

## Women Presentation in Advertisements: Measuring Effects on Perception of Urban Youth in Karachi, Pakistan

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Keywords	Abstract
Women Presentation, Unethical Advertisement, Negative Impact on Youth, Consumer Behavior.	<i>The media is increasingly commercialized, leading to the perpetuation of stereotypes against women. This study aims to examine the presentation of women in today's commercials and its impact on cultural beliefs. Data was collected from two universities in Karachi using a questionnaire. Additional information was gathered from archives, blogs, interviews, newspapers, and reports. The study employed reliability, validity, and regression analysis using SPSS software. The findings indicate a significant relationship between the presentation of women in advertisements and the identity of women in urban areas of Pakistan, negatively impacting women's roles. The study reveals a strong association between the portrayal of women and their objectification as sex objects in ads. The results demonstrate that the youth in Pakistan strongly disapprove of the practice of using women for brand identity and increasing brand attractiveness. The public rejects current media trends in Pakistan and believes that advertisers should adhere to ethical and moral values, as ads often contradict the true aesthetic values of Pakistani society.</i>

### INTRODUCTION

Globalization facilitates communication with the masses and transforms the world into a marketplace. The rise of entertainment-centric programs has contributed to the increase in advertisements. The primary objective behind advertising is to maximize profit. Our attitudes, values, and beliefs about lifestyle, social responsibilities, and the distinction between right and wrong are significantly shaped by advertising discourse. However, in the modern era, the advertising industry tends to focus more on depicting minorities, including women, within this consumerism culture (Gulati, 2014). It has now become a common practice to present girls or women as mere objects and subject them to various forms of abuse. The objectifications of women, sexism, exploitation, and evaluation have negative effects on individuals and society as a whole (Zayer & Coleman, 2015). Barber (2011) argues that women are often presented in advertisements as sexual objects. Sensual messages conveyed through such presentations suggest to female viewers that using certain products like shampoo, fairness cream, or a particular dress will enhance their value and social status (Reichert & Lambiase, 2003). Sometimes, advertisements are presented in a way where women are used to attract and engage the attention of clients and sponsors, even if the actual users of the product are not women. In traditional societies like Pakistan, a woman's willingness to reveal herself on national platforms is considered dishonorable and devalues societal norms (Ullah, 2014). While advertising plays a significant role in shaping frames of reference, critical discourse analysis should pay more attention to local commercials. Thus, it is crucial to evaluate the language and other pragmatic

features of advertisements for products. Although various researchers, such as Vahid and Esmae'li (2012), have conducted studies on advertisements, the study serves as an addition in this area. The study seeks to explore the impact of metaphorical language and the exploitative representation of women in a decorative form, particularly on our society, especially the youth (Shaikh et al., 2015). However, this study focuses on the presentation and objectification of women in advertisements because understanding the roles of female-oriented advertisements and brand marketing is important for assessing their positive or negative influence on consumer buying behavior and their effects on youth, particularly in urban areas.

### **Study Objectives**

1. To assess the impact of women's identification in the urban market on the presentation of women in advertisements.
2. To examine the impact of women being portrayed as sexual objects on the presentation of women in advertisements.
3. To investigate the impact of brand identity and attractiveness on the presentation of women in advertisements.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review primarily consists of previous research focusing on female portrayals in advertising. The excessive representation of the female body perpetuates sexism, portraying women primarily as sexual objects that attract male viewers (Szymanski et al., 2011). The portrayal of women in advertising evolves with time, reflecting societal changes. Advertising is one of the most influential media that intentionally and subconsciously impact our daily lives, playing a substantial role in shaping society's perspectives (Alam et al., 2023). Women are often depicted in stereotypical roles, such as mothers or housewives, or in seductive appearances (Gulati, 2014). Advertisers and marketers primarily use the physical attractiveness of women to create allure and encourage customers to purchase their products (Kenalemang-Palm, 2023). Some advertisements focus solely on women's beauty to increase viewership and sales, which are both unethical and do not accurately represent our values. Many attractive female models inspire both female and male customers, using various products like cosmetics, outfits, and drinks to create a point of attraction for consumers (Lima & Casais, 2021). The flawless bodies of models in commercials become a source of distortion in the minds of young people as they resort to unnatural means to achieve the physique of their favorite celebrities (Furnham & Lay, 2019). The influential documentary "Miss Representation" highlights that advertisers' primary concern nowadays is capturing more viewers' attention. They often broadcast explicit content that tends to be either more violent or sexual, exposing young children to these constant perceptions that shape their worldview and significantly impact their lives (Ahmadli, 2023).

