

# Stereotypes of woman in Advertising:

## A review

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**Abstract** - Advertising plays a crucial role in shaping the attitude and behaviour of society towards woman. For decades, advertisers are presenting women in their advertisements to generate more revenue. Women's role is often associated with different stereotypes by advertisers. In every form of media, women are portrayed by advertisers as just housewives - taking care of domestic chores, sex objects, dependent etc. This literature review brings forth the image of women in advertising since late 1960s. Also changing image of women in advertisements with time is studied with a glimpse of advertisements which have portrayed women positively and vividly.

**Keywords** – Advertising; women; role; stereotypes.

### I. INTRODUCTION:

Advertising is a main component of promotion mix that can be used to promote the advertiser's product or service. For centuries, advertisers are presenting women in their advertisements to generate more revenue. Advertising plays a crucial role in shaping attitude and behaviour of society. So advertisers should stop portraying women in negative roles. Women's role in media is associated with different stereotypes. Stereotypes are generally observations and assumptions about a person which can be either positive or negative that rarely communicate

accurate information about others. Literature on stereotyping of women in media revealed that various studies categories: women portrayed at home and with family, women and occupation, women and their age, women and their physical appearance, women as product representatives, women are presented as housewives taking care of domestic chores, the sex kitten, dependent, stupid etc. These stereotypes create a negative impact as it leads to forming notions about women that degrade them.

Advertisements broadcasted in various forms of media showcase women's body, it can be justified only if the product advertised demands it, but in products like cars, deodorants, shaving products etc where there is no sense of using them, women are simply being used as an objects to promote a brand. Similarly in some food brands are also use seductive image of women as if the food has something to do with sex. Women across globe are not only housewives, many women are working too. These days we can see women are outpacing men in every field, whether it is a corporate, sports, television industry, education sector, aviation sector and so on. But some advertisers are still depicting women in selected negative roles only. Advertisements of products like soap, detergent, toilet tissue and child care items depict the women as having the ultimate responsibility for making the buying decisions for these products which is not true. Women are also presented in advertisements as sex objects. To attract male consumers women are made to look appealing and are used by advertiser's as sexual objects. Defining women as

sex objects has become the leading representation in the media.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Beginning with late 60s, studies that talked about women portrayals in the media was by Bardwick and Schumann in 1967. They analyzed male and female role portrayals in television ads and revealed that women are portrayed primarily as homebound. In 1974, Courtney and Whipple investigated image of women in television commercials and found significant differences between men and women. It showed women appeared mostly in advertising of cosmetics products and were less likely used in advertisements for cars, trucks and related products. Seventy-five percent of all advertisements using women were for products found in the kitchen or bathroom to men were portrayed mostly in house settings rather than business settings. Women did not make important decisions and lastly women were depicted as dependent on men and were regarded primarily as sexual objects.

McArthur and Resko (1975) claimed that women were most likely to be defined not by occupational or other types of roles, but in roles that defined them in terms of their relationships with others, i.e. as spouse, girlfriend, parent or friend.

Bardwick and Schumann (1976) analyzed the portrayal of women in television commercials and concluded that to an amazing extent women are preoccupied with dirt; the television woman is shown as housebound. Some studies presented evidence pertaining to the lessening of the stereotype associated with women. They claimed that women are no longer only portrayed as housewives or in the home, but also in business settings. (Ferrante, Haynes & Kingsley, 1988; Lysonski, 1985;).

The majority of these studies have been conducted in the USA, even though most criticism about the stereotypical depiction of women in advertising appeared to stem from Europe (Macdonald, 1995; UN, 2000). The emergence of retro-sexism, however, highlights the premise that female role stereotyping is not solely a 1960s or 1970s phenomenon, but rather a contemporary global problem (Bordo, 1995).

