

## GENDER STEREOTYPING IN ADVERTISING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES & EFFECTS ON ITS AUDIENCE

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### ABSTRACT

*Recently, there has been a lot of marketing research done to gauge the various differences between the way males and females perceive advertising, be it in print advertising or in mass media ads. In the following paper, we attempt to understand how gender stereotyping in advertising affects its intended audience in terms of gender. Also, we will tap into ads that use humor against those which are of a more serious nature and differentiate between the way the communication is perceived and accepted by males and females, and how they respond to it, and ultimately, whether a change in this cycle can help the advertising industry and provide for a better means of communication between companies and consumers today.*

**Keywords:** *Stereotypes, humor, advertising, Indian consumer*

### INTRODUCTION

Stereotype is a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing (Fung and Ma, 2000). When fixated on gender, it differentiates men and women based on certain attributes that are specific to that gender (Afolabi, 2013). For example, the role of the man as the sole provider of the household as opposed to the caregiver and nurturer role of a woman would fall under the title of gender stereotyping. Stereotypes are generally a common opinion of a group towards another group, which develops over time or through socialization. Stereotyping can have positive as well as negative effects, but usually the latter is more profoundly observed. Usually, once stereotyped, the perception is molded and is quite difficult to change for most people.

When it comes to gender stereotyping in

advertising, the way the ad is decoded by the human watching it, decides how that person, be it male or female, reacts to it. Previous research has shown that the use of humor in ads where gender stereotyping is done helps to create a more positive image of the stereotype and helps the cognitive processing function to turn out to be more accepting than not (Eisend, Plagemann and Sollwedel, 2014). Eisend et al. enumerate further, stating that the process of humor generation plays a vital role. Research has shown that humor can shine out in different ways. It could be a simple violation or incongruity of a thought process that has been so strongly imbibed in one's mind, that a sudden violation or opposition of that thought process seems humorous to that person. Sometimes, the abnormality of a situation, when shown strategically, turns into humor, all the while managing to convey the message that it intended to. Unlike past times, men and women are no longer

confined to one particular role in their life. Evolving times have dramatically changed social conventions, which have in turn brought about a change in the way men and women live their life. 70% of the female population now works outside of their home and in every field today, whereas men have started to domesticate themselves more than the past, in terms of cooking and taking care of household duties as well as children. Hence, there is a use of humor in advertising through gender stereotyping, in a way that defies the social norms by, say interchanging roles of men and women and depicting something totally untraditional.

Mass media is not how it used to be in the past. This source of communication has gained increasing amounts of power over the years and has become a major influential factor when it comes to molding opinions and perceptions of the audience towards certain social and general issues in a big way. Not to mention that the content overall of mass media has revamped itself to showcase more and more previously unseen matter.

### **Objective of the study**

- 1) Understanding the processing differences in the brains of men and women to gauge how their perception when presented with the same situations
- 2) Define gender stereotyping; what it is and trace its trend.
- 3) The various types of gender stereotyping and how they are used and their intended effects on the audience.

The objective is then followed by select examples of various advertisements we watched in order to relate them to this study and our findings. Our view in brief of whether this trend is changing; whether for the better or for worse and how this change is affecting the audience.

### **INFORMATION PROCESSING DIFFERENCES**

The general observation of research conducted in this field shows that the way men and women process advertised content differ significantly. Men process content they view in commercials or billboards in a much more simplified manner. Men are known to cognitively process the focal message in its simplest form. For example, when they see a particular commercial for a brand of beer, the most simplified way that a man will usually perceive it,

as is “buy this beer”. Contrary to this, when a woman sees a particular commercial, there is a slightly more evaluative thinking process involved. Women usually try to understand what the communication is about; they go through all the components of the commercial like the lights, sounds, visuals and even dialogues and portrayals of roles. It has been observed that women try harder to relate themselves to the communication they watch before making a decision. They try to build logic by relating each piece of information with the piece received previous to that, making it an incremental reasoning process. This non-linear reasoning process allows women to think in an interrelated approach, not in straight lines. This can be linked to the Elaboration Likelihood Model of processing information (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). While men take the central route, women are known to link the central cues and the peripheral cues to build a holistic image of the message. In general though, women will gravitate more towards ads that are more woman-oriented and men towards those that are more man-oriented.

