

Changing Role of Women- A Lifestyle Analysis



Management

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ABSTRACT

Historically, consumer and market researchers have viewed women in the roles of wife, mother, homemaker, and hostess, or single girl preparatory to these roles. Roles outside the family, such as career woman or professional worker, which may be called "social roles," were given little or no attention. The study emphasizes the importance of lifestyle and its influence on women buying behavior. The main purpose of the study is to examine the association between lifestyle and consumption pattern. Consumers often chose products, services and activities over others because they are associated with a certain lifestyle. Three groups of women – students, working women and housewives are included in the study. Differences and similarities among the groups will be observed in selected lifestyle and demographic characteristics. The study focuses on some sociological aspects of changing role of women and formally incorporates them into consumer behavior measures.

1. Introduction

The role of women in our society has changed significantly in the past three decades. Women and girls have many more opportunities and face different challenges. The playing field is not level, but neither is gender bias as institutionalized as it once was. Women who have achieved great stature in government, industry, sports, and the media have become a familiar sight.

Women in India are beginning to follow the direction that the women of the Western world took more than eighty years ago; demanding treatment as human equals. However, it has become more and more evident as the revolution ages that Indian women may have to adapt the Western feminist method to their very traditional and religious culture. India has different complications that put the development of women in a completely altered context than their Western counterparts.

Although the key targets remain similar: improvement of health care, education and job opportunities in order to gain equality between men and women in the various settings of public society, the workplace, the school yard and – possibly the most fundamental setting of all – the home. Women are striving to be independent on the equal level of men. The additional complexities that the women of India must also challenge are the caste system, the heavy religious customs, older and more traditional roles of the sexes, as well as the even stronger power that men hold in India.

With these changing roles the lifestyle of Indian women has changed drastically. Lifestyle reflects the overall manner in which people live and spend time and money. Operationally, a person's life style can be measured and described in two ways:

- By the product person consumes.
- By the persons activities, interests and opinions.

2. Objectives

- To examine the life-style and demographic characteristics of these groups and examine the similarities and differences.
- The specific research questions were:
 - I. Are the demographic characteristics of the groups significantly different?
 - II. Do life-style(psychographic) variables discriminate significantly between the groups?

3. Review of Literature

A number of researchers have focused on identifying the lifestyle of consumers. Plummer in (1971) studied the lifestyle profiles of the commercial credit card users. Richard and Sturman (1977) successfully applied lifestyle analysis for segmenting the users of Slimwear Branded apparels.

Lifestyle analysis is also used to build the lifestyle profiles of specific segments like working women, (Burns and Foxman 1988), women shopping behavior (Roberts and Wortze,1979)

. Reynolds, Crask and Wells (1977) analyzed the lifestyle differences of women with modern orientation and women of traditional orientation. Reynolds and Wells (1978) applied life style analysis for market segmentation, the development of product strategy and the development of the most appropriate communication strategy. The studies of Lazer (1963) and Jones (1982), indicate that lifestyle analysis is important in formulating marketing strategy.

Forrest and Blumberg (1981) viewed the life style as a principle which allowed management to assess accurately the needs of relevant market segment, because demographic descriptions have proved inadequate for this task. Ahmed and Jackson (1979) also confirmed that life style analysis could be of tremendous value to marketing managers. It facilitated the reduction of a large, heterogeneous population into a few basic groups. Product decisions are also influenced by life style patterns.

Tai and Tam (1997) examined the similarities and differences of the lifestyles between Hong Kong and Singapore consumers. Their results showed that the major difference between Hong Kong and Singapore consumers lies in cultural and traditional values.

4. Research Methodology

Three groups of women-student, working and housewives were taken for the study. The population consisted of women between the ages of 18 and 35, living in the urbanized area of Delhi, NCR.

The study was restricted to these age categories primarily to facilitate a more meaningful evaluation of the similarities and differences among comparable groups of women.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1: Demographic Characteristics

Of the total respondents the majority fell under the age bar of 18-25 comprising about 55% and 31% fell under the age group of 26-30.

