

'T.V. Advertisements' Are These Exploiting the Women

Dharwal Kumud*, Dharwal Tikshan**, Nanda Tapsi***

*Shri Guru Ram Das College Of Medical Sciences & Research, Amritsar, **Amritsar College Of Engineering, Amritsar.

***Vivekanand Institute Of Professional Studies, New Delhi, India.

Abstract: Introduction: The woman is being indecently depicted so extensively in advertisements, that she has become a commodity, a substitute of the product for which she advertises, rather than the featured product. Method: A 21 point questionnaire is put to medical and engineering students aged between 17- 20 years. A very strong public opinion is to be mobilized, especially from the younger generation, the forbearers of next generation, as they can only revolutionize this humiliating nexus between the business houses and the media. Result: The project here analyzes the thinking of the young community, present day torch bearers for creating a change in the society. The effort is being made, with the eclectic methodological approach and critical analysis using combination of questionnaire and content analysis, to bring depth to the understanding about the hype of women in advertising to the extent of exploitation. Conclusion: This reprehensible depiction of women lowers the body esteem and the self esteem and so the morale of female gender and furthermore leads to a general degradation of morality of the society leading to increased crimes against women. [Dharwal K et al NJIRM 2012; 3(1) : 119-124]

Key words: women, exploitation, television, advertisements

Corresponding Author: Dharwal Kumud, Dharwal Clinic, Cheel Mandi Near Ramgarhia School, Amritsar Punjab, India. 143001, E-Mail: Kdharwal@Gmail.Com

Introduction: Today we live in e-age, a society that is being dominated and confounded by electronic media where ads and commercials tell us what our necessity is and what isn't? Advertising has a major role in social reinforcement because of its presumed power for moulding opinions, attitudes and behaviour. Often, the product that the companies want to market is placed within reach of the prospective customers, the target consumer through advertisements. According to Ewen and Ewen¹, advertising not only sells us products and services but it also indirectly tells us ways to understand the world. Advertising has to generate sufficient profits not only for the manufacturer but also for its advertising agency. In order to survive, the advertising industry resorts to principles of competition, accumulation, and profits.

Women in India have emerged as a prime target for advertisers. Factors such as purchasing power for Indian women, coupled with their changing status in society and their higher television viewership have contributed to women being the prime targets by Indian advertisers. Advertising focuses attention on women's domestic role, reinforces traditional values and perpetuates the belief that purchase of advertised product can change you to a successful woman, wife or mother. While advertising encourages women to consume, it also

induces women to perceive themselves as commodities, as indicated by Winship².

The younger generation are the wings of today's society. Most of the advertisements are also made keeping this target generation in mind. An opinion poll of students was sought and then analyzed, whether they also feel the way as we the not so young feel, that there is commodification of women in advertisements which leads to lowering of body esteem as well as the self esteem of women and leading to degradation of morality of the society as a whole.

Aims and objectives:

- To study whether, women are used as a commodity in advertisements, for selling a product.
- To study that it is just glamour and sex that sells the product than the features of the product itself.
- To study if with the use of glamour and sex appeal the ethics in advertisement are strangled.
- To study whether, the body esteem, the self esteem and the morale of all women is lowered due to such indecent portrayal of few women in the advertisements.

- To study if through these depictions, there is a degradation of morality of the society leading to a general hike in crime against females.
- It was then critically analyzed and the results are discussed in the oncoming paragraphs.

Material and methods: After explaining the aims and objectives of the study and taking their consent, a questionnaire with 20 points and 1 for content analysis, was put to 400 males/ females medical and engineering students, aged between 17- 20 years.

Results: Student response were recorded as follow:

i Students were asked if they watched TV and for how long?

- 35% voted that they watched television for less than 1 hour,
- 51% voted that they watched television for 1 – 3 hours,
- 14% voted that they watched for more than 3 hours.

ii Students were asked what they preferred watching?

- 4% voted that they watched news,
- 8% voted that they watched soap-operas,
- 16% voted that they watched sports,
- 30% voted that they watched movies,
- 42% voted that they watched music channels.

iii Students were asked if they watched advertisements?

- 17% voted that yes they watched advertisements,
- 50% voted that they watched sometimes,
- 10% voted that they did not watch advertisements at all,
- 23% voted that they did surf the channels when advertisements came.

iv Students when were asked the time slot for advertisements for the kind of programs they watched?

- 82% voted that the time slot for ads watching was less than half hour,
- 18% voted that it was more than half an hour.

v Students were asked what excited them in an advertisement?

- 21% voted that creativity in advertisements excited them,
- 42% voted that ideas of advertisements,
- 27% voted that manner of presentations of advertisements,
- 5.5% voted that jingles of advertisements and
- 4.5% voted that the presence of fair sex in advertisements excited them.

vi Students were asked the reason for watching advertisements?

- 34% voted that they watched ads for awareness of new products,
- 8% voted that they watched ads to find improvement in old products,
- 18% voted that they watched advertisements for decision making to buy which brands product,
- 14% voted that they watched ads for comparison between two brands,
- 14% voted that they watched ads for its creativity,
- 3% voted for the models coming in them,
- 9% voted for the heck of just watching television.

vii Students were asked what in an advertisement was more important for a product to survive in the market?

- 26% voted that features of the product were important,
- 4% voted for the models in advertisements,
- 57% voted for the good quality products,
- 13% voted for the other factors of the advertisement.

viii Students were asked if glamour and sex appeal in advertisement is the main reason for advertisements to survive in the market?

- 22% said to a great extent,
- 54% said to some extent,
- 10% said not at all,
- 14% said can't say.

ix Students were asked if the presence of a woman attract the attention of viewers towards the advertisement?

- 24% said always,
- 64% said sometimes,
- 12% said never.

x Students were asked if they believed that the women are used as an object to be viewed in an advertisement?

- 32% said they strongly agreed,
- 49% said they agreed,
- 16% said they disagreed,
- 3% said they strongly disagreed.

xi Students were asked that how far the glamour factor was important as an addition to the features of the product to sell the product?

- 33% said to a great extent,
- 55% said to some extent,
- 5% said not at all,
- 7% said can't say.

xii Students were asked if they supported the use of glamour for selling a female product?

- 30.5% said to a great extent,
- 47% said to some extent,
- 15% said not at all,
- 7.5% said can't say.

xiii Students were asked if a product for a body part should be shown by a fragmented part of the body or the whole sensuous body should be used for the product to look more attractive?

- 12 % said that the whole sensuous body,
- 73% said that it depends from product to product
- 15% said the fragmented part of the body was enough.

xiv Students were asked if they craved for having the slim figure/ the macho physique of the model shown in the commercials?

- 39% said yes,
- 41% said sometimes,
- 20% said no

xv Students were asked if the presence of woman in commercials degrade the morale of the woman?

- 51% said yes,
- 21% said no,
- 28% said can't say.

xvi Students were asked how far are the ethics being followed with the use of glamour and sex

appeal, at the expense of decency and good taste in the advertisements?

- 12% said to a great extent,
- 20% said to some extent,
- 53% said not at all,
- 15% said can't say.

xvii Students were asked if the commodification of women leads to distorted mentality?

- 40% said yes,
- 44 % said can say so,
- 8% said no,
- 8% said can't say.

xviii Students were asked if it was true that even the viewers appreciate the advertisements and look forward for those advertisements that have glamour and sex appeal in them?

- 44% said yes,
- 32% said no,
- 24% said can't say.

xix Students were asked if the advertisements using Indian traditional values and Indian family bonding not effective than those showing eroticism to promote the product?

- 31% said yes,
- 42% said no,
- 27% said can't say.

xx Students were asked if they approved of the animated form of women in place of the use of women models?

- 29% said yes,
- 57% said no,
- 14% said can't say.

xxi Students were asked to name 3 advertisements where women were depicted but were not at all related to them.

- 97 % mentioned the advertisement of "Axe deo".

Discussion: Advertising is not a new concept rather it is an age old tradition dating back to Narad muni ji, the drum beaters of kings, the sales representatives, the pamphlets, the newspapers, the magazines, the big bill boards and the television commercials. However with the changing face of entertainment, the results of the survey are

crystal clear that television has become the most favoured medium of advertisement; 65% students viewing television for 3 or more hours; 67% out of that watched advertisements during that period but only 10% students said that they do not watch advertisements. The repetition of Television commercials day after day leaves an indelible mark on youngsters minds hence advertisers should ensure that it depicts a positive portrayal of women in advertisements Aruna et al³. The commercials have flourished everywhere like a virus, once it strikes there is no way we can remove the marks it leaves behind. It strikes by both audio and visual modes on the psyche of its unwary targets.

The definition of advertising is now outdated. It was previously, to endorse a product and highlight its qualities to induce the public to buy it. 34% of the students alleged that they watch ads for the awareness about new products and 30% more viewed to compare the products for decision making in their purchases. Advertising is now a key factor in deciding whether a product will sell or not. Ads create a blurred, confusing, a "murky picture". Brands are now brainwashing consumers to buy their products using images to sell the product. Moore⁴, comments that far from being a passive mirror of society, advertising is an effective and pervasive medium of influence and persuasion, and its influence is cumulative, often subtle, and primarily unconscious." Advertising creates an entire cultural worldview, shaping our attitudes and beliefs. The advertiser's aim is to make the product look as good as it can through an image with scenic locales, captivating situations, catchy dialogues, peppy jingles, and on top of all, a gorgeous beauty endorsing it. 63% of the students viewed the ads for their idea and creativity, however only 5% confessed that the models in the ads did excite them to view that advertisement.

Most of the advertising companies use ploys to give the audience a reason to buy their product that they are trying to sell by appealing to their innermost desires. The number one method of selling many consumer goods is the use of sex appeal in advertisement. Of all the methods used in advertising, sex appeal catches the attention best, because it is our second strongest drive, next

to our drive for survival. Whitman⁵, rightly believes that one of the life force-8 for the foundation of an advertisement is the desire to impress the opposite sex. At the same time, however, sex advertising is nothing new but an age-old phenomenon.

The voyeuristic portrayals of women as things not only to be looked at but also to be desired have always been used by some in order to maximize sales. Students do feel the same though they necessarily do not view the ads for this reason; 54% believe and 22% more strongly believe that the use of glamour and sex appeal in the ads is the reason behind the survival of the product in the market.

It is 'Sex and Manipulation' by the Media that sells the product than the actual features of the product. The students 32% strongly and 40% do believe that females are being used as an object to be viewed in an advertisement with 33% strongly believing and further 55% agreeing that the glamour factor plays an important role in addition to the features of the product in its sales. Most people know that sex appeal is used on them every day, but few realize that they are also being manipulated through certain words and writing techniques. This fact passes unnoticed because this has been hammered so often on our minds to have numbed our mental perceptions. For example, if you turn on your television, the majority of advertisements in between your favourite sitcoms project the female models, weather related to or even remotely not related, to the product. It is observed that in Indian advertisements ,there is gratuitous and irrelevant use of women's physical appearance "Whether it is to sell shaving cream or edible oil, milk biscuits or cigarettes, washing powder or condoms. Business houses vie with each other for the customers' attention, often using scantily clad nubile young women in their advertisement campaigns to achieve this end...". Levit⁶ observes that this attention getting strategy inevitably works.

Most women in today's media are viewed as sex objects, and most advertisements use this as a way to sell a product and 88% of the students do realize that the presence of a female model grabs the attention of the viewers more. However 30%

strongly and 47% do recommend the use of female models for a female product.

This may seem to be a harmless way of promoting a product but these sexually provocative advertisements have had a grave effect on our society. The mass media in today's society is money driven, and it seems that they will go to any length to amass profits. The media controls the images being aired but does not care what will be the outcome, aside from the accounting profit figures at the end of the day. Today's advertising industry has used women in a biased way. 63% of the students agree that the ethics are not at all followed in ads and are at the expense of decency and good taste. The ethics are kept at bay emphasizing that what the advertisements depict are social statements, the moods and the widely held and shared beliefs of the public. The advertising practitioners view ethics as: moral muteness, moral myopia, and moral descent Henthorne⁷.

Students views about an alternative to this offensive ads menace, that should a fragmented body part for the target area be used, had no clear verdict with 12% in favour of this but 73% said that it should depend on product to product. However even fragmenting female anatomy, according to Mills⁸, are associated with male focalization, the female is objectified for the male gaze. As Ewen and Ewen¹ pointed out, by showing the fragmented images of women's bodies "each body part becomes eroticized and sexual, to-be-looked-at, marvelled in and suggestive of allure and availability. Another option of using an animated form, met with a response as 29% in favour and 57% strongly against it.

Here we differ with students where 41% said presence of women in commercials does not degrade the moral of women but 12% a few sensitive ones believe that it does.

Women shown in advertisements represent a skewed idea of what the average woman should look like: a perfect hour glass, a zero figure, this leads to misrepresentation of idea of beauty in women's minds. The advertisements tell women that they are unacceptable unless they gain

enhancement through cosmetics, clothing, jewellery, and they need to buy the right ones: the ones the models and actresses use and wear. The image, consumer gains is that with a particular product their life would be better and happier, and then young women somehow think that their faults can be masked by these artificial products to present them in a new avatar which is just as, perfect as the model is. Dens et al⁹ feel thus these ads lower the self esteem of women.

Students gave an opinion on our assumption that this distorted sexually provocative female body depiction leads to distorted public mentality; 84% think that it does 8% say no but 8% are nonplussed in correlating the two factors. This, 'Who bothers' type irresponsible behaviour of media might be one of the reasons for a great hike in the crime against females.

The verdict by our flag bearers the young students is unambiguous. The media's 'sex sells' approach is of particular concern. That is the zeroed down target against which we should strike with our utmost efforts to wipe the miasma scaffolded over our consciousness created by the commercials.

The role of gender in advertising has been an issue in society since the advent of modern media and advertisi. The use of sex in advertising has been happening for several decades and the reason for it?--It works Blair et al¹⁰. Advertisements that are sexy in nature tend to be remembered more often than advertisements that are not. The question to ask, though, is how ethical is it to use sexual appeal in advertisements? These methods construe a female social problem that began in the 1960s with the portrayal of stereotypical housewives. Women in advertisements are shown in a negative fashion. Winship², feels that in this process, the female becomes depersonalized, dehumanized and objectified.

This exploitation of female sexuality in advertising has negative consequences. Thanks not/ to beauty pageants and the advertisements, teenage girls get the impression that being skinnier is sexier culminating into eating disorders like anorexia nervosa etc. More young men are also turning to drugs like steroids to help build muscle strength like male hunks of ads. As when asked from students the response was that 39% fully and 41% were some time fascinated by these advertisements

The aim of this critical analysis is to uncover the hidden meanings underneath the explicit images and words in the commercials and help excavate the hidden messages behind the symbols that construct gender bias. The advertisements and the sale of product have become lame and the "women have become the crutches for the companies to sell their product".

With this study the views of younger generation are before you. They also favour a freedom from the drudgery of this visual slavery bestowed on them and they want a respectable place for their ladies in the society where they are free from the loathing gazes of men and live in a peaceful environment with their morale high in self esteem.

Conclusion: Advertisements especially on the television have out-faded all other age old method of promoting the products. With this a nuisance rampart is a new wave of commercialization of women in ads. It is a clear cut violation of the advertising guidelines and ethics.

Female bodies, as an important constituent of advertising, have been turned into a commodity. The results of the study reveal that the younger generation also agrees with us that this menace has taken a herculean proportion and needs a lot of hard work and strength of character as a mass movement to put a curb on the ever increasing degradation of female body as "depersonalized, objectified nonentity".

However, confronting the negative effects of media on women, requires focusing on the entire spectrum of media representations that limit, demean or degrade women. Unless this vulgar portrayal of women is not prevented, we cannot build the morale of females and stop the rising graph of sexual offences against women.

References:

1. Ewen S, Ewen E. Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press;1992.
2. Winship J in Handling Sex in Looking on images of Faminanity in the Visual Arts and Media. Betterton R ed London : Pandora; 1987.

3. Aruna, Kotwal N, Sahni S. Perception of Adolescents Regarding Portrayal of Women in Commercial Advertisements on T.V. J Soc Sci. 2008;172:121-126.
4. Moore J. Women and advertising : the social cost of commercial culture. Justice; 2010.
5. Whitman D E. How to Boost Your Ad Response by Tapping Directly Into People's Brains. CA\$HVERTISING: How to Use More Than 100 Secrets of Ad-Agency Psychology to Make Big Money Selling Anything to Anyone", Career Press;2010.
6. Levit M. Sex in Advertising: Does it Sell? EzineArticles.com, Expert Author 15.02.2005.
7. Henthorne TL. Ethical judgments of sexual appeals in print advertising. J Advertising. 1994: 13-18.
8. Mills S. in feminist Stylistics, by Routledge.11 new fetter lane, London. 1995:36-48.
9. Dens N, Pelsmacker PD and Janssens W. Effects of Scarcely Dressed Models in Advertising on Body Esteem for Belgian Men and Women. Behavioral Science Sex Roles. 2010; 605-6: 366-378.