

Effect of Mass Media on Objectifying of Humans

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Abstract

Media is a tool that is used to convey mass communication to a larger audience or crowd. It is a good source of entertainment and information and also has a great impact in our day-to-day life. It has its feet everywhere, right from the children to the old people, and it affects each age group differently. As media is the source of information we are dependent upon, it is a support to the people for shaping their opinions and attitudes. In this paper, we have conducted a survey within the indicated age group and determined the influence, the views and opinions of the people. Also, we have identified certain events in media that greatly magnify this issue, and finally suggested a solution to reduce the influence and not objectify humans.

Keywords: Objectifying, Advertisements, Models, Media

Introduction

Mass media is a small word with very broad justification. It has its feet ranging from newspapers to television to social media. Almost the entire population of any country is dependent upon mass media and is thus affected by it. The affect is not always positive but does have an effect on the minds of people, especially the youth in many wrong ways too. Objectifying of humans here basically indicates to the defining of a perfect human based on physical characteristics. The excessive focus given on the appearance does force our mind to perceive it as a fact that there is a perfect human, which is wrong. A person should not be defined with his/her appearance. Instances as promotion of products by attractive models, beauty pageants, promotion of gyms and cosmetic surgeries have led to this.

Thus this paper aims at studying this effect of mass media in objectifying humans, focusing on the age group of 15–55 years as this is the age group most vulnerable to it.¹ Children below 15 years of age are under the control of parents and thus are guided in their decisions and people over 55

years are not very capable of accepting changes in their body due to many health conditions.² At the end, the paper needs to highlight the severity of this problem which is generally yet not very known. Objectifying of women has been considered but it is important to realize that not just women but men are also objectified. Attaining abs, biceps and other body shapes has now become a trend. The adverse side of this is that the influenced people take paths as steroids to achieve such things quickly and end up risking their lives.

Literature Survey

Objectifying is basically reducing or degrading the value of someone to a mere product. It is evident in the way, for example, the commercials stress on the importance of skin tone, figure, looks and body. Not just this, media generally depicts these things as supreme and disregards others that do not fit this description. There have been studies made that show the effects of advertising of thin models. The conclusion as made by Halliwell³ sums up the fact that the women that appreciate themselves are not affected much

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but those who idealize being thin and well-shaped were affected by the advertising. Thus, idealization of body shape does affect the mind-set of a person. Similarly, another study by Fardoulya et al.⁴ shows the effect on young girls. It basically studies the changes in mood when women come across online fashion magazines, models and thus compare the appearances. For women high in appearance comparison, Facebook usage led to more facial discrepancy. Furthermore, women high in appearance comparison tendency reported more facial, hair, and skin-related discrepancies after Facebook exposure than exposure to the control website. In addition to this, there is a trend noticed of inculcating eating disorders by Antonios et al.⁵ that highlights the eating disorders that are observed in women due to the induced effect of media. The findings of the paper clearly indicate that the young girls disliked their bodies and thus started dieting. Also, the visual media promoted diet plans which accelerated the eating disorders. All this led to dissatisfaction. Moreover, according to Rust,⁶ children should not include gym as a part of their schedule as there is always a danger of children over doing things. Lots of budding footballers who train hard from an early age suffer later with their legs. Too much exercise can make children ill and their immune systems suffer. The consciousness about the body image was aroused and it was studied by Aderike et al.⁷ that media is seen as the core risk factor for negative body image for men and women, and studies confirm that this leads to negative self-perception, negative emotional state and unhealthy behavior. Furthermore, there is a noticed shift of the cultural ideal of physical attractiveness, with women subscribing to a visibly toned ideal that emphasizes health and fitness. Further, it investigated the impact of athletic and muscular fitness-idealized images compared to traditional thin ideal images on women's body dissatisfaction and exercise behavior, under the framework of Social Comparison Theory by Robinson.⁸

These things are all the more encouraged by media in forms of events such as beauty pageants. In a study by Cartwright,⁹ it says that participation in activities that focus on physical appearance at an early age can influence teen and/or adult self-esteem, body image and self-worth. Adults need to be aware of the potential long-term impact super-competitive, beauty-driven pursuits can have on a young girl's psyche. Intense participation in activities that spotlight physical appearance instills the idea that physical beauty and superficial charm are the keys to success, thus making self-worth and self-esteem inextricably tied to attractiveness. Similar studies by Martina¹⁰ and also by Crawford¹¹ highlighted the effect of child beauty pageants. This is also emphasized by Kovar¹² that signifies the effects of media on one's body image. Another study by Awasthi¹³ was made based upon the objectifying of people based upon clothing.

