



Attitudes towards Portrayal of Women in Advertisements: Scale Development and Refinement

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Abstract

The media plays an important role in influencing and shaping values and attitudes, particularly of adolescents, as they are surrounded by mass media and are more tech-savvy; get easily influenced by the content shown in commercials. The main objective of the present research is to develop and refine scale for measuring the attitude of people towards portrayal of women in advertisements. To achieve the objective of the study, primary data through questionnaire has been collected from 150 respondents residing in Amritsar region of Punjab. The item and reliability analysis has been applied to refine the scale. It is concluded that Young generation especially women prefer to see women in more confident and independent role rather than decorative role. The policy makers should understand that adverse depiction of women has the carryover effect on the sale of the product.



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Introduction

Media has emerged as strong channel for socialization. Media does not only publicize the particular message to target audience instead it produces and disseminates ideas, information, assumptions, beliefs and values which directs their thinking and understanding about the world (Verma and Raksha, 2017).

The media plays an important role in influencing and shaping values and attitudes, particularly of adolescents, as they are surrounded by mass media and are more tech-savvy; get easily influenced by the content shown in commercials. The commercials which exploit womanhood and portray vulgarity reinforce negative stereotypes on the viewers also (Aruna *et al.*, 2008).

Females are often portrayed as homemakers' decorative objects completely dependent on men and rarely shown as independent & career oriented. In our traditional set up, the role of woman is confined to four walls of home. She is perceived as one supposed to take care of the family and if she decides to have children she is viewed as less committed to her career with no desire to achieve (Mehta, 2006). Such viewpoints and suppositions still affect the projection of women in each and every sphere of life.

Attitudes basically describe a tendency towards an object, whereas perception describes the organization and interpretation of a certain external stimulus. It is a way how one understands or interprets something. It is an organized process in which an individual interprets situations from an environment and draws subjective and personal influences and conclusions from these to take certain actions (Hornstein, 2019).

Women's integration in media is a task beset with hurdles. Advertisements portray women in stereotypical roles like housewife, sex-object and dependent (Kumari and Shivani, 2015) which do not depict the real contribution of women to society and generates common gender role stereotypes (Das and Sharma, 2017). Portrayal of women in advertisements highlights a division of gender display in advertisement by segregating the action of male and female models. Males are shown as active models while females are displayed in passive role (Shields and Heineken, 2002).



Literature Review

The portrayal of women in advertisements is a matter of debate. Numerous studies have been done on the issue of perception of people towards role portrayal of women in advertisements. Few are listed below

Pandit (2021) in her report 'Desi ads follow gender stereotypes' discussed the findings of UNICEF research that women in Indian advertisements dominate most of the screen time (59.7%) and speaking time (56.3%) and usually sell domestic and beauty products only. This type of behavior of advertisers in representing women reinforces the traditional gender roles of women in advertisements.

Soni (2020) conducted a study to understand the perception of men regarding women's body image in advertisements. The researcher collected a sample of 313 respondents comprised of 196 female and 117 males. The techniques applied are quantitative and descriptive in nature. The research recommended a need for making changes in representation of women. The commercials have an adverse affect on the self-esteem and confidence of women which gives birth to various eating disorders and dissatisfaction. It was concluded that the interpretation of men regarding advertisements related to women are completely different from women. The difference in opinion can only be decreased by making teams comprised of balanced number of both the male and female advertisers. On the other hand, if teams are composed of men only, their ideas and perceptions would adversely affect the thought process of women.

Roberts and Koggan (2019) identified the roles which women portray in advertisements. The research focused on the roles in which women are portrayed to be improved in advertisements and also the overall marketing strategy. The thorough review of empirical studies was conducted and it was concluded that sensual roles are an important part of mass media commercials and the women with different characteristics and from varied backgrounds respond differently to such portrayal of women. Some ads were observed to identify the major problem area. It was observed that females are shown in sensual roles in ads related to beauty products that would gain popularity especially among men. Further, it was discussed that when men and women both are portrayed in the advertisements together, women are shown in decorative roles and men in dominating roles in order to show men superior to women.

