

## **Portrayals of Women in Commercial Advertising: A Comparative Study Based on Contemporary Advertisements**

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### **Abstract**

Both Social Progress Index (SPI) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have given importance to gender equality and inclusiveness in their agendas as it is considered one of the primordial struggles essential to bring balance to the social sphere. On the other hand, advertising has been one of the primary modes of transforming and transporting these messages to the audiences seeded across the furthest corners of the remotest locations. While in the beginning, advertisements were used to serve simple requirements of sharing information among multiple receivers, over the hundreds of years of socioeconomic, cultural, political, and economic changes, made it complicated. Among many roles that an advertisement plays as a non-personal mode of communication, bringing social changes is one of them that has the power even to form values and opinions and sometimes brings phenomenal changes into behavior. The commercial form of advertainments is often found in favor of such portals that discreetly bitches a few fundamental values and ethics set by the governing bodies and may lead to spreading misinformation and misconceptions. Similarly, women have been subjectified in advertisements from the very beginning with different objectives, however, for this research, the portrayals of women in commercial advertisements have broadly segregated into conventional and non-conventional categories. To analyze the distinctive differences between the two categories, the advertisements from 2015 to 2022 have been considered as the SDGs enacted by the United Nations with a prominent goal 'gender equality' aims to bring down the conventional categorization and portrayals of gender in all forms.

**Keywords:** Advertisement, women, gender equality, commercial advertisement, portrayal of women

## 1. Introduction

Women are portrayed in inappropriate and stereotyped ways throughout the globe, in both industrialized and developing nations. The problem persists unabated even though there are laws and procedures in place. There have been a number of empirical investigations in India that point to an outdated narrative about women (ISID, 2019). Researchers from all around the globe have expressed serious concerns about the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the advertising world. However, little research has examined the impact of such a communication approach on consumers, especially in India. But there has been no research comparing conventional with nonconventional classifications. Using SPI, the researchers want to examine, during the course of this study, the specific characteristics that exist between the two groups across the period of time spanning from 2015 to 2022. According to census statistics, women in India are becoming more educated and economically active. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate customer reactions to determine whether such a communication approach is effective. Advertising affects our everyday lives consciously and subconsciously and shapes society in a larger sense. It has a crucial impact on developing and propagating societal values due to mass media's ubiquity. Consumers in the modern marketing environment are pickier than ever before, what with all the information available to them and the sheer volume of products from which to choose. In this context, advertisements have helped businesses achieve their communication goals and play a crucial part in consumer marketing (Singh & Vij, 2007). Everyone has to promote their products in order to inform clients about it, increase sales, expand their market share, and move up the ranks to the top of their respective industries. Every company invests a lot of money to advertise its products, but the money invested will only lead to success if the finest advertising strategies are employed for the product. The advertising industry has seen a radical change in recent years as companies attempt to get consumers to purchase and utilize their goods and services (Sama, 2019).

Daily, people are exposed to many voices and pictures through television, newspaper, social media, website, magazines, billboards, the internet, radio, and so on. Every brand makes an effort to grab a little bit of time from an unwary consumer so that they might extol the superior qualities of their wares. The marketer's task is to come up with a gimmick that will keep the audience interested. India has a large population of children and young people. So it's up to the advertising to sway people to purchase their products. Yet they have taken the extreme step of depicting women in commercials as content and objects (Krishna, Kandavel, & .M, 2015). Modern advertising has a significant influence on people's worldviews, morals, and decision-making, and behavioral patterns. The advertising industry covers a huge range of specializations. In the broadest sense, advertising is just a public notification used to disseminate information and solicit business. As the name implies, advertising has two distinct functions: informing consumers and influencing their purchasing decisions (Shahwar, 2013). Over the last two decades, advancements in IT have allowed for a worldwide communications network that is not limited by borders and has an impact on both public policy and private beliefs and conduct, particularly among women. Anywhere, the media could play a far larger role in promoting women's equality. There must be a shift away from the electronic, visual, and aural media's ongoing portrayal of negative and demeaning images of women (Jayalakshmi, 2015). The commercials (media) have exalted them because to the power they

possess in their hands, in addition to illustrating the social expectations and the efforts of women to respond adequately to them. The media's function is not limited to just reproducing realities; rather, it has the potential to form, modify, and even create new realities (Gupta & Pal, 2020).

