



Representation of Indian Women in Advertisements

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ABSTRACT:- The paper relates to the depiction of Indian women in contemporary advertisements and the possible effects such type of advertisements can have on the youngsters and the society in general. It also questions the need of showing such kind of portrayal in the media and the role of governing bodies in the same.

Keywords:- advertisements, sexuality, society, women.

Remember the Cadbury Dairy Milk advertisement in which a young and seemingly modern wife simply asks her husband, “When was the last time that you said I Love you to me?” The husband stops eating, looks at her with a little bewildered expression, then silently gets up and opens the refrigerator and brings a Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolate for her. She says that it was just a simple chocolate which he gives her every day, so he tells her that this is his way of indirectly telling her that he loves her and she also realises it without any furthering of dialogues. What kind of emotions does this advertisement evoke in the audience? Emotions of love and wedded bliss, but certainly not of sexuality. The demure expressions which this young couple display are the base of Indian relationships and consciousness. (Arvind Ravikumar)

Dr. Anthony Curtis, Mass Communication Dept., University of North Carolina at Pembroke on his webpage defines advertising as, “... the paid, impersonal, one-way marketing of persuasive information from an identified sponsor disseminated through channels of mass communication to promote the adoption of goods, services or ideas.”(What is Advertising?)

Today we are living in a world where a person is hardly allowed any space to think or to make a decision on his own or based on his/her own intellect /knowledge/wit. All the decisions that one makes today are made on his/her behalf indirectly by the capitalists through media which includes everything fiction books, magazines, newspaper, movies, advertisement and news. Now the next question which would arise obviously is how does it happen? In a lay man’s language if one wants to understand, it creates images in one’s mind which are enforced so much by the regular display of these advertisements that finally people start believing in the fictitious creation of media as the ultimate truth.

These created images are related to everything that we do in our daily lives to our views on different genders which have a profound influence on the behaviour of its audience. The question which arises is that, when people try to imitate something they had seen or heard, are they capable enough to segregate the right from the wrong? The advertisements when aired on TV are not able to restrict its audience to a select group which would be able to understand the underlying meaning of the message being conveyed through the commercial. The result is an audience which varies from hoodlums, people of notorious minds and interests and people whose bent of mind is only based on use of women for personal or social exploitation. In the beginning, advertisements were once shown to sell a product, however, as years pass, advertisements begin to objectify women and begin to use women as a way to sell products. Will these roles stop putting women in such domesticating roles, or will women continue to be the subject to products? (Women’s role in Advertisements)

The world with the concept of globalization has become a place where every human being has become a machine for whom what matters is I, Me, Mine and worldly pleasure’s have become a priority for which one is ready to do anything, and a lot of money is being invested to project and nurture this ideology.

Kacey D. Greening from Capital University in his research article “The Objectification and Dismemberment of Women in the Media” writes:

Kilbourne (2002) pointed out that advertising is a 100 billion dollar a year industry. Each day we are exposed to more than 2000 ads. Advertising can be one of the most powerful sources of education in our

society.... The most prominent means of transporting this sexualized female identity is through the mass media. Female objectification was once thought imponderable but, through a growing body of research, this belief has been proven wrong. The existence and the implications of female objectification have recently been explored.

Empirical studies have indicated that women are overwhelmingly targeted more for sexually objectifying treatment than men (Gardner, 1980; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Henley, 1977; Van Zoonen, 1994).

If we focus our attention on gender issue only and its representation in media, some very basic questions which come up are- how a particular gender is represented? Why is it done? Does it have any effect on society? And if it has what kind of effect is it? It seems that all advertisements have one philosophy where the female is the prize that one will get if one uses the advertised product. Ultimately the female for whom there is so much hue and cry for emancipation and equality is reduced to a mere product which has no commonsense or wit to make decisions. She could be influenced and seduced at a moment's notice by using some manly tactics and the easiest way is by using the advertised products.

