

Media as One of the Reasons for Prevalence of Female Objectification

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Abstract: Thinking that a woman is meant for taking care of others but not herself, or she is weaker than a man in all the terms is very common and has been entrenched in our society - in our beliefs, customs, and traditions. Society tells us that women are objects, not subjects. These kinds of mindsets persist because everything around us is like that; even a small television commercial or a print ad which is published on a large scale can have a huge impact on millions of people. It is frightening to consider just how deeply entrenched objectification of women really goes as all the things that shape our mind and the way we think are designed in such a way that we tend to consider such profound issues as "normal". But the matter of fact is, living in a society where individuality itself is not much valued, living as a woman is becoming extremely tough.

Keywords: objectification, media, advertisements, stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

The objectification of women is such an utterly common thing that the population rarely ever notices it. They never really step back and wonder why breasts are the focal point in that ad for shoes. In India, objectification is ingrained in our society. Women are subject to gawking, wolf-whistles, street harassment, attacks, rape or sexual violence due to this mentality of objectification.

Objectification is a phenomenon that not only changes the way we view models or actresses, but also how we see every woman and ourselves. Therefore it becomes important to understand, what makes us view every woman as an object. Media and notably advertisements shape the way we look at the society due to the reoccurring themes that happen. These ads emphasize visual pictures that play a part in how the gatekeepers behind these messages are influencing the lots and there's a pattern in the ways such advertisements are being shown. They set standards for what's masculine and what's feminine, and as a result they are eventually victorious in influencing our means of thinking, acting and seeing the world. It's simple to imagine how one business, noticing the success of another, may adopt a similar advertising model and embrace a similar kind of objectification as a way of marketing their merchandise. It's a vicious cycle that's brought society's view of women to an entire new, perverted level.

Objectification in the advertising industry is quite clearly seen where women are used to sell certain products without there being any correlation between the products and women kind in general. It's true that men are too objectified more than they used to be, but men don't live in a world where they are very likely to

be raped, harassed, or beaten up as a result of this type of mindset, whereas women and girls do. Most of us would say that "I don't pay attention to advertisements; they have no effect on me" but the fact is that the influence of advertising is quick, cumulative and subconscious and they sell more than products. The glossy magazines tell us what clothes to wear and what overpriced perfume to buy if we really want to 'sell ourselves' and get the man we want. Through the media, advertisers define what's sexy and what's beautiful. They set the standard for every woman [1]. Not every woman has a size zero figures and not every woman should! Some teen magazines target 12-13 year old girls, and these girls tend to believe that it is necessary to match up that level of so called physical perfection [2]. But the fact is, these images created by such advertisements are not real, they are artificial and constructed. And when real women and girls measure themselves against it they feel depressed as their self-esteem goes down [3].

RESEARCH METHODS

Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of learning how research is finished scientifically. In it, we study the various steps

that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them.

Sociologists draw on a variety of both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative methods aim to classify features, count them, and create statistical models to test hypotheses and explain observations. Qualitative methods aim for a complete, detailed description of observations, including the context of events and circumstances.

Media Content Analysis

It is a research methodology utilized by sociologists to investigate social life by deciphering words and pictures from film, music, and media, etc. The research can even be time consuming. The researchers explore however the words and pictures that are used, and also the context during which they're used—particularly their relationship to one another—to draw inferences regarding the underlying culture. It has been used extensively to examine the place of females in society. Under this method I would be focusing particularly on advertisements and choose a set of different television commercials to analyze, look at the use of certain words and images which will provide an insight into particularly complex subjects.

Statistical Survey

Survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research and it encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions to the respondents. The survey research is a very valuable tool for assessing opinions even on a small scale. Methods are used to collect information from a sample of individuals in a systematic way. For my research, I have chosen rating scale as a method of collecting data; it's a set of written statements. The researcher will analyse that to what extent a respondent agrees with the statements mentioned, as they will rate it on the scale of 0 to 5 where 0 refers completely disagreeing and 5 refers completely agreeing. I have collected data from maximum age groups of people and I have represented them in the form of graphs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The media content (advertisements) analysis is as follows.

i. Surf Excel: "As good as Mom's Hand Wash"

Most of the Indian television commercials focus on maintaining the household work and in almost all the cases women are portrayed as doing that job. Be it a detergent's, cleaning product's or a hand wash's advertisement, it's women who are always in a lead role but unfortunately they don't lead their own lives, as they are too busy perfecting

other's lives. Women and their body parts sell everything from food to washing powder. We are all aware of the fact that a number of women have started to work in different fields and have started acquiring a public role instead of limiting themselves to the private sphere of life, which was prevalent in the traditional Indian society. But most of the advertisements that seek our attention still focus particularly on women's role as a housewife or a mother who is either seen as washing her children's and husband's clothes or cooking food for her family. This particular ad's tagline explains how a detergent powder, is as good as a mother's hand wash, certainly because only mothers and daughters are supposed to have achieved expertise in washing clothes. A woman, in this case - the mother, is responsible for everyone's work without knowing what her own choice is. Although there have been several ad campaigns showcasing female empowerment, there has not been much difference because these ads try to portray women as either a superwoman or a supermom who is capable of handling her job and her children both at the same time. But no one asks why is a woman responsible for handling all of this, why her priorities should always include others rather than herself, why she has to be someone's wife, mother, sister or daughter first and then her own self. If not encourage women to be there for themselves, these advertisements should at least not encourage the traditionally acceptable roles of women, because by doing so, they normalize the attitudes against women which are a result of such underlying issues.

