
COMMODIFICATION, DEPICTION AND OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN PAKISTANI TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS

M. Raza

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
majidraza929@gmail.com

Norsiah Abdul Hamid

Universiti Utara Malaysia, Malaysia
nor1911@uum.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Objectification of women has been a concerning issue over the past years worldwide. Objectification usually emerged from the commodification and depiction of women through television advertisements. However, the process that helped the advertisers to secure more patronage on the intended item over the depiction of women is attractive. Therefore, the objective of the paper is to analyse the commodification and depiction of women in Pakistani television advertisements. The reviewed literature concluded that the way women are commodified and objectified in advertisements is totally against Pakistan's social system. Resultantly, such portrayal of women is a source of gender inequality, stereotyping, sexual, seductive, and provocative presentation of women that reinforces the objectification of women in society. In addition, the representation of women in a sexual manner in the advertisements destroys the value system of society in general. It is a widely accepted fact that the objectification of women is an ethical issue requiring further investigation to determine how women are portrayed in Pakistani advertisements.

Keywords: *commodification of women, depiction of women, objectification of women, television advertisements.*

INTRODUCTION

Western researchers have long studied and investigated the commodification, depiction of women and objectification of women (Aliyu & Shahriar, 2019; Li et al., 2019). In addition, most researchers (Kayal, 2014; Tekvar, 2008; Oniku & Joaquim, 2021; Kilbourne, 2000; Kordrostami & Kordrostami, 2020) believed that advertisements played a pivotal role in making women an object to satisfy male sexual pleasure. Resultantly, the status of women has been decreased to set standards of humanity and turned into a useable thing like a commodity (Gramazio et al., 2021). Furthermore, Loughnan et al. (2015) justify the idea that, over the years, women have become animals due to the excessive depiction of their image in an objectified and

seductive way. Advertisements have been a successful tool for promotion (Loughnan et al., 2015) because it heavily relies on cultural aspects of the targeted population and changes the image of women in them (Eisend, 2019).

Whereas Wilson (2015) criticized that objectification has remained the core concept of feminist theoretical fundamentals, however, less attention has been given to highlighting the aspect of why rather than what objectification is or could be. Furthermore, Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) concluded that women are socialized in such a way that they develop a sense of observer's view to look at their bodies. However, Bianchi and Mensa (2020) claimed that the use of female images had been instrumentalized with the help of sexual objectification, which showed that the only characteristic women possess their sexuality (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Nussbaum, 1995). In the same vein, the objectification of women in advertisements is destructive in society (Samji & Vasquez, 2020) on mental and physical grounds (Bayazit, 2020; Bhandari, 2018). It is a sensitive issue not only for women of certain regions or religions but for all, and, therefore, it needs to be looked at by considering key questions like how women are portrayed in advertisements and its consequences on society in general. In addition, the portrayal of women in advertisements has been seen as weak and submissive, which is alarming to see the treatment of men with the women in the ads (Vaux, 2013).

Therefore, the present study aims to evaluate the contribution of the literature on commodification, depiction of women and objectification and advertisements with a view to finding the focus of the literature on concerned aspects in Pakistan. Moreover, the literature review will bring forth important aspects of commodification, depiction, and objectification of women in Pakistani television advertisements. It will be significant for future research to evaluate studies related to aspects of the objectification of women in Pakistani television advertisements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present literature review consisted of research works conducted on the commodification, depiction, and objectification of women in advertisements previously. Exposure to advertisements has become common practice to anyone, and people are socializing by reflecting certain attitudes, values, and behaviours to deal with women in advertisements (Lindner, 2004). Therefore, it is essential to go through and understand what others have done in the realm of commodification, depiction of women, and objectification of women and women as an objective item, particularly in television advertisements.

Commodification of Women

The commodification of women is an aspect of objectification of women where women are treated as a commodity to exchange with the viewers by getting some amount. Moreover, women in advertisements are presented as a mere gadget for male pleasure, which destroys the image of women in society (Holtzhausen et al., 2011). Furthermore, the image of objectified women has been cultivated through the constant and excessive display of women in Television advertisements where women equate with sex symbols and means of promotion in society (Daha, 2020; Nasir et al., 2021). In addition, objectification has been used in Pakistani advertisements (Farhan & Nouman, 2021), whereas Ali (2018) said that sexual objectification of women is used as a core technique in Pakistani television advertisements.

