

## FEMVERTISEMENT: INDIAN WOMAN FROM COMMODITY TO ENTITY

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**Abstract:** Advertising is a mass marketing technique which persuades the consumer to purchase a product. In order to persuade for purchasing a product ads are being shown repeatedly on various media which consciously and unconsciously have a strong impact on the mindset of the society. Therefore, the choice of content and presentation in advertisements is most important. Crucial aspect of it is the portrayal of Woman. Earlier in Indian advertisements woman has been portrayed more like a Commodity rather than an Entity. Now in this new era of Woman Empowerment advertisers prefer Femvertisements more than Advertisements. As defined by SheKnows Media, Fem-vertising is “advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls.” Present study is an attempt to gain an insight into this transformation of Visual advertisements in India.

**Keywords:** Advertisements, Commodity, Entity, Femertisements, Women Empowerment.

**Introduction:** Advertising is a mass marketing technique which persuades the consumer to purchase a product.

In the present era advertising is leaning towards Femvertising. Advertisers are portraying woman not as a commodity but as an entity. The author is trying to get an insight into this transformation to know the increasing inclination of Indian advertisers towards the theme of woman empowerment.

In order to persuade for purchasing a product ads are being shown repeatedly on various media which consciously and unconsciously have a strong impact on the mindset of the society. We consume massive amounts of advertising every day, not only on television but on Social Media also. Cultivation theory developed by George Gerbner suggests that exposure to television, over time, subtly “cultivates” viewers’ perceptions of reality.<sup>4</sup> Although in this theory George Gerbner is basically talking about exposure to television only but it is obvious that equally we are exposed to advertisements while watching television. So we can say that Advertising plays a very important role in shaping our society—the way we see, think, understand and act.

Advertisers are like communicators, so it is their moral duty to create responsible advertising that has a positive impact on society. When the content of advertisements promotes an inclusive picture of society, advertising can work as an accelerator for social progress. A great variety of advertisements portray woman as an individual personality who should be respected and accepted. The inclination of advertisers towards this kind of theme is a positive sign for women empowerment in India. That means advertisers started preferring Femvertisements more than mere Advertisements.

Things meant for ladies, are advertised in such a way that they are attracted towards it. If men are to be customers, then ads are according to their tastes. But we cannot ignore the fact that the ad not only

influences the prospective consumers but the society as a whole. It is not necessary that the consumer of the product for the ad being shown is a woman. Everyone has a mother, daughter, sister or female friend they care about, and people aren’t out protesting the idea of girls and women should be respected as an Entity.

**Femvertisement:** Femvertising is advertising that employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls. Samantha Skey, Chief Revenue Officer of SheKnows Media, an American digital media company for women headquartered in Scottsdale, Arizona defined femvertising as “pro-female messaging within advertising and how it has shaped brands’ approaches to female consumers”.<sup>13</sup>

SheKnows polled 628 women about their thoughts on femvertising and how it impacted their purchasing. They found that 91 percent of respondents believe how women are portrayed in advertising has a direct impact on girls’ self-esteem, and 94 percent agree that portraying women as sex symbols in advertisements is harmful. “There is a strong and growing focus on the way that women and girls are portrayed in advertising, which has always played a critical role in shaping the way society thinks about gender,” said Samantha Skey.

In an interview with The Huffington Post, Lauren Greenfield, a photographer and documentarian who directed the viral LikeAGirl ad for Always, emphasized the importance of “femvertising” ads “When it comes to gender and telling real stories about girls, there’s a really clear line of authenticity that needs to be respected.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Sheri Matthews, Account manager, Digital Visitor, “most advertising for women, or about women, has always been about being perfect. Whether it was about getting the stains out of your husband’s shirts in the 50s, or what the best snack to buy your kids are today; it’s always about inspirational futures. However, empowerment

advertising – ‘femvertising’ – isn’t the same. It’s selling a story that it is actively inviting women to participate in; not an ideal. Instead of saying ‘this is what you need to buy to be perfect’, these campaigns say ‘you’re already perfect, so come and join in!’ It’s about saying you can do it, not you should do it”.<sup>8</sup>

**Review of the Literature:** Considerable number of research has been found regarding portrayal of women in advertising. However, few researches had been made in the Indian context with special References to role portrayal of women in Indian advertising.

