above, i.e. those belonging to LVMH's fragrance brands, are just examples. It is true that this form of representation is not limited to the media generated by this brand or just this industry. In fact, many industries publish adverts that enforce stereotypical ideologies on the public. This proves to be incredibly dangerous as it can have many psychological impacts. For instance, young people's precocious sexual behaviour might result from the hyper sexualization witnessed in adverts. It has been found that since young people tend to be quite impressionable, they get fascinated by the images they encounter on television and the internet and may occasionally imitate adult sexual behaviour without having the ability to handle any eventualities. Young girls, particularly, are further perplexed by the conflicting social expectations that place pressure on them to appear both virginal and alluring, innocent yet sexually experienced (Gouvernement du Québec, 2002).

Furthermore, it is also highly likely that many younger people might try to fit a specific mould as per what is portrayed in these adverts. For example, viewing adverts similar to those analysed in this paper, it is evident that there is a very specific body type that is repeatedly used. To a certain degree, this starts to be considered normal and therefore, puts a lot of pressure on women as they feel like they need to cater to a certain body type to fit in or be appreciated by men. Another impact on women is the tendency for these adverts to portray them as submissive and make men seem like a dominant force who are the only ones capable of saving women. This plays on the psyche of many women and makes them feel powerless or even allow certain behaviour by men which should otherwise not be acceptable.

The psychological impact of these adverts is also witnessed in men. It can be argued that men internalize the idea that success and attractiveness are connected to dominance, power, and violence as a result of how their bodies are portrayed in relation to girls, which in a way gives them power and makes them feel more 'superior' (Swift and Gould, 2021). This combined with the tendency for media to portray men as the more dominating gender, unfortunately, influences them to behave violently. Sexual abuse, for instance, is very commonly witnessed in many parts of the world. Unfortunately, whilst some men think this is okay, the matter is further worsened by women feeling as though they must remain silent in the face of such abuse. Only 1% of teenage girls who had forced intercourse, according to statistics from 30 nations, sought professional assistance. According to the Department of Justice, just

one in five female student victims in the United States between the ages of 18 and 24 reports the crime to the police. Young women are reluctant to discuss their experiences because of shame, denial, and fear of consequences, among other factors (Swift and Gould, 2021).

In line with the same, sexual adverts that portray violence and dominance also lead to domestic abuse. Women who watch violent advertisements perceive violence towards them as the norm. The general public has been educated into accepting violence against women. Additionally, some of the advertisements encourage youth to act violently from an early age. The advertisement's message misleads young males (StudyCorgi, 2021). Many young boys develop the belief that they lack manliness if they are not always "ready for action," capable of, and interested in having sex with any available lady (Kilbourne, 285). This toxic masculinity culture is very dangerous as it can make men may lash out violently towards women as a result of suppressed wrath (Shannon, 2018).

Conclusion

Media is used for a myriad of purposes with one of the most prominent being advertising. All brands, may they be big or small, use advertising media to a certain extent to inform their target audience and prospective buyers about their products and services. Unfortunately, the advertising media published by some industries and companies proves to be controversial. This research paper aimed to analyse the advertising in the fragrance industry with a specific focus on two of the LVMH brands - Christian Dior and Guerlain.

The fragrance industry has enjoyed some impressive growth on a yearly basis and the expectations for its future are also quite positive. However, the industry is also very competitive implying that brands need to do what it takes to make sure they are staying at the top and perusing consumers to buy from them - this is where advertising steps it greatly. As time has gone by, it has been noticed how the adverts produced in the fragrance industry tend to comply with certain norms i.e., enforcing stereotypical representations of the binary genders. This most commonly entails hypersexualising, objectifying and degrading women whilst making the men seem more dominant, powerful and in charge. As seen in the analysis, subsidiary brands of a company as large as LVMH are also guilty of creating their fragrance adverts within these criteria to a great extent.

Ultimately, regardless of how small or large the company producing such adverts is, when viewed, it can have adverse impacts on the psychology of both men and women. Women psychologically start to believe that they must look a certain way to be accepted in society as well as accept unjust behaviour from men because they are naturally the ones in power. On the other hand, even men are influenced by such adverts to the degree that they start to encapsulate this toxic masculinity displayed - this then leads to violent behaviour towards women including rises in cases of sexual abuse and misconduct.

