

Skims Lab Pernicious Elements

Audrey Nohos

Propelled into fame by a sex tape, Kim Kardashian has leveraged her notoriety to build an empire. Beginning in 2019, the underwear company Skims is now worth four billion dollars (Merced). “Skims Lab” an advertisement capitalizes on Kim Kardashian’s sex appeal. And, yet, Kim Kardashian, who markets herself for her edgy, transgressive moves, has created a commercial that marks tired, well-worn stereotypes and displays pernicious elements for instance the using logical fallacies specifically appeal to popularity, mystifying the means of production, naturalizing pornographic poses, perpetuating sexist gender stereotypes, colorism and unrealistic female body ideals, these elements subconsciously bolster unhealthy values to vulnerable individuals especially women with mentally damaging effects like encouraging poor self-esteem and eating disorders.

Skims grossed over 750 million dollars in 2023 alone (Merced). Reaching that level of success because of the elite celebrity status of Kim Kardashian and using her power to obtain ambassadors/models that span from the National Basketball Association both women’s and men’s league to many A-list celebrity ranging from musician like Sabrina Carpenter, Usher, Lana Del Ray, Cardi B to athletes like Patrick Mahone's, Neymar, Nick Bosa, to classical runway icons like Tyra Banks, Alessandra Ambrosio, Candice Swanepoel, Heidi Klum to actress like Brooke Shields, Lana Condor and Megan Fox. Skims have nothing less than a star-studded line up pushing loungewear, and bathing suits. The main model for Skims is the brand's very own CEO Kim Kardashian. An ad released on March 11th, 2024, titled “Skims Lab” is a prime

example of the CEO using her famous curves and reputation to elevate her product (*SKIMS Lab*). “Skims Lab” ad has been watched by over half a million people on YouTube alone and was even prominently displayed on a billboard in New York’s infamous Times Square where according to a Business Insider article published in 2024 over 380,000 people walk daily, bring the number of views into the millions (Shaw).

Social media increased the number of advertisement people see pre-day making it easier for businesses to draw in customers, and Skims uses this to their advantage. A *New York Times* piece published in July of 2023 highlights the phenomenon that is Skims clothing since the company's founding close to six years ago. The brand is now worth over four billion dollars and is only planning to cultivate more success with time (Merced). Success of Skims is not a miracle but skilled marketing targeting social media users. The **Los** Angeles Times article states that Gen Z spends upward of seven hours a day consuming media across platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and various streaming apps (Faughnder). And combined with research from a **study** done by the University of Southern California in 2023 finds that the average person sees over 5,000 advertisements a daily and the number only increases with social media usage (*USC MAPP*). Skims is successful because its marketing strategy of social media worked meaning that “nearly 70 percent of its overall customers are millennials or Gen Z-ers” and 85% of customers are in the United States (Merced). With Gen-Z's having elevated levels of screen time, **then** any other generation means that Gen Zers are continually assaulted with advertisements at an expedited rate. So, when an article by *Forbes* states that Gen Z is the lead “purchasing power” of online goods a direct link can be seen between screen time, the number of advertisements seen, and purchasing of product (Jaggi). This is the reason Skims is a billion-dollar company because of Kim Kardashian influential and skillful marketing tactics on social media.

Advertisements are meant to catch an audience's attention by making the product stand out and one-way commercials go about doing this by creating a false narrative around the product. From the staging/opening shot of the commercial where the camera focuses on a name tag clipped to the lapel of a see-through plastic lab coat on top of a piece of Skims nude shape wear, giving the audience a direct shot of Kim Kardashian's chest. Concentrating on the name tag, it states Kim #0042 Chief Engineer. Throughout the advertisement, the over-fabrication of production, creating and testing of Skims products is shown, and the opening shot perfectly encapsulates the deception the creator of the ad wants the audience to buy into. Sut Jhally, notable media professor at University of Massachusetts, notes something called the "magic system" which is when goods are given sovereignty almost becoming enchanted (Jhally). Merchandise becoming something that isn't, can be seen in the "Skims Lab" when the camera zooms into the material on a t-shirt and as the camera zooms toward the threads a galaxy can be seen. The galaxy appearing is used as a visual metaphor for out-of-the-world material, but it is nothing more than a blend fabric. Lying to patrons can cause harm to the audiences because it is selling the feeling of something magical instead of the product.

