

# THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING AND ITS EFFECTS ON TARGET AUDIENCES: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** Today, advertising is a key driving force behind varied conceptions of beauty. Models with revealing clothing, fair skin, and bare midriffs are the ones who play influential paradigmatic roles in society, not “size-zero” models. Such methods are troublesome for India because the media's definition of beauty is heavily westernized. The feminist movement and the evolution of women's positions in society have sparked a lot of academic interest in how women are depicted in advertising. Traditional representations of housewives, women who rely on a man's protection, and depictions of sexual objectification were common in early studies. For more than four decades, advertisers have been accused of employing inappropriate and degrading stereotypes when it comes to the representation of women in advertising. This is a major worry in the United States right now. Despite the fact that a reduction in gender stereotyping would be reasonable, This does not appear to be the case in today's culture, which mandates many gender roles: There is a plethora of information available in the literature. Female stereotyping is alive and well, according to studies, even if it takes on different forms and patterns now than it did in the past.

**Keywords:** Marketing, television commercials, advertising, portrayal of women, Indian media

## Introduction

Marketing is frequently described as a battle for consumer attention. The major goal in today's dynamic business environment is to attract customers, but the question remains as to how low one can go to acquire this fleeting appeal. Is it acceptable to denigrate women and portray them as sexual objects in order to elicit a second look at the advertisement? Though not universally embraced and derided by many, the use of overt sexual appeal in advertising has expanded significantly. According to literature, such explicit portrayals only cause a major outcry and a poor perception of the company in the long run.

“Advertiser’s main aim is to increase sales through positive impressions on audiences, about their products and services, by grabbing their attention, through persuasion in a very short span of time; before turning the page of a magazine/ newspaper, before changing the channel of the TV; before clicking the new screen on a computer; and while driving on the highways. Advertising is omnipresent; one cannot escape from the influence of advertising. It has the ability to control the market by creating diverse personal needs, changing attitudes, self-images and preferences. While some consider advertising as a mere economic activity with the single purpose to sell” [1].

Female empowerment has been a more common theme in advertising, challenging stereotyped gender roles and encouraging body acceptance, as evidenced by campaigns like Dove's "Real Beauty," which has received widespread praise for infusing empowerment messaging into marketing efforts. While such advertisements have been widely debated and praised for sending good signals to women, little study has been done to determine whether and why these campaigns are beneficial, as well as the effects they have on female consumers. It's possible that these ads have succeeded in instilling positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions as a result of the emotions aroused by them. This study aims to determine the many ways that empowering advertisements influence consumers' perceptions of females in advertising, as well as their effects on important marketing performance indicators such as brand attitudes, buy intentions, and emotional responses.

## Objectives

- ❖ To obtain a conceptual understanding of the function of women in sexually enticing advertisements and consumer perceptions of these advertising.
- ❖ To examine the strength of the emotional connection to the brand resulting from femvertising.

## Literature Review

“A sound literature on female portrayals in advertising has been developed, using content analysis as an instrument for the elucidation of stereotypical depictions. Print advertisement in particular has been excessively investigated, as magazine advertisements provide a frozen frame that facilitates thorough visual examination and the application of a code scheme” [2].

“Modern women who have grown accustomed to offensive or stereotypical advertisements do not think that the portrayal of their gender is realistic” [3]. In fact, while most college women accept how they are portrayed, they disagree that commercials adequately portray women in their daily activities. This indicates that even firms that do not offend women in any way are failing to connect with their target demographic. According to the conclusions of the literature analysis, marketers should utilize realistic imagery and messaging in female-targeted tactics to boost self-esteem, develop relationships with customers, and increase positive product and brand assessments.

