Analyzing and Regulating Body-Shaming Contents on Facebook (Meta) Advertisements against Indian Women

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ABSTRACT

It is observed that present media, entertainment, cinema, and communication platforms are full of misogynist content and body-shaming expressions. In India, women started using digital media and Social Networks a little later compared to the western world. Globally the representation of women is poor in digital media planning, regulation, and development of policies. Advertising is not untouched by these problems. Many Indian ads are mocking people's body types, skin colour, gender, caste, language, and sexuality. Misogyny and online body-shaming cases are repetitively reported on various platforms, including leading social networks like Meta, Instagram, and Twitter. Advertising Standard Council of India (ASCI) report titled "What India Takes Offence To" mentioned the nature of complaints filed against endorsers in recent years and very recently Chapter 3.1 (b) of the Advertising Code is already updated by ASCI. After this change, they expect advertising becomes more sensitive and inclusive under the headship of their new chairman. ASCI 2.0 helped the advertising self-regulators sharpen their focus on digital platforms. Moreover, it was observed that unhealthy stereotypes, meaningless comments on skin colour, and nastiest remarks on body shapes, and size are used frequently observed in advertisements. Knowingly or unknowingly content developers also share misogynist and body-shaming content against women on various media platforms and promotion campaigns. Therefore, this paper will review the literature on regulations, codes, and guidelines dealing with Body-Shaming Content against women in social media advertisements in India, especially those posted on Facebook (Meta). Moreover, important reports, ASCI code, and websites are also studied to understand the status of online body shaming cases in India.

Key Words – Body shaming, Digital Ads, Meta, ASCI, Mental Health.

INTRODUCTION

At the very outset, the whole world knows that web 3.0 is expanding its dimensions and scope day by day. Governing the internet is like governing an infinite galaxy. Facebook (Meta) is one of the leading global social media platforms where more than 2.9 billion registered active users. Approximately 43.2% of Facebook users are female in the world. Facebook had around 10 million advertisers (Herd Digital , 2022). India alone has 349.7 million registered users on Facebook. Social media should be socially inclusive and not exclusive as it is meant for maintaining healthy social interaction. Our social life and image are dependent on various factors including online behaviour, etiquette, and social media profiles. The pressure on virtual appearance especially onlive social media platforms is continuously increasing among young girls in modern times. Moreover, incidents of online body-shaming against women are also reported in many countries. Women are forced to look like models or similar to stereotyped hypothetical images prescribed by society. From cosmetic creams to fitness products and from fashion products to accessories we can observe that body-shaming contents are frequently used in the endorsement of an offering or during various promotional campaigns. Digital Advertisements frequently borrows many phrases, narratives, and words from social domains. Nevertheless,media planners are quite active in using digital platforms and all other public domains. Sporadically, media planners overlook a few words or gestures despite careful planning and investigations. Henceforth, we have ombudsmen, whistle-blowers, and regulators in our framework who notify crucial issues and report the same to the concerned authority. It is a long time that many cases of body shaming content are reported on various popular digital platforms. Therefore, Laws, guidelines, and regulations are enforced for tackling problems related to cyberbullying and body-shaming stuff on digital platforms.

Body shaming is defined as an act of mocking or stigmatizing an individual for their body appearance (Webcapable, n.d.). The term body shaming refers to the act or practice of humiliating or criticizing a person's body shape, size, colour, body part or other features. This may be expressed or implied in nature and is usually very subtle in nature. Criticizing a person's physique when it does not fit social norms and this social stigma is followed as a tradition by many Indian families. Moreover, each body part of women is targeted for bullying and body shaming. Women are judged more by their physical appearance and look even in the digital era. No filters and No makeup photos are recently observed in response to these problems. World Wide Web and social media can be informative, interesting, and thrilling but at the same time, they may be exclusive, offensive, damaging, and mean too (Lickteig, n.d.). The prevalence of body shaming content has grown and blended so much in society and its nature that this issue is often seen as a bonding experience amongst friends and is used as a joke crutch in movies, soap operas, web series, and tv shows. With the advent of sharing and forwarding options on social media many memes, jokes, short videos, animations, and content are forwarded by people without even grasping the double-meaning words. The prevalence of body shaming in our society has been for quite some time but since the existence of social media, it has reached a new level, and now, more often happens online on Facebook or Instagram. Moreover, the same words or contents are deeply imprinted on the minds of content developers. Therefore, they continue with similar vocabulary or narratives while writing a story, designing an ad, or developing a concept.

