



## SELLING UN-STEREOTYPES IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS: A GENDER DISCOURSE

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### ABSTRACT:

The media plays an extremely influential role in modern Indian society. Regardless of whether the media is influenced by the dominant beliefs of today's culture, or if it determines them, the weight that advertisements carry on individual's behavior is tangible in our society.

While all forms of media serve to reinforce culturally dominate stereotypes, advertisements specifically saturate our everyday lives. Women and girls are consistently bombarded with sexualized and unrealistic images of stereotypical beauty, as well as representations of what it means to be 'female.' Such sexist representations of gender in advertisements serve as a hegemonic force. Ads targeted at children teach kids from a young age what roll they must inhabit in order to conform to societies norm of male and female.

How do gendered images repeated in advertising come to reflect the ideologies of dominant patriarchal society? To what extent are these ads teaching children how to 'be' male or female? Advertising no longer seeks to inform consumers about a product, but rather to emphasize the intrinsic value of a product based on a strategy of selling and marketing. This shift in the goals of advertisers occurred in part due to the sheer increase in mass of advertising.

Indian advertisement scenario has taken some bold steps to also show some advertisements which do not portray stereotype men or women images. Sometimes the traditional gender roles are reversed. When this happens, one can see men behaving in ways that are generally associated with femininity, and women behaving in typically masculine ways. This is often the case in gay and lesbian advertising. Witnessing these ads can be a shock to most, as they are not accustomed to this reversal of roles. This is an indicator that there is in fact a distinction between the genders in advertising, and also sometime it does bring a social message and awareness.

### KEYWORDS:

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How do gendered images repeated in advertising come to reflect the ideologies of dominant patriarchal society? To what extent are these ads teaching children how to 'be' male or female? Advertising no longer seeks to inform consumers about a product, but rather to emphasize the intrinsic value of a product based on a strategy of selling and marketing. This shift in the goals of advertisers occurred in part due to the sheer increase in mass of

advertising. In a culture where the media distributes information through millions of outlets, gender sensitivity of TV commercials sometimes do reveals the true picture of the situation. Those who are conscious about gender discrimination use to speak against painting women in wrong way. Now, this survey came with statistics on how people view the matter. It will help advertisement firms and product advertisers to be more cautious in displaying and painting model's role. Some of the current commercial advertisements are grossly gender insensitive. Such as, the commercial of a fairness cream want to mean that a lady performer in a theatre cannot attract spectators by the dint of her acting only, but she should be pretty to do so . This is not only undermining a woman's capacity but also misguiding TV viewers about the taste of the spectators. Beauty soap also reels on the same idea. It shows that only the soap can make a lady attractive to the admirers. As if they want to disapprove "Beauty is only skins deep". We know the company showing these commercials perform social responsibilities as part of their corporate policy. They can scan their commercials to check gender sensitivity before releasing it to the media. Another point is culture sensitivity. We have our own culture of dresses, music etc. But many commercials are not sensitive to this,

advertisers as well the makers need to consider the culture of this soil when they select dresses ,jingles, dialogues, gestures etc. Many viewers will be happy to see that the advertisement firms are more sensitive to gender and cultural issues.

Gender equality is becoming a very popular topic, especially in today's society. Gender equality focuses on people's rights and encourages the same opportunity, no matter what gender one may be. Many agencies around the world are 'jumping on the bandwagon' and creating ads drawing attention to the importance of women and girls, while also informing the public to let their voices be heard. The collection focuses on International Women's Day on inequality of women across the globe and the overall importance of gender equality, just to name a few.

### THE HISTORY OF ADVERTISING IN INDIA

Anthropologist William Mazzarella divides advertising in post-independence India into four key phases. The first of these began after Indian independence from Great Britain (1947) and lasted until the early 1960s. Indian advertising in this period still operated as an outpost of the British Empire. The overall style of advertising was factual presentation coupled with an overall lack of creativity. The second phase (early 1960s to 1980s) emerged in large part as a reaction to the first and stressed creativity and an Indian professional identity independent of Great Britain. A third phase (1980s) turned away from creative and innovative advertising and toward creating efficient marketing channels that would have a wide impact throughout the country. The fourth and current phase, which also came into being simultaneously in 1980s, is characterized by a synthesis of effective marketing mechanisms and a high level of creativity.

