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Role Portrayal of Women in Advertising: An Empirical Study

By Sangeeta Sharma¹, Arpan Bumb²

Abstract

One of the sensitive areas in the world of advertising and marketing is the portrayal of women. Women are an indispensable part of Indian society as they constitute half of the population and play critical roles. However, the depiction of women as sex symbols, objects of desire, and as having subservient behaviours has presented a great concern to feminist scholars, activists, and researchers. The objective of this research paper is to study how women's role portrayal impacts consumers' willingness to buy and to identify the difference in views of Indian men and women when it comes to the stereotypical role portrayal of women in advertisements. The study uses MANOVA statistics to identify whether significant differences exist between the men and women when it comes to willingness to buy. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis are used to identify the latent variables. The impact on purchase intent is determined by validating the proposed hypotheses through structural equation modelling statistics.

Keywords: Advertising, Gender, Women's portrayal, Object of desire, Sex symbol

Introduction

Advertising is an all-pervasive and significant social agent that manoeuvres gender roles (Gauntlett, 2008). Advertising not only shows the reality of current times but also shows the glorified picture of the world, which might not always be positive and welcoming (Zawisza, 2019). Gender roles create a stereotype about how ideal men and women should behave in society; such roles also create an unrealistic expectation from one gender (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Past research has identified the portrayal of women as stereotyped to household roles and settings (Matthes et al., 2016; Uray & Burnaz, 2003), relationship roles (Kitsa & Mudra, 2019; McArthur & Resko, 1975), sexual orientation (Zawisza et al., 2018; Eisenstock, 1984), decorative roles (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Uray & Burnaz, 2003), and also highlighted the submissive nature of women, which is also depicted through non-verbal cues (Lin & Yeh, 2009; Goffman, 1979). Several past studies have concluded that television advertisements possess a high stereotypical gender role portrayal (Eisend, 2019).

These stereotypical issues when it comes to the projected image of women not only paint an unrealistic picture in the minds of the audience but also encourage women to achieve the same.

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The depiction of unrealistic images leads women to have lower self-dignity, body dissatisfaction, and restricted self-development (Eisend, 2010; Goffman, 1979; Bessenoff, 2006). Negotiating the radical potential of women's bodies in an intensely neoliberal and patriarchal marketplace is a thriving debate, which is often the source of a great deal of ideological conflict within contemporary feminist activism and discourse (Matich et al., 2019). According to Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977), which propagates the view that new behaviours can be learnt by observing others, the ideal image of women results in the promotion of stereotypes and sexism in society.

The preponderance of depictions of women as weak and second-class citizen is evident in advertisements (Grau and Zotos, 2016). Despite the progress made to reduce the stereotyped roles of women, fading the lines is a slow process as women have been stereotyped in advertisements for more than two centuries (Sylvendahl, 2017). One of the attempts to reduce gender bias is femvertising (Peres et al., 2017; Varghese & Kumar, 2020), which showcases women in higher positions and roles. Femvertising is a method visualized as "female empowered advertising" (Akestam et al., 2017). The process of femvertising is becoming common with the newer trends of gender equality, changes in society, and the developments in women's rights movements.

Women audiences do not easily absorb the idea of femvertising, challenging advertising that seeks to reach audiences through contextualizing age and background (Kapoor & Munjal, 2017). Various researchers have rescinded faux-feminism in the media and zeroed in on the dire need to boost honest corporate goodwill in femvertising (Becker-Herby, 2016). The theory of ventriloquism suggests that femvertising is guided by a patriarchal mindset and is not supported by the feminist movement (Hoad-Reddick, 2018). Femvertising negates the principal of commodity feminism, a mode of mitigating feminist issues related to the marketers associated to brands, and further corroborates the social role theory (Becker-Herby, 2016). Coming from commodity feminism, femvertising was prone to the appropriation of feminist values to boost sales. It is also observed that people are open to comply with feminist values but do not want themselves to be associated with feminist attitudes because of double standards (Burn et al., 2000). The fourth wave feminist theory (Rodrigues, 2017) is supposedly a marketing ruse, highlighting stereotypes (McCleary, 2014) and negative brand feelings (Perez et al., 2017).

The main purpose of any advertisement is to lure customers so that they end up buying the product. The importance of purchase intent while gauging the attitude/response towards the advertisement has been extensively studied. Willingness to buy provides a clear estimate about the effectiveness and attitude towards brands. Therefore, this study uses willingness to buy as the dependent parameter to gather the responses towards the advertisement. This study aims to present the relation of several issues including stereotyping, sexual portrayal, submissive behavior etc. to role portrayal of women affecting the willingness to buy. The study also compares the views of men and women and presents an overall picture of how all the participants visualize these issues in terms of willingness to buy.

