Empowering Women or Objectifying Them? A Study of North Indian Advertisements

Ms. Prisha Goel

Research Scholar

The Millennium School, Amritsar

Abstract

Purpose: To study and analyze the portrayal of women in the advertisements and how respondents react towards the positive portrayal vs. Nudity in the television commercials. The main purpose is to analyze the impact of such portrayal towards position of women in the society.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach: The sample size of 1210 was taken for the study. Major factors affecting attitudes of respondents were found with the help of Factor Analysis and Respondents were classified and distinguished with the help of Cluster Analysis.

Findings: Women have been projected in a sensual manner in the advertisements. As per advertisers, world is full of thin, beautiful, fair and slim models and there exists no dark, ugly or fat women, leading to a sense of inferiority among women. Major factors affecting attitude of people towards positive portrayal of women vs. nudity in advertisements were found out and listed as "Urge to look like models", "Impact of Erotic content", "Non acceptance of erotic content" etc. The respondents were classified as "Indifferent" and "Leveraged".

Practical Implications: The Study reveals the position of women in the society that has been degraded. Thus, government should take important steps to regulate the activities of the advertisers who are doing unethical marketing.

Originality/ Value: As per researcher's knowledge, no such detailed and comparative study has been conducted in India and this study potentially helps in abridging gaps in literature.

Keywords: Women, Gender, Portrayal, Advertisements, Erotic.

Paper Type: Research Paper

Theoretical Background

Regardless of how excellent a product or service might be, its success heavily depends on effective advertising. The goal of any advertising program should be to cost- effectively reach the largest audience possible and attract new customers. If done correctly, advertising can be a wonderful investment for your small business; If done poorly, advertising can become a huge money sink. Television advertising means conveying a message, typically to market a product or service. TV advertising allows you to show and tell a wide audience about your business, product, or service, allowing you to actually demonstrate the benefits of ownership. You can show how your product or service works and how it's packaged so prospective customers will know what to look for at the point of sale.

Media, particularly advertising, plays a significant role in reinforcing narrow beauty standards. These portrayals often contribute to body dissatisfaction among women, encouraging restrictive eating behaviors, constant preoccupation with weight, and a rise in body-related disorders. Various studies have been conducted to study how a woman frequently compares her body with social stimuli and how exposure to these stringent, idealized body images limits a woman's satisfaction with her own body. It was seen that throughout childhood and adolescence, girls and women are bombarded with media images. An emphasis on physical appearance and body type is prevalent even in television commercials and popular teen magazines heavily emphasize fashion, beauty, and female stereotypical roles.

According to Mazuruse and Musasa (2015), advertising frequently portrays women as overly concerned with appearance and reliant on men for decision-making. Such depictions, they argue, contribute to negative societal outcomes including gender-based violence and diminished self-worth. A similar researcher, Nur and Mahfuza(2017) concluded that, it is true that gender differences are there when we talk about advertising. And it is equally true that women have always been shown as the lower group. The choice of words used by advertisers in beauty advertisements to depict women does not show the true picture of women. Tazanfal and Iqra(2015) concluded that advertisers portray women negatively or in sensuous roles in order to increase their selling. Advertisers showed that in order to attract the opposite gender, you need to look prettier. Himashree (2014) revealed that advertisers portray women in the role, he feel would be beneficial for him. It hardly matters whether the role is meaningless or meaningful. It was seen that media has not been showing any interest to change the position of

women in the society. Media has not been taking any initiative to raise the voice against negative portrayal of women.

On the other hand, some researchers revealed that position of women in the advertisements has been changed. She has not been seen in stereotypical roles only. (Moorthi, Roy and Pansari) state, "There is a difference in product categories advertised by women. Advertisers are willing to portray women in male dominant society." A researcher with same view point, (Sukumar) found out that the role of women in advertisements who no longer confined to four walls of a house. "Though a change has been seen in the portrayal of women, yet its position does not depict the true picture in the society. She was still found in passive roles and dependent on men" (Belkaoui and Belkaoui,1976). Japanese magazines content also showed such portrayal of women where no stereotypes have been seen. These magazines portray both men and women in positive way. They showed men participated in household chores. Thus it was seen that Japanese magazines depict men and women in both Eastern and Western cultures.

