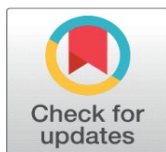
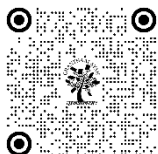


A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF MALE & FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

The study analyses the representation of men and women in advertisements along with its connection with our society's prevailing social conditions. A sum of ten advertisements from various parts of the world are used throughout the study to identify the gender representation, and sexual biases present in the advertisements. The advertisements are for popular brands from various sectors such as cosmetics, Food & Beverage, Clothing & Accessories, households, Electronics, and automobiles.

Two advertisements from each sector have been used for the study. This includes the brands such as Kiehl's Skincare, and Nivea from Cosmetics, Frooti, and Slice from Food and Beverage, Warner, and Weyenberg Massagic shoes from Clothing & Accessories, Mr. Clean, and Dettol from the Household sector, and Sony Vita from Electronics, and Ford Figo from Automobile.

All the advertisements chosen are of different periods including both vintage, and recent considering the continuity of hyper objectification, and sexualization in the advertisements. This includes a period from the 1970s to 2017 and journals, articles, and reports from recent years. Many advertisements use sensual content to grab the audience's attention, thereby selling the products. Along with the Critical Discourse Analysis, this study also follows Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, Media Representation, and the theory by Laura Mulvey.

Keywords: Gender Representation, Media, Advertisements, Social and Cultural Perceptions, Critical Discourse Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Advertising refers to the practice and techniques for creating attention to a product or service. The primary aim of advertising is to create awareness and thereby promote a specific good or service. [Advertising. \(2023\)](#) The advertisements often aim at customer generation by building awareness through the process of branding. It includes projecting the name, logo, tagline, and other features of the product or service aiming to attract potential customers. Along with that, the

advertisements also help in building high-brand recall which eventually leads to an increase in sales, and credibility.

There are advertising regulators to monitor the standard of advertisements; one such regulatory is the 'Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI)', a voluntary self-regulatory organisation that deals with monitoring advertisements and aims at building confidence among the public. ASCI was established in 1985 and says that all advertisements must be genuine, and not objectify women. [Advertising Standards Council of India. \(2023\)](#) 'The Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)' focuses on "governing the content of the commercials released in the UK, its promotions, and direct marketing". ASA says, "No marketing communication should be ambiguous, exaggerated, and inaccurate" [Advertising Standards Authority \(United Kingdom\) \(2022\)](#)

Amongst the various advertisements, print advertisements are considered one of the oldest and most common forms of advertisements. In 2023, the market volume for Newspaper Advertisements is expected to reach US\$2.31 billion. Additionally, it is also anticipated that by 2023 the advertising spending in the print advertising market will rise to US\$2.37 billion.

Media can persuade thoughts through how things are portrayed. In the year 50s and 60s, women were represented as mothers and wives, looking after the family. Moving forward to the 70s and 80s, the portrayal of women's roles was more distinct, but they have often depicted as sex symbols a trend that keeps on continuing [Benson \(2021\)](#)

Advertisements use various strategies to manipulate the audience. Through the advertisements, the advertisers manipulate the readers by creating a false impression about the idealized lifestyle and making them believe whatever the advertisement showcases are true [Kaur. \(2013\)](#)

A large majority of advertisers use sensual content as a tool to sell their products and services. The usage of nudity, and muscular men, are all included as a strategy for promoting the brand. She then continues to say that, using ideas, and activities associated with sex creates trouble as it decreases women to an object. [Sharma \(2021\)](#).

