



## OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS: SOME ETHICAL ISSUES

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### ABSTRACT

Advertisements are the means of promoting the products. To promote the products the advertisements have to persuade the consumer to buy the goods. Advertisements play upon emotions, creating a scenario that heightens the consumer's emotional state. They build a fantasy in which the consumer's life is better because of the product. Advertisements sell values, images, love and sexuality. Indian ads clearly show the gender roles and stereotypes of women. They are shown almost exclusively as housewives or sexual objects. Women are objectified to sell everything from cars to beer. Thinking that women add beauty to the advertisements they are being used as the promoters of beauty standards that are unnatural and unattainable. Women are constantly exhorted to emulate this ideal, to feel ashamed and guilty if they fail, and to feel that their desirability and lovability are contingent upon physical perfection. They are shown as they exist only for male gratification and their body is an object for others to visually consume. Advertising images create a climate in which the marketing of women's bodies--the sexual sell is seen as acceptable.

The paper seeks to identify and explain the ethical challenges in advertisements. How women are targeted in some unethical advertisements. Paper also tries to study the implications of these advertisements on the Indian society. The increasing rate of cosmetic surgeries, eating disorders, depression and low self-esteem and so on to show how the images of women in the advertisement affect women's self-image. Paper also tries to suggest some measures for building ethical considerations in advertisements.

**Key words:** advertisements, objectification, women, ethics.

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### INTRODUCTION

Advertisements play an important role in promoting the products and brand building. They play upon emotions and use desire to lure people into the purchase. Over the years advertisements have attempted a wide variety of advertising approaches like humor, sex, emotions. Advertisers

use one of these appeals to ensure that the targeted audiences receive their message. The media's framing of women in highly restricted and negative ways is a global phenomenon that cuts across all cultures and has endured a long passage of time. Among the various forms of mass communication, advertising is often condemned as the most sinful

when it comes to perpetuating sexism and exploiting sexuality.

Women are more integral part of advertisements. They are portrayed in various roles and more often as sexual object. They are being shown as they are meant only for sexual pleasure that is sexually objectified. The objectification of women involves the act of disregarding the personal and intellectual abilities and capabilities of a female; and reducing a woman's worth or role in society to that of an instrument for the sexual pleasure that she can produce in the mind of another.

#### ETHICS IN ADVERTISEMENTS:

The following are the three major moral principles that ads should follow.

- ✓ Respect truthfulness
- ✓ Respect the dignity of each individual
- ✓ Respect the social responsibility

But now a day's advertisements do all sorts of things to persuade people to buy the goods. Women and her sensuous behavior is a major object in all sorts of advertisements. Advertising law says that they have to tell the truth about the product that they are advertising. Are they telling the truth?

Let's see some of the advertisements:

**Deodorant ads** are the one where women are portrayed as sex objects and a man can sexually attract her by just applying that deo. These ads usually show women being struck by a sudden attraction for the man who wears them and "lustily hankering after them under the influence of such deodorants.

Here are some examples:

**Axe** men's deodorant

The ad shows a man transform into a walking chocolate figurine after spraying himself with Axe's Dark Temptation deodorant. As he walks through the city, women throw themselves at him, licking and biting off various parts of his body.

**SET WET** Deodorant

This ad shows a women lusting behind a man who uses that deo.

**Zatak** deodorant

A young man, shirt unbuttoned, sprays himself before a visit to the dentist with India's Zatak deodorant brand, which must smell *amazing* because it drives the dentist to unbutton her blouse.

**Engage, Wild Stone** and **Eighteen Plus** Deo spray are some more to mention.

#### AMUL MACHO

The ad showed a young bride conjuring images of conjugal bliss as she washed the underwear of her husband. These are some of the ads which show women as only a sex object and nothing else.

Next the **Soap and Fairness Creams ads**. These ads show women as slim, fair, oil less and pimple less face with no wrinkle!!! Society's interpretation of beauty has changed nowadays. Women are not coming up with beauty and style decisions on their own but the media and advertising plays a huge role in influencing what women view as "beautiful".

Examples: **Lux** soap is one such advertisement where it is shown that if you use that soap you will be beautiful as a **cine star!!**. **Santoor** soap advertisement says if you use santoor soap you will be young always! The soap and Fairness cream advertisements are selling hope of being beautiful. Fair skin represents beauty and success, and as a result Indians are keen consumers of products that promise to lighten skin.