However, in India there are certain noticeable changes. A woman’s role has taken a 180° turn from being solely the nurturer of the family to someone who can now compete with a man on almost every level, be it personally or professionally, and in some new family structures, a woman is the sole provider as well. Hence, even though a product may make a commercial targeted towards its female clientele, the image of the woman being presented in a more masculine way, can be that of a strong confident and successful individual, and in some cases, even a protector. Something like this, which is a slight negation of the female stereotype, is more likely to be taken positively by the viewers and more accepted, relative to say, a man soaking in a bubble bath trying to beautify his image.

Here is where humor plays an important role. It has been seen that humor has the power to positively affect one’s thinking and perception. Some commercials that may use traditional stereotypes in their ads end up getting a good response when humor is tastefully introduced into the scene. Humor kind of causes a distraction from the “stereotype” creation and helps see a completely different side to the communication rather than focus on the negative aspects of these traditional

portrayals of men and/or women. Just like humor is used in some awkward situations to diffuse the tension, a normal human being's tolerance towards certain issues goes up and the inhibitions are lowered when a humorous situation comes up in a TV commercial or even a print ad, and sometimes this even helps increase the positivity towards the brand or the product.

### **ROLE PORTRAYALS**

There are a variety of roles men and women play in today's world. They are partners, business associates, parents, earners etc. Through all this, advertisers now have a varied way of showcasing these roles. Let us see a few of these media stereotypes.

### **BEAUTY STEREOTYPES**

These come out in ads of clothing, fragrances, make-up and even unconventional products like furniture, wherein the lead male or female character is a perfectly dressed, perfectly made-up and has a very confident, go-getter kind of personality. It almost seems surreal that everyone in this reel world is so free from any human physical flaws. And while we know that this is not reality, and that magnificent advances in computer technology have made sure that whatever remaining tiny flaws may be present can be easily removed on screen, viewers purchase those products or services in a strong attempt to attain just that perfection. A perfect example of this would be the Fair & Lovely ads that show women transforming into beauties with light and fair skin, which in turn helps them to get ahead in their careers. The actual message given out here is that only fair-skinned women can succeed, but its users perceive it as a way of increasing the self-confidence by feeling and becoming beautiful.

### **DECORATIVE STEREOTYPES**

This simply means that men and women featured in certain ads are used as something of a decorative asset, rather than to actually convey a message. They may or may not even interact with the actual product in the communication. They are used to make the communication look pretty and nothing more. Here, one will find a world where less than gorgeous people do not exist at all, but is populated with men with 8-pack abs and women who have a figure that most designers would kill to work with. The models in these ads are objects of desire and

their main objective is to entice consumers to buy into their commercial. A classic example of this would be ads like Axe deodorants, Jealous 21 posters that say "Not for the masses" etc. Another example of decorative stereotypes is property ads, where a beautiful woman is sitting overlooking a pretty scenery outside, where she doesn't interact with the actual product, but manages to convey the fact that a home purchased here would give you views like this from your home every day. A fact to be noted here, is that women are a lot more likely to be stereotyped here than men.

### **A MORE TRADITIONAL VIBE**

The Indian ad scenario typically witnesses a lot of family-based commercials, wherein the woman is mostly a mother and housewife and the male lead is seen going off to work and/or coming home tired in the evening. Another category is mother-and-child ads, which portray a stereo-typical bonding. Products like spices, food products etc. are a perfect setting to use such a family-oriented ad, since it is believed that Indian consumers tend to respond strongly and positively to this traditional family spending time together. Mothers being cautious of their kids' health and being choosy of purchases for their family's sake are targeted at women, as they are the primary shoppers of the household.

### **ADVERTISEMENTS WHICH HAVE USED STEREOTYPING**

From a baby food product advertisement to a car advertisement, stereotyping is experienced in almost every commercial. Stereotyping has been part of advertisement since ages. Blame it on the society or on the perception of the people, they have been constantly contributing to it. Now we discuss the examples of some of the companies along with the industry.

