

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING INDUSTRY OF PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Advertising is one of the most powerful and effective tool that directly affect the buying behavior of consumers also it shapes people's perception of beauty, gender roles, and societal norms. Women representation and their objectification in advertisements have received attention throughout the world in general and particular in Pakistan. In Pakistan, the advertising industry has historically depicted women in stereotypical and objectified roles, perpetuating gender inequality and reinforcing traditional gender roles. In many Pakistani advertisements, portrayal of women is as subservient and passive with dependency upon men. Furthermore, women are often sexualized and objectified in advertisements, reducing them to mere objects of desire. This study emphasizes that how media build objectified descriptions of beauty gadget of desire, leisure rather than human. This study argues that how the stress of beauty and perfection build by media can be harmful for women and especially for young girls. This study discuss the ethical issues of operating women as a sexual object by advertisers in marketing industry. This study also discuss despite these negative trends, there are some positive developments in the advertising industry in Pakistan. Some advertisements have started to challenge traditional gender roles by showing women in non-traditional roles and promoting gender equality. However, these examples are still few and far between. A semeiotic analysis through purposive sampling technique has been adopted to analyze the data.

Keywords: Sexual Objectifications, Famine Beauty, Women in Advertisements, Gender, Stereotype.

INTRODUCTION

Media is a strong dynamic force for socialization and brings the people close and connected with each other (Rideout, 2007). As compared to the past years people are more engaged and constant towards media (Kung, Picard & Ruth, 2007). Being a powerful instrument media can take part as a central character in transmission of information and influence the beliefs, lifestyles and attitude of people (Jewkes, 2011) Number of studies verified the immense impact of media on public and they get the same message and adopt similar approach from media as well.

Since 2002, in Pakistan and particularly in the field of media the representation of women is being changed. Credit of liberal media policy has given to General Pervaiz Musharaf (Iqbal, 2012). In all genres of media, freedom of expression can be observed whether it's Print, Electronic or Social Media. With the passage of time and requirements of the society different mediums of media gain popularity, Advertising in fact is one of a creative form of communication (Kazmi, Batra, 2009), that have constantly influence on our daily lives, as well as this is an unavoidable component of a social life. Advertisements were meant to sell the products but currently we are blasted by images of selling everything (Khan & Allil, 2010).

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Advertisements are always demonstrating the glorified picture of the world, which might not always be positive and pleasant (Zawisza, 2019). Different messages, approaches through different commercial ads are inside in our intimate relationships, our homes, our hearts and our heads (Narasimhamurthy, 2014). As compared to European countries and rest of the world representation of women in advertisements and gender role of women in society is also different in Asia from those of other countries like America and Britain (Moorthi, 2014)

Asian societies are patriarchal societies and unluckily media is also part of it. Systemic patriarchy has already taken so much away from women and everything associated with femininity. (Pallavi, 2017) In early years of television commercials, back in 1980's a stereotypical representation of women has been observed by taking care of family and domestic responsibilities (Sexton, 2008). The earliest studies demonstrated the ads in magazines etc reflected stereotypical roles like women don't make decisions or perform main tasks excepts of domestic responsibilities (Baker, 2005). Women are just born to accomplish household stuff, they are completely dependent on men and needs their protection. (Amber, S. 2002).

Celebrity culture and constant exposure of such materials have supposed normal and common for many people especially for teenagers. Even most of our teenagers taken these "Actresses" as a role model & idols for them and they make an effort to replicate their appearance, outfit selection, style and also want to look like them (Alam, 2019). One of the bad result of replication or passion to achieve perfection is they adopt some destructive artificial methods which may helpful to get some short term results along with long term physical and mental disorders (Shahid, 2011). Portrayal of women in commercials in negative way and transmission of false message in society is dangerous in terms of humanity. This study relates with media theory "Cultivation Theory" presented by George Gerbner, this theory explained people who watched television frequently are more influenced by the message or approaches that the media cultivate. In other words media have a power to influence attitudes, behaviors and thought processing of public.

Objectives of Study

- To highlight the stereotypical representation of women in advertising industry of Pakistan.
- To highlight the emerging trends breaking stereotypical thinking in advertisement industry of Pakistan.

Statement of Problem

A precise approach towards women to restrict them to serve male goals demonstrated in different advertisements; perception of stereotypical women are who is passive, dependent and house-bound woman interested in nothing beyond her daily house hold work and an attractive object who encourage the consumers to buy a product. The present study tries to draw attention towards these stereotypes. This study also analyzes and emphasizes the factors of conversion of media towards positivity and progressive approach in portrayal of women in advertisements.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Feminine Beauty & Gender

Advertisements exhibit social temperament of our lives. An advertisement doesn't mean to communicate or transmit the information about product only but also broadcast the information about formation of social representation (O'Barr, 2015) Advertisements are acknowledged as an influential characteristic of media for promoting ideas in all across the world but at the same time advertisers are to blame of generating synthetic desires and needs by taglines of beautification, glamour & power (Collins, 2011).