Through mystifying the means to production Skims glamorizes the true conditions products are manufactured in. Well, the commercial is set on a spaceship to create out of this world merchandise yet in reality the product is made in Thailand and China with a "lackluster commitment to sustainability" (Sparkman). According to the Skims compliance statement states that "SKIMS is committed to upholding high ethical standards within its global supply chain and ensuring that, as a zero-tolerance policy, modern slavery and human trafficking are not present in any of its operations" but, while that is all good in words very little action is taken to enforce the statement (*SKIMS*). Skims has been repeatedly accused of "Green washing" which is when a

company will deceive customers into thinking that the product is environmentally friendly when it is not (Sparkman). An example of this is Skims packaging stating “I AM NOT PLASTIC” print on the bags but also there is a number four which stands for type 4 plastic which is “low-density polyethylene” but still contradicts the company's package of stating there is no plastic. Plastic packaging impacts ecosystems while sitting in landfills because it can't decompose meaning that the 9.2 billion tons of plastic ever made is still on this earth and Skims is only contributing to the problem and lying to consumers but their use on plastic (*Supply Chain Solutions Center*).

Along with the harms of plastic a much bigger problem arises which is the concept of “fast fashion” a term first coined in 1989 in a New York Times article (Schiro). Fast fashion is the rapid production of trendy clothes sold for cheap prices with the intent to copy more expensive clothes at a fraction of the cost and quality for consumers to only wear a minimal amount of times before the piece of clothing is no longer in fashion or wearable due to poor quality. The industry of fast fashion greatly harms the environment and according to a study done in April of 2020 by Kirsi Niinimäki a Professor at Aalto University located in Finland, fast fashion uses 79 trillion gallons of water, contributes 92 million tons of waste, along with immense amounts of carbon dioxide put into the atmosphere yearly (Niinimäki). So, people focusing on buying sustainable products and avoiding the harms of fast fashion are duped out of their environmentally friendly ways so Skims can profit.

 Women being portrayed as submissive sacrificial lambs to amuse male gaze in advertising is not a new concept but when seeing it daily can create an oversexualized narrative that is poisonous to real women. The narrative of women being sex objects is pushed so heavily in the media when in the “Skims Lab” advertisement shows a “Support Test” which in tales a

close shot of Kim Kardashian bouncing in a chair in a bra, nothing seems array because Kim Kardashian is supposed to be a fantasy of a women. Expectations of women being like Kim Kardashian damages real women and seeps into the violent reality of rape and sexual assault against women. For example, RAINN the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network states that “1out of every 6 American women has been the victim of complete or attempted rape” and since 1998 over 17.7 million American women have been raped (RAINN). The way the women are portrayed in media does nothing to callout or counter the amount of sexual violence towards women but instead exploits it for financial gain. Not only continuously seeing sexual images enforces a false narrative and physically harm women but cause distress on women psychological. According to a research paper titled “*Pornography: A Concealed Behavior with Serious Consequences*” details the link of mental health and pornography usage. The data from the study shows that overconsuming pornography can lead to anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts (Noel). So, when constantly exposed to porn-like images, women's mental and physical health are greatly put into danger.

Women throughout the history of advertising have been poised to look ditzy and submissive but by doing so enshrine harmful gender stereotypes that not only wound women mental but can lead to physical harm. “Skims Lab” shows a variety of tests being done on the Skims products, one of the tests shown is the called the weightless test, the test features Kim Kardashian floating in space wearing a bra and underwear. A documentary by Sut Jhally, a professor at University of Massachusetts who has been studying media for over 20 years, titled “*Codes of Gender*” talks about women’s stereotypes in advertising. Jhally talks about many topics that apply to the “Skims Lab” ad like the “benignness of the surround” and how it perpetuates the stereotypical submissiveness of women. Kim Kardashian floating in the “Skims Lab” ad is a

prime explanation of a term “benignness of the surround” (*The Codes of Gender*). The “benignness of the surround” is when a model in an advertisement particularly women was poised looking ditzzy and suspended in the air or open to attack, assuming the surrounding area is safe putting women in a submissive state. By making women look brainless and vapid advertisements can propel stereotypes that women are unaware of their surrounding which can lead to physical assaults against women. According to a study showcased in *Codes of Gender* when talking to men that have been convicted of assault, they seek victims that fit the description of women in advertising. Meaning that women in advertising are put in “victim-ready poses” which is so normalized in the media that men aggressors use those traits as a handbook while picking prey (*The Codes of Gender*).

