

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISING: A PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

In recent years, Indian advertising has witnessed a significant transformation in the manner in which women are portrayed. The way women are depicted in advertising changes with times, reflecting the transformation taking place in society. Advertising is one of the major media that affect our daily life consciously and unconsciously and are responsible to play a significant role in shaping the society in a much broader perspective. Women today are no longer consolidated behind kitchen walls. Their aspiration for coming out of the door also taught society to think differently. Marketer wisely utilised this transformation process to launch their product and advertisement strategically.

Present study, provides a broad outlines the various ways through which women are depicted in Indian advertisements.

Key Words: Women, Indian advertisement, Media, Advertising effectiveness

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Introduction:

Advertisement is a part of society and affects our daily life, both consciously and subconsciously. The content and message of advertisements, therefore, have a very responsible role to play in the shaping of a society and its more. In recent years, Indian advertising has witnessed a significant transformation in the manner in which women are portrayed. Women have been depicted in numerous contexts and in innumerable ways in Indian advertising – as a girl child, a prospective mother, a home-marker, a career women and also as one who just enhances the appeal of the advertisement.

We can't forget *Lalitaji*, dressed in a white sari with a blue border saying “*Surf ki kharidaari mein hi samajhdaari hai?*” This advertisement from the mid-1980's, was a landmark in Indian advertising history, as it presented a hitherto unseen image of the Indian housewife, as a discerning individual, who made intelligent choices (*see. Exhibit 1*).

Exhibit 1



Source: <http://projectbee.wordpress.com/2008/01/>

Literature review:

Considerable number of research and commentary has been found regarding portrayal of women in advertising. However, few researches had been made in the Indian context with special reference to role portrayal of women in Indian advertising. The review of literature used in this paper found that the most of the research is based on the following techniques primarily. (see Table: 1).

Table: 1

Sl.No.	Techniques of Research
1	Content analyses of magazine and TV advertising
2	Attitudes and intentions toward role portrayal of women in the media
3	Studies dealing with communication effects.
4	Cross cultural comparisons of the role portrayals of women in the mass media

Table: 2

Previous research on women in advertising

Author & year	Study findings
Courtney and Lockeretz (1971)	They found that the ineffectiveness of advertisement To reflect the true range of women's roles within society. Many ads tended to portray women as homemakers neither making important decision nor doing important things, in most of the cases dependent on men or sex objects.
Wagner and Banos (1973)	It was found that more advertisements showed women in working roles and portrayed women in more responsible working capacities.
Wortzel and Frisbie (1974)	They empirically tested the role portrayal preferences of women in advertisements based on 100 reactions of five female roles with seven product advertisement situations, and concluded that the effectiveness of role portrayal depended on the product being

	advertised in media. For instance-for personal, grooming products, the working woman role was preferred, whereas for household appliances it was a family role that was preferred.
Hofstede (1980)	He found that the U.S. culture to be more masculine than the Indian culture. Based on his findings, he ascertain that the women in the U.S.would be portrayed in more diverse roles than women in India.
Bellur and Bellur (1992)	They conducted a study in order to analyse the impact of socio-economic changes on marketing in India. They concluded that westernisation had brought about substantial changes in the social environment. A breakdown of traditions barriers, higher literacy rate and development of a new marketing environment provides a manifesto of change where women not only in traditional roles, but also in modern roles.
Sexton and Haberman (1974)	They found in their study based on how women depicted in magazine advertisements found that women in cigarette advertisements are frequently employed in a decorative capacity, while in home appliance advertisements women were depicted in a traditionally way. On the other hand, Airline advertisements tended to show women as sex objects.

Role of women in Indian Advertising:

Women have been depicted in numerous contexts and in innumerable ways in Indian advertising – as a girl child, a prospective mother, a home-marker, a career woman and also as one who just enhances the appeal of the advertisement. However, majority of modern Indian advertisements present a more realistic and balanced picture of woman. There has been a general shift whereby advertisements have moved from showcasing women merely as tradition-bound homemakers to those playing modern roles. The modern day Indian working woman, who plays multifaceted roles and emerges as one who is, not only in full control of herself, but also has the power to influence others around her. The plethora of changes in India on the cultural, social and

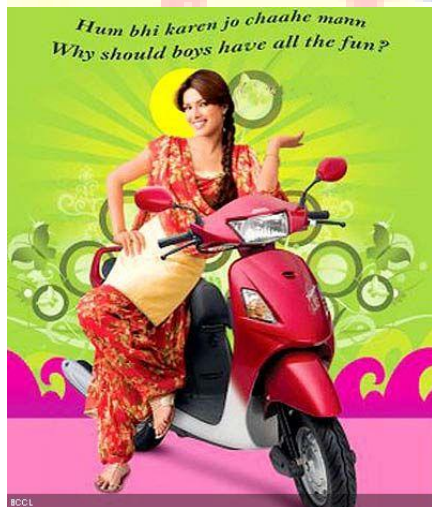
educational fronts has brought about a transformation in society, which, in turn, is also finding its influence on the advertisements of the day.

Women presently constitute a major factor in the work force, as a result a result the role portrayals is expected to become much wider. Career oriented roles are beginning to become more common, but majority of the advertisements still shown woman in a secondary position or as a dutiful housewife taking care of the house, her husband and children.

Women playing non-conventional roles in advertisements are definitely on the increase. They are also finding increasing presence as brand ambassadors and endorsers for products which are not necessarily women-oriented. A sportswoman like *Sania Mirza & Sania Nehwal etc* is often seen and accepted as yielding referent power in advertisements for a variety of products, in the same manner as any other male sports personality.

This is a reflection regarding the acceptance of woman playing many roles and the changing cultural mindset. However, women are portrayed in substantive way in the advertisements for cement, steel or scooter etc (*see.exhibit-2*) which continues to be male dominated. Women are an epitome of both beauty and intelligence, and this has been amply demonstrated in the case of innumerable advertisement models who have won several beauty pageants over the years.

Exihibit-2



Source:<http://www.google.co.in/imgres?q=print+ad+by+priyanka+chopra+in+scooty+ad&um=1&hl=en&sa=N&biw=1024&bih=677&tbm=isch&tbn>

Exhibit-3



Source: <http://www.afaqs.com/advertising/storyboard/index.html?id=2378>

Women are also depicted in an unflattering role in many advertisements. While there are extreme cases of objectionable depiction of women, the general tendency of using a woman to lend glamour and visual appeal to an advertisement is quite common.

Exhibit-4



Source: <http://www.afaqs.com/advertising/storyboard/index.html?id=1986>

Some advertisements present women in poor light in an indirect manner. In a particular after-shave lotion commercial. Women are also used to sell many men's products including men's shaving cream or even men's undergarments (Remember the infamous **Amul Macho ads** with the tagline – *Yeh to bada toing hai!?*)(See.exhibit-5).

Exhibit-5



Source: <http://www.afaqs.com/advertising/storyboard/index.html?id=>

However, many activist organisations have taken up the issue of the “commodification” of the female body. In India, **The Indecent Representation of Women (prohibition) Act, 1986** was passed. The Act forbids the depiction of women in an indecent or derogatory manner in the mass media.

Conclusion:

The new Indian woman is here to stay and she will continue to evolve in her multidimensional role as a girl child, a prospective mother, a home-marker, a career woman and also as one who just enhances the appeal of the advertisement.

Her evolving roles and resulting needs will new business opportunities for marketers. With greater monetary independence, there has been considerable improvement in the way a woman is valued at home. These changes have also led to reduction in the ‘commodity’ status of women and their portrayal as sex objects in advertisements particularly in Indian advertisement context.

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