

Role of Women in Advertisements A Paradigm Shift

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Abstract

This research report seeks to study the opinion and response of the viewers on the portrayal and role of women in advertisements. The research method used for analysis is Survey. The respondents subjected to the survey were demographically categorized on the basis of gender, occupation and age. The review of literature throws light on how women were used as commodities in some ads, as a mere dependant being and also sexually objectified in many ads. As a parallel observation, it occurs that involving women in advertisements was to incite the audience and make them attentive. The result of this research is to study the change in the portrayal and role of women in advertisements from past to present and also observe the shift in perception of the viewers.

Keywords: Role of Women in advertising, Portrayal of women in advertising, Women in advertising

1.Introduction

Women have been a vital part in Advertisement ever since Advertisements existence. The portrayal of women has done good and equally bad too over a period of time. The commercialization of the media has contributed to old and new stereotypes. The old stereotypes usually showcased women to be a happy housewife whose life revolved merely around the daily household chores, husband and children whereas the new stereotype showcase women more of a sexual object and also further using their body types to promote products. use of jingoistic commercials also use color and body as a media to promote their products which off late has created debate. The present research article will try to find out the change in the portrayal and role of women in advertisements from past to present and also observe the shift in perception of the viewers.

Indian advertising has undergone a significant transformation in past few years. The way women are depicted in advertising has changed, reflecting the transformation that has simultaneously taken place in society. Advertising is one of the major mediums that affects us in our daily lives whether consciously & unconsciously. It plays a significant role in shaping society in a much broader perspective.

Though we say that ads mirror the changes in society, ads also have the power to affect society and cultures and therefore it forms a cycle. When we take a look at advertisements today there present a wide range with some depicting women in the age old roles of housewives or homemakers taking care of their families as their main responsibility. Ads also have begun portraying stronger women in their changing roles in the socio-economic or industrial world as business people and even some at the top of hierarchies. Having said this it is important to also lay stress on the ads that are derogatory to the image of women.

Advertising is the best way to communicate to the customers. Advertising helps informs the customers about the brands available in the market and the variety of products useful to them. Advertising is for

everybody including kids, young and old. It is done using various media types, with different techniques and methods most suited.

Advertisement is everywhere, one can find them digitally on social media platforms like Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and many other digital platforms, it also very much present in print media through magazines, posters, flyers, hoardings, buses, movies, theatres, malls and list goes on. Ads are present where ever our eye falls. The sole motto or purpose of an Advertisement is to educate, convey, stir an interest and sales at the end of the day.

Advertisement has become an inseparable part of our lives as one can rarely miss the ads that surround our lives. It not only becomes very important to observe who is conveying the advertisements that reach us, but also observe how it is said as it leaves a huge impact on the viewer or audience.

Basically, advertising is a very artistic way of communicating with the customers. The main characteristics one should have to get on their objectives are great communication skills and very good convincing power.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of literature is mainly pertaining to the portrayal of women in advertisements and relevant ethical issues.

1. Portrayal of Women in Advertisements

Published literature, discussions indicate that there is a significant increase in the advertisements in recent times. Portrayal of women in these advertisements in various media such as print, TV, outdoor is a cause for concern. The commonly made observations are that the women are portrayed as glamorous objects, they are shown as dependant on men, are shown in traditional mundane roles as housewife, teacher, nurse, mother. They are rarely shown as decision makers or in positions of power or as accomplished women. Some advertisements are felt to be obscene or vulgar and degrade the dignity of women.

In order to control such advertisements The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has laid down a code of conduct. ASCI is a voluntary self-regulatory council of India. It was formed in 1985 with an intention to control the content of advertisements, not to hamper the sale of the products which may be found offensive by some people. It has adopted a Code for Self-Regulation in Advertising. It is a commitment to honest advertising and to fair competition in the market-place. It stands for the protection of the legitimate interests of consumers and all concerned with advertising - advertisers, media, advertising agencies and others who help in the creation or placement of advertisements.

2. Fight for Just Portrayal of Women

An organization called “Saheli Women’s Resource Center” has published an article titled “The Fight for a Just Portrayal” on their website. The article says “Over the past decade, women’s organizations have been agitating about the way their sex is portrayed in the media. Some of the things women have been fighting, for example, are advertisements encouraging parents to save for the daughter’s dowry, the equation of a ‘good’ woman with a housewife, equating a brand of vegetable oil with mother’s love”. The article further says that such campaigns by women’s organizations have little impact on advertisements which promote sexist stereotypes and pornographic images which have increased. The said organization strongly objects to the use of women’s faces and bodies to sell products because such advertisements put women at par with the products and turn them into objects of display and sale.