Generally advertisements are transmit an exceptionally powerful message among women and made them realize that their respectable existence dependent upon fair complexion (Reichert & Fosu, 2005). Advertising has use as a tool to publicize different ideas and thoughts among the public, forced them to think about particular direction that whitish skin tone is a key of acceptance in society and brown skin tone having no respect, which is the genuine skin tone of Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India (Ullah, Khan 2014). In Pakistan there are numerous television advertisements including the brands Fair & Lovely, Skin White, Nisa, Golden Pearl beauty cream, Face Fresh, Hoor beauty soap etc are few examples of white skin texture as a typical impression of attractiveness for females.

Both male and females are equally compromise their health in a competition of perfection, both genders chasing the standard of flawlessness including (ideal physique, bouncy hairs and skin color etc)

offered by media but at the cost of psychological depression (Jean,2006). Unfortunately to meet the artificial needs of perfection is a problem of both the genders and become a social reality, Media affects the perception of people, their behaviors, and beliefs and how they react and deal with social realities (Barber, 2011). Media is responsible for formation of social standards which can lead a result of unhealthy social environment and reason of a huge damage for individual persona and for entire society as well (Iftikhar, Islam, 2016)

A typical culture of objectification of women in media is equally lucrative and entertaining at a same time (Huhmann & Mott-Stenerson, 2008), that's a reason ethical and cultural damage is not painful for business community however, this practice is harmful on humanity basis (Iftikhar, Islam, 2016). At the age of development when gender roles, sexual attitudes and behaviors are being shaped, unfortunately adolescents may be exposed to sexual content. The balance between persuasiveness and ethics should be maintained in advertisement because children who are more exposed to different ads. (Zaman, Mahmood, Arsalan, 2015)

Fair complexion is just a first stage to reach the perfection, there is an extensive list in this perspective, long, shiny and bouncy hair is another powerful element claimed in women attraction. (Ullah, Khan 2014). Now a day's demonstration of women in advertisements has grown a lot on sexuality based content, an on-going trend has been seen in media where electronic, prints and in social media as well portray women as a commodity, glamorous objects and sometimes as victims is common. **Marium Yunus** once writes in a daily "*The Nation*" that "*The way media presented female on television in most of the advertisements is unnecessary and need less, their portrayal as they are born for male satisfaction*"(Zia, 2007). Women are portraying as a glamorous object in a precise way to catch the attention of audience and particularly the male audience (Dickey, 2006)

Private media are more biased towards conventional stereotypical roles of women, because private media are entirely commercial interest based business which is cause of destruction for concept of gender equality (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen (2011). Gender roles create a stereotypical thinking about both the genders and generate idealistic expectations about the impression of an ideal men and women of a society (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Hypothesis

H1: It is more likely that the portrayal of women in advertising industry of Pakistan is stereotypical.

H2: It is more likely that the latest approach of representation of women replaced stereotypes in advertising industry of Pakistan.

Research Questions

- What are the prevalent representations of women in the advertising industry of Pakistan and how do they impact gender roles and stereotypes in society?
- How has the portrayal of women in the advertising industry of Pakistan changed over time, and what factors have contributed to these changes?

METHODOLOGY

12 Pakistani advertisements have been selected through purposive sampling technique from television, newspapers and social media. Qualitative form of research method has been selected and through semiotic analysis Pakistani advertisements has been examine.

Stereotypical Portrayal of Women:

Women have been main focus of consumers from over the past 100 years (Levy, 2006). In this time of globalization, the media industry faces a number of challenges and pressure by the corporate world or business community. Somehow in the race of money making corporate world are failed to fulfill their responsibility towards society and especially in a case of women portrayal (Pallavi, 2017). Women are typically portrayed as nurturing and caring, with an emphasis on their role as wives and mothers. In terms of physical appearance, women in Pakistani advertisements are often presented as fair-skinned, with long hair and feminine features.

