

GENDER INEQUALITY AND STEREOTYPES IN INDIAN

T.V. COMMERCIALS

By Richa Sharma

Abstract

Since the evolution of media industry and its development women were stereotyped and objectified too. Even in the 21st century, where we consider ourselves as liberal minded, women are still stereotyped. It is very evident in the television commercials wherein women are shown in certain positions which are either compromising of their status or projected in very stereotyped roles.

This research study is therefore, undertaken for highlighting this issue. The main objectives of the research are to study the television commercials, which objectify and stereotype women and the views of youth for the same. Media is considered to be one of the most important tools of society. In the modern times, it has the power to reach out to a large audience by using the various mass communication tools and create an impact with its reach, which now is considerably far and wide. Social media through its ever increasing apps and networking is an inevitable source of influence on the masses. Thus, it is important to understand the role it plays in stereotyping and objectifying women.

Keywords

Humanities, Television, Advertisement, Women Studies, Gender Inequality, Gender Stereotypes, Commercials, Media Inequality, Objectifying Women.

Introduction

Gender inequality refers to health, education, economic and political inequalities between men and women in the society. Wherein, over-generalizations about the characteristics of an entire group based on gender is gender stereotyping. Mass media in today's globalised world plays an important role. It sets trends in fashion and also acts as a "window to the outside world". It is therefore important to understand the depth of influence it has on the masses. Gender inequality and stereotypes in context of media industry can be seen in terms of, uneven distribution of jobs, status and position given, stereotyping certain tasks, etc.

Review of literature

During the course of this research study, work of several authors and journalists was referred. The references are enumerated below:

According to Madhusmita Das (2016), "The content analysis of the study finds that women in Indian TV advertisements are mostly portrayed in Decorative and Family role and rarely as free wheeler and in working role."

Shreya Kedia in her article, 'The Missing Women of Indian Media' (2015) highlights that "While one can still find women journalists in the desk section, magazine or the features department, very few can be found on the field to report crucial beats like politics, criminal justice, technology, sports, business etc. Also, whenever a women's issue arises, women are preferred to cover them."

In the 1980s, Courtney and Whipple (1983) found that women were being portrayed in the home settings and men appeared in business settings, although the difference was less than those found in the studies of the 1970s commercials.

Das, M. (2000). Men and women in Indian magazine advertisements: A preliminary report. "Results indicate that although the portrayals of women and men in Indian magazine ads have changed over the period, they are still portrayed in stereotypical ways. Role portrayals in Indian magazine ads seem to be influenced by the nature of the product being advertised."

According to MICCI director Nandini Sahai, who presented paper titled "Women in Media: Fighting Stereotype-Identity and Gender in Goa", maintained women journalists continue to suffer discrimination despite having made "great advances" in the past two decades in India. She cited a national survey on the status of women journalists in the print media, according to which 45.5 per cent of women journalists in the country felt discriminated against because of their sex.

Problem statement

The amount of gender inequality in terms of equal status and opportunities provided is visible with naked eyes. The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the world's longest-running and most extensive research on gender in news media, has been yielding an increasing amount of data at the international level since 1995. According to the research, In India women constitute only 22% of the news subjects across all topic categories; only 12% of the news stories have women as the central focus. Whereas, they are top choice as a model in advertisements of- beauty products, deodorants, domestic products etc. As mentioned earlier it is important to understand the role of mass media in life of the audience since it has a widespread reach. Various advertisements stereotype and objectify women and thus it was important to understand the impact it has on the youth in general. Since, they are considered the building blocks of the nation.

Objectives

There are two primary objective of this research paper.

1. Studying the advertisements displayed in the Indian T.V. between 20th Jan 2017 - 26th Jan 2017 being played on the television on regular basis on top 10 Hindi channels, as ranked by infobharti.com and understanding whether they stereotype and objectify women. The channels studied are- star plus, Sony entertainment television, colours Viacom 18, Zee TV, Sab TV, NDTV imagine, star one, Sahara one, 9X, UTV Bindass.
2. Studying the view of youth for the same. Whether they feel the Indian advertisements promote gender inequality (in terms of status) and gender stereotypes.

