

Challenging the Female Stereotypes in Indian Television Advertisements: The Women Consumers' Perspective

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Abstract

The stereotypical roles portrayed by women in advertisements have been a matter of much public criticism and controversy. Their submissive and exploited image has cast a negative impact on the women's community all over the world as researched by different scholars with more emphasis on content analysis techniques of advertisements. However, this empirical research - conducted among women consumers like housewives and modern girls/ working women residing in a cosmopolitan city - Delhi - discusses about their attitudes, reactions, and perceptions about the two major role stereotypes in Indian television advertisements, that is, submissive roles for housewives advertising household products and glamorous roles for modern girls advertising cosmetic products with examples. The paper also analyses certain hypotheses (whether the consumers would agree to a role reversal in these cases), examines the bias of the advertisers towards fair skinned models for cosmetics, and how do these commercials influence the respondents' purchase intentions, and so forth. The results show that women consumers are influenced by the advertisements for their purchase requirements; however, they not satisfied with the stereotypical nature of role portrayal and the bias towards fair skin in TV advertisements, and would welcome a reversal of roles for housewives and modern girls respectively. They would prefer an average Indian woman with dusky skin color in different advertisements; a point that could help marketers design their promotional strategies.

Keywords: television advertisements, role stereotypes, female role portrayal, consumers, fairness, purchase intention

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Advertising messages may be short, but they are often powerful, persuasive, and influential in shaping the attitude and behavior of consumers. The portrayal of women in advertising is significant in the social arena, particularly when it relates to household (washing/ kitchen) and cosmetic (personal care/ fairness) products, which form a large part of the market share of most companies competing in the FMCG product mix. The dominance of television advertising in our lives has the ability to persuade and shape our beliefs, and influence our basic thoughts; it as a kind of cultural conditioning (Kilbourne, 1990). The advertising industry in India grew from ₹ 728 billion in 2011 to ₹ 820 billion in 2012, registering an overall growth of 12.6%. Total advertising spend across media was ₹ 327.4 billion in 2012. Despite the economic slowdown, advertising revenues saw a growth of 9% in 2012, as against 13% in 2011 and 17% in 2010 (Indianmirror, 2013a).

Apart from the print media, which accounts for 46% of the advertising pie, about 45 % of the advertisement industry money goes into television advertising, and over 70% of the ad revenue on television comes from ads that target women, with surveys showing that it is women who are the big purchasers in the family (Vishwanath, 2001). The aggressive growth of television industry in India in the last two decades dominates all the other available media platforms available as of now, growing 12.5% in 2012 and accounting for ₹ 370 billion (US\$ 6.81 billion) of the total revenue earned (Indianmirror, 2013b). In urban India, 85% of all households have a TV and over 70% of all households have access to satellite, cable, or DTH services. Television penetration is only around 65% in India and hence, there is great scope for the industry to grow exponentially. Television advertising revenue touched

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₹13,083 crore, up at a healthy growth rate of 14.74% from 2011, when the revenues stood at ₹ 11,402 crore ("Television in India," n.d.).

Significance of the Study

The ideals that television advertisements portray do not necessarily reflect society, but may influence people's beliefs about the world outside of their immediate environment. Many a times, it leads its receivers to believe what is untrue. Advertising is studied to explain its effects on self-image and standards of beauty, but rarely examines how it connects with the values of the consumers it supposedly represents. People perceive the world around them as depicted by television and increased television viewing is associated with stereotypical views, as it blocks other sources of information, ideas, and comprehension (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980 ; Rokeach, 1973).

This empirical research paper examines the attitude and perception of women consumers in Delhi about the portrayal of women in Indian television advertisements, particularly in household (bathroom/ kitchen) (Bretl & Cantor, 1988) and cosmetic (personal care/ fairness) products ads, and whether or not those depictions reflect the realistic situations, roles, and values of women in the present Indian society. Though the advertising industry seems to have moved ahead from stereotype images of women to independent and business savvy career women, the controversy and debate over the portrayal of women continues even today. Though content analysis has been an important tool in exploring this research topic, it is very critical to assess the women consumers' attitudes and perception about the portrayal of women in television commercials in India.