Methodology

The researcher aimed to conduct a survey within the indicated age group and determine the influence of mass media. The influence of mass media in framing an idealized body structure in the minds of people, their views and opinions is studied in this research paper. This survey will help understand the extent of the situation. The researcher conducted the survey using Google form and circulated it among the targeted audience via various social networking sites majorly WhatsApp and Facebook. The survey obtained 207 responses out of which approximately 60% were among the age group of 20–30 years. The questions were kept short and crisp to encourage more participation and appropriate answers.

Data Analysis

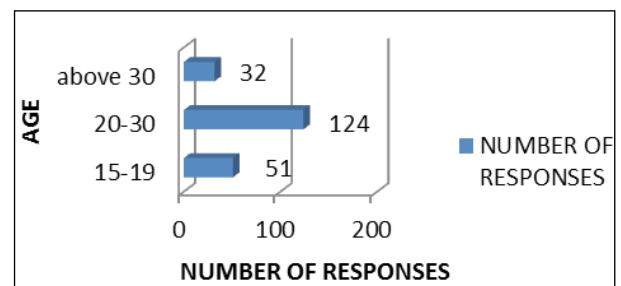


Figure 1.Age of the Respondents

The age was asked to determine the majority of the people filling the form. Out of the 207 responses, 51 were filled by people in the age group of 15–19 years, 124 were filled by the people in the age group of 20–30 years and the rest 32 were filled by the people of age 30 and above. As the paper is more inclined towards the youth, the form responses are dominated by the people aged between 20 and 30 years.

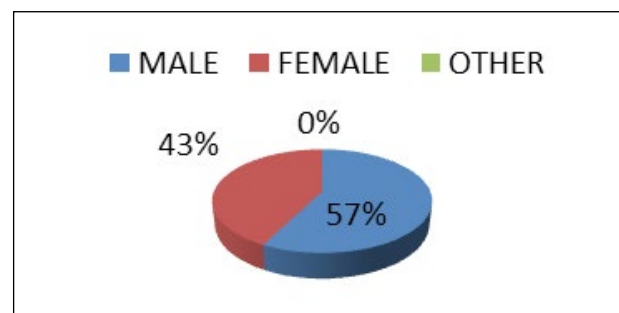


Figure 2.Gender of the Respondents

Gender of the audience was a generalized question to obtain equal responses from both the genders so as to avoid biasing of the interpretation of results. From the responses obtained, 43% of the total responses were filled by women and the rest 57% of the responses were filled by men. The percentage of men and women who filled the form is nearly the same; thus the responses can be taken into consideration.

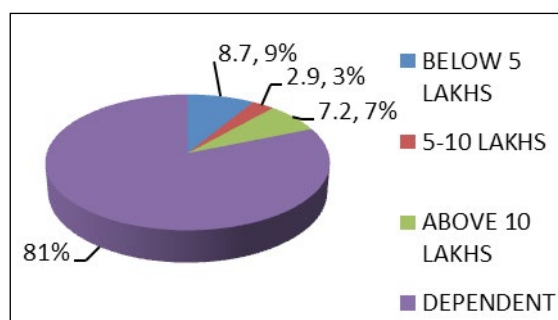


Figure 3. Income of the Respondents

Income is a major factor. One may be influenced but to take a suitable step after the influence greatly depends upon the economic status of the person. From Fig. 3, it is clear that majority of the people filling this form were dependents or students. Here dependents basically included house makers.

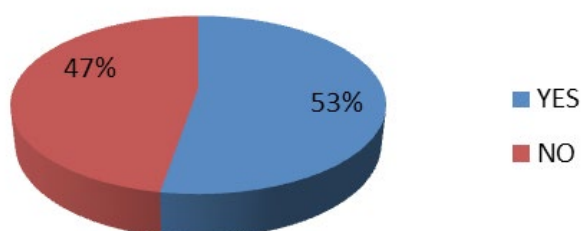


Figure 4. Idealising model/ actor with respect to physical appearance

Mass media publicizes models with defined physique and looks that makes the public believe that the looks being published are the perfect ones and thus they generally look up to them, especially in terms of appearance. Figure 4 indicates the percentage of audience that idealizes models or actors with respect to physical appearance. From the results obtained, it can be clearly seen that 43% of the people that were surveyed agreed to the fact that they do look up to models. This magnifies into the severity of the situation.