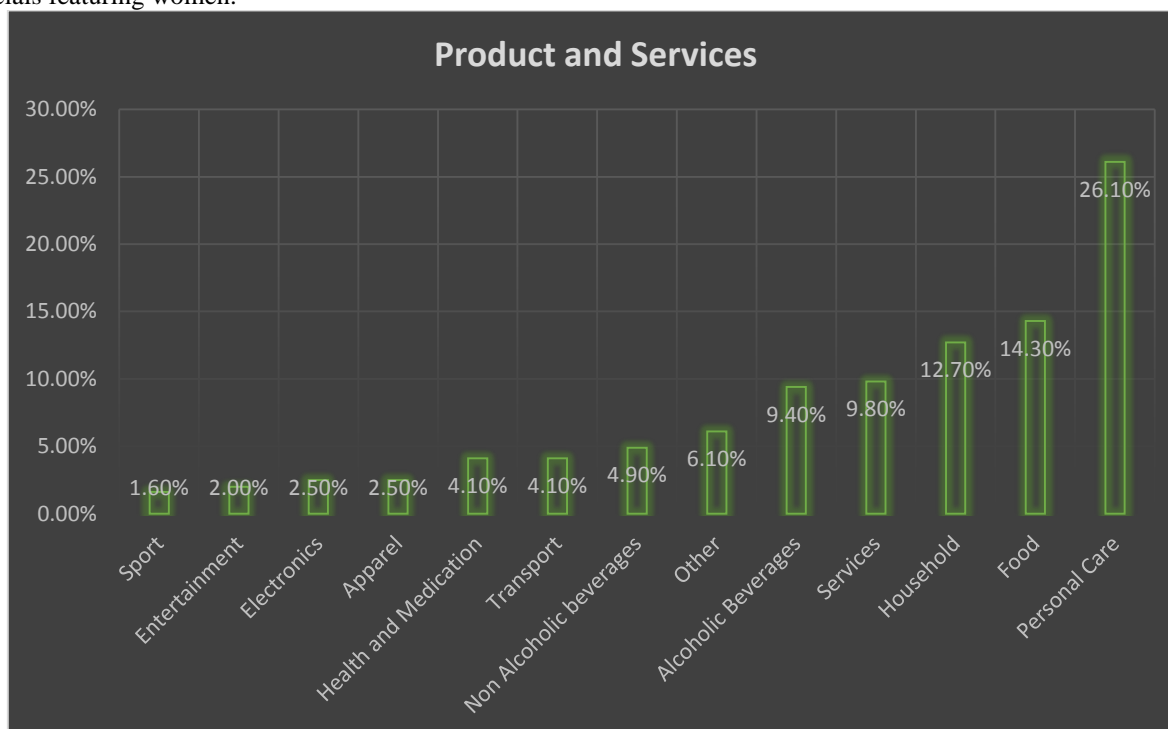
“Empowerment has been a fundamental element of feminist ideologies that aim to achieve gender equality, a definition that is recognized by both feminists and non-feminists” [4].

“Ads with female empowerment themes have been applauded for challenging gender stereotypes in the media and raising awareness about issues facing females of all ages while empowering women and young girls”[5].

Analyzing gender representations and sexuality in advertising, Sabat (2019) suggested “advertisements should work as a cultural pedagogy that teaches members of a given society how to be women or men, what is femininity and masculinity, hence, producing, in this way, identities and representations of reality”. Sabat (2019) argues that “advertising doesn’t create meanings but borrows them from social relations, while, at the same time, these advertisements reaffirm and consolidate these very same representations, as for instance, women always at home or exhibiting their bodies to men pleasure”

### Analysis

Below graph indicates that 13 product and service categories were advertised in the Commercials featuring women.