Review of Literature

➡ **Evolution of Stereotypical Roles :** The beliefs, attitudes, and the stereotypes still influence our perception of the world around us; for example, when we think of a surgeon, we are still likely to consider a man! Whom do we associate with elementary school teachers? What is the gender of the person that you would link with models or that with engineers? Most of the people still indicate that elementary school teachers are female, models are female, and engineers are male. Stereotypes refer to cognition of individuals in head and mind about an image that is a socially acceptable trait or characteristic, but typically do not correspond to social reality (Broverman, Vogel, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Bhargava, 2009).

The stereotypes also reflect structured sets of beliefs about the personal attributes of men and women. Such awareness begins in the preschool years and is well developed by the time children enter first grade (Flerx, Fidler, & Rogers, 1976). Parents also help in shaping values, beliefs, and behaviors related to gender. Parents communicate their stereotypes to children in numerous ways. Boys are given building blocks, sports equipment, and model vehicles. On the other hand, they encourage girls to play with dolls, doll houses, and miniature kitchenware and household appliances.

➡ **Issue and Significance of Female Role Portrayal in Advertisements :** The issue of evaluating the roles in ads has many dimensions. We are primarily focusing on the number of persons and types of their role portrayals in the ads; the setting of the ads (home, office, or outdoors); the most suitable role for the main female lead, whether she is in a homemaker/ housewife role for household products or in a decorative/ glamorous/ attractiveness role for cosmetic or personal-care products; her relationship and her interactive actions with others in the ads; and the link between role portrayal and selected products or services in India. These factors have been the cause of critical focus and criticism on this issue. They enable the marketers in making decisions for market segments and product positioning and thus improve their promotional strategy for implementation (Pegu & Kumar, 2013 ; Roberts & Koggan, 1979 ; Sexton & Haberman, 1974).

➡ **Presence of Role Stereotypes for Women in TV Advertisements :** As suggested in media and cultivation studies, heavy viewing of television and repeatedly seen advertisements dominate people's minds and lead to

indoctrination of the world and stereotypes as depicted in them (Gerbner et al., 1980). Television commercials emphasize the two-dimensional image of women in the form of extremely limited range of roles. They focus on glamorous roles as sex objects, like a secretary or as indifferent companions or entertainers. They are projected as dependent on men who take major decisions; in many advertisements, women have no decisive role in the commercial, but appear as an item of display and decoration, for example, in advertisements of cars and motorbikes purchase (Prakash, Kumar, & Prakash, 2012 ; Whipple & Courtney, 1985).

They are also portrayed as young and attractive modern girls or working women using cosmetic products for beautification, thereby depicting that a woman's goal in life is to attract and retain a man (Gilly, 1988 ; Gunter, 1986; Knill, Pesch, Pursey, Gilpin, & Perloff, 1981). The afore-mentioned aspect can be highlighted by considering the Indian advertisement of a fairness cream : The girl is dusky, dull, and average looking, who is rejected by a beauty company; she applies Fair & Lovely, the result - the girl is now fair and has become modern, and the world accepts her as a beautiful girl. Women, in particular, can suffer some serious psychological setbacks from the subtle and negative impact of advertising aimed at them through cosmetic and fairness products (Vaux, 2011). The other aspect of dimension relates to married women in television advertisements depicted in the traditional role of housewife/ a mother or a daughter-in-law stereotype (Bardwick & Scumann, 1967; Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Dominick & Rauch, 1974; Ferrante, Haynes, & Kingsley, 1988 ; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975; Whipple & Courtney, 1985). They are shown as submissive homemakers using household products used in the kitchen or say, in the washroom (Milburn, Carney, & Ramirez, 2001 ; Trowler, 1988).

In this category, one could relate to Indian television advertisement examples, like Vim Bar soap ad, where one housewife friend instructs and advises the other concerned neighbor to use it for effective and sparkling bright cleaning of kitchen utensils; Complian health drink ad, where the enthusiastic mother is seen telling her daughter and son about the nutritional usefulness and providing each of them with a glassful of Complian to drink; the Harpic ad, where the worried housewife looks for an effective liquid soap cleaner for toilets and finds Harpic liquid as the most suitable one in the interest of whole family's health and hygiene!

