

A Gender Perspectives on Women's Body Image in Television Advertisements

Madhusmita Konwar, Kashmiri Saikia

Research Scholar Department of Sociology, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Vishwavidyalaya,
Assam

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.806041>

Received: 08 May 2024; Revised: 26 May 2024; Accepted: 31 May 2024; Published: 01 July 2024

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the portrayal of women in television advertisements through a gender perspective. It explores how advertisements perpetuate traditional gender norms and beauty standards, often depicting women in roles that emphasize physical appearance and reinforce societal expectations. It discusses the impact of these portrayals on women body image and self-esteem. The paper is primarily based on secondary sources of data such as books, article, and research paper, and various e- sources.

Keywords: Gender, body image, women, television advertisement

INTRODUCTION

Advertising is an attempt at creativity that specifically influences consumers' intention to purchase a particular product and changes or creates the perception of the product in consumers' minds. Advertisement involves rational and emotional appeals to people. In rational appeal the product can be focused primarily on its benefits and the problems it can solve while on the other hand emotional appeal caters to consumers' psychological, emotional and social needs (Baheti, 2012 cited in Somasundaran Chakkambath, 2017). Advertisements are especially designed to reach customers through various channels. Advertising disseminates a variety of marketing information designed to meet the needs of both buyers and suppliers (Seluman, Eguono, Gbenga & Aimiomode, 2024). Advertising has a powerful influence on shaping and perpetuating stereotypes (Seluman, Eguono, Gbenga & Aimiomode, 2024).

Television advertising is all about creating ads that grab people attention and convince people to buy something. Before making an ad, companies do lots of research to understand what people like and what makes them buy things. Then, they come up with ideas for the ad, like funny stories or emotional scenes. After that, they hire actors, find places to film, and work with directors to bring the ideas to life. Once the filming is done, editors add music and special effects to make the ad look polished. When the ad is ready, it's time to show it on TV. Companies pick specific times and show their ads based on who they want to see them. After the ad is on TV, companies watch to see if it's working. They look at things like how many people remember the ad, visit their website, or buy their product because of the ad. Depending on how well the ad does, companies might change their approach or make new ads. TV ads aren't just on TV anymore. With streaming and digital platforms, companies can now make ads just for the internet. They use data to show ads to people who are most likely to buy their product. But even with all these changes, TV ads are still a big deal. They have a special way of sticking in people's minds, whether it's a funny commercial. As long as people are watching TV, there will always be companies trying to get their attention with clever commercials.

In a study by Emma Halliwell and Helga Dittmar in 2004, they explored the effects of different types of

advertisements on women's body-focused anxiety and advertising effectiveness (Roy & Augustine, 2019). They aimed to identify ad images that could sell products without causing distress to a significant portion of women. Ui-Jeen Yu, Mary L. Damhorst, and Daniel W. Russell delved into the impact of body image on consumers' perceptions of idealized advertising images and brand attitudes in their 2011 study (ibid). They discovered that some young female consumers challenged the notion that thin bodies were the only attractive ones, emphasizing the significance of body image in interpreting media representations. In 2014, Todd J. Williams, Jeff Schimel, Joseph Hayes, and Murat Usta shows how individuals' self-worth influenced their response to societal ideals portrayed in advertising, demonstrating the broader implications for both men and women (ibid).

Objectives:

- To understand the portrayal of women in television advertisements through a gender perspective.
- To understand how the advertisement affect women's body image and self -esteem.

METHODOLOGY

The paper is mainly relies on secondary sources which includes published articles and research papers excess through E-Journals.

Gendered Portrayals in Television Advertisements:

Gender is not only used as one of the bases for market segmentation, but has also emerged as one of the preferred advertising strategies over market products (Kumari & Shivani, 2012). The roles usually given to women in advertising are frequently given to draw attention to the message of the image (Seluman, Eguono, Gbenga & Aimimode, 2024). Therefore, for marketing communicators, gender, gender-related behavior and its role in marketing communication is very important (Kumari & Shivani, 2012). The stereotypical portrayal of gender in Advertisement plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing social attitudes, and impacting individuals and communities (Seluman, Eguono, Gbenga & Aimimode, 2024).

The portrayal of women In media is a complex issue that can be understood through an intersectional framework, which considers the various overlapping identities that women hold and how these intersect to influence their representation. Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, helps us understand that women's experiences are not homogeneous but are shaped by a range of factors including race, class, sexuality, age etc. It recognizes that these identities are interconnected and can create unique experiences of discrimination, and marginalization. It continues to marginalize the most marginalized people of the society. The representation of women in media often varies significantly by race. For example – women with darker skin tones are portrayed in a wider range in comparison to women with lighter skin tones.