**Courtney and Lockeretz (1971)** found that advertisements are ineffective to reflect the true range of women's roles within society. Many ads tended to portray women as homemakers neither making important decisions nor doing important things, in most of the cases dependent on men.<sup>2</sup>

**Wagner and Banos (1973)** found that most advertisements showed women in working roles and portrayed women in more responsible working capacities.<sup>14</sup>

**Sexton and Haberman (1974)** concluded in their study based on how women depicted in magazine advertisements found that women in cigarette advertisements are frequently employed in a decorative capacity, while in home appliance advertisements women were depicted in a traditionally way. On the other hand, Airline advertisements tended to show women as sex objects.<sup>11</sup>

**Hofstede (1980)** found that the U.S. culture to be more masculine than the Indian culture. Based on his findings, he ascertains that the women in the U.S. would be portrayed in more diverse roles than women in India.<sup>6</sup>

**Shoma Munshi (1991)** analyses the role of advertising discourses play in the construction of a ‘New Indian Woman’ in her multiple avatars of homemaker, also argues that advertising goes on to show how, interestingly enough, women's spaces of resistance are created by advertisers themselves, even if that may not be their primary aim. The article examines how these spaces of resistance have to be understood as part of the entire dominant social structure.<sup>7</sup>

**Mr.Sumanta Dutta (2013)** in his paper concluded that with greater monetary independence, there has been considerable improvement in the way a woman is valued at home. These changes have also led to reduction in the “commodity” status of women and their portrayal as sex objects in advertisements particularly in Indian advertisement context.<sup>3</sup>

**Content of Indian Advertisements:** Review of the overall content of few Indian advertisements: *Havells ‘Respect for Women’ Campaign*

Havells Air Fryer range shows a man on his terrace staring at a lady exercising on a nearby terrace. His wife catches him staring when she steps in with a plate of french fries. Not knowing how to respond, he tells her that the lady exercising must be cooking healthy food. His wife brings a Havells ‘Air Fryer’ and informs her husband that even the product makes 100 per cent healthy food. She goes on to tell him that he can get married to the product - it won't mind him staring at other women.

The advertisement on iron shows a top manager getting ready for his meeting. But he notices that his shirt isn’t ironed. He asks his wife nicely to iron it out for him. She gets the iron and tells him to do it himself indirectly by saying that his employees won’t like it if their boss can’t even iron his own shirt. She then points out the difference between a stree and an istree (woman and iron).



**Source:**[https://www.google.co.in/search?q=havells+iron+ad&biw=1366&bih=637&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwiPi\\_vUz6jAhVQWY4KHWRD2gQ\\_AUIBigB#imgsrc=8TL8sP-j5o8UbM%3A](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=havells+iron+ad&biw=1366&bih=637&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwiPi_vUz6jAhVQWY4KHWRD2gQ_AUIBigB#imgsrc=8TL8sP-j5o8UbM%3A)

Another one opens with two friends who are back from a grueling tennis session and want to try some fresh juice. The host of the house orders his wife to make fresh carrot juice without thinking that she might be tired or busy too. So she comes and hands him the carrot along with the juicer, and reminds him that she isn’t a kitchen appliance.

Havells coffee maker ad shows not just about the institution of arranged marriage, but also the reasons why people indulge in it. A mother who wants her son to get married complains about not having anyone to make coffee around at home, to which the prospective wife promptly gives her a Havells coffee maker and proclaims that she's not a kitchen appliance.

*Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine ad*

Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine ad features a couple going shopping for a washing machine. The man stands around, stares at his phone and boldly proclaims that the store clerk should show his wife the machine, as it's her 'department.' The next few scenes make it clear that doing the laundry is, in fact, nobody's department so to speak, and expecting

women to stick to these roles is not just sexist but is also massively regressive.



**Source:**[https://www.google.co.in/search?q=havells+coffee+maker+ad&biw=1366&bih=664&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwiTnplnabJAhUD2BoKHZ7iBnMQ\\_AUIBigB#tbm=isch&q=Lloyd+Unisex+Washing+Machine&imgsrc=Lb8RCppzpE8DiM%3A](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=havells+coffee+maker+ad&biw=1366&bih=664&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwiTnplnabJAhUD2BoKHZ7iBnMQ_AUIBigB#tbm=isch&q=Lloyd+Unisex+Washing+Machine&imgsrc=Lb8RCppzpE8DiM%3A)  
**Ariel Washing Powder Ad**

Ariel Washing Powder put out an ad questioning the ingrained belief in a lot of Indian households that women should be the ones doing the laundry. It starts with a guy asking his wife why she didn't wash his clothes, and then proceeds to show a bunch of dudes having a ball while washing their clothes. The ad really brings out the fact that doing the laundry is a normal thing regardless of gender.