There are studies on gender role portrayals in India in the area of print ads; regarding the role of men and advertisements preferred by various segments (Mathew, 1990) and the role of both the portrayal of men and women in Indian magazine ads and the changes in family structures of our society with the emergence of working women (Das, 2000).

➡ **The Dilemma of Fairness :** The prevailing attitudes and bias in the Indian society also attaches stereotyped stigma to a girl child who is of dark complexion. Our elderly women also make comparisons within the family about the fairer skin (Ghosh, 2012). Matrimonial advertisements in any newspaper in India often mention about the requirement or description of fair brides. Actress Frieda Pinto commented that people in India are fascinated by fair and white skin (Peters, 2011) and that triggers the use of fairness cream by young girls and women who have brown and dusky skin that constitutes 70% of Indians. According to fashion guru Prasad Bidapa, it is not desirable to create a cultural bias that fair skin is better, and that these products help women to be more successful (Chowdary, 2012).

Women feel humiliated about a fact over which they have no control. They follow an usual sequence of events on the screen : Initially, a girl with dark skin is shown; she is depressed and demoralized as other relatives and friends 'reject' her due to her skin shade ; she is unsuccessful in her personal and professional lives too ; then, when the girl uses the advertised product, her skin shade transforms from dark to fair ; the advertisements usually end by portraying a sea change in the life of the person by using the given product for fairness (Gundala & Chavali, 2005). Such advertisements appeal to customers with set emotional notions of fear instinct, that if the products were not used, the dark skinned women would remain unwanted in social circles and unsuccessful in life amidst others. It can be classified as unethical on analyzing it more deeply (Gundala & Chavali, 2005). Firstly, it reflects racial discrimination and sexual stereotyping as these advertisements target women. Secondly, these advertisements target the customers by causing fear in them through misleading warnings and messages. Such appeals are used purposefully, as advertising research confirms the fact that emotional messages are better remembered than those that are not (Biener & Taylor, 2002; LaTour & Zahra, 1989).

➤ **Effect of Role Stereotypes on Attitudes and Reactions Towards Advertisements:** In a small sample survey of college women, the respondents reacted to role portrayals based upon their positive and negative attitude towards women's liberation (Mazis & Beuttemmuller, 1972). The women felt that advertisements portrayed them in offensive ways in few set roles as homemakers or as sex objects (Lundstorm & Sciglimpaglia, 1977). In a study relating to advertising effectiveness, researchers found that young and modern women preferred young and modern portrayal of spokeswoman in ads like them, whereas old and traditional women chose roles for women in advertisements similar to their age and nature (Leigh, Rethans, & Whitney, 1987). In a Canadian study, women perceived that female role portrayal was not accurate and realistic in advertising (Young & Crane, 1992).

➤ **Impact of Advertisements on Purchases made by Women Consumers :** The close relationship existing between advertising, the consumer goods industry, and the crucial economic role of women as consumers has led the marketers to create the sensual and decorative role portrayal of women for display in advertising (Whipple & Courtney, 1985). Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) reported about stereotyping of women's role in print ads, and they believed in the uniqueness of the product women choose to buy. Though women are brand loyal; interestingly, they may try out new products, which would attract their attention, arouse their curiosity and interest as innovative products and appeal as value for money (Nielson Report, 2011). Women buy not only personal-care items for themselves, but also buy for their children, husbands, and households as well (Vishwanath, 2001). In another study, older women and lower income group women based in US would avoid buying those products whose ads were offensive and sexist, though they may continue buying other products of that firm (Lundstorm & Sciglimpaglia, 1977). A survey in Canada found that women may stop buying the existing products or refrain from acquiring new products if the company portrayed women in a narrow manner in their advertisements (Young & Crane, 1992), thus indicating that attitude and perception would influence their purchase intentions.