Advertisements create the myth that women are primarily sex objects for the consumption of men and every man has by right access to the bodies of all women, according to the article ‘The fight for just Portrayal’ Some basic observations on the representation of women in Indian perspectives have been made

by Dr. Khokan Kumar Bag and Piyal Basu Roy in a paper published by them in 2010. According to the authors of the said paper, in the era of globalization, changes are prevalent everywhere, from infant to aged, from country to country, irrespective of sex, caste, religion, race and so on. But it is really controversial that how far these changes are improving environmental quality, whether it is physical or social.

An article by Prachi Srivastava, published in May 2011, titled “Is Indecent Representation of Women in advertising justified?” states the following : Women, play a very significant role in advertising today both as consumers and as influencers. The depiction of women in Indian advertising has been a topic of debate for a while now. The experts against the indecent representation of women in advertising strongly believe that the woman's moral and social status is mainly determined on the basis of the degree of exposure of her physical form to public view.

Some advertisements portray features of women as things that are separate and more important than the true image of a woman. They push perfection to a great extent that there seems to be no scope for inner beauty. Women advertising redefine women attractiveness as something that is away from natural. Is woman today, the primary consumer of the product/service advertised? Or is she herself the product or service? There are advertisements where the females are shown in bad light. They are clad in skimpy clothes even when their presence in the advertisements has no relevance with the brand.

There have been advertising campaigns where there has been a very decent portrayal of women and they have been very successful too like Titan, Raymond's, Jewellery advertisements, cosmetic advertisements like L'Oréal etc. On the other hand , few advertising gurus believe that in some of the brands the so called indecent representation of women plays an important role in brand recognition. For example, condom ads, innerwear ads have more impact on the audience when such representation is done as it is provocative. Talking about indecent representation of women in advertising, Alyque Padamsee, advertisement guru and theatre personality says, “I think it's stupid advertising. It attracts attention to the commercial, not to the brand so it is silly.

In India where there is democracy, everything is legal and we don't want that these blue nose people say that you can't do this and you can't show a girl in a bikini on the 26 cover of the magazine but why not? You want to show, show it. But I think, it doesn't do anything good for the brand”.

On the same issue , Sam Balsara, Chairman and MD, Madison World, says, “I think cases of indecent representation of women in advertising are few and far in - between. There are now only very isolated examples where women are used out of context or skin is exposed unreasonably. Advertising in India has done far more for emancipation of women, making them appear as role models, making them confident, outgoing and independent- than we are given credit for. That advertising exploits women is an old stereo type that hangs over and is not based on current reality”. According to Alan Collaco, Secretary General, ASCI, “The complaints against Indecent Representation of women have gone down from about 4-5 a year to only one last year. Advertisers are more sensitive nowadays.

The products against which complaints have been received are deodorants, condoms and innerwear. There has been a case of clothes ware where the Ad headline ”You'll melt once inside” read in conjunction with the visual depiction of a woman in a provocative pose was considered indecent as it was likely to cause grave and widespread offence. It should always be remembered that any indecent representation of women doesn't help”. The bold representation of women in advertisements can be done only if it is associated with the brand and is relevant to it. Mostly such advertisements don't contribute much to the sale of the product and are restricted to brand recognition and recall.

3. Women in Advertising: Representations Repercussions and Responses

In a paper entitled “Women in Advertising: Representations Repercussions and Responses” published in November 2009, the authors Maurice Patterson, Lisa O’Malley and Vicky Story have said that the representation of women in advertising has been the subject of discussion and debate for over four decades with advertisers standing accused of utilizing inappropriate and degrading stereotypes.

According to IAPI (Institute of Advertising Practitioners in Ireland) it makes no commercial sense for advertisers to promote negative images of women. In a recent study to measure the attitudes of young women to sexually objectified advertising comparison was made with similar surveys carried out in 1991 and 2000. Respondents agreed that females were portrayed as sex objects in advertisement, but, were less offended by these portrayals than female respondents in 27 1991.

