

Gender Stereotypes in Advertising: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Gone are the days when men were considered as the financial providers of the family and women as the caring mothers and loving wives happily doing household chores. Women are now engaged in the workforce where they can take on various leadership roles within companies. They are not only taking up of the responsibilities of a mother but also an executive of an organization. It is commonly believed that advertisements reflect the society, but, in reality, they failed to depict the achievements of women; instead they prefer to follow the traditional gender stereotypes. Advertisements portray women as ‘damsels in distresses.’ They are depicted as feminine being weak and fragile, easily frightened, defenseless, blinded by emotions, dependent on male counterparts and showing their beauty, grace and sexual attractiveness. Advertisers often display them in domestic scenes and in products like perfumes and cars. They are shown as sex objects to promote the brand. While men are portrayed as athletic, strong male individual engaging in high status jobs. These gender stereotypes continue to persist and degrade the status of women. Keeping all the above deliberations in view, this paper will aim to identify all the possible gender stereotypes that exist in advertising. By employing semiotic analysis techniques as research tool, the paper will explore how different icons, symbols and indexes used to perpetuate gender stereotypes in advertisements. While the discourse analysis will adopt Fairclough’s three dimensional framework – textual features, discursive practice and social practice to expose how the advertisers construct ideologies about the female in advertisements.

Keywords: Female, Stereotypes, Advertising, Semiotics, and Discourse Analysis

Introduction

The depiction of women in advertising is often labelled as exploitative, derogatory and demeaning, which does not represent the modern women (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2015). Advertising always lags behind in promoting gender equality. Instead, it still reinforces female stereotypes and fails to depict the empowerment of women. Gender stereotyping in advertising occurs when gender roles depictions deviate from equality. This occurs, for instance when women

are pictured in doing household chores, in a high degree of nudity, being dependent on men's protection and making tremendous efforts to get the 'ideal beauty' in order to keep their mate happy; while men are shown in leading positions being strong and powerful. Advertising picture men and women the way we think they behave not the way they actually do behave in society.

Cortese (2015) claimed that feminine counterpart is disregarded and devalued in advertisements when they are depicted as passive and subordinate; as sex objects or obsessed with household chores. He further argued that advertisers are constantly bombarding women with the message that they are inherently flawed. They make women believe that if they are not physically perfect or attractive, they will not be loved by men. Goffman (1978) one of the first sociologists to study gender stereotypes in advertisements claimed that women are often portrayed in a stereotypical way and have a submissive role and a lower physical and social position than men. 42 years have passed since Goffman's research and women are still portrayed similarly, thus indicating that advertisers continue to degrade the status of females in most advertisements.

Gender stereotypes prevail both in texts and images of the advertisements. To reveal those stereotypes, a critical discourse and semiotic analysis were used to examine the texts, images, sign, gestures, and facial expressions in the ad.

Literature Review

Gender stereotypes in particular, are defined as beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men. It is a stereotype that involves the reduction of persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits and stressed that stereotyping reduces, naturalizes, and fixes differences (Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). Courtney & Lockeretz (2019) argued in the favor of stereotypical depictions that women are portrayed more in the domestic scene, dependent on men's protection and appear incapable of making decisions. While men are portrayed as strong, independent and played more working roles than women.

Furthermore, Rollero (2016) argued that women played more recreational and decorative roles. They were more frequently objectified, were more attractive, and were often dressed in seductive dresses than males (Rollero, 2016). The underlying messages of advertisements emphasize sexuality, often presenting women as sex objects (Nagi, 2014). Female body is used to take part in advertisements and reached different level with the opinion that sexuality is nothing to hide and open to public (Buglio, 2015).

Bughio (2015) stated that advertisements portray women in two positions, housewives and models and men as the breadwinner. Goffman (1978) explains that a man may do the "female task," but never under the watchful eye of the woman.

Women are constructed as subordinate, unreasonable, beautiful, emotional characters without authority or control over events. On the contrary, men are engaged in powerful and dominant positions with reason and courage but limited emotional disclosure (Cankaya, 2013). Moreover, advertisers portrayed women with unrealistic beauty that is unattainable in reality. Women in advertisements are usually depicted as attractive, having fair, soft, smooth, shining and flawless skin. They are additionally expressed with youthful attributes, including wide eyes, full lips, high cheekbones, flawless skin, pleasant appearance and sexual allure (Tehseem & Kalsoom, 2015).

Researchers found other aspects of stereotypical portrayals of women that are manifested in advertisements. They were depicted in subordinate positions like sitting, leaning or laying down, in comparison to their male counterpart (Masse, 1988). They were often pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface conveying a sense of one's body being delicate and precious thing (Goffman, 1978).