Skims brands sell merchandise from shapewear, dresses, shirts, pajamas, and most notable bras and lingerie, one of Skims most viral products was released earlier in 2024, which is the “nipple push-up bra” the design of the bra has two bumps in the bra where a woman's nipples should be always giving a woman a constant look of arousal. Outside of offering a women support the point of a bra is smooth and conceal a woman's chest so by putting nipples on a bra the woman looks as though she is always ready for sex playing into the narrative that a woman's life goal is to serve men and always be aroused. The nipple bra plays into a much bigger problem of the sexual objectification of women. According to research due to the amount of unrealistic beauty standards and sexual objectification pushed onto women there can be serious mental side effects one side is called self-objectification which causes shame, anxiety, hyper awareness of the body state, unipolar depression, eating disorders and sexual dysfunction. Self-objectification is when “girls and women are socialized to view themselves as objects to be evaluated based on their appearance” (Klein). The link between self-objectification and its side effect of sexual

dysfunction which is the low sexual desire, arousal difficulties, sexual pain and inability to orgasm play an important role in the “orgasm gap” which is males achieving orgasms at higher rates than their female counterparts in heterosexual relationships (Vanderveen). Meaning that because women have been taught that their bodies are never good enough, they become so self-conscious that it forms into self-objectification, which enables women ability to have sexual pleasure because “women engage in sex as ‘spectators’” (Klein). Women have become so hypersexualized to fit a male gaze that sex to some women becomes unpleasurable and more focused on displeasure with their appearance than the sex itself.

Even though the ad emphasizes the company’s appeal to women of color by selling products matching their skin tone. The product that made the internet first fawn over the brand was the shapewear because sizing goes from XXS to 5X and is offered in a variety of skin tones from paler to darker complications. Sizes in fashionable trendy clothing going up to 5X are almost unheard of in most brands. For example, popular brands like Brandy Melville offer one size of clothing: extra small, excluding all customers excelling their botched ideals of women's bodies. Brands like Brandy Melville deliberately cut their own profit margins by neglecting other more common body types but because Skims offers such variety in sizing everyone with the means to buy is a potential consumer. But when it comes to the marketing of products the use of skinny traditional models is used distortionally more than plus size models, so well the brand can claim size inclusivity it is rarely displayed. The Instagram of Skims uses the occasional plus size model to keep followers happy, but the larger scale of posts are thin models. Another key to Skim's success is the shade range of shapewear, bras and underwear offered and well Skims does a wonderful job of making skin tone inclusive products Skims marketing campaigns use of colorism is prominent. A paper published by Harvard defines colorism as “is the process of

discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over their dark-skinned counterparts. Colorism is concerned with actual skin tone, as opposed to racial or ethnic identity” (Hunter). A prime example of colorism within the African American community is what is known as the paper bag test. According to the Jim Crow Museum the test was used 20th century to discriminate against African Americans from entering social clubs and even churches with a skin tone darker than a paper bag which was thought to be a “midway between white and black hues” (Pilgrim). While the process of the paper bag test may have stopped, the ideas of colorism are eminent in marketing and advertising campaigns like Skims. Examples of colorism being used in Skims marketing are the positioning of models, meaning that white or lighter skinned models are placed in front well models with darker complexations are pushed to the back or straggling to the side. So, in alignment to the size inclusion of the brand the question can be raised of whether Skims and Kim Kardashian care more about profit or the inclusivity of marginalized groups.

Ads such as “Skims Lab” encourage eating disorder in vulnerable women trying to achieve an impossible figure. Kim Kardashian, known for her figure and claims through exercise, and eating right everyone could have her body but fails to mention the money, procedures and eating disorders she must have to maintain her body giving vulnerable women the unrealistic idea that you too can look like Kim Kardashian. Because of the lies Kim Kardashian tells about her body, sensitive followers of the celebrity are more likely to join the 28.8 million Americans that struggle with eating disorders, the 15% of women that will have an eating disorder by the time they are in their mid 40’s and if the eating disorder becomes too severe they could even sadly join the over 10,200 deaths every year attributed to eating disorder (ANAD). An example of Kim Kardashian portraying unrealistic body ideal is when she famously wore Marilyn Monroe’s “Happy Birthday, Mr. President” gown to the 2022 Met Gala, but when

she first tried on the dress it didn't fit which forced her to lose 16 pounds in three weeks.

According to the Mayo Clinic it is healthy to lose one to two pounds a week, so Kim Kardashian would have to be put through extreme diets and training to lose that amount of weight that fast (Bell). Within the "Skim Lab" video there is a moment where Kim Kardashian steps in front of a wall of TV's giving her petite frame a moment to be showcased. Looking at images of unrealistic body standards women and young girls become more prone to eating disorders.

Skims the loungewear, shapewear, underwear, swimwear empire run by Kim Kardashian is worth four billion dollars. And it has many positive qualities, for example its inclusivity in size and shade range but has questionable morals regarding both issues. Well good things can be said of Skims and its marketing does more harm than they realize. By giving women, the subliminal message of you will only be good enough if you are sexualized can cause eating disorder, anxiety, depression and because that message about women is also given to men serious issues of assault and rape can occur. Society needs to stop oversexualizing women in advertising for a profit and start portraying real women. And a good place to start would be the women owned business of Skims because if anyone can change the narrative of women it would be Kim Kardashian if she stopped playing into tale of sexual objectification for profit.

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