The distribution of education level attained by the three groups is as follows:

Majority of the students are college graduates (78%) .

66% of the working women are post graduates having earnings of 30,001 -40,000 per month while 28% started working after graduation.

The survey showed that house wives of present time are more educated. 72% of them are post graduates and rest 27% have attained education till graduation.

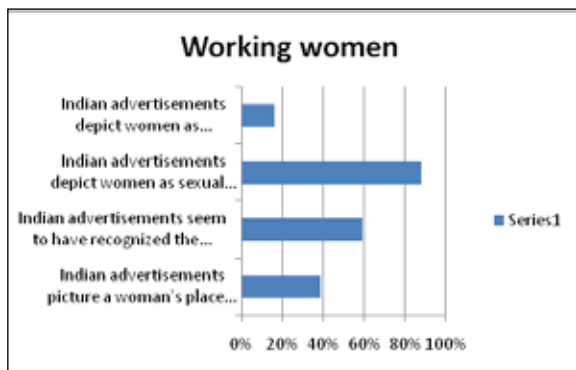
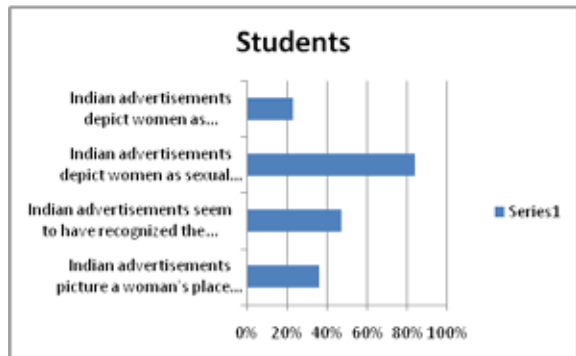
5.2: Analysis of Lifestyle Variables

Factor 1: Sex Stereotyping

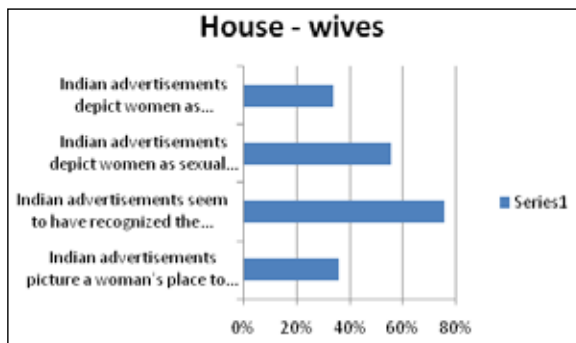
The graph shows the percentage in each group who agree with

the statements. Most of the students and working women believe that women are depicted in Indian advertisements as sexual objects and there are comparable numbers who also believed that Indian ads have recognized the change in women's role.

While most of the house wives believe that Indian advertisements have recognized the changes in women's role.



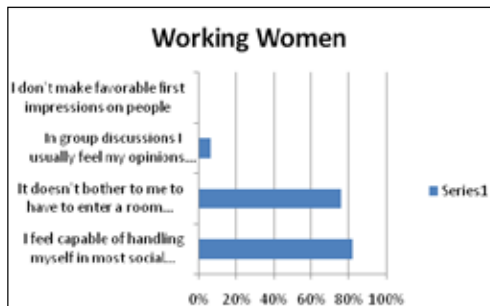
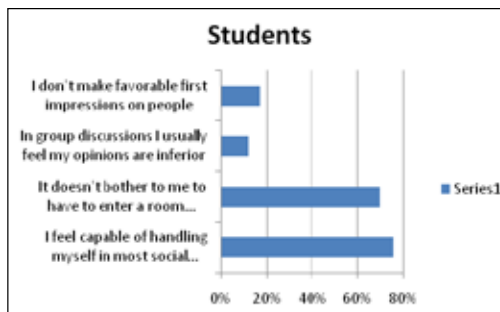
The survey reveals that a large number of working women perceive that women's role portrayals in the ads depict women as "sexual objects" and do not reflect the changes that are taking place.