ii. Slice: "Amasutra"

An advertisement of Slice mango juice, called 'Amasutra', shows Katrina Kaif seducing a mango, which is supposed to create the desire to buy a slice mango juice. Just a few close ups of her seducing a mango seems to have been successful in capturing people's attention. The advertisement is obviously unrealistic having no meaning attached to the mango drink. Women are knowingly or unknowingly selling their bodies, which explains that these women are themselves not aware that not only they are being objectified but they are also encouraging

it. Why can't the drink be advertised using its own characteristics? It must be tough for one to imagine a male featuring in these types of ads, depicting the exact same thing as what Katrina is seen to be doing; in fact most of the people would find it impossible to happen, simply because men are always portrayed as muscular, strong and powerful. If they were to sell the similar product, all they would be doing is hold it up and smile. Apparently no one thinks why that happens. So, the thought that women are essentially equated with their sexual charm is a pretty damaging message to send to any man because it is targeting men who are still forming their core concepts concerning the way to view and treat women.

iii. Seagram's Imperial blue: "Men will be Men"

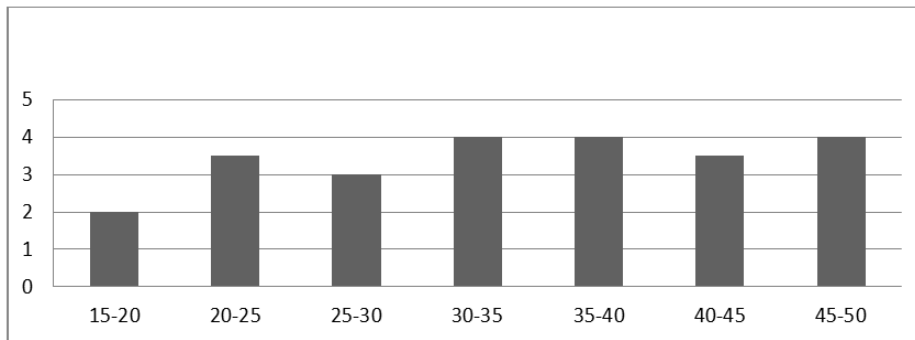
Seagram's Imperial Blue is a brand that sells Indian whiskey and music CDs. Its tagline says- "Men will be Men", which in itself is very problematic. Seagram's sexist "Men will be Men" campaign glorifies negative stereotypes on what masculinity means and is meant to advertise 'CDs' without even giving us a glimpse into the music. Almost all their advertisements are focused on men as consumers of the alcoholic product. In all of their commercials women are objectified without any apparent justification. The ad's tagline has assigned certain characteristics to men and women. Women in all their commercials are shown emotional and stubborn who are easily convinced by gifts whereas; a man is shown to be careless and chauvinist. This advertisement not only stereotypes men and women but also sexually objectifies women as mere commodity that will only be valued or helped if she qualifies certain conventional beauty standards. It emphasises that to be a man it's necessary to admire 'other' women,

and only those who have certain conventional beauty standards. The advertisement conveys a wrong message to the viewers especially the young generation that these are some of the characteristics that should be present in a man to be called 'a man' and generalizes all the genders.

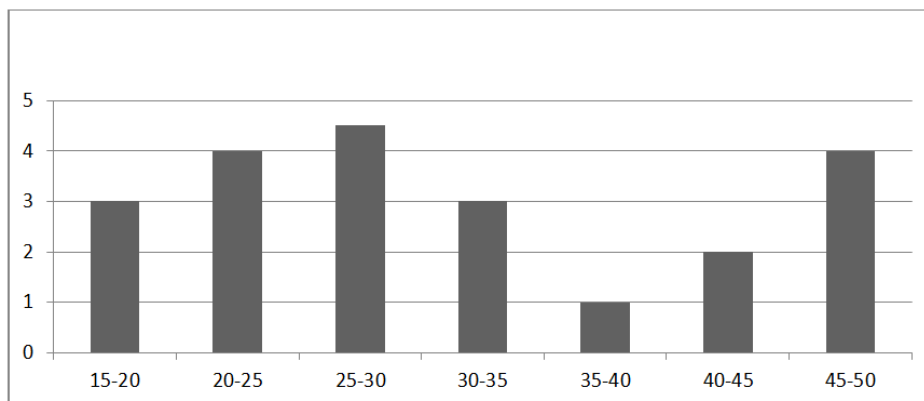
iv. Addiction: "Spray it on. Turn them on."

