

Contrasting Realities: Italian Advertisements and Non-Sexist Linguistic and Social Norms

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to scrutinise whether sexism is confined solely to the Italian advertising domain or extends into the language employed by the general populace and the broader cultural fabric of society. In Italy, despite numerous efforts made over the past decades to eradicate sexism in advertising campaigns, marketers frequently resort to its various manifestations, deeming it a powerful tool for attracting potential consumers. The prevalent utilisation of the female image in a sexist manner, portraying women as objects of desire, remains commonplace. Surprisingly, even renowned influencers aligned with the radical feminist movement often incorporate such tactics in their social media content. Sexism manifests through two principal avenues: firstly, the erotic portrayal of women's bodies and/or their sensual behaviours, frequently coupled with language expressions encompassing with dual meanings; secondly, the perpetuation and reinforcement of stereotypical gender roles. While the latter has largely diminished in the contemporary era, the former persists prominently. This case study research employs a qualitative analysis approach. Various data sources, including legal documents, historical records, and contemporary media, are critically analysed. The findings suggest that, despite the societal and linguistic rejection of

sexism in contemporary Italy, where gender equality prevails across social, economic, and legal realms, the advertising industry continues to rely on such practices heavily.

Keywords: *Advertisements, Contemporary Society, Italy, Sexism*

INTRODUCTION

Italian advertising has garnered a longstanding reputation for its frequent utilisation of erotic and sexist imagery, particularly in its portrayal of women, across diverse mediums such as television, billboards, and radio. This trend, which gained momentum in the 1970s and persists in various iterations today, underscores complex interactions among historical, cultural, and socioeconomic elements within Italy (Eos, 2023). During the 1950s and 1960s, women were consistently depicted as subservient to men in Italian advertising, reflecting the prevailing patriarchal norms of the time. Such depictions mirrored the societal framework where men held authoritative positions within the family unit, while women were predominantly confined to domestic roles and had limited involvement in the workforce beyond familial boundaries (Burei, 2021).



Figure 1. It illustrates a 1950s advertisement portraying a woman tending to her child's clothing and engaging in household chores, reflecting the societal expectations of women's roles during that era in Italy.

(Source: <https://www.ebay.it/itm/134798506149>)



Figure 2. It depicts a 1960s advertisement showcasing the idealised and stereotypical portrayal of a woman preparing a cake.

(Source: <https://www.pinterest.it/pin/507288345502287840/>)

In Italy, the advertising landscape underwent a profound transformation following the pivotal year of 1968, commonly referred to as the year of the sexual revolution and this epochal period heralded a significant shift in societal attitudes toward sexuality, gender roles, and cultural norms. As a result, the portrayal of women in advertisements underwent a profound evolution (Giuffrida, 2023). Furthermore, during this same period, numerous feminist groups emerged, advocating for women's rights and striving for complete freedom and parity with men. Prominent figures within the Italian Women's Liberation Front, such as Luciana Castellina, Giglia Tedesco, Marisa Rodano, Nilde Iotti, and Lina Merlin, rose to prominent positions. Nilde Iotti served as President of the Chamber of Deputies from 1979 until 1992, while Lina Merlin played a pivotal role in reshaping Italian law by successfully pressuring Parliament to abolish the so-called "bachelorette clause", which mandated the dismissal of female workers upon marriage (Arcobello, 2022). The progress of women and their liberation within society was remarkable. Departing from traditional depictions of women in subordinate roles, advertisements progressively portrayed women engaging in overtly erotic behaviours, often characterised by partial nudity. This departure from previous portrayals symbolised the ethos of the sexual revolution, which advocated for the liberation of sexual expression and the dismantling of repressive societal norms. Thus, advertisements reflected the evolving zeitgeist of the era, embracing newfound concepts of sexual freedom and empowerment, albeit through a lens often criticised for objectifying and commodifying women's bodies (Garzina, 2023).