Table I

Category		Description
Women in traditional roles		
1.	Dependency	Dependent on male's protection; In need of reassurance;
		Making unimportant decisions
2.	Housewife	Women's place is at home; primary role is to be a good wife;
		concerned with tasks of housekeeping
3. Women in decorative roles		
	Women concerned with physical attractiveness	Women in pursuit of beauty and physical attractiveness

		(e.g. youthful)
	Women as sex objects	Sex is related to product; sex is unrelated to product
4.	Women in non-traditional roles	
	Women in non-traditional activities	Engaged in activities outside the home (e.g. golf, football)
5.	Career-oriented women	Professional occupations; entertainer; non-professional;
		Blue-collar
6.	Voice of authority	The expert
	Women portrayed as equal to men	
7.	Neutral	Women shown as equal to men

Table Source: Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976); Mitchell and Taylor (1990); Lysonski (1985); Zotos and Lysonski (1994)

### III. CHANGING STEREOTYPES OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS WITH CHANGING TIMES:

Woman role in advertising has changed over the time. In modern advertising, women are taking a broader role reflecting the transformation taking place in society. In recent years, advertising has witnessed a significant transformation by presenting a more realistic and balanced picture of woman. Although, woman in India, are portrayed as traditional and stereo typical over the decades, there is a difference in product categories advertised by them. Advertisers in the decade 2000 are willing to portray woman in male dominated advertisements as compared to advertisers of 1990s. The findings of the study are in sync with those found by Munshi (2000). He states that the portrayal of women has changed, but only slightly. From housewives to business leaders, from sex objects to sports person women role in advertising is changing in recent times. A glance from the past advertising research regarding women portrayals in ads:

1890s: Led by Susan B. Anthony, the National American Woman Suffrage Association was formed in May 1890. At the same time, this ad from 1893 clearly says that a woman's place was in the kitchen, far from polling sites.

1943: This ad, created by J. Howard Miller for Westinghouse Electric, was designed to boost morale during wartime as women took over jobs vacated by men who joined the military. As one of the first depictions of an empowered woman in an ad, the poster was revived by the feminist movement in the 1980s.

1950: TWA (Trans World Airlines) asks, "Who says it's a man's world?" Women are starting to take on a more active role in ads.

1970s: Courtney & Lockeretz found that the ineffectiveness of advertisement to reflect the true range of women's roles within society. Many ads tended to portray women as homemakers neither making important decision nor doing important things, in most of the cases dependent on men or sex objects. 1973: It was found by Wagner and Banos that more advertisements showed women in

working roles and portrayed women in more responsible working capacities. 1974: Sexton and Haberman conducted study which was based on how women depicted in magazine advertisements found that women in cigarette advertisements are frequently employed in a decorative capacity, while in home appliance advertisements women were depicted in a traditionally way. On the other hand, Airline advertisements tended to show women as sex objects. They empirically tested the role portrayal preferences of women in advertisements based on 100 reactions of five female roles with seven product advertisement situations, and concluded that the effectiveness of role portrayal depended on the product.

1980s: Enter a new kind of woman, who can have it all — be a mother, a professional, and ... wear power suits. Hofstede found that the U.S. culture to be more masculine than the Indian culture. Based on his findings, he ascertains that the women in the U.S. would be portrayed in more diverse roles than women in India.

1990s: Bellur and Bellur conducted a study in order to analyse the impact of socio-economic changes on marketing in India. They concluded that westernisation had environment. A breakdown of traditions barriers, higher literacy rate and development of a new brought about substantial changes in the social marketing environment provides a manifesto of change where women not only in traditional roles, but also in modern roles.

#### IV. ADS PORTRAYING WOMEN NEGATIVELY:

- **Gucci:**

This ad attempts to demonstrate a women's place in the world at a man's feet which is very offensive. This shows man stronger and dominating than women. It was later banned in the United Kingdom for "abasement of women's dignity".

- **Del Monte 1953's ad campaign:**

Del monte "Women safe ketchup" ad campaign had a simple message – "We've make it so easy to open our ketchup bottles even women, with their weak fingers and stupid not-man brain, can open to access our quality vinegar-tomato puree." That advertisement shows how in that time, until women's right started playing a major role in our society, women are often viewed with less power than men.