Today Indian advertising has the enormous job of speaking to one of the world's most diverse populations. English is the only common language throughout India, but it is unknown in many sectors of the population. Tough television, radio and newspapers rely on more than dozen languages but still they are limiting the communicative reach of many advertisements to certain geographic regions or some sectors of society. While addressing India's elite, English language is used in advertising but when speaking more colloquially to the masses, it uses many local languages. In northern India, Hindi is widely used in ads but it is not used in southern India and North-eastern parts of India, where it is less spoken.

**WHAT ACTUALLY IS GENDER ADVERTISEMENT AND HOW IS IT PORTRAYED IN INDIA?** IT refers to the images in advertising that depict stereotypical gender roles and displays. Gender displays are used heavily in advertising in order to establish the role of one gender in relation to other, and some scholars argue that advertisers are obsessed with gender. Advertisers focus on gender relationships because people define themselves by gender, and gender can be "communicated at a glance", making it easy for advertisers to use this theme in their works. The effects of advertising on body image have been studied by

researchers, ranging from psychologists to marketing professionals. These days we know that the media and body image are closely related, particularly, the body image advertising affects our own body image. Of course, there are many other things that influence our body image: parenting, education, intimate relationships, and so on. The popular media does have a big impact, though. This is because thousands of advertisements contain messages about physical attractiveness and beauty, examples of which include commercials for clothes, cosmetics, weight reduction, and physical fitness.

### IS THE INDIAN ADVERTISEMENT PLAYING A VITAL ROLE IN CREATION AND MAINTENANCE OF GENDER NORMALITY?

Advertising is a significant agent of socialization in modern Indian industrialized societies, and is used as a tool to maintain certain social constructions, such as gender. Men and women are depicted as differing in attitudes, behaviour, and social status. These differences separate the sexes into different genders. Gender advertisements give the viewers a glimpse into a world laden with socially defined and constructed gender relations, displays, and roles. These images are crafted to mimic real life and many people mistake the concepts of fantasy and reality in regards to advertising. Erving Goffman would call it "commercial realism", when advertisers try to present the advertising world in ways which it could be real. Goffman argues that advertisements do not look strange to us, when they should. Advertisements take something that exists already in the world and they change it, forming a distorted reflection. "They emphasize some things and de-emphasize others," it is a hyper ritualization of the world, and we recognize, and even relate with some of the images.

### ROLE OF GENDER IN INDIAN ADVERTISING

It is argued that these images could be teaching the viewers a vast array of social cues, and even the most subtle ones make an impact on the viewers. Further it is said that gender relations are learned through advertisements. Among these learned gender roles are those of femininity and masculinity. Men and women are portrayed in advertisements according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. To be a woman is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine. There is little room for variation or a reversal of roles, except within the smaller frame of niche marketing.

### MASCULINITY IN ADVERTISING

In advertising, men are often portrayed in the following ways:

- Alert and conscious of surroundings
- Standing upright
- Bodies are controlled
- Hands in pockets
- Serious
- Physically active

Bravery, adventurousness, being able to think rationally, being strong and effective, for example, are all "manly" traits that are usually encouraged. So also is the ability to think independently and take the initiative. Media images supporting these behaviors' include the strong, silent Marlboro man and military ads telling young men to be 'all you can be'.

### FEMININITY IN ADVERTISING

This ad suggests that using this hormone cream will in fact make you look younger. Portrayals of women in advertising:

- Touching self
- Caressing an object
- Lying on the floor
- Sitting on a bed or chair
- Eyes closed
- Not alert
- Vulnerable
- Body contorted
- Sexy and sexually available
- Seductive
- Playful
- Careless

The body – and particularly here the female body – is always inevitably controlled by social norms and the modification of the body through industries such as fashion and beauty that exhibit femininity.

