
Impact of Advertisements on Women Empowerment (India)

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ABSTRACT

Advertisement is a powerful tool that aims to communicate details about the company's product / service to the target audience and persuade them to purchase it. As a consequence, advertisements also have numerous social, cultural and economic impacts upon the viewers. Visual – verbal imagery being an influential technique in communication, the people's values, attitudes and behavior are highly altered. With regard to Indian women, from being selfless nurturers and home makers for decades together, they are emerging as successful resources in all fields of business. There is a shift in the belief that it is a "man's world" and scores of women entrepreneurs and employees are proof to it. Despite all the hindrances and challenges thrown at them, many women have managed to emerge victorious. The society's beliefs and behavior has a major role, favorable and unfavorable, to play in this scenario. In this paper we attempt to understand what influence advertisements have on the empowerment of women of India, based on the impact they create in the society.

Keywords: *Women empowerment, Advertisements, Influence*

Introduction

Advertising is a very effective tool of communication to sensitize the people in a developing country like India. It has the responsibility to play an important role in the empowerment of the women particularly regarding their rights, privileges and other facilities. Advertising has evolved constantly throughout its history in response to changes in the economy, technology, fashion and societal norms. The dream of a woman to become perfect and beautiful is fulfilled by the commercials as the advertisers push women into the world of her dreams over reality and make them special, but only in the virtually sphere. Advertisements have thus become an effective market instrument in creating unwanted needs that guarantee to mold women into heavenly beauty.

And as for the attitude of the society at large, the never ending portrayal of women as objects in order to sell products has led to nothing else but the objectification of women, and it continues doing so.

Women Empowerment: Meaning

The topic of "Women Empowerment" is a burning issue all over the world. Feminist empowerment is defined as a process in which women come to believe in their ability to construct, and take responsibility for, their gendered identity, politics, and choices. It refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal-right to women, and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- J freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity,
- J have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace,
- J to make their own choices and decisions,
- J have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities,
- J have equal social status in the society,

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-) have equal rights for social and economic justice,
 -) determine financial and economic choices,
 -) get equal opportunity for education,
 -) get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias,
 -) get safe and comfortable working environment.

Advertising and Women

When televisions are switched on and advertisements run, we see a stereotypical image of woman – one who can take care of her family, is well mannered and empathetic, hard working, polite, beautiful, slim, pleases the members of the opposite sex quite easily, and the list goes on.

We live in an age inundated with advertising, from commercials on TV to posters on the sides of buses. We see ads every time we open a magazine or call up a Web page on the Internet. All that exposure has a significant effect, and the stakes are often more than deciding whether or not to buy a certain product. Women, in particular, can suffer some serious psychological blows from the subtle and pervasive effects of advertising aimed at them. Some of the prominent effects are:

) Unhealthy body images in advertising -- regardless of whether they are used to sell weight-loss products or something else -- project an unrealistic image of women's body weight and can contribute to the development of anorexia, bulimia and other serious eating disorders in women.

) Women often appear dependent, passive and child-like in advertisements, sending a message that such qualities are normal and even desirable in women. Even more disturbing, men receive the message that women should act submissive and dependent, and come to expect that in their relationships with the opposite sex.

) Advertisements often depict very young and impossibly beautiful women. As women get older, they feel pressure to look younger, ignoring the natural beauty of a 50- or 60-year-old body in an impossible effort to retain a 20- or 30-year-old one.

) Many ads present consequence-free scenarios with beautiful people enjoying, say, junk food or video games. When coupled with other images presented to women -- thinness, youth and sexuality -- it creates a dangerous impression that such a lifestyle is attainable, when in fact it can often result in low-self esteem and damaging habits.

) Cosmetic retailers design advertising to alter women's attitudes toward cosmetics, encouraging them to buy more products. Many advertisers shape this attitude by encouraging women to feel dissatisfied with their appearance.

) Advertising influences how women feel about themselves -- often in a negative way. Based on the images they see in advertising, women often feel they should be thin and beautiful and hold down full-time jobs while also being full-time mothers. These images are often unrealistic and unattainable.

Advertising and Society

Advertising and society both are inter-related and affect each other in many ways. Sometimes the content of advertisements is guided by society and sometimes advertisements have dominance over society. Even though an advertisement is not meant to be a moral guide, it is also true that it has certain responsibilities towards the society merely because it reaches millions of homes and influences people, directly or indirectly. The mass media are essential not only in promotion and propagation of innovative ideas but also in transformation of the society. Advertisement affects and changes the behavior, thinking, perception and ideas of people often. As an effective audio-visual media, advertising has tremendous impact on Indian society where majority of population is illiterate.

The market and the media have shaped how women should perform at home. The ideal woman is beautiful, a good cook, follows ritual and traditions, looks after elders and children, a perfect wife, whiten the husband's

and children's dirtiest white shirt etc. At the same time, women's bodies are constantly used to sell surrogate advertisements of cigarettes, tobacco and liquor companies. Marketers need to understand that incessant exposure to such messages does have an impact on the viewers and the society at large. Ads that inspire and empower women makes a difference, both to the way women feel about themselves and the way our society views the empowerment of women.

It goes without saying that the role of Indian women in real life has changed significantly over the years. However, advertisers continue depicting eager-to-please, male dominated females in order to reach out to the end consumers. Such advertisements not only affect the self esteem of women, but also influence how the society perceives them. Today's Indian woman is no longer confined to the kitchen, and this movement should be encouraged as well as applauded in the contemporary advertisements. So, instead of pushing on us these clichés, marketers should present their product strategically, simply because such ads knowingly or unknowingly affect our daily life and play a crucial role in shaping society's outlook.

Even though the modern ads of such women-focused brands promote women as confident, smart and career oriented, the bottom line remains the same – being beautiful to please others, either to get the much coveted job of an air hostess, to become a successful singer, to be a top actress, or to get settled in the end with a nice groom.

Ads that celebrate women and girls rather than objectify them have become wildly popular in the current scenario. The ripe time is now, when the audience is not as dim-witted as the marketers perceive them to be. Advertisers need to stop typecasting women and come up with a much better portrayal of women.

Conclusion

For decades we have been watching advertisements that portray women as submissive caregivers who are involved in rearing children and performing the usual household chores. If we revisit history then we will find several advertisements of the 80s which endorsed the stereotype that a woman's life is dedicated to the well being of her family alone, and that she feels successful when her husband or in-laws acknowledge and appreciate her efforts. There are many advertisements which, while portraying women as strong and independent, still reinforce the stereotypical role of the women being the home managers.

Thus, even when we say that Indian advertising has witnessed a noteworthy transformation in the manner women are portrayed, it somehow still supports the orthodox image of a female. While Indian advertisements may increasingly portray women as confident and empowered, they have not really stopped the objectification of women. Even though the progress made in this arena is visible, it is still quite slow, as compared to the progress we have made in other spheres of the society that we are a proud part of.

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