



**FEMINISM AND THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF WOMEN IN
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: THE ETHICAL NARRATIVES**

Philip Osarobu ISANBOR

Department of Philosophy, Seminary of All Saints, Ekpoma, Nigeria

philip.isanbor@uniben.edu

OCHID ID: 0000_0002_9128_6467

&

Andrew ONWUDINJO

Institute of Humanities, Pan Atlantic University, Lagos, Nigeria

aonwudinjo@pau.edu.ng

Abstract

The contemporariness of the gender agenda projects the concerns to assess the values of women in relations to trending civilization interests along sexuality and gender. Such arrangement showed the level of individual responsiveness and resilience, as some feminist groups with the ethics to overcome the challenges of women in the society, regarding their gender limitations have been in the decreasing tide of values. This is due to the imposing nature of the society on the promotion of women's weaknesses rather than their strengths as persons. Contemporarily, the feminist groups are concerned about the rate of the commercialization or commodification of women, especially the promotion of commerce using female gender as objects of advertisement and enterprises. With this development of values, the female genders are mainly seen or regarded as mainly objects of lived-experiences rather than as subjects of lived-experiences. The commercialization or commodification of women thus poses significant ethical concerns, as it reduces the individual to objects for transaction rather than recognizing their intrinsic worth and autonomy. The practice perpetuates gender inequality, objectification and leads to women exploitation. Feminist movement therefore seeks to analyze these ethical implications as crucial attention for fostering a society that values human dignity and promotes fair and respectful treatment of all individuals. Employing the expository and phenomenological methods of analysis, the paper projects the importance of ethical educating or reorienting the human society on the values of feminist ethics as approaches in handling the societal perception of women, not be to be objects of trade and business advertisement. It concluded that with proper ethical education or reorientation on the values of women and on the needs to overcoming the growing tide of the commercialization or commodification of women in the society.

Keywords: Commercialization/Commoditification, Feminist Ethics, Human Values, Gender Agenda, Women

Introduction

The advent of the feminist movement in the recent centuries placed a quest for gender equality in all human spheres. Before now, in the ancient Ionian era, women are inferior and what they owe the society is just domestic responsibility. This is evident in Plato's republic when he refuted vehemently the participation of women in partisan politics and Aristotle annexing this



fact in his reproductive hylomorphism theory where he distinguished man been the form, while women been ordinary matter in the production, that is a common object. These views and many other erroneous thought abrogated the essential and diverse roles of women in the society, as great contributor to the various fields such as education, healthcare, politics, business and many more, thus viewing the feminine gender as a mere commodity.

Viewing women as objects in society perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces gender inequality. These dehumanizing perspectives can manifest in various forms, from objectifications in media and advertising to unequal treatment in professional and personal spheres. Addressing these issues involves challenging societal norms, promoting gender equality, and fostering a culture that values women for their ability rather than reducing them to mere objects. Exploring the ethical implications of viewing women as object of commerce raises critical questions about human dignity, equality, and societal values. This perspective not only challenges fundamental principles of respect but also prompts a deeper examination of the consequences on individual well-being and broader social dynamics. Thus, this paper seeks to critically evaluate the ethical implication of the idea that views women as an object of commercialization in the society.

Clarification of Terms

Commercialization: Commercialization is the process of bringing new products or services to market. The broader act of commercialization entails production, distribution, marketing, sales, customer support, and other key functions critical to achieving the commercial success of the new product or service. It is also the condition of being focused on the profitable aspects of something, especially to excess. It is to manage on a business basis for profit. The verb commercialize comes from the adjective commercial, “done for financial profits,” and its root, the Latin word “commercium” which means ‘trade.’ It is when one takes an activity or an organization and manages it so that it results in a profit, one commercializes it. Commercialization is sometimes negative because it has a sense of valuing profits over anything else. It can also be positive like the commercialization of life-saving drug when it leaves the lab and hits the market. Commercialization refers to the whole process of the business of selling something. The words commercial, commercialize, and commercialization all relate to commerce, which is the exchange of goods and services.¹

Commercialization which in this context also means “commodification” happens when something or someone turns into a money-making business. It can also be good thing, but it’s often used in the negative, like when the commercialization of a holiday means you just have to buy stuff. Meanwhile, commercialism is an attitude or philosophy devoted to supplying goods and services and making profits. The root of commercialism is commerce, which is the buying and selling of things. It can help you remember what commercialism is if you remember that commercials try to sell you things. However, to say something is commercialized, it is used or changed in such a way that it makes money or profits, often in a way that people

¹. “Commercialization” Vocabulary.com, Dictionary, Vocabulary.com, accessed November 20, 2023, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary> Commercialization.



disapprove of. Disapproval, it seems such a pity that a distinguished and honored name should be commercialized in this way.