The study focuses on all these aspects as advertisements play a prominent role in societal development. Even though print advertisements can have a large impact on people as a large majority consider them as a credible source of information, it is not practically possible to depend on a stand-alone medium in the age of diversified media. So, the advertisements for this study are chosen from multiple mediums as all the advertisements are available or published on different platforms by the brands for better reach. All these aspects make this study relevant as well as futuristic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mohammad Hossein Yousefi and Farzad Rostami through their paper deal with the representation of females in print advertisements. The paper begins by saying that "Print advertisements not only try to persuade the consumers buying decisions but also aim at influencing their social attitudes" which is what this study tries to convey to a great extent. This paper focuses on the health magazines published in Iran, and the various strategies adopted by those magazines to pursue their customers. The key point discussed by this paper is media/advertisers use language to take control over the readers. Along with that, this paper analyses various aspects like linguistic features, various discursive techniques, and women's representation

in magazine advertisements. The data was analyzed based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework which combines the text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice to identify the connections between language, ideology, and power [Yousefi. \(2019\)](#)

The report "Women in Advertising" by Jill Urlage was published by IPSOS. As per the report, advertisements are important to our culture as they represent the social norms of our society. In addition, they also can alter people's perceptions of gender roles. Most advertisements portray women as a second-class citizen who always indulges in household activities or as a sex symbol rather than individual equivalent to men. As a result of this, most women feel suppressed or rather compare themselves to the images they have seen in various advertisements especially when it comes to beauty brands. This can lead them to a high chance of feeling a lack of confidence in their bodies which is what the brands utilize and gets benefits in one way or another.

This report questions that ideology and asks, 'Can brands enhance their business outcomes while contributing to society', which itself is a relevant question to ask for. In addition, this report points out that 'There is an increased likelihood of a positive impact on long-term brand relationships as well as short-term behaviour change when advertisement depicts women positively'. Further, this report says 'Attitudes towards the evolution of an advertisement can be determined by the role and depiction of women in advertising which in terms will result in positive social change eventually [Urlage \(2021\)](#).

3. RESEARCH GAP

This study deals with the three main aspects in connection with advertisements. It includes gender biases, representation of men, and women, and its connection to the cultural perceptions prevailing in our society.

Various advertisements from different sectors have been chosen for the study. The selected advertisements from the Cosmetics, Food and Beverages, clothing and Accessories, Household, Electronics, and Automobile sectors are included, and that too from different time periods ranging from the 1970s to 2017 [Kang \(1997\)](#) This factor makes this study stand apart from the rest as most of the study focuses on either one or two sectors. Also, the role of gender representation in advertisements and its connection with the prevailing cultural perceptions in our society makes this study crucial.

As the factors, gender representation, biases, and cultural perceptions are interrelated all these will be analyzed together. The images, language used in the copy, the theme of the advertisements, and the brand will be analyzed carefully before deriving a conclusion. So, in a nutshell, it is the semiotics aspect along with the key factors like gender, and culture that makes this study relevant.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study focuses on the disparities in the representation of men and women in advertisements by the various leading brands. Media being a powerful tool plays a prominent role in influencing the masses. As the prolific writer, Mr. Voltaire once said, "With power comes great responsibility". This is what many brands lack particularly when comes to advertising their products.

Mostly, in the advertisements, men are portrayed as an authoritarian power, and women are either suppressed or objectified in a sexualized way to arouse an

attraction, and thereby sell the products. Most brands use these tactics as a necessity to beat their competitors in their potential market. All these advertisements reflect the gender biases present in our society which is the sum of cultural perceptions. This study deals to project those disparities present in society, especially the way it is reflected in our media through advertisements.

5. OBJECTIVES

- To compare the representation of men and women in advertisements.
- To analyze the gender biases, present in the advertisements and their role in cultural perceptions.

6. QUESTIONS

- What are the different ways adopted by the brands to portray men and women in their advertisements?
- How do the cultural perceptions prevail in our society reflected in the advertisements?
- How are the advertisements connected with the gender biases present in society?

7. HYPOTHESIS

- The images, language, and theme play a vital role in reflecting the gender biases, and cultural perceptions prevailing in society.
- Advertisements hold a definite position in portraying and upholding the gender biases present in society to a great extent.