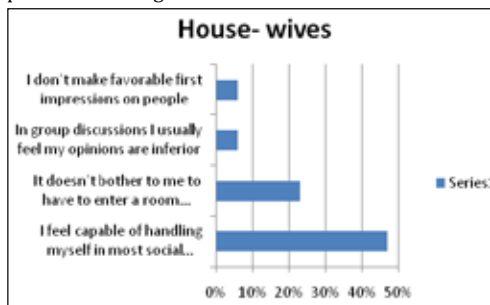
Factor 2: Self Confidence

Psychological literature suggests that because of the nonaggressive and noncompetitive roles of women, self-confidence has been associated with masculinity rather than femininity (Bardwick 1971).

In the present study working women displayed highest self confidence (82%) followed by students (76%) and house- wives (25%).



House-wives showed a lesser degree of self-confidence as compared to working women and students.



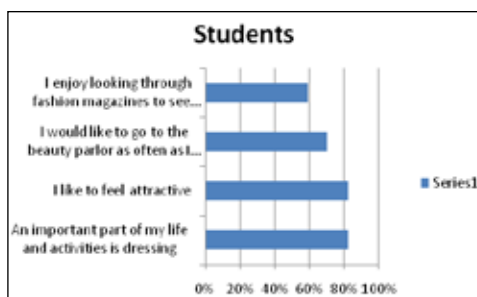
Factor 3: Fashion and Personal Appearance

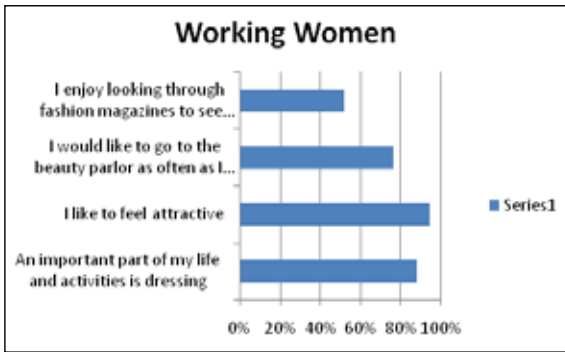
Attitudes and behavior toward fashion have been consistently investigated in life-style studies. Douglas (1975) employed this measure to compare working and nonworking wives in France and the United States. Wells and Tigert (1971) attempted to correlate this factor with product usage.

The present study also shows fashion and personal appearance is a major parameter in life style analysis.

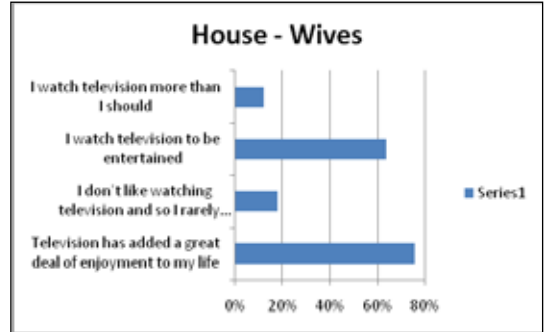
With changing times attitude towards fashion has also changed. Nowadays people are more conscious of their looks and appearance.

Indeed the survey showed, for all three groups, "feeling attractive" has a very high saliency. The graphs below show the perception of the three groups on various parameters of fashion and personal appearance.