This study will enable marketers to analyse the issues pertaining to women, having a negative influence on the willingness to buy for the advertised product. The study will also allow them to develop advertising campaigns, which are considered appropriate by the majority of Indian consumers, in turn reducing the possibility of backlash for the advertisements Eisend (2019).

Research Hypothesis

This study tries to identify issues and situations with respect to role portrayal of women and analyse the impact on the willingness to buy the product or service advertised. The study also tests the responses of men and women respondents to provide a better understanding of how role portrayal affects the willingness to buy across genders. The following hypotheses are tested in this study:

- H1: Sexual orientation of women in the advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.
- H2: Stereotyping women to be domestic in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.
- H3: Subservient/Submissive nature depiction of women in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.
- H4: Depicting women having weak behavior will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.

Literature Review

Initially, the research about the representation of women in advertising was conducted in a variety of geographical locations including Australia (Browne, 1998), France and Denmark (Furnham et al., 2000), China (Cheng, 1997), Sweden (Milner & Collins, 2000) etc. Most of the studies reported that stereotypes amongst genders still exist (Furnham & Mak, 1999; Grau & Zotos, 2016), and the presence of stereotypes is reducing in western regions, but the status in Asia and Africa remains the same (Furnham & Farrager, 2001). The common stereotypes include depicting women in weak roles or positions, using them as sex objects, portraying them as housewives, showcasing them as silent etc. Matthes et al. (2016), by using content analysis, identified that culture of a nation has a significant influence on the role portrayal of genders and concluded that gender stereotypes still exist in the nations rating higher in the Hofstede's masculinity index.

Moreover, the concerns are based on the premise that the use of stereotypes can be perceived as unethical by presenting an unrealistic image of women. Other studies by LaTour and Henthorne (1994) and Tinkham and Weaver-Lariscy (1994) have supported the notion that ethical perceptions influence the customer evaluation of advertisements. A study by Liu et al. (2019) has shown that women tend to have a reduced purchase intent towards the products that used offensive stereotyped roles of women in advertising.

Perhaps the most widely studied topic in the role portrayal of advertisements is sexual appeals, including nudity or sexual appearances. Women are often used as "sex objects" to induce a sexual appeal in the advertisement (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). In Indian advertisements, women are usually treated as an object or commodity by exploiting the sexuality and segregating the body into different parts (Das, 2000). Women are often used as decorative objects by involving the pictures of parts of the body including shots of the breast, leg, and pubic area and are shown dressed in either leisurewear or swimwear (Hall & Crum, 1994). Other studies have shown that women are often portrayed in sexually appealing roles (Lin, 1998; Verhellen et al., 2016).

The study by Bardwick and Schumann (1967) analysed male and female roles in television commercials and concluded that women are more likely to be depicted as homebound or as housewives rather than involved in business, industrial, or professional activities. Similar research

has been carried out by Valls-Fernández and Martínez-Vicente (2007), Prieler and Centeno (2013) and Verhelle et al. (2016). Another stereotype involves women to appear in products related to cosmetics or beauty rather than products associated with cars, gaming stations, computers etc. (Matthes et al., 2016; Kitsa & Mudra, 2019). While depicting women as housewives, they are often portrayed in kitchen and bathroom settings (Dominick & Rauch, 1972), which asserts the role of women to be limited to cooking and cleaning. Women are also more likely to be defined in relationship roles such as mother, sister, wife etc. and not as individuals (McArthur & Resko, 1975; Furnham et al., 2000).

Further, women are also depicted as submissive to men and may even face aggressive verbal or physical behavior in the advertisements. Lysonksi and Pollay (1990) have identified that women are often portrayed as subservient in domestic settings, inactive, indoors, and without authority and expertise. Women are also shown having no purchasing power and dependent on men for survival (Sukumar & Venkatesh, 2011; Das & Sharma, 2017). Such a depiction of women results in low self-esteem and creates an impression that the role of women in a society is secondary to that of men. A study by Goffman (1978) has shown that women are often depicted having passive behaviours, weak non-verbal cues such as licensed withdrawn, unfocused attention etc., and are located at a physically low level with smaller physical sizes as compared to that of men. Browne (1998) identified several aspects of body language resulting in weak depictions of women. They are associated with attributes related to the traditional view of femininity such as shy, giggly, weak, and passive (Kitsa & Mudra, 2019).

