

“Representation of Black Women in Beauty Commercials”

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Abstract

The following paper aims to identify and analyse the hidden undertones of representation, over-sexualization, whitewashing and most importantly colorism. Mainstream media is saturated with images of black women, which can be perceived questionable. Black women are often posed as too sexual and erotic, given an animalistic demeanor. However, within the minority of black women, there is a vividly debated hierarchy. Black women with a lighter skin tone are often more favored, due to colorism. Resembling an Eurocentric ideals of beauty has its perks. The lighter skinned toned women are far more likely to create an impact, while being portrayed as desired and attractive. The darker skinned toned women fail to fit into the mold of Eurocentric Beauty, and their dark skin often subjects them stereotypical depictions and clichéd portrayals, such as the ‘angry black woman’. Nonetheless, darker-skinned toned women are often whitewashed, or have their face features alternated. Yet, changes are slowly but steadily emerging, as darker-skinned toned women are rising to the top in every sector of the entertainment and fashion industry, challenging beauty and society norms. Within the specialization of Consumer Behavior and Market Communication, the thesis has conducted a qualitative research study, examining four different commercials, featuring the highly famous singer and actress - Beyoncé Knowles.

Introduction

In the last few years, minorities and marginalized groups of individuals has set their sights on dominating and being included in different media platforms. Women with hijabs and curvy bodies are now slowly, but gradually being represented in the fashion industry. Ashley Graham, a American plus size model has been part of multiple fashion shows and grazed the covers of numerous celebrated fashion magazines. Halima Aden, a young Somali girl from Minnesota was signed to a huge model agency in 2017, and have since walked the runway for notably Marc Jacobs and Kanye West. These representation of black muslim women and plus size women were previously dismissed, as they failed to fit into the spectrum of the idealised beauty. The days of women of color and plus size women being dismissed for their appearances have dissolved. The biggest fashion houses and magazines are now covering the new age of women, who do not simply apply to the proposed and expected beauty ideal. Women with long legs, skinny bodies and white skin tones are still dominating most of the fashion and entertainment industry, however, a slightly change in adding multiple women with different features and body shapes are being represented, while slowly creating their own marks, and pawing the way for future generations.

South Asian women have also dominated the entertainment industry in the last previous years. The earliere stereotypical portrayals of South Asians, in the likes of Abu from The Simpsons, and Raj from The Big Bang Theory have succumbed. Women of South Asian descent, such as Priyanka Chopra and Mindy Kaling are rewriting the norms of the typical South Asian. With their blockbuster movies and Tv-series, they have created a large platform for South Asians to be shown beyond the typical Indian accent and curry infused homes. African American women has always suffered under stereotypical and clichéd conditions in movies and tv-series. Yet, women like Kerry Washington and Viola Davis have shown an another side to African Women, with their protagonists role in respectively, ‘Scandal’ and ‘How to Get Away with Murder’. Surely, women of color and different ethnicities are slowly being acknowledged and respected for their diverse body and face appearances. These women are demanding attention. They require the same amount of respect and appreciation,

which would typically be single handed to a white skinny women, by challenging the perception of beauty norms.

Yet, the problem is still intact. Experts have dismissed this sudden rise of minorities as a trend, which will slowly fizzle out.

Problem formulation

Media avenues and channels are exposing the public to a generous amount of women of color, in respectively movies, tv-series and fashion shows. However, women of color are largely being categorized and are subjected to whitewashing and colorism, specially in beauty commercials and ads. The problem formulation seeks to research and understand the tendencies of whitewashing, colorism and representation in beauty commercials. The paper is investigating and examining these tendencies from four different commercials. The commercials are from the exceedingly famous cosmetic company L'oréal. Furthermore, since the focus is on identifying and researching the above terms, the paper is studying these four commercials, featuring singer and actress Beyoncé Knowles. In a more precise and descriptive way, the research is applying Beyoncé Knowles' L'oreal commercials, to study how black women are represented in beauty advertisements and how these representation have changed and occur in the light of colorism, over-sexualization and whitewashing? Through the commercials, the paper intends to spark a conversation of power dynamics, hair textures and skin lightening. This has been chosen, due to the hidden undertones of colorism, whitewashing and representation of black women in mainstream media. Knowles fits the recipe, when the conversation is about hair texture, over-sexualization and skin lightening, since she has been critiqued and blamed for fitting into the mole of Eurocentric beauty.

Theory

The subsequent pages will introduce a brief description of the chosen theories and concepts. Expert statements will be reviewed, intending to link the theories and concepts to the research problem. The chosen theory and concept are representation and colorism. Representation and colorism are two essential statements, seeking to create a better understanding of the selected commercials. The paper seeks to understand the notion of representation, and how this paper can connect the theory to the representation of black

women in commercials. Unlike representation, colorism will be used as a concept, with the intention of relating the concept to the whitewashing and oversexualization of black women. Lastly, a short background story on advertisements will be included. Stuart Hall's background story will also be incorporated, as the paper will use Hall's theoretical statements on representation.

Representation

The following section will unfold a few of Stuart Hall's statements regarding representation. Stuart Hall is a Jamaican-born cultural theorist and sociologist. Hall's book from 1997 will be used in this section; "Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practises (Culture, Media and Identities series)" (1997). The paper will lend statements from this book, in order to investigate and showcase how the notion of perception is through representation. One example could be the commercials, and how the idea of deep rooted racism and colorism is vaguely represented through them. Hall asserts the meaning of language and culture, since the commercials are simply pictures, they are reduced to the public's opinion, and how the meaning and message is solidified and expressed.

The course of language is depicted as one of the main issues, especially as the message and meaning are pre constructed: "To put it briefly, representation is the production of meaning through language" (Hall, 1997). In other words, representation is viewed in the language. According to Hall, the language is then given a powerful role - a role representing a meaningful message to the audience: "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully to other people" (Hall, 1997). In relation to the problem formulation, this statement will provide a broader understanding of the chosen commercials. Though, the commercials are images subjected to whitewashing, or simply giving the idea of how a brand can help you to become vividly more 'lighter' - Hall's statement of representation through language and meaning will be conducted as a framework.

Hall presents culture as being a key role in representation. He asserts the significant connection between those, and how representation can stem from culture: "But what does representation have to do with 'culture': what is the connection between them?" (Hall, 1997). According to Hall, culture is about shared meanings. Language being the primary factor,

words are then demonstrated, by being exchanged and produced through individuals. The concept of language is a crucial aspect of representation and meaning.

In order to understand representation, Hall has three different theories, narrating the particularly diverse representations. The first one is mentioned as the reflective: “Does language simply reflect a meaning which already exists out there in the world of objects, people and events (reflective)?” (Hall, 1997). The important point in the reflective aspect of representation is through the dualism and the reflection of the people’s culture and language. The second one is the intentional. The significant part of the second theory, states how the focus is primarily on the situation, as individuals speaking are simply expressing and demonstrating their personal opinions (Hall, 1997). The third one focuses on the ‘art of constructionist’: “This theory questions, whether the personal opinion “is constructed in and through language” (Hall, 1997)

In a previous passage, it was mentioned how language plays a key role in culture and representation. Through the language, individuals are able to create a dialogue between each other, and express their opinions, which then leads to shaping and creating their own culture. In addition to that, the contributors can also construct their own realities as they see fit, in terms of how they represent themselves, and express their feelings and opinions. In conclusion, since the language is given a certain power, it functions as ‘representational system’ (Hall, 1997) Stuart Hall has two definitions of the word representation:

“1. To represent something is to describe or depict it, to call it up in the mind by description or portrayal or imagination; to place a likeness of it before us in our mind or in the senses; as, for example, in the sentence, “This picture represents the murder of Abel By Cain.

2. To represent also means to symbolize, stand for, to be a specimen of, or to substitute for; as in the sentence, ‘in Christianity, the cross represents the suffering and crucifixion of Christ.” (Hall, 16)

Through Hall’s statements, language is the key factor to represent the world. However, if one were to pose a question on language and culture, language is used as mediator between feelings and thoughts, which represents culture: “Primarily, culture is concerned with the

production and the exchange of meanings - the ‘giving and taking of meaning’ ”(Hall, 1997). Yet, we as individuals are able to represent a factor, by simply applying a meaning to it. We allow certain aspects of objects and people to have a meaning, with our personal interpretation. Although, we have the power to bring meaning to objects, Hall explains the ‘circuit of culture’, and how meanings are constantly circulated and produced: “Meaning is what gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we ‘belong’ ...(...)” (Hall, 1997). Our identity is marked and maintained throughout the constant change and production of meanings and feelings.

Hall mentions the power of meaning, and how it translates into a dialogue. For instance, the research problem is concerned with different aspect of representation, colorism and whitewashing in commercials, and the research aims to interpret hidden undertones and meanings. Hall states how different opinions translates into a debate, and a right or wrong answer simply do not exist: “It is worth emphasizing that there is no single or ‘correct’ answer to the question...(...)” (Hall, 1997). The looming shared and expressed analytical opinions are subjective, while still providing a reasonable historical and cultural context.

