



The Impact of Television Commercials (TVCs) on Society: A Psychological Perspective

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Abstract:

This research paper explores the profound impact of advertising on economic empowerment and consumer behavior, emphasizing how advertisements shape consumer perceptions and drive product sales. It delves into the ethical concerns surrounding the portrayal of women in advertisements, examining how such depictions can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and influence societal attitudes towards women. The study also highlights the psychological effects of visual advertising, particularly on adolescents, and discusses the broader social implications of using sexualized imagery in marketing. Through expert opinions and scientific insights, this paper offers a comprehensive analysis of how advertising not only promotes products but also molds societal norms and values.

Advertising is a powerful force that drives global economic activity, playing a crucial role in reinforcing commercial success. The two key factors in selling a product are its quality and its advertisement. While a product's quality ensures repeat sales, advertising is essential for initially introducing the product to consumers. The creation of an advertisement involves careful planning by the advertiser or advertising agency, determining what to showcase and how to present the product visually. The approach of an advertisement depends on the type of product, target audience, presentation method, and budget. Crafting a successful advertisement requires a high level of skill, as it must effectively connect with the audience and convey a compelling message that encourages consumers to try the product.

Advertising has become an integral part of daily life, influencing consumer decisions through visual and auditory media. Often, advertisements utilize images of women to attract attention, even when such imagery is irrelevant to the product being promoted. As of 2024, issues related to the portrayal of women remain significant

and pervasive across all levels of society. The objectification of women and their treatment as secondary to men are two inhumane practices that contribute to various problems faced by women. These practices not only reinforce negative stereotypes but also create environments in which women can become victims of these harmful attitudes.

Introduction:

Advertising has become an integral part of modern society, influencing consumer behavior and shaping economic landscapes globally. The effectiveness of advertising lies not only in the quality of the product being promoted but also in how the advertisement is crafted and presented to the target audience. A well-crafted advertisement can significantly enhance product sales, even if the product is not of the highest quality, by creating a strong initial impression on consumers. However, the ethical implications of advertising, particularly the use of women in potentially objectifying and stereotypical roles, have raised concerns about the impact of such portrayals on society.

Keywords

Advertising, Consumer behavior, Female imagery, Objectification, Adolescent psychology, Media ethics, Societal impact

Research Question

The primary question is how the visual elements in advertisements, which can prompt a consumer to purchase a product within seconds, affect the human mind. What impact do the images of women used in these advertisements have on the human psyche? Related questions include whether certain visuals in advertisements are harmful to individuals and society, what effects these visuals have, and whether there are any regulations governing the display of such images. Additionally, is it possible that advertisements containing sexual content contribute to the increase in certain perverse feelings within society? These questions were discussed with experts in the field of mental health.

Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing expert interviews, literature reviews, and psychological analysis. The study focuses on understanding the impact of female imagery in advertisements on various demographics, particularly adolescents. Interviews with mental health professionals provide insights into the psychological effects of these visual elements, while a review of existing literature on advertising ethics and consumer psychology offers a theoretical foundation.

The Role of Advertising in Economic Empowerment:

Advertising plays a crucial role in strengthening economies by driving consumer demand and facilitating the flow of goods and services. The success of a product in the market often hinges on its perceived value, which is heavily influenced by how it is advertised. An effective advertisement not only informs potential customers about the product but also persuades them to make a purchase. This persuasive power of advertising is what makes it a vital tool for economic empowerment, as it can create demand for products and services, thereby stimulating economic activity.

The Ethical Dilemmas of Advertising:

Despite its economic benefits, advertising raises several ethical questions, particularly regarding the portrayal of women. Advertisements often use images of women to attract attention, even when the product being advertised has no direct relevance to women or their representation. This practice perpetuates the objectification of women, reducing them to mere tools for selling products. The ethical dilemma arises when such portrayals reinforce harmful stereotypes and contribute to the systemic inequality faced by women in society.

The Psychological Impact of Visual Advertising:

Visual advertising has a profound impact on the human psyche, often triggering emotional and psychological responses that influence consumer behavior. The use of sexually suggestive imagery in advertisements, for example, can stimulate the pleasure centers of the brain, leading to increased consumer interest in the product. However, this same imagery can also have negative consequences, particularly on adolescents who are still developing their understanding of sexuality and relationships. The repeated exposure to sexualized advertisements can lead to distorted perceptions of gender roles and relationships, potentially fostering unhealthy attitudes and behaviors.

