

EVOLVING GENDER ROLES: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDIAN DETERGENT ADS

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Abstract:

This study examines the portrayal of women in Indian detergent advertisements over the past decade, focusing on six major brands: Surf Excel, Ariel, Ghadi, Tide, Nirma, and Rin. Utilizing a qualitative textual analysis of advertisements from 2010 to 2020, the research identifies recurring themes and roles assigned to women, with a particular focus on the evolution of these portrayals. The key findings reveal that while traditional depictions of women as housewives persist, some brands have made strides in promoting gender equality by depicting men in domestic roles and women in more diverse roles. These findings highlight the significant impact of advertisements on societal attitudes towards gender roles and dwell on the need for more inclusive and representative media portrayals. The study suggests that advertisers should continue to evolve their content to reflect the diverse roles of women in modern society.

Key Words: *Women Representation, Indian Advertisements, Media Portrayal, Gender Stereotypes, Advertising Trends, Gender Equality, Media Influence.*

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Introduction:

The portrayal of women in Indian advertisements has been a subject of considerable discussion and critique over the years. Historically, television advertisements in India have predominantly depicted women in domestic roles, reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes. This trend is particularly evident in commercials where women are shown primarily within the confines of the home, engaged in activities such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the family. In contrast, men are often portrayed in professional settings or engaging in activities outside the home, suggesting a division of labour based on gender roles.

This stereotypical representation has significant implications for societal perceptions of gender roles. When audiences repeatedly see women in these limited roles, it perpetuates the notion that a woman's place is in the home and that her primary responsibilities are domestic. This portrayal undermines the progress towards gender equality and restricts the perception of women's capabilities to the domestic sphere.

Despite the pervasive nature of these stereotypes, there have been some positive changes in recent years. A few advertisements have begun to challenge traditional gender roles by depicting men in domestic roles and promoting the idea of shared household responsibilities. For example, the "Bail Kolhu" ad featuring actors like Pankaj Tripathi and Manoj Bajpayee normalizes the presence of men in the kitchen. Similarly, Ariel's "Share the Load" campaign emphasizes that household chores are not solely the responsibility of women.

Concepts: Advertisements are powerful tools of communication that shape public perceptions and attitudes.

They serve as a reflection of societal norms and values while also having the potential to influence and alter these norms. In the context of Indian society, advertisements play a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging traditional gender roles.

The central concept of this study is the representation of women in Indian advertisements, with a specific focus on how they are often portrayed as housewives. This study aims to explore the extent to which advertisements contribute to the stereotyping of women and whether there have been any shifts towards more equitable portrayals.

Relevance of the Study:

The study of gender representation in advertisements is relevant for several reasons. First, advertisements reach a vast audience and have a profound impact on societal attitudes and behaviours. The way women are depicted in these advertisements can influence how they are perceived in real life, affecting their opportunities and treatment in various spheres of life.

Second, understanding the portrayal of women in advertisements is crucial for assessing the progress towards gender equality. If advertisements continue to depict women in traditional, subservient roles, it indicates that societal attitudes have not evolved significantly. Conversely, a shift towards more diverse and empowering representations of women would suggest progress towards gender equality.

Finally, this study is relevant for the advertising industry itself. Advertisers need to be aware of the impact of their content and strive to create advertisements that reflect and promote gender equality. By analyzing current trends and identifying areas for improvement, this study can provide valuable insights for advertisers and contribute to the creation of more inclusive and representative advertisements.

Literature Review:

This study attempts to examine the representation of women in various Indian detergent ads from 2010 to 2020. The review draws a comprehensive understanding of the portrayal of women in Indian advertisements and how it shapes societal mindsets.

Defining Advertisements:

Advertisements are promotional messages designed to persuade or inform people about a product, service, idea, or brand. These messages are distributed through various media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, social media, and websites. Advertisements aim to create awareness and interest in the advertised product or service and encourage people to take action, such as making a purchase or supporting a cause. Effective advertisements use persuasive techniques such as emotional appeal, humour, celebrity endorsements, and catchy slogans to capture people's attention and engage them with the message.

According to Belch and Belch (2021), advertising is "a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future." Similarly,

Bovee and Arens (2019) define advertising as "the nonpersonal communication of information usually paid for and usually persuasive in nature about products, services, or ideas by identified sponsors through various media."

Women and Advertisements:

In Indian advertisements, women are often portrayed in stereotypical gender roles and are objectified to sell products. This portrayal reinforces gender biases and perpetuates harmful stereotypes about women. Advertisements have a powerful influence on how people perceive gender roles and expectations, thus impacting societal norms and values.

Historical Perspective:

Historically, women in Indian advertisements have been depicted primarily as housewives, confined to domestic roles such as cooking and cleaning. Studies have shown that women in ads are rarely portrayed as business professionals or in skilled jobs like doctors or lawyers. Instead, they are often shown in passive, submissive roles, dependent on men or seeking their approval.