Ali (2018) highlighted the accusation of objectified portrayal of women in Pakistan television commercials. Content analysis was applied and the gathered data was carefully displayed in the



form of frequencies and their percentages. Chi-square test was used to test the relationship between sexual objectification and television advertising in Pakistan. No relationship was found out between females' sexual objectification and television commercials. Young females were indifferent and did not show any offence regarding the sexual portrayal of women in advertisements as they were grown up in the surroundings with such sexual images and objectification of women. It was suggested that marketers before setting their goals should consider that they should not exploit society and should avoid using women as sex object.

Das and Sharma (2017) in their paper examined the perception of the respondents in relation to the presentation of females in Indian television and also the variations in the perception in relation to the gender. Primary data was gathered from total 125 young participants including 62 females and 63 males using a structured questionnaire. For the analysis of data, factor analysis was used and it was resulted that majority of the respondents do not shown any disagreement towards the portrayal of women in Indian T.V advertisements. As regards the sexual depiction of females in advertisements the participants were not feeling much uncomfortable. It was further revealed that there was a variation in the perception of the respondents when considered on gender basis. It was found that women were more critical regarding women roles depiction in Indian T.V advertisements in comparison to male.

Das (2016) explored the changes in the way women have portrayed in the Indian television and how people perceive such representation of women. A sample of 500 respondents was selected through convenient sampling method. The sample comprised of 250 males and 250 females from Delhi and Rajasthan. The statistical tools used for analyzing data included Factor analysis, Chi-square, Kruskal Wallis H test and Mann Whitney U test. It was found that women were preferably shown in the roles where she was depicted as objects and rarely as working at a position over men. Results also revealed that most of the time women were projected as sex object to attract men by presenting their body parts. In context of difference in perception of male and female, it was found that female were more concerned about depiction of women in commercials than men. Further, it was suggested that existing policy must be reviewed that would lay stress on restriction on showing such commercials that are ruining the dignity of females and will help in establishing the equal status of both the genders in advertisements.

Raghuram et al. (2015) conducted a study to examine the impact of sensual advertising on the customers purchasing decision. The data was collected with the help of a questionnaire.



Descriptive analysis was used for the analysis of the collected data. The study resulted that the majority of the respondents were least bothered about such sensual portrayal of women and rest of the participants were not in line even, some were strictly offended by the same and others were least displaced. So, it was concluded that advertisers focus on sexual appealing factors that negatively impact the customers and the whole market.

Panarese (2014) conducted a study to examine the level of sex stereotyping in the Italian mass media and to see some new roles in which men and women are portrayed. Content analysis was conducted of 815 Italian advertisements and a qualitative research was done on the basis of few of the case studies. The results of content analysis revealed that women were more often portrayed as charming and appealing in comparison to men. Men were dominated in domestic roles and few were depicted as professionals, entrepreneurs, managers and teachers. On the other hand, the qualitative research revealed that females were projected as professional and aspiring. So, these kinds of new portrayals articulated the differences in gender in a more transparent way that proved the complexity of the topic.

The review of literature reveals that Indian society has undergone a rapid transformation but still most of the advertisements are based on gender stereotypes where women are shown as decorative objects rather than showing realistic image of women. Therefore in the present paper we have tried to develop and refine a scale to study the perception of young generation towards role portrayal of women in advertisements. An effort has been made to generate the reliability of scale by refining and purifying the initial scale so developed.

Database and Methodology

The study is based on primary data and relevant data has been collected through from a sample of 150 respondents residing in Amritsar (A progressive District of Punjab). a non-probabilistic judgement-cum-convenience sampling technique has been used to collect the data. Pilot survey was also done to check the authenticity of Questionnaire. Item and Reliability Analysis has been used to refine the scale. SPSS 26.0 has been used for analysis.

Empirics and Analysis

Attitude Scale – Development and Refinement

Scale Development



A comprehensive study was done in order to find out the set of comprehensive statements that would help measuring the perception of young generation towards portrayal of women in advertisements. In all, a set of 26 statements showing the several attributes representing perception of young generation towards the portrayal of women in advertisements were framed (see Table 4.1). Items/statements for the scale were selected from published resources (Das and Sharma, 2017; Sukumar, 2014; Nagi, 2014; Zimmerman and Dahlberg, 2008; Aruna *et al.* 2008 and Plakoyiannaki *et al.* 2008).