Feminism: This is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely orientating in the west, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests. It is the belief that women should be allowed the same right, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state. However, feminism is about all gender having equal rights and opportunities. It's about respecting diverse women's experiences, identities, knowledge and strengths, and striving to empower all women to realize their full rights. It's about leveling the playing field between genders, and ensuring that diverse women and girls have the same opportunities in life available to boys and men.

Meanwhile, we exist to advance and protect the rights of diverse women and girls. At its core, feminism is the belief that women deserve equal social, economic, and political rights and freedoms. Over the years, feminism has focused on issues like the right to vote, reproductive and sexual freedom, and equal pay. Feminism, has also explored racism, gender norms, self-expression, and much more.² Feminism is the social movement that seeks equal rights for women. Widespread concern for women's rights dates from the enlightenment; one of the first important expressions of the movement was Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). The 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, convened by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others, called for full legal equality with men, including full educational opportunity and equal compensation; thereafter the woman suffrage movement began to gather momentum.³

Gender Inequality: This is a human discrimination on the basis of sex or gender causing one sex or gender to be routinely privileged or prioritized over another. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and that right is violated by gender-based discrimination. Gender equality is, first and foremost, a human right. It implies that women, men, boys and girls of all classes and races participate as equals and have equal value. They enjoy equal access to resources, freedoms and opportunities to exercise control. However, the root causes of gender inequality are gender bias and social norms that restrict women's rights and opportunities, which together with preference/comparative advantage between men and women, are the root drivers of gender gaps. Gender inequality is the prejudicial treatment of people based on their gender while it affects women and girls most prominently, gender inequality is not limited to male/female binary. Gender inequality occurs when people face discrimination, fewer opportunities, and increased violence because of their gender: via the effects of economic inequality, less political representation, unequal education, lack of healthcare provision for women, increased social violence on girl-children and women and unequal household

². "Feminism." Merriam-Webster.co. Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>

³. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed. (1998), b.c. "Feminism."



responsibilities. When gender inequality exists in a society, it produces unequal outcomes that hurt not just those targeted because of their gender, but everyone else, too.⁴

Cultural and Legal Views of Women as Commodities

The idea of women being treated as commodities is reflections of the historically patriarchal and oppressive nature of some societies, where women are seem as objects to be bought, sold, or traded for the benefit of men. This can manifest in various forms, such as forced marriage, human trafficking, and sexual exploitation. Treating women as commodities devalues their inherent worth and reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. It perpetuates a systemic inequality where women are viewed as possessions rather than equal individuals with their own autonomy and agency. This dehumanizing treatment of women can lead to physical and emotional abuse, as well as lasting psychological trauma.

It is important to challenge and dismantle the mindset that allows women to be viewed as commodities, and instead recognize and respect their inherent dignity and rights as human beings. This involves promoting gender equality, fostering education and empowerment for women, and advocating for the eradication of all forms of exploitation and discrimination. Treating women as commodities refers to the practice of viewing and exploiting women as objects that can be bought, sold, or traded for the benefit of others. This dehumanizing perspective diminishes women's autonomy, agency, and value as individuals.⁵ It can take various forms, including:

1. **Forced Marriage:** In some cultures, women may be married off without their consent, often for financial or social gain. They are essentially treated as a commodity that can be traded between families.
2. **Human Trafficking:** Women and girls are frequently victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labor, where they are bought and sold like commodities for profit.
3. **Sexual exploitation:** The commercialization of women's bodies for sexual gratification whether through pornography, prostitution, or other forms of sex work, reduces women to objects for men's pleasure, disregarding their consent and well-being.
4. **Mail-Order Brides:** In some instances, women from economically disadvantaged countries are sought by men from wealthier nations who essentially "purchase" them with the promise of a better life, often without considering their agency or desires.⁶

Historical Development of Women as Objects and of Commerce and Inequality

Under the foregoing themes, an attempt was made to establish the meaning of the principal concepts in this enterprise, viz., Objects of commerce, women and feminine inequality. And from the articulations we found out that the concept describes how women have been treated as commodities and objects of service as well being treated unequally and unjustly which is

⁴. "Gender Inequality" Vocabulary.com, Dictionary, Vocabulary.com, accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary.Gender+Inequality>.

⁵. "Commodities" Vocabulary.com, Dictionary, Vocabulary.com, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary.Commodities>.

