

THE EMERGENCE OF THE “NEW WOMAN”: A STUDY ON SELECTED TV COMMERCIALS

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Abstract: Television commercials have the reputation of depicting a stereotyped portrayal of men and women alike. In a society like ours, which is partly developing and partly reeling under the societal taboos, it becomes very necessary to ascertain the role of mass media towards maintaining a gender equitable society. Women have been in shackles of societal evils since centuries, thus, it is mandatory for them to empower themselves and find the lost ground. Television Commercials have high viewership and persuades people towards any purchase. The content in the commercials have been undergoing transformation despite the host of stereotyped content. Several commercials have been appraised for its invaluable content which leads towards imparting gender equal messages to the society.

This paper examines the selected commercials from the Hindi channels and analyses the content. The channels have been studied for about the past 6 months, from January to June 2016, critically using codes. The selected advertisements are fresh and vibrant, promoting the concept of “Women independence” and a gender neutral concept.

Keywords: Commercials, Women, Empowerment, Transformation, Content Analysis, Hindi Channels.

Introduction: The struggle for women's equal rights is a struggle since long ago. Every social reformer or movement has worked on emancipating the rights of the woman. Media has the enormous responsibilities to focus on the marginalised and elevate their status through widespread flow of information and access to knowledge. It is not unknown that despite the advancement in all sectors, women in our country are still reeling as second class citizens.

Advertisements are a persuasive form of mass communication has always been accused of being sexist in its approach. Advertisements have that blame to showcase “unrealistic, biased and stereotyped” picture which furthers the ideas of stereotyped notions in the society. Hence, advertisements through its content can depict the realities more and less of the stereotyped notions.

Of late it can be witnessed some innovative and gender equal commercials which is a fresh lease of air. Several commercials have promoted the concept of “live-in relationship”, “Second marriage” and men-women equally taking part in decision making. As an important tool of marketing, it is essential that advertisements portray a transformed and women at par with men. This paper deals with the analysis of the transformed role of women in the television commercials.

Review of Literature: Wagner & Banos (1973) has reported that several advertisements portrayed women in careeristic capacities in spite of the widespread stereotyped portrayal of women.

Choudhury, Maitrayee (2000) has stated that feminism has brought in a fresh lease of life which is bringing in equality and freedom of women. She has

suggested in her article that women's movements have a major role in advocating for the cause of women and negating the existing stereotypes.

Banerjee Shourini (2015) has noted that the 'achiever' tag of women in the advertisements is inspirational to several women and is a welcome change.

Research Objectives:

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To understand the portrayal of women in the selected commercials
- To analyse the role portrayal of women in the selected commercials
- To understand the growing trend of television commercials

Methodology: The study has taken up Qualitative Content analysis analysed the commercials during prime time of major Hindi channels of three genres mainly- Star Plus, Set Max and Aaj Tak of Entertainment, Movie and news channel respectively. The channels have been studied over a period of 3 months- July to September 2016. The days for viewing were selected through structured random sampling i.e, prime time 8pm to 10 pm. The channels have been studied for 36 days which amounts to 72 hours. The advertisements have been analysed using specific codes.

Codes: The codes for analyzing the commercials have been framed on the basis of Arthur and Resko's (1975) categories.

- Role Portrayal
- Feminine Image
- Body Language

Findings and Analysis:

Table 01: The stance adopted by the products towards portraying a non-stereotyped woman

Product Name	Role Portrayal	Feminine Image	Body Language
Bournvita	Portrayal of a woman who trains her son to be an athlete	Strong Independent Woman	Positive, action mode. Outdoor activities brings her out of the four walls of the house.
Vatika Hair Oil	Independent Woman who braved her cancer	Strong, Urban Working Woman	Submissive who later emerges stronger and generates positive vibe.
Raymonds- Single Mother	Urban Single Mother	Achiever, Working Independent Woman	Mother who works and looks after the child singlehandedly and does not rue about it.
OLX- Husband and Wife	Urban Independent Woman	Achiever, Working Independent Woman	Wife is independent working and fiercely straight forward. She does not shy away from sharing her opinions.
Brooke Bond Red Label	Urban Independent Woman in a live-in relationship	Working, Independent Woman and a Home-maker	Strong woman who believes in modern relationship ideals, forward thinking lady and her mother-in-law too.
ELSS-HDFC Investor	Home-maker who insists husband to enter into mutual decision making	Homemaker.	Her behaviour is focused towards making the husband realize her role in making any financial decisions. Calm and composed, yet determined.
Axis Bank	Woman who manages her affairs and her employees well	Strong, achiever, self-sufficient working woman	Independent woman who is in charge of her life and does not need a man or anybody to help her.
Cadbury	Two homely women frees themselves from the boundaries of homeliness	Home maker	Breaks the barriers of a typical housewife and dances in the streets, in turn the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law coming closer to each other.
Chevrolet Enjoy	Portrayal of a woman who drives the car, taking the family for a trip	Independent Urban woman	Breaks the stereotype of showing men drivers only. Very smart, confident and friendly, who drives her family for a trip and the bonding between the daughter and mother-in-law is evident.

The commercials, though few in number have made an attempt to come up with gender equal themes and empower the women. The commercials in guise promote gender biasness and unfair themes related to women. But the above mentioned commercials have been selected keeping in mind the codes. The role portrayed by women in the above mentioned commercials have portrayed women in different light altogether. Brooke Bond Red Label and ELSS-HDFC Investor though have women inside the home, are bold and radical in their approach. Cadbury commercial celebrates the free spirit of the two housewives who diminishes their differences and the barrier by dancing away in the streets. The free-spirited, independent, non-submissive image of women have been depicted in the advertisements, which is far away from the host of

cosmetics/household products/food products which portray women as guile, naïve, passive, sex object or bound within the four walls as a nagging wife. Some of the commercials of Airtel and Tanishq in the past have explored the concept of “second marriage” and “wife holding higher qualification”. The advertisements of today are not shying away from exploring the themes of live-in relationships or housewives breaking the barriers of a strict household and dancing to the tunes of peppy numbers in the streets of a ‘baraat’. The commercials are slowly progressing towards portraying the woman who is progressive not in her dress, but her thinking, ideals, approach and beliefs and is not dominated by the patriarchal ideals of the society.

Conclusion: Media’s misrepresentation of women is a not a new issue and has been continuing globally in

different aspects. Television is one of the most preferred medium in the country for its magical appeal to the aural and visual senses. Advertisements, being a persuading form of communication, has been a vital tool for marketing the products of the entrepreneurs, by hook or crook. Therefore, as a

component of mass media, the onus lies upon the ad-makers as well as the regulatory bodies like ASCI to promote more gender-equal, transformed and relevant commercials focusing not only on the urban or working woman but also to render significance to rural set-up and forward approaches.

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