

A HISTORICAL STUDY OF EMERGING TRENDS OF FEMININE POWER IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract

By examining the history of women in Advertising, the present study bibliographically analyses trends and patterns of the portrayal of women in Advertising spanning from early 19s to 21s broadly. The objective of the present study is to focus on the historical aspects of Advertising with a special focus on the portrayal of women in print and electronic media of Advertising. Advertising has been one of the key affecting factors in society at large and business in specific. Henceforth, the present paper broadly covers the history of advertisement, the history of women in the advertisement, its emerging trends, and patterns to understand how this will affect the purchasing intention, brand image, attitude, and persuasiveness towards the advertisement. Advertisers have an important role in portraying women in their advertisements. The study shows that earlier the image of women portrayed in advertising was stereotypical and only limited to products related to feminine, housewives, Jewellery, health and child care which has been now changed to a combination of knowledge, intelligence and ability showing Feminine Power. Being historical in nature, the present study is carried out through a bibliographic and descriptive method to understand its trends and implication with both the dimensions like portrayal of women in advertising in general and portrayal of women in women' media.

Keywords:

History of Advertising, Female portrayal, Culture, Society, Femvertising

1. Introduction

This paper imparts the historical background of the emerging trend of portrayal of women in Advertising. Although research related to portrayal of Women in Advertising, women power portrayal, degree of gender stereotyping in media and many more have an extensive history, the historical aspects of portrayal of women in Advertising and its emerging trend have not been studied so far. By examining the history of women in Advertising, the present study analyses trends and patterns of the portrayal of women in Advertising since its inception to current trends. The objective of the present study is to focus on the historical aspects of Advertising with special focus on portrayal of women in print and electronic media of Advertising.

Since its inception, Advertising has been playing a role in the market specifically and society at large. Advertising reflects current trends in culture while informing individuals about brands, products, services, and ideas (Pollay 1986). Starting from the ancient time to the middle age or till the invention of the printing press, there were various techniques/models through which business persona run their text/image advertisement.

The present study observes the trend of women's portrayal in Advertisement considering Advertising as a social institution, though more often it is an industrial institution affecting society and culture at large. At first, the paper deals with the bibliographic presentation of newspapers and magazines published for women specially, and tries to seek the way women were portrayed and its major themes, and then looking at the advertising portraying women in specific. By doing so, the emerging trend can be observed clearly.

In 1770, 'The Lady's Magazine' the 1st women's magazine was published in England for upper class women, showcasing their fashion life and etiquettes. The fictions and articles published incorporated in the magazine were portraying the fashion life of upper class women. The year 1830 became significant in the history of the United States when Godey's Lady's Book advocated that women should focus on the domestic sphere to be submissive, pious and pure (Kosut, Mary 2012).

Persistently, in the year 1863, The Delineator- a fashion magazine published tissue-paper dressmaking patterns. Gradually the magazines started portraying household interest of women. The Harper's Bazar published in 1867 began with publishing women's interests like fashion and household chores. 1st published in 1892, Vogue remains the leading fashion magazine to the date. Henceforth, examining time from mid-seventies to end of nineties, the major attraction or theme for any newspapers or magazine remained fashion and household core for women.

Just before the emergence of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, the early 20th century began to portray women in power as in 1941 first in its type Wonder Women appeared in DC Comics issues. Though the portrayal of Wonder Women did not intend to be published through any Advertising, the portrayal in various media of the film, itself Advertised emerging trend of women in power. At the same time, the decade also marked sexual objectification of women in media through advertising and film. Interestingly, the advertising and media related to sports remained male's dominant field wherein women were portrayed occasionally.

Gradually, the feminist movement, though initially meant for white women only, started affecting portrayal of women in Advertisement and media in general. The decade became prominent when Ms. Magazine started addressing issues from feminist perspective. Lots of dramas, movies and books were published or released during the time centring women empowerment. The book related to portraying image of women in movie was published by Molly Haskell in 1974 with a title 'From Reverence to Rape' (Kosut, Mary 2012). Gradually towards the end of the 20th century in the year 1996, a magazine titled 'Bitch: Feminist Response to Pop Culture' broadly focused on the response to antifeminist messages in media.

