

## Perception of Adolescents Regarding Portrayal of Women in Commercial Advertisements on T.V.

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**ABSTRACT** Advertisement is a powerful medium designed to sell products, aspirations and communicate concepts of acceptable behavior and gender roles. The question of women's portrayal on T.V has been a matter of debate for considerable time now. The present study, "perception of adolescents regarding the portrayal of women in commercial advertisements on T.V" was conducted with the objectives, to ascertain the responses of the adolescents regarding the image of women in advertisements on T.V and study the impact of commercial advertisements on adolescents. The study was conducted on a sample of 90 adolescents, which consisted of 45 girls and 45 boys. An interview schedule was used to elicit the required information. The results of the study revealed that advertisements left an impact on both the genders. The presence of female model in the advertisement influenced their liking for a particular product. Fashion statement of girls was also influenced by advertisements. Boys felt that whenever a beautiful model is screened in an advertisement, it stays on their mind for long period of time. Majority of them felt that advertisement depicts women in stereotype roles and that the advertisements are not representing the personality of Indian women. The respondents wanted to see women in different kind of roles in the future advertisements. They wanted advertisements to be more educative, informative, product oriented, family oriented and with a bit of humor. Majority of girls wanted women to be shown as confident, independent and empowered individuals, whereas, boys wanted women to be projected in fashionable and glamorous roles.

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable because they are new and inexperienced consumers and are prime targets of many advertisements. They are in process of learning their values and roles and developing their self-concepts. Mass communication has made possible a kind of national pressure that erodes private and individual values and standards. (Kilbourne, 1990)

The influence of advertising on adolescents is hardly surprising, researches show that adolescents emulate the behavior of attractive models, especially when the behavior is rewarded. Nowhere else is the heady combination of physical beauty and personal success portrayed as pleadingly and persuasively as in commercial advertisements (Gardner, 1999).

Advertisers often emphasize sexuality and the importance of physical attractiveness is an attempt to sell products (Fox, 1996) but researchers are concerned that this places undue pressure on women and men to focus on their appearances.

In today's media, women are looked upon as a tool that can help to sell a product, women and sex are often a great combination when to get a product to come off the shelves. There are many

different companies that stretch far and wide to include women and sex in their advertisements for sale purposes and many use very interesting ways of including women to sell their products (Lemmon, 2002).

Women have been stereotyped in the media more than any other group. A stereotype against women creates a world where no one is ugly, overweight, poor, struggling and disabled. In advertisements women are often portrayed in similar roles and are grouped together with the assumption that all women are the same or should be the same. Women in advertisements take on a fake look because they are made to look as close to perfect as possible. Women in advertisements are masked with make-up and almost always the pictures airbrushed to perfection. Women like a super women image where they are supposed to do it all. All with working with full time job she can still play the role of man and take care of kids, clean, cook, and maintain a heavy relationship with husband. This is not true in all the real world but because it is portrayed so much in the media people feel it is necessary to have high expectations for women (Ryan, 2002).

Women are still shown primarily in submissive positions as sex objects. Sexual women are used in advertisements for women to imply

that the product will increase the user's appeal to men. Advertisements continuously promote the message that women's ultimate goal is to attract men. However, it is important to note that "advertisements depicts" for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we think men and women behave (McLaughlin and Gault, 1999).

Viswanath (2001) of Jagori, (a women's based organization) reported that the advertisements today are geared at the upper middle and upper class, targeting the upwardly mobile women. This 'modern' woman is supposedly more free with 'choices' to exercise and this is apparent in the slick advertisements where women have free body language and seem more open, articulate and more sexual. No where else is this more obvious than in condom ads. Kamasutra's selling point was, "For the pleasure of making love". Passion is more up front, sexuality more explicit and you clearly see the woman having pleasure as well.

Rachoza (2003) conducted a study "The stereotypical image of women in advertisements and found that women are still seen as objects and women are expected to look and act like those portrayed in ads. The women in advertisements represent what society, especially the men of society, holds as the ideal image for a woman. The images of woman today are highly sexualized to appeal to those looking. Women in the twenty first century are under the power of gaze, the male gaze.