Research methodology

The study used primary data and secondary data for analysis according to the objective set out in the study. Primary data were collected by questionnaire method. Secondary data were collected from websites and research papers available online.

For the first part of the research, content analysis is used to find out the different type of Role portrayed by women in TV advertisements. 26 advertisements that appeared frequently on the top 10 Hindi channels as mentioned earlier were studied. The advertisements were divided into different categories, according to the product it sold. The categories are- advertisements of Detergent (07 no.), Deodorants (09 no.), weight loss –lifestyle (03 no.), and fairness – beauty (07 no.). Nonprobability sampling, specifically systematic purposive sampling is used to have the sample for the study.

For the second part of the study, a survey/questionnaire has been prepared with 100 respondents ranging from age group of 16 years of age to 62 years of age answering 20 questions with different yardsticks emphasising the research topic. The result of the survey is tabulated to examine the general perception of the audience, specifically youth, about the stereotyping of role of women in Indian T.V. advertisements. The research tools employed in the current research is the content analysis and the survey method through structured questionnaire.

Result- Analysis and Interpretation

Through the means of questionnaire method (with help of google forms) 100 samples were collected. The total no. of questions asked was 20. Out of which first 06 questions enquired about respondent's general background including Age, Gender, Religion, Native Place/ Mother Tongue, Education and Monthly Household Income.

For the next 14 questions the respondents replied in the following manner:

Q.1) Do you watch T.V. Commercials/advertisements? (100 responses)

Yes- 76%

No- 08%

May Be- 16%

Analysis- 76% of the respondents watches T.V. commercials as opposed to 08% who don't and 16% who aren't sure about it.

Q.2) What are your general perceptions about the T.V. advertisements?

- a. Entertainment- 49.5%
- b. Window to the world- 30.3%
- c. Affects culture negatively- 13.1%
- d. Sets trends in fashion- 32.3%
- e. Pass time- 26.3%
- f. Affects children negatively- 10.1%
- g. Creates awareness amongst the women- 24.2%
- h. Relaxation and relieving stress- 18.2%

Analysis- the general perception of the respondents for the T.V. advertisements is that they are for Entertainment purpose with 49.5% supporting it. 30.3% respondents believe that it acts as a "window to world".

Q.3) What values according to you are reflected in them?

- a. Culture code for married women- 16.8%
- b. Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes- 29.5%
- c. Household unity- 18.9%
- d. Consumer culture- 52.6%
- e. Depiction of women as secondary individuals- 10.5%
- f. Depiction of women as sexual objects- 17.9%
- g. Increases career awareness- 27.4%
- h. Emphasis on rituals- 11.6 %
- i. Other- 4.2%

Analysis- According to respondents, advertisements largely reflects consumer culture with 52.6% in support of it. While 29.5% believe that it reinforces gender stereotypes and 27.4% suggests that it is the reason for increase in career awareness. Among the respondents 16.8% agreed on the point that advertisements reflect culture code for married women whereas 11.6% believed that it creates emphasis on rituals.

Only 17.95 of the total respondents believe that advertisements depict women as sexual objects and only 10.5% believes that advertisements depict women as secondary objects.

Q.4) Please give your opinion on advertisements you watch frequently.

- a. Promote consumerism and profit- 42.7%
- b. Reinforces gender roles- 14.6%
- c. Leads to status competition- 14.6%
- d. Glamorizes life- 32.3%
- e. Promote unnecessary wants- 31.3%
- f. Forcibly set the taste- 13.5%
- g. Portray women as sexual objects- 8.3%
- h. Humorous and entertaining- 32.3%
- i. Enables to watch celebrities- 12.5%

Analysis- Largely, respondents agreed on the point that advertisements promote consumerism and profit with **42.7%** votes. 32.3% respondents believe that it's plainly for humorous and entertaining purpose. 32.3% believe that it "glamorizes life". While 13.5% and 12.5% respondents believe that advertisements forcibly sets the taste and enables them to watch celebrities respectively.

