

STEREOTYPE AND CULTURE IN INDIAN ADVERTISEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

A stereotype is a representation of a group that signifies a particular characteristic. A stereotype is a preconceived notion, especially about a group of people (vocabulary.com) Stereotypes are the inference we make about the characteristics of certain group of people. Marketers are constantly seeking ways to make their products more easily identifiable to specific groups of end users. Advertisers are constantly trying to reinforce cultural stereotype to persuade their target market. In some cases, they may intentionally or unintentionally use stereotyping to show a product as appealing to their desired target customers or in an attempt to infuse humor into the advertisements. But sometimes the stereotype may rely on the characteristic that is negative or exaggerated.

KEYWORDS: Stereotype, Advertising, Culture, Gender Roles

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of technology and industrialization in the recent years has brought the countries around the world together as one global community. Any changes in any part of the world impacts the rest of the world. Along with this development, the rise of competition in the global marketplace and changing consumer demands and expectations of the product quality, services and benefits is growing with same speed. A distinguishing feature of human culture is to change. The changes can be seen over period of time in the habits, tastes, styles, behaviours, values etc. of the people. Rapid industrialization and technological development has changed the attitudes of the people. Instant food, time and man power saving devices, fast food establishments, changing life style have all gained quick acceptance. Gradual change in the Indian cultural pattern can be seen due to advertising. Advertising promotes more mere products. Images shown in the advertising are often idolized and eventually set the standard which in turn feel the need of it and live up to it. Advertisers essentially have the power to promote positive or negative images, this indirectly affects the culture. The present paper proposes to study the gender roles in Indian advertising and also the impact of Indian advertising on the Indian cultural values and behaviors.

Advertising is an influencing promotional tool. Advertising plays a significant role for manufacturer, customer and the society as well. It helps the manufacturer in introducing new products, maintaining the demand of the existing product, attracting new customers and strategically increases the sale of the product or service. The customers are benefited by the information provided by the advertisements about the product, service, quality, and benefits etc. Advertising generates huge revenue and promotes employment in the country. Currently it is the most effective means of spreading the message or information across a large audience of the world. Advertising is virtually everywhere and roles are both contested and admired. In the present it is not possible to avoid the effects and influence of various advertising media.

Advertising has become the business of the people, for the people and by the people (www.wikismu.edu.sg). The main objective of the advertisers is to influence the public towards their product or service and persuade them to buy the same. In the process the advertiser approaches the target consumer through various appeals of advertisements where attempts are made to communicate and influence the purchase of the existing and potential consumers.

Advertising depends on the use of effective appeals and in these days the use of stereotypes in advertisements are variably used to grab the attention and create instant recognition in the market. A stereotype is a representation of a group that emphasizes a trait or group of traits that may or may not communicate an accurate representation of the group. A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing: *the stereotype of the woman as the carer*. (www.oxforddictionaries.com). It is a challenge and most difficult decision making process for an advertiser to use proper stereotype to communicate to the target market. Sometimes stereotype is useful and aids to communicate easily. In Indian advertisements, gender stereotypes are used largely. Men or boys are usually shown as dirty, naughty, strong and independent; women are shown as empathetic and dependent. Female stereotypes take various forms. Women are portrayed as indecisive, childlike, obsessed with their own physical appearance, submissive to men, sexual objects etc.

In India women have been respected and have been worshiped. The portrayal of women as the object of desire seems to be a popular trend in recent days. Portraying women as sex object and display their body to sell products is an example of sexual exploitative advertisements. An advertisement which portrays women as sex objects is considered humiliating and cheap tactics, especially if sex is not relevant to the product. For advertisements of lingerie, condoms, etc. sex appeal is relevant, hence displaying their body may be considered. Advertisers also use nudity in the advertisements to promote their product, which is also considered unethical. For example, Levis commercial, showing bare chested young man with his pant button opened revealing partly his inner wear had a statement “bare what’s inside, live unbuttoned”, which itself cannot be termed as decent. These types of advertisements cause severe offence. Earlier insurance companies sold policies for son's education and daughter's wedding, and jewelers pitched their products primarily for the brides-to-be. However some advertisers are aware of the cultural change and are recognizing the diversity of women’s role in today’s life. There are advertisements which depict the modern day independent women.

