

Paradigm shift in female role portrayals in Advertising: A theoretical framework

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Abstract

Women have been portrayed with erotic images and are being used as sexual elements by the advertisers at present, consequently having bad effects on the youth. As far as women empowerment in advertisements is concerned, they are portrayed as obverse to the same, completely degrading their image. On the contrary much of the advertisements highlight men with multiple powers and depict a very rosy picture of them. Explicit media is much to blame instead fastening a firm's belief of women's perception of themselves in eyes of men as also for themselves. Advertisement- being a mirror of society goes on to overemphasized on negative aspects of beauty and sexuality as being profit yielding basis. People in general adopt whatever is being shown and hence leaves a marked impression of disrespect to women hood. In this growing age of media communication, it is very painful thing to see women being portrayed as an epitome of sacrifice and exhibiting stereotype role in their lives. Despite the growth in professional roles by women, their picture is depicted as being a subordinate and submissive in much of the advertisements. In the present study, theoretical framework is being worked on and contents of few advertisements have been critically analysed to see the better picture of advertisements in today's world.

Keywords: Advertising management.

Introduction

Advertisements are the most influential and powerful medium of marketing in society. Jean Kilbourne in her article portrays advertising as the foundation and economic life blood of the mass media. The foremost purpose of the mass media is to deliver an audience to advertisers, just as the primary purpose of television program is to deliver an audience for commercials.

The wave of feminism began in the mid-19th century and continued till early 20th century mainly in UK and USA. The improved rights in case of marriage and property supported feministic community a lot. In 1960's and 1970's it extended to the right of education, work and the home.

In 1963, Betty Friedan, a writer published the feminine Mystique, considered to be the important work of the inherent feminism's second wave. Friedan argued that women were unhappy because of feminine Mystique. She blamed the media for showing women inside four walls of her home and living for family: people used to be taken as man's wife, mother, and love object etc, undoubtedly totally dependent on men for basic and important decisions.

Germaine Greer (1970) in her book, the "Female Eunuch" argued that women were treated as exclusive eunuchs by society. More extensively, she attacked the nuclear family, romantic role of women limited to the women's sexuality, the role not natural but artificially learnt.

Laura Muvey and her theory of the 'Male Gaze' is an important feminist work. Society's patriarchal approach recognises the male gender and the sexuality of men as the dominant norm.

The third wave of feminism began in 1990's. It addressed the different disadvantages that women experience because of race, ethnicity and class.

Post feminisms after 1990's suggests that feminisms may not be relevant anymore because women have won

equal rights and equal opportunities. The young ladies don't even know about feminism or any such movement as they are in the era where women share, experience and enjoy equal rights.

Literacy Review

Women in advertising have been considered vital for the promotion of products and services both for verbal and visual depictions. Through it has been criticized many a time because of the content and misrepresentation message as not the true representation of their position in the society. The advertisers are considered to be responsible for the increased violence against women. Various researchers justify the way women have been portrayed in the advertisements is the way she has been treated in the society and such illicit portrayal of women in the advertisements has become a considerable issue. To examine the role portrayal of women in the advertisements and to what extent these advertisements affect the place of women in the society, studies have been conducted. Some of the analytical studies show that women portrayal is positive. Though the gender was biased in earlier times, but now the scenario has changed and gradually the women have been portrayed in the advertisements as equal to men. But some of the studies contradict the results of the researchers and they conclude that though a little change has been witnessed in the way women have been presented in the advertisements, this change is negligible when compared to the contributions made by women.

The study of Nagi (2014) revealed that, "Sexual appeals in visual images may arouse the subconscious desires that manifest themselves in the purchase of that product. However sex appeals are perceived differently from person to person, time to time, society to society and culture to culture. The advertiser must be sure that the product, advertisement, audience and use of sexual elements all

match up to make the call effective.” Men and Women spontaneously prefer images, which warm up the senses irrespective of the model, the respondent’s gender or any other such element. Earlier Women likely associated on cheap and luring products are shown whereas men with expensive and elite ones. It does represent women negatively for viewers see women as sex objects, for attraction and lurement. Women have been shown in meaningless and glamorous roles in order to sell more. Radzinur and Mahfuza (2017) revealed, “The choice of words used by the advertisers in beauty advertisements to depict women does not show the true picture of women.” Conley and Ramsey (2011) found in their study that portrayals of women in passive positions was seen more frequently than male models. Women with flawless skin were significantly more prominent than men in the advertisements. Women were shown dismembered, that is particularly one part of their body was focused upon. (Soley and Reid, 1981) conducted a study that suggested that “The presence of women as decorative models improves recognition for the entire advertisement.” Tehseem and Iraq (2015) concluded, “In order to attract the opposite gender, you need to look prettier. Women have been shown in glamorous but meaningless roles to attract viewers.”