⁶. "Commodities" Vocabulary.com, Dictionary, Vocabulary.com, accessed November 25, 2023, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary.Commodities>.



summarily called in technical terms the commodification of Women. Now, in this section we shall take a voyage down memory lane to ascertain how this practice has evolved from the time of the ancient civilizations down to our contemporary era. This shall be treated under different demarcations, namely; the ancient era, medieval era, modern era and contemporary era

The Ancient Civilizations and the Commodification and Unequal Treatment of Women

Taking a study of the ancient civilizations on the topic under review with express focus on one particular group would result to arriving at a particularly narrow and limited view of the situation in general. Thus we shall consider the Ancient Athenian civilization, Ancient Mesopotamian Civilization, ancient Egyptian civilization and lastly the Ancient eastern civilization. Now Athens, one of the city-states in Ancient Greece is hallmarked by the democracy system in operation. We must note however, that the democracy in practice today was developed from and differs slightly from that of the one practiced in Athens. While it was the rule the majority, this majority count was determined by the votes cast by the male heads of family. By implication, the women did not have suffrage nor political rights. In more specific terms, women ancient Athens had no legal rights whatsoever, they could not own property, they could not vote neither could they participate in government.⁷ Their role as defined by the society was to serve as housekeepers and bear children, especially male children or as William O'Neal puts it, they were primarily meant to be wife and mother.⁸ It also noted that in Ancient Athens, even female children were not allowed the opportunity of being given formal education. H. I Marrou opines that there is no mention of formal education of Athenian girls in the classical period.⁹ Instead the girls were to be with their mothers gleaning domestic skills such as wool spinning, cloth making and food preparation, the art of housekeeping and marriageability as these were very much needed so as to ensure matrimony.

In Egypt, however, the case was apparently different. Women took up a wide range of responsibilities both in public sphere apart from being home keepers and child bearers. The Egyptian women had freedom to indulge in commerce, own properties, sue and be sued and even represent their husband in some specific rituals and activities. Lehman and Troolin held asserted that this way of life was rooted in the Egyptian doctrine of Ma'at which encouraged harmony and balance and equality in all areas of life.¹⁰ Equally Lehman and Troolin remarking on the situation of things in Ancient Egypt, avowed that Egypt were a nation ahead of time.¹¹ This is owing to the fact that Egyptian female were seen and held as equal to their male counterparts which is new trend in our world today under the ship of feminism. Despite the disparity in the treatment of women within these two societies discussed more attention would be given to the situation of classical Athens so long as the topic in question is concerned.

⁷Cedar School, "Women in Ancient Greece," accessed on December 1st 2023, <https://www.cedarbankschool.westlothian.org.uk>

⁸William J O'Neal, "The Status of Women in Ancient Athens," in *International Social Science Review* 68, no. 3(1993): 115-121.

⁹H.I Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1956), 197.

¹⁰Candace Lehman and Amy Troolin, "Egyptian Women, rights, roles and modern treatment," accessed on 1st December, 2023, <https://www.study.com/academy/lesson/egyptian-women-royalty-privileges-tradition>.

¹¹Lehman and Troolin, "Egyptian Women, rights, roles".



The Medieval Era and the Commodification of Women and Preponderance of Feminine Inequality

The medieval era was significantly marked by the predominance of the church and aristocracy. In the medieval era, women were often viewed as second-class citizens and faced significant limitations and restrictions- ranging from being conceived as deceitful, sexual, innocent or incompetent.¹² They were sometimes objectified and exploited for commercial purposes, such as prostitution, due to poor living conditions and poverty. Equally women were widely considered lower than men, thus not worthy of performing the same task or activities that men typically did.¹³ While women from more modest backgrounds worked alongside men in medieval guilds, they still faced challenges and restrictions, including lower pay and limited opportunities for advancement. The lives of women in the Middle Ages were determined by the Church and the aristocracy, and women were not passive victims of the religious and political patriarchy, despite the restrictions they faced. Talking about education of females in the middle ages, only those who opted to be nuns, life of dedicated service of God and the poor, had the opportunity of a much more thorough education. In contrast, a woman's education did not go beyond basic reading abilities coupled with instructions on how to do homely activities.¹⁴ In the aspect of politics and governance women were voiceless and law was man's law.

The Modern Era and the Commodification of Women

The modern era witnessed a seismic shift from dictatorship of the church and aristocratic elites over the life of people to the rise of science and technological discoveries. With this new discovery came also new forms and ways in which the commodification and unequal treatment of women was perpetrated. During this era, women were often treated as inferior to men and faced significant discrimination. Women were depicted as weak, dutiful, and inferior to men, and their intelligence and judgement were often regarded with contempt. The industrial revolution also had a major impact on the treatment of women, with gender being a significant influence on salary. Women tended to receive between one third to one half of a man average salary, and many were forced to enter the workforce to provide for their families, often facing harsh conditions and low pay. The gender wage gap during the industrial revolution was based on real differences between male and female productivity, and women were sometimes excluded from industries where labour markets were less competitive by men's distributional coalition, which uses discriminatory language to justify their attempt to maintain higher wages by excluding women.¹⁵ In the modern era women continued to face discrimination and inequality, with gender inequality being a key driver of poverty and a fundamental denial of women's rights.¹⁶

¹² "Women in Medieval Literature and Society," accessed on December 1st 2023, <https://www.sites.udel.edu/britlitwiki/women-in-medieval-literature-and-society>.

¹³ "Women in Medieval Literature and Society."

