

Portrayal of women in the advertisement: An analysis

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental emphasis in this study is the detailed qualitative evaluation regarding portrayal of women in various advertisements. The data has been gathered and presented categorically from the responses of the participants living in the area trans to Gomti. The data collected from female and male participants has been analyzed independently, giving equal importance to the perspectives of both genders in the analysis. We have included 75 female and 75 male participants for analyzing their opinion regarding depiction of women in various advertisements. We have collected their responses on various adds related to perfumes, cosmetics, soaps and undergarments. In this research it has been analyzed to what extent the objectives are supported in light of the data. In this work we have deliberated about statistical analysis and also into social discourse and policy-making.

Keywords: Sexualization; Decoration Object; Ideal Beauty; Media & Advertisement Role; Women objectification

1. Introduction

Advertising in society is not merely a means of selling products or services, but it also influences social, psychological, cultural values and gender roles. Advertisements help establish new ideological standards in society. The images shown in advertisements and the messages conveyed through them reinforce the ideas prevalent in society, and therefore advertisements

are capable of shaping the image of women in a particular way. This power of advertising portrays the position of women differently in both the conservative and modern perspectives prevalent in society, but in doing so, the real image of women becomes obscured.

In the culture of consumerism, numerous means are being used for the dissemination of advertisements. Among these means, the image

of women is being used prominently to make advertisements even more attractive. The researcher's humble effort will be to study how the image of women is being portrayed through different means of advertising dissemination.

2. Literature Review

In advertisements, women are often portrayed as symbols of beauty, attractiveness, and sexual appeal. Such representations create a societal perception that a woman's true value lies not in her personality, intelligence, leadership skills, or social contributions, but rather in her external beauty and physical attractiveness. As a result, many women begin to prioritize their physical appearance over their internal qualities.

In this context, the "Male Gaze Theory" proposed by Laura Mulvey (1990) is extremely important [1]. According to this theory, in visual media, women are primarily presented from a male perspective. In advertisements and films, the camera angles, narrative structure, and overall visual composition are designed in such a way that women become mere objects of attraction, rather than active individuals. As a result, their social identity becomes limited, and their identity is confined to physical attractiveness alone.

Prabha Khaitan (2003) is of the opinion that while globalization has provided many new opportunities for women, commercialism has also established their body as a consumer commodity [2]. In the advertising industry, the image of a woman is used for the purpose of increasing the sales of products, due to which her social and human identity is affected.

Similarly, according to Mrinal Pandey (2021), the presentation of women in modern media has gradually moved towards objectification [3]. Beauty contests, fashion industry, entertainment programs and advertisements make women's body the main medium of attraction. Due to continuous such portrayal, a woman's real social role, intellectual capacity and personal identity become secondary and she starts being evaluated on the basis of external appearance.

Kamla Bhasin says "Media and Advertising have turned women into an object. she is not allowed to think beyond her body. In every advertisement, a woman is either in the kitchen or she herself is selling the product, [4]."

J. Kilbourne, says "Advertising is an environment of objectification it turns people into objects and objectifies us especially women are turned into objects for the gaze of others, [5]."

Naomi wolf (1990) argued that the primary function of the beauty industry is to manufacture of sense of inadequacy among women, according to her "the beauty industry works to make women feel deficient, so that they will buy products to fix the deficiency." Wolf contended that advertisements present an unattainable standard of beauty, which leads women to believe that their natural appearance is flawed. Wolf further explained- "advertising creates the problem and then sells the solution, trapping women in a cycle of consumption." in this process, media and advertisements first construct bodily "problems" such as wrinkles, fat, or dark skin and then market products as they only remedy [6].

Erving Goffman (1979) in his study of gender advertisements explain how ads use "rituals of subordination" to portray women. He argued that "advertisement display women in poses that signal dependence, subordination, and the need for protection [7]." Goffman stated that these visual cues train consumers to associate femininity with passivity and beauty products. As a result, women consumers purchase product not only for utility but perform the "rituals of femininity" shown in ads. This shows a direct link between advertising imagery and purchasing behaviors.

