

Idealization of Women's Body Image in Advertising Industry

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Abstract—Ethics means a set of moral principles which govern a person's behaviour or how the action is conducted. Ethics has its roots in every domain like media, education, hospitality, business, environment etc. Ethics is the most important feature of the advertising industry. Ethics in advertising means a set of well defined principles which govern the ways of communication taking place between the seller and the buyer. The Ethical Advertisement is the one which does not say lie, does not make the false promises to the customers. But the pertinent question is: Are the ethical laws really kept in mind while performing an action? Big companies, today, have been endlessly using advertisements to promote their product. But are these advertisements ethically abiding? This paper will focus on the increasing negative role played by media in objectification of women in the advertisements that employs the picture of "ideal women" to promote their products. In addition to objectification, the other assault that media has on dignity of women is the increasing problem of "Dismemberment advertisements". Dismemberment advertisements employ female's particular body parts for the purpose of selling a product. These advertisements promote that if every body part is not flawless, then the possibility for beauty is ruined. Amongst the vast employment of advertisements in every sector like product promotion, service promotion, say for example transportation facility, activity promotion, for example running competition etc. The problem of dismemberment and objectification has spread its roots. Therefore, It has to be believed that this is a very serious issue that needs to be discussed and sensitised people on the psychological and sociological harm that has produced from the depiction of women in media.

This study involves a survey of 99 citizens of Delhi from the age group of 17-55 years with the questionnaire consisting of questions like: "Whether ads that objectify women help in increasing the sale of the product? Is it really important to portray a female on an advertisement to make it fancy and eye catching? Are there any provisions or laws in media ethics that support or refute dismemberment advertisements? What are the adverse effects of dismemberment ads on the society? What steps has been taken or can be taken to overcome the problem? The aim is also to examine whether in the chase for ideal body image, people are forgetting to focus on developing ones creative abilities that can help one in being a productive member of the society. Too much concentration on external beauty is not useful, neither for an individual nor for the society i.e. "Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder". It does not open out on the future and leads to stagnation. This paper also suggests that we are forgetting that nature is wild and therefore beautiful, and so are we. Beauty lies in the imperfections that distinguish us from one another. All women decorated, as Barbie's will not make us

moral human beings. It would rather lead to an envied competition of who is the best, as there is no closure to this conundrum.

Keywords: Dismemberment, Objectification, Idealisation, Ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

As the world is techno boosting day by day, it has become a basic need for the companies to reach the society through appealing formats. With neck-to-neck competition companies try to capture the market through innovative and eye catchy advertisements. Where on one hand, advertisements make the product reach its customer with the comfort of sitting at home, on the other hand advertisements deeply effect the way how the people look at themselves and to the society around. Hence, advertisements, nowadays, are encountering many debatable issues.

There has been a notion of "perfection" which has been spreading its roots in the minds of adolescent girls and women. But the one who decides the definition of this "perfection" is Media. This study majorly focuses on "The roles and implications of advertisements". Secondly, how the advertising companies on one hand, try to bridge the gap between buyers and sellers but on the other hand, have an adverse negative effect on the society. Thirdly, this paper analyses the increasing rate of cosmetic surgeries, eating disorders and increasing problems of depression as an outcome of a desire to become the ideal women, who is shown in the advertisements. And lastly, what laws are there to control the problem and what the general public can do to stand against this epidemic.

2. ADVERTISEMENTS: BOON/BAN

In today's era where the world is flooded with companies and the upcoming start-ups, reaching and satisfying the audience is like breath to the survival of the companies. Advertisements are audio or video form of notice or announcement in a public medium promoting a product, service, or event. Advertisements are at the same time boon and bane to the society. They play a strategic role in introducing a new product, sale of the products and hence minimising the gap

between the buyer and the seller. This in turn leads to overall growth and development of the society economically and socially. But the way in which companies promote their products is alarming. Companies try to hit the customer emotionally and through sexual appeal. These two methods have become a trump cards of the big companies for their overwhelming profits. Where the companies are enjoying the boosted turnover, such advertisements have become monstrous to the female's mental, physical and social health.

3. OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN

The procedure of representing or treating a human like an object is known as objectification and when that object is women then it is termed as objectification of women. If we believe that women have human rights and equal rights like man, then we must not support objectification of women because it is a violation of human rights. The advertising industry, fashion industry, media, enterprises and some in government and private agency use objectification as one of the tools to dehumanize, control and abuse women that leads to the denial of human rights and inequality. Whenever society and culture transform women's bodies into objects, it creates atmosphere where violence and exploitation of women are both tolerated and tacitly encouraged. This makes it simpler to abuse or maltreat women when we give women a status of objects instead of individuals or a person. Whether it is in a form of racism, sexism, and discrimination against transgender, terrorism, and objectification is "quite often the initial move toward advocating brutality or violence against that person."

In the world of advertising, companies tend to use images which they believe will help to make their product sell. Such images are mostly of women as compared to men. The story doesn't end here. The women that are being shown by the advertising and make-up industry are not the women who really exist. This woman is scar free, unimaginably tall, with a Barbie waist, zero figure size, with the most glowing skin etc. Men have always desired such women who exist only behind the screen.

Here comes the issue. Advertising companies have followed the mantra of "Create a Need". The woman in the ads doesn't exist anywhere but men always desire such woman. Women too on the other hand want to imitate the one who is portrayed in the ad and hence, are compelled to buy that product expecting to look impossibly beautiful. They try to internalize the perceiver's perspective into their own body. As a result, they start indulging in acts which are harmful to them, for example, bodily surgeries, using harmful chemicals on body, injecting botulinum, skin lightening sessions, breast augmentation, rhinoplasty etc. They end up living a fake and imitating life. Fedrickson and Robert (1997) coined the term to this i.e. "self-objectification".

4. DISMEMBERMENT

In addition to self-objectification, the epitome of objectification comes from dismemberment advertisements. Kilbourne (2002) in one of her discussions said dismemberment of women is the monstrous problem in advertising. Dismemberment ads employ female body parts for the purpose of selling a product. Such ads focus on one part of women's body, say breasts. Dismemberment ads leave many women feeling that their entire body is spoiled on account of one less than perfect feature. These ads promote the idea that women should view her body as many individual pieces and that each of her body part should be flawless. If every body part is not flawless, then her beauty is ruined. Women and girls from a very young age are made to view their body as something which needs constant alteration. This further leads to the problem that females suffer from disorders like body shame, appearance anxiety, depression, sexual dysfunction, and eating disorders. For example, Natan, a jewellery company floated the poster claiming that remote control for getting a woman ready for sex is a piece of jewellery.

A jewellery ad which shows how women can be bought by jewellery



PS Vita, a gaming company, introduced their new product by claiming that just as women's body can be used from either side for enjoyment, similarly this product too can be used from either side.

Brilliant ad by this gaming company



It can be seen that in both the advertisements, the women's face is not visible whereas her body parts are being highlighted and used to promote their products. So the media is not selling the messages and material, they are simply selling sex and by doing so they are making women objects of desire and sex.

5. IMPLICATIONS

When girls and women start to imitate one shown in the advertisements so as to internalise the perceivers expectations, they gradually get inclined to be more concerned with their observable body and end up neglecting their non-observable body attributes i.e. health and hygiene. They start taking body surgeries and steroids which are harmful to the body. When the young girls fail to imitate the women on the screen, they feel shameful and disgusted of themselves. In addition to this, they suffer from mental and physical disorders like depression, jealousy, lack of self-confidence, appearance anxiety, constant body observing, dietary issues, body disgrace and intellectual functioning, access to administration and political adequacy. They also get involved in unusual eating habits, engaging in unhealthy activities for getting validated by males, sexual dysfunction.