The Influence of Advertising on Adolescents:

Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the effects of advertising due to their impressionable nature and the developmental stage they are in. Advertisements that depict women in sexualized or objectified roles can have a lasting impact on how young people perceive gender roles and relationships. This is especially concerning given that adolescents are still forming their identities and are highly susceptible to external influences. The portrayal of women in advertisements can shape their views on what is considered desirable or acceptable behavior, potentially leading to harmful attitudes and actions later in life.

Expert Opinions on the Impact of Advertising:

Several experts in psychology and sociology have weighed in on the impact of advertising, particularly on how it shapes societal norms and individual behavior. Dr. Bharati Patil, for instance, argues that advertisements featuring inappropriate or irrelevant depictions of women can be considered objectionable. She highlights the importance of context in determining whether an advertisement is appropriate, noting that what may be acceptable in one cultural or social setting may be deemed inappropriate in another.

Dr. Rajendra Barve adds that the impact of advertising on viewers depends largely on their age and maturity level. He points out that sexually suggestive advertisements can be particularly problematic for younger viewers, who may not have the cognitive ability to fully understand the implications of what they are seeing. This can lead to confusion and potentially harmful behavior, as young people may attempt to emulate what they see in advertisements without fully understanding the consequences.

Dr. Sagar Mundada emphasizes the role of the brain's pleasure centers in responding to advertisements. He explains that sexually suggestive imagery can trigger a release of chemicals in the brain that create feelings of pleasure, leading to repeated engagement with the advertisement and the product it promotes. This can create a cycle of behavior where consumers are continually drawn to products that are advertised using sexualized imagery, even if those products do not necessarily meet their needs or expectations.

The Cultural Context of Advertising:

The cultural context in which advertisements are viewed plays a significant role in how they are perceived and interpreted. In a conservative society like India, where traditional values and norms are still prevalent, advertisements that feature sexually suggestive or objectifying imagery are likely to be met with resistance. This is particularly true when such advertisements are viewed by families, where the presence of children or elders may make certain depictions uncomfortable or inappropriate.

Dr. Shubha Thatte points out that the discomfort experienced when viewing certain advertisements with family members can be a sign that the content is problematic. She argues that advertisements should be designed in a way that respects cultural values and norms, and that they should not perpetuate stereotypes or objectify individuals. She also stresses the importance of parental guidance in helping children navigate the messages they receive from advertisements, ensuring that they develop a healthy understanding of relationships and gender roles.

The Social Implications of Advertising:

The social implications of advertising are far-reaching, particularly when it comes to the portrayal of women. Advertisements that objectify women or depict them in stereotypical roles can reinforce harmful societal norms and contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality. This is especially concerning given the widespread reach of modern advertising, which is no longer confined to traditional media like television or print but is now omnipresent on digital platforms as well.

The portrayal of women in advertisements can also have a direct impact on how women are treated in society. Studies have shown that exposure to sexualized imagery in advertisements can lead to increased instances of gender-based violence, as it normalizes the objectification of women and desensitizes individuals to the harm caused by such behavior. This is particularly true for younger viewers, who may internalize the messages they receive from advertisements and carry those attitudes into adulthood.

The Need for Ethical Advertising Practices:

Given the potential for advertising to influence societal norms and individual behavior, there is a growing need for ethical advertising practices that respect the dignity and rights of all individuals. This includes avoiding the use of objectifying or stereotypical imagery, particularly when it comes to the portrayal of women. Advertisers should also be mindful of the potential impact their advertisements may have on vulnerable populations, such as adolescents, and take steps to ensure that their messages are appropriate for all audiences.

One approach to promoting ethical advertising is through the establishment of guidelines and regulations that govern how certain themes, such as sexuality and gender, are depicted in advertisements. These guidelines should be informed by cultural values and social norms, and should be designed to protect the interests of both consumers and the broader society. In addition to regulatory measures, there is also a need for greater awareness and education among advertisers and marketers about the potential impact of their work on society.