The same study further states that in advertisement sex has become more explicit, more models have appeared in the nude. From the mid 1960, there were significantly more over portrayals of women as sex objects (Henthorne and LaTour 1995, Mayne 2000, Reichert et al, 1999, Soley and Kurzbard 1986).

Results of the study in 1991 showed that women were still critical of the way in which they were portrayed in advertising. Women still thought that advertisements treated them mainly as sex objects, showed them as fundamentally dependant on men and found the portrayal of women in advertising to be offensive.

According to this sample of women, an offensive advertising campaign would have a negative effect on company image and purchase intention. (Ford, LaTour and Lundstorm 1991).

4. Images of Women in Advertising

In an article titled ‘Images of women in Advertising: Dynamics and Consumer Perceptions, the author Elera Pruvli says that, the history of images of women in advertising goes back to the end of 19th and beginning of 20th century. Products advertised with the images of women were like cosmetics (talcum powder and soap) or sweets and drinks (tea, coffee, chocolate). The perfect housewife was one of the key figures in advertising though the goods promoted may not necessarily be household goods. The image of female as a sexual figure is more recent. It is also necessary to note that all over the world women in the advertisements during the period 1920 to 1990 have become progressively thinner. The female models in the advertisements have been extraordinarily attractive and unrealistically thin, as per the same article stated above.

5. The opposite sex effect

The opposite-sex effect has been a very ubiquitous finding. Providing sexual images of women is more effective when targeting men (Jones, Stanaland and Gelb, 1998; LaTour & Henthorne, 1993; LaTour, Pitts, & Snook-Luther, 1990; Smith, Haugtvedt, Jadrach, & Anton, 1995). On the other hand, the display of sexual images of men is more effective when targeting women (Reidenbach & McCleary, 1983; Simpson, Horton, & Brown, 1996).

The manner in which men and women are depicted in sexual ads has been mainly explored via the use of content analyses.

In some instances, the content analysis is limited to a single culture and a single time period. For example, Lin (1998) found that women were more often depicted as sex objects, and that men were depicted as heavier and not quite as attractive.

In other instances, the content analysis is longitudinal; for example, Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, and Zavoina (1999) found that women were three times more likely than men to be portrayed in a sexually explicit manner, and this ratio remained consistent for 1983 and 1993. Fergusson, Kreshel, and Tinkham (1990), in a content analysis of Ms. Magazine over a 15-year period, demonstrated an

increase in the portrayal of women as sexual objects.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Methodolog

The research methodology used is Quantitative study.

3.2. Objective of the Study

Every research Project revolves around a basic, fundamental question, that is, what is the objective of the study, what is the need of this research and the most important one is its practical implications.

As and how the media has made advancements , the minds of the people have been adapting to it, be it consciously or not.

As we are bombarded with advertisements through many ways and channels, it ticks the boxes in changing opinion and also perceiving and forming an strong image about women through constant exposure to advertisements.

This research includes opinions of people of different demographical category to record their opinion on how the role of women in advertisements has been perceived and also has it changed over the period of time with advertisements.

The objectives of this research are

1. To study the traditional advertising ,portraying women.
2. To study the traditional advertising ,portraying women in today's context.
3. To access the necessity of women participation in Advertising.

3.3.Scope of the Study

The Scope of this study helps us to see the response and shift in perspective of viewers on women through comparing them with earlier and present day ads. This study also gives a wider picture on how important and influencing are women in advertisements.

3.4.Geographical Area covered

Bangalore urban

3.5. Limitation of the study

- 1.Limitations of the study is that the study was conducted only in Bangalore Urban
- 2.In this study questionnaire is used as an instrument for a sample population; therefore this study may not gather all the information from the whole population of Bangalore city

4. SAMPLING AND COLLECTION OF DATA

This is a quantitative study on the of the paradigm shift of portrayal of women in advertisements. The samples of this study consisted of 52 respondents ranging from 18- 65years with different demographical background. Due to the standardised type of responses asked in the questionnaire, a quantitative approach was used. Secondary sources of data like published articles, journals, books and online articles were used as references for the introduction and the review of literature.

Figure 1: Age of the respondents

Age in years	Distribution of Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	12	23.1%
25-35	12	23.1%

35-45	10	19.2%
45 and Above	18	34.6%
Total	52	100%

The study began with a careful compilation of case study of advertisements and relevant questions that were then made into a questionnaire based on the dichotomous questions.