Research Gap

There are many studies that analyze unethical issues such as stereotyping of women, using women as sex objects, and depicting them as the weak gender etc. Some of the studies have identified the effect of willingness to buy but have presented a mixed conclusion (Zawisza & Cinnirella, 2010). This study tries to bridge the gap and provide clear evidence on the presence of specific issues that lead to a decrease in willingness to buy. Also, past studies on the effectiveness of advertising have focused mostly on western countries while determining the relation of the effectiveness of ethical issues in advertising. However, little is known about eastern countries. Further, in India, there is a limited number of studies that deal with the effectiveness of role portrayal. Many of the studies have taken primarily female samples (Orth & Holancova, 2004), college students, or industry professionals (Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015), limiting the interpretations of the findings. In this study, the authors have included views from both genders in a variety of professions to deal with this limitation.

Past studies have focused only on limited issues of role portrayals of women and have used a univariate statistic tool such as regression or ANOVA, however, this study uses all the aspects present in the negative or stereotypical role portrayal of women. As suggested by Eisend (2019), researchers should explore the issues to assess gender roles in different ways and identify how to avoid negative effects while utilizing role portrayal. This study also provides a framework in the form of a model for the role portrayal of women. Further, a comparison by using multivariate statistical measures —structural equational modeling, MANOVA and ANOVA tools—the variations in response between genders are tested.

Method

The parameters for the roles of women were identified through the past research stated in

the literature review section. However, to compensate the gaps observed in the advertising ethics theory and the actual practices, the ethical code of conduct for advertising content for four countries (the United States of America, United Kingdom, India, and China) was thoroughly reviewed, and issues commonly described as unethical in these guidelines were included in the study. The following Table 1 presents the issues and situations that can be considered as unethical for the portrayal of women along with their description.

Table 1. Negative Issues Concerning Women

S.No.	Parameter	Description
1.	Women are dependent and need men's protection	Advertisements depicting women dependent on male counterparts, often shown as seeking protection from males. Further, women's decision is dependent on other members at home (Bretl & Cantor, 1988).
2.	Less Intelligent	Advertisements showing women as dumb or less intelligent than men (Kitsa & Mudra, 2019; Grau & Zotos, 2016).
3.	Submissive and face aggressive behaviour from men	Advertisements showing women to be silent and facing aggressive behaviour from men, can be through verbal, physical, or mental abuse (Lysonksi & Pollay, 1990).
4.	Advisory roles/ do not make important decisions	Women, when shown in employment, are in advisory roles or do not take any important decisions, including purchase decisions (An & Kim, 2007)
5.	Younger than males	When males are present, women are depicted as younger than them (Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007). This creates an impression that ageing is a taboo.
6.	Weak physical positioning with respect to males	Women are often portrayed as lying down on the ground or on a bed, making women passive, and in some cases is a clear indication of social hierarchy (Browne, 1998; Goffman, 1979).
7.	Sexy/skimpy clothing, skin showing	Advertisements are shown with women wearing sexy/skimpy clothing reflects emphasis on skin showing (Hall & Crum, 1994; Reichert, 2003).
8.	Sexual postures/ expressions/ gestures	Showing women in advertisements to have expressions, posture, and gestures that induce sexual appeal (Khraim, 2012).

9.	Focus on certain parts of body	Focusing on certain parts of a female's body to incite sexual appeal (Ferguson et al., 1990; Das, 2016).
10.	Object of desire/ sexual object	Women only shown as objects of desire, primarily as objects of male sexual desire, rather than as whole people. They are often used in products to induce a sexual appeal (Kilbourne, 1986).
12.	Successful women are depicted as sexually attractive	Often the women who are successful in the advertisements are shown as sexually attractive, concluding that there is a need to be sexually attractive to be successful.
13.	Weak posture	Women are portrayed having a weak posture, with a knee or head bend towards ground etc., making women look weak (Kitsa & Mudra, 2019; Goffman, 1979).
14.	Unfocused attention	Unfocused attention includes withdrawal symptoms in which women usually shy away and do not focus on anything firmly. This aspect indicates that she is psychologically weak and less stable. She is more dependent on the surroundings for her stability (Kitsa and Mudra, 2019; Goffman, 1979; Das, 2016).
15.	Feminine touch	In many situations, women are shown with their fingers touching their contours to feel the body. While touching, the caress is usually on face, neck, shoulder etc. Such touch depicts women as delicate and fragile (Goffman, 1979; Das, 2016)
16.	Passive behaviour	Women remain passive and silent in the advertisements and tend to appear unalert and removed from social settings (Furnham and Mak, 1999)
18.	Happy housewife	Focusing on the role that women are happy as housewives and their only duties are limited to home. Women in a typical sense are shown in home settings, concerned with the kitchen and bathroom. They are not shown in offices or working environments (Jaffe & Berger, 1994; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente, 2007)