The definition and theory of representation will be a catalyst for the analytical section. The statements made by Hall will be applied on the chosen commercials, and the analysis and discussion will focus on the meaning portrayed through the images, and how it can stem from colorism, whitewashing, and sexuality.

Colorism

Researching the representation of black women in commercials, colorism is a term, which will be examined and dissected. The definition of colorism was founded by Alice Walker in the early eighties. Walker who is an acclaimed author, is known for the famous novel, ‘The Color Purple’, and according to her the definition of colorism is the “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color” (Walker, 1983). According to the article by Kimberly Jade Norwood “If You Is White, You’s Alright: Stories about Colorism”, Norwood explains the difference between racism and colorism. One example of racism could be the refusal of hiring a whole race, due to their skin-tone, as

‘colorism would not preclude the hiring of a black person, but there would be preference for a black person with lighter skin tone than a darker skinned person’ (Norwood, 2015). Norwood argues the different positions colorism contributes to the lives of women and men, and how women are often more targeted than men.

“Colorism also is often gendered. Because of its unique relationship to who and what is beautiful, it has a tendency, although not exclusively, to affect and infect 5 women more than men” (Norwood, 2015)

From one angle, the definition of colorism is a discrimination of skin tone, and from another point of view, it is ‘prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color’ (Walker, 1983). Study has previously shown, how lighter skinned women, during slavery, were giving the easier labor, unlike darker skinned women, who had to do the hard chores around the fields. “Historically, the ideas of colorism suggest that African Americans with lighter skin tone are more intelligent and attractive than their darker-skin toned counterparts” (Wilder, 2015). Even though some experts disagree with the distinctive division between skin tones, stemming from slavery, it is arguably factual: “From this vantage point, the institution of slavery created the system of racism and a subsystem of colorism” (Wilder, 2015) Originating from slavery, colorism is still intact in modern times. Given how lighter-skinned toned individuals would set themselves apart from the darker-skinned toned individuals, by marrying each other and ‘procreating with one another’ after slavery was demolished (Wilder, 2015). The consequences of colorism affected opportunities and mobilities. As mentioned earlier, Norwood focused on the impact of work ventures for dark-skinned toned individuals, setting the frame of how lighter skinned toned individuals would be preferred, and according to JeffriAnn Wilder, these consequences were visible in the early days:

“As a result of the educational and socio-economic privilege bestowed to fairer-skinned blacks with visible white ancestry, the black community became economically and socially stratified based upon skin tone” (Wilder, 2015)

Linking internalized racism to colorism can be argued, since scholars dispute the different reasons and origins of colorism. From one point of view, the term can explain the discriminative biased black community, and from another point of view the debate of skin color can be connected to 'European domination' (Wilder, 2015). Solely based on the massive impact of colonization, an Eurocentric racial hierarchy was introduced: "...(...) colonial expansion (as opposed to slavery) is credited for introducing a Eurocentric racial hierarchy aligning whites at the top and blacks at the bottom" (Wilder, 2015). Besides slavery, the colonial domination extended the idea of how white skin tone was superior, unlike dark skin - which was presumed to be inferior. One of the more modern conceptualization of colorism is the notion of skin bleaching. "...(...) such as skin bleaching - as a form of global white supremacy and domination among people of color around the world" (Wilder, 2015). Gendered colorism is a phrase illustrating the distinctive impact of skin color, and how the bearing of colorism is amplified amongst black women: "This is not surprising given the societal value placed on female beauty" (Wilder, 2015).

Commercials

The research aspires to understand and present the background objectives of advertising. Indeed, the advertising industry is presented as a tool to communicate and inspire individuals to invest their money into a product: "The aim of most ads is to persuade us to buy goods or services offered by the advertiser" (Green, 2012). Yet, ads or commercials have the means to have an impact on people's behavior and mindset, by offering them products or services, which can either be helpful or influential. In terms of the growth in digital media and advertisements, media platforms have ensured new ways to promote and grow their businesses. As a society, we are constantly exposed to different types of commercials or ads, in the spectrum of traditional media channels, such as TV or Radio: "These include TV and radio commercials, newspaper or magazine ads...(...)" (Green, 2012).

Social media is also another media platform, which have witnessed a massive growth in the last few years. The social media platforms allows users to share content or simply participate and network throughout numerous channels. According to Green, although advertising appears in mass communication, companies has started to venture into the social networking

sites, such as Instagram, Twitter or Facebook: “They either place ads on these sites or create company profiles and encourage people to follow them in order to receive promotions and updates on new products” (Green, 2012) This has led to the revolution of influencers, who have made a career on displaying ads on their profiles. According to Green, Youtube is one of the many media platforms, who takes advantage of the digital imposed advertisements.

“Youtube, an online video platform, has become a popular advertising channel. It is accessed by million of people worldwide daily, and videos are easy to embed in social media messages. This means that ads on Youtube can potentially reach a huge global audience” (Green, 2012)

However, commercials and ads have had their fair share of controversies across the globe. Individuals tend to use their personal media profile to connect or comment on news worthy aspects, and most commercials have experienced backlash for condoning racial discrimination or misogynistic tendencies. (Green, 2012). Several companies have been forced to remove their commercials, due to public outrage and media shaming. (Green, 2012) These controversies will be related to the upcoming segments, venturing into discussions of how commercials represent black women, in a sexual, whitewashing and coloristic context.

Research Paradigm

The following research framework will set the tone for the thesis, as it will introduce the use of methodology and methods. The implication of the research framework provides the thesis with tools to analyse the overall research question. A qualitative research design will be presented with the help of Alan Bryman’s book: ‘Social Research Methods’ (Bryman, 2016). Bryman will be the main source for the presentation of the ontological considerations and epistemological considerations. Since other experts have different versions and definitions of the terms, the research gravitated towards Bryman’s view on research paradigms and qualitative research design. Robert K. Yin’s perspective of the case study strategy will also be featured, allowing the thesis to add a different approach. In terms of thematic analysis, the research implements Graham R. Gibbs’s approach on thematic analysis

from his book: “Analyzing Qualitative Data” (2007) Furthermore, the four commercials will be analysed with the accustomed tools and methods from each of the three experts, Bryman, Yin and Gibbs.

Ontology

Looking into the ontological considerations, Bryman explains how ontology is ‘concerned with the nature of social entities’. (Bryman, 2016). He briefly argues whether the social entities can be treated as objective entities. Bryman’s concern is directed towards the existing entities in the universe, and whether they are related to social actors: “...(…) or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors” (Bryman, 2016). Ontology is concerned with the idea of reality, and how we can understand the reality. For instance the social reality is revised and altered, during debates, interpretation and negotiation. Additionally, ontology is combined by two different positions referred to as ‘objectivism and constructionism’ (Bryman, 2016).

The chosen ontological approach is constructionism, as it delves into multiple realities. On one hand, the realities are constructed, and it is produced through interactions, interpretations and opinions: “...(…) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2016). The social actors are partly the reason why social phenomena are in a constant modification. The research investigates the social realities, and participates in the interpretation of the chosen commercials: “In recent years, the term has also come to include the notion of researchers own accounts of the social world are constructions” (Bryman, 2016) He argues the idea of confronting the social actors:

“This position challenge the suggestion that categories such as organization and culture are pre-given and therefor confront social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning” (Bryman, 2016)

On the other hand, opting for the constructivism approach can limit the research, since the research can be viewed as one version of a social reality. One example could lead to the interpretation of coloristic and racial notions in the chosen commercials, opposed to a different research illustrating the significant and important representation and empowerment

of black women. Yet, Bryman argues the different versions of social reality, in regards to one specific reality: “In other words, the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive” (Bryman, 2016)

Epistemology

As mentioned earlier, the research paradigms can be found in different versions, however, the research has opted for Bryman’s version. Bryman’s version appears again within the epistemological considerations. Since epistemology is a philosophy, it is concerned with the theory of knowledge: “An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline” (Bryman, 2016). One approach could be in regards to how an individual understands knowledge, understand their own thinking process, and how the knowledge is perceived by other individuals. Epistemology is concerned with the question of how reality is known? Bryman addresses the concerns of applying the same procedures, principles and ethos in the social world as the natural sciences:

“A particular central issue in this context is the question of whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures and ethos as the natural sciences” (Bryman, 2016)

The nature of knowledge and reality is examined through different scopes, and Bryman states the current criticism and skepticism towards the production of knowledge (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, the chosen epistemological considerations for the study is interpretivism. Bryman explains the term as a ‘contrasting epistemology to positivism’ (Bryman, 2016). The above description of the epistemological research paradigm is centered around the application of the principles, procedures and ethos from natural sciences, and questions whether the same can be applied to the social world. Bryman defines the interpretivism term as a critical stance towards those principals, connecting the social world and natural sciences: “The term subsumes the views of writers who have been critical of the application of the scientific model to the study of the social world and who have been influenced by different intellectual traditions...(...)” (Bryman, 2016). Given the cultural aspect within the thesis, the interpretivism aspect allows the research to be examined within the social world. Especially, since commercials will be analysed, dissected and interpreted - the study will be revolved

around the complexities of individuals and institutions. Bryman further explains the requirement of a different logic: “The study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order” (Bryman, 2016).

