

GENDER IMAGERIES IN INDIAN PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS: A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

Our society is constantly changing and evolving and so are our social roles. The differences between men and women and the roles assigned to them on the basis of their gender have been areas of great interest for scholars since the 1950's. Media has played a key role in keeping up with and portraying and/or creating these gender distinctions. The present paper uses the framework of Visual Grammar (1996) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978, 1994) to evaluate the gender imageries presented in advertisements in the Indian Print Media since the 1980's. In addition, the paper aims to assess how the roles of men and women in the society and in advertisements have changed over the last few decades.

Keywords: *Advertisement, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Visual Grammar, Gender theories.*

1 Introduction

Research in the field of women stereotypes has been an area of interest among scholars since the onset of feminism. With the emergence of mass media and advertising, studies concerning the role of women in media and advertising began to mushroom. Notable scholars in the domain include Hawkins and Coney (1976), Bronski (1984), Lysonski (1985), Kilbourne (1999), Uray and Burnaz (2003), Eisend (2010), Shao (2014), Grau and Zotos (2016) to name but a few. The present research adds to the field by making an analysis of the gender imageries prevalent in print advertisements in India since the 1980's.

2 Research Framework

Representational meanings in the selected advertisements are studied by means of Kress and Leeuwen's Visual Grammar and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics. Representations give visual or verbal realisations to reality. In an image realisations can be Narrative or Conceptual. Narrative representation deals with 'unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006: 59) while Conceptual representation shows 'participants in terms of their more generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence, in terms of class, or structure or meaning' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006:79).

In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the system of *Transitivity* is used for the representation of reality through the selection of various process types where each process type has participant roles in different configurations: Actor- Goal, Senser-Phenomenon, Behavior- Phenomenon, Sayer- Verbiage-Receiver, Carrier- Attribute, Token- Value, and Existent (See Halliday, 1994). Analysis is carried out at the level of clause.

3 Analysis

The advertisements taken up for the study have been categorized based on gender depictions.

1. Advertisements which reflect and strengthen gender roles and stereotypes
2. Advertisements which set cultural standards of beauty
3. Advertisements which objectify women or present them in decorative roles
4. Advertisements which present men in dominant roles

5. Use of sexist language
6. Changing trends in Advertising

3.1 Advertisements Reflecting and Strengthening Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Advertisements in Figures 1-5 belong to the 1980's. These advertisements clearly mirror and exhibit women's role which is that of being a homemaker. The women in these advertisements are either interactive participants where their goal is the household entity they are working on - sewing machine, pressure cooker, nurturing children, clothes they wash- or as typical of advertisements, they are not interactive participants rather represented participants who are there to have the audience identify with them and create a relationship of involvement. However, gender imageries are still very dominant as women are the represented participants in most advertisements related to the household, kitchen, children etc. while men feature in roles of breadwinners or other tasks related to the world outside the home.

The advertisement in Figure 6 promoting 'Dalda' has both a man and a woman advertising the same product; however, their roles are very clearly defined. The woman discusses the recipe of Gulab Jamuns and how it gets better with the use of this product (defining her role as a housewife) whereas the man is the shopkeeper who sells this product; hence, he's the one with a job and is the bread winner in the household.

3.2 Advertisements which Set Cultural Standards of Beauty

Advertisements present and set the idea of beauty for different cultures and genders. In our part of the world, women are expected to have a flawless, snow-like complexion and that notion is still intact today as was it a few decades ago. We see fairness products crowding the shelves of the supermarket. Women or as the trend is these days, celebrities, in these advertisements are represented participants making eye contact with the audience, identifying with them and suggesting that it is possible for them to attain the same standards of beauty (Figures 7,8). The general trend has been for women to feature in these beauty advertisements while the standard of beauty for men has always been a rough, rugged man who is strong, muscular and powerful, as a result, men were absent from the domain of beauty product advertisements for many decades.

3.3 Advertisements which Objectify Women or Present them in Decorative Roles

The objectification of women has been a common trend in advertising from the beginning. Women are presented as decorative commodities whose goal is not to do any action in the advertisement. They are not actors or interactive participants but are objects of admiration or desire.

When they do perform the role of an interactive participant it is usually in the process of admiration where the object of admiration is men. These depictions in advertising don't present a realistic image of women in the society and creates a passive role for them in the social structure (See Figures 9, 10).