On the other hand, Castro (2003) said that women are presented seductively and objectively in television advertisements, making them a selling thing rather than a human being. Scholars such as Kolbe and Langefeld (1991) claim that women are not only presented as weak male dependent person but also showed as a thing for male use, which should be under their influence. Women are presented in advertisements as they are made to show off their physical features (Richins, 1991) instead of being appreciated by human attributes and intellect.

While Szymanski et al. (2011) examined that women are presented as fragmented body parts for men's gratification as an object of desire rather than a human being. Women's body is usually used by advertisers for selling products and their services (Collins, 2006), while in ads, their intelligence, personal characteristics, and vision are celebratedly disassociated (Al Falaq, & Puspita, 2021). In a study, Gill (2008) said that if you watch advertisements, you will find women as objects by presenting their bodies sexually attractive to elevate the product's sales. The presence of women in men's ads showed that the use of women is to increase sexual appeal and reward of purchasing that product (Gilly, 1988; González, Meyer, & Toldos, 2021). Similarly, Nath & Saha (2021) said that the women in the ads presented as a tool of attraction, seduction, decoration, and communication to highlight the product's reputation. Scholars (Vaes, Paladino & Pavia, 2011) suggested that visible discrimination has been observed in the advertisements among men and women where the ratio of women objectification is higher than men (Hemalatha, 2021). Additionally, Yläne, Williams, and Wadleigh (2010) pointed out that women are presented in the ads in three ways; to establish a favourable scenario, to present their bodies seductively, and lastly, to make the product more authentic by providing a comparison. In the same way, the presence of renowned porn star Sunny Leone, in condom ads seductively licking strawberries to give this impression that woman is a commodity, enjoyable and eatable just like eating strawberries (Banitt et al., 2008).

Moreover, Górnicka (2016) suggested that it is unfortunate to see a woman giving seductive looks, opening her mouth intimately, spreading her legs sexually, reveals breasts, buttocks, and genital parts in advertisements, which is alarming for social behaviour. Researchers (Miller, 1991; Zhao & Belk, 2008) believed that the only use of women in advertisements is to sell products which has devalued their intelligence and personal attributes; therefore, women in advertisements are for buying and selling products (Zotos & Tsichlab, 2014). The image of women in advertisements has changed and is accepted as commodities by displaying themselves as young, lovely, and sexy (Kessler-Harris, 2003).

The audio, and visual media promote commodifying women as seductive objects (Boyle, 2008; Kaul, 2012; Smaill, 2009). The hints of seduction in advertisements can be seen in modern media (Gitlin, 2007). On contrary, women are also depicted as scrupulous, rigid, caretakers, politically naïve, socially inevitable, and, ironically, culturally modern (Das, 2016). Previously the role of women was stereotypical and traditional, and their only responsibility was to look after their husbands and, after a while, children. Numerous studies (Anderson, 2000; Sharma & Bumb, 2021) have argued that the house is where women can show their strength but be clumsy, naïve, and weak (Brooks, 2010; Jacob, 2001). However, later, with the advent of technology and advancements, advertisement and marketing agencies changed the role of women from household to the bottle of alcohol through visual depiction (Russell, 2002; Atkinson et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the depiction of women was associated with product features, male consumption, and their satisfaction (Falk & Campbell, 1997; Radway, 2009; Yim, & Park,

2019). The image of women and products are merged so subtly that their identities died, but their presence shows that both of them served for delight as an object (Fox-Genovese, 2000). Many previous research (Dibben, 1999; Swan, 2010; Talbot, 2019) confirmed that women had lost their humanity and subjectivity due to inhuman depiction as objects, commodities, and useable elements (Sliwinska, 2019).

Similarly, women became a tool for fulfilling the desires and wishes of others (Ewen, 2022), whereas men were portrayed as an aspirant of that particular woman (Winn, 2004). In a nutshell, the objectified portrayal of women made them mere commodities or an object without a personal will (Ahmad, Sultan, & Abbasi, 2023; Minh-Ha, 2009). Clover (2015) stated that women in horror cinema are also depicted as weak and tormentors because of fear. Similarly, Scully (2013) analysed music videos and concluded that the presentation of women is linked with a male desire for video settings that do not give space to women to act independently. The only possibility of women in that scenario is when they have to encounter men, or they are used to male gratification. Gill (2011) argued that women are being discriminated in advertisements because of the unnecessary use of objectification in society. In addition, Afaque and Shah (2018) suggested that women are depicted in Pakistani television advertisements as a commodity for the consumption and gratification of men.