1. It is said that a person is known by the dress he wears, so obviously it plays an important part in forming our personality. But what has not been observed is we always see beautiful and handsome people buying these clothes. Obviously these people are those cover page models who is a dream of any and every common man. These people are inspired to be like them. But of course in the real world it is not possible to be so flawless. People who are plus size are never shown buying clothes. Nor we ever see them on the posters. This itself is

contributing in stereotyping, showing that these perfect looking people tend to be more fashionable/stylist. If we look at an advertisement of Raymond's, we will always find a handsome looking gentleman who is perfectly dressed from head to toe and is absolutely fit. Similar observations can be made in Ralph US polo where a sports person, obviously very fit, is taken as a model. The same is observed in case of women. For example in the print ads of Bibakurtis we will always find a flawless looking girl. What can be seen is all these advertisements, through whatever channel, will always have a fit looking person representing their brands and not some healthy looking or fat or skinny looking person. As this does not inspire or motivate people to buy clothes. The main reason for doing so is that it motivates people to feel that after wearing the same clothes the person would start looking like one of the model.

2. Jewellery earlier in the history used to define a rank of a person. Now it signifies a treasure for any girl. When we say jewellery our mind automatically think of a woman. We never think of men. If we look back in history we see that men also used to wear a lot of jewels to show their status. Even now men wear jewelry but we rarely see any advertising targeting them. For example, in the ad of Tanishq we see Mr. Amitabh Bachchan (husband) giving an anniversary gift to his wife, Mrs. Jaya Bachchan. This is something very common. Also jewelry is generally 'gifted' to a girl by someone and not seen as going and buying herself. This results in men buying gifts for their wives/girlfriends, or father to his daughter, another stereotyping.
3. As men are seen as bread earner and women are seen a care taker often we see such stereotyping till now in food industry. And we see that the marketers are not very willing to change that perception. So we see women are the target audience. We can see in the ads of Saffola and Sundrop refined oils where a woman is worried about the health of her husband and her kid. We can also see in the commercials of Johnsons and Johnsons baby care product range where a mother is worried

about the baby's skin. Also in the advertisement of Kellogg's Chocos we find Juhi Chawala being health conscious of her school going boy. Even in the advertisements of Maggi noodles we see mothers serving noodles to a hungry family, making the stereotyping even stronger. Also in the advertisement of dish washer's like Pril or Vim women are taking care of utensils. All these activities shows that women are the care taker of the house

4. Automobiles like cars and bikes create a rush in one's body. The speed and the energy it gives a person is likened to an adrenalin rush. This being an outdoor activity and compared to a sport is once again stereotyped as a man's forte. Advertisements for cars and bikes even today are largely targeted at the male audience. However, women today have both the capacity and willingness to indulge in the automobile market. Take the example of car companies like Hyundai, Tata Motors or even Chevrolet. All of them use male models as protagonists.

### **CHANGE IN THE TREND OF STEREOTYPING:**

Till now we discussed on stereotype advertisement running in different industries now we will be showing changes being made in advertisements to change how people perceive certain things typically.

1. In any detergent advertisement, cleaning of clothes is done by a female. And generally these advertisement starts with a housewife who gets tired of washing clothes still it has no effect but as soon as they use the company's product it gets easier to wash clothes, resulting in a cleaner and whiter clothes. This was a common ad which company used to market their product targeting women. For example, Surf Excel advertisement used their tag line stating "mummy ko bolo daag ache hain". In all advertisements the main target was housewife but for the first time wheel tried changing this stereotype thinking of woman being concerned with cleanliness of clothes. The television commercial (TVC) starred Salman Khan who is considered as the 'man of the masses' in India. In the ad, Salman Khan buys Wheel detergent for his wife who is Prachi Desai saying "aaj se isko hi! (Hi to

Wheel – the brand) and “isko bye” (bye to the old detergent)”.The clothes when washed smell heavenly and Salman Khan is found running around and throwing different flowers at his wife while his wife smells the clothes which were just washed. This ad tried showing that this can be an enjoying experience for any husband and wife. This is the first time in the Indian market that a man purchased a detergent unlike what generally is shown in any TVC.

