

ADVERTISEMENT PRESSURE AND ITS IMPACT ON BODY DISSATISFACTION AND BODY IMAGE PERCEPTION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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***Abstract:** The paper investigates the relationship between the pressure created by advertisements as perceived by the respondents and the subsequent effects on their body image perception and dissatisfaction. The sample size of this study is 915 females above 12 years of age and the sampling area is Chennai. From the results it was found that around 30% of the women respondents have stated that they are pressurized by advertisements. Further it was found that the women are overestimating their present body size and idealize a thinner image. The empirical results distinctly explain the relationship between the advertisement pressure and its impact on body dissatisfaction and body image perception to the detriment of women. Thus the culture of thinness in advertisements may lead to body dissatisfaction of women and which may further manifest to eating disorders which is a concerning issue for India.*

***Key Words:** Advertisement Pressure, Body image, Body dissatisfaction, BDI, Silhouette scale*

Introduction

Advertising

The mass media have an important role in modern democratic society, as the primary channel of communication and specifically advertising is a main source of information to people. We are unaware of how much we are exposed to advertising. It is able to subliminally filter through ideas about how identities are constructed within society. Consequently advertising has received much importance and recognition in any society. While advertising can be seen as necessary for [economic growth](#), it is not without its [social costs](#). Detractors of advertising accuse it of an array of sins ranging from an economic waste to promotion of harmful products, from sexism to deceit and manipulation, from triviality to intellectual and moral pollution.

Advertising, Gender and Physical Appearance

Men and women are targeted according to their social beliefs and attitudes. Although physical appearance is important in both males and females, beauty is generally defined as peculiarly a feminine attribute and according to Ivy & Backlund, 2004 preoccupation with one's appearance is seen as part of the feminine stereotype. The advertisements have a negative impact on women than men, as women appear more emotional and unconfident in contrast to men. The point of concern to be noticed about women's appearance

in commercials is that the advertisements focus mainly on beauty and body features of the model, and less on the product and they give emphasis to the physical attractiveness of woman.

Review of Literature

Patricia Madel (1998), examined female adolescents' perceptions of advertising, locus of control and self-efficacy in relationship to eating habits and body image. Based on the findings of this study, female adolescents who had realistic perceptions of their body image and eating habits had more internal locus of control and higher levels of self-efficacy. Females, who were more involved in their appearance orientation, were more likely to be controlling with an exaggerated sense of control and their self-efficacy was lower. Females who were satisfied with their weight were more likely to have positive appearance evaluation as part of body image and were less concerned with appearance orientation.

Howard Lavine et al., (1999), examined whether exposure to TV ads that portray women as sex objects causes increased body dissatisfaction among women and men. Results revealed that women exposed to sexist ads judged their current body size as larger and revealed a larger discrepancy between their actual and ideal body sizes (preferring a thinner body) than women exposed to the nonsexist or no ad condition.

Jessica Lea Varnado (2000), study assessed the effects of exposure to the media portrayal of ideal body shape on women's mood, body satisfaction, and internalization of societal values concerning attractiveness. Results indicated media exposure to ideal-body images demonstrated no significant changes in women's affect, body satisfaction or endorsement of the thin ideal. Indirect support for the sociocultural theory of eating disorders was provided that demonstrated lower levels of satisfaction with size and shape of body and higher levels of negative affect predicted bulimic symptomatology in women.

Cynthia M. Frisby (2004), examined the impact of exposure to ads of thin, physically attractive, models on the self-evaluations exhibiting varying levels of self-reported body esteem. Exposure to idealized images of models was not related to lowered self-evaluations regardless of the level of body esteem. However, women with low levels of body esteem did report lowered self-satisfaction with body esteem when exposed to physically attractive images of models. The present concludes that exposure to idealized images negatively affects a woman's self-esteem.

Duane A. Hargreaves & Marika Tiggemann (2004), aimed to examine the effect of exposure to images of idealized beauty in the media on adolescent girls' and boys' body image. It was found that exposure to idealized commercials led to increased body dissatisfaction for girls but not for boys. Idealized commercials led to increased negative mood and appearance comparison for girls and boys, although the effect on appearance comparison was stronger for girls. The results suggest the immediate impact of the media on body image is both stronger and more normative for girls than for boys, but that some boys may also be affected.