Most of the time, women are presented as an incentive for a male if they buy the product, as Baudrillard (2020) concluded that “buy a razor, get the woman!”. Similarly, Gupta (2005) proposed that the depiction of women in men’s product ads has nothing to do with practical implications but provides some seducing content to facilitate males. From the previous literature, it is evident that women’s presence in advertisements is linked with beatification, seduction, and sexuality (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). Furthermore, the reviewed content of the ads comprised of emotionality rather than rationality. While it is observed that women on the one hand, are sexually exploited in society, but on the other hand, they are treated as mere objects of society (Ali et al., 2021; Ali, & Shahwar, 2011). Resultantly, women internalize such treatment and act according to the wish of the male dominant society, which further downgrades the status of women in a society. Women dealt as commodities for selling things in exchange for using particular commodities (Sivanathan & Pettit, 2010).

Depiction of Women in Advertisements

The depiction of women in the ads is another aspect of objectification of women which needs to be evaluated. This section will present the studies with respect to the depiction of women in advertisements. Previously, women were presented in stereotypical roles such as polite, accommodating and nurturing (Coontz, 2016; Real, 2002), whereas males were regarded as ideal, dashing, independent and above all, wise (Cummins, 2005). The image of women in Pakistani media is not different from the western perspective of media; here, too, women are considered as a male dependent, helpless, volatile, and confused (Surette & Bess, 2013).

It has been found that in advertisements, depiction of women considerably gains prominence as compared to the product’s features. Sometimes, it becomes difficult to highlight the purpose of women in the ads. Women’s portrayal is linked with a sexual object (Afaque & Shah, 2018) whose sole purpose is to satisfy male desire, whereas other researchers pointed out that women are not only objectified in Pakistani advertisements, but their representations are conditioned with stereotypical roles (Maheshwari, 2017; Waheed et al., 2018).

The role of women in Pakistani ads is traditional and stereotypical who are subservient and supporting, for instance, a courageous man, an obedient wife, and a well-behaved daughter helping mom to complete domestic affairs (Iram, Bukhari, & Abbas, 2023). Similarly, Brissette (2023) demonstrated that 75% of women presented in the advertisements for using kitchen utensils, while 56% of women were portrayed as a housewife or helping in the house. It is said that most promotional ads present women as housekeepers or caretakers of family members (Aftab, Akhtar & Ali, 2023). Women in the ads are concerned about family, personal well-being, and maintaining beauty (Mady et al., 2023). The depiction of women in ads revolves around cooking, washing, and doing kitchen things (Mustafa, & Ameen, 2023).

Furthermore, the depiction of women in Pakistani ads is as women are least concerned about decision-making, unintelligent, sexual but delicate and can be controlled by men (Sattar, Ahmad, & Asim, 2022). In other words, the presentation of women in the media and advertisements is according to the wishes of men. It is seen that the advertisers tried to promote the concept of perfect women (Nasir, Basit & Ahmad, 2023).

Moorthi et al. (2014) said that males in television advertisements showed as intelligent, strong, and saviour of women in different life situations. The advertisements paved the way to strengthen the concept of male superiority over females (Munshi, 1998). The ads are also responsible for the impression that women always require men for their safety (Seow & Brown, 2018). Adil and Malik (2021) argued that the current trend of Pakistani advertisement has changed, which shows both male and female in the most advance and modern gender roles to promote gender equality in Pakistan. Nawaz et al., (2022) stated that the depiction of women in billboard advertisements is divided into three categories: women presented as household caretakers, a symbol of beauty who is more active than domestic women and lastly, women presented as an active agent of social change who challenges the stereotypical role of women in Pakistan.

The portrayal of women in advertisements is improving nowadays by showing different and powerful aspects of women; nevertheless, much is unchanged and remains to be investigated. In this respect, Mirzoeff (2010) pointed out that “what is perceived is never the same as what is there in a material sense. Furthermore, the portrayal of women in the advertisement is not to fulfil the needs of the viewers but to create dissatisfaction among the audience (Richins, 1991). Though women are presented differently in the ads using marketing tools (Gill, 2011), their images are used to charge with pornographic blends and distorted and disintegrated body parts to highlight the importance of physical parts rather than personality (Kuhn, 2013). Similarly, Sanyal (2009) pointed out that women lost their cultural reputation and social prestige. Previous studies have demonstrated that the distorted representation of women in advertisements has decreased the status of women to the level, where they are perceived as a source of seduction, vamp, and virginity (Lonnquist, 2003; Lee, 2010; Carter, 2015).