The discursive constructions of these female bodies are quite plainly 'prepared for consumption' by men. These constructions not only reveal the inevitable gender-power relations about the body but also suggest the cultural ambivalence about sexualized bodily display and image management. This sort of ambivalence both idealizes and denigrates individuals' explicitly performed efforts to produce and portray bodies that conform to societal 'ideals.'

But by now Indian advertisement scenario has taken some bold steps to also show some advertisements which do not portray stereotype men or women images. Sometimes the traditional gender roles are reversed. When this happens, one can see men behaving in ways that are generally associated with femininity, and women behaving in typically masculine ways. This is often the case in gay and lesbian advertising. Witnessing these ads can be a shock to most, as they are not accustomed to this reversal of roles. This is an indicator that there is in fact a distinction between the genders in advertising, and also sometime it does bring a social message and awareness.

I must also mention hear that in India the use of Hindu images in commercial advertisements are often seen. An interesting advertisement with a message that Helmet is a must while driving a motorbike shows Hindu Goddesses wearing Helmet before a war. But sometimes the advertisement also becomes controversial by using the images of Hindu gods and goddesses: one such is the

Advertisement of Javed Habib where he uses the Hindu Images for advertising his Brand.

An such example showing the gender sensitization where an add timed with the celebration of Durga Puja, the Bengali spot presents a little tale of "outsiders" among women – the lesbian, the trans person, the woman whose husband left her because of cysts in her ovary, the lonely widow – who are supposed to be excluded from the traditional custom of "sindoor khela".

It is true that till recently, this ritual – carried out on the morning of Bijoya Dashami, the day on which the idols of Durga and her family are immersed to signify their return home – was confined to married women and related to a blissful conjugal life. And people such as the ones depicted in the advertisement (portrayed by actors) were left out.

However, that original practice has been largely abandoned, especially at community celebrations, and all women – and even men – irrespective of marital status or age, take part in what is one of the last moments of merry-making.

Another advertisement of an online maid service **bookmybai.com** has gone viral on social media and has drawn criticism on social media, especially on Twitter, for being sexist and letting users choose maids based on religion. The organization has more than 10 thousand verified candidates in Mumbai and Pune and recently extended their services in Gujarat as well. The aim of the website is to bring together the maid bureaus functioning across the country on a single platform and to provide services ranging from cleaning and cooking to babysitting. The tagline of the ad that reads "Diamonds are useless, gift your wife a maid" has been called "cheeky" by the netizens. The ad has been condemned and called sexist for its presumption that women are responsible for housework. However, the company has said the ad is "light hearted"

The question now rises is gender sensitivity coming of age in Indian advertising?

India's Glass Lion wins at Cannes Lions this year lent some respect to the country's metals tally and brought much cheer. As is known, Glass Lion: The Lion for Change specifically recognises work that challenges gender bias and shatters stereotypical images of men and women which remain rooted in marketing messages. Therefore, the Grand Prix for P&G's 'Tough the Pickle' campaign and Glass Lion for Ariel Matic's 'Share the Load' campaign are being seen as perhaps heralding a new era of gender sensitivity in Indian advertising. Gender stereotypes abound in Indian advertising – be it for deodorant brands for men, which present women in a highly sexualised manner, or a plethora of ads in the FMCG, household electronics and other sectors, which present women as homemakers fretting over their family with no life of their own. The less said about the fairness cream ads the better.

Even a brand like Airtel couldn't break out of this stereotype. One would recall the 'Boss' ad, where the senior executive wife, who is her husband's boss in office,

still goes home and prepares dinner and waits for him to come home.

In contrast, there was an ad in Raymond's 'The Complete Man' series, which showed a working couple about to set out for office, when their child starts to cry. It is the husband who decides to stay back and comfort the infant, even as the wife drives off to work.

Myntra recently came out with three ad films that present women in non-stereotypical roles, including a lesbian couple and a single mother, which have been well-appreciated by all. Tanishq's ads too have sought to break stereotypes. The latest ad featuring Katrina Kaif shows the actress asking women to marry only when they are ready for it and not due to social pressures. The jewellery brand's 'Second marriage' ad also broke norms by showing a woman with a child getting married for the second time. And the model chosen for the bride's role in the ad was not your typical fair-skinned, straight-out-of-the-fashion-magazine beauty.