#### *Titan Raga – The Raga woman of today*

Conceptualized by Ogilvy and Mather Bangalore, the film titled 'The Raga woman of today' 'HerLifeHerChoices' is set at an airport lounge where Nimrat is reading a book when a male voice asks if the seat beside her is taken. She looks up to be pleasantly surprised to see a familiar person she once dated. They share a warm hug while she asks how he has been. The man responds with a retort – the same as when you had left me.

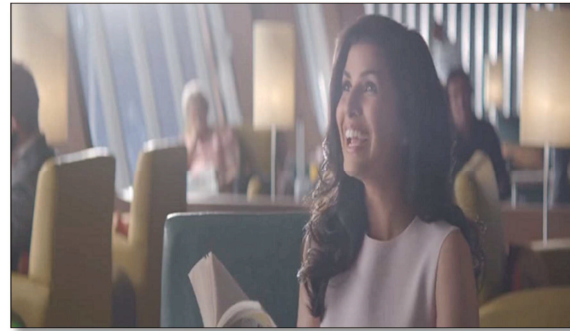
After a while he notices that she isn't married yet and asks her for the reason. Nimrat says she never found the time. He quickly makes a comment on how they (she and him) could have made it, had she chosen to quit her job. She asks him why he didn't quit his job, to which he responds, "How can a man not work, yaar?"

Nimrat is now amused and looks at her Raga watch while there is an expectant pause in the film. She looks up confidently to tell him that he is still the same man she had left all those years ago.

She offers him coffee while the man is seen shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

Nimrat's voiceover says, "Khud se naya rishta...Titan Raga".

The ad film has been made to appeal to its right target segment – the progressive, confident and passionate woman who makes her own choices and does not live to regret them at all.



**Source:**<http://lighthouseinsights.in/titan-raga-nimrat-kaur-ad.html/>

#### *Amul 'Manthan' Campaign*

Amul ad celebrated economic independence of women in villages. The campaign themed 'Manthan' created by Draftfcb-Ulka shows the role the co-operative movement has played in elevating the lives of women dairy farmers. The film shows how the empowered women in villages are now multitasking. They are shown running the dairy sheds, tending to their business, using laptops, teaching and even taking up leadership roles in their village.

RS Sodhi, managing director, GCMF, said, "We are extremely proud of the Amul journey so far and the role played by women in managing the dairy cooperatives. This film is an attempt to celebrate their contribution and demonstrate their capabilities to the urban world."

#### *Airtel Boss – The Smartphone Network*

Airtel launched a very interesting TVC that made all the required buzz for the brand both offline and online. The TVC 'Boss Film – The Smartphone Network', designed and developed by Taproot India, features an urban couple who work in the same organization and in the same team too (goof up number one). The ad shows the woman as the boss who wants the work to be completed by any means and once she is back home she transforms into a wife who cooks for her husband to make him happy. She also tempts him to come home early for dinner



**Source:**[https://www.google.co.in/search?q=airtel+boss+ad&biw=1366&bih=664&nojs=1&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwizsWxrqjAhVRGI4KHQNWBEoQ\\_AUICCGC#imgsrc=Unf3rZOIGOajM%3A](https://www.google.co.in/search?q=airtel+boss+ad&biw=1366&bih=664&nojs=1&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwizsWxrqjAhVRGI4KHQNWBEoQ_AUICCGC#imgsrc=Unf3rZOIGOajM%3A)  
**Godrej Appliances Women's day DVC**

The 3-minute ad titled 'This Women's Day, Tell her', begins with a married woman starting her day by



reading a blog named 'Married Man You Will Love' written by a shy married man. The ad runs through the married man's blog talking about how much he loves his wife and how much he would like to talk about her alone. At one point, when her husband walks in, she asks him why he isn't like him (the married man), never once realizing that it is her shy husband who is the creator of that blog. All throughout the ad, we see her using Godrej appliances with ease, while she smoothly juggles between household chores and office work.

#### *KitKat India's female astronaut*

KitKat India's 4-minute Diwali Music Video featured a lonely astronaut out in space missing her family back in India. Although the storyline did not deal directly with 'women empowerment', it said a lot by featuring a female astronaut as the main protagonist. The beautiful story is set inside a spacecraft where we can see her missing her family and looking outside when the spacecraft moves over India. On Diwali day, she receives a KitKat and is happy to be over a brightly lit up India.