The portrayal of women in advertising evolves with the times, reflecting societal evolution. However, do commercials show a shift in how women are portrayed throughout time? Does it support long-held beliefs about how women should behave in society, or does it go counter to such beliefs? Does the portrayal of women in advertising have an influence on society as a whole? This study will attempt to answer that question. Advertising has been the subject of much media attention, but a little academic investigation into whether or not it is really useful as a marketing strategy.

### **1.1. Indian advertising**

Commercials are one of the most pervasive forms of media, influencing our everyday lives in both overt and covert ways and contributing to the overall shape of our society. Different factors including cultural beliefs, lifestyle, and human behavior have an impact on society. The media also plays an important role in preserving morals in society. It is seen as a crucial instrument for influencing and spreading societal beliefs. One way that sellers (advertisers) and buyers (consumers) spread the ideology that lies underneath their words is via advertisements (consumers). They are renowned as potent marketing techniques that affect customers' purchase decisions while also penetrating into their cultural life via the use of language and social themes (Gupta & Pal, 2020). While Indian television and YouTube commercials outperform international norms in terms of girls' and women's representation (at least from the perspective of show and speaking time), their depiction is problematic since it reinforces gender stereotypes. Female characters are more likely to be presented as marital, less likely to be featured in paid occupations, and also more often to be shown as carers & parents than men (The Hindu, 2021).

There has been a lot of talk over the years about how women are portrayed in ads. Many of the advertisements we've seen in the past haven't treated women with the respect they deserve, but rather have served to reinforce stereotypes that they lack the strength and independence necessary to succeed, that they are primarily sexualized by men, that they are only concerned with their appearance and their families, and that they belong in the home. However, with time being, there has been a change in these stereotype concepts. Smart advertisers used this metamorphosis to their advantage when introducing new products and campaigns. There have been a lot of marketing initiatives in recent years that emphasize messages of female empowerment. In particular, no commercial must be authorized which portrays a disparaging picture of women," as stated in Rule 7 of the Advertisement code from the Cable and Television Network Rules 1994, which is followed by the Doordarshan Code for Advertising and the codes of the industry self-regulatory agencies, the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) and the Broadcasting Complaints Council of India (BCCI). Women shouldn't be represented in a way that highlights their passivity and submission to males, or that suggests they should be relegated to a secondary position in the home or the community. The provider of cable television service is responsible for ensuring that depictions of women on the channels he offers are both aesthetically pleasing and consistent with generally accepted standards of decency. However, most brand-based commercials go against these conventions (ISID, 2019).

## **1.2. Portrayals of women in Indian advertising over the ears**

Publicity via advertising provides a means for the commercial to adapt to the ever-accelerating pace of change and disseminate important information in today's competitive business climate. Opportunities and difficulties have arisen for businesses and society as a whole as a result of rapid technological development and rising diversity in personal preferences and societal norms (Sharma, Mehta, & Gupta, 2020).

Supposedly, stereotypes about women and members of racial and ethnic minorities are made worse by advertising. The advertising we see reinforces the notion that women are not capable of great things, that they need men to succeed, that they lack unique qualities, that they are seen mainly as sexual objects by men, that they are only concerned with their appearance and the needs of their families, and that they belong in the house.