The mass media and digital media have billions of viewers and the body shaming content used against a woman in advertisements is actually against the entire society including female viewers. This is high time to trace these words through a computer algorithm and find out the regular offenders who stalk or body shame women on digital platforms while endorsing an offering. Social media is one of the platforms where women entered a little late in research, analysis, content development, and policy formulation. In the late nineties, several cases of body shaming and misogynist content were reported on social media platforms, advertisements, and movies. Not only male but female counterparts also use abusive and derogatory content on public domains including social media against their female friends. Despite so many efforts, health experts assume that it is a bit difficult to handle body shaming in the social media age(Health News, 2022). Henceforth, finding lawful ways to resolve and discourage body shaming cases on social media is essential. Recent cinema, advertisements, and OTT platforms are flooded with derogatory words and body shaming content against women. If we offer a fair representation of women in media planning and digital media regulations, probably we could develop a sound and sensible strategy to deal with such issues. This study is an attempt to analyze body-shaming content against women on Facebook Advertisements, promotional stories, Facebook pages, reviews, and in the comments sections. In social, political, and cultural domains online body shaming is used as a tool. Further, the advertisements are severely impacted by the current scenario therefore, regulators are recommending vigilance and awareness programs for controlling such episodes on social media platforms.

METHODOLOGY

The information is gathered for summarizing the initiatives of social media regulators, ASCI, and other bodies. Secondary data is used for identifying and confronting body-shaming content against women on Facebook Advertisements. It is assumed that cyberbullying and body shaming exists since the inception of social media and it is unavoidable in most instances. In recent years advertisers are inclining toward inclusive advertisements and women content developers are proposing the idea of socially inclusive advertisements. Ad makers are sensitized by the regulatory bodies for following their guidelines while developing or circulating promotional stuff on social media. Preexisted laws, guidelines, and recent policies are reviewed for presenting the crux of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social norms, social surveillance, and social stigma are generally imposed on the deprived segment, especially women. Modern feminists are suggesting numerous solutions for proposing complete freedom for women. On the other side few criminal mindset people, habitual offenders, and sometimes ignorant people are accused of a crime against women. Depending on the nature of the crime and crime scene judiciary pass a verdict. Nevertheless, prevention is always better than cure, therefore, laws, guidelines, mandates, and codes are developed. It is expected that education and legal awareness improve the behaviour of people in society. Moreover, it is observed by scholars that strict surveillance and moral policing may cause mistrust among countrymen and endorsers. Therefore, an amicable solution and voluntary initiatives are required from regulatory bodies and ad makers both. In this section general and specific legal provisions and guidelines related to online body shaming ads are reviewed. Further, a few studies in a similar area are also investigated and presented in this section where online body shaming is observed. Skin colour is specified by many popular matrimonial sites(Cardoza, 2009). The relationship between pressure created by advertisements on the perception of people about self-image was established. It was found that body dissatisfaction, eating disorders and many others problems are actually an outcome of this relationship(Maran, 2012). A cross-sectional study of the pattern of body image perception was conducted in Karnataka it was found that the majority of underweight and overweight girls have a normal perception of themselves and they were satisfied(B.M. Rashmi, 2016). In a study, it was observed that matrimonial advertisements allow filters to shortlist partners on the basis of caste, body weight, skin colour, height, and

various other body parameters(Chattopadhyay, 2019). In another study, it was found that the social media image of an ideal person is influencing their thoughts and perception(Shreya Saxena, 2020). According to a study conducted on the impact of advertisements on society in the construction of an ideal women image, it was observed that people criticize models on the basis of body weight and skin type(Sharma, 2021). In another study conducted in Mumbai on body shaming, it was observed that people face the consequences of body shame and 52% of respondents face body shaming in their life(Krishnakumar, 2022). According to a study conducted by Fortis Hospital, 90% of women accept that body shaming is quite common in India. In a recent article Analyzing it was observed that (Aarna Gupta, 2022).

