



## “ROLE PLAY OF ADVERTISEMENTS IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT” - A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*Media is considered to be a most important tool in providing information and creating awareness in the contemporary society. It can reach millions of people all over the world simultaneously at a time. It is rapid in its communication and influences the heterogeneous crowd through mass communication. As a creator, the role of women in the development of the society is significant and the empowerment of women in society is indispensable for cultural, social and economic empowerment of the society. Media advertisements plays central role in transmitting the information to the society, especially when it's focus is on women. We have witnessed women in various media advertisements being portrayed in manner. And it had created a deleterious effect in the society, especially in rural and unorganized sectors. Amendment to such a scenario could be done only through women participation and decision-making in society. Recent social awareness videos, illustrates an increased participation of women in decision-making and promotes a fair and balanced portrayal of women in media, which leads to women empowerment. This is a qualitative comparative case study, predominantly emphasise on women's portrayal in new media advertisement. It considers and compares two advertisements on You-tube channel. The findings strongly strengthen that there is a paradigm shift from the notion that women being portrayed as a sensual product in advertisement are taking a shift as decision makers leading to social empowerment.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Advertisement, Women Empowerment, Decision-making, Social empowerment, Comparative case study.*

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Media plays an integral in shaping the society. People are informed and educated through the media messages. It has taken a big step towards the development of our nation by educating people about the needs of individuals in particular and the society as large. Media has touched the millions with information through newspapers, radio, television, PSA, advertisements and films. An average citizen in daily life would spend a minimum 4 hours in front of television, radio or newspaper, television and social media have become the most influential part of electronic media in current days, portraying different culture, behaviour, attitudes and ideas.

Women as a gender, have dreams to be fulfilled, to lead a choice life, manage a team, work at home, become an entrepreneur, be a star in entertainment industry and so on. But in most cases the need to work for a living at home or outside creates a subservient attitude and they are not able to voice their decisions. Their freedom of thought and action has been suppressed in different ways like sexual harassment, physical abuse and rape which provoke women to take decisions which are not to their preferences. Mass media, being an efficient mode of communication, can create awareness by publicising the issues faced by women for the public. There has been a transition in media in recent times in portraying women as decision makers instead of decorative role. The two advertisements taken for the study effectively depicts the change in trend in using women for advertisements and the message it spreads, with an earnest hope it would translate into change in the society.

## **Women in Society**

Media as an ocean provides information about current affairs, politics, medicine, job opportunities, sports, commercial advertisements and miscellaneous general information. They also influence the gender equity by discriminating women in films and advertisements by showing them for decorative value. Though if we consider Vedic times, India as a nation has shown enormous respect and equality to women to an extent that our land is called a Mother Land. Post Vedic era saw a paradigm shift in the position of women in the society, that customs and values were made by men to favour men consequently and women suffered discrimination in silence. The duty of a woman was ingrained repetitively to ensure that women effectively play their traditional roles of daughters, mothers, wives, and daughters-in-laws and not step out of these roles. They become locked queen in the kitchen. Modern women have proved themselves on par with men in all walks of life, even in jobs or sports that were considered only for men. Despite such changes in society still most women face violence inside and outside the family throughout their lives. According to the National Crime Record Bureau in India, violence against women are steadily increasing in the country. The soaring crime rates and violence against women in the country reflects women as weaker sex and are being dominated and exploited.

## **Women in Media:**

Women in media have roles on both sides, on screen and behind screen. In times when women were shut behind doors few broke the barrier to act in ads and films but were treated disrespectful by the society. Slowly there was a transformation that female came out to participate in all activities in the society and on screen media women were given due respect. Though there was more participation by women, they were used as objects to showcase the brand and to hide the

real pros and cons of a particular brand. Most advertisements showed women for the purpose of attracting the consumers without questioning the necessity of a female in that context. On the other hand, they were given roles like cooking, cleaning, feeding a child, washing clothes and so on.

