



Analysis of Projection of Women in Advertisements on Society

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ABSTRACT

A number of factors influence the cultural values, lifestyles, and behaviour of a society, the prevalence of mass media has led to the conclusion that advertising plays a major role in influencing and transmitting social values. The portrayal of women in advertising is an issue that has received a great deal of attention through the years. It is said that advertising contributes to the role of stereotyping of women and ethnic minorities. Advertisements reflect the stereotype that women do not do important things, are dependent on men, lack individuality are regarded by men primarily as sex objects, are preoccupied with beauty and motherhood and should be in home. Advertisements reflect and shape our values. Therefore what is portrayed must be accurate and true representation of the women community. Advertisers should portray women in diverse roles and not just be sensitive to them in order to influence the purchase behaviour. As per law also no advertisement is permitted which in its depiction of women, violates the constitutional guarantee to all citizens such as equality of status and opportunity and dignity of an individual.

Keywords-Objectification, Artificiality, Stereotyping, Misleading, Unrealistic.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has facilitated conveying of media signals manifold with entire society been converted into a marketplace. The immediate effect of entertainment centric programming has led to the rise in advertisements alongside the media contents. The basic objective of advertising is profit maximization with the depiction of minorities within society including women in tune with the consumerist culture.

Advertising involves a commercially viable language of appearances and images in which commodity relations systematically penetrate and organize cultural meaning. The print and television advertising media is one area where these changes are significantly visible, targeting the consumers and thus influencing their purchasing behaviour. The consumer purchases various commodities for their basic needs in order to sustain life. A successful commercial that creates a lot of "buzz" can earn a spot in media history.

Advertising for women have increased due to increase in purchasing power and decision making capabilities of women yet role are stereotypical either as housewives or sex objects with an ideal body image and fair skin. Even in neutral portrayal women are projected as inferior especially intellectually. Gender relations affect the unequal power relations in society and these are reinforced in advertisements. Social responsibility especially in case of women is found to be wanting as advertisements use female forms even if women may not be the target consumers.

ADVERTISING AND ITS ILL EFFECTS

"Advertising is a highly visible and seemingly controversial agent of socialization" by Paff, Lakner, 1997. Indeed, it appears everywhere in our lives, on television, on the internet, on busses, in our mailbox, in magazines, and now in the toilets of our favourite restaurants or nightclubs.

Advertisement is a way of communicating information to the consumer which enables the consumer to compare and choose from the products and services available in the market. Its not comforting to note that even when using the successful woman image, the prized catch remains a man. It's alright to go out and conquer the world, the ads seem to say, as long as one defers to a man at the end of a regular office day. In addition to the fact that advertisements are very essential both as communicating and convincing tool for manufacturers it has certain following drawbacks also:-

a) MISLEADING CUSTOMERS

Consumers play a vital role in the economic system of a nation because in the absence of effective demand that emanates from them, the economy virtually collapses. Invariably, consumers are a vulnerable lot for exploitation, more so in a developing country with the prevalence of mass poverty and illiteracy. India too is no exception to it. Instances like overcharging, black marketing, adulteration, profiteering, lack of proper services in trains, telecommunication, water supply, airlines, etc are not uncommon here. From time to time, the government has attempted to safeguard consumer's interests through legislations and the CPA 1986 is considered as the most progressive statute for consumer protection. It has to be kept in mind that advertisements are the tool in the hands of the sponsors to make prospective customers users of their products or services. However to achieve this goal, messages put forward must not give misleading or false information. It should not degrade a rival product, withhold information on possible side effects of the product, injure the feelings of a certain section of society like women, minorities, different ethnic groups etc and be immoral or obscene. Advertisers have the basic responsibility of being aware that whatever they are advocating ought to be backed up by the manufacturer with standard goods or services.

In theory consumer is the king, but in practice consumers have no other option but to buy the products and services. They are at the mercy of powerful traders and manufacturers. In the words of Prof. Galbraith, "It is not the consumer who is the king, but it is the large corporation who is the king in the economy. Whatever happens is not because the consumer wants it but because large and powerful corporations prefer it that way."

b) ETHICALLY OBJECTIONABLE

Many advertisements are highly objectionable because they undermine moral values and ethics. Some advertisements are such that they cannot be seen with the family; they undermine the social values, divert the attention of people and corrupt young minds.

Another ethical concern is the kind of sexual images advertisements are bombarded with. Some advertisements portray woman as mere objects which suggest woman's features are things separate and more important than a woman's true self. It is also objectionable that some advertisements portray women as weaker sex, mindless, submissive, confused, childish, generally in need of help and so on. This encourages women to believe that they are, or they desire to be ought to be weak, mindless and needy. Some advertisements portray wrong images of women, these kinds of advertisements affect the society at large and influence the attitude of men about women that women are mere sex objects, etc. all these erode the self esteem of women which is totally unjustifiable.

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS

The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes over the past few millennia. From equal status with men in ancient times through the low points of the medieval period to the promotion of equal rights by many reformers, the history of women in India has been eventful. In modern India, women have adorned high offices in India including that of the President/Prime minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition, etc.