What exactly is it, though? If objectification is the process of representing or treating a person like an object, then sexual objectification is the process of representing or treating a person like a sex object, one that serves another's sexual pleasure. (Sexual Objectification)

Let's talk about some advertisements which are the extreme opposite of the Cadbury advertisement for eg. Slice, Wildstone, Denver Deo etc. These advertisements are explicitly sexual and make one question their impact on the Indian sensibility. India, even though the land of Kamasutra and Khajuraho, is very secretive about an individual's sexual and romantic life. But these advertisements create a divide between the younger and the older generation. Gen Y believes more in what the media and their celebrity idols show them on air than what their parents or educators preach. This creates confusion in the minds and behaviour of this targeted audience. These advertisements leave an impression on a common man's mind that a woman is just an object, which can be exploited easily as she is very weak by nature and always needs a man for her protection.

The first advertisement to be considered is of Wild Stone deodorant, which has now been taken off air but was there on TV long enough to have an impact on the targeted audience. The action of the advertisement begins with Drum beats echoing within the walls of a colourful neighbourhood as family members and revellers carry on the Durga Puja. The WILD STONE Man is shown walking along a corridor and that's when an open haired, sensual, sari clad woman who is on an errand for the Puja bumps into him. And at that very moment, the fragrance of WILD STONE takes her by storm and creates a fantasy in her mind's eye. Flashes of an illegal sexual liaison flood her thoughts. She is snatched back from her fantasy only to realize that the WILD STONE man is looking at her confidently, like he knows about the thoughts that just ran through her mind. He leaves with a look that says they're going to meet again.

The female is dragged to the level of a mere object which is there to be consumed, and if one uses the deodorant in question it happens automatically, one needs to do nothing the very fragrance of the deodorant will make her ready to be seduced. The way sexuality in India is portrayed it appears as if it has no sanctity and it happens anytime anywhere, there is no concept of fidelity. The advertisement in a way sends the message that this woman is open for sex. She presumably can be had by anyone. And how can anyone guarantee that the audience watching the advertisement is not thinking the same about every woman around them.

Robert Vaux of Demand Media in his article, 'The Negative Effects of Women's Advertisements' writes:

Sexuality can be a powerful motivator, and many advertisements use sexually explicit imagery to help sell their products.... 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.

Second advertisement to be considered is of Wild Stone Zatac Talc. This advertisement starts with a very common looking helper in a tailor's shop applying the talc on himself, right after which a beautiful, coy lady in orange colour sari enters the shop. The boy starts taking her measurement and as he touches the skin of the lady, she feels as if ice was being slid on her body erotically. Sensing her reaction (and the attention that he is getting because of using this talc), the man continues taking measurement and the lady seems getting more out of control.

After watching the advertisement there are two things which become very important to talk about: First, the advertisement shows something which is not true i.e Is it practically possible that two Indian adults will start to make out in the broad daylight, in a crowded bazaar, when another man, quite older in age is sitting just some feet away from them? Secondly, it sends out a wrong message to the young people, because in today's life young people, watch a lot of TV and most of their decisions are influenced by what they see on TV. Will it not make youngsters or very average looking men to think that using this product will make them sexually appealing? And when this thing will not happen in reality what will they resort to in frustration?

The article, "Negative Influences of Media on the Society" says:

Do you feel like attempting a stunt from a movie? Do you base your fashion on what you see the celebrities are wearing? Do you copy the hairstyle of your favorite famous personalities? Have you ever attempted to walk model-like in an attempt to imitate those ramp models in fashion shows? If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it is accepting the influence on media in your life. However, it is important to dwell on the negative influences of media because these can change the dynamics of the society for the worse.

The third advertisement to be considered is again of Wild Stone deodorant and the setting is in a Train:- A young sari-clad woman is shown travelling alone on a long-distance train. She's immersed in her Sidney Sheldon when a six-foot-tall, handsome, well-groomed stranger walks in with a briefcase. When he sits across from her, she gets a whiff of his perfume, which distracts her so much that she can't return to her book. She glances at him. He's clean-shaven, broad-shouldered and casually dressed. He's reading a newspaper and minding his own business. She stands up as if to adjust her luggage on the overhead rack. Deliberately, thus, she exposes her back, which is almost bare except for a thin strip of cloth that holds her blouse in place. She even pulls her long hair to the front to facilitate an unobstructed display of her shapely back. The man begins looking at her. She knows it, and turns around to acknowledge it. Then she sits down, gracefully lifts her leg up on her seat and proceeds to unclasp her *anklet*. The allurements over, she sits upright and smiles at him seductively, confronting his gaze, waiting for the next move. Just then, to spoil it all, the ticket inspector comes by and says "Mrs Kumar, your ticket, please?" She blushes. The train keeps on moving. (A Ban that Stinks)