18.	Relationship roles	Women are shown in relationship roles i.e., as a wife, mother, sister etc. and not as independent women in advertisements (Das, 2011)
19.	Focus on certain products	Women are only shown in certain advertisements with products such as cleaning, housekeeping, cooking etc. and not in products such as cars, gaming stations, insurance policies etc. (Kim and Lowry, 2005; Kitsa and Mudra, 2019)

Procedure

After identifying the issues that make the advertisement unethical, a questionnaire was developed to measure the effect on purchase intent. The questionnaire was tested for its reliability and content validity. The reliability of the questionnaire indicates the extent to which the experiment, tool, or procedure yield the same result repeatedly (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). The validity is the extent to which the tool measures the intended value or how true the results are (Golafshani, 2003).

After obtaining the responses, reliability for the questionnaire was measured by Cronbach alpha, which yielded value of 0.89. This value is greater than the recommended value of 0.7 (Taber, 2018). The initial estimate of validity was obtained from content validity, and five experts were asked to rate the questionnaire item to be relevant or non-relevant, as described by the method proposed by Lynn (1986) and Waltz and Bausell (2005). Each of the experts rated the questionnaire items to be relevant for the study, hence the values for I-CVI (Item Content Validity Index) and S-CVI (Scale Content Validity Index) obtained is 1.00. As the questionnaire is valid as well as reliable, it can be used further in the study.

During the administration of the questionnaire, participants were asked to understand the ethical issues in advertisements related to women with a lucid description of the parameters as presented in Table 1. The participants were then asked to fill the questionnaire in a closed and contained environment. After the data collection, incomplete responses and outliers were removed. After this, factor analysis was applied to identify the latent variables. Factor analysis is employed in research to reduce the number of variables to facilitate interpretations. The confirmatory factor analysis was used to confirm the model proposed by exploratory factor analysis. Structural Equational Modeling technique was used to validate the hypotheses. The differences between male and female groups were determined by MANOVA, a statistic that can identify the variations between two or more means.

Measures

The questionnaire was comprised of two sections. The first section measured the *role of parameters*, where participants were asked to rate the impact of the parameters, listed in Table 1, on a Likert scale of 1-5 (1 being the least; 5 being the most). The second section measured the *purchase intent*; the participants were asked to rate their willingness to buy the particular product, service, or idea advertised on the Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 being most likely to the product; 5 being not buying the product at all).

Participants

The participants consisted of students, professionals, teachers, and academicians. These participants were selected randomly from various geographical locations to avoid any biases. The total number of participants was 252. These details were also observed from the sample collected: 115 females (45.63%), 137 males (54.36%), 114 (45.23%) students, 68 (26.98%) working professionals and 70 (27.77%) teachers/academicians. The participants were from an age group of 16-67 years.

Results

To identify the latent variables, the complete dataset of 252 participants was taken. The adequacy of data collected for the factor analysis was measured using Kaiser-Meyer-Okin (KMO) index. The overall KMO value for the ethical issues was 0.82 and for individual items, the minimum value obtained was 0.75, which is more than the recommended value of 0.5. Therefore, the collected sample is adequate and factor analysis can yield meaningful results.

The issues about the role portrayal of women are combined under latent variables to facilitate clear interpretations. The Exploratory Factor Analysis is applied to the data obtained from section 1 of the questionnaire. To select the number of latent variables, eigenvalue criteria is used in which the latent variables are selected that have an eigenvalue of more than 1. Four latent variables observed are named as:

- LW1: Sexual orientation
- LW2: Domestic Portrayal
- LW3: Submissive/Subservient Nature
- LW4: Weak behaviour