Only 8.3% respondents believe that advertisements portray women as sexual objects while, 14.6% believe that advertisements reinforce gender roles.

Q.5) Describe General perception of women, about women in T.V.? (Gender Stereotype)

- a. Women should support men. 34.5%
- b. Men have more power than women in sexual relationship.- 13.8%
- c. Women should not have extra marital Relationship. – 12.6%
- d. Women's labour is controlled and appropriated by men. – 14.9%
- e. Women's work is not important like men's work. – 17.2%
- f. Woman should be feminine in appearance and submissive in behaviour.- 21.4%
- g. Child care is women's work.- 31%
- h. Main care taker and bread winner of the family is man.- 21.4%
- i. Men should earn and women should look after the family.- 27.6%

Analysis- Women's perception about women in the T.V. largely is that- women should support men with 34.5% .The second most common perception with 27.6% votes is that men should earn and women should look after the family. Further, **21.4%** respondents believe that woman should be feminine in appearance and submissive in behaviour and main care taker and bread winner of the family is man. **17.2% believe that women's work is not important like men's work whereas, 14.9% respondents states that women's labour is controlled and appropriated by men.** Only 13.8% have perception that Men have more power than women in sexual relationship.

Q.6) What is necessary to achieve success?

- a. Education- 62.2%
- b. Intelligence- 60.2%
- c. Personality- 40.8%
- d. Beauty – 4.1%
- e. Smartness- 42.9%

Analysis- Education and Intelligence are top criteria's for achieving success with 62.2% and 60.2% votes respectively, according to the respondents. Further 42.9% believe smartness as necessary. 40.8% believe personality to be important. **Only 4.1% voted for beauty as a necessary component for achieving success.**

Q.7) Advertisements promote only women as prime caretakers specially related to health and hygiene like the following:

- a. Health drinks such as Bournvita, Complan, Horlicks etc.- 54.8%
- b. Soaps such as Dettol, Savlon etc. – 49.5%
- c. Food items: Saffola Oil, Tata Salt, Snacks- 72%
- d. Others- 5.4%

Analysis- 72% respondents believe that for promotion of food items women are depicted as primary care takers. Whereas 54.8% agree that health drinks advertisements shows women as primary care takers. 49.5% agree on soaps, hygiene products.

Q.8) Advertisements promote patriarchy as reflected in insurance policy advertisements.

- a. Yes- 34.4%
- b. No- 7.3%
- c. Maybe- 58.3%

Analysis- **34.4%** respondents strongly agree with the statement whereas only 7.3% disagree. Whereas, 58.3% were not sure about it.

Q.9) who are more likely to be shown advertising cars or business products, solid products such as steel and cement, etc.?

- a. Men- 62.6%
- b. Women- 4%
- c. Both- 33.3%

Analysis- Here, **62.6%** believe that men are more likely to be shown advertising cars or business products, solid products such as steel and cement, etc. comparatively only **4%** voted for Women. Where, 33.3% believed that both are suitable.

Q.10) who in general largely appears in the advertisements in domestic products, mobile phones, two wheelers, soaps, etc?

- a. Men- 21.4%
- b. Women- 21.4%
- c. Both- 57.1%

Analysis- **57.1%** respondents believe that both genders are equally suitable to appear in advertisements in domestic products, mobile phones, two wheelers, soaps, etc. Men and women individually both received 21.4% votes.

Q.11) Do T.V. advertisements such as “paan masala’s” depict women primarily as sexual objects only?

- a. Yes- 24.7%
- b. No- 48.5%
- c. Maybe- 26.8%

Analysis- 48.5% strongly disagreed with the question whereas 24.7% supported it. And 26.8% respondents were not sure.

Q.12) Whether or not media responsible for the stereotyping of women?

