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ROLE OF ADVERTISING –“REINFORCING OR  
BREAKING STEREOTYPES”



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Short Profile

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ABSTRACT:

We, in this 21st century, claim to have a changed mindset that we do not discriminate between boys and girls. However, if a girl wants to join the army and a boy wants to open a beauty salon, we hesitate and exhibit our static mindset by asking them to do what they are stereotypically expected to do. It shows that inequalities still prevail. The

real Question is whether Media (Advertising, in particular) reinforces or break stereotypes based on gender given that consumers being “passive” develop positive or negative psychological associations with advertisements. It is the media that has the power to influence the masses and if the media itself is gender stereotype, how do we then expect our society to be indifferent towards gender?

Advertising / T.V commercials, in particular are a significant form of media which present women in a stereotypical manner. The advertising world continues to use the objectified, so to say, commodified female body as its major selling point.

Advertisements exploit a female’s sexuality in order to promote products. Most of the advertisements show males as hard, tough, independent, sexually aggressive, dominant, unafraid, violent, breadearners engaged in masculine accomplishments and rarely involved in housework. Females, on the other hand are portrayed as gentle, dependent, feminine, ornamental objects whose main functions are to please men, look good, involve themselves in house work, and stay quietly on the periphery of life. They are represented as “hollow beings”, who measure their worth through their skin tone, body weight, beauty quotient and the like. While men are portrayed as staying outdoors, females, are more responsible persons purchasing household items, looking after children in the home environment etc.

The rise, in the proportion of working women has created a cultural shift in our society today Advertisers have responded to these changes by creating diverse modern images of women. This helps them to attract different segments of the women’s market. Thus to a large extent, the market mechanism is an invisible hand driving advertisement content.

The paper uses economic resource theory and sociological theory to examine significant interaction effects between role portrayal and different female market segments on advertising

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effectiveness.

### KEYWORDS

*psychological associations, REINFORCING OR BREAKING STEREOTYPES, Advertising.*

## II. OBSERVATIONS BASED ON AUDIO-VISUAL ANALYSIS:

### (I) HOUSEKEEPING:

Household is the art of orderly management of house activities and house affairs. A lady getting up in the morning, attending her family, looking after family hygiene, and getting things done from her domestic help – this is a generation old stereotype image of a housekeeper. Have we ever seen any washing detergent, toilet cleaner, dish washing and sanitation advertisement with a male in the lead? ‘Surf Excel’- “DaagAccheHain”, a detergent brand by Hindustan unilever shows a gender stereotyped image of a woman washing clothes and beaming at a freshly washed white shirt with a little boy rolling in the mud. Citing another example, do men not have cracked heels that every crack cream ad shows women with cracked heels?

### (ii) AUTOMOBILES:

Light weight two wheeler ads cast females in the lead like Anushka Sharma in TVS scooty and Priyanka Chopra in ‘Hero Honda’, depicting that only light weight gearless scooters are meant for women. In contrast, four wheeler cars especially SUVs cast males in the lead like the advertisement for ‘Mahindra Verito’ where Jimmy Shergill is asking “Are you a verito man”? Tata safari storm, “ the real SUV”, where a man goes off the road and is shown doing some stunts. Even if females are used in such ads, they are simply used as ornate commodities to promote the sales of these vehicles.

### (iii) SOFT AND HARD DRINKS:

‘Thumbs –up’ a soft drinks action and a stunt based advertisement stars Akshay Kumar popularly known as “KhatroonKaKiladi.” ‘Mountain Dew’- “DarrKeAageJeetHai”, yet another action and stunt based ad casts men as action doers. “JagaiyeapneandarKa officer” – ‘Officers Choice’, “Khoobjamega rang jab mil bethenge teen yaar – aap main aur Bagpiper”, ‘Bagpiper’, “Make it large” – ‘Royal Stag’, are few alcohol brands who select only male models.

## III. STEREOTYPING NOT BEYOND THE REALM OF MARKETING- “IMPACT OF MODERN WOMEN ROLE PORTRAYALS ON ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS”:

A study by Lynn J Jaffe and Paul D Berger analyzes that advertisers have responded to the modern image of the working woman simply to stay in the market. However, the question is how far the market mechanism has succeeded in breaking gender stereotypes in the case of Indian advertising given that gender discrimination is a legacy inherited from our past. .

**(i) THE MODEL:**

The study talks about two modern portrayals namely, the “Superwoman image” in which a woman manages the demands of both job and home with little help from anyone. The other is the “Egalitarian image,” in which a working woman and a working husband equally share household chores. They conducted the experiment on a sample of 140 married adult women and examined the effect of these modern female role portrayals on advertising effectiveness. Print Ads for a food product were used.

**(ii) THE HYPOTHESES:**

H1a: Each of the two modern portrayals (superwoman and egalitarian) will yield higher advertising effectiveness than a traditional portrayal (i.e, the main effect of role portrayal on advertising effectiveness will significant).

Comment: Research has suggested that some women find the super woman portrayal unrealistic. Most could not imagine combining work and home with the ease that advertisers had depicted in these portrayals. Many of the women found the idea of sharing household chores an ideal worth attaining and preferred advertisements depicting this ideal.

H<sub>1b</sub>: Of the two modern portrayals, superwoman and egalitarian, the egalitarian portrayal will yield higher advertising effectiveness.