According to the ad filmmaker who directed the film, Kailash Surendranath, the Liril film that was released in the middle of the 1970s was likely the first to depict a female wearing a bikini in Indian advertising. This is according to the director of the video. Additionally, it was a turning point in the way that Indian women were portrayed in soap commercials. In the 1980s, Unilever & its advertising agency, Lintas, started a campaign called "one woman army" to compete with the low prices offered by Nirma. The concept of the samajhdar Lalitaji was influenced by the mother of the character's creator, Alyque Padamsee. Alyque Padamsee's mother would constantly emphasize not only bachat but also "worth for money" while she negotiated with the vegetable seller. JS Films, which was formed by scriptwriter Jayendra Panchapakesan & cinematographer PC Sriram, was responsible for producing the Rasna advertisements for a number of years. Ankita Jhaveri, also known as the Rasna girl, began her career with the company when she was around three years old and served as the image of a soft drink concentration for approximately the next five years. In the 1990s, Ava Mukherji, who played the smart-aleck Dadima in ads for Ayurvedic Concepts, was as at ease chatting about processing as she was offering treatments. Suresh Manian, who worked at Contract, came up with the idea for Dadima. In 2013, Lowe Lintas wasn't specifically aiming to cast a dark-skinned lady in the role of the bride; rather, the team just believed that she would be a good fit for the character. They were then taken aback when folks admired that particular aspect of it. It was not intentional in any way. This video has been directed by Shamik Sen Gupta of Hectic Content in the year 2015. Because his wife continued to work up to the final day of her pregnancy, he has a strong connection to the topic at hand (The Economic Times, 2017).

Women's roles in advertising are still mostly relegated to that of housewives or sex objects, with a focus on thinness and perfect skin, despite women's growing economic independence and decision-making clout. Women, particularly in terms of intelligence, are often portrayed as being intellectually inferior even in unbiased media. Advertising enhances the uneven power relations that exist in society as a result of gender relations. Due to the usage of female models in commercials even though they may not be directed at women, social responsibility, particularly in the case of women, is deemed to be lacking (Gulati, 2014). As demonstrated in ads like Dove's "Real Beauty," which has gained widespread recognition for integrating empowerment messages into marketing efforts, female empowerment has emerged as a subject in advertising that is becoming more and more common, challenging stereotyped gender roles and encouraging body acceptance. These advertisements may have been effective in

influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors toward the advertised brands because of the favorable feelings they elicit (Drake, 2017). There is no question that a number of these complaints were and continue to be legitimate. In addition, there is little doubt that many marketers have sought to react by eschewing stereotypes and attempting to develop more enticing role models. Many people have voiced their displeasure with the advertising industry and its agencies in recent years due to the sexism they see reflected in commercials.

### 1.3. Stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising

Women have been portrayed in advertisements in stereotypical ways for many decades. The feminine appeal has been found to be a common phenomenon in the advertisements created and circulated in the United States as well as in the United Kingdom, however, other nations also followed a similar trend in using the feminine appeal in putting an advantage over their consumer and wooing their target segment. The stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising also affected the very concept of gender equality that started with print advertisements and followed through the audio-visual advertisements and later inflected the online advertisements. There are very few studies done on the stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising, however, in 2008, Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki, Kalliopi Mathioudaki, Pavlos Dimitratos & Yorgos Zotos came out with a study dealing with the depiction of women in global advertisements. The study consolidated the pieces of evidence on the web pages that illustrate the role of women through international advertisements. According to Knupfer, the stereotypical idea of a female being shown as an element to accentuate sexuality, attractiveness, and dependence on male counterparts has always been at the center stage of such advertisements. Many advertising campaigns promoting high-technology products are shown their favoritism towards highlighting women in the helpless and suppressive stage while the male is portrayed as the ones who enjoy the technological advancement that helps in their endeavors (Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki, 2008).