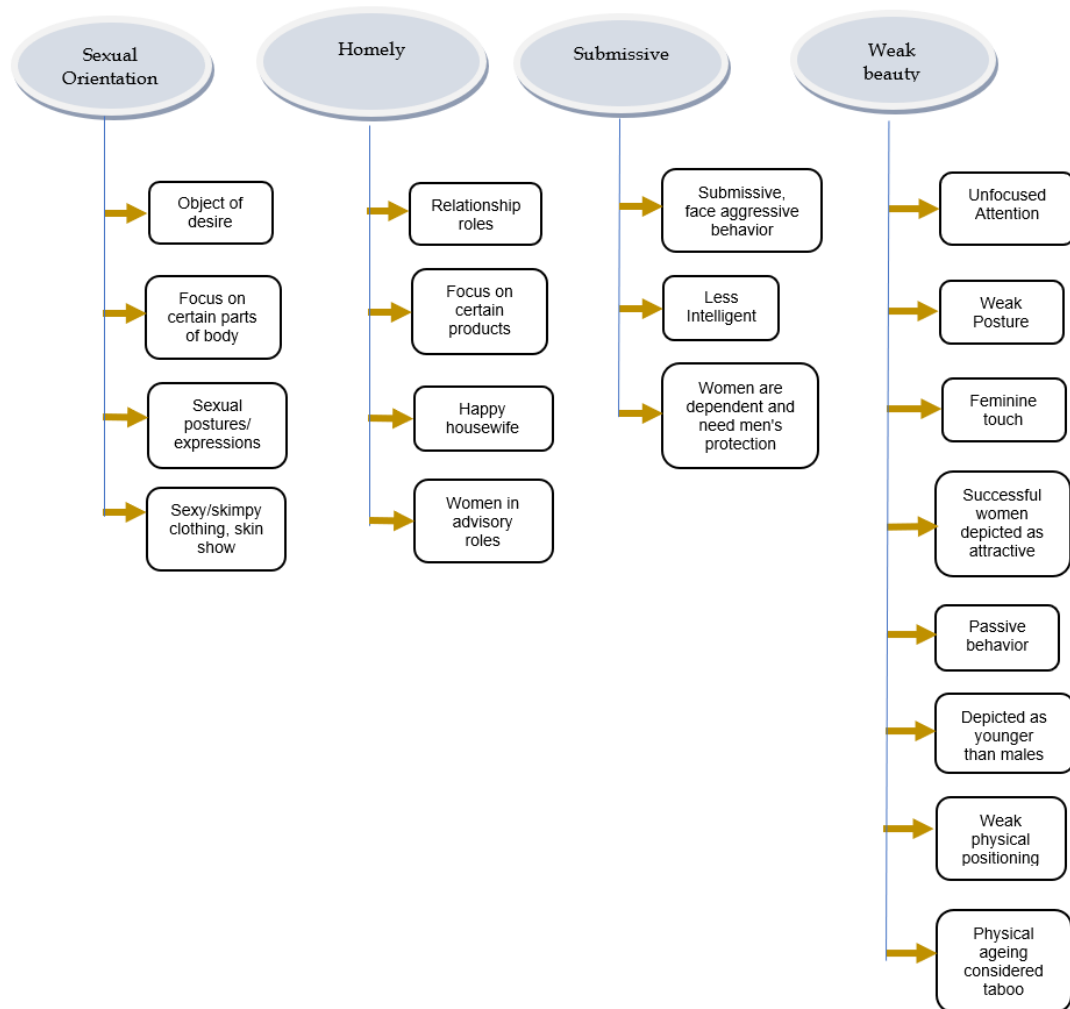
The following Table 2 shows the results of the Exploratory factor analysis. The components of latent variables are depicted in boldface. The factor analysis is based on the principal component analysis with Oblimin rotation and minimum residual method.

Table 2. Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Issues Concerning Women

S.No.	Parameter	LW1	LW2	LW3	LW4
1.	Women are dependent and need men's protection	-0.01	0.04	0.63	0.13
2.	Less intelligent	0.01	-0.06	0.77	0.20
3.	Submissive and face aggressive behavior from men	0.15	0.08	0.70	-0.07
4.	Advisory roles/ don't make important decisions	0.09	0.46	-0.05	0.19
5.	Younger than males	0.01	0.28	-0.16	0.45
6.	Weak physical positioning with respect to males	0.10	0.19	0.21	0.34
7.	Sexy/skimpy clothing, skin showing	0.72	0.06	-0.21	0.16
8.	Sexual postures/ expressions/ gestures	0.87	-0.06	-0.08	0.07
9.	Focus on certain parts of body	0.81	-0.01	0.14	0.00
10.	Object of desire/ sexual object	0.73	0.05	0.28	-0.22
11.	Physical ageing considered taboo	0.11	0.20	0.05	0.49
12.	Successful women are depicted as sexually attractive	0.25	0.09	0.04	0.37
13.	Weak posture	0.11	0.04	0.24	0.50
14.	Unfocused attention	-0.03	0.01	0.22	0.69
15.	Feminine touch	0.31	0.10	-0.21	0.40
16.	Passive behaviour	0.09	0.30	0.18	0.46
17.	Happy housewife	-0.02	0.73	0.10	-0.07
18.	Relationship roles	0.01	0.73	-0.14	0.03
19.	Focus on certain products	-0.05	0.74	0.03	0.00

The following figure shows the model for the role portrayal of women.