Figure 3. It represents a 1970s advertisement featuring a young woman endorsing branded jeans, accompanied by a suggestive invitation stating *Chi mi ama mi segua* (Who loves me, follow me). (Source: <https://storiellamoda.wordpress.com/2012/10/06/jesus-jeans-scandal-oliviero-toscani/>)

The emergence of erotic and sexist imagery in Italian advertising can be traced back to the post-war era, characterised by significant socio-cultural transformations. The 1970s marked the onset of a burgeoning consumer culture and the ascendance of mass media, prompting advertisers to adopt increasingly provocative strategies to vie for attention amidst intensified competition. Within the competitive advertising landscape, where the primary objective is profit maximisation, the deployment of erotic and sexist imagery emerges as a potent tactic to captivate consumer interest and stimulate sales (Renda, 2024). Advertisers leverage the long-established notion that "sex sells" to craft provocative campaigns designed to elicit visceral reactions from audiences. Furthermore, the predominantly male-dominated advertising industry often fosters an environment where the objectification of women is normalised, perpetuating the cycle of sexism in advertising. Despite the pervasive presence of erotic and sexist imagery in Italian advertising, there has been growing resistance and backlash from various segments of society (Barracane, 2023). Advocacy groups, feminist movements, and regulatory bodies have increasingly called for greater accountability and regulation within the advertising industry to address the perpetuation of harmful objectification of women. Commencing in 1983, amidst the rising influence of radical feminist groups in both politics and broader society, concerted efforts were made to challenge the prevalence of sexist and excessively erotic advertisements in Italy. This period witnessed the introduction and deliberation of numerous legislative proposals within the Italian parliament aimed at prohibiting advertisements that portrayed women solely as objects of sexual desire. From 1983 to the present day, there have been more than sixty-one proposals to regulate advertising campaigns deemed sexist, erotic, vulgar, or disrespectful toward women, yet none have been ratified into legally binding norms (Siccardi, 2023). Despite these endeavours, all such proposals have been consistently rejected by the Constitutional Court, the highest judicial body responsible for determining the constitutionality of legislative measures, throughout the years. At the core of the court's rulings have consistently been articles 21 and 33 of the Italian Constitution, which unambiguously affirm the freedom of artistic expression and scientific inquiry. Within this constitutional framework, advertisements, including those considered erotic and sexist, were granted the status of "artistic creations". This legal stance effectively protected advertisements from censorship or prohibition based on their content, thereby setting a legal precedent that upheld the autonomy of artistic expression, irrespective of its societal implications (De Paola, 2017). The rulings of the Constitutional Court underscored a delicate equilibrium between safeguarding individual freedoms and regulating commercial speech. While acknowledging the concerns articulated by feminist groups regarding the objectification and commodification of women in advertising, the court upheld the paramountcy of constitutional guarantees of free expression and artistic freedom. Consequently, advertisements, regardless of their contentious or provocative nature, were deemed to fall