Qualitative Research Design

By incorporating the constructivism and interpretivism paradigms, the research has a subjective point of view within the different themes and subjects. Subsequently, the qualitative research is the main strategy for the thesis, since the research is focused on the essence of human experience and reality. Choosing the qualitative research strategy lies in quality of meaning and experience. Bryman states the importance of words in qualitative research: “Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data”. (Bryman, 2016) The action in the commercials will be analysed and viewed upon a subjective opinion, alongside with interpretations of meanings and actions in the commercial. A case study will also be presented, as singer and actress Beyoncé Knowles will be the main case, which will be studied and investigated: “The basic case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman, 2016)

Data Collection

Four different, yet visually similar commercials from L’oreal will be analysed and examined. The four videos, which will be treated as text, are featuring singer and actress Beyoncé Knowles, and the research will extract data from her videos with L’oreal. The commercials were chosen to portray the growth and visual representation of lighter skinned women. According to Bryman, collecting data highlights the importance of adding sources and data to the research: “...(…) the researcher establishes in advance the broad contours of what he or she needs to find out about and designs research instruments to implement what needs to be known” (Bryman, 2016). The commercials are used to illustrate the characteristic undertones, within the whitewashing, colorism, representational and sexualized context. The research opted for four commercials, since it will provide the study with a broader illustration of the chosen themes and subjects. The commercials will allow the research to look deeper into the chosen characteristics, and aims to elevate the study by searching for further hidden meanings and differences. The collected data implement the

thesis with description and develop explanations and interpret the final results from the commercials. Additionally, a purposive sampling was selected, avoiding the challenges of collecting random data. According to Bryman, purposive sampling ensures the research with profound and strategic sampling: “The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way...(...)” (Bryman, 2016). Indeed, the collected samples will then be forced to have relevance to the research problem. The samples are the four commercials, and they were chosen, due to their convincing illustration of representation, colorism and whitewashing.

The first commercial is from 2003, and features Knowles, alongside singer Natalie Imbruglia. The two women are promoting the hair brand Féria from L’oreal: Féria By L’oreal Beyonce Commercial (2003) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jTeg46cVJY>. This commercial was selected to highlight the marketing strategies of choosing a severe famous African-American woman, embracing her naturally curly hair. Knowles being the famous woman, has curly hair in the ad, which is a rare sight. The second commercial was released in 2005, and it is also from L’oreal, and once again features the singer Beyoncé Knowles: “Beyonce L’oreal Hot Straight Hot Curl (2005) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgWB_SbfQVY. While Knowles shoots for a video, she mentions the hair brand Studio, and how her ‘wavy curls’ are easy to straight, after using the product, and at the same time protects the hair. Once again, this commercial was chosen, with the intention of dissecting the undertones of an African-American woman promoting a hair brand. Knowles demonstrating two different hair-styles, is clearly shying away from using her own natural hair in the commercial. The last commercial, which will be analysed focuses on the relentless whitewashing strategy, featuring Knowles. The commercial is from 2011, and one can not miss the difference and transformation Knowles has undergone within the years. Other than her lightened skin-tone, her hair is also a few tones lighter: “Beyonce New L’oreal Paris Féria Ad Commercial (2011) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHINsYzer3M> The concept of whitewashing is transparent and visible in the commercial from 2011, as the concept of representation is shown in the 2003 commercial, even though the curly hair is operated as a promotional technique. The last commercial featuring Beyoncé is from from 2013. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaW3lrfKQVU> In order to provide a different aspect to the thesis, a commercial revolving around a makeup product from L’oréal was chosen. This

specific commercial differentiates from the rest, since the focus is on a foundation, instead of a hair product. Beyoncé is shown in a different light, while still holding on to her long bleached hair, and her airbrushed skin, giving the impression of how the True Match Foundation functions. Again, the choice of the commercials is also seen in the spectrum of dark skin, since the brand is promoting inclusivity and diversity, while using a light-skinned woman in their campaign. Lastly the concepts of sexualization and colorism in the commercials will be analysed, given the sexual undertones portrayed and propelled in the four commercials.

Case Study

According to Yin, a case study is one of the many strategies imposed on social sciences: “Other ways include experiments, surveys, histories, and the analysis of archival information”. (Yin, 2003). A Case study strategy is preferred, when research questions begins with either ‘why’ or ‘how’. (Yin, 2003). Yin asserts how the research strategy can be adapted to different situations, and amplify the research with a wider knowledge of the chosen case. Case study can differ between an individual, organization or a social and political group. (Yin, 2003). Since the case study strategy allows the research to investigate an individual, the research has chosen Beyoncé Knowles as the main case to be studied. Knowles’s commercials are chosen to depict and create the illusion of how black women are often represented, in the spectrum of colorim, sexualization and whitewashing.

Method of Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

In terms of analysing the collected data and answering the problem formulation, the study elected thematic analysis for the fundamental qualitative data research. Alan Bryman’s version of thematic analysis has been chosen, in company with Graham R. Gibbs, within the spectrum of themes and the similarities with coding. Bryman asserts how thematic analysis is initially common in qualitative research: “One of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis entails what is often referred to as thematic analysis” (Bryman, 2016). Pragmatically, thematic analysis accentuate and pinpoints themes and patterns within the collected data. The established patterns are subjected to be categorized and put into themes, followed with the connection to the problem formulation and research questions. Bryman

mentions the similarities between codes and themes: “Also, for some writers a theme is more or less the same as a code, whereas for others it transcends any one code and is built up out of groups of codes” (Bryman, 2016). Gibbs accentuates the relation between texts and codes. He mentions the coherent prospect of analysing and coding. Thematic coding enables the research to identify sections of a text, or in this case a commercial: “Usually, several passages are identified and they are then linked with a name for that idea - the code” (Gibbs, 2007). Initially, thematic coding is centered around theoretical and analytical representation, while avoiding the descriptive procedures. In order to read the texts, the research has to undergo an in-depth reading, while asking questions of ‘what is going?’, ‘what are people doing?’ and last ‘what is the person saying?’ (Gibbs, 2007).

Themes

Before choosing the final themes for the research, the study examined the pinpoints for choosing a theme. In the last paragraph, themes are consequently supported by the repetition of patterns and the identification of different passages. The research area works within the concept of colorism, and how it is viewed in the chosen commercials. Since, the videos of the commercials are being considered as text, the commercials are filled with undertones of colorism, with different hair texture and alterations of skin tone. Thematic analysis is considered to be a underdeveloped procedure: “...(…) thematic analysis is a remarkably underdeveloped procedure, in that there are a few specifications of its steps or ingredients” (Bryman, 2016). Notably, the themes has to be related to the research focus and provide the research with a theoretical understanding: “...(…) that provides the researcher with the basis for a theoretical understanding of his or her data that can make a theoretical contribution to the literature relating to the research focus” (Bryman, 2016). Furthermore, the themes will be illustrated through the commercials. Gibbs’s theoretical view on coding, amplifies the in-depth reading of the commercials, while identifying the repeated patterns.

The chosen themes are colorism, representation and sexualization. The representation aspect is a constant theme in all of the commercials. The representation of black women and the representation of lighter-skinned toned women are an constant factor in the chosen commercials. Following Bryman’s guidelines for choosing themes: “repetitions: topics that recur again and again” (Bryman, 2016) representation is a repeated pattern, serving as a

catalyst for the research area. Sexualization is another identified theme, which is a repeated pattern, considering the amount of sexual tendencies and movements Knowles are displaying. The theoretical aspect and understanding of colorism is one of the main concepts in the research, reasoning the choice of colorism as a theme. Colorism is traced in the commercials, providing the research with a profound understanding of the deep-rooted hunger for Eurocentric beauty.

Limitations

One aspect of limitation can be found in the commercial section. The commercials from L'oreal seem quite similar, since three of the commercials are promoting hair products, and one of them are focusing on a makeup product. Most of the commercials, which were excluded from the data collection, were also either promoting hair products or makeup, given the reason why the research opted four commercials. The amount of commercials can also be weighed as a limitation. With a enormous project like this, a higher number of commercials could be appropriate, adding different segments to the literature. However, the chosen commercials are lacking representational perspective of darker-skinned toned women, and since the research is operating within the concept of representation, Beyonce or her white counterparts are the driving forces behind the commercials. Many factors related to the beauty industry has been eliminated. For instance, are older women promoted just as severely as younger women, or is beauty related marketing mostly conveyed by younger women? Are transgenders considered a marginalized group in the beauty industry? How are the LGBTQ community represented and portrayed in commercials? These were a few of the excluded analytical points, and in order to set boundaries, certain topics and groups of people were eliminated. The choosing of the videos were limited, since one of the original commercial's were not even available online, forcing the research to look through other videos and finding similarities with the original video. Choosing the qualitative research could be a disadvantage, since the results can not be considered a definitive answer, since the research is exceedingly subjective, and fails to be extended to a wider population, due to uncertainty.