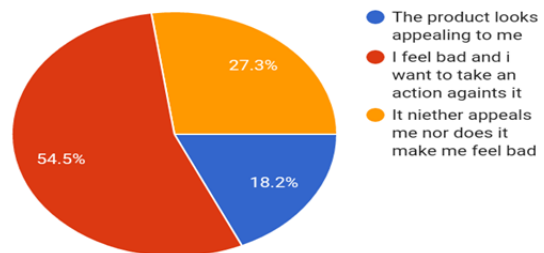
Objectification of women have societal effects also. Objectification of women advocates the treatment of women is mere playthings. Whether or not these images "pollute" the cultural environment, they certainly change it. For example, it has become a mindset now that if a women can sell her sexiness, she is the ace of everything. The amount of teen sexual activity is on the rise, the number of teen pregnancies are increasing, and the amount of people suffering from sexually transmitted diseases are increasing in society. With the increasing employment of white women in the advertisements, the condition of black women is ever worse. They face harassment by males of being ugliest and having no more value than a servant.

Kelbourne(2002) discussed in her article that women face these heart-gargling problems because they are trapped in the vicious circle of 'becoming what is there in our dream'. Our subconscious lets us that may be the use of the product will make us world-wanted.

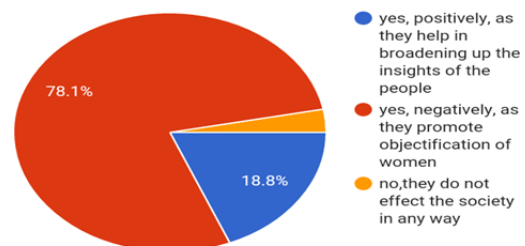
6. CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON THE BASIS OF SURVEY

A survey was being conducted amongst 99 citizens of Delhi from the age group of 17 years-55 years in which 42.4% were males and 57.6% were females. The participants were asked about 'How do they feel when they see objectified pictures of women on the advertisements?' Where more than 50% of participants reported that they feel guilty about it, 18.2% reported that the picture makes the product look more appealing. When asked 'Whether objectified picture helps in increasing sale of the product?' 87.9% of participants did not agree with it but 12.1% claimed yes to this. Adding to this, where almost 70% of the participants claimed that such advertisements should be banned, 18% claimed that there is no need to ban them and 12% feared that banning would decrease the sale of the product. Alarming response was seen when the participants were being asked 'Whether the issue was disturbing to them before also and what steps did they take?' Where more than 51% reported that the issue was disturbing to them from before also but they didn't take any step against it, 18.2% reported that they tried to take a step but they failed due to inadequate resources. Where almost 80% of the participants claimed that such advertisements are hazardous to the society, 20% claimed that such advertisements are helpful as they help in broadening up the insights of the people.

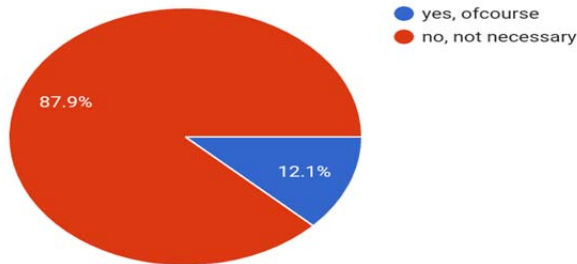
How do you feel when you see objectified portraits of women on the advertisements ?



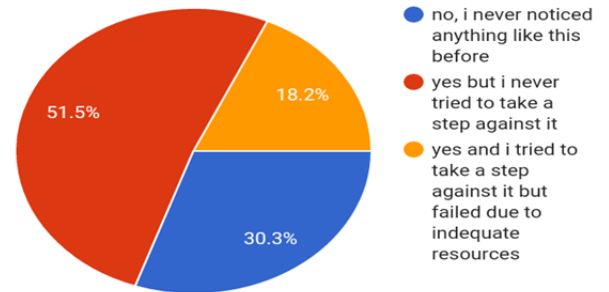
Do advertisements showing objectified pictures of a woman effect the society?



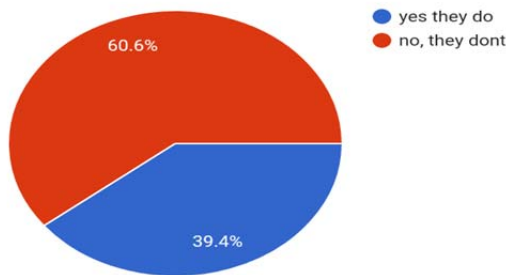
Do you think such objectified pictures are necessary to increase the sale of the product?



