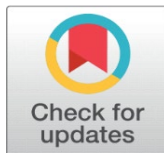
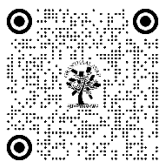


THE EVOLVING IMAGE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS: A REVIEW

J. Jeyarani ¹ , Dr. R. Vasanthan ²

¹ Research Scholar, Department of English, National College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Tirchirappalli, India

² Associate Professor and Head, Department of English (UAP), National College (Autonomous), (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University), Tirchirappalli, India



Received 07 November 2022

Accepted 20 December 2022

Published 21 March 2023

Corresponding Author

Dr. R. Vasanthan, vasanthan@nct.ac.in

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2SE.2022.256](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2SE.2022.256)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2022 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Ads, also known as adverts or advertisements, are typically seen as a form of public communication aimed at promoting a product, service, brand, or event. The purpose of such ads is to convey the benefits of the product to the audience through visually appealing print or visual media. Advertisements play a crucial role in driving sales by tapping into consumer desires and shaping cultural trends. Companies spend significant amounts on marketing their products through advertising. Over time, the representation of women in advertisements has been changing, moving away from stereotypical portrayals. This paper examines the evolution of the image of women in Indian advertisements.

Keywords: Evolving, Image, Women, Advertisements, Society, Television

1. INTRODUCTION

The image and representation of women around the world has been evolving over the years in every sphere of their existence including advertising. Today, women are getting distinguished as professionals in diverse occupations or positions within the society. The image of women in advertising is also gradually changing over a period of time though for a long time, it followed the conventional thinking about women and their position and role in the society. This paper delves

into the evolving image of women in Indian ads over the time and the backdrop of the process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent times, the evolving image of woman in advertising has received the attention of academicians as well as media practitioners [Das \(2000\)](#), [Siu et al. \(1997\)](#). [Courtney and Lockeretz \(1971\)](#) did the first study of women's image in role portrayals with a study of 112 ads in magazines. Their judgement at the end of the study was that the ads mirrored mostly the stereotypical roles of women. Many other studies done after them also highlighted the occurrence of stereotyping women's image in ads and this approach was in existence for a long time [Siu et al. \(1997\)](#). Compared to the other parts of the world, the image of women in advertising is categorically different in Asia [Cutler et al. \(1995\)](#). In the same way as the cultural life and values of the Asian countries are very different from that of countries like the United Britain, Canada, and the US [Hofstede \(1980\)](#), the image of woman portrayed in ads are also distinct in Asia when compared to these countries. There are not many studies based on the evolving image of woman in Indian ads, though in the print, [Matthew \(1990\)](#), [Munshi \(2000\)](#) and [Das \(2000\)](#) have done the groundwork in the field of women in advertisement. This study aims to fulfil this gap by analysing the evolving image of woman in Indian ads in television over the decades.

3. IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE 1970S ADS

Women in ads studies throughout the 1970s mainly focused on whether advertisements accurately reproduced the contemporary position of women or if stereotypes of women were perpetuated through explicit picture depictions in certain role scenarios or by suggestive clues [Kerin et al. \(1979\)](#). It has been demonstrated that there has been a considerable increase in the proportion of women in employment roles [Wagner and Banos \(1973\)](#). Women were mostly represented in the 1970s as housewives or mothers, with significantly fewer women playing professional roles than males [Dominick and Rauch \(1971\)](#). Men were shown in the advertisements as being in positions of power and trust in professional settings, whilst women were mostly depicted at home or with jobs that were scarcely noticeable. Additionally, males were depicted in advising positions to women, which suggests that they play subordinate roles in their interpersonal and professional interactions with men [Silverslein and Silverstein \(1974\)](#). In addition, even when they are not the main consumers of a good or service, there are far more males featured in television advertising. So, in the 1970s, women were not represented as autonomous individuals but rather as sexist stereotypes [Courtney and Whipple \(1974\)](#).

4. IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE 1980S ADS

Although the disparity shrank from the 1970s commercials, women were still represented in domestic settings while males appeared in professional and corporate settings in the 1980s [Courtney and Whipple \(1983\)](#). The disparity between how men and women are represented has so decreased since the 1970s, with more women being shown as employed and fewer women being depicted in non-working jobs and in family environments [Sullivan and Connor \(1988\)](#).

5. IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE 1990S ADS

In the late 20th century, television became a dominant presence in households and women were frequently targeted by advertisements for beauty products that promised to improve their appearance. These advertisements often perpetuated negative stereotypes about women and perpetuated the notion that women needed to look a certain way in order to be considered attractive. Despite India being a country with a rich cultural heritage that includes female goddesses, it also has high rates of violence and sexual abuse against women. In Indian advertisements, women are often portrayed in stereotypical and objectifying ways, rather than being given a self-identity. Ads tend to depict women as submissive to their husbands, dutiful mothers, and loving to their children. This portrayal emphasizes women's roles as homemakers and caretakers, rather than focusing on their social or economic empowerment. While some ads may show women as achieving equality and breaking stereotypes, there is still much room for improvement in terms of avoiding gender stereotypes in Indian advertising. [Jacob \(1992\)](#)

A lot of transformation has taken place in the Indian advertising world in the past few years. The image of women in advertising keeps evolving which is a sign of societal transformation too. Because of its influence on the lives of people, from a much broader point of view, advertising plays a considerable role in determining the society. While ads reflect the changes in the society, they also have the capability to shape the society and traditions. Most of the advertisements in the past, and some even today, present a wide range of ads representing women in housewives or homemakers' roles alone, their primary duty being caring and working for their families. However, this image had greatly evolved over the period of time, and today, many ads represent women in stronger roles, not confined to the home and family, but in roles involving socio-economic development, in the business world with or as top businesspeople in command. Though there are still ads out there that are critical of women's role and demean the image of women, at the same time, some ads try to break this code of belief and conventions. [McArthur et al. \(1975\)](#)

In recent times, there have been a number of advertisements in India that aim to challenge and break down gender stereotypes. For example, Tanishq's jewelry brand commercial on remarriage is a strong effort to break taboos surrounding the subject of remarriage. Havells' ad "Respect for Women" shows a man in various situations asking his wife to either make juice or iron clothes and in response, the wife gets the appliance and asks him to do the necessary task. Bharat Matrimony's commercials show a changing attitude towards working women and have a positive impact on viewers. The Jaago Re ads feature strong women who are not afraid to challenge traditional masculine attitudes. Advertisements such as Vogue's ad featuring Madhuri Dixit, in which she talks about teaching men not to make women cry, and #ShareTheLoad by Ariel, which questions the traditional expectation that laundry is solely a wife's responsibility, challenge age-old traditions and behavior. These ads bring a positive message and instill hope for a more equal and just society. However, some ads are harmful to women's image and perpetuate negative stereotypes, such as Fair & Lovely's message that a woman's life will be difficult if she is not fair-skinned, or deodorant ads that depict women as desperate for men or border on vulgarity. [Milner & Collins \(2000\)](#)

6. IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE 2000S ADS

Advertising is a creative industry and in the 21st century, there are advertisers who are showcasing strong women and their progress. However, there are still some advertisements that depict women in a way that does not reflect their true status in society. For instance, Jack and Jones' 2016 ad featuring Ranveer Kapoor carrying a woman on his shoulder with the tagline "Don't Hold Back, Take Your Work Home" was criticized for promoting sexism and glorifying sexual harassment in the workplace. In 2013, Ford Figo's ad, which showed Silvio Berlusconi with three women tied up in the back of the car, was deemed as promoting sexual harassment. Most car or bike ads are focused on the male space and often depict women in a victimized or sexualized manner. In 2011, Wild Stone Deo and Set Wet Zatak advertisements portrayed women, including married women, lusting over men who used the products. Tamil advertisements for nightwear, such as Nandu Brand Lungies, show women with lustful eyes. In Pommies Nighties ad, actress Devayani describes the product as making her feel like the queen of the home. These advertisements play into gender roles and can be seen as promoting sexism and discrimination.

7. REVIEW

Advertising has undergone a significant transformation in recent times, moving away from the objectification of women and towards a focus on empowerment and equality. This shift is largely due to the growing movement for gender equality and the activism of feminists, women, and social justice advocates. They have spoken out against the sexualization and exploitation of women in media and advertising, leading to a reconsideration of the portrayal of women in these industries.

Instead of portraying women solely as objects of beauty, marketing campaigns now often emphasize the importance of a balanced family life and a strong sense of self. The image of women in advertising has evolved from a passive and decorative object to a confident and assertive individual. This change can be seen in advertisements for a wide range of products, from dishwashers and detergents to cars and soap.

For example, in a recent Airtel advertisement, a woman is shown as a successful boss at the office, and then later, as a loving wife preparing dinner for her husband. This ad highlights the balancing role of women, who are both professional and caring, and it is a significant departure from earlier advertisements that only emphasized women's physical appearance.

Thus, the advertising industry is moving in a positive direction towards a more respectful and empowering portrayal of women. Advertisers are beginning to recognize that women are more than just objects of beauty and are instead complex individuals with a range of talents and responsibilities. The trend towards a more balanced and empowering depiction of women is a step in the right direction and one that will continue to gain momentum in the years to come.

The traditional gender stereotypes that depict men as the sole breadwinners and women as homemakers have become less prominent in advertisements. This shift can be seen through the portrayal of men participating in household tasks. For instance, the Prestige Kitchen Appliance company features Bollywood star Abhishek Bachchan gifting his wife, former Miss Universe Aishwarya Rai, with household appliances, with the tagline, "Those who love their wife won't reject Prestige." This change in representation highlights that men are not only responsible for financial

stability but also play a role in sharing the responsibilities of family life with their wives.

