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FEMALE ROLE PORTRAYAL IN INDIAN MEDIA: AN EXPLORATION OF FACTORS AFFECTING IT'S ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the various factors that affect advertising effectiveness of female role portrayal in Indian Media. A total of 410 consumers above 20 years of age and from northern region of India were surveyed employing researcher controlled sampling. Data was collected through structured, refined research instrument that comprised of scales to measure various aspects of sex role advertising and its effectiveness. The research instrument also had items to generate demographic profile of respondents and female autonomy levels. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted to reveal the existence of underlying factors that made up the attitude of Indian consumers towards female role portrayals, purchase intention and company image. Also sociocultural attitude of consumers towards appearance and idealized imageries in media was explored. The results of this paper aim to provide valuable insights in the area of sex role stereotyping in Indian media and its effect on Indian consumers. It shall help domestic and international marketers in dovetailing their marketing strategies and developing appropriate promotional messages.

KEYWORDS

company image, female role portrayals, information, internalization and purchase intention.

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INTRODUCTION

Media is undeniably reaching a level of near "omnipresence". It has affected all aspects of human lives, influenced thought processes, produced economic revolutions and cleansed societal evils. It has become the ultimate platform that showcases us to the world and the world to us. The most evolved form of media is the Social Media. It is a dynamic, instantaneous medium of communication that connects opposite corners of the planet with a few simple clicks of the mouse. Its "viral" nature makes it the most useful platform to quickly generate a global response for any issue ailing humanity. Social issues, particularly, issues related to women have for a major part been in the shadows. But with the advent of the Social Media epidemic, much support and impetus has been received by the "Feminism" movement.

Despite all the limelight women issues have recently received, there still remain certain "stigmas" and stereotypes that abound on the social media itself. These stereotypes generally portray women in roles that have now become redundant in our fast-evolving society. These discrepancies often create a setback to the positive progress the society had previously gained. The constrictive defining roles of women which generally range from, traditional stay-at-home wife to the independent and career driven corporate lady, are no longer applicable to today's female population. Media is the mirror that shows the reflection of the society and when the image it portrays isn't accurate, the purpose of its existence fails. Since these stereotypes are generally propagated through media itself, thus, it becomes an obligation on the media to correct these errors.

Issues regarding gender stereotyping in advertising has been a highly researched topic in the recent past. The history of Indian society has long been accused of unfair treatment of its female population. But with the turn of a new century, gradual transformations have brought about massive positive changes. The epidemic of social media addiction has also boosted awareness regarding this issue. Consequently innumerable campaigns have been launched to protest against such unfairness. Indians have taken up the aim of breaking gender stereotypes with vigor. Whether the cause is the recent rise in the phenomena of "Feminism" or in the general awareness of our society towards the gross misrepresentation of the fairer gender, this issue can now neither be avoided nor pushed to the back-ground. This realization has also hit big brands and is slowly metamorphosing their advertising approaches.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A significant amount of work has been done on consumer and industry response to stereotypic role portrayals in the media. Still there exists a dearth of substantial literature in quantitative study on this topic. Usually the reactions of women are more focused upon towards these role portrayals. In 1971, the *Good Housekeeping* magazine conducted a poll. 40% of the polled audience (women only) felt television commercials offended women. Fram *et. al.* (1971), came up with factual proof that women may differ in their attitudes towards role portrayal of women in media. Younger, highly educated women were more critical in their views in comparison to their older or lesser educated counterparts. Witkowski (1974) and Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1977) found similar results when they surveyed women's attitudes towards magazine advertisements. The effect of this attitude on purchase intention of the consumers was also studied by Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia. Going deeper into the subject matter, these attitudes of women were related to the concept of a woman's own beliefs regarding her societal role. Wortzel and Frisbie (1974) studied the influence perceptions regarding a woman's role in the mind of consumer on the preference they harbor towards specific situational depictions of women in advertising. They found the relation between preference and product function trumped the relation with role of women in society. On the other hand, Sciglimpaglia, Vanier and Lundstrom found that, the less traditional the role orientation of woman was, the more offended she was with stereotypical portrayals in advertising (1978).

