

Taylor Vazquez - How Age Demographics Change the Marketing Strategies for Cosmetic Products

As the frequent targets of inappropriate portrayals and scrutiny in product advertising, women of all ages have felt the negative effects of being under the magnifying glass of consumers. The most common recipient of offensive material is the young, beautiful, twenty-something who seems to be blessed with flawless beauty and sex appeal. These portrayals are detrimental to the self-worth of young women because they fall victim to advertising ruses that convince them that they must be more attractive in order to be accepted. It is not just young women, however, that are affected by product advertising. Women in their forties or older, preadolescents, and teen girls are also plagued by advertisements geared toward their demographics that come equipped with their own set of marketing schemes to make them older, prettier, and younger. By analyzing this topic through the lenses of marketing and women and gender studies, it becomes possible to see how advertising strategies may change depending on the values each demographic of women prizes most. In advertisements for cosmetic products, women at various stages of their lives are shown either desiring, gaining, or maintaining their beauty through the use of a product specifically designed to fulfil what is coveted by women their age. The marketing strategies for cosmetic products targeted at older, young adult, and adolescent women involve preying upon the insecurities of each demographic in order to better sell a product.

Being beautiful is the main theme among advertisements for cosmetic products, however when it comes to marketing geared toward older women, the strategies employed vary from the norm. These women are no longer seen as the beautiful, sexual, twenty year olds who are commonly portrayed in both cosmetic and other types of advertising. Instead, older women are

portrayed as a group that once again must achieve youth, thus creating a marketing ruse meant to target the insecurities of aging women. Michelle Hannah Smirnova writes in her article, “A will to youth: The Woman’s anti-aging elixir”, posits that the “cosmeceutical industry constructs the older woman as a victim of old age, part of an ‘at-risk’ population” (1236). “At risk” populations are made of people who are susceptible to a hazard or a disease; Smirnova’s analysis of older women as being a part of this group suggests that old age is a disease that must be prevented or fought. Cosmetic advertisements geared toward older women contain buzzwords like “fight”, “lift”, or “erase”, which implies that a woman aging has lost her beauty or is in the process of losing. By fighting, lifting, and erasing the signs of aging (disease), an older woman can retain the beauty she was supposed to have when she was younger. Women are being conditioned to believe that by “defying one’s own signs of aging by effectively doing battle with one’s own body” (LaWare and Moutasatos 190), they will once again reach society’s standards of beauty. In other words, aging is cancerous and despite being a natural facet of life, it should be seen a hindrance to life, as well. Overall, the main goal of cosmetic advertising for older women is to show that a quality life comes with youth, beauty, and sexuality. They seek to remind older women of why these are desirable traits.

The implication that there should be a desire for eternal youth among older women can be seen in cosmetic advertisements for older women. Through the use of a certain product it is suggested that a fairytale transformation or an awakening of youth would occur (Smirnova 1240). These advertisements view aging women as tarnished because a typical fairytale transformation does not culminate in a woman finding incredible beauty in old age, but in innocence and youth. The beauty women have will be lost with age and it is up to marketing strategies to plant the idea that the magic of cosmetics will bring it back. In recent years, there

have been marketing strategies that push for older celebrities to advertise products meant for women falling under the aging demographic. This approach is meant to create “an aura of authenticity . . . and suggest that the promises of the product and the promises of the cosmetic company itself, are authentic” (LaWare and Moutasatos 191). Through using aged celebrities to market their cosmetics, companies are seeking to convey the message that the products are worthy of use because they can fulfill their promise of giving the user youth and beauty, or, authenticity. While this shift in the typical conventions of advertising may be a step-forward in the sense that young women are no longer advertising products for older women, the idea that it is impossible to age and still remain confident in oneself is still present. LaWare and Moutasatos, in their article, “For Skin That’s Us, *Authentically Us*”, analyzed ads featuring Andie MacDowell and Diane Keaton and found that while they are older than the typical cosmetic model, they are still featured in ads that show them as toned and thin—a representation of what the product can do for their faces (205). It is instances like these that make the concept of using older models comical. The whole point of this marketing strategy is to show how aging is natural and not something to be fought; however, by giving these “aging” models the appearance of having eternal youth and beauty, the ads revert back to the common ruse that using products will give an older woman her youth back:

These ads still leave the audience in doubt as to what images are authentic, what really can be attributed to the product and what can be attributed to digital editing . . . As a result, these ad campaigns perpetuate limited parameters of acceptable femininity and acceptable aging. They perpetuate the myth that aging is something which we can control and which can be fought and resisted . . . and

that we can control the process by purchasing the right beauty products. (LaWare and Moutasatos 195-196).