3.4 Advertisements which Present Men in Dominant Roles

Presenting men in a dominant position is quite common in advertisements related to driving, gold loan, insurance advertisements because men are considered to provide for the family. Clearly, in Figures 11-12 the men are in a position of dominance performing the action of giving and women are passive receivers. Similarly, it is common in motorbike advertisements (See Figures 13-14) to show men in a position of dominance and action i.e. riding the bike while the women passively sit behind the men and enjoy the ride.

3.5 Use of Sexist Language

Sexist and stereotypical language found in advertisements has been divided into the following categories:

3.5.1 Women is actor and goal is household or kitchen work

She's (Actor) tied to the **kitchen** (Goal) cooking the ordinary way.

She's (Actor) able to **cook** (Goal) in minutes the Prestige way.

Mothers who care (Actor) use **Dalda** (goal)

3.5.2 Women are the goal and are placed in a position of weakness

Train **her** (goal) to be an ideal housewife

Buy **her** (goal) an Usha Sewing Machine

So you can take care of **your daughter** (goal)

3.5.3 Men are placed in a position of power and are the actors or possessors

So, **you** (Actor) can take care of your daughter

Now **you've** (Actor) got the power- Bike ad

3.5.4 Women are equated with objects

Figure 9 presents a woman standing next to a motorcycle equating her services with those of the motorbike. The text makes it challenging to decipher who is being talked about until the last line where the service of Jawa motorcycle is explicitly referred to.

3.6 Changing Trends in Advertising

With changing times, progressive agendas and increasing awareness amongst people regarding feminism, UN's endeavor to bring equality and do away with patriarchal structures, there has been an effort of bring about a change in the trend of portrayal of men and women in advertisements. Figure 15 shows an advertisement where both the man and woman are partakers in the chore of washing clothes which was traditionally considered a woman's domain.

The visual shows both the man and the woman making eye contact with the audience, holding a t-shirt indicating they are both involved in an action process of washing clothes. However, the tagline of the advertisement reads 'Washing clothes is not just a woman's department' whereby through linguistic means the responsibility of washing clothes is still being assigned to the woman. Rather a tagline like -Washing clothes is also a man's department would set a better platform for reform.

Another change in recent decades is the shift from a man's rugged and strong appearance in advertisements towards a softer look with men featuring in fairness cream advertisements and beauty soap bar advertisements. They play the same role as women of being the represented participant with an attribute they received by using the product. They look at the intended audience in an attempt to create a relationship of affinity. In the past, the use of such products by men was frowned upon and men who did use them were considered less masculine, as a result hardly any advertisement from the 1980's exists where men are seen to advertise such products. The promotion of such products has now made the idea of men with a flawless, spotless, smooth skin an acceptable notion (See Figure 16).

With changing times, men have also come to be presented as sex symbols in advertisements where they are made to remove their clothes even when the product doesn't demand it.

In modern advertisements women are shown in a position of dominance and empowerment as they ride their own kind of bike (See Figure 17) which is colourful and feminine- The tagline for this advertisement 'Why should boys have all the fun?'- clearly establishes the idea of enjoyment as being a part of a male's world. Here, linguistically the tagline shows fun as being a possessive attribute for a boy. The visual indicates the women in an action process enjoying, rather having 'fun', placing her in the world of a man.

3.7 Conclusion

Many stereotypical portrayals of men and women exist in advertising today created by interplay of both the visual and the verbal aspects. With changes in the social structure in India and with the empowerment of women, gender stereotypes are fading as more and more women are entering the professional arena. The role of advertising is to mirror the society and also to create social roles. Keeping to its purpose, there has been an advent of some form of reform in Indian print advertising to break these stereotypical notions; however, the industry has a long way to go in this direction.

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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



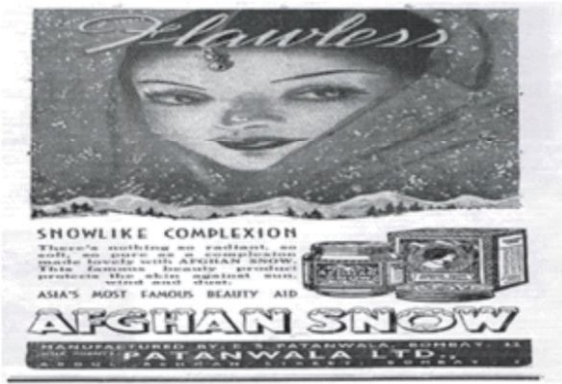


Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17