A large number of researchers found women as misrepresented or low represented in advertisements. It was seen that Women were shown with household chores only and represented as mothers and housewives. (Pillay), in her study revealed that the misrepresentation of women has resulted in rather narrow limited views of women as portrayed by female characters in advertisements. "Stereotypes exist today and the "happy housewife" stereotype is predominant in TV commercials. TV cultivates a view of the world", (Srikhande). Men were shown in white

collar jobs as compared to men. Wood, in her research concluded that men were shown as strong, confident and authoritative and on the other hand, women were considered to be dependent, caring and passive.

To sum up, it was seen that the previous studies have provided a handful of useful information regarding the way women has been portrayed in the advertisements, yet there are insights that are still to be studied:

How difference in gender differentiates the attitudes of respondents towards the portrayal of women in advertisements?

Methodology

The paper presents and validates comprehensive model to explain variables regarding the portrayal of women in the advertisements. The data of 1210 respondents is collected from three commercially developed cities of Punjab region, India with the help of structured questionnaire. Equal respondents from three cities Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana are taken. Random sampling technique is being used to select the respondents. After analyzing the reliability using Cronbach's Alpha method, other tools used are Factor Analysis and Cluster Analysis using SPSS.

Data Analysis

Out of 35 statements, five statements were removed as per the results of Cronbach's alpha method of checking Reliability Analysis. Exploratory factor analysis was conducted on 30 statements to explore the positive portrayal vs. Nudity of women in the advertisements. Total of 1210 respondents were taken in the study. Visual inspection for the data revealed that there are enough correlations among the statements to move ahead with the factor analysis. In Anti- image matrix, correlations are very low; hence data was ready to be used for factor analysis. KMO measure of sampling adequacy was computed and found to be 0.898 which is a good figure (Hair et.al 2011).

The value of Bartlett's test is found to be significant indicating that correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and value of chi square is also significant. Hence all these standards indicate that data is appropriate for factor analysis. From total 35 statements, factor analysis was applied on 30 statements due to reliability analysis.

Factor Number	Name of Dimension/ Factor	Variables	Factor Loadings
		- Viewers like to see highly attractive models. - Viewers wish to look like models.	.717

		● Advertisements encourage us to spend money on goods and services, which we do not really need.	.727
		● Positive portrayal will be helpful to provide equal opportunities to men and women.	.490
F1	Urge to look like models		
			.466

		● People get influenced to buy something looking at the advertisement. ● Advertising creates a mythical world in which no one is ever ugly, overweight, poor, struggling or disabled. ● People compare themselves with models.	.466 .471 .481
		● Sexual appeal in advertisements increases the attention to the advertisement but not necessarily to the product and the brand.	.401
		● Media tries to persuade customers to remain attractive forever as one of their major duties by purchasing the	.545
F2	Impact of Erotic content	appropriate products. ● We should Stop buying the products from companies using unethical marketing. ● Advertisements with erotic images appeal more to feelings than to reasons.	.526

			.631
		● Erotic ads- least reputable. ● Sexual portrayal cannot define the quality of product. ● Erotic contents in advertisements are not fit to be watched with the entire family. ● Erotic images in advertisements are offensive.	.611
			.585
F3	Non acceptance of erotic content		.673
			.573
		● Advertisers concentrate more on the model rather than the product itself. ● Advertisements create confusion over product distinctions by diverting the attention towards models. ● Sexuality in advertisements is a mirror of acceptable social behaviour about sexuality. ● Modest use of sex seems more appealing.	.515
			.519
F4	Models over		
	products		.653
			.489
		● Eating disorders are more prevalent because viewers want a body shape exactly as of models.	.467