within the purview of constitutionally protected speech, thus thwarting efforts to legislate against their content. The decisions of the court reflect broader discussions concerning the regulation of media content in democratic societies, particularly the tension between freedom of expression and the imperative to shield against material that is harmful or offensive (Tonala, 2023). In the realm of Italian advertising, the rulings of the Constitutional Court emphasised a dedication to preserving fundamental rights and freedoms, notwithstanding societal pressures and demands for more stringent regulation. Nevertheless, these rulings also sparked continuing debates regarding the ethical obligations of advertisers and the necessity for enhanced self-regulation within the industry to tackle issues concerning gender portrayal and the propagation of detrimental stereotypes. In contemporary Italy, the advertising sector operates within a self-regulatory framework commonly referred to as a code of conduct. This code, intended to regulate the content and practices of advertisers, ostensibly seeks to uphold responsible and ethical advertising standards. However, despite the existence of this code, many individuals within the advertising industry frequently overlook it, viewing the depiction of women in sensual, sexist, and erotic contexts as a potent and effective strategy for driving advertising campaigns. Additionally, the aforementioned code lacks provisions for any form of sanction, whether pecuniary or otherwise, in the event of its violation, leaving enforcement entirely to the discretion of those involved in advertising and marketing endeavours (De Lucia, 2023). Despite heightened awareness of gender equality issues and the objectification of women, deeply ingrained cultural norms and commercial imperatives frequently overshadow efforts, perpetuating a cycle of sexualized and stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising. Driven by the pursuit of profit and market dominance, advertisers and influencers often prioritise shock value and sensationalism over considerations of ethical or social responsibility, resulting in a proliferation of advertisements that reinforce harmful stereotypes. The ineffectiveness of self-regulatory measures in curtailing the use of sexualized and objectifying imagery underscores the limitations of voluntary industry standards in addressing systemic sexism and misogyny. While codes of conduct may establish guidelines for ethical advertising practices, they often prove inadequate in the absence of robust enforcement mechanisms and meaningful consequences for non-compliance. The persistent reliance on sexualized and objectifying depictions of women in advertising mirrors broader societal norms and power dynamics that prioritise profit over principles of equality and respect. Eroticism in advertising is a subject of significant interest among both academics and professionals in marketing and communications. The use of erotic imagery, language, and messaging is increasingly prevalent in contemporary advertising, aiming solely to capture the public's attention and evoke emotions and desires (Riccardi, 2023). Some argue that Italian advertising ranks among the most sexist globally, perpetuating and reinforcing stereotypes and discriminatory portrayals, relegating women to decorative and hypersexualized roles. Moreover, advertising sexism yields detrimental effects on society, ranging from linguistic influences to women's diminished roles in the workforce and the perpetuation of patriarchal structures (Podestà, 2021). The central focus of this research is precisely to examine whether advertising sexism reflects a patriarchal society where women are marginalised compared to men, including from a linguistic perspective.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The central focus of this research is to investigate the impact of Italian advertisements and modern social media influencers' snapshots on non-sexist linguistic and social norms.

Specifically, this study seeks to:

- 1) Analyse the extent to which Italian advertisements reflect or challenge sexist norms in society, and explore the historical and contemporary portrayal of gender roles in Italian advertisements, identifying patterns and shifts over time.

- 2) Investigate the legal and constitutional underpinnings that protect artistic expression in Italian advertisements and examine their implications for addressing sexism.
- 3) Focus on recent examples of sexist advertisements, assessing their influence on public discourse, societal attitudes, and linguistic expressions in Italy.
- 4) Understand the dynamics between advertising practices and social media posts, public perception, and legal responses over the decades, highlighting changes and continuities in addressing sexism.

To achieve these four aims, this paper addresses the following related research questions:

- 1) How do Italian advertisements and social media posts from the 1950s to the present day depict gender roles and sexism?
- 2) In what ways do Articles 21 and 33 of the Italian Constitution influence the content and regulation of advertisements?
- 3) What is the impact of contemporary sexist advertisements and social media posts on Italian language and societal norms between 2020 and 2024?
- 4) How have public and legal responses to sexist advertisements in Italy evolved from the 1950s to the present?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between Italian advertisements and non-sexist linguistic and social norms, contributing to the broader discourse on gender representation in media and society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies in the past have delved into the realm of sexist advertisements in Italy, with researchers from diverse fields such as psychology, marketing, and sociology often reaching similar conclusions. The majority of these studies (Galliano, 2021; Arienzo, 2022; Cambianica, 2023) assert that the utilisation of erotic and sexual imagery, coupled with language that may verge on pornographic or adult content, contributes to the effectiveness of advertising objectives. Indeed, visual advertising images must command attention, provoke reactions, elicit specific emotions, or offer entertainment. Nudity, particularly of females, or highly erotic images are undeniably adept at capturing public attention. Whether these images and texts portray women in an offensive, sexist, or demeaning manner is inconsequential because the primary objective is to startle and intrigue consumers. Frequently, these depictions insinuate that women, like the product being advertised, are commodities for sale, with little relevance to the actual product being promoted. Subliminally, the message conveyed is that a woman is merely an object of sexual gratification, with certain images evoking scenarios bordering on violence, including sexual violence. All these elements have been shown to contribute to the success of campaigns aimed at generating profits. It is noteworthy that the annual revenue from sexist advertising campaigns has been on the rise each year, as evidenced by financial reports (Polimi, 2023) within this sector (from 75 billion euros in 2020 to 87 billion in 2021, 93 in 2022, and 106 in 2023).