Brittney E. H. Schrick, B.S. (2005), study focuses on the relationship between television viewing and body dissatisfaction in normal, young adult women during college. Results indicated that participants who viewed programs with a higher average thinness rating showed significantly greater internalization of the thin ideal. Also greater internalization of the thin ideal was related to the choice of a smaller ideal body size. Because body dissatisfaction was not significantly related to any measures of media consumption or internalization, the above findings indicate the possibility that media consumption and internalization of the thin ideal may not be related to long-term body dissatisfaction as is often assumed.

Jaehee Jung (2006), employed a repeated measures design to assess the effects of exposure to attractive models in the media on women's mood and body image. Exposure to media images had an influence on women's mood by decreasing positive mood and elevating anxiety and depression from pre-exposure to post-exposure. In both pre- and post-exposure conditions, women with high-appearance self-schema exhibited significantly greater negative mood and lower body dissatisfaction and appearance evaluation than did those with low-appearance self-schema. This study suggests that media images of thinness and attractiveness may negatively affect college women's mood.

Patricia van den Berg et al., (2007), examined the role of media body comparison as a mediator of the relationships between psychological factors and sociocultural pressures to be thin and body dissatisfaction in both females and males. In females, media body comparison partially or fully mediated relationships between self-esteem, depressive mood, friend dieting, magazine message exposure and BMI, and body dissatisfaction. In males, media body comparison was not a significant predictor of body dissatisfaction. Shelly Grabe et al., (2008), suggests that exposure to mass media depicting the thin-ideal body may be linked to body image disturbance in women. This meta-analysis examined experimental and correlation studies testing the links between media exposure to women's body dissatisfaction, internalization of the thin ideal and eating behaviors and beliefs. Effects for some outcome variables were moderated by publication year and study design. The findings support the notion that exposure to media images depicting the thin-ideal body is related to body image concerns for women.

Hung-Yi Lu & Hsin-Ya Hou (2009), performed a cross-sectional study, testing a model of predictors and consequences of body dissatisfaction. Analytical results revealed that body dissatisfaction among respondents increased with BMI, perceptions of how others viewed their bodies and upward social comparisons. Body dissatisfaction also markedly influenced respondent weight-loss intentions. Results imply that medical, psychological and social factors must be considered by school health educators wishing to understand the causes and consequences of body dissatisfaction among female college students.

Mary L. Marcum (2010), examined the messages that influence women's body satisfaction and body dissatisfaction and found that women construct their personal body image based on their interactions with others. More importantly, the communication that takes place between these women and those who inhabit their social worlds are sources for constructing their body image. Thus, women constantly consume messages on a daily basis about their bodies. Because of the constant consumption of body image messages, educators can utilize this research to create activism and awareness about the various ways in which society perpetuates unrealistic standards of beauty and dangerous thinness.

Problem Statement

Body image is a multidimensional concept that manifests itself in a variety of ways, encompassing perceptual, cognitive, behavioural, and affective domains (Cash & Deagle, 1997). Body dissatisfaction is a disturbance in body image or in the way one perceives his/her weight or body shape that has the potential to affect mental health and quality of life (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Body dissatisfaction, is a powerful, most potent and consistent precursor of a whole range of unhealthy body-related behaviors like – unhealthy dieting regimes and problematic eating behaviors (starving, bingeing, and purging), clinical eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia), cosmetic surgery, extreme exercising, and unhealthy muscle-enhancing behaviors. It is also linked to depression, anxiety, sexual dissatisfaction, and low self-esteem. Therefore body dissatisfaction is a significant risk for physical and mental health, and thus well-being. The inaccurate perceptions of appearance in advertisements can lead some women to engage in various compensatory body image investment behaviours, such as extreme dieting, in an attempt to improve the perceived defect in appearance (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002). Thus Advertisement pressure to attain idealized media images may increase body dissatisfaction. The relationship between advertisement pressure and its impact on body dissatisfaction have been analyzed in this research paper.

Objectives of the Study

To analyze the differences and inconsistencies in the ideal and emotional body image perception of women.

To analyze the relationship between advertisement pressure and body dissatisfaction of women.

