

Changing Role of Women in Advertising

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Abstract

The portrayal of women in advertising has long been a subject of scrutiny and debate. Traditionally, women were often depicted in advertisements as mere objects of desire, confined to stereotypical roles as submissive homemakers or alluring figures meant to attract attention. However, in recent times, the landscape of Indian advertising has undergone a notable transformation, reflecting the changing status and roles of women in society.

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: In the early days of advertising, particularly in the 1950s, women were predominantly portrayed as housewives whose primary responsibilities included keeping the home in order, cooking for their husbands, and ensuring domestic bliss. These representations reinforced traditional gender roles and perpetuated societal expectations. Fast forward to the present day, and the narrative has shifted. Women are now portrayed in a more positive light, breaking away from the confines of outdated stereotypes.

Evolution of Women's Portrayal in Advertising:

The evolution of women's portrayal in Indian advertising is evident when examining advertisements from different decades. In the 1950s, the imagery was dominated by the homemaker archetype, emphasizing women's roles within the confines of the household. However, as societal norms began to shift and women gained increased access to education and employment opportunities, the portrayal of women in advertisements started to change.

By the 21st century, a significant transformation was underway. Advertisements began depicting women as independent, assertive, and enjoying both career and personal life. Women were no longer confined to domestic spaces; instead, they were shown pursuing diverse interests and actively participating in the workforce. This shift in portrayal is reflective of the broader societal changes wherein women were breaking free from traditional gender roles and asserting their presence in various spheres.

Representation of Women in Contemporary Advertising:

Contemporary advertisements portray women as individuals with agency, independence, and diverse interests. They are shown making choices, pursuing careers, and engaging in activities that go beyond the stereotypical roles assigned to them in the past. This change is not merely a reflection of the advertising industry's evolution but mirrors the real progress that women have made in society.

One significant aspect is the emphasis on women's economic independence. With more women joining the workforce and contributing significantly to household incomes, advertisers have recognized the importance of catering to this demographic. Women are no longer depicted solely as consumers of household products; instead, they are portrayed as decision-makers with purchasing power, influencing choices that go beyond traditional gender norms.

Challenges and Persistent Stereotypes:

While there has been commendable progress in the portrayal of women in advertising, challenges persist. Some advertisements still cling to stereotypical images, perpetuating outdated gender norms. These ads often reinforce traditional expectations, showcasing women primarily in caregiving or decorative roles rather than acknowledging their multi-faceted roles in society.

Television, being a powerful medium, has the potential to challenge these stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and progressive representation of women. However, there is a need for a more conscious effort to shift away from perpetuating gender biases and fostering a more nuanced understanding of women's roles.

The Impact of Media on Women's Image:

The media plays a important role in shaping societal perceptions, and advertising, as a subset of media, contributes significantly to the construction of gender norms. The constant bombardment of stereotypical images can influence not only how women are perceived but also how they perceive themselves.

For instance, the commodification of women's bodies in advertising, often associated with the promotion of certain products like alcohol, perpetuates the idea that a woman's worth is tied to her physical appearance. This objectification diminishes women to mere objects of pleasure, denying them their humanity and agency. Such representations contribute to the perpetuation of harmful beauty standards and reinforce the notion that a woman's primary value lies in her physical attractiveness.

The Feminine Touch and Ritualization of Subordination:

Erving Goffman's analysis of gender representation in advertisements brings attention to the "feminine touch" – a pattern where women's hands are shown engaging in delicate and ritualistic gestures. This not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also subtly implies a form of subordination. The ritualization of subordination extends beyond gestures to broader themes in advertisements.

Certain ads, such as those for products like Axe body spray and Kamasutra condoms, often depict stereotypical and exaggerated gender roles, reinforcing traditional power dynamics. The withdrawal of females into dreamy and introverted states in these advertisements further perpetuates the idea that women exist primarily for the gaze and desire of others, while men are portrayed as active and in control.

Advertisement as a Reflection of Societal Values:

Advertisements are not created in a vacuum; they are a reflection of prevailing societal values and norms. Over the years, as women's roles in society have evolved, so too have their depictions in advertising. The representation of women is not only a matter of creative choice but also a response to the changing dynamics of consumer demographics and societal expectations.

In the 1960s, advertising began to shift from focusing solely on the product to selling a lifestyle associated with it. This marked a departure from the earlier emphasis on women as mere accessories to the product. The focus shifted to showcasing the lifestyle that the product could bring, emphasizing how it could enhance the consumer's life. This transition is emblematic of the broader societal shift towards valuing experiences and lifestyles over material possessions.

Impact of Advertising on Consumer Perceptions:

The power of advertising lies in its ability to shape consumer perceptions and influence purchasing behaviour. The representation of women in advertisements not only reflects changing societal norms but also contributes to shaping cultural attitudes. Consumers often internalize these

portrayals, impacting their views on gender roles, body image, and societal expectations.

For instance, the persistent use of women as objects of desire in certain advertisements can perpetuate harmful beauty standards, leading to unrealistic expectations and body image issues among consumers. On the other hand, advertisements that portray women as empowered decision-makers and contributors to society can contribute to positive social change by challenging traditional gender norms.

Addressing Concerns and Advocating for Change:

While progress has been made, there is a need for continued advocacy to address the concerns surrounding the portrayal of women in advertising. Television, being a mass medium, can be a powerful platform for challenging stereotypes, disseminating information, and fostering public dialogue. Advertisers and content creators have a responsibility to create content that not only reflects diverse realities but also actively contributes to dismantling harmful stereotypes.

A strong strategy for awareness and mobilization of public opinion is crucial for developing a positive image of women in media. This involves challenging advertisements that perpetuate harmful stereotypes, advocating for diversity and inclusivity in advertising, and promoting responsible and ethical representation of women. Additionally, creating public dialogue around these issues can lead to increased awareness and sensitivity among both advertisers and consumers.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the changing role of women in advertising reflects broader shifts in societal norms and values. From the traditional homemaker image prevalent in the 1950s to a more progressive and inclusive representation in contemporary times, the portrayal of women in advertisements has come a long way. Women are now depicted as independent, empowered decision-makers with diverse interests and contributions to society.

However, challenges persist, and certain

References-

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Figures:

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

