

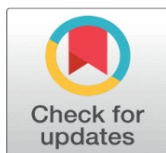
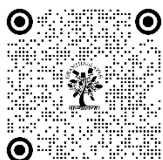


# THE CHANGE-MAKERS: A STUDY ON THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN SELECTED TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Dr. Seena Johnson <sup>1</sup>  

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor (Senior Scale), Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Manipal University Jaipur, Rajasthan, India



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## Corresponding Author

Dr. Seena Johnson,  
[seena.johnson1@gmail.com](mailto:seena.johnson1@gmail.com)

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## ABSTRACT

In India, the majority of people believe that any form of mass media can reflect society. Advertising is one of the most important and influential media products. Advertisements (Ads) are known for being convincing, particularly television ads, which are thought to be the most successful kind of mass-market advertising. Advertising serves as a critical agent of socialization in modern developed societies and is used to maintain specific social structures. The current research article uses discourse analysis to examine how the idea of women's employment is presented in selected Indian television commercials. This study primarily focuses on the use of language in advertisements that are used to control people's thoughts. After analysis, it was found that when the majority of household advertisements, label women in a subordinate position, some brands challenge these stereotypes. The storylines focused on women's empowerment are receiving a warm reception from society. Advertisements that portray women positively have more chances of success, making the brand unique and standing out among the mass.

**Keywords:** Commodification, Discourse Analysis, Objectification, Stereotype, Women Empowerment

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved; It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing".*

Swami Vivekananda

The significance of women's empowerment; was emphasized in the eighth Millennium Development Goals. It highlights that to reach the position of a

developed country, India must convert its massive female labor force into a constructive human resource, which can be accomplished only with women's empowerment. In the contemporary epoch, the perception of women's empowerment has undergone a drastic shift from well-being to an equity perspective. According to [Batliwala \(1994\)](#), empowerment has been deciphered as the course of action through which the powerless acquire better power over their life situations. It eventually leads to better self-confidence, an internal transformation, and the power to accomplish one's desired goals [Presser & Sen \(2000\)](#). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) concept of the Human Development Index (1990) avowed that "*without empowering women, overall development of human beings is not possible and stressed that if development is not engendered, is endangered*".

Irrespective of caste, class, or gender, the idea of empowerment suits well with those who are powerless. But from the initial stage itself, the discourses concerning empowerment are always centered on women [Malhotra et al \(2008\)](#). While looking at the history of women's empowerment, we see audacious women who lived their lives on their terms; and were willing to challenge societal norms. Most of the time, they were forced to do so due to their arduous life circumstances. During that time, there were no explicit efforts to improve women's status or to empower them. A radical approach to women's empowerment emerged due to the shift in power dynamics in favor of women's privileges and gender equality during the 1980s and 1990s [Batliwala \(1994\)](#).

Empowerment is viewed as a temporary process and there is no cut-and-right rule for empowerment. What empowers one woman may not empower another [Cornwall \(2016\)](#). Through the empowerment process, women's external qualities (education, health, awareness, mobility, decision-making power, material security, and status in the family), and internal qualities (self-assurance and self-awareness), enhances that will facilitate them to have a fulfilling life. The majority of the women's movement had made efforts to establish socially and culturally that women are equal to men in terms of competencies and decision-making abilities. When yesteryears women's liberation movements focused on securing reproductive rights, sexual liberties, and workplace equality; these days' empowerments extensively comprehend the trivial gestures of women empowerment like purchasing clothes or eating a particular brand of chocolates, etc. [Gill \(2018\)](#).

Indian advertisements which frequently mirror traditional societal norms, connect the brand's target audience with progressive gender equality concepts. Currently, there have been noteworthy changes in the portrayal of females in advertisements. Instead of being portrayed as sexual and passive objects of the male gaze, the females are now depicted as dynamic, self-sufficient, and powerful members of society. Owing to the part women play in deciding upon everyday household products, they are considered pivotal characters in advertisements. Many advertisements highlight how women perform household duties purely to please their families and rarely participate in decision-making. Fortunately, in recent times these conservative stereotypes have paved the way for new approaches to advertising in developing markets.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A feminist understanding of power, according to Jo Rowlands, is deeply concerned with

*'the dynamics of oppression and internalized oppression and that empowerment must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to occupy.... decision-making space.... so that the people affected come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and have influence'* (Rowlands (1997), pp:87).

Batliwala (1994), in *Women's Empowerment in South Asia: Concepts and Practices*, say that empowerment is the process of confronting prevailing power relationships and obtaining more restrictions on power resources. The decision-making power of women in households, women's mobility, employment, and cash earnings are considered crucial indicators of women's empowerment. Age, educational status, marital status, and type of family have some bearing on a woman's free mobility. Employment with cash earnings is more likely to empower women. A woman who is educated, employed, and competent enough to make her own financial choices rather than her spouse is considered empowered Biswas & Kaul (2016). According to the World Bank, empowerment is defined as *"the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes"* Chattopadhyay (2005).