¹⁴ "Treatment of Women in Medieval Times," accessed on December 1st 2023, <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/Women-The-Roles-Of-Women-In-Medieval-Times>.

¹⁵ Eric Schneider, Review of Gender, Work and Wages in Industrial Revolution Britain, *Technology and Culture* 52, no.1(2011): 195-196.

¹⁶ "Gender Justice and Women's right," accessed on December 1st 2023, <https://www.oxfam.org/>.



Contemporary Manifestations of Women as Object of Commerce

It is quite obvious that women have been subjugated because of their personality roles in the society. Hence with this stereotype, they are seen as an end to a means; be that as it may, in our society today the commodification of women, treating them as objects for commercial gain, raises significant ethical concerns. This practice encompasses various forms, including sex trafficking,¹⁷ forced labor, and exploitation in the entertainment and advertising industries. The ethical implications of treating women as objects of commerce are multifaceted and encompass issues related to human rights, gender equality, and societal attitudes towards women.¹⁸ Hence, we shall be looking at the modern manifestation of women as an object of commerce that can be seen in various aspects of society, including advertising, the entertainment industry, and the globalized world.

Advertising: Women are often objectified in advertising; with the idea that "sex sells" This means that women's bodies and sexuality are used to promote products and services, reducing their value to mere objects for profit.¹⁹ The Objectification of Women In the world of advertising, today women have often been objectified and used as a tool to sell products. This practice has been prevalent for decades and has sparked numerous debates about the portrayal of women in marketing campaigns. The objectification of women in advertising can be seen across various mediums such as print, television, and digital platforms. It is a complex issue that raises questions about gender equality, societal norms, and the impact of such representations on individuals and society as a whole.

The objectification of women in advertising has deep roots in history. Throughout the 20th century, advertisements frequently depicted women as objects of desire, often emphasizing their physical appearance and using sexualized imagery to capture attention.²⁰ This approach perpetuated stereotypes and reinforced traditional gender roles, positioning women as passive objects rather than active participants in society. For instance, in Africa during the slave trade era, some African women were used as an entertainer in British gathering such that he Africa women will be force to showcase her body because of the amazing beauty which most African women possess so in other to enhance their racial discrimination towards Africans as (Black), who often are regarded as apes. However, the portrayal of women as objects in advertising has significant implications for society.²¹ It not only perpetuates unrealistic beauty standards but also contributes to the normalization of gender-based discrimination. Research has shown that

¹⁷Alina Sajed, *Women as Objects and Commodities*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.363>

¹⁸Alina Sajed, *Women as Objects and Commodities* 11 January 2018
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.363>

¹⁹ Kellie, Dax J et al. "What drives female objectification? An investigation of appearance-based interpersonal perceptions and the objectification of women." *PloS one* vol. 14,8 e0221388. 23 Aug. 2019, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0221388

²⁰ Kathy L. Peiss, *American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture* 1998 "The Journal for Multi-Media History"

²¹Kaydee Gilson, <https://westminsteru.edu/student-life/the-myrriad/the-commodification-and-exploitation-of-women-from-the-core-to-the-periphery-in-relation-to-the-united-states-and-thailand.html>



exposure to objectifying portrayals of women can lead to negative psychological effects, including body dissatisfaction and low self-esteem among both men and women.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the harmful effects of objectifying women in advertising. Many brands and marketers are now striving to adopt more inclusive and empowering representations of women in their campaigns.²² This shift reflects a broader societal movement towards gender equality and the recognition of the importance of diverse and respectful portrayals in advertising. Meanwhile as it stands now in our societies, governments and regulatory bodies should also take steps to address the objectification of women in advertising.²³ Some countries like the United State of America, England, Germany, Switzerland e.t.c. have implemented guidelines and regulations that aim to promote responsible and non-exploitative depictions of women in marketing communications. These measures serve as a means to hold advertisers accountable for their representations and encourage ethical practices within the industry. In all, the objectification of women in advertising is a multifaceted issue with far-reaching implications. While progress has been made towards more respectful portrayals, there is still work to be done to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote positive representations of women in marketing.

Entertainment Industry: In the world of pop music, artists are often expected to conform to certain rules, including objectifying their bodies to gain fame and success.²⁴ This is also evident in the film and television industries, where women are often portrayed as objects of desire or as mere decoration. The entertainment industry has a long history of treating women as commodities, using their physical appearance and sexuality to attract audiences and generate revenue. These practices are evident in various forms of entertainment, including film, television, music, and live performances.²⁵ Women are often objectified and exploited for their looks, talent, and demand, leading to a culture of commodification that can have detrimental effects on women's well-being and societal perceptions; women are reduced to their physical attributes rather than being valued for their skills and talents. This is perpetuated through marketing strategies, media representation, and societal norms that prioritize women's appearance over their abilities. As a result, women are often portrayed as commodities to be consumed by the audience, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and unrealistic beauty standards.²⁶

The exploitation of women's sexuality is another prevalent issue in the entertainment industry. Female artists, actors, and performers are often pressured to conform to sexualized roles or personas in order to gain visibility and success. This can lead to a culture of exploitation where women are valued primarily for their sex appeal rather than their artistic contributions. The

²² Joseph Kay Women on the Market-Luce Irigaray on December 13, 2012. <https://libcom.org/article/women-market-luce-irigaray>

²³ Kilbourne, Jean. "Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel." Free Press Paperbacks, 2000.

