

## GENDER PORTRAYALS IN INDIAN TV ADVERTISEMENTS: UNDERSTANDING THE PERCEPTION OF YOUTH IN ROHTAK

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### Abstract

*In today's dynamic environment, mass media, especially advertisements, significantly shape perceptions about product appeal and societal norms, notably gender roles. Gender distinctions, vital in defining societal roles, also perpetuate entrenched stereotypes (Dominelli, 2007, p. 29). A study at Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, titled "Gender Portrayals in Indian TV Advertisements: Understanding the Perception of Youth in Rohtak," examined young adults' perspectives (20-25 years) on these portrayals. The findings highlighted a mix of traditional and evolving gender representations. While many ads upheld traditional roles, others showcased diverse female roles. Respondents favored conventional roles but stressed ads should be convincing, brief, informative, and respectful. The study underscores a need for more authentic and inclusive advertising, aligning with modern perspectives on gender equality.*

**Keywords:** Gender, Television, Youth, Advertisements.

### I. Introduction

In today's fast-paced world, numerous resources cater to mankind, with mass media being notably pervasive. Clarke (1992) highlights how various media forms, like television, radio, and magazines, shape people's perceptions. Advertisements, a significant aspect of this media, subtly reinforce societal beliefs about gender and race (McLaughlin & Goulet, 1999). Gender profoundly influences modern advertising, encapsulating societal views on masculinity, femininity, and their associated stereotypes (Dominelli, 2007, p. 29). While traditional Indian roles depict men as providers and women as homemakers, evolving movements challenge and redefine these stereotypes. Yet, advertisements often lag, perpetuating dated gender roles rather than reflecting contemporary achievements of women. Kotler and Keller (2008) define advertising as a sponsored non-personal promotion, but the industry frequently defaults to traditional gender norms for clarity (Kim & Lory, 2005). Notably, men dominate ad narratives, side-lining women to glamorous roles in India's advertising landscape, overlooking their intellectual contributions. Early studies, like Bardwick and Schumann (1967), observed this skewed portrayal, with women often confined to domestic settings. Men are supposed to be the main attraction in maximum advertisements - their concern, their actions, their accomplishment, their woes, where the significance of the women are marginalized (Schaffter, 2006, p. 50). The women are confined to the glamorous role in Indian advertisement industry. The Indian advertisements rarely see a woman as intellectual, self-assured, independent and productively undertaking the responsibilities and contributing efficiently in society. Rather the women are seen as the objects – beautiful objects for the eyes with full concentration on their body and body parts. In India though the

gender roles are getting little bit relaxed in household chores, many roles still remain firm (Jananpathy, 2002, p. 227). Bardwick and Schumann (1967) in one of the earliest studies on gender role portrayals in television advertisements found that in comparison to men women appeared mostly inside the home and as housewives in television advertisements. For the marketing of the beauty products, most of the advertisement companies use glamour, women in the sense to attract attention of a men or looking beautiful to please men. The women audiences have an influence of these advertisements. In some advertisement women are shown to be housewives in a role of caretaker and home cantered work etc. Consequently, the Indian government introduced measures, such as the 'Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act,' aiming to regulate and prevent negative gender portrayals in media (Joshua, 2013).

## II. Rationale

The depiction of women in media, particularly advertisements, has been a longstanding subject of academic inquiry and public discourse. This proposed study aims to scrutinize the patterns and trends in how women are portrayed in Indian television commercials and gauge the youth's perceptions of these depictions. It's crucial to assess female representation in media, given the historical invisibility and often skewed portrayal of women. Numerous studies, including those by Courtney and Lokeretz (1971), Dominick and Rauch (1972), and Hassim (2006), emphasize the media's tendency to misrepresent women, perpetuating both positive and negative stereotypes. Therefore, understanding the media's role in shaping these images and discerning young people's perceptions becomes imperative.

Television stands as a pivotal medium for mass communication, fostering awareness, knowledge dissemination, and behavioral change. This study zeroes in on advertisements due to their persuasive nature and significant influence in molding consumer behavior and attitudes. Despite advancements, gender disparities persist in ads, often relegating women to secondary roles or using them merely as product endorsers, reflecting underlying gender inequalities.