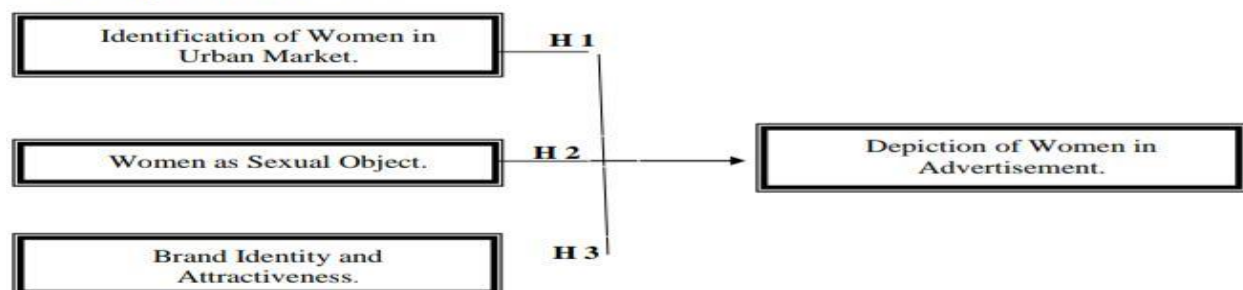
According to Szymanski et al. (2011), women are frequently objectified and reduced to sex objects based on their physical appearance and attractiveness. This highlights the issue that women are often included in advertisements for products primarily targeted at male consumers (e.g., shaving creams, razors). Their presence in these ads is not directly related to the product itself but rather serves as an inappropriate means to attract male customers. This perpetuates the objectification of women (Szymanski et al., 2011). The issue of objectifying women is not

confined to advertisements alone but extends to the broader media landscape, where women are used to attract clients' and sponsors' attention (Middleton, Turnbull, & de Oliveira, 2020). Sexuality is a powerful and commonly used technique to capture the opposite gender's attention and create an appealing product (Oniku & Joaquim, 2022). Many popular clothing brands in Pakistan are following the trend of using sex appeal to attract youth, leading them to visit their stores and make purchases. This trend is also prevalent in many other FMCG (Fast-Moving Consumer Goods) product advertisements, especially in their social media campaigns. Advertisements serve as tools for companies or businesses to shape consumers' perceptions of their products or services. However, to achieve their goals, the messages conveyed must not consist of unethical or false information (Gulati, 2014).

Advertising plays a powerful role in manipulating gender roles within society (Gauntlett, 2008). It portrays the world in ways that may not always be positive or friendly while simultaneously reflecting the realities of the time (Zawisza, 2019). Gender roles stereotype the ideal behavior of men and women in society, creating unrealistic expectations for each gender (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Advertisements attempting to engage audiences by contextualizing age and background may struggle to reach female audiences who do not readily embrace the concept of femvertising (Kapoor & Munjal, 2019). Many studies have criticized the superficial feminism presented in advertising and highlighted the urgent need for sincere corporate goodwill in femvertising. The ventriloquism theory argues that feminist advertising lacks support from the feminist movement because it is driven by a patriarchal mindset (Hoad-Reddick, 2018).

Femvertising challenges the principle of commodity feminism, a strategy aimed at addressing feminist concerns within brand marketing, and aligns with social role theory (Becker-Herby, 2016). As a product of commodity feminism, femvertising has been susceptible to using feminist ideals as a marketing tool. Moreover, it has been observed that despite people's willingness to embrace feminist principles, many are hesitant to be associated with feminism due to its perceived double standards (Burn et al., 2000). The theory of fourth-wave feminism is often seen as a marketing ploy that draws attention to stereotypes and evokes negative brand sentiments (Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017). Sexual appeals, including nudity or sexualized appearances, have been extensively researched in terms of their portrayal in advertisements. Women are frequently used as "sex objects" in ads to evoke sexual attraction (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). In Indian advertisements, women are often depicted as objects or commodities, with their sexuality being exploited and their bodies being fragmented into various parts (Das, 2000). Women are frequently portrayed in seductive ways, emphasizing specific body parts such as breasts, legs, or the pubic area, and are shown wearing revealing clothing or swimsuits. Several studies have revealed that women are often depicted in seductive manners (Verhellen et al., 2016).

## 2.1. Conceptual Framework



## Hypotheses

H1: There is a positive and significant impact of the identification of women in the urban market on the presentation of women in advertisements.

H2: There is a positive and significant impact of women as sexual objects on the presentation of women in advertisements.