These questions were highly thought out, so as to provide accurate results. All the questions were of a positive nature as there are no negatives for the topic in discussion.

The statements that appeared in the questionnaire were:

1. The Ad here portrays women showcasing her interest and knowledge to select products for household chores.
2. The Commercials tells that Fair skin is very important to be loved and noted.
3. The Ad portrays that women are father's responsibility and later husband's.
4. The Advertisement conveys that the man of the house does the purchase decision for the women and rest of the family.
6. The Commercials conveyed a message that the health and well-being of the family was taken of women.
7. The Women in the Ads influenced many people and helped in sales of the product as the target customer of the Product were women/housewives at large who could relate themselves to the character portrayed.
8. Women should use certain products to keep herself in shape and be irresistible.
9. The Ad suggests that through beauty and charm women gets what she wants.
10. Women are portrayed submissive to Men in the Ad.
11. The Ad breaks the stereotype that washing clothes need not only be a women's responsibility and man too can share the work.
12. The Ad suggests that women need not give away her Maiden name after marriage and man too can change his surname after marriage.
13. The Ad gives a social message to the society of not having wrong assumption on how women achieves success.
14. The Ad does educate women and others also about the importance of investment on health rather than investing on gold
15. The Ad changes the perspective that men can no more marry women just for the sake of her helping out him in chores and cooking.
16. The Ad is quite objectionable and objectifies women merely as sexual object where she is drawn to him through a deo.
17. The Ad tells that women need not settle for anything less and should buy high quality products as they are worth it
18. The Ad tells about the importance of social responsibility through a women who represented India in Sports and won Gold medal.
19. The Ad poster shows women in a strong and competent avatar, tells unbeatable and unbreakable , which is used as a quality to describe the Product/Service
20. The Ad portrays women as a object of desire.
21. The Ad objectifies women sexually and has shown her obscenely even though the product showcased and comparison done with women is irrelevant

22. The Ad here has no relevance to the women nor she uses the product.
23. The Ad tells that women shall take advantage of her husband’s difficulty/situation where he cannot reply
24. The Ad does portray women in a sexually objectified way and she is also not the end user of the product.
25. The Ad misleads the audience ,as it portrays that the women shall go to any extent and away from her ethics in the fantasy she suddenly acquires from the deo
26. The product displayed in the Ad is not only restricted to Women yet the bikini clad model grabs the attention of the audience as she is used as medium to get audience attention and product registration in the minds of the people.
27. The Nissan car Ad here is misleading the audience by placing a Women dressed sensually were as it does not describe the product by any means. Also the caption which says "The New electric Toy"does mislead as it showcases Women in a larger picture than the product itself. The involvement of women is irrelevant and unnecessary.
28. The ice cream Ad uses sex appeal to reach the audience.
29. The beer Ad uses women in an enticing manner to draw audience attention. The involvement of women is irrelevant and unnecessary.
30. The Ad instils a thought that the sexual emotions of a women can be turned on by men using the deo.

Figure 2 : Survey statistics in percentage

Statement no	Agree %	Disagree %
1	92.3%	7.7%
2	96.2%	3.8%
3	57.7%	42.3%
4	92.3%	7.7%
5	92.3%	7.7%
6	88.5%	11.5%
7	50%	50%
8	92.3%	7.7%
9	80.8%	19.2%
10	100%	-
11	96.2%	3.8%
12	92.3%	7.7%
13	92.3%	7.7%
14	100%	-
15	92.3%	7.7%
16	76.9%	23.1%
17	100%	-
18	100%	-
19	84.6%	15.4%
20	92.3%	7.7%

21	92.3%	7.7%
22	65.4%	34.6%
23	84.6%	15.4%
24	92.3%	7.7%
25	92.3%	7.7%
26	96.2%	3.8%
27	92.3%	7.7%
28	88.5%	11.5%
29	92.3%	7.7%

5. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data collected and analysis for this research involved a combination of existing literature study and case studies of advertisements from the 80's to the present. The literature provided a theoretical foundation for the study. This included history and evolution of advertisements. Portrayal of women in these advertisements helped to study the wide spectrum of perception and portrayal of women in ads ranging from the 80's to the present. The research methodology used was quantitative.