➤ **Factors and Variables:** The following important issues, factors, and variables emerged from the literature reviewed and field discussions:

- Popularity of television advertisements among women consumers for new products and product variations.
- Social bias for stereotypes among different communities and age groups.
- Ad influence on products and services purchase; impact of offensive ads.
- Types of role portrayals, central role situations.
- Glamour role portrayals for cosmetic products, attractiveness of women, decorative roles.
- Passive, less attractive housewife role portrayals for household products.
- Extent of stereotypical role portrayals of women in ads in different brands of products.
- Identifying relationships between choice of role portrayals and products' use.
- Role reversal, roles changed for cosmetic ads and household product ads, and their impact on perception and purchase.
- Fair skin appearance for cosmetic ads, unrealistic or realistic!
- Satisfaction among women consumers regarding women's role portrayals in ads with respect to our societal values.
- Choice of type of advertisements for a self-role portrayal.

Research Questions

Many research questions emerge from the literature review. This research will attempt to answer two main groups of questions. First, currently, how women are stereotypically portrayed in Indian television advertisements and how do the women consumers perceive them? What role do the advertisements play in influencing their purchase behavior? Why only housewives are depicted in ads of household products? Why are only glamorous women

depicted in ads of cosmetic products ? For example, what are the criteria for the roles they are portraying, and whether it is realistic and fair to portray them in that manner? Why is there a bias for fair skin among the advertisers?

The second question challenges the stereotypes and asks - how women consumers perceive this portrayal compared to the actual values and perspective of women in India? If housewives are depicted in cosmetic advertisements, will there be any change in the consumers' perception? If glamorous women are depicted in household products, will there be any change in the consumers' perception? The afore-mentioned key questions and issues help to shape the following objectives and hypotheses from a perspective of women consumers.

Objectives of the Study

- (1) To study about the different stereotypical casting of women in advertisements.
- (2) To explore the impact of advertisements on purchase behaviour of women consumers.
- (3) To examine the domination of fair skin bias in ads.
- (4) To explore the suitability of featuring modern girls in household products/services commercials.
- (5) To explore the suitability of featuring housewives in cosmetic advertisements.
- (6) To understand the level of satisfaction among the women consumers regarding advertisements and their choice of self-roles.

Hypotheses

- ➔ H1: There will be a change in the consumers' perception if housewives are depicted in cosmetic advertisements.
- ➔ H01: There will not be any change in the consumers' perception if housewives are depicted in cosmetic advertisements.
- ➔ H2: There will be a change in the consumers' perception if modern girls are depicted in advertisements of household products.
- ➔ H02: There will not be any change in the consumers' perception if modern girls are depicted in advertisements of household products.
- ➔ H3: There is no significant difference in the perception of the housewives and modern women regarding stereotypical roles of women in ads.
- ➔ H03: There is a significant difference in the perception of the housewives and modern women regarding stereotypical roles of women in ads.

Methodology

➔ **Research Design:** It is a descriptive study where the primary data was collected through a questionnaire and interview schedule. The secondary data was collected from journals and articles from newspapers and blogs.

➔ **Sampling Method and Sample Profile:** Convenient sampling was used. The sample size of the study was 230 respondents consisting of 115 homemakers and 115 modern girl students and working women. They belonged to a mix of different income cross-sections and communities spread over four regions (north, south, east, and west) of Delhi.

➤ **Research Instrument and Data:** A structured questionnaire was formed based on variables identified from the literature review and focused group discussions with some prospective women respondents. It was validated by expert academic researchers and professionals in this field, and a small pilot study consisting of 30 respondents was conducted in order to refine the questions. During the main survey, random questions were also posed to the respondents on the questionnaire items to find out why they answered in the way they did or to find the logic behind their answering. The final year MBA women students living in different regions of Delhi assisted in data collection and conducting the interviews during May-June 2013. Finally, 200 questionnaires, 100 from each category, were found to be appropriately filled in for data coding and analysis.

➤ **Data Analysis :** The recorded observations and frequency descriptions were calculated in terms of percentages. The calculation for hypotheses testing was done using chi - square, with the help of MS- Excel for analysis. The results of the chi-square tests were also verified with the help of SPSS software version 17.