- a. Yes- 44.7%
- b. No- 13.8%
- c. Maybe- 41.5%

Analysis- 44.7% agreed with the statement that media is responsible for stereotyping of women and only 13.8% disagreed.

Q.13) Whether or not stereotypes restrict progress and control women?

- a. Yes-53.6%
- b. No-13.4%
- c. Maybe- 33%

Analysis- Stereotypes restricts and control women is the opinion of 53.6% respondents where as 13.4% believe otherwise.

Q.14) Whether or not media reinforce, racism, casteism, class and gender bias?

- a. Yes -42.3%
- b. No-16.5%
- c. Maybe- 41.2%

Analysis- 42.3% believe that media reinforce, racism, casteism, class and gender bias and only 16.5% went against the statement.

Findings

- The general perception of the respondents, which are largely in the age group of 15 to 35 (88%) is that T.V advertisements are for '**entertainment purpose**' with **49.5%** votes. Some **24.2%** respondents believe advertisements to be a medium for creating awareness amongst women and only **13.1% believe that it 'affects the culture negatively'**.
- According to **52.6%** respondents the General value reflected is consumer culture. **Only 17.9% believe that 'women are depicted as sexual objects' and 10.5% saw**

‘women as secondary individuals’. Here, **29.5%** also agreed that an advertisement plays a role in reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

- The opinion of participants about advertisements they watch frequently is that it **‘promotes consumerism and profits’ with 42.7% votes**. Whereas **14.6%** believe that it reinforces gender role, **only 8.3% believed that advertisements ‘portray women as sexual objects’**.
- The general perception of women about women in T.V. advertisements is that **‘women should support men’ with 34.5% votes** and **31%** believe that **‘child care is women’s work’**. **Only 17.2% agreed that women’s work is not important like men’s work and 12.6% believe that women should not have extra marital affairs**. Further only **14.9%** believe that women’s labour is controlled and appropriated by men.
- When given option between education, intelligence, personality, beauty and smartness **only 4.1% voted for beauty**.
- Advertisements for food items such as snacks, oil etc. is more likely to promote women as the primary caretaker. **62.6%** of the participants accepted that Men are more likely to be shown advertising cars or business products, solid products such as steel and cement, etc. they also believed that **likelihood of women in such advertisements is only 4%**.
- Out of all the respondents, **44.7% believe that media is responsible for stereotyping of women**. Only **13.8%** believe it isn’t and **41.5%** are not sure about its impact in stereotyping.
- When asked if stereotypes restrict progress & control women, **53.6% agreed**. **33%** did not wish to comment and only **13.4%** strongly disagreed.
42.3% respondents accepted that media reinforces racism, casteism, class and gender bias. Only **16.5%** disagreed.

Conclusion

To fulfil the first objective of the research study, I studied 26 advertisements that appeared frequently on the top 10 Hindi channels as mentioned earlier. The advertisements were divided into different categories, according to the product it sold. The categories are-

advertisements of Detergent (07 no.), Deodorants (09 no.), weight loss –lifestyle (03 no.), and fairness –beauty (07 no.).

Out of 26 advertisements, 23 clearly stereotypes women in certain fixed role. They were either depicted as “super wives, daughter-in-laws, or mothers” whose primary role is to wash cloths, cook snacks according to families demand or take care of family’s health and needs. Shockingly, All the advertisements of deodorants shows women as mere brainless, sexual objects who gets attracted to good smelling men. Many of these advertisements are endorsed by so-called ‘Bollywood celebrities’. Then, there are advertisements which emphasis the importance of having ‘slim figure’ to be accepted by the family and society. Many Advertisements also promote ‘fair complexion’ as the desirable complexion, again it is endorsed by top ‘female celebrities’. The level of gender stereotype and inequality in terms of status is visible with naked eyes.