There is, therefore, a dire need for companies to reevaluate their advertising media and ensure that they are not directly or indirectly communicating an incorrect narrative that can influence the masses negatively and lead to dangers in society.

Bibliography

Beauty Packaging (2022). *LVMH Experiences Strong Start to 2022*. [online] Beauty Packaging. Available at: https://www.beautypackaging.com/contents/view_breaking-news/2022-04-12/lvmh-experiences-strong-start-to-2022/.

Choudhary, B. (2020). *Saviour Syndrome Of Masculinity: Can Our 'Heroes' Never Break Down?* [online] Feminism in India. Available at: <https://feminisminindia.com/2020/09/11/saviour-syndrome-masculinity-superheroes-break-down/>.

Dijk, M. van, Farbos, A. and Marchis, G. (2019). *An interpretation of women's sexualisation in perfume commercials and its influence on men's consumer behaviour How does women's representation in perfume commercials influence men to buy women's perfume?* [online] Available at: https://rucforsk.ruc.dk/ws/portalfiles/portal/64856118/Perfume_Group___Communication_project___spring_2019_.pdf.

Ferreira, N. (2019). *Color Psychology: How Color Meanings Affect You & Your Brand*. [online] www.oberlo.com. Available at: <https://www.oberlo.com/blog/color-psychology-color-meanings#:~:text=In%20color%20psychology%2C%20black%27s%20color>.

Fortune Business Insights (2022). *Perfume Market Size, Share | Global Industry Report, 2026*. [online] www.fortunebusinessinsights.com. Available at: <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/perfume-market-102273>.

Gouvernement du Québec (2002). *Effects of Hypersexualization*. [online] www.quebec.ca. Available at: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/family-and-support-for-individuals/childhood/child-development/effects-stereotypes-personal-development/effects-hypersexualization>.

Highsnobiety (2022). *LVMH: What to Know About the Luxury Conglomerate*. [online] Highsnobiety. Available at: <https://www.highsnobiety.com/tag/lvmh/>.

Kilbourne, J. (2000). *Can't buy my love : how advertising changes the way we think and feel*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

LVMH (2020). *Perfumes & Cosmetics - Fragrances, makeup and luxury skincare – LVMH*. [online] LVMH. Available at: <https://www.lvmh.com/houses/perfumes-cosmetics/>.

Muhammed, F. (2020). *Media and Gender*. [online] TwoCircles.net. Available at: <https://twocircles.net/2020sep15/439024.html>.

Payne, E. (2020). The Essence of Femininity: The Subversive Potential of the Music Video Aesthetic in Perfume Advertisement. *Sonic Scope: New Approaches to Audiovisual Culture*. doi:10.21428/66f840a4.0cbdf606.

Sabanoglu, T. (2022). *LVMH Group's perfumes and cosmetics revenue worldwide 2021*. [online] Statista. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/306630/global-revenue-of-lvmh-group-s-perfumes-and-cosmeticss-segment/>.

Shannon, J. (2018). *Has The Over Sexualisation of Media caused Anxiety in our Teens?* [online] Jonnyshannon.com. Available at: <https://www.jonnyshannon.com/blog/how-medias-sexualisation-has-affected-our-teens>.

Shikongo, E. (2020). *SEXUALISATION OF THE FEMININE IN PERFUME ADVERTISEMENTS IN VOGUE AND*

Stoltzfus, J. (2020). *What is Media? - Definition from Techopedia*. [online] Techopedia.com. Available at: <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/1098/media>.

StudyCorgi (2021). *Sex in Advertising and Its Harmful Effects / Free Essay Example*. [online] StudyCorgi.com. Available at: <https://studycorgi.com/sex-in-advertising-and-its-harmful-effects/>.

Swift, J. and Gould, H. (2021). *Not An Object: On Sexualization and Exploitation of Women and Girls*. [online] UNICEF USA. Available at: <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/not-object-sexualization-and-exploitation-women-and-girls/30366#:~:text=Consequences%20of%20hypersexualization%20for%20girls>.

Wihardja, E. (2021). *CHAPTER II COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LVMH GROUP'S MARKET POSITION AND HOW THEY GAINED COMPETITIVE*. [online] Available at: <http://e-journal.uajy.ac.id/26068/3/171223389%202.pdf>.