8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1

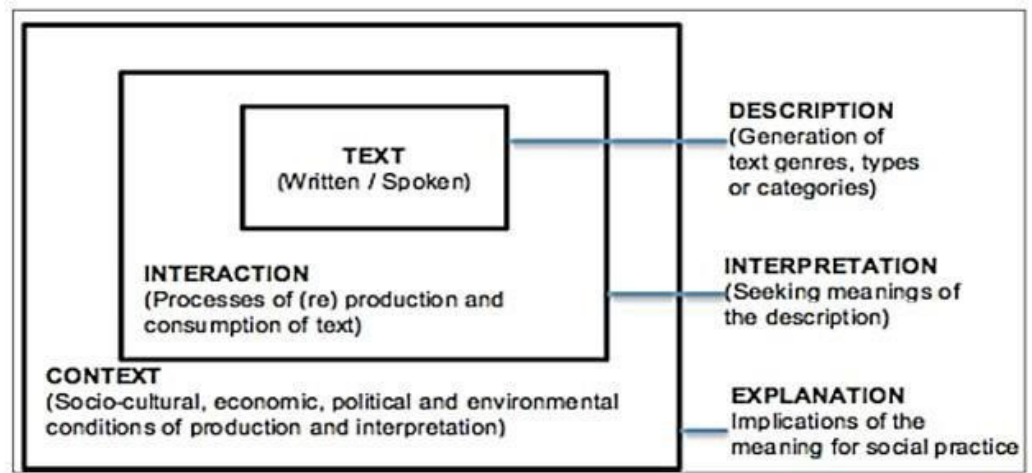


Figure 1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough's three-dimensional model [AAZAM. \(2021\)](#) of Critical Discourse Analysis is divided into three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. It is a framework that deals with the process of social interaction. The first stage of this theory deals with the description, which is about the formal properties of the

text. Text typically includes identifying and labeling the specific features or elements of the language which comprises the grammar, vocabulary, and textual structures. The second stage deals with the connection between the text and interaction. In this stage, the text is viewed as a product of a process of production and as a tool in the process of interpreting. Along with that, this stage also focuses on the cognitive process of the participants. In the third stage, the theory focuses on the relationship between the interaction and social setting. [Ilyas \(2021\)](#) The above-mentioned figure shows the inter-textual analysis. Fairclough refers to it as the 'recontextualization' of texts or discourses which means shifting from one context to another.

9. MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Media representation is one of the important theories connected with media studies. Representation is referred to as the way gender, age, ethnicity, regional, and national identity, current events, and social issues are dealt with and presented in media texts. In addition, media text can play a crucial role in shaping the knowledge and understanding of an audience about these significant topics.

Various factors which contribute to the effectiveness of media representation are construction, mediation, selection, anchorage, Stereotypes, and Ideology. Along with that, the visual codes, layout and design, language and mode of address, camera shots, and angles play a prominent role in media representation.

10. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The primary focus of this study is to analyze the representation of males and females in advertisements. The brands chosen for the study comprise both national and international from different sectors such as cosmetics, food and beverage, clothing and Accessories, household, electronics, and automobiles [Gupta & Pal \(2020\)](#) considering their popularity, and the volume of gender bias present in it. The advertisements of two leading brands from each sector were chosen to identify and compare the representation of males and females in it. The sectors selected for the study fall under essentials, and daily-use commodities and are constantly relying on advertisements for their promotion.

In addition, these advertisements and brands have a great role in society and need to be responsible as they can contribute positively to society's transformation if they do their part well. Along with that, all the advertisements chosen were controversial due to the image depiction, usage of text, sensuality, and objectification of women [Nagi. \(2014\)](#). Adding to it, the respective brands were forced to pull down the advertisements from their official website, and online platforms considering the public opinion, and the legalities.