Analysis and Results

The different tables provide the response observations of the respondents in terms of percentages as primary data, corresponding to the various items in the questionnaire. The interpretations also include the qualitative data obtained in interactions and personal interviews.

➤ Demographic Profile

1) Housewives: About 100 respondents - in the age group of 25 - 46 years - belonging to different communities in cosmopolitan areas of Delhi answered the questionnaire correctly and gave personal interviews. The median age was 34 years.

2) Modern Girls/ Women - Students : Around 50 respondents - belonging to the age group of 16 to 24 years - from different communities agreed to participate in the survey and gave their consent for being part of personal interviews . The median age was 21 years.

3) Modern Girls/ Women – Working : Around 50 respondents - in the age group of 22 - 30 years - agreed to participate in the survey and interviews and correctly filled the questionnaires. The median age was 26 years.

Table 1. Number of Respondents Watching Ads

Options	Yes	No
Housewives	60%	40%
Modern girls/women	64%	36%

Table 2. Products' Purchase Based on Ads

Options	Yes	No	Sometimes
Housewives	70%	24%	6%
Modern girls/women	54%	30%	16%

Table 3. Portrayal of Women in Ads of Different Household Products vs. Cosmetic Ads

Options	Yes	No	Maybe
Housewives	52%	36%	12%
Modern girls/women	28%	30%	42%

Table 4. Portrayal of Modern Women in Household Product Advertisements

Options	Yes	No	Maybe
Housewives	46%	30%	24%
Modern girls/women	54%	42%	4%

Table 5. Stereotypical Character Roles in Ads

Options	Yes	No
Housewives	76%	24%
Modern girls/women	68%	32%

Table 6. Portrayal of Housewives in Cosmetic Ads (e.g. Lakme)

Options	Yes	No
Housewives	68%	32%
Modern girls/women	74%	26%

Findings (for the Items in the Questionnaire)

1) Do you watch advertisements? : The advertisements were watched by all the respondents (Table 1). When asked about the same (reason for watching advertisements), most of the respondents (60% housewives and 64% modern women) wanted to know about the launch of new products.

2) Do you buy products based on the advertisements shown? : The Table 2 shows that 70% of the housewives and in case of modern working women and students, 54% of the respondents bought products based on the advertisements shown. The independent women or students had more time for shopping and it was also revealed that word of mouth does have an important role over here. The homemakers were more dependent on television advertisements for deciding on their product purchases.

3) Do you feel that women shown in advertisements of household products are portrayed as less attractive than those shown in cosmetic ads? : The Table 3 depicts that 52% housewives thought that women featured in advertisements of household products are shown as less attractive than those shown in other advertisements. Whereas, 30% modern girls/women did not think that housewives are shown as less attractive. This may be because this category did not give much attention to such ads. For example: On analyzing an image from a Lakme ad, we observed that an attractive, glamorous young women is featured in the ad; however, a less attractive modern woman is featured in a RIN washing powder ad, which is a household product.

4) If in an advertisement of washing powder, a modern woman is featured instead of a housewife, will you feel like buying that product ? : Forty-six percent housewives and 54% modern girls/women were of the view that they would buy the washing powder even if a glamorous model was advertising the product (Table 4). While talking to them, we realized that a large portion of the population felt that glamorous/beautiful models should also appear in ads for household products without being depicted as housewives; they could be shown as professionals and career women, thus ruling out stereotypical roles. Example: in Comfort liquid soap ad, a modern girl/ woman is using the garment cleaning liquid soap, a convenient household product. Also, the Dettol Healthy Kitchen Gel ad shows a lady doctor using the dishwashing gel. These ads depict the changing situational roles and regular needs of modern working women in society.

5) Do you feel that the advertisement world revolves around stereotypical people? : Both 76% housewives and

Table 7. Fine with Portrayal of Fair Women in Cosmetic Ads

Options	Yes	No
Response (both categories)	13%	87%

Table 8. Satisfaction of Women Consumers with the Portrayal of Women in TV Advertisements

Options	<i>Very dissatisfied</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very satisfied</i>
Housewives	16%	28%	20%	22%	14%
Modern girls/women	18%	40%	10%	26%	6%

Table 9. Choice of Advertisements for a Self - Role

Options	Cosmetic	Household products	Both
Housewives	28%	20%	52%
Modern girls/women	58%	24%	18%

68% modern girls/women thought that the advertising world revolves around stereotypical people, where fair girls and models are given much importance (Table 5).