Nibha Shrivastava (2007) argued that Indian television advertisements portray women primarily in domestic roles and as objects of beauty to sell products. She stated that "The Indian woman is shown as a consumer who finds identity through purchasing for the family and for herself" this creates a direct link between female imagery and household buying decisions [8].

Amrita Shah (2010) analyzed how fairness cream advertisements commodify Indian women's skin color. She noted that "ads equate fairness with success, marriageability, and social mobility, thus turning skin tone into a product to be bought [9]." This directly influences women's consumer behavior in the beauty market.

Raka Ray (2000) studied post-liberalization India and found that advertising creates a "new middle class femininity" where conception becomes a marker of modern identity, she argued that "women are positioned as key consumers whose shopping choices signify family status and personal liberation [10]."

Shoma Chatterjee (2012) examined Bollywood and advertisement and concluded that they promote a "single, thin, fair ideal" for Indian women. She wrote that "the media teaches Indian women that their value lies in how closely they can approximate this marketed body, leading to increased consumption of beauty products [11]."

It is clear from the above literature that the presentation of women in advertisements is not only a part of marketing strategy, but its social, cultural and psychological impact is also wide. Most scholars are of the opinion that commodification of women in advertisements affects their dignity, social identity and gender equality and strengthens stereotypes about women in the society.

3. Methodology:

In the present study qualitative as well as analytical research procedure has been utilized. The objective of the study is to understand the presentation of women in advertisements, their objectification and the social effects arising from it. For this reason, instead of relying only on statistical facts, special emphasis has been given in the research on interpretation of their meaning, indications and social contexts.

Descriptive Research Design has also been used in the study. Through this, the presentation of women in various advertisements has been systematically described and analyzed, so that it can be understood what kind of image the

advertising industry is creating of women and what impact it is having on the society.

3.1 Area for Study:

Lucknow city has been selected for the presented research. Lucknow is a multicultural metropolis, where people of different religions, languages and social classes live. It is an important urban center of North India due to its wide access to education, administration, business and media (Census of India, 2011). Due to the coordination of traditional social values and modern lifestyle, it was considered a suitable area for study.

Although Lucknow city is generally divided into two parts:

- Trans Gomti Area
- Cis Gomti Area

This division has been made on the basis of Gomti river. The eastern part of Gomti river is called Trans-Gomti region and the western part is called Cis-Gomti region.

In the presented research, only the Trans-Gomti region has been selected as the study area.

Trans-Gomati region. Trans-Gomti is a relatively developed and modern area of Lucknow, where rapid urbanization has occurred in the last few decades (Lucknow Development Authority, 2020). In this research, Gomti Nagar and Indira Nagar of Trans-Gomti region have been selected for study. Mainly middle and upper middleclass families reside in these areas. Here, due to greater access to education, information technology and modern communication media, the study of social effects of advertisements was considered more appropriate.

3.2 Procedure followed for Data Collections:

Vital basics of this research is Survey Method and also Content Analysis. Under survey method, primary data was collected from the respondents through structured questionnaire. Through the questionnaire, an attempt was made to know how the respondents view the presentation of women

in advertisements and what effect it has on their social outlook.

On the other hand, a qualitative study of various television and social media advertisements was conducted through content analysis, so that the female image, sexual connotations and objectification tendencies contained in them could be understood.

The period of the study was fixed from October 2023 to March 2024, that is, this research was conducted over a period of approximately six months.

3.2.1. Data analysis:

After an in-depth study of the selected advertisements during content analysis, the following major themes emerged:

- Sexualization
- Decoration Object

- Ideal Beauty

3.2.2. Cultural Interpretation

On the basis of these topics, the presentation of women in advertisements was analyzed and an attempt was made to understand how the modern advertising industry is affecting women's social image, self-realization and gender perceptions of the society.

Question 1: Do you see advertisements with female images?

Through this question, an attempt was made to find out from the respondents whether they see such advertisements in which female images are used. Its objective was to understand what is the level of interest and attention towards advertisements with female images of male and female respondents of Trans-Gomti region (Table 1). Survey was carried out on 75 male and 75 female respondents.

