It is a Sexist World out there:
A Qualitative Research on Sexism in Indian Advertising

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Abstract

Sexism in advertising is omnipresent, but these themes have been controlled in many countries by understanding sexism and its elements. However, the Indian advertising industry continues to resort to sexist themes to attract attention. In order to control it, this study tries to understand the concept of sexism and its building blocks in emerging markets such as India. Due to the gap in the understanding of the non-target segment groups, the perception of sexism persists. Sexual themes are appreciated when their usage is appropriate and context related.

Keywords: Objectification, sexism, sexy, stereotype, titillating.

1. Introduction

As per Lavidge and Steiner (1961), the aim of advertisements is to create product awareness and, eventually, sales. However, in the presence of myriad advertising messages, consumers' attention gets distracted, which diminishes recall (Riebe & Dawes, 2006). A particular advertisement must be able to stand out from the advertising clutter for it to be recalled effectively. Therefore, advertisers resort to creative and unusual ads to increase the message elaboration, which enhances recall (Till & Baack, 2005).

In the process of attracting attention to aid recall, advertisers often resort to sexual themes (Whipple & Courtney, 1981). Evidently, such themes demand the presence of attractive women and explicit plots. These themes often lead to portrayals of a particular gender (mostly women) in a derogatory fashion (Boddewyn, 1991). Such depictions are also termed as offensive and showing women as objects of sex (Lysonski, 2005). The objectification of a particular gender (sexism) can lead to a negative impact on the minds of impressionable audience such as children and adolescents (Khan, 2011).

Ryan and Kanjorski (1998) conducted an experiment on college students to understand the effect of exposure to sexist advertisements on impressionable members of the society. The results showed that exposure and enjoyment of sexist humour was positively correlated with "psychological, physical, and sexual aggression in men, self-reported likelihood of using force in sex and increased tolerance for rape and sexist attitude". Rape is also supported in cultures where it is treated as a joke (Richlin, 1992). A study by Lanis and Covell, (1995) exposed men to themes which treated women as objects of sex. The results indicated that such an exposure enhanced rape supporting attitudes.

Sexist themes and humour is created by attacking (figuratively) a particular group of individuals (mostly women). Women are shown to be "powerless", "repressed", "possessed" and in some themes, "comic". The humour is created by over powering them which leads to laughter. The enjoyment of such themes affirms the point that the audience is deriving pleasure in the misery of the attacked group (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). This influences the attitude of the impressionable audience towards the stereo typed group. Such attitudes are strong predictors of sexual aggression in men (Byers & Ma, 1992).

Previous studies have tried to understand the meaning and antecedents of sexism in advertising (Boddewyn, 1991; Lysonski, 2005). However, several research gaps are present in the existing literature, namely (1) The research in this field has not focused on the Indian advertising industry(2) Qualitative research in this field is scarce; therefore, the solution to curb sexism has not been understood from the participants of that study (3) Previous research has collected data from college students; therefore, the perception, meaning and understanding of sexism among other social groups remains unexplored.

This study aims at filling the above research gaps by not

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only understanding the perception of sexism in advertisements but also by finding a solution for the same from a non-student, white-collar, urban social group. This is the first qualitative study conducted on this topic in the context of an emerging market like India. The study is aimed at revealing the understanding of sexism, the reason behind its pervasiveness in the Indian advertising industry and ways to control it. Additionally, this study is also aimed at understanding the negative impact of sexism in advertising on the Indian advertising industry. Four research questions are proposed to perform in this study:

RQ1: What is the difference between 'sexy' and 'sexist' advertisements as per the Indian audience?

RQ2: What are characteristics of advertisements that lead to a sexist theme?

RQ3: What are the harmful effects of sexism on the advertising industry?

RQ4: What are the ways to curb sexism in the Indian advertisements?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sexism in advertising

Using attractive women and showing sexual content is very common in the advertising world. Nudity and sex attract attention and keeps the audience engaged (Lysonski, 2005). But such themes often lead to sexist depictions, knowingly or unknowingly. Sometimes, sexual themes are combined with ideasthat are derogatory to women (Boddewyn, 1991). These depictions lead to objectification of women which results in advertisements that are demeaningand offensive. Sexual objectification refers to "using women (mostly) as decorative or attention-getting objects, with little or no relevance to the product advertised" (Boddewyn, 1991).