Literature Review

The consecutive pages implements the research with generated findings, in the context of whitewashing, colorism and the portrayal of darker-skinned women and men. Thus, the literature review adds dimensional findings, providing the research with tested and existing evidence. The generated findings also adds different angles to the research, giving the study a wider spectrum to answer the research problem.

Whitewashing

Whitewashing in beauty have thrived in centuries, where women of color were either digitally retouched to appear lighter, or had certain features adjusted, to fit in the spectrum of Eurocentric beauty. Hair textures, skin color and even face transformation has been quite popular, when black women have been on the cover of magazines or in commercials. According to the article ‘Where’s the Representation? The Impact of Whitewashing Black Children’ from Kai Nelson , the term whitewashing is defined as; “The term White Washing can be defined as a racist practice of removing visible minorities in popular media by making their skin appear lighter...(...)” (Nelson, 2016) Whitewashing is depicted as a phenomenon in the beauty industry. The definition of the term allows the research to examine the characteristic of the concept, and relate the chosen commercials to the term. Whitewashing of women and men in the film industry, have also been met with considerably a huge amount of criticism. White men and women have invaded roles initially written for non-white people, whether it was biographies or real life events.

A qualitative research were conducted a few years ago on the prevalent issue on whitewashing in mass media. “Image Slavery and Mass-Media Pollution: Popular Media, Beauty, and the Lives of Black Women” (Richardson-Stovall, 2012). The research seeked to gain a wider understanding of African-American women’s opinion of the lack of diversity and the complexities of representation in mass media, and whether their self-image was negatively affected, due to their race being marginalized in popular media. Stovall takes a stand against the normalization of demeaning women, and mentions how sociopolitical control is one of the main aspect in this case; “I also argue that defining certain women as beautiful, and others as not, is a form of sociopolitical control that empowers some and disempowers others.” (Richardson-Stovall, 2012). Whitewashing of skin tones sparks a conversation on race, identity and representation. Brands such as Dove, L’oreal are one of the

few brands who have whitewashed their black women, or at least given the impression of the lighter, the better: “What was once an unachievable fantasy has now become an achievable standard via plastic surgery, make-up techniques, hair-altering products and procedures, or computer imaging” (Richardson-Stovall, 2012).

With the lack of diversity or the tactical input on whitewashing, women across the world have seen themselves indulging in bleaching creams, and hair procedures filled with toxic chemicals, resulting in how the standard of beauty has been socially constructed in mainstream media. Within this topic, representation will be related, since the impact of society and mass media can build self-hate and low self-esteem: “In a society where popular media is widely consumed and extremely influential, we are bombarded with powerful images and messages that call our beings into question” (Richardson-Stovall, 2012) The concept of whitewashing will be closely examined and discussed in the analytical section, and the term will be applied on the chosen commercials.

Colorism and Media

In the previous segments, the research dissected the concept of whitewashing. As mentioned earlier, whitewashing in beauty is considered a phenomenon, with different media avenues challenging the dark-skinned toned women or men’s social identities. The previous pages also gained a wider understanding in the representation of black women in commercials, given the aspect of whitewashing, and how non-colored people tends to be the chosen ones, despite their given lack of identification or representation. In order to understand colorism, the definition of the word is prejudice and discrimination towards individuals, with a certain skin tone:

“Colorism is a preference for light skin tones and devaluing of dark skin. It is a genderzied phenomenon, mostly affecting women, that creates social and workplace inequities and negatively affects women of color.” (Sims, Hirudayaraj, 2015)

A compelling aspect of colorism is the link between skin tone and social classes: “There are other events on the timeline that are more ambiguous, yet underscore the complexities of colorism.” (Wilder, 2015). This is due to the visibility of colorism in media, and how it goes beyond representation and identification. Media coverage tends to feed into obscure and stereotypical notions of darker-skinned people. Darker-skinned people are viewed to be less privileged and tends to be on the lower end in society, and this was reflected back in 2005 during the media coverage of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. One incident demonstrated the preconceived notion of darker-skinned people, when a journalist on live TV deemed the social classes of the black people affected by the Hurricane: “...(…) CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer reported, ‘so many of these people, almost all of them that we see are so poor and they are so black’” (Wilder, 2015). This comment mentioned in National Live TV outraged viewers, and the CNN anchor’s remarks were labeled as ‘racist’ and ‘insensitive’ (Wilder, 2015). Many more incidents have been highlighted in mainstream media, however, the most prominent episodes are the remarks correlating social classes to skin-tone: “This reflects, of course, the intersectional nature of colorism. That is, skin tone is inexorably linked to, and intersects with, race, class, and gender” (Wilder, 2015).

Colorism and Men

Surely, the research seeks to investigate the tendencies of colorism and representation of darker-skinned people in contemporary media, however the depiction of darker-skinned people is also questionable. In regards to the portrayal of dark-skinned people in mainstream media, one of the noteworthy aspects is the demonizing and the criminalization of dark-skinned people: “With regard to African American men, colorism may not directly relate to attractiveness in the media, but it is definitely associated with perceptions of violence and criminality” (Hall, 2008). The association and connection with violence and criminality is often portrayed in the media, or even in movies. A recent interview with British rapper, activist and author Akala went viral, when he was a guest on the morning show; Good Morning Britain. Piers Morgan, one of the regular hosts questioned Akala on the increased knife-crime in London, England, and whether the stabbing and criminality had a racial tone to it. “The perpetrators and victims appear to be almost exclusively young black men” (O’Conner, 2019). Akala debated the dangerous effects on labeling certain crimes to a specific race, and even argued how middle-aged men would not

automatically be labeled as paedophiles, even when hundreds of them are convicted each year:

“You will never be called upon to explain that not all middle-aged white men are paedophiles, despite the fact that hundreds maybe thousands of them are convicted every year, because it’s obvious that not all middle-aged white men are paedophiles.”

The debate contributed to the underlying issues and assumptions on the connection between race and violence, in regards to labeling a certain race to violence and criminality, and how race resurfaces, and becomes a conversation, when non-white people are in the midst of it. (O’Conner, 2019). The media coverage of dark-skinned toned men are also evident in motion pictures, as black men demonstrates the stereotypical gangster living in the projects, either selling drugs or is involved with some kind of crime: “...(…) new images such as Black men being portrayed as thugs, hoodlums, gangsters, and criminals have replaced these more overly historic racist images” (Hall, 2008). The motion pictures chooses to highlight, and to an extend exaggerate dark-skinned men with afrocentric features, giving into the perception of discrimination and prejudice (Hall, 2008) A significant incident took place in the mid nineties, when a then famous NFL player and actor happened to be convicted of murdering his ex-wife and her male friend. O.J’s Simpson became a national sensation, after he was convicted of murder. However, his mugshot was visibly darker

“For instance, in the case of O.J. Simpson, the infamous mug-shot pictures of Simpson, which graced the cover of *Time magazine*, was actually darkened making Simpson appear more sinister, menacing, and violent” (Hall, 2008).

According to Hall, darkening Simpson benefitted the concept of a darker-skinned toned man, as it equates the perception and character of a violent black man. Certainly, commercials has had their fair share of scandals, by discriminating and reducing black men’s abilities, such as their attractiveness and likeability, unlike their non-colored counterparts. (Hall, 2008) The negative portrayal complements the socially constructed ideology of black men: “...(…) their negative portrayal in the media, only enhances negative evaluations toward all African American males, especially those who are darker-skinned.” (Hall, 2008).

Colorism, Magazines and Movies

Through the lens of fashion magazines, movies, fashion runways, colorism has been the theme, whenever the conversation involved darker-skinned toned women or lighter-skinned toned women. In 2009, a young African American actress won accolades across the globe, due to her Academy Award nominating lead role; *Precious*. In 2010, the actress, known as Gabourey Sidibe grazed the cover of *Elle* magazine. *Elle* being the top of the most notorious fashion magazines in the world, picked Sidibe as one of the exemplary women of 2010, ‘who were changing the world’ (Leach, 2010) Yet, the fashion magazine was heavily criticized, due to the excessive whitewashing of Sidibe’s face: “In the image Sidibe’s skin appears to be several shades lighter than her normal color” (Leach, 2010). *Elle* released a statement, apologizing and blaming the excessive use of lighting, resulting in the alternation of Sidibe’s skin tone. (Leach, 2010). The example of Gabourey Sidibe is one of many, and fashion magazines have earliere blamed the whitewashing and skin tone transformation, on makeup, lighting, camera etc. Irrespective of the reasons or excuses, the message being delivered continues to be the same.