What is this advertisement trying to portray- That every girl or woman (even if married) is always open for a sexual liaison? Are there no moral or social ethics or any boundaries which need to be followed? The sacred institution of marriage- is that just a farce? How many men/ fathers will not think twice before letting their wives/daughters to travel alone? And why is she made to read Sidney Sheldon only, are there no other books available? On the other hand, the Men! Who will stop their imaginations or desires from seeking forbidden pleasures? Just think of the millions of men-women, boys-girls travelling at one point of time in the country. Can the producers of such kind of advertisements certify that their product is not sending a wrong message in the society and will never lead to any crime anywhere in the country?

Portraying woman as an object is not limited to any one type of product only, but it is so amazing that every product ultimately is made related to sexuality and the girl becomes the trophy or award in return for using that product.

There are advertisements where one doesn't even understand the purpose of the girl in the particular advertisement. One such advertisement broke all barriers, when it comes to relevance and appositeness. Most of the people will have to apply their minds with full concentration to understand its meaning, if ever they could. The advertisement belongs to JK Super Cement Company. The advertisement starts with a woman coming out completely drenched from the sea, she is dressed in a red bikini completely and the setting is of the sunset as background. The Lady takes 4-5 steps and then a slogan rings from behind as ' J K super cement "strong cement".'

Obviously the purpose of an advertisement for any cement company is to show its products strength but one fails to understand how it relates to the product. This advertisement got repeated at least 100 times during the day and every time left one wondering what could be the purpose behind this depiction. "Some advertisements use women that are irrelevant to the product, but use the female as a way to sell the product to the audience." (Women's role in Advertisements)

The woman in the advertisement is used just to grab the attention of the male audience, without any decipherable connection between the product and depiction. In another advertisement of the same cement there is a young girl dressed in red, dancing in circles in front of a minaret in some secluded area and then again the slogan from the voiceover *Ummeed hai isme kuch Khas hai* is heard being spoken in the background. A study "Sexuality, Contraception, and the Media" published in the Pediatrics journal reveals that:

Teens rank the media as the leading source of information about sex, second only to school sex education programs. Numerous studies document adolescents' susceptibility to the media's influence on their sexual attitudes, values and beliefs....

Research also shows that heavy exposure to media sex is associated with an increased perception of the frequency of sexual activity in the real world.⁴³ As a result, television may function as a kind of "super-peer," normalizing these behaviors and, thus, encouraging them among teenagers"(191 -194)

In the above stated context let's discuss two more sensational advertisements from the Wild Stone deodorant brand. The advertisement opens with Dia Mirza dressed in a white bathing robe and with her semi-wet hair she walks towards the window of her room. She gets a strong whiff of perfume and when she opens her eyes she sees a young man in the house opposite to hers. They exchange glances. Instead of drawing the curtain she opens the window wider, looks at him and returns back indoors. In the next shot, she is shown dressed in a red sari, seated by the dressing table and doing her makeup. While doing so, she quickly checks if he is looking at her. When dressed, she again walks to the window, looks at him seductively and then leaves. The

advertisement then shows the man spraying himself generously with the Wild stone deodorant and the voice over announces “presenting Wild Stone Red.” The advertisement ends with the man looking on and wondering where she has gone. The very next moment, the doorbell of his house rings. He pauses for a bit to contemplate who that might be and then grins. The voice over says, “It happens.”

This advertisement again surpasses all the imagination where the lady and the boy are in separate houses but as soon as the boy sprays the deodorant all the senses of the lady are shut down and she is shown behaving as animals do during their mating season. She is eager to build relations with the boy keeping aside all the Indian sensibilities and behaviour. This advertisement again furthers the idea of female being a second rate citizen who has no brains, no intelligence, or wisdom to contribute to the progress or betterment of the society, but she has only one thing on her mind, always all the time and that is sex, which is so uncontrollable a desire that if someone has something with him to attract her, he can seduce her anywhere, anytime easily!

