

The Analysis of Women's Representation in Indian Television Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Advertising has a high influence on the cultural environment of India and is one of the most vital sources of revenue that supports and motivates the vast majority of commercial media. It can even be said that advertising is the basic force that stands behind all the other operational media industries.¹ We come across many advertisements while watching television on daily basis and if these advertisements are built on ethical grounds, they are beneficial to advertisers as well as its targeted audiences. However, there is a rising concern about some advertising companies that are using unethical content of advertising that has a harmful effect on the society.

Descriptive research design and content analysis research technique has been used for the analysis of different television advertisements. This paper is based on both the secondary as well as primary data that has been collected through different books, published articles and advertisements telecasted on Indian television. The present paper is focused on the representation of women in Indian advertisements. How advertisements portray women on television through a very effective tool of media i.e., via a short duration of video content that put a great impression on people's mind. The paper also focuses on how these advertisements reinforce stereotypical image of women through patriarchal norms and values. Women are often depicted in advertisements as objects of desires and such depiction often leads to violence against them. Advertisements depict the world from a masculine point of view, representing women as mere a sexual object. This kind of framing, what Laura Mulvey called the male gaze, encourages men viewers to see women as sexual objects and compels women to see themselves as objects of men's desire.²

Keywords: women, advertisements, patriarchy, portrayal, sexual objects

I. INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a convincing form of mass communication that, according to the AIDA model of hierarchical effects, is capable of turning potential consumers' attention to a particular product, service or idea, turning attention into interest transforming interest into desire, and finally converting desire into action (intention to purchase or consume).³ Advertisements can be divided into different types depending on the mass media used to distribute the advertisement, namely: print advertisements (newspapers, journals, magazines, etc.), radio advertisements, television advertisements, outdoor advertisements (through hoardings, banners, billboards, etc.), indoor advertisements (kiosks, window displays, etc.), and online advertisements. Of all the platforms, television is known to be one of the most effective medium of advertising because of its reach and popularity.

Television is an audio and visual means of communication, and its popularity and reach in India is incomparable with any other mass communication medium. According to Broadcast India 2018 Survey conducted by the Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) India, out of 298 million, 197 of million Indian homes have television sets, and television is the most successful medium for producers of advertisements to meet their viewers.⁴ With such massive exposure provided by television it becomes necessary for one to analyse the messages delivered by advertisers to households. Because commercials not only hold messages that can increase sales or improve the brand image, they are also believed to represent and influence the society's socio-cultural norms.

Advertisement serves as catalysts and reflects the aspirations of a society and how advertisement has the ability not only to affect customers' attitudes and behaviours, but also to incorporate and mould socio-cultural narratives.⁵ For a long time, media also portrayed women as objects of sexual pleasure from music videos and video games, which further lets advertisers believe that such representations are the way of gradually gaining more viewers' attention. Advertisements show women in stereotypical roles for a number of products (specifically male grooming products) mostly as sex objects.⁶ In India

too, advertisement has not stayed away from depicting women as sex objects. Women have often been depicted as artifacts of sexual gratification and used simply to provide glamour in advertisements. The representation of women in advertisements aimed directly at the male population cannot be denied. In such advertisements, female models and celebrities are used to connect to the males and attract them to improve the sales of the items.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Liesbet Van Zoonen (1994) in his book "Feminist Media Studies" argues that apart from unimaginative depictions of women, many feminists have collectively questioned the media on the subject of pornography. Watching pornography is believed to have some serious effects on the behaviour of men towards women. Feminists believe that pornography enables aggression and promotes violence against women. The innovative strategy against pornography was proposed by Andrea Dworking (a radical feminist activist) and Catherine MacKinnon (a radical feminist lawyer). They proposed that pornography is not just a criminal act encouraging violence against women, but it is also a breach of women's civil rights because it explicitly shows women being physically subordinated to men.⁷

Srijani Chakraborty (2013) in her article 'The Depiction of Women in Media, With Special Reference to Them in Advertisements' says that it is very easy to find a woman in the advertising of automobiles and male grooming products who, most of the time, is half naked and exposes her body to sexually attracts the man. Such representation has many ways of having adverse effects on society. Women and girls are made to think that if they become sexually available they can get a perfect male partner; on the other hand, males are given the impression that if they purchase the particular product they can get any woman they want or do whatever they want with her.⁸

Manita Kahlon (2013) in her article "Portrayal of Women in Advertising" says that women are portrayed as an object, an element and their subjectivity and dignity are denied accordingly. Their primary obligation is to fulfil people's wants and needs. Men are made to believe through the portrayal of women through advertisements that women are only a source of pleasure. The body parts of women are featured in numerous advertisements and in some cases appear independently as showing just the pictures of the lips, legs, breasts, butts and so on. Divided parts of women's bodies influence people to think they are merely objects or figures to play. Such representations of women make them lesser individuals without any emotions and feelings in the minds of others, and also themselves. In such images of women, the head is frequently absent and confirms the likelihood that thinking and the use of mind is not the regions of women, and they are only minor artefacts of desires. This has further impacts in women's lives, something other than dismissing their image. This representation also contributes to brutality towards women because men are set up to believe that women have no reason or will, and when women do not follow men or fulfil their sexual needs, the incentive turns them into violence.⁹