Role of female portrayed in advertisements	
Category	Description
<b>Women in traditional roles</b>	
Dependency	Dependent on male to protect herself In the need of assurance In charge of making unimportant/ minor decisions
Housewife	Women's place would always be at home Primary role is to be a good wife Should always be concerned with the housekeeping tasks
<b>Women in decorative roles</b>	
Women concerned with physical attractiveness	In pursuit of beauty and physical attractiveness (e.g., youthful)
Women as sex objects	Sex is related to the product; Sex is unrelated to the product
<b>Women in non-traditional roles</b>	
Women in non-traditional activities	Involved in activities outside the home (ex. sports) Involved in masculine activities (ex. construction)
Career-oriented women	Playing the roles of professions (ex. Entertainer, blue collar jobs)
Voice of authority	Expertise in non-feminine matters
Neutral	Equal to men

**Table 1. Portrayal of women in stereotype and non-stereotype roles in advertising. (Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki, 2008)**

Signorielli, in his study ‘Images of Women in General Interest and Fashion Magazine Advertisements from 1955 to 2002’ strongly suggested that stereotypical behavior can be the result of advertisements in a similar category. The changes in behavior towards women were evident in another study by Kilbourne done in 1990 where the author illustrates how women are portrayed in advertisements, how they are perceived by the viewers, and their roles in society. The impact of gender stereotyping often gets beyond what advertisers are portraying in their illustrations and impacts physical appearance. There are several studies that show the effect of stereotyping advertisements on women, one such case on ‘media image of women attractiveness’ tests out the perception by exposing women to the models of a fashion magazine, and the outcome shows that the women who were taken as the subject possesses negative impression of their own body image and desired physical alterations (Lindner, 2004). Another recent study on the no-stereotypical depiction of women in advertisements from the Indian perspective analyzed six audio-visual campaigns that emphasize the role of women in non-conventional ways (non-traditional roles and equal to men). Interestingly the ads were shared over social media with taglines like #rideyourindependence, #sharetheload, #herlifeherchoice, #boldandbuitiful, #fueledbylove, and #trendsetternotfollowers that reflect the progressing perception and an urge to promote gender quality through advertisements (Sayak Pal, 2022).

#### **1.4. United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals and Gender Equality**

In 1992, at the ‘Earth Summit,’ the concept of sustainability was elaborated and prior to that the term was coined in ‘World Charter for Nature’. Two constructing paradigm that emerged during this time was the ‘protection of environmental and natural resources efficiently’ and ‘lasting economic growth’. In 1995 at the “World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen”, social development was added to be the third pillar to achieving sustainable development. In the following years, the outcome of the Rio + 20 conference an ‘Open Working Group” (OWG) was created to work towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The OWG continues its work toward sustainability through the implementation of agendas like Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Tomáš Hák, 2016). Multiple organizations came in to support the implementation of SDGs toward achieving sustainability and the World Bank Fund is one of the fundamental ones that is taking an instrumental role in achieving sustainability by 2030. The fund operates based on the three major and core objectives, ‘construct and strengthen the SDGs related awareness and capacity across the institutions and actors’, ‘invigorate the progress of the analytics to aid in solving the SDG-related challenges’, and ‘encourage multi-stakeholder partnership among the World bank group as well as with external stakeholders’ (WBG, 2019).

In 2015, the tenure for MDGs got over and the SDGs came as a replacement with a target to achieve sustainability by 2030. The MDGs had eight goals in total that were established and fulfilled perfectly, followed by the SDGs with seventeen goals which are designed in triple bottom line approach to implement sustainability through environmental, social and economic development. MDGs were primarily targeted towards the poor nations while rich nations were expected to provide support and assistance to help them in achieving sustainability. SDGs were on the other hand laid out the goals to develop and spread the knowledge of sustainability throughout the world. The triple bottom line approach has four goals stated at the base level

followed by eight goals at the middle level, four goals at the top level and one goal that connects all three level in a straight line (Sachs, 2012).



**Image 1. SDGs, and SDGs Weeding cake, source: The United Nations (www.un.org), Stockholm Resilience Center (2016)**

The seventeen sustainable development goals ‘no poverty’, ‘zero hunger’, ‘good health and wellbeing’, ‘quality Education’, ‘gender equality’, ‘clean water and sanitation’, ‘affordable and clean energy’, ‘decent work and economic growth’, ‘industry, innovation, and infrastructure’, ‘reduce inequalities’, ‘sustainable cities and communities’, ‘responsible consumption and production’, ‘climate action’, ‘life below water’, ‘life on land’, ‘peace, justice, and strong institution’ and ‘Partnerships for the global’ are meant to be the call to action for all the 193 member nations across the globe.

