

## INDECENT REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MEDIA AND ADVERTISEMENT IN INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

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With the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, mass media has taken a drastic and powerful change, with the 4g speed of the net and various social media, the world has never been the same as before. This media has influenced all the sectors of society and with all its boons it came with its evil eye. An instrument that is affecting the cultural value, behavior of a society, promoting customer's taste and among all this, the portraying of gender as a means of attracting customers have been well documented. Television, films, newspaper, posters, hoardings has grown and became the instrument of greatest mass appeal and acceptance. Women play a very significant role in advertising today. The depiction of women in an alluring and unrealistic way has reached a height of indecency where advertisements are showing females in indecent ways even if it has no connection with the actual content. The media and advertisements have been stereotyping women with their jobs, as entities who are obsessed with make-ups and clothes, depending on men and doing jobs like washing and cleaning, how ironically washing powder ads have just been portraying women as if it was their sole job for cleaning clothes. In the last few years, an excess of nudity and vulgarity is being portrayed in society through various advertisements and also films, and daily soaps. This is impacting society's behavioral change towards women. The media very effectively shapes the views of society; therefore what is portrayed must be an accurate and true representation of the women community and not objectifying them and reflecting them as the weaker section of the society.

**Keywords:** Indecency, Unrealistic, Commodity, Stereotyping, Objectifying.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The meaning of decency and the degree of morality has changed the way than it used to be. In the traditional society, there was very less exposure of women in the media but now women are all over the media, whether it is movies or advertisements, or fashion. And even though the meaning of decency and morality has been more liberal than it was, doesn't mean it can be used in a negative way, which is what exactly media had done to the image and value of women. Media has proved to be one of the largest sectors which are directly affecting society. In the name of art and freedom, a lot of indecencies has been going on in the media, whether it is a film, daily soaps, music albums, or advertisements. The reflection of women in Bollywood item songs has kept no boundary of decency whether it is the song, the costumes, or the environmental setup of the videos of the item numbers. In-fact the item songs and the story has no link between them, but these offensive songs have become a compulsory part of the movies because of attracting more viewers and promoting the movie. Movies, songs, and advertisements have a great influence on the youth and such representation of women will in no way put a better image in the mind of these young viewers. Over this the women in our movies have most of a secondary character to that of a man, it is very unusual to witness a strong female character in an action movie. Or in a very rare number of movies women get the dominating character, whereas the characters of women should be as equally empowering as that of a men's character because in today's world women are no way lacking behind in anything or any sector then why should be there image shown like that. <sup>2</sup> From advertising false ideas like women having no wrinkles, no scars, long and smooth legs, false body image to portraying a sexual character the advertising companies have stopped at nothing to promote their products in the market. Advertisements for women have increased due to their increase in purchasing power and exposure to the world. Yet, the roles that women play in the advertisements are stereotypical either as housewives or sexual objects. Even big companies selling products for women themselves have been objectifying them, like in the 2016 advertisement of 'Jack and Jones', a clothing company, the ad shows a very cool Ranveer Singh objectifying women and not letting them

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<sup>2</sup> Scholarly research journal on Stereotyping women in Indian cinema  
(Sep.,5- 2020, 2.35am),

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323786469\\_STEREOTYPING\\_WOMEN\\_IN\\_INDIAN\\_CINEMA#read](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323786469_STEREOTYPING_WOMEN_IN_INDIAN_CINEMA#read)

‘hold him back’. ‘Don’t hold back’ should be an empowering message for women, but here it is being used by a man to show his power over a woman at the workplace<sup>3</sup>.

## ADVERTISEMENT AND ITS ILL EFFECTS

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Women have come to become very paradoxical when it comes to advertisement. Adrian Furnham<sup>4</sup>, a British psychologist in his paper for ‘changes in the stereotypical portrayal of men and women in British television advertisements’ found that advertisers use gender role reversal for humor. A study has found that the ads in India are more backward and stereotypical if compared to western countries, is because of our social culture, and instead of changing the views by proper information the advertisements are pushing the society more towards believing in what they already believe. The portrayal of entities who loves to shop but on their husbands' money, even if the ads move a bit forward than normal to show the modern women but also that image comes with a backdrop of the image of a stereotypical woman. When the advertisement of Amazon thought shopping was only a women’s prerogative which straight away generalizes the act of shopping, and even while trying to break the stereotype as they claim but it simply shows that when the women are buying clothes for herself it is because of her obsession for shopping while splurging for the man in their life is a means of ‘showing Love’, the ad also comes with a hashtag of #WhenaWomanshops.<sup>5</sup> Many advertisements are highly objectionable because they simply undermine moral values and ethics; they undermine social values, divert the attention of people, and corrupt young minds. Advertisements that goes to any extent to sell their products including sexual images, stories, or simply some very sexually colored objectionable references, as in a Nando’s advertisement. Nando is a South African based restaurant company, in one of their horrifying ads and left a lot of women feeling horrified, the ad was simply comparing parts of women body to meet and promoting the rape culture in disgusting ways. After a lot of hue and cry from the public Nando,s issued a public apology but even then the ad’s message was shocking to a large extent and a threat to what a society