‘the results and the implicits message they convey are the same: women of color, whatever their skin shade, are not light enough for mainstream media because they are not white’ (Phoenix, 2014)

A research in the late nineties unfolded the different characteristics between advertising or editorial pictures. The research focused predominantly on black people, and found the massive difference between darker-skinned toned individuals in advertisements, commercials, and fashion magazines, versus the darker-skinned tone individuals in editorial photos: “The research discovered that African Americans in advertisements had lighter skin and more Eurocentric features in ads compared to editorial photographs” (Hall, 2008). However, magazines centered around African Americans, or darker-skinned toned in general, such as *Ebony* or *Essence* magazine has also received plenty of criticism for their alternation of skin tone and their resemblance to mainstream media platforms: “...(…) images of African

American women continue to glorify and value light skin and White features over more Afrocentric features (Hall, 2008).

In the last few years, the images have slightly been restored, while representation and diversity in mainstream media has never been more in demand. Two blockbusters made the headlines last year, while one movie had an all Asian cast (*Crazy Rich Asians*, 2018). The other one had an almost all black cast (*Black Panther*, 2018). One of the lead actresses in *Black Panther*, Lupita Nyong'o won an Academy Award in 2014, for her role in the critically acclaimed movie "12 Years A Slave". Yet, her cover on *Vanity Fair* was the centre of controversy: "She is not accused of bleaching her dark skin; rather *Vanity Fair* has been criticised for publishing a photograph in which the actress appears considerably lighter than she actually is" (Phoenix, 2014). The Mexican born, Kenyan actress appeared to have her usually dark skin transformed, and according to the article of "Colorism and the Politics of Beauty" - Nyong'o's historical win at the Academy Award was not enough for *Vanity Fair*: "Even after winning awards, and being nominated for others, it seems that Nyong'o's skin colour is considered too dark to feature in *Vanity Fair*" (Phoenix, 2014). In the same year Lupita Nyong'o was named *People Magazine's* Most Beautiful Person (*People Magazine*, 2014). Eleven years earlier, the same magazine failed to recognize dark-skinned women:

"For instance, in *People's Magazine's* '50 Most Beautiful People' list from 2005, only four African American Women made the list, and, out of the four, all of the women possessed light skin tones and were from mixed Black/White heritages (i.e. Halle Berry, Alicia Keys, and Sophie Okonedo) with the exception of Oprah Winfrey, who has medium skin tone" (Hall, 2008)

Another African American Oscar Winner, Halle Berry has been in the frontline of representing a look, far from the typical dark-skinned toned women possess. Unlike her darker-skinned toned peers, Berry has also been accused of being favored by Hollywood, since she resonates and fits into the mold of Eurocentric beauty, alongside Oscar nominee Dorothy Dandridge, who was also nominated back in 1954. Experts argued whether their skin-tone and beauty had a part in their success and acceptance: "...(...) maybe, their

appearance, which is closer to America's definition of beauty, along with their talent, played a part in their success and acceptance as Hollywood actors" (Hall, 2008)

Racism in Commercials

Tv-commercials has been in many recognisable controversies, due to their images and depiction of darker-skinned toned women. One particular commercial, which was forced to be put down, due to a global outrage is the Dove commercial from 2017: "Dove initially released a shorter version of the ad on Facebook before it aired on television (Roebuck-Joseph, 2017). The ad featured different ethnicities, such as a caucasian woman, an asian woman and a black woman. At the time, the ad was promoting a new soap, which resulted in different women of different nationalities taking their shirts off. Though, the women were being switched, alongside the shirts - the visible aspect were when a dark woman took her shirt off, and turned into a white woman. An Nigerian model, named Lola Ogunyemi was the black woman in the ad, who turned into a white woman: "The ad showed Ogunyemi removing her shirt and turning into a Caucasian woman...(...)" (Roebuck-Joseph, 2017). The ad was considered racist, and insensitive, as if the black woman was washing her skin off. Dove instantly removed the ad, and issued an apology. "We have removed the post and have not published any other related content. We apologise deeply and sincerely for the offence that it has caused" (Slawson, 2017). Since the damage was already done, people flood to argue whether the ad was racist or simply empowering women from all types of nations and colors. Yet, Dove has been accused in other incidents, and were attacked for elevating white beauty and dismissing black beauty.

In 2011, the same incident took place, when Dove was promoting one of their newest body wash products. Similar to the newer add, the 2011 add promoted an image of a black woman, with the headline saying 'before'. A white woman was also pictured with the headline 'after'. The white woman in the add had visible more beautiful skin: "According to Dove, all three women were intended to represent the benefits of using the lotion" (Taylor, 2017). Dove has been accused of racially intended content and promoting hate and discrimination (Taylor, 2017). It seems Dove has missed the mark, by promoting another lotion with the text- 'nourishing lotion for normal to dark skin' referring to dark skin being abnormal. (Taylor,

2017) Arguments differ whether Dove intended to hurt with their visible images and text, however, Dove is one of the many brands who has been targeted as racist and insensitive towards dark-skinned woman

Analysis

In April 2018, the highly recognized music festival Coachella were applauded for featuring their first African-American female to headline the show. Beyoncé was the first black woman to be the main headline for the festival, and decided to give the audience a full-blown 2 hour performance of her greatest hits. After her historic performance at Coachella, fans were quickly to rename the festival to Beychella. A year later, a documentary was released on Netflix, allowing the audience to get a glimpse of how exactly ‘Beychella’ took place. One of the most interesting moments in the Netflix Special, is a quote from the late African American civil rights activist and poet Maya Angelou: “What I really want to do is be a representative of my race” (Nevins, 2019). “ I know that when i’m finished doing what I’m sent here to do, I will be called home” (Nevins, 2019). These quotes add a sentimental and tender message, revealing the substance and context behind the name for the Netflix special, titled ‘Homecoming’ (Netflix, 2019)

“Beyonce, dropped her documentary “Homecoming” - which she directed, wrote and executive produced - on Netflix. It is both a concert film and a behind-the-scenes look at what it took to put on her massive 2018 headlining Coachella performances, or ‘Beychella’,...(...)” (Bradshaw, 2019)

The subsequent pages will illustrate the complexities of the chosen themes, including whitewashing, representation and over-sexualization in mainstream media, and answer the problem formulation. The analytical section intents to examine and investigate the research problem, concerning the coherence between colorism and commercials, aiming to signify and debate the idea of whether the representation of black women has changed throughout the years. The chosen commercials will be analysed within the field of colorism and representation, parallel to the chosen themes. Opting for a qualitative research strategy, the data will be sampled within the field of purposive sampling. The previous sections explained

the goal of purposive sampling, leading to the sampling of a particular case. Without going further into the methodological tendencies, the selected case study is Beyoncé.

Beyoncé

Beyoncé Giselle Knowles was born in Houston, Texas on the 4th September 1981. She became a part of the music scene in the early nineties, competing in televised talent programs such as *Star Search*, with then girl group 'Girl's Tyme': "Nevertheless, it was a defining moment for the musically gifted grade-schooler from Houston, Texas. Although Beyonce was devastated at the loss, she did not give up" (Arenofsky, 2009). After a few years later, Knowles joined another girl group named Destiny's Child, who were signed to the music label Columbia Records. The girl group consisted of four girls, and were managed by Knowles' father Mathew Knowles. (Arenofsky, 2009). With their catchy R&B tunes and pop infused singles, Destiny's Child gathered global recognition and popularity. Despite a group alteration, Destiny's Child were re established by Beyoncé Knowles, Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams. The three young girls were slowly climbing the ladder of success and were considered one of the biggest girl groups in their era.

Destiny's Child would had fans croon to their lyrics. They would sing about female empowerment and pay homage to all the independent women, in their famous soundtrack featured in the movie 'Charlie's Angels': "As lead singer, Beyoncé supplied the focus and motivation behind Destiny's Child amazing accomplishments, which included multi platinum, Grammy-winning R&B singles and albums" (Arenofsky, 2009). The group decided to take a break in 2002, allowing Beyoncé to venture into solo-projects and feature on the notorious rapper Jay Z's enormous hit single 'Bonnie & Clyde'. (Arenofsky, 2009).

One of the most groundbreaking albums of 2003 belonged to Knowles. She had her debut album 'Dangerously in Love' on top of the charts, and won awards for the single's 'Crazy in Love' and 'Baby Boy'. "She thrilled international audience with spectacular stage stage shows and took on movie roles, product endorsements and a signature clothes line" (Arenofsky, 2009). With one of the largest fan-base, a marriage with one of the wealthiest rappers in history, Knowles was no stranger to the controversies and scandals surrounding her life, her marriage and the success of her carrere. Knowles was targeted for being favoured for

her light skin-tone, and looking into her earlier years, her light skin complexion has been quite the disadvantage; “Beyoncé would often come home crying that the other girls were making fun of her. ‘I wish I was darker’, she would say.” (Taraborrelli, 2015).