An isolated study titled “Does Sex Really Sell? Paradoxical Effects of Sexualization in Advertising on Product Attractiveness and Purchase Intentions”, however, presents contrasting findings. The authors (Gramazio et al., 2021) aim to demonstrate that the commonly held belief in the effectiveness of the “sex

sells” approach in advertising campaigns should not be assumed, as it does not necessarily lead to higher profits in sales. They argue that sexualized marketing strategies yield negative outcomes and should be abandoned for several reasons:

“Women responded negatively to female sexualized ads, expressing higher negative emotions, which in turn disinclined them to purchase these products. On the other hand, men did not show any significant increase in product attractiveness or purchase intentions toward female sexualized ads compared to neutral ads. Sexualized ads may fail to achieve their intended purpose, which is to sell products. These findings raise questions for advertising agencies regarding the justification for the proliferation of such ads” (Gramazio et al., 2021: 715-716).

However, Gramazio et al. are unable to provide a rational explanation for why sexist advertisements generated increased revenue during the years 2020-2021. Furthermore, their conclusions are based on a limited sample size (105 women and 97 men), which may not accurately represent the entire Italian consumer society.

To comprehend why advertising in Italy has consistently resorted to depicting women in a sexist manner with highly erotic and sensual content over the years, it is instructive to consider Florence Rochefort’s *Femminismi. Uno sguardo globale* (Feminisms. A global look), published in 2022. The author discusses feminisms in the plural form, comparing the initial post-war women's movements with those of the present era. The feminist movements of the 1950s and 1960s, including the Italian Women’s Liberation Front and the Women’s Liberation Movement, vigorously advocated for the advancement of women’s status within society and achieved significant milestones in the years that followed, such as securing the right to divorce and abortion. In 1964, Margherita Huck became the first Italian woman to lead the Astronomical Observatory of Trieste, elevating its international reputation. Conversely, contemporary feminists have predominantly engaged in political activism, aligning openly with left-wing factions and neglecting issues common to all women. Present-day feminist movements do not encompass all women but rather exclude some based on ideological biases. Notably, in recent years (2018-2023), feminists have refrained from taking a stance on the sexist portrayal of women in advertising. Many of them, having transitioned into influencers, frequently rely on images of their sensual bodies to endorse their products or those of prominent brands (Terranova, 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This research adopts a qualitative approach, specifically utilising a case study methodology. Case study research is particularly effective for an in-depth understanding of complex issues within their real-life context (Yin, 2018). This methodology is well-suited to explore the intricate relationship between Italian advertisements and non-sexist linguistic and social norms.

Data Collection

The study encompasses the following components for data collection:

- 1) **Constitutional Analysis:** The research examines Articles 21 and 33 of the Italian Constitution, which safeguard the freedoms of expression and artistic creation. The Italian Constitutional Court’s interpretations, which consistently affirm that advertising images and accompanying

linguistic expressions are forms of art and not subject to censorship, are scrutinised. This legal framework sets the stage for understanding the boundaries and liberties within which Italian advertisements operate.

- 2) **Contemporary Newspaper Articles:** A corpus of newspaper articles from major Italian publications, spanning from 2020 to 2024, is collected. These articles are selected based on their coverage of explicit sexism in advertising. The selection criteria include articles discussing public reactions, legal challenges, and societal implications of sexist advertisements. This period was chosen to provide a current perspective on how sexist advertising influences contemporary language and social norms.
- 3) **Historical and Contemporary Advertisements and modern social media posts:** Advertising images from the 1950s to the present day, including social media ads, are compiled. The selection process involved identifying advertisements that have been considered sexist but deemed legal under Italian laws and jurisprudence. This historical range allows for the analysis of the evolution of advertising practices and their alignment with or divergence from non-sexist norms over time.