Using a structured questionnaire, this research aims to explore the youth's perceptions, particularly those aged 20-25, about women's portrayal in Indian TV advertisements. Additionally, the study seeks insights into the cultivation theory of mass communication, exploring how media's repetitive portrayals shape societal perceptions and norms over time.

## III. Theoretical Framework

Advertising plays a pivotal role in shaping societal views on gender roles, and historically, Indian ads have often reinforced outdated stereotypes about women. These depictions frequently relegated women to domestic spheres, highlighting their subservience and reducing them to mere physical attributes, mirroring entrenched patriarchal values.

The influx of Western influences in the 1990s, post-economic liberalization, brought both Western beauty standards and progressive advertising concepts to India. Brands like Nike and Dove spearheaded messages of inclusivity and female empowerment, striking a chord with

the Indian populace. As we moved into the 21st century, feminist narratives began influencing Indian advertising, challenging prevailing biases. Initiatives like the "Dark is Beautiful" campaign tackled colorism head-on, advocating for a spectrum of beauty standards. Meanwhile, Ariel's #ShareTheLoad emphasized household gender equality, urging men to partake in domestic chores.

Today's Indian advertising landscape is evolving. Leading brands are portraying women beyond traditional roles, spotlighting them as professionals and trailblazers. Examples include Unilever's "Kan Khajura Tesan," which highlighted women's decision-making roles, and Star Plus's "Nayi Soch," lauding female cricketers.

However, hurdles remain. Instances like Fair & Lovely's branding overhaul and Manforce Condoms' contentious ads spotlight persistent biases and objectification. To genuinely advance gender equity, brands must prioritize authenticity, address internal biases, and ardently advocate for inclusivity, steering India toward a more egalitarian cultural paradigm.

- Pavani et al. (2017) explored the portrayal of women in Indian television ads, focusing on how these influences adolescent girls' purchasing decisions. Their findings revealed that advertisements depicting women primarily as beauty symbols significantly influenced these choices.
- Fatma (2016) scrutinized the evolving portrayal of women in television commercials, noting that these portrayals often adhere to male-dominated ideologies, confining women to traditional household roles.
- Nath (2016) delved into the efficacy and drawbacks of using sex appeal in advertisements. He discovered that excessive sexual content could backfire, emphasizing the need for marketers to judiciously incorporate such elements based on product context.
- Sasirekha et al. (2020) analyzed the portrayal of women's body image in magazine ads, noting that models typically showcased were young, attractive, and slender, potentially influencing readers' self-perception and aspirations.
- Kumari and Shivani (2015) evaluated women's representation in Indian media advertisements, observing a predominant portrayal of women as homemakers endorsing household products, often utilizing young models for brand promotions.
- Eisend (2022) assessed the portrayal of older individuals in advertising, revealing mixed reactions. He emphasized the need for advertisers to consider societal implications, particularly ageism, in their campaigns.
- Chatley (2018) explored women's roles in Indian advertisements, noting evolving representations yet highlighting persistent depictions of women balancing multiple roles while primarily attending to domestic responsibilities.
- Kumar (2017) investigated perceptions of overt sexualization in ads, noting its potential to attract consumers but also its risks in creating negative brand associations.
- Sharma and Bumb (2021) examined gender differences in perceptions of women's roles in advertising, concluding that varied viewpoints exist among Indian men and women, impacting purchasing intentions.

- Das and Sharma (2017) studied young adults' perceptions of women in Indian TV ads, revealing that while some portrayals aligned with cultural norms, scantily clad depictions did not foster lasting brand loyalty.
- Soni (2020) probed the societal impact of advertisements on women's self-perception. Her research highlighted the pressure women feel to conform to specific physical ideals propagated in commercials, which negatively impacts self-esteem and contributes to issues like eating disorders, especially among young females.