Beyoncé’s skimpy shorts and sexual dance movements has also been deemed as an issue. She would be considered too sexy, and her sexual behavior were not inclined with her previous good girl image: “Adulthood, of course, not only allowed Beyoncé to feign empowerment and independence, but also gave her unqualified permission to shake her booty, mix sex with sensationalism...(...)” (Arenofsky, 2009). Furtherly, critics have brought attention to her lack of commitment to racial politics and her light skin privilege:

“Many critics, however, cite the ‘overly’ sexual nature of her performances, the championing of her marriage and motherhood, the lack of direct engagement with racial politics, as well as her expressed Creole heritage, complementary light skin privilege, and mainstream appeal to call Beyoncé Black feminist credentials into question” (Davis, 2017)

Despite the numerous attacks on her personal life and public figure, Knowles’ continues to break barriers. She has supported oppressed marginalized groups, and declared herself as a feminist and brought attention to the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2016, the visual album titled ‘Lemonade’ was released, once again providing evidence to Knowles’ feminist beliefs. Nonetheless, one of the most praised and famous single from the album is ‘Formation’. The visual video was critically acclaimed for contributing an insight into the disparaging of black females: “...(...) ‘Formation’ music video inadvertently demonstrate the longevity of harmful colorist prejudices and the disparaging of Black female sexual and creative agency within the black community” (Davis, 2017). Beyoncé illustrated the ‘continued role of colorism’, and payed tribute to the black women in the back, who were restricted and oppressed, due to their skin color (Davis, 2017).

In her Netflix special from 2019, Knowles were once again celebrating ‘blackness’, she made it a mission to include black women and men from America’s largest black universities and colleges. Her whole performance from the Coachella Festival included black marching bands,

singers and dancers from these universities across the country, to show appreciation and devotion to the many talents of the African-American community (Netflix, 2019). Although she continuously supports oppressed minorities, Knowles's is accused for being the frontrunner of whitewashing, and representing an Eurocentric beauty ideal, with her sleek hair and light skin tone. The chosen commercials from L'oréal, featuring Beyoncé will operate as a catalyst for the research problem, and an analytical approach of distinctive themes will be conducted.

L'oréal

The french based company is one of the biggest beauty companies in France. L'oréal manufactures additional high-quality brands such as Lanôme and Ambre Solaire. The company produce a large number of cosmetics and perfumes, and according to a statistic from 2016, L'oréal is one of the biggest global beauty companies in the world (Agnew, Daneshkhu, 2017). According to their website and timeline, the company began in paris in the early 1900 century. (L'oreal, 2019). The women would dye their hair, and make brave beauty choices, despite their surroundings. According to the timeline, Eugène Schueller, who was a chemist, started to slowly connect the dots of hair dyes, and would make a profit from his sales to hair salons. The name L'oréal was then established two years later, after a few name alterations and successful business strategies. The company spent the next many years expanding the business, and had their products available in 17 countries. L'oreal has thrived in over 100 years, and manages to still stay relevant and active, with their infamous 'because you're worth it' phrase.

Yet, they are crucified for their depiction of black women and Asian women. In 2008, the company received backlash for their whitewashing images of Beyoncé Knowles: "Cosmetic company L'oreal has been accused of 'whitening' singer Beyoncé Knowles' skin color in a series of press ads in women's magazines in the US" (Sweeney, 2008). In a similar incident, the company failed to acknowledge the representation of South Asian women, as they whitewashed Indian actress Freida Pinto's skin tone. In a different interview, the actress accused L'oréal for whitewashing her during one of the campaigns she participated in: "Freida Pinto has revealed she believes her skin was lightened in an advertising campaign for

L'oreal in 2011" (Young, 2019) L'oreal denied both of the allegations, and blamed the lightning for both of the women's alternated skin tone.

Commercials

The following paragraphs will present an analytical approach regarding the commercials. In a previous section, a brief depiction of the commercials were presented, intending to explain the different reasons of choosing the specific commercials. The crucial aspects of the commercials were chosen to enable and elevate the analysis and discussion segments. As mentioned earlier, the themes regarding the research area were chosen to allow the research problem to look into the minor details and evident resources, while adding a historical and cultural context.

L'oréal 2003

The first chosen L'oreal commercial was released in 2003, which was in sync with the rising popularity of Beyoncé Knowles. Knowles was venturing into a solo-artist in that specific year, since her girl group dissolved the year before (Arenofsky, 2009). In the commercial, Knowles is featured with another pop female artist named Natalie Imbruglia, who happened to be slightly more famous than Beyonce. Imbruglia is the first woman introduced, illustrating the benefits of the hair brand, and how it has improved her hair color. Imbruglia is shown with a deep red hair color, and promotes the different benefits giving by the hair brand, as one of them being the ability of highlighting the hair three times more than the average. Secondly, Knowles enters the frame, following the same footsteps as Imbruglia, crediting Féria for keeping her hair color intact. Knowles ends the add with L'oréal's famous phrase; 'because you're worth it'. The interesting aspects of the commercial are quite expressed in the introduction scene, and the presentation of each of their hair color and hair type. As specified earlier, Imbruglia is the first woman to enter the screen, followed closely by Beyoncé standing behind her. The power relations between the two woman are quite evident in the first few seconds, since the commercial rely heavily on introducing Imbruglia first. The minor details of the lighting, the setting and the production of the commercial are also evident in the beginning, disclosing the year of the commercial, and how profound the low quality was back in 2003.

Despite the trivial details, the age of the commercial is also depicted through their dressing. Imbruglia is captured wearing an overall red outfit, with her top, her scarf and her pants all in same color, matching her deep red hair color. Knowles on the other hand is also wearing a dress, which emulates the yellow tones of her hair color and skin tone. However, while Imbruglia is promoting straight hair, Knowles is promoting blond curls. This is a rare sight, since most black women promoting a hair brand, often has their hair straightened. The shift from straight hair to curls is interesting, but can also be traced back to the marketing strategies provided by the L'oréal team. Indeed, the commercial shows the inclusion of different hair textures, crediting the Féria hair brand, which can cater to white straight hair, and black curly hair. Yet, the noteworthy aspect of promoting a hair brand, catering to a black female demographic can slightly be unbalanced and contradicting. Mainly, since Knowles is shown with a curly weave. The commercial fails to acknowledge black women with their actual curly hair, following tendencies from colorism.

L'oréal 2005

The second commercial was released in 2005. Beyoncé is shown in a different light. The video quality is different, the product is different and another interesting aspect of the commercial, is the spotlight, which is only on Knowles. Unlike the previous ad, This one is following the significant rising star power of Beyoncé, as she is the only known face in the video. In the beginning, the audience are watching Knowles reenacting a video shoot, before she stops in her tracks and promotes the hair brand. This time Knowles is promoting the hair brand Studio, and their new addition, Hot Straight cream. The video shoot stops immediately, and the camera is shifted to Knowles talking about the Studio product, and follows it with a mini tutorial. A voiceover takes over, detailing the countless benefits of the brand, including a long lasting silky effect. As mentioned above, Knowles is the only famous person in the video, while the other females are subjected to background dancing only. Instead of sharing the limelight with someone remarkably more famous, she now appears as the star of the commercial. Besides the spotlight, Knowles has wavy curls instead of the other curls she had in the L'oreal Commercial from 2003. She takes it upon herself to demonstrate how to use the hair product, as she inserts her hair with the cream, and follows it with an iron straightener. Her hair is transformed, from wavy to straight in a few seconds.

The message of the L'oreal commercial is demonstrated within those few seconds, as her hair becomes shiny and protected, with the help of Studio Hot Straight cream. Her hair is a few notches darker, than the blond curls she had in the previous commercial. Instead of the blond hair, her hair is vividly light brown, immersed with highlights. Once again, the commercial falls in the lines of false advertising, assuming to create products, which works in the favor of black women as well. The lines are blurred with Knowles proceeding to indulge in falsehood, promoting a hair product - while wearing fake hair.

L'oreal 2011

The third commercial is from L'oreal Paris and was released in 2011. Once again, Knowles is advocating for the Féria hair color product from L'oreal. Unlike the last two different commercials, Beyoncé is center stage. The attention is entirely on her, while she dances to the melodies of her own song 'Naughty Girl'. Dressed in a short black dress and high knee black boots to begin with, she is consuming the viewers with sultry dance moves. Next, her outfit changes into another black bodysuit, and images of her tossing and turning, while the camera is still focused on her bleached hair and half-naked body appears. Unlike the previous commercials, she looks quite different, while soaking in the attention of the viewers. Her behavior in front of the camera can be perceived as demanding and sexual, shedding the previous bubbly and girl next-door image. The clothes are more revealing, the attitude is relentlessly more sensual and sizzling, adding to her altered and whitewashed revolution.