- **Axe:**

Axe ad that went with the tagline 'Even angels will fall' shows how a man who uses Axe deo becomes so desirable that even angels will fall down on earth because Axe deodorant has made him "irresistible" even for angels to avoid temptation. The ads fit in overall with the Axe brand, which is all about the perspective that using it will make men more attractive to women. The most disturbing element of the ad lies at the end, where all the women flocking towards him as if they are his belongings please the single man. Axe has sexualized their product as their slogan, "Spray More, Get More," indicates that the self of

ownership the man has over his deodorant is equivalent to that he has over these sexualized women. The sexism of the marketing is unpleasant and damaging.

- **Vim Bar:**

The Vim Bar ads have always shown women washing dirty utensils and complaining about how they cannot seem to clean the food stains. The ad has shown that a mother cannot attend her son's football match because she has piles of utensils to clean and there is no time for her to go watch her son play football. And in comes Vim Bar, shown to be a saviour to many women like her, mothers and housewives who are shown to be working in the kitchen and portraying the ideology of the nation that a woman belongs in the kitchen. Women are not the only ones who are responsible to clean utensils. It's also the men who have an equal responsibility of helping out their wives in the kitchen.

- **Amul Macho:**

Amul macho 'Ye to bada toing hai' ad campaign featured women washing her husband's Amul macho underwear. Women while washing fantasizing as if he is still wearing it. The expressions of women in the ad make it sexually explicit and vulgar. Within a short span of its release the IB ministry of India banned its screening but soon after this Advertising Standards Council of India cleared it for public viewing.

In past, majority of ads objectify women and portray them in stereotypical roles, there is some ray of light with some such ads which are made a wholly different attitude towards women and have shown them in an altogether different light. Now femininity has also become associated with a stronger, more independent and confident women. Few ads that no doubt changed the attitude and role of women in advertisements are as follows:

- **Titan Raga 'Woman of Today':**

This little short sees a woman bump into an old lover at the airport. As the conversation turns nostalgic, the guy claims that they could've worked out as a couple, if she'd only quit her job. Suffice to say, this doesn't go down too well with the woman, who makes it clear that she'll do whatever she damn well wants to. According to Titan, they celebrate the woman who is modern, progressive, confident and passionate.

- **Femina:** This brand's ad came out in the year 2000, where a young girl dressed like a bride walks around and as the viewers think of her as the bride, they find that the whole 'marriage atmosphere' was for her mother's remarriage after the death of her husband. With the release of this ad, many people were of the view that it elevated the position of women on small screen.

V. **ADS PORTRAYING WOMEN POSITIVELY:**

- **HDFC Standard-** Then came in 2008, HDFC's 'sar utha ke jiyo' campaign. A

new difference was seen where a young daughter writes a cheque for her dad's new car with her own savings and her dad accepts after an initial hesitation with a look of pride on his face. In this ad the stereotype of the mentality of is that a girl's earning cannot be taken by the parents or say that girl's are not capable enough to support parents was challenged.

- **Tanishq:** Tanishq – A Wedding to Remember ad sends out a bold message, where a dusky lady with a child is getting remarried. This ad was so much-loved because of its new thinking that it garnered almost half a million hits on YouTube in the first week of its release. Widowed and divorced women in India have historically been treated as outcasts, but this ad aimed to reject that notion. The clip shows a woman marrying for the second time, and her husband displays love and respect for both his wife and her young daughter.

- **Dove – Real Beauty:**

Dove attempted to highlight this issue in this emotional video campaign, showing women the stark difference between two drawings of themselves – one they created and another drawn by a forensic artist specially trained to produce realistic portraits of people.

## VI. CONCLUSION:

Advertising plays a crucial role to conserve the status and respect of women in society as it is ubiquitous. Whatever be the product or service, woman have become a key component of a successful advertisement. But the modern advertising is changing its face now as women have proved themselves as equipotent to men in every field. Advertising agencies should go beyond the stereotypical portrayal of a woman. Advertiser must also show every aspect of woman in their advertisements to generate a vivid picture of women in the society. Moreover to avoid getting their ad blocked, they should stop portraying women as just sex objects. They need to show her as an independent being who don't have to rely on someone for her every single need and she has a place beyond the boundaries of her house.

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