
AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION I PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS ACROSS POPULAR MAGAZINES IN INDIA

□ Dr. Shyama Kumari

Abstract The study examines and compares the nature of female portrayal in Indian magazine advertisements from three categories: general interest, male oriented and female oriented magazines. Using content analysis, advertisements in all the issues published during the month of April 2014 to July 2014 were analyzed. The result of the study indicates that all three magazines prefer to depict women in stereotyped role (mainly as sex object or housewife). It was found that advertisers in men's and general interest magazine frequently portrayed women in outdoor setting while advertisers in women's magazine preferred to portray women in home settings. Findings reflect only a slight difference in the preference of nature of portrayals across magazine types. The future research study can be extended to cover more magazines in different genre and can give focus in analyzing impact of portrayal on company's communication strategy.

Keywords: Gender, Portrayal, Content analysis, Advertisements, India, Magazine

INTRODUCTION:

There have been a lot of studies conducted on gender representation in advertisements and still it remains the research interest of many social scientists and marketers. This may be due to the changes which we are happening in the socio-economic fabric of society. There has been a continuous growth of female participation in the workforce across the hierarchy in the corporate sector, in other fields of employment as well as improvement in their education and literacy rate can also be noted. Therefore, it is imperative to scan the environment regularly so that things can be planned and moved as per the preference and trends of the changing time, thereby assisting firms to stay in demand and lead a sustained

growth. Munshi (1998) asserted that 'with changing times, advertising modes of address had to change too considering the rise in the number of nuclear families and economic necessity dictating that most households are double income ones. With women now fulfilling multiple roles, co-breadwinner and family maker, advertisements have to address this duality in the woman's roles'.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review indicates a large number studies on gender role portrayal analysis in print media. In 1971, Courtney and Lockeretz content analyzed advertisements in general audience and news magazines of 1970 for the roles portrayed by men and women. It was found that only 9 percent

□ Assistant Professor, Banarsidas Chandiwala Institute of Profession Studies, Dwarka, New Delhi, labh.shyama@gmail.com, Mobile: 98714 73299

of the women were portrayed in working roles as compared to men and majority of advertisements reflected stereotypical roles for women. Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) compared the women portrayal in magazine advertisements and examined to what extent stereotypical roles have been maintained and reinforced. It was found that advertisements have not contemporized the female portrayal and have failed in portraying them in the wide variety of roles they play in today's world. Lysonski (1985) examined the gender representation in print advertisements in UK from female, male and general audience magazines. It was found that women continued to be portrayed in stereotypical role. The study reported only minor role change in the representation of women while they were continued to be portrayed as housewives, concerned about their physical attractiveness, dependent on men, and as objects of sexual fulfillment. In another study by Mitchell and Taylor (1990) female role portrayals in British women's magazines in late 1980s was investigated to identify trends during the mid-1970s. As against previous researches, the results of this study indicated less stereotyping of women as "physical objects" and a trend towards using either "family" or "independent" cues.

Kellerman and Kellerman (1998) conducted a follow-up study of the role portrayal of men and women in advertisements from eight general audience magazines of United States published during 1996. The result indicated that men as compared to women were portrayed more in working role in ads of 1970 and 1982 while in

1996, ads showed balanced approach. Moreover, the study also indicated a shift towards the decorative role of both the sexes.

One of the studies by Vela et. al. (2007) examined male and female stereotypes in Spanish magazine advertisements during the last three decades of the twentieth century. They found that though gender stereotypes persist but there was a considerable change in their representation in the last 30 years.

Despite being plethora of research study available on gender portrayal very few infact only a limited number of studies compared the female representation across magazine types (Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009). The study conducted by Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) examined female role portrayals in magazine advertisements of the UK and also compared female representation across different magazines. Specifically, the previous studies focusing on gender representation in across magazines indicated that magazines targeted to female audience were likely to portray them in decorative and sex roles; however the findings of Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) study contradicted the past evidence and reported increasing use of decorative and traditional depictions of women in female-oriented magazine advertisements (Lysonski, 1985; Ferguson et al., 1990; Taylor et al., 2005). Similarly, in one of the studies on gender portrayal conducted by Das (2000) in Indian magazine ads, found only a slight decrease in the traditional role portrayals in the ads; majority of advertisements still portray gender in

stereotypical or traditional role. Another study by Dwivedy et. al. (2009) examined the role portrayals of men and women selected from the India's most popular men's, women's and general interest magazines of the year 2006–07 also indicated male and female are portrayed in traditional roles.

