

MEDIA AND WOMEN: AN ANALYSIS ON DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN DIGITAL MEDIA.

Gitashree Sharma

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University.

Kabyashree Borgohain.

Hirakjyoti Khakhlari

Abstract: One of the sensitive areas in advertising and marketing is the portrayal of women. Women are an indispensable part of Indian society as they constitute half of the population and play a critical role in our society. However, the depiction of women as sex symbols, objects of desire, and as having subservient behaviours has presented a great concern to feminist scholars, activists, and researchers. The objectives of this paper are to study how women's role portrayal impacts consumers' willingness to buy and to identify the difference in views of Indian men and women when it comes to the stereotypical role portrayal of women in digital media.

Keywords: advertisement, censorship, depiction, obscene, stereotype.

Introduction:

Media is means of communication through which information, data, news or ideas are delivered to people. People today depend, consciously or unknowingly, on various media outlets for news and information. It has converted the world into a global village where information can be transmitted from one part of the world to another within a few seconds. Media has a significant role in shaping a society where men and women enjoy equal rights.

Women are an integral part of society and are influential in all domains (Sharma & Bumb, 2021). The subjection of women has marked India's past has been characterised by the subjection of women. We must catch up in delivering an equal society that is fair to our girls. Women continue to fight for equal rights in modern civilisation, despite making up half of the population and being an essential part of society. Indian society is patriarchal and hierarchical, with men being seen as superiors and women as second-class citizens in the public and private arenas. Men are valued more highly than women regarding resource management and decision-making under a patriarchal social and ideological structure. Different roles have been assigned by society to both men and women, with the role of women being seen as inferior and the role of men as superior. The socialisation process varies from male to female as well. Through socialisation, a person can learn or acquire certain societal norms, values, attitudes, and ways of thinking, among other things, and eventually, through such learning, a person's personality is shaped. The ideals taught to boys and girls are tremendously biased towards girls. In addition, more senior roles in communities or social institutions are typically held by men. Gender stereotypes are still prevalent (Sharma & Bumb, 2021). Distorted depiction of women in media signifies the prevalence of such stereotypes. In this article, an attempt has been made to analyse the presentation of women in digital media.

OBJECTIVES : The objectives of this research paper are –

1. To understand critically the intersection of patriarchy in mediated reflections in digital media.
2. To understand the diverse trends of digital media in portraying women.
3. To analyze whether the media commercials abide by the media ethics and laws codified in India.

Emerging Feminist school of thought and role of media: Theoretical framework.

The establishment of a democratic state on a worldwide scale received a boost from the first wave of modernity, which led to the establishment of a facility to boost knowledge and citizenry (female) empowerment through education (Sarkar, 2014). A second wave of modernity followed, concretizing empowerment in the form of equal possibilities for all citizens, regardless of gender, faith, caste, or color, and the ability to support oneself through job. The stereotypical gender roles that are profoundly ingrained in society have been diversified, highlighted, and diminished by the gender roles that women now play. This pushed people to forge their own identities and social structures and join a shifting social order, particularly for women. Throughout the world, the media strongly supported and promoted modernism, influencing all facets of life. The spread of modernity gave women their own room to develop their professional standing and identities, but it was also fraught with problems and tensions between historical narratives and representations from today's popular culture. It resulted in inequity within the gender class: women who crossed the threshold of modernity and those who failed in social imagery (Sarkar, 2014).

Now women became empowered to choose a life of their own and also a lifestyle. The scholars of Foucault's schools of thought and feminist writers like Rose warned that such 'space and power,' 'freedom of choice', 'the shaping of being', and the 'inculcation of a form of life' could be a tool for exploitation by the male patriarchy (Sarkar, 2014).

There are some viewpoints which represent various schools of thought in recent feminist discourse like social comparison, cultivation, and self-schema and so on (Sarkar, 2014). These perspectives help the researchers to examine how the media images were translated into induced body images in women's psyche (Sarkar, 2014). These, however, also clarify why some groups of women remain susceptible to the negative effects of the media while others exhibit astounding degrees of resilience (Sarkar, 2014). It is important to note that the media projects ideal women onto the weak, who are then forced to conform. This group of people might be referred to as the normative dissatisfaction sector of society because they are able to resist the pressure and remain as they are (Sarkar, 2014).

According to the cultivation theory, images of women who conform to the sociocultural ideal of beauty are overrepresented in popular media, and viewers' ability to interpret unrealistic standards in the media is influenced by repeated exposure to images (Sarkar, 2014). The cumulative effect of seeing images of tall, slim women repeatedly in many kinds of the media over time leads many women to be seduced into adopting an unattainable standard of beauty as reality. Many women believe that ultra-thin ladies are the norm and that any woman who does not fit this stereotype is abnormal (Sarkar, 2014).

The social comparison theory discusses how media representations of women's bodies affect their self-perception (Sarkar, 2014). It investigates how people assess themselves in relation to their peers, groups, and social categories (Sarkar, 2014). Depending on the target of comparison, a person usually compares himself to either better or worse in some dimension (Sarkar, 2014). An upward comparison occurs when an individual compares himself or herself to someone who fares better than himself/herself do on a particular construct (Sarkar, 2014). In contrast, downward comparisons involve a person comparing himself or herself to someone not as well off as himself in a particular dimension. In general, upward comparisons have been found to correlate with depression of mood, whereas downward comparisons are more likely to elicit elevation of mood (Sarkar, 2014). Mass media is seen to be one of the most dominant and commanding influences, especially on women defining themselves (Sarkar, 2014). Television, advertisements, magazines and other forms of popular media provide many references for upward social comparison. Images in the media generally project a standard to which women are expected to aspire, yet that standard could be more achievable for most women (Sarkar, 2014).