## 2.1. Review of related literature

When exposed to advertising, people generate opinions based on their presuppositions and worldviews. The adoption of either a favorable or unfavorable view of advertising serves as a proxy for one's attitude toward the medium. Although there are important conceptual distinctions between advertising beliefs and attitudes, earlier research has often conflated the two due to the strong relationship between them.

In the article titled "*Feminism in advertising: irony or revolution? A critical review of femvertising,*" Varghese & Kumar (2020) explore femvertising, a kind of advertising that promotes positive messages about women and challenges stereotypes, is becoming more common in the media. However, there has been no concerted effort to pinpoint the factors that are causing this phenomenon's rising profile in the public eye. Reviewers point out that there is some uncertainty as to whether femvertising is a marketing ploy or the result of a genuine social movement for change that has the support of major corporations. They have emphasized that femvertising is not an immediate phenomenon, as it is a major trend in advertisement and corporate marketing that reflects an emotional confluence with a social movement. The paper gives a summary of the various causes of femvertising and differentiates between real and false feminism in advertising, allowing future academics to tackle the problem to enhance feminist study & marketing research. It is not fully accurate that femvertising has taken over the feminist movement. As we have seen, its rise may be attributed to a confluence of five separate but

interrelated variables. The rising awareness of gender stereotypes; the growing criticism of organizational and commodity feminism; the growing awareness of the importance of diversity in advertising; the rising adoption of the campaign, cultural branding, and conscientious capitalism; the rising scrutiny by regulatory authorities on gender norms representations in advertising; and the growing activism around the improved portrayal of women in advertising (Varghese & Kumar, 2020).

In the research article "*Representation of Woman in Indian Advertisements*," **Sanwalka (2018)** aims to draw attention to the changing role of women in Indian advertising in the digital age. During the information technology (IT) revolution, the media's importance has grown as a result of globalization. More people than ever before have access to various forms of media, and the widespread dissemination of this information is causing a flurry of activity in the information speed dials of every citizen. The media has been an essential force in bringing attention to women's contributions to the economic and social advancement of society and in fostering a shift in cultural expectations. There was a universal consensus that commercial depictions of women stoked harmful stereotypes and tended to treat them like commodities. However, this trend reversed dramatically once the number of women with college degrees increased and the notion of women's empowerment was pushed more aggressively. More commercial ads, aimed at specific audiences in an effort to raise product knowledge and tout its societal advantages, are appearing in the media. Advertisers benefit from the attractiveness of women's appearance and their sexuality while creating catchy commercials. Since the advertising firm's overarching goal is to get the product out there as a symbol of excellence in its category, it may ignore the product's potential effect on consumers, despite the fact that doing so may violate marketing principles. It is true that communication has a dual function, first in elevating women's standing in Indian society, and second in utilizing her as an appealing object, however Indian culture does not tolerate the concept of such replicas and portrayals of women for unfavorable purposes (Sanwalka, 2018).

In the article titled "*Impact of Social Changes on the Role of Advertising*," **Subramaniam (2017)** explores how recent shifts in the social and political landscape have affected the function of the media and advertising. The research lends credence to the idea that societal shifts are permanent and sends a warning to the public that it must adapt quickly to maintain its position at the forefront of social progress. This research focuses on the ever-present phenomenon of social change, which permeates all levels of society and has far-reaching consequences for every citizen. This article aims to shed light on how the unpredictable and ever-changing nature of today's business climate is being influenced by societal shifts in advertising, goods, and services. It is believed that commercials may alter societal norms and serve as a supportive interactive and instructive medium. With its growing audience and positive reaction, electronic media is increasingly seen as the most effective means of altering people's outlooks on life. Despite the high cost and limited time allotted for television ads, audiences still watch them. This is because marketers are skilled at grabbing the attention of viewers with creative and engaging campaigns. As a result of societal shifts, companies are increasingly promoting items that are intended to disseminate information and spread messages that have far-reaching effects (Subramaniam, 2017).