Advertising as a whole still conforms to traditional gender portrayals (Chisholm). Women are more likely to be portrayed as dependent in a lot of advertising, and pictures are much more likely to be taken at home than men (Paek, Nelson, &Viella, 2011, Chisholm). It portrays women as always powerless and men as powerful and protective Irving Goffman's book *Gender Advertising* (1979) explored a range of portrayals of women and men in terms of power. Goffman's findings include that women are generally depicted as small in relative size, especially in height. Men tend to be portrayed as taller than women, placing them in positions of power, authority, and rank (Goffma, 1979). Portrayals of unrealistic images lead to female self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and restricted self-development (Eisend, 2010; Goffman, 1979; Besenoff, 2006 cited in Sharma & Bumb, 2021).

Television advertising plays a significant role in shaping perceptions of gender roles and expectations,

particularly in how women are portrayed and targeted as consumers. Historically, TV ads have often reinforced traditional gender stereotypes, depicting women in domestic roles and emphasizing their appearance and relationships rather than their abilities or aspirations. However, there has been a shift in recent years towards more diverse and empowering portrayals of women in advertising.

Television advertisements frequently perpetuate traditional gender norms, often portraying women in ways that emphasize physical appearance and reinforce societal beauty standards. For instance, advertisements for beauty products often feature women with flawless skin and slender figures, promoting an idealized standard of beauty that is often unattainable for many. Such portrayals not only contribute to the objectification of women but also perpetuate feelings of inadequacy among viewers who do not fit this narrow definition of beauty. Many skincare advertisements feature women with perfect, blemish-free skin, promoting the notion that flawless skin is essential for beauty and self-worth. For example, a commercial for a popular skincare brand may show a woman applying the product and instantly achieving radiant, glowing skin, implying that using the product will lead to similar results for the viewer. Fashion advertisements often showcase women with slim, toned bodies, promoting the idea that thinness is synonymous with beauty. For instance, a clothing brand may feature a campaign with models wearing their latest collection, all of whom have slender figures and flawless appearance, reinforcing societal beauty standards and ideals. Moreover, advertisements for household products frequently depict women as the primary users and beneficiaries of the products, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Television advertisements often depict women in domestic roles, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations. This portrayal not only limits the representation of women in the media but also reinforces the idea that their primary value lies in their ability to fulfill domestic duties. For example, a commercial for a cleaning product may show a woman effortlessly cleaning her home, implying that maintaining a clean and tidy household is her responsibility. Women have historically been underrepresented in positions of power and authority in television commercials, further reinforcing gender inequalities. Ads have often depicted men as the decision-makers and experts, while women are relegated to supporting roles or portrayed as needing guidance from men.

Impact on Body Image:

The portrayal of women in television advertisements can have a significant impact on viewers' body image and self-esteem, particularly among women and young girls. Research has consistently shown that exposure to idealized images of beauty in the media can lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and disordered eating behaviors. Television advertising has frequently emphasized women's appearance and beauty standards, promoting products and services aimed at enhancing or altering their physical appearance. This focus on unrealistic beauty ideals can contribute to low self-esteem and body image issues among women and girls, as they compare themselves to the unattainable standards portrayed in ads. The narrow representation of women in television advertisements can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and exclusion among those who do not fit the stereotypical mold of beauty. This lack of diversity in representation can be particularly harmful to individuals from marginalized groups, such as women of color, who are already underrepresented in mainstream media.

CONCLUSION

Television advertisements play a powerful role in shaping societal perceptions of beauty and gender roles. From promoting unattainable beauty standards to reinforcing traditional gender norms, advertisements often perpetuate harmful stereotypes that can negatively impact women's body image and self-esteem. Advertising is a handsome profession in society that women accept as a means of income. But often through this advertisement. Women are placed in higher roles and positions but stereotypical portrayals are still realized. To reduce the differences created by gender stereotypes, advertisers should try to improve the status of

female role portrayals that it requires.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Advertiser should feature women in all product categories, not just cosmetics, household or cleaning products, to improve women's status.
- Advertisers must avoid portraying women in subservient and weak roles, as these can generate negative perceptions.
- Society must teach children about gender equality and sensitivity from an early age to change how women are portrayed in television advertisement.
- Establish a censor board specifically for television ads, involving educated people, especially women, to monitor and control misleading and indecent advertisements.
- Family should provide equal education and opportunity to their children regardless of gender.

REFERENCE

1. Chisholm, S (n.d). Gender and Advertising: How Gender Shapes Meaning.
2. Kumari & Shivani (2012). A Study on Gender Portrayals in Advertising through the Years: A Review Report. *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* Volume 2(2), 2012, pp. 54–63, ISSN: 2164-0262
3. Roy, A., & Augustine, R. (2019). A Study on the Impact of Advertising on Female Body Image. *Centre for management studies*.
4. Seluman, Ikharo & Eguono, Aghawadoma & Gbenga, Arikenbi & Aimiomode, Ainakhuagbor. (2024). Stereotypical portrayal of gender in mainstream media and its effects on societal norms: A theoretical perspective. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*. 5. 743-749.
5. Sharma, Sangeeta and Bumb, Arpan (2021). Role Portrayal of Women in Advertising: An Empirical Study. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(9), 236-255.
<https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss9/16>
6. Somasundaran Checkmate, Ranjith. (2017). A Study on the Impact of Advertisements on Consumers.