Döring & Pöschl (2006) state that by communicating specific images of men and women, such as through gestures, roles and colors, advertising is said to shape what shall be interpreted as masculinity and femininity by society.

Kang (1997) analyzed gender portrayals in his study by using the categories proposed by Goffman (1978) and he found that female roles, were still portrayed in a stereotyped way. In his investigation, he identified four significant pictures:

- "Feminine touch" – Women using their hands and fingers to trace or caress an object delicately.
- "Ritualization of subordination" – woman in a submissive body position or behavior.
- "Licensed withdraw" – woman is psychologically removed from the picture which results in leaving the women vulnerable and dependent on the man's protection.
- "Body display" – high degree of nudity.

Courtney & Lockeretz (1971) examined images of women in magazine advertisements. They reported the following findings:

- Fewer women were shown in professional roles.
- Women were shown in non-active and decorative roles.
- Women rarely go out far from home by themselves or with other women.
- Women were shown as dependent on men's protection.
- Women were regarded as sex objects by men.

- Women were most often shown in ads for cleaning products, food products, beauty products, and clothing or in a family setting.
- Males were most often pictured in ads for cars, travel, alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, banks, industrial products and industrial companies.

According to Hall and Crum (1994) women's bodies and body parts appear more often than pictures of men's bodies. Men's faces are photographed more often than their bodies. Women in beer advertisements are portrayed through shots of the chest, leg, buttock and crotch. Besides, they found that most women in these advertisements appeared in either leisurewear or swimwear, whereas the men were always dressed in work clothes. They argued that this reinforces the stereotype that women are sex objects, while men work, make decisions and look after women who are not capable of looking after themselves

Kumari and Shivani (2013) found that women were not depicted in the office setting or in working role, in fact they were most often shown as without any clear indication of working status. This indicates that advertisers prefer to underplay the employment status of females in most of the advertisements.

Cankaya (2013) argues that women were portrayed as “sex objects who are usually young, thin, beautiful, passive, dependent, and often incompetent and dumb”. She proceeds by claiming that the contexts women appeared in often had to do with home and children, and working women were represented as very feminine and gentle. Men were represented as independent and dominant, women adopted the role of a submissive and helpless supporting character who are "passive and waiting for men's attention"(Cankaya, 2013).

Cohan (2001) suggested three principal ethical issues in women's advertising:

1. Many ads portray women as confused, childish, contradictory, or generally in need of help. The message is that a sexy woman the type that men want – is one who is easily manipulated, vulnerable and weak.
2. Advertisers depict women from something natural to an unattainable beauty. They are depicted with impossible youth, impossible perfection that seem inhuman.
3. Advertising often portrays women as things or as mere sex objects by use of stunningly models.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims at

- Exploring all possible stereotypes that exist today in association with women in print advertising.
- Finding how advertisers construct ideologies about female stereotypes.
- Finding out the different roles that are given to female in print advertisement.

Methodology

A qualitative design was employed in this study to reveal all the gender stereotypes manifested in print advertisement. Four print advertisements (see Appendix) were analyzed with the aid of a critical discourse analysis (CDA) and a semiotic analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way of how social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. As a result, CDA was used to reveal those ideologies that were enacted in advertisements which naturalize women in stereotypical roles. The critical discourse analysis was based on Fairclough's three dimensions framework: textual, discursive and social-cultural level. The textual analysis involved the analysis of rhetoric devices and the vocabulary that advertisers have used to stereotype women. The discursive analysis focused on the level that deals with the text production and interpretation while the social practice analysis are related to the ideologies disseminated in the advertisements.