The decade of 1980s to 1990s portrayed black women in the media through various activities. In 1981, a video game Ms. Pac-Man featuring a female protagonist became popular. Towards the end of the decade, many girl-oriented video games were launched in the market. Around the year 2000, various beauty pungent advertisement and promotion accelerate beauty product into the market. With the trend of makeover and beauty products, advertisement related to objectification for the sexual appeals run like anything. Along with Advertisement of beauty products, sexual objectification and pornography were in trend where portrayal of women and their body was subject to sexuality. In his study, Lazar (2006) studied beauty ads promoting beauty campaigns; advertisement helping women looking more attractive. The study altogether shows that though it

is labelled as objectification, advertisements portrays women enjoying their beauty. Through these advertisement, they are also influencing by being more attractive. Post-feminism also supported the women who have control over their own sexuality.

The recent trend in advertising portrays women beyond their traditional roles (Grau and Zotos 2016). They have been pictured as business owners, doctors, athletes, professors, and other roles that were previously assigned to men. These advertisements also show females taking their own decisions. Gradually, the trend has been emerged in advertisement showcasing women power in decision making, emerging roles as change maker and able to change people's perception, thoughts and behaviours. Additionally, this also gives an indication of women taking charge of their own decision. There has been enough research in the area of Femvertising, i.e. advertising showing women in power, highlighting different dimensions like advertisement showing Women Empowerment (Abitbol and Sternadori 2020), advertisement containing messages of pro-women (Windels et al. 2020), and advertisement as social movement marketing (Abitbol and Sternadori 2020), etc. Some researchers have defined the change in social power as the ability to modify and control others' states by providing rewards or administering punishments (Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003). This type of advertisement indicates emerging trend of constructing social concept of gender in society. Additionally, this has ability to pursue the audience's perception differently by changing the existing one. Media at large and Advertisement in particular plays major roles in deconstructing gendered define role in society.

Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that characterize a particular group of people. It encompasses the way of life and identity of a community, including their language, religion, traditions, social norms, arts, music, literature, and cuisine. Culture is not limited to national or ethnic groups; it can also exist within smaller communities such as subcultures or even organizations.

Cultural practices and expressions vary widely across the world, reflecting the diversity of human experiences and perspectives. Culture plays a crucial role in shaping individual and collective identities, influencing how people think, interact, and interpret the world around them. It provides a framework for social interaction, establishes norms and expectations, and helps to preserve and transmit knowledge from one generation to another.

Cultural diversity is highly valued for its enrichment of society, fostering creativity, understanding, and tolerance. However, cultural differences can also lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and challenges, particularly when people from different cultures come into contact. The study of culture, known as anthropology, helps us understand and appreciate the complexities and nuances of different cultural practices and beliefs.

It's important to note that culture is not static but rather evolves and changes over time. Globalization, advancements in technology, and increased interconnectedness have contributed to the blending and exchange of cultural ideas and practices. This dynamic nature of culture highlights its adaptability and capacity for innovation.

Overall, culture is an integral part of human existence, influencing our thoughts, behaviours, and interactions, and it shapes the rich tapestry of human societies around the world.

C. Wright Mills affirmed that people "are strongly predisposed to see, hear and read what they have been trained to see, hear and read. Yet we cannot overlook the social bases of their fascinated receptivity."

Advertising plays a very crucial role in our society, it reflects the social norms and culture of the society. It has the power to influence the mind of the people, how they see each other and also how they treat each other.

Advertisement, often referred to as advertising, is a form of communication used to promote or market a product, service, idea, or organization to a target audience. It is a way for businesses and individuals to reach out to potential customers, raise awareness about their offerings, and persuade consumers to take a specific action, such as purchasing a product or supporting a cause.

Advertisements can take various forms, including print ads in newspapers and magazines, radio and television commercials, online ads, billboards, posters, and sponsored social media content. They employ different techniques and strategies to capture attention, generate interest, and influence consumer behavior. These techniques can include appealing to emotions, showcasing product features and benefits, using celebrity endorsements, creating memorable slogans or jingles, or employing humor or storytelling.