²⁴ The Commodification of Women's Bodies by Ruth Akinradewo

²⁵ Kellie, Dax J et al. "What drives female objectification? An investigation of appearance-based interpersonal perceptions and the objectification of women." PloS one vol. 14,8 e0221388. 23 Aug. 2019, doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0221388.

²⁶ Fredrickson, Barbara L., and Tomi-Ann Roberts. "Objectification Theory: Toward Understanding Women's Lived Experiences and Mental Health Risks." Psychology of Women Quarterly, vol. 21, no. 2, 1997, pp. 173-206.



prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse further underscores the systemic issues within the industry.²⁷ The sex industry is a complex and multifaceted industry that encompasses a wide range of activities, including prostitution, pornography, and sex trafficking.²⁸ Exploitation within the sex industry refers to the coercion, manipulation, and abuse of individuals for financial gain or other benefits. This exploitation can take various forms, which should not be limited to human trafficking, but forced labor, sexual slavery, and the commercial sexual exploitation of children.²⁹ We shall be looking at some various forms of exploitation such:

Human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons through force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation. In the context of the sex industry, individuals may be trafficked for forced prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation.³⁰ In this view, women are mostly used as a tool in carrying out this act such that it goes against the fundamental human right because some traffickers are meant to watch or play as a guard towards human trafficking. In some cases, individuals within the sex industry are subjected to forced labor, where they are coerced into providing sexual services against their will. This can involve physical and psychological abuse to maintain control over the individuals.

Sexual slavery refers to situations where individuals are held against their will and forced to engage in sexual activities for the financial gain of others, this form of exploitation often involves severe physical and emotional abuse.³¹ However, another aspect which is one of the most distressing aspects of exploitation in the sex industry is the commercial sexual exploitation of children. This is evident in our society today, because sex predators are now in the verge of abusing children who are considered as vulnerable in the societies meanwhile their vulnerability is rampant but corrective measures are to be put in place by government agencies, so as to enable smooth and healthy society. Children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and may be forced into prostitution or pornography production. Hence, exploitation within the sex industry is a pervasive issue that requires comprehensive efforts at legal, social, and economic levels to address effectively. Understanding the various forms of exploitation, its contributing factors, impact on victims, and ongoing efforts to combat it is crucial in working towards a world free from such abuses.³²

Online Platform and Image Commodification: Women on online platforms are complex and multifaceted issue that encompasses various aspects of gender, technology, and commerce. The digital age has brought about new challenges and opportunities in the way women are portrayed, marketed, and consumed online. From social media to e-commerce websites, women are often depicted as objects of desire, beauty, and consumerism, leading to concerns

²⁷United Nations on Crime and Drugs <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html>.

²⁸United Nation Office on Drugs and Crime, *An Introduction to Human Trafficking: Vulnerability, Impact and Action*.

²⁹United Nations on Crime and Drugs <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-Trafficking/Human-Trafficking.html>.

³⁰Goffman, Erving. "Gender Advertisements." Harper & Row, 1979.

³¹Banet-Weiser, Sarah. "Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny." Duke University Press Books, 2018.

³²Dines, Gail. "Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality." Beacon Press, 2010.



about their representation, and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. Through online platforms, it is a longstanding and concerning issue. In various industries, women have been objectified and marketed as commodities, reducing their worth to their physical appearance or societal stereotypes. In online platforms, including social media, e-commerce sites, and other digital spaces, have both perpetuated and challenged this trend.³³ This commodification of women on online platforms through image-based marketing strategies has wide ranging implications for individuals, society, and regulatory frameworks. Addressing these complex issues requires a multi-faceted approach that involves stakeholders from various sectors working together to promote more inclusive, respectful representations of women in digital spaces. Platforms frequently use images of women in ways that may objectify or stereotype them. Whether its clothing, beauty products, or various goods, marketing strategies often rely on using women's images to sell their products; this can reinforce gender stereotypes and contribute to the perception of women as objects meant solely for consumption.