The advertisements chosen for the study were shortlisted from various other advertisements from a period ranging from the 1970s to 2017 depending upon the above-mentioned factors, as well as the impact it had amongst the audience. And it also shows the never-changing methods the brands and sectors are following for promoting their products for a longer time. Apart from the advertisements, the study has also analyzed reports, documents, papers, and websites till a period of 2023 for better accuracy, and understanding of the subject. In addition, the advertisements were released and so is collected from multiple media including print, and brand-owned digital platforms as we cannot depend only on a particular medium in this diversified age. Further, a qualitative methodology was adopted for the study followed by Fairclough's three-dimensional model (2001), media representation, and critical discourse analysis.

11. BRANDS SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

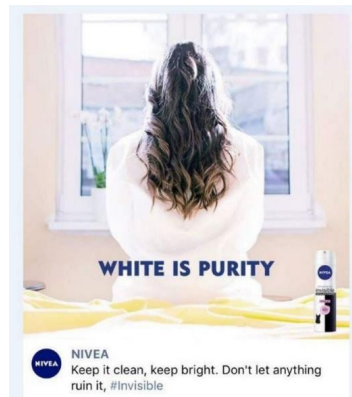
Brands Selected for the Study	
Cosmetics	Kiehl's Skincare, Nivea
Food & Beverage	Frooti, Slice
Clothing & Accessories	Warner Weyenberg Massagic shoes
Household	Mr. Clean Dettol
Electronics and Automobile	Sony Vita Ford Figo

1) Cosmetics



Kiehl's skincare portrays the concept of the Marvel comic character Captain America to sell their product Facial Fuel Heavy Lifting. Their other products include a cleanser, a shaving cream, and a moisturizer. The above-mentioned advertisement was released in the year 2013 in various parts of the United States of America as part of their marketing efforts to connect with the male audience.

The character was considered a super soldier who is powerful, and influential for many. Chris Evans, who played Captain America, was an inspiring character, and people, especially men, adored him for his strength and looks. So, this advertisement gives the message that man stands for strength and superiority even though the company asked the audience to take a look at the history of both brands as there was no direct connection between Kiehl and Marvel's Captain America. And consumers can be like one by using it as the product helps to resist aging. Both the Kiehl and Nivea advertisement is a clear-cut representation of gender biases and society's expectations about them [Koimoi. \(2013\)](#)



Nivea's "White is Purity" advertisement was released on April 02, 2017. It was one of the racist advertisements by the brand. This advertisement gives the impression that being white makes us pure. Nivea being a moisturizer, and antiperspirant brand tried to mislead the targeted audience and the public by conveying a message that questions the identity of many people. To a large extent, this advertisement aims at exploiting social norms to gain profit. This advertisement went viral and affected the reputation of the brand to a great extent. This advertisement was pulled down from the brand's official pages within two days due to the criticism it endured particularly for its gravely problematic tagline [DyIparker \(2018\)](#)

The brand then released an official apology; stating "The advertisement was inappropriate and does not reflect the core values of the company" The brand even apologized and removed the post. In addition, they also told that the brand believes in diversity and inclusivity, and takes pride in creating and marketing products that see beauty in all forms. Further, they added that discrimination in any form cannot be acceptable as an employee or as an individual. Along with that, the brand was also keen on responding to the concerns of the public.

2) Food & Beverage



The Frooti advertisement endorsed by Shah Rukh Khan [Koimoi. \(2013\)](#) was published on March 05, 2013. The entire focus of that advertisement was the King Khan of Bollywood Endorsing the King of Mango Drinks. It was much accepted by the audience compared with the Aamsutra Slice advertisement by Katrina Kaif. Frooti portrayed the gentle look of Shah Rukh Khan in an appealing way for the mass audience, especially for women and kids whereas Katrina Kaif was shown in a seductive way by the brand Slice. Along with that, the Frooti advertisement shows a Subtle shift: from Tetra to Pet bottle, as they were planning to bring a complete makeover for the brand. The association of Shah Rukh Khan helped the brand to gain massive publicity as the hashtag '#SRKLovesFrooti' was trending on Twitter (Frooti Vs Slice Aamsutra - SRK or Katrina - Social Media Campaign Report, 2013) Frooti's commercial was way better than the Slice advertisement as it was not a seductive commercial.