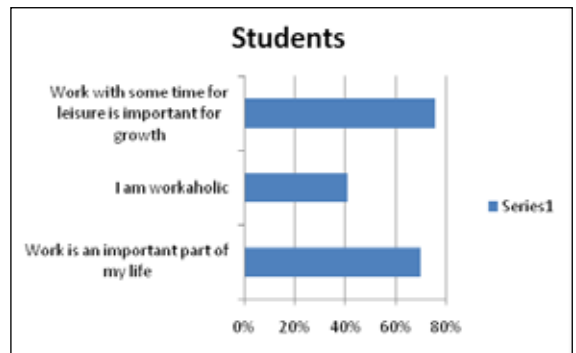
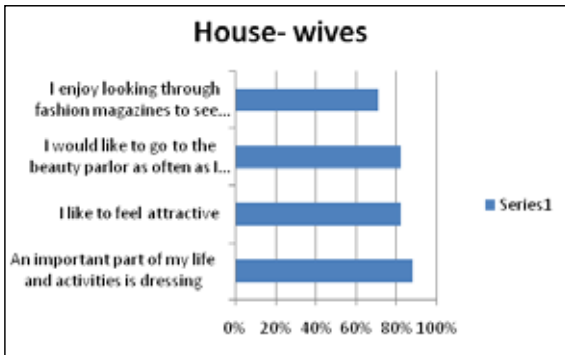


More than 80% of working women agreed on the statement, "An important part of my life and activities is dressing", and "I like to feel attractive."



Factor 5: Addiction to work

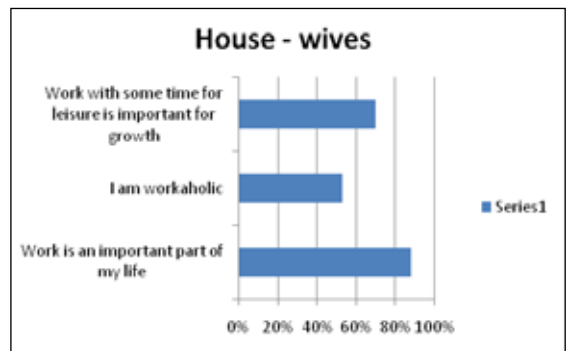
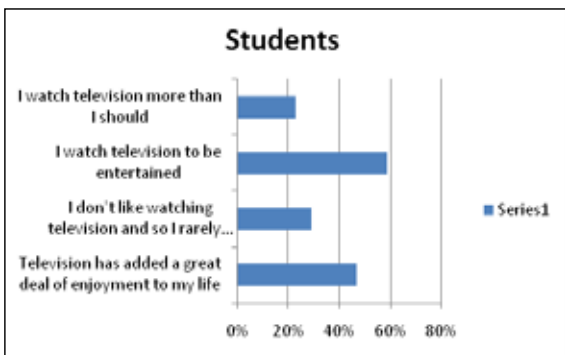
The three groups agreed that work was an important part of their lives; however, with regard to their enthusiasm for work, 65% of working women admitted that they are workaholics whereas only 41% students and 53% house - wives admitted the same.



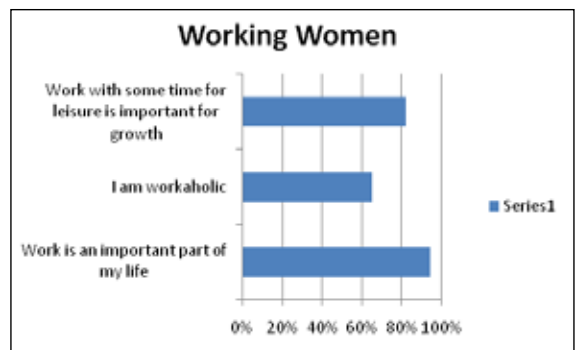
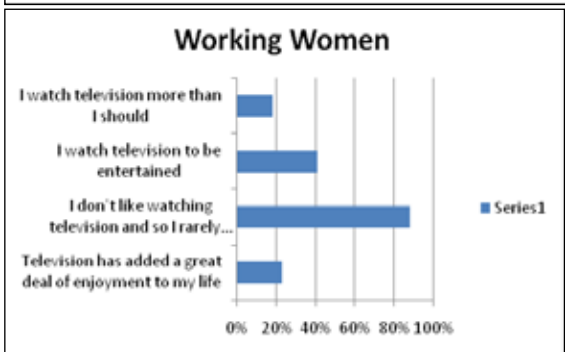
Factor 4: Television viewing

On the whole Working women are less sympathetic to television viewing than other groups. Nearly 76% of the house-wives admitted that "Television has added a great deal of enjoyment in their life" whereas 47% of the students and 23% of the working women felt the same.