By just applying a branded deodorant, a man can attract many ladies around him and make them unable to resist him, the tagline describes. The brand shouts out to the masses that their products make men more attractive to women, who they present as brainless objects, yet, hot and sexy who exist merely to please men. This advertisement and many other ads also insult, undermine and objectify men, but as mentioned earlier they don't live in a world where they are likely to get harassed, raped, sexually assaulted, cat-called or threatened in any way, simply because they are portrayed as the powerful sex who has control over the opposite sex. Such ads promote that women do not have control over them and highlight the fact that it's eventually men who can control women. The fact that there are a number of people who are easily being influenced by these types of ads prove how deeply ingrained this issue is. We don't even realize that we are objectifying another human being till; somebody calls it out, which again happens rarely. Is it not acceptable to men that women are independent enough and can be much more than just being -hot and sexy? It's time to move beyond the "girls are hot, boys will be boys" narratives and, get more creative.

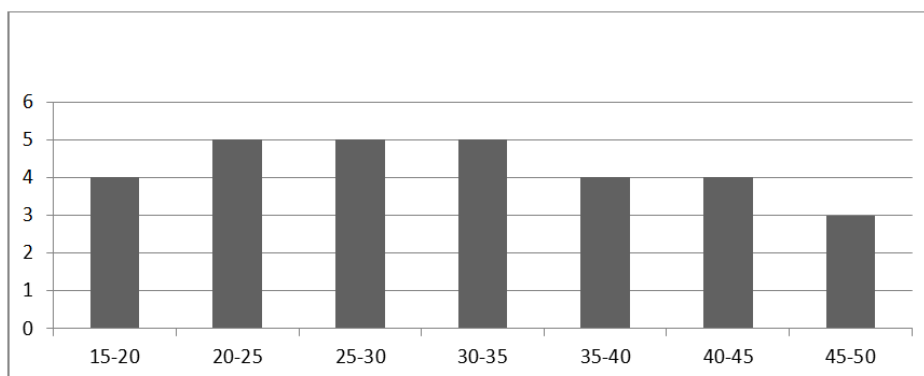
The statistical survey conducted using the ratings for a set of statements is given below. The graph represents two axes, x-axis being the age group of people and y-axis being their ratings. The statements go as follows.



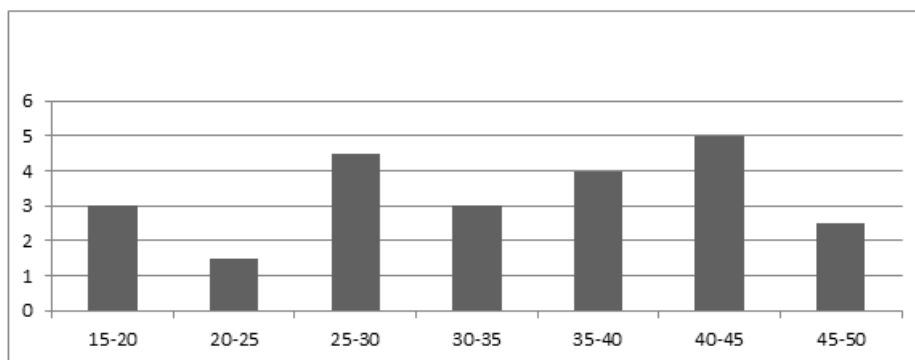
Graph-1: Females are always portrayed as a weaker sex in the media



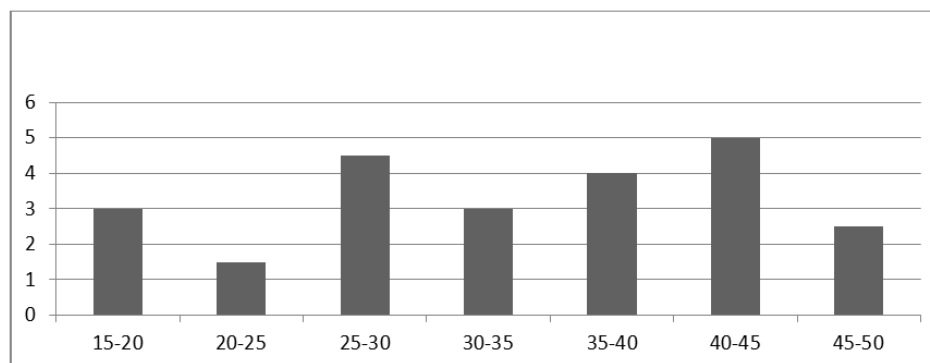
Graph-2: Men are also objectified in advertisements



Graph-3: Media plays a major role in objectifying women



Graph-4: I usually ignore or don't pay attention to ads objectifying women



Graph-5 : It is an effective way to sell a product

CONCLUSION

The study reflects that there are a number of advertisements which encourage and promote objectification of women in various ways. Gender stereotypes are continued to be shown in a positive manner, due to which the scope of harassment and sexual violence against women has actually increased. Most of the people agree upon the fact that portrayal of women, specifically in media is always degrading to some extent compared to the way men are portrayed. This is an indication that action must be taken as soon as possible and everyone should contribute in spreading awareness about how deeply entrenched this issue is, in order to bring about a change in the way people think and behave.

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