

## "Women Portrayal in Advertisements"

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### Abstract

Mass media are cultural forces, which do not simply reflect but indirectly help in shaping social attitudes and behaviour. Advertising is a tool of mass media, which mirrors attitudes, behaviour and life styles in a society.

The status of women in India and portrayal in media has raised a controversy. Offensive and vulgar advertisements showing women's body in an obscene way has been widely debated and dragged to the court. Unethical advertisers continue to show women in an undignified manner.

In view of the fact that advertisers reach a broad spectrum of people, they can have a great impact on society and particularly the youth. Due to glamorous presentation the detrimental effects are over looked.

Therefore it is high time that the respective contributors i.e. advertising directors, models, and the society at large should be aware of these detrimental and harmful effects of such advertisements. Hence the study proposes some possible recommendations to bring the change in the advertising content.

**KEYWORDS:** Mass Media, Advertising, Mass Products, Portrayal, Status of Women, Social Attitude, etc.

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### Introduction

Advertising attempts to put forth image of objectives to be obtained by society. The ideals portrayed by media may not necessarily reflect the society but might certainly influence the people's belief about the world around them. And when the society is continuously exposed to such imaginary picture depicted by the advertisements, the consumer- the society starts believing it as a reality, starts forming its beliefs, expectations, perceptions and attitudes.

As the Women have crossed the boundary from her domestic sphere to profession arena, expectations and representations have changed as well. The media we are constantly exposed to play an important part in shaping our beliefs, attitudes, perspectives and expectations and also that of the world around us. All though its messages might be short but it has a powerful, persuasive and influential impact in shaping the social attitude.

### Objectives of the Study:

1. To understand the concept of Advertising and Communication
2. To examine the woman portrayal in advertising
3. To study the impact of advertising on Society
4. To suggest some measures to protect the woman dignity in the field of mass media

### Research Methodology:

Basic methodology used for the study is analytical and hermeneutical. The secondary data is collected by way of detail analysis of the advertising in different media and also by the way of books of eminent authors and internet.

One definition of advertising is: "Advertising is the nonpersonal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media." Communication means not only speech or pictures, but any way one person can pass information, ideas or feelings to another.

Everywhere we turn, advertising is telling people, women especially, what it means to be desirable. Many of these messages share a common theme: women must be "beautiful." Women have always been measured against cultural ideals of beauty, but advertising often uses sexism to make images of "ideal beauty" more prevalent and increasingly unattainable. Women are depicted as objects to lure male consumers. Some ads also show women as objects to be tasted. Similarly they are type cast in certain stereotype roles. Advertisements use women in every product / brand that is being advertised irrespective whether a female model is required or not. Advertising directors argue that women are far more aesthetically beautiful than men and since in India, men have the main purchasing power, the image of scantily clad women will make them buy anything.

The ideals portrayed by media may no be necessarily reflect the society but might certainly influence the people's belief about the world around them. And when the society is continuously exposed to such imaginary picture depicted by the advertisements, the consumer- the society starts believing it as a reality, starts forming its beliefs, expectations, perceptions and attitudes.

Indian tradition has generally respected womanhood, though we do find derogatory references to women. Manu declared "YatraNarastuPoojyante, RamanteTatraTevataha"... means where women are honored there the gods reside or rejoice [Manusmriti- 3.56]

The mass media have an important role in modern society as the main channel of communication. The stronger and more purposeful the communication channels, the more developed the countries and vice versa. The media help to upgrade the quality of our lives. They affect our aesthetic, cultural, civic, social, political and economic outlook.

Advertising has become as much a part of our lives as breathing. When you turn on the TV, open your mailbox, drive on the street, pick up your phone or surf the internet, you come face to face with some facet of advertising. It has developed into one of our culture's primary sources for information, solutions, ideas and entertainment.

In India the role of media is dynamic and it reinforces the cultural values and norms. Amongst them the most effective is the audio visual media. In its attempt to be effective the mass media has created a negative impact on the younger minds in the aspects like, the cultivation of images, ideas and consciousness. Attitudes, behaviors life styles are adopted through a complex process of imitation and comparison with attitudes, behaviors, life styles presented by the mass media. Advertising, a tool of mass media apart from selling products/ brands, also sell attitudes, behavior and life styles.

