

# PROGRESSION OF THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISING: FLOUTING DOWN THE CONCEPT OF GENDER STEREOTYPING

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*Advertisements play a significant role in changing the outlook of society. It not only plays role in creating awareness among the people about the various products and services available but also helps to project the image of people associated with the advertisement. Advertisements always portray men and women in different roles and it is seen that women are projected as a weaker section in the advertisements they are often shown dependent on the men. It is believed that an advertisement contributes to the role of gender stereotyping. Advertisements reflect the value, thoughts, culture and shape of society. Advertisements reflect the stereotype that women do not do important things, are dependent on men, lack individuality are regarded by men primarily as sex objects, are preoccupied with beauty and motherhood and should be in home As a one of the biggest medium of communication Advertisements should contribute towards improving the projected image of women and try to improve it. The paper aims to present the various roles which are played by women and how these roles have been revolutionized with the period of time and how it has helped to project the women in different roles*

**KEYWORDS:** *Advertisement, women, gender stereotyping, Symbolic Annihilation***INTRODUCTION**

Advertisements are one of the most effective means of circulating information among the masses. They aim at achieving the basic objective of profit maximization. They are paid mechanism of reaching people. Advertising involves a commercially viable language of appearances and images in which commodity relations systematically penetrate and organize cultural meaning. The print and television advertising media is one area where these changes are significantly visible, targeting the consumers and thus influencing their purchasing behaviour. The consumer purchases various commodities for their basic needs in order to sustain life. A successful commercial that creates a lot of “buzz” can earn a spot in media history. Advertising is the window of society thus we can say that advertisements reflect the views prevailing in

society. “Advertising is a highly visible and seemingly controversial agent of socialization” by Paff, Lakner, 1997. They appear everywhere in lives whether it is print media, electronic media, magazines, bill boards, internet, mailboxes and now even in restaurants, clubs etc. Advertisements have a capability of bringing social change in society. Hence they play a significant role in showcasing the image of women. Women are normally shown as housewives, dependent on men, object of beautification, inferior to males they normally play role of good wife, sister, mother but there are very less advertisements which display other roles which a women play in society whether it is of home runner, motivator and equal to their counterparts in all the spheres of life. However there large number of changes which are taking place in the field of advertisements to improve the

image of women and to overcome the concept of gender stereotyping which exist in the field of advertisements.

**Gender Stereotyping in Advertisements**

Gender Stereotyping in advertisements refers to the image in advertising that depicts or displays stereotypical gender roles. Gender displays are prominently used in advertising in order to establish the role of one gender in relation with the other. It is believed that advertisers focus on gender relationship because people define themselves by gender. *Goffman* believes that when we look at ads carefully, they are in fact very strange creations, particularly as regards their portrayals of gender relations. He shows us that in advertising the best way to understand the male/female relation is to compare it to the parent/child relation in which men take on the roles of parents while women behave as children normally would be expected to. In advertising women are treated largely as children *Erving Goffman in his book Gender Advertisements [1979]*. Advertisements draw its material and information from the society ,experience of the audience and displays such information in the way that helps to sell up the product .Men

and women are always projected in the advertisements according to the concept of femininity and masculinity. For example, when people think of an advertisement for a household cleaner, what comes to mind, most likely, is a woman. It is also likely that the picture in mind of peple corresponds closely to what researchers have called the .happy housewife stereotype. According to Gender stereotypical perceptions women are supposed to be dependent, weak, incompetent, emotional, fearful, flexible, passive, modest, soft-spoken, gentle, care takers while men are powerful, competent, important, logical, decision-makers, aggressive, focused, strong and assertive. (*Media and Gender Stereotyping :The need for Media Literacy, Adhikari Sharda 2014* )Deepa Dhanraj, a Bangalore-based activist and documentary filmmaker, wrote in a paper for an international seminar in 1990 : “In Indian advertising, women are used as models in sexist ads for diverse products from tyres to ceiling fans. Apart from this, a stereotyped notion of gender roles is explicit in the casting for ads. Primary roles for men as demonstrators, experts are used and their physical presence is male strongly felt as the authoritarian ‘Voice of God’ in commentaries.