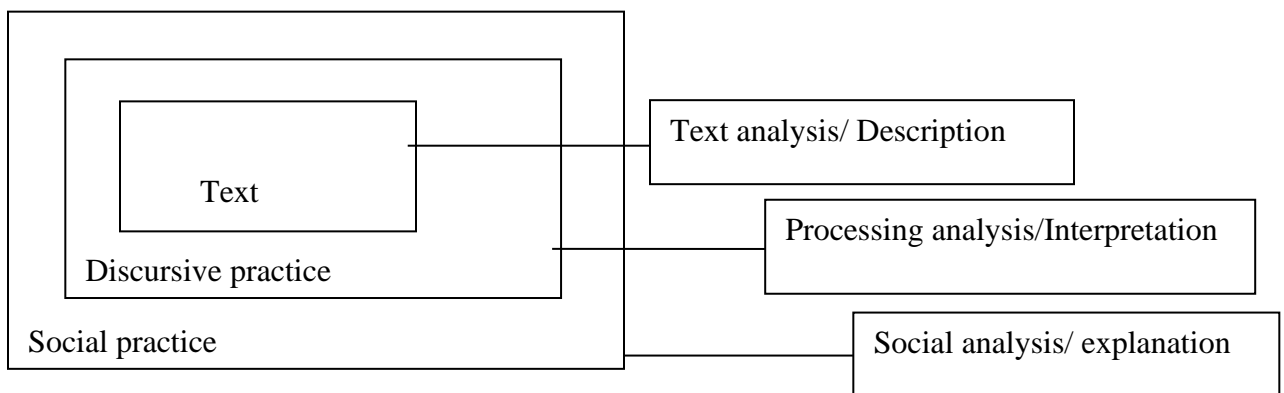


Figure 1. Fairclough's dimension of discourse and discourse analysis (Janks, 2016).

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as sign. It involves the study not only of what we refer to as sign in daily speech but of anything which stands for something else. In a semiotic sense signs take the form of words, image, sound, gestures and objects. According to Saussure “a sign can be divided into two components—the *signifier* (the sound, image, or word) and the *signified*, which is the concept the signifier represents, or the meaning” (Chandler, 2007). Therefore, this study will use a semiotic analysis to explore the sign, symbols, gestures, body language, facial expression and color manifested in the advertisements.

Analysis & Discussion

The happy housewife

Textual Analysis

“100% Indian woman ka match sirf catch”.

Here the tagline is targeted at the woman. By emphasizing on the word woman here the advertiser fortifies on the stereotype that kitchen is the place for women only and not for men. Furthermore, the brand enhances the idea that it will match the expectations of the contemporary Indian women who like get 100% satisfaction from everything, especially when it comes to pleasing their husbands. The above sentence legitimizes on the unequal distribution of power between genders.

Discursive Analysis

Strategy used in advertisement	Linguistic devices
Celebrity endorsement	“100% Indian woman ka match sirf catch”.
puffery	100%, match
Emotional words	Indian woman

Social Practice Analysis

Women are still portrayed happily in the household product. This ad shows that women are confined to domestic chores, while men are associated with power and authority. It proves that female stereotype still continues to persist, especially in India, where women do not have power in decision making and their place are believed to be in the kitchen. Whether a female celebrity is

powerful or independent, still advertising considers women as inferior and never fails to depict them in stereotypical roles.

Semiotic Analysis

In this ads, Vidya Balan is shown smiling with the ok sign and maintaining direct eyes contact with the audience. She is shown with a huge smile which denotes that she is happy in her role as a housewife. The ok sign indicates a sense of satisfaction towards the product and showing the fact that women find happiness in cooking with tasty spices, especially when they have to please their husband. And to show her happiness, the yellow background is used as yellow color denotes joy, liveliness, positivity. Her traditional Indian Kurti, her long hair and her simplicity pictured her as a housewife.

The Ideal Beauty

Textual Analysis

“AISA GLOW DIKHE, HAR NAZAR RUKHE”. “You think having a glow that catches the fancy of the world is difficult? With lotus WhiteGlow Gel Crème, it’s just easy to get this attention-arresting skin. As it comes enriched with saxifrage extracts and milk enzymes that help lighten and brighten your skin in 7 days. So go for lotus WhiteGlow Gel Crème and get uninterrupted admiration.”

The underlined words signify the importance of being beautiful. It conveys the idea that being beautiful and attractive is a girl greatest weapon to make men fall for them. The ad here tells women to attain such glow and perfection like the stunning model so that they can seduce men with their beauty. And if they use the lotus WhiteGlow they will get numbers of admirers.

Discursive Analysis

Strategy used in the ad	Linguistics devices
Celebrity endorsement	AISA GLOW DIKHE ,HAR NAZR RUKHE.
Puffery	Nazar Ruke, uninterrupted admiration, brighten your skin in 7 days.
Emotional words	Attention arresting skin, glow, lighten and brighten

Social Practice analysis

Advertisers have created a new type of woman that does not exist in reality. They are portrayed as having an ideal beauty, being young, attractive with fair, smooth, soft and shining skin free from wrinkles, scars and blemishes. They are depicted as having radiant hair, dazzling and bright eyes. Here the advertiser has used Jacqueline Fernandez, the former Miss Universe of Sri Lanka to prove such ideology of ideal beauty. She is depicted in a flawlessly glowing skin and she looks fresh and young. The ad here is shaping the ideology that women are only beautiful if they are the ‘white ideal’. They should get rid of blemishes and enlighten their skin so that they may look attractive and pleasant to the opposite gender.