In a study, Sedgwick (2015) stated that the women are replaced with eroticism, which has one motive to incite male pleasure. Many researchers (Nussbaum, 2001; Davidoff & Hall, 2013) believed that due to the objectified representation of women, they are confined to the status of decoration. The sole purpose of advertisers is to use the tool of temptation along with women in advertisements for selling things (Shields, 2010), whereby the body of women is a victim of discrimination (Altstiel & Grow, 2006; Kilbourne, 2012). Therefore, women’s survival lies in male protection. Women’s only job is to present themselves as pleasurable and seductive to gain male attention and care. For instance, women should follow the ideal

body image in advertisements to make them more demanding. It is so because women are always desperate to seek men's attention (Lorde, 2012) even though males arrogantly refuse to accept them.

Women as an Items

This literature section deals with the research that explored the depiction of women as an item in advertisements. Media cultivate women's image as seductive items through advertisements. Consequently, by excessive and repeated exposure to such images on TV screens, women turn to start accepting the media image of being items or seduction objects and thinking about self-objectification. Szymanski et al. (2011) concluded that 1 out of 5 women in the US is treated as objectified items suffering from gender victimization, raped brutally, and experienced at least one rape attempt as media integrated the stereotypical role of women according to their definition of truth. Hence, humans recognize manipulated stereotyped portrayal in media as truth (Mitchell & McKinnon, 2019). Furthermore, females are shown in advertisements as eye-catching to men. The advertisements are designed for male desires (Burke, 1996) where women are presented seductively. Women were also depicted in a way that was desperate for their male counterparts (Vicinus, 1992). Besides, women in television advertisements were shown in such a way that their bodies were in contact with their male members (Greenberg et al., 2003). In addition, Mayer, Mayer and Peev (2021) said that women seemed in control of men for seducing other men to purchase advertised products.

Women were often portrayed in classified advertisements in which there was no need for them by any means. Likewise, Mahmoud, et al. (2023) suggested that women have become a mandatory part of advertisements even though the product has nothing to do with women in practical life. Similarly, females excessively used in male-orientated commercials, including shaving razors, liquor, and cigarette, and exposing their bodies in front of men for men (Darowski & Berns, 2022). They have been depicted in male product advertisements where they appear seductive, sexual, and a tool of male pleasure (Wolin, 2003). Similarly, Prioleau (2013) said that women also presented as flirting with good-looking men and seducing them with frame language and gestures. The use of women has become common practice that even if there is a need for women's presence in the ads or no relevancy between products and women (Andini, et al., 2022), advertisers still endure women's presence in the ads (Roca, Suárez, & Meléndez-Rodríguez, 2023). The orientation of women in the ads, especially in men's products, for instance, shaving razors, bears, and cigarettes is just to show their bodies to men (Peterkin, 2001).

In addition, more examples of men's ads are set wet gel, zekat body spray, and fog. These ads contain the seductive appearance of women's bodies (Zubair, 2022). The women appeared to be flirting with handsome men seductively through language and gestures. The depiction of women's body parts in advertisements are described as women are seen in parts rather than as a complete human being who is ready and easy to handle for male pleasure (McComb & Mills, 2022). The trend of presenting women's body parts is immodest, shameless, and erotic, commonly known as female charms: a depiction of breasts, lips, legs, and blowing hair makes women more seductive and provocative (Rezaie, 2010).

Furthermore, it is said that it is a naked truth that female parts are used to diverge from the product's weakness, and used to the degradation and lowering women's status to the body parts make them an object (Chattopadhyay, 2023). In comparison, the depiction of men

is all about muscle strength (by presenting six-packs), attractiveness, and social status (Haq, 2023). Shin, and Lee (2023) suggested that the degradation and discrimination of women are confirmed by the tool of pornographic aesthetics, styles, and trends.

The sexual effects of advertisements on women's body parts reflect reducing women into different body parts, is a deliberate attempt to harass them publicly (Pomerleau, 2004). These sexual factors are a combination of table and strip dance, promotion of prostitution, and a blatant example of dehumanizing women by showing them liking their lips, seductively lying on the ground, and showing their genitals and breasts (Laskewicz, 2005). In addition, open displays of torture chambers, women being perpetrators, enslaved and hanged with chains, and the role of lusty mistresses searching for their male masters and organized displays of dead women's bodies all are common trends in modern advertisements. Therefore, arousing, alluring, and sexually exciting are new roles of women in the ads for selling things and their bodies (Aksar, Jiang & Gong, 2022).

