

Recent Trends in Depiction of Women in Advertisements

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Abstract: Advertisements are the most crucial means of communication because they are highly influential. Visuals used in advertisements greatly impact the viewer's perception of the object, person or product being portrayed. In this context, portrayal of women is an important concept to be studied. Women have been portrayed in various roles in advertisements over the years, ranging from 'inferior and domestic to strong and powerful'. This portrayal has evolved over time due to various changes in society and has helped improve the image of women. This paper discusses the current trends in how women have been portrayed in advertisements by considering relevant examples and highlighting the benefits of portraying women in good light. The paper rationalizes the benefits of this new trend through literature reviews, research findings and then draws a final conclusion.

Keywords: advertisements, change, portrayal, trends, women.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender based advertising has been very common and is meant to capture different sentiments and influence viewers. Women especially have been used as a medium to attract attention by being objectified. Such appeals were very common in the past for all sorts of advertisements by various brands considering that visuals of women have maximum retention in the viewer's mind. This kind of portrayal was very demeaning to women all over because it showed them in negative light. Many even objected such advertisements and over time advertisers on realizing the importance of women in society have begun to portray them in positive light.

The changes in Sexist advertising has been the result of feminist movements rising all around and more voices being raised against discrimination. Many women now even occupy pivotal leader roles in society which further helps prove that they too are capable and powerful. Regulations by various governing advertising bodies have brought about significant changes by laying out rules such as rejecting advertisements which depict women in an unacceptable manner. These regulations have caused a lot of advertisers to modify their advertisements to make it more acceptable. Such change is good for women all over and aims at improving their image in society. Brands like Tanishq, Airtel and Havells in the Indian context have taken a great initiative and used their advertisements as a medium to prove that women too are independent, powerful and deserve all the respect. Many researches have also proved that such positive images boost the morale of women and even instigate them to further purchase products of the brands that portray them in good light. Therefore the positive images of women shown have significant benefits to the brand as well as the morale of women.

Very few times do the creators of advertisements realize the power they have in their hands to make an impact because people are easily swayed by what they see, and believe it to be true too. This means that unless advertisers consciously take an effort to improve the image of women in advertisements no great change can be seen. Therefore the trends towards positivity i.e showcasing women in positive light and no more as inferior lies in the hands of advertisers who seem to be taking a keen interest in this direction leading to the trends in portrayal of women in advertising,

Need and rationality:

The need of this research lies in the basic fact that women form a major portion of consumers for every brand and that women are also very commonly portrayed in advertisements; sometimes in good light and sometimes negatively. This means that women will be dissuaded from purchasing certain products if they see themselves being objectified or shown in an unacceptable manner in the advertisements of that particular brand. This is useful for marketers all around to modify their advertising strategies and portray the modern woman who is no longer dependent on others and can fend for herself.

This research therefore helps establish how the new trends have boosted the morale of women and thus can also benefit brands by creating a positive brand image in the minds of women.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women have been portrayed in many different forms over the years. In the past, they were mostly portrayed as inferior and were objectified to gain viewer's attention. Lately there have been a lot of developments with respect to portrayal of women in advertisements and more importance is being given to the image of women. New strategies are being thought of by advertisers to improve the image of women and researchers too are proving that this change is essential especially if the world wants to move towards an egalitarian society. (Zotos & Tsihla, 2014)

The advertising field of Indian television has recently witnessed a significant change in the manner that women are shown. Many modern advertisements now portray women in a more positive light. The modern woman is more exposed to education and have a greater social mobility than their elders. Since they now have an independent purchasing power, they are being given more respect. Several guidelines regarding the portrayal of women in the law has also been stated which further highlights the need to portray a positive image of women in advertisements. (Khare, Srivastava N, Srivastava 2011)

Women now occupy pivotal roles in society in various fields such as science, business, arts, humanities etc. They are no longer inferior and can stand up for themselves. Female education is also being supported by many countries and is leading to the rise of powerful women. In this context research proves that the effectiveness of advertising too will increase if the modern women are portrayed because now women are more capable of understanding what happens around and raise their voice against discrimination. This means that advertisers too must modify their advertising campaigns and stop demeaning women and only objectifying them because they deserve much more respect. (Jaffe & Berger, 1994)

Gender based advertising has played a major role in influencing people. Initially women only portrayed the inferior role in advertisements but recent trends have shown that advertisers are willing to portray even women in male dominant advertisements and show that they are strong and capable too. This change however has been very small and requires many more advertisers to follow suit and take the lead. The female role in advertisements have also become less stereotypical and more modern owing to the changing mentality of the society too. (Moorthi, Roy, & Pansari, 2014)

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this research paper was to study various literatures relevant to the topic across many journals. Various periodicals and websites were also researched to obtain data. Data collection was through secondary sources.

