

The representation of black women in brand communication messages – why do brands get it wrong?

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Abstract

There is an increasing presence of ‘femvertising’ – an advertising form that highlights and centres themes on pro-woman messaging and counters stereotyping in the media (Varghese & Kumar 2020). Considering this revolution, an irony is that black women are taking a knock because marketers continuously misrepresent black women. Marketers live in a bubble of their own creation – there is an idea that brands matter, and advertising is important (Hall 1993:104). However, with each passing year, there is an emerging trend of misrepresenting the “other” (mostly Black women); resulting in marketers losing touch with consumers they are meant to be directing connecting with (Ritson 2020). Brands such as Dove in 2017, Clicks/TRESemmé in 2020 and The Burning Platform on Cliff Central in 2021 show how prevalent the misrepresentation of black women is. There is still an argument that brands make a difference to society at large but what difference are brands making if black women are misrepresented in their advertising messages? (Ritson 2020). Makhubu and Mbogwa (2019:11) argue that most black people carry years of suppressed emotions in institutions where “rational thinking” leaves no place for emotions, thus, marketers expect black women to bear the brunt of these derogatory brand communication messages. While women representation, femvertising, and women literature offer some reflections and suggestions on how to take liberal women discourse seriously when studying the substantive representation of women both conceptually and empirically (Celis & Childs 2011), this study analyses why brands get the representation of black women wrong.

Keywords: Representation, Black Women, Blackness, Advertising, Brands