
Advertising: Boon or Curse for Women

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Abstract

In this era of globalization, advertisers have been finding various ways of presenting the females in advertisements, to entice the buyers, which even seem to be working in their favour. But advertising as currently practiced, is a form of communication intended to promote the sale of a product or a service, to influence general public opinion. But when we talk about the way a woman is portrayed in the advertisements, then the opinion differs. There are various advertisements which present the female as a symbol of love, care, motherhood, gentleness, elegant, and all the femininity, whereas on the other hand there are certain advertisements which portray women as sex object or dutiful wives of their husbands. And the reason behind this differentiation is that the companies feel that this strategy will help to make their product popular. When we talk about today's advertisement world, there aren't many ads which somehow don't depict the females as either a young attractive woman or simply a housewife who is busy in doing the household work. They only understand women as a decorative element, an attractive figure or a housewife.

In this paper, effort has been made to search the current image of women and challenges faced by them in advertising media. The paper envisages the need of a complete revolution in the way a woman is portrayed in advertisements nowadays.

Keywords: Advertising media, globalisation, femininity.

Introduction

Advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them, as defined by the Advertising Association of the UK. Advertising is the foundation and economic lifeblood of mass media. Advertising is a huge industry and affects all of us throughout our lives. In the advertising world, marketers tend to use such images of women, which they believe will help to make their product sell. The objectification of women has for the most part always existed in advertisement and has been the driving force behind many feminist movements. . "Studies of advertisements in a variety of men's, women's, and general interest magazines have categorized women in various roles: housewife, decorative element, sex object, and dependent on men; (Zimmerman & Dahlberg, 71)." There is no doubt that advertisements are everywhere, in fact the average woman sees about 400 to 600 advertisements per day.

There have been numerous studies done on the scope of advertisements and how they depict men and women differently. The objectification of women has become so common in advertising world that such images can be found in any type of advertisement, whether it is a cosmetic item or a car, clothing or furniture, whether its related to women or not. But still, women are presented as a decorative element in today's advertising world. There is a need of a complete revolution in the way a woman is portrayed in advertisements nowadays.

Objectives of the Study:

- To study the objectification of women in advertisements.
- To examine the challenges faced by women and effect of negative advertising on women.
- To discuss the empowerment and growth of women with the help of advertising media.
- To give the suggestive measures for creating an equal world of advertising media for women.

Research Methodology:

The paper examines the current image of women and challenges faced by them in advertising media. The study is explanatory and descriptive in nature. It is based on secondary data collected from various valid sources such as websites of companies, media firms, books and articles on advertising and women empowerment, media, reports; however internet is the major secondary data source.

Analysis of advertisements related to women:

Positive image of women

- DOVE (Depicting that women of all shapes & sizes are beautiful.)

Negative image of women

- Fair & Lovely (representing that females who have fair complexion are only considered to be beautiful.)
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- Verizon Commercial (showing that it is not compulsory that only boys are good and interested in science & engineering, infact girls have a vital interest in such fields and can do even better if given the right opportunities.)
 - Under Armour Campaign (celebrating the determination and accomplishments of ballerina Misty Copeland, who was told she had the "wrong body" for ballet.)
 - Always Campaign (Shows that its good being a girl as girls are no more weaker or requires sympathy from anyone.)
 - Pantene Campaign (questions that why are women always apologizing. "DONT BE SORRY" is their slogan for this campaign).
 - Mc Donalds (depicts relationship of father-daughter, and questions against gender discrimination.)
 - Airtel (represents husband-wife relationship, depicting that a woman need not only be a wife but can be a boss even.)
 - Cadbury's Bournvita (representing that a mother can be so motivating and inspirational).
 - The Representation Project (which says that all women deserve better representation in media & in our larger culture.)
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- Axe Deodorants (portraying women as an object, for increasing the sales of their product.)
 - Hardee Fish Sandwich (portraying women negatively by sexualizing food items.)
 - Mc Leggs (depicting women as an object saying it's nice to have a girl around the house.)
 - Old Spice (representing women as an object to cater demand for their product.)
 - Gucci (by objectifying females in their campaign.)
 - Killer Jeans (portraying women negatively in their advertisement.)
 - Bebe (objectification of women negatively, by representing her in cage.)
 - Dolce & Cabana (representing women as an object, like a decorative item.)
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Challenges faced by the women in advertising media:

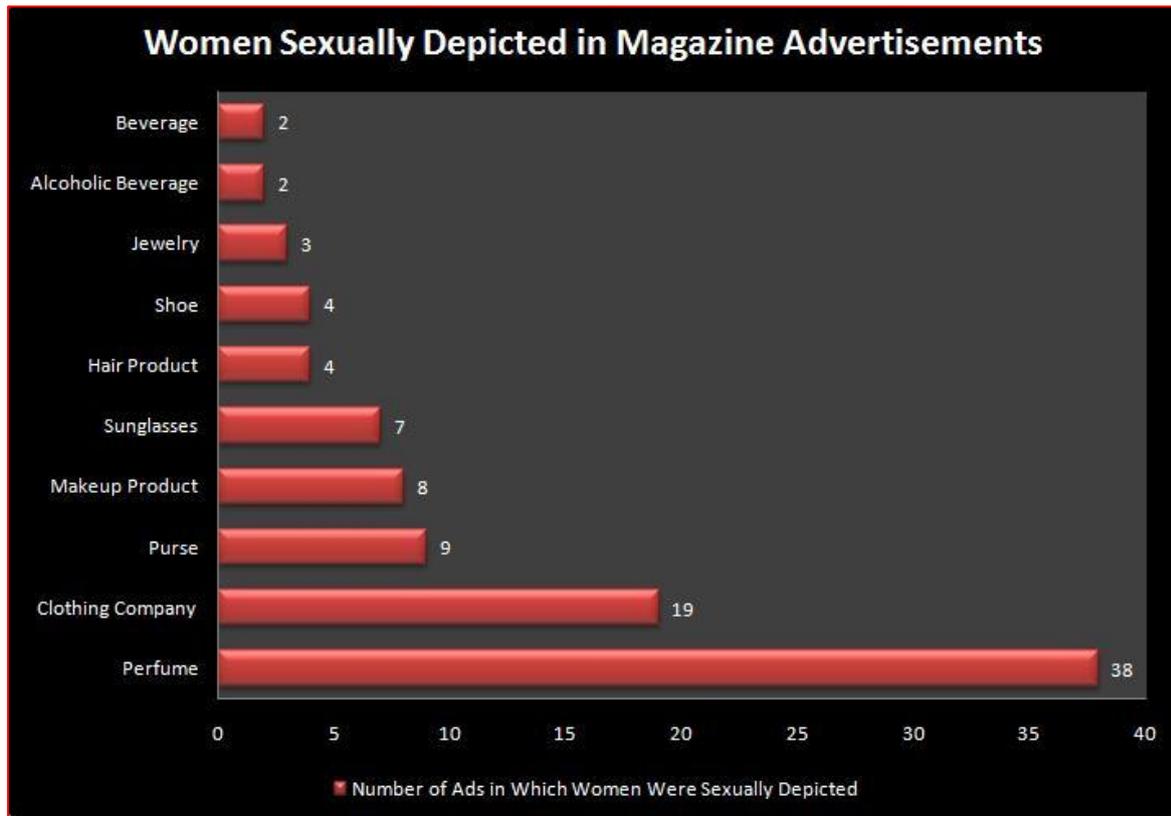


Fig.1.1

There are many challenges and stereotypes which have to be faced by women in the advertising scenario. Whether gender discrimination or objectification of women, there is a long list. Women has been used as a sex object in most of the advertisements of various products, in which perfumes tops the list, followed by clothing companies and purses, last in the list is beverages. Various other challenges faced by the women in advertising world are:

- **Overcoming Gender Discrimination:** Gender lines are drawn early, and exclusions for women continue throughout adulthood. Gender bias begins in elementary school continuing on into college. This can be seen in the advertising media too, women are not equally treated as men.
- **Lack of motivation and inspiration:** Motivation and enthusiasm work as the driving force that pushes us to take action, and to achieve our goals. Women even lack such motivation and inspiration in our society, which results in moreover worse situation.
- **Male dominance:** Women have to face many challenges due to the male dominance in the society and in the working life as well. Patriarchy or male dominance is a social system which can even be seen in our advertising world as well. Women are treated as objects or a dutiful housewife, which is only considered as a decorative item in the advertisements.

Family Restrictions: Various restrictions are imposed on the women in our society. In the name of customs and culture, women face such restrictions. May it be gender disparities or lack of education, all such acts results in worst situation for the women.

- Poor security: As an individual, a woman even lacks in proper security, whether social security, or political or economic. A proper feminist security framework should be planned out for this purpose.
- Lack of training facilities: Women can contribute to the society and to the advertising world itself, only when provided with proper training facilities. It is a tool for achieving the goals of equality and development. Gender disparities should be eliminated and equal access should be provided to the women by such training facilities.