In our day to day life we observe in all different kinds of media that the focus is mainly on women it may be the print media i.e. the newspapers and magazines or it may be an electronic media-i.e. advertisements, daily soaps, films, and internet sights etc. This paper attempts to discuss the issues around the media's portrayal of women and it also throws light on the impact of bodily images and self-identify, on young impressionable minds. It looks at the economic interests behind the objectification and eroticization of females by the media as well as efforts to counter negative stereotyping.

Advertising seems to be obsessed with gender and sexuality. Advertisements continue to represent an arena in which gender display plays a major role. The status of women in India and her portrayal in media has raised a controversy and led to the rise of many movements. The contention that advertising is offensive in the portrayal of women is highly subjective.

Over the past five decades gender role portrayals in advertisements have changed in accordance with the changing roles of women in the society. During 50s and 60s when very less percentage of women were in the labour force, advertisements typically portrayed women as objects of sexual gratification, or as spouses, homemakers and mothers whose characteristics were passivity and dependence. Therefore the picture that emerged was that of a woman who never produced knowledge enhancement or health sector but always remained a loyal better half to her male counterpart. Those women were and now in many adds portrayed as stereotypical images. The ads of Moov, Ariel, and Surf excel ICICI smart kid, saridonetc.gives startling examples for this opinion.

Today women and their body parts sell everything from food to cars. Popular film and television actresses are becoming younger, taller and thinner. Women magazines are full of articles urging them to lose that extra twenty pounds to have everything within their reach, that is– the perfect marriage, loving children, great sex and rewarding career. Why are the standards of beauty being imposed on women, the majority of whom are naturally longer and more mature than any of the models? The answer may be -"economic reasons."

Advertisements use women in decorative poses more frequently. There is growing concern that photographs of slim, flat stomach models in advertisements, like LG microwave, guarantees that cooking in microwave helps you to stay slim and healthy. But such adds promote an unhealthy view of young women that could encourage disorders. Cosmetic advertisements like fair and lovely, L'oreal, Ponds, SantoorMedimix, define "beauty" for the women. The beauty Queens mushrooming all over the world have mesmerized the minds of thousands of young women as to what should be the size and weight of an ultimate woman.

Sexual appeals are often used to gain consumer's attention. Most of the time it may not even be appropriate to the product being advertised. Advertisements of Axe, Red Tape, M.R.Coffee contain a number of symbolic cues that are sexually suggestive and combine to reinforce an image of the women's sexual submission to the man. Women are often dressed in indecent attire with a sensuous gaze. Men' products like Deo Sprays, suiting and shirting, razors, motorbikes invariably use admiring women by the side of men. The intensity of sexual appeals and the increasing number and variety of products being marketed with sexual overtones can be seen in today's advertising.

But positive side of contemporary ads is that increasingly women are presented in professional roles requiring decision making on items or topics other than household, hygiene or beauty products and sometimes they are portrayed as autonomous and equal to their male counterparts.

Thus as women began to enter the workforce, the ideal woman began to be transformed changing demographic, economic and social patterns, encouraged a resurgence of feminist groups. Women in advertisements become central characters, portrayed as working outside the home, in non-traditional progressive occupations.

The number of urban working women in Indian society is steadily increasing and changes over the last decade have been significant. This change is also reflected in current advertisements of Asmi Diamonds, Titan Raga, Ponds, Whisper etc. There is a growing trend of independent, single, working women and a similar life style portrayal can be seen in advertisements. But this single working women's image also has a tinge of sexism.

Coinciding with this reduction in the portrayal of women in traditional homemaker and worker roles, there has been increase in advertisements in which women are portrayed in purely decorative roles. Increasingly woman's role is to be sexy and alluring. Though advertisers have begun to recognize the changing status of women, the increase of women portrayals as sex objects indicates that stereotypes and sexual objectification continues. In fact, the increased emphasis in advertising on sexuality and sexual availability has reached what earlier would have been considered "pornographic".

