

Women in Unconventional Advertising *An analysis of select advertisements*

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Abstract: Advertising is a means of communication with the users of a product or service. Advertisements are messages paid for by those who send them and are intended to inform or influence people who receive them, as defined by the Advertising Association of the UK (The Economic Times). Advertisements influence the perceptions of the people about the society they live in. Advertisers use different ways to affect the consumer's perception of the product. Such story lines are added that can touch on specific emotions or bandwagon approach is used which makes consumers feel that they are "missing out" by not using the product being advertised. The portrayal of women and the roles assigned to them in advertisements have been the subject of much debate and criticism. By and large advertisements are stereotypical when it comes to projection of women. They are used as objects in order to sell products such as the girl who applies fairness cream in order to look fairer to excel in life or shown as the home managers. However, the representation of women is different in many advertisements. Certain companies and brands have taken the risk to portray an entirely different dimension of the traditional accepted norms of the society. There are some advertisements that challenge or at least do not conform to some of the conventional notions about women and their role in society. Such advertisements show women as strong and independent human beings. This paper analyses some of the non-conventional advertisements of five years – from 2012 to 2016 and discusses different dimensions of the out of the box ideas they promote. This exploration will show how women are portrayed in the advertisements and provide useful insights into the ideas that the select advertisements portray.

Keywords: Advertisements, women, beauty, traditional, branding, marketing.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A cursory look at the Indian media and the content of advertisements reveal the diversity and clashing trends that are portrayed about gender. There are advertisements that display women as sari clad homemakers having the sole aim of pleasing their families while as some advertisements show women as independent go-getters. However some trends are clearly emerging from the confusion in this mix of contradictory roles assigned to women.

A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing can be called a stereotype (Fung & Ma, 2000). When it is about gender, then differentiation is made between men and women based on certain attributes that are specific to that gender (Afolabi, 2013). For instance the typical role given to men and women is believed to fall under stereotyping. Men are typically given the role of sole provider of the family and the caregiver and nurturer role is assigned to women. Common opinions of a group towards another group, which are formed over time or through socialisation, are stereotypes. Even though stereotyping can have positive effects as well but usually negative effects are profoundly observed. A stereotyped perception is difficult to mould or change.

When it comes to gender stereotyping in advertising, the reaction of the audience, be it men or women, depends of the way that advertisement is decoded by them. Men and women are no longer dedicated to only one role in their lives. Social conventions have dramatically changed which in turn have brought about a change in the traditional role of men and women. Women are increasingly working outside the realm of their homes in various fields and men have started taking part in domestic chores as well as rearing of children. Hence advertisements have also been depicting this change by portraying the interchanging the traditional roles of men and women. Since mass media is also not what it used to be in the past. It has gained power enough to influence public opinion.

Since men and women are no longer restricted to the traditional roles but play various roles. In addition of being partners, parents, they are also business associates, earners, etc which gives advertisers many ways of presenting their roles. The focus of the current study is to discuss how such roles are portrayed, what ideas are put across and to understand what are the stereotypes that these unconventional advertisements tried to break. Nineteen advertisements from five years - from 2012 to 2016 are selected for analysis. The sample is selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique. Non-probability sampling focuses on sampling techniques where the units that are investigated are based on the judgement of the researcher. Purposive sampling relies on the judgement of the researcher when it comes to selecting the units that are to be studied (Laerd Dissertation). The criteria for selecting the advertisements is their out of the box concept, availability and, being women oriented. The concepts of the advertisements are then arranged under five frames: Beauty is skin deep, Equality, Damsel is not in distress, Beauty with brains, Her life her choice.

S.NO	Advertisement	Year
1	Anushka Sharma TVS Scooty Pep ad	2012
2	Fastrack Summer Bags	2012
3	Mujhe Pankh De Do - Stayfree Women for Change	2012
4	Bournvita Boxer - "Tayyari Jeet ki"	2013
5	Tata Docomo's 'Open up' Campaign Lizard	2013
6	Raymond - 'Being There'	2014
7	Samsung Galaxy Note 4	2014
8	Hyundai - Life is Brilliant	2014
9	Havells coffee maker	2014
10	PC Jeweller - 'Woman of the house'	2014
11	Airtel Boss – The Smartphone Network	2014
12	Apni Kismat Apne Haath': Google's Ad for 'Android One	2014
13	Tata Tea - 'Kaala Teeka'	2014
14	Titan Raga 'Woman of Today'	2014
15	Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine	2015
16	Titan Raga's Garden of Eden	2015
17	HDFC Life- Ghungroo	2015
18	Forest Essentials Ayurvedic Cream	2015
19	Break the Bias	2016

Table A shows the sample of advertisements

Beauty is skin deep: These advertisements break beauty stereotypes.

Dabur Vatika's 'Brave and Beautiful'

This focused on the struggle of cancer survivors. The ad shows a woman who loses her hair due to chemotherapy and the fear of social negation she has. But the support she receives from her family strengthens her belief in herself, and then the other people around her accept her wholeheartedly, regardless of how she looks.

Equality: Relationships have evolved and these ads show couples sharing responsibilities of the household.

Raymond - 'Being There'

The ad shows a working couple juggling between their parental and professional responsibilities. The ad breaks the stereotype by showing the father taking the responsibility of staying with the child at home while the mother goes to fulfil her work responsibility at office. The ad has no dialogues but puts across the concept of a man who shares the workload at home like taking care of the child and is sensitive to the professional workload of the woman.

Bournvita Boxer - "Tayyari Jeet Ki"

A mother offers a health drink to her daughter who is an aspiring boxer. It makes a statement that competition is not always between equals but one has to be prepared to overcome challenges. Later in the boxing tournament, she competes with a bigger boy and defeats him. The ad highlights a mother's role in progressive parenting and inculcating good habits in their children, to prepare them for eventualities in life.

Samsung Galaxy Note 4

Usually women are shown torn between personal and professional responsibilities but this ad shows a man striving to strike a balance between office and family. It breaks the stereotype about the capabilities of men in childcare as it shows the father spending quality time with his daughter as well as manages to get his professional work done on his phone.

Hyundai - Life is Brilliant

The ad revolves around a child missing his mother who is away from home because of a project. The father entertains him all day and fulfils the child's wish of meeting his mother by bringing him to his mother in Hyundai. This ad also shows man discharging domestic and official responsibilities; which is usually expected of a woman.

Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine

This ad features a couple going shopping for a washing machine. The man gets busy with his phone and directs the store clerk to show the machine to his wife, and calls it her 'department.' In the next scene, the wife makes him realise that the laundry is not anybody's 'department'. Both men and women wear clothes and both need to do laundry. Assigning chores particularly to women is sexist.

Havells coffee maker

This ad takes a dig not just at the logic of people wanting to marry because they need someone to cook for them. A mother who wants her son to get married complains about not having anyone to make coffee around at home, to which the prospective wife promptly gives her a Havells coffee maker and proclaims that she's not a kitchen appliance.

Her life her choices: These ads show women taking bold and unconventional career choices and excelling in it. These ads show career oriented women whose priority is their career if it means leaving the traditional role of home maker and even leaving their husbands because there is no unconditional devotion to anybody.

Titan Raga 'Woman of Today'

The ad shows a woman bumps into her ex-husband at the airport. As the conversation turns nostalgic, the guy claims that they could've worked out as a couple, if she'd only quit her job. The woman makes it clear that her career is as important as his career is. This ad celebrates the idea of independent and career oriented women, hence breaking the stereotype that it is just the household and not the career that should be a priority in the life of a woman.

Airtel Boss – The Smartphone Network

The ad features a female boss who refuses to let her subordinates go until they finish an assignment. Later in the ad she is shown cooking dishes for husband and the husband is one of her subordinates. It is portrayed that a woman can be a responsible boss in her office and a loving spouse in her home and successfully play both the roles.

Anushka Sharma TVS Scooty Pep ad

This ad shows a group of college going girls who want to wear western clothes but are forced not to by the school authorities. However they manage to have their way and change the mindset of the school authorities as well. Hence this ad promotes mobility, independence and dismisses the idea of controlling what women should or should not wear.

Damsel is not in distress: These ads show women can not only save themselves from difficulties but can take initiative in helping others a well. These ads have a strong message of female empowerment.

PC Jeweller - 'Woman of the house'

It shows that the husband has been staying at home for six months, working on a book and the house runs on the wife's income. This ad breaks the stereotype that only men can be the sole bread earners of the household. It establishes that women are dependable enough to count on when it comes to financial stability of the family. The ad breaks another stereotype by showing the husband comfortable in his position of not being the 'bread earner' of the family.