The sketch of an ideal women draw by television commercials, to achieve ideal image is impossible for a majority of woman. Artificial beauty depends upon different surgeries, injections and treatments adding a

strict diet plan and heavy workout, which is maybe possible to afford by a specific class but not for everyone (Moorthi, Roy, Pansari, 2014). Female representation in most of the ads is needless and irrelevant; their presences and body charm used to attract audience to encourage them to buy a product (Bibi & Khan, 2009). In Pakistani media “Representation of females associate with women’s identity, dignity and cultural representation which actually do not represent the culture but weaken her beneficial role and position in society” (Afaque & Shah, 2018)

“Jazz” Pakistan’s largest Mobile Network

“Jazz” Pakistan’s mobile network and internet services provider cast an actress “Nargis Fakhri” for their commercial. This ad released in 2015, the photo shoot of the actress was absolutely in seductive and pleasing posture which took place at front page of “Jang” Urdu news paper for many days and also observed on billboards at different roundabouts of the country. Her body curves have nothing to do with 3g phone and its cheap price. This is conventional example of presenting women as a showpiece and broadcasting the message of perfect and ideal body shape.

Tarang Tea Whitener

This is not a film poster, a poster of TVC ad of “Tarang” a tea whitener brand aired in 2015 with the cast of Javed Sheakh, Saima, Shan, Fahad Mustafa, Mehwish Hayat and Iman Ali. Big names of industry are in one frame. Huge budget can be estimated easily in terms of casting big names of industry, beautiful sets and huge cast of supporting actors. But during 2 minute and 25 seconds the main product hardly displayed twice or thrice in an entire advertisement. All celebrities show-off their dance skill so well but the connectivity of dance moves, expensive sets, and presences of 6 well known celebrities with the main product of tea whitener. This TVC is nothing more than over glamorized item number.

Layla Beauty Cream

Advertisement of “Layla Beauty Cream” is a thought provoking commercial aired in 2020. A famous tiktoker Zulqarnain is in lead, a character that is in search of beautiful wife. This TVC is clear example of stereotypical promotion of a product by selling a concept of white skin tone. Concept of ad is a groom wanted a beautiful girl having fair complexion as a life partner. On other side girl didn’t have fair skin tone that’s why she deceive her in-laws by sending them her picture with beauty filters. Throughout her marriage she avoids to make her face publicized. After marriage truth revealed in-front of groom and reality made him shocked because she was not looking as per his expectations. Unfortunately this ad gives a clear message to its audience that without having fair complexion, there is no place for you in society. If you want to have a beautiful married life than make it sure you are fair enough, for this purpose we are here to give you a solution in a form of Layla beauty cream.

Gala Biscuits

After “Noor Bukhari” famous film actress “Mehwish Hayat” attached with Gala Biscuits as a brand ambassador. Mehwish Hayat is highly paid beautiful actress of Pakistan. Gala a biscuit brand and a TVC of dance track with the tag line “Mere Des ka Biscuit Gala”, which means Gala is a national biscuit, aired in 2020. If this biscuit belong to the nation of Pakistan then why limited to dance performance? Through the dance moves and wearing heavy dresses, jewelry and bold makeup, actress is promoting culture and traditions of nation. During this one minute and thirty seven seconds product they displayed product only thrice. Truly no relevancy of performance with the product of biscuits, moreover the dance performance dominates or some extent hides the product. Later on this advertisement banned by Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority.

Slice Juice

TVC ad of “Slice Mango Juice” aired in 2021. Mahira Khan is in ad as a model. This advertisement is simply a juice ad but actress poses, her moves and her bold dress is questionable that either it is a juice ad or something else because the desire for Mango juice expressing in a quite seductive and romantic way. The way she looked at mango and feel the taste of mango, moreover cameraman took the shorts of eyes, lips while licking mango pulp and hand movements, raise a point is this seductive love for mango juice?

Face Fresh Beauty Cream:

“Face Fresh” beauty cream, this ad based on a dance performance by Kubra Khan aired in 2022. Kubra Khan a well known face of Pakistani drama industry shows her dance skills in beauty cream commercial. Main

product displayed once at the end of ad, entire dance performance and nature of product goes on two different tracks. Different dance moves presenting by a model that is physically and apparently beautiful, spreading the message of beautification and perfect physique. More over lyrics of track convey a message if you have fair and beautiful skin complexion you can achieve millions of followers at snap chat and instagram.

Latest Approach: Pakistani society is patriarchal society but the latest rays of feminism penetrate into the thick layers of patriarchy, women have start taking initiative to step out for education and build up a career (Huda & Ali, 2015). As compare to previous era positive portrayal of women in advertisements has been observed. Many articles have been published and documentaries have been made against unfair portrayal of women during past 60 years (Stern 2004). Women are portraying excessively and unnecessarily in commercials. (Shahwar, 2013)

In a present time we are considered our women are equal to men and want her portrayal as a self-governing, powerful and an influential individual. Advertising industry realized and starts to form a new sketch of ideal women for society (Soni, 2020). Advertisements can be a game changer for transformation of traditional gender roles in a society and educate people about gender equality and respect. Media have a power to transform attitude and behaviour of general public (Adil, Malik, 2021)

Participation of women in professional activities makes them feel more confident and make them realized that their real task is much more than stay at home (Sharma & Bumb, 2021). Gender balance however at workplace or at home gradually affect comfort of both male and female individually and overall complete family setup as well.

