

# THE EVOLUTION OF FEMALE ROLES IN ADVERTISING -FROM DEMURE TO MULTITASKER AND PROGRESSIVE

*Dr. Ritu Bhatia*

*Assistant Professor*

*Department of Human Development*

*Smt. P.N Doshi Women's College Ghatkopar (W) Mumbai -86 India*

## **Abstract**

Advertising is probably one of the most significant and influential products of media. An average person spends one and a half years of his life watching advertisements. Gender representation particularly women in advertising is one of the most debatable issues surrounding the medium, and is closely examined today than never before. The questions then crop up how women are being portrayed in the advertisements in a world where social change in attitude is occurring? Does contemporary advertising reflect women's current changing status in society? Does advertising kept pace with societal changes? The major concern is therefore, that does the advertising reflect the reality of modern society or does it still mirror the age-old mind set? The current article reviews the evolution of female roles in Indian advertising.

India will become the fifth largest consumer market by 2025 and women will be the most important decision makers in the consumer segment. Apparently to find a place in her lifestyle and that of her family brands will have to advertise in a manner that appeals to her sensibilities and outlook. However, the paradox that defines the Indian woman is a challenge that stabs most brands. To elucidate, while docile homemakers still exist in the largest cities, confident young women may exist in the tiniest village communities. For every successful woman there is a woman who lives in constant fear of domestic violence. For every woman whose income is greater than that of her husband willingly spends evening time in the kitchen for the rest of her family. All these women are equal participants in the consumer economy and cumulatively represent the India's female psyche. The woman models in an Indian advertising have been portrayed as traditional woman dressed in Indian attire. They are portraying a glorified role of housewife or a demure bride. They are also recently being portrayed as the modern woman with super powers -a woman who is always perfect in her looks or in her duties no matter what the situation is. Apart from this, Indian advertising is always been suggestive in nature. With the number of prohibitions now being reduced now days, Indian ads are progressively more sexual and show women proactively seeking men's attention, wearing provocative dresses and performing like sexual goddesses.

## **Some brands do control the paradox...**

Three decades on, television audiences still recollect the Nirma washing powder advertisement. The idea of the first ad was simple: doing the laundry, an important responsibility for homemakers, should not be a chore but enjoyable activity. Keeping with the premise, the women in the advertisement wore the whitest of clothes and so did their families. The messaging was unpretentious: Nirma is an essential aid for the quintessential Indian homemaker; if her family's clothes are white, bright and clean, her world is perfect. That was all that defined a woman then. In the year 2015, the Nirma advertisement changed the content and show four women help to pull out an ambulance stuck in a ditch while the men hesitate to help in case, they soil their clothes. The messaging is implicit: Nirma is a useful aid for the 21st century Indian woman who walk shoulder to shoulder with man. Between being a homemaker, a professional and a responsible citizen, she juggles multiple roles with ease. Nirma only adds to her efficiency in the form of a reliable cleaning agent. Nimra's Hema, Rekha, Jaya and Sushma of the 1980s were docile homemakers, content with doing the laundry and picnicking with their families in ultra-clean clothes. Their 21st century avatars, however, are confident women who will not let the fear of

dirtying their clothes stop them from fulfilling their duties as citizens. Nirma's positioning from the 1980s to 2015 has evolved to match the wavelength and thought processes of the 21st century Indian women.

Another example is of advertisements of financial services which mostly show men as decision makers for buying policy for their families. The woman in Indian society has always been considered as dependent on male members of family who take decision in major financial matters. Not many Indian women play an active role in investment decisions that influence the brand choice for financial services. But now situation is different as society is changing with number of single women is increasing, women becoming empowered and now more and more Indian women start taking active part in financial decisions of the family. The advertisers sense this change and have also started showing women in prominent decision-making role for financial services.

However, not all brands celebrate the empowerment of the modern woman. There are a large number of male-centric products which objectify women today, like ads promoting body deo /perfumes for men reinforcing sexual labels. The advertising of deo of popular brand is showing girls going crazy for a boy wearing that fragrance, the content is nastily demeaning to women in society. Indian women have always been associated with the typecast traditional roles of homemaker, wife, mother and daughter. Most advertisements reflect the household errands and associated problems like portraying women struggling for clean vessels or to get healthy edible oil, or washing powder for clean spotless clothes. Nevertheless, there is a change now where woman bring a washing bar for utensils and man washes the dishes before she returns from work. Similarly, the advertisements of fair skin creams have always generated controversy by showing that fair skin is an indispensable quality which should be desired by all Indian women who have dusky skin tone. The advertisement of Fair & Lovely showed that fair skin is a solution for all issues in women's life like fair skin might get a her a good job or a desired groom. However, lately the company realized this skin discrimination and started showing women craving for equality in fairness in life and not only fair skin tone, for instance, in one of the ads the daughter refuses to marry until she has established her own identity and is 'equal-equal' with her partner. The evolution in the positioning a beauty product— from being an aid to attract male attention to becoming a tool for asserting one's identity— is clearly a sign of advertising's progress in context of women.