Another group that is often accountable to stereotyping in Indian advertisements is that of senior citizens. An elderly persons usually attaining the age of sixty or sixty five years of age are categorized as senior citizens (legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com). Senior citizens are often portrayed as dependent and weak.

EXAMPLE OF STEREOTYPE ADVERTISEMENTS IN INDIA

An advertisements of ING Vysya Life Insurance showed a girl child as a burden on parents by quoting “*Dikhne me toh pyari hai, yeh khushiyan thodi bhari hai*” (To look at she is lovely but this happiness is heavy), which was questioned critically across the country. However some advertisements are gender sensible like the advertisement by HDFC where a father feels proud of his daughter who buys a car for her father and he says “*beti badi hogayi, aur car bhi*” (daughter has grown big and the car as well) which portrays a daughter as an independent girl and not a burden to her parents. Most recent advertisement of Nirma detergent powder has shown the boys playing in mud, throwing the mud ball at each other and their parents also joining them in their game. Which portray that men/ boys are dirty.

Similarly Hero Honda Pleasure targeted at the female riders focused on the freedom and empowerment to women in their advertisements. The advertisers thought of taking it forward to small towns with a small town girl riding Hero

Honda Pleasure and gives a lift to a guy which is not so common in India as small town girls in India are rarely seen riding a two wheeler. The ad had the tagline of “*why should boys have all the fun?*” which receive an awesome response. This ad portrayed fairer sex as one that is smart, intelligent, independent and one who makes her own choices. This particular advertisement was endorsed by Bollywood celebrity Priyanka Chopra.

Another Indian advertisement of Cadbury Bournvita’s ‘*Aadatein*’ in which a mother teaches her son to reach greater heights by amplifying her own skills of running and being strong so that he competes with her. The advertisement gives a strong message to the society that a mother can bring out the best in her child by bringing out the best in herself, which indeed is a very positive and women empowered message to the present society.

Portrayal of old aged people in the HDFC standard Life Insurance receive good response from the public in which a boy insists his grandfather to buy him a bicycle for his birthday. The boy’s father notices this and the next day goes to the grandfather to give him a cheque to buy a bicycle but the grandfather refuses and instead hands him a cheque to buy the bicycle for his grandchild. HDFC Standard Life Insurance was one of the first insurance firms to break the ice using the idea of self-respect instead of ‘death’ to convey its brand proposition. Similarly the advertisement for ICICI Prudential Life Insurance in which the wife advises her husband to get life insurance as it would secure their future as well as help for their daughter’s education. The changing need and demand of the customers and the changing culture has pushed advertisers to create the theme in more socio- cultural message which doesn’t harm the prestige of any gender.

CONCLUSIONS

With the fast expansion of marketing industry, high level of competition, in recent days, advertising has emerged as the most demanding and challenging business as well as industry. Advertising plays an important role by creating primary demand for the product or service and its usage rate thus increase in the form of customers. It not only stimulates the product distribution but also builds brand preferences and loyalty. It also reduces the time between the purchases and persuades the consumers to try various new products in the market. Advertising is a persuasive promotional tool especially for companies whose products and services are targeted at mass consumer markets.

The economic boom in India is largely characterized to the globalization and industrialization which has brought about an influence on the Indian culture subsequently. Indian advertising industry is not spared by the cultural changes. Advertising is driven by the social process, thus it follows the time-tested norms of social and cultural behaviour. Advertising is highly visible business activity and any lapse in the moral standards can lead to severe consequences for the company and the image of the brand. Advertising also impacts values. While it reflects society to a certain degree, it also has the effects the cultural values and behaviours. Hence, the advertising experts should take responsibility to break stereotypes which influence the cultural aspect of the society and pledge to protect the values and prestige of the gender.

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