

Decisive Role of Fairness Products in Advertising:

A focus groups study covering negative psychological effects on women due to marketing of fairness products

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Abstract

It is widely accepted now a day's that television advertisements of fairness creams do not only promise lighter skin tone but also associate skin tone with success, and as a result they create inferiority complex in dark skin people who are the major part of our society. Through use of shock bureau theory technique, the advertisements do not only create false ideas but also create discrimination among people.

Today a number of advertisements keep portraying that a dark skin tone female is not needed and they all are depress and after using a fairness product their life changes on 180 degrees she gets married to handsome prince, she gains self-confidence and even she becomes successful in her professional career. According to recently published report, "India Fairness Cream & Bleach Market Overview,

2015-2016” more than half of the revenues of the \$180m skin care products in the market are generated by skin whitening products. In Pakistan situation is almost similar.

The ideal beauty in subcontinent is fair skin tone. The aim of this study is to scrutinize how fairness products are creating complex psychological problems in society. Qualitative data were gathered from six districts of Karachi through focus group interviews. These focus-group interviews with Pakistani women (age limit between 19 to 29 years old) stated that their obsession with fairness increases after seeing fairness cream advertisements. Many participants said that the connection between beauty and fair skin arises from historical beliefs like lighter skin tone is symbol of elites etc. that are now being reinforced through whitening products advertisements. However selected population does not rate fairness as a main ingredient of beauty but they are aware of the benefits of being fair.

Keywords – Obsession, Fair Skin, Inferiority Complex

Introduction

Fair is beautiful and dark complexion is often considered as a taboo in our society. This fact is realized by our advertisers and they create huge market of fairness products on basis of fear from darker skin tone. Most of the time they showed advertisement that people with darker complexion don't have the right to live a happy life just because their skin is darker? Our fairness product ads pick out dark complexion girls and apply their product on them and completely whitewashed their face. The 'before and after' versions continuously blink on our TV screens which reinforce the beliefs

in our society that dark skin color is a symbol of inferiority and fair skin color is a symbol of superiority. Average Pakistan, girls go through the sentence “fair, slim and smart” dilemma while their parents choosing potential partner for them. The most of the time female are rejected on account of her color which they think makes her unattractive.

The bigger need of a society is to grow up and accept that dark skin color neither defines ugliness nor it creates any hurdle at any front of life. At the same time our advertiser can change their storyline too for the fairness product. They can promote confidence, healthy skin texture and women empowerment in their ads. Fairness product advertisers should have to stop feeling sorry for girls who don't have fair complexion! They are just as normal as any fair skinned girls are. In this study adverse effect of fairness product advertising has been highlighted.

Literature Review

The BBC once reported that in South Asia more fairness creams are sold than bottles of Coca Cola. GIA market research has observed that the global fairness product industry touches \$10 billion mark in 2015, headed by the growth in India and China.

Del Guidice declares that skin lightening phenomenon not only common in Asian countries but also have strong roots in the Africa too. In South Asian culture most objectionable personality trait is having darker skin. As a problem statement in South Asian Culture, having dark skin is the most undesirable trait. (Guidice,2002)

Lal acknowledged that the sub-continent culture has tradition of women objectification. Matrimonial columns and websites are full of fair skin female demands. (Lal,2003)

Islam et al highlighted in his research paper that people use many national and international brands fairness products but product performance is always questionable among users. Most of these fairness products commonly targeted young female population of the society. Different groups of academicians and journalists in Bangladesh have spoken about the adverse effect of skin fairness products usage. (Islam,2006)

[Kavita Karan](#) conducted focus group interviews in India and came to conclusion that in our region beauty is strongly associated with fair skin tone. Many participants strongly agreed that fair skin can bring successful marriage life, empowerment, job opportunities and confidence even more affection from love one. (Karan,2008)

In an article published by Enotes J stated that teens are anxious about how they look. They wish to fit in the society. In order to meet the criteria of beauty standards they have to bear lots of difficulties. As compare to male's beauty standards for females are tough. Mostly they are judge by their skin tone, dressing style and physical appearance. Female beauty is based on attractive features, a good skin texture, nice hair, and a smart figure. (Enotes,2010)