Dr. Anshu Raina (2014) in her article 'Representation of Indian Women in Advertisements' suggests that on Indian television, particularly the advertisements of deodorants, there are various advertisements showing women as objects, who are there to be consumed. The advertisements of Wild Stone deodorants, Denver Deodorants and so on are extremely basic instances of creating an impression of women in the minds of individuals as someone who has no power of their faculties and can be controlled by fragrance. Such portrayals communicate misleading ideas to audience peculiar to the young viewers.¹⁰

Himashree Patowary (2014) in her article "Portrayal of Women in Indian Mass Media: An Investigation" discusses that commercials, as a piece of visual media, play an essential part in endorsing distinctive items, but there has been a growing constructive criticism on women's projection in advertisements as they portray women as a piece of decoration. Furthermore, the speaker concluded that women's sexual objectification had caused violence against women. Very frequently, women are seen as objects.¹¹

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Advertisements, as part of the audio visual media, are very important when it comes to influencing people's life choices and attitudes. But feminist have been accusing these commercials for negative portrayal of women and dismissing actual facets of women's lives. Whether women are portrayed in stereotypical traditional ways: occupied with household chores, and if they are outside the house they are depicted as a simple sex object with the shortest possible 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 that on how these advertisements reinforce stereotypical image of women through patriarchal norms and values.
- To study how women's bodies are objectified in advertisements and often used as a piece of decoration to attract the audience, when sometimes they are not even needed for the product being advertised.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This paper is a descriptive study in nature. It is based on primary and secondary information. The secondary data and information have been comprehensively analysed for preparing this paper. The secondary information has been collected from different scholars' and researchers' published books, articles published in different journals, conference paper, working paper and websites. For primary data, some of the television advertisements are analysed to conclude the results.

V. REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS

The way women are portrayed in advertisements has always been a point of discussion. women's sexual objectification through advertisements is a cause for concern. The advertising industry has gone down in history with reputation of using images of female bodies to sell a wide range of products from automobiles to fast food and from male grooming products to soft drinks. Women are also used in advertisements where the male population constitutes the majority of the target audience.

Usually female bodies are objectified in advertisements in such a way that products are being compared to a woman's body, and often women are depicted as only sex objects or used for decorative purposes.¹²

According to George Gerbner's Cultivation Theory, developed in 1967, heavy media exposure, particularly television, can lead an individual to interpret reality on the basis of the distorted image portrayed by the monotonous and dominant television messages. Individuals tend to view the world through media produced manipulated perception of reality. The long-term influence of the intense media viewing tends to affect an individual's attitudes and beliefs. Consequently, in the majority of television advertisements, women's sexual objectification can potentially affect the audience and their perception of women.

This could lead to the viewing of women as commodities or objects of sexual gratification by audiences. It could also trigger the society to have a misguided perception of women.¹³

One of the categories of products that have earned a reputation in their advertisements for sexually objectifying women is the Men's Deodorant advertisements. "*The male deodorant market in India has a share of Rs1000 crore of the total 1400 crore deodorant market, making the male to female deodorant market ratio at 70:30. The market is dominated by Hindustan Unilever (Axe), Mc Nroe Chemicals (Wild Stone), Marico co. Ltd. (Set Wet), Emami (He) and Vini Cosmetics Private Limited (Fogg)*".¹⁴

Axe deodorants have popularized with the tagline "The Axe Effect" in its commercials since its entry into the Indian market in 1999. The Axe effect applies to the impact the deodorant wearer has on the female population. It claims to attract a multitude of women to the man who sprayed the Axe deodorant on himself. The various advertisements as part of the Axe effect campaign introduced more or less the same idea with slight variations-that of the woman becoming bizarrely attracted to the deodorant wearer. These advertisements depict women essentially as sexual beings, lusting for men, who appear to lose their logic and rationality once they get a slight hint of the advertised product.

Not long ago, Axe Deodorants advertisement starring Ranbir Kapoor (Bollywood actor) used similar representation of women. The advertisement depicts Ranbir Kapoor's day which started with jogging, moving forward to his workplace which is a shooting studio, enjoying dinner with friends and ends with him sitting in his car. In the duration of one minute, there were eight people who were attracted towards him comprising seven women and one gay man. Every time he got attention from someone, he clicks a small score machine in his hand which, in the end of the advertisement, shows the number '0147'. Then his driver shows his score with his own machine which is '2375', and the advertisement ends with the tagline 'Score More with

Axe New Blast' with the image of the driver person using the advertised product 'Axe Blast'. In this very advertisement, the usage of sex is very explicit with the line 'Score More' which does not need any illustration. Pollay (1986) underlined that since its beginning, the advertising has always sold sex in one form or the other. It sometimes guarantees seductive capabilities and sometimes the sexual stimuli attract our attention. Sex has been used in various forms although in subtler way than pornography.¹⁵ The image of women being attracted to a stranger just because of the fragrance is very facade, as it provoke the misrepresentation of women in media with no faculty to think or decide, who can lured and manipulated very easily.