More than 65% students agreed that work forms an important part in their life. Whereas more than 70% agreed that work with leisure is important for growth.



94% of working women says that work is an important part of their life and majority also understands the importance of leisure and therefore 82% agreed that work with some leisure is important for growth.

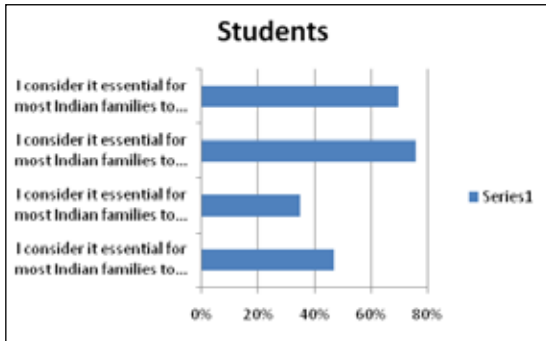


Those responding to the statement "I don't like watching television and so I rarely do so" were 88% working women, 29% students and 18% house-wives.

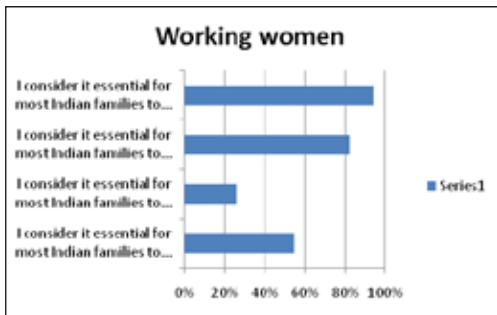
Factor 6: Life Simplification Products

Wells (1972) proposed a paradigm linking consumer characteristics, as follows: demographic, personality traits -> activities, interests & opinions -> evaluation of product benefits -> preferences -> intentions > purchases.

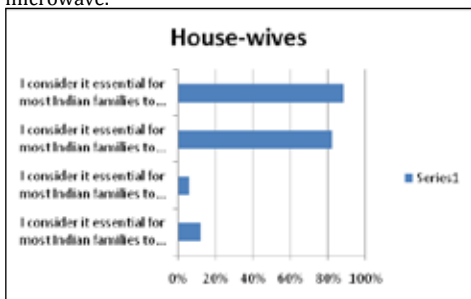
Although the purpose of this study was not to evaluate product preferences, two product-specific dimensions were included to examine the attitudes of different groups of women toward certain classes of products.



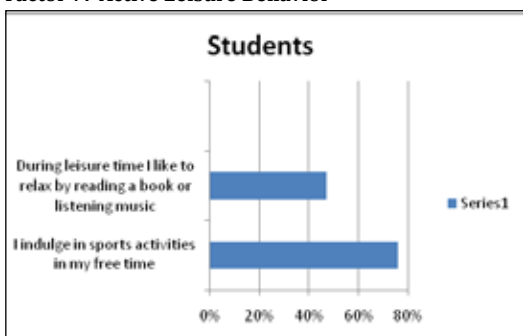
The frequencies on individual statements show all the groups basically disagreeing that automatic coffee makers, dishwashers are essential for Indian families.



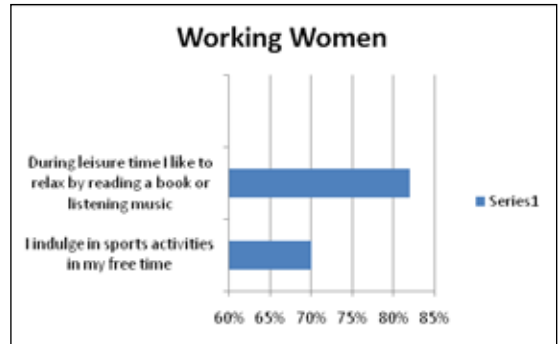
All the three groups agreed that on the statements, "I consider it essential for most Indian families to own a washer and dryer" and "I consider it essential for most Indian families to own a microwave."