In another advertisement of the same brand, people are shown flying kites on their roofs and it is a kind of celebration. All of a sudden, a fragrance reaches a girl’s nose and she feels intoxicated. As soon as she realises that this fragrance is coming from a boy on a nearby roof who has sprayed the deodorant, she leaves the string of the kite that she is flying intentionally and asks her younger brother to go down and bring it back. After having removed the obstacle, she walks straight to the boy, showing the audience an erect back and her body language too is sexually very aroused. She jumps onto the boy’s roof and cuts the string of his kite with her teeth and the message is conveyed. The expressions and body language of the actress make it more explicit. Finally a voice in the background sings ‘*Dil beyimaan, beyimaan, beyimaan hai...*’

Let us evaluate the advertisement firstly from a feministic point of view. Does the girl play an active role in what is happening? The answer is no. Does she act as someone who is capable of making a decision and one who has her own choices? The answer again is a no and it is because her only role in the advertisement is to be enjoyed like a product. Moreover the philosophy behind the product is that all these encounters keep on happening wherever the male who has used the product goes.

Advertising visuals have objectified women to the extent of portraying women as a mere sum of their body parts, denigrating their intelligence and individuality. The advertisements make girls and women feel inadequate if they do not conform to the image projected in the advertisements. Stereotyping of women is a widespread phenomenon in the Indian media extending beyond the realm of marketing. (Gender Sensitivity & Indian Advertising)

Second this happening in a country, where these relations are considered to be pious and secret this is what is catered to the audience where, even now all the members of a family right from an infant to the oldest watch TV together. Take an example of another advertisement i.e. of AC Black Whisky. This surrogate advertisement for AC Black Whisky (displayed product was AC Black Apple Juice) had stirred up a bit of controversy in the early 2000’s and eventually was taken off air but only after everyone who watches television had seen it at least once. In this advertisement, a man takes a sip of Aristocrat Black Apple Juice/Whisky and looks at an attractive woman on the other side of the room, and as he keeps drinking her neckline keeping on getting lower with every sip that he takes. As he sips for the kill, he is astonished to find his own shirt open. The woman is also playing the same game. The tagline says, *Kuch Bhi Ho Sakta Hai* meaning Anything is possible.

If one looks at this advertisement, what message does it send to the society which is conservative and where people drink less because of the values? In order to make them do what the company desires, again a girl is being used and as the man keeps sipping the whisky and with every sip her neckline keeps on getting lower.

It appears that the songs in India, especially in Punjabi, are patronized by the people who deal in liquor. Almost every song seems to glorify the habit of drinking. The philosophy is the more one drinks, the smarter and desirable one becomes. One can watch any movie released in recent times it will always have a scene, where the young people be it girls or boys are drinking and dancing in a night club, and they go on drinking mindlessly and next thing is a bedroom, so ultimately it is established as something like style statement for young people.

Coming back to advertisements again Katrina Kaif’s commercial of Slice became quite famous because of her subtle seductive act in the advertisement. This ad is widely known as the ‘Aamsutra’ and the uncut version of the advertisement is as long as a short movie and shows the pretty actress in a never seen before sensual avatar. The way she licks the drink from her fingertips and uses her body language makes her look very sensuous and desirable. (Impact of Media use on Children and Youth)

Sexuality can be a powerful motivator, and many advertisements use sexually explicit imagery to help sell their products, 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. Some of the advertisements in this category are Levis jeans advertisement featuring Akshay Kumar, Maxima Waterproof Advertisement, Denver Deodorant, Engage Deodorant and Sun feast Dark Fantasy chocolate biscuit to name a few. But the question which remains unanswered is : Is all this required in order to sell a product? How much and to what extent is the female body to be used and exploited?

What is the effect that all this is having on the young generation, the people with disturbed mindset and unsatisfied yearnings? The companies just want to rake in the *moolah* with having any kind of Corporate Social Responsibility. There should be a limit to which a human body can be used and strict governing bodies which look after all these cinematic representations so that a wrong message is not sent to the society.

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