Research Paper Management

People Perception Towards The Portrayal of Women In Advertisements: A Study With Special Reference to The Bangalore City

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ABSTRACT

Much research has been conducted on the portrayals of men and women in advertising. Advertisers are often criticized for portraying stereotypical gender roles, and particularly for depicting women as dependent (such as a homemaker) or decorative (such as a sex object). The purpose of the study on which the article is based was to identify the role of advertising in marketing a product, perception of people towards the portrayal of women in advertising and perception of people towards the erotic images of women in advertising in Bangalore city. Opinions of 500 respondents were analyzed to determine how women are portrayed in advertising. The findings indicate that advertising is necessary to provide information about the product advertised as well as to increase the sale of a product. Women in advertisements are projected in fashionable and glamorous roles and they are also portrayed as decorative and alluring. With regard to the erotic images of women in advertising, the respondents agreed that they attract the immediate attention of the customers for a product and last long in the minds of men and women.

KEYWORDS marketing, commercials, female models, role portrayal, Stereotypes, women in advertising

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is everywhere - in magazines, on television, in movie theaters, on countless web pages, on busses, in subways and on milk-cartons. It is understood that any surface that will hold still long enough to be read is considered a potential advertising medium. Advertising is part of our daily cultural experiences and it is almost impossible to avoid them. The study of advertising is not just about what manufacturers say to consumers, but it is about how it is said. The influence of advertisements is far beyond a simple message about a product. Advertisements can introduce characters to the public imagination, make icons out of actors, generate new stories etc. Advertising is a media institution, and an industry with its own way of doing things, having its own channels of communication, and its own key personnel who carry out skilled tasks. It enables the modern organizations to create effective means of communication with its customers. Advertising is a means through which a product or a service is made known to the public. And it is one of the most powerful tools used by the marketers to induce the customers to make decisions. It is the act or practice of calling public attention to one's product, service, and need etc., especially by paid announcements in news papers and magazines, over radio or television, billboards etc.

Much of the public and academic attention directed towards advertising is focused on the ways that advertisers have depicted women. Since 1970's various content analysis have shown a gender difference in the portrayal of people in advertisements (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Geis, Brown, Jennings-Walstedt, & Porter, 1984; Schneider & Schneider, 1979). These studies have found the following limited and unrealistic themes: women were depicted as "happy house wives", submissive, incompetents, or sex objects in a decorative role; women were shown as dependent on men; and working women were underrepresented (Courtney and Whipple,1983; Ferguson & Kreshel,1990).

Different types of appeals are used in advertising to draw the attention of the customers. Emotional, personal , social, scary, humorous, musical and sex are some of the appeals that are commonly used in advertisements. Among these appeals sexuality is considered one of the most powerful tools of marketing and particularly advertising. Use of Women in advertisements in a 'sexual way' is one of the effective ways of capturing the attention of the customers. It is considered that exposing the women's body is a matter of interest to all human beings (Steadman 1969). Thus it seems to be an attractive, way to create charm among consumers. The use of sexually attractive Women in advertisements is found in the advertisements of most classes of frequently purchased consumer products like clothing, cosmetics, toiletries, and food brands; and also in many types of consumer durables like motor cars, cameras, carpets, furniture and even for technical and industrial products such as drugs, plastics, and office machineries(Stead man 1969).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertisement is a powerful medium designed to sell products, aspirations and communicate concepts of acceptable behavior and gender roles. The question of women's portrayal in advertisements has been a matter of debate for considerable time; women are often portrayed as housewives and too frequently as professionals. And the advertisers have introduced the attractive independent women. Advertisements also portray women as a confident, independent career oriented. And advertisements of today Portray women much in sexual roles and also as decorative objects. Ford, La Tour, and Lundstrom (1991) examined the attitudes women had towards female role portrayals in advertising. The survey was based on one survey made in 1977 by Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia that measured women's general perceptions of their portrayals in advertisements .The results of the 1991 study showed that women were still critical of the way in which they were portrayed in advertising. Women still thought that advertisements treated them mainly as sex objects, showed them as fundamentally dependent on men and found the portrayal of women in advertising to be offensive. In a study conducted by Rudman and Verdi (1993) the researchers compared the sexual and violent imagery of females and males in advertising and came out with the findings that female model were more likely than male models to be placed in submissive, sexually exploitive, and violent positions. Approximately 80% of the advertisements contained, female models that were posed in sexually exploitive postures. In half of the advertisements studied, female models were "dismembered"(i.e., body parts were excluded or obscured) by the camera angle or logo placement. Only 17% of men were portrayed in sexual roles compared to women in advertisements. Findings document that such patterns have been increasing over time. Lin (1997) examined the extent to which sexism was used in television advertising, focusing on male as well as female portrayals in television commercials and came out with the findings that both women and men were depicted largely in stereotypical "traditional"; roles, and women were more often shown in

a state of undressing, and exhibited more "sexiness," and were depicted as sexual objects (9.2% of men vs. 20.8% of women) compared to men. In a study conducted in the year 1999 Reichert *et al.* (1999) examined how sexual explicitness in advertising continued to increase by comparing various magazine advertisements from 1983 and 1993, and found that in 1993 both female and male models were more likely to be dressed in a sexually explicit manner; and in both years, female models were three times as likely as males to be dressed in a sexually explicit manner, with 40% of female models in 1993 dressed provocatively. And the researchers came out with the findings that there was an increasing trend in female models being dressed in a sexually explicit manner in advertisements. Krassas *et. al.,* (2001) examined the sexual objectification of women in magazine advertisements by comparing Cosmopolitan and Playboy magazines which demonstrated that the sexual objectification of women through the reinforcement of the male gaze was clearly the dominant rhetoric in both magazines, even though one was a pornographic magazine and the other was not . Each magazine had at least one section that contained fairly graphic descriptions of sexual encounters, and each magazine included sexually suggestive photos of women. Women in these magazines were often scantily clad. Women in advertisements were depicted in a sexual manner just to gain attention towards the product advertised. Frith&Mueller,(2003) found that the attractive female bodies and sexual stimuli had been historically used in the U.S advertisements to attract the attention of the viewers and to make an attempt to create interest in a product or service. The attractive female bodies were used as an object of sale in advertisements regardless to their talent, and intelligence. Lindner (2004) examined the images of Women in magazines of General Interest and Fashion magazine advertisements from 1955 to 2002, by comparing the advertisements in general interest magazines, and fashion magazines from 1955 to 2002 and came out with the findings that women were portrayed more in decorative roles and decorative portrayals of women had increased significantly in both magazines of general interest and fashion magazine advertisements. Sanchez, Gamble *et. al* (2005) compared and analyzed women in advertisements of the mainstream, Black-oriented, and Latin magazines and their study revealed that, 42% of advertisements in Cosmopolitan were found to contain suggestive body exposure, compared with 13% of suggestive body exposure in Ebony, 32% of suggestive body exposure in Essence, 0% in Filipinas, and 21% in Latin Girl. According to the researchers these patterns persisted over time. A comparative study of the attitudes of women in 1990's and 2000 towards sexual portrayals of women in advertisement was conducted by Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008) who examined the sexual objectification of women in advertising by measuring the attitudes of young women to sexually objectified advertising. The survey combined the elements of two previous studies (Ford, LaTour, and Lundstrom, 1991; Mittal and Lassar, 2000) where a questionnaire was administered to 94 female undergraduates. The results showed significant change in the attitudes of young, educated women. The researchers found that the respondents were of the opinion that females were portrayed as sex objects in advertisements, but were less offended by these portrayals than female respondents in 1991. Julie and Rosselli (2008) analyzed the extent to which women were presented as sex objects and as victims in print advertisements by considering 58 magazines where a total of 4136 full page advertisements were examined and these advertisements were drawn from men's, women's, news and business, entertainment, teen and special interest magazines. The findings indicate that one in two advertisements that featured women portrayed them as sex objects and sexual objectification varied greatly by magazine type where men's, women's fashion, and adolescent girls magazines showed the highest rates of objectification and special interest, entertainment, and news and business magazines showed the lowest rates of objectification. And the percentage of advertisements that portrayed women as sex objects was significantly higher in men's magazines than in any other magazine categories. The victimization of women in advertisements was not as prevalent as women's sexual objectification.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

The literature review reveals that many studies have been conducted to show that women in advertisements are depicted as sex idols and decorative objects. A very few studies carried on research on the, people's perceptions toward the portrayal of women in advertisements, and no study has tried to analyze the role of advertisement in marketing a product. And a very few studies throw light on the perceptions of the people toward the erotic images of women in advertisements. As a result, the present study is undertaken to understand and analyze the perceptions of people regarding the role portrayals of women in advertisements, to study the perceptions of people on erotic images of women in advertisements and also to examine the role of advertisement in marketing a product. Hence, the present study has been taken up to throw more light on the above said issues.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the importance of advertising in marketing a product.
2. To examine the perception of people towards the portrayal of women in advertisements.
3. To examine the perception of people towards the erotic images of women in advertisements.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study focuses on the perception of people on the portrayals of women in advertisements in Bangalore city. Both primary data and secondary data were used in the study. The secondary data relates to the review of literature focusing on the images of women in advertisements. The primary data were collected from the field survey by using questionnaire schedule. The opinion of the respondents on the role of advertisement in marketing a product, role portrayals of women in advertisements and the perception of the people on erotic images of women in advertisements were measured by requesting the respondents to indicate on five- point Likert-type scales, anchored on "strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree". Selection of sample and fixation of sample size has followed simple random sampling method consisting of 500 respondents from Bangalore city. The population of the study was males and females who were 18 and above who watched advertisements. University graduates and post graduates, house wives, working men and women comprised the sample. Finally, the data were collected and interpreted by applying the mean value to arrive at meaningful conclusions.

LIMITATIONS

1. The scope of the study was confined only to the Bangalore city.
2. In this study questionnaire is used as an instrument for a sample population; therefore this study may not gather all the information from the whole population of Bangalore city.

INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Table-1 Opinion on 'importance of advertising in marketing a product'.

Sl. No	Statements	Mean Value
1.	Now a days we find advertising every where	4.63
2.	Advertising a product is necessary	4.47
3.	Advertising is necessary to increase the sale of a product	4.26
4.	Advertisements have become a part of our lives	3.80
5.	Advertisements are educative, informative and product oriented	3.79

Source: Field Survey.

The above table represents the importance of advertising in marketing a product. Most of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement ' Now a days we find advertising every where' for which the mean value stood at 4.63 which is followed by the statement ' Advertising a product is necessary' and the mean value stood at 4.47. Majority of the respond-

ents gave low priority for the statement ' Advertisements are educative, informative and product oriented' for which they assigned the mean value of 3.79 compared to the statement ' Advertising is necessary to increase the sale of a product' and 'Advertisements have become a part of our lives' for which they assigned the mean values of 4.26 and 3.80 respectively. To conclude, most of the respondents strongly agreed that there is an increasing trend in advertisements and advertising a product is necessary as the people come to know about a product's existence in the market only through advertisements. Irrespective of advertisements being informative, educative and product oriented, the respondents agreed that advertising is necessary to provide information about the product advertised as well as to increase the sale of a product.

Table-2
Opinion on perception of people towards the portrayal of women in advertisements.

Sl. no	Statements	Mean value
1.	Women in advertisements are projected in fashionable and glamorous roles	4.26
2.	A very few advertisements portray women as educated and career oriented	3.89
3.	Women in advertising are portrayed as alluring, and decorative objects	3.89
4.	Advertisements portray women mainly as 'sex idols'.	3.71
5.	Most of the advertisements suggest that a women's place is at home	2.88
6.	Advertisements suggest that women are fundamentally dependent upon men	2.75

Source: Field Survey.

The above table reveals the perceptions of the people toward the portrayals of women in advertisements. Majority of the respondents strongly agreed to the statement 'Women in advertisements are projected in fashionable and glamorous roles' for which the mean value stood at 4.26. It is interesting to note that the respondents agreed and gave equal weightage to the statements 'A very few advertisements portray women as educated and career oriented', 'Women in advertising are portrayed as alluring, and decorative objects' for which the mean value stood at 3.89 followed by the statement Advertisements portray women mainly as 'sex idols' for which the mean value stood at 3.71. The respondents gave low priority to the statements 'Most of the advertisements suggest that a women's place is at home' and 'Advertisements suggest that women are fundamentally dependent upon men' for which the mean value stood at 2.88 and 2.75 respectively. On the whole the respondents are of the opinion that women in advertisements are projected in fashionable and glamorous roles. They also agreed that women are portrayed as alluring, decorative objects and also as sex idols in advertisements.

Table-3
Opinion on perception of people towards the erotic images of women in advertisements

Sl. No	Statements	Mean Value
1.	The erotic image of women in advertisements attracts the immediate attention	3.66
2.	Erotic image of females in advertisements last long in the minds of men and women	3.61
3.	Erotic images of women in advertisements are offensive	3.56
4.	The advertisements containing erotic images of females are more appealing compared to other advertisements	2.95
5.	The erotic images of females in advertisements are interesting to watch.	2.35

Source: Field Survey.

The above table presents the perceptions of the people toward the erotic images of women in advertisements. The respondents agreed to the statement 'The erotic image of women in advertisements attracts the immediate attention' for which the mean value stood at 3.66 followed by the statement 'Erotic image of females in advertisements last long in the minds of men and women' for which the mean value stood at 3.61. The respondents also agreed to the statement 'Erotic images of women in advertisements are offensive' for which the mean value stood at 3.56. The respondents disagreed with the statements 'The advertisements containing erotic images of females are more appealing compared to other advertisements', and 'The erotic images of females in advertisements are interesting to watch' for which the mean value stood at 2.95 and 2.35 respectively.

On the whole the respondents are of the opinion that though erotic images of women in advertisements are offensive, not interesting and not more appealing compared to other advertisements, they attract the immediate attention of the customers for a product and they last long in the minds of men and women.

CONCLUSION

Research findings suggest that the respondents were not very critical toward advertisements. They considered advertisements to be necessary, a useful source of information to assist in purchase decisions, and advertisements increases the sale of a product which benefits the manufacturer as well as the advertisers of the product. While the role of advertising in marketing a product is concerned, the respondents were of the opinion that advertising a product was necessary as it helps them in providing knowledge about the products existing in the market and assist them in purchase decisions which in turn leads to increase in sales.

With respect to the portrayal of women in advertisements, the respondents were fairly critical. They felt that advertisements portrayed women in fashionable and glamorous roles, and very few advertisements portrayed women as career oriented. The respondents were also of the opinion that the advertisements portrayed women as alluring, decorative objects and treated women mainly as "sex idols". It is interesting to note that there was also a positive change in the perception of respondents towards portrayal of women in advertisements. According to the respondents the role of women in advertisements was no longer confined to four walls of a house. And they also agreed that the advertisements portrayed women as an independent woman.

Regarding the perceptions of the people toward the erotic images of women in advertisements, the respondents were of the opinion that the use of erotic images of women in advertisements were not interesting to watch and were not appealing compared to other advertisements. According to the respondents the use of erotic images of women in advertisements was offensive. But they were of the opinion that this kind of advertisements attracts the customer's immediate attention and they last long in the minds of the people. And people remember only the erotic image of women in advertisement but not the product advertised. This research finding is useful for marketers who are interested in customer retention. They have to be more sensitive when designing their advertising messages and also with the use of erotic images of women in advertisements. As marketers are inclined towards using brand name and company name in their branding decisions, careful execution of advertisements is integral for product success. Though the use of erotic images of women in advertisements attracts the customer's immediate attention and last long in their minds it helps only in short term profits. It does not help in long run. In order to survive in the market for a long period by making the public to remember the product advertised careful execution of advertisement for a product is necessary.

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