**Table -I**

**Displaying masculinity and femininity in advertisements**

Masculinity in advertising	Femininity in advertising
Alert and conscious of surroundings	Touching self
Standing upright	Caressing an object
Eyes open and looking around	Lying on the floor
Bodies are controlled	Sitting on a bed or chair
Mean expression on face	Not alert
Gripping things tightly with hands	Holding an object or a man for support
Hands in pockets	Seductive

*Jhally, Sut. "The Codes of Gender". Media Education Foundation. Retrieved 14 October 2011.*

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

*Dominick and Raincheck* in earliest studies in 1971 found that women were mostly portrayed in role of housewife and the occupational role of women was substantially less as compared to men In 1998 *Anusha Chopra* in her report has specified that the portrayal of women in print media is quite degrading more often she is depicted as a commercial commodity. *B.A Browne, 1998* points that boys and girls are shown in traditional roles in commercials featuring children. Boys are shown aggressive, dominant whereas girls appears shy, giggling and deferent. *Malika Das in 2000* made a comparative study of men and women portrayals in Indian magazine advertisements and in other western countries .She says that in both the cases Indian as well as western advertisement s the two sexes are used for advertisement of different types of products. *Kilbournne 2002* specifies that advertising is a 100 billion dollar per year industry. Advertising can be one of the most powerful source of education in our society. *Schaffter (2006)* has analyzed 200 advertisements from 1994 to 2005 .She says that sexism and gender stereotyping are still prevalent in advertising industry in India. She even says that there is innocuous distortion of reality by advertisers, as it predisposes women to unfair treatment by society. *Deodrin Correa (2011)* in ‘the construction of gender identity in India through television advertisements : A semiotic analysis ’ found that all advertisements involving domesticity emphasized traditional role of women as wife and mother. *V.L.R Moorthi in 2014* studied ‘The changing role portrayed by women in Indian Advertisement ’ He studied 25 television advertisements from 1980-1990 ,35 advertisements from

1999-2000 and 45 advertisements from 2000-2001 . He concludes that advertisements in year 2000 are willing to portray woman in male dominated ads as compared to advertisements up to 1990. Thus a study of literature reveals that portrayal of women in advertisement has changed over a period of time but the change is negligible as compared to the role change that has actually taken place in real world. Hence showing vast disparity between the, *REEL* life and *REAL* life image of women.

**PROJECTION OF WOMEN IN THE ADVERTISEMENTS**

**a)Women as Homemakers** –Women are placed in advertisements that consumers associate them to (*Peden*). Women are often seen with ‘rough house work’ such as washing the dishes (*Mullins and Pearson 238*) , softness , tenderness ,politeness are the few words associated with women and theses adjectives are well portrayed in the advertisements featuring women as homemakers .These characteristics make women fit for advertisements of washing powders ,kitchen appliances etc .

**b) Women as epitome of Motherhood** - It is also seen that the women are shown as epitome of love .She is shown in the advertisement of brands featuring electric appliances, utensils, food and culinary items. For example, *Hawkins* one of the premier brand of pressure cookers has been portraying women as mother, wife as it is believed that food cooked by mother or wife is tasty and healthy or how can we forget the advertisement of *Johnson and Johnson* in

which it is shown that how women can take care of child and it is seen that if they choose males for such products they are usually shown struggling with the product and showcasing the need of women who can actually manage the homes. In the advertisement of Bournvita women are shown portraying the role of mother in which she boost up her son to excel in life and face all the challenges. Thus giving positive vibes to the real life mothers.

**c) Women as objects** – Researches have proven that women are often used as objects in the advertisement. Research has shown that advertising can manipulate and deform images of women in the media, to create a stereotype of women as sex objects. It has also been proven that men almost always appear fully clothes while women are constantly portrayed as wearing less clothing, which comes back to the issue of women being portrayed more as objects. Throughout the past forty years, the representation of sexuality in advertisements has grown a lot, especially for women. This is due to the high levels of “themes and behaviors” (Courtney & Edison) we see in the media every day. This objectification is a violation of duty of business towards society i.e. corporate social responsibility. The negative impact of objectification is clearly defined by Dr. Jean Kilbourne who notes that, “turning a human being into a thing is almost always the first step in justifying violence against that person”.