6. CASE STUDIES

1. The Liril girl

The Liril film launched in mid-70s was possibly the first to show a bikini-clad girl in Indian advertising, according to Kailash Surendranath, the ad filmmaker, who directed the film. It also marked a watershed in the portrayal of the Indian woman in soap ads: "prior to that she was always shown as very demure and mostly fully clad." A girl enjoying her bath and prancing under a waterfall (in Kodaikanal) was a novelty for the Indian audience. It was met with an overwhelming response.

Figure 3



(Source : <https://oldbombay.in/liril-soap-advertisement/>)

2. 1980s Surf's Lalitaji

Unilever and its ad agency Lintas launched a one woman army to take on the competitively priced Nirma. The idea of samajhdar Lalitaji was inspired by her creator Alyque Padamsee's mother who always stressed on not just bachat but 'value for money' as she haggled with the vegetable vendor over 2 rupees.

Figure 4



(Source : <https://twitter.com/IndiaHistorypic/status/1758382509702905880>)

3. 1990s Ayurvedic Concepts' Dadima

Ava Mukherji, the smart aleck Dadima from the Ayurvedic Concepts commercials was as comfortable gabbing about processors as she was recommending remedies. Dadima was created by Suresh Manian at Contract. Says Joono Simon who worked on the campaign, "Himalaya needed a big differentiation, to stand apart from other cosmetic brands. Ava was a unique celebrity. She'd worked as a copywriter in Kolkata, understood craft and even pointed out a few nuances.

Figure 5



(Source : economictimes.indiatimes.com)

4. Airtel Girl

The original Airtel 4G commercial was scheduled to have two guys facing off. Realising this was a fairly clichéd scenario, which would lead to another ad full of stubble and rippling muscles, the characters were changed to women purely because it would be more refreshing. Sasha Chettri, the Airtel 4G girl, was hired because she looked different from the other girl in the ad. Then as Dias puts it, "It took on a life of its own as her face struck different kinds of chords.

Figure 6



(Source: <https://zeenews.india.com/business/news/technology>)

5. Lux Ad

The lux soap commercial tries to implicit a feeling of desire through the representation of women in a seductive way.

Figure 7



(Source : Researchgate)

6. Pepsi can commercial

This Pepsi Skinny can commercial portrays women in a stereotypical way of skinny Women are attractive and are chosen and hence the can.

Figure 8



(Source: www.thedailybeast.com)

7. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS & SUGGESTIONS

7.1. Findings

The study examined how earlier ads portrayed women compared to present day ads.

Through the questionnaire, the perspective of the viewer could be captured which is formed or constructed through the messages the advertisements conveyed to them.

As the respondents were both Men & women, a wider picture on the study is achieved as how these ads were received by both the men and women.

Majority of the statement were agreed by the respondents which clearly shows that the objectives of this study was achieved.

There is a clear and noticeable paradigm shift of the portrayal of women in comparison with earlier ads and present day ads.

The respondents also agreed upon the statements which stated that certain type of advertisements did not require the involvement of women in it, the respondents also agreed that the ads objectified women and used them as sex appeal to grab attention of the viewer.

This study helped us to see the response and shift in perspective of viewers on women through comparing them with earlier and present day ads. This study also gives a wider picture on how important and influencing are women in advertisements were and are.

7.2. Conclusion

By and large the respondents were appeared to be progressive in their thinking and were vocal about the issues pertaining to role of women in advertisement.. The respondent's perceptions about the role of women in advertisement and its relevance to the socio-economic status differs as per their level of education, level of income and the other characteristics like occupations.

With the objectives being met, I would conclude this study with the below points,

1. The role of women had changed positively when compared to the earlier traditional advertisements, where she was portrayed dependable, vulnerable and where she often sought validation.
2. The advertisements in present context abide by certain ethics and code of conduct and take care of the representation of women.
3. The Social status of the women is positive in present day advertisements.
4. The audience who are by large educated understands how important is the role of women in advertisements and what is the impact it creates on the viewers mind.

7.3. Suggestions

In order to add value to the current research various qualitative research techniques such as focus group interviews will give researchers greater insight into the consumer mindset. Moreover in the future a more detailed study can be conducted to analyse ads over the past three decades to gain perspective on the consumers evolving thought process and the changing pattern in advertisement. Further studies and research can be made on the Role of women in Advertisement sector how she contributes to the creative and monetary aspect of the company, by thorough study on women, who worked in advertisement sector. To be more precise a study on how monumental has the women been in the advertisement sector other than being ornamental.

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