Advertisements are also criticised for stereotyping women and portraying them as "inferior", "submissive", "dependent" and "helpless" whereas showing men to be "confident", "independent" and "powerful"(Khan, 2011). Sex-role stereotyping has been criticised for implying that women are meant only for performing household chores. Advertisements often depict themes where women are concerned about cleaner floors and shiny utensils. These themes limit the duties of a woman, typecasting them as being concerned only about household duties and the happiness of her children (Boddewyn, 1991).

Previous studies show that advertisements with a sexual content are enjoyed by both the sexes as long as the plot

does not resort to sexist depictions (Whipple & Courtney, 1981). However, there is a thin line between sexy and sexist depictions; therefore it is important to understand the difference between the two. "Sexism concerns distinctions which diminish or demean one sex in comparison with the other particularly through the use of sex-role stereotypes" (Boddewyn, 1991). 'Sexy' is defined as "marked by or tending to arouse sexual desire or interest" (Lysonski, 2005). Sexy advertisements show males and females enjoying each other's company (Nokes, 1994) therefore such plots do not offend women(Lysonski, 2005).

Previous research in this field posits that the problem does not lie in showing advertisements with partial nudity or sexual behaviour. The issue also does not relate to the moral norms which individuals should conform to (Boddewyn, 1991). However, the problem arises when women, especially, are offended or the dignity of the female sex is hampered. The depiction of women is often labelled as exploitative, derogatory and demeaning, which does not represent the modern woman (Lysonski, 2005). Therefore, such themes are judged as sexist where as others are referred to as sexy.

Sexism and its interpretation depend on the values of the individuals. A certain rule or a clear demarcation between sexy and sexist does not exist. Therefore, advertisers do not have specific guidelines to follow for avoiding sexist themes. However, it is seen that different locations have different perceptions of sexism (Lipman, 1991). The culture of the location primarily dictates the opinion of the people. Therefore, if we intend to understand and eradicate sexism from a certain location then we must perform the study in that particular culture (Lysonski, 2005).

2.2 Sexism in Indian culture

Sexism and gender stereotyping in advertising has been studied since the 1960s (Gilly, 1988). But the western countries have developed since then, and have been able to control sexism in their advertisements, to a certain extent (Khan, 2011). This shows that the advertising industry's norms have improved since Boddewyn (1991) study when many of the western countries like the United States of America suggested the existence of sexism. Khan (2011) showed that foreign respondents do not, largely, perceive their advertisements to be sexist anymore but the Indian respondents see the industry as sexist and the port rayal of women as objects of sex.

Religious beliefs of a particular country or a region dictate a certain tolerance towards issues like sex in advertisements and the definition of decency (Gilly, 1988). Islamic countries have a low tolerance towards nudity and sex in advertisements whereas Christian nations are relatively tolerant (Boddewyn, 1991). The Indian society is male dominated and the culture regards women to be inferior to men, and think of them as powerless and dependent. The Indian culture expects women to perform household chores and duties. The image of women shown in the advertisements is therefore a product of the treatment of women in the Indian culture(Khan, 2011).

The presence of sexist advertisements might have several ill effects on the Indian society. Ubiquitous sexist themes might disrupt the perception of women in the society (Ryan & Kanjorski, 1998). Adolescents and children might start consideringwomen as objects of sex, denying them the respect that they deserve. Additionally, the offended sections of the population might develop a negative attitude towards the brand, therefore wasting huge amounts of advertising funds. This can also lead to a total disregard for the advertising industry. The audience might stop taking advertising seriously thus affecting the entire industry and rendering the advertising expenditure useless (Fam & Waller, 2003). In order to understand and eliminate the ill-effects of sexism in advertising, we must first understand the perception of sexism held by the Indian population

3. Data and Methodology

The target population for this study is urban, white-collared, professionals Indians. Therefore, we selected educated adults, possessing a non-manual occupation, earning more than 40,000 INR (600$) per month.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used to collect data as phenomenology is the theoretical basis for this study. Additionally, since little is known about this topic, therefore it was appropriate to use FGDs in this exploratory study. The interactions between individuals with different point of views were conducive for the emergence of interesting themes (Morgan, 1993). All the FGDs were conducted face-to-face while in a place (home) that was most comfortable to all the participants. For the convenience of the participants, FGDs were conducted during holidays. The average duration of each FGD was around 35 minutes. The mode of conversation was English as all the participants preferred it over other languages. All the FGDs were recorded and then transcribed in

English (Refer Table 1 for FGD details).