Data Analysis

The analysis is conducted through thematic analysis, a method well-suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The steps involved in the analysis include:

- A) **Familiarisation with Data:** Immersing in the data by reading and re-reading the newspaper articles, constitutional texts, and advertisements to identify initial patterns and insights.
- B) **Coding:** Generating initial codes from the data. This involves systematically coding interesting features across the entire data set and collating data relevant to each code.
- C) **Generating Themes:** Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme, and reviewing these themes to ensure they accurately represent the data set.
- D) **Defining and Naming Themes:** Refining the specifics of each theme and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
- E) **Producing the Report:** Integrating the analytic narrative and data extracts, relating the analysis to the research questions and the existing literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we delve into a troubling yet prevalent phenomenon in contemporary advertising: the utilisation of sexist imagery to shock and allure consumers. Italy has witnessed a concerning phenomenon wherein women are portrayed in sensual or erotic poses solely for commercial purposes (see Cambianica, 2023). This trend serves as a stark reminder of the enduring belief within advertising circles that shock value holds paramount importance. These advertisements often employ double entendres and associate the imagery with language carrying double meanings, frequently alluding to sexual connotations, to

further engage the audience. The perpetuation of such imagery not only reinforces harmful gender stereotypes but also highlights the pressing need for a critical reassessment of ethics within the advertising industry. Despite concerted efforts by various organisations and individuals committed to protecting women's dignity, endeavours to eliminate sexist and vulgar billboards and television advertisements have largely been unsuccessful (see Rochefort, 2022). These promotions persist and flourish, eluding removal or censorship (Landoni, 2023). Even advertising disseminated through social media channels is steeped in sexism and the nudity of the female form. Indeed, female influencers resort to these elements because they constitute two winning components that ensure a successful strategy (Besso, 2023).



Figure 4. It illustrates an ad for a restaurant *Il Galletto*, displayed in Barletta, Italy, in 2020.

(Source: <https://www.vanityfair.it/news/approfondimenti/17/02/22/pubblicita-sessiste-stop-sindaco-imola>)

The term *petto* carries a dual meaning, referring both to “filet chicken” and “woman’s breast”. In this context, the advertisement inevitably assumes a sexual connotation. This billboard, featuring a semi-nude woman, has sparked considerable debate. The Imola City Council has publicly condemned the advertisement, arguing that it does not align with the values of civility and respect for women. Nonetheless, it is also evident that content with double meanings, even if vulgar, generates discussion, which is a fundamental advertising objective: to provoke public discourse.



Figure 5. It showcases an advertisement for the pasta brand *Antichi Sapori*, displayed in the city of L'Aquila in 2021

(Source: <https://www.rete8.it/cronaca/234pubblicita-con-corpi-di-donne-la-denuncia-marketing-sessista/>)

The advertisement features a scantily clad woman alongside the suggestive phrase *La Pasta più Bona che c'è* (the most delicious pasta on the market). It captures the viewer's attention through the use of the term *BONA*, which carries a dual meaning: “delicious” in the context of food and “sexy” when describing a woman. Some women's rights organisations have criticised the advertisement for its sexist use of imagery and condemned the message. By exposing the body of a naked or semi-naked woman, the advertisement evokes “mouth-watering” hunger as well as other primal instincts. Women's associations have urged the municipal administration to remove the poster, but their efforts have been unsuccessful.



Figure 6. It depicts a billboard erected in Misano Adriatico, Italy, in 2022.

(Source: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2020/01/11/la-carne-non-e-tutta-uguale-i-manifesti-pubblicitari-di-una-macelleria-scatenano-le-polemiche-lideatore-li-rimuove-e-si-difende-mi-riferivo-alle-differenze-tr-a-le-carni/5664687/>)

The proprietor of Butcher Shop Ugolini created and erected a billboard featuring two female buttocks: one youthful and toned, the other slightly more mature with visible cellulite. The advertisement emphasises that “meat is not all the same”, with *CARNE* translating to “meat” in Italian. The image circulated widely on social media, sparking numerous protests, ultimately leading the proprietor to remove it after one year. This type of advertising is not only offensive to women but also sets a poor example for young people. These gender stereotypes, described by some as humorous, are not only in poor taste but also deeply offensive and vulgar, and should therefore be censored.