The primary objectives of advertising are typically to increase brand awareness, drive sales, and establish a positive perception of a product, service, or brand in the minds of consumers. Effective advertising campaigns often involve thorough market research to identify target audiences, understand their needs and preferences, and craft messages and visuals that resonate with them.

Advertising plays a significant role in the modern consumer-oriented economy, where businesses compete for consumers' attention and spending. It helps consumers become aware of products and services, compare options, and make informed purchasing decisions. Additionally, advertising can also contribute to shaping cultural trends, influencing social attitudes, and promoting social causes.

Overall, advertising is a pervasive aspect of contemporary society, serving as a powerful tool for communication, persuasion, and commercial success. Its impact extends beyond the promotion of goods and services, shaping consumer behavior, popular culture, and societal attitudes.

Time line of Women Perspective in Advertising:

Over the decades, when in 50's advertising showing women in the kitchen, managing her husband and handling the whole work of the family. A meta-analysis of advertising globally found that women are pictured more apparently as dependent and in the home than men.

In 70s and 80s portraying of women shifted from dependent women to somehow independent from men and shown in different way. Nevertheless, this wasnt better for women. Still women were portrayed as sex symbol or insurmountable images of fineness.

During that time, advertisements often portrayed women as faultless objects or symbols representing desirable conditions rather than as individuals. This objectification had developed over decades of using women's images as attention-grabbers in ads. While some depictions were obvious displays, others were more subtle.

Magazine advertisements specifically used parts of a woman's body to attract attention to their products. For example, the Ivory Snow ad focused on legs, which served both as a source of sexual appeal and patriotic pride. The Ivory Snow ad cleverly combined the notions of economy and vanity. Since nylon stockings were scarce, using this soap promised to extend the lifespan of stockings. The advertisement aimed to encourage women by making them envision themselves with famous legs, further emphasizing the desirability associated with the product. The advertisements during the 1950s objectified women by emphasizing their physical attributes, particularly their sexual characteristics. Women were often depicted as objects or symbols rather than as individuals, which reflected the prevailing societal attitudes and norms of that era.

Clairol and other advertisers capitalized on women's desire for physical perfection and attractiveness. By offering a product that promised a transformation through hair color, Clairol tapped into the dissatisfaction some women felt about their physical qualities. The idea of achieving a dream-like perfection by simply changing one's hair color was a powerful motivator for women to purchase Clairol products. The desire to be attractive was not unique, but it received more extensive and approving coverage from advertisers compared to previous years. Advertisements for personal hygiene products, such as Calox tooth powder, emphasized the enhancement of sexual attractiveness as a value proposition. They suggested that using their product would make the user "outstanding" and implied that this quality was essential for attracting the opposite sex. Furthermore, these ads implied that having attractive teeth alone would be enough to find and maintain a romantic partner. The advertisers targeted women's insecurities and aspirations, presenting their products as means to achieve a higher level of desirability and attractiveness. By doing so, they created a narrative that linked physical appearance to personal fulfillment and success in relationships.

Car advertisers were not hesitant to employ the use of attractive women to capture attention. In particular, the "Body by Fisher" ads sponsored by General Motors emphasized the concept of "winning beauty," but the promotion of the actual automobile was downplayed. The car sketch featured in the advertisement was relatively obscure and had little connection to the central photo of the young women. As a result, the relevance of the women to the "Body by Fisher" phrase was minimal and subliminal, suggesting that their presence was primarily intended to be eye-catching rather than directly related to the product being advertised.

This type of advertising approach, where the focus is placed on the attractiveness of women rather than the features and qualities of the product itself, is a common tactic used by advertisers to draw attention and create positive associations. By using beautiful women in their ads, car advertisers aimed to capture the interest and desires of potential customers, suggesting that owning their cars would make individuals more attractive or desirable. The subtle and indirect connection between the women and the product allowed for the creation of a subconscious link between physical beauty and the car brand, potentially influencing consumers' perceptions and preferences.