Method

Participants

As the impact of advertisements and body image dissatisfaction thereof affect fewer men than women at a ratio of 1:20 (Ramya Kannan, 2010), men were completely excluded from the study and only women above 12 years of age were considered for the study. Each of the research subjects responded to a questionnaire on demographical details and other variables related to the study. Primary and secondary data was collected for the study. The Primary data of the study was collected through Structured undisguised questionnaire prepared in English and Tamil (A Vernacular language predominantly used in Chennai). The secondary data was collected from newspapers, magazines and other research articles relevant to the objectives of the study.

Sampling design

Selection of sampling area

India's fourth largest metropolis is Chennai. This research has been carried out in Chennai as it is a place consisting of population with different psycho-social profile and thus can be used to arrive at meaningful conclusions for the objectives.

Estimation of Sample Size

As the population is indefinite, Convenience sampling was adopted for the study. Sample size as estimated by sampling proportion method is 683. Since the calculation was based on the 2001 census and the population had seen an increase, the final responses were approximately aimed from 900 respondents. Questionnaires were delivered to 1105 subjects and 120 of the distributed questionnaires were not returned and 70 questionnaires were incomplete and therefore rejected. The final sample of the study contained 915 women in Chennai.

Research instrument

Primary data has been collected using a structured undisguised self report questionnaire. Questions pertaining to the respondents attitude towards advertisements, the pressure perceived, respondents satisfaction with their body image were collected. The body dissatisfaction scale developed by Stunkard and Sorenson was used to determine the body dissatisfaction of respondents. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS application.

Results

Attitude towards Advertisements – Mean Score

The respondents' attitude towards advertisements was determined using multiple choice items in the questionnaire. The responses were scored on a 5- point scale ranging from "1" Strongly disagree to "5" Strongly agree, with "3" representing a neutral response.

Mean score is an important measure to study the average of the respondents' opinion. The mean score value (as presented in Table 1) of the respondents attitude towards advertisements is positive (mean score 73).

Advertisement Pressure

Respondents attitude towards the pressure created by advertisements was determined on a 5 – point scale ranging from "1" Strongly disagree to "5" Strongly agree, with "3" representing a neutral response. The statements in the questionnaire were about whether the respondents felt pressurized by advertisements to look beautiful, to have a perfect body shape and to look attractive.

It was found that (as presented in Table No. 2) nearly one third (31%) of the respondents disagreed that they are pressurized by advertisements to have a perfect body shape, Around 42% respondents agreed that they are

pressurized by advertisements to look beautiful, and nearly 35% of the respondents agreed that that they are pressurized by advertisements to look beautiful.

Table No. 3 classifies the respondents based on their perceived advertisement pressure with respect to physical appearance. It was found that around 70% of the respondents stated that they are not pressurized by advertisements and around 30% stated that they are pressurized by advertisements.

Body Image Perception & Body Dissatisfaction – Silhouette Scale

The Silhouette Figure Rating Scale (Stunkard, Sorenson, & Schlesinger, 1983) was administered to determine body image dissatisfaction. The scale has nine figure drawings representing a monotonic increase in percent body size from the first to the ninth silhouette (extremely thin to obese). Each figure is scored on a scale of 1-9 with 1 being the thinnest and 9 being the heaviest. The drawings are printed in the questionnaire in conjunction with questions asking them to choose which drawing accurately reflects their current body size and which drawing reflects their ideal body size. Body image discrepancy or body dissatisfaction was calculated by subtracting one's ideal body rating from one's current body rating. The discrepancy between the figures chosen is taken as a measure of their level of body dissatisfaction.

Mean present figure scores (4.5) on silhouette scale were significantly higher than the ideal scores (3.4) and the attractive figure for both men (3.2) and women (2.9) indicating that the respondents are overestimating their present body size and idealize a thinner image. Moreover the mean scores of ideal figure, attractive figure – both men and women are anorexic (Small body size) (as presented in Table No. 4)

Advertisement Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction Score

Body dissatisfaction score is calculated by subtracting the figure number the respondents want to look like from the present figure. Table No. 5 classifies the body dissatisfaction score of respondents pressurized by advertisements. It was found that around 19% of the respondents have stated no dissatisfaction with their present figure and around 81% have stated their dissatisfaction with their present figure. Of which around five percent of the respondents aspire to have a larger body figure than their present figure and nearly 76% of the women aspire to have a smaller body size than their existing figure (as presented in Table No. 5).