Objectification of Women

The study conducted by Harper and Tiggemann (2008) suggested that presenting oneself to others through the internet leads to the developing concept of self-objectification among women. De Vries and Peter (2013) suggested that research on the objectification of women has not paid proper attention to the phenomenon of self-portrayal, sexual objectification, and self-objectification of women through the internet. However, the mainstream media, according to Myers (2009), promotes the effects of sexual representation of women in terms of objectification of women and self-objectification. Banitt et al. (2013) pointed out that different techniques and strategies are used to present women in such a way that they can associate women's bodies with beauty products to increase sales. In comparison, advertisements also use women to promote a particular lifestyle (Spigel, 1992) and enhance brand loyalty among the targeted audiences.

Portrayal of women in UK print advertisements was decorative and depicted stereotypical roles (Tschla & Zotos, 2016). At the same time, Ruggerone (2006) studied the production of female images and concluded that women objectification was done through images which further displayed for the male gaze. Additionally, Tiggemann and Brown (2018) said that women usually look young and Caucasian in magazine advertisements. Women were presented in seductive, sexual, and provocative manners in fashion advertisements. A considerable amount of work on women's portrayal in advertisements has been studied and evaluated by feministic scholars (An & Kim, 2007). The phenomenon of objectification has also been studied by many researchers in Pakistan such as Ullah (2014) and Ali and Ab (2016), who concluded that television advertisements played a decisive role in strengthening the idea that women's body has only one function, which is to please male. Similarly, numerous researchers (Rana, 2021; Ahmed et al., 2019) believe that advertisement continuously promotes the idea of body perfection, which cause problems among women in Pakistan.

For several years, great efforts have been made to study the objectification of women, and researchers found that women were not objectified over the night but gradually changed women's status from household care giver to strip dancers (Weiner, 2023). Some researchers think that although the trend of stereotypical depiction of women is decreased massively, however, it is still practicing in social context because of its acceptability (More, 2023).

In the same vein, Ullah & Khan (2014) have tried to comprehend the cause of the objectification of women in Pakistani television advertisements and found that the patterns of advertisements make women an object of desire, a piece of seduction, and a tool of leisure but not as the normal people having feelings and emotions. It was found that women's physical appearance is a real identity that needs to be shown off to the male audience and which is required to accomplish the standard of beauty. Nagi (2014) aimed to find out the representation of women in advertisements and evaluate public opinion in this regard. The findings indicated that most women in ads presented in decorative, recreational, and self-involved manner. Furthermore, Yazdanparast, et al., (2018) suggested that women are presented differently according to the nature of ads; for instance, home care items depicted women as housewives, while cosmetic and deodorant ads present women seductively. The common theme among all ads is the freshness of young, energetic, enthusiastic, and attractive women. Patowary and Himashree (2014) explored that in Indian visual and print media, women in ads are used as a commodity, a symbol of seduction, and a product of beauty. Recent research focused on the media's role in depicting women through a feminist perspective (Tabassum, Farid & Akhtar, 2023). Conclusively, previous research has shown that the objectification of women in media, particularly in advertisements, has increased prejudice and stereotypical behaviour towards women in society (Fernandez & Menon, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, objectifying women sexually in Pakistani Television advertisements violates the code of ethics promulgated by PEMRA and destroys our social norms and cultural sanctity. If such portrayal persists, ultimately, society will accept the image of women in advertisements, which will cause social unrest in terms of women's image and gender respect in society. Secondly, the viewers will get desensitized in relation to women's image due to the socialization of sexually objectified women in the advertisements. Pakistan's social system is totally against such portrayal of women, which propagates nothing but gender inequality, stereotyping, sexual, seductive, and provocative presentation of women that reinforces objectification of women in society. The frequent depiction of women obscenely and sexually in advertisements destroys the value system of society in general and the understanding of gender equality. It is a widely accepted fact that the objectification of women is an ethical issue requiring further investigation to determine how women are being portrayed in Pakistani advertisements. Women were presented as submissive, meagre, and caregivers in advertisements in the past. However, modern advertisements use new strategies to get more profit within less time, one of which is women. The women are presented as objects, mere commodities, items, and tools of pleasure for males. The reviewed literature suggested that women objectification contributed a lot to lessening the status of women in society and elevated the impression that women are nothing, but something used for gaining profit and pleasure.

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