



## Women and Advertising in Indian Perspective

**Kajal Dey, Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Subhas Chandra Bose Centenary College, Lalbagh, Murshidabad.**

### Abstract:

Advertising is an indispensable tool for dissemination of information in a creative and glamorous way. Today in this age of media boom, it is impossible to underrate the impact and significance of advertising in informing, guiding, and persuading every individual who are exposed to it. Development in social, political, and economic systems have led to massive transformation of advertising as an appreciative and utility based vital communication and powerful marketing tool. The main aim of this paper is to discuss the women and advertising in India. This work is done on the basis of secondary data.

**Key Words:** Advertising, Customers, Women, Society & Information.

### Introduction:

Over a period, women have been portrayed in numerous ways and forms by the advertising world. But the portrayal of women in ads has changed depending on competitive business in the global market and the customers. To seek universal acceptance of the product, the advertisers tend to promote stereotypical behavior patterns and portray fixed roles which psychologically leads to loss of identity and depersonalization (Datta, 1998). In most of the advertisements, we see that women are portrayed as housewives, mothers, and companions to men, mainly promoting household products, food items or providing support for the liking of men's products such as deodorant or aftershaves. Most of the men's deodorant ad shows young girls chasing after a boy who used such a product due to its irresistible fragrance or girls getting overly excited and tempted when the boy after using the deodorant passes by or comes near (Axe Dark Temptation: Chocolate Man, Axe effect). In India, despite of the rising consciousness about the significance of women's role in society and increase in women's employment in the workforce, a traditional halo is still very much attached to these fixed and traditional roles of 'pati-bhakta sita-savitri', cooking, cleaning, and caring for children (Datta, 1998). Even today, in this 21st century, though the image of the women have been metamorphosed by the new genre of advertising portraying women as epitome of beauty, glamour and uninhibited by nature, endorsing even electronic gadgets and automobiles, women are hardly shown in any hard-core decision making roles except while promoting cosmetic products in private areas such as dressing room, bedroom or bathroom, selection of detergents, food or drink items in kitchen and dining space and deciding the interiors of the house, thus making women stay within the boundaries of private sphere mostly, considering as an embodiment of tradition. Therefore, we see that the interpretations may vary but the role of women in advertisements is indispensable. Advertisers tend to appeal consumers to buy products through advertisement taglines and concept directly or in a subtle manner. Women are exposed in advertisements to enhance the sex appeal of a product even when it has no link with the product and totally irrelevant for the selling of the product but only to attract people towards the ad by objectifying women's body; for example, film actress Paoli Dam exposing her cleavage while promoting Bisk Farm biscuit product. Hrithik Roshan endorsing Hide & Seek Milano biscuit ad where the girl comes in and step by step, in an intimate and pleasurable way helps him to make the chocolate okies. Katrina Kaif portraying a sensuous image in promoting fruit-drink Maaza and referring it as 'Aamsutra', the camera, focusing on how a drop of the drink trickles down her cheeks to her lips and

experiencing the pleasure of tasting the mango flavour. Recently Wildstone soap for men print ad depicts an intimate scene of a couple, bodies drenched in mud with the tagline 'It happens' and the jingle 'Let's Play Dirty' gives the message that men enjoys unshackled pleasure without having to "Try Too Hard", creates sex appeal by arresting the attention of the viewers to the provocative image of the 'podies' covered with mud than on the product itself. The French theorist Foucault states that sex is incandescent (Foucault, 1990); and so, we see that advertisers tend to captivate the minds of the viewers by inserting sexual innuendos in most of the advertisements. Foucault in his 'History of Sexuality' even says that the pleasure derived out of the sexual experience depends on its intensity, specific quality, duration, and the reverberation it creates in the body and soul.

### **Sexual objectification in advertising:**

Sexual objectification objectifies the female body by projecting it as eroticized zones of desire and also equating a woman's worth with her physical appearance. According to Kuhn (1985), the cultural way of looking at a female body as a sex object in various images reminds that traditionally women have been the property of men and even considered as 'natural for men to evaluate women and make advances based on these visual representations' (Das, 2012). Advertisements on cold creams, body lotions are womencentric, showing woman utilizing the product to tone her skin to make it soft by caressing her arms and legs while the man, getting provoked to touch her soft cheeks or other body parts. Advertisement on Parachute body lotion with the jingle 'Jagaye Love Dohara' depicts by using the product, the woman's skin will become so soft and irresistible that her husband cannot help but steal a moment and yearn to touch her, making him fall in love all over again. As if creams and lotions are only meant to be used by women to maintain the 'beauty' of the skin so that men experience the pleasure of 'touching; or rather men do not require using creams and lotions to tone their skin to maintain the 'beauty' element. Even the designing of the body lotion bottles are curve shaped (Parachute body lotion), indicating as if the product is meant to be used specifically only on a 'woman's body' and not on a man's body; thus objectifying and commoditifying a woman's body in a patriarchal society.