From the above mentioned works, it is clear that from consumer point of view, the overall impression one gets is that of criticism. When we come to the industry's viewpoint, the situation is quite different. According to an article by Kerin, Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1979), the industry held on to its non critical view towards these stereotypical portrayals of women in advertising. They quoted Franchille Cadwell, President of Compton/Cadwell, division of Compton advertising. He said that the industry persons, for example, copywriters "aren't going to show women in new roles if women don't respond to being shown in new roles." (*Advertising*

Age, 1976). The expert believed that women hadn't really changed much, but they were ready to change their advertising strategies if they felt a change in figures of recall, attitudes towards products and sales with the use of "liberated" advertising. At that point of time the industry people also came up with academic research conducted on proprietary data, showed proof that stereotypical role portrayals were instead of being offensive, were actually approved by a substantial group of women, thus ensuring its continued use in media (Major, 1969).

When talking about women portrayals as decorative objects initially there wasn't much research. The earliest documentation is from 1969 by R. H. Bruskin Associates. They conducted a survey and nearly one half of the respondents claimed to recall great deal of sex in advertisements they had viewed. Also out of the population, when asked if they were offended by such portrayals, fewer than one half replied in the affirmative. As discussed before the study by Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1977), 42% of surveyed women felt objectification of women in media was prevalent. The younger and more educated women were more vocal about their dissent than in comparison to their older and less educated counterparts. Some other researchers also tried to explore this area. Wise, King and Merenski (1974) conducted a survey of college going students and their parents. They were requested to provide their thoughts on a single, general worded question- "Advertisers make too much use of sex appeal in their advertisements" the overall response to this was avoidance to give solid support to the above-mentioned statement. The details of demographics brought to fore the differences in agreements to the notion aforementioned. Older females were mostly of the opinion that the use of sex appeal was a bit too much in advertising. There are studies that tried to relate use of sexual appeal with other consumer behavior dimensions like brand recognition and recall.

SOCIO-CULTURAL ATTITUDE TOWARDS APPEARANCE

In a typical advertising print copy it mainly consists of an illustration, reading sequence and a body copy (Bovee and Arens, 1986). Thus the point of priority for the advertisers became the visual part, that is, the image. A general rule of thumb that is prevalent in most minds everywhere is that "Beautiful is good". Thus physically alluring models and celebrities were employed to create and advert with a better reach and selling point features that brought better recall. The advertiser's justification to such measure was that the model or celebrities employed in such advertisements were in congruence to the product segment being advertised. Also they were used in such a way that generated more brand recall. This was in accordance to the "match up hypothesis" (Kamins, 1990) and the ELM concept (Elaboration likelihood model). Audiences are groomed with such symbolism that when exposed to related image and subject their minds would be stimulated to recall the relevant product of service. Therefore when the images of these specific "good looking" entities are repetitively exposed to the audience they begin to internalize such standards and subconsciously start pursuing the "contemporary ideal beauty" (Lin, 2008). Englis *et al.* (1994) came from the other side of the spectrum to advocate against such impressions. According to them the focus should not be on these contemporary feministic depictions in the media. Rather it should focus on trying to balance the rising masculine expressions in advertising and the restricted definition of beauty standard that focuses on the "ideal women". As Till and Busler (2000) observed in their studies that the notion of contemporary beauty had been revolutionized to incorporate features of women like intellectual competence, social competence, concern for others and integrity. And thus in order to make advertising more effective measures like understanding the audience's behavior like purchasing decisions and emotional reflections should be thoroughly researched upon. The understanding from these research works shall help devise better marketing strategies that would materialize into symbolism of advertising and appease the latest feminist and thus become the current fashion trend in advertising industry (Englis *et al.*, 1994).

Researchers (Thompson *et al.*, 2004) developed a scale SATAQ (Sociocultural Attitude towards Appearance) to measure media influence by assessing internalization of appearance ideals and appearance pressures alongwith awareness about media information sources that provide these pressures. Appearance pressures are another aspect of media influence wherein the consumer feel pressured to behave in apatricular way due to the idealized imageries present in advertising. Information sources and awareness regarding them also influence consumers by shaping their attitudes towards ad stimuli. This scale was widely used and repetitively validated in many studies (Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Heinberg, Thompson and Storer, 1995). Factor analysis of the scale brought forth three major constructs: Internalization, Pressure and Information (Thompson *et al.*, 2004). One study conducted by Ichani and Ahmad (2016) found the SATAQ constructs to act as a moderator on the variable of purchase intention. Not much work was found regarding the constructs of information and pressure with advertising effectiveness.