In the 2017 study article titled "*Representation of Women in Advertisements*" by Kumar, the author examines the portrayal of women in advertising. The primary goal of this paper is to examine the changing representation of women in advertising, from that of a helpless entity to that of a dynamic, powerful figure who is attempting to break all the stereotypical views and move toward social and economic independence, and see the generational gap and comprehension related to marketing of women in advertisements. The emphasis of advertisements has shifted from objectifying women to empowering women, which has led to a change in the psychological state of society. Previously, women were portrayed negatively, with their integrity being used for unusual things, and their sanity and freedom being questioned by the male-dominated society. This study examined how the evolving roles of media and advertising have affected the lives of women via the use of a qualitative methodology based on in-depth interviews (Kumar, 2017).

According to the study of Khandeparkar and Motiani (2015), while sexism is still pervasive in advertising, it has been curbed in many nations by a better knowledge of sexism and its features. Nonetheless, sexist messages are still widely used in Indian advertisements. This research examines sexism in developing economies like India in an effort to define the problem and identify its root causes. Perceived sexism continues among non-target segment groups because of the knowledge gap between them and the target segment groups. When used tastefully and in a relevant context, sexual themes are well received. The purpose of this research is to provide light on the nature of sexism, why it is so ubiquitous in India's advertising business, and what can be done to combat it. This research also hopes to shed light on how the pernicious effects of sexism in marketing have influenced the advertising sector in India. Ads featuring beautiful ladies and sexual imagery, as claimed by the writers, are quite prevalent. Sexuality and nudity are guaranteed attention-getters and crowd-pleasers. However, sexism may easily arise from such ideas, whether intentional or not. The sexualized and the sexist are often intertwined. Because of changes brought about by globalization, people are becoming more accepting of sexism in marketing. At the same time, sexism in advertisements is on the rise as companies race to differentiate themselves from rivals by using trending topics. Marketers use a larger degree of explicit themes in order to get the desired shock value. As a result, people report experiencing more sexism (Khandeparkar & Motiani, 2015).

Deeba Shahwar (2013) discussed in this study '*A Study of Audience Perception about the Portrayal of Women in Advertisement of Pakistani Electronic Media*' commercial advertising for goods and services; public service marketing for various organizations, projects, and issues; and — a phenomenon of rising relevance today — political marketing in the benefit of politicians and parties. The purpose of this research work was to get a better understanding of how Pakistani women are portrayed in media ads, specifically with regard to the prevalence of stereotyped images of women in Pakistani media and the extent to which these portrayals are relevant. The data as a whole suggests that most ads' depictions of women are superfluous and pointless. In order to pique the interest of potential customers, ads often include beautiful women. It also shows that people's cultural and societal norms and even their clothing choices and the way they express themselves in language are changing as a result of the way women are portrayed in advertising. The findings also show that advertisements for fitness and beauty items target women by capitalizing on their attractive bodies (Shahwar, 2013).

Advertising is likely one of the most significant and impactful media products, according to **Helen Ingham's** study, "*The portrayal of women on Television.*" These commercials depict women in stereotypical roles as housewives or sexual objects, while men are presented as either inept or manipulable while being superior to women in the home. Women are shown as being tall and slim, with long, toned legs, pearly white teeth, and flawless hair and complexion. She is often featured in commercials for cosmetics, health supplements, and other items designed to enhance one's physical appearance. The survey also demonstrates that women are depicted in a wide range of professions and occupations on television. Depending on the role, television shows may present women positively or negatively, reflecting the shifting perception of their status in society. Perhaps most crucially, female characters are shown as being inferior to male characters intellectually and dependent on males. These portrayals of women have an enormous influence on individuals (Ingham, 2012).