Sohail Kamran assembles qualitative data through twelve focus group interviews in Rawalpindi from female university students and girls from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Conclusion of that study suggested that fairness product ads exaggerate the product performance and benefits. Some respondents answered that they face skin problems due to usage of such products. Fairness product advertising is re-enforcing negative values in society. (Kamran,2010)

Nadia Kanwal stated that in order to understand the fairness mania in the sub-continent background we have to go through the historical facts. Fair skin tone foreigner always rules subcontinent Aryans to Moguls than British all are white. So, fair skin tone becomes status symbol in our region. Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon

stated that man always run off from his/her individuality so we all are trying hard to look different. Fairness product industry always play with this observable fact and sale individuality through there advertisements. (Kanwal , 2013)

Saman Ismail and Samiya Loya held a survey 250 respondents from different areas of Karachi filled it out. The most of the population was agreed that they belong to Asian race that's why many people born with darker skin tone but when it comes to beauty standard majority of people agreed that fair colour is beautiful. (Ismail, Loya, 2014)

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frame work of any study helps us by giving practical insight of any research or how phenomenon being studied and works. Following are the theories that support this study.

The first theory is “Reinforcement” given by Joseph Kalper (1960)is applicable to the present study as it support our phenomena that fairness product advertising is continuously supporting wrong believes in society. According to the theory of reinforcement, “Media strong already existent concepts of the society and it support lots of stereotyping.

Second theory that implies on our study is “Cultivation theory” which analyzes the continuing effects of television. As per George Gerbner (1956) “People who spend their most of the time at TV world they believe social reality is align with television and whatever content present on television is slowly cultivated in mid of people. The images and ideology transmitted through television media heavily influence perceptions of the real world”. In this study we found how much female are influenced by these advertisements and by watching such ads they purchase product to look good.

Research Questions

On the basis of above-mentioned studies and theoretical frame work we started research work with the following research questions that are:

R1: Do fairness product advertisements spread negativity and damage self-esteem of women?

R2: Do fairness creams TV commercials reinforce the idea fair is good and dark is bad?

R3: Do fairness creams' quality is often deceptive?

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative research approach. The study is conducted in Karachi, Pakistan. The units of data collection were extract from females of six districts of Karachi. Each focus group comprised eight participants who were selected through convenient sampling. Total number of participants of these six focus groups was 48. All focus groups were managed by the same moderator and each focus group held in 45 minutes. All participants allow recording the discussion, which facilitate to examine the information gathered during the study.

For conclusion of data, thematic analysis approach is used. To remain focused on topic a questionnaire was prepared. The questions were:

- ✓ Do you think that fair skin is essential for beauty?
- ✓ Does fairness advertising create awareness or reinforce negative attitude in society?
- ✓ Fairness Products that are advertised through different media are effective?

- ✓ What is the most hurting element of these fairness product advertisements?

Limitation of the study

This study was directed with a lesser sample size through focus group discussions. The same type of study may be held with bigger sample size by using different methodology and at a different location.

Discussion

This discussion is presented on thematic analysis basis as per Michi Komori. The following themes are derived from focus group discussion:

- (i) Reinforcing negative values in the society
- (ii) Deceptive Advertising
- (iii) Hurting the self-esteem of the girls

Reinforcing Negative Values in the Society

According to the question that whether these creams create awareness or reinforce negative attitude in society, 48 out of 35 i.e. 73% participants believed that the fairness product advertisements are potentially reinforcing and raising negative values such as supremacy of white face skin. They said every commercial shown on TV or published in print media presents white skin superiority. They particularly mentioned some famous brand ads taglines, such as jo face fresh wohi beautiful, ab gora hoga Pakistan, rangat nikharay khubsurat bnaye etc and said these ads reinforced the idea that beauty is only associated with a fair skin tone.