Deepa Dhanraj, a Bangalore-based activist and documentary filmmaker, wrote in a paper for an international seminar in 1990 : "In Indian advertising, women are used as models in sexist ads for diverse products from tyres to ceiling fans. Apart from this, a stereotyped notion of gender roles is explicit in the casting for ads. Primary roles for men as demonstrators, experts are used and their physical presence is made strongly felt as the authoritarian 'Voice of God' in commentaries. Women, by contrast, are cast either in auxilliary roles or as feather-headed clients who have to be convinced at length to purchase X product, in pseudo-scientific terminology. These images bear no relationship whatsoever to the reality of Indian women or their on-going struggles to achieve economic and political autonomy."

a) OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING:

Is the woman the target-audience a product/service is aimed at? In other words, is she the primary consumer of the product/service advertised? Or is she herself the product or service? This is the basic ambivalence that leads to the great, unending debate on the portrayal of women in advertising, mainly in the electronic media.

Women are often viewed as a sex object because they are identified by their physical attractiveness and their sex appeal. Most often than not, in advertisements especially, they have no relationship with the products but they are chosen and shown anyway because of what their bodies/figures can offer. Objectification of women is hence when women are reduced to a mere commodity, judged by their attributes of their bodies rather than who they are, as a person.

Advertisements also portray women as scantily clad. A woman's body can be used to push through any product in the market, starting from washing powder to shaving cream or to iron and steel products. Women are used to endorse products meant to be used both by men or women. These advertisements seem to believe that since men have the purchasing power, they can be compelled by a woman model in an ad to buy that product.

b) STEREOTYPING OF WOMEN

Representation of women in television makes an interesting feature, advertisements always shows women in stereotypical roles. They are either represented as mothers, wives or in sensuous roles. They can be seen carrying out household chores with full make-up. Working women are represented as highly efficient who could effortlessly manage both their professional lives and household chores, pleasing everybody. Such images of women are seemed to promote the notion that women need to handle both private and public sphere with great ease. This amounts in putting extra pressure on them. Such images of today's woman have generated double demands from women. Women failing in carrying out these tasks have been branded as inefficient. In addition to all these advertisements have further escalated the situation by raising the expectation of the society on them and pulling down the woman's confidence level.

c) CREATING ARTIFICIALITY

Many people, mostly women, are made to believe that they can find happiness and liberation in things. According to a social critique," the wife's endless appetite for goods endlessly fostered reduces a husband to a cash register". Mass media reminds women every time that a perfume or a lipstick can completely change her life. It can save her marriage and can fetch her job with a handsome salary. In some of the household products generally in front is the female and in the backdrop as a voice over for the product is that of male, suggesting her to choose this particular product. It reinforces the belief that women have to be led by the male, as they are more decisive. The male voice serves as a guiding force, instructing the female every time.

Advertisements also portray women as beautiful objects. For instance, a certain cement company compares woman strength with that of the cement, implying that women are as strong as cement. It floats the message that women should always be very strong and age can never catch them.

d) IMPACT ON CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR

Advertisements of some sort are manipulative and circumvent conscious reasoning and seek to influence the consumer to do what the advertiser wants and not what is in consumer interests. It violates, that is, the consumer's right to be treated as a free and equal rational being.

As per Galbraith's advertising violates the individual's right to choose for him or herself: Advertising manipulates the consumer. The consumer is used merely as means for advancing the ends and purposes of producers and this diminishes the consumer's capacity to freely choose for him or herself.

In theory consumer is the king, but in practice consumers have no other option but to buy the products and services. They are at the mercy of powerful traders and manufacturers. In the words of Prof. Galbraith, "It is not the consumer who is the king, but it is the large corporation who is the king in the economy. Whatever happens is not because the consumer wants it but because large and powerful corporations prefer it that way."

From the above stated situations we can say that consumer is there, consumer is important but consumer is always tenses and is not effective. There are a large number of laws/orders/ rules which teach the spirit of consumerism. But it has become a wonder land of lawyer's paradise and hardly few cases succeed in court. Besides this consumers are also ignorant. There is poor business response and weak consumer movement.

e) UNREALISTIC AT TIMES

Jean Kilbourne, one of the best-known advocates of raising awareness about the exploitation of women in advertising, claims that, "we are exposed to over 2000 ads a day, constituting perhaps the most powerful educational force in society". But the problem is that it often exploits women as sex objects and adornment strips women of their individual identities.

Women are viewed as "things", objects of male sexual desire, and/or part of the merchandise rather than people (Hall, Crum, 1994). Body exposure and frequency of these ads have increased at an alarming rate over time. These chest, leg, buttock, and crotch shots increase the stereotypes and images that women are "bodies", rather than "somebodies" (with personalities) (Hall, Crum, 1994), which ultimately reflects the provocative, exploited images. The exploitation of women in the media has become so commonplace, particularly in advertising, that most people fail to get outraged or even notice it anymore. But many women do care about these images and understand their true power of women in advertising today.