According to the findings of a study published by **Gangadhar**, commercials featuring women are more effective in appealing to male consumers. Sexist advertisements, which utilize women's bodies to promote things that have nothing to do with their anatomy or needs, are on the rise. Different approaches are used depending on the gender of the intended audience. Typically, the goal of advertising directed towards women is to have the target audience relate to the female spokesperson for the product, which in turn increases the ad's attraction to male consumers. Commercials aimed at men often include claims about how the product will make them more attractive to women. Women are never seen as competent managers of their personal finances. Commercials also perpetuate the idea that women have little interest in politics or anything beyond the home. These kinds of generalizations instill in people the belief that women should seem youthful and attractive while men should look robust and healthy. Consideration of the locations where male and female characters are shown lends credence to the gendered belief that women belong in the home and men in the workplace. The youngsters in commercials are shown in stereotypical sex roles, which mostly reflect the current quo (Gangadhar, 2008).

Tatyana **Burtina claims** (2005) that the modern world is an intriguing one to study in a research piece. As a society, we are conditioned to consume certain forms of media first thing in the morning. In this day and age, it is inconceivable to imagine surviving without some kind of media or technological advancement. The advertising that people see every morning has a significant impact on how they conduct their lives. Depending on the product, advertisements may be aimed towards a wide variety of demographics, however, a significant portion of the market is comprised of young people. Teens who have been outed frequently have feelings of shame about their looks, their bodies, or the clothing they wear. Therefore, advertisements are effective because they appeal to people's fears and wants for acceptability by promising them love and pleasure after they buy the advertised things. In the long run, ads have the primary influence on the actions, attitudes, and beliefs of their intended audiences about the subjects advertised (Burtina, 2005).

### 3.1. Objectives and methods

The research had the primary objective of identifying the audio-visual advertisements those are connecting the idea of both the conventional and non-conventional portrayals of women in the

society. While the non-conventional portrayals of women through advertisements support the very idea of 'gender equality' that comes under the sustainable development Goals (SDGs) enacted by the United nation, conventional portrayals oppose the concept of equality between the gender. For this research two advertisements (one depicting women in conventional roles, another in non-conventional roles) were chosen for each year (from 2015 till 2022) starting from 2015 when the SDGs were first implemented till the present year (2022).

The advertisements were primarily chosen based on the year of broadcasting and their inclinations toward illustrating the role of women. Thereafter, the commercials were thematically analyzed based on the patterns and motives of the storytelling. For the analysis, the commercials are simply divided into two distinctive categories "women in conventional roles" (subsiding the idea of gender equality for the sake of selling the products) and "women in non-conventional roles" (supporting gender equality while approaching consumers with their products).

#### **4.1. Result and Analysis**

##### ***Advertisements depicting women in conventional roles***

*Ek mazboot rishte'*, commercial form Dabur Amla is a typical example of stereotyping advertisement that portrays women in the image of conventional roles. The advertisement starts with a scene where a young mother is having a conversation with her daughter and the paternal grandmother of girl child is engaged with the male child of the young mother. The girl child gets saddened seeing her paternal grandmother pouring more attention on her brother and seeks an explanation from her mother. The mother then took the girl child for a hair oil massage and express her love and affection for the girl child and also explained the reason behind the grandmother's affection for her brother to balance out the mother's favoritism towards the girl child. The short commercial of 40 seconds not only portrays the typical appearance of women with long and lush hair but also showcases the women in their homely atmosphere, managing the roles and character mandated by society.

*Tanjara Masala Podi / Tamil*, the advertisement was originally broadcasted in Tamil and shows a woman decked up carrying food for her future husband and in-laws. The food was refused to be touched by the mother of her future husband while others followed her angry gesture and refrain from taking the food as well. The young girl came back to the kitchen and made dishes using 'Tanjara' spices while the aroma got a grip on the future mother-in-law. She finally approves of her daughter-in-law and everyone seems to agree with her while enjoying the delