
TRANSITION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT:

Over the millennia, the role of women in India has undergone significant changes. The history of women in India has been eventful, from equal status with men in ancient times to the low points of the mediaeval era to the pursuit of equal rights by many reformers. . Advertising is one of the main media that has an effect on our everyday lives, both consciously and unconsciously, and is responsible for influencing society in a much broader sense. Today's women are no longer confined to their kitchens. Their desire to make a difference in the world caused society to think differently. Marketers wisely used this transition mechanism to strategically launch their product and advertising. The role portrayal is largely done within the male dominant ideology. The men are largely posited as strong, independent and macho men, while women are generally confined to household chores, or mother/ caretaker roles whose world centers on the house. Owing to influences from the west, the familial norms are shifting from being patriarchal to more egalitarian (where both spouses are partners in making decisions and contribute equally to all household decisions).

KEY WORDS: *Women, Indian Advertisement, New Strategy.*

A number of factors influence the cultural values, lifestyles, and behavior of a society, the prevalence of mass media has lead to the conclusion that advertising plays a major role in influencing and transmitting social values. Today, everyone wants to advertise their goods in order to educate consumers about them, increase sales, gain market share, and reach the top of their industry. Every company spends a significant amount of money on advertising their goods, but the money invested can only be effective if the best advertising tactics are used for the product. Advertising has changed dramatically in recent years in terms of enticing customers to buy/use their products/services. In print and visual media, the demand for commercials has skyrocketed.

Over the millennia, the role of women in India has undergone significant changes. The history of women in India has been eventful, from equal status with men in ancient times to the low points of the mediaeval era to the pursuit of equal rights by many reformers. Some women have also held high positions in modern India, including President/Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Leader of the Opposition, and so on. With changing times, one of the transformations is the way women are portrayed in ads, which reflects the societal change. Advertising is one of the main media that has an effect on our everyday lives, both consciously and unconsciously, and is responsible for influencing society in a much broader sense. Today's women are no longer confined to their kitchens. Their desire to make a difference in the world caused society to think differently.

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Different types of appeals are used in advertising to draw the attention of the customers such as emotional, personal, social, scary, humorous, musical and sex are some of the appeals that are commonly used in advertisements. Among these appeals sexuality is considered one of the most powerful tools of marketing and particularly advertising. Use of Women in advertisements in a 'sexual way' is one of the effective ways of capturing the attention of the customers. It is considered that exposing the women's body is a matter of interest to all human beings. Thus it seems to be an attractive, way to create charm among consumers. The use of sexually attractive Women in advertisements is found in the advertisements of most classes of frequently purchased consumer products like clothing, cosmetics, toiletries, and food brands; and also in many types of consumer durables like motor cars, cameras, carpets, furniture and even for technical and industrial products such as drugs, plastics, and office machineries. Despite its drawbacks, advertisement is an effective marketing method. Its flaws could be mitigated if the public and government kept a close eye on the advertisers. Before purchasing a producer's goods, consumers can verify the claims made by the producer. Manufacturers and marketers should also avoid costly advertisements and keep their advertising budgets under control. They should also adhere to ethical principles, and women should not be portrayed as things in advertisements; instead, attempts should be made to reflect positive images that will boost, rather than denigrate, women's self-esteem. Women today prefer a female figure that possesses the required degree of technical competence. All women would find a female with whose lifestyle they can associate to be the most trustworthy when promoting non-technical items such as home and personal care products. The question of how to represent women most effectively in all forms of advertising cannot be easily or quickly resolved. It does, however, provide a huge opportunity for advertisers and agencies to do substantive research and take positive action.

HYPOTHESIS

In this research paper, it had been hypothesized that *media portrayal of women in advertisements, to some extent, has transformed with changing times.*

Female role portrayals become less stereo typical over the decades. This would be reflected in the kind of advertisements and the product categories of advertisements in which women are used. Woman in television advertising in the 1980s would be more stereo typical than that of a woman in 2020. Women's roles in numerous fields around the world, such as advertising, academia, and politics, have evolved over time. Women now make up more than thirty percent of the workforce in the tech industry. They are also making a name for themselves as experts in various fields. Women have been abused in the media since the beginning of the industry, but the extent to which women have been exploited has changed dramatically. Many advertisers have realised how important it is to represent women realistically. Because of the rise in the number of working women, not only do women have more say in family decisions, but there are now more single female households, which mean more independent transactions.

If Women's perceptions and representations have shifted as they have moved from the domestic to the professional sphere then many advertisers should now portray women in a variety of roles that represent their daily lives, these days.

Objective of the study

Discrimination based on age, race, ability, and sexual orientation has been pushed through gender biased advertising for decades. For years, harmful preconceptions in advertising may have gone unquestioned. Is the advertising sector capable of accurately reflecting the variety of the world we live in? Women's roles have evolved over the decades in print and television advertisement all over the world. Although the green shoots of progressive communication narratives about women have blossomed, they are nonetheless problematic, whether in terms of visual imagery of femininity or making one sex look awful to make the other look good.

