

RIGHT PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA



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Abstract:

This paper is based on secondary data collected through different books and published journals. Television advertisements also collected for analysis. An explanatory and exploratory method is used to write this paper. The paper focus on the representation of women in Indian advertisements specifically those run on television from last 10 years. How these advertisements portray women on television through a very short and effective tool of media that leave a great impression on people's minds. The paper will focus on the objectification of women's body in different advertisements as sex objects. It will also focus on how these advertisements reinforce stereotypical image of women through patriarchal norms and values like the rightful place of women is always in home or look beautiful is the most important duty of a young women or for working women it is also important to manage the home front.

Keywords: *Advertisement, Gender, Objectification, Patriarchy, Stereotyping.*

Mass media are cultural forces that do not simply reflect but indirectly helps in shaping social realities. Life styles are often adopted through a complex process of imitation and comparison with attitudes and behavior presented by mass media. From feminist perspective mass media plays an important role in communicating women's issues, agendas, actions, etc. It can play a crucial role in popularizing women's perception, goals, rights, movements for equality etc and it can also have the power to make such things visible in the eyes of common people. But it helps in enforcing the patriarchal agenda as well. Media affects the mind sets of people; change the perception about themselves and the society among them, change in priority about their needs, etc.

"According to the study conducted jointly by federation of Indian chamber of commerce and industry (FICCI) and price water house

corporation private limited (PWC), television held the largest share (59%) in the entertainment industry followed by films (28%), music (12%) and radio (1%)".

-Rommel Rodrigues (2005)

Advertisements are effective tool of mass media which impart knowledge and information with a dash of entertainment. Advertising affect our daily life consciously and unconsciously and are responsible to play a significant role in shaping the society in a much broader perspective. Advertising is a vital marketing tool that enables the firms to communicate directly with the consumer. Therefore, ads are made with the intention to seek viewer attention and response. Advertising apart from selling products or brands also sell attitude, behavior or life style. On an average an adult spends about two years of his life watching TV advertisements. It is presumed that viewing



these advertisements affect the viewer's attitudes and preferences. Advertisers have long been enamored with women and culture. Most of the advertisements portray women as the torch-bearers of cultural heritage. They are often portrayed in stereotypical images. She could be a wife, mother, daughter-in-law or mother-in-law. A common sight of women in advertisement for decades is in the kitchen, cooking food, washing bucket-full clothes, or feeding husband or children. Advertisers have also been accused for objectifying women's bodies. Nudity and sexuality of women are often used to gain consumer's attention. Most of the time women's appearance may not even be appropriate to the product being advertised. Women are often dressed in indecent attires with a sensuous gaze. The depiction of Women in Indian media be it films, television serials, news, media, visual advertisement is indeed an area of great concern.

Objective of the Study

As part of the audio visual media, advertisements are very important when it comes to influencing the choices and attitudes of people. But these advertisements have been accused of portraying women in negatively manner and ignoring the real aspects of women's lives by feminists. Women are either portrayed in typical traditional ways: busy in doing household chores, or if they are outside the home they are portrayed as mere a sex object with possible shortest clothes. The main objectives of this paper are:

- To study the portrayal of women in advertisements of different brands or products. How these advertisements portray women on television through a very short and effective tool of media that leave a great impression on people's minds.
- To study the objectification of women's body as an object in advertisements that women are often used as a piece of

decoration to attract the audience, when sometimes they are not even needed for the product being advertised.

- To study the negative impact of this portrayal of women's body that sometimes leads to the violence against women.

Review of Literature

Valdivia, Angharad N. (2004) in her edited book *A Companion to Media Studies* discussed that advertisers recognized that it has been so long portraying women in stereotypical roles, so they started to change the depiction to some extent. They try to address women's concern but on the other hand they bluff with the audience thorough their campaigns that equality has achieved. But close examination of such advertisements reveal that they reinforce same stereotypes in modern manner. The change in the image of women is not enough, the change must be occur in the mind set of advertisers and in the social system that surrounds us. Women are needed to be portrayed in strong independent public figures like politicians or athletes.

Linda Lazier and Alice Kendrick (1993) in their article *women in advertisements: sizing up the images roles and functions*, found out that the portrayal of women in the advertisements of television and print media has not change over the period of time. They claim that women in advertisements are not seen as important decision makers although they make important financial decision at home. Further the contribution of women in the workforce has been ignored by the advertisers socially and statistically and stereotypes that are used in the advertisements ignore the complex lives of modern women.

Perse, Elizabeth M. (2001). In her book *Media Effects and Society* talks about the effects of media on the society; one of the worst effects of media on society is through sexual content which is opposed by many



feminists. They claim that it is harmful for women as it promotes objectification of women's body, sexualisation of women, discrimination against women and support a society that accepts violence against women very easily. According to feminists pornography is the main sexual media content that de-values and de-humanizes women in eyes of men.