According to the Self-schema theory women use three points of reference to perceive their physical appearance: the socially represented ideal body, the objective body, and the internalized ideal body (Sarkar, 2014). The way that women are portrayed in the media and by other essential individuals their lives affects how they envision the ideal physique that society has for them—that is, how they perceive what it means to be physically attractive and beautiful. The objective body, in contrast, is concerned with a person's contentment or discontent with his or her physical appearance; people always have an opinion about their physical demeanor (Sarkar,2014). The degree to which a person embraces the ideal picture and strives to live up to it is known as the internalized ideal body (Sarkar, 2014). On the other hand, some women's internalized ideas closely resemble the socially portrayed ideal, which makes them especially susceptible to the media's potent influences (Sarkar, 2014).

Media and women:

The media in the early 90s used to be a means of reporting and broadcasting broadly news and songs, films, music and less of product advertisements. The products like NIRMA detergent or LUX soap remained famous for women's foray to be advertised during that era. The media and the pattern of advertisements have entirely changed in the post-globalised era, and it has become a dynamic mode and tool to shape, mould and change public opinion and create markets and demand for different products by projecting slim, trim, sculpted women's bodies like a commodity (Sarkar,2014).

Due to its potential to significantly impact society, media has one of the highest societal obligations, including portraying social reality (Ojha, 2011). Today, however, it has been seen that the media has been portraying women unrealistically, even by showing them as the objects of their male counterparts (Sharma & Bumb, 2021). The trend of depicting women as sex symbols, objects of desire, and passive agents of society continues (Ojha, 2011). Sharma and Bumb (2021) stated that a society's culture significantly determines how gender is viewed. Furthermore, it is deemed unethical to portray women unrealistically. Common stereotypes of women include portraying them in subservient roles or situations, exploiting them as sex

objects, portraying them as housewives, emphasising their silence, etc. (Sharma & Bumb, 2021).

The advertisements are profoundly discriminating towards females (Ojha, 2011). According to Sharma and Bumb (2021), most of the time, women in Indian ads are shown as objects or commodities. In order to create a sexual appeal in ads, women are frequently employed as sex objects by depicting photos of various body parts, such as the breast, leg etc. Moreover, women are usually presented as housewives or homemakers than as engaged in commercial, industrial, or professional tasks. Most ads for bathrooms and kitchens highlight women rather than men, implying that women's roles are restricted to cleaning and cooking (Ex. the advertisement for Howkins Pressure cooker, detergent powder etc. Women are frequently represented as domestically subordinate, passive, interior dwellers lacking power and knowledge. Another myth is that women are more likely to be shown in products for cosmetics or beauty than in those for computers, gaming consoles, cars, etc. It is also demonstrated that women lack purchasing power and depend on men to survive. Additionally, rather than portraying women as individual beings, they are more likely to be defined concerning other roles, such as mother, sister, wife, etc. (Sharma & Bumb, 2021)

With the advancement of information and communication technology, the internet has become a user-friendly medium of advertisement. The submissive depiction of women or stereotypical presentation is also visible in online advertisements (Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos and Zotos, 2008). Based on the intended readership, different women are portrayed differently on websites. In websites aimed at women, men, and people in general, respectively, it has been observed that women are portrayed as decorative, dependant, non-traditional homemakers or equal to men (Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos and Zotos, 2008). Internet advertising also features women in subordinate or supportive roles, highlighting their sexuality, attractiveness, and need for a man's protection. Images of women in supportive or even helpless roles are frequently used in advertisements for high-tech products, in contrast to depictions of men using technology effectively to advance their professions (Ojha, 2011).

In the last three decades, the media seems to have reinforced stereotyping by projecting women as homemakers, docile and tolerant of suiting, mass perception and taste, also amongst its avid consumers – the women who would buy particular products for their house, body and beauty. Thus, in India, women on the small or big screen still perform the traditional role of washing clothes, invariably serving food to adults, craving cosmetics to become more beautiful and displaying their clothes (Sarkar, 2014).

Advertising has played a vital role in depicting the gendered role of men and women in society. The stereotypical portrayal of women in the media perpetuates the conventional mindset that views women as having different gender roles and holding subordinate positions in society (Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos and Zotos, 2008). The distorted portrayal of women further fuelled unrealistic expectations of society from women (Ojah, 2011). Representations of 'ideal' women encourage sexism and societal stereotypes (Ojah, 2011). Depiction of women as less intelligent, subjected to the aggressive behaviour of male counterparts, physically weak, sexually attractive successful women, absence of decision-making capacities etc., lowers their self-esteem. It gives the perception that their societal place is inferior to that of males (Sharma & Bumb, 2021). The inaccurate representation of women also makes women feel insecure about their identity and dignity. (Sharma and Bumb, 2021). Besides, women have shown little

interest in buying things that portray women in stereotypical ways (Plakoyiannaki, Mathioudaki, Dimitratos and Zotos, 2008).

Conclusion :

Women in India are still defined by the patriarchal hegemonic culture identified by the religious scriptures. Therefore their status is low as compared to their male counterparts. Many advertisements are unethical because they do not adhere to the rules established by ethical organisations like ASCI (Advertising Standard Council of India). According to ASCI, advertising should not contain anything obscene or vulgar, particularly during depicting roles of any gender. Advertisers and consumers are morally obligated to ensure that women are pretty represented or depicted realistically in media (Sharma & Bumb, 2021).

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