6) Would you like to see a housewife in a “Lakme” cosmetic advertisement? : The Table 6 points out that 68% housewives and 74% modern girls/women felt that an average looking Indian girl or a housewife should also be featured in cosmetic advertisements. It was observed that audiences wanted to see a typical Indian housewife in a glamorous ad; they felt that advertisers do not focus on typical dusky Indian beauty that should be depicted in beauty cream ads. Examples: a) Godrej Hair Color ad, where the woman is shown as a housewife; not for a household product but for a beauty/ make-up cosmetic product, that is, hair color; b) Ponds ad, where a wife is shown for the face cream ad.

7) Do you feel it is appropriate on the part of the advertisers to focus on fairer looking women for cosmetic advertisements? : About 87% of the respondents were of the view that advertisers should not always focus on fairer looking girls, showing them as real beauties and depicting them as successful women of India; it hurts the sentiments of others who are not so fair (Table 7). It can spoil their self-confidence as they see such ads and buy those products; they buy such products by thinking that these (the products) will drastically improve their looks, which does not happen.

8) How satisfied are you with the portrayal of women in TV advertisements? : The Table 8 shows that about 34% housewives and 58% modern girls/women were dissatisfied with the way women are being portrayed in TV

Table 10. Stereotypical Role Behavior in Advertisements of Different Brands

Product Brand Advertisements	Response
Lakme (cosmetic)	28%
Fair & Lovely (cosmetic)	62%
Rin (household)	2%
Surf (household)	3%
L'Oreal (cosmetic)	4%
Dove (body care/ cosmetic)	1%

advertisements, whereas 36% housewives and 32% modern girls/women were actually satisfied with the portrayal of women in TV ads. It is obvious that women in India are not at all satisfied with the way they are portrayed in advertisements. When asked, many women said that they are being depicted as sex objects; for example, in a now banned ad of Zatak deodorant, a newly wed bride is shown waiting for her husband in a beautifully decorated room; but she suddenly gets enticed by her neighbor wearing that "deodorant," she removes the wedding ring and starts undressing. And at the end of the advertisement dawns the line - 'just Zatak her'. The recent government crackdown on such overly sexual commercials is based on its conviction that such advertisements are "indecent, vulgar, and suggestive".

9) If given a chance, in what advertisement role would you like to see yourself? : It is evident from the Table 9 that 52% housewives wanted to appear in both types of advertisements other than selling household products if they were given an opportunity, whereas 58% modern girls/women felt that they would only appear in cosmetic advertisements; the younger generation wanted to feature in beauty products ads and they did not want to be portrayed as housewives.

10) According to you, which cosmetic/ household product brand advertisement has shown the highest level of stereotypical behavior? : Sixty two percent and 28% of the respondents felt that Fair & Lovely and Lakme advertisements depicted the highest stereotypical behavior respectively (Table 10). The advertisers have always shown that girls with fairer looking skin get success and are high on sex appeal. While talking to quite a few housewives and students, it was found that advertisers have always shown that fairer skin is superior to dusky skin, which hurts the sentiments of many girls and women. On the contrary, the respondents' favorite ad was of Dove products, which focus on the real Indian women.

➡ **Hypotheses Testing:** The chi-square test is used for testing the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference between the observed (F_o) and expected (F_e) frequency results. Chi-square is a statistical test commonly used to compare observed data with data we would expect to obtain, according to a specific null hypothesis.

The formula for calculating chi-square is as follows :

$$X^2 = \sum \left[\frac{(F_o - F_e)^2}{F_e} \right] \quad \dots\dots\dots(1)$$

At degrees of freedom, $df = (r - 1) \cdot (c - 1)$

where,

r is the number of rows and c is the number of columns in the contingency table. That is, chi-square is the sum of the squared difference between observed (F_o) and the expected (F_e) frequency data (or the deviation, d), divided by the expected frequency (F_e) data in all possible categories.