Scale Refinement

The 26 item initial scale refinement was done through Item and Reliability Analysis.

Table 4.2(a) represents the several statistics for the scale. In this Table column 2 shows the maximum and minimum average score which varies from 2.95 for S22 to 6.01 for S1. Column 3 indicates that S6 has the highest S.D. predicted as 2.14 and S1 has the smallest S.D. as 1.21. Columns 4 and 5 show the average score and variance if the item was deleted from the scale. The 6th column shows the Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. The 7th column represents the value of alpha if the item was removed.

Table 4.2 (a) exhibits the overall value of Cronbach's alpha which is estimated as 0.731. It is observed that values of alpha for items S3, S5, S6, S15, S16 and S26 is considered to be greater than the overall alpha value of 0.731 and the removal of these items leads to an increase in alpha value as 0.811 as shown in Table 4.2(b). It can be observed from the Table 4.2 (b) that the values of the items S1, S7 and S11 are greater than overall alpha value which is observed from the Table 4.2 (c) and the removal of these items viz., S1, S7 and S11 has brought an increase in overall alpha value as 0.868. Corrected item-to-total correlations of these items was also low. Thus the 26 item scale has been reduced to 17 item scale after the application of this technique as reproduced in Table 4.3.



Table 4.1
Initial Perception Scale

| S. No | Item/ Statement |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S1 | Advertisements have a strong influence on the mindset of the society. |
| S2 | Advertisements exploit society. |
| S3 | Women are considered a need in advertisement, no matter relevant or not. |
| S4 | Attention towards product and brand become secondary due to sexual content in the advertisement. |
| S5 | Advertisements have changed the role of women in modern society. |
| S6 | Advertisements have brought about dramatic role shift among women. |
| S7 | Advertisements have created a new generation of women characterized by a unique image consciousness. |
| S8 | Customers should reject a product whose advertisement disrespect a women. |
| S9 | Advertisements are excessively misusing women to sell more. |
| S10 | Now a days, women are playing more career oriented roles in advertisements. |
| S11 | Women portrayed advertisements stay on mind for a long period of time. |
| S12 | Women are rarely shown as independent decision makers, contributing positively towards the society. |
| S13 | Advertisements suggest that women are fundamentally dependent upon men. |
| S14 | Women in advertisements are shown as devoting their lives for family only. |
| S15 | A very few ads portray women as educated, career oriented and on responsible working positions. |
| S16 | Advertisements have popularized the new dimensions to leisure behaviour and time orientation of women. |
| S17 | Advertisements containing sensual content cannot be watched with family. |
| S18 | Women can take decisions relating to household products only. |
| S19 | Fashion statement of girls is also influenced by advertisement. |
| S20 | The erotic image of women in advertisements attracts the immediate attention. |
| S21 | Young generation accept sensuous (affecting senses rather than intellect) portrayal in advertisements. |
| S22 | People usually compare themselves with models after watching advertisements. |
| S23 | Advertisers concentrate more on the model rather than the product itself. |
| S24 | Ads seldom portray women to represent the products of high value like automobiles, share market and insurance etc. |
| S25 | Advertisements portray women mainly as 'sex idols'. |
| S26 | Ads that reinforce the stereotype that the female should be content in a home maker role are avoided. |



