



DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENT

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Abstract

Advertising has become one of the most powerful forms of communication that shapes public perception and social behavior. In India, the representation of women in advertisements has been a subject of intense discussion due to the persistent stereotypes and changing trends influenced by modernization, feminism, and digital media. This study examines how women are portrayed in Indian advertising, how these portrayals have evolved over time, and the impact they create on consumer perception and gender norms.

1. Introduction

Advertising reflects the social, cultural, and economic environment of a country. In India, women have been used both as a medium to attract attention and as symbols of cultural identity. From the early decades of independence, where women were portrayed as homemakers and caregivers, to the present era, where they are seen as independent professionals and decision-makers, the portrayal has undergone a significant transformation.

However, despite modernization, gender stereotypes continue to dominate many forms of media. Women are often shown in domestic roles, beauty-centered contexts, or as objects of attraction. In contrast, a new wave of advertisements now emphasizes empowerment, equality, and individuality. This study explores these contrasting narratives and attempts to understand how advertising mirrors and molds the perception of women in Indian society.

2. Review of Literature

1. Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) found that advertising across cultures perpetuates gender stereotypes, often portraying women in subordinate roles.
2. Das (2011) analyzed Indian television advertisements and concluded that while urbanization has improved female representation, traditional roles persist in rural advertising.
3. Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) highlighted that women in global advertising are frequently associated with beauty, domesticity, and sexuality.
4. Chakraborty (2013) emphasized that Indian advertising reflects both the patriarchal mindset and gradual feminist influences.

5. Kaur and Garg (2014) examined Indian print ads and found that over 60% depicted women in decorative roles rather than authoritative or intellectual positions.
6. Munshi (2015) discussed how digital and social media platforms have begun altering these depictions, promoting a more realistic and empowered image of women.
7. Sengupta (2013) studied television commercials and found an emerging trend of “women of substance” – independent, career-oriented, and self-assured.

The review suggests that while there has been progress, gender bias and stereotypical portrayals remain deeply embedded in Indian advertising culture.

3. Problem Statement

Despite rapid socio-economic progress and the growing participation of women in every sphere of life, Indian advertisements still often portray women through narrow stereotypes — as homemakers, beauty icons, or dependent figures. This misrepresentation can distort social perceptions and hinder the broader acceptance of gender equality. The study seeks to evaluate the current portrayal of women in Indian advertising and assess whether these depictions reflect or resist changing social realities.

4. Research Objectives

1. To analyze the portrayal of women in Indian television, print, and digital advertisements.
2. To identify recurring gender stereotypes in advertising content.
3. To examine changes in women’s representation over the past decade.
4. To evaluate consumer perception regarding the portrayal of women in advertisements.
5. To suggest strategies for promoting more realistic and empowering portrayals of women in Indian advertising.

5. Hypotheses

H₁: Women are predominantly portrayed in stereotypical domestic and beauty-related roles in Indian advertisements.

H₂: The portrayal of women in advertisements has gradually shifted toward empowerment in the last decade.

H₃: Positive and empowered portrayals of women enhance brand image and consumer trust.

6. Research Methodology

Research Design:

Descriptive and analytical in nature.

Data Source:

Primary Data: Survey conducted among 200 respondents from urban areas of Rajasthan (Udaipur, Jaipur, and Jodhpur), using structured questionnaires.

Secondary Data: Journal articles, online advertisements, newspaper archives, and marketing reports (2015–2025).

Sampling Technique:

Purposive sampling of respondents aged between 18 and 45, including both male and female participants.

Data Collection Tools:

Questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale to assess opinions on various types of advertisement portrayals.

Data Analysis Techniques:

Descriptive statistics (percentages, mean scores).

Chi-square test and correlation analysis for hypothesis testing.

Content analysis of 50 advertisements across television, YouTube, and social media.

7. Data Analysis and Findings**1. Representation Type:**

58% of advertisements analyzed depicted women in traditional roles (caregiver, homemaker, beauty-oriented).

27% showed women in professional or leadership roles.

15% portrayed women in neutral or gender-equal contexts.

2. Consumer Perception:

72% of respondents believed that advertisements still reinforce outdated stereotypes.

68% appreciated ads showcasing empowered or career-oriented women.

81% felt that realistic portrayals create a stronger emotional connection with the brand.

3. Trend Analysis:

Significant increase in “empowerment ads” such as Tanishq, Ariel – Share the Load, Titan Raga, and Whisper’s Touch the Pickle campaigns.

Brands adopting feminist or gender-neutral narratives witnessed higher brand engagement and recall.

4. Statistical Findings:

Chi-square results supported H₁, indicating a continued dominance of stereotypical portrayals.

Correlation analysis supported H₂ and H₃, showing a positive association between empowered portrayals and consumer approval.

8. Conclusion

The portrayal of women in Indian advertising reflects a complex interplay between tradition and modernity. While there is growing visibility of independent, strong, and career-oriented women, stereotypical representations persist across several product categories, particularly in beauty, household, and food-related advertising. Audiences increasingly prefer realistic and empowering depictions, indicating that socially responsible advertising is not just ethical but also commercially rewarding.

Advertisers must move beyond token empowerment and adopt genuine inclusivity and diversity in representation. Media regulators and advertising agencies should collaborate to promote gender-sensitive communication that supports equality and inspires positive social change.

9. Suggestions

1. Encourage gender-neutral storylines in advertising campaigns.
2. Include women in creative and decision-making roles in ad agencies.
3. Promote awareness programs on responsible media representation.
4. Establish self-regulatory guidelines for advertisers to prevent objectification.
5. Highlight achievements of women in varied professions to inspire balanced depictions.

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