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Women in Advertisements: It's Ethics and Impact on Society

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Abstract:

Objective: Our aim in this paper is to focus on the pathetic and ingenious ways women are used in product advertising. If this is not objected, it may lead to further deterioration of the status of women in the society which can be the first step towards valueless and unethical society suppressing the very existence of women with proper societal status. Creating awareness and sensitizing the society on this aspect is the need of the hour. A small attempt from us in this direction.

What is its impact on our society?

It is argued that the images used in advertising could have a wrong impact and even the most subtle ones make an impact on the viewers. Further, it is said that gender relations are learned through advertisements. Amongst these, learned gender roles are those of Men and Women are portrayed in advertisements, according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. To be a woman is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine. There is little room for variation or reversal of roles. When all this seems normal for the media, it has a very bad impact on the general women in the society.

Topics covered in this paper:

- Introduction
- Role of gender in advertising
- Creation and maintenance of gender normality
- Social pressure on men to endorse traditional masculinity and sexuality in advertising. Femininity in advertising
- Portrayal of women in advertising in gender displays in advertising
 - Family
 - Feminine touch
 - Licensed withdrawal
 - Reutilization of subordination
- The body in consumer culture
- Where to stop this unethical culture
- Our Findings- Opinions taken from the cross section of the society are enumerated below
- Conclusion

Conclusion: Women in advertisements have become a major target group to promote and feature anything on earth. The question is whether women suit this kind of promotion of any product, its only inclusion of women even without any rhyme or a reason. We can even say, they have become the victims for propagating anything in the market. We made our small attempt to interact with the people of various age groups to take their opinions. None appreciated wrong usage of women in ads. Our attempt in this paper is only to contribute to the ethical values of a man in his life. We have to make a beginning somewhere! So, Why not every time women are used as a symbol for exposing, a statutory warning or a tagline like, "Exposing is very indecent for women... Keep up your dignity" should follow.

1. Introduction

Values, Integrity and Ethics play a very vital role in a man's life. When the value system comes from our upbringing, Integrity depends on the deep rooted faith in the human values. When all of us know these basic realities, why is that few women go for such obscene and unethical practices of selling themselves in the society. It is not a simple question to answer. Every religion in this world justifies only the right and never wrong in any circumstance. So, it does not matter, we belong to any region or religion, values in our life are ingrained even before we understand the meaning of the word, Values.

Today, the majority of the problems faced by the women in the society are eve-teasing, rape, molestation, abuse and so on. On the other side, we have elaborate campaigns to protect and preserve the integrity of women in society.

2. Role of Gender in Advertising

While examining today's economic system, two processes which always go together can be noticed viz. product and promotion strategies through advertisement. Advertising and marketing are too old to talk about their definite starting points or their turning points, what really matters to understand its position in today's world, can be detected (Presbrey, 1929). The industrial revolution altered this marketing system completely and after the invention of the television, intense promotions kept this system alive. But keeping it alive wasn't the only issue, also its hunger needed to be fed. So, advertisers sought different ways to maintain their visibility, by addressing (or by looking like they were addressing) a certain group of people's needs. In order to achieve all these, one of the capitalist system's actions was to portray women as sexy, thin and flawless, using various techniques to keep the income in huge amounts, while creating certain problems.

Creation and maintenance of gender normality

Advertising is a significant agent of socialization in modern industrialized societies and is used as a tool to maintain certain social constructions, such as gender. Men and women are depicted as differing in attitudes, behavior and social statuses.

These differences are what separate the sexes into different genders. Gender advertisements give the viewers a glimpse into a world laden with socially defined and constructed gender relations, displays and roles. These images are crafted to mimic real life and many mistake the concepts of fantasy and reality with regards to advertising.

Commercial Realism is where advertisers try to present the advertising world in ways which could portray close to real.