Dove senior brand manager Katie Adams added: "The Campaign for Real Beauty has continued to challenge the narrow definition of beauty. Our research shows that women want to see more realistic representations of beauty in the media and advertising, so it is no wonder that the campaign has continued to resonate with millions of women worldwide."

CHANGING IMAGE OF WOMEN THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS

The exploitation of women in the media has been part of the advertising industry since its beginning, although the level to which women have been exploited has changed drastically.

Women, being the integral part of our so-called democratic nation have always been looked down under the dictatorship of men. Women not only suffer in the rural India but the problem remains the same in the urban sector of the society too. Pandit Jawarhar Lal Nehru once said that "by merely looking at the condition of women, one can figure out the growth of the nation."

While stereotyping still exists, advertising's portrayal of women is improving in many areas. Many advertisers have begun to recognize the importance of portraying women realistically. The increase in number of working women has resulted not only in women having more influence in family decision making but also in more single female households, which mean more independent purchases. As the women have crossed the boundaries from domestic sphere to the professional arena, expectations and representations of women have changed as well. Many of the advertisers are now depicting women in diversity of roles that reflect their lives. In many ads, the stereotypic character traits attributed to women have shifted from weak and dependent to strong and autonomous.

Despite its negative aspects, advertising is a useful tool of marketing. Its drawbacks could be removed if the people and the government keep a watch on the advertisers. People should satisfy themselves about the claims made by a producer before they purchase his products. The manufacturers or the advertisers should also avoid wasteful advertising and keep advertising expenditure within limits. They should also follow the ethical standards and in advertisements, women should not be depicted as things, rather efforts should be made to reflect positive images that will serve to enhance, not denigrate, women's self esteem.

CODE AND LAWS FOR ADVERTISING ETHICS

The exploitation of women in the media has become so commonplace, particularly in advertising that most people fail to get outraged or even notice it anymore. But many women do care about these images and understand their true power. If commercials are so effective at selling products, they also must be capable of selling stereotypes.

a) An act INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN (PROHIBITION) ACT, 1986 prohibits indecent representation of women through advertisement or in publications, writings paintings, figures or in any other manner and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. The act defines indecent representation of women as the depiction in any, in manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent, or derogatory to, or denigrating women, or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injury the public or morals. Further section 3 prohibits any exhibition or publication, directly or indirectly, or any advertisement, which contains indecent representation of women in any form. It prohibits also the production, selling, hiring, distribution, circulation or sending by post any book, pamphlet, paper, slide, film etc which contains indecent representation of women in any form.

b) The Consumer Protection Act, 1986 provides effective safeguards to consumers against defective goods, misleading advertisements, unfair trade practices, and other forms of exploitation.

c) The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has adopted a code for self regulation in advertising. It is expected from all its members, whether they are the advertisers, advertising agencies, media houses, or outside contractors or suppliers dealing with the advertising work, to follow such self-regulatory norms and behave in a responsible manner.

Unfortunately, despite the presence of the act, indecent representation in various forms and in various modes is galore in the society. There is lack of support in this matter from political front but many of women groups have succeeded in combating such representation in different places. In the final analysis, it becomes quite clear that the proposal of study would substantially contribute in understanding the nuisance of women image and violation of rights of both the consumer and women in India because of advertisements by focusing on a critical study of policies and institutions put in place to protect their rights.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Traditions among some communities such as sati, jauhar and devdasi have been banned and are largely defunct in modern India. However, some cases of these practices are still found in remote parts of India.

The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armored with their talent. They had proven themselves. But in India they are yet to get their dues. The last fifty years the Independence of India, we have seen women coming out to be educated, to do jobs, to make careers, yet the perception that women are second to men has not been erased. Now thus it is time to study and analyse the anomaly that, though she work shoulder to shoulder with men, she still remain second - why ?

There are some of the smart marketing techniques that need to be adopted by many advertisers to challenge long standing assumptions about who does the cooking and cleaning, which brings home the bacon, and what motivates Mrs Consumer to buy. A self regulation in media against obscenity and violence along with stricter implementation of law is the need of the hour .The social responsibility is necessary and the media should scale down a little bit on the profit motive in the interest of the greater public good. In such a situation because of some advertisements at times the women, society and consumers become a harassed lot. Therefore, there arises the need to study the dynamics of violation of both women and consumer rights and asses the policies and institutions to protect them.

He who controls the media controls the flow of information and the power of perception. The media's manipulation of women's sexuality also serves as further proof that women's bodies are still not their own in any arena.

The mainstream media promote women as eye candy, valued for little more than their desirability and eagerness to please. The images of today display the values of a society that has more interest in the body than the mind. They are techno enhanced labyrinths of unattainable appearances that leave women and men feeling horrified, estranged, and restricted by unrealistic, silent mandates

Until the media and the advertising industry develop a newfound respect for women, the struggle to be taken seriously and viewed as equals will continue. In particular, no advertisement shall be permitted which projects the derogatory image of women. Advertiser shall ensure that portrayal of the female form is tasteful and aesthetic, and within the well established norms of good taste and decency.

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