In the commercial, Knowles is shown in a particular power position. Ultimately, the commercial is from 2011, paying tribute to the powerful and influential Beyoncé Knowles, given the reason why she's the only featured female in the ad. The background is white and silvery, providing enough centerspace for Knowles, without disturbing background noises and images. The minor details such as the light, the setting and the production is assumingly more contemporary, due to the commercial being released in 2011. In a previous passage, the relentlessly whitewashing strategy relating to this commercial was emphasized. Apart from the over sexualized demeanor, Knowles' skin tone and hair texture is dramatically alternated. As mentioned earlier, her hair color is bleached, and her skin tone is more lighter than earlier. She is promoting the hair color brand, while wearing a blond weave, and accommodating to

Eurocentric beauty ideals. An interesting factor is whether her rising popularity is subjected to the alteration of her skin tone and hair texture.

L'oréal 2013

L'oréal launched the new upgraded foundation product True Match, which promised women across the globe, a wide range of 33 foundation colors, estimated to match the lightest woman to the darkest woman. The video commercial was released in 2013, and Beyoncé was chosen as the face of the campaign. The research opted for this commercial, as it specifically concentrated on a different product, than the estimated hair brand products. This commercial is quite different and more subtle, than the last three commercials. Knowles is shown in a neutral light, differentiating herself from her sexual and in-your-face demeanor. Knowles is introduced, while sitting on the floor, wearing a white short dress, allowing the viewers an insight into her brown, glowing skin. Her hair is straight, with wavy locks and combined by brown colors and blond highlights. Knowles narrates the commercial and begins with a message 'There is a story behind my skin' (Youtube, 2013). During the narration, the camera shifts to Knowles standing in front of a mirror, admiring her own flawless skin. Furtherly, the camera zooms into her skin, while Knowles gives an oath to all the faces before. While the camera is zoomed on her face, ethnicities of African American, Native American and French are displayed on the screen, conveying the message of the ethnicity of the women. The oath to the women can be depicted as metaphorical, as she slowly portrays her skin as the 'mosaic of all the faces before' (Youtube, 2013).

Next, Knowles claims her only makeup to be True Match, devoting herself entirely to the makeup brand. An voiceover takes over the narration, and mentions the benefits of the foundation, including their expertise in matching the skins 'unique tone and undertones' helmed by technology. (Youtube, 2013). As previously mentioned, the True Match foundation is able to match the lightest skin tone to the darkest. Additionally, the foundation can also match a warm, neutral and cool undertone, providing an insight into Knowles's foundation color - 'c6 soft sable'. (Youtube, 2013). The last frame is Beyoncé twirling in a long black gown, in front of three long mirrors. Instead of ending the commercial with the L'oréal phrase 'because you're worth it', she ends it with 'I'm worth it', which separates this commercial from the previous ones.

The dynamic in the commercial is instantly significant. The vibe is different, indicating a largely soft and subtle tone. The images are slow, and the focus is utterly on Knowles, demonstrating the power position of Queen B herself. Even though she's dressed in a short white dress, viewers are drawn to her soft spoken voice and her flawless skin. The previous over sexualised images are replaced by close up images, relentlessly driven by her airbrushed face. The commercial is set in 2013, allowing viewers to relate more to the soft story telling, as powerful black women are represented more as classy and elegant, without being subjected to whitewashing. Yet, even though the True Match foundation is demonstrating their niché, with their large collection of many foundation shades, their choice fell on a light skinned black woman. Women of color has fought years to be acknowledged, and have their presence felt in the beauty industry. From one aspect, the True Match foundation is trying to venture into a different zone, as they represent diversity and inclusivity. On the other hand, the commercial fails to represent and acknowledge darker-skinned toned women, by choosing a light-skinned toned woman, with straight blond locks, and features closer to a white woman, to represent their brand.

Discussion

Representation

One of the aspects of the research area is related to representation, intending to view how Beyoncé represents black women in contemporary beauty commercials. The portrayal of her character in the four chosen commercials are vividly different. Her assumed innocence in the beginning starts to surrender to the hyper sexualisation of black women in modern media, and then is reversed in one of her contemporary commercials. According to Stuart Hall's concept, representation is viewed in the language: "Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent the world meaningfully to other people" (Hall, 1997). Since the commercials appears as our main texts, it is impossible to look beyond the cultural aspect of the commercials. Since culture is about shared opinions, and expressed through language, the culture of light skin privilege is evident in the L'oréal commercial from 2011. Beyoncé is standing alone on the podium. She firmly distances herself from the young

innocent woman, sharing the stage with far bigger artists, who could perhaps steal her spotlight.

One noteworthy aspect of representation of black women is also shown in the commercials. The commercials are reflected upon society's take on black women, using sexuality as their driving forces, propelling undertones of sensualism. Beyoncé is representing a noteworthy demographic of light-skinned woman, sheltering her from the stereotypical socially constructed angry black woman. The stereotypical social construction of black women is hidden. According to Hall theories on representation, he mentions the reflective aspect of representation: "Does language simply reflect a meaning which already exists out there in the world of objects, people and events" (Hall, 1997). In order to align the reflective representation with the commercials, Knowles could perhaps represent the misguided perception of black women, as she is viewed as a black sexual object. A narrative, already pushed into the universe. On one hand, she is considered a black woman, while on the other, she fits into the spectrum of Eurocentric beauty ideals. Apart from her bleached hair color and her light-skin tone, her nose and lips are small, face features often parallel to white women, yet she is marketed as an insanely famous black woman.

Representation of black women with curly hair is evident in the 2003 commercial. The commercial is showcasing two different hair styles and hair texture - straight and curly. While singer Natalie Imbruglia is representing the white women, with her straight polished hair, Knowles is shown with curly blond locks. One could argue the benefits of the commercial, and how two different hair textures are represented. The straight hair is relatively common with white woman, and the curly hair is closer to black woman. However, the marketing strategy of opting for a black woman to promote a hair brand, is quite alarming, since the curly hair is considered to be fake. Yet, this is seen throughout all the four chosen commercials. In the second commercial from 2005, Knowles is seen with two different hair textures, and since she is promoting a hair brand, she is once again wearing fake hair, even when she is trying to demonstrate a mini tutorial. In the last two commercials from respectively 2011 and 2013, Knowles's hair is a few shades lighter and more straight, creating a false illusion of the benefits of the hair products. Well-known hair brands have had their share of criticism, since they only cater to straight hair, and this could be perceived as an additional issue.

Colorism

The term was defined in a previous segment, underlining the favoring of lighter-skinned toned individuals. Alice Walker stated colorism as a ‘prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their color’ (Walker, 1983). The second theme, which is colorism is related to the research problem, and the paper aspires to understand those tendencies in commercials. From one aspect, the singer and actress Beyoncé Knowles is quick to claim her African-American heritage, with an oath to black colleges in her Netflix Special, and her continuous support to racially discriminated groups. However, whether it is her collaborations with beauty products or her own music videos, Knowles clings to an overly-whitewashed version of herself.

“Over the years, it seems as though Beyonce has gotten lighter as she has gotten older. No this is not genetics and let’s not pretend her skin color in her first Destiny’s Child album cover matches that of her latest album *4*” (Owens, 2013)

Colorism has been an ongoing topic in the entertainment and beauty industry. For instance, colorism is propelled in the four chosen commercials. Knowles hair and face is the occurring topic, since black women were always put in categories, and favored upon their appearances and skin complexion: “What was first given to us by slave masters, in separating the house slaves from the field ones, has now taken place in how we objectify our women and each other” (Owens, 2013). Clearly, her face features are small, such as her lips and nose, indicating a relative closeness to white women. The first two commercials from 2003 and 2005 sets the tone for the revolution of Knowles, unlike the commercial from 2011, which screams the notion of a black whitewashed woman. However, the setting has changed in the 2013 commercial, as Knowles has shedded her previous sexual demeanor, to a more elegant and classy version of herself. Understanding colorism from the commercials can be quite complex, since Knowles are gathering more fans and power, her appearance changes chronologically with the success. Apart from the first commercial, Beyoncé has the same hair texture in the following commercials. The next three commercials, she is demonstrating soft and straight hair, without providing viewers crucial information on how she actually has fake

hair sewed into her scalp. In terms of relating her skin tone and hair to colorism, a previous passage mentioned the favoring of light-skinned toned individuals. This could indicate how Knowles is already bestowed with privilege, due to her light skin tone - and her soft wavy bleached locks is another testament to the same privilege. (Owens, 2013)

Experts have claimed colorism to be the main catalyst for Knowles's success, and even individuals close to her, agrees on that statement. According to Knowles' father Mathew Knowles, Beyoncé managed to thrive in the music industry, due to her light skin complexion. (Andrews, Ferguson, 2018). He questions and targets other successful black female artists, who have maintained their success over the years, and are still considered relevant in pop culture: "It's a particularly important and controversial topic in the music industry, where many think light-skinned artists have an edge over their darker-skinned counterparts" (Andrews, Ferguson, 2018). The black female artists, like Rihanna, Mariah Carey and Nicki Minaj have received their amount of fame and fortune, and have one thing in common with Beyoncé: "The answer is that they have lighter skin" (Ferguson, 2018). These women have also suffered from the scrutiny of the public eye, watching their every move - and even question their successful careers, due to their light skin complexions. The implications of colorism are often among black females, since females are more generally judged upon their appearances and beauty.