Table 4.2 (a)
Perception (Initial) Scale: Descriptives, Item-Total Correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha

| Item (1) | Mean (2) | Std. Deviation (3) | Scale Mean if Item Deleted (4) | Scale Variance if Item Deleted (5) | Corrected Item-Total Correlation (6) | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted (7) |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| S1 | 6.01 | 1.21 | 100.02 | 213.85 | 0.125 | 0.730 |
| S2 | 3.41 | 1.53 | 102.62 | 199.21 | 0.422 | 0.712 |
| S3 | 4.83 | 1.57 | 101.20 | 215.68 | 0.035 | 0.738 |
| S4 | 3.32 | 1.72 | 102.71 | 194.13 | 0.472 | 0.707 |
| S5 | 5.42 | 1.35 | 100.61 | 213.56 | 0.111 | 0.732 |
| S6 | 5.17 | 2.14 | 100.86 | 210.93 | 0.068 | 0.741 |
| S7 | 5.33 | 1.33 | 100.70 | 213.12 | 0.126 | 0.729 |
| S8 | 3.19 | 1.99 | 102.84 | 190.63 | 0.457 | 0.706 |
| S9 | 3.41 | 1.66 | 102.62 | 194.25 | 0.490 | 0.706 |
| S10 | 5.45 | 1.31 | 100.58 | 211.02 | 0.184 | 0.727 |
| S11 | 4.96 | 1.37 | 101.07 | 216.76 | 0.028 | 0.736 |
| S12 | 3.18 | 1.71 | 102.85 | 196.66 | 0.422 | 0.711 |
| S13 | 3.43 | 1.62 | 102.60 | 207.63 | 0.203 | 0.727 |
| S14 | 3.43 | 1.58 | 102.59 | 201.75 | 0.345 | 0.717 |
| S15 | 4.93 | 1.46 | 101.09 | 218.16 | -0.012 | 0.740 |
| S16 | 4.92 | 1.38 | 101.11 | 222.72 | -0.118 | 0.745 |
| S17 | 3.23 | 1.77 | 102.80 | 192.61 | 0.490 | 0.705 |
| S18 | 3.29 | 1.71 | 102.73 | 192.75 | 0.509 | 0.704 |
| S19 | 5.54 | 1.33 | 100.49 | 211.35 | 0.173 | 0.728 |
| S20 | 3.28 | 1.65 | 102.75 | 192.11 | 0.547 | 0.702 |
| S21 | 3.04 | 1.43 | 102.99 | 202.13 | 0.383 | 0.715 |
| S22 | 2.95 | 1.58 | 103.08 | 201.14 | 0.361 | 0.716 |
| S23 | 2.99 | 1.89 | 103.04 | 199.63 | 0.310 | 0.719 |
| S24 | 3.09 | 1.47 | 102.94 | 202.53 | 0.361 | 0.716 |
| S25 | 3.54 | 1.61 | 102.49 | 201.98 | 0.332 | 0.718 |
| S26 | 4.68 | 1.48 | 101.35 | 223.42 | -0.132 | 0.747 |

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.731



Table 4.2 (b)
Perception (Improved) Scale: Descriptives, Item-Total Correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha

| <i>Item</i> (1) | <i>Mean</i> (2) | <i>Std.</i> <i>Deviation</i> (3) | <i>Scale Mean</i> <i>if Item</i> <i>Deleted</i> (4) | <i>Scale Variance</i> <i>if Item</i> <i>Deleted</i> (5) | <i>Corrected Item-</i> <i>Total Correlation</i> (6) | <i>Cronbach's</i> <i>Alpha if Item</i> <i>Deleted</i> (7) |
|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S1 | 6.01 | 1.21 | 70.08 | 218.68 | -0.026 | 0.820 |
| S2 | 3.41 | 1.53 | 72.67 | 194.99 | 0.512 | 0.796 |
| S4 | 3.32 | 1.72 | 72.76 | 189.86 | 0.556 | 0.793 |
| S7 | 5.33 | 1.33 | 70.75 | 218.19 | -0.019 | 0.821 |
| S8 | 3.19 | 1.99 | 72.89 | 185.66 | 0.544 | 0.792 |
| S9 | 3.41 | 1.66 | 72.67 | 190.64 | 0.561 | 0.793 |
| S10 | 5.45 | 1.31 | 70.63 | 215.81 | 0.043 | 0.810 |
| S11 | 4.96 | 1.37 | 71.12 | 222.02 | -0.115 | 0.825 |
| S12 | 3.18 | 1.71 | 72.90 | 192.15 | 0.511 | 0.795 |
| S13 | 3.43 | 1.62 | 72.65 | 203.46 | 0.284 | 0.808 |
| S14 | 3.43 | 1.58 | 72.65 | 197.17 | 0.440 | 0.800 |
| S17 | 3.23 | 1.77 | 72.85 | 188.50 | 0.569 | 0.791 |
| S18 | 3.29 | 1.71 | 72.78 | 188.55 | 0.592 | 0.790 |
| S19 | 5.54 | 1.33 | 70.54 | 215.95 | 0.039 | 0.809 |
| S20 | 3.28 | 1.65 | 72.80 | 187.41 | 0.646 | 0.788 |
| S21 | 3.04 | 1.43 | 73.04 | 198.67 | 0.458 | 0.799 |
| S22 | 2.95 | 1.58 | 73.13 | 196.92 | 0.448 | 0.799 |
| S23 | 2.99 | 1.89 | 73.09 | 195.73 | 0.376 | 0.804 |
| S24 | 3.09 | 1.47 | 72.99 | 198.23 | 0.456 | 0.799 |
| S25 | 3.54 | 1.61 | 72.54 | 197.43 | 0.424 | 0.801 |

Overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.811



Table 4.2(c)
Perception (Final) Scale: Descriptives, Item-Total Correlations, and Cronbach's Alpha

| Item (1) | Mean (2) | Std. Deviation (3) | Scale Mean if Item Deleted (4) | Scale Variance if Item Deleted (5) | Corrected Item- Total Correlation (6) | Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted (7) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| S2 | 3.41 | 1.53 | 56.37 | 198.15 | 0.538 | 0.836 |
| S4 | 3.32 | 1.72 | 56.46 | 193.40 | 0.569 | 0.834 |
| S8 | 3.19 | 1.99 | 56.59 | 188.95 | 0.560 | 0.834 |
| S9 | 3.41 | 1.66 | 56.37 | 193.41 | 0.593 | 0.833 |
| S10 | 5.45 | 1.31 | 54.33 | 224.04 | 0.054 | 0.860 |
| S12 | 3.18 | 1.71 | 56.60 | 195.55 | 0.528 | 0.836 |
| S13 | 3.43 | 1.62 | 56.35 | 206.27 | 0.316 | 0.847 |
| S14 | 3.43 | 1.58 | 56.35 | 200.15 | 0.469 | 0.839 |
| S17 | 3.23 | 1.77 | 56.55 | 192.47 | 0.572 | 0.834 |
| S18 | 3.29 | 1.71 | 56.48 | 191.99 | 0.607 | 0.832 |
| S19 | 5.54 | 1.33 | 54.24 | 223.75 | 0.047 | 0.860 |
| S20 | 3.28 | 1.65 | 56.50 | 190.97 | 0.659 | 0.830 |
| S21 | 3.04 | 1.43 | 56.74 | 201.57 | 0.493 | 0.839 |
| S22 | 2.95 | 1.58 | 56.83 | 199.43 | 0.488 | 0.838 |
| S23 | 2.99 | 1.89 | 56.79 | 198.33 | 0.408 | 0.843 |
| S24 | 3.09 | 1.47 | 56.69 | 201.19 | 0.488 | 0.839 |
| S25 | 3.54 | 1.61 | 56.24 | 199.98 | 0.463 | 0.840 |

Overall Cronbach's alpha = **0.868**



Discussion and Conclusion

Media has grown up by leaps and bounds over the last century. Advertisements as a source of communication have a power to control the needs and preferences of the audience. They have both positive and negative effect on the perception of people. The issue of projection of women in advertisement is a matter of discussion from a fairly considerable time (Mehta 2021).

The present work is an attempt to address the issue with respect to perception of young generation towards the portrayal of women in advertisement. A comprehensive measurement instrument of 26 items has been developed. It was further refined by using Item and Reliability analysis and Cronbach's Alpha approach. The application of this technique has resulted into a 17 item reliable scale.

Young generation especially women prefer to see women in more confident and independent role rather than decorative role. The policy makers should understand that adverse depiction of women has the carryover effect on the sale of the product.

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