**People organize** their knowledge about the world around them by sorting and simplifying received information. Therefore, they create cognitive schemes, which are certain representations of the reality displaying its most typical and fundamental elements and properties. These schemes are responsible for defining the essence of our worldview and have a significant influence on social cognition – understanding, anticipation, situation and emotion control. Gender roles have also been impacted by the media and advertising. An advertisement showing Indian Domestic Violence Campaign Features Hindu goddesses Bearing The Scars Features Lakshmi, Durga And Saraswati The combination of religious deities with the results of violence make for a powerful message in this Indian domestic violence campaign. Featuring the Hindu goddesses Lakshmi, Durga and Saraswati, the shots show the women in typical serene yet powerful poses.

But each goddess bears the scars of physical violence - a graze, black eye, a fat lip and cuts. The accompanying text reads: "Pray that we never see this day. Today, more than 68 per cent of women in India are victims of domestic violence. Tomorrow, it seems like no woman shall be spared. Not even the ones we pray to.

Gender roles in media and advertising are also sometimes impacted by humor. Advertising frequently uses gender roles to promote products. There are various stereotypes in regards to humorous advertising with both males and females. Stereotypes can produce oversimplified conceptions and misapplied knowledge evaluations. Humor is generated on two steps. First, some kind of incongruity that violates a predominating view has to be recognized and, second, if people cognitively resolve this incongruity, they experience humor. Humor occurs when it seems that things are normal, while at the same time something goes wrong that breaks our expectations. One such example is the Amul Butter advertisements regularly comes up with the burning social issues and the happenings of the contemporary scenarios.

The video of the Vogue Empower Deepika Padukone starring divided opinion amongst people. While the video garnered polar reactions, Amul came up with a cool version for their brand, cashing in on the internet uproar. In the video titled, 'My Choice', Deepika Padukone appeared in the video with 98 other women from Mumbai and was directed by Homi Adajania, produced by Dinesh Vijan. As it has been for every sketch, where Amul brand tried to get a humorous angle out of trending stories. This time, Amul featured the famous grab of the video (Deepika's hair blowing in the wind) to market their product. Amul ad's in their banner read, 'It's my choice, to use a butter knife or use my fingers'. The Bollywood actress, who battled for women's equality in a video for Vogue's women empowerment initiative, received harsh criticism from politicians, feminists and even from the Bollywood industry. Her contemporaries, Sonakshi Sinha and Kangana Ranaut also rubbished her idea of sex outside marriage and said that empowering is not about sex alone.

While Amul's butter and other products have been ruling our taste buds, its cartoon advertisements have been winning our hearts. The iconic Amul girl has never been shy of expressing its views on any event that has created a buzz. Over the years, the brand has come up with iconic illustration using pictures and pun to satisfy and articulate what often people failed to say. It often happens that after Amul brings out its version on a topic, we feel, yes! This is exactly what we were looking for. And, we have to say, Amul never disappoints us.

### THE RECOGNITION OF A THIRD GENDER

The eunuchs (transgender community in India) are often shut out from mainstream society. Many are disowned by their family and have to scrape a living begging on the streets or worse.

But they are also in demand to sing and dance at auspicious events such as weddings and naming ceremonies – so creating a musical ad for Brooke Bond was not something that seemed manufactured or artificial.

Inclusiveness has always been at the heart of Brooke Bond Red Label. So when presented with an opportunity to make this come alive for the eunuch community, I found it very pertinent.