Findings:

Visuals that cause discomfort or embarrassment when viewed with family can be considered objectionable. As Dr. Bharti Patil notes, displaying unnecessary visuals is objectionable. Indian society upholds certain moral values and restrictions, which should be maintained as part of social responsibility. Minors should be prohibited from viewing sexual content, and it is crucial for adults to distinguish between right and wrong during this developmental stage.

When visuals, sounds, and gestures that distract the mind are repeatedly shown in advertisements, they may become normalized. Certain segments of society may start to believe these portrayals to be true. Advertisements that use such imagery often target the brain's pleasure centers. Individuals accustomed to accepting whatever

advertisements present may begin to believe them and act accordingly. For example, a girl watching a Lux soap advertisement might imagine herself as Kareena Kapoor and mimic her behavior. The depiction of subconscious desires in advertisements can create strong beliefs about human behavior and blur the line between fantasy and reality. Psychological studies suggest that activities that provide pleasure tend to be repeated. Video games, TV series, movies, and advertisements use visuals, background music, and dialogues to emotionally engage the audience.

The family is the primary institution for human development. Due to changing lifestyles, parents spend less time with their children, leading to increased isolation. Consequently, children often turn to entertainment media during their solitude.

Advertisements that portray objectionable female images are likely to have a more significant impact on adolescents aged 8 to 17. Adolescence is a time of curiosity, imagination, and imitation. If adolescents are influenced by inappropriate behavior, such visuals may reinforce that behavior. Continuous exposure to such visuals can lead to negative opinions about women.

Young children exposed to sexually explicit content may become curious about their parents' marital relationship, leading to behaviors like secretly observing their parents' private moments. They may also develop habits of secretly viewing nude images of women, attempting to spy on women, or trying to touch them inappropriately. This curiosity may become habitual, leading to incidents like eve-teasing, molestation, rape, physical harm, or even murder. Studies have shown that individuals who commit such crimes tend to consume more obscene content.

Positive advertisements can be viewed together by families and communities. What is shown in these ads is more likely to be accepted and adopted subconsciously by the general public.

In the 17th to 19th centuries, paintings based on love stories like Radha-Krishna and Geet Govind were created in Rajasthani and Pahari styles, often depicting the hero as King Krishna. Similarly, viewers today may compare themselves to characters in TV advertisements and feel inclined to purchase the advertised products. However, whether they will buy the product again depends on its quality. Watching visuals in advertisements may lead viewers to imagine themselves as the characters and compare themselves to others, as depicted in the ad. This behavior can have both positive and negative social impacts.

Repeated exposure to advertisements makes the visuals seem real, leading people to adopt them. As a result, this inadvertently supports criminal behavior against women.

Displaying visuals in consideration of the audience's age and awareness is an ethical practice. Targeting the right customer through advertising increases the likelihood of product sales.

TV is no longer the only medium for viewing audiovisual advertisements. People of all ages can now watch ads anywhere and anytime using mobile phones and laptops via the internet. If adolescents encounter objectionable visuals, it is the responsibility of parents to explain them, preventing misinterpretation.

Incorporating elements that resonate with the target audience in advertisements will increase the chances of product sales. If respect and dignity for women are consistently portrayed, it will likely translate into treating women with respect in reality.

Conclusion:

Advertising is a powerful tool that can shape consumer behavior and drive economic growth, but it also comes with significant ethical responsibilities. The portrayal of women in advertising, particularly when it involves objectification or the reinforcement of harmful stereotypes, can have far-reaching consequences for society. It is essential for advertisers to consider the social and psychological impact of their work and to adopt ethical practices that promote the well-being of all individuals.

As society continues to grapple with issues of gender inequality and the objectification of women, the role of advertising in perpetuating these problems cannot be ignored. By fostering a culture of ethical advertising, where respect for human dignity and the promotion of positive societal values are prioritized, we can work towards a more just and equitable society.

Recommendations

- **Ethical Guidelines:** Development and enforcement of ethical guidelines for the use of female imagery in advertisements.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Initiatives to raise public awareness about the potential impacts of advertising on societal norms and behaviors.
- **Parental Guidance:** Encouragement for parents to actively engage with their children regarding the content they consume and provide guidance on interpreting advertisements.

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