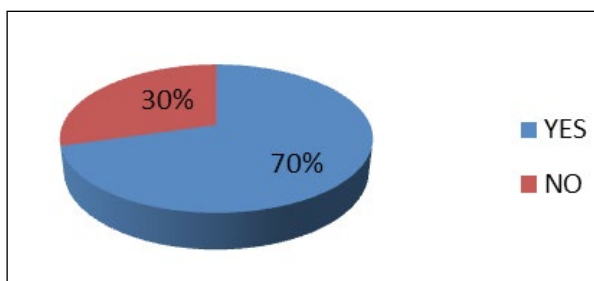


Figure 5. Idea of going to gym

The body consciousness of the people is a required data. Figure 5 denotes the data obtained from the survey conducted to know if the audience feels that going to gym is a good idea. As majority of the audience under

survey were youngsters, the main purpose of them joining the gym was to enhance their physical appearance. From the results obtained, it is evident that almost 70% of the people prefer the idea of going to gym. The concept of a perfect body, figure is spread to the masses by the mass media also; the advertisements of gyms, and supplements to achieve figures as the top models are all encouraged by the mass media.

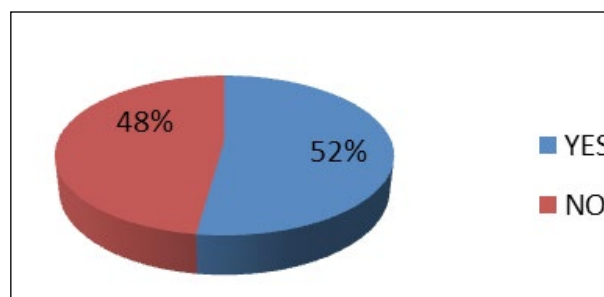


Figure 6. Deficiencies in physical appearance

To ascertain the thought process of people about their appearances, the survey intended to record the perspective of audience towards their physical appearances and if they feel they have deficiencies. From the data obtained as in Fig. 6, it is quite evident that 52% of the audience does believe that they lag somewhere in their physical appearance. It is obvious, one would say, that they lag somewhere only because they compare themselves to someone else and somewhere in their mind they are inspired by them and are constantly looking up to them.

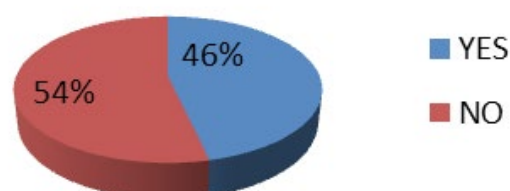


Figure 7. Branded attire adds value to appearance

These days, most of the clothing brands have their brand ambassadors who are the leading stars of the fashion industry. The main aim of them doing so is to influence the people that are the fans of the celebrities to buy the merchandise from their store. Thus the survey found out the percentage of the people that go for branded clothes as they feel their appearance is enhanced. Figure 7 represents the data which states that 46% of the people agree to this. Although it is not the majority, but nearly half of the people, which is a big number. The reason somewhere lies in the fact that to look good you need to be wearing branded clothes as the stars do not go for cheap clothing. This point is also mentioned by Awasthi,¹³ who discusses about the objectifying of people based upon clothing.

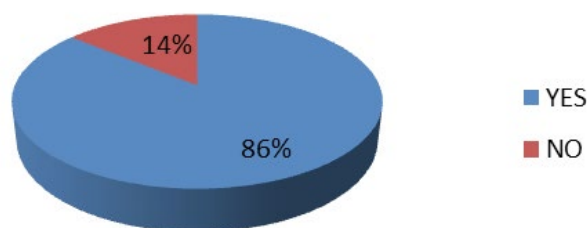


Figure 8. Well groomed appearance lends credence to appearance

Grooming and looks are all external factors that are being considered to define a good person. As 86% of the audience believes in the fact, the mentality of the society is formed in a way to accept that if you are good, are well dressed with expensive clothes, and probably set your hair according to the latest trend, only then you are good looking.

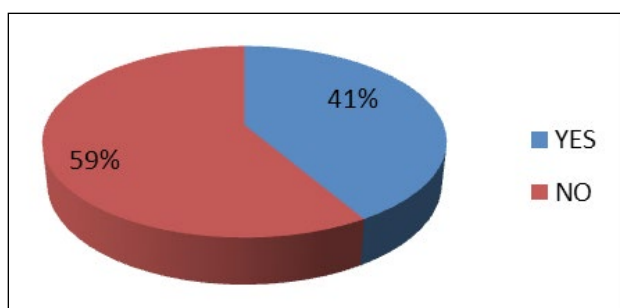


Figure 9. Quality doesn't come cheap

To have a better understanding, the survey inquired how many people agreed that quality does not come cheap, or in other words, only costly products are good. The result indicates that 59% of the people believe in this notion. Thus quality is related to the cost of the product and the costs are indirectly related to the celebrity endorsing the product, the range and extent of advertisements put behind the publicity of the product.