Changes in Representation:

There has been a growing trend towards more inclusive and diverse representations of women in Indian advertisements. Recent ads have started to depict women in non-traditional roles, such as in the workplace or as sports stars, promoting gender equality. Advertisers are also embracing body positivity and representing women from diverse backgrounds, breaking down stereotypes and promoting inclusivity.

However, despite these positive changes, the portrayal of women in Indian ads still has a long way to go. Many ads continue to depict women in demeaning roles, reinforcing negative stereotypes. The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) has issued guidelines to prohibit the use of sexist or derogatory language and the objectification of women's bodies, but adherence to these guidelines remains inconsistent.

Theoretical Perspective:

From a theoretical perspective, this study is grounded in feminist theory, which examines the ways in which media representations of gender perpetuate inequality. Feminist scholars argue that advertisements play a significant role in shaping cultural attitudes towards women and reinforcing traditional gender roles. By critically analyzing advertisements, we can understand how they contribute to the construction of gender identities and the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination.

Research Gap:

While there has been considerable research on the portrayal of women in Indian advertisements, most studies have focused on general trends rather than specific product categories. This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on detergent ads, a category that has traditionally depicted women as housewives. By analyzing changes in these ads over the past decade, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the progress made and the challenges that remain in achieving gender equality in advertising.

The literature review highlights the significant role that advertisements play in shaping societal attitudes towards gender roles. While there have been positive changes in the representation of women in Indian ads,

much work remains to be done to achieve gender equality in advertising. This study contributes to the existing body of research by focusing on a specific product category and examining the impact of these ads on societal attitudes towards women. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide insights into how advertisements can be used as a tool for promoting gender equality and challenging traditional gender roles.

Objectives:

- **Analyze the Portrayal of Women in Indian Detergent Advertisements:** This study aims to systematically examine how women are depicted in advertisements for major detergent brands in India. The study will look into the roles and characteristics assigned to women in these ads and how these portrayals have evolved from 2010 to 2020.
- **Evaluate Changes in Societal Mindsets Towards Women:** This objective focuses on assessing whether there has been a shift in societal attitudes towards women as reflected in advertisements. By comparing ads over a decade, the study will determine if there is a trend towards more progressive representations of women.

Methodology:

Textual Analysis: The study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing textual analysis as the primary method. This approach is chosen to deeply analyze the content of advertisements and extract meaningful insights regarding the portrayal of women. Textual analysis allows for a comprehensive examination of the themes, narratives, and visual representations in the ads.

Purposive Sampling:

Advertisements were selected based on specific characteristics that are relevant to the study's objectives. The research focuses on six major detergent brands in India: Surf Excel, Ariel, Ghadi, Tide, Nirma, and Rin. These brands are chosen due to their significant market share and popularity, ensuring that the study covers advertisements with a wide audience reach.

By combining qualitative textual analysis with purposive sampling, this methodology ensures a detailed and focused examination of the research questions, providing insights into the portrayal of women in Indian detergent advertisements and the broader implications for gender stereotypes in society.

Findings:

The research aimed to examine the portrayal of women in Indian advertisements, particularly focusing on six major detergent brands: Surf Excel, Ariel, Ghadi, Tide, Nirma, and Rin. The study seeks to determine whether women are depicted in traditional housewife roles or if there have been changes towards more empowering portrayals.

Thematic Analysis:

The main focus of the research was on thematic emphasis and the interpretations that could be derived from detergent advertisements. The findings and analysis centered on how women are portrayed in these ads and whether these portrayals reinforce or challenge traditional gender roles.

1. Surf Excel

- **Portrayal:** Women in Surf Excel advertisements are often shown in nurturing and caretaking roles, focusing on their ability to keep their family's clothes clean.
- **Themes:** The ads emphasize the product's effectiveness in removing tough stains, thereby supporting women's roles as homemakers who maintain cleanliness and hygiene.
- **Examples:** Ads showing mothers cleaning their children's clothes, reinforcing their role as primary caregivers.

2. Ariel

- **Portrayal:** Ariel has been more progressive in its portrayal of women. Recent campaigns have shown men participating in laundry, challenging traditional gender roles.
- **Themes:** Gender equality, sharing household responsibilities, and empowering women.
- **Examples:** The "Share the Load" campaign depicts men helping with laundry, promoting the idea that household chores are not solely women's responsibility.

3. Ghadi

- **Portrayal:** Ghadi advertisements have evolved from emphasizing functional benefits to emotional storytelling. Women are still often shown in traditional roles, but there is a focus on the emotional impact of clean clothes.
- **Themes:** Emotional and psychological benefits of clean clothes, with women portrayed as caring figures ensuring their family's well-being.
- **Examples:** Ads showing mothers ensuring their children's clothes are germ-free, highlighting their nurturing roles.