Karl (1995) remarks that empowerment is both individual and collective. Empowerment occurs at various levels, like individual, group, community, psychological, sociological, and economical, challenging the assumptions regarding status, uneven power relations, and social dynamics Sharma (2006). Empowerment is all about change, choice, and power. Contemporary academic discourse refers to a strategy whereby a qualitative and sustained enhancement in an individual's life is created. For women, empowerment is a process rather than an event that necessitates a range of skills and competencies both at the individual (education, employment, and health status) and collective levels (organizing, mobilizing, solving problems, and political representation) Moghadam and Lucie (2005).

Through women empowerment, which questions the deep-rooted power equations women acquire the power to recognize their rights and to carry out their responsibilities to themselves and others in the most effective way possible Gill (2018). Women play a crucial part in the socio-economic expansion, and if women were not given the power to partake along with men in the development process, developmental efforts will have a limited effect Malhotra (2004). Women in the Vedic period were given privileged social positions and had complete freedom to devote their entire lives to the interest of learning and self-realization. They were taught a variety of disciplines, including martial arts, and were permitted to participate in wars and fights. Women in those periods were given respectable positions inside and outside the home Seth (2001).

### **3. ADVERTISEMENTS & WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

Advertisements, the leading instrument of mass communication have historically witnessed the indecent objectification and commodification of women. With time, modern advertisements started to portray women as self-reliant, courageous, powerful, bright, and capable of multitasking. The Indian advertising industry, which once created its domain by stereotyping and oppressing women, is now selling the concept of women's empowerment. These undercurrents give an idea that the disparity between women and men is shrinking, and society is showing a positive attitude by adopting progressive advertisements.

Even if she is part of a family, a woman is an individual who has aspirations and rights. However, even though she is equal and empowered, she is frequently denied

privileges that men enjoy in our society. Many times, she was not given full hand freedom to make her personal choices and live her life as she desired. She always wants to get approval from others to fulfil her wishes. Nowadays, commercials aimed at women's audiences emphasize women's empowerment and urge women to achieve their goals and value themselves.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

In the present study, Discourse Analysis was employed for analysis focusing mainly on the language aspect. It is concerned not only with language but also with the cultural and intercultural peculiarities of advertising language. Since advertising involves language and social practices it is viewed as a media discourse. A qualitative design was adopted for this study, which intends to evaluate how the concept of discourse is applied in advertising through the construction of meaning based on the spectator. The advertisements for the present research study were chosen using purposeful sampling techniques, and the aim was solely to investigate women empowerment advertisements.

The advertisements that challenged the face-ism trend by portraying powerful, independent, and progressive women with a sound message were selected for the present study. *Ariel Washing Powder, Havells Coffee Maker, Tanishq Jewellery, Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine, and Nirma Ambulance ads* were the five adverts taken and analyzed. Discourse as text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice are all concepts included in the discourse analysis framework. Its goal is to investigate the connection between language, ideology, and power.

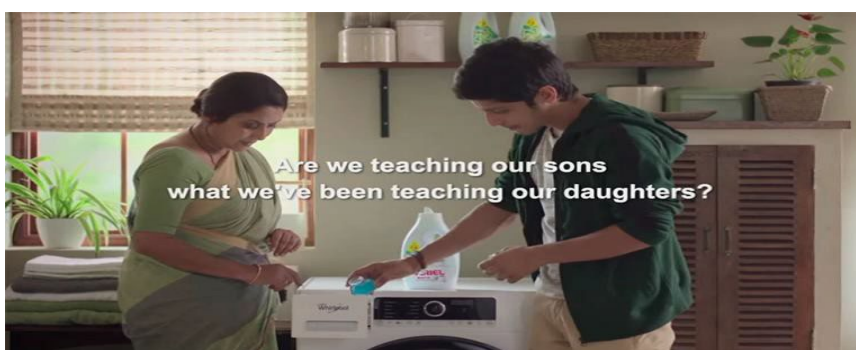
#### **5. ANALYSIS & FINDINGS**

##### **5.1. ARIEL WASHING POWDER**

Ariel washing powder has come up with an advertising campaign named *#share the load*. Ariel washing powder puts out a question "*Is laundry only a woman's job?*" The ad questions the age-old deep-seated belief in Indian households that women are the only ones who are supposed to wash the clothes. The first advertisement begins with a man asking his wife, "*Have you washed my green shirt?*".

