WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ADVERTISEMENTS IN INDIA IN 2014

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ABSTRACT

The term empowerment can be defined as, “enabling or authorizing a person or group to take actions or make decisions”. India is a country of rich culture and history. There are stories of strong and influential women throughout Indian history. The convenient interpretation of history by the patriarchal society has lead to a point of time where, women constituting half of the population are considered weak or inferior to men. The definition of empowered women is very difficult to outline. The society can only progress and develop if all the elements in it work together. The standard of living determines the freedom and privileges offered to the female members in the family. The advertisements are one of the important media of communication used by marketers globally. The advertisement reflects the social perspective about various ideas. The advertisers conduct detailed research and select the most acceptable way to communicate the idea. Women are the main target in 80% of the advertisements. The study aims to measure the changes and differences in the perceived value of women in the society with reference to the television advertisements with the theme “Women Empowerment”. Empowerment is not only about opening up access to decision making, but also must include processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy that decision-making space (Rowlands (1995) The Human Development Report 1995, stresses that empowerment is about participation: Empowerment. Development must be by people, not only for them. People must participate fully in the decisions and processes that shape their lives. (UN, 1995 b: 12) but at the same time promotes a rather instrumentalist view of empowerment; Investing in women’s capabilities and empowering them to exercise their choices is not only valuable in itself but is also the surest way to contribute to economic growth and overall development (UN, 1995b: iii).

KEYWORDS

Media influence, Television Advertisement, women empowerment, Indian Culture, Patriarchy, United Nations Global Compact,
INTRODUCTION

Advertising has changed constantly throughout its history, in response to changes in the economy, technology, fashion and social relations. But the shifts that it has undergone in the last two decades have been particularly significant, as developments in information and communication technologies, the emergence of a new generation raised on computer games and music television, and the growing confidence of increasingly ‘media-savvy’ consumers forced a radical rethink of previous advertising strategies. Gill, (2008) Corporate Citizenship, together with the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility (ICCSR) at the University of Nottingham, in 2012 conducted a study of the role of business and women’s empowerment in developing markets. Women’s empowerment is, in this report, defined as “a way to strengthen the social and economic role of women in the society, including improved access to opportunities and resources.”

There are many advertisements which portray women as part of the household. It is easily acceptable that only a husband coming back from work is stressed and it is the duty of the wife to find ways to entertain him. The objectification of women is a matter not at all noticed by the viewers of the advertisement. The boy uses his perfume or shaving gel or motor bike to impress a girl. It is assumed that the girls are to be attracted using these advertised brand of products. This is accepted by Indian market, which is reflected by the increased sales of the products.

Women’s Empowerment Principles as per United Nations Global Compact.

1. Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
2. Treat all women and men fairly at work – respect and support human rights and non-discrimination.
3. Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
4. Promote education, training and professional development for women.
5. Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
6. Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
7. Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

The image of women in mass media and women's participation in the production of messages disseminated by the mass media cannot be studied in isolation from the broad socio-economic, political, and cultural context at a specific point in time. How women are represented in mass media ultimately results from interplay of forces which mould social reality. One of these social forces is the mass media. Communication media produce message systems and symbols which create or structure prevailing images of social reality, thus affecting the process of social change (Fauconnier1979).
A study in 1964, which was carried out by Bauer and Greyser and reported in 1968 in *Advertising in America: The Consumer View*. As part of the study, about 750 people were asked to count the ads they noted from the time they got up in the morning until 5:00 P.M., and another group of 750 people were asked to count ads from 5:00 P.M. until they went to bed. The results showed a total of 76 advertisements of which a person is to some degree aware.

Advertising is a powerful tool for selling, but it can also be a powerful tool for attitude change and behavior. Hence, the danger of advertising, which stereotypes women, is that it can lead to forming notions that undermine women and their abilities. One of the most strident criticisms of the way in which women appear in television and print advertisements is that women are portrayed in an extremely narrow range of roles, with depictions concentrated on the traditional occupations of housewife, a mother and secretary. (Aseman 2013) As per the reports of FICCI in 2008 the television advertisement industry in 007 is worth Rs.225.9 million which showed an 18 % growth from 191.2 million in 2006.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

(Arens, 2008) says that advertising is the structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature, about products, services and ideas, by identified sponsors, through various mass media.