The participants were chosen on the basis of purposive and snowball sampling while information saturation dictated the number of FGDs (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Twenty-five participants were involved in the 6 FGDs conducted in the Indian state of Ahmedabad. The participants belonged to different states in India. The participants consisted of 15 men and 10 women, aged between 23 to 38 years. Most of the participants possessed a Master's degree and a fluency in English (Refer Table 2 for demographic details). Therefore, all the FGDs were conducted in English. The participants were from different professional backgrounds, such as, investment banker, marketing manager, IPS officer, consultant, area sales manager, entrepreneur, HR executive, Yoga trainer, doctoral scholar, and technical head. All the participants were aware of the 'sexism' phenomenon in the Indian advertisements. The data was collected in April, 2014.

An inductive approach was adopted to analyse the data as the aim of the study was to understand sexism from the participants' vocabulary (Haley, 1996). Therefore, the analyses were performed on the basis of the words used by the participants instead of depending on a pre-decided coding scheme. Every line of the transcripts was analysed to search for the answers to the research questions and the relevant data was assigned initial codes. An emic approach was used for the coding scheme (Chen & Haley, 2010). Further, every transcript was coded by comparing it with the previously coded transcripts to recognise similar themes in the data. Similar themes were classified together depending on its relevance and context. To reduce the initial number of codes, themes engulfing a broader concept were grouped together. Lastly, an overarching model was built to represent the overall picture of the data collected.

This study was conducted while keeping in mind the four major evaluative criteria for qualitative research: Credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability (Chen & Haley, 2010). To maintain credibility, the discussion was not driven by the moderator as far as possible so that the biasesof the researchers do not interfere with the discussion among the participants. Additionally, the FGDs were recorded to ensure that the exact words of the participants could be analysed. Three researchers analysed the same data to ensure that the interpretation of the themes was devoid of personal idiosyncrasies, thus maintaining dependability (Cresswell

& Miller, 2000). The exact words of the participants have been presented throughout the article to facilitate the interpretation of the data, converging into the major themes (Graves, 2007). The presentation of the participants' verbatim quotes is the most effective way to ensure conformability (Chen & Haley, 2010). The interpretation of the data and the emergence of the various themes can be judged by the reader for transferability in different contexts.

In order to select the two ads for the study, we adopted a procedure suggested by Weinberger and Spotts (1989). We collected a sample of 39 television ads, from various websites, that contained sexual connotation. Three coders(two authors and a colleague) retained 20 ads from this sample that were deemed appropriate for this study. The inter-coder reliability was 0.92. Furthermore, three independent judges (different from the previous step) were asked to select one sexy and one sexist ad, from the set of 20 ads. The judges were instructed to select ads that they felt were the best representations of either a 'sexy' or a 'sexist' theme. Later, the ads that were not selected by at least two coders were eliminated from the sample. The coders were instructed to continue this elimination process to select one ad for the sexy theme and one for the sexist theme.

During the data collection process, the participants were shown the sexy ad followed by the sexist ad, before commencing the FGD. Depending on their discussion, the FGD was taken forward by the moderator. The aim was to answer the four research questions. Each discussion lasted for 30-40 minutes in an unstructured fashion, with minimum interference from the moderator.

4.   Results and Discussion

The participants were asked to classify both the ads (as sexist or sexy), and discuss the reason behind their classification. Most of the participants clearly categorised the first ad as sexy and the second one as sexist. As one participant said "the first ad was sexy" while another participant, while referring to the second ad, said "it was more like portraying females as sex objects". A female participant, while referring to the first ad, said "I find it beautiful and I find it sexy so sex is not a bad thing". The female participants were quick to judge the second ad, saying "the second ad was clearly demeaning to women". Even the male participants were clear about the second ad and said "I found the ad very offensive". Therefore, it is clear that the second ad was offensive to

women, therefore, sexist while the first ad was sexy.