Contrary to this, 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 (2014) states, “There is a difference in product categories advertised by women. Advertisers are willing to portray women in male dominant society.” Sukumar, (2014) strongly finds out that the role of women in advertisements is 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 is still found in passive roles and dependent on men” (Bekaoui 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 show men participating in household chores: depicting 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 (2008), 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 2003). Men are shown in white collar jobs as compared to women. 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. Himashree (2014), concludes that Advertisers portray women in the roles; they feel would be beneficial for them.

It hardly matters whether the role is meaningless or meaningful.

Content Analysis of selected Advertisements

Advertisements depicting changing role of women in them with some taglines can be classified as such:

Beauty over Brains

The advertisers create such advertisements which are responsible for the brain wash of audience. The “taglines” added with the advertisements such as “CHEHRA AISA JO BADAL DE AAPKI DUNIYA” made people believe the knowledge stands nowhere, all you need is a beautiful face in order to get success or to make your dreams come true. An advertisement showed that a young girl with the dancing talent is nothing but after using a fairness cream, her life gets a new opportunity and she wins a dancing competition. This shows that it isn’t her dancing talent but the complexion of her skin, that makes her win the competition.

Advertising, Then and Now... The Changing Scenario

If women are scaling new heights and have a voice in all fields, then women in advertisements can’t be confined just to washing clothes, cooking or makeup or pleasing husbands and family.

The beaming wife with a spatula, the obedient daughter and daughter-in-law, the loving mother, the seductress – these are some social conventions on women that advertising has continuously reinforced since time immemorial. Women have done it all: washing, cleaning, cooking and, most importantly, pleasing the men in their lives. While men have conquered mountains, closed business deals and succeeded in every walk of life, women in advertising get relegated to the confines of her house.

It is said that advertising is a reflection of the life around. Showing women as homemakers obsessed with getting the ‘ziddi’ stain out of clothes must have made sense a few decades ago but today’s women have come a long way. In recent times many advertisements have gone beyond the white picket fence when it comes to portrayal of women.

Ariel’s Dads #ShareTheLoad campaign went viral when people around the world supported the ad for bringing to fore the problems of stereotypes. When Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer, Facebook, shared the video and called it one of the most powerful she had ever seen, the ad racked up massive viewership on the internet. When Dads #ShareTheLoad won five Lions at Cannes this year, we knew change had arrived and arrived in style, roaring to get noticed.

Moving with Societal Change

So what has changed since the days of the Hemas, Rekhas, Jayas and Sushmas of the advertising world?

According to Divya Radhakrishnan, MD, Helios Media, “Advertisements are based on two counts. One, reflection of society and, two, aspirational ambience. Therefore, it can’t

stray far from its surrounding, if it has to stay relevant to the audience.”

Advertising always represents what is happening in society. A few decades back the trend was that a woman has to take care of the house, the kids and the daily chores. Many detergents, including Nirma, showed women enjoying washing clothes. They probably did enjoy it because of how they were raised and what they were taught growing up. But in the last three decades, the role of the same Hema, Rekha, Jaya and Sushma, of Nirma, has changed. They are still running the houses but they have a different hold in our society.”

This change was evident when Taproot Dentsu used the same four characters Hema, Rekha, Jaya and Sushma for the ambulance ad. This time around, instead of trying to get the perfectly white shirt whiter, the women were seen trying to help a stuck ambulance. Breaking out of the confines of the house, the ad rather focused on women getting the job done, no matter how dirty.

Role of Advertising as Social Agent

The important question is if advertising really brings about a positive change?

“Ariel’s Dads #ShareTheLoad was a response to an Indian condition. But it had universal resonance. It went viral globally at the speed of feeling. We received lakhs of comments, stories and confessions from people who wept after seeing our work. It seems to have embraced the world with pure empathy and hope. Everybody connected with it. I was fortunate to be on the Glass Lion Jury at Cannes with so many brilliant people from different countries and various parts of the world. When the #ShareTheLoad film played, many of them broke down and had tears streaming down their face. We were bonded by empathy. Advertising is more powerful than we think. It can change the world,” Paul said.

Conclusion

To conclude, Women have been portrayed with erotic images and are being used as sexual elements by the advertisers at present, consequently having bad effects on the youth. As far as women empowerment in advertisements is concerned, they are portrayed as obverse to the same, completely degrading their image. On the contrary much of the advertisements highlight men with multiple powers and depict a very rosy picture of them. Explicit media is much to blame instead fastening a firm’s belief of women’s perception of themselves in eyes of men as also for themselves. Advertisement- being a mirror of society goes on to overemphasized on negative aspects of beauty and sexuality as being profit yielding basis. People in general adopt whatever is being shown and hence leaves a marked impression of disrespect to women hood. In this growing age of media communication, it is very painful thing to see women being portrayed as an epitome of sacrifice and exhibiting stereotype role in their lives. Despite the growth in professional roles by women, their picture is depicted as being a subordinate and submissive in much of the

advertisements. Focus these days relies more on model presentation and its outer beauty rather than the original product and its quality. Women have been shown as a figure responsible for managing household chores only. Their ability to manage work life balance is least focused in today’s advertisements.

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