➡ **H01: There will be a change in the consumers' perception if housewives are depicted in cosmetic advertisements (Based on the Question: Would you like to see a housewife in a "Lakme" advertisement?).**

Table 11. Contingency Table for Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis 1

Women's Category/Options	Yes (O)	No (O)	Total
Housewives	68 (71)*	32 (29)*	100
Modern Girls	74 (71)*	26 (29)*	100
$df = (2-1) \cdot (2-1) = 1$	142	58	$N = 200$

In Table 11, (*O*) refers to observed frequencies; (**)* refers to expected frequencies; degrees of freedom, $df = (2-1) \cdot (2-1) = 1$

Therefore, calculated chi - square, $X^2 = 0.872$, from formula (1) and Table 11. At $\alpha = 0.05$ and $df = 1$, the critical tabled value chi-square = 3.84.

Here, the calculated chi-square value $0.872 < 3.84$ (tabled value). Therefore, the hypothesis H01 is accepted. That is, there will be a change in the consumers' perception if housewives are featured in cosmetic ads. This means that the audience will accept the ads where housewives or less attractive women are featured in cosmetic ads.

➔ **H02: There will be a change in the consumers' perception if modern girls are depicted in advertisements of household products (Based on the Question: If in an advertisement of washing powder, a modern woman is shown instead of a housewife, will you feel like buying that product?).**

In Table 12, (*O*) refers to the observed frequencies; (**)* refers to expected frequencies; degrees of freedom, $df = (2-1) \cdot (3-1) = 2$

Therefore, the calculated chi - square value, $X^2 = 16.92$, from formula (1) and Table 12. At $\alpha = 0.05$ and $df = 2$, critical tabled value = 5.99. Here, the calculated chi-square value $16.92 > 5.99$ (tabled value). Therefore, the hypothesis H02 is rejected. That is, the audience would not accept the ads where modern women/ young models are depicted using household products like washing powder.

➔ **H03: There is no significant difference in the perception of the housewives and modern women regarding stereotypical roles of women in ads (Based on the question: Do you feel that the advertisement world revolves around the stereotypical role of women?).**

In Table 13, (*O*) refers to observed frequencies; (**)* refers to expected frequencies; degrees of freedom, $df = (2-1) \cdot (2-1) = 1$

Therefore, the calculated chi - square value, $X^2 = 1.56$, from formula (1) and Table 13. At $\alpha = 0.05$ and $df = 1$, critical tabled value = 3.84. Here, the calculated chi-square value $1.56 < 3.84$ (tabled value). Therefore, the hypothesis H03 is accepted. It means both the categories of women felt that advertisements revolve around the stereotypical portrayal and behavior of women.

Table 12. Contingency Table for Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis 2

Women's Category/Options	Yes (<i>O</i>)	No (<i>O</i>)	May be (<i>O</i>)	Total
Housewives	46 (50)*	30 (36)*	24 (14)*	100
Modern Girls	54 (50)*	42 (36)*	4 (14)*	100
$df = (2-1) \cdot (3-1) = 2$	100	72	28	$N = 200$

Table 13. Contingency Table for Chi-Square Test for Hypothesis 3

Women's Category/Options	Yes (<i>O</i>)	No (<i>O</i>)	Total
Housewives	76 (72)*	24 (28)*	100
Modern Girls	68 (72)*	32 (28)*	100
$df = (2-1) \cdot (2-1) = 1$	144	56	$N = 200$