4. Tide

- **Portrayal:** Tide ads typically depict women as primary caregivers and multitaskers, reinforcing their role in household management.
- **Themes:** Efficiency, multitasking, and control over household chores.
- **Examples:** Women efficiently managing their family's laundry needs, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

5. Nirma

- **Portrayal:** Historically, Nirma ads have shown women as the primary users of the product, often depicted in traditional homemaker roles. However, recent ads have included a more diverse range of women, including working women.
- **Themes:** Traditional roles, evolving to include diverse lifestyles and interests.
- **Examples:** Early ads showing women washing clothes by hand, recent campaigns featuring female athletes using the product.

6. Rin

- **Portrayal:** Rin advertisements have a mix of empowering and traditional portrayals. Some ads show women as efficient and successful in their tasks, while others reinforce traditional gender roles.
- **Themes:** Efficiency, empowerment, and traditional responsibilities.
- **Examples:** Women portrayed as responsible for household chores, with some ads showing them in more empowering roles.

Interpretation:

Traditional Gender Roles in Advertisements:

Surf Excel and Tide

- **Findings:** Women are predominantly portrayed in nurturing and caregiving roles.
- **Societal Implication:** These portrayals reinforce the stereotype that a woman's primary role is within the domestic sphere, perpetuating traditional gender norms.
- **Utility:** Understanding these portrayals helps in recognizing the subtle reinforcement of gender roles in everyday media, encouraging a critical view of such content.

Ghadi

- **Findings:** Emotional storytelling often depicts women in traditional roles, emphasizing their responsibility for household cleanliness.
- **Societal Implication:** This depiction reinforces the notion that domestic tasks are inherently women's duties, thereby normalizing gender-based division of labour.
- **Utility:** Highlighting these portrayals can spark conversations on the need for equitable distribution of household responsibilities.

Progressive Shifts in Gender Portrayals

Ariel

- **Findings:** The "Share the Load" campaign promotes gender equality by depicting men participating in laundry.
- **Societal Implication:** Such advertisements challenge traditional gender roles, promoting a more balanced and equitable view of domestic responsibilities.
- **Utility:** These portrayals can inspire behavioural changes, encouraging men to take a more active role in household chores and supporting gender equality.

Nirma

- **Findings:** Recent advertisements include women in diverse roles, such as working professionals and athletes.
- **Societal Implication:** These ads help broaden the societal view of women's capabilities, promoting the idea that women can excel in various fields beyond the domestic sphere.
- **Utility:** Such representations can motivate young girls and women by providing positive role models and reinforcing the idea that they can aspire to any role in society.

Mixed Portrayals and Their Implications:

Rin

- **Findings:** Advertisements show a mix of traditional and empowering portrayals.
- **Societal Implication:** The presence of both traditional and progressive depictions indicates a transitional phase in societal attitudes towards gender roles.
- **Utility:** Recognizing this mix helps in understanding the ongoing evolution of gender norms and the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality.

The findings align with previous studies indicating that women are often portrayed in traditional domestic roles in advertisements. However, there are signs of progress, with some brands like Ariel and Nirma attempting to challenge these stereotypes and promote gender equality.

Implications:

The findings of this study are crucial in understanding how advertisements influence societal attitudes towards gender roles. Traditional portrayals contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, affecting how women and men perceive their roles within the household and society. On the other hand, progressive portrayals can challenge these stereotypes and promote gender equality by presenting a more balanced view of gender roles.

Recommendations:

- **Promote Diverse Portrayals:** Advertisers should depict women in a variety of roles, reflecting their diverse contributions to society. This can help break down stereotypes and promote gender equality.
- **Encourage Shared Responsibilities:** Advertisements should highlight the importance of shared domestic responsibilities, promoting the idea that household chores are not solely the woman's duty.
- **Support Positive Role Models:** Media should feature women in empowering roles, providing positive role models for young girls and challenging traditional gender norms.

The findings of this research bring to the forefront, the ongoing need for media to portray women in roles that reflect their multifaceted contributions to society, rather than limiting them to traditional stereotypes.

Conclusion:

This study analyzed the portrayal of women in Indian detergent advertisements from 2010 to 2020, revealing a persistent emphasis on traditional housewife roles despite some progressive shifts. The research highlights the importance of continuing to challenge gender stereotypes in media to promote gender equality. Future research should explore the impact of these portrayals on consumer perceptions and behaviour, and how further changes in advertising can contribute to societal progress.

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Cite This Article: Dr. Jain P. (2024). Evolving Gender Roles: Representation of Women in Indian Detergent Ads. In *Educreator Research Journal: Vol. XI (Issue III), pp. 113–120. ERJ.*
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12932914>