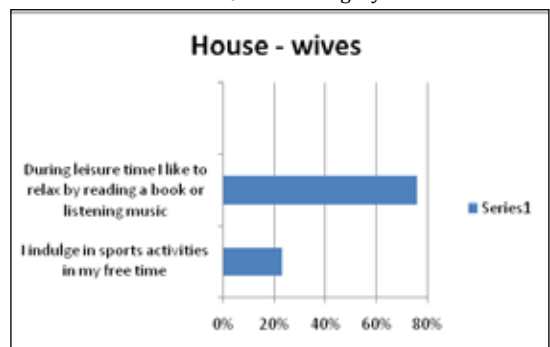
Factor 7: Active Leisure Behavior



The survey showed that majority of students(76%) and most of the working women(70%) like to indulge in sports during their free time . On the other hand a very small percentage of house-wives(23%) showed their interest for the same.



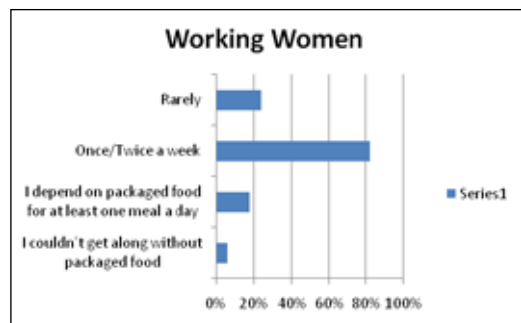
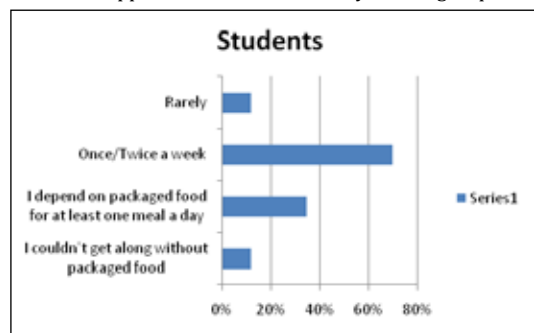
While majority of the working women (82%) and house-wives (76%) like to relax by reading a book or listening music. Students accounted for 47% in this category.



Factor 8: Packaged Food

The survey showed that all the three groups are highly health conscious.

The two statements included, "I couldn't get along without packaged foods," and "I depend on packaged food for at least one meal a day," show no differences between the groups. In general, this factor appears to have low saliency for the groups.



Majority of the students, working women and house-wives agreed that they consume packaged food once/twice a week.

While 29% of house-wives said that they consume packaged food rarely.

6. Conclusion

In this study an attempt was made to evaluate the perceptions of three groups of women who were identified as students, working women and house-wives. Significant differences were found on various demographic, life-style characteristics.

Of the total respondents the majority fell under the age bar of 18-25 comprising about 55% and 31% fell under the age group of 26-30.

The survey showed that house wives of present time are more educated. 72% of them are post graduates and rest 27% have attained education till graduation.

In terms of lifestyle characteristics the opposition of students and working women to sex stereotyping emerged clearly. The study reveals that a large number of students and working women perceive that women's role portrayals in the ads depict women as "sexual objects" and do not reflect the changes that are taking place. This view is not shared by most of the house-wives.

The profile from other dimension suggests that working women and students are more confident compared to house-wives.

The survey showed that all the three groups are conscious towards looks and appearance indeed, for all three groups, "feeling attractive" has a very high saliency.

Working women and students are less prone to television viewing as compared to house-wives for whom television forms an important source of entertainment.

The study was an descriptive attempt to analyze some aspects of changing roles of women and their general significance to consumer research. Although a stratified sampling procedure was used, the population was limited to a single geographic area; generalizations to a larger population are problematic.

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