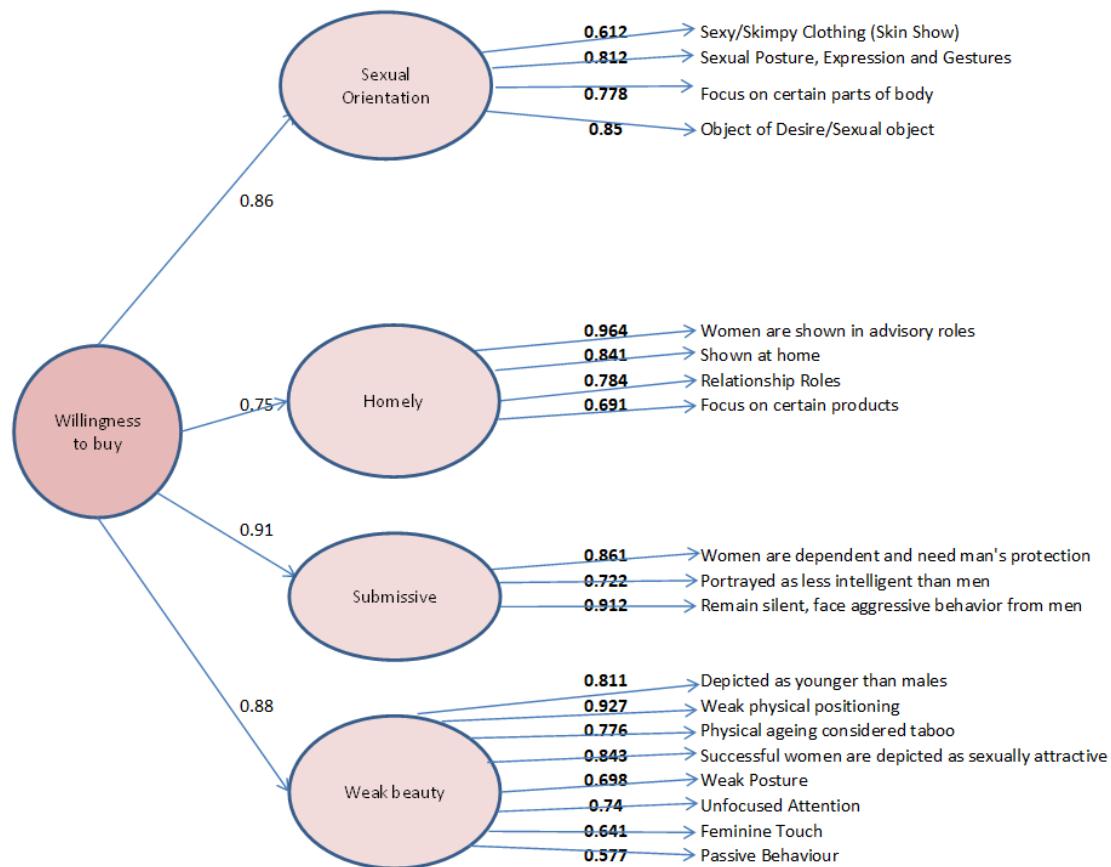
Figure 1. Model of Role Portrayal of Women in Advertising



As EFA is not sufficient to assess properties of the constructs such as unidimensionality (Koufteros, 1999), Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to validate the results obtained. The model proposed by the Exploratory factor analysis was linked with the willingness to buy by using the data from the second section of the questionnaire. IBM SPSS and R were used to compute the Confirmatory factor analysis and carry out Structural Equational Modelling for issues of women.

The results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for the model for the ethical issues for women show that the RMSEA value is 0.055, TLI is 0.912, and the RMSR value is 0.05, which are in consonance with the standard values. Hence, the model is valid and can be utilized in structural equational modelling. The path estimates from the Structural Equational Modelling can be used to accept or reject the hypothesis. The following figure shows the results of the Confirmatory factor analysis for issues concerning women.

