

# MOTHER INDIA OR SEXY INDIA

## THE EFFECTS OF OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS ON BRAND 'INDIA'

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**Abstract:** This study examined the effects of objectification of women in Indian advertisements on Brand INDIA and has stated suggestions and opinions to Rebrand India as 'Mother India' instead of currently prevailing notion of 'Sexy India'. Adult volunteers were questioned on varying effects of these advertisements on the mindset of Indian society and were asked for their progressive suggestions. Confirming to the title and scope of our study, this research led to concrete conclusion of current Indian advertisements on Objectification of women negating the brand image of India.

**Keywords:** Advertisement, Objectification, Branding, Women, India.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Which are the factors that influence a brand?

A study suggests that:

- Quality
- Positioning
- Repositioning
- Long-term perspective
- Internal marketing
- Credibility
- Well-blended communication

are the factors that prove to be considerations when trying to build a **BRAND**.

So, what is Rebranding?

Why Rebrand INDIA?

- It is a marketing process of strategizing brand building with the help of a new name, logo or design with a purpose of creating an altogether different perception and image in the minds of the targeted audience.
- Marx and Engels in 1956 claimed that, "the transformation of a historical era can always be determined by the condition of progress of women towards liberty" (cited in Towns, 2009, page number: 694). The current status of women in Indian advertisements is that of an object and role defines the status of a gender in society.

#### **Rebrand India=no objectification of women in Indian advertisements**

Hence, there is a need to Rebrand India as Mother India in its true sense and not for name sake.

Advertisement is firstly, paid form of Promotion, secondly, is targeted to public at large and thirdly, is one-way form of disseminating persuasive information for the purpose of promoting adoption of goods/services/ideas, delivered through means of mass communication channels. Hence, it plays an influential role in shaping the thoughts of audience it is targeted at. Today, a person is rarely allowed with space to make his/her own decisions based on his/her own wit/intellect/knowledge. All the decisions are made on his/her behalf by organizations that continuously hammer an idea and create an image in a person's mind. These images then become a lifestyle, including the 'objectification of women in advertisements'.

Therefore, the current study helps us understand how measures taken to stop objectification of women in Indian advertisements will lead to Brand-Mother India.





Figure 1

**II. OBJECTIVES**

- To highlight how women are objectified in Indian advertisements
- To create an awareness with regards to the same

**I. Literature Review**

- Advertising is often accused of perpetuating stereotypes through its portrayal of women, ethnic minority and other groups. The results of various studies explored that over the year’s women are portrayed either preoccupied with their household jobs, like cooking or health and hygiene of the family and beauty or as the decorative or sex objects in advertisements. Sometimes the women also have to represent the product to which they are not at all related with. Even

body parts of women are objectified to sell the products starting from alcohol to automobiles. In contrast, men are portrayed as constructive, adventurous and powerful. Though the masculine and feminine roles are quite modified with the times, advertisements fail to depict them. Manusi (1998) after examining the role of Indian women in TV ads found that gender stereotype in Indian ad is prevalent. Das (2000; 2011) has different studies on the print and TV advertisements and found the same result.

- Advertisement is the mere reflection of the society. It has a wide reach, thus, its effect on society can't be ignored. According to a good number of researchers the continuous stereotypical portrayal of women by the advertisements are putting regular pressure on women whether it is their social status or beauty and led to several types of social problems. The stereotypical portrayal of women in advertisements are responsible for giving an idea to the society that women are the weaker sex and are not able to take any important decision; they are viewed as dependent on men, whose primary job is to take care of the family. If she is independent, going out, earning money for her family, then she is portrayed in a super woman image in the ad, where even with her full-time job she is supposed to do each job with perfection. Though in real life it cannot be possible, the continuous portrayal of women with such image rises high expectations of the society of women. The power of women also shapes men's expectation for finding women who are over five feet and six inches tall but less than hundred pounds, who looks great in a dress and demure and submissive (Rajgopal and Gales; 2002)
- Advertisements take advantage of the of the Indian mentality of craze for fair skin especially for girls. Young girls are made the target of various fairness creams and encouraged to become fair to either get a husband or to get a job (Patel, 1998; Munshi 2001). The objectification of women's body, the use of women as the sex object in scantily dress to promote the products to which they have no connection, the comparison of women's body and body shapes with the products like automobiles, alcohol bottles, perfume bottles, bottles of body lotion; not only devaluates the self-esteem of women in the society but also leads to violence against women in the society. (Kilbourne, 1999)