Fig.1.2 Challenges Faced by Women

Women Lead Men in Social Media Adoption:

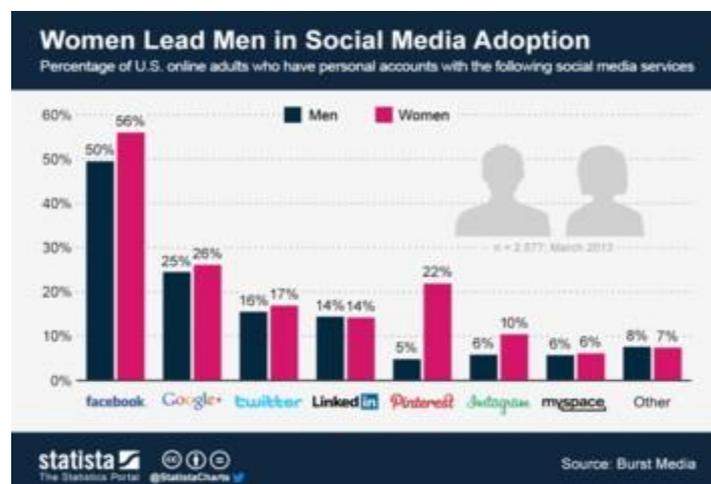


Fig.1.3 Women Lead Men in Social Media Adoption

This bar diagram clearly depicts that women lead men in social media adoption, by a very good margin. She is the new boss in media; still she is considered as secondary part of the society and given subordinate position in the advertising media, either like a housewife who has to follow orders of her husband, or a decorative item in the frame. We need to understand this change and accept it open heartedly, and start depicting the women as strong headed and equals.

Position of Women in Indian Scenario:

When we talk about the Indian scenario of advertising, regarding the way a woman is represented, situation is quite same. Like the other countries, in India too, it's a male dominating advertising world. But slowly and gradually, there is a change in the perspective; a woman is nowadays portrayed in the advertisements. Earlier a woman was only considered as an element of the ad, whether needed or not, whether related to the product or not. She was only considered as a decorative item, which has to be present anyhow, even if not needed. But now, things are changing. New media technology offers greater opportunity for connection and community and at the same time poses interpersonal challenges for girls and young women. Historically, power was in the hands of the male members of the society, it was a complete patriarchy society in India, but now a woman is no more in a subordinate posture in the advertisements. Now she has a leading position, and can be seen as a boss, a corporative head, a powerful journalist, an entrepreneur or a strong headed homemaker. She is not just a wife, or a decorative item in the advertisements anymore.

Effects of Negative Advertising on Women:

Many questions arise as to how such negative advertisements affect women. There are various things which prove that females are badly affected by such negative portrayals. Most ads expose women who are very thin and attractive. These images send messages to young girls and women that you have to look like this or you are undesirable. The obsession of staying thin comes from comparison theory, where people look at others and determine who is in the better state of attractiveness. Beside looks, women are expected to perform female gendered tasks such as cleaning, cooking and taking care of the husband and children, all while looking perfect. There are several such negative effects of advertising on women:

- 69% of girls in a study said that magazine models influence their idea of the perfect body shape.
- 44% of women who are average or underweight think that they are overweight.
- 30% of women chose an ideal body shape that is 20% underweight and an additional 44% chose an ideal body shape that is 10% underweight.
- In a study 47% of girls were influenced by magazine pictures to want to lose weight, but only 29% were actually overweight.

- Girls who were already dissatisfied with their bodies showed more dieting, anxiety, and bulimic symptoms after prolonged exposure to fashion and advertising images in a teen girl magazine.

Suggestive Measures:

Advertising is a huge business all over the globe, it affects larger than imagination, and each & every section of our society. Being such a powerful medium, it has certain responsibilities attached with it. When we talk about women, advertising should represent women in a clean and equal manner. It should help in creating an environment where women are seen with all respect and should be treated as equals, and provided with equal opportunities. This can only be done by following a channelized route for women empowerment in advertising media. First most, advertisements that inspire and empower women may actually be making a difference, both to the way women feel about themselves and companies' bottom lines. Because such advertisements play a vital role in shaping the image of women, for the coming generation.

The idea of feminist advertising or “FEMVERTISING”, is very important, as it is a step in the right direction to change the unrealistic ideals that today’s media have set. Advertising that is not only culturally relevant but also addresses and urges to take action on an issue that impacts our society makes this movement of advertising impactful. Through feminist ads, there can be a genuine push towards actual equality and treating people the same across the globe. Some vital steps can help in attaining respectful and positive image of women, in advertising world:

- Equality to women should be given on the whole. They should be provided with equal opportunities as the male members of the society.
- Feminist advertising or the “FEMVERTISING” should be promoted for enhancing the positive image of women.
- Women should be given proper education and training facilities for improving their skills and further shaping their future.
- Patriarchy or male dominance in society should be avoided, so that women can stand for their rights. This will help in development of women in advertising world and the society, as whole.
- Family support plays a vital role in enhancing the positive image of women. When women will have that support they can further stand for attaining equality in advertising world even.

Conclusion:

Advertising being such a powerful medium, it has certain responsibilities attached with it. When we talk about women, advertising should represent women in a clean and equal manner. It should help in creating an environment where women are seen with all respect and should be treated as equals, and provided with equal opportunities. Earlier a woman was only considered as an element of the ad, whether needed or not, whether related to the product or not. She was only

considered as a decorative item, which has to be present anyhow, even if not needed. But now, things are changing. New media technology offers greater opportunity for connection and community for girls and young women.

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