In this context, it becomes important to study the opinion of adolescents about the portrayal of women in commercial advertisements on T.V. It would be interesting to know the likes and dislikes of adolescents about portrayal of women in advertisements and to see whether they are different from rest of the population. It would be helpful in ascertaining the type of roles and images of women; the adolescents want to see in future advertisements. With these assumptions in mind the study was taken up with the objective- (i) to study the impact of commercial advertisements on adolescents with special references to the images and role portrayal of women, (ii) opinion of adolescents regarding stereotype image of women in advertisements, (iii) characteristics of a good advertisement, and (iv) changes needed for the future portrayal of women in advertisements.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on a sample of 90 adolescents, which consisted of 45 girls and 45 boys. The two colleges (one Girls College and one Boys College) were selected purposively and 45 students were drawn randomly from each college. An interview schedule was used to elicit the required information. The data were collected in the month of October and November 2005.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected to obtain information regarding the opinions of the respondents about the kind of impact the advertisements leave on them, opinion of stereotype image of women in advertisements, characteristics of a good advertisement and changes needed for future portrayal of women in advertisements.

The Figure 1 depicts that majority of girls (75.5%) and boys (62.2%) felt that advertisement left an impact on them. The respondents who felt that advertisement do not have an impact on them stated that they are mature enough to distinguish between right and wrong, and they are not easily fooled by these advertisements.

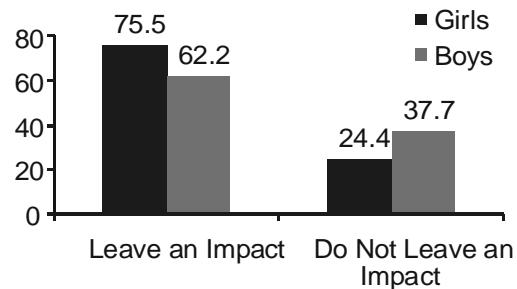


Fig. 1. Impact of advertisements on respondents

It is clear from above Table 1 that majority of girls (57.7%) and boys (51.1%) felt that advertisement affected their consumption pattern, 60% girls also felt that advertisement persuaded them to be like beautiful models, where as 35.5% boys said that whenever they see beautiful models in the advertisement it stayed on their mind for long periods. Dressing style of the model in the advertisement also left an impact on 20% girls, as it affected their fashion statement. Both girls (20%) and boys (22.2%) felt that advertisement influenced their liking for a particular product if an attractive

model is shown in the advertisements, whereas 17.7% girls stated that they tried to imitate the character shown in the advertisement and (28.8%) girls said that it affected their self esteem i.e. various advertisements of fairness cream and beauty soaps enhance an inferiority complex in them. Bahuguna (1997) also reported that in advertising women are depicted as groomed, passive recipients of consumerism, creates images, which not only distort reality but also enforce outdated ideals of womanhood. These images put a great stress on today's urban woman to live up to a fictional idea impossible to realize.

**Table 1: Kind of impact on respondents**

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Girls (n=45)		Boys (n=45)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Consumption pattern	26	57.5	23	51.1
2.	Affect on body image	13	28.8	-	-
3.	Dressing Style	9	20	-	-
4.	Desire to be like models	27	60	-	-
5.	Emulate	8	17.7	-	-
6.	Awareness	4	8.8	7	15.5
7.	Model stay on mind	-	-	16	35.5
8.	Influence liking	9	20	10	22.2

\* Multiple responses

**Impact Left by the Presence of Film Personality**

Majority of girls (68.8%) and (71.7%) boys agreed that the presence of film personality in the advertisements do leave an impact on them.

It is clear from Table 2 that majority of both girls (55.5%) and boys (51.1%) felt that presence of film personality in the advertisement influenced their consumption pattern. Large number of girls (33.3%) stated that it affected their fashion. Both girls (15.5%) and boys (37.7%) felt that the presence of their favorite film actress in the advertisement influenced their liking for a particular product, 33.3% girls 22.2% boys said that whenever their

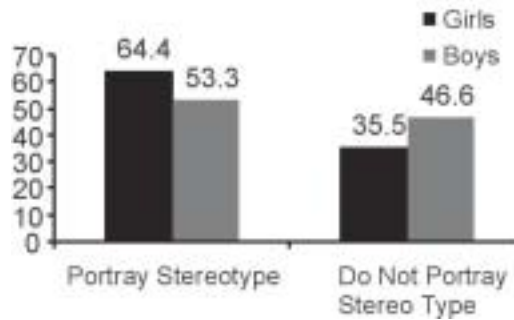
**Table 2: Kind of impact left by film personalities**

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Girls (n=45)		Boys (n=45)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Consumption pattern	25	55.5	23	51.1
2.	Desire to be like them	14	31.1	-	-
3.	Influence liking	7	15.5	17	37.7
4.	Affect fashion	15	33.3	-	-
5.	Watch it carefully	15	33.3	10	22.2

\* Multiple responses.

favorite actor appeared in advertisements, they watched the advertisement more carefully.