Overall, in majority of the researches conducted in the past, reported prevalence of stereotyped images of females in magazine advertisements in most of the countries (Cutler et al., 1995; Das, 2000, Uray and Burnaz, 2003, Hovland et al., 2005; Kim and Lowry, 2005). The study examines the nature of female portrayal in Indian print advertisement across magazines, thus, this study seeks to answer the following research questions (RQ):

RQ1. How females are portrayed in ads across different magazine types?

RQ2. Does the preference for location of advertisement vary across magazines with respect to female portrayal?

RQ3. Does the role portrayal, credibility status, age/appearance and employment status of females in ads vary across magazines types?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to fulfil the objectives of the study, a systematic research method was required to assess the female representation in the advertisements. An extensive literature review indicated that content analysis is the most preferred research method to study the gender role portrayals in advertisements (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1979; Lysonski, 1985; Gilly, 1988; Furnham & Voli, 1989; Mitchell & Taylor, 1990;

Ford & LaTour, 1993; Milner & Collins, 2000; Das, 2000; Khairullah & Khairullah, 2009; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009; Sahzad & Shahwar, 2011). For the purpose of this study, content in the context of portrayal analysis refers to words, statements, character, imagery of character, location, theme, product category, role that are considered as unit of analysis.

(a) Sample Design for content analysis

As the study aims to assess the portrayal of females in advertisements across three major Indian magazines therefore three different magazines were selected from three categories: general interest magazine, male oriented and female oriented magazine. The most read magazine was determined with the help of Indian Readership Survey (IRS) data. The magazines which were having highest readership in India were: India Today (English) in General Interest Magazine; Autocar (English) in Male oriented magazines; & Femina (English) in Female oriented magazines.

This study examined advertisements that feature women in all the issues published during the month of April 2014 to July 2014. Advertisements which were quarter page or more in size and at least a female character were retained for the study. Next, a total of 154 advertisements were collected but only 120 advertisements were fit into the criteria and were further coded and content analyzed. The study excluded all repeat advertisements, corporate advertisements, advertisements containing only children, animated characters, and with no adult female character. Out of 120, the content analysis yielded 48 ads in India Today, 19 in Auto car and 53 ads in Femina.

(b) Coding Procedure

By following the similar research (particularly Das 2000; Milner & Higgs 2004); the present study also adopted the coding procedure of past researches on gender portrayal with minor alterations to make it more appropriate to fulfil the research objective.

Variables for Content Analysis

Central Figure

In this study, any female adult playing a central role in an advertisement were classified as central figure. In case if more than two females were portrayed in the ad, the one who is featured more prominently were picked for further coding.

Role Portrayal

The study used the same role portrayals categories used in previous researches. Following categories were identified; (i) Housewife/Parent/Spouse/Girl Friend; (ii) Sex-object/Decorative; (iii) Career Oriented; (iv) Authority Figure/Decision Maker; (v) Non-Traditional; (vi) Celebrity; (vii) Neutral and (ix) Others.

Age

Central figures were categorized as being (1) Young (35 Years or less) (2) Middle Age (35-55 Years); (3) Old (55 Years and above) or (5) unclear.

Employment Status

Central figures were categorized as being (1) Employed; (2) Celebrity; (3) Unemployed or (4) Unclear.

Credibility

Central figures were categorized as being either (1) product user (2) authority, when they were depicted as sources of information or expert (3) Non-user or (4) unclear.

Product Category

The product categories were

based upon the literature review and the scope of this study. The product categories were classified into following: (1) Personal care (cosmetics/toiletries); (2) Home (Household Products); (3) Food & Beverages; (4) Auto & Auto accessories; (5) Clothing (men & women); (6) Fashion/Jewellery/Accessories; (7) Financial Services/Banking; (8) Electronics/consumer durables; (9) Telecom/mobile services; (10) Travel/Tourism/Hotel and (11) Others.

Location

Central figures were categorized according to whether they were depicted in a (1) Home; (2) Office; (3) Store/Restaurants; (4) Outdoor; or (5) Other.