Nirma Ambulance Ad

Nirma ads usually show women washing clothes and being happy with the results of the washing powder. But the Nirma Ambulance Ad is in total contrast with the previous ads of Nirma. It depicts two women who push an ambulance out of a ditch while everybody else was mute spectators. They get their clothes dirty but Nirma is there to help. Hence Nirma switched from portrayals women as home-makers doing laundry to change-makers taking initiatives.

Beauty with brains: These ads show women who are more than just beautiful.

'Apni Kismat Apne Haath': Google's Ad for 'Android One'

The ad shows men and women getting what they want from life. Aspirations of women are not subdued but both the genders are getting equal opportunities. Sari clad women are riding two-wheelers, female reporter, policewoman; even a woman amputee climbs a mountain defeating the barrier of disability. Women across cultures are fulfilling their wishes. The ad conveys an inspiring message that everybody should be able to shape their own future.

Tata Tea - 'Kaala Teeka'

Beverage brand Tata Tea has launched the second phase in its 'Power of 49' campaign that targets women voters. It takes up the issue of women empowerment. The ad conveys the apathy of educated voters and, also the safety of women. It argues that the reason of women not getting what they deserve from the establishment is because they don't actively participate in the electoral process.

II. CONCLUSION

Media reflects society. Television is one of the strongest media and its nature makes it one of the most viable and strong story teller, yet the competition from other forms of media is increasing. Since it is profit-based, therefore if it has to survive then it has to provide the masses what they want to see. It might be the reason of the portrayal of the stereotypical image of women being the caregiver of the family, childrearer, hard working, submissive, slim and, pleasing to the opposite gender has been portrayed in Indian advertisements. That is what people believed and the media has to show the common beliefs manifest on the small screen. Nielsen India study (2014) on Indian households supported by Ariel, has found that 76% of Indian men believe laundry is a woman's job, and 68% would prefer to watch TV over doing the laundry.

However certain brands and companies have tried to shun stereotypes and present women in somewhat differently. The current study shows that many advertisements about gender equality, girl education as well as other domestic issues are made while as few that can break beauty stereotypes are made.

Forest Essentials Ayurvedic Cream breaks the beauty myth and shows a woman who gets ready, beautifies herself like any other woman but then seeks the blessings of her father, unlike the traditional 'maa ka aashirwaad', and heads to a battlefield to participate in a war. There are some ads like *Tata Docomo's 'Open up' Campaign Lizard* where a woman is not shown but the stereotype is broken by portrayed that a man and his son fears a lizard and runs. Usually men are shown as saviours and women are shown afraid of cockroaches and spiders etc. But the ad shows that men are also fearful of certain things and there is no shame in accepting your phobias. Usually women are shown struggling to strike balance between work and household but this advertisement of *Samsung Galaxy Note 4* shows a man juggling between taking care of his daughter and fulfilling his professional responsibilities. *Break the Bias* is an ad with an inspiring message), "Change the way you look at a woman's success. She is unstoppable now." It establishes that women excel because they work hard and are capable enough to deserve success not because they give favours to their seniors. It shams the idea that just because a woman is successful in her career doesn't mean she used her femininity to get to the position.

Some ads break the stereotype that boys are the bread earners, therefore only their career should be taken seriously. Advertisements like *HDFC Life- Ghungroo* show how a father struggles to make her disabled daughter independent. Similarly *Bournvita Boxer-Tayyari Jeet ki* portrays how a mother prepares her daughter to pursue her career in boxing, by not only competing with equals but also with bigger boys. *Titan Raga's Garden of Eden* an ad by Titan features Katrina Kaif exploring the question of, when is the right time is to get married. It discusses the reasons and brushes off the reason of succumbing to social pressure. It leaves with the thought of following one's heart and only that can determine the right time for one's marriage. Likewise the ads like *Fastrack Summer Bags* and *Mujhe Pankh De Do - Stayfree Women for Change* encourages women to be themselves, without feeling any guilt. Women still face challenges in every phase of their lives but the advertisements depict that the climate is changing. If being a home maker is an option, so is being a pilot, painter, soldier, academic and, more and more women are portrayed who are brave enough not only to follow their heart but break social shackles as well.

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