



## THE CHANGING PARADIGM IN GENDER CONSTRUCTED TEXTS IN MEDIA- A SEMIOTIC APPROACH

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**Abstract:** In arguing on 'The Politics of Truth' Foucault put forward two significant, simple relative terms namely 'truth' and 'power' which are a base of hegemonic discourse. What society perceives as a truth is nothing but a power for the prevailing section. In modern world, the omnipresence of media presents multiple truths before us, yet signifying one, which would become a leading truth. The impact of media on culture is very potent and is all pervasive since three centuries. It is a major driving force in shaping societal structures and operations. In this course, media platforms create and endorse gender and gender norms through usage of powerful and striking images and messages, these in a way consciously or subconsciously are associated with the attributes of male or female characteristics. These gender codes shape the way in which society views gender and assists in determining as to what acceptable gender performance is. It is through media's reinforcement of gender stereotypes, codes, symbols and gender displays that shape the way in which society perceives and constructs genders. Mass media becomes a primary tool that introduces and encourages individuals (especially young individuals) to participate in a gendered world (Krijen et al, 169). Repeatedly, the roles of genders take a new shape conveniently to suit the aspirations of socio-political time frame of a period. Through this paper the researchers would like to explore the changing construct of the gender by media in current scenario. This is the era of feather touch technology, where everything around us is getting smarter so does the conceptual image of women in media advertisements. However, what we need to look at is whether it as smart in reality too? Or it is just an old wine in a new bottle? In this media super highway, creation of consent also takes place in smarter way. The politics of polished words and swanky images reinforcing the age-old gender image is interesting to study. We agree to the fact that media has potential to hegemonize the ideas, identities and roles. Daniel Chandler (Television and Gender Roles) states that television still perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes because it reflects dominant social values and attitudes in the society and reinforcement of such values is seen as 'natural'. Thus, the 'male gaze', who objectifies & commodifies women is viewed 'unmarked' which is invisible and largely unquestioned bias. In this respect, researchers would like to present the perspective and ideas on construction of gender identities in Indian media more so, in advertisements where the semiotics of underlying images are more vocal than the verbal text.

**Key words:** Gender, Media, Politics, Representation, Semiotics, Changing Pattern.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Media are often said to be the reflection of the society. Very popularly termed as the mirror of the society or at least that's what widely thought by the people. It's arguable whether the media accurately mirrors the society or not. It cannot be discarded that, the media do have a socio-cultural influence on the society. Influence comes from the part that, media is the carrier of the information, ideas, thoughts & opinions. In short, media informs & entertains at the same time. The media is all pervasive. It has both positive as well as negative collision with reference to women. Where, education & socialisation is considered media has played significant role but the negative impact comes from the mere fact that of the depiction of women through pornographic and violent images. Mass media forms like; Cinema, Television Channels, Tele-Serials and Advertising display codes that are associated with representing contemporary societal values. They also disseminate the codes of gendered world consciously & subconsciously. These gender codes shape the way in which the society views gender and assists in determining what an acceptable gender performance is, which concurs with Gerbner theory of Cultivation – which says that the extensive exposure to media, overtime, gradually shapes our view of the world and social reality. Because there is a constant exposure to media in its all forms it can be said that, through media's reinforcement of gender stereotypes, codes and displays, shapes the way in which society perceives and constructs genders. Over the period, such codes are institutionalised. These codes are transformed from generation to generation with adaptations according to changing period. At the very outset, it needs to be understood that, Gender is not formed at birth; Gender is socially and culturally constructed or mapped attitudes, behaviours and roles that we assume as male and female or the 'other sex'. Whereas, sex is more a biological difference between man and woman. The gender is a more complex representation of expected values adopted in a community or a society. It is objective from society to society.

