

## Construction of the 'Beauty' concept: An Analytical Study of *Femina* – A Leading Women's Magazine

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### Abstract

*Magazines have often been adulated and have enormous readers due to its vast, varied and rich content in its glossy and colourful pages. Magazines cover issues in an in-depth manner and are read as well as preserved by the readers. The advertisements also play a key part in making the magazines widely popular. Women's Magazines in India have a fundamental role to play in educating, informing, and creating awareness about various women issues. Magazines are instrumental in spreading awareness about various women issues and should negate the stereotyped portrayal of women as 'fashion-obsessed', 'beauty-obsessed' and portrayed as 'Glam dolls'. This research paper deals with a content analysis of 'Femina' magazine, a leading women's magazine in India for 4 months- January to April 2016 (5 issues). The space given to each component in magazine content has been adequately studied. The results reveal that the content of the magazine is highly coloured with notions of beauty, fashion and advertisements which objectify women.*

**Keywords:** Women's' Magazines, Stereotype, Beauty, Objectify

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### INTRODUCTION

In today's world, it is difficult to avoid the media. The role of mass media in our daily life is undeniable. Magazines are an integral component of print media, and have potential to sustain readers and build circulation. Magazines are liked by all and sundry due to its glossy pages and wide variety of articles. It gives an in-depth view on the current happenings and

covers wide range of topics of interest like travel, food, celebrity, lifestyle, arts, and entertainment, fashion, health, culture, and so on. In this age of globalization, women are still struggling to find equal footing in our patriarchic society in all aspects due to the persistence of stereotypes and inequalities. Thus, women's magazines should contain content which focuses on uplifting and boosting the morale of women and giving career-oriented information as well. Unfortunately, several studies have revealed that women's magazines devote maximum space to articles and advertisements related to physical beauty concepts like weight issues, looks and appearance or beauty surgery. Lindsey & Bissell (2014) opines that women's magazines, have the ability to shape the thinking process on weight loss and body image. Women's magazines and fashion magazines have to take the blame upon themselves for being too preachy about ideal feminine body and attitude image. Not only the content but the advertisements too are stereotypical. When one theorizes "Framing" in mass communication, it helps us to understand how media content that is framed by message creators influence the audience. Framing means the most important and relevant matters deemed by the message creators send, irrespective of the negative influence it has upon the psyche of the women. Magazines influence teens, women and the aged alike and may lead to several body dissatisfaction, plastic surgery, lifestyle changes as well as eating disorders.

More often than not we come across advertisements which claim to magically eradicate all sorts of ugliness from our face, body or any physical features. The advertisements assure us that achieving a clear face or bouncy hair or carrying a particular brand of handbag will remove all troubles in our life. Advertising constitutes to be a very important part of a magazine for its revenue.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Anjalin Umana (2015) has stated that, the magazines depict an explicit message of beautification and pleasing men. Skill oriented, career-focused and sports related advertisements were missing from the magazines. She has expressed that the magazines were abundant with excessive erotic display of the women body.

Shyama Kumari, Shradha Shivani (2013) has found in their study that 64.2 per cent of the advertisements in the magazines had portrayed women in stereotypical roles- as a housewife or as a sex object. They have also found that women featured more in women's products and were less in commercials of financial services and telecom.

Das (2000) has stated in the study on Indian magazine advertising scenario [1984-1994] that the portrayal of both men and women has undergone tremendous change over the years, but it largely remains stereotypical.

Ferguson, Kershel & Tinkham (1990) has found that women in the magazine advertisements have been stereotyped mainly as sex objects, portrayed in traditional roles such as housewife and are shown as dependent upon men.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To analyse the textual content of Femina Magazine
- To analyse the advertisements of Femina Magazine.
- To analyse the construction of the concept of “Beauty” and other feminine characteristics

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research paper deals with a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of 'Femina' magazine, a leading women's magazine of India. Five issues of Femina magazine, a fortnightly, published during the span of 4 months from January to April 2016 were selected based on representative sample features. Fifty percent of total issues meaning 5 issues out of a total of 10 issues published during 4 months were selected through Systematic Random Sampling. The space given to each component of the magazine content in the magazines has been adequately studied. The advertisements as well as the thematic content of the magazine have been critically studied using codes.

