

## CHANGING ROLE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN TV COMMERCIALS

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### Abstract

In modern times, advertising has become the life line of the business economy. Before the initiation of economic reform policy, very few channels were operating. Government controlled Doordarshan occupying the centre stage. But the open market economy has boosted private players in diverse fields including entertainment areas. Women now in the globalised economy get ample opportunity to promote them as well as find a way to maintain livelihood. In the earlier times, they are portrayed as hardworking homemakers having only job of cooking delicious dishes or to do traditional job of nursing babies, cooking, washing and cleaning. But now many contemporary advertisements portray women in a more positive way i.e. as independent, assertive and a career woman. Since they have now independent purchasing power, they are now being more valued at home. This research paper deals with fastly changing role of women in Indian TV commercials by having a look on some representative advertisements. The emphasis is to link role depiction of women in advertisements with the emerging status of women in Indian Society as advertisements are reflection of changes in the societal fabric.

**Key Words:** Advertising, Women, Portrayal, Role, Society

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## **Introduction**

“Advertising is telling and selling”. It comes from the latin “adverto” which means to turn round. It therefore denotes the means employed to draw attention to any object or purpose. Through an advertisement, an advertiser intends to spread his ideas about his products/ offerings among his customers and products.

Advertisement not only promotes the commodities for commercial gain but it is also a medium through which culture can be promoted, demoted or redefined. This public arena is being consciously or unconsciously is utilized for the promotion or demotion of a particular culture. Although there are many media for advertising, but electronic media especially television captures a lion’s share. It reaches to a wide number of viewers.

## **Review of Literature**

According to Cosmas (1982), the social role of advertising involves a number of interconnected relationships - "those between person and object, use and symbol, symbolism and power, and communication and satisfaction. Thus, advertising must be considered in light of cultural expectations.

Hall (1997) suggests that members of the same culture must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, and thus to interpret the world in roughly similar ways.

According to M K Srivastava (2009), the promotional culture of advertising has worked its way into "what we read, what we care about, the ways we raise our children, our ideas of right and wrong conduct, our attribution of significance to 'image' in both public and private life". Advertising is a social practice, and it does not operate in a vacuum.

## Objectives

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To study the changing role of women in Indian Advertising.
2. To highlight the media's role in constructing the images of women.

## Different Advertising Media in Globalized Economy

There are several categories of advertising listed below:

1. Broadcast media e.g. TV, Film, Radio, Internet and Screen sliders,
2. Outdoor Media e.g. Poster hoardings, Display Boards, Electric signs etc,
3. Print Media e.g. Magazines, Trade Journals, Technical Publications and Periodicals,
4. Transit Railways, Buses, Aircrafts, subways etc,
5. Direct Mail Advertising

1. **Broadcast Advertising-** It is a very popular medium of advertising and includes TV, Radio, and Internet etc. TV advertisements have become very popular from the day they have been introduced. Many factors are taken into consideration to ascertain the cost of advertising. Like time of telecast of ad e.g. prime time or non-peak time, duration of the ad, popularity of TV channel etc (e.g. airing of ad on Colors channel may be more expensive than on Star Utsav). Radio lost its charm few years back but now it is fast picking up because of introduction of FM channels in nearly all big cities. Small-scale advertisers also prefer the radio.



**2. Print Advertising-** Print media is another popular mode of advertising. Nearly every magazine or newspaper is filled with advertisements. Print media also offers options like promotional brochures and fliers for advertising purposes. The advertising space in newspapers and magazines are sold according to the area occupied by the advertisement, the position of advertisement (front page/middle page), as well as the readership of the publications. Like the case of broadcast advertising, in print advertising also an advertisement in a relatively new and less popular newspaper would cost less than placing an advertisement in a popular newspaper with a high readership.

**3. Outdoor Advertising-** Outdoor advertising is also a very popular form of advertising that makes use of several tools and techniques to attract customers outdoors. The most common examples are billboards, kiosks, events and trade shows organized by companies.

**4. Transit Advertising-** It consists of card advertising that is located within buses, subways, and railways and outside display that appear on the front's sides and backs of buses and other public transports, vehicles and terminals etc. It is the lowest cost media and allows geographic and seasonal selectivity. It has high leadership and can reach pedestrian and traveling public. However, it is limited in quantity by the number of public vehicles in operation.

**5. Direct Mail-** It is any advertising sent in mail including sales letters, folders, pamphlets, booklets, catalogues, and the like. It is the most personal and selective media and reaches only desired prospects and has minimum waste in circulation.



The effectiveness of direct mail advertising is measurable and can be timed as per advertiser's will. It can take any size, shape or form permitted by the post office. But direct mail is costly as the receiver may consider it as junk mail as it may not have an entertainment value. Therefore, it is not a very good means of mass communication.

### **Women's Role in Media**

From the year 1991 when the satellite television was introduced, the idiot box of 1980s turned into a new world full of magic and hundreds of channels. It is a fact that all developments lead to unexpected changes. The advertisers too have recognized their specific target groups and have started making advertisements according to target viewers of the serials. Particularly the young children and teenagers are more affected as they are exposed to a new outside world and therefore the advertisements being shown shape their thinking whether it is representation of women or other things. Gender and media is the subject that is being discussed frequently. Media can act as both a perpetrator and as a protagonist. It can either be an accomplice to gender based discrimination by portraying stereotypical sensational images of women or it can provide balanced coverage that empowers women while exposing acts of gender bias. Now, different aspects of television would be analyzed from a gender perspective under the following heads.