As per (Aseman 2013) women are not happy about the way they are presented in television advertising. Majority of the respondents said that women are often portrayed negatively in television advertising as they are often used when it comes to washing of toilets, washing of clothes, etc. This in line with the literature review where it was said that women are negatively portrayed in television advertising generally. Advertising presents a traditionally stereotyped portrayal of women. Women are typically portrayed in advertising in the traditional role of a mother or beauty or sex symbol and these do not represent women’s diversity. Although limited to magazine and television advertising, many cross-cultural content-analytic studies agree that the portrayals of women and men’s roles in advertising differ by culture (Sengupta, 1995)

Jo Rowlands point out that empowerment is a bottom-up process and cannot be bestowed from the top down: The outside professional cannot expect to control the outcomes of authentic of empowerment being given by one group to another hide an attempt to keep control (Rowlands, 1995).

Neptune, 1997 opines that “the psychology behind this hierarchical, chain-of-command conception of responsibility merits further investigation. After decades of research on racial and gender biases in magazine advertising, ample evidence exists that there is a
problem. The challenge now is to understand why this problem has been so resistant to change.”

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is exploratory in nature. The existing studies and literature is analysed. The content analysis is the technique used for the study. The researcher has observed and studied the advertisements and made an unbiased examination about the portrayal of women in the contemporary advertisements. The advertisements selected are from the everyday advertisements shown on national media channels. They are:

- Havells Electrical appliances.
- Nirma washing powder Ambulance ad.
- Airtel Boss- the Smartphone network.
- Vogue empower.
- Scooty pep.
- Titan raga.
- Fair & Lovely – Marriage proposal.
- Amul manthan.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Empowerment should not only be safety and education but also respect and honor given to the person. It is not necessary that there is a reservation for women but the opportunities and expedience to achieve these opportunities must be equal to all human beings irrelevant of gender. It is to be made sure that each individual is given equal rights and duties to dream and fulfill those dreams. The analysis shows the depiction of women in different scenarios speaking and reacting for their position and status. The scenarios vary from family to the public locations. All the advertisements show women who are beyond the stage of accepting basic necessities from the male members of the family. It shows a representation in which a woman expects more importance and respect then electrical equipment. The Indian culture expects a woman to take care of the house. The women in India independent or not consider it as an honor to handle the feeding aspects of home management. But the respect should be placed where it deserved.

Nirma washing powder ambulance ad shows a roadblock as an ambulance is stuck in a pothole in road. The potholes and bad conditions of the road is a regular scenario in India. The difference is well dressed women taking initiative to understand the emergency of the patient and push the vehicle. Women are always represented as beautiful, clean, shy and weak. This ad is the response to this stereotype. Women are not afraid of hardwork and getting the hands dirty when required.
The Airtel advertisement of fast network shows a happily married couple. The husband works as a subordinate of his wife in office. The wife is strict boss, but still they are happily married. The Indian mythology describes husband as equal to god. There are traditions where women touch the feet of the husband. The ad is a new generation eye opener to those who expect women to be compliant and submissive.

Vogue magazine has entered Indian market many years ago. But the expected market was high end female members. With the strong television advertisement the brand is getting attraction of a wider audience. There are three advertisements of #vogue empower theme. Three represents three famous actresses of Indian film industry. Three advertisements have three strong messages, the violence against women, the absence of feeling security by women and strength of women soul and persona.

Scooty pep is a brand which introduced glamour and fashion aspect to a necessity good. The motor bikes were always depicted as convenient, powerful and trustworthy. The introduction of different colors and using the mainstream movie stars as brand ambassadors introduced the theme of fun into motor bikes. Women are expected to be cautious and alert always. The actions of the women are always scrutinized by everyone. The ad shows a young girl enjoying the freedom of travelling without restriction and enjoying it. The ad with tagline “why should boys have all the fun?” sends a clear message.

Titan raga is a brand exclusively for women. The ad shows the right of women to choose her partner. The decision making power of women is acknowledged in the ad.

The product Fair & Lovely was under many criticism for earlier advertisements which shows women desperate for marriage and failure because of skin color. But there was a change in the messages of the brand. The brand shows a women being confident and going against social norms of deciding her marriage age.

Amul is a brand which is always a pride of the country. The advertisement shows the story of self dependent women who are respected by their husbands.

The advertisements represent change in the mindset of people. But how much of it is happening in the real world is another area of discussion. With the belief that every television viewer is watching these advertisement and advertisements influence social cultural change, we can conclude that there is women empowered India in horizon.

**REFERENCE**


