

A Study of Factors Influencing the Choices of the Consumers for the Portrayal of Women in Advertising

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Abstract

The role of women has been changing over the years in various fields around the world like advertising, academics, politics, etc. Today 30 per cent of employees in the software industry are women. Advertising has evolved into a powerful marketing tool over the last century. Advertising is one of the “promotional tools” used in marketing endeavors, as one means of communication between the seller (advertiser) and the buyer (consumer or organization). Advertising plays a very important role in communicating with the consumer and influencing the consumer's decision-making process. The general roles that women play in advertising are Decorative Role, Recreational Role, Independent Career Role, Self-involved Role, Carefree Role and Family Role. The portrayal of women in advertising has been particularly stereotypical with confinement of women to household chores. The female model in the advertisement or commercial should represent an image that target consumers can identify with. The aim of marketing communication is therefore to link the organization (sponsor) with the target audience in a manner to which the audience can relate.

Keywords : Consumer, Women, Advertising, Career, Women Empowerment.

JEL Classification : D 11, J 16, M 37.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to American Marketing Association, marketing is defined as: “The process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives.” Hence, Advertising is a paid,

structured and non-personal form of marketing communication by an identified sponsor designed to reach a specific target audience with a persuasive message about a product, service or idea. The general roles that women play in advertising are Decorative Role, Recreational Role, Independent Career Role, Self-involved Role, Carefree Role and Family Role. In the ads there are three main types of portrayal of women. The first type of ads includes the female body displayed as good looking. The second type exhibits the housewife who is nurturing, caring, and older. These ads, feature women as competent only in cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. The final type is the empowered female, in control, young, and attractive. It is only the third type of ad, which



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has occurred much less frequently that empowered and recognized women as equal to men. The portrayal of women in advertising has been particularly stereotypical with confinement of women to household chores. With the rise in the number of women in the workforce, their role in the family and the society has changed, albeit slowly. This has automatically created greater financial independence for women, who were earlier subservient, meek and submissive to male dominance. This has implications for marketers and advertisers who have framed ad messages keeping into mind the Indian cultural settings.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- a) To study the role of women in advertising and promotional activities.
- b) To study the major factors influencing the choices of the consumers for the portrayal of women in advertising.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- i) Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) analyzed the contents of eight general interest magazines (i.e., Life, Look, Newsweek, The New Yorker, Time, Saturday Review, U.S. News and World Report, and Reader's Digest). They found that advertisements in 1958 showed women mostly as housewives in decorative roles and idle situations or as low-income earners with limited purchasing power.
- ii) Lundstorm and Scigliompaglia (1977) attempted to address the question of the current status of consumers' attitudes toward sex role portrayal in advertising and the effect of role portrayal on company image and purchase intention for the offending companies. An analysis of attitudes towards sex role portrayal showed that women generally held more critical attitudes toward sexual role portrayal than men. Attitudes of women were significantly different from those of

men on six of the twelve role portrayal statements. Women more than men, found advertising to: (1) suggest that they don't do important things; (2) portray women offensively; and, (3) suggest that their place is in the home. Also, women felt that they were more sensitive to their role portrayal than they had been in the past. Of interest, however, was that women were less prone to agree that advertising shows men as they really are, and less likely to agree that advertising treats women as sex objects than were male respondents. Women believed that companies which portray women offensively in their advertising are more prone to have discriminatory employment practices. In addition, they believed that these role portrayal are merely an extension of that company's view of women's societal role.

- iii) Goffman (1979) conducted a provocative analysis of visual images in print advertisements, and he contended that carefully posed models and carefully selected settings of advertisements created "a pseudo-reality that is better than real" (p. 23). He illuminated how advertising functions to display our notions of gender roles, making use of visual meanings. Goffman's analysis of nearly 400 advertisements made it clear that gender differences in function and status not only carry over from the real world to the advertisement world but may find their purest expression there.
- iv) Results of a study by Kilbourne (1990) revealed that people, after being exposed to advertisements that depict women in stereotypical roles, showed significantly more negative attitudes toward women, especially concerning their managerial skills, than after being

exposed to advertisements that depict women in professional roles that require such skills. These results suggest that there is indeed a relationship between the way women are portrayed in advertising and people's ideas about how women are supposed to behave and the roles they are supposed to occupy within society.

v) Results of a study by Bhullar (2000) indicate that the respondents do not equally like all roles in which women are portrayed in ads, rather liking for some roles is much higher than for other roles. The ads showing woman in the role of mother and that showing woman in the role of working woman were liked the most. This was followed by the ad showing housewife. The ad which has been liked the least is the ad showing woman in the role of traditional glamour girl. She also found that men liked the ad portraying housewife significantly more than women, while women have liked the ad portraying modern glamour girl significantly more than men. It was found that overall liking towards portrayal of women in different roles is more dependent on the age of the respondents than on the sex of the respondents.