In last few years, portrayal of women in Indian media is much discussed. It is often felt and understood that, there is increase in overdose of nudity and vulgarity that is being depicted in media be it, Newspapers, Television, Films, Magazines, Hoardings and Posters. Cable and satellite television have grown rapidly in the last two decades. As the access to TV is increasing and with the advent of globalization correlating to increase in education levels



the representation of women on television has changed greatly over the period of time. To know the extent of this changing role of women in society, one is to ask how much the ideology has changed behind these representations of women. It is important for us as researchers to question how real the representations of women are on television and how these affects the attitudes of those who watch. The impact of media per say is gigantic especially that of visual media which serves as a very powerful medium for communicating idea and images. The impact of television can be seen on all age group be it adolescents or old, sitting in front of the television for hours and the watching series of images that become impregnated on minds and thus act as the measuring canon for coded behaviours. Advertisement as cover major space on TV becomes a major tool in driving these canons.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To understand the changing pattern of women in advertisements
- To analyse the portrayal of women in current media industry with special reference to Television
- To Comprehend the role of women in Indian advertisement in the changed times and audience expectations
- To evaluate the relevant feasible suggestions

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses content analysis as a research method. Content Analysis is described as the scientific study of content of communication. It is the study of the content with reference to the meanings, contexts and intentions contained in messages. Holsti (1968) says that it is any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages.

This study takes into account only the year May 2013- April 2014 for purpose of analysing advertisements. A cluster of advertisements have been selected for the analysis, out of thousands and lakh printed and broadcasted.

For the purpose of the study, the advertisement is classified into categories. The selection of advertisements is concluded based on six basic categorisation of available products in market. These are not any standard classification but categorised for the purpose of the study based on the product and their utility.

1. Staples, which are used on regular basis (ex: Soaps)



2. Impulse, which are not planned and bought due to external influence (ex: Chocolates)
3. Emergency Goods, which are bought when it becomes necessary (ex: Umbrella)
4. Convenient products, which is used by people on day to day basis (ex: Milk)
5. Speciality products, which are based on specific decision of buyers (ex: Sports cars)
6. Raw materials, which are used to prepare other things (ex: Atta)

Researchers have chosen popular advertisement that will fit into the category based on the repetition/ recurrence of such advertisement. In the course of the working on this research paper, more than 50 television and internet advertisements were analysed repeatedly. Precisely, the major ads description used in the current paper relates to ads like Mcdonalds Sandwiches, Dark Fantasy chocolates, Skore dotted condom, Axe deodorant, Mahindra Centuro Bike and so on.

To provide justice to discourse on gender it is indeed important to include the neglected feminine community too. Though the current research's aim was exactly to discuss on this, there is a need to have a justifiable eyes in looking at various issues. The researches were also keen on the advertisements aimed at transgender community or their presence and prominence attained in Indian ads. Astoundingly, there was not even one such ad found over television as for the researchers gathered material. There was one online video entitled "The Seatbelt Crew" featured a team of transgender cautioning the motorists to wear seatbelts. Except the government ads on welfare program under sexually minorities' schemes, there were no ads found in print medium.

When we talk of advertisement in media, new media is also included in the preview. Because, some advert are very much prevalent over internet in spite of banning of their broadcast in television. This is done to give a holistic approach so that researchers can bring in some advertisements which are popular on new media forums. Thus, it is an effort to study advertisement's from television and new media.

Probably, there is no yard stick to measure what is obscene and what is not. What is not acceptable in one culture is rather a matter of fact in the other. Thus, researchers here, go by the fact that, any advert which is said obscene does have a subliminal erotic context to it and given the cultural settings of Indian sub continent those ad's which one feel uncomfortable/ sore to watch in presence of entire family.