It was necessary to find the reason behind their categorization of the two ads. Therefore, they were asked to define sexism, explaining the underlying attributes of a sexy theme and a sexist theme. At this point the participants were unsure about the difference between the two themes. One of the male participants said "there is a very thin line" and other said "it is a grey area". Therefore, the participants were asked to discuss and come to a conclusion.

4.1 What is the difference between 'sexy' and 'sexist' advertisements as per the Indian audience?

During the course of the discussion, participants expressed their liking towards sexy ads. One of the female participants, while referring to the first ad, said "I think sexy is still good" and yet another one said "I like the ad". This showed that both males and females do not mind sexy advertisements. Further, they enjoy such ads without getting offended (Lysonski, 2005).

The participants engaged themselves in identifying the making of sexy ads. One of the female participants said "in the first ad, the woman was leading the man into whatever… that's okay". We can draw the conclusion that the audience does not mind sexual themes as long as the woman is in control of her actions. The audience should be able to see that the woman is shown to be enjoying herself, willingly (Lysonski, 2005).

A male participant said "the ad can be sexy without being sexist because the script demands it or the product demands it". Another male participant pointed out "the question of being sexist does not arise in the case of a condom ad but in the case where a woman is used for selling cement then there is only beauty and no brains"(referring to a famous cement ad featuring a bikini model). As long as the nudity or sex is embedded in the theme of the ad or the product has an intimate image (like condoms) then the presence of a sexual theme is termed as sexy (Aruna & Sahni, 2008).

The participants classified those ads as sexist where the woman was treated as an object of sex. One male participant said "objectifying women as a sex object to sell" while another participant said "stereotypes like women are meant to be working in the kitchen or meant to clean the floors or meant to wash men's underwear". Therefore, most of the participants agreed that sexist themes are the ones where women are either stereotyped

or used as objects of sex. On the other hand, the participants termed sexy ads as "titillating", "beautiful"and "arousing". These definitions concur with the definitions provided by Lysonski (2005).

One of the participants said "sexism is not related to only women it should be related to men also". The participants therefore were clear that sexism is not restricted to women, exclusively.

One of the female participants said "in the first ad it was more like the girl was doing it willingly and in the second as it was like once that guy used that deodorant this girl had no choice and cannot resist the temptation". This shows that the audience does not take offense as long as the woman is shown to be under control of her actions. The first ad is termed as sexist because it implies that women are objects of desire for men (Malhotra & Rogers, 2001). One of the female participants termed the use of women in such ads as "play things". This can be highly derogatory to the female population, therefore, termed as sexist.

The participants in two groups spoke about the fairness cream and beauty enhancement products which stereo type both the sexes. One of the male participants pointed out saying "there is a difference if it is product it is to be used for men then it will have 'sexual content' … But if the product is catering to the women then… will show confidence in the women". The advertisers try to create a desire in the minds of both the sexes by using themes which impact the respective audience greatly (Khan, 2011). This shows that advertisers, while in the process of attracting attention, end up stereotyping both the genders. The males too can get offended by such themes, as mentioned earlier.

A female participant contributed by saying "somehow the strength of the woman's character is linked to the confidence that is derived by that beauty product: all 'Fair and Lovely' (a product which lightens skin tone) ads. Once that girl applies 'Fair and Lovely' she will get the job in an aviation centre or she will start singing and win awards". The participants emphasized that beauty products claim that only beautiful (read fair) girls are successful in any field. Therefore, ads stereotype women by implying that only attractive girls get their work done. Most of the participants were highly offended by the themes adopted by beauty enhancement products. While comparing the male fairness creams, a female participant said "these ads, if I remember correctly, are

that you become fair and attract more women" and another responded by saying "they are no way related to a guy's carrier". Evidently, stereotyping is prevalent in the case of men too.

4.2 What are characteristics of ads that lead to a sexist theme?

After reaching the conclusion that sexist advertisements exist in the Indian advertising industry, it was imperative that the participants helped us in understanding the reason behind their existence.

A female participant spoke about the evolution of the ads by saying "TV or magazine… the ads have evolved… it started off, you know,as a functional basis and right now it is like what maximum can I put out in just one minute or these much seconds…. Whatever can be attractive".The advertisers are always looking for new and innovative ways to attract the attention of the audience (Aruna & Sahni, 2008). The ads have evolved greatly over time; they used to focus on the functionality of the product in the past. Due to the increasing competition in the market every firm wants to stand out of the crowd and make ads which are catchy and interesting. One of the male participants pointed out "Maybe they don't want to impress you but they want to shock you so that you remember that ad". This is the best way to aid recall as there is no time to explain the product attributes and its functionality.