Dr Snigda Sukumar, (1991) pointed out that ‘Advertisers are often portrayed women with stereotyped gender roles, and particularly for depicting women as dependent (such as a homemaker) or decorative (such as a sex object). Such blind portrayal of women attracted competition in the market and tend to increase the sales by attracting the customer. The celebrity endorsed advertisement led to hide the real worthiness of the product. Brushing, bathing and other hygiene activities are common for men and women but female are made to advertise these products. Selection of car, house building items, investment options and such are male oriented and female play a submissive role in such ads. Such discrepancy degrades the intelligence of women and projects them as people who could not make any decision in important matters.

NafisaNewaz, (2017) rightly pointed out that “the use of women in advertisement were quite unethical include women exploitation, influencing consumers to buy a product without providing them with adequate knowledge on what is to be bought, and deceptive advertising, involving false claims and other issues which could lead to moral deterioration of the society”.

The society imbibes such false representation of women and is passed on to the future generation leading to gender inequality and discrimination. In short Media has an imperative role in the creation of gender equality and thereby prevent crimes against women in India. Two audio visual advertisements were taken for the study to analyse the shift in new media advertisements towards the portrayal of women.

### Water Wives



**Fig: 1.1:** Video by Action Aid India, Nov. 30, 2015, Written by AmrithaKohli.

Water being an essential life sustaining commodity which is scarce in most parts of India forms the basis of this social awareness video. An old man who already has two wives ( Fig:1.1), with the second one pregnant, marries another young girl for the sake of collecting water for the family. All the women in the family are depicted as second class citizens with no choice of their own. First wife accepts the new one with some reserve that she is old and not capable of

maintaining the household. The second wife protests against it but with no effect as she has no say in this and she is not in a position to carry water. The third wife is totally deceived that she had to marry a very old man, not by her choice, and face the wrath of the previous wives. The man of the house who decides all these acts as if it is the need of the family and he gets nothing out of it. In the last scene when the new wife goes to fetch water, the girl child of the family is sent with her with a pot, exposing the inequality in the society. The short audio visual effectively portrays the status of women in the society. They are the caretakers of the family and do everything for the men and children of the family. Their wishes, choice, decision, capabilities are totally destroyed and not given any consideration. From childhood the society discriminates female by ascertaining certain works only for girls, such as cooking, fetching water, cleaning, washing and nurturing children. Men are shown as decision makers, head of the family, born to slave women, enjoy life and use women however they please. In short, this video shows women as subordinate of men with no status in the society and with no empowerment.

### Every Woman's Right



**Fig: 1.2:** Every Woman's Right- Astral Pipes Advertisement, May 21. 2017

Open air defecation is a health hazardous problem in all developing nations, especially in India, where more than 60 percent of rural population resort to this practice. Government has been taking steps to create ODF *Open Air Defecation Free* status of all villages and cities in the country through Swachh Bharat programs. In this context, women suffer the most as in many places. They have to wait till the dark to relieve themselves creating health issues and discomfort. Young girls find this practice, a lapse in their dignity as they feel shy to use open air for defecation. Absence of toilet in the house causes more distress to women than men as men feel no difficulty to use open air. On the other hand girls are forced to use the cover of darkness, wait till suitable time comes, go in groups, being stalked, abused by men, face danger from snakes and other animals, exposed to harmful germs and feel undignified. In such a scenario this audio visual ad, empowers women to take an initiative, cause discomfort to men while they go for defecation,

have guts to mock at them, expose their misgivings and make them built toilets in their house. The video shows a group of village women visiting the place of defecation of men as in, singing songs loudly and mocking at them for relieving themselves in the open (Fig: 1.2), creating great discomfort for the men and not allowing them to proceed with their act of passing faeces. The men are angry, ashamed and feel the pinch of controlling the urge to pass stools. The daring women promises to repeat this daily if proper toilets are not built in their houses. Finally, they achieve what their desired through their ingenuity. Though this ad is for Astral pipes the social message is strong and depicts women as decision makers and achievers.

### DISCUSSION:

A study done by Madhushmita Das, (2016), clearly showed a change occurring in the media towards portraying female. She has analysed 268 advertisements and divided the roles of female into four categories. It indicated that in Indian TV advertisements, Decorative role (45.9%) is the most prevalent and dominant role portrayal of women, Family role (27.2%) is the second most depicted role of women followed by Free wheeler (13.8%) and Working role (13.1%) of women in Indian TV advertisements.

