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Stereotypical Show of Gender by Media: A Critical Review of Select Audio-Visual Literature

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ABSTRACT

We, in this 21st century, claim to have a changed mindset that we do not discriminate between boys and girls. However, if a girl wants to join army or a boy wants to open a beauty salon, we hesitate and exhibit our stagnant mindset by asking them to do what stereotypically a boy and a girl ought to do. It shows that discrimination still prevails and will till human existence. Studies have also revealed that Media plays a significant role by helping us take varied decisions of our lives. On the same time, stereotyping is also being practiced by media. It is Media that presents everything to the masses and influence them. In such a scenario, if media is gender stereotype, how we expect our society to be indifferent towards gender? This study is a critical review of select advertisements where gender has been presented in stereotypical manner.

KEYWORDS : Gender Stereotyping, Discrimination, Media.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Sugar and spice and all things nice,

That's what little girls are made of.

Slugs and snails and puppydog tails,

That's what little boys are made of."

Mass media play an important role in contemporary world, by broadcasting information in fastest pace and giving entertainment to widely spread audiences throughout the globe. They consist of print, television, radio, books and the Internet. The latter is now the most developing medium; however, in a country like India, TV also has a wide spread of influence. By creating a certain type of message, media have a capability of manipulating people's attitude and opinions. Among all the influences on how we view men and women, media are the most pervasive and one of the powerful in putting light on. Woven throughout our daily lives, media transform their messages into our consciousness at every turn. All forms of media communicate images of the sexes, many of which perpetuate absurdity, unrealistic, stereotypical and limiting perceptions. Both the sexes; men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Television programs for all ages disproportionately depict men as serious confident, competent, powerful, and in high-status 'positions. Gentleness in men, which was briefly evident in the 197Os, has receded as established male characters are redrawn to be more tough and distanced from others (Boyer, 1986). Brown and Campbell (1986) report that men are seldom shown doing housework. Doyle (1989), finds media shows males as "aggressive, dominant, and engaged in exciting activities from which they receive rewards from others for their 'masculine' accomplishments." Men are presented as hard, tough, independent, sexually aggressive, unafraid, violent, totally in control of all emotions, and-above all-in no way feminine. Equally interesting is how males are not presented. Doyle (1989) observes that boys and men are rarely presented caring for others. Horovitz (1989) points out they are typically represented as uninterested in and incompetent at homemaking, cooking, and child care. MTV routinely pictures women satisfying men's sexual fantasies (Pareles, 1990). Texier (1990) finds media reiterate the cultural image of women as dependent, ornamental objects whose primary functions are to look good, please men, and stay quietly on the periphery of life. From children's programming in which the few existing female characters typically spend their time watching males do things (Woodman, 1991).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This piece of research is based upon observation; hence, it is Qualitative Research. Data were collected by method of Observation, Document Analysis and Audio-Visuals Analysis. The sampling technique used for this study was Non-Probability-Purposive Sampling technique. It took us 11 months to carry out the research and writing the entire paper.

4. OBSERVATIONS

HOUSE KEEPING: Household is the art of orderly management of house activities and house affairs. A lady getting up in the morning, attending her family, attending domestic help(s) to get varied things done, looking after family hygiene - this is a generation old stereotype image of a housekeeper which has roots deep engraved in our minds since times immemorial. Following this thinking, our Indian commercials have flamed this stereotyped nuance.

- Have we ever seen any washing detergent, dish washing, toilet cleaner and sanitation advertisements with a male in a lead? A sparkling instance would lay weight over this point. 'Surf Excel-*Daag Achhe Hain*' a detergent brand from Hindustan Unilever features only little boys in different roles, one as a protector where a brother beats up a mud puddle to make his sister laugh, another as a crusader, and yet another as a well-intentioned individual who gets into a mock fight to break up another!!!

  Here we get a well sought gender stereotyped image of a woman washing clothes and beaming at a freshly washed white shirt with little boys rolling in mud.

- Citing another example' 'Harpic-a toilet cleaner'. Has any viewer given a thought over the fact that why is it always a lady opening the door for Mr. Hussain-the brand ambassador for Harpic who is shown marketing the product door to door. Never seen a man opening up the door!!

  We wonder if men find it difficult to detain themselves at home or does men find difficult to undergo sanitation activities at their respective homes that sponsors or script writers of the ads always subject a female in all such activities?

- Another point of discussion comes by watching advertisements of few medicines and drugs. Back Pain, Muscle Relaxants, Itching ointments, headache balms and whatever the area of pain is, why is a lady in an ad shown as struggling with the pain? Aren't men vulnerable to such pains? Do men not have cracked heel that every crack cream ads show women worrying about their cracked heels??