**Discussion:** The subject of empowerment of women is becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since last few decades. The status of women in India has been subject to many great changes. Women's rights have touched a lot of things, and now it is slowly making its way into conversation in advertising as well.

#### **Inclination of Advertisers towards**

**Femvertising:** For a brand whose primary consumer segment is women, the "women empowerment" theme fits in like a dream. But apart from such kind of brands other brands whose consumer segment is not only women, even sometimes product is not at all related to women still advertisers are choosing the theme women empowerment. This theme is getting acceptance and popularity in Indian society. For example Airtel 'Boss Film – The Smartphone Network' has more than 2M Views on Social Media. Published on July 24th 2014 to August 5 2014 the ad on YouTube had 850K plus views. The Facebook page which grew by 21K fans in the same period, had posted the full length TVC which has got more than 850K views. The post on Facebook got more than 225 shares, 51K people liking it and another 324 people talking about it.<sup>9</sup>

Created by JWT Delhi, in KitKat India's female astronaut ad emotional stirrer has been well received on digital with over 264K+ views in four days. Apart from running in between YouTube videos, the film is also being spread through social media. The Facebook and Twitter pages of Nestle India and KitKat India have been sharing and spreading the word. Although this ad does not talk directly about women empowerment but showing a woman as Astronaut in itself supports women empowerment.<sup>10</sup>

Havells has launched its campaign under the theme 'Respect Women'. Created by Lowe Lintas, the campaign consists of six TVCs – five in Hindi and one in Tamil. The campaign points to the reality that despite achieving a lot, women have not been able to get the desired respect. The campaign shows women as more than just homemakers or cooks, and capable of much more. In its ads Havells tries to show that woman is not a Commodity but an Entity who has her own identity and should be respected as an individual. It signs off as 'Havells Appliances. Respect Women.'

Vijay Narayanan, VP Marketing, Havells India, said, "In the small appliances segment people don't really want to see the features in full ads, not even just its USPs. So we decided to talk to the people who use it the most – the women....."

Shriram Iyer, ECD of agency Lowe Lintas and Partners, whose client is Havells said, "It's almost taken for granted that the woman in the house will do the job of the home appliance. So, we thought of doing a tongue-in-cheek campaign to show that there are appliances to do that job."<sup>14</sup>

Godrej Appliances, a part of Godrej Group, one of the largest players of home appliances in India launched its first digital video commercial. Breaking misconceptions that women are not as tech-savvy as men are, while also showcasing the brand's products, the digital video ad features a multi-tasking woman who is at ease with technology at home and at work. However, she feels she isn't being appreciated for all that she does for the family. The central message of the ad is directed towards men as they often forget to appreciate the woman in their lives while she does many roles with ease.

Earlier there were so many ads which portrayed women as helpless and as weaker section of the society. One of them was the Fair and Lovely ad of HLL. Hindustan Lever Ltd. (HLL) instituted a huge campaign with a series of ads that were centered around "the fairer girl gets the guy" theme. The ads ran from December 2001 to March 2003.<sup>4</sup> One commercial featured a father struggling financially saying "if only I had a son," while his dark skinned daughter looks on helplessly and demoralized because she cannot help in supporting her family. The ad then cuts to a clip of the woman after using Fair & Lovely – now dressed in a mini-skirt working as a flight attendant and taking her father to a 5-star restaurant.

After the issues raised in the society for depicting women as weak and helpless these ads were banned and HLL made new ad portraying women as confident and powerful for example Fair and Lovely Dad and Daughter ad in which father wanted his daughter to get married and daughter after applying Fair and Lovely says she will get married but after 3

years when she will be able to be independent and earn equally as boy earns.

Ads of Lloyd Unisex Washing Machine and Ariel Washing Powder come with the theme that doing laundry is not only a woman's job. The content of the ad shows that this work can be enjoyed by men also. It is one of the best examples of Femvertization. The Ad of Titan Raga with the theme 'HerLifeHerChoices' shows the conflict between Commodity and Entity where the empowered woman is proud of her choice to be an independent working woman.

'Manthan' theme of Amul emphasizes economic independence empowerment of rural women, clearly depicted that even in village women are not dependent on male and have their own identity.

**Conclusion:** Researcher after analyzing the present trends of advertisements is safely able to conclude that now advertisers are emphasizing on Femvertization, which is giving importance to pro-

female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls. Society as a whole is accepting this changing trend therefore advertisers are more and more inclining towards the theme to portray women as an Entity rather than Commodity. There is a gradual transformation from advertisements to Femvertisements.

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