## **OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **-A Bike, Tyre and Dots...**

In arguing on 'The Politics of Truth' Foucault put forward two significant simple relative words namely 'truth' and 'power' which is a base of hegemonic discourse. In the societal evolution, weaved truth and crown of power have always had synergy. Without this mutual synergy there would not be a concept of ruler and ruled. Hence, what society perceives as a truth is nothing but the power for the dominated class, be it Dukes, Kings, Queens or Emperors. In modern world, the omnipresence of media presents multiple truths before us, yet signifying one which would become a dominative truth. Keeping this in mind, it can be said that, our linguistic categorization of the sexes shapes how we understand, perceive sexual differences and how they are represented. There is also a need to acknowledge how language delimits the ways in which we talk about biology, human nature, cognitive process and so on, which have become a part of our daily social being. The mass media function in the larger system of patriarchy and capitalism that controls media structures and organisations and represents women as subordinates. The recent series of debate of mass media vis-a-vis gender gives deeper understanding of various aspects culture, power and equality.

If one tends to believe the fact that the media is pervasive, has a very potent impact on culture, and is a major driving force in shaping societal structures and operations then it can be said that society is formed by structure characterizations and role-play by men, women & the gender. In this regard, media platforms create and endorse gender and gender norms through usage of powerful and striking images and messages, these in a way consciously or subconsciously are associated with the attributes of male or female characteristics. Fiske, terms this as semiotic 'guerrilla warfare', with the audience metaphorically involved in 'smash and grab' raids on media meanings. The relationship between the media and culture is, however, dialectical. Culture is not a static system, but an ever evolving process that constantly changes to accommodate emergent alternative and oppositional meanings, values and practices (Williams 1977).

Therefore, US sociologist Gaye Tuchman's famous essay "The symbolic annihilation of women by the mass media" signalled the importance of studying how the media portrayed women in the twentieth century, which saw rapid change in women's lives in society – for



instance, acquisition of the vote, growing numbers of women entering the paid labour force and in education, and the rise of the women's movement. Tuchman saw how stereotypical portrayals of women might adversely affect their lives. Posing a number of questions about the media, she asked, how do media portray the lives of men and women and what do they tell us about how we should behave, in gendered terms? Do these portrayals limit how women see themselves, and what they might expect out of life? What kinds of lives do the media portray as being the best ones for women? The media, she claimed, were not accurately reflecting the social and economic changes to women's lives over the course of the century. In the context of Indian media, women being in the forefront of mainstream television channels because of the soap culture and coverage of women in other genres like news. This phenomenon of coding the gender can be understood by comparing the magnitude given in coverage of political news and sensual & sensational news covered on women.

The great quantity of various types of mass media in the digitalised era becomes a primary tool that introduces and encourages individuals to participate in a gendered world. Mass media forms set societal standards for men and women. These forms shape the way in which society views and identifies male and female characteristics. Mass media projects gender stereotypes as models for the sexes to follow. Men within the media are popularly constructed to be powerful aggressive figures, embracing financial stability and dominant control. Whereas, the media projects women as nurturing figures, concerned with family and nourishing feminine beauty. Often, these stringent gender assumptions cast negative representations that place barriers on women to develop and reach their true potential within the societal structures. Through reinforcement of such codes in media, masculine and feminine functions become absorbed into their respective cultures, and are endowed in society as the common ideal for men and women.

The gender construction by mass media and the way the attributes are attached to each of masculinity and femininity is interesting. As stated above, Masculine qualities are always characterized as strong, aggressive, assertive, and courageous and Femininity on the other hand as passive, nurturing, caring, graceful, and beautiful. One of recent Television car Ad can be a better example for this. The woman asks man about his other affair suspiciously, the man does not answer except a smirk. The next shot, a car is driven by the man on a



hillside changing the gears with action of front and back devotedly. The advert is direct and derogatory which demeans women to the state of second sex to a material, Car. The man in the ad embraces a car as a loving spouse. The concept of ideal man, women, the prestige and respect they earn because of these ideals strengthen often how people have to choose an option to move on towards accomplishment of such things. This means to say that media is active accomplice/ partner in this orientation of society.