2. Insurance commercials have depicted the male member of the family as the decision maker for any insurance policy. Ads show the ‘man of the house’worried about the future of his wife or child or his parents and in order to protect and secure them, they buy an insurance policy. But this trend too is changing. For the first time ICICI insurance commercials showed the wife telling her husband on ‘karvachauth’ that she believes her wishes will be fulfilled only with long life of her husband through ICICI insurance.It tried to change the perception that only a man has the responsibility to realize that he needs to secure his family.Thus it change the stereotypical thought of people.
3. Another stereo-type is to consider women as an object of beauty. Products like Fair&Lovely were introduced to help the women lighten her skin complexion. But what was not observed was the fact that men too wanted these creams as a solution to their dark skin color. However, products that were earlier targeted at women found it difficult to cater to the male market as well. This was because of the stereo-typical belief that men and women’s skin types are different. If the man used the same cream which was created for a woman, then it would end up embarrassing them. Fair and lovely changed the perception of people by not only advertising but also launching the product named “Fair & handsome”. Consequently, men are taking care of their skin and undergoing the same treatments which women undergoes in order to look beautiful. Doing facial and taking care of their skinare no longer restricted towomen only.
4. Hero Honda pleasure-  
Two wheelers were traditionally meant for

men to ride. Women were never considered in the target group and most advertisements for scooters pictured men. However, an opportunity was found in a large target group of women who could ride a scooter. Scooty as a range of 2 wheelers was thus introduced in the Indian markets especially targeting women through their positioning and advertising. The advertisement starring Priyanka Chopra, starts where Priyanka, who is a daughter, is being asked too many questions of where she is going and when she will return back home while her brother just steps out of the house without being asked any such question.The ad ends with the message that even girls have an equal right to enjoy like boys. With a tagline “Why should boys have all the fun” scooty broke into the stereo-typed Indian mindset of a male dominated scooter market. and that they should not be restricted to a place so they created a scooty for such girls.

5. Even in the commercials of alcohol brands it men were targeted as the main consumer of such products but now its perception too is changing with Priyanka Chopra and Anushka Sharma endorsing for brands like Blenders Pride.
6. Moving slightly away from the consumer industry, Vogue magazine recently came out with a “Health Initiative”, wherein models who were diagnosed with eating disorders or addition problems and the like, would strictly not be included in any photos taken by the magazine, successfully promoting the fact that you can look healthy by actually being completely healthy and not taking the shorter, easier and dangerous way out.

## DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### \* RETHINK AND RE-SET

This trend of “superficial beauty” that is set by ads featuring perfect bodies has slowly started taking a turn. As a shaper of public opinions and views, advertising asan industry must be more open-minded towards the so-called “art of perfection”. The example of beauty and role portrayals that have been set by this medium can also be re-set by it. Viewers today are a lot more sensitive to issues and to create a new vision of beauty would be

groundbreaking in its own way. Following age-old trends is like taking the easy way out. This is the age of innovation, and the possibilities for it are endless in a medium that has no bounds of creativity. Men and women are slowly but surely leveling up with each other in every field of life, both inside the house and outside it. Casting them in a mold that is outdated, however beautifully done, will still have stiffness to it.

Advertising as a medium plays such a big role in today's world of shaping people's minds and perceptions and mentalities that it should be used in the most positive way possible and to the maximum capacity at that, because whether or not one is influenced by advertisements, they definitely are not ignored! Our final conclusion, after talking to people belonging to both sexes, is that the more realistic an ad is, the more believable it is and the bigger is the impact that it will have. Recent research and articles have shown that the unintended effects of gender stereotyping and objectification are more likely to showcase themselves in a negative sense than a positive one, whereas a change in this trend in that the gender difference be reduced, is more likely to leave a longer-lasting impact on the target audience. This trend is already on its way towards a revival, as is evident in a significant number of commercial as well as non-commercial products and hopefully the advertising industry has an upheaval of a noticeable

magnitude.

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