



PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract: *Advertising is the paid form of non-personal communication for promotional activity. According to Philip Kotler, advertising is “any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services through mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television or radio by an identified sponsor”. Advertising can transform the audience from their practical value to the symbolic value. In reality we are purchasing the image of a particular advertisement, not a product or service. Raymond William identifies the concept of advertisement as a “magic” that can change a product or service into an attractive signifier. Being a persuasive instrument, advertisements have an ethical responsibility in the society. Sometimes it is seen that women are portrayed negatively (such as a sexual or stereotypical object) in advertisements. A gorgeous female model has become a basic part of any advertisements which sometimes are unnecessary. In that case the prettiness of that model attracts the consumers and the advertiser doesn’t need to apply further efforts to influence the audience. For instance, a heart shaped painting epitomizes love, and this is universally interpreted in the same way. On the same path, advertising uses women as a symbol of beauty which is a universally accepted concept. This may easily leads to the negative representation of women, more specifically it can be said that such portrayal of women body is a landmark of attraction. Commercials have the leeway to persuasive communication for getting through their target audience. Most of the advertisements are focuses on reinforcing one’s image and beauty. Advertisements generally are constructed by stating a problem and offer a solution by illustrating that through the beauty of women.*

Keywords: *Advertising, Women portrayal, Stereotypical representation, Social responsibilities and Ethical values.*



Introduction

In a contemporary society the role of advertising is not only to stimulate the purchasing of products and services, but also to contribute to the formation of social identity to the consumers. Robert Heath, an influential academic and researcher from England mentioned in his book, *'The Hidden Power of Advertising'* (2011) that the influence of advertising is neither limited to the depth of the message nor to the consumer's power to process a rational and emotional message, it manifested to the process of low inclusion of the consumer. He assumed that advertising had an influence only when the consumers had paid close attention to a particular advertisement. Luxurious and lavish lifestyle, beauty and sex are frequently used in the contents of advertising to promote a large number of products from chocolates to cars, from cosmetics to electronic devices.

It can be considered that advertising sells values, images and concepts and strive to create a virtual reality that is considered normal in society. Author Jim Fowles pointed out the changing fashion trends as a cycle of attraction that has been defined in a popular culture and completed in advertisements (Klein, 2013, 30). The evaluation of the role of women in this cycle of attraction identifies the changes in fashion, style and social values. Advertising actually tells the consumers who they are, who they wish to be and what they wish to do. The manipulative words and messages in advertisements influence the consumer's critical thinking and their personal opinions.

Women are most tendentiously portrayed as a beautiful and attractive content in commercials (Aysed, 2014, p. 6129). In that case of such advertisements which are begun with a pretty woman posturing with the particular product or service, there is no need to make more efforts by the advertisers to attract the consumers. The female characters in commercials are portrayed as the centre of attraction, ideal housewives or independent young lady (Nagi, 2014, p. 86). Actually advertising apprises women how to be better by dyeing hair to look younger, how to lose weight to be attractive to him, how to prepare a delicious meal for him so that he's elated to come home etc.

Women representation in advertising

According to a study by Furnham and Paltzer that men are portrayed as more dominant in conveying a verbal message whereas women are presented as a visual content predominantly.



Freyre (2003) described how patriarchal society prejudice against women who are considered as *Fragile sex* and *fleshly puppet*.

There is a strong manifestation that in decision making the female representation is imbalanced in relation to that of the men because the frame of reference regarding women contemplated in commercials squeezed out the male thoughts of women. On the top of that as men are instigated in their thinking by their cultural and social norms, where women are the secondary to men, the possibility of male concepts regarding women are getting biased along with these culturally determined terms rather than equally balanced impression.

On the other side, the consumer culture also vends the ideology of white beauty which states that the women should be slim and attractive by their sex appeal to men.

Being an inspiring and persuasive instrument, advertising have not only the ethical value, but also have the cultural value in the society. It has the power to affect the mind of the audience so that the society has changed.