Online Marketing and the Values of Women: It is truism, that influencers and celebrities often promote products and services by leveraging their image and lifestyle; contributing to the commodification of their personality. This phenomenon extends to e-commerce websites where women's bodies are used to sell products, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards and reinforcing the notion that women's worth is tied to their physical appearance.³⁴ Hence, the objectification and commodification of women's on online platforms can have detrimental effects on their self-esteem, mental health, and overall wellbeing. Constant exposure to idealized images can lead to body dissatisfaction, comparison, and feelings of inadequacy among women. Moreover, the portrayal of women as objects for consumption can contribute to the normalization of gender-based violence, harassment, and discrimination. The perpetuation of narrow beauty standards through commodified images further marginalizes individuals who do not fit into these limited ideals.

Gender Disparities in Paid Opportunities: Gender disparities in pay and opportunities persist in the entertainment industry, with women often receiving lower compensation than their male counterparts for similar work. Additionally, women are frequently underrepresented in key creative roles such as directing, producing, and writing. This lack of representation limits the diverse perspectives and narratives that are brought to the forefront in entertainment, perpetuating a cycle of commodification and marginalization.

Commercialization of Women and Some Ethical Narratives

Aristotle

It's crucial to remember that, by today's standards, Aristotle frequently held views about women that were highly problematic. According to him, women are less valuable than males and need to be viewed as "objects of commerce." Notwithstanding, it remains imperative to scrutinize the ethical ramifications of these perspectives, given their significant impact on subsequent intellectuals and their continued applicability in contemporary society.³⁵ The notion that women ought to be viewed as property or as things that can be purchased and sold is one of the

³³<https://westminsteru.edu/student-life/the-myrriad/the-commodification-and-exploitation-of-women-from-the-core-to-the-periphery-in-relation-to-the-united-states-and-thailand.html>.

³⁴ Zoovu <https://blog.zoovu.com/women-vs-men-gender-differences-in-purchase-decision-making/>

³⁵ "The Impact of Aristotle's Views on Women as Commodities," in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 1, ed. Donald M. Borchert (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2006), p. 896.



main ethical ramifications of Aristotle's perspective on women. This can result in a number of issues, such as a disregard for the autonomy and rights of women. Aristotle's perspective also has an ethical implication in that it reinforces a patriarchal society in which women are viewed as inferior to males.³⁶ Numerous problems may result from this, such as a lack of chances and respect for women in the workplace as well as a failure to acknowledge the accomplishments of women. It may also result in a misogynistic and violent culture towards women.

There are several ethical ramifications to Aristotle's conception of women as commodities, many of which persist to this day. The ethical implications include impact on women's healthcare access. Access to vital healthcare treatments, like reproductive health, is frequently withheld to women who are viewed as commodities, which can have detrimental effects on their overall health and wellness. The effect on women's financial standing and capacity to provide for their family is a further cause for concern. Poverty and economic instability may result from this, which may then encourage more marginalization and exploitation. Women's mental health and self-esteem can suffer greatly from the dehumanizing component of seeing them as commodities.

More so, possibility of exploitation of women is one further ethical implication of Aristotle's perspective. Women may be perceived as commodities that can be used for financial advantage if they are perceived as commodities. Prostitution and other detrimental activities like human trafficking may result from this. It may also result in a culture of objectification, where women are not regarded as human beings with intrinsic worth and dignity but rather as objects. From the perspective of objectification, which can affect how women are seen, treated, and valued in society as a whole, women who are seen through a prism of intrinsic inferiority run the risk of having their humanity and agency ignored.

Jean Jacque Rousseau

Prominent philosopher of the eighteenth century Jean-Jacques Rousseau had strong opinions about the place of women in society. His views on women as commodities were entwined with his more general conceptions of women's nature and function. The gender roles and social conventions that were common in Rousseau's day strongly influenced his ideas.³⁷ Rousseau felt that a woman's main duty was to serve her husband and children, which led him to view women as commodities. This can lead to low self-esteem of women who might feel that that is all they can contribute to the society He maintained that since women's primary function was to take care of the home, they shouldn't be permitted to possess property or carry on business. According to Rousseau, women were expected to be submissive to men and to be loyal to their families. This viewpoint, which was consistent with the patriarchal beliefs of the time, saw women as objects to be used for the advantage of males. Hence, Rousseau's views on women's roles in society were shaped by his larger philosophical system, especially by his notion of the "natural" order.³⁸ He argued that women were naturals at some things, which fit them for

³⁶ "Aristotle's Views on Women," in *The Ethics of Aristotle: A New Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 20.

³⁷ "The Impact of Rousseau's Views on Women," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, ed. Patrick Riley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 80.

³⁸ Patrick Riley, *The General Will Before Rousseau: The Transformation of the Divine into the Civic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 19.



particular roles in the household. Rousseau felt that these innate characteristics made women unfit to participate actively in the political or economic arenas, therefore confirming their perceived inferiority to males.