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<sup>3</sup> Article on Ranveer Singh apologizing for ‘sexist’ Jack and amp; Jones ad (Sep., 5-2020, 2.58am)

<sup>4</sup> Adrian Furnham, Changes in the stereotypical portrayal of men and women in British television advertisements. Sep., 11-2020, 12.20am

<sup>5</sup> Women break age old shopping stereotypes with Amazon’s latest advert #WhenAWomanShops Sep., 11,2020, 12.41am

we are being nurtured in where such advertisements can so easily make its way to such a huge platform like media. Deepak Dhanraj and activist wrote in his paper 'General myths that instrumentalize women' in 1990, that in Indian advertisements women are used as models in sexist ads for diverse products. Women in advertisements are being used as a weapon of persuasion by misleading the customers and also alluring them. Most of the advertisement has some labels attached to them all pointing towards degrading a women's image, everyone or the other ads have these labels on them like, irrational or unintelligent female, famine touch which is always soft and seductive, Female is portrayed as a submissive character, the women are vulnerable to sexual threats where the man needs to save her, or the women are dependent on a male. Even a simple cereal ad portrays stereotypes like a tired working husband and a housewife's role to better her husband's life. The Kellogg's all-bran ad shows how the woman who is a housewife needs to be healthy but not for herself but so she can be a better wife and manage her husband's tantrums and her children at the same time <sup>6</sup>.

### **INDECENT PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN OTHER SECTORS OF MEDIA**

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In a study by UNICEF on why are women so often victims of violence the very first point that came up was when women are repeatedly objectified and hypersexualized in the media, which has the power to reach out to millions of the world's population in no time, there can be nothing more worst that can be blamed than media. Hypersexualized models of femininity and a perfect standard of beauty in the media affect the mental, emotional and physical health of girls and women on a global scale. Displaying women in magazines are a whole new story. When it comes to magazines, it almost feels like it's a women's world but for the pleasure and liking of men. Magazines are periodical publications that are supposed to give current articles and news but instead, it has become a catalogue of women, either showing themselves off seminude or selling makeups or clothes featuring their perfect skin and body. Even a magazine of women's health features actress Cobie Smulders posing topless, with only her arms around her bare chest<sup>7</sup>, in no way this kind of image is anyway necessary for portraying women's healthy. If a women's health magazine cover can have such display of picture, it is hard to which talks about fashion and movies. The degree to which women are sexualized in magazines, lyrics of songs, television, videos games, and in music videos today is horrifying comparing to the fact that we are in the 21st century and we are fighting for

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human rights in every step, and even with an increase in women's empowerment and their voice in the society, such indecent representation is very much out in media with such little concern and change brought in it. The Rap songs and the music videos over time ridiculously objectified women in the lyrics of the songs, the lyrics keep on having elements like emphasizing women's body parts, portraying women as intoxicating substances and food items, using an obscene simile or metaphors like comparing women with firecrackers or ointments and appreciating and flaunting the white skin. There is nothing in the lyrics but sexually portraying them to attract viewers and listeners. Honey Singh, one of the biggest rapper in Bollywood have shocked the society with its misogynistic crudest forms of rap lyrics but amazingly there has been the warm acceptance of such songs in the Indian society<sup>8</sup>. A Student in Delhi has very effectively hit back at the singer criticizing his misogynistic lyrics songs like 'Blue Eyes' which have nothing in it other than portraying a woman in bright short dresses, with lip gloss and a figure like 'bomb', who is being wooed by a man to go out for clubbing. Some of these famous singers' lyrics were widely criticized on social media after the 2012 gang rape in December in Delhi which focused attention on India's male-dominant culture. His songs all over are just ridiculously cringy if the lyrics are heard and are always all about women and partying. Songs like this have been attracting the youth of the country. Such portrayal of women in media is not to be tolerated especially when medium like these affects the countries youth and influences them<sup>9</sup>. Bollywood being a huge industry and such a big part of our countries media item songs like 'Sheila ki jawani' 'Chikni Chameli' is such a ridiculous and not acceptable way of describing and portraying women to the society. There are times when there is no link between the actual story of the movie and the item numbers but is just present there for attracting viewers. Looking at an analysis of 600 song lyrics from top billboard hits, 56% of them had at least one sentiment objectifying them<sup>10</sup>. Even movies like 'Mardaani' which is all about a female police officer and her empowerment have a title like Mardaani' which is completely a masculine term a word that depicts male masculinity and strength and says nothing about a women's valor. Women

