



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

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IMAGES OF WOMAN IN ADVERTISING AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Advertising is a powerful tool used by the marketers to persuade, manipulate and shape behavior of the consumers. The images of woman in advertising has been a matter of debate from considerable time since most of the advertisements use woman to represent their products and services as she is the one who makes majority purchases for her family. Women in advertisements are presented either in a sexually provocative manner or in a non-traditional role which has left a very bad impact on the society leading to various problems like depression, eating disorders, sexual crimes etc.

KEYWORDS

Advertising, Women, Marketing.

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is everywhere - in magazines, on television, in movie theaters, on countless web pages, on busses, in subways and on milk-cartons. In fact, advertisements are so common in our times that we don't even realize we are looking at them anymore. They invade not only our mailboxes, but our minds and in doing so, they contribute to the image we shape of women in our culture. From decades women have been portrayed as housewives, dependent on men & sex objects in advertisements. From past one decade, representation of women in advertisements has been experiencing a shift from the house wife centric ads to the career women ads. Advertising has tended to move from the role of the traditional housewife who is always in the Kitchen to the role of the new woman that we now recognize. In addition to keeping a Perfect house, these women also have successful careers and more than ever they are beautiful and fashionable. Kilbourne claims that the portrayal of women in advertising is negatively influencing the view men have of women in our society and how women view themselves. She claims that the constant barrage of images and texts depicted in advertisements, suggest the idea that 'the thinner a woman is, the better she is', has a strong influence, especially in female adolescence, that contributes to eating disorders and low self esteem issues.

IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

Why do you think most of the advertisements are focused on women? Maximum advertisements are women and family oriented. Women are the perfect home makers. And she is the one who makes majority purchases for her family. Starting from vegetables to clothes. Since woman plays a dominant role in the purchase activities, nowadays, many marketers are targeting women and are increasingly portraying them in their advertisements. With the passage of time the role of women in advertisements has witnessed a transformation - from that of a homemaker to prime purchaser. Women consumers have become more demanding nowadays. And it is a great challenge on the part of the marketers to cater to the needs of ever changing needs of the women consumer. The image of Indian women in advertising during 1970's was totally different from that of today. The improvements in the role of women in advertising offer both merits and demerits to the society.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS DURING 1970's

The role of Indian women was confined only to a perfect care giver in most of the advertisements during 1970's. Women were often portrayed as housewives and too infrequently as professionals. Women did not have individuality and they were portrayed often as dependent, requiring men to solve their problems. The advertisements in 1970's presented the following views about woman's role:

- (1) a woman's place is in the home,
- (2) women do not make important decisions,
- (3) women are dependent and need men's protection, and
- (4) men regard women primarily as sexual objects; they're not interested in women as people.

The Surf and the tajmahal advertisement of 1970's are the examples that depicted women in house hold activities. And her role was limited only to cleaning, washing clothes, cooking, taking care of her children, husband etc. "a perfect home maker". She was confined only to these works in order to please her husband. Studies have shown that advertisements portraying women as homemakers may activate the belief that women are nurturing, communal and domestically minded (Clifton, McGrath, & Wick, 1976; Nose Worthy & Lott, 1984; Six & Eckes, 1991). And women in the advertisements represent what Society, especially the men of society, holds as the ideal image for a woman. The image of woman in advertising under went a great change from a mere house wife to a professional during 1980,s.

WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS OF 1980's

The feminist movement which took place in America had a great impact all over the world including India. After the zenith of the feminist movement, women started to observe all they had accomplished. Indian Women finally had the potential to portray herself in society. They also realized that they have a separate world other than the kitchen. Advertisers quickly realized that their target audience would react best to advertisements that portrayed women's power. "Changes in advertising are, of course, changing as society changes" (Taflinger). Women began to strongly reject the traditional ideals. The Charlie advertisers were the first to realize that society had truly changed. And they "introduced the attractive independent woman who needed no one else in her life. Women no longer responded to advertisement depicting them as housewives with no potential. The marketers recognized that the new woman was the successful businesswoman. Women were responding to products and advertisements that provided a better image of women. Marketers studied what women responded well to. The liril and the sun film advertisements in 1980's introduced the attractive independent woman who was confident and free. After these

advertisements were published, advertisements from perfume to jeans were all giving the same message: women could be successful. Indian Advertisements in 1980's were produced for women as they were viewed by them. During 1990's and subsequently the advertisers worked hard to build multiple possible identities for woman in advertising who can sell their products in a better way.

WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS OF 1990's

However, in the post-feministic 1990s and subsequently, advertisers have been attempting to construct multiple possible identities for women in an effort to change their stereotypical image and enhance their spending power. In Today's advertisements, women appear less frequently dependent upon men while men are less likely to be depicted in themes of sex appeal, dominance over women and as authority figures. Advertisements have also started portraying women more frequently as career-oriented and in non-traditional activities and are constructing the persona of the 'new Indian woman'. Where on one hand, the media is portraying this strong image of a modern day woman; the Ariel advertisement of 1990's portrayed woman as a confident, independent career oriented woman. There is also a section that is misusing this image. There are advertisements that are showcasing that if a woman wants to explore her talent she has to display her physical attributes. In the advertising industry whether a woman is promoting cosmetics, jewelers, fabrics, domestic gadgets or any other product; she is always projected as a sex object. The investigators and commentators have long speculated that repeated exposure to such images in advertising and media contribute to a broad range of social problems, including sexist attitudes and beliefs, sexual harassment, violence against women, eating disorders etc (Beckwith,1994;Kilbourne & Lazarus,1987; Lazier-Smith,1989). As woman in advertising was portrayed as independent and fashionable the advertisers used her as decorative object and women in advertisements were used to represent those products with which they were not at all concerned with. And the present day advertisements are highly sexualized to look at.

WOMEN IN PRESENT DAY INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

Women in present day advertisements are portrayed much as sexual and decorative objects. In a research study conducted by Lin (1997) demonstrated that women more often than men were shown in a state of undress, and exhibited more "sexiness", and were depicted as sexual objects. In an analysis of women appearing in advertisements in time and vogue from 1955 to 2002, Linder (2004) reported that an average of 40 percent of advertisements featured women as decorative objects. Women of today are portrayed as stronger and highly sexualized. But this time it is a new type of beauty and self-image. This new image is that of a tall, skinny, woman with perfect skin. New stereotypes are consolidated in order to portray women on television. Features that some years ago were unimaginable are now common in this new portrayal of women. They are more independent and self-confident. The role of women in today's advertisements is both at home and in the workplace, and they are also portrayed as an icon of beauty. Commercials in 2001 represent a new professional woman who had not reached some banned areas years ago. A good example for this is the commercial of the airlines where we can see the present day women professionally dressed and with an aspiration to reach the sky. And in the Lux soap advertisement we can see the woman portrayed as an icon of beauty.

IMPACT OF PORTRAYAL OF WOMAN IN ADVERTISING ON SOCIETY

Portraying woman in advertising in a wrong way causes a very bad impact on society as a whole. The commercials that females are mostly in are ones that portray them as thin and beautiful while some being subservient to men. The way women are dressed in advertisements do not depict the Indian culture. The negative effects of portraying women in advertising fall into a huge range of problems. The most common effect would be the constant increase of women's struggles with dieting and eating disorders. Kyra, Covell (1995) made an attempt to assess the influence of sexist advertisement portrayals of women by using four subscales of Burt's (1980) and came out with the findings that the media portrayals of women can influence sexual attitudes and beliefs. And males who see print media advertisements in which women are presented as sex objects are most likely to evidence increased sex role stereotypic and rape myth beliefs, and are likely to be more accepting of interpersonal violence (primarily against women), than are males exposed to other types of advertisements. In another study conducted by Natalie and Covell (1997) the researchers examined the impact of print advertisements on attitudes towards women and the impact of seeing sex images and progressive advertisements on attitude towards feminism and the women's movement and the researchers came out with the findings that there was presentation of women in advertisements as objects for sexual gratification which encouraged attitudes supportive of sexual aggression among young adults. Based on the findings the researcher suggested that the continuous exposure to such advertisements among young adults would hinder women's efforts of obtaining true equality with freedom from sexual aggression.