vi) Lindner(2004) took a longitudinal approach to analyze the portrayal of women in a general interest magazine and a women's fashion magazine from 1955 to 2002, the results of this study showed that stereotypical images of women are found quite frequently. Stereotyping occurred frequently with regard to objectifying women ("objectification"), showing women as subordinate to men ("ritualization of subordination"), or depicting women as mentally withdrawn from the larger

scene ("licensed withdrawal"). The existing imbalance in terms of social power between men and women was reinforced through these images, as the stereotyping of women in these categories was associated with lower degrees of social power and control. In addition, few significant changes over time were found in the images of women in magazine advertisements, except for decreases in "feminine touch," "ritualization of subordination," and "movement," The results for all other categories revealed that the extent to which women were shown in stereotypical roles had remained fairly constant throughout the years. This was a rather surprising finding considering the changes in the actual roles women occupy in real life that have occurred since the Women's Movement and the subsequent trends toward equality, especially with regard to the business world. Women's progress in gaining social power is thus counteracted by disempowering women in visually subtle ways.

vii) Schaffter (2006) analyzed 200 advertisements over a 12-year period from 1994 to 2005. She unveils the ingenuity of advertisers & showed that sexism and gender stereotyping are still prevalent in the advertising industry in India. She pointed out that few role models are depicted; women are mostly pushed to domestic roles and portrayed by beautiful models in eye-catching ads. The reality is that women are not just homemakers or mothers. Millions of women in India are professionals engaged in productive activities but are selectively kept out of ads. This is innocuous distortion of reality by advertisers, as it predisposes women to

unfair treatment by society. Not just stereotypical but unethical and offensive representations of women in advertisements work to their detriment and succeed in perpetuating gender hierarchy. On the role of media she writes that if media is sexist, advertising is undoubtedly regressive.

4. ROLE OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING AND PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

The general roles that women play in advertising are Decorative Role, Recreational Role, Independent Career Role, Self-involved Role, Carefree Role and Family Role. In the ads there are three main types of portrayal of women. The first type of ads includes the female body displayed as good looking. The second type exhibits the housewife who is nurturing, caring, and older. These ads feature women as competent only in cleaning, cooking, and taking care of children. The final type is the empowered female, in control, young, and attractive. Considering the changes in the actual roles women occupy in real life that have occurred since the Women's Movement and the subsequent trends toward equality, especially with regard to the business world. Women's progress in gaining social power is thus counteracted by disempowering women in visually subtle ways.

Female celebrities include well-known, successful, high-profile women in various fields, including entertainment, sport and business. A model is defined as a woman who poses for a specific purpose, such as art or photography, as often used in advertisements and commercials.

The following pertinent female role portrayals will form the foundation for roles:

- i. Career woman
- ii. Homemaker
- iii. Mother
- iv. Mannequin
- v. Physically decorative woman

- vi. Social being
- vii. Product user
- viii. Romantic role

Here, it is notable that the role of women in the economic and social periphery has changed over the years whether it is academics, service, politics or advertising. Every institution is embracing with the more number of female applicants. This is basically a socio-cultural change in the female population where she has come out from her traditional role of house-keeper, family upbringing and other to a modern techno-savvy career oriented employed and independent human. The female model in the advertisement or commercial should represent an image that target consumers can identify with. The aim of marketing communication is therefore to link the organization (sponsor) with the target audience in a manner to which the audience can relate. Advertising plays a very important role in communicating with the consumer and influencing the consumer's decision-making process.

5. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICES OF THE CONSUMERS FOR THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING

The portrayal of women in advertising has been particularly stereotypical with confinement of women to household chores. Women were rarely shown as equal partners; for example, as a person who is employed and has her own will. These portrayals largely stem from the gender role norms accepted and prevalent in the Indian society. The role portrayal is largely done within the male dominant ideology. The men are largely posited as strong, independent and macho men, while women are generally confined to household chores, or mother/ caretaker roles whose world centers around the house. Owing to influences from the west, the familial norms are shifting from being patriarchal to more egalitarian (where both spouses are partners in making decisions and contribute equally to all

household decisions). With the rise in the number of women in the workforce, their role in the family and the society has changed, albeit slowly. This has automatically created greater financial independence for women, who were earlier subservient, meek and submissive to male dominance. This has implications for marketers and advertisers who have framed ad messages keeping into mind the Indian cultural settings. Besides sex stereotyping, another issue of relevance to portrayal of women in advertising relates to the use of nudity in portraying women.

In India, advertisers often treat women with disdain portraying them as if they have been created only to attend to man's creature comforts. Women more than men, found advertising to:

- a) Suggest that they don't do important things;
- b) Portray women offensively; and,
- c) Suggest that their place is in the home.

Also, women felt that they were more sensitive to their role portrayal than they had been in the past. Women believed that companies which portray women offensively in

their advertising are more prone to have discriminatory employment practices.

6. CONCLUSION

Advertising is the one of strongest tool for promotion of products and services. The role of women in advertising as well as in marketing is as a decorative, recreational, independent, self involved, carefree and family bearer. The portrayal of women in advertising has been particularly stereotypical with confinement of women to household chores. The role portrayal is largely done within the male dominant ideology. The men are largely posited as strong, independent and macho men, while women are generally confined to household chores, or mother/ caretaker roles whose world centers around the house. With the rise in the number of women in the workforce, their role in the family and the society has changed, albeit slowly. This has automatically created greater financial independence for women, who were earlier subservient, meek and submissive to male dominance. This has implications for marketers and advertisers who have framed ad messages keeping into mind the Indian cultural settings.

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