Here was a golden chance to #UNSTEREOTYPE the typical portrayal of this community in pop culture. #UNSTEREOTYPE is Unilever's movement to break gender stereotypes in advertising. A new ad from Vicks India featuring a transgender mother and her daughter has gone viral. The heart touching ad tells the story of how Gauri Sawant, a transgender woman and activist, came to adopt Gayatri, a young girl whose birth mother died of AIDS. In the ad, Gayatri narrates the daily rituals she has adopted with her new mummy, from hair massages to watching horror films together, and the struggles her mother faces as a transgender woman. She questions the unfair legal treatment of transgender people in India. It defies traditional gender ideas. A sensitive and

socially important storyline gets the brand message across subtly "My Civics book says that everyone is entitled to basic rights" Gayatri says. "Then why is my mom denied them?" By the end of the ad, Gayatri says she is going to be a lawyer - for her mom.

Transgender women have a long history in India, featured in Hindu mythology and sought out for blessings. In 2014, India's Supreme Court ruled that transgender people had equal rights under the law and granted legal status to individuals who identify as a third gender - neither male or female. Still, transgender people continue to face bias and discrimination in Indian society.

Discrimination and hate are often manifested from a fear of what people don't know or understand. Visibility helps mitigate this fear, emphasizing our common humanity. This Vicks India ad connects us to the universal experiences of parental love and mother/daughter bonds fostering vital conversations necessary for positive change

In another Indian advertisement for the first time a long format digital ad for Myntra's in-house brand, Anouk, depicts a lesbian couple in a vivid display of emotions. The bold move has got a national and international media attention.

In a realistic evolution, the Myntra and Fastrack ads delve deeper into the issue. They picture homosexuals as individuals confident about their identity, and unapologetically 'non-conformist'. A young man practises kathak in the rain while wearing *ghunghroos*. A series of men share their love of pouting while taking selfies. And a man goes down on one knee to propose to his partner with a ring. These scenes from a new TV advertisement by e-commerce platform eBay India break several stereotypes and is perhaps the first Indian commercial to consummately feature two men in a homosexual relationship.

Some leading Indian brands did come out in support of the LGBT community when section 377 was upheld by the Supreme Court in December 2013.

The examples are growing, but do they signify a change in attitudes and outlook? Are advertisers and agencies beginning to show greater sensitivity towards gender depiction in their ads? Or is the advertising industry yet to come of age as far as gender sensitivity is concerned?

In the book gender advertising by Erving Goffman it states: *"If gender is defined as the culturally established correlates of sex (whether in consequence of biology or learning) then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of those correlates."* Gender displays can otherwise be defined as rituals of gender behavior, and they are used to help interpret social reality. This is what advertising mainly borrows from, and for Goffman this is the reason as to why ads do not look strange to the public. Further, Goffman argues that there are codes which can be used to identify gender. These codes of gender can be seen in the portrayals of men and women in advertising. There are four categories under which we can see these codes of

gender: the family, the feminine touch, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal.

## CONCLUSION

Beauty can be defined largely as a perception. It is a group of social norms that interpret a particular form of appearance that is valued. Since almost four decades ago, women have been expected to conform to a particular body image and to behave in a certain manner of which would ultimately decipher and enforce their femininity. Both men and women strive to achieve this beauty which influences them to shape themselves and alter their appearance in order to conform to those norms. These norms are largely derived from the media's presentation of models and well known stars through advertisements for products and magazine covers. As our society is now filled with these advertisements in all aspects of life, such as on TV, billboards, in supermarkets displayed with the products (particularly beauty products) and on social media, children are now viewing this material at a younger age and in turn creating the perception that this is the ideal appearance whilst they are still very impressionable. Young children learn by observing and imitating what is presented to them.

It is very common for young men and women to compare themselves to models in ads, in terms of their physical attractiveness. The appearance and body size of the models within the advertisements in the final image seen by consumers are, more often than not, altered through editing programs such as Photoshop, in order to achieve the perfect (or impossible) desired look. The use of these images creates a false beauty ideal for both men and women to aspire to, as well as creating the use of extreme dieting and surgical procedures in order to resemble a similar image that is displayed in advertising. This emphasis on an ideal body appearance has been regarded as being psychologically detrimental to the well-being of many young men and women, and on their self-image. The extant research shows that stereotypes can be helpful or detrimental, depending on several factors, such as the gender attitudes of the audience.