### **Advertising Management:**

Advertisers utilize improved technicalities and minute detailing of camera angles, sound, and light effects to gratify masculine 'voyeuristic' desires by placing the female as an object to gaze at and the spectator in a masculine subject position. Feminist Laura Mulvey states that socially established interpretations of sexual differences also control images and erotic ways of looking at. She speaks of two forms of pleasure in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' 1975, i.e., 'voyeuristic' pleasure which is gaining satisfaction by seeking the pleasure of subjecting others to a controlling and curious gaze of desire and 'scopophilia' which is erotic pleasure originating by visualizing another person as an object of sexual stimulation. 'Looking' is an active male role while the passive role of being looked at is adopted by the female. She uses the concept 'male gaze' as a feature of gender power asymmetry where under the construction of patriarchy, women are objectified because heterosexual men are in control of the camera and thus putting the viewers into the perspective of a heterosexual male. Male gaze focuses on emphasizing the curves of the female body, referring women as objects rather than individuals, displaying women as how men think they should be perceived, and female viewers view the content through the eyes of a man. Mulvey (1989) argues that male gaze takes precedence over the female gaze because women look at themselves through the eyes of men, thus reflecting the underlying power asymmetry. So, through this male gaze, female sexiness is brought into the equation when the media product is itself not sexy.

### **Aim of the present-day advertising:**

Advertisements tend to display women's body to sell product, the main objective being to employ slim attractive figures to grab attention and stimulate desire, which the advertisers expect to get transferred to the specific product. Women's Body is equated with commodities and presented as rewards of consumption. For example, it is shown in ads that if the man buys the beer or any other hard drinks, he gets the girl. Similarly, men's products like Fair and Handsome cream and deodorant ads shows that if the

man uses the product, he will get a greater number of girls than other men not using the product. Through these kinds of advertisements, men are instructed to regard women's body as objects, creating an atmosphere which tries to devalue women as people, and encouraging sexual harassment in society. Dehumanization of women happens in advertisements where women's Specific body parts are focused like a woman's torso is put adjacent to a picture of Skoda Octavia rider, inviting viewers to admire the curves of both. In such ad's women are not even portrayed as whole objects rather reduced to 'a collection of dismembered parts', in turn, degrading women (Sharma & Singh, 2006). So, this commodification of women has totally distorted our understanding on sexuality and gender roles in society.

### **Women: Cultural beauty, commodity, appealing to sell**

Television advertising today creates a sense of 'hyperreality' for the viewers through various types of advertisements to maintain the appealing factor of the product being endorsed. According to Baudrillard there is no longer a 'reality' which television allows us to see, rather the 'reality' becomes the string of images shown on the TV screens. The world of hyper-reality is constructed of these strings of images known as simulacra, which only get their meaning from other images and so does not have any grounding in the 'external reality'. It portrays a distorted reality and a simulation where the simulacra have no connection with the reality (Baudrillard, 1994). Consumer culture has commercialized the woman's body and women have always been measured in terms of 'cultural ideals of beauty' as advertising joined hands with sexism, creating pervasive images. Advertisers always try to create a 'new paradigm of female perfection' where women are portrayed 'in an endless array of shapes and sizes', as objects of attraction and desire (Sharma & Singh, 2006). The main purpose is to create a gap between what women are and what they should be, which significantly affects the way women especially young adolescent girls think about themselves that the only important thing is the way they physically look because at this stage of life they tend to develop their sense of self-identity. Further, it also causes women to believe that their self-worth is dependent on getting attention from men. Thus, through advertisements people tend to receive negative message about body image particularly, making young girls and women feel under high pressure to maintain an unrealistic 'physical image' by sacrificing their health to the extent of becoming anorexic and going through minor or major cosmetic surgeries so that they can conform in achieving that 'perfect' shape. Advertising should be neutral rather than being different for men and women. India being a patriarchal society, everything is centred on adult Indian male, even when it comes to media communication. In today's contemporary society the roles of men and women have changed. The world of the Indian woman is no longer limited to the four walls of the house while Indian male also now plays his role in household chores. Advertisers are taking notice of this metamorphosis as depicted in the Ariel ad where the father is cleaning his child's dirty clothes and Femina ads portraying women as "the woman of substance"-independent and head on (Sharma & Singh, 2006). But since gender roles are socially constructed, mostly we see gendered advertising being carried out because advertisers want viewers to enjoy their commercials and to associate the product with a comfortable reinforcing and regenerating picture of 'mainstream' cultural values. Thus, on the one hand 'advertising encourages women to consume by 'empowering' them with a fiction of choice', on the other hand 'it induces women to perceive themselves as commodities' (Das, 2012). Foucault states that it is a form of power which intends to create subjects out of individuals by providing pseudo notions of liberation and empowerment to women, while keeping them still under the traditional halo of the patriarchal power systems (Foucault, 1994). Advertisements are designed to take optimal advantage of gender-specific fantasies, myths, and fears. Like the 'Raymond Man' is almost like a dream come true for a woman, playing out her fantasies and becoming an aspiration for men (Sharma & Singh, 2006).

### **Conclusion:**

So, we see that advertisements 'act as perpetrators of the patriarchal stereotyping of women and connive at gender discrimination' (Das, 2012). Thus, as technology is improving and advancing and media sources increasing, advertisements are affecting our lives more and more. Contemporary advertisements in both print and electronic media serve as significant transmitters of cultural ideas about gender and are

influencing the cultural changes in society. So how women are being portrayed through advertisements deserves our immediate attention and consideration in our society.

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