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**A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HERBAL SEXUAL MEDICINE WEBSITES MARKETING TO
WOMEN**

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ABSTRACT

An area attracting increased attention from the 'profit driven' commercial drug industry is the potentially lucrative medication market for female sexual problems. In the absence of an approved pharmaceutical drug, numerous internet based herbal sexual medicine (HSM) companies are targeting this market. Very little has been known about the marketing messages that HSM companies are sending out to women via the internet.

This research delivered a critical analysis of the marketing messages of five prominent internet based HSM companies: Zestra; Femvigor; Hersolution; Vigorelle, and; Provestra. The analysis revealed three main discursive themes forming the basis of the marketing strategy. In the first theme, the HSM websites presented a medicalised view of women's sexuality and sexual problems, this framing implicated all women as being sexually dysfunctional and requiring biologically based sexual medication. In the second theme, stereotypical gender constructions were used in the HSM websites to portray women's sexuality as inadequate compared to men's, whilst emphasising the importance of sex for men and the necessity for women to fulfil men's sexual needs in order to maintain intimate relationships. This again led to the conclusion that women needed to consume sexual medication. In the third theme, the HSM websites capitalised on the current western societal emphasis placed on the importance of sex for health. In conjunction with the portrayal of the importance of sex was a call for women to act responsibly concerning their health. Being 'responsible' for sexual health, was portrayed in the HSM websites as consuming sexual medicine.

The critical analysis of the HSM websites ultimately revealed that the marketers of HSMs had researched and identified potential issues that could make women anxious about their sexual problems. They appeared to emphasise these problematic issues in an attempt to increase a women's anxiety about her sexual concerns, with the aim of manipulating women into purchasing sexual medication. These findings add considerable evidence to suggest that HSM companies are involved in the disease-mongering of female sexual problems.

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