For the second part the results are based largely on perception of youth (15 years of age- 35 years of age). From the results obtained via survey method we can conclude that youth to till some extend believe that women are stereotyped in the advertisements in Indian television. 44.7% believe that media is responsible for stereotyping of women and only 13.8% disagreed, the rest opted to stay neutral on the statement. Also, 42.3% respondents accepted that media reinforces racism, casteism, class and gender bias, only 16.5% disagreed. Apart from these, various other findings as mentioned above strongly indicate that the general perception of the youth is that advertisements in Indian T.V. propagate gender stereotypes and gender inequality.

Limitations and Suggestions

- For this particular research, frequent advertisements displayed only on top 10 Hindi channels were examined. Channels of different fields, language and categories can be included.
- Equal respondents from both the genders weren’t available. In this study, 61% respondents are females and 39% male.
- The sample size due to time constraint was limited to 100. Larger samples can be collected.

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Appendix

1. What is your age?
2. Gender
 - A. Male
 - B. Female
 - C. Other
3. Religion

4. Native Place/ Mother Tongue
5. Education
 - A. HSC
 - B. Graduate
 - C. Post Graduate
6. Monthly Household Income
 - A. Rs. 20,000- Rs. 30,000
 - B. Rs. 31,000- Rs. 40,000
 - C. Rs. 41,000- Rs. 50,000
 - D. Rs. 51,000 and above
7. Do you watch T.V. Commercials/advertisements?
 - A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. Maybe
8. What are your general perception about the T.V. advertisements?
 - A. Entertainment
 - B. Window to the World
 - C. Affects culture negatively
 - D. Sets trends in fashion
 - E. 5. Pass time
 - F. 6. Affects children negatively
 - G. 7. Creates awareness amongst the women
 - H. 8. Relaxation and relieving stress
9. What values according to you are reflected in them?
 - A. Culture code for married woman
 - B. Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes
 - C. Household unity

- D. Consumer culture
 - E. Depiction of women as secondary individuals
 - F. Depiction of women as sexual objects
 - G. Increases career awareness
 - H. emphasis on rituals
10. Please give your opinion on the advertisements you watch frequently.
- A. Promote consumerism and profit
 - B. Reinforces gender roles
 - C. Leads to status competition
 - D. Glamorizes life
 - E. Promote unnecessary wants
 - F. Forcibly set the taste
 - G. Portray women as sexual objects
 - H. Humorous and entertaining
 - I. Enables to watch celebrities
11. General Perception of Women about women in T.V. advertisements (Gender Stereotype)
- A. Women should support men
 - B. Men have more power than women in sexual relationship
 - C. Women should not have extra marital relationship
 - D. Women's labour is controlled and appropriated by men
 - E. Women's work is not important like men's work
 - F. Woman should be feminine in appearance and submissive in behaviour
 - G. Child care is women's work.
 - H. Main care taker and bread winner of the family is man.
 - I. Men should earn and women should look after family
12. What is necessary to achieve success?
- A. Education
 - B. Intelligence

- C. Personality
 - D. Beauty
 - E. Smartness
13. Advertisements promote only women as prime caretakers specially related to health and hygiene like the following:
- A. Health drinks, such as- Bournvita, Horlicks, etc.
 - B. Soaps, such as- Dettol, Savlon, etc.
 - C. Food items: Saffola Oil, Tata Salt, Snacks
14. Advertisements promote patriarchy as reflected in insurance policy ads.
- A. Yes
 - B. NO
 - C. Maybe
15. Who are more likely to be shown advertising cars or business products, solid products such as steel and cement, etc.?
- A. Men
 - B. Women
 - C. Both
16. Who in general largely appear in the advertisements in domestic products, mobile phones, two wheelers, soaps etc?
- A. Men
 - B. Women
 - C. Both
17. Do T.V. advertisements such as that of Paan Masala's depict women primarily as sexual objects only?
- A. Yes
 - B. No
 - C. May be

18. Whether or not media responsible for the stereotyping of women?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. May Be

19. Whether or not stereotypes restrict progress and control women?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. May be

20. Whether or not media reinforce, racism, casteism, class and gender bias?

- A. Yes
- B. No
- C. May be

Bio

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