Despite being presented as a great step forward in advertising, these ads are only serving to mislead. Another example of this can be seen in the advertisement pictured, in which Ellen Degeneres, a popular television personality, is advertising an anti-aging cream called “Simply Ageless”. The name of the product itself is meant to remind readers of the saying “age is just a number” and show that aging is a natural thing; however, the ad’s tagline reads, “No, I’m not a teenager! I just wear simply ageless” (2009). This phrase completely negates any of the positive intentions that the product title infers because it is still praising Ellen Degeneres for looking like



a teen, despite being an older adult. This once again sustains the belief that older women must desire eternal youth. It can be debated as to whether or not the intentions of the cosmetic companies are genuine, however, the bottom line of these advertisements directly reflects the idea that the main marketing strategy is to exploit insecurities in addition to suggesting that aging women must purchase the products shown in order to reach the level of beauty of the older models presenting them.

When it comes to offensive or demeaning advertising, young adult women are often the group that is targeted by it. Whether they are featured in the ad itself or simply a viewer being negatively affected, it is commonplace for women in their twenties and thirties to be the ones that carry the brunt of the negativity that can come with advertising. This is most likely due to immense societal pressure to continue to look delicate and beautiful at this age, and as a result culminates in heavy insecurities within the demographic. Negativity, in this instance, refers to the detrimental effects advertisements can have on a woman's self-esteem due to their use of unrealistic and oversexualized images. The model woman who is flawlessly featured with the perfect skin and body also comes with the perfect personality of confident and sexual. This trope is seen throughout product advertisements, cosmetics included. In cosmetic ads, the woman's beauty is effortlessly maintained through use of the products. Products marketed toward young women focus more on the concept that they want to maintain their beauty rather than become beautiful, as seen in the advertisements for older women and preadolescents. In the ad pictured, Covergirl magazine utilizes Taylor Swift, age 25, to advertise a new foundation. The tagline reads "Introducing a breath of fresh air! Flawless coverage with a light-as-air feel" (2011). The keyword in this tagline is "flawless" which relates back to the concept of young adult women following the model standard presented to them in advertisements. The word "coverage" suggests the maintaining of beautiful skin; a woman should want to cover up any blemishes to

avoid looking unattractive and makeup is the vehicle that makes that happen. The marketing strategy at work utilizes a young, popular, “flawless” model to advertise a product that will aid



consumers in maintaining the standard of beauty presented in the ad.

Cosmetics companies follow the idea that make-up “usage would be highest among persons with strong desires to be attractive coupled with a sense that adornments are part of being attractive and self-doubts concerning current attractiveness” (Bloch and Richins 9). Bloch and Richins use the term “adornments” in their article, ‘You Look “Mahvelous’: The Pursuit of Beauty and the Marketing Concept” to describe products women might use to enhance their beauty, with cosmetics falling under this umbrella. Young adult women certainly desire to be attractive because this is what they believe the average person should be. It is easy for women to become doubtful of their beauty when they are under the impression that everyone except themselves follows the standard of attractiveness put in place by advertisements. As a result, they use cosmetic products that promise instant and certain beauty, which is what young women want. They need their beauty in the moment and must be able to maintain it, they need cosmetics “to function as social extensions of [their] body, as integral parts of [their] body-image” (Kilyeni

20). Women who perhaps have a higher self-esteem or sense of self-worth would not fall into this marketing ploy, and as a result will not buy makeup products to appease the whims of society. However, with the high usage of beautiful models advertising these products, it is easy for a woman to become trapped in the cycle of perpetually buying these cosmetic products. Using cosmetic products is second nature to young women as they desperately try to maintain their image in order to not be outside the realm of expectations of appearance for women their age, and by failing to meet the norm, they are failing as women.

While it is true that ads for cosmetic products show young women keeping up with the beauty standards of women in their demographic, there is also a theme of oversexualization present in some ads which show that these advertisements are suggesting that young women maintain a level of sexuality, as well. The advertisement featuring a woman in a revealing, sexual, or compromising position is nothing new. The woman could be shown demurely in submissive positions or half naked (and more) in which her sole desire is to use the product advertised, as it is the source of her sexuality. This concept can be seen in today's advertisements for cosmetic products and also follows the marketing strategy presented previously, except instead of being pressured to maintain beauty standards, young women are pressured to maintain the notion that they are wild sexual beings. Carmine Sarracino and Kevin M. Scott in their book, *The Porning of America*, use the picture on the following page to illustrate how this strategy works with cosmetic advertising. The image features a flawless woman advertising a *Clinique* brand cream, not so subtly depicting a sexual act commonly seen in pornography.



What this ad is perpetuating is the idea that this product is the source of the woman's sexuality. Simply because she is young, a woman should covet her sexuality because it is this ideal that makes her more attractive. *Clinique* is essentially selling a product that will make women more desirable to men, because this is what should make them feel like they have value.