Figure 7. It depicts a 2021 sexist advertisement for a rotisserie in Aversa, Italy.

(Source: <https://www.cronachedellacampania.it/2019/11/te-la-diamo-gratis-la-patata-acquistando-due-polli-scoppia-la-polemica-per-la-pubblicita-sessista/>)

The proprietor of a rotisserie had posters erected with a “winking” yet undoubtedly sexist promotion. The advertisement offers a seemingly innocuous deal: purchasing two chickens entitles customers to free potatoes (*la patata*). However, the large advertising poster leaves little room for misinterpretation: a buxom woman in a bra appears in an alluring manner. The phrase *Te la diamo gratis* (we give it for free) takes on a double meaning, as in Italian slang, *La Patata* (potato) is a euphemism for a woman’s vagina. Many individuals on social media expressed outrage over the photo of the poster and the blatant sexist connotation associated with the word *patata* when referring to a woman.



Figure 8. It depicts a 2022 advertisement for electric scooters, in Ragusa, Italy.

(Source: <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/vienimi-dietro-sono-elettrica-cartellone-sessista-ragusa-1829361.html>)

This is another sexist advertisement featuring an almost naked young girl on a motorcycle with the slogan *Vienimi dietro, sono elettrica* (Come behind me, I am electric). The double entendre in the ad's message is unmistakable, as, in Italian, *vienimi dietro* can also carry the very explicit sexual meaning of “cum behind me”. The billboard was displayed on the streets of Ragusa, Italy, sparking a wave of indignation due to the image and content being considered sexist and potentially offensive to many citizens' sensitivities. Despite the criticism, the company that utilised the advertisement never removed it, as it was deemed capable of boosting the company's business income.

International renowned brands, including Gucci, Prada, and Dolce e Gabbana, utilise sexist ads for their business.



Figure 9. It portrays a 2022 Dolce & Gabbana advertisement.

(Source: <https://www.blitzquotidiano.it/photogallery/dolce-gabbana-la-pubblicita-che-incita-alla-gang-bang-del-2007-foto-2133923/>)

The ad, displayed in several Italian and European cities, depicts a model in a swimsuit approaching a woman lying on the floor, while a group of men looks on. This scene has faced significant criticism for its portrayal of simulated sexual violence against a woman. Representing a woman as submissive to a man in 2022 is entirely unacceptable.

As mentioned previously, renowned female influencers also employ sexist and provocative imagery to endorse their products or those of other brands, as this mode of self-representation is deemed lucrative from a business perspective (see Arienzo, 2022). One notable example is Chiara Ferragni, who, boasting over 27 million followers, is regarded as a prominent figure in contemporary left-wing feminism (Galici, 2023).

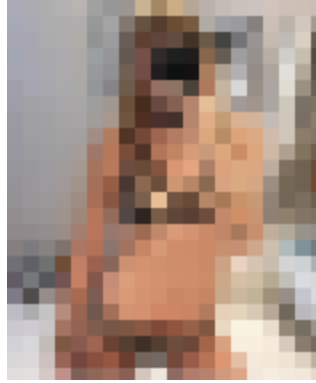


Figure 10. It illustrates one of Chiara Ferragni's Instagram posts from 2023, in which she promotes her women's lingerie products.

(Source: <https://www.affaritaliani.it/costume/chiara-ferragni-in-lingerie-la-foto-allo-specchio-e-super-sexy-foto-573108.html>)

It is not unexpected that even world-famous influencers resort to sexist imagery purely for profit. It does seem somewhat contradictory that those who profess to be feminists — and should therefore safeguard, protect, and celebrate the female figure — choose to display their nudity in public. This conveys the message that women don't need to be competent or intelligent to be successful and visible; simply flaunting their bodies is enough. However, this is not surprising in the case of Chiara Ferragni, as she does not represent the original values of feminism (Soncini, 2023).