OBJECTIVES

Thus keeping in mind all the above studies the following objectives were the aim off this study:

1. To investigate and identify factors that constitutes media influence on consumers.
2. To investigate and identify factors that constitutes a consumer's attitude towards advertising effectiveness of role portrayal of females in Indian media.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The questionnaire used in the study had two major sections. The first section used a scale adapted from the (Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia, 1977). It contains 17 attitudinal items. The main aim of this scale was to measure attitude of audiences towards advertising effectiveness in regards to female portrayals in media and its subsequent effect on consumer behavior like purchase intention and company image. Many previous researches have shown the said scale contains four sub scales namely "Role Portrayal Criticism, Accuracy of Role Portrayals, Company Image and Purchase Intention (Theodoridis, Kyrousi, Zotou and Panigyrakis, 2013). The items under Role Portrayal Criticism (RPC) construct consisted of six statements that were negatively worded with respect to female portrayals in media (statements 2, 4, 8, 9, 10 and 11). For the Role portrayals Accuracy (RPA) construct, it included six statements, which were positively worded with respect to female stereotyping in media (statements 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 12). Company Image (CI) subscale had two image oriented statements (statement 13 and 14). Purchase Intention (PI) construct had three items (statements 15, 16 and 17). This scale has been used in numerous studies and thus repetitively validated in the process (Harker *et al.*, 2005).

The second section of the questionnaire contained a scale with thirty items. This questionnaire is also known as SATAQ (Sociocultural Attitude towards Appearance Questionnaire). Thompson *et al.* (2003) conducted a vast and comprehensive study to develop and validate this widely used measure via factor analysis. According to their analysis, four different subscales were generated. Two distinct Internalization (INT) factors were received (general and athletic). For the purpose of this study, the athletic internalization items were forgone as they didn't add value to the research topic. Next construct was of media Pressure (PR) and media as an Information (INF) source.

The research instrument was administered to 410 consumers from Northern India region. Some were administered online while others in paper and pencil form. The researcher was always ready to remove any doubts or ambiguities faced by the respondents. Convenience sampling was used. The collected data was screened for missing data and outliers with the help of software SPSS (Version 19). Exploratory factor Analysis was conducted to identify the factors underlying attitudes of respondents towards female role portrayals and its advertising effectiveness along with their socio cultural attitude towards appearance/idealized images present in media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following table shows the gender distribution of respondents of this study:

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF RESPONDENTS OF THE STUDY

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	217	52.9
Female	193	47.1
Total	410	100

Almost equal representation of both genders was present for the study in order to keep in mind the opinions of both genders on the topic and thus increase the generalizability of the results.

The data collected after being coded into SPSS 19, was screened and then subjected to exploratory analysis section wise. Exploratory Factor Analysis of section one is shown in table below:

TABLE 2: EXPLORATORY FACTOR RESULTS OF SECTION ONE

Factor	Items	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Factor 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, I believe that the portrayal of women in advertising is changing for the better Ads which I see accurately portray men in most of their daily activities. Ads which I see accurately portray women in most of their daily activities. Ads which I see show men as they really are 	.746
Factor 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ads suggest that women don't do important things Ads treat women mainly as "sex objects" I find portrayal of women in advertising to be offensive Ads suggest that women are fundamentally dependent upon men 	.742
Factor 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even though I may see an ad which is offensive for one product, I would continue to purchase other products that I have been using from the same company If a new product is introduced with ads that I find offensive, I might still buy it if it offers me benefits which I find attractive If a new product or service which I use adopts an ad campaign which I find offensive, I'll discontinue using it 	.774
Factor 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Companies that portray women offensively in their advertising are more likely to discriminate against women and other minorities in job promotion and advancement, compared to other companies in the same business or industry. I believe that how women are portrayed in ads merely reflects the general attitude of that company toward women's place in society 	.607