#### **IV. Research Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, will be employed during the data collection phase. Quantitative research aids in gathering statistically measurable data, while qualitative methods facilitate capturing the perceptions of the youth effectively. Content Analysis is defined as a systematic examination of the content within communication, focusing on meanings, contexts, and intentions embedded in messages. Positioned at the intersection of observation and document analysis, content analysis serves as a methodological approach where the content produced by individuals is examined and analyzed. This method is often viewed as an unobtrusive or non-reactive form of social research, as it analyzes pre-existing communications rather than eliciting direct responses from individuals (Kerlinger, 1973). Berelson (1952) further elucidates content analysis as a technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative evaluation of the explicit content within communication. For this study, a content analysis tool will be utilized to extract qualitative insights, while a semi-structured questionnaire will be employed to gather quantitative data.

#### **Locale of the study**

The descriptive study was conducted in Haryana. The locale of the research is Rohtak, Haryana at Maharishi Dayanand University (MDU) with (Post graduation students). According to the Census of India (2011), Haryana is the state with lowest female Sex Ratio; 861 (female per thousand male). Haryana is the state in which the patriarchy system is strictly followed and the youth have been selected for the study as it will be interesting to explore their perception about the Indian TV commercial advertisements, living and being up brought in the same environment. The research will be conducted in two phases:

**Phase-I** Two leading private general entertainment channels (GECs) were chosen based on their high TRP ratings. The study observed advertisements aired during prime time, specifically from 8 to 9 pm. These advertisements were meticulously watched, categorized, recorded, and systematically coded. Utilizing predetermined categories such as status, role/traits, setting credibility, voice-over, eye contact, and product category, each advertisement was coded for analysis. The research then delved into the frequency of these variables, exploring associations among the categories using appropriate statistical methods. Among all the advertisements viewed, the ten most frequently aired ones were prioritized. This phase primarily emphasized a content analysis of these selected advertisements.

**Phase-II** The study's second phase will engage a sample of 60 participants aged between 20 and 25 years. Participants will be sourced from Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, using a non-probability purposive sampling method. Among the six advertisements chosen for this phase, three will portray stereotypical roles of women, while the remaining three will depict non-stereotypical roles. These advertisements will be presented to the selected participants. Alongside basic demographic inquiries, respondents will answer questions addressing the varied roles women assume in TV advertisements. The findings from the semi-structured questionnaire will be organized systematically to evaluate the collective perceptions of the audience. Additionally, it will highlight any discernible differences in perceptions based on gender and age concerning the representation of women in Indian TV commercials.

### Sample and Sampling Techniques

#### Sample

**Phase-1:** For content analysis of the advertisements, ten advertisements are selected. The advertisements will be selected on the basis on their repetition during the prime time (8-9pm).

- Inclusion criteria: TV channels with the highest TRP. And the Advertisements shown in prime time (8-9pm)
- Exclusion criteria: TV channels with low TRP. And the Advertisements shown in time slot then than prime time.

**Phase-II:** To capture a diverse range of perspectives from respondents, a semi-structured questionnaire will serve as the primary research instrument. A survey involving 60 participants will be conducted using purposive sampling techniques. This sample will comprise an equal distribution of genders, with 30 young males and 30 young females from Maharishi Dayanand University. The selection criteria target individuals aged 20-25 who are either pursuing or have completed their master's degrees. These chosen respondents will be presented with six specific advertisements for evaluation.

**Inclusion Criteria:** The focus is on post-graduate students from Maharishi Dayanand University. Given their advanced educational background, post-graduate students are presumed to possess a deeper understanding of the nuances surrounding women's portrayal in advertising. Their academic exposure enables them to critically analyze and articulate perceptions about these advertisements more comprehensively and insightfully.

**Exclusion Criteria:** Undergraduate students are excluded from this study due to their comparatively limited knowledge base when juxtaposed with their post-graduate counterparts.

#### Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling will guide our data collection approach. This non-probability sampling method allows for the deliberate selection of specific participants based on known attributes

or characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. Unlike random sampling, where participants are chosen by chance, in purposive sampling, researchers possess prior knowledge about the sample, ensuring alignment with the study's goals. This method is favored for its precision, offering more targeted and relevant insights. As Dane (1990) aptly states, "Purposive sampling's strength lies in its ability to pinpoint individuals or events that are pivotal to the study's core objectives."

### **Data collection**

Advertisements will be watched in the prime time during the period of one week out of which most repeated ten advertisements will be selected for the content analysis. Six advertisements will be chosen and then these advertisements will be shown to the respondents to know their perception towards the portrayal of women in Indian television advertisements.

## **V. Results and discussions**

### **Findings and discussions: Phase-I**

The qualitative assessment examines advertisements, assessing both stereotypical and non-stereotypical portrayals. Those receiving higher TRP ratings naturally receive extended airtime. Given that these ads reach audiences across age groups, it's crucial they avoid depicting women in ways that could negatively influence society. Among the ten most frequently aired advertisements studied, six presented stereotypical portrayals, often casting women in domestic roles. In contrast, two ads showcased women in diverse roles outside traditional domestic settings. This disparity underscores evolving societal attitudes; as perceptions shift over time, advertisers are increasingly crafting non-stereotypical content that resonates more authentically with viewers.

### **Phase-II**

Respondents predominantly watch television for over an hour, favoring entertainment channels, particularly music and dance genres. FMCG product advertisements attract most viewers, with females gravitating towards beauty products like soaps and creams, while males lean towards durable goods like mobiles and bikes. A significant 60% of female respondents perceive advertisements as informative about new products. Interestingly, 13% of males and 10% of females believe these ads offer valuable insights for decision-making.

Regarding gender portrayal, a striking 95% of respondents recognize women as central figures in FMCG ads. Some also note women's prominence in ads for durables like mixers and purifiers. While 43% of males endorse traditional roles for women, emphasizing their perceived perfection in such roles, 33% of females stress the importance of gender equality. However, a similar fraction of females see no issue with women's portrayal in traditional roles. A majority across genders (57% males and 53% females) appreciate women's representation in ads for boosting product sales and setting examples. Yet, concerns arise over negative depictions causing societal embarrassment. Respondents value advertisements that are concise, persuasive, informative, and culturally resonant.



## VI. Conclusion

Television remains an omnipresent force in our lives, reaching an astounding 96.5% of the population with 183 million households owning a television set (BARC 2015). Recognized as a premier platform for targeted advertising, television's unique ability to simultaneously engage a vast audience has made it a preferred medium for marketing experts. Despite the higher costs associated with television commercials, their strategic placement during prime programming ensures their efficacy in conveying specific sales pitches to viewers. However, the repetitive nature of these advertisements, though monotonous to adults, leaves an enduring impact on impressionable young minds.

The portrayal of women in media, particularly in advertisements, has sparked extensive research and debate. Such portrayal is crucial as media often perpetuates skewed images of women, either through invisibility or negative representation (Courtney and Lokeretz 1971, Dominick and Rauch 1972, Ferrante et al. 1988, among others). Consequently, understanding youth perceptions regarding these portrayals becomes imperative, given media's profound influence on societal norms and gender roles.

Mass communication via television not only fosters awareness but also shapes behavior and perceptions. Advertisements, being persuasive and captivating, significantly influence attitudes toward products, services, and societal norms. A concerning trend emerges when analyzing gender representation in commercials. While both genders appear in ads, men often dominate roles of authority and leadership, while women frequently find themselves confined to domestic settings, perpetuating age-old stereotypes. To probe deeper into these perceptions, a study was undertaken focusing on youth aged 20-25. This research sought to gauge their reactions to women's portrayals in Indian TV ads, considering both stereotypical and non-stereotypical content. While some advertisements showcased progressive images, others clung to traditional gender roles, predominantly portraying women as homemakers. This dichotomy underscores the lingering societal adherence to age-old gender norms.

Interestingly, respondents exhibited a blend of traditional values and contemporary expectations. While many felt comfortable with women in traditional roles, there was a palpable openness to more diverse and realistic portrayals. Respondents emphasized the importance of advertisements being informative, concise, and relatable, advocating for authentic depictions rooted in real-life experiences. Thus, while many viewers express satisfaction with current gender portrayals, there's a growing consensus for more balanced and inclusive representations.

In conclusion, while television advertising remains a potent influencer, it also holds a mirror to society's evolving perceptions of gender. As brands navigate this landscape, striking a balance between tradition and progress becomes paramount. Authenticity, inclusivity, and a nuanced understanding of diverse audience sentiments will be crucial in shaping a more equitable and reflective advertising ecosystem.

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