H3: There is a positive and significant impact of brand identity and attractiveness on the presentation of women in advertisements.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The market research employs an exploratory research design and follows a positivist approach. The study is cross-sectional, enabling the measurement of quantitative aspects. The survey method aligns with the positivist philosophy, and data collection primarily relies on an adaptive questionnaire. The target population includes MBA evening program regular and executive students from PAF KIET North and City Campus, as well as final-year students of the Mass Communication Department evening shift at the University of Karachi. Additionally, lecturers, associate professors, assistant professors, and professors are also included in the study. A sample size of 100 is used for the quantitative research, employing a convenience sampling technique. The questionnaires are well-structured and consist of closed-ended questions with Likert-style rating scales. To examine the relationship between the dependent variable (DV), which is the presentation of women in advertisements, and the independent variables (IV), such as the identification of women in urban markets, women as sexual objects, and brand identity and attractiveness, linear regression analysis is employed as the statistical tool. The analysis is carried out using SPSS-25. To ensure the stability and consistency of the questions in the questionnaire, Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the reliability of each variable. The first variable, "Presentation of Women", comprises six items with a Cronbach's Alpha=.710. The second variable, "Identification of Women in Urban Market", consists of five items with a Cronbach's Alpha=.821. The third variable, "Women as Sexual Objects", includes five items with a Cronbach's Alpha=.668. Lastly, the fourth variable, "Brand Identity and Attractiveness", comprises four items with a Cronbach's Alpha=.621.

## DATA ANALYSIS

**Table No 1: There is Positive and Significant Impact of Identification of Women in Urban Market on Presentation of Women in Advertisement.**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	31.673	10.574		2.995
	Identification of Women	.734	.157	.426	4.663

a. DV: Presentation of Women in Advertisements

Table No. 1 presents the test results of the hypothesis regarding the positive and significant impact of the Identification of Women in the urban market on the presentation of women in advertisements. The table indicates that the presentation of women in the market does have a positive and significant impact on the presentation of women in advertisements. Furthermore, it is noted that the coefficient (B: .734), the t-value (4.663), and the *p*-value (.000) support the approval of the first hypothesis of the study.

**Table No 2: There is a Positive and Significant Impact of Women Sexual Objects on Presentation of Women in Advertisement**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	33.245	5.434		6.118	.000
1 Women as Sexual Objects	.444	.051	.664	8.788	.000

a. DV: Presentation of Women in Advertisements

Table No. 2 presents the test results of the hypothesis regarding the positive and significant impact of women as sexual objects on the presentation of women in advertisements. The table indicates that the presentation of women in the market indeed has a positive and significant impact on the presentation of women in advertisements. Furthermore, it is noted that the coefficient (B: .444), the t-value (8.788), and the *p*-value (.000) provide evidence supporting the approval of the second hypothesis of the study.

**Table No 3: There is Positive and Significant Impact of Brand Identity and Attractiveness on the Presentation of Women in Advertisement**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	53.734	4.027		13.344	.000
1 Brand Identity and Attractiveness	1.964	.290	.565	6.774	.000

a. DV: Presentation of Women in Advertisements

Table No. 3 presents the test results of the hypothesis regarding the positive and significant impact of brand identity and attractiveness on the presentation of women in advertisements. The table indicates that the presentation of women in the market does indeed have a positive and significant impact on the presentation of women in advertisements. Additionally, it is noted that the coefficient (B: 1.964), the t-value (6.774), and the *p*-value (.000) provide support for the approval of the third hypothesis of the study.

## CONCLUSION

The primary goals of marketing and advertising strategies are profit generation and profit maximization. However, in pursuit of these goals, many ethical issues and problems related to

these activities are often overlooked. Companies tend to promote their products by exaggerating their attributes and quality, employing emotional and sexual appeals to increase sales. Women are objectified in various forms of media, exposing them to sexual harassment (Ali, 2015).

Numerous multinational organizations in Pakistan utilize young and fresh models in their advertisements, often deviating from societal norms in terms of their dress and appearance. The traditional and social values of Pakistan differ greatly from those of Europe and the USA, making it clear that the global advertising approach does not work universally. The continuous exposure to Western culture poses a significant threat to the identity of Pakistani women.

This study focuses on how Pakistani women are portrayed in today's advertisements, which negatively impacts their value and position in society, particularly among the youth in urban areas. It is important to note that the perceived class represented in these advertisements does not reflect the majority of the Pakistani public. Nudity is strictly forbidden and deemed unacceptable in Islamic culture; thus, Pakistani commercials should not incorporate it as a means to boost sales or create a memorable brand image. Advertising agencies need to develop ethical ads that accurately depict Pakistani culture and the true representation of Pakistani women, ensuring that they do not cross any boundaries and that these boundaries are clearly defined. Marketers should prioritize promoting brands rather than relying heavily on female models. While Pakistan is moving towards globalization, it does not imply compromising on the morality and teachings of Islam.

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