It is for sure that Indian brands have been pushing the women empowerment narrative further, with more nuanced takes on gender equality than ever before. Be it campaigns like Ariel's Share The Load, Havells' Hawa Badlegi, Tata Tea Jaago Re 2.0 or the Dalda spot, which features a mother encouraging her son to try his hand at cooking, Indian ads have come a long in the way they are now subverting gender stereotypes.

The aim of this paper is to describe:-

- The representation of women in advertisements has changed over the years or not.
- Examine female role portrayals in Indian Television advertisement

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

Advertisements largely represent societal ideals, keep us involved, and create an indelible impression on us. The objectification and stereotyping of women has been prevalent in most Indian advertisements throughout history. These sexist Indian ads demonstrate our history of misogyny. As stated above, the problematic construction of interpreting the meanings of ads which women are objectified changes the social positioning(s) of women in the society.

Indian television isn't exactly known for its political correctness or progressive mindset. TV shows and ads stick to the same tropes and settings that were on when Doordarshan was the only available cable entertainment, mostly portraying women as commodities or simple individuals who only dream of getting married to someone their families approve of. Certain companies and brands have taken the risk of trying something different however, shedding the tried and tested settings for modern and progressive portrayals of Indian women. If we carefully look at the current portrayal of women then there are many interesting examples where brands not only empower women but have made their branding around creating a strong identity for them. For example: In the latest ad of Airtel film "Boss" the lady is shown as independent with complete professional attitude. This is quite a big change from what was shown in the past. Even second marriage is shown in a very positive light by the jewellery brand Tanishq. Here re-marriage is set as the backdrop for its contemporary range of wedding jewellery. The new sea change is

marked with the fact that more and more women are joining the work force and are independent enough to take their own decision. Earlier women of the 80s were portrayed just doing household chores or just adding glamour to advertisement. The role of women in India has seen the change over the years with more and more women joining the workforce and becoming independent decision makers which are quite a contrast to her role even in the society. From the sacrificing homemaker who would have done it all for the betterment of her family is now the guilt free happy mom doing multiple roles. Now, her forte includes more independence and decision making.

Even in the latest ad of Prestige where we have celebrity couple Abhishek and Aishwarya are shown enjoying cooking. The best portrayal of women has been by brand 'Havells' which started the 'Respect for women' series.' Also, the detergent ad of 'Nirma' shows three women pushing a vehicle an ambulance stuck in a ditch. All these ads are creating a different space in the advertising space where a non-traditional role of women has gained a momentum. Most importantly, even society is welcoming the positive imagery of women where they are relating more to the real women of substance rather than just the glitter doll role. The latest 'Horlicks' campaign titled 'Love you ma' shows mothers in traditional avatars but being a source of constant support to their independent daughters in various professions like police officer, sports star etc and a little daughter holding hands of her mother in supporting her in return. It is a beautifully shot film which shows the new era woman in altogether a different light.

The same Indian woman who was once upon a time shown as submissive housewife is now shown as confident, independent and makes her own choice. No longer will you see the stereotypical roles of women in the ads. Now a new momentum has gained precedence in the last few years, which breaks the old imagery of women being in the backdrop or shown as an eye candy. While big brands are doing their bit, smaller brands are also creating milestones.' Fiberfitness' shows the most beautiful gift given by a son to his mother and father, of being healthy for life by joining health club. Here, again, the mother is given most importance. While women employees add up to 30% of work force in the software industry, there are instances where still few brands showcase women mostly as homemaker or just glamed up. But the percentage to which the role of women has changed over the recent years is quite an eye opener.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

The total number of respondents who had participated in the research paper is 500. It can be seen that the number of people who had mostly taken part in the survey is ranging from 20 to 29 years of age. The number of male was lesser than that of women. The percentage of women stood at 60% whereas the number of men stood at 40%. Therefore, the majority number of responses came from the female end in comparison to the male end.

Question No.1: Do you think the way of portrayal of women in Indian Advertisement has changed in recent time?

67.3% of respondents have chosen 'Yes', which pretty much concludes that even if its minimal, there still has been changes in how the society portrays women in advertisements.

On the other hand, the next majority (29.1%) went for the option ‘Maybe’. This signifies that even when most people are sure that there have been changes in how women are portrayed in the advertisements. There are also a wise number of people who are still unsure about the process. Hence, the percentage of the respondents who said ‘No’ i.e. 7.3% of respondents can be counted together with the people who are unsure.

Question No.2: Is the change has positive or negative impact?

58.9% of respondents think that this change in the portrayal of women has been both positive and negative in addition to 36.4% of people think it has a positive impact on the society.

On the flip side of the coin, 3.6% of the respondents think it is a negative effect while 9.1% of the think there has been no such changes, which is very real. Since, every single person has lived a different life with different experiences; it was already assumed that some people will witness the changes and some don’t. Not all societies and communities accept such changes or has people with such a mindset. Hence, this difference is very evident.

Question No.3: Do you think that women are represented in sexual and erotic ways over popular media like TV?