These gender representations conform and reinforce expected gender norms and roles rendered by men and women in the society. It becomes very difficult for genders to construct their own identity without having the pressure of already conformed functions and responsibilities. This process can be attributed to Tuchman symbolic annihilation (1978) where, we are systematically subjected to accepting gendered role. In this regard, gender is actively constructed through advertisements and other media tools. Women within these ads are represented in domestic homemaker roles or displayed in a more sexualized manner. Men within these ads are portrayed to assimilate more powerful roles both financially and socially. This becomes a prime example of how gender norms and roles become assimilated within advertisements. Motorbike (not mopeds) ads can be best paradigm to illustrate this argument. In most of the ads it's the man's stunts which endorse the bikes. In Mahindra Centuro ad, a bare chest man hunts two girls travelling in a car across all country roads, streams, hillocks who stole his shirt. On reaching them, the girl who is wearing his shirt takes out the shirt in an inviting manner and hands it back to him. The man does not take back his shirt but instead just takes his goggles from shirt pockets & leaves. This ad is one example to show how media meanings are laden within the images, where, underlying message is understood without the use of spoken words.

In one of massive campaigns on contraceptive products, the Skore condoms, surrounds around a sexually fantasized concept of 'dots...dots...dots...'. The different women on the ad wears a dotted Bindi, a circular metal ear rings, foot chains designed in dotted shapes, bathing suits having circles all around painted in Black and Pink. A women wearing pearl necklace bites it romantically keeping between lips staring in an inviting manner towards men. The camera voyeuristically angled at third eyes who are none other than men watching the actions of women. Though the ad or the product is pertaining to the men, it is the women who are made to teach men about their needs within the ad framework. The



other condom ads like Moods, Kamasutra are no different from these. The Brand Kamasutra went one step ahead to come up with multiple products under the same brand like of Kamasutra Deodorants. These products are in market by mere exploitation of false assumptions of mass consumers which are not based on any scientific findings. The I-PILL tablet ads showcased nothing apart from the guilt felt by women after indulging in love making. Though the medical researches proves the lethargic effect in the post consuming period like infanticide, there is no hope of ban on such products. This whole elephantine ad campaigns raises serious questions about the ethics, morality and societal divergent paths triggered by market driven forces. This goes same for even men's deodorant ad's too. The main and foremost reason why men use deodorant is to create an impression among women is the basic line in most of the adverts. Considering it is a men's product women are predominantly used in most of the deodorant advertisement. Women in these adverts are shown as consumables or products there by equating them with commodities.

The advertisers and the advertisement are killing the very fact of womanhood and showing them as trophies that can be won just by using deodorant sprays, sporting a bike or a car or by flavoured condoms. In most of these ads women are portrayed sensuously or in derogatory manner.

#### **Advertisements and its effects...**

Daniel Chandler (Television and Gender Roles) also states that television still perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes because it reflects dominant social values and attitudes in the society. If we take into consideration Hypodermic theory of effects which believes in the effectiveness of images and messages, then, reinforcement of such values is seen as 'natural'. So, in a primarily patriarchal society, men dominate media and its production and, influenced by these stereotypes, unconsciously reproduce a traditional 'masculine' perspective, perpetuating dominant gender stereotypes. Viewers are frequently invited to identify with male characters and to objectify females. This is called 'the male gaze', where women are objectified & commodified. This mode of viewing is called 'unmarked': it is an invisible and largely unquestioned bias.

In India, the growing trend in advertising seems to be to portray women less often as housewives, but also not more often in non-traditional, career-oriented, or authority figure roles. There seems to be an increase in neutral portrayals of women in a number of ads.



Women in recent advertisement though not stick to traditional roles there isn't much that show them in strong positive side also. This might be attributable to the fact that although Indian society is changing, but it is still a patriarchal society and dramatic changes may not be accepted as easily. Furthermore, as studies by G Ramu (1988) and S Bharat (1995) had found, Indian men and women, regardless of their educational level or career status, hold conservative perceptions of women's roles within the family. It's not only in Advertisements that we see sexuality and sensuality, even in reality shows these are evident. Even in reality shows for kids the children are made to wear dresses that are too sensual for their age and they wear them without knowing the pretext of such costumes. This is one way of impregnating the young minds who go on to carry the same image and appeal even in later stages of their life. It is imperative to understand that these images have profound effect on other young minds and might push them to replicate. As Bandura Ross have stated in their Media Cultivation Theory, the Kids who participate in various Reality Shows can be the role models for others not only in acquiring such a talent but in other aspects as well. If not the talent all children will imitate the dress and other aspects which may not be in tune with the norms that we have practiced.