Apart from sex, advertisements use women and their sexuality to attract audience towards the advertised product. One example of such representation is Wild Stone Deodorant advertisements. One particular advertisement of Wild Stone Deodorants starts with the view of an Indian house with wedding preparations, people dancing around and bride having henna applied on her feet, when she got interrupted by her wedding planner that 'jewellery designer is here'. As she moved inside the house, the fragrance of the advertised deodorant worn by the jewellery designer captured her attention and suddenly she forgot everything, even that she is a bride, and started acting strange around the jewellery designer. She dropped her Dupatta¹⁶, moved her hair aside and implicitly asked the designer to try the jewellery on her. The advertisement ends with the bride touching the hand of the jewellery designer in an unusual way and walking away with a female voiceover "Ab Duniya Behkegi" (Now

Everyone Will Be Lost). Again, same representation of women is found where the fragrance of deodorant is so powerful that women lose their sense and surrender themselves to the man who wear the advertised deodorant. What messages are those portrayals spreading to the general audience? What perception of women does it create in people's eyes? Can any woman be so unconsciously attracted to an unknown individual? These are few of the many queries that can be posed to such advertisers.

Furthermore, such representation of women in repetitive formation can also have an effect on the perception of women about themselves. Seeing themselves as sexual objects can affect the sense of self respect among women. Women are very often represented in Indian advertisements with no agency, very easily influenced and unable to take rational decisions. This irrational representation of women on the television sets through a very short but repeated form of media have the strong tendency to mould women's behaviour in a similar way in real life. The Objectification Theory by Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), as cited by Ullah and Khan (2014), states that in a society that sexually objectifies women, women tend to see themselves from the viewpoint of an observer, internalize the perception of an observer as the primary view of themselves, which can contribute to repetitive body monitoring, guilt and insecurity, and lead to mental health hazards such as eating disorders, unipolar depression and sexual dysfunction.¹⁷

The reason of women's use as sexual objects is the escalating the sale of the advertising products. Yet marketers need to understand the fact that sexuality or nudity is not going to increase sales but the product's quality or marketing creativity can do so. In 1969 Steadman conducted a research to see the impact of the sexual content on consumers. He pointed out that sexually illustrated content supports a very little in recalling the brand name. Non-sexual content is generally more effective at recalling the brand name than the sexual content. Chestnut, LaChance and Lubits conducted another study in 1977 to look at the impact of sexual portrayal of women in advertisements on consumers. They observed that in advertisements, women's sexuality may, sometimes, help in marketing of the advertisements but has no long-term effect on the recognition of the brand name.¹⁸

Presently, television is a part of everyone's life and everyone is influenced to some extent by the content seen on television. This kind of portrayal of women tends to make male viewers assume that the use of such particular products will make women respond in certain manner, and if a woman does not behave as shown in the advertisements, it is very possible for men to exhibit coercive behaviour against them. *"By viewing women as exclusively sexual beings whose purpose is to sexually arouse and gratify men, a power differential is created in which women generally are subordinate. This power hierarchy may support development of perceptions of women as appropriate target for sexually aggressive behaviours"*.¹⁹ Advertisements are available to everyone around the world. Isn't it possible for an average looking young man to start thinking that the usage of a specific product will make them sexually appealing and the change will definitely affect women around them? And if the same thing doesn't happen, can't it turn into frustration that can sometimes lead to violence particularly against women.²⁰

VI. CONCLUSION

Violence against women is expanding at a high frequency. the objectification of women as sexual objects through most contemporary advertising, the men's psyche that women are mere objects of desire and can be used according to their needs, tends to be intensified in male dominated society. A new dominant image of women that is deemed to be greedy, deliberately aggressive, sexist, manipulative, insensitive has evolved in recent years. However, the important aspect to remember is that this new image is only seen in male deodorant advertisements, showing women again in a misleading sexist manner. It is highly morally reprehensible that media is creating a new, different, distorted image of women that has nothing to do with women in real life. These have been manipulated by the media for so long that the conscious and subconscious mind of individuals do not even notice and accept such misleading claims. But, there are still some people who are concerned about women's negative portrayal in advertisements and the long-lasting effects that it can cause.

In India, Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986, prohibits the representation of women in any form that is harmful for them or is indecent in any form. Another act, The Consumer Protection Act 1986 also prohibits advertisers to create misleading facts in any form through their advertisements. It provides safeguards to consumers against false depiction of any product and other forms of exploitation.

On the one hand, society continues to struggle to eradicate the issue of violence against women. simultaneously, few elements in media promote violence directly or indirectly through advertisements. Society has always been the passive spectator of the image of women being wrecked. need of the hour is to try to enforce strongly the laws that already exist to protect women in one way or another. At the same moment, the sleeping society needs to be shackled and revealed to it to come up for women's protection. The society must necessarily and actively participate in the movement against the misrepresentation of women in advertisements and at least boycott those products which promote objectification of women along with their advertisements.

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