F5	Feeling of inferiority		.484

		• Displaying beautiful and sexy models in ads increases unnecessary cosmetic surgery. • Women- a need in advertisement, no matter relevant or not. • Product whose advertisement is disrespectable should be bought from another company. • Advertisements sell more because they have almost nude content in them.	.537 .473 .485
F6	Opposite attracts	• Sale of a product directly related to bold portrayal of women. • Viewers want to be acceptable by opposite genders. • It seems interesting to watch opposite genders in advertisements.	.638 .716 .475
F7	Youngsters accept sensuous portrayal	• Young generation accept sensuous portrayal in advertisements. • Advertisements set standard images for genders. • Advertisements foster teenage sexuality.	.427 .652 .555

Explanation to the derived Factors:

Factor 1- Urge to look like models

This is the most important factor that explained 21.717% of the variance. The variables included in this factor are, "Viewers like to see highly attractive models (.717)", "Viewers wish to look like models (.727)", "Advertisements encourage us to spend money on goods and

services, which we do not really need (.490)", " Positive portrayal will be helpful to provide equal opportunities to men and women (.466)", "People get influenced to buy something looking at the advertisement (.466)", "Advertising creates a mythical world in which no one is ever ugly, overweight, poor, struggling or disabled (.471)" and "People compare themselves with models (.481)." Thus, women in order to look like models engage themselves in gyming and dieting. Eating disorders become more prevalent.

Factor 2: Impact of Erotic content - The second most important factor in the advertisements is the dependency of women. This factor accounted for the variance of 6.121% of the variance. Variables that make up this factor are, "Sexual appeal in advertisements increases the attention to the advertisement but not necessarily to the product and the brand (.401)", "Media tries to persuade customers to remain attractive forever as one of their major duties by purchasing the appropriate products (.545)", "We should Stop buying the products from companies using unethical marketing (.526)" and "Advertisements with erotic images appeal more to feelings than to reasons (.631)." The erotic content in the advertisements results in the attention towards warmer images only and not towards the product.

Factor 3: Non acceptance of erotic content

The third important factor accounts for 4.787% of the variance. Variables included in this factor are, "Erotic ads- least reputable (.611)", "Sexual portrayal cannot define the quality of product (.585)", "Erotic contents in advertisements are not fit to be watched with the entire family (.673)" and "Erotic images in advertisements are offensive (.573)." It was seen that people believe that erotic content in the advertisements is not fit to be watched with the entire family. Thus, advertisers need to avoid such content.

Factor 4: Models over products

The fourth important factor accounts for 4.304% of the variance. Variables included in this factor are, "Advertisers concentrate more on the model rather than the product itself (.515)", "Advertisements create confusion over product distinctions by diverting the attention towards models (.519)", "Sexuality in advertisements is a mirror of acceptable social behaviour about sexuality (.653)" and "Modest use of sex seems more appealing (.589)." The advertisers gave more importance to the models rather than the products. They believe that only a beautiful model is required to attract the viewers.

Factor 5: Feeling of inferiority

The fifth factor accounts for 3.647% of the variance. Variables included in this factor are, "Eating disorders are more prevalent because viewers want a body shape exactly as of models (.467)", "Displaying beautiful and sexy models in ads increases unnecessary cosmetic surgery (.484)", "Women- a need in advertisement, no matter relevant or not (.537)", "Product whose advertisement is disrespectable should be bought from another company (.473)" and "Advertisements sell more because they have almost nude content in them (.485)." The advertisers create a mythical world where no ugly, fat or dark girl is there.

Factor 6: Opposite attracts

The sixth factor accounts for 3.609% of the variance. Variables included in this factor are, "Sale of a product directly related to bold portrayal of women (.638)", "Viewers want to be acceptable by opposite genders (.716)" and "It seems interesting to watch opposite genders in advertisements (.475)." Advertisements revealed that viewers get attracted towards the opposite gender.

Factor 7: Youngsters accept sensuous portrayal

The seventh factor accounts for 3.384% of the variance. Variables including in this factor are, "Young generation accept sensuous portrayal in advertisements (.427)", "Advertisements set standard images for genders (.652)" and "Advertisements foster teenage sexuality (.555)." It was seen that youngsters accept the sensual portrayal of women in the advertisements. They consider nudity as Modernity.