67.3% of people believe that women had been objectified over popular media several times as a means of getting special attention. It can be agreed that there has been several such instances every single person had to come across regarding this particular aspect, at least once in their lives. 20% of the crew don’t think the same way whereas 14.5 % percent claim that they have no idea about this particular subject.

Question No.4: Do you agree that in few advertisements women have been projected as educated and career oriented ?

80% of people agree that women have been projected as educated and career oriented in different advertisement commercials and 20% of the respondents have disagreed to the cause.

This has kind of been controversial on different levels over time. The broad minded ones would want to accept the changing times and create meaningful ideas to create new advertisements irrespective of genders, whereas there would also be the ones who would still think sticking to old fashioned ways will get them the attention they need. Therefore, in the light of such a situation, it can be said that it is good to see majority of people witnessing advertisements where women are portrayed as a bright and independent entity.

In my survey, 62.3% of respondents feel that the recent changes in the portrayal of women will have a positive impact on women. 39.6% of people do not think the same way and 9.4% of people are saying that there would not be any such effect.

Question No.6: Do you think that in Kitchen appliances or any cooking ingredients advertisement male can be projected?

It is a fact that Cooking/Kitchen related activities are mostly associated with women and there have also been advertisements where mothers are teaching their daughters how to cook well because that would pave their way in becoming a “good wife”. My question to

my respondents was if they think that portraying men in the same role would be fine or not.

85.5% of people think that it would be okay to do the same on contrary to which 14.5% of people think that “Maybe” it would be okay and 1.8% of people aren’t okay with the very thought, from which we can conclude that majority of the respondents are okay with having men in the same role as women, unlike a small percentage.

Question No.7: How often do you find women model has been used as sex object in advertisement?

40.4% of the respondents come across such sexist advertisements mostly every day or 40.4% of them at least came across them once in a week in majority. 11.5 % gets to see such advertisements once in a month and yearly respectively.

Question No.8: Do you think sexualisation of women is an effective way to sell a product ?

45.3% of people do not think sexualisation of women is an effective way to sell a product where as 39.6% of people astonishingly think maybe it is an effective way and 18.6% of them think that it is effective. Therefore, it can be concluded that there’s a long way to go and get the whole percentage to agree on considering sexualisation of women in advertisements as wrong and ineffective means in selling a product.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that the role of women in television advertising has evolved throughout time. Despite the fact that women in India have been stereotyped as conventional and stereotypical for decades, there is a distinction in the product categories that they promote. The women have left the secured domain of their home and are now in the battlefield of life, fully armoured with their talent.

They had proven themselves. But in India they are yet to get their dues. The last fifty years the Independence of India, we have seen women coming out to be educated, to do jobs, to make careers, yet the perception that women are second to men has not been erased. Advertising is thought to be a creative field. Is it, however, creative to portray women in this way? I admire advertisements that represent strong women as human beings who have grown into their full potential. And I have a question for advertisers who portray women in a sexist way: do any ladies in your family look like the women you show in your ads? If that's not the case, where do you get your ideas?

But, in comparison to advertisers in the 1990s, advertisers in the decade 2000 are more eager to portray women in male-dominated advertising. This study tried to cover as many advertisements as possible in order to investigate the shifting portrayal of women in Indian television commercials. However, it does not cover all adverts, and future studies may be able to cover a larger number of ads. In addition, the evolving portrayal of men might be investigated, and a comparison analysis would add to the study's depth. A comparative analysis of advertisements from various countries could be conducted to assist international corporations. In the last several years, Indian advertising has seen a dramatic transition. The way women are portrayed in advertising has changed over time,

mirroring the societal changes that have occurred at the same time. Advertising is one of the most powerful mediums that influence us both consciously and unconsciously in our daily lives. It has a huge impact on the way society is shaped in a larger sense.

The rise of progressive advertisements is a positive sign for feminist causes in India, but there are a few grains of salt to be taken with the obvious benefits. India's rapidly growing middle class has no doubt helped spur the development of higher levels of gender equality, with many of these progressive ads being targeted at that audience. Obviously even middle and upper class women still face numerous challenges, but the climate has shifted as far as what they can and cannot do, and these advertisements reflect that. Home-maker is still an option, but so is student, pilot, soldier, sports star, politician, academic, and so on. And yet ultimately this is a relatively small audience in a country where around three quarters of the population is still rural. The vast majority of Indian women are not included in the audience for these progressive ads. The ages targeted tend to be teenage to thirties and the audience is never the lower classes. For most women traditional roles still take precedence. Furthermore, not a single one of the progressive ads displayed showed a woman with a family or long term relationship, subtly implying a sort of mutual exclusivity between independence/empowerment and family life. This message is quietly subversive to the otherwise empowering tone, and also ignores the reality of both outside work and domestic life as being the dual responsibilities of countless women. Essentially, these ads imply that a woman can only be empowered/independent etc if: she is young, single, middle to upper class, does not have family/home obligations or children, etc. If, however, economic stabilization increases and more women acquire a higher level of purchase power, progressive ads may well reach a wider audience with their message of empowerment.

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