The Figure 2 depicts that majority of girls (64.4%) and boys (53.3%) agreed that advertisements portray women in stereotype roles as they felt that woman is projected mostly as housewives or in glamorous roles. Advertisements depict women as a product user but never

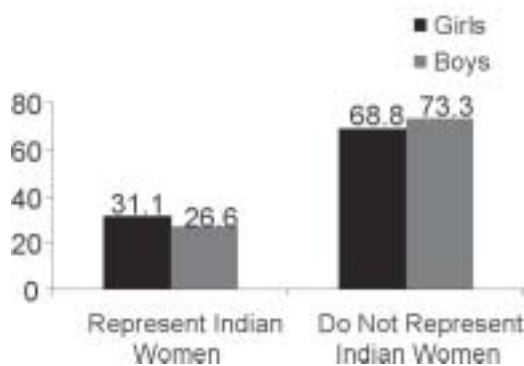


**Fig. 2. Portrayal of women as stereotype in advertisements**

as a product maker

The studies conducted by Kilbourne (1990) and (Vishav, 2003) also revealed that women are shown in stereotype image exclusively as housewives or sex objects.

The Figure 3 reveals that majority of both girls (68.8%) and boys (73.3%) felt that advertisements are not representative of the personality of Indian women as women in advertisement are attired in western clothes and do not depicts Indian culture. One girl respondent stated, "women are mostly shown in glamorized image and an average Indian woman is not glamorous in reality". Malhotra



**Fig. 3. Representation of Indian women in advertisements**

and Rogers (2000) studied the television images of women and found that they are more openly sexual. This image did not match the reality of women's bodies in India.

It is evident from the Table 3 that majority of both girls (57.7%) and boys (51.1%) felt that an advertisement should be educative and informative. A number of girls (48.8%) and boys (42.2%) felt that advertisement should be family oriented. An equal percent of both girls (33.3%) and boys (33.3%) felt that an advertisement should have a comic content in it which makes an advertisement more interesting to watch.

**Table 3: Quality of a good advertisement**

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Girls (n=45)		Boys (n=45)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Family oriented	22	48.8	19	42.2
2.	Comic	15	33.3	15	33.3
3.	Educative and Informative	26	57.7	23	51.1
4.	Emphasis on the product	7	15.5	5	11.1

\* Multiple responses.

Table 4 reveals that majority of respondents felt that a change is needed in advertisements especially in the portrayal of women. Majority of girls (62.2%) and boys (57.7%) felt that advertisement should be more product oriented rather than emphasis given on the female model. An equal percent of girls (31.1%) and boys (31.1%) suggested that advertisements should be more educative and informative. Some girls (26.6%) and (4.4%) boys suggested that women should be presented in different roles and in different career settings, 33.3% girls and 20% boys stated that advertisements portraying

**Table 4: Changes needed in advertisement**

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Girls (n=45)		Boys (n=45)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Product oriented	28	62.2	26	57.7
2.	No vulgarity	15	33.3	9	20
3.	Less emphasis on the model	15	33.3	3	6.6
4.	More educative	14	31.1	14	31.1
5.	Different roles of women	12	26.6	2	4.4
6.	Comic	4	8.8	10	22.2
7.	Content strong	8	17.7	6	13.3

\* Multiple responses

women should not be vulgar. The other changes suggested by the respondents were that advertisements should be more comic and the content of the advertisements should be strong.

It is clear from the Table 5 that majority of girls (73.3%) wanted women to be shown in independent and empowered roles in future. A large number of girls (60%) felt that women should be projected as affectionate and loving. In contrast majority of boys (64.4%) felt that women should be projected in fashionable and glamorous roles, while only (44.6%) wanted to see women in independent roles. Very few girls (13.3%) and boys (6.6%) wanted to see women in traditional and conservative roles.