In the process of creating a shock, the advertiser looks for themes that are most attractive to the target segment. In the case of men, a female participant said "it is more about catching up with the man's fantasy". A male participant spoke about attracting the male attention by saying "they are actually catching the eyeballs of the target consumers who like sex so they show that stuff". Therefore, unwantednudity and sex are useful themes for advertisers to attract the male attention (Aruna & Sahni, 2008). But this can cause problems as some of the viewer sperceive such themes as sexist.

One of the female participants said "it is a vicious circle thing. The marketers make ads and people get influenced and think of women as objects and marketers make more ads. So it's this circle which makes these ads". The participant believes, as discussed earlier, that the sexist ads are capable of influencing the impressionable population of the society. Hence, the viewers start enjoying ads which portray women as objects of sex. Since the audience seems to enjoy sexist themes, the

advertisers adopt these themes further. Interestingly, this time they go one step ahead in order to stand out from the competition (which resorts to sexist themes). Therefore, this is a vicious circle where the advertisements reinforce the behaviour of the viewers (Lysonski, 2005). Therefore, the degree of sexism in ads is increasingas time is passing.

Some of the participants did not agree to the decision that some of the previously mentioned ads were stereotyping any gender. When asked about the washing powder ads which show women being concerned about the cleanliness of their children's clothes, a male participant said "if a woman thinks that keeping her children's clothes clean then that is not sexism but if you think that it is only woman's work then it is sexism". He further added "the thing is that sexism is there when it is imposed on the woman but in most of the circumstances the women may choose that they want to work and don't want to work outside… ad is not showing that the whole achievement of the women is cleaning the clothes of their children… It is showing that one woman who is taking that decision is happy that her child's clothes are clean… that is not stereotyping… Stereotyping is when they are showing that it is true for everyone". Another male participant supported him by saying "see there might be a reason for women being there in the ads as the women are the decision makers for detergents… that depend on the market research". Therefore, these participants were of the opinion that the themes shown in such ads are not generalising the role of women, they are just focussing their communication to their target consumers who are mostly females. They are in no way stereotyping women or imposing a certain role which only women should take up.

A female participant was quick to judge the sexist ad that was shown to them, by saying "I am ok with it as it is a marketing perspective so if they want to market it to guys who want to attract women so if you look at it in that point of view that it is what it is actually doing. I don't take it as sexy or sexist as it a people's perception how they take it". The advertisers make ads which are specifically made for their target consumers, and in the process of creating an impression on them end up offending the bait (women, in the case of deodorant ads) in the ad. Therefore, the target consumer perspective is taken into consideration by the advertiser which is fair as per her argument.

The ads are directed to attract the attention of the target consumers. For example, a washing powder company considers females, in their 30s, as their target segment;therefore, they make ads that appeal to that segment alone. But the problem occurs when the non-targeted segment views this ad. They are not able to relate to the ad, and develop a negative attitude towards it. For example, if a highly educated woman who is a social worker watches an ad which is meant for housewives then she might think that the ad is implying that only women are supposed to wash clothes. But in reality what the ad is doing is serving its target population. Therefore, the advertisers should be careful about the perception of the non-targeted segment population too

One of the male participants pointed out a very interesting phenomenon while expressing the use of women as sex objects in the deodorant advertisements. He said "in private they find it attractive and that is where the sexism lies and I think marketers have identified the fact that I am ok as an individual watching in on the TV in my home but if I see it in the group of 20 people then I will say what the hell is happening". If individually the consumer likes objectification of women then the product will do well. In a social setting the same individual might agree with a group by calling the same ad as sexist, in order to avoid embarrassment. Therefore, it will be difficult to understand that a person who criticises ads with female objectification is actually offended by them.