Prasad, Kiran (2006) in her edited book Women, Globalization and Mass Media discussed that though there are some changes in the campaigning of advertisements portraying women, but still these women are not out of the traditional limitations. If a woman is portrayed working outside the home, she is also a good house wife who manages both office and home. Again and again the primary duty of women as a good house wife is reinforced by the advertisers. More and more women can be seen in the advertisement of kitchen appliances, dishwashing products, washing powders and floor cleaning products, and more men can be seen in advertisements of business, companies, cars and motor bikes with women in background.

Nagi Parul (2014) concludes in her article Projection of Women in Advertisements: a Gender Perception Study that the study concludes that women in print advertisements are depicted as mere sex objects. She also said that women are portrayed in advertisements whether the product is related to them or not. The purchasing behavior of people is affected by the charming women portrayal but this preference varies from person to person. Sometimes people influenced by the charming portrayal of women but most of the time the quality of product can not be confirmed by its portrayal. She suggests that there must either be self regulatory mechanism or government should control the portrayal of women in advertisements.

Patowary Himashree (2014) in her article Portrayal of Women in Indian Mass Media: an Investigation said that media has been ignoring the real problems of women's lives and has been engaged in the negative portrayal of women. The projection of women in Indian media suggests that women are not respected very much in society but often seen as only objects. Women only have three projected roles in media that are biological, domestic and decorative. The author also implies that the sexual objectification of women also leads to violence against women. Women are also often seen as commodities.

Dr. Mishra Deepanjali (2015) in her article Portrayal of Women in Media suggests that the depiction of women in Indian magazines advertisements has been changing. Women are not confined within the four walls of kitchen in these advertisements. Their depiction is now in more modern manner. But the saddest part is that the patriarchal norms still work behind the changed depiction. With modern depiction of women in advertisements, the objectification of women has taken place. Besides being independent and self respecting; women are often portrayed as a sex object in the advertisements.

Dr. Raina Anshu (2014) after analysis different advertisements on Indian television concludes in her article Representation of Indian Women in Advertisements that women are treated as trophy or gift in Indian advertisements which will be given to the person who uses the advertised product. Women are often projected as without any common sense or wit to make decisions. They are very easily attracted or influenced by the person who is using the product being advertised. Such advertisements leave impression on common people's mind that women are very weak and foolish that they can be exploited very easily.

**Methodology**

This paper is a descriptive study in nature. It is based on secondary information. The secondary data and information have been comprehensively analyzed for preparing this paper. The secondary information have been collected from different scholars' and researchers' published books, articles published in different journals, conference paper, working paper and websites. Some of the advertisements that are running on television now a day are also analyzed to conclude the results.

Portrayal of Women in Indian Television Advertisements

Today, we come across hundreds of advertisements daily. They are affecting every aspect of our day to day dealings, our conversations, our thoughts and to a certain extent control our behavior as customers and consumers. Advertisements stare and scream at us from every street corner, every newspaper, every magazine, every hoarding, every stall or shop or showroom, radio and television. They don't even spare our computer screens when all we are interested in is checking our mail or even simply browsing through.

Advertisement educates people about new products and their uses. Advertising message about the utility of a product enables the people to widen their knowledge. It is advertising which has helped people adopting new ways of life and giving-up old habits. It has contributed to the betterment of the standard of living of the society. But there is another concern about the advertisements that advertisers are using advertisements to sell their product without taking into consideration the negative effects of the content they use in their advertisements. Advertisements has been accused by many feminists of using women in ways that had adverse effects on women's identity in the eyes of world as well as in the eyes of women themselves.

Objectification of Women's Body

Advertisements have long been accused of objectification of women's body for the purpose of selling their products. Feminists have always been opposing advertisements that objectify women's body in any manner. Sometimes women are used in advertisements as a piece of decoration, sometimes advertisers use women to attract the audience specifically male audience. Irrespective of the fact that women are needed or not in any advertisement, they are casted by advertisers just to attract the audience. From 2012, advertisements of Slice Soft Drink started running on television that has one of the most famous actresses of Indian Film Industry Katrina Kaif. Slice has launched many advertisements casting Katrina Kaif and in every advertisement the portrayal of her body can catch attention of anyone. The Slice advertisements with tag line "Ab Ras Barsega" (juice will shower) starts with the view of room in which the lead female is sitting in the window watching a mango tree outside. She stands up and goes to the mirror and put off her bangles while her back is in the full angle of camera with a thin strap showing her back from neck to the end of her spine. While putting her bangles off she has visions of eating mango and the camera start focusing her lips and neck. Then she starts running towards the mango tree while in the background the music is playing with lyrics "Bohot Hui Ye Aankh Micholi, Khelungi Main Ras Ki Holi" (no more hide & seek, m going to play with juice). Then she plucks a mango from the tree with her chunri and starts enjoying the mango and again the angles of camera is in such manner that it is only focusing on her lips, only then a bottle of Slice appeared in her hands.