Magazine advertisements highlighting a thin, attractive female model yield greater self-objectification and the process of inspecting this type of advertisement can encourage women to think about their physical appearance as if looking on as a critical observer. Images from the media are frequently exposed to Western women, and the usage of skinny idealized women in advertising is prevalent. Data also shows that males who were exposed to advertisements of women being sexually objectified were more likely to believe stereotypes about sex roles as well as rape myth beliefs.

When sexuality is used in advertising, certain values and attitudes towards sex are 'sold' along with a product. The message may be that "innocence is sexy", that women enjoy being dominated, that the use of a certain product is naughty but legal, or that use of a certain product will make the user more attractive to the opposite sex, and



many other messages. The way beauty is portrayed in the media causes dissatisfaction and negative thoughts about oneself when those results are not achieved. Socio-cultural standards of male images are presented in almost all forms of popular media, barraging men with images that portray what is considered to be the "ideal body". Such standards of beauty are almost completely unattainable for most men; a majority of the models displayed on television and in advertisements are well below what is considered healthy body weight.

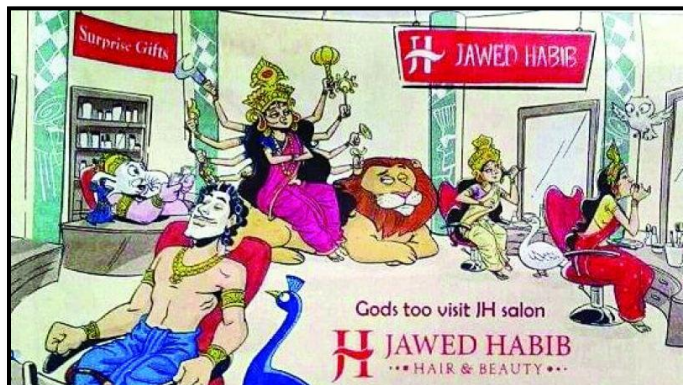


FIG 1: ADVERTISEMENT OF GODDESS DURGA USE BY HAIR DRESSER JAWED HABIB



FIG 2: ADVERTISEMENT OF BOOK MY BAI.COM



FIG 3: ADVERTISEMENT OF MYNTRA TO PROTEST ON DISCRIMINATION

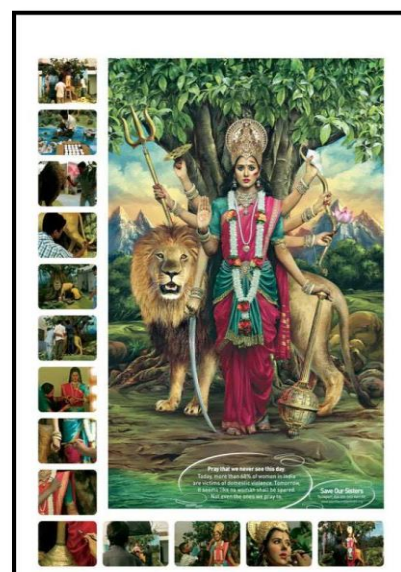
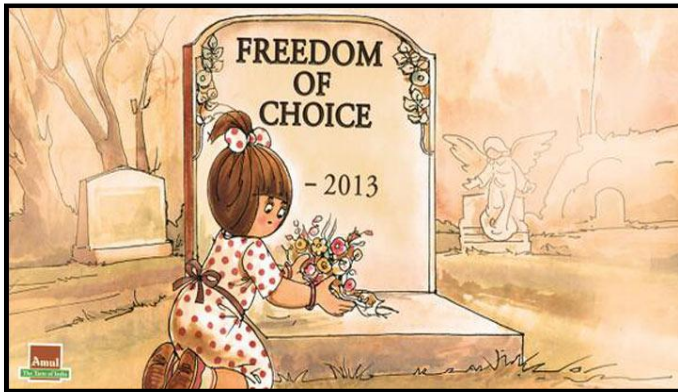


FIGURE 4, 5, 6: SERIES OF ABUSED GODDESS, CAMPAIGN AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN INDIA

**FIG: 7 ADVERTISEMENT OF AMUL, SHOWING THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE.**



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