Conclusions

The relationship between the pressure created by the advertisements and its subsequent effects on women body image perception and body image dissatisfaction was investigated. From the results it was found that around 30% of the respondents are pressurized by advertisements. The mean score values of silhouette scale variables indicate that the women are overestimating their present body size and idealize a thinner image. Moreover the mean scores of ideal figure, attractive figure – both men and women are anorexic (Small body size). Classification of the body dissatisfaction score of the respondents pressurized by advertisements revealed that around five percent of the women only aspire to have a larger body figure than their present figure and nearly 76% of the women aspire to have a smaller body size than their existing figure. The empirical results distinctly explain the relationship between the advertisement pressure and its impact on body dissatisfaction and body image perception to the detriment of women. Thus the culture of thinness in advertisements may lead to body dissatisfaction of women and which may further manifest to eating disorders which is a concerning issue for India.

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Table No. 1

Means Standard Deviations for Total Sample (N=915)

Study Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude towards advertisements	25.00	100.00	72.9454	15.15013

Table No. 2

Advertisement Pressure and Physical Appearance

Statement	Response	No. of Respondents	Percent
I feel pressure from ads to have a perfect body shape	Strongly Disagree	81	8.9
	Disagree	209	22.8
	Neither / nor	115	12.6
	Agree	378	41.3
	Strongly Agree	132	14.4
Total		915	100
I feel pressure from ads to look beautiful	Strongly Disagree	95	10.4
	Disagree	230	25.1
	Neither / nor	203	22.2
	Agree	286	31.3
	Strongly Agree	101	11.0
Total		915	100
I feel pressure from ads to look attractive	Strongly Disagree	145	15.8
	Disagree	261	28.5
	Neither / nor	190	20.8
	Agree	236	25.8
	Strongly Agree	83	9.1
Total		915	100

(Source – Primary Data)

Table No. 3

Respondents pressurized by Advertisements

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent
Yes	269	29.4
No	646	70.6

Response	No. of Respondents	Percent
Yes	269	29.4
No	646	70.6
Total	915	100.0

Table No. 4
Mean Descriptive Statistics of Silhouette Scale Variables

Silhouette Scale Variables	Mean	SD
Present figure	4.507	1.475
Figure you most want to look like (Ideal figure)	3.421	.991
Figure most women want to look like (Attractive figure – Women)	2.932	.890
Figure men find women most attractive (Attractive figure – Men)	3.177	.916

TABLE No. 5
Advertisement Pressure and Body Dissatisfaction Score

Body dissatisfaction score	Advertisement pressure	
	Yes	Percent
-2	6	2.2
-1	7	2.6
0 No-body dissatisfaction	50	18.6
1	93	34.6
2	80	29.7
3	26	9.7

4	5	1.9
5	2	.7
Total	269	100

Silhouette Figure Rating Scale (Stunkard, Sorenson, & Schlesinger, 1983)

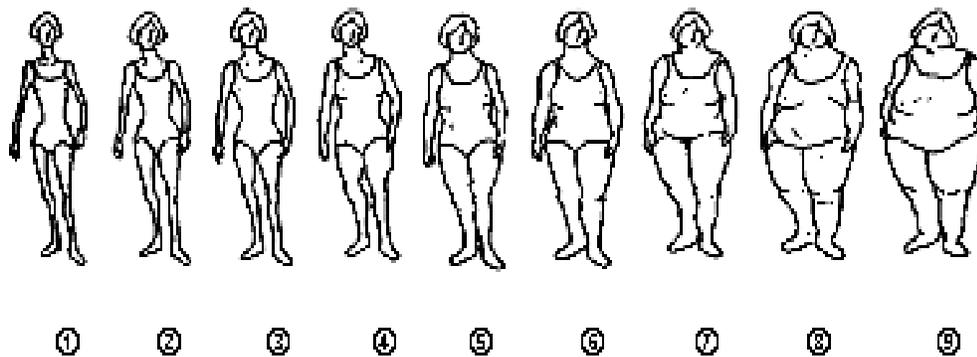


Figure No. 1

Contributor's Note: This research paper is the part of doctoral thesis awarded to Professor Dr. Sasi Rekha V. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Professor Dr. Sasi Rekha V.