The portrayal of women in Indian advertisements has also shifted from objectification to empowerment. For example, the Hamam Soap advertisement used to feature a mother using the product to protect her family, however, the current ad depicts a mother who is taking action to protect her daughter from harassment. She does this by learning martial arts, and the tagline of the ad is, "Run, Chase, and Do Anything Without Fear." The modern mother is shown to prioritize her daughter's safety and well-being over her beauty and is committed to raising her daughter to be strong and confident in the face of modern-day challenges.

Advertisements have evolved to reflect a more inclusive and empowering representation of gender roles, breaking away from traditional gender stereotypes. The shift towards showcasing men and women as partners in household tasks and empowering women is a positive change and a step towards promoting gender equality.

In the current ads, the image of women had evolved from the 'damsel in distress' types to 'damsel in power'. More ads show that women could safeguard themselves. The changed role of woman due to education, self-respect and economic independence is greatly responsible for this shift in the mindset of advertisers. However, real women empowerment can be achieved only when all women are empowered. The need of women may change according to their geographical setting, but, the respect and care they deserve as sisters, wives or mothers is the same everywhere. Empowerment lies in gender equality at home, in the society, in politics, health care, and everywhere else.

8. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This review study indicates that the image of woman in TV ads has massively evolved over the decades. For so long, although woman in India were portrayed as conventional and stereotyped characters, today, the shifting difference in their image and the product categories they advertise is clear and superior. This review shows that advertisements that portray women with respect and equality can also address the harmful effect of gender stereotyping and promote gender equity and diversity. Skillful and creative advertisements portray the image of women to propagate that girls need to go to school and gain skills for employment to effectively transition to bigger and higher roles. Women's requirements of nutrition, their awareness of menstrual hygiene and management, sanitation, general and personal hygiene programs are subjects that have surfaced in the Indian advertisements for the benefit of women.

The review highlights that there is increased representation of women and girls across age, class, colour, and other diversity indicators. Diverse templates of beauty are promoted in the present-day Indian TV and print ads and detrimental beauty norms of women and girls based on fairness and thinness are getting increasingly avoided. At the same time, more women and girls are portrayed as leaders, especially in the public sphere, and there is a visible positive growth in gender norms. Further studies can be made on a comparative analysis of Indian advertisements related to women with other nations for a universal analysis and picture.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Courtney, E. Alice., and Lockeretz, W. Sarah. (1971). A Woman's Place : An Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 8(1), 92-95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3149733>.
- Courtney, E., Alice., and Whipple, T.W. (1974). Women in TV Commercials. *Journal of Communication*, 24(2), 110-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00375.x>.
- Cutler, B. D., Javalgi, R.G., & Lee, D. (1995). The Portrayal of People in Magazine Advertisements : The United States and Korea. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, 8(2), 45-55. https://doi.org/10.1300/J046v08n02_04.
- Das, M. (2000). Men and Women in Indian Magazine Advertisements : A Preliminary Report. *Sex Roles*, 43(9/10), 699- 717. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007108725661>.
- Dominick, J.R., and G.E.Rauch. (1971). The Image of Women's Network TV Commercials. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 16(3), 259-65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838157209386349>.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Cultures and Organizations*. London : McGraw-Hill.
- Jacob, R. (1992, November16). "India is Opening for Business". *Fortune*.
- Kerin, A. Roger., Lundstorm, J. William., and Scigimpaglia, Donald. (1979). Women in Advertisements : Retrospect and Prospect. *Journal of Advertising*, 8(3), 37-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.1979.10673287>.
- Matthew, V. (1990). Faces of the Indian Male : A Study of Stereotypes. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 32(2), 217-225. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1990-30973-001>.
- McArthur, Z. Leslie., and Beth, G. Resko, (1975). The Portrayal of Men and Women in American Television Commercials. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 97(2), 209-220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1975.9923340>.
- Milner, L. M., & Collins, J. M. (2000). Sex-Role Portrayals and the Gender of Nations. *Journal of Advertising*, 29(1), 67-79. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4189135>.
- Munshi, S. (2000). Wife/mother/daughter-in-law: Multiple avatars of Homemaker in 1990s. *Indian advertising. Media, Culture and Society*, 20(4), 573-591. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344398020004004>.
- Silverslein, A., and R. Silverstein (1974). The Portrayal of Women in TV Advertising, *Federal Communications Bar Journal*, 27 (1) 71-98.
- Siu Wai-sum., and Au, Alan Kai- ming. (1997). Women in Advertising : A Comparison of Television Advertisements in China and Singapore. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 15(5), 235-243. <https://doi.org/10.1108/02634509710177305>.
- Sullivan, L. Gary., and Connor, O. J. P. (1988). Women's Role Portrayals in Magazine Advertising : 1958-1983. *SexRoles*, 18(3/4), 181-188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00287788>.