Content analysis was done by studying certain relevant advertisements such as: Tanishq remarriage ad, Airtel ad with a woman as the boss and Havells 'Respect for women ad'.

Apart from content analysis distinct variables were identified to understand the changing roles of women in advertisements:

Roles of traditional women

1. Dependent on male's protection
2. Housewife
3. Objectification of women

Roles of the modern women:

1. Women in non-traditional activities
2. Career-oriented women
3. Voice of authority

Objectives:

- To analyze the trends in portrayal of women in advertisements
- To understand objectification of women in advertisements
- To understand benefits of portraying the modern women
- To study relevant literature based on the subject matter

Hypothesis:

H1: The current trends in portrayal of women might offers evidence of significant increase in advertising effectiveness By identifying the variables it was possible to understand the fact that indeed the role of women has changed over the years not only in society but also what is portrayed in advertisements. This change has led to a positive impact on the minds of women because when they see themselves portrayed in a positive light they are immediately influenced and inclined towards the brands because of a morale boost. It is human nature to be attracted towards something that increases your value which is true in the case of advertisements influencing women and being more effective when portraying respect for women rather than when women are objectified. Therefore there is significant evidence that trends in portrayal of women and advertising effectiveness might have positive correlation, and therefore the hypothesis can be proved.

IV. SCOPE OF STUDY

The aim of the paper is to evaluate the pros of the latest trends in advertising where women have been portrayed in a positive light. Advertisements have a huge impact on the mindset of the society and also have a strong influence on how people react to different situations. The paper tried to bring to light paper how the change in depiction of women aims to achieve a positive impact by boosting the morale of women and giving them more respect which would automatically increase the brand image and make the advertisements effective because women are now crucial decision makers in the house and if they are not convinced and if they are portrayed in an unacceptable manner they will retaliate.

V. FINDINGS

Some of the observations that have been made based through the various articles studied and also information gathered were as follows:

- In the past an extremely demeaning pattern was observed in various advertisements like Dior, Axe, and even Levi's showing women only as sexual objects just to gain attention and sell more products.
- This negative pattern however over the years has gained significant changes with more pro women organizations and more importance given to women by society
- Brands like Airtel, Tanishq and Havell's have taken significant efforts to make an impact:
 - a. Airtel in their advertisement portrays the modern powerful woman who is the boss of her company and works hard to remain independent
 - b. Tanishq shows an advertisement which portrays that women too are gaining freedom now and can get remarried and don't need to tie themselves up to conservativeness
 - c. Havells with its respect for women campaign portrayed how important it is to revere women and not just consider them as dependent and worthless
- Regulatory bodies too are making significant changes to their regulations and laying out rules to ensure that negative image of women is not portrayed
- Women no longer remain subdued and do not stand any intolerance any longer. This means that if women are being demeaned in advertisements they will no longer stay quiet and will voice their opinion. Women are also now crucial decision makers of the family so portraying a positive image of women is essential
- Many researches have shown that modern portrayal of women has increased the effectiveness of advertisements because women are now strong and powerful and need to be shown that way and only then will they be influenced to like the brand and consider it for their purchase
- In a world where women are progressing towards achieving equal rights every small thing has a huge influence and role to play in the process; and advertisements being so crucial to the society makes it all the more important to change the kind of advertisements and move in a more positive direction.

VI. CONCLUSION

Advertisements play a crucial role in the portrayal of gender roles. The connotations that are created by the media generally don't portray the true image but easily influence the viewer's opinion. In the past it was very evident that women were only shown in advertisements as objects just to gather more attention. This kind of projection was very controversial because it demeaned the image of a woman. As stated, advertisements are the tools which have a deep impact on the minds of the consumers so they must ensure that images of women are used in a positive manner.

People are now more aware about what is right and what is wrong and have learnt to voice their opinions. This is why advertisements where women were only objectified are declining because women don't want to accept that image any longer. They too are educated and occupy main roles in all spheres of life and hence want to be portrayed that way.

This research was aimed at understanding what the trends are and if it has been beneficial in any manner. The trends have definitely been enlightening to observe because it has shown how advertisers as well as society in general has evolved. Today the advertisements are expected to be more educative, ethical and informative. Women should not only be projected as the product-user but also as a product-maker to encourage their place in the society. Women too need to be shown as empowered individuals with confidence, positivity and authority.

Portraying women in a positive light also increases the advertising effectiveness because women play a major role in making consumption decisions almost in every culture; and are an important target of these advertisers. If women are displeased after viewing an advertisement then that will automatically create a negative brand image and the effectiveness of the advertisement would reduce. However if the advertisement had portrayed women in positive light then the situation would have been reversed.

Therefore in conclusion the recent trends in portrayal of women in advertisements has been positive because it depicts the new modern empowered women. Such advertisements are not only good for the brand image but also boosts the image of women in the world.

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