3. Social Pressure on Men to Endorse Traditional Masculinity and Sexuality in Advertising

Since the 1980s, men's bodies have been used more for advertising, depicting a similarly idealized body image to that portrayed of women. Research suggests that men feel social pressure to endorse traditional masculine male models in advertising. In other words, when concerned about being classified by other men as feminine, feminine men endorsed traditional masculine models. The authors suggested this result reflected the social pressure on men to endorse traditional masculine norms.

A study on male body obsession found that advertisements for everything from cars to underwear depicted bodybuilder images with "washboard abdominal muscles, massive chests and inflated shoulders, a mixture of muscularity and leanness probably attainable only by drugs.

Though women's equality is advancing in society, men have become more fixated with muscularity because it is still seen as a cultural symbol of masculinity. In addition, it has been suggested that a muscular body has become an aesthetic norm for many in the society. The representation of (thin and lightly muscled) was limited predominantly to the advertising of clothing that may look more appealing on slimmer, taller men. 'Soft' and 'round' were rarely depicted and if they were, tended to be the object of humor. It is important to note that representations of male bodies are often used irrespective of their relevance to the product being promoted.

4. Femininity in Advertising

'Woman as delicate, not alert and self-touching Feminine'. This ad suggests that women who do not use youth hormones will be sad because men will not love them.



Figure 1

5. Portrayals of Women in Advertising in Gender Displays in Advertising

Further, Goffman argues that there are codes which can be used to identify gender. These codes of gender can be seen in the portrayals of men and women in advertising. There are four categories under which we can see these codes of gender: the family, the feminine touch, the ritualization of and licensed withdrawal.

5.1. Family

It is said that grown-up women are depicted as young children in advertising. They are shown with fingers in their mouths and dressed like children or dolls. When a family is shown in advertising, often the mother resembles the daughter, whereas that is not the case for boys and their fathers. "Boys have to push their way into manhood... girls merely have to unfold."

5.2. Feminine Touch

It is argued that in advertisements, women are often seen touching themselves, which is a sign that their body is delicate. Women are also depicted as barely touching an object or caressing it, whereas men firmly grasp an object, as if to say that they control over their life, while women are merely there.

5.3. Licensed Withdrawal

The idea that women in advertisements is often depicted as confused, un-alert, and mentally drifting for the scene, unaware of her surroundings, while men are shown as alert and prepared to fend off any potential threats.

5.4. Reutilization of Subordination

Women are presented as submissive or Subordinate to men. This submission can clearly be seen as the women are literally placed below men and can often be found lying on the floor or on a bed, while men are standing upright, or sitting in a chair, lip biting, holding self, etc. All of these keep a person off-balance and at the mercy of their surroundings and all of these body postures signify submission.

Sometimes the traditional gender roles are reversed. When this happens, one can see men behaving in ways that are generally associated with femininity and women behaving in typical masculine ways. This is often the case in and advertising. Witnessing these ads can be a shock to most, as they are not accustomed to this reversal of roles. This is an indicator that there is in fact a distinction between the genders in advertising.

6. The Body in Consumer Culture

Within, the body is celebrated as a site of pleasure. It is desirable and desiring and the closer the body is to the idealized images of youth, health, fitness and beauty, the higher it is. Consumer culture allows for the unabashed display of the human body.

In modern times, clothing is designed to glorify the "natural" human physique, a stark contrast to the 19th century in which clothes were created to conceal the body. Victorian male garments loose fitting and conservative in subdued colours, reflected the emphasis for the respectability of the male body. Victorian women had to be squeezed into corsets to accentuate the hourglass figure despite the vigorous propaganda against tight-lacing. With the rise of consumer culture the display of sexy figures and obscene ads a have become very common.

7. Where to Stop this Unethical Culture

Furthermore, the cultural popularity of the outdoor beauty can be defined largely as a perception. It is a group of social norms that interpret a particular form of appearance that is valued. Both men and women strive to achieve this beauty which influences them to shape themselves and alter their appearance in order to conform to those norms.

These norms are largely derived from the Media's presentation of models and well known stars through advertisements for products and magazine covers. As our society is now filled with these advertisements in all aspects of life, such as on TV, billboards, in supermarkets displayed with the products (particularly beauty products) and on social media, children are now viewing this material at a younger age and in turn creating the perception that this is the ideal appearance whilst they are still very impressionable.



Figure 2

In the early twentieth century, society began to pursue material goods with the goal of fulfilling a general desire to own the item rather than for later use. This is largely due to the use of advertising media and the perception, particularly with beauty products, that the models pictured obtain their looks by using these products.

It is very common for young men and women to compare themselves to models in ads, in terms of their physical attractiveness. The appearance and body size of the models within the advertisements in the final image seen by consumers are more often than not altered through editing programs such as Photoshop, in order to achieve the perfect (or impossible) desired look. The use of these images creates a false beauty ideal for, both men and women to aspire to, as well as creating the use of extreme dieting and surgical procedures in order to resemble a similar image that is displayed in advertising. This emphasis on an ideal body appearance has been regarded as being psychologically detrimental to the well-being of many young men and women and on their self-image.

When sexuality is used in advertising, certain values and attitudes towards sex are 'sold' along with a product. The message may be that "innocence is sexy", that women enjoy being dominated, that the use of a certain product is naughty but legal, or that use of a certain product will make the user more attractive to the opposite sex and many other messages. This unwanted message offending the women has to be condemned.

8. Our findings- Opinions Taken from the Cross Section of the Society are Enumerated Below

- In general, men, women and children felt, they cannot enjoy or appreciate advertisements that expose the body of a man or woman
- 95% Women expressed that they cannot accept such ads as good. Moreover, majority felt, these are the reasons for women abuse in society.
- Women do not like to expose themselves. Instead they like to be properly dressed and wear more jewellery.
- Majority men do not like to see women exposed.
- Generally all age groups accepted that they will support the campaign against unethical practices by not buying those products.
- Women do not like to be featured in men's products.
- Many expressed there is a lot of gap between screen life and real life.
- Many also stated that we need to be practical in life.
- Even business people expressed that they can reduce their expenditure if these advertisements are banned.
- A woman from media and ads stated that she does not like it but has no choice.

9. Conclusion

Atrocities on women are mainly due to the distorted life styles adopted, inferiority complex, low self esteem and disgusting approach towards life. When a child is brought up with guilt, insult, mockery and no confidence, he enters adulthood, without proper maturity. This will deny him in having proper respect towards elders. So this leads to humiliation and hatred towards elders in the society. A person with low self confidence always shows off his might and power on the weaker sex and the kids. It is very essential to ensure that proper value system is ingrained in a child at the right age. Discipline, moral values, respect should be taught at home from the infant stage of the child. A child who often listens to epics, moral stories will find a right solution and perfect direction in his life. He can never afford to commit any wrong in his life time. This allows a person to respect gender equality. A healthy nation can be developed with proper value systems. A man should be respected with his values and not on the basis of his financial status. Being rich is good, but for being rich, adopting wrong methods can never be appreciated at any cost. Ethics of life go a long way in protecting the human values and humanity at large.

Advertisements take something that exists already in the world and they change it, forming a distorted reflection. "They emphasize some things and de-emphasize others," it is a hyper ritualization of the world and we recognize and even relate with some of the images. Now it is very essential to put a full stop on all these dirty rituals. The first step in this direction should be taken by the women, seconded by all the responsible men who have at least one of them in their lives, they are,

- Mother
- Sister
- Daughter
- Wife
- Girl Friend

So, now every responsible individual should condemn the product, where women are sexually featured. This alone can answer the unethical ways of using women in advertising.

10. References

1. The content is developed from our personal ideas, interactions with people of various age groups and their experiences. The paper is also based on secondary data and sources from,
2. Wikipedia
3. Google
4. Books and magazines