**Table 5: Depiction of women in future advertisements**

S. No.	Responses	Respondents			
		Girls (n=45)		Boys (n=45)	
		N	%	N	%
1.	Fashionable and Glamorous	18	40	29	64.4
2.	Simple	12	26.6	7	15.5
3.	Independent\ Empowered	33	73.3	20	44.4
4.	Affectionate and Loving	27	60	17	37.7
5.	Traditional and Conservative	6	13.3	3	6.6
6.	Feminine	5	11.1	9	20

\* Multiple responses

These findings are contradictory to the study done by (Capila and Sawhney, 1989). Which revealed that majority of the respondents wanted girls to be shown as simple, docile, domesticated within the family nucleus. The difference in the findings may be due to the age difference, because adolescence is the age when they identify themselves with the present T.V. characters and fashionable and glamorous images attract them.

There was a sex difference in the opinions of boys and girls majority of boys wanted to see women as fashionable and glamorous, whereas majority of girls wanted women to be projected as independent.

## CONCLUSION

Advertisement is a powerful medium designed to sell products, aspirations and communicate concepts of acceptable behavior and gender roles. The repetition of Television commercials day after day, though boring to the adults leaves

an indelible mark on impressionable young mind. All advertisements by and large (mainly on T.V) depicts sports, work situations as man's existence and as a woman's world hardly is a woman shown as an equal partner who is employed and a person of her own will. The question of women's portrayal on T.V has been a matter of debate for considerable time now, hence the present study entitled "perception of adolescents regarding the portrayal of women in commercial advertisements on T.V" was conducted with the objectives, to ascertain the responses of the adolescents regarding the image of women in advertisements on T.V and study the impact of commercial advertisements on adolescents with special reference to the images and role portrayal of women. The results of the study revealed that advertisements left an impact on both the genders. It affected the consumption pattern of both the respondents. The presence of female model in the advertisement also influenced the liking of a particular product. Fashion statement of girls was also influenced by advertisements whereas boys felt that whenever a beautiful model is screened in an advertisement, it stays on their mind for long period of time. Presence of film personality influenced the liking of both boys and girls and the respondents paid more attention to that particular advertisement. Regarding the views of the respondents about stereotype image of women in advertisements, majority of both girls and boys felt that advertisement depicts women in stereotype roles and that the advertisements are not representing the personality of Indian women. After having an informal discussion with the respondents, it was found that the respondents wanted to see women in different kind of roles in the future advertisements. They were of the opinion that advertisements should be more educative, informative and product oriented, it should be family oriented and should contain a bit of humor in it. Respondents suggested that women should be presented in different roles; she should not be projected only as product user but also as product maker. In advertisement portrayal of women should not be vulgar and the product should be given more emphasis than the female model. Majority of girls wanted women to be shown as confident, independent and empowered individuals in future advertisement, whereas, boys felt that women should be projected in fashionable and glamorous roles.

## SUGGESTIONS

- Advertisements play an important role in influencing and shaping values and attitudes, particularly of adolescents; hence advertisers should ensure that it depicts a positive portrayal of women in advertisements. The advertisements which exploit womanhood and portray vulgarity should not be screened on T.V., as it reinforce a negative stereotypes on the viewers especially on adolescents who are more vulnerable to advertisements and going to be our future generation.
- There is need to recognize the changing roles of women. Advertisements should show women working in a wide variety of career settings. They should be projected in diverse roles such as educated, decision maker, independent, confident and self-reliant.
- Advertisements should depict average Indian women instead of focusing only the upper strata of the society. The viewers should be able to identify with product being advertised and with the model shown in the advertisements.
- The content of the advertisements should be relevant to the product. There should be more emphasizes on the product rather than on the female models and their figures. Women in the advertisements should not be used for attention seeking purpose. It is unnecessary to show women in advertisements related to male products such as men's underwear and vests.
- There is need for special committee to scrutinize all advertisements carefully to ensure that advertisers do not portray women in derogatory and stereotype ways.
- It is necessary that society should be motivated and sensitized to the issues of portrayal of women in commercial advertisements on T.V., so that they can take necessary steps for healthy projection of women in the media.

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