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<sup>8</sup> The biggest problem with Yo Yo Honey Singh: Bollywood's embrace of him (Sep.,13- 2020, 1.20am)

<https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/the-biggest-problem-with-yo-yo-honey-singh-bollywoods-embrace-of-him-574960.html>

<sup>9</sup> Yo Yo Honey Singh: Enlightening the Indian Youth since 2006, (Sep., 13- 2020, 1.34am)

<https://qrius.com/yo-yo-honey-singh-enlightening-indian-youth-since-2006/>

<sup>10</sup> University of South Florida Scholar Commons Graduate Theses on *Objectification of Women in Bollywood Item Numbers*. (Sep.,13- 2020, 1.58am)

<https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=9145&context=etd>

nowadays have become a face of media and advertisement for the sole purpose of attracting viewers and buyers, but the problem lies that women are not entities born for the purpose of this, they are not existing for attracting and alluring customers and being a submissive character and such portrayal of women has been putting wrong notions in the mind of the society and has been attracting crimes towards them and without any kind of actions taken against such portrayal of women in the mass media the effect of it will keep on decreasing women's image and their role in the society.

## **THE EYE OF LAW**

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- 1) The Constitution of India** - The Constitution of India is the basic framework for all other persisting laws in the country and our Constitution has given a lot of importance. The constitution provides for equality. Article 14 provides for equality before the law. Article 21 of the constitution is the Magna Carta of Human rights and safeguarding a lot of aspects for the proper livelihood of a person. Article 21 of the Constitution of India states that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to a procedure as established by law. This law has been interpreted very widely since the case of Maneka Gandhi<sup>11</sup> and says very clearly that every woman is an individual human being and has a right to live a dignified human life. Also being a part of the constitutional duties the constitution makes sure that under Article 15(3) to make special provisions for safeguarding of women<sup>12</sup>.
- 2) The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986** - The act provides for the control on this menace. The condition of the advertisements and the representation of women have none the less changed in a better way in the media. And hence no proper standard can be established but general knowledge about what should be called an obscene portrayal of women should be kept in mind. The NCW has also recommended the inclusion of any notice, circular, label, and wrapper. Or any other document, laser, light sound electronic media to be included under the definition of indecent representation in the act. The Act should also include convictions as there is hardly any under this law.

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<sup>11</sup>1978 AIR 597.

- 3) The Indian Penal Code, 1860**-Section 292 of IPC<sup>13</sup> and section 293 very clearly states the punishment for obscene objects or items and prohibits obscene or objectifying.
- 4) The Information Technology Act, 2000**– Section 67 of the Information Technology Act is the most serious legislative measure against pornography, the section says that whoever publishes or cause to be published in electronic form which is obscene and of prurient interest shall be punished<sup>14</sup>. The wordings of sec 67 are wide enough to cover all perpetrators of pornography.
- 5) Young Person's (Harmful Publications) Act, 1956** – Harmful publications mean any books, magazines, pamphlets filled with pictures that portray women in the wrong light.

### CONCLUSION-CURBING THE INDECENT PRACTICE

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Women have the Human right to live with dignity and with respect all over the country without any discrimination, a strong portrayal of women in our society is very important to change the degrading status of women and to stop putting wrong images about women in society. Role of education and awareness is the first and the basic ground of improvement that is required, empowering of women through education should be given big importance, women sometimes themselves becomes a victim of the indecent representation of themselves because of the lack of education and awareness. The area of mass media is a huge stage for creating awareness, instead of creating a wrong image of women through the media. The media should be used as an effective tool to create social awareness among people and not to encourage such indecent practices. The portrayals of women in the media should be equal to that of men and not degrading their image in advertisements, songs, and movies. Smart marketing techniques should be adopted by the marketing companies where women are empowered more in their roles in the advertisements which will have a positive effect on society. The self-regulating authorities need to strictly look into the matters of indecent representation and should adhere to their guidelines, this council should make aware of eradication of such portrayal and make aware of the penalties in such cases. This needs to be done to portray females in a more decent way and not as a commodity to sell and attract but as an individual with dignity and value.

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