4.3 What are the harmful effects of sexism on the advertising industry?

The participants were concerned about the impact of sexist advertisements on the image of women in the society. A female participant, while referring to children, said " they might not be matured enough to understand that these are just marketing gimmicks to attract the attention. They might perceive it… like distorted reality" while another said "they might perceive women as only objects of desire". Therefore, they agreed that sexism can have a negative impact on the younger generation. One of them further added "Maybe later on, in their college or work place they also might treat women like that". Therefore, there is a fear that teenagers might perceive women only as objects of sex, treating them without respect. This is a major concern for the society.It can increase the crime rate and result in a society which is unsafe for women.

The groups did not completely agree with the findings

of Fam and Waller (2003). When asked about the audience losing trust in the advertising industry, one of the participants said "these days how many people believe in ads? How many of us just by seeing the ad, go and buy something?" This shows that the audience is indifferent to the content of the advertisement. The only thing these advertisements do is aid in product recall, as mentioned by a female participant by saying "Even if I have a negative recall of that ad or it offends me, I would still pick that up". Therefore, the audience does not develop a negative attitude towards brands telecasting sexist advertisements. This is another incentive for the advertisers to continue adopting sexist themes with female models in skimpy clothes.

4.4 What are the ways to curb sexism in the Indian advertisements?

The participants were of the view that a female should feature in the ad only if her presence is required to demonstrate the product utility. A female participant said "it is a deodorant right? You have to mask your body odour, why you have to show a woman who is half naked and what is the need for that?" Another participant responded by saying "sometimes there are ads where there is no connection between a product and the girl". These ads should concentrate on the functionality of the product rather than having an unnecessary theme which includes sex or objectification of women. If the role of a woman (in an erotic theme) in the ad is not required then it is seen as objectification of women, therefore termed as sexist (Malhotra & Rogers, 2001).

The participants expressed that there is a very thin line between sexy and sexist advertisements. However, a female participant said "there have been ads which have certain amounts of indications and that is the strength of the marketer where you are trying to point out this is what we mean but you are not showing that". This shows that the theme of the ad can be sexy but there is no need to show a highly explicit scene or extreme nudity. These things can be achieved subtly by implying the idea which is supposed to be understood by a keen observer. This way the involvement in the ad will be high and audience will not be offended (Dijafarova, 2008).

5. Implications

This topic is based on a sensitive issue and the discussions conducted helped a great deal in gathering useful data. Since the group members knew each other, they were comfortable in speaking out their opinion, candidly. The

discussions helped validate the literature and, at the same time, brought new insights which helped us inunderstanding the concept further. The objectives of this study were met in the due course (Refer to Figure 1 for the conceptual map of the findings). This figure represents the three major components that have emerged from the FGDs that were conducted for this research. These components are (1) the antecedents of sexist themes (2) the meaning of sexism in Indian ads and (3) the outcome of sexist themes in ads. While every FGD and its participant revealed their unique experiences and meaning of sexism, all of the participants mentioned the above themes either implicitly or explicitly. The antecedents that lead to the sexist themes are (1) the desired shock value from the ads to attract audiences' attention, which leads to explicit sexual story lines, (2) the hypocrisy of the audience while evaluating sexual themes and (3) the perception of the non-targeted population. Furthermore, the participants believed that the objectification and stereotyping of a gender are the prime constituents of sexism in ads. Lastly, the participants firmly believed that sexism in ads is capable of shaping the minds of the audience in a way that can lead to the treatment women as objects of sex. (Figure 1)

As per the findings of this study, some sections of the audience are sensitive to sexism in advertisements, therefore it was important to understand the elements of sexist advertisements. The audience is looking for interesting advertisements, devoid of unnecessary sexual theme. As per the findings, consumers enjoy ads which implicitly point towards sexual activity rather than explicit depictions. Viewers appreciate ads with titillating themes as long as the product or the situation demands for it. Such ads are liked even by the female viewers. Therefore, care should be taken to ensure that erotic themes are adopted only if it is consistent with the product/campaign. Unnecessary placement of erotic themes leads to the audience perception of sexism. Campaigns depicting themes where women arenot in control of their actions are perceived as sexist.

The importance of beauty can be minimized in advertising. This puts an undue importance on the physical aspects, conveying that a woman has to be attractive to be successful (Khan, 2011). This can affect the impressionable audience like teenagers and youth who might place a great deal of importance to beauty (Vacker, 1993).