Another popular brand that employs sensual content to market its goods is Slice K. (2015). It is also referred to as an Aamsutra advertisement. The advertisement was published on March 06, 2013, which was a day after the release of Shah Rukh Khan's Frooti Advertisement. The Outlook has mentioned this Aamsutra advertisement with the headline "Sex Sells: Intelligent Strategy or Yet Another Tool to Objectify Women?" Sharma (2021) featuring Katrina Kaif. This was one of the advertisements that objectify women to attract customers and thereby sell the products. The slice advertisement had an increase in fans and engagement ratio when compared with the Frooti advertisement endorsed by Shah Rukh Khan.

3) Clothing & Accessories



This is no shape for a Girl by the brand Warner is one of the most controversial vintage advertisements of all time Nmattox. (2019) The advertisement was published in the 1970s. This advertisement used sexism, and racism to promote their product. The advertisement copy says that a woman should not be pear-shaped. And their lingerie will help resolve this issue. This advertisement aims at degrading women in certain shapes which are beyond societal standards rather than encouraging them to stay the way they are and be happy about themselves. Warner calls this product a Body-Do where suddenly, the consumers will get a proportional body. Undoubtedly, this advertisement also points out that the consumer decisions of women are influenced by a man's desire Garber (2015)



The commercial for Weyenberg Massagic Shoe appeared in Playboy magazine in 1974. This advertisement portrays a woman with a bare chest, which aims to catch the audience's eyes. This advertisement became controversial not just because of the image but also of the slogan which says "Keep her where she belongs..." This gives an impression that a woman is inferior, and projects the patriarchal assumption that a woman has low standards when compared with a man. Along with that, this advertisement is a clear representation of gender discrimination and sexism. This advertisement aims at targeting the men who rejected the women's liberation movements and are taking a positive stand on toxic masculinity by degrading a woman's existence [Garber \(2015\)](#)

4) Household



An advertisement by Mr. Clean, a product by the brand Procter & Gamble [Dora. \(2022\)](#) was one of the most controversial, and sexiest advertisements of all time. The advertisement was released in 2011 as part of the Mother's Day campaign on both print and social media. The advertisement says that cleaning is a women's duty. The advertisement portrays a smiling daughter, and mother with a body copy "This Mother's Day get back to the work that matters". The assumption that cleaning and looking after the home is a women's job lifts societal norms which itself hurts society and the public in general. This advertisement says that a woman, particularly a

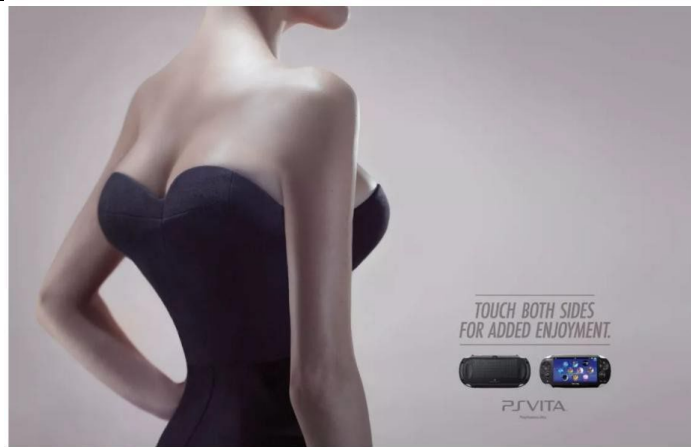
mother should engage in household work, and thereby stick to the gender stereotypes. Also, the usage of gender stereotypes, conveying a sexist message doesn't go well with a responsible brand. The usage of the word 'job' denotes that a woman's priority is to take care of the house. Along with that, the advertisement supports gender expectations by evoking the idea that a woman should be indulged in household chores from a young age, the representation of a mother and a daughter symbolizes that concept. In addition, the advertisement says that a woman is not allowed to be free from maintaining the household work even for a single day [Stampler \(2012\)](#)



