

**The Cultural Representation of Gender Roles in Indian Advertising:
A Critical Analysis of Stereotypes, Shifting Narratives, and Societal
Implications**

PhD Proposal

Sakthi Priya K.S

**Assistant Professor, Department of Visual Communication, VPMM College of Arts and
Science.**

Date: 04/05/2025

Abstract:

This research proposal seeks to investigate the cultural portrayal of gender roles within Indian advertising, emphasizing the representation of traditional stereotypes, the progression of narratives, and the wider societal consequences. Advertising serves as a significant medium that influences and mirrors public perceptions. In a nation as varied and culturally intricate as India, advertisements do more than just market products; they convey profound social messages, frequently reinforcing or contesting established gender norms. By conducting a critical examination of visual and textual elements across print, television, and digital advertising from the 1990s to the present, this study will analyze how concepts of masculinity and femininity have been constructed, upheld, and redefined. Additionally, it will assess the impact of globalization, feminism, and digital consumerism on the transformation of gender representations. Employing a qualitative research framework that includes semiotic analysis, interviews, and focus groups, the research aims to deliver a thorough understanding of gender discourse in Indian advertising. The outcomes of this study will enhance the fields of gender studies, cultural studies, media studies, and advertising ethics, while also providing valuable insights for advertisers and content creators to develop more inclusive and socially responsible narratives.

Introduction:

Advertising significantly influences the formation of societal norms and values. In India, where traditional customs and modern influences intersect, advertisements transcend their commercial purpose to become cultural artifacts that mirror shared ideologies. Historically, Indian advertisements have reinforced strict gender roles, portraying men as providers and women as nurturers.

Nevertheless, recent trends indicate a shift, with certain advertisements actively challenging these stereotypes and advocating for gender equality. Despite these progressive developments, gender stereotyping continues to be widespread in Indian advertising. While some brands adopt forward-thinking gender narratives, numerous others persist in perpetuating antiquated roles. It is essential to conduct a thorough analysis of these representations over time, comprehend their progression, and evaluate their societal impacts.

This proposed research is crucial in a time characterized by swift cultural and digital transformations. As audiences grow increasingly discerning and diverse, advertisers face heightened expectations to act with social responsibility. A thorough investigation of gender portrayals in advertising will provide significant insights into the complex relationship between media, gender, and culture in modern India.

Literature Review:

The representation of gender roles in advertising has been thoroughly examined in various global contexts. Researchers including Goffman (1979) and Kilbourne (1999) established foundational insights into how media perpetuates societal norms regarding gender. In India, academics such as N. Mankekar and R. Vohra have explored how advertisements both reflect and influence cultural ideals.

Studies reveal that advertisements in India frequently represent women in submissive, ornamental roles, whereas men are depicted as dominant decision-makers. Although recent campaigns strive to showcase empowered female figures, these modifications tend to be superficial. Additionally, scholarly works illustrate the impact of patriarchal frameworks and religious beliefs on the content of advertisements.

Recent research indicates a transformation in storytelling, especially within urban-focused advertisements, that embodies feminist perspectives and evolving family dynamics. Nonetheless, there are still deficiencies in the examination of regional variations, the disparities between rural and urban contexts, and the effects of digital media on gender representation. This study aims to address these deficiencies and provide a comprehensive understanding of gender representations in Indian advertising.

This study's theoretical framework is based on feminist media theory, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, and Judith Butler's Theory of Performativity. These viewpoints will inform the analysis of advertising narratives, both traditional and contemporary.

Research Problem

The primary research focus is to conduct a critical analysis of how gender roles are culturally represented in Indian advertising. This study aims to investigate the ongoing presence of gender stereotypes, the development of new narratives, and the societal consequences of these representations.

- *Key research questions include:*
 1. What are the common representations of men and women in Indian advertisements across various media platforms?
 2. Which stereotypes are most commonly observed, and in what ways have they transformed throughout history?
 3. To what degree do advertisements either mirror or contest societal perceptions of gender roles?

4. What are the ways in which audiences perceive and react to representations of gender in advertising?
 5. What are the wider cultural and psychological effects of advertising content that is gender-specific?
- *What stereotypes are most prevalent, and how have they evolved over time?*
 1. How do advertisements either mirror or contest societal perceptions of gender roles?
 2. In what ways do audiences perceive and react to representations of gender in advertising?
 3. What are the wider cultural and psychological effects of advertising content that is gender-specific?

This research holds significance as advertising plays a crucial role in influencing societal perceptions. Gaining insight into its function in either upholding or contesting gender norms can contribute to the development of more ethical and inclusive media practices.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology, incorporating aspects of content analysis, semiotics, and ethnographic research. It will examine a targeted selection of Indian advertisements across television, print, and digital media over a period of thirty years, from 1990 to 2020.

- **Data Collection:** Advertisements will be sourced from prominent brands spanning various sectors, including fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), clothing, finance, and technology. Sources will include archives, YouTube channels, brand websites, and advertising databases.
- **Content Analysis:** Advertisements will be analyzed for gender representation based on established criteria.
- **Semiotic Analysis:** Both visual and textual components will be scrutinized for signs, symbols, and cultural codes that reflect gender norms.
- **Audience Studies:** Focus group discussions and comprehensive interviews will be carried out to gain insights into audience perceptions, particularly among diverse age, gender, and socio-economic demographics.
- **Sample Size:** The study will encompass approximately 100 advertisements and 8 focus groups, each consisting of 6 to 8 participants. Ethical considerations such as informed consent and anonymity will be strictly followed.

Expected Outcomes

The study aims to reveal:

1. A classification of gender stereotypes prevalent in Indian advertising.
2. An analysis of the evolution of these representations over time.
3. Audience responses to both stereotypical and progressive depictions.
4. An evaluation of the disparity between progressive narratives and conventional imagery.

This research seeks to contribute to the fields of media and cultural studies by examining the role of advertising in shaping gender identities within the Indian context. Additionally, it will offer suggestions for ethical advertising practices that foster gender equity.

References

- Butler, J. (1990). Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.
- - Goffman, E. (1979). Gender Advertisements.
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/Decoding.
- Kilbourne, J. (1999). Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel.
- Mankekar, P. (1999). Screening Culture, Viewing Politics.
- Vohra, R. (2005). Gender Stereotyping in Advertising.
- Sengupta, A. (2017). Gender and Media: A Critical Analysis of Indian Advertisements.
- Munshi, S. (2001). Images of the 'Modern Woman' in Advertising in India.
- Rai, S. (2019). Shifting Narratives: Feminism and the Media.