Nowadays, a new form of advertising is emerging in Italy; however, it is premature to assert whether the depiction of the woman figure, often portrayed in sensual and erotic positions, will be replaced by images representing the LGBTQIA+ community. The inception of this new trend gained momentum in February 2023, during the Sanremo Italian Music Festival, where web star Fedez and singer Rosa Chemical delivered passionate and explicit homosexual kisses onstage (Manca, 2023). Several prominent brands have already started incorporating images related to various LGBTQIA+ groups to promote their products. Nevertheless, this subject warrants further investigation and may be the focus of future research.

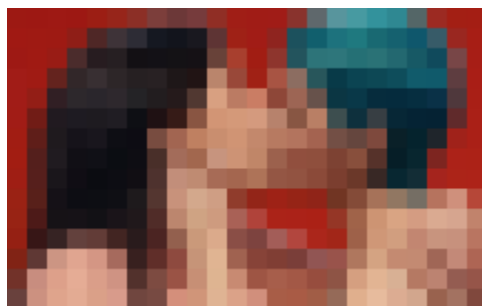


Figure 11. It showcases a 2024 Dolce & Gabbana advertisement designed to appeal to LGBTQIA+ groups, which are gaining influence within national and EU Institutions.

(Source: <https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2021/05/27/russia-censura-lo-spot-di-dolce-e-gabbana-rifutano-i-valori-della-famiglia-e-propagandano-relazioni-sessuali-non-tradizionali/6212020/>)

The European (EU) Parliament, commencing in 2008, endeavoured to halt sexist and demeaning advertising targeting women through legislation intended to be effective across all member states, albeit without success. The legislation merely urged Member States to ensure individually that advertising and marketing materials do not contain elements that, when considered in context, endorse, glorify, or incite

violence against women (Mosca, 2022). EU member states have thus far failed to enact substantial and efficacious legislation aimed at prohibiting advertisements featuring nudity, vulgarity, or objectionable stereotypes. In this domain, apart from nominal codes of conduct, punitive legal frameworks are notably absent, leaving regulatory oversight primarily reliant on the discretion of industry stakeholders (Rubin, 2024).

It is widely acknowledged (and *notoria non egent probationem*) that advertising in Italy and other EU countries has long depicted women as sexual objects, a trend that persists today. Fortunately, advertising, while a potent communication tool, does not accurately reflect contemporary society at large. Indeed, women now occupy positions of significant influence and have achieved full equality with men in various fields (Baldi, 2024). The current Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the main opposition party, Elly Schlein, and prominent figures such as the Presidents of the Supreme Court of Cassation - Margherita Cassano - and the Constitutional Court - Silvana Sciarra - exemplify women in positions of power who excel in their roles. Additionally, numerous journalists, deputies, senators, ambassadors, and scientists are women (Colarusso, 2024). Furthermore, the Italian language as a whole cannot be labelled as sexist, as it now demonstrates full respect toward the female gender and the role of women in contemporary society (Balsamo, 2024). It has undergone significant transformations both grammatically (elimination of the so-called generic or marked masculine) and lexically (introduction of female terms for all professions and institutional positions), aligning with the stringent guidelines set forth by the EU Commission and Parliament (Marazzini, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicate that sexist advertising, which portrays women in sexually suggestive or pre-orgasmic poses, is employed solely for commercial purposes to startle and capture the attention of the public, including potential consumers. It is an effective tool for boosting the sales of certain products or enhancing the sponsorship of commercial activities (see Galliano, 2021). However, it does not appear to convey "negative values" capable of influencing language, both written and spoken or society as a whole, given that women have achieved full equality with men in every sector of public and private life. Therefore, it is unwarranted to assert, as some do, that advertising mirrors contemporary society and represents its shared ideas and values (Deleonardis, 2024). Additionally, the notion that sexist advertising, depicting women as objects that incite sexual urges, may contribute to so-called feminicides lacks factual and legal basis, especially considering that Italy, among all EU countries, ranks low in terms of feminicide rates. Progressive countries, led by left-wing and centre-left parties, which advocate greater cultural sensitivity against patriarchy and in favour of feminist activism, have higher incidences of feminicides than Italy (Bulian, 2023). Nonetheless, the utilisation of eroticism in advertising continues to spark debate and controversy, due to its possible cultural implications and its potential impact on individuals' mental health.

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