Exploratory Factor Analysis of section two is shown in table below:

TABLE 3: EXPLORATORY FACTOR RESULTS OF SECTION TWO

Factor	Items	Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)
Factor 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I compare my appearance to the appearance of TV and movie stars I do not try to look like the people on TV I compare my body to the bodies of people who are on TV I wish I looked like the models in music videos I compare my appearance to the appearance of people in magazines I do not compare my body to the bodies of people who appear in magazines I would like my body to look like the people who are in movies 	.877
Factor 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movies are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive" Pictures in magazines are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive" Movie stars are not an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive." Famous people are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive" Magazine advertisements are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive" TV commercials are an important source of information about fashion and "being attractive" 	.897
Factor 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to exercise I've felt pressure from TV and magazines to be thin I do not feel pressure from TV or magazines to look pretty I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to have a perfect body I've felt pressure from TV or magazines to diet 	.880

In accordance to the items loaded under each factor and as logic dictated the factors were named as follows:

- Factor 1: Role Portrayal Accuracy – this factor showed positive attitude of respondents towards female role portrayals
- Factor 2: Role Portrayal Criticism- this factor indicated negative attitude of respondents towards female role portrayals.
- Factor 3: Purchase Intention: this factor was indicative of positive or negative purchase intention behavior of respondents due to female role portrayals in advertising of related products and service.
- Factor 4: Company Image- : this factor was indicative of positive or negative image of company engaging in female role portrayals related advertising, in the mind of the respondents.
- Factor 5: Internalization: this factor included items that indicated whether respondent internalized to high or low degrees the idealized images being shown in media.
- Factor 6: Information- this factor showed whether respondents held media sources as important information sources for lifestyle and social roles related decisions.
- Factor 7: Pressure- this factor was indicative of the degree to which the respondents felt pressure from media images to conform to their portrayals in advertising.

Thus, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), provided with seven significant factors that affect advertising effectiveness of female role portrayals in Indian media.

CONCLUSIONS

As was evident from the results, seven factors viz., Role Portrayal Accuracy, Role Portrayal Criticism, Purchase Intention, Company Image, Internalization, Information and Pressure were received. The aim of this study was to explore these variables in Indian context. The existence of these variables has been proved and

validated in international studies. This study conclusively proves that similar factors also affect Indian advertising in relation to female role portrayals. Internalization, information and pressure together make the socio cultural attitude of consumers towards appearance (Thompson et al., 2004). These factors have been shown to affect the audience's self image issues. Thus the presence of these factors in Indian context raises concerns whether marketers include these variables when creating promotional messages because the negative effect of such portrayals could severely affect audiences' self image and health too (Phares et al., 2004; Kiaczynski et al., 2004; Thompson and Stice, 2001; Rand and Wright, 2000; Demarest and Langer, 1996; Drewnowski and Yee, 1987; Mintz and Bentz, 1986). Effect of female stereotyping in media and its effect on purchase intention and company image has been studied often in international context before (Few studies of significance exist that explore variables of attitude towards sex role portrayal and advertising effectiveness (Ford and LaTour, 1996; Sciglimpaglia and Lundstrom, 1978; Wortzel and Frisbie, 1974 and Ford, LaTour and Lundstrom 1991). Thus again in Indian context these factors need to be studied and the relationships between these need to be kept in mind by Indian marketers and managers. Thus, this study provided empirical proof of these variables in Indian context and validated the scales measuring these variables for Indian consumers. Reliability was also achieved and thus these scales can be used in future studies to carry out more in depth research on the topic of female role portrayals.

LIMITATIONS

The study has following limitations:

1. Study is restricted to northern region of India.
2. A larger sample size will create generalizability of results.
3. Time limitations also existed.

SCOPE FOR THE FURTHER RESEARCH

The results of this study shall help and guide future researchers for more quantitative studies on the topic which as of yet are rare. Studies that cover larger regions of India and its population are recommended. Longitudinal studies shall help improve results and its applicability. Also empirical relationship between these variables can be tested in future studies.

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