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *Participants*

Participants included 106 adult volunteers, aged between 21 years and 45 years, out of which 33 volunteers were males and 73 were females, from all over India. Extremists were excluded from this research study particularly because of their extreme gender biased views.

#### *Materials*

**Primary Data:** A questionnaire prepared under 'Google forms', was passed across to these participants. This form consisted of 6 close ended questions and 1 open ended question and before starting to answer the questions asked, the respondents were mandated to fill in their name and Email ID. Also, a preface was provided to this questionnaire to explain the meaning of 'Objectification of Women' in the context of this study.

**Secondary Data:** We referred to the following sources of Secondary data:

- a. Ph.D. Thesis
- b. Research papers
- c. Websites
- d. Advertisements

#### *Procedure*

The questionnaire was passed on to the respondents through E-mail and an online chat application and accessibility to the questionnaire to be filled by the respondents was kept open for 5 days.

#### *Limitations*

- a. Number of respondents and availability of time, both proved to be limitations for this study
- b. This research does not take in to consideration, the holistic view of the subject of objectification of women in India and hence, the factors contributing to objectification of women have not been considered.

### IV. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

1. Have you ever come across an Indian advertisement that objectifies women?

Table 1

Have you ever come across an Indian advertisement that objectifies women?	Total No. of persons	Percentage
No. of respondents	106	
Yes	89	84
No	17	16

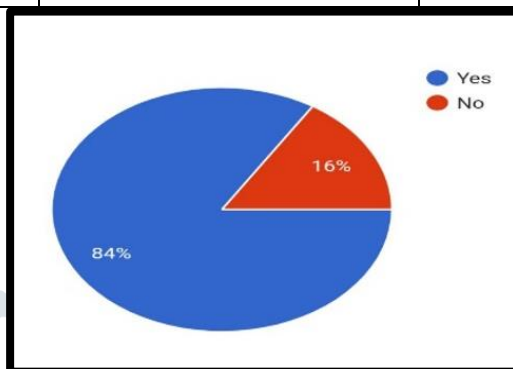


Figure 2

**Interpretation:** The first question tells us that, majority of the respondents have come across an Indian advertisement that has objectified women which means that portrayal of women in this manner has been evident enough in these advertisements

2. If yes, what is your view about it?

Table 2

If yes, what is your view about it?	Total No. of persons	Percentage
No. of respondents	98	
Does not matter/ neutral	4	4.1
Have not thought about this in this way	43	43.9
It makes me angry	29	29.6
I do not support this and already taking small steps towards change	22	22.4

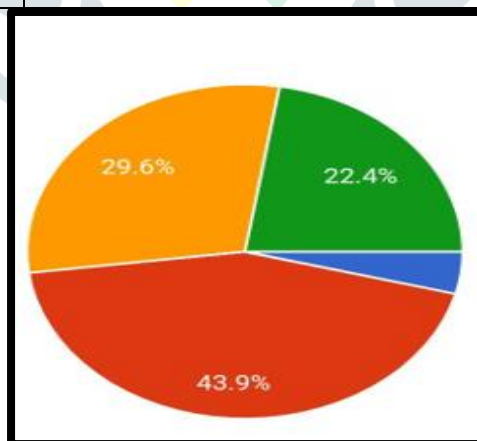


Figure 3

**Interpretation:** However, the apathy here is that it does not matter to 4.1% of respondents and a whopping 43.9% of respondents have not taken it in a way of such advertisements objectifying women. It contradicts the 1<sup>st</sup> question where they agree to witness an advertisement in which women have been objectified