POLICY FRAMEWORK, INITIATIVES AND REGULATIONS

Indian constitution is protecting the rights of women in different domains and provides equal rights to women. They can maintain their dignity and modesty as per the constitutional provisions. The Advertising Council of India (ASCI) also reforming its guidelines to tackle gender-sensitive issues and body shaming. Advertisements that mock or deride anyone on the bases of gender identity and sexual orientation, body shape, age, and physical and mental conditions, will now be considered in violation of the ASCI Code. The penalties and actions for the same are also specified under various legal provisions. For the years 2021-2022 approximately 5532 complaints were processed by the regulators and around 62 % increase was noticed in the complaints filed to the ASCI and out of these 48% were for digital advertisements. An artificial intelligence-based tracing system is used to trace the objectionable contents on social media advertisements. Indian Constitutional provisions and criminal laws cover many aspects of crimes against the modesty of a woman. India's legal system is drafted in such a manner that every gender is equally respected. IPC, CRPc, IT act, and Indecent Representation of Women Act are already covering various aspects of online body shaming. But the provisions are similar as they are for offline body shaming. Cybercrimes perceive online body shaming a bit differently because tracing sources and committing acrime against the online population is a wider aspect and to be treated like a global matter. The offender may be sitting at one place and harming a person in another nation on web space. Unlike Pinterest and Twitter, Facebook users are more ignorant and less aware because of its mainlining large user base. Therefore, the social involvement of youth in framing such policies and training them on how to develop inclusive content is essential. Meta policies and guidelines should be more transparent and inclusive for all people from different cultures, body types, and skin complexions. BIBA launches a thought-provoking popular digital campaign "Change The Question" for avoiding fat shaming in the advertisement.

A few research are conducted and it was found that body shaming fuels dissatisfaction among youth and affects their mental health too. Dove India also introduced a campaign "Har body Ko Pyar Ka Haq" for slamming body shaming in India. Brands like Urbanic endorse "My right to wear" and Allen Solly promotes "Own Your Shape". Dove also raised many other issues like the matchmaking process and body confidence. Joy suggests "Beautiful by Nature" and Plum Body endorses "Love Every Inch" in their campaigns. The Advertising Council of India is always adapting a progressive approach to regulate objectionable, misleading, and illegitimate content in advertising. A summary of Scopus research papers on Online Body Shaming in Advertisements is presented below. Although we have bodies to regulate and sensor media and entertainment stuff there is a lack of sound digital media policy for controlling body-shaming content over the internet and social networks. A strong lobby is continuously opposing body shaming on television and social media but till 2021 there was no sound policy or regulator network for controlling body shaming stuff. In a country where millions of people suffer from mental and psychological disorders, these contents create pressure and further research need to be conducted for establishing a relationship between advertising pressure and the mental health of women or other genders.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the literature review and current policy framework, it is observed that mere amending and advertising code or policy may not provide a solution for the problems related to body shaming content in digital advertisements. Therefore, it is suggested that a sound policy is required for regulating body-shaming ads on digital platforms. the impact of social media and visuals on televisions is long-lasting in the minds of people. Hence, the content should be more inclusive and user-friendly. It is not a wise decision to insult one market segment for promoting the product to another segment. Fairness products, cosmetics, fitness products, perfumes, and other regular offenders should be given a timely warning, and vigilance is required for identifying regular offenders through online tracing. Cosmetic surgery and beauty treatments should not be endorsed with body shaming content. Meta is a leading platform and it can set up a benchmark for other social networks by adapting a progressive approach for regulating online body shaming in India.

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