There are advertisements where one doesn't even understand the purpose of the girl in the particular advertisement ex; J.K Super Cement, men's shaving blade and under garments where women are unnecessarily used only to please the male audience.

#### EFFECTS:

Let's see what are the effects of these ads on women and society in general.

##### • Excessive Thinness

Research shows a correlation between the media's unattainable standards of beauty and this rampant epidemic of body Dysmorphia. About 90 percent of women overestimate their body size.

One study showed that 69 percent of girls stated that women in advertisements influenced their idea of the perfect body shape. On television, half of the ads aimed at women speak about physical attractiveness.

##### • Eating Disorders

One out of every four female college students engages in unhealthy means of controlling their weight. This comes in no small part because of advertising and commercials depicting excessively

thin women. Unhealthy body images in advertising -- regardless of whether they are used to sell weight-loss products or something else -- project an unrealistic image of women's body weight, and according to HealthyPlace.com, can contribute to the development of anorexia, bulimia and other serious eating disorders in women.

- **Sexual Exploitation**

Sexuality can be a powerful motivator, and many advertisements use sexually explicit imagery to help sell their products. While sexiness in and of itself isn't harmful, reports from Jean Kilbourne and other activists cite an alarming trend of objectification and exploitation in advertising. Women often appear wanton, passive and child-like in advertisements, sending a message that such qualities are normal and even desirable in women. Even more disturbing, men receive the message that women should act submissive and wanton, and come to expect that in their relationships with the opposite sex.

- **Foster teenage sexuality**

Ever since advertising emerged as a profitable industry, sex and ads have been tied together. Images that are sexually suggestive have been used to sell just about everything and have become the advertiser's best friend. The use of sexual appeals in advertising makes children aware of their sexuality at an early age and plays an important role in shaping adolescents' sexual attitudes, values and beliefs. Also, the variables loaded on this factor bring out the negative effects of the use of sexual appeals (sexually explicit dialogues and images) in advertising. Children and often adults respond to the sexual cues in ads and the common side effects are sexual obsession and gratuitous sex.

- **Promote unsafe behavior among children**

The sensuous attitudes shown in the advertisements sends a message to the children that these behaviors are acceptable and the image of women as sex object is true.

- **Breeds artificial needs**

Advertising manipulates us to buy things we don't need by playing on our emotions. It creates artificial needs. Sometimes they create confusion in the minds of people which brand of the product to buy. The repetition of advertising on television, Internet

and newspapers illustrates the capacity of companies to create a need in the consumer's mind.

- **Promotes consumerism**

According to George Zinkhan, as a society, we are no longer involved on what we need but what products we want to have. We are always crazed about the newest products and latest ideas. Everyone is looking for the next best product. Many feel advertising helps promote this idea. Advertisers are consistently making ads showing how their product is the most useful and the best that money can buy. They are selling products and feeding the egos of the consumers. They are selling products and feeding the egos of the consumers. Many people fear that the advertisers are increasing the idea that we need to have the best products rather enjoying a day of happiness.

- **Lower satisfaction with the self**

The ads like shampoo, soap, fairness cream, weight loss products etc... shows an image of a woman who is fair, slim, tall and young. These ads have a negative impact on women resulting in dissatisfaction of the self. Exposure to the "ideal" body images has been found to lower women's satisfaction with their own attractiveness. 44% of women who are average or underweight think that they are overweight.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Advertisements should strictly follow the ethical codes. It should always be a public helper and informer to choose the product. They have to be pro social and realistic. It is good to have a sensor committee to look into the content of the advertisements. Women who are involved in the advertisement should think morally that they are giving a wrong message to the society and de-grading the woman self.

### **CONCLUSION**

India, even though it is a land of Kama sutra and Khajuraho is very secretive about an individual's sexual and romantic life. But the 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 lustrous by nature. What these advertisements are 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?

These types of advertisements are negatively influencing the human behavior. It degrades the women, shapes negative sexual attitudes among younger generations.

If the mass Medias would have strictly followed the ethical codes and stop objectifying women there should not be any need to give safety measures and sex education to the school children.

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