Comment- According to economic resource theory, among a sample of 65 couples, research by Hochschild(1989) found that the lesser the wives earned relative to their husbands, the more housework they did. Townsend and O’Neil’s (1990) research indicated that when a wife contributed more to family income, she expected exchange of greater economic resources for greater authority and decreased house work or an equal division of house work.

H<sub>2</sub>: Women with higher incomes will respond more favorably to the egalitarian portrayal than to the other portrayals (i.e the two ways interaction effect between income and female role portrayal on advertising effectiveness will be significant in the indicated direction).

**(iii) METHODOLOGY:**

• **SAMPLE** : The sample consisted of 140 married women between the ages 21 and 50. A quota sample was used to obtain a cross section of various demographic combinations. To get the variation in income, the sample included women with different working status (unemployed, working part-time, working full-time). The sample has three sub-groups, with, one third women in each viz., 21 to 30, 30 to 40 and 41 to 50. Interviewers screened respondents to obtain representations from each sub –group.

• **EXPERIMENT DESIGN**: Each woman was exposed to the same six print advertisements for a food product, especially designed for the study. After studying the ad, the respondents indicated the ad’s effectiveness in terms of feelings towards the ad (“affect” and their “purchase interest”) . It was a

factorial design with partially repeated measures. It included two within-subject variables and four between –subjects variables. One within – subject variable was “positioning” – This had 3 levels- traditional, superwoman(modern1) and egalitarian (modern2). The other within-subject variable was execution at two levels: set 1 and set 2. Each set consisted of traditional positioning, super woman positioning and egalitarian positioning. The four between –subject variables were income, gender ideology, number of children, education.

- **DEPENDENT VARIABLES** : Affect and purchase interest ( There were two dependent variables)
- **INDENPENDENT VARIABLES**: Role portrayal: development of stimuli.
- **ANALYSIS**: A two way ANOVA with subjects or judges as the row factor and role portrayal as the column factor. The former were random level factor and the latter fixed level factor. MANOVA for repeated measures was used, using SPSSx software to test main effects and interaction effects on advertising effectiveness
- **RESULT :TABLE 1** : Mean advertising effectiveness by positioning

positioning				
Mean ad effectiveness	Traditional	Superwoman	Egalitarian	Significance level
Purchase interest	2.76	3.72	4.50	P < 0.001
Affect	2.68	3.70	5.00	P<0.001

In terms of ad effectiveness, the egalitarian group shows higher effectiveness that both superwoman and traditional groups

Table 2: Mean advertising Effectiveness, By Income and positioning

Income							
Higher Positioning				Lower Positioning			
Mean ad effectiveness :	T	M1	M2	T	M1	M2	Significant level
Purchase Interest :	2.36	3.58	4.57	3.15	3.87	4.43	P<0.05
Affect :	2.10	3.51	5.02	3.25	3.90	4.98	P<0.05

The results also support economic resource theory and reveal that women who earn higher incomes have a bigger difference in advertising response between the modern and the traditional positioning compared to women with lower incomes. i.e Higher income women differentiated more sharply between these positioning.

- **INFERENCE** : The two hypothesis H1a, H1b and H2 are supported / accepted in the indicated direction. Analysis revealed that egalitarian portrayal is the most effective role portrayal among many segments of the female market. Identification of an overall preference for the egalitarian positioning is an initial

step in establishing the impact on advertising effectiveness, of the cultural changes taking place in society. The study also points out that women are important constituents of the MARKET and that their choices promote products and further that, the MARKET MECHANISM CAN OVERULE GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ADVERTISING.

#### IV. BREAKING GENDER STEREOTYPES : OBSERVED ‘CHANGE’ :

In spite of the significant presence of the stereotypes in commercials, advertising specialists use non-schematic ideas of promotion of products and services. Nowadays, women are being presented as liberated, strong and independent of social expectations. The most popular, non-stereotypical commercial is the “DOVE CAMPAIGN” aimed at women at every age and with different kinds of figures. It emphasizes natural beauty instead of perfect shapes. The female viewers prefer to watch women, with whom they can identify. Male roles in advertising are redefined as well - British commercial of cleaner called “Ajax” presents handsome men cleaning the kitchen with this product. Citing another example, a new “Airtel” commercial on TV titled ‘BOSS’ . The ad shows that a woman and her husband both work at the same place where she is the boss. She orders a task to the husband as an employer and at the same time she cooks dinner for him and waits at home. At one hand, the ad perpetuates the stereotype that no matter how successful a woman is, she still cooks for her husband but we can say, this ad is half way to gender equality by portraying the wife as superior (Boss).

#### V. CONCLUSION:

Men and women in decision making positions –in family, community, workplaces and society at large- can be gender sensitized through media intervention. The change of mindset, attitude and values for the “dual position”, of women in family, workplace, constitution, women rights and legislative directions, can be packaged in interesting viewer friendly programmes for assimilation and absorption in the social psyche. Male concern on women issues; men sharing domestic responsibility and decision making power; protection of a girl child’s right to be born and to survive, importance of woman health, education, skill development, employability for the family and society, democratization of family structures and such other important issues need to be taken up by our media, particularly the ADVERTISING segment- “Its not about woman development – Its about Human Development.....!”

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