Figure 2. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for Issues Concerning Women



MANOVA test (Pillai type) is also conducted to identify whether the responses of males and females are different or similar. The test concluded that significant differences are present in the views of males and females who participated in the study as the p value for all the variables combined yields a p value of 0.331 which is greater than 0.05, hence rejecting the null hypothesis. For individual items also, there is a significant difference in the opinion of the groups as the p value for each of the items is greater than 0.05. Moreover, the F value for each of the parameters is small, hence the differences are significant. The following Table 3 shows the results for the ANOVA test for the individual variables.

Table 3. ANOVA Test Results

S.No.	Parameter	p-value	F value
1.	Women are dependent and need men's protection	0.5874	0.2957
2.	Less intelligent	0.9156	0.0113
3.	Submissive and face aggressive behaviour from men	0.4857	0.4885
4.	Advisory roles/ don't make important decisions	0.4943	0.4695
5.	Younger than males	0.9472	0.0044
6.	Weak physical positioning with respect to males	0.3507	0.8766
7.	Sexy/skimpy clothing, skin showing	0.4935	0.4711
8.	Sexual postures, expressions, and gestures	0.4564	0.5577
9.	Focus on certain parts of body	0.9464	0.0045
10.	Object of desire/ sexual object	0.448	0.5787
11.	Physical ageing considered taboo	0.5149	0.4262
12.	Successful women are depicted as sexually attractive	0.6798	0.171
13.	Weak posture	0.2176	1.5334
14.	Unfocused attention	0.5308	0.3946
15.	Feminine touch	0.8944	0.0177
16.	Passive behaviour	0.1051	2.6593
17.	Happy housewife	0.823	0.0502
18.	Relationship roles	0.5306	0.3951
19.	Focus on certain products	0.3527	0.8691

Hence, there is a need to understand the responses of males and females separately as a significant difference exists between these two groups. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed is tested in three categories—males, females, and overall (comprising both males and females). These categories will facilitate interpretation of how the issues in the role portrayal of women vary according to gender. Data from the male participants were used in the model predicted in Figure 1 to test the hypotheses under the male category. This step can be performed as the reliability of the data is high, the rotation results would not change significantly while using a subset of the overall dataset. Similarly, data for women participants are used for hypothesis testing of the women category, and the complete dataset is used for the overall category.

The following Table 4 shows the results of hypothesis test for overall category.

Table 4. Results of Hypotheses Test

S.No.	Hypothesis	Critical Ratio	p-value	Result
H1	Sexual orientation of women in the advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	1.420	0.159	Rejected
H2	Stereotyping women to be domestic in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	1.419	0.156	Rejected
H3	Subservient/submissive nature depiction of women in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	7.621	0.000	Accepted
H4	Depicting women having weak behaviour will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	3.641	0.000	Accepted

The following Table 5 shows the results of hypothesis test for the category: men.

Table 5. Results of Hypotheses Test

S.No.	Hypothesis	Critical Ratio	p-value	Result
H1	Sexual orientation of women in the advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	1.020	0.139	Rejected
H2	Stereotyping women to be domestic in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	0.919	0.256	Rejected
H3	Subservient/submissive nature depiction of women in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	5.624	0.000	Accepted
H4	Depicting women having weak behaviour will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	4.341	0.000	Accepted

The following Table 6 shows the results of hypothesis test for category: women.

Table 6. Results of Hypotheses Test

S.No.	Hypothesis	Critical Ratio	p-value	Result
H1	Sexual orientation of women in the advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	2.941	0.002	Accepted
H2	Stereotyping women to be domestic in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	4.011	0.000	Accepted
H3	Subservient/submissive nature depiction of women in advertisements will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	3.811	0.000	Accepted
H4	Depicting women having weak behaviour will have a negative influence on willingness to buy.	4.476	0.000	Accepted

The acceptance and rejection of each hypothesis is based on two criteria: the p-value is less than 0.05 and the critical ratio is more than 1.96.

Discussion

The previous theories related to gender stereotypes reflect that any deviation from traditional gender roles invites criticism (Eagly et al., 1991). With the continuous improvement in the purchasing power of women and the importance of women in the economy, the advertisements started to depict women in stronger roles and positions (Teng et al., 2020).

It is clear from the results section that the stereotypical or negative role portrayal of women affects willingness to buy. However, variations are observed amongst the male and female respondents indicating that different issues related to role portrayal of women incite different responses amongst genders.