Based on the Social Comparison Theory which was developed by Festinger in 1954, many researchers have observed that the presentation of idealized concepts in advertising can influence the viewers because they collate themselves with that concepts depicted in the advertising.

Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) suggested four predominant stereotypes which are found in advertising – (1) Women's place is in the home,

(2) They are dependent on men for any major decision making,

(3) They need the protection of men,

And (4) they are sexual objects to the men rather than a human being.

The comprehensive review of the last few decades designate some general concurrence on stereotyping in commercials where women are predominantly portrayed as confiding on men, sex-object, housewives or caring mother who do not make any important decision, whereas men are pictured as decision maker in a commanding role.

Promoting stereotypes

Sometimes advertisers sponsor conformity in human behavior pattern and promote stereotypes for universal acceptance. According to Dr. Sarojit Dutta, certain groups of people



are portrayed in some fixed roles which psychologically lead to the crisis of identity and the best example of such cases are women as housewives, mother and companions to men. They are shown as the decision makers only for the selection of health drink, detergent, soap, kitchen appliance, bathroom cleaner etc. Whereas men are shown as the decision makers for the life insurance plan, electronic gadget, car etc. in the advertisements. In almost all the countries women are still ostracized to the secondary role that leads to Womens' Lib Movement. In Indian society advertising has presented the position of the women as the traditional role of Sita-Savitri-Annapurna and Urvashi with modernized social context.

According to Scott and Faulder,

- Advertiser's intention is to please the consumers.
- Advertising is not a trend setter, it's a trend follower. It serves for the commercially most fascinating market segment, i.e. women as housewives and men as decision makers.
- The appraisal of advertising is not widespread. Women who protest against such stereotyping characteristics are not considered as the representative of the average female consumers.

Generally stereotyping occurs when women are delineated with domestic products, such as body care products, home care products or food items; whereas men are represented with others, like cars, leisure or alcoholic products. It becomes problematic when stereotypes expedite the judgments and expectations which circumscribe the life opportunities of a particular social category. That's why the public policy is concerned at the time of decision making for marketing activities.

On the other hand, there is a noteworthy share of women in acting the roles in such commercials. The analysis of the kinship between the female portrayals projected in the advertisements and their pattern of roles in the production of the commercials leads to the original plea to the employment stature of the women in the advertising industry. This ingenious vantage point was introduced with respect to the making of television commercials by the Screen Actors Guild – New York Branch Women's Conference Committee. The research team analyzed the status of financial rewards of the major actors, extras and the off-camera voice over associated with the commercials. Obviously here the major actors are paid higher rather than others. Along with this, they are also paid accessorial for its airing. As the extras do not get these advantages there is a difference in earning flair between the major



actors and extras, which may suppose to an enormous proportions. Whereas the off-camera voice over work is also financially rewarded with the accessorial and this are actually the most profitable areas of the employment in advertising sector. An analytical study on a representative sample of advertisements for various kinds of products, services and ideas resulted that male dominated the major and extra categories in case of television commercials. That being the case particularly the voice over work was profusely assigned to males. Since women are marginalized in such categories and underprivileged form the higher earnings, employment status, as well as behind, the production scenario of the commercials are considerably subservient to that of the men.

Women as the sexual object of commercial

The commercial contents coupled with sexual messages are presented through images and the words selected.

The easiest way to draw the attention of the audience is through sex. Sexual attraction is frequently used in the advertising of perfume, where a woman entered into the scene with her amusement, while a handsome man follows her. In case of the commercials of body care cosmetic products, such as body lotion, soap etc. we have seen that a man expresses his desire to touch the velvety woman skin. In such advertisements while men are hardly pictured partially unclothed, women habitually are.

The world's leading brands such as Calvin Klein, Victoria's Secret, Nike, Giorgio Armani, Gucci have defined their identities through the definition of sexual identities of women (Torlak, 2013, p. 38).