This advertisement by the brand Dettol aims at using the shock factor to draw the viewer's eyes. This advertisement features a crime scene with a dominant masculine figure. The advertisement was considered highly controversial because it trivializes criminal behaviour using dark humour. The tagline used here is "When ordinary soap just won't do..." is supposed to be "humorous" in tone. The advertisers failed to understand how tone-deaf and crass their portrayal turned out to be in an era when we as a society are trying to spread more awareness about issues such as domestic violence and assault against women. The brand tries to evoke the fear factor by connecting a murder scene to the soap. In addition, the advertisement depicts the source as a killer and also says that the murder is messy, it has to be cleaned [Walshaw-Wertz \(2014\)](#)

5) Electronics and Automobile

This is the advertisement for a gaming device: the PlayStation Vita. The advertisement was published in 2012 promoting the double-sided Interface which has a touchpad on the back and a screen on the front. Even though the device does not have an inherent connection with sensuality, the advertisement features a woman with breasts on both her front and back with the tagline "Touch both sides for added enjoyment." The image of the woman takes up half of the page whereas the product is relegated to the corner. The advertisement equates women's sexuality to a gaming device that can be used for enjoyment. So, in a nutshell, the advertisement portrays women as an object which can be used for pleasure [Siy \(2016\)](#)



The advertisement for Ford Figo's compact car was released with the tagline asking the customers to leave their worries behind with the Figo's extra-large boot. This refers to the several affairs of Mr. Berlusconi and is considered one of the most controversial advertisements. The advertisement features Mr. Silvio Berlusconi, the former Italian Prime Minister whose political career has been badly affected by sex scandals. Mr. Berlusconi could be seen flashing a victory sign and smirking from the driver's seat along with three ladies who were bound and gagged in the trunk of the automobile.



The audience told it was offensive, distasteful, and misogynistic. The advertisement received a huge backlash, and negative comments which ended up with the brand executive apologizing, and later the advertisement was pulled down from their website, and other media platforms officially. In addition, Mr. Jim Farley, Marketing Chief, Ford Global said that 'the advertisement was totally inappropriate, it cannot be acceptable, and thereby actions have been taken' during his speech at the New York International Auto Show. Brand Figo was known for its luggage capacity. As a result of the controversy, the local vehicle sales of Ford India fell by 14% from April 2012 to February 2013 [Stampler \(2013\)](#)

12. CONCLUSION

This paper focuses on the manner men and women are represented in advertisements. In general, Advertisements have a prominent role in increasing the

sales of a brand which eventually leads to generating profit. Traditionally Print Advertisements are considered one of the oldest, and most influential forms for shaping customer perception. This study uses critical discourse analysis for finding the major themes related to the strategies used by various brands. The data analysis indicated that as part of their marketing strategy, a large number of brands use sensuous appeal as a primary tool to grab the audience's attention. An increase in the number of eyes on the product could potentially lead to a hike in the number of customers.

The data is collected from a total of ten leading brands from cosmetics, food and beverage, clothing and Accessories, household sectors, electronics, and automobiles. The data includes advertisements from both National and International levels over different time periods including both Vintage as well as recent advertisements, and documents. Along with the qualitative method this study also used Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, and Media Representation theory to analyze the selected advertisements.

The indifferences discussed in this study in connection with advertisements can be found in other visual arts such as movies too. Laura Mulvey has said that many popular movies are filmed to satisfy the masculine scopophilia which is also referred to as the male gaze or masculine gaze. She also says that such movies aim at sexualizing women for the male audience [Loreck \(2016\)](#) So, it is evident that women all over the world are used as an object to gain the audience's attraction and thereby build an interest, desire, and action or in a nutshell as a tool to sell the product.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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