3. Do you think it is appropriate to portray women in this manner?

Table 3

Do you think it is appropriate to portray women in this manner?	Total No. of persons	Percentage
No. of respondents	105	
Yes	97	92.4
No	8	7.6

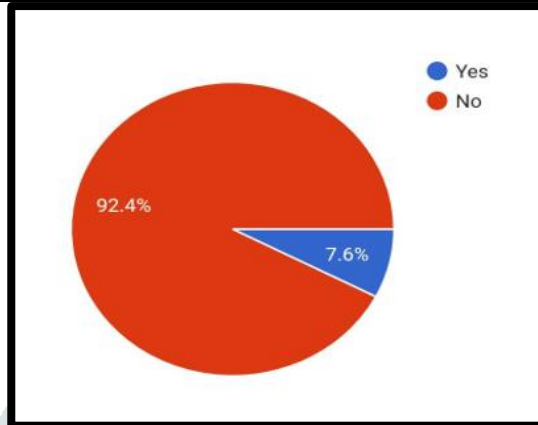


Figure 4

**Interpretation:** Here, 92.4% of respondents are of an opinion that, it is inappropriate to portray women in a role that is objectified.

4. Do you think this negatively affects the self-esteem of women?

Table 4

Do you think this negatively affects the self-esteem of women?	Total No. of persons	Percentage
No. of respondents	105	
Yes	94	89.5
No	11	10.5

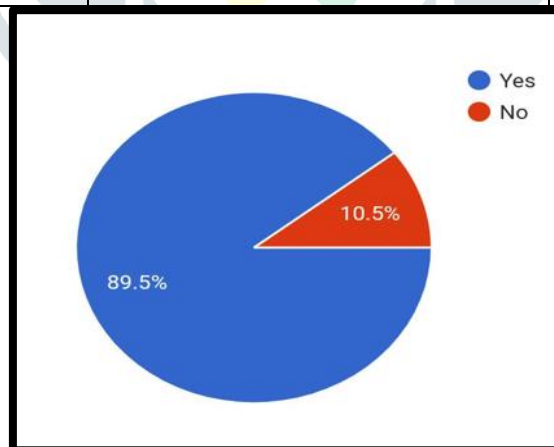


Figure 5

**Interpretation:** Yes, Objectification of women in advertisements does affect the self-esteem of women in India and we have major chunk of 89.5% of respondents having this opinion

5. Do you think these kinds of advertisements create a demeaning impression of women in the minds of the people?

Table 5

Do you think these kinds of advertisements create a demeaning impression of women in the minds of the people?	Total No. of persons	Percentage
No. of respondents	105	
Yes	100	95.2
No	5	4.8

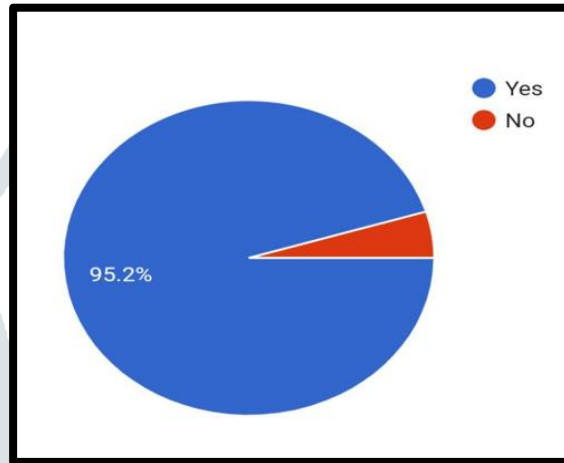


Figure 6

**Interpretation:** These advertisements further degrade the perception of women in the minds of a lot of people and to our support we have 95.2% of respondents.