There has been a socio-cultural change in society over the decades which are very evident from the increasing number of women pursuing careers, changing family role structure, and especially unfavorable and harsh attitudes of females towards traditional stereotype sex-role. Women from past were discouraged to chase their dreams and to become independent. But now women have more career oriented thoughts and focused on their goals. Now it is normal to be a working women also look after domestic duties (Raza, Noor, 2016). Emerging culture of breaking stereotypical series in Pakistan is in progress now. There have been some diverse and realistic changes in recent years, such as increased representation of women in the workforce and a growing focus on gender equality.

Shan Foods

“Shan Foods” advertisement which has been aired in 2018, this advertisement gives a brand new concept where there is no woman in kitchen and busy in cooking of delicious food to impress her in-laws to be. In this advertisement, groom to be is cooking for his in-laws and seeking approval instead of bride to be. Family of girl checks the cooking skills of groom which is an exceptionally fresh idea capturing the attention of public and became a thought provoking element for society that kitchen is not only the responsibility of women.

Tapal Tea

“Tapal Danedar” a tea brand has been aired their TVC as on screens in 2021 with tagline of “Tum, main aur aik cup chai”. Famous actors Ahmad Ali Akbar and Syra Yousaf acted in this advertisement as a family; in this add husband expressed regard and care towards his wife. Wife, who came late from office and feeling tired, served a cup of tea by his husband such a beautiful gesture for sharing responsibility whether financially or in house hold work.

Khaadi

”Khaadi”Pakistan first clothing brand introduced X Plus size in their ready to wear outfits in 2021. For collection name “Now or Never” the plus size model Bihamaal Zurqa hired by brand. The step taking by brand is appreciable which point out the positive change towards attitudes of body shaming. There are number of people around us suffering with different physical and mental issues, which is a major cause of their plus size. This campaign addresses them to accept yourself the way you are, you have right to live your life happily and we are here to serve you.

Shan Foods

Another ad by “Shan Foods “ aired in 2022, beautifully convey a message in TVC and encourage women to get education and pursue their career and breaking chain of stereotypical thinking that women are born

to please their family and especially their husbands by cooking of delicious meal. Ushna Shah and Saba Faisal are in leading roles. The most interesting factor which is highlighted here that mother in law belongs to a old school of thoughts realized that her daughter in-law pursue her carrier and make her dreams comes true, she and her son support daughter in law and share her responsibilities of taking care of her grandson and other house hold stuff. She cooked lunch for her daughter in law and bring it to the hospital for her. Such a beautiful message, a woman is supporting another woman and uplifts her towards achieving her dreams.

Cadbury Dairy Milk Chocolate

Cadbury Dairy Milk ad aired in 2022. This advertisement shows a family structure where a grandmother wanted to get her granddaughter married but the girl wanted to complete her studies and get admission in Masters. Disappointment and tears of girl made the grandma realize the feelings of girls and she agrees for her education and decided that once she will complete her degree we will celebrate her success. In our society this is one of major issue where when girls cross their 18, parent's starts finding groom for them and let their wishes and dreams die, but this advertisement breaks the taboo of generation gap and suggests respecting each generation.

Pepsi

Another beautiful advertisement by Pepsi Pakistan hits the television screens and social media in 2022 with the attractive tagline of "Waqt ky sath agar soch bhi badli ja sakti ha tu Why not meri jan". Which means that with the passage of time if thoughts can be changed then why not my love. Such an outstanding concept of women empowerment, this campaign raised a voice for women that they can ride motorcycle, this is not a gender specified transport which is only made for males. In Pakistan motorcycle is consider as an economical vehicle which is consider to ride males only, there are thousands of women, school going girls who are dependent upon their brothers, fathers and husbands. This campaign gives them a motivation and confidence that they can also ride a bike.

DISCUSSION

The representation of various social groups and identities has evolved significantly in recent times, moving away from stereotypical and harmful portrayals that have historically been prevalent in various forms of media. In Pakistan, depiction of women in advertisements has been an area under discussion and criticism. Historically, advertisements in Pakistan have often perpetuated harmful and sexist stereotypes of women, portraying them primarily as objects of desire or as subservient to men. Though, emergent awareness has been observed in recent few years in terms of positive and diverse representation of women.