The issue “sexual orientation of women”, constituting of sexual posture, expression and gestures, focus on certain parts of the body, an object of desire/sexual objects, and sexy/skimpy clothing results in negative willingness to buy for women participants. The result is in accordance with the past study by Paliwoda et al. (2009) and Mayer et al. (2019), which claims that despite the country studied, female respondents are less inclined than their male counterparts towards the overt sex appeal advertising depicted by female models. It is because women are more sensitive towards issues related to sexuality and get offended by excessive sexual depictions. In Indian society, this is a pertinent theme since it remains taboo to discuss issues with sexual connotations. On the other hand, this issue does not generate a negative willingness to buy for male participants and in the overall category. Male participants are found to get intrigued by the sexual portrayal of women (Taflinger, 1996) and gave more attention to such advertisements. This is also recognized in other past studies, validating the adage “sex sells”. Sexual appeals like nudity often have the most attention capturing ability (Zank et al., 2005) and thus can often lead to an improvement in

purchase intent. There is also an increase in the usage of sex appeals in the advertisements (Carpenter & Reichert, 2004) due to the attention capturing capabilities of such advertisements.

“Domestic portrayal of women”—including focus on certain products, shown at home, relationship roles, and women shown in advisory roles—results in negative willingness to buy for women participants because with the increase in the involvement of women in professional activities and work environments, women feel that their role is not limited only to home or domestic chores but much more than that. When women are stereotyped to domestic roles, somewhere the message of restricting her freedom gets propagated, and women today want to attain self-sustainability in terms of economic, social, and legal aspects. On the other hand, men feel that women’s responsibility at home is quite extensive and still consider that women’s primary role is of a homemaker. Males try to restrict women to homes as they feel threatened by women at the workplace. A study by Hoover et al. (2019) shows that men assign leadership roles to male counterparts only, are less likely to work under a female boss, and are less likely to hire women for office work; further, when men feel their authority to be threatened, they try to restore it (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). This aspect results in the generation of non-negative willingness to buy in the case of male participants and overall category as they still want females to be associated with home activities.

“Subservient/Submissive nature”, constituting depictions such as women being less intelligent, remaining silent, facing aggressive behavior from men, being dependent and in need of man’s protection, and “Depicting women as weak” includes issues such as unfocused attention, weak posture, feminine touch, passive behavior, depicted as younger than males, weak physical positioning, physical ageing considered taboo, and successful women depicted as sexually attractive, results in negative willingness to buy for both men and women participants. This is because portraying women as weak and submissive to men in the 21st century is considered negative and stereotypical. Women in every society are now achieving new heights and creating new avenues, therefore, if an advertisement portrays women as weak or submissive to men, it surely is going to be considered stereotypical and may face backlash from the audience. There have been multiple instances where advertisements have been banned due to huge criticism from the people. Some of the examples include: advertisement from Philadelphia cream cheese depicting that only women can take care of children (2019) and a Volkswagen eGolf advertisement where women were shown in a passive role while men were shown in adventurous positions (2019). Both advertisements were banned by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) as they depicted women in stereotypical roles. The study reflects that women are not inclined to buy a product when women are portrayed in stereotypical images or as sexual objects, therefore, the marketers can design campaigns with women depicted in a positive light i.e., showcasing women as confident, decision makers, etc. Men are also inclined to buy the product when they find women in confident roles, carrying the burden with men equally. However, she can be portrayed in an alluring outfit to add glamor to the advertisement, hence increasing the willingness to buy for men. To move towards a society with equal status for both genders, portraying women in a similar fashion as men would enhance equality in society.

Many advertisements are unethical because they do not abide by the guidelines provided by ethical bodies like ASCI (Advertising Standard Council of India), which state “Advertisements should contain nothing indecent, vulgar, especially in the depiction of women, or nothing repulsive which is likely, in the light of generally prevailing standards of decency and propriety, to cause grave and widespread offence”. It is the moral responsibility of the advertisers and viewers to have the representation of women at par with that of men.

Conclusion

The study shows that considerable differences exist between males and females when considering the role portrayal of women and willingness to buy the product being advertised. The differences are attributed to the varied orientation of the mindset of both the genders. Although women are placed in higher roles and positions in advertisements now, stereotypical portrayal is still common. To reduce the differences created by gender stereotypes, it is necessary for advertisers to improve the status of women's role portrayal. If the advertisers took a decision to endorse women in all the categories of the product rather than limiting them to cosmetic, household, or cleaning products, the status of women will improve. Advertisers should also be careful when using certain role portrayals of women as it may generate more negative appeal than others, especially depicting women as subservient and weak.

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