Kilbourne (2000) in her study concluded that dismemberment advertisements focus was on one part of the body, e.g. woman's legs. Sexual advertisements as well as dismemberment advertisements employ female body parts for the purpose of selling a product. Dismemberment advertisements promote the idea of separate entities. These advertisements overtly and covertly encouraged women in viewing their body as many individual pieces rather than a whole. These advertisements left many women with a feeling that their entire body was spoiled on account of one less than feature. Girls and women were conditioned from very young age to view their body as "work-in-progress" or something in constant need of alteration. In a study conducted by Kuntjara (2001) the researcher studied the different types of images of women portrayed in advertisements and came out with the findings that the images of women portrayed in advertisements usually created artificiality that established an impossible standard of physical perfection for women. And women in advertisements were depicted as an object chosen by men for their sexual gratification. Women were often portrayed as sexual object and the images of women in advertisements gave the message those women who had qualities of intelligence, cheerfulness, who was young, sexy, rich educated and lovable was considered as an ideal woman. Campbell (2003) conducted a research study and came out with the findings that "the respondents with high levels of exposure to fashion magazines advertisements exhibited significantly higher degrees of liking for ultra thin fashion models than did those respondents with low levels of exposure to fashion magazine advertisements". They found that the visual images depicted, had an impact on women's emotional status, when their bodies did not match the ideal type shown in the images. This led to the development of eating disorders.

Almost 90 percent of the Indian advertisements of the present day involve woman to represent their products and services since she is the one who make majority purchases for her family. It is pathetic to note that these women are portrayed as sex objects in most of the advertisements. These women emphasize the unhealthiness of our society and our national obsession with diets and eating disorders. And studies have indicated that portrayal of women as sex objects in advertising and media leads to negative psychological effects, such as depression, hopelessness and eating disorders among the youth as well as the adults. And can give women negative self image because of belief that their intelligence and competence are not being acknowledged.

CONCLUSION

Advertising is a powerful medium designed to sell products and aspirations. The repetition of commercials in the media though boring leaves an indelible mark on the minds of the people of the society. The images of woman in Indian advertisements have undergone a great change. And this change or development offers both advantages and disadvantages to the society. In the present day's advertisements women are portrayed depending upon the product they have to promote. And at the same time there are certain section of people who are misusing the image of women by portraying her as decorative and sex objects in which has left a very bad impact on the society leading to many problems like eating disorders, depression etc. Advertising or media cannot be fully blamed for such an effect. We the people of the society must be educated to decide what to accept and raise our voice against the derogatory portrayal of women in advertising and media.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Advertising play an important role in influencing and shaping values and attitudes of both adolescents and adults; Hence advertisers should ensure that it depicts a positive portrayal of women in advertisements.

2. There is a need to recognize the changing roles of women. Advertisement should show women working in a wide variety of career settings and in diverse roles such as education, decision maker, independent, self confident and self reliant.
3. Advertisements should also depict the average women instead of focusing only on the upper strata of the society.
4. Women in advertisements should not be used for attention seeking purpose.
5. There is a need for special committee to scrutinize all advertisements carefully to ensure that advertisers do not portray women in derogatory and stereotype ways.
6. It is necessary that society should be motivated and sensitized to the issues of portrayal of women in advertisements so that they can take necessary steps for healthy projection of women in advertising and media.

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