Inter-Coder Reliability Test

In this study, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted using *Holsti* method. Two final year management student (one male and one female) coded advertisements. Both the coders were given a week's training on content analysis in order to code the advertisements. The *Coefficient of percent agreement* is .85 (85%).

Results

Nature of Portrayal across Magazine Types

A comparative analysis of advertisements among the selected magazines were undertaken to divulge insights on nature of women portrayal in across magazine types.

Table 1.1 shows appearance of product categories across magazine types. Product categories with a dominant presence in men's magazine i.e Autocar were automobile (42.1%), financial services and consumer durables (15.8 %) while ads of fashion (26.4%) and personal care (24.5%) often

Table 1.1: Frequency of Product Categories across Magazines

Product Category	India Today (n=48)		Autocar (n=19)		Femina (n=53)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Personal Care	-	-	-	-	13	24.5
Home	2	4.2	-	-	5	9.4
Food & Beverages	3	6.3	-	-	4	7.5
Automobile	-	-	8	42.1	-	-
Clothing	8	16.7	2	10.5	1	1.9
Fashion	4	8.3	1	5.2	14	26.4
Financial Services	2	4.2	3	15.8	1	1.9
Consumer Durables	2	4.2	3	15.8	1	1.9
Telecom	1	2.0	1	5.3	1	1.9
Travel & Tourism	9	18.7	-	-	4	7.6
Others	17	35.4	1	5.3	9	17.0

figured in women's magazine (Femina). Ads of travel and tourism (18.7%), clothing (16.7%) and fashion (8.3%) prominently appeared in general interest magazine (India Today).

Table 1.2 shows the preference of advertisement location. Out of 120 ads, advertisers in men's magazine frequently portrayed women in outdoor setting (52.6%) while advertisers in women's magazine preferred to portray women in home settings (34%) followed

by store/restaurant (15.1%) and only in one advertisement (1.9%) they were depicted in the office setting. Compared to the men's and women's magazine, the general interest magazine presented women frequently in outdoor (35.2%) and home (20.8%) setting with a sizable portrayal in the office setting (10.4%). To conclude, advertisers of the in those magazines prefer to portray women primarily in outdoor location.

Table 1.2: Location of Advertisement across Magazine Types

Location of Advertisement	India Today (n=48)		Autocar (n=19)		Femina (n=53)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Home	10	20.8	-	-	18	34.0
Office	5	10.4	-	-	1	1.9
Store/Restaurant	2	4.2	2	10.5	8	15.1
Outdoor	17	35.4	10	52.6	5	9.4
Others	14	29.2	7	36.8	21	39.6

Table 1.3: Preference for Role Portrayal of Females across Magazine Types

Role Portrayal	India Today (n=48)		Autocar (n=19)		Femina (n=53)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Housewife	9	18.8	5	26.3	9	17.0
Sex-object	21	43.8	9	47.4	24	45.2
Career- oriented	4	8.3	2	10.5	2	3.8
Non-traditional	2	4.2	2	10.5	-	-
Authority/Celebrity	7	14.6	1	5.3	18	34.0
Neutral	5	10.4	-	-	-	-

Table 1.3 shows preference of role portrayal of women. In all the three magazines, women were predominantly portrayed as sex-object in men's magazine followed by general interest and women's magazine while women as housewives were dominantly portrayed in general interest magazines followed by women's magazine and then men's magazine. They also portrayed women in activities outside home (as career-oriented and in non-traditional role) and as authority figures (in authoritative role) but the incidence of such role portrayal was very low. It was found that in men's magazine, only one advertisement depicted woman in authority. In addition to this, only general interest magazine portrayed women in neutral role (10.4%). By and large, all the three magazines poised to portray women as sex-object and as

housewife.

Table 1.4 shows advertisers preference of credibility status being portrayed by women in advertisements. It is inferred that majority of advertisements in general interest magazines and women's magazine has a tendency to portray women prominently as product user as compared to magazines targeted to men. Results revealed that men's magazine predominantly used women in those advertisements where they were not the prime customers of the advertised product (47.4%) followed by product user (31.6%). It can be concluded that women as product user is highly preferred credibility status.