Semiotic Analysis

The model looks young and naturally beautiful as she is pictured in a natural makeup with her hair open. Her lips are slightly opened, revealing her perfect white teeth. These physical characteristics are stereotypically associated with beauty. The model is looking directly to the audience and her direct gaze denotes confidence. Her hand is placed delicately under her chin which symbolizes that women are fragile, delicate and are not meant for manly work. She is wearing a sleeveless top which is revealing her bare skin. Cortese (2015) argues that the exposure of naked skin stimulates the sexual appetite to the opposite gender and their long hair flow is a sign of attractiveness and femininity. The white background and the saxifrage are enhancing her beauty and her white skin.

The Sex Object

Textual Analysis

“I am juicy couture”. A bold and alluring new fragrance that evokes the glamorous rebel in every juicy girl.

Here the underline words pictured the girls as being seductive. The word Juicy is generally associated with young attractive and sexy girls. And similarly, in this ad the girl is portrayed as erotic, thrilling and exciting. Rebel is a negative word, but when it is associated with the word glamorous, it signifies the elegance of the woman. Rebellious is for only juicy girls and they do this in a sexy, seductive and unabashed manner. The bold and alluring scent will evoke a sensual and passionate feeling among the juicy girls.

Discursive Analysis

Strategy used	Linguistics devices
An attractive model	“I am juicy couture”

puffery	Rebel, juicy
Emotional words	Bold, alluring, glamorous

Social Practice Analysis

Sometimes sexual themes in advertising are combined with ideas that are derogatory to women. Sexual objectification refers to "using women (mostly) as decorative or attention-getting objects, with little or no relevance to the product advertised" (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2015) . Perfume advertising resorts to emotional appeal, in which the product is symbolically associated with sensuality, eroticism and mystery. These adverts try to create a mood rather than provide information about the tangible properties of the product. The word juicy depicts how the girl is regarded as a sex object by men. And men prefer to have a bold, attractive and at the same time a sexy partner.

Semiotic Analysis

The advertisement portrays an attractive young woman with a daring look who is wearing a black dress. The gaze of the girl depicts her as being bold and daring. Her bright red lipstick evokes an erotic feeling. The flowing water from the roses blends with the word juice. The squeezing of the roses pictured her as being wild and dangerous. And the roses connote her fatal beauty. Her well fitted black dress is revealing her breast cleavage, making her more accessible as a sex object. Her black dress denotes rebellion, strength, elegance and mystery. Her looks, her red lipstick and the crushing of the roses portray her in a sexually aggressive manner. Denotatively, the model is shown as being dangerous and sexually skilled.

Dependent on Men’s Protection

Semiotic Analysis

In advertisements, Men are shown steady while women are shown usually holding hands, leaning on shoulders, thereby implying that women are much in need of support, help and protection Goffman (1978).

In this ad we can see a lady leaning on the shoulder of a man and the man is delicately holding her waist. Such gestures connote the idea that the lady needs the protection of the man and her daring gaze depict the fact that nobody can dare to harm her as she is now under the protection of the man and she is safe. According to Khan (2016), advertisements are often criticized for stereotyping women and portraying them as “inferior”, “submissive”, “dependent” and “helpless” whereas showing men as “confident”, “independent” and “powerful”.

Her bare legs are a sign of sexuality. The surfing board behind her back may denote her as a strong and bold lady, but she is still under male dominance. She still needs to be taken care of

by a male. The ideology of the ad is that females are weak, and they always need their mates for their safety. No matter how strong, courageous, or bold a female may appear, they are always under male dominance.

Conclusion

The battle of gender equality is an ongoing process and advertisers always find a way to mock or belittle women in any role. The study aimed at investigating gender stereotypes in print advertising. By using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis and semiotic analysis, the study found that advertising perpetuates female stereotypes from the happy housewives to sexual objects. They are still pictured as weak, dependent and inferior beings. Both textual and visual elements are used to reinforce gender stereotypes. The study also reveals that the stereotypical representations of women as weak and powerless were found to have been replaced by the depictions of powerful, daring and perfect-looking women whose sexuality was emphasized. Also, it was observed that they were always represented with an ideal beauty in different roles.

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APPENDIX: ADVERTISEMENTS CHOSEN FOR ANALYSIS



The happy housewife & the ideal beauty



The sex object & Dependent on men's protection