Moreover, Rousseau's conceptions of the division of labour within the family also influenced his views on women as commodities.³⁹ He supported a conventional division of labour in which women were given interior obligations such as caring for the family and nurturing, while males were allocated outward ones like supporting the family through trade and commerce. This distinction served to strengthen the idea that women were more valuable for their contributions to the home than for their capacity for economic action. The dominant socioeconomic structures and gender dynamics of the eighteenth century are reflected in Rousseau's ideas on women as commodities and in his more general conception of women's place in society.⁴⁰ Despite controversy and criticism, his theories provide insightful perspectives on historical perceptions of gender roles and how women are treated in social contexts.

Simone Beauvoir's View

Beauvoir contended that women were frequently viewed as goods or as exchangeable sexual commodities. She thought that the objectification of women had several detrimental repercussions, one of which being the denial of women's human potential. Additionally, she contended that by treating women like objects, this hindered them from being recognized as whole moral agents and strengthened gender stereotypes. According to Beauvoir, women's objectification prevents them from realizing their full potential as people.⁴¹ Society denied women the chance to grow into unique, independent individuals with full intellectual potential by treating them as nothing more than objects. Consequently, this prolonged their enslavement and curtailed their prospects for individual and occupational development.

Beauvoir further argued that treating women like objects upheld societal attitudes that weakened women's agency and moral standing and reinforced gender stereotypes.⁴² Women were denied the respect and recognition they needed as complete moral individuals capable of making significant contributions to society, by being reduced to objects of desire or trade. For feminist thought and activity, Beauvoir's examination of the objectification of women as commodities has had a profound impact. Her work has influenced current conversations about gender equality, individuality, and dispelling damaging stereotypes that restrict the opportunities and agency available to women.

Furthermore, the notion that women's liberation must be linked to the emancipation of all people, and that patriarchy is an oppressive system, is one of the most important consequences of Beauvoir's work.⁴³ She maintained that women's troubles were a component of a wider system of inequality rather than being distinct from other social problems. She felt that in order to eradicate this inequity, society needed to be completely restructured, with changes made to

³⁹ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 45.

⁴⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile, or On Education*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 24.

⁴¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), 437.

⁴² Beauvoir, *The second sex*, 529.

⁴³ Beauvoir, *The second sex*, 634



how families are viewed, how people interact economically, and how work is defined. Hence, Beauvoir proposed that women should be able to define themselves through their own experiences and actions rather than through their biological sex. This idea is related to her concept of "existentialism," which is the belief that people create their own identities through their choices and actions.⁴⁴ Another implication of Beauvoir's work is that people should be judged based on their achievements and actions rather than on their gender or other biological characteristics.

John Stuart Mill's view

Prominent political economist and philosopher of the 19th century John Stuart Mill was a fervent supporter of women's rights. Mill expressed his opinions on women's oppression and the need for social reform to solve this issue in his seminal work "The Subjection of Women."⁴⁵ He argued that patriarchal societal institutions were responsible for the unfair treatment of women. According to Mill, giving women the same legal and educational rights as men will not only address this injustice but also help build a more just and equitable society that benefits all people. Mill's utilitarian ideology, which emphasizes maximizing happiness and well-being for the largest number of people, is the foundation of his perspective on the subordination of women. According to him, depriving women of their rights goes against the concepts of fairness and utility and impedes the advancement of society.⁴⁶ Moreover, Mill maintained that the cultivation of a genuinely meritocratic society depended on judging people according to their innate qualities and character rather than their gender or other unchangeable traits.

More so, "The Subjection of Women" is still regarded as a foundational text in the history of feminist political theory because it offered a rigorous philosophical framework for arguing for gender equality and questioning long-standing social conventions. Mill's views are still relevant in today's debates about gender parity and the continuous fight for women's rights. Mill claimed that women should be granted the same rights to liberty as males, allowing them to fully actualize their potential. He defined liberty as the freedom to follow one's own objectives and interests without undue interference from others.⁴⁷ Mill's larger philosophy of individual autonomy and self-determination is the basis of his view of liberty as the cornerstone of gender equality. He argued that a person's ability to make decisions about their life shouldn't be restricted by social norms and traditions. This position is consistent with his support for women's rights, as he felt that giving women equal freedom would enable them to actively engage in society and further civilization. Furthermore, Mill rejects paternalistic views and the imposition of traditional gender roles, which is highlighted by his emphasis on liberty as a way to gender equality.⁴⁸ He made the argument that everyone, regardless of gender, ought to be free to choose their own paths and follow their dreams without being restricted by arbitrary social norms. In conclusion, the core of John Stuart Mill's arguments regarding gender equality was his conception of liberty that is, the ability to follow one's own objectives and interests

⁴⁴ Beauvoir, *The second sex*, 635

⁴⁵ John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Susan Mendus (London: Penguin, 1998), 16.

⁴⁶ Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of women*, 60.

⁴⁷ Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of women*, 65

⁴⁸ John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women," in John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty and The Subjection of Women*, ed. Alan Ryan (New York: Penguin, 1987), p. 173.



free from external interference. He aimed to remove obstacles that prevented women from fully engaging in society and reaching their full potential by promoting equal liberty for them.