Table 1. Response of respondents from Trans-Gomti region regarding viewing advertisements with female images

Options	75 Male Respondents in Trans Gomti Region	75 Female Respondents in Trans Gomti Region
Yes	60 (80.0%)	68 (90.7%)
No	15 (20.0%)	7 (9.3%)

Interpretation:

The data obtained clearly shows that out of total 75 male respondents of Trans-Gomti region, 60 (80.0%) male respondents admitted that they watch advertisements with female images, while 15 (20.0%) male respondents said that they do not watch such advertisements. This makes it clear that most of the male respondents are aware of the presence of female images in advertisements and such advertisements come to their attention.

Similarly, out of 75 female respondents from Trans-Gomti region, 68 (90.7%) female respondents admitted that they watch advertisements with female images, while only 7 (9.3%) respondents selected the "No" option.

The percentage of female respondents was found to be higher than that of male respondents, which makes it clear that women are more conscious and aware of such advertisements.

A comparative study of the responses of both the groups shows that advertisements with female images are widespread in the Trans-Gomti region and most of the respondents watch these advertisements regularly. Especially its acceptability is seen more among female respondents. This leads to the conclusion that the use of female images in advertisements is effective in attracting audience attention and has become an important part of respondents' daily media consumption. The presented data also indicates that the reach of advertisements with female images is wide in the trans-Gomti region,

which provides adequate support to the basic hypothesis of the research.

Question 2: According to you, what is the main reason for the presentation of women in advertisements?

Through this question, an attempt was made to know what is the main objective of the

presentation of women in advertisements in the view of the respondents. For this, the respondents were given four options, which included promoting the product, generating attraction among the audience, giving respect to women in the society and all the above (Table 2).

Table 2. Response of respondents from Trans-Gomati region regarding the main reasons for presentation of women in advertisements.

Option	75 Male Respondents in Trans Gomti Region	75 Female Respondents in Trans Gomti Region
Promoting the product	25 (33.3%)	20 (26.7%)
Creating appeal among the audience	35 (46.7%)	15 (20.0%)
Securing respect for women in society	5 (6.7%)	25 (33.3%)
All of the above	10 (13.3%)	15 (20.0%)

Interpretation

It is clear from the data in the table that out of 75 male respondents of Trans-Gomti region, 25 (33.3%) male respondents believe that the main purpose of presentation of women in advertisements is to promote the product. Whereas 35 (46.7%) male respondents believed that female images are used in advertisements mainly to attract the attention of the audience. Only 5 (6.7%) male respondents believed that the purpose of woman's presentation is to give respect to women in the society, whereas 10 (13.3%) respondents considered all the above options appropriate.

After studying the responses of 75 female respondents of Trans-Gomti region, it is found that 20 (26.7%) female respondents considered the promotion of the product as the main reason. 15 (20.0%) female respondents selected the option of generating attraction in the audience. On the contrary, 25 (33.3%) female respondents believed that the purpose of presentation of women in advertisements could also be to give respect to women in the society. Whereas 15

(20.0%) female respondents accepted all the above options.

Comparative analysis of responses of male and female respondents shows that male respondents view the presentation of women in advertisements mainly as a strategy to attract commercial attraction and audience attention. On the contrary, a notable section of female respondents also associates it with social respect and positive presentation. This difference reflects the difference in the social and psychological outlook of the two classes.

Overall, it can be said that in the Trans-Gomati region, most of the male respondents consider the presence of women in advertisements as a means of marketing and increasing attractiveness, whereas the opinion of female respondents is relatively balanced and they do not consider it limited to commercial purposes only but also see it from a social point of view. The findings thus obtained indicate that there is a clear difference in the perception of male and female respondents regarding the presentation of women in advertisements, which presents important findings for the research.