### **Codes**

The codes have been framed based on Goffman's Frames and Kang's Additional categories as well as Arthur and Resko's (1975) codes.

- Caption
- Body Language
- Rewards offered

## ANALYSIS

**Table 1:** Area Analysis of Femina Magazine

Issue 2016	Number of Ad Pages	Ad %	Number of Content Pages	Content %	Total Number of pages
January 12	57	41.30 %	81	58.69 %	138
February 8	51	36.95 %	87	63.04 %	138
March 2	69	47.91 %	75	52.08%	144
March 25	78	47.56 %	86	52.43 %	164
April 8	70	47.94 %	76	52.05 %	146

From the Table-1, it can be seen that the advertisements comprise nearly 57 pages (41.30%), whereas the textual content is printed in 81 pages (58.69%) for the Jan 12 Issue. The next issue (February 8) has 51 pages (36.95%) of advertisements whereas 87 pages (63.04%) constitute magazine content. Similarly, 78 pages (47.56%) comprise of advertisements whereas 86 pages (52.43%) comprise of textual content for the March 25 issue. The further issues (Apr 8) has 70 page (47.94%) advertisements, 76 pages (52.05%) content and (March 2) 69 pages (47.91%), 75 pages (52.08%) respectively.

**Table 2:** Analysis of Product wise Advertisements

Product Category	Advertisements in the Issues
Beauty/Cosmetics/Fashion	70
Clothing/Shoes/ Bag	52
Jewellery	60
Food	16
Health	7
Finance	5
Tourism	3
Magazine	13
Electrical	8
Others	25

It is evident (Table 2) that beauty products, cosmetics and fashion items have been advertised the most, followed by Jewellery, apparels, shoes and bags. Significantly, food items have considerable advertisements, but health, electrical and electronic ads are least preferred in women's magazine. Surprisingly, there were no automobile advertisements in the women's magazine denoting the stereotypical attitude of advertisers, as they are likely to prefer a business or sports magazine that enjoys high male readership.

**Table 3:** Brand wise Analysis of Advertisement Content

Brand	Product Category	Caption	Body Language	Rewards Offered
Ponds White Beauty BB Cream	Beauty	"Instant spot-less fairness, everyday."	The woman looks confident and bright.	Fairness and spot-less face is essential for every woman to look picture-perfect every day.
Fair and Lovely BB Cream	Beauty	"Fairness Cream with a Make-up Finish"	In order to achieve professional excellence, it is important to devote time to look good.	It has the dual qualities of foundation and fairness which helps in having the best face for facing job interview.
Ponds Age Miracle	Beauty	"Makes you feel up to 10 years younger"	Fresh and younger looks.	Anti-ageing properties to make you look 10 years younger. Miraculous day cream.
Loreal White Perfect Magic White	Beauty	"Revolutionary Whitening"	Fresh, vibrant, bold looks.	Brighten skin within 5 seconds. Flawless radiance with double whitening elements.
Close Diamond Attraction	Toothpaste	"Diamond Attraction"	The woman has shining teeth which makes her happy and content.	The whiter and shiny teeth will make you look beautiful and help you escalate the social ladder.
Santoor Gold	Soap	"For beauty that is as eternal as Gold"	The woman has radiant and glowing skin.	The soap offers bright, sandal-kind, youthful charm.
Asmi Diamond Jewellery	Jewellery	"For the woman of spirit"	Charming, mesmerized, complacent.	A woman who is free-spirited and is eternally beautiful wears diamonds.
NAC Jewellers-Fabula	Jewellery	"Swankily Seductive"	The woman has a charm and elegance with amazing poise.	The jewellery will seduce and bring in flamboyant attitude.
Kelloggs Specail K	Food	"2 Week Challenge"	Confident, slim avatar, ready to rock the marriage.	2 bowls, 2 weeks will help in reducing 2 and a half kgs which is essential to uplift the confidence and enjoy the

				wedding season.
Imperial Jewellers	Jewellery	“The Beauty, untouched by the world.”	The woman finds her true calling in the jewellery, which makes her beautiful.	Unique Beauty , because of the dazzle of the jewellery.
V Star	Undergarments	“The New body language”	Eyes fixed downwards, clad in cowboy style wearing undergarments.	“Girl is the New boy” tagline tries to relate a woman with a man. The undergarment will help in becoming bold and be a part of the new-age woman.
Triumph	Undergarments	“The maker of Lingerie”	Girl, half-naked, clad in lacy lingerie engrossed in her own self.	Nothing's more beautiful than a woman in lace- is the tagline which states that a woman needs to adorn herself in lacy lingerie to be beautiful.