Summary and Implications

To conclude**,** Women have been projected in a sensual manner in the advertisements. It is argued that advertisers portray men and women according to the standards set for them. Men were related with the masculine definition of the society and is portrayed in the likewise roles. Words like strong, authoritative, active, superior, hard, etc are meant for males and women represents passiveness and submissiveness. Advertisers depict women in roles obsessed with beauty only. In advertisements where both the genders were portrayed, women were shown in subordinate roles as compared to men. Women were portrayed as responsible for family only. She is meant to be caged in the four walls of a house.

The factor analysis revealed that the important factors that affect the attitudes of the respondents include, **Urge to look like Models**; in which viewers like to see highly attractive models, they wish to look like them, so they spend unnecessary amount of money on the goods and services which we really do not need. Thus advertisers should not create a mythical world where everyone needs to be pretty. As it leads to harsh dieting plans and cosmetic surgeries. The next factor, **Impact of Erotic Content**; concluded that erotic content in advertisements appeal more to feelings than to reasons, thus it is the social responsibility of advertisers to not to harm society or any person's feelings.

The next factor, **Non acceptance of erotic content;** showed that the companies whose products ads include erotic content are least reputable. They found them offensive. Thus marketers in order to build the reputation or to maintain it should avoid the erotic content in the advertisements. The next factor, **Models over products**; concluded that advertisers concentrate more on models than the products; their motive is to create confusion over the products by diverting their attention towards the models. Thus advertisers should not manipulate their customers in order to earn more. The next factor **Feeling of Inferiority;** revealed that as per advertisers, world is full of thin, beautiful, fair and slim models and there exists no dark, ugly or fat women. This leads to the feeling of inferiority among women.

As it is said that advertisements is a mirror of society. But advertisers do not depict a true picture of women. Even though women have contributed much to the society as well as to the nation, still her contribution has no say. She's depicted in passive and submissive roles. Though many of the researchers concluded that a change can be seen over a period. But this change is not equal to the contribution made by women. The results of the study found out that two clusters were formed. Indifferent respondents, who are not affected by the portrayal of women in the advertisements. Thus advertisers need not to change their strategy. The other cluster formed was Swayed or leveraged. The respondents feel that the erotic content in the advertisements is offensive and thus marketers should avoid the sexuality from the advertisements.

From the above stated, it can be concluded that advertisers need to change their strategy from earning good returns only to earn ethically. They should be responsible towards the society. In order to earn more and more, the position of women should not be suffered. There should be a proper platform for women too and they should get the jobs and respect they deserve. As, advertisements are meant for the promotion of product and not for the objectification of women.

Bibliography

- Aaker, David A., John G. Myers, and Rajeev Batra. (1992) *Advertising management*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Ahmed Belkaoui and Janice M. Belkaoui(1976), "A comparative analysis of the roles portrayed by women in Print advertisements:1958, 1970 and 1972", Journal of Marketing Research, Vol.13, No. 2 (May, 1976), pp. 168-172

  - Anat First(1998) "Nothing New Under the Sun? A Comparison of Images of Women in Israeli Advertisements in 1979 and 1994", "Sex Roles, A Journal of Research", June 1998, Volume 38, Issue 11–12, pp 1065–1077

Aydinoglu, N., & Cian, L. (2014). Show me the product, show me the model: Effect of picture type on attitudes toward advertising.

Baker, C. N. (2005). Images of women's sexuality in advertisements: A content analysis of Black-and White-oriented women's and men's magazines. *Sex roles*, *52*(1), 13-27.

Belkaoui, A. (1976). The impact of the disclosure of the environmental effects of organizational behavior on the market. *Financial management*, 26-31.

Browne, B. A. (1998). Gender stereotypes in advertising on children's television in the 1990s: A cross-national analysis. *Journal of advertising*, *27*(1), 83-96.

Browne, B. A. (1998). Gender stereotypes in advertising on children's television in the 1990s: A cross-national analysis. *Journal of advertising*, *27*(1), 83-96.