From 90s to 21st century this portrayal was continue. Development of social media platforms, a new way for communication and marketing plays a crucial role in how girls see themselves. Almost nine out of 10 (88%) girls say they compare themselves to images in the media and half claim they feel negatively affected.

2. Theoretical Review

To understand all the aspects of feminine power portrayal in advertisement, the present paper studies research done in the field. In 2006, Lazar investigated the post-feminist portrayal of women in advertisement. The study focused on promoting beauty products through 'beauty ads' helping women to be more attractive. Though the advertisement considered as the objectification of the feminine body and sex, females showed in the advertisement portrayed in a way of enjoying their body, beauty and influencing other people around them by being more attractive. This may be also interpreted as females taking charge of their own sexuality. The post-feminism thinking which advocates subjects related to female sexuality were being reflected in the advertisements. The results suggested in the findings of the paper classified feminine power portrayal in advertisement in four categories: 1) Empowered Advertisement promotes product purchased by or for female consumers, 2) Advertisements based on knowledge as power portray women in education, 3) Agentive advertisements show women practicing freedom of choice for the decisions of their life, and 4) advertisement related to sexual power portrayal of women indicate their controlling power in the environment.

Previously, Women were not portrayed in advertisement as roles related to the gender of women were assigned to male characters portrayed as women. On the contrary, recent emerging trend in advertisement shows working professional women, taking charge of their own decisions, portrayed as physically strong person representing sports figures.

However, there still exists a difference between the portrayals of female versus male athletes. For example, female athletes are featured mainly in women's magazines (Grau, Roselli, and Taylor 2007). Gradually, the trend had emerged portraying women athletes taking charge of their own. The advertisement by Nike in the year 2010 portrayed female athletes with a tagline: 'I'm making myself' (Arend 2015) suggests women's power portrayal in advertisement demonstrating physically powerful women. The trend in advertisement portraying women in 1995 and in the year 2010 has a paradigm shift from traditional portrayal of women in advertisement to the powerful, intellectual, and decision maker.

Research done in the field of portrayal of women in Advertisement highlighted the key aspects related to influence of advertisement as persuasive. Research related to women in Advertisement, especially about Femvertising which represent women empowerment messages in advertising influences other women in their day-to-day life decision making.

Research done in the field of portrayal of women in advertisements highlighted the role of women as mothers, lovers, wives, housewives, or sexual objects. In 2016, Grau and Zotosemphasised the portrayal of women in advertising with all the possible roles assigned to her. This also creates a stereotype about how women and men should behave, leading to unrealistic expectations from gender.

A research paper titled 'Role Portrayal of Women in Advising: An Empirical Study' (2021) shows how portrayal of women's role impacts consumer perception towards the product. The authors Sharma and Bumb had also covered differences in view of men and women towards the stereotypical role portrayal of women in advertisement.

Eisend (2010) did a meta-analysis of 64 research articles focused on the gender stereotypes in the advertisement from 1986 to 2007 broadcasted in on TV and radio suggesting that there still exist stereotypical portrayals of women. The advertisement challenges the stereotypical portrayal of women by highlighting the empowering position of women known as Femvertising (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017).

In 2006 Lazar categorised women power portrayal in advertising. Gill in 2008 also worked on power portrayals of females in advertising. She broadly categorized female power in advertising as more vengeful, agentic, and sexual.

3. Methodology

This research paper is descriptive research paper where the data collect from the secondary sources. Being historical in nature, the present study is carried out through a bibliographic and descriptive method to understand its trends and implication with both the dimensions like portrayal of women in advertising in general and portrayal of women in women's media.

4. Analysis / Discussion

Since the late 19th century, the portrayal of women i.e. the face and form of women is to draw attention and attractiveness to advertisers for their products. The advertising easily divides into different sections like sexual objectification, women's maternal and marital roles, and division of labor both at home and in the workplace. Each section is concerned with an analysis of certain advertisements. As the number of products increases day by day the appearance of women is altered, it might seem more glorified, younger and wonderful. This transformation of women for more attraction changes their portrayed in more personified allocations.