#### **Advertisements empowered traditionality with modernity for modern Indian woman: Boundaries are diluted now days:**

Media in any form must reflect the society at contemporary level. Advertisements have started to show what is changing in society which in fact is a healthy trend by looking at the current changes in lifestyle patterns or status of women in society. Now days advertisements are gradually moving towards representing an egalitarian set-up by consciously dodging stereotypical gender roles and steadily blurring boundaries of gender discrimination. However, the traditional role of women is still represented as most of the Indian audience are still not in the mind set to see women devoid of domestic chores like cooking and nurturing her family. Nevertheless, women audience have been appreciating this empowered image of woman in media.

#### **Advertising with sexual connotation -evolved from subtle to aggressive:**

Apart from the traditionality and modernity the issue which is marking its presence more aggressively is advertisements with sexual images and messages. Indian television isn't exactly known for its political correctness. Certain companies and brands have taken the risk of trying something different. However, shedding the tried and tested settings for modern and progressive portrayals of Indian women. It is appalling to see that, women continue to be sexualized and misinterpreted in advertisements, even in 2021. Some men consumer's products show women as Nymphomaniacs who are ready to do anything for men just be attracted towards him due to the deodorant he uses. Similarly, most despising is the ads showing woman in condom ads where the woman is just a body- a sexual object who is ready to act and tempt her partner. The objectification of woman in such types of ads has demeaned women to lowest level. Usually, men are being wired to desire and see a woman as such without much hesitation. Undesirably, such unpleasant attitude is always reinforced in Indian ads who have normalized such behaviour. The hypersexualized models of femininity in the media affect the mental, emotional and physical health of girls and women. Such image and connotations increase women's superfluous consciousness towards their physical characteristics. Many researches reflect that, sexual objectification of female in advertising has serious implication in society and is one of the strong reason for mental health problems like eating disorders, overt focus on looks and subsequent depression, sexual dysfunction among young women.

**Conclusion:**

**Current ads are Liberal Too – But Measurable Enough?** In contemporary era some advertising companies try to uplift the status of women in society with their sensitive and sensible narration in ads, but such ads are limited. Even though an advertisement is not meant to be a moral guide, it does have certain responsibilities towards society because it reaches millions of homes and influences people, directly or indirectly. The advertisers in India must understand that continuous exposure to progressive messages in ads create an impact on the mind set of audience and could bring change in the society at large. The viewers must try and support this kind of advertising. Different forms of female empowerment are shown now days through socially focus ads which not only challenge but also reverse the traditionally dominant roles of woman. The change is required where Indian advertisement industry needs to portray the role and image of women which match with the improving and empowering status of modern Indian women. Today's woman is not only a home maker but a multi- tasker, self-sufficient, self-reliant and who is a important decision maker for her family.

**References:**

1. Allan, K., & Coltrane, S. (1996). Gender displaying television commercials: A comparative study of television commercials in the 1950s and 1980s. *Sex Roles*, Vol 35(3&4), 185-203.
2. Bharathi, JP, Mahitha Davala and Sounjanya, J. (2014), Women in Advertisements: It's Ethics and Impact on Society, *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, Vol 3(12), 128-131.
3. Courtney, E. Alice., and Lockeretz, W. Sarah. (1971). A Woman's Place: An Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements. *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 8 (1) 92-95.
4. Das,M and Sharma,S (2012) "Women in Advertising: Metamorphosis from docile to dynamic" *International Journal of Business management*, Vol. 2 (3) January-June 2012 pp.27-36 7.
5. Das,M and Sharma,S (2012) "Effects of Television Advertising on Body Image of Women" *Pragyaa Journal of management*, Vol. 3. (1&2) 2012 pp.22-30.
6. Kolaskar, A. S., & Dash, M. (2012). *Women and Society: The Road to Change*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.