

SOCIAL CONDITIONING OF GENDER ROLES THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT---*The unfair treatment of women by the society is often justified by authoritative male gender in the name of familial duties and customary traditions, but is this injustice rational? This paper attempts to look into the role of mass media, specifically advertisements, in shaping gender roles. A few advertisements are critically analysed to bring out the gender biased portrayal of men and women in the advertisements and probes into the dangerous attitudes that it develops in the society due to this biased portrayal that is often very subtle.*

Keywords--- *Gender roles, Advertisements, Stereotypes, Normalisation, Familial duties.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of advertising can be traced back to ancient Egypt and Rome, where papyrus paintings and wall paintings were used to encourage people to join the army, take part in sports and also to advertise products. But after the advent of the printing press, advertisements for new books and medicines were being placed in the newspapers. By the 19th century, advertising products and other commodities became the order of the day and were propagated through various mass media. Advertisements were aimed at a particular culture or group, and hence the approach varied accordingly.

After globalization, with the growing technological advancements, there was a restructuring of the consumer market, which led to the assimilation of different and exotic cultures all around the world. Products from all over the world became available at the local markets, leading to a whole new consumer behaviour. This change in consumer behaviour was hugely supported by the import and export duties, which in turn helped the capitalist to be strongly rooted in the worldwide market. This restructuring gave the natives access to all the exotic products that were marketed by the foreign countries, and there was a sense of attraction that the natives developed towards the exotic products. In India, this led to a massive exchange of culture and values, because the foreign products not only marketed their product but also their culture, taste and etiquette. This alteration has a huge impact on the Indian society, where brands and products are the deciding factors for one's status in the society. So, to keep their markets blooming, capitalists focus on selling their products by endorsing them to their customers through advertisements that lay emphasis on gender roles and female objectification. This increases their appeal in countries like India, where women were always treated as second class citizens, who could help the dominant male to satiate his libido.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lori D Wolin (2003) in her article "Gender issues in Advertising- An oversight Synthesis of Research: 1970-2002", studied three decades of gender-based advertisements and recorded her input. She states that gender advertising literature findings, contend that gender differences exist.

Tartaglia, S., & Rollero, C. (2015) in their article "Gender Stereotyping in Newspaper: A Cross-Cultural Study" studied newspaper advertisements collected for one month and decoded them, the results demonstrated that men were always featured as playing professional roles, while women were only presented as decoration. Also, female characters were more often sexualized than male characters.

Linda Tuncay Zayer & Catherine A. Coleman (2015) in "Advertising Professionals' Perceptions of the Impact of Gender Portrayals on Men and Women: A Question of Ethics?" identified the advertisement patterns with professionals which recorded the vulnerability of women and the immunity of men to the negative consequences of gender biased advertising. It also tracks the discourses of the society on determining the buying decisions made by both the genders.

Bernard, P et.al (2015) in their article, "From Sex Objects to Human Beings: Masking Sexual Body Parts and Humanization as Moderators to Women's Objectification" reflected on the usage of women's body in advertisements and their impacts. It suggests that when female bodies are sexualized, they are perceived as objects, this results in the objectification of women at a primary cognitive level. They have also recorded the implications of this sexualized portrayal of women, which result in the dehumanization of the female gender.

III. OBJECTIVE

To analyse the differences in the portrayal of men and women in Indian advertisements, which emphasise gender stereotyping and the way the female body is objectified and exploited to encourage consumers to buy the products.

IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Do advertisements encourage gender stereotyping or gender roles?
- Can a consumer watch an advertisement and not be influenced?
- Is the objectification of women in advertisements a threat to the society?

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Critical analysis of the advertisements using these parameters

- Characterization
- Symbol
- Advertising Techniques

VI. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I. Characterization

In the Prestige glass top stove advertisement (I), a very famous Bollywood celebrity couple were roped in as the ambassadors. It shows the couple getting ready to go out, but the wife is in the kitchen getting ready by viewing her image in the glass top stove. This emphasises the fact that the kitchen space belongs to the woman alone, no matter what her profession or status in the society is. The reaction of the husband is of utmost importance in this advertisement, he is amazed looking at the shiny stove, this conveys to the audience that, the man is seeing the stove for the first time. This very short sequence clearly draws the line between the space of a man and a woman in the house, and this couple in particular, reinforce the fact that this space barrier is present even in elite and popular households. This encourages the audience and delivers a very subtle message that men and women are different and that they share very different roles based on their gender difference.

The Prestige Glass Top advertisement (II), is the latest version of the same product. When both these versions are compared, there is a lot of differences that are clearly visible. This version has only one celebrity female endorsing the product, which directly and intelligibly states that the need of a male counterpart in the kitchen is absurd or unnecessary. “Thus male-oriented products are more often promoted by male primary characters, and female-oriented products are more often promoted by female primary characters” [5]. The presence of the male in the previous version and the absence of the male in the present version, both highlight the same fact, that the kitchen space does not belong to the man.

At the outset, the Kinder Joy advertisement (IV) might not look like it is influencing gender roles, especially because it is a kid’s product, but when carefully dissected, there are layers of meanings that are conveyed by this advertisement. The toys that are placed inside each coloured package make all the difference, girl products have baby dolls, kitchen products or accessories, while the boy products have heavy duty toys, superheroes or sports cars and bikes. This depiction might look harmless, but it has a huge impact on the brain-developing pattern of the child. From a very young age the child is made to believe that men and women are not only different by biology but also in terms of the role that they are expected to perform in the society. The boys are inspired to be strong and independent men in the future, as they are made to believe as kids that the gender that they belong to is the powerful and authoritative one, which decides the fate of the female gender. Likewise, the girls are inspired to become good mothers and housewives as the toys that they get are exemplar of duty that they would perform in the future, like cooking for the family, tending their children or fulfilling other household chores. This characterization might look innocuous, but it subtly conditions the mindset of the children at a very young age and places before them the expectation of the society, based on the gender they belong to. “Regardless of the actual causes of gender stereotyping in Philippine television advertisements, gender stereotypes may have negative consequences, including restricting life opportunities” [6]. This consciously makes the children recognize their place in the society, directly resulting in the creation of sentient generation that grows up with an affiliation towards the constructed gender roles.

Th Hindu- Tamil advertisement (V) clearly demonstrated gender bias, in spite of the social responsibility that it promises to assimilate in its consumers. The gender construction here is ostensible, because everything looks normal and habitual. When this advertisement is inspected, it is seen that all the events that appear as

scenes are symbolic of the vast range of news that the newspaper covers, while this appears harmless, it is observed that the occurrence of a female actor in the advertisement is in only one scene, which is the scene where a woman goes through labour pain. All the other scenes engage male actors to represent the various sectors, like politics, sports, movies, religion, and business. This is a glaring example of how the gender construction is proudly prevailing in the society.

Symbols

Along with Gender construction, the Prestige Stove advertisement (II), also centralized on the beauty standards that are expected of a woman. Superficially, it might have looked like the actor was against the “slim standard” of a woman, but when viewed critically, the product is sexualized. It is made to fit into the beauty standard that is designed for the female, which is the size zero figure, this feature is seen as an added advantage to the product. The treatment of women as commodities is achieved by depicting the women traditionally, i.e. by laying focus on their sexual appeal or attractiveness or domestic servitude. [7]

The Butterfly Desire Mixer advertisement (III) also used the mixer as a sexual symbol, it was designed with the ideal female body attributes, like lean figure, attractive colour or complexion and a flawless tone. This artistry gave out a silent yet prominent message that the consumer can be easily persuaded to buy a product if it was sexually portrayed. Tuchman also asserts that women as “symbolically annihilated” by advertisements or mass media. This works out either ways, both when a woman is objectified and a product is sexualized, this evidently shows the dangerous attitudes that assimilate in the society, towards womenfolk.

The Kinder Joy advertisement (IV), shows one product that was designed in two different ways to suit the needs of the two genders. The choice of colour was a very prominent factor in this product design, that was symbolic of the gender differences that the brand encourages. The female product was in pink, which symbolises the naïve, cute and fairy-like figure of the female, whereas the male product was designed in blue, which conveyed that men are knowledgeable, bold and hardworking.

Advertising appeals and techniques

The caption of the Prestige Glass Top stove advertisement (I), is a clear proof of what they propagate, it translates as “if one loves his wife, how would he say no to Prestige”. This caption is indoctrinated into the minds of people, slowly but very strongly and it indirectly draws the line between a man’s role of buying the kitchen product for the wife and the woman’s role of happily cooking using the product. This use of caption is a very clever technique that stays in the mind of the consumer for a pretty long time and the essence of the caption that is repeated over and over becomes the expectation of the society towards both the genders.

There is a change in the caption used in the new version of the Prestige Glass Top advertisement (II), it translates to “if one loves his family, how would he say no to Prestige”, here the family is exchanged in the place of woman, this again is a word play, because it indirectly tells the audience that the happiness of the family depends on what product the woman uses in the kitchen. Again, lucidly stating the fact that the role of each gender is fixed and places that as the only factor for running a successful family.

The Butterfly Desire mixer advertisement (III) was one of its kind, because when all the companies were busy advertising their product’s efficiency and ruggedness, this brand relied on the product’s appeal. “a common

observation of sexual appeals in advertising is that they portray a heterosexual male view of what is attractive.” [8] It began with the husband’s sensual compliments, which made the consumer believe that he was complimenting his wife, but towards the end of the advertisement, the consumer realizes that he was actually describing the mixer. This portrayal may sound bizarre, but this technique of masking the reality and surprising the audience had a great effect. It is persuasive and at the same time creates curiosity in the consumer’s mind and encourages them to buy the product just to experience the product’s appeal.

The caption of the Hindu newspaper advertisement (V) that appears at the end promises to bring the world to the consumer in their own regional language, by providing them with quality world news. This does not merge with their gender biased worldview, because their advertisement focuses only on the prominent and herculean male gender and is completely ignorant of the female gender that is breaking the glass ceiling, off late. Their advertisement, shows a great inclination towards gender prejudice and thus can only propagate the Grand narrative of the influential male gender. This has great impact as the consumers, as it makes them believe a national newspaper can never be wrong.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This critical analysis of these advertisements brings in a lot of insights on how the minds of the people are indoctrinated by the falsity that is constructed by the media. Especially the fate of women, are decided by the media, and this construction, with constant repetition becomes the truth. This damage that is caused to the society can never be made right, if this biased portrayal of the genders continues. Advertisements that encourage gender stereotyping are often results of the poor characterization, this poses a great threat to the society, as it trivializes the role of women as mere domestic workers for the family. The use of women as sexual symbols in advertisements, justifies the violence and brutality expressed by the male dominant society towards women and normalises the same. Thus, this ill-treatment of women is seen as common phenomenon, which motivates the men to continue doing the same. Also, advertisements are a form of mass media that have tremendous influence on the society as it is open to all age groups and classes of the society, consequently it has a vital impact on framing the mindset of the individuals and the society as a whole. Therefore, companies and advertisers should realize that they have a crucial responsibility in making an ideal society that is gender-fair and egalitarian.

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