During the 1950s, the image of women in advertising began to shift. While women were still portrayed in traditional roles, there was a change in the way their personal attributes were used to sell products. Instead of relying solely on their feminine charms and personal qualities, a new concept emerged where the image of women themselves became a commodity.

The emphasis shifted towards portraying an idealized version of female beauty and perfection. Advertisements frequently featured photographs of beautiful women to attract attention to the product. However, the reader's identification with these images was assumed to have changed, reflecting a growing emphasis on the perfectibility of the female face and figure.

This shift in advertising can be seen as a reflection of the evolving cultural and societal expectations placed on women. The emphasis on the idealized female appearance in advertisements reinforced traditional gender roles while also promoting the idea that being female meant striving for a certain level of physical perfection.

It's important to note that this description captures a historical perspective on advertising in the 1950s. Advertising and its portrayal of women have continued to evolve over time, reflecting changing societal norms and values.

5. Conclusion

While there were certainly positive strides made in terms of diversity and empowerment, there were still prevalent issues with stereotyping and objectification. Here are some common themes and trends in the portrayal of women in advertisements during that time:

1. **Gender stereotypes:** Many advertisements in the 1990s reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Women were often depicted in domestic roles, showcasing them as caregivers, housewives, or mothers. They were frequently shown in the kitchen, doing household chores, or caring for children.
2. **Sexualization and objectification:** Advertisements in the 1990s often used sexualized imagery to sell products, particularly in industries such as fashion, beauty, and fragrance. Women were portrayed as objects of desire, with emphasis placed on their physical appearance and attractiveness rather than their abilities or intelligence.
3. **Thin ideal:** The "thin ideal" was prevalent in advertising during this period. Many advertisements featured slim and often airbrushed models, perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards and promoting body dissatisfaction among women.
4. **Beauty and cosmetics:** The beauty industry heavily targeted women in the 1990s, with advertisements promoting various cosmetic products and treatments. These ads often emphasized flawless skin, long and voluminous hair, and perfect makeup. The portrayal of women in these ads implied that achieving these beauty standards was essential for success and self-worth.
5. **Fitness and health:** The 1990s witnessed a rise in fitness and health-focused advertisements, with women being targeted as consumers. Fitness products, exercise equipment, and diet programs were marketed using images of toned and fit women, suggesting that achieving a particular body type was necessary for a healthy and fulfilling life.
6. **Empowerment and independence:** Alongside the prevalent stereotypes and objectification, there were also advertisements that attempted to showcase women as empowered and independent. Some brands sought to break away from traditional roles and portrayed women in professional settings, highlighting their achievements and aspirations.

6. Rational / Implication of Study:

By featuring women in advertisements, movies, streaming content, and television entertainment in a more positive and empowering way, it is argued that not only will society benefit, but brands will also experience positive business outcomes.

Research suggests that advertisements that portray women positively have a greater impact on brand perception in both the short and long term. The portrayal of women in advertising influences attitudes towards the creative content itself and affects overall brand sentiment.

Therefore, it is essential to depict women in a positive, appropriate, and modern manner to foster positive associations with the brand.

While progress has been made in some advertising categories regarding the depiction of women, there is still work to be done to ensure that all women are represented in a positive and empowering light. This means moving away from stereotypes and outdated portrayals and embracing diversity, inclusion, and the representation of women from different backgrounds and experiences.

Advertising has the potential to shape how we perceive each other and can serve as a source of positive role models for young girls. By showcasing women in empowering and aspirational roles, advertising can contribute to driving societal change and promoting gender equality.

Brands can also benefit not only from contributing to social progress but also from the positive association with doing good for society. Consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that align with their values, and advertising that promotes gender equality can help brands attract and retain customers who appreciate such values. By doing so, brands can improve societal attitudes, provide positive role models, and drive positive business outcomes.

7. Limitations of the Study

The present study is confirmed to the historical portrayal of women in advertising; print and electronic media. The study does not focus on gender in large but portraying female in particular.

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