#### **Detrimental effects of such advertisements-**

In view of the fact that advertisers reach a broad spectrum of people, they can have a great impact on society and particularly the youth. Sometimes, even the side effects of

the products are over looked or even ignored due to the glamorous presentation of the products and the models in the advertisements.

The money spinning advertisements on TV affect the mindset of those who watch these on TV. Women in advertisements outnumber men, yet negative and debasing images of women are represented through these advertisements. Media mirrors society by reflecting it as a society with low morals, with crime, sex and pornography. Media teaches by means of vibration and images that leave a greater effect on the youth. The youth consider this stereotyping of women as reality and the young girls consider "Beauty Queens" as their role models.

By presenting an ideal difficult to achieve and maintain the cosmetic and diet product industries are assured of growth and profits. And it's no accident that youth is increasingly promoted, along with thinness, as an essential criterion of beauty. And according to the industry, age is a disaster that needs to be dealt with. The stakes are huge. On the other hand, women who are insecure about their bodies are more likely to buy beauty products, new clothes and diet aids.

But in reality as these girls do not lead their daily routine in a healthy way; suffer from the problems like depression, loss of self-esteem, development of unhealthy eating habits in the later stage. These all may lead to lack of immunity level or resistance power. Many girls use unhealthy methods of weight control including fasting, skipping meals, excessive exercise, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting. In this twenty first century the girls' teen agers adopt the new way to control weight i.e. smoking. Thus these practices are leading not only to the unhealthy way of life but deterioration of moral and social values.

It is difficult for teens to develop healthy attitude towards sexuality and body image when much of the advertising aimed at them is filled with images of impossibly thin, fit beautiful and highly sexualized young people. The underlying marketing message is that there is a link between physical beauty and sex appeal and popularity, success and happiness.

Sometimes even the products themselves are harmful to the mankind but the impact of these glorified advertisements is so much that the side effects of such products are overlooked by the consumers e.g. The anti-wrinkle injections or creams which act by relaxing the muscles could damage the facial tissues permanently. Similarly, the antiperspirants contain aluminum salts which block sweat glands and reduce sweating. The result is body cannot get rid of toxins and excessive heat.

In addition to magazines and advertisements on television, to catch the attention of people at the roads, marketers are now featuring bare skinned women to promote their products. Advertisements featuring models decked in their bare minimums, [Deccan chronicle] Life Style add [a model wearing sexy outfit] Advertisements of CMR, Kalaniketan, Solutions and Manoranjan have models having designer wear, etc. Such advertisements are dangerous and can distract commuters. These advertisements tend to

attract the attention of the riders resulting in accidents. Advertisements with such vulgar and immoral taste would find its impact on young minds. Judging from these viewpoints the media has reflected negative images of women on television to the point of distorting women's views of their own gender identity.

In most of the advertisements of recent times too, a woman is either washing clothes and utensils, cooking, serving food to family members or trying to make her husband feel better who's at that time reading a newspaper or suffering from cold. A woman does all this even when she's headache or backache. These advertisements arguably encourage sexism. They reinforce the old belief that a woman is supposed to forgo her own comfort and keep on doing household chores without getting tired. The media still portray women as objects showing who in certain way can catch the attraction of people. It's very amusing to see a woman in advertisements for products like cement. Media not only portray women as mere commodities, they often unintentionally stereotype women.

The opposing portrayals of women in advertisements may be contributing to an ambivalence and confusion about women's roles in society. Research findings demonstrate the power of advertisement portrayals of women in influencing gender role attitudes. The males who were shown magazine adds in which women are portrayed as sex objects were significantly accepting of rape myths, gender role stereotyping, interpersonal violence [particularly towards women] and held more adversarial sexual beliefs. Such portrayals tend to encourage rigid, authoritarian gender roles and support male dominance, as compared to males shown progressive roles of women in adds. Continuous exposure to such advertisements may reinforce male attitudes supportive of sexual aggression and opposed to women's efforts to equality. Therefore, we would expect that exposure to advertisements in which women are presented as competent decision makers [progressive roles] rather than sex objects, would reinforce attitudes supportive of equal treatment.