Table 3. Response of respondents from Trans-Gomti region regarding presentation of female image in advertisements

Option	75 Male Respondents in Trans Gomti Region	75 Female Respondents in Trans Gomti Region
Professional image	10 (13.3%)	30 (40.0%)
Gender image	30 (40.0%)	10 (13.3%)
Provocative image	25 (33.3%)	8 (10.7%)
Domestic image	10 (13.3%)	27 (36.0%)

Interpretation:

It is clear from the data obtained that out of 75 male respondents of Trans-Gomti region; 10 (13.3%) respondents considered the professional image of woman in advertisements as prominent. On the contrary, 30 (40.0%) male respondents described the sexual image of women as the most important. Similarly, 25 (33.3%) respondents selected the provocative image, while only 10 (13.3%) respondents considered the domestic image prominent.

On the other hand, out of 75 female respondents from Trans-Gomti region, 30 (40.0%) respondents believed that women are mainly presented in professional form in advertisements. 10 (13.3%) respondents chose sexual image, while 8 (10.7%) respondents considered sensual image as dominant. Whereas 27 (36.0%) female respondents selected the option of domestic image.

A comparative study of the responses of male and female respondents shows that there is a clear difference in the thinking of both the groups. A large section of male respondents believe that women are presented in advertisements mainly as a sexual and attractive image. On the contrary, most of the female respondents give relatively more importance to the professional and domestic role of women in advertisements.

If the sexual images (40.0%) and provocative images (33.3%) chosen by the male respondents

are combined, it becomes clear that almost three-fourths of the male respondents associate the presentation of women in advertisements with attractiveness and sexual appeal. At the same time, the higher percentage of professional and domestic images among female respondents indicates that they also consider women's social and family roles important in advertisements.

From these results it is concluded that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of male and female respondents regarding the presentation of women in advertisements in the Trans-Gomati region. While male respondents consider women's sexual and provocative presentation more important, female respondents give more importance to relatively positive and responsible roles. This finding reinforces the aspect of the research that the form of female image in advertisements is perceived differently according to the gender of the audience.

Question 4: The tendency of female objectification is still visible in the female images shown in advertisements.

Through this question, an attempt was made to know to what extent the respondents accept the trend of objectification of women in present-day advertisements. The respondents were given three options to express their opinion, which included agree, somewhat and disagree.

Table 4. Response of respondents from Trans-Gomti region regarding trend of objectification of women in advertisements.

Option	75 Male Respondents in Trans Gomti Region	75 Female Respondents in Trans Gomti Region
Agree	45 (60.0%)	20 (26.7%)
To Some Extent	20 (26.7%)	35 (46.7%)
Disagree	10 (13.3%)	20 (26.7%)

Interpretation

It is clear from the data in the table that out of 75 male respondents of Trans-Gomti region, 45 (60.0%) respondents agreed with the statement that the trend of objectification of women still exists in the present-day advertisements. 20 (26.7%) respondents agreed “somewhat”, while only 10 (13.3%) respondents disagreed with this statement.

Similarly, out of 75 female respondents of Trans-Gomti region, 20 (26.7%) expressed full agreement with this statement. Maximum 35 (46.7%) female respondents selected the option “to some extent”, while 20 (26.7%) respondents disagreed.

Comparative analysis of the responses of male and female respondents shows that male respondents clearly agree more about the trend of objectification of women, whereas a large section of female respondents adopt a balanced view on this topic and consider the option “to some extent” more appropriate.

It is also noteworthy that the percentage of disagreement among male respondents is relatively low, indicating that most men accept the presence of female objectification in current advertisements. On the other hand, the responses

of female respondents show that instead of completely accepting this trend, they evaluate it based on the circumstances and the nature of the advertisement.

The overall results make it clear that most of the respondents in the Trans-Gomti region believe that the trend of objectification of women still exists in some form or the other in modern advertisements. Especially the clear agreement of male respondents and partial agreement of female respondents confirms that the concept of objectification in the society regarding the presentation of women in advertisements has not yet ended. This finding also provides sufficient support to the main hypothesis of the research.

Question 5: Most advertisements focus on a woman's body/appearance and not on her abilities and capabilities.

Through this question, an attempt was made to know whether in the view of the respondents, the presentation of a woman in current advertisements focuses more on her physical beauty and attractiveness rather than her personality, ability and efficiency. To answer this question, respondents were given three options, which included disagree, agree and to some extent.