Numerous advertisements have portrayed women as hollow beings who measure their worth through their skin tone, body weight, beauty quotient and the likes. Advertising visuals have objectified women to the extent of portraying women as a mere sum of their body parts, denigrating their intelligence and individuality. The advertisements

make girls and women feel inadequate if they do not confirm to the image projected in the advertisements. Stereotyping of women is a widespread phenomenon in the Indian media extending beyond the realm of marketing.

So far the paper has focused on the ads featuring women in the lead where they are portrayed as being cooperative, passive and non-aggressive. However, now the paper touches those advertisements seeking power and physical strength, where the aggression in all such commercials is exclusively limited to those male actors in a good physique with chiseled abs. Indian Commercials is on the target of intellectuals for discussions because of its increasing inclination towards gender stereotyping. Such ads keep a veil between males and females where aggression , power and strength is targeted upon males and women is always shown as a responsible person making for everyday purchases. They are more portrayed in home environment while men outdoors. Such a notion is relentlessly sprouting the buds of gender stereotyping in our society.

AUTOMOBILES: In all sorts of automobile advertisements especially of jeeps, cars rather say SUV segment, we will find a man driving his SUV amongst the sliding hills and roads of some risk prone, remote and unsung areas of the country. Just because, we perceive women to be an epitome of care and sacrifice gripped in emotions, inefficient in physical domain that advertisers barely think of casting females in such ads.

Usually light weight two wheelers ads cast females in the lead like Anushka Sharma in TVS Scooty pep Ad "*Shake-Em Up With Scootygiri"* and Priyanka Chopra in Hero Honda Pleasure Ad saying "*Why Should Boys Have All The Fun*?" which depicts that only light weight gearless scooters are meant for women, And four wheeler cast males in the lead like an advertisement for Mahindra Verito where Jimmy Shergill is asking "*Are you a verito man?"* which depicts this car is only meant for men, Tata Safari strome- "*the real SUV"* where a man goes off road and is shown doing stunts, Mahindra Bolero and the like. This proves testimony to the fact that females aren't considered fit for driving such vehicles.

ACTION SEQUENCE: Superman, Spiderman, Batman, Shaktiman! Never heard or read Super, spider or bat-woman!!!

For an instance if all of us fantasize a lady struggling with a rope jumping from one building to another sounds either impossible or exaggeration or to some, hilarious too. Perhaps, the orthodox social fabric of our country can be held as a culprit of such biased and gender stereotype approach. To solidify our assertion, one-two examples would do the work.

- 'Thumbs-Up-a soft drink action and a stunt based advertisement stars Akshay Kumar most popularly known as "*Khatroan Ka Khiladi"*.
- "*We are animals"* –a campaign for Wrangler is the most action packed commercial putting men and women in bizarre poses in the wild with men still being in the limelight.
- Mountain Dew- *"Darr Ke Aage Jeet Hai"*, yet another action and stunt based ad casts men as action doers.

HARD DRINKS:*"Jagaiye apne andar ka officer"*- Officers' Choice*, "Khoob jamega rang jab mil bethenge teen yaar- aap main aur Bagpiper"*- Bagpiper*, "Make it large"*- Royal Stag are few alcohol brands who always select only male models to act in their surrogate advertisements for alcohol under the shade of club soda. We barely see a female endorsing an alcohol brand, which is another type of stereotypical thinking of society that thinks that ladies do not drink. Such an assertion can be objectionable to some but the overall thought process behind discussing this head is to emphasize on the existence of gender stereotyping in Indian commercials.

5. SOME EFFORTS BY GOVERNMENT

- Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) is the sole body responsible for imposing regulations in advertising. It is concerned with safeguarding the interests of the customers by disallowing commercials deemed as indecent, offending, gender sensitive according to the laid standards for the same. However, plans and protocols set by this Council have not been not able to hit the bull's eye so far, they have proved more to be 'lip laws'. Effective and sincere efforts are required to enforce the rights of the Council.
- Apart from ASCI, Government of India has enacted the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986 to prohibit indecent and gender stereotype representation of women through ads.

6. CONCLUSION

It is high time to break the shackles of such mundane knit of our minds and gender stereotype approach. Executives of such ads must ensure that such veiled views or marketing of their product might lead to misinterpretation of the commercials which the advertiser might not have intended and might fetch bad publicity for the company at the least. We should stop thinking that women are always submissive, emotional, quiet, neat, clean, clumsy, artsy, housewives and child rearing machines only, and about men we perceive they are aggressive, no emotions, loud, messy, athletic, math and science oriented, money maker, naughty but they can be otherwise as well. Some particular body should always be there to keep check upon such advertisements, so that we do not deliver such discriminant attitude to our upcoming generations towards gender. We need better attitudes towards masculinity and femininity other than carrying forward the same stereotypical beliefs to them.

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