- (a) Serials,
- (b) News channels,

(c) Music videos, and

(d) Advertisements.

(a) **Serials:** During the decade of 2000, there was an overdose of serials in comparison to earlier times like popularly watched K-serials on Star Plus (Kasauti Zindagi Ki, Kyonki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi, Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki, Kahin Kisi Roz,) to Zee TV (Teen Bahuraniaan, Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hai, Meri Doli Tere Angna) and Sony TV (Kkusum, Thodi Khushi Thoda Gam and Khwaish). Now there are various serials like Balika Vadhu, Is Des Na Ana Meri Lado, Utran, Phulwa, Lagi Tujhse Lagan etc on a very popular channel Colors and many more channels which depict the changing role of women in Indian Society. The point is what kind of ideals/ role models that we want our young generation to emulate? Do we want our young girls to be like Kalpana Chawla, Sunita Williams, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, Ms Mamta Banerjee, Mrs Indira Gandhi, Madam Curie or to inculcate negative values of being unreliable, malicious and cunning in our relationship? There is a need for a serious analysis of the issue.

(b) **News Channels:** The number of news channel in India is increasing day by day offering their services 24X7 for public attention. They are also doing sting operations to create sensational news. It has been observed that covering gender issues for most TV channels means sensationalizing the news of rape cases, kidnapping, honour killing etc. they keep on searching spicy topics and dish out soap-opera style stories on them. Now, a pertinent question arises here as to how credible is the media? Can we find any one

news channel wholly devoted to women issues? Sadly, the core issues concerning women are not addressed.

- (c) **Music Videos-** There is yet another side to Television i.e. music videos. When we think of a music video, we visualize image of a woman who is titillating (i.e. making someone feel mildly interested/sexually excited) and sensuous. The music industry particularly Bhojpuri music videos and films is attacking women's dignity and right to privacy with lyrics, dialogues, scenes that touch dangerously low level of degradation and sexual abuse. It seems that music companies are using woman's body as an object to maximize their profits and promoting obscenity. This is something that is of serious concern.
- (d) **Advertisements-** Advertisements are a prominent and very significant part of television viewing. It informs, persuades and motivates the consumer about the advertised products, services or ideas. In earlier times, portrayal of women has always varied from one stereotype to another-such as a girl child being a prospective mother, a woman as a sex object or an eye catcher or as homemaker. But times have changed and so has the women in advertising. Women are now no longer confined to four walls of the house; they are moving out and are also supported by her male family members.

Now modern advertisements are presenting a more realistic and balanced picture of Indian women. Let us have a glimpse on some of the advertisements being shown on Indian Television.



1. HERO HONDA PLEASURE (Why should boys have all the fun)- This advertisement advocates women empowerment. Today women have stepped out; realizing their potential in fulfilling their dreams and for them, driving a vehicle is one of the symbols of liberty and fun. This ad completely breaks the notion that outdoor fun is only a domain of men.
2. ARIEL DETERGENT (Ariel ki safai do khusboo mein aaye)- This ad uses the slice of life concept where has returned home from work and comes across a message from his wife that she would be late from work. He then prepares dinner and drops some curry on his shirt and washes it himself. This advertisement has broken the myth that only women are supposed to do household work.
3. ASMI DIAMOND JEWELLERY (I believe in me)- Kajol is viewed as a woman who is traditional yet fully capable of participating in the modern world. Her modernity does not necessarily mean divorce from traditional ethos. She is the brand ambassador of Asmi and provides assurance to the target audience that wants to do things differently without breaking from the past. Here she says she does not believe in stars, talking parrots and crystal balls but believes in herself.

### **Globalization and Advertisements vis a vis Women**

Market economy runs with an extreme motive of profit; numerous attempts are being taken up to promote its business interest. Globalization has facilitated





this process. Private enterprises always try to innovate strategies to sell their products via effective advertisement. In other words, advertisement helps promote goods for commercial gains. Products like gadgets, electronic and house hold items, housing, travel, financial and insurance goods etc advertised to increase the interest in these things amongst the public and to create prospective customers. More importantly in the advertisements, women are predominantly employed to promote products and services. In every item they are utilized whether it requires their presence or not. Before the initiation of economic reform policy, very few channels were operating. Government controlled Doordarshan occupying the centre stage. But the open market economy has boosted private players in diverse fields including entertainment areas. Women now in the globalised economy get ample opportunity to promote them as well as find a way to maintain livelihood.

### **Conclusion**

In advertising, there has been a rapid change in the depiction of women in Indian TV commercials during past two decades. Women in India have now greater physical, cultural and social mobility than what their mothers and grandmothers used to have. Today's woman has the freedom to explore new ways of living, peer bonding, handling relationships, and so on. Since they are getting monetarily independent, their value at home is also increasing. This has reduced the "commodity" status of women and their portrayal as sex objects in advertisements has witnessed a key change. They have kept pace with the changes in the society. While it is common to use women in advertisements to attract men, the reverse is also happening in few cases, though in a subtle way. Further it

appears that neo-liberal economy creates opportunities not for all women, but a certain section of women enjoy the fruits of open market economy. The mass media in India needs to be highly active to discuss serious issues concerning women and prepare the women to play their rightful and equal role in society.

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