Before older women try to regain their beauty and before adult women try to maintain it, there are young girls moving very quickly toward maturity. With such a high level of importance being placed on physical appearance, it is only natural for young girls to have a desire to look older than they are because young adult women have reached a level of beauty that comes with age and experience. While cosmetics marketed toward young girls and teens is not the sole cause of their rapid maturity, it does play a factor. Many products advertised show off the allure of adulthood by including makeup with popular children's toys or stores. For example, *Barbie* toys come with makeup kits, and the quintessential girl store, *Claire's*, sells their own makeup products; the question of why these and other children's franchises are promoting early maturity arises. Francis Palumbo, in his article, "Growing Up Too Fast", argues that companies are marketing cosmetics to girls as a way to make a profit and are succeeding through exploiting a child's developmental stages (124). It is a common occurrence for a girl to identify with her

mother or an older adult and have a desire to be like that role model, living out this desire by perhaps trying on her clothes or even playing with her makeup. Marketing strategies geared toward a younger audience reflect this, giving young girls the maturity they desire by giving them their own makeup. Young girls seek to reach the point of womanhood where all the cosmetic advertisements urge consumers to maintain their beauty. It is an attractive stage for young girls because of the level of respect that comes with being an attractive adult; there is a great emphasis placed on managing to look put together, confident, and sexy at the same time. It can also be argued that the strategy behind marketing cosmetics for young girls comes from the idea that adolescence is a sensitive time. As girls go through puberty and begin to endure one of the more uncomfortable phases of their life, “self-perception of physical attractiveness and levels of self-esteem are low” (Gentina, et al. 117). Before reaching the prize of adulthood, a tumultuous transition period must occur for preadolescents and it is this tumultuous time that companies capitalize on. There is a great deal of pressure on girls to participate in grooming behaviors such as putting on makeup and taking care of their hair, which further explains why marketing makeup to girls is commonplace. Adolescents are trying mature and enter adulthood, and using makeup makes the transition quick.



This image is of an article in *Seventeen Magazine* advertising a lipstick. The model pictured is older than the demographic of the magazine and the advertisement has a caption that states “I am known in the office as the girl with the pink lips. Having a bright signature shades makes you feel memorable.” The use of a pretty, older model who claims she is popular around her place of work is meant to show young the girls the allure of adulthood, in which a young woman using this particular cosmetic product is confident, sexy, and well-liked. This advertisement is showing that using this lipstick can make a girl stand out among her other teenaged peers. The girl is not known around her office for strong work ethic, but for her pink lips, which is once again perpetuating the idea that a girl will feel more valued for acting like an adult. Through buying this particular product, the girl will feel like she has bypassed that bridge between girlhood and adulthood by looking sharp and mature and therefore has achieved the beauty that society values.

These marketing strategies keep women in a perpetual state of consuming. The goal of marketers is to sell a product and make their company money, and exploiting demographics is an effective, albeit devious method. It can be said that wearing makeup and viewing advertisements for makeup put women on a slippery slope; there is a difference between saying “I want to wear makeup because it makes me feel pretty” and “I need to wear makeup because no one else thinks I’m pretty without it.” With such a focus placed on unnatural beauty and societal standards, especially in cosmetic advertisements, it becomes difficult for a woman to fit in with the first line of thought. Marketing strategies focus on the idea that “People with very low in self-esteem may feel that adornments would be useless in enhancing their appearance, whereas those on the high end of the scale may see no need to adorn themselves” (Bloch and Richins 7). Essentially, these ploys are meant to prey upon the women in the middle ground. These are the women who have

just enough self-esteem to want to go out and feel good about themselves, yet are still very aware of their insecurities and desire to conceal them with makeup in order to feel a sense of self-worth. By marketing products that are meant for everyday use with models that are not everyday people, the advertisements for both cosmetics and other products are conditioning women to consistently feel like they are living a lesser quality of life without these items and as a result should desire to buy them.

The concept of women being caught in a cycle of the young desiring to be old and the old desiring to young is understandable, however exploiting it for commercial purposes is where problems lie. It becomes incredibly difficult for women to feel comfortable about who they are when cosmetic advertisements are constantly telling them that they need to be better. As a result, women continue to buy these cosmetic products in order to satiate society's (and therefore their own) needs for perfection. In the end, cosmetic companies get what they want, which is money and a steadily growing market of insecure women. By preying upon the insecurities associated with different demographics of women, cosmetic companies are conveying to them that being themselves or acting their age (in regards to young girls and older women) is undesirable, despite being completely natural. Cosmetic companies seek for women to embrace the unnatural, to succumb to the unnatural expectations placed on them and to purchase products to help them maintain or achieve their value in society. In doing this, the insecurities of each age demographic are put on display and women are told that they can hide any fault for the small price of some lipstick or concealer.

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