In the second advertisement campaign, the father feels sad after seeing her daughter's ability to multitask while managing her office and household work. The father then realizes that the daughter had seen her mother doing all these chores alone. The father then leaves an apology letter in which he says, '*I never helped your mother, and what you saw you learned...Sorry on behalf of every dad who set the wrong example.*' The father then promises her daughter that he will help her mother to complete all her household tasks.

These two ads depict the fact that household work is a normal thing irrespective of gender. The brand had taken bold efforts to portray innovative thinking from both genders. In both ads, the parents realize that they failed to provide an environment of equality for their kids. Within the household when the children believe that laundry is a mother's job subconsciously this negative notion is passed down from one generation to the next. Both these fresh, appealing, provocative challenging commercials make people make a nominal makeover in their lifestyle, which leads to a significant change. Leaving us with a thought to think over, the brand has communicated an idea that is appropriate to all sectors of society and simultaneously encourages a call for action at the home itself.



Following the *#ShareTheLoad* commercial campaign, market results show that by encouraging a progressive gender role the detergent brand sales have increased by 76% [Sonavane \(2017\)](#). The brand was successful in eradicating the scars of inequality and was able to bring a combination of its brand identity and an ideology of its belief, resulting in the creation of an effort that goes beyond social media marketing.

## 5.2. HAVELLS COFFEE MAKER

The Havells coffee maker sets its advertisement against the backdrop of a marriage alliance. The introductory sentence begins like this *"I've been telling him - settle down, settle down"* says the boy's mother. The boy's mother started narrating the problems her son is going through in the USA due to his lonely life. The dialogue *"even for a cup of hot coffee, he needs to go out in the cold!"* shows the mother's concern. Immediately the girl says, "One minute..." and leaves the scene for a few minutes with everyone's permission. The prospective wife promptly presents her with a Havells coffee maker and tells, *"24 hours coffee, settle down with this...no visa problem...it is ready for the marriage"* and continues her talk and the last statement *"You know what Aunty...I am not a Kitchen Appliance..."*. She makes it clear that she is not a kitchen appliance and that if they want a woman just to make coffee it's better to settle down with the coffee maker.

The first few minutes of the commercial introduce the Coffee Maker, and the final dialogue confirms the girl's intentions. This dialogue emphasizes the girl's autonomy and personality in the advertisement. Here, in this advertisement, it is

very clearly depicted that a marriageable girl; should never be compared to or degraded to the level of a coffee maker. These statements demonstrate how the girl is proclaiming her rights as a woman. In the concluding tagline, "*Havells Appliances... Respect Women*", the product also underlines the importance of women's rights. Through the concluding statement, "*Havells Appliances... Respect Women*," the product also underlines the importance of women's rights.

This ad pokes fun at the age-old stereotypical practice that cooking is meant to be a woman's job. When the majority of the ad shows men sitting idle watching or enjoying their work, the women are often portrayed as the one who is supposed to be there in the kitchen. This advert explicitly shows that the purpose of marriage is not to have a person to do your errands. The advertisement shatters the typecast image of a woman who is supposed to bend her head and be shy in nature in front of the groom's family. The prospective bride in this ad has shown the courage to speak up about her opinion.

### 5.3. TANISHQ JEWELLERY

The jewellery brand Tanishq uses the backdrop of remarriage for its collection of wedding jewellery ads. In Indian society, widowed and divorced women are mostly treated as outcasts. This advert splendidly discards the notion and supports the idea of a second marriage, a topic that fast-changing modern Indian society is yet to accept [Twishy \(2013\)](#).

The advertisement begins with a bride who is also a mother of a young daughter getting ready for her wedding. She notices a lovely young girl standing near the door and requests permission to enter. They both walk into the marriage hall together after a lively conversation. When the couple starts walking around the sacred fire, the girl expresses her desire to join them. When the elders and her mother discouraged her, stepdad carried the little girl in his arms, and the three continued to circle the sacred fire, much to the bride's delight. Toward the end, we can see the little one asks the groom whether she can call him father. While most of the advertisements feature fair-skin models for the commercials, this taboo-breaking progressive advert tried to break the stereotypical norms by portraying a dusky bride as the antagonist.



### 5.4. LLOYD UNISEX WASHING MACHINE

The advertisement depicts a couple in a home appliance store looking for a washing machine. The commercial has been thoroughly examined, with attention paid to the language and visual aspects of the advertisement.

In the advertisement when the wife glances through the various models the husband is fully occupied with his phone showing no sign of interest. The

commercial begins with a question, "Yes Sir, Washing Machines? The man replies, "Show her, it is her department", the same age-old assertive statement commonly made by men. The next question wife asks is, "Do you have a Unisex Washing Machine?", this highlights her sarcastic reply to her husband's statement. The salesman uses promotional discourse to impress and provoke the audience's interest. He says "So easy even Sir can do the washing" which indirectly intended to make the husband aware that even men can wash clothes.

**INDIA'S FIRST UNISEX WASHING MACHINES**

**WASHING CLOTHES IS NOT JUST WOMEN'S DEPARTMENT!**

Inverter Technology to save power, UVtron Technology for germ-free clothes and Easy Swipe Touch for effortless operation – the new range of Lloyd Washing Machines is equipped with so many user-friendly features and technologies that now even men can do the washing, easily.

Touchwash			Smartswirl Pro			Silkswirl		
Model No.	Capacity	Wattage	Model No.	Capacity	Wattage	Model No.	Capacity	Wattage
LWMT32ES	7.5 Kgs	400W	LWMT3	7.5 Kgs	400W	LWBS30V	6.5 Kgs	290W
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Touch Operation - One Tap Spin</li> <li>• iAP Technology - iWash Function</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• iAP Motor - iSmart Start - iTap Pause</li> <li>• Drain Release - Memory of Power Interrupt</li> </ul>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Touch Operation - One Tap Spin</li> <li>• Drain Release - Memory of Power Interrupt</li> </ul>		

**5 YEAR WARRANTY**

SMART SWIPE TOUCH

UVTRON TECHNOLOGY

INVERTER MOTOR

Lloyd Unisex Washing Machines, the latest product from Lloyd home appliances promotes the campaign against the deep-rooted traditional beliefs that household chores are believed to be a woman's department. The wife in the advert is very fashionably dressed in modern attire; looks very intelligent, young, and smart subtly using sarcasm to make her husband realize washing (laundry) is not just women's work. Besides focusing on urban women, this ad inspires men to take up the responsibility of helping their wives and warns them not to take women for granted. The ad also claims that their machine makes washing easy and that "even men can do the washing, easily".

## 5.5. NIRMA AMBULANCE

Nirma, synonymous with low-priced detergents, was at the forefront for the past three decades. The brand which has grown in value and volume strongly believes that customer wants a long-term solution to please their needs. In contrast to the earlier Nirma advertisements, where a girl dressed in a frock and a white sari-clad happy mother with a detergent packet in her hands the recent ambulance television commercial features the idea of women empowerment. Nirma changed the perception of women as mere homemakers to women as change-makers.

The ad opens up showing an ambulance trapped badly in a mud-spattered pond. The people surrounding there mostly men merely watch the pathetic situation of the ambulance. Despite tackling the situation, some are interested in taking photographs and some got irritated at the sight of the dirt. The four ladies fully clad in clean and tidy attire enter, with familiar names 'Hema, Rekha, Jaya, and Sushma...' with showing hatred towards men on their faces and go into the mud puddle to take the ambulance out and not bothered about the blemishes on their outfits. They complete the hectic task by pushing out the ambulance from the dirty mud pool and are not bothered about the blemishes on their outfits.



The trustful housewife and loving mother of yesteryear advertisements who was mainly worried about familial obligation had evolved into a strong and self-assured woman. Since so many changes have happened in women's attire, their approach and attitude toward their life have also changed. The entire idea of the woman's hand getting their hand dirty and doing a guy's job implies that today's women are no more behind than their male counterparts.

## 6. CONCLUSION

There is a total transformation in the status of women where they have turned into more economically and educationally self-sufficient as compared with the past. These reforms cannot claim that the whole women are empowered, independent, and progressive. They still face challenges in a new manner. Patriarchal societies have given women a repressed position. Patriarchy which describes the social relations between men and women has a significant base, hierarchy creates liberty and solidarity for men, which permits them to have control over women [Jaggar & Rothenberg \(1993\)](#). Toys, children's books, magazines, advertisements, and movies all emphasize the disparity between males and females [Giddens et al. \(2006\)](#).

These refreshing television commercials symbolize a society where men and women are alike, empowered, and respected in a parallel manner. The typecasted gender discrimination and long-standing socio-cultural standards that believe men and women are different are criticized in subtle ways. The ad which reflects reality takes a promising step to empower women and thereby educate and make society aware that women are capable of multitasking. These adverts have touched on the various issues that require empowerment and underline that women also have the right to lead happy and meaningful life in society.

As the position of women is reforming in the developing world, with more women linking up with the workforce, the characters played by women in commercials also got an inevitable transformation. When the majority of household advertisements, label women in a subordinate position, some brands challenge these stereotypes. The storylines focused on women's empowerment are receiving a warm reception from society. Advertisements that portray women positively have more chances of success, making the brand unique and standing out among the mass.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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