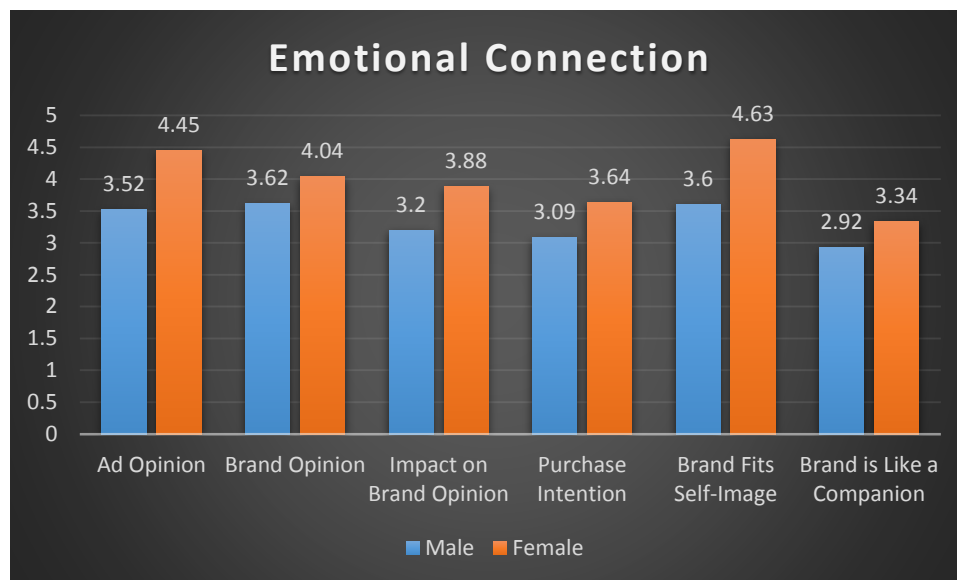


**Graph 1: Product and Services**

More than a quarter of the commercials featured personal care products. Food (14.3 percent) and household products (12.7 percent) came in second and third place, respectively. Almost 10% of the commercials promoted services and alcoholic beverages (in 9.4 percent of the cases). The remaining eight product or service categories were each featured in less than 9% of the commercials. Women were the least frequently featured in advertisements for sports-related products (1.6 percent).

In 39.6% of television advertising, rational appeals were employed, while emotional appeals were used in 29%. In 31.4 percent of the commercials, a mix of intellectual and emotional appeals were used. Household products and personal care items were among the products or services included in the rational appeal advertising. Alcoholic beverages and food were frequently advertised when advertisers exploited emotional appeals. Personal care products were largely sold in commercials that combined intellectual and emotional appeals.

There are hundreds of advertisements who encourage upward social comparison, generate comparable and cumulative effects, mislead women about ideal body image and attractiveness, and sensitise them to body-related media messages and pictures. For example, Kartina's Veet cream claims to offer youthful and moisturised skin in just three minutes. Ads for products that have nothing to do with beauty or body image, such as Complian health drink, Sani fresh toilet cleaner, Slice Amsutra, Sunfeast Dark fantasy biscuits, Tide detergent, Philips iron, TVS Wego, and many others, all mislead women and girls by depicting underweight, slim models, establishing a standardised body image and beauty in the public's imagination.



**Graph 2: Emotional Connection Metrics.**

Female respondents who were exposed to female empowerment advertisements expressed significantly more positive attitudes toward the ads and brands, as well as higher purchase intentions, confirming previous research findings that most women have purchased a product because the ad featured a positive portrayal of women.

To be honest, women are no more or less susceptible to advertising's impacts than any other group. Indeed, 'studies have proven the many, often extremely subtle, and empowering pleasures that women, as individuals or as members of interpretive communities, obtain from commercial texts, even those that appear to operate against their interests.

### Conclusion

The primary goal of this research was to determine how women perceived female representations in advertisements. As a result of the research, three key themes emerged, each of which is linked to three distinct points of view. They are depictions of women that devalue or idealise them while portraying them in a modern light. Furthermore, the study had two additional goals: to see if women compare themselves to advertisements and, if so, how they believe the advertisements affect them. The findings revealed that not only do the informants compare themselves to advertising endorsers, but they also believe that advertising imagery has a negative impact on their psychological health by making them feel depressed and anxious.

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