Though there is an increasing number of a female model shown in advertising today, but the underlying messages still emphasise sexuality, often presenting women as sex objects. Also, the number of women in "decorative roles" has been increasing over time. Fifty years ago, women were essentially Good wives and Mothers in short depicted as good care takers. But today when women have undergone and are undergoing radical changes, the media refuse to throw away their blinders about constructing identity of women. Today, women are still represented as either care takers or as a desired object probably with suave images. The ad's today have not deviated in images portrayal for example; a widow would still will wear pastel shade chudidhar or that of mothers being multi tasker with drugged costumes, which has not seen the light of the day. Media more so television being a potent tool for revolution in ideas and attitudes should have brought change in their gendered outlook. Instead, television is lagging behind in depicting the existing or modified social system.

### **The Law and Breaking of Law...**

Advertisements being the major source of revenue, the advertisers will be looking at marketable images which again centre on sex and gender. And hence, the women portrayal



continues to be more and more absence & explosive. The trend is evident on television. An different trend to this is still elusive. As per, The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, of 1986, provides for the regulation of representation of women in the media. It prohibits indecent representation of women through advertisements, books, writings, paintings, figures or in any other manner. Section 4 prohibits the production, sale, hire, distribution, circulation, sending by post any books, pamphlets, slide, film, writing, drawing, painting etc., which contain indecent representation of women in any form. Yet advertisements showing women in an indecent way are aired day in and day out and infact, the trend seems to be on a rise. To this law, The National Commission of Women (NCW) has suggested modifications in the Act and elaborates upon ways to strengthen it and make it workable so that the objectives can be achieved. The NCW recommended that section 2(b) of the Act be modified to read as “Derogatory representation of women means the depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form of body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being derogatory to or denigrating women and is also likely to deprive, corrupt or endanger public morality or morals.” As per the above definition depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or her body or any part thereof would amount to indecent or derogatory representation if it has:

- \* The tendency to present a woman as a sexual object.
- \* The tendency to present a women as a sexual commodity for man's pleasure, or
- \* The tendency to glorify woman’s subordination to man as an attribute to womanhood  
or
- \* The tendency to glorify ignoble servility as an attribute to womanhood, or
- \* The effect of being indecent or being derogatory to or denigrating women or;
- \* It is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public morality or morals.

## **CONCLUSION**

Modern media especially advertisements works like ‘Sobee’, a dead virus which does not affect your computer but gives an operating route to the virus creator to play with your computer. The Sobee attacked computer is not less than a slave of virus generator computer. Thus, the slaved computer can be used to steal or transform anything without the knowledge of the original user of the computer. The ads we see, the item numbers we are witnessing work like sobee planting stereotypical attitude towards our perception of



women's body. The ad creators, industry gurus know how this system works but the consumers or audience are unaware of this mechanism. Believing that media are the agents of social change we need to see what our images and message mean or portray and how they influence the human minds. We, as human, have the ability to getting used to things very easily and this happens at subconscious level which is called as "subdued libidinal energy". It is time when we start looking into our messages and images and create media awareness and reduce gender inequalities and healthy sexuality. Social learning theory claims that audio visual media provides powerful images that can be very important sources of both desirable as well as undesirable models for imitation. When women's images exhibit traits of strength such as courage, determination, intelligence, self-respect and honesty, the viewers perceptions can be exploited for positive results. In spite of the law, gender representation in the media is a sombre distress even at present though there have been discontent amongst the Civil Society. This calls for a debate on need for effective law for proper implementation against the obscene depiction of women in media.

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