6. Do you find it to be morally right?

Table 6

Do you find it to be morally right?	Total No. of persons	Percentage
No. of respondents	104	
Yes	95	91.3
No	9	8.7

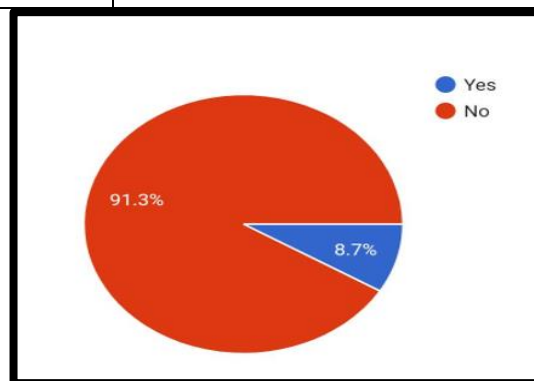


Figure 7

**Interpretation:** Objectification of women is immoral according to 91.3% of respondents and hence, affects the Brand INDIA.



*Summary:* Majority of the respondents mutually agree to the facts that, objectification of women leads to lowering the self-esteem of women, is immoral and create a demeaning perception of women in the society. To first, stop the means through which our women are objectified and then, stop the whole act itself, following were the suggestions made by our respondents

#### V. SUGGESTIONS AND OPINIONS OF THE RESPONDENTS:

1. Actresses should stop objectifying themselves for monetary compensation
2. "It is an outdated form of advertising" says a lady, she further suggests that, not only men/women should be treated equally but, we should also accept LGBTQ community
3. This respondent says "I believe ads have a great impact on the society so, if women are being objectified, the society will believe that it is right to objectify women and everyone will treat women in the same manner"
4. The other respondent says, "Objectifying women is morally not correct as this somewhat puts a negative impact in the minds of people"
5. "Women should not be used as a tool to attract the audience to sell a product"-a respondent
6. A very relevant suggestion we got: Without a bigger proportion of women in senior jobs in Marketing, media and Advertising, better representation of women will be slow to be established
7. Advertisements should portray women, happy in their own skin and not create indiscrimination with such advertisements that portray women negatively

#### VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we would want to state an opinion of one of our respondents: "Objectification of women in media leads to creation of false image of women in the minds of public. Media plays a very important role in image creation. Objectification of women being curbed in media can lead to better image of women in the minds of public"s

The results of this study provide very concrete evidences of how Objectification women in Indian advertisements creates a perception that affects the arena of Marketing in India leading to a negative impact on Brand INDIA. If Brand INDIA is to be rebranded, women should be discouraged to be submissive and dress provocatively to sell a product/service/an idea. It is the brand image of 'Mother India' that we want to retain rather than that of 'Sexy India' that we have created.

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#### APPENDIX

##### *Preface*

Hello, we are conducting a research project and the objective of this research project is to re-brand the marketing activities in India as one that, immensely respects women. Would you be kind enough to fill this form to help us complete this research project?

Objectification of women in Indian advertisements in context of this research project means, there is strong focus on women as sexual objects rather than a person as a whole.

**Example:** Fairness creams have female models; Deodorant advertisements show women being attracted to men's Deodorants.

1. Have you ever come across an Indian advertisement that objectifies women?

- Yes
  - No
2. If yes what is your view about it?
- Does not matter/ neutral
  - Have not thought about it in this way
  - It makes me angry
  - I do not support this and I'm already taking small steps towards change
3. Do you think it is appropriate to portray women in this manner?
- Yes
  - no
4. Do you think this negatively affects the self-esteem of women?
- Yes
  - No
5. Do you think these kinds of advertisements create a demeaning impression of women in the minds of the people?
- Yes
  - No
6. Do you find it to be morally right?
- Yes
  - No
7. What is your opinion about this objectification of women in advertisement?