The major category of women shown in ads was decorative role (45.9%), where they were used to catch the eye of the viewer or attract them to see the ad, regardless of the content or any consideration for their intelligence. Next comes the domestic role (27.2%) where women are shown to do the stereotype work like cooking, cleaning, washing etc. or they stand in the background when men do the major action. Working role (13.1%) depicts women as doctors, engineers, lawyers, and others endorsing things they use in their profession. Finally Freewheeler (13.8%) is one where women do things not traditionally done by them, do what are considered to be men's job or even more like buying cars, fixing appliances, order men around, adventure sports, investment choices, act as independent decision maker.

The two videos analyzed in this paper fall into the two categories; Water Wives depict family role and to some extent decorative role. Every Woman's Right video- depicts free wheeler category, where women are empowered to achieve their goal. (Table 1.0)

**TABLE 1.0: COMPARISON OF TWO ADVERTISEMENTS**

S.No.	Criteria	Water wives	Every Woman's Right
1.	Theme	Potable water is one of the most essential commodities.	Proper sanitation facility is the right of every citizen.
2.	Main characters	Three village women who are the wives of a single man	Many village women both young and old.
3.	Characterisation	All three are subservient to their husband. Have no power to voice their wishes.	Women think on their own, organise themselves and carry out their plan.
4.	Portrayal	All three do routine household work including procuring water from a far off place	Women think out of the box and visit the defecation place of men which is taboo among villagers
5.	Empowerment	All three are not decision	Women decide their plan of action,

	nt	makers, have no choice of their own and comply with the husband who decides everything	execute it boldly, make men realise their hardships, forcefully voice the remedial measures and achieve what they want.
6.	Message	-Women have no choice. -Have to do routine household work. -Comply with man's decision. -Even the girl child is sent for water collection- not the male child. Proposes a strong message that female are not equal to men.	Women can decide and organise themselves They can go out anywhere and do any activity of their choice. No need to comply with the man's decision all times. Young and old women can come out and voice their rights forcefully. Proposes a strong message of female empowerment.
7.	Result	Women can do nothing effective out of their houses and the next generation follows the same.	Women can achieve anything by coming out of their houses and make things happen in accordance to their needs

An analysis of the above mentioned videos brings out the changes occurring in media, gender sensitisation and acknowledgement of gender equality. The shift from portraying women, from family oriented roles to free wheeler roles clearly depicts a change in mind set of media personnel and their intention to spread a message of gender equity. Such small changes occurring presently would create a positive balanced society in future.

The upshot is that there is a paradigm shift in portrayal of women in commercially driven advertisementsto socially desirable one. There is an urgent need to sensitise this issue, notwithstanding the fact that there are such programs happening sporadically, through mass media in a large scale in urban and rural areas. Even liberal societies in Western countries have had achieved gender equity through media. As of now, data base on such issues is weak in India, any effort to compile information on women *vis-à-vis* advertisementwould pave the way for quality research in this area.

#### CONCLUSION:

Gender inequality and discrimination is a reality, even in this modern times, in all countries, more so in a developing country like India. Media has a definitive role in creation of awareness among people regarding gender equality. But it has been stereotypically portraying women as decorative objects over the past years. Recent changes in new media has succeeded in showing female in the real where they act as decision makers on par with men. Though the percentage of new

dimensions are small the trend shows great promise that in future more such open minded ads would be filmed giving due respect to women. The Astral pipe advertisement regarding sanitation and open air defecation is an eye opener as to what women could achieve if given empowerment. The stark contrast in portrayal of women, in both the videos taken for the study, clearly evinces the paradigm shift in the new media towards gender equality. Goldman and Papson (1998) discuss examples of female representation in the context of Nike adverts. In general terms they argue that, while female representations (in sport in particular) may have largely got away from sexist bodies and the male gaze, still the ads invite self-absorption as much as self-celebration. Such changes create a hope that future media would be gender sensitive and thereby spread the message of equality and respect of women. This would lead women empowerment and ultimately resulting in social empowerment.

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