Evaluation

Treating women as commodities is deeply rooted in patriarchal and oppressive attitudes that have been perpetuated through cultural, social, and economic practices. It not only exploits women but also contributes to systemic gender inequality and reinforces harmful stereotypes. However, addressing this issue requires challenging traditional gender roles, advocating for women's rights and empowerment, promoting education and economic opportunities for women, and combating the underlying social and economic factors that perpetuate the commodification of women. It also involves creating and enforcing laws and policies that protect women from exploitation and providing support for those who have been victimized. Ultimately, it requires a concerted effort to change societal attitudes and norms to value and respect women as equal.

Flowing from the cultural patriarchal understanding, women in the society are often subjected to domestic functions founded on the belief that it is their sole responsibility to compliment men in marital life. This kind of subjugation shows the level of stereotype that exists from the time of old. This attitude towards the women placed them in the inferior position in marital life and shows the oppressive nature where women are seen and bought or sold, or traded in marriage. This conception often leads to forced marriage, without the consent of the lady thus leads to human trafficking and sexual exploitation. These attitudes towards women portray a systematic inequality where women can only be seen as possession rather than individuals with dignity and distinctive equal right and autonomy.

This is a call to challenge and dismantle the erroneous mindset that viewed women as inferior to men in the society. The feminist movement therefore grabs the need to request for human dignity in both political, social and economic spheres of life. This movement advocates abolishing the cultural belief system that run through the marital life. Little wonder that some members of the feminist movement refuse to marry and prefer to be a single mother rather than being an object in marital bondage. Hence it seeks for the recognition of respect that is inherent in all human person, and call for self-dignity and rights as human beings. It requires the need to see women also as a valuable gender that could contribute to the wellbeing of human society, promoting gender equality, fostering education and empowerment for women and need to eradicate all form of discrimination.

Notably in the ancient Ionia era, women do not have suffrage nor political right, they have no legal right of which they could not own property, vote or participate in government. This could raise the question of the main purposes in the society. Their role was to serve as housekeepers and bar children. All these boiled down to the opinion that only sees women as object of domestic responsibilities. This opinion is obvious in many of our rural contemporary society, where illiterate is at its peak and women are seen as object that only supplies children and do their house chores, thus not to involve in partisan politics or decision making in the society.

The medieval era recorded to be the era of the church and aristocracy portrays women seen as second class citizens. This is also evident in today's society where women in the religious



spheres are not been allowed to take some functions as men do. The leaders of the church in most cases are men, mainly because women are seen within the worshipping centers as inferior in spirit and divine possessiveness. They are faced with many restrictions even in the traditional belief where women of the houses are restricted from performing some official ritual ceremony because they are being seen as unclean.

It is quite obvious in the contemporary time that women in most cases are seen as means to an end and object of sexual gratification. These include the trends of sex trafficking, breast milk bank, forced labor, victims of rape, and exploitation in the entertainment and advertising industries. Women nudes are being used as object of advertisement s it is belief that it quickly appeal to human emotions more than that of men. Entertainment industries used women as object to gain many more customers and patronage, for instance is the case or strippers in the night clubs and beer parlors. It is notable that in today's society, employees that work in the social centers are mostly women of which because of their struggle to meet daily needs are being raped, molested, exploited and been abused in many ways without any legal refinement. More also, women are often objectified with the notion that 'sex sells' meaning that women's bodies and sexuality are used to promote products and services, reducing their value to mere objects for profit. This centered around the conception that their sexual displays appeal to sexual emotions, those eradicating the religious notion that the human body is the temple of God

Conclusion

The issue of women inequality that result from the erroneous conception of seeing women as object of commerce is an existential concern that exist and still persist in the society. We understand that, for instance, the use of commodified images of women influences consumer behavior by shaping perceptions of beauty, desirability, and social status. Marketing strategies often rely on objectifying representations of women to create aspirational narratives that link products or services with an idealized lifestyle.⁴⁹ This can lead to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and stereotypes, as well as the reinforcement of consumerist culture that equates women's value with their ability to consume or embody certain ideals. So, in addressing the objectification and commodification of women on online platforms presents regulatory challenges due to the global nature of the internet and varying legal frameworks across jurisdictions. While some countries have implemented measures to combat harmful representations of women in advertising and media, enforcement remains a significant challenge in the digital landscape. Therefore, the rampant trends that seen women as object of commercialization remain a perennial issue in all sphere of human life even in the midst of the present feminist movement. In all, there is a need to call for the recognition of human dignity without sexual discrimination or bias, as the paper requests for sexual equality and the respect for human dignity irrespective of the gender of the individual.

⁴⁹ Kellie DJ, Blake KR, Brooks RC. What drives female objectification? An investigation of appearance-based interpersonal perceptions and the objectification of women. 2019;14(8):e0221388. Published 2019 Aug 23. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0221388



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