A recent UNESCO report describes the litany of common images of women in the media: "the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, and the devious witch, the hard faced corporate and political climber." The report, released in 2009, states that, at the current rate of progress on stereotyping women, it will take another 75 years to achieve gender equality in the media.

#### **The need for change:**

Today there is an increase in number of women working in communications sector. Therefore the change is needed. Men and women are complementary and each needs the other for building the human purpose of existence. Women should come forward to create their own world just as men do. Deep seated, interiorized inferiority and pretended complicity are equally harmful to healthy woman hood. She has to find her right place in society and find happiness in being what she really is as a person with dignity and freedom.

Empirical research has supported those advertisements that reflect local cultural values are indeed more persuasive than those that ignore them. E.g. Advertisement of ICICI

Prudential Life Insurance pictures the transformation of the sindoor of women into company's logo. This shows the advertiser's obsession of protecting 'Sindoor' i.e. married woman. Even the advertisement of Havells-electric wire depicts the mother-son relationship in a very touching way.

The new advertisements of Titan Raga watches is targeted at the educated, urban, socially forward, working woman, who definitely knows how to handle her home front as well as her professional life. This identity of New Women that cuts across regional, linguistic, castes and other differences is definitely welcome.

The commercial of pond's Dream Flower is a take off from the real incident that case happened in Delhi [case of NishaRao] regarding dowry. This advertisement projects an upcoming urban woman who doesn't want to low down to the age old practices of dowry system. This projection of social change in advertisements is appreciable. There is a need for advertisers to produce advertisements that project an angle of self confidence, professional and independent woman. Such depiction in Indian Advertisements is few in number as they are considered threatening to men.

Women should be represented as more than the standard stereotypical negative and simplified character viewers generally see. Women need to be shown in occupations that are not the stereotypical, such as the occupations of nurse, maid, sales assistant, or models. Teenage girls should be represented on television as being able to have serious conversations and feeling that their brains are as important as their looks. Advertisers should produce high quality, entertaining socially conscience ad campaigns. Media should make an attempt to provide more positive gender identity for young women and represent women on television in more realistic ways, should stop reinforcing negative stereotypes of women, and stop portraying women as sex objects in advertising. For all these reasons, society should have a deep concern with the gender roles that young women are learning from television.

Parents who allow their children to fall into this media-perpetuated image of beauty and how young girls (or girls in general) should look and act. I think that a lot of the weight falls on the shoulders of the media for causing girls to buy into the idea that ultra-thin (The modern terminology is zero-figure) is the only way to be, but I think that the parents of these children are doing almost nothing (in most cases) to counteract that message—some in fact reinforce it..and thus the generation gets misguided..

Women's organizations can also provide a platform to promote critical analysis of media content and gradually disrupt the process of hegemony that is taking place constantly. Thus the woman should learn to take her own decisions and should participate in the decision making at family and social level. Thus men will never be the loser in such a situation rather they could find the world a much better place to live in.

### **Conclusion:**

In view of the need for the change mentioned above it is the duty of all the media, society, the corporate sector, organizations to protect the woman dignity in society and

the mass media. They have a major role in re-creating women's image for the contemporary society. An image of truth and power, of wisdom and responsibility, creativity and leadership. The advertisements should be produced in such a way that there is a challenge for marketers to identify and communicate 'Satya'. It should be just pious and pleasant to the receiver. It is only this investment which will help in building a relationship with the audience more effectively.

Liberalization and Privatization have definitely invaded the consumer market in India. Urban India is slowly transforming in to a western society. The concept of global village and information revolution has led the markets to target the world with one message. In this process, western culture is being imbibed into our veins. The advertisers have not succeeded in just portrayal of women. There is surely a renaissance going on for the Indian women. But this renaissance is not being captured correctly by the advertisers. There is a need to voice out for a change in advertising content.

Our Indian Philosophy, aesthetics and tradition have expounded various virtues, qualities of women in mythology, literature etc. to show that the women are worthy of not only the respect but of worship.

Dr. Radhakrishnan Says, "the position of women in any society is a true index of its cultural and spiritual level"....So tracing back the dictum of Manu, "Where women are respected Gods reside or rejoice". My request is-- let men respect or rejoice first, the Gods will follow there after...

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