Whereas 13 i.e. 27% participants said that girls shown in most of these advertisements present the true picture of our society norms. Because whether it is matrimony, professional success or even gaining love of your parents, you have to look fair or fresh. These

advertisers adopt negative traits of our society and portray women as plastic dolls.

Hence research question (R2): Do fairness creams TV commercials reinforce the idea fair is good and dark is bad? has been proven because 73% of focus groups participant believe that whitening products ads reinforce false believes lies in our society. They particularly showed women can only find potential partner when they have fair complexion. In culture of Indo-Pak fair color is symbol of upper class which is why these ads continuously reinforce that if your skin color doesn't become fair you can't gain success on different walk of life.

Deceptive Advertising

According to the question that do these fairness products lighten skin color or not, and what is the performance of the advertised product, 84% out of 40 respondents said that what is claimed in the fairness product advertisements is false. Some respondents i.e. 11% or 5 respondents feel that permanent use of the fairness products cause's pimples, rashes and allergy on their skin. However, 5% i.e. 3 respondents said these products are useful if you pay a high price for good brands.

On the other hand, the moderator raised the question that if fairness product does not sale what they claim then why you use these products? 84% Participants i.e. 40 responses revealed that they face social pressures regarding fair skin so they don't have any option except using the fairness products again and again.

Hence research question (R3): Do fairness creams' quality is often deceptive? Has been proven because 84% participants of focus groups agreed that while they purchase these fairness products their quality didn't satisfy them. Whatsoever, these products advertisement claims are far from reality. Our respondents also included that they don't have any chance of

accepting buying these products because fairness at any cause is their prime focus.

Demoralizing Female

Participants expressed that fairness product advertising is again and again playing a crucial role in hurting the self-respect of the women. A few participants shared their personal experience with us that their partners, siblings, friends, colleagues etc. make jokes about their skin color and sometimes they refer any fairness products.

73% i.e. 35 respondents revealed that fairness product advertisement show that girls can have a better matrimonial match or nowadays they will be professionally successful after using these products, so whenever they watch such ads, they feel much oppressed. 27% i.e. 13 respondents said that when people are suggesting them to use these products, they feel disgraced.

Hence research question (R1): Do fairness product advertisements spread negativity and damage self-esteem of women? has proven because majority of focus groups respondents argue that these advertisements physiologically hurt them and they become too much depress after watching or viewing fairness products ads.

Conclusion

Here is an inherent faith in sub-continent that beauty is always link to the fair skin tone. These believe are frequently demonstrating in fairness product advertisement. Celebrity endorsement strongly reinforces the idea lighter skin tone promise success at every front of life. In early advertisement of fairness products only matrimonial success was shore up with fair skin tone but now a day's they show career development and public attention only gain through whitening of skin.

Previously fairness products are only advertised for women but now they are also targeting male population too. Most of the fairness products for men insist after using their product they will become successful in interview even their physical fitness is gloomy because of their dark skin. However, fairness products are selling misconception and negative attributes in society.

Although advertising a product is necessary but we have to create some boundaries or ethical values for advertising fairness products. Instead of promoting stereotyping in society fairness product market can advocate their product can promise healthy skin which is good enough for improve facial look of any person. These ads sidetrack people attention from their product quality.

This study qualitatively explores the fact that many women in our society are un-happy with their darker skin color which is affecting their mental state. Girls are called by different names because of their dark skin tone. In this situation when advertisers bombard the product benefits they instantly become inspire from it. But when product do not delivered what it claim their market hugely loose without a second. These fairness product ads show white face skin color supremacy, like girl getting married after applying the cream. Such portrayal of women needs to be stopped in advertising because it reinforces and raises negative values and customs in Pakistani society. Advertisers can play a positive role in this regard as they can break the perception and beliefs of the people about the fair face skin supremacy by changing their content and concepts.

Why we not celebrate confidence in these product ads. We can use real life people who are not fair but their skin is fresh and they achieve highest goals in their life. Perhaps rejecting people on the basis of their skin color might not be the most pressing issue that we face at the moment, however, breaking free from it, definitely is.

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