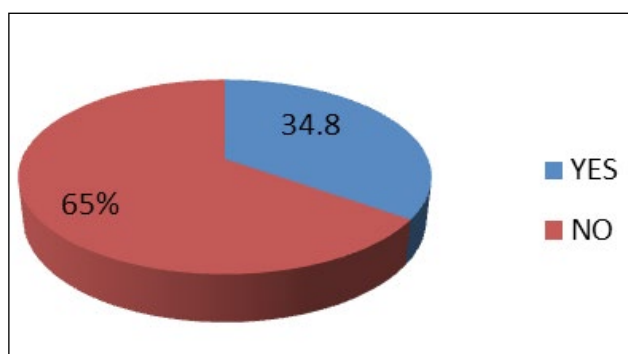


Figure 9. Idea of celebrity endorsement of products

It was essential to know the view point of the public about celebrities' publicizing the products. From the result obtained and represented in Fig. 10, it is evident that 65% of the people do not agree with the idea of celebrity endorsement of products. The reason behind

the disagreement is the fact that celebrities endorsing the products increase the value and also somewhere or the other influence the minds of the people, especially the illiterate population that are followers of a particular star. This creates a bias in the minds of the people and drives them along the wrong path.

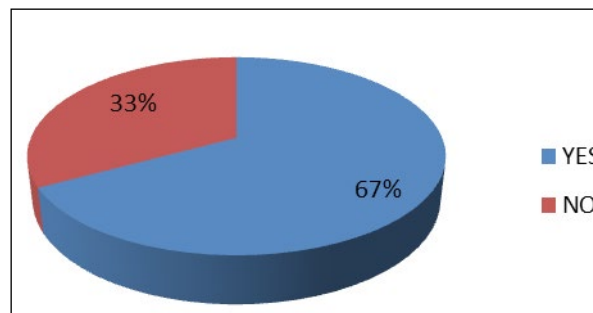


Figure 8. Celebrity endorsement increases the value of the product

From Fig. 11, 67% of the people that were surveyed have agreed to the fact that celebrity endorsement of product increases the value of the product. Value here does not only indicate the monetary value but also the aesthetic sense of the product. The disagreement is an indication that they believe that celebrities influence the public in a great way and may also lead to wrong idea of the product in the minds of the viewers.

Findings

The above results are indirectly related to objectifying of humans, as the public considers the celebrities to be superior to them especially in appearance consideration. Majority of people look up to some model in terms of physique. Also, large percentage of youth believes in the idea of going to gym. The reason being that they feel they lack in physical appearances which is also portrayed above. Moreover, the idea of branded products increasing the appearance is also supported by almost 100 people. Not only branded products, but a large number of people also accept the fact that quality is not cheap. In addition to this, majority of the audience feels that when any celebrity endorses a product, the people tend to create an image that if we also use this product we can become like him/her. Thus, 67% of the public denies to the idea of celebrity endorsements. All of this is again nothing but objectifying the celebrity by making a statement that he/she is a perfect human. In such cases, the product companies misuse the influence of celebrities to promote wrong facts about the products also. They also promote the idea that one must strive to achieve physique, looks and attire as represented by the models and eventually they create a prejudice in the minds of the viewers that the model or actor is perfect. This is similar to an object which is labelled and all other manufacturers should mold their objects the same way.

Summary

From the above responses, it can be ascertained that mass media plays a crucial role in determining and establishing the fact as to what is a perfect human. Whereas, there cannot be anything as “the most beautiful person”, “Ms Universe”, “Mr Universe” and many such titles that are assigned, this creates a sense of inferiority within the minds of the people; it also makes us look at anyone with an eye of comparison. This emotion is also expressed by Dante,¹⁴ who has highlighted the negatives of beauty pageants. The truth is that everyone is beautiful in a unique way and should not be forced to amend themselves physically. Going to gym, opting for cosmetic surgeries, including make-up and various other artificial beauty-enhancing products in to the daily routine are not good practices. It is generally a good trait to look up to someone and form a role model in life, but when it comes to physically idealizing someone, it is objectifying. In this process, people lose their uniqueness and blindly follow the crowd, as they believe they would be bullied or looked down upon if not done so. To rule out this misconception from the society, we need to devise methods to convince people to stop believing in this ideology.

Conclusion

The youth of this country should make people aware of the fact that they should stop this stereotyping of trying to find a perfect human, compare with him/her and put in efforts to be like them. These are ways in which big companies try to market their products. You would not find any company endorsing products with a dark-skinned, obese person, the reason behind is that looks matter a lot and this has been a prejudice established over time.

Recently, the issue of objectifying of women by commenting on their dressing sense and choices was raised by the activists. But it is essential to realize that not just the women, objectification is faced by the entire human race. The only solution is to discourage such activities by the media, especially beauty pageants, fairness creams, body-building regimes and many other such incentives encouraged by media. Instead of that, make people feel good about how they are, learn to appreciate one's own uniqueness and flaws and not compare with anyone as everyone is a unique individual.

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