Portrayal of Women in Advertising in Different Time Frame

Furnham and Skae (1997) considered advertising are moving in the direction of a slightly less stereotypical attitude.

1970's	Representation of women was stereotypical.
1980's	Female portrayal was continued to be in stereotypical role.
1990's	Almost consistent with the previous portrayal but observed minor changes in such portrayal.



2000's	Some slight changes are observed in such representation.
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Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986

History of the legislation – In response to a women’s movement for a legislative action against the negative portrayal of women in the country, the Rajya Sabha Bill was introduced by Margaret Alva in the year 1986 and became Law in October 1987.

An Act to prohibit indecent representation of women through advertisements or in publications, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

Objective of the Act – This Act was intended to govern the women’s portrayal in mainstream media and to ensure that women’s representation in media is not indecent in any kind of media content, especially in advertisements.

According to this Act, no person shall publish, or cause to be published, or arrange or take part in the publication or exhibition of, any advertisement which contains indecent representation of women in any form.

No person shall produce or cause to be produced, sell, let to hire, distribute, circulate or send by post any book, pamphlet, paper, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting, photograph, representation or figure which contains indecent representation of women in any form:

Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to any book, pamphlet, paper, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting, photograph, representation or figure – the publication of which is proved to be justified as being for the public good on the ground that such book, pamphlet, paper, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting, photograph, representation or figure is in the interest of science, literature, art, or learning, art, or learning or other objects of general concern.

Penalty – Any person who contravenes the provisions of Sec3 or Sec 4 shall be punishable on first conviction with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, and with fine which may extend to two thousand rupees, and in the event of a second and subsequent conviction with imprisonment for terms of not less than six



months but which may extend to five years and also with a fine not less than ten thousand rupees but which may extend to one lakh rupees.

Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Rules, 1987

In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 10 of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, the Central Government hereby makes these rules. These rules are called the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Rules, 1987. They were come into force on 2nd October, 1987.

Code for Advertising

There are 33 dos and don'ts for advertisers in the Code for Commercial Advertisements on Doordarshan. It incorporates the provisions of Indecent Representation of Women Act and Consumer Act, 1986.

The section on women stipulates that no advertisement shall be permitted that

- (a) Projects derogatory images of women
- (b) Portrays women in such a manner which emphasizes on passive qualities and encourages them to submissive role in the society
- (c) Encourages mutual disrespect between the genders
- (d) Does not ensure the presentation of women in aesthetic standard and is not within the established norms of decency.

Conclusion

Many researches revealed that the advertising imagery influenced them in a negative way as well as in some positive way also, such as independent and superwoman. In case of independence advertising represents the ability of women to sort out and solve their problems and live their lives independently against the domination of the men in the different aspects of life like economically, socially and emotionally. In the similar way, the concept of superwoman in advertising represents the ability of women to do various activities at the same time, such as to be a mother, homemaker, economically successful professional as well as a beautiful and attractive lady.

The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act (1986) and Rules (1987) was established to maintain the integrity of women and uphold their reputation. It will



become successful only when this Act and Rules are implemented properly. Though the penalty of these provisions are not so strict enough.

The above mentioned guidelines and codes would be to remind the advertisers about their ethical and social responsibilities towards the viewers. Based on the results of different studies it can be said that the image of the women in commercials is quite distorted. That means the objectification and stereotypical representation of women lead the purpose of creating an attractive appeal towards the product or service advertised. The product would sell better if it was advertised by a beautiful and attractive lady – though this statement is not fully agreed by the consumers, they said that they were not influenced by such factors, but many researches reveal that the advertisers fully rely on the above statement.

Additionally the ingress of more and more women in the advertising industry is advocated as the simplest and obvious solution for all the case of underrepresentation of women in commercials. It is generally speculated that the increased number of female presence at all the levels of advertising production including the top tiers, will spontaneously results to the more balanced presentation of women in advertising.

So the advertisers should be more sensible for the society by treating all the viewers as human beings, not to be gender biased, and create a healthy advertising environment and further a healthy society.

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