Table 5. Response of respondents from Trans-Gomati region regarding the focus being given more on a woman's body and appearance rather than her abilities in advertisements.

Option	75 Male Respondents in Trans Gomti Region	75 Female Respondents in Trans Gomti Region
Disagree	12 (16.0%)	25 (33.3%)

Agree	48 (64.0%)	18 (24.0%)
To Some Extent	15 (20.0%)	32 (42.7%)

Interpretation

It is clear from the data obtained that out of total 75 male respondents of Trans-Gomti region, 48 (64.0%) respondents agreed with the statement that in most of the advertisements, more attention is given to the body and external appearance of the woman rather than her ability and efficiency. 15 (20.0%) male respondents selected the option "to some extent", while only 12 (16.0%) respondents disagreed with this statement.

After studying the responses of 75 female respondents of Trans-Gomti region, it is found that 18 (24.0%) respondents agreed with this statement. Maximum 32 (42.7%) female respondents selected the option "to some extent", while 25 (33.3%) respondents disagreed. This makes it clear that the viewpoint of female respondents is more balanced and rational than that of male respondents.

Comparative analysis of the responses of both the groups shows that a clear majority of the male respondents accept that advertisement makers give more importance to a woman's physical attractiveness than her personality and capabilities for promoting the product. On the other hand, a large section of female respondents appears to agree with this statement "to some extent" instead of completely agreeing, which indicates that they do not view all advertisements in the same light, but form their opinion based on the nature and context of the advertisement.

It is also noteworthy that the percentage of agreement (64.0%) is highest among male respondents, which indicates that according to them, women's physical beauty and attractiveness are used more as a marketing strategy in advertisements. At the same time, more selection of the option "to some extent" among female respondents shows that they accept the presence

of this trend, but do not consider it equally applicable to every advertisement.

Overall, the results obtained conclude that in the view of the respondents of Trans-Gomti region, the focus of presentation of women in current advertisements is based more on her physical beauty and attractiveness rather than her personality, ability and efficiency. In particular, the clear agreement of male respondents and partial agreement of female respondents confirms the fact that the external image of a woman is still being widely used in the advertising industry as an effective means of marketing. This finding also provides sufficient support to the first hypothesis of the research.

4. Conclusion

Under the presented objective, after analyzing the responses to the first five questions received from male and female respondents of Trans-Gomti region, it becomes clear that at present, female images are being used widely and effectively in advertisements. Most of the respondents admitted that they see advertisements with female images, which proves that female presence has become a common and effective communication strategy in the advertising industry.

According to the perception of the respondents, the main objective of the presentation of women in advertisements is to promote the product as well as to attract the attention of the audience. Especially male respondents considered it a medium of professional attraction, while a section of female respondents also associated it with social respect and positive presentation. This makes it clear that there is a difference of viewpoint on this subject in the thinking of both men and women.

On studying the nature of the image of women in advertisements, it was found that male

respondents saw women mainly as a sexual and provocative image, whereas female respondents accepted a relatively higher number of professional and domestic images. This makes it clear that in the eyes of men, the presentation of women in advertisements appears more attractive, whereas women also recognize her multidimensional nature.

The study also revealed that most of the respondents agree that the trend of objectification of women still exists in some form or the other in current advertisements. Although the percentage of agreement was found to be "somewhat" higher among female respondents, their responses still indicate that they too do not completely deny the trend of objectification of women in advertisements.

Similarly, from the analysis of the fifth question, it was concluded that in advertisements, more importance is given to the physical beauty and

external attractiveness of the woman rather than her ability and efficiency. Male respondents agreed more with this statement, while female respondents partially agreed with it. This situation makes it clear that the presentation of a woman in advertisements is still considered mainly based on her physical attractiveness.

Overall, it can be said that the study of Trans-Gomti region concludes that the image of women in advertisements still remains an important medium of marketing and attracting the attention of consumers. In the presentation of a woman, professional objective, attractiveness, sexuality and external beauty are given relatively more importance, whereas her ability and efficiency get relatively less place. Therefore, this finding supports the first hypothesis of the research "The tendency of objectification of women is still visible in advertisements".

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