Sexuality

Sexuality as a concept can be considered quite ambiguous and complex, since experts have different narrations and views on the topic. One aspect claims sexuality as a resourceful tool and a liberation of the female body. Another approach of sexuality focuses relentlessly on the misinterpreted and misguided perception of the female sexuality, constructing women as sexual objects. Female sexuality can often be perpetuated from a male perspective, which is where the common issue lies. The famously acclaimed African-American author and social activist Bell Hooks is known for her take on feminism, race, sexuality and gender. Hooks is also famous for her feminist take on the world, debating and discussing the concept of intersectionality (Hooks, 2000). The book 'Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics', Hooks is manifesting the power of sexual value:

“Women will only be truly sexually liberated when we arrive at a place where can see ourselves as having sexual value and agency irrespective of whether or not we are the objects of male desire” (Hooks, 2000)

In of the earlier segments, the research aimed to follow Alan Bryman’s guidelines on choosing themes. According to Bryman, a theme is a repeated pattern: “repetitions: topics that recur again and again” (Bryman, 2016). Gibbs is also included in the same segment, focusing on the relation between data and coding: “Coding is how you define what the data you are analyzing are about” (Gibbs, 2007). In relation to the commercials, sexuality is a relevant and repeated theme, capturing the essence of the female sexuality. Beyoncé has often been accused for her over sexualized images and performances, as some experts would even strip her claim of being a feminist.

The first few commercials add a different tone to Knowles - than sexual. However, the L’oréal commercial from 2011 is quite explicit in portraying Knowles’s demeanor as demanding and sultry. She is seen strutting and dancing to the tunes of her own single ‘Naughty Girl’. Additionally, the clothes are more revealing, adding substance to her exotic and sensual presence. Viewers are exposed to hair tossing, body twirling and runway walking, while trying to focus on her hair color. Indeed, the hair brand Féria is expected to be the dominating factor, but is overshadowed by Knowles’s sizzling attitude. She carries herself with ease. Her sexuality is the prominent element in the commercial. On one hand, the tunes of her single ‘Naughty Girl’, pays tribute to all the females, who carries their sexuality on their shoulders, without being shamed for it. This could be one argument, of why the video production opted for this single, since their vision of Knowles is a famous black female - who is empowered and confident in her own skin and sexuality.

Beyoncé is no stranger to constant criticism and scrutiny from the public eye. Yet, famous individuals has additionally shared their opinions of the over sexualized images and performances. Emma Watson, who is famous for her role depiction of Hermione Granger in the highly celebrated movie series ‘Harry Potter’, which is adapted from the book series of the same name, has contributed to the critique of Beyoncé Knowles. According to Watson,

Knowles fails to live up to feminist standards, as her sexuality is the prominent essence in her videos and performances:

“As I was watching (the videos) I felt very conflicted. I felt her message felt very conflicted in the sense that on the one hand she is putting herself in a category of a feminist, but then the camera, it felt very male, such a male voyeuristic experience of her” (Rodulfo, 2017)

Knowles’s fan following, better known as the Beyhive - came to her rescue and heavily criticized Watson for her hypocritical standpoint. Watson, a self acclaimed feminist has indulged in exposing her body for magazines, and the public would simply not accept the double standard: “Then, people started seeing hypocrisy in her words because of how she responded to Beyoncé self-titled album...(...)” (Rodulfo, 2017)

Whitewashing

The last chosen theme is whitewashing. Whitewashing has been a constant issue in the portrayal of black women: “The term White Washing can be defined as a racist practice of removing visible minorities in popular media by making their skin appear lighter...(...)” (Nelson, 2016) In the previous literature review, the thesis looked into the problematic concept, and how even celebrated women have been subjected to whitewashing. The concept evokes and challenges the notion of representation of darker-skinned toned women, in terms of whether black women are partly considered attractive, if they are a few tones lighter. This concept is vividly noticeable in the last two commercials from L’oréal. Since, the L’oréal commercials are released in different years, Knowles is dramatically altered in the last two commercials. Specifically, the commercial from 2011, Knowles is shown in a whitewashed version of herself. The earlier segment focused on the relentlessly strategy of enforcing sexuality onto the screen. Relating sexuality to whitewashing can be one approach, as Knowles is seen capturing the attention of the audience. With her sultry and sensual dance moves, she demands to be desired and brings a different edge to this specific commercial. Yet, this is also the same commercial, viewers are witnessing a different look on Knowles. Her hair is bleached, and her skin tone is a few shades lighter than usual.

L'oréal came under the scrutiny of the public a few years ago, when they uploaded a few images of Knowles from their Féria hair brand commercial. This specific commercial was released in 2008, and showcases once again, a whitewashed version of Beyoncé: "In the ads the 26-year old star, who is married to rapper Jay Z, appears to be much whiter than typical pictures of the singer-cum-actress" (Sweney, 2008). L'oréal released a statement, denying the alternation of her skin tone: "We highly value our relationship with Ms Knowles. It is categorically untrue that L'oreal Paris altered Ms Knowles' features or skin tone in the campaign for Féria hair color" (Sweney, 2008). According to L'oréal, the whitewashing was prominent due to the lightening and video setting. However, the same issue reoccurs in other commercials as well. On one hand, the whitewashing concept is critical, since huge cosmetic brands are following the same guidelines, whitewashing their black women. Conversations related to black women being shown in a attractive or desired light can be sparked, when beauty cosmetics are participating in showcasing one type of beauty - the Eurocentric beauty.

The impact of whitewashing can be quite harmful for black women across the globe, and even black children. Representation is largely lacking in modern media, leading to self-esteem issues and internalized racism, and especially children can suffer under those conditions: "...(...) whitewashing in media negatively impacts children in the Black community and aids in the robbery of their childhood" (Nelson, 2016). Children are witnessing a massive rise of different black faces in modern media. Black people are now portrayed as superheroes, and the fashion industry is more diverse than ever. However, the issue with whitewashing and colorism is still intact. Beauty companies are still whitewashing black women, and perpetuating their idea of how black women should be illustrated.

The last commercial from L'oréal featuring Beyoncé is focusing on her soft glowing, yet light skin tone. A contrast to her expected sexual movements and demeanor, she is shown in a different light. Poised, elegant and soft. In this specific commercial, she is promoting the makeup brand True Match. Interestingly, the team from L'oréal made her look a bit tanner than usual, while still holding onto her bleached blond locks. She is tanned enough to be considered a black woman. In the commercial from 2003 and 2005, her hair and skin tone have respectively brown and yellow undertones, which makes her look almost black, but still desirable as a light-skinned toned woman.

Conclusion

The problem formulation sought to understand the tendencies of whitewashing, colorism and representation in beauty commercials. Furtherly, the study aimed to investigate those tendencies from four different commercials, featuring Beyoncé Knowles. The commercials were chosen to understand and interpret how black women are represented in beauty advertisements, and how these representations have changed and occur in the light of colorism, whitewashing and representation. Conducting a qualitative research study, the paper managed to look beyond the commercials, and interpret hidden undertones. In relation to representation, none of the four commercials featured a darker-skinned toned women. Surely, the commercials have Knowles' as their face of the campaign, but she was either set in the same frame with a white woman or alone. This could indicate the problematic notions of representing black women, who have more common features with white women. The commercials fails to challenge the beauty of darker-skinned toned women and acknowledge women with a darker skin tone than Knowles. They fail to represent different black women, with real hair textures, even when they are using Knowles to promote brand, which can work in the favor of curly haired women. In terms of colorism, Knowles' colossal fame is the driving force behind the commercials. As a proud black woman, she sheds her inhibitions, and exceeds to carry herself in a whitewashed and sexual demeanor. The problem formulation also ventured into the sexual and whitewashing schemes in beauty commercials. Since analysing the four commercials, the paper fathoms the over-sexualized and whitewashing strategies. In the first two commercials, Knowles look quite similar to her Destiny's Child days, with her brown hair and brown skin tone. However, as her success has increased over the years, her skin tone has been lightened. This could pose an additional question such as - are success equivalent to a lighter skin tone? Even with the occurring changes of representation of black women. The lighter-skinned toned women are still dominating mainstream pop culture. Due to the success of a few darker-skinned toned women, they are still falling behind on the success ladder. The successful women, who are bestowed with light skin privileges, are also relying heavily on their sexual inhibitions, allowing the public to view them as sexual objects. In conclusion, small changes have been

made in different industries, yet colorism and whitewashing is still represented thoroughly in many different media platforms.

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