Table 1.5 shows the age preference w.r.t to women portrayal by advertisers. Findings indicate that

Table 1.4: Preference of Credibility Status of Females across Magazine Types

Credibility	India Today (n=48)		Autocar (n=19)		Femina (n=53)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Product User	35	72.9	6	31.6	44	83.0
Expert	9	18.8	2	10.5	7	13.2
Non-user	4	8.3	9	47.4	1	1.9
Unclear	-	-	2	10.5	1	1.9

Table 1.5: Age preference across Magazine Types

Age (in years)	India Today (n=48)		Autocar (n=19)		Femina (n=53)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
less than 35	44	91.7	17	89.5	48	90.6
35-55	4	8.3	2	10.5	4	7.5
55 & Above	-	-	-	-	1	1.9
Unclear	-	-	-	-	-	-

women were over whelmingly portrayed in younger age and rarely in middle age across the magazine types. Only one advertisement in women's magazine (Femina) depicted women in older age. This instance holds true for all the three magazines selected for the study and reiterates the stereotyped mindset of the advertisers where they think that keeping young in ads give them more eye balls to their ads.

Table 1.6 shows employment status of women in the magazine advertisement. It can be found from the analysis that women's magazine depicted women as unemployed more often (24.5%) in comparison to men's magazine (10.5%) while general interest magazine did not report women as unemployed. Similarly, percentage of women portrayed as employed in advertisements were high in case of general interest (16.7%) and men's

magazine (15.8%) as compared to women's magazine (9.4%). Interestingly, in all the three magazines, women employment status was kept as unclear (68.8% in India Today; 68.4% in Autocar and 35.8% in Femina).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A comparative study of content analysis of magazine advertising indicates that all three magazines prefer to depict women in stereotyped role (mainly as sex object or housewife). Sexually objectified women in ads re-establish the advertisers' belief that a beautiful and attractive person has a better possibility of getting noticed (Solomon & Rabolt, 2006).

Additionally, preference of portrayal of women in the role of a housewife also reflects that in India the prime responsibility of a woman is considered to be towards her family where she is expected to perform all her

Table 1.6: Employment Status of Females across Magazine Types

Employment Status	India Today (n=48)		Autocar (n=19)		Femina (n=53)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Employed	8	16.7	3	15.8	5	9.4
Celebrity	7	14.6	1	5.3	16	30.2
Unemployed	-	-	2	10.5	13	24.5
Unclear	33	68.8	13	68.4	19	35.8

duties in the roles of wife and mother rather than on any other roles (Moideen, 1993).

Moreover, there is only a slight difference in the preference of nature of portrayals across magazine types. Like in case of employment status, women's magazine depicted women as unemployed more often as compared to men's magazine and general interest magazine did not report women as unemployed.

It was also found that advertisers in all the three magazines chose to depict young female models in their advertisements; they **hardly employed women of older age**. Here, as per Census of India (2011) **'it is worthwhile to realise that the Indian consumer market also comprises of a significant percentage of middle-age and older women consumers'** (Kumari and Shivani, 2015) **and they should also be given due importance in the ads**. Similarly, in case of preference of location of advertisement, advertisers in men's magazine frequently portrayed women in outdoor setting while advertisers in women's magazine preferred home settings.

Interestingly, the study found that advertisers in female oriented and general interest magazines portray women as product users while magazine targeted to males portray women as non-users of the product.

This divulges the notion that females are also utilized for those products where they are not the prime customers that too as sex-object. It may be noted that in our study the incidence of female as sex object is very high in case of male oriented magazine.

This study explored how women

are depicted in the contemporary Indian print (magazine) advertisements. Furthermore, a large amount of literature has focused on gender role portrayal in advertising in many western countries but very few researchers have studied the same in context of Indian advertising.

Therefore, the current study made contribution to the limited literature on the topic of gender portrayal research in India.

Limitation and Future Research

The study has some limitations as well that need to be addressed. First, the sample size taken for content analysis of magazines were too small therefore a separate study with a large sample size could be conducted to have an in-depth analysis of advertising strategies.

Second, in this study, only portrayal of females across magazine advertisement has been considered whereas a study of both the gender would give better understanding of gender representation strategy.

A longitudinal study in this regard may provide a clear picture on how representations of men and women in advertising have varied across different magazine types over time. The future study should extend gender portrayal research to internet and digital marketing space.

Moreover, a parable problem in this area of study is the incomplete literature on gender portrayal research and its effects on the communication strategy of the company. Thus, future research study can give focus in analyzing impact of portrayal on company's communication strategy.

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