This advertisement is only one example of many advertisements of Slice Soft Drink portraying women's body in same manner and sometimes even worse. In this particular advertisement in which a soft drink is being advertised, why there was a need to show a woman in such short dress that more than her



half back was open, she was licking her own lip and showing her body. The objectification of women's body has always an issue in the society often raised by different feminists, but the portrayal of women mere as an object to attract the audience is still a trend in the media and in this case in advertisements. In this particular advertisement the kind of dress she is wearing, the kind of postures she is giving are clearly leads to the objectification of women's body. The taste and quality of a soft drink and women's body are not remotely connected to each other but Slice advertisers used a woman and her body to sell their drink.

In advertisements women are used by advertisers to sell their products but many times this usage has many negative impacts on the lives of women. Many advertisements has accused of objectify women's body. Sometimes women are used to sell the products that are not even related to them. For example in the advertisements of men's talcum powder what is the need of women. In addition the portrayal of women in such advertisements is so negative that they are directly harmful for the image of women in the society. In the advertisements of Zatak Men's Talcum Powder, the objectification of women's body is very clear. The advertisement starts with the view of a tailor's shop where the Master Ji (head of the shop) is sitting in the shop and a boy is applying the Zatak Talcum Powder. Then a lady came in traditional India dress that is Saree. The Master Ji calls the boy and asks him to take measurements of the lady. Then the boy came with inches' tape and starts measuring. The moment he touches the belly of the lady, she feels an ice cube slipping on her belly. Then he measures her chest and his hand touches her back and the same ice cube things happened again. The boy who was hesitating in measuring the lady suddenly starts enjoying and continues measuring her neck while in the back ground the song is playing with lyrics "Tere Chhoone Se Thanda Lagne Laga Hai" (I feel cold when

you touch me). The boy and lady were so much enjoying the touch of each other that they both did not notice that the boy has started measuring parts that are not needed but Master Ji notices and the advertisement ends with the tagline "Just Zatak Her".

In this advertisement two main issues can be raised. First of all why do we need women in the advertisement of men's talcum powder and second if we use women anyway, why there is a need to portray her in such a manner that only her body parts becomes the central piece of advertisement and catches all the attention of audience. In this very advertisement, the scene of ice cube running through her body because his hand touches her is very fake and unrealistic. The lady was so much lost in that, that she did not notice that the boy is touching her body parts and reason behind this was only the talcum powder that was being advertised. What message is passes to the general audience, what image of women it creates in the eyes of people, can any woman be so blindly attractive towards an unknown person, these are some of many questions that can be asked to the advertisers of such advertisements. The meaning of the narration "Just Zatak Her" can be interpreted as 'just attack her' or may be make a woman so vulnerable through the touch that she losses her senses to him. Same issue has been raised by many feminists and the campaign was so strong that this advertisement got banned on television but before that it has run through many times that every regular viewer of television has watched it enough times to have a image of that in their minds. Even after the camping against this advertisement, the objectification of women's body is well known and can easily be noticed in other advertisements running on Indian television. The concept of 'male gaze' is important in understanding the portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisements. The advertisers often depict women's image as some decorative piece or center for attraction for the consumers. As men are the main consumers in the society,



they are seen as invisible spectators who define beauty or perfect female body. To please men's gaze, advertisers often portray women's half nude images, more importantly perfectly sized women (Valdivia, Angharad N.).

The objectification of women's body in the advertisements of soup is very common. Though there has been concern among feminists about this issue but the objectification of women's body is still can be seen in almost every advertisement of soup. Very often women are portrayed taking shower, laying in bath tub where half of their body is visible on the screen. In the advertisements of Fiama Di Wills Soup, one of the successful Bollywood actresses Dipika Padukone has portrayed. The advertisement starts with Dipika smelling a peach in the market place that reminds her Fiama Di Wills Soup and suddenly she starts running while throwing her bag. On her to home she also took her jacket off and even her sandals before reaching home. The background music is playing the whole time with lyrics "Ab Rukna Mana Hai" (it is forbidden to stop now). She reached home and starts taking bath. She is portrayed laying in bath tub and enjoying the fragrance of the soup, while her body parts have all the focus of the camera. The advertisement does not end here, when she came out of her bath tub, a male (seems to be her partner) entered with another color's Fiama Di Wills Soup and again she starts jumping on him and few seconds later the advertisement ends with the view of both of them taking shower together with the tag line "Rukna Mana Hai" (it is forbidden to stop).