**d) Women as object of beautification** – Most of the ads on TV sell us values and images (Kilbourne; “Killing Us Softly 4”). They show us feelings as well that can make us sad, happy, and fearful, etc. Women come up with the theory of “how we look” and what is the ideal female beauty is. Most models in magazines are extremely photo shopped and women feel pressured to measure up to these unrealistic images of women. In order to be portrayed as beauty objects they are often used in advertisements involving beauty products, clothes, tight jeans and fairness creams.

**e) Women as ‘Symbolic Annihilation’** – The concept of ‘symbolic annihilation’ was introduced by George Gerbner (1972). He first briefly referenced the concept without elaboration as: “*representation in the fictional world signifies social existence; absence means symbolic annihilation.*” Gerbner used this concept to reveal how representations (including omissions), in the media cultivate dominant assumptions about how the world works and, as a result, where power resides.

## CHANGE IN THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ADVERTISEMENTS

It has been observed that there has been considerable change in the role of women in advertisement. From the image of housewife to house runner, from the image of weak section of society to a more confident and self dependent women, to a weak timid creature to a sound, powerful and motivator. Depiction of women in advertisements has changed and it is becoming healthier over the time. In most of the advertisements of recent times, a woman is projected as confident, extrovert, dominant and having go getting attitude rather than just portraying them stereotypically as being a homemaker washing clothes, utensils, cooking, taking care of family members etc (*Positive Portrayal of Women in TV Ads by Kouser Noor Fathima*)

These changes are discussed below –

**1. Women as home runner** – Now a days we often see the advertisements that feature women as the home runners

She is considered to be equal to men in all the spheres of life. Titan Raga Add display the positive side of women This little short sees a woman bump into an old lover at the airport. As the conversation turns nostalgic, the guy claims that they could be made as a couple, if she’d only quit her job. Suffice to say, this doesn’t go down too well with the woman, who makes it clear that she’ll do whatever she damn well wants to. According to Titan, they celebrate the woman who is modern, progressive, confident and passionate.

**2. Advertisements displaying the equality among genders** – Advertisements have started displaying men and women in reversal roles as it was believed that management of home, kids is always the work of women but the advertisements are breaking up this myth for example Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine This one features a couple going shopping for a washing machine. The man stands around, stares at his phone and boldly proclaims that the store clerk should show his wife the machine, as it’s her ‘department.’ The next few scenes make it clear that doing the laundry is, in fact, nobody’s department so to speak, and expecting women to stick to these roles is not just sexist but is also massively regressive.

**3. Women as society changer** – Now a days advertisements feature women as brave, bold, smart thus breaking down the image of being soft and kind for example Nirma Ambulance Ad

In stark contrast to earlier Nirma ads, this one features a strong message of female empowerment. It depicts two women who decide to take matters into their own hands, helping push a car out of a ditch while all the men stand around and watch helplessly. Oh, and they get their clothes dirty too! Nirma switched from portraying women as home-makers to women as change-makers.

**4. Women no longer an object of beautification- Advertisements** feature women as more independent, care free and self lover. She is no longer concerned about beauty or looking slim

**5. Advertisements featuring women as independent and confident** – The women are shown as more confident and independent and happy. This is very well displayed in the advertisement of Pleasure which displays that why should boys have all the fun and breaking down the stereotypes by motivating the young teenage girls.

**6. Advertisements featuring women brave and beautiful** - Dabur Vatika’s ‘Brave and Beautiful’ campaign focused on the struggle of cancer survivors, especially women who lose their hair during chemotherapy, and the social negation they face in the process. This ad depicts one of these women foregoing her head-scarf to go to work, and the support she receives from the people around her, regardless of how she looks.

## CONCLUSION

It is rightly believed that media has power to change the society. It has power to create literacy among people, change the outlook of women although lot of efforts are being made to change the image of women but the road is very tough and lot needs to be done. The advertisement agencies, makers should make all the efforts to remove the concept of gender stereotyping which prevails in the society. There are some of the smart marketing techniques that need to be adopted by many advertisers to challenge long standing assumptions about who does the cooking and cleaning, which brings home the bacon, and what motivates Mrs Consumer to buy. A self

regulation in media against obscenity and violence along with stricter implementation of law is the need of the hour .The social responsibility is necessary and the media should scale down a little bit on the profit motive in the interest of the greater public good. In such a situation because of some advertisements at times the women, society and consumers become a harassed lot. Therefore, there arises the need to study the dynamics of violation of both women and consumer rights and asses the policies and institutions to protect them.

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