Firms are looking to maximize the impact of their ad campaign by focusingon their target segment. They develop ads that depict the lifestyle of the targeted consumers. The perception of stereotyping prevails when a more liberal, non-targeted segment views these ads. Therefore, some of the ads are termed as sexist when they are actually doing what is best for their brand. This is the prime reason behind the perception of sexism in the advertising industry.

The culture also feeds the advertising themes. Since the Indian culture is viewed as sexist by the study by Khan (2011). As pointed out by a participant, another reason for the existence of sexism is that people often agree to the fact that sexist ads are offensive, when asked in public. However, they seem to enjoy such themes personally. We cannot generalise this theory but the data collected points in this direction.

Some of the participants believed that sexist ad campaigns will lead to a negative attitude towards the brand. But one of the groups did not agree with this idea as they believed that a negative recall can also lead to purchase of the concerned brand. Therefore, sexist themes might not hamper the brand image. This was contrary to the study done by Famand Waller (2003).

The society is evolving and becoming increasingly tolerant towards sexism in advertising due to globalization. At the same time, the degree of sexism in ads is also increasing as every advertiser wants to be one step ahead of the competition, and develop themes which will stand out from the crowd (Aruna & Sahni, 2008). In the process of creating the shock value, the advertisers resort to a greater magnitude of explicit themes. Thus the perceived degree of sexism is increasing.

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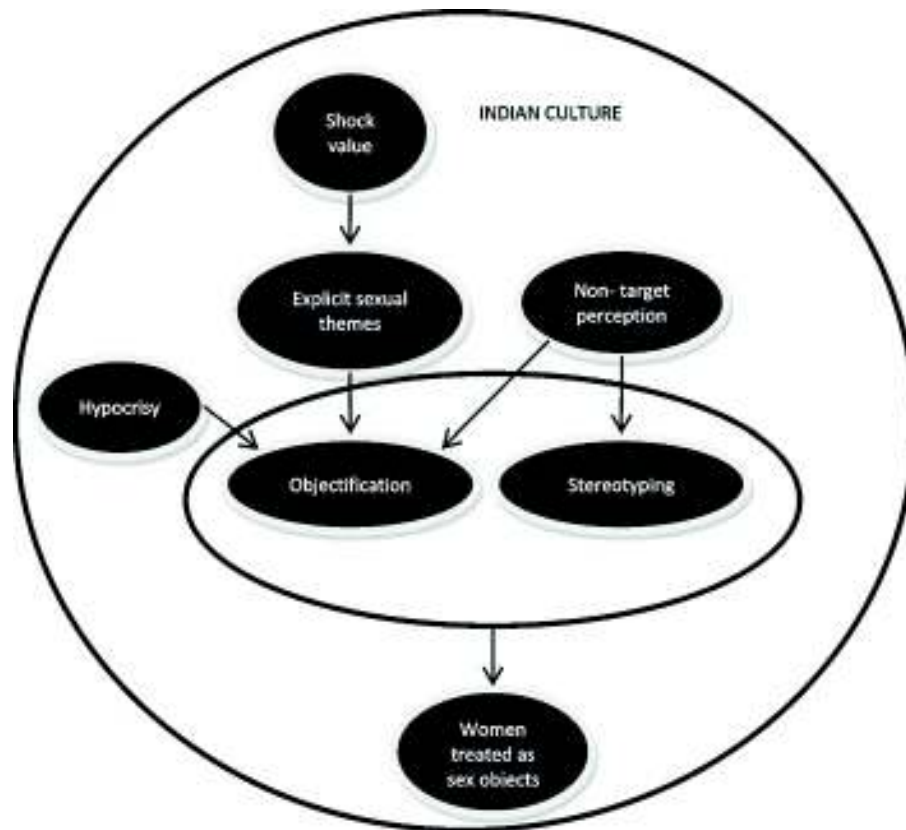**Figure 1: Conceptual Map to understand Sexism in Indian Advertising**

Table 1: Details of FGD

FGD number	Participants	Duration (mins)	Length of transcript (pages)
1	4	39	20
2	4	31	21
3	4	35	17
4	4	35	16
5	5	36	22
6	4	33	17

Table 2: Demographic details of the participants

		Total Number
Age group	23-25 years	5
	26-30 years	11
	31-35 years	6
	Above 35 years	3
Gender	Male	15
	Female	10
Education	Upto graduation	8
	Upto post-graduation	15
	Others	2

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