In another advertisement of soup, the same objectification of women's body is the issue. The advertisement belongs to the company Lux. In a particular advertisement of Lux Bathing Soup, a Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor has featured. The advertisement focused on the fragrance of the soup. This advertisement starts with Kareena Kapoor walking in a hall while she is putting off her

jewelry and gown with her own voice running in the background, saying "What is Beauty: This- Putting Off Her Ear Ring; This- Putting of Her Necklace ; No, My Beauty is My Confidence, My Perfume-Putting Off Her Gown". Then she is portrayed laying in a bath tub revealing half of her body parts. While she was laying in the bath tub she was projected as if she was laying under the flowers. After that she is shown walking towards the stage and everyone is admiring the fragrance coming out of her. Then the advertisement ends with her saying "The Mystery of Beauty is Lux Perfume".

These two advertisements are just example of hundreds of advertisements of soups that portray women in same manner. The body of women has been used by advertisers to sell their products. Other than the objectification of women's body, advertisements of this kind can also be pointed out for reasons such as they put over emphasis on the beauty of women. In such advertisements women are portrayed with flawless fair skin and slim body, and many times Bollywood divas are projected to set the standards of beauty of women. Through such depictions, women who do not have fair skin or perfectly slim body feel inferior and try to join the race of being fair and slim. For the sole purpose of selling their products, advertisers use fair skin of women without considering the fact that this portrayal can be harmful for women with dark skin tone. Women who cannot fit into that perfect figure not only feel inferior but also this may damage their self confidence.

Findings

After analysis different segments of advertisements from Indian television it can easily be said that feminists have not been wrongly opposing the portrayal of women in advertisements. The projection of women in Indian television advertisements has been affecting the lives of women in different manner. Simon de Beauvoir's concept of



women as “other” to men has successfully been carrying out by the Indian advertisements.

When the country is following the footsteps of globalization and trying to promote the marginalized section of the society through various policies and legislations, women in advertisements are either depicted as sex objects or a piece of decoration to increase sells of the product. Women have been projecting in advertisements of products that are not connected to them even remotely. Today, violence against women is already growing with high speed, and with the objectification of women as sex objects through these advertisements, the men psyche that women are mere objects and can be used as per their needs, continues to be reinforced. In recent years a new image of women has emerged who is selfish, actively aggressive, sexist, abusive, insensitive, etc. but the main problem is when we notice that this new image can only be seen in advertisements of male deodorants. Media is creating a new false image of women that has no relation with reality. One another very misleading concept of Indian television advertisements is the emphasis on women’s beauty. Advertisements of beauty creams put great pressure on young girls to look like those beauty queens. One of the worst consequences of this is the low self esteem of those women who cannot fit into this unrealistic boundary about the facial beauty. Women with dark complexion spend more and more time and energy to look a bit fairer.

Conclusion

Advertisement is a very powerful tool of media which affects the mind set of people in a very short period of time. In today’s world, women are equally participating with men in almost every field. In mass media, women today have more space than ever before. In advertisements also, now women can be seen much more than men. Advertisements have tendency to carry out a story in one or sometimes even in half minute that leave a

great impression on viewers’ mind because of short and very loud messages they carry. But after close analysis of Indian television advertisements it can be conclude that advertisements in India are not fulfilling their duty towards the society. The projection of women in Indian advertisements that can be done for highlighting the real issues of women’s lives, for their upliftment, for the awareness among people about the rights of women, for the empowerment of women etc. But the focus of advertisers is on something else; their main object is to grow sells of their products without taking into consideration the message any particular advertisement brings to the society. Women very often are used as a piece of decoration in the advertisements for the products that are not connected to them such as men’s deodorants or undergarments. One factor behind the violence against women is the portrayal of women as only sex objects in advertisements.

On the basis of conclusion the following suggestions are made:

- Advertisers should understand that the projection of women in advertisements affects the lives of women and they can sell their products with casting women in stereotypical roles.
- The false depiction of women’s sexuality should ban on television.
- Women should be casted in advertisements of products that are related to them not just a piece of decoration to attract the audience.
- The objectification of women’s body in advertisements needs to examine by authorities. The advertisers need to understand the harms that objectification of women’s body can bring to society specifically to women.
- The over emphasis on the outer beauty of women should stop and advertisements of beauty creams should not show women with dark skin color as inferior to others or being rejected because they are not fairer.
- The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986 should be implemented in more effective manner. Every advertisement in India that cast women should go through the analysis under the sections of this Act.



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