**Table 4: Quantitative Analysis of Textual Content**

Issue	Pages for Beauty/ Fashion/ Lifestyle/ Sex/ Relationship	%	Pages for Academics/ Career/ Health/Inspirational Profile	%	Total No. of Pages (Textual)
Jan12	53	65.43	28	34.56	81
Feb 8	72	82.75	15	17.24	87
Mar 2	62	82.66	13	17.33	75
Mar 25	69	80.23	17	19.76	86
Apr 8	64	84.21	12	15.78	76

Table-4 shows that comparatively the amount of space given to beauty, fashion /sex /relationship is higher than pages dedicated to academics, career and health. Motivational stories of personalities in off-beat areas are few. In Jan 12 issue, considerable space has been provided to topics related to beauty, fashion, lifestyle, sex and relationship with 53 pages (65.43%) whereas academics, career, health have 28 pages (34.56%). The next issues have a similar pattern to share. (Feb 8) issue has 72 pages (82.75%) to beauty, fashion etc content and merely 15 pages (17.24%) for academics, career oriented content. The Mar 2 issue has 62 pages (82.66%) for fashion, beauty etc and only 13 (17.33%) for inspirational and career oriented content. It appears to be the magazine policy as even successively issues like Mar 25 also shares similar content share where 69 pages (80.23%), a major chunk of the textual content is about fashion, beauty and sex whereas a very minimal 17 pages (19.76%) for career and health related

issues. This is followed by Apr 8 issue which has 64 pages (84.21%) for fashion, sex etc and barely 12 pages (15.78%) for motivational and career oriented stories.

## FINDINGS

- Very few articles focused on women's health, personal hygiene, career, educational prospects or finance. Majority of the articles were devoted to fashion trends, lifestyles, cosmetics, beauty products, sex and relationships.
- Cover story of an issue dedicated to "India's Most Beautiful Women 2016", had only prominent film personalities of Bollywood bagging the crown. It reinforced that beauty is related to stardom and physical appearance and not achievements in other areas.
- There were certain motivational stories on woman war journalist, Muslim woman writer, woman storyteller, woman space scientist, women entrepreneurs, woman NGO worker, women insurance agents, women on managing debts, organic farming, Kashmiri sportswoman, woman bike-rider and on tips to juggle between career and motherhood. However, the number is minimal but the articles were inspirational.
- Personality profiles were mostly of actors, models, singers, musicians and directors. People from various walks of life needs to be featured more in the magazine rather than people from the silver screen.
- The advertisements of cosmetics, bags, shoes and clothing items denote the reinforcement of the products to enhance the physical appearance and construct the notion of "Beauty." The products mostly stated that the usage would help in the glowing appearance of a woman and aid in uplifting the social status as well as attract the opposite sex.
- The advertisements mostly jewellery and cosmetics tried to mislead women by portraying their products to make a woman look elegant, fair, slim and unique. These notions ingrained deeply in the psyche of the woman who in turn opt for several ways to get that stereotyped "feminine sculpted perfect look."
- LIC is the only financial service featured in the magazine and had women as its models.

- Automobile, electronic gadgets, electrical items and finance have been given minimal or absolutely no place in the magazine. This reinforces the stereotype that women are interested in fashion, beauty and sex and not other aspects.

## CONCLUSION

Femina is a leading women's magazine in the country; therefore, it undeniably has a lot on its shoulders to provide to women. The magazine though caters to urban, English speaking upper elite class of the society, has to fulfill its obligations to the society. Mostly, covered with advertisements and content about love, sex, relationships, fashion and lifestyle trends, there is a dearth in its coverage of development issues. The careful analysis of the textual content implies that career, education, environment, legal, political, social, and health aspects were completely untouched. With our country still struggling to provide a gender equity environment due to the deep-rooted patriarchal set-up, a leading women's magazine like Femina has an obligation to serve women's cause besides fashion, beauty, and sex.

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