On one hand, we have seen a rise in advertisements that showcase women in powerful and independent roles. These ads challenge traditional gender roles and showcase women as strong, confident, and capable. However, on the other hand, there are still many ads that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. Women are often portrayed as passive and subservient, with their primary role being that of a care giver or homemaker. Women are also frequently objectified and sexualized in advertisements, which reinforces the idea that their worth is based solely on their physical appearance. Considering women as a sexual object in advertisements is an ethical issue that has been widely debated in the marketing industry worldwide, including in Pakistan. Moreover, the sexualization of women in advertising can be harmful to children and young adults. It can normalize and desensitize them to sexual objectification, which can lead to unhealthy attitudes towards women and relationships in the future.

Another one is the main ethical issues associated with using women as sexual objects in advertising is the promotion of unrealistic and unhealthy beauty standards. This creates a distorted and unattainable image of femininity, which can lead to negative self-image and low self-esteem among women. Additionally, this can lead to the normalization of sexual harassment, bullying, body shaming and violence against women.

Another issue with the portrayal of women in commercials is lack of diversity. Ads often feature fair-skinned and thin women, which reinforces the narrow beauty standards that have long been prevalent in the country. This lack of diversity can have negative consequences for women who do not fit into these limited beauty standards and can lead to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. Irrelevant content and

unnecessary appearance of women in ads is another issue; most of the advertisements are dance based performances which is not in culture of Pakistan. Pakistan has different set of norms and traditions demolished by following western or Indian culture in advertisements.

CONCLUSION

Stereotypes are always found in every society and it has also been observed that most of the advertisements promote and encourage gender stereotypes. Media should realize productive role of women as constructive members of society who equally contribute to national development. In perspective of fast moving world, role of women should come out as an independent individual. Overall study concluded, women are exceptionally and gratuitously portrayed in advertisements and in continuous dissemination of messages by the mass media.

Television commercials build up a concept and legitimize female body as a spectacle, also portray a standardized image of women in society where they are limited in the certain boundaries of their house hold or domestic activities. Our key concern is to overemphasis the feminine beauty disables a woman to recognize actual potential, which is not, resides in appearance but in their intellectual development. Our women must realize the difference between real and reel life. Picture of an ideal women are not natural, those ideal faces looks perfect by using different beauty cosmetics. The objectifying nature of advertisements may be creating anxiety, body shame, eating disorders, inferiority complex and other psychological issues among Pakistani women. However, currently these stereotypes have been beaten and challenged in recent Pakistani advertisements. In conclusion, while there have been some positive changes observed in the representation of women in advertisements of Pakistan but there is still a long way to go. It is important for advertisers to be more conscious of the messages they are sending and to work towards more diverse and empowering representations of women in their ads.

SUGGESTIONS

Here are some suggestions for advertisers and brand ambassadors/ models & actresses who signed contracts for commercials:

- Women should not be portrayed as mere objects of desire or lust in advertisements. They should be shown as individuals with their own agency and autonomy.
- Advertisements should depict women with different body types, sizes, and shapes to promote body positivity and inclusivity.
- Advertisements should avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes that limit women's potential and perpetuate gender inequality.
- Advertisements should celebrate women's achievements and portray them in roles that showcase their leadership and decision-making abilities.
- Advertisements should show women in non-traditional roles, such as in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, to promote gender equality and challenge gender norms.
- Women should not be used as props to sell products or services. Advertisements should focus on the product or service being advertised, rather than using women to attract attention.
- Advertisements should promote women's empowerment by showcasing women as strong, capable and confident individuals who can make their own decisions and lead successful lives.
- Advertisements should avoid promoting unrealistic beauty standards that put pressure on women to conform to narrow beauty ideals. Instead, they should promote natural beauty and self-acceptance.
- Advertisers should collaborate with female creatives to ensure that women are portrayed accurately and positively in advertisements.
- Advertisers should prioritize consumer feedback and listen to the voices of women to ensure that their advertisements are respectful and empowering.

FUTURE DIRECTION

There is a lot of work that is needed for research on this field in Pakistan. Future researches can start with qualitative interviews to investigate the experiences and perspectives of women working in the advertising industry in Pakistan and identify ways to promote gender equality and address gender-based discrimination. so that researcher can examine how gender portrayals in advertisements affect consumer behavior, such as purchasing decisions and brand loyalty. Researchers can examine the portrayal of women in niche markets, such as sports, technology, and finance, and explore how it reflects and affects gender norms in these areas. Researchers can also examine the portrayal of men in advertisements in relation to women and explore how it reinforces or challenges gender norms and stereotypes.

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