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Women in Advertisements

Adlin Asha, M.A., M.Phil. (Candidate)

Powerful Means of Social Communication

Advertisements are by far the most powerful means of social communication one can ever come across. It is part of us since the time immemorial. The most standard definition of advertising is: “Advertising is the non- personal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services or ideas by identified sponsors through the various media”. (Bovee 1992, 7)

Three Purposes

Advertising serves three purposes. They are as follows:

- to sign up new customers
- to increase use of goods
- help the customers to choose the items among competing brands

This holds true for all kinds of products and markets. On the whole, these three purposes can be merged into a single purpose i.e., to persuade the customer to choose one brand over another and hold them for life. So it basically deals with capturing human feelings and emotions. Advertisers use different methods to achieve this.

A Non-moral Force

The role of advertisement in today’s world is not just spreading brand awareness; it also shows us where we situate in the world today. “Advertising is a non-moral force, like Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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electricity, which not only illuminates but electrocutes its worth to civilization depends upon how it is used”, said William Bernbach.

Women in Ads

Indian and global advertisement portrays women in domestic role or as decorative sex object. This we can say, because media loves to see women as home-makers. And it loves to see her as an fervent consumer. Therefore here, we see the different roles that women are shown to fill, and in some aspects they *are* representative; there *are* domestic women, career women, mothers, beautiful women etc.

Role of women

Women are still portrayed in a conventional manner. They are placed in extremes - either they'll be the beautiful, dutiful or devoted mothers and housewives or the seductive 'other' women. Advertisements that show wives worried over their husbands' health or children's' eating disorder is quite common. All Kellogg's breakfast and other cereal advertisements primarily have women models. Such advertisements locate the woman within dominant ideology as someone, who bears the primary burden of responsibility of nurturing and caring for others. In short, mothers are shown as worthy objects.

Change in Tone

The good news now is that now a mother is more than just a mother, but also a friend to her children. The tone slightly shifted from a heavy-handed one to a more light-hearted approach. While the picture of the caring mother is structurally maintained, at the same time it is being re-presented with, beneath the essential selflessness, hints of playfulness, good-humour, and assertiveness. There are plenty of health drinks advertisements that portray women having an upper hand over her husband when it comes to family and health.



Why women??

Hygiene and cleanliness is something of an individual concern in reality. Advertisements completely rule out the possibility of men being responsible towards household maintenance. Women are shown in very poor light in many other advertisements too such as Harpic and other cleaning products, which implies that these products leave the surface sparkling and

for which the women get praised from her husband and her family members. Why do ads have to show women cleaning up properly to get approval from the family! Why not men????



Some advertisements shows the housewife, pathologically obsessed by cleanliness, debates the virtues of cleaning products with herself and worries about "dirt in husband's shirt collar" (but no one ever asks why he doesn't wash his neck).

Besides, there is an increasing trend in 'family' and 'couple' representations in advertisements for consumer durables like washing machines, refrigerators and micro-wave ovens, products earlier dominated by women alone.

In the name of tradition and modernity

Saree is not just a six yards of cloths, but it is a wonderful outfits for women in India. It is the most graceful traditional Indian outfits for women. It defines the beauty of a woman and brings out her grace, elegance and glamour. It reflects of the true essence of the beauty of an Indian woman. Perhaps it is the beloved of Indian women. Women love to dress up themselves in sarees. No any attire is as graceful as sarees. Glamour of sarees is unique than of any other attire. Women look more graceful and glamorous if they wear sarees. According to my views, sarees are perfect outfits for women. Women in colourful, floral, dyed, printed, embroidered and even in plain sarees look very beautiful than of any other attire.



But nowadays, the saree advertisement doesn't show only the colourful sarees and its patterns, but also the female bodies. Here, Women existence in advertisement merely to seek male attention.



Women advertising male products – Is it necessary?

Media no longer “mirrors” the society. Women previously portrayed as domestic attendants and now as sex objects. In other words, they are actually used to seduce men in buying products.

In today’s advertising the statement “anything relating to sex is a forbidden topic” has undergone a change. For decades women have been portrayed as housewives, dependent on men and sex objects in advertisements. In a number of advertisements the levels of the objectification of women becomes literal. Many advertisements depict women as various objects.

Female models used in products not related to them like men’s razors, men’s wear, men’s deodorant etc. Actually, damages and insults women’s image. For example, the axe deodorant advertisement in particular is in extremely poor taste. Do they really think the Indian audience is stupid enough to buy deodorant expecting women to start unbuttoning their shirts the moment they smell them! For crying out loud! These, indecent portrayal of women in advertisements negatively influences the mindset of society.



For Men

Women are often used in advertisements to imply a sexual relationship between the man who uses the product and the woman in the advertisement.

For Women

Sexual women are used in advertisements to imply that the product will increase the user's demand to men.

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Images of female bodies are everywhere. It seems, Women-and their body parts-sell everything from food to cars. The advertisements should emphasize on product rather than female models.

Thus, in an attempt to make the advertisement seem 'desirable', advertisers associate their product with an 'attractive' image. This attractive image always is a woman, who provides the “desirable” image for the advertisements, irrespective of her relevance to the advertisements. So, it is necessary that the advertisement should emphasis on products rather than female models

Stereotype images

The series of cosmetic cream ads, which shows a young girl being rejected at an interview for being dark not only show women as being only judged for their physical appearance but also makes the women feel that men attributes highest value to their beauty.



The majority of soap advertisements are set in a domestic situation, because the home is a place of comfort for women, and is also where women's capability is supposedly appreciated. Often, the central characters are female, and the ultimate achievement for these women in soaps is to get married and have children. In fact, the underlying messages are often tend to be male dominated or the subordination of women and their role in the society

This actually portrays, although Indian society is changing, it is still a patriarchal society or a male-dominated society (such as portraying women in non- traditional ways). Many mother-daughter advertisements in recent times bear out female bonding, in effect, cleverly marginalising the role of men by cutting them out completely from such advertisements. Yet, women do not appear in advertisements for 'solid' products such as steel and cement and even if they do, they are sidetracked within the script.

The trend seems to be to portray women less often as housewives or concerned with looks, but not more often in nontraditional, career-oriented, or authority figure roles. Instead, there seems to be an increase in neutral portrayals of women, due, in part, to the dramatic increase in the number of advertisements for such products.

Various Scientific studies and statistical data yield the conclusion

Women are shown almost exclusively as housewives or sex objects. The study also recorded that, although men in Indian advertisements appeared more often in traditional ways, they were not portrayed in very negative ways.

In addition, my own observation is that there is an increased appearance of men in Indian advertisements than women. This may be attributable to a number of factors. First, India is one of the fastest growing markets for consumer durables and several "male-oriented" products such as insurance, medical, industrial, and technology-related products.

Because men are more often considered to be the primary decision makers for such products, the increase is understandable. Second, the number of advertisement in business and general interest magazines in India has increased tremendously while the number in women's magazines has not. Both of these factors could have led to an increase in the number of men appearing in Indian advertisements.

We are supposedly living in an egalitarian society. Rights and responsibilities are meant to be equal. But still, with the increasing number of female models shown in advertising today, the media seem to give more equality to female images, but the underlying messages still emphasize sexuality, often presenting women as sex objects. Also, the number of women in "decorative roles" had actually increased over time, according to a 1993 US study by L J Busy and G Leichty.

Thus, although portraying women in neutral ways may be acceptable to Indians, portraying them in non traditional ways may not be. Advertisement depicts for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we think men and women behave.

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