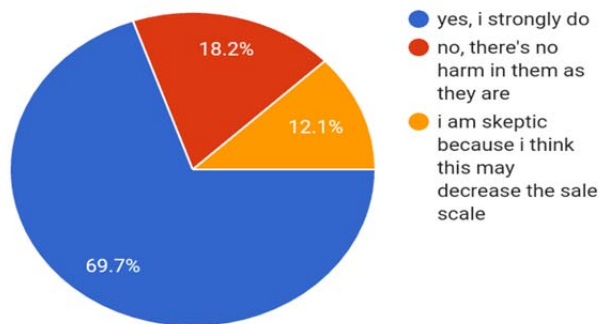
Was this issue bothering you before also but you felt helpless as to what can be done to curb it?



Does the objectified pictures of women on the advertisements make the product more appealing?



Do you think such advertisements need to be curbed?



7. CAN ANYTHING BE DONE?

There have been set code of conduct in media ethics to be followed by advertising agencies. In order to regulate the system, "The Advertising Standard Council Of India" was set up that looks after the propagation of an ethically abiding advertisement that doesn't give a false picture of the product, do not use humiliating picture of humans or animals, do not advocate crime or any anti-social act etc. There have been other legislations that have been passed for the same like 'Drug and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisement) Act, 1954' and 'Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Act, 1969'.

Apart from the legal setups, society at large can bring a huge difference. Although the path is tough but not impossible to achieve.

1. The first and the foremost step required is to curb the "ideal-woman" image which can only be done by flashing the reality in the advertisements.
2. Advertisement should create awareness and influence the consumers by providing valuable suggestions to make their purchase decision.
3. It is recommended to the media owners that only the advertisement which will give women prestige, code of conduct, moral values and thereby increase the standard of living and maintaining good living style of the consumers should be permitted to be aired.
4. Pay attention on the complaints coming from consumers about the product ads.
5. Women themselves should refuse to participate in such modelling contracts.
6. The root of such contracts will be abolished if there will be no market for such products, which is possible only when women will start giving refusal to use of such products.

7. The conducted survey found out that awareness would play a radical role in curbing this problem. Both males and females should be made aware of the fact that the “ideal” women who is portrayed in the advertisements are merely an outcome of picture editing and makeup. They are not real.
8. Moreover, companies should employ other means such as promotional offers, gender-neutral advertisements, giving free samples etc. to sell their products.

Adding to it, nowadays, there have been many companies who have started a foot against “real and not ideal women” advertisements, like, Dove, ITC, Aerie. Dove has begun a campaign that promotes Photoshop-free advertisements which claims that beauty of a women is not artificial rather the one which she possesses in reality.

8. CONCLUSION

Although the issue of objectification of women in advertisements have been ignored until now, but ignoring it further is no longer tolerable. It is high time we start understanding barrier and cultural strength that are liable for higher or longer rates of objectification of women cases in different cultures. Everybody deserves respect and each one has the Right to Live with Dignity.

Though there are now more advertisements that objectify men. But there’s a major contrast between objectify men and objectified women. At the point where men are objectified, they are considered as bigger, stronger and more capable whereas objectification of women shows that they are weaker, more defenceless, less powerful. But most importantly, men don’t face the same outcomes as women have to suffer. As we see from birth, men in all the society have true power and entitle with more rights which women don’t have. Laws support men while ladies still don’t get equivalent pay or have equal rights like men. We need to change the

advertisements/texts/dialogues that represent women in objectifying manner. So its important to stand up, to stand up with more and more individuals. When men and women discover the strength to do this, cosmos will change.

Idea of body imaging and beauty prescribed by the media and society coincides with the concept of a healthy living too. But defining oneself on such basis is totally unacceptable and absurd. Being conscious of your health is a positive aspect. It is a means to reach other ends. Conclusively, we can say that it can be a ‘means’ of life but not its ‘end’ goal. There is a lot of difference between getting inspired to stay healthy and getting inspired to have ‘Body goals’ which we see trending now days on the platform of social media.

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