Conclusion

- It is apparent that stereotypes exist and are pervasive in our media today; the less attractive housewife stereotype is predominant in television commercials. Though not harmful, it does not project the real image of women in general. However, the advertisers' emphasis on fairer looking skin and the portrayal of only attractive/glamorous/sexy women being successful in life in advertisements of cosmetic products is harmful. Such advertisements send out the message that you need to be fair, good looking, and voluptuous to receive good opportunities and consequently, achieve success in life (the plain Janes or even the average looking women with good brains and education stand no chance in front of the fair beauties!). This puts a deep psychological pressure and promotes a sense of being inferior in women who have dusky/brown skin and are average looking.
- For portrayal of women in advertising, the proper role becomes a central issue. If given a chance of featuring in an ad, the older respondents said that they would opt for both household and cosmetic products, whereas the young respondents said that they would still prefer a role in cosmetic ads!
- Women watch television commercials, particularly housewives, for information about new product launches and new variants of the existing products. Most of the respondents were influenced by the advertisements for making their purchase decisions.
- This study is meant to be a preliminary attempt to quantify the current portrayal of women in the Indian television commercials from the perspective of women consumers' attitudes and perception in contrast to the widely used content analysis methods. A major portion of young and older women in India are not satisfied with the way women are portrayed as sex objects and in unrealistic manner in the advertisements, which are contrary to our social values.
- The results of the study indicate that some changes in the portrayal of women have taken place over time. However, several stereotypes still remain. The personal-care products in the cosmetics range, like the Dove soap and shampoo advertisement, was a favorite among the respondents as it depicts average Indian women (and not glamorous divas or models) with normal dusky skin in its ads.

Conclusion from Hypotheses

- The respondents were aware of the stereotypical portrayal of women in ads. They want advertisers to depict the real Indian women in their cosmetic ads and not portray models and actresses only.
- Things have moved ahead and perceptions have changed as consumers would accept housewives in ads of cosmetic brands. They would prefer an average looking Indian women or a traditional housewife in a glamorous ad for cosmetic products, so that a realistic image of a dusky Indian beauty is projected that would inspire confidence among a larger section of our society (regular women would think that they can also look glamorous and beautiful after using those products).
- Stereotypical roles are a major concern in the advertising world. It is the responsibility of the advertisers that they should not portray women as mere sex objects and should not depict that fairer skin is beautiful and superior to dusky/brown skin. Ads should be realistic.
- There are not many advertisements where models or modern girls featuring in cosmetic ads are depicted in ads for household products, as it is not actually accepted by people yet (you will not see models or the young crop of actresses selling detergents!). Advertisers should start targeting the young generation for such ads to change the consumers' perception regarding housewives - that they are always at home wearing a saree and are running around to complete the household chores and managing the family responsibilities.

Suggestions and Recommendations for Managerial Relevance

- Women should be portrayed in a respectful manner in advertisements.
- The ads should be realistic and adhering to social values. The advertisements should not be risqué, for example, a newlywed bride is shown getting attracted to a man (not her husband!) because of the fragrance of the deodorant he is using. Such advertisements portray women in an extremely derogatory manner and should be avoided.
- The ads should refrain from conveying the message that only fair and beautiful women are successful and confident. Ads should be made separately for different skin tones. Like if a dusky girl wants to improve her skin tone or bring a grace to her skin because of sun tan or any other reason, an ad should be made focusing only on the dusky skin and not portraying her to be dull and lacking in confidence. The end result should not be projected that after using a certain cream, she becomes as fair as snow white!
- The advertisers should not portray homemakers as dull stereotypes who are always engaged in household chores, dressed in shabby sarees, and complaining about certain things. The products can be sold with a positive attitude where a housewife is shown to be active and happy.

While this research examined the current portrayal of women in Indian television commercials, there are still many areas, which could be explored from the consumers' perspective.

Limitations of the Study and Scope of Future Research

While this research has focused on the current stereotypical portrayal of women in television advertisements for household and cosmetic products primarily, there are other areas left to be explored. This could be women's role in ads with reference to different product categories. The sample size and base were limited to about 200 respondents in Delhi region; further studies could include larger sample base with respondents from different states of India to understand the different regional perspective of women purchasers, if any.

This research could be complemented by comparisons with women's stereotypical portrayal in print advertisements in India to better understand the changes in female roles that have been evolving with the increased globalization and modernization of our society. Perhaps, the findings could be further widened to include the female stereotypical roles in TV and print ads from different countries to understand the advertisement strategy and the creative contents used in different countries and cultures. That could help multinational companies operating in India to adapt those advertisements to the Indian context and markets and vice-versa for some Indian companies marketing their products abroad.

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