Budgeon, Shelley. (1998) "I'll tell you what I really, really want": Girl power and self- identity in Britain." *Millennium girls: Today's girls around the world* 115-144.

Conley, T. D., & Ramsey, L. R. (2011). Killing us softly? Investigating portrayals of women and men in contemporary magazine advertisements. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *35*(3), 469-478.

Courtney, Alice E., and Thomas W. Whipple. (1983) *Sex stereotyping in advertising*. Free Press.

Covert, J. J., & Dixon, T. L. (2008). A changing view: Representation and effects of the portrayal of women of color in mainstream women's magazines. *Communication Research*, *35*(2), 232-256.

Debevec, K., &Iyer, E. (1986). The influence of spokespersons in altering a product's gender image: Implications for advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Advertising*, *15*(4), 12-20.

Delphine Vantomme, Maggie Geuens and Siegfried Dewitte (2008) "How to Portray Men and Women in Advertisements? Explicit and Implicit Evaluations of Ads Depicting Different Gender Roles"

Duker, J. M., & Tucker Jr, L. R. (1977). "Women's Lib-ers" versus Independent Women: A Study of Preferences for Women's Roles in Advertisements. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 469-475.

- Ferguson, J. H., Kreshel, P. J., &Tinkham, S. F. (1990). In the pages of Ms.: Sex role portrayals of women in advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, *19*(1), 40-51.

First, A. (1998). Nothing new under the sun? A comparison of images of women in Israeli advertisements in 1979 and 1994. *Sex roles*, *38*(11), 1065-1077.

Ford, J. B., Voli, P. K., Honeycutt Jr, E. D., & Casey, S. L. (1998). Gender role portrayals in Japanese advertising: A magazine content analysis. *Journal of Advertising*, *27*(1), 113-124.

Furnham, A., &Paltzer, S. (2010). The portrayal of men and women in television advertisements: An updated review of 30 studies published since 2000. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, *51*(3), 216-236.

Greer, Germaine. "The Female Eunuch. 1970." *London: MacGibbon and Kee*(1971).

Kumari, S., &Shivani, S. (2013). A Content Analysis of Female Portrayals in Indian Magazine Advertisements.

Lavine, H., Sweeney, D., & Wagner, S. H. (1999). Depicting women as sex objects in television advertising: Effects on body dissatisfaction. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *25*(8), 1049-1058.

Leonard N. Reid & Lawrence C. Soley(1981), "Another Look at the "Decorative" Female Model: The Recognition of Visual and Verbal Ad Components*", Current Issues and Research in Advertising, ,* Volume 4,1981, Issue 1, Pages 123-133

Lin, Carolyn (1993) A. "Cultural differences in message strategies: A comparison between American and Japanese TV commercials." *Journal of Advertising Research* 33 40-49.

Low, J., &Sherrard, P. (1999). Portrayal of women in sexuality and marriage and family textbooks: A content analysis of photographs from the 1970s to the 1990s. *Sex Roles*, *40*(3), 309-318.

Lundstrom, W. J., &Sciglimpaglia, D. (1977). Sex role portrayals in advertising. *The Journal of Marketing*, 72-79.

MacKay, N. J., &Covell, K. (1997). The impact of women in advertisements on attitudes toward women. *Sex Roles*, *36*(9), 573-583.

MacKay, N. J., &Covell, K. (1997). The impact of women in advertisements on attitudes toward women. *Sex Roles*, *36*(9), 573-583.

- McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw. (1993) "The evolution of agenda-setting research: twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas." *Journal of communication*,
43.2 58-67.

- Mickson, M., &Tendero, M. M. (2015). A Critical Evaluation of the Portrayal of Zimbabwean Women in Advertisements and its Impact on Shona Culture.
- Milner, L. M., & Collins, J. M. (2000). Sex-role portrayals and the gender of nations.

Journal of Advertising, *29*(1), 67-79.

- Milner, L. M., & Collins, J. M. (2000). Sex-role portrayals and the gender of nations.

Journal of Advertising, *29*(1), 67-79.

- Moorthi, Y. L. R., Roy, S., &Pansari, A. (2014). The Changing Roles Portrayed by Women in Indian Advertisements: A Longitudinal Content Analysis.
- Mozzarella, William (2003), Shoveling Smoke, Duke University Press, Durham, NC.
- Nagi, Parul (2014). "Projection of Women in Advertisement: A Gender Perception Study." *International Journal of Managerial Studies and Research,* Vol 2. pp 75-88.
- Nerisa Pillay(2008), "The Portrayal of women in television advertisements on SABC3: A reflection on Stereotypical Representation"
- Orth, U. R., &Holancova, D. (2004). Men's and women's responses to sex role portrayals in advertisements. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *21*(1), 77-88.
- Patowary, H. (2014). Portrayal of Women in Indian Mass Media: An Investigation.

Journal of Education & Social Policy, *1*(1), 84-92.

- Patowary, H. (2014). Portrayal of Women in Indian Mass Media: An Investigation.

Journal of Education & Social Policy, *1*(1), 84-92.

- Peterson, R. A., &Kerin, R. A. (1977). The female role in advertisements: Some experimental evidence. *The Journal of Marketing*, 59-63.
- Plakoyiannaki, E., &Zotos, Y. (2009). Female role stereotypes in print advertising: Identifying associations with magazine and product categories. *European Journal of Marketing*, *43*(11/12), 1411-1434.
- Plakoyiannaki, E., Mathioudaki, K., Dimitratos, P., &Zotos, Y. (2008). Images of women in online advertisements of global products: does sexism exist? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *83*(1), 101.

- Plous, S., & Neptune, D. (1997). Racial and gender biases in magazine advertising: A content-analytic study. *Psychology of women quarterly*, *21*(4), 627-644.

    • Radzi, N. S. M., & Musa, M. (2017). Beauty Ideals, Myths and Sexisms: A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Female Representations in Cosmetic Names. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, *17*(1).

Radzi, N. S. M., & Musa, M. (2017). Beauty Ideals, Myths and Sexisms: A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Female Representations in Cosmetic Names. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, *1*

Reese, N. A., Whipple, T. W., & Courtney, A. E. (1987). Is industrial advertising sexist?. *Industrial Marketing Management*, *16*(4), 231-240.

Reid, L. N., Soley, L. C., & Winner, R. D. (1981). Replication in advertising research: 1977, 1978, 1979. *Journal of Advertising*, *10*(1), 3-13.

Schneider, K. C., & Schneider, S. B. (1979). Trends in sex roles in television commercials. *The Journal of Marketing*, 79-84.

Shrikhande, V. (2003). Stereotyping of Women in Television Advertisement.

SnigdaSukumar(2014), "People Perception towards the portrayal of women in advertisements: A study with special reference to Bangalore city", "*Indian journal of Research*, Volume 3, Issue 2, Feb 2014

Terri D. Conley, Laura R. Ramsey(2011), "Killing Us Softly? Investigating Portrayals of Women and Men in Contemporary Magazine Advertisements", Psychology of women, Volume 35, Issue 3, pp 469-478

VaishaliSrikhande (2003), "Stereotyping of Women in Television Advertisements"

Whipple, T. W., & Courtney, A. E. (1985). Female role portrayals in advertising and communication effectiveness: A review. *Journal of advertising*, *14*(3), 4-17.

Wilson, Clark L. (1966), "Marketplace Behavior- A Psychometric Approach", *American Marketing Association Proceedings*, American Marketing Association, Chicago.

Wortzel, L. H., &Frisbie, J. M. (1974). Women's role portrayal preferences in advertisements: An empirical study. *The Journal of Marketing*, 41-46.

Y L R Moorthi, Subhadip Roy and Anita Pansari, (2014), "The Changing Roles Portrayed By Women in Indian Advertisements: A Longitudinal Content Analysis", Iim Bangalore, Working Paper No 446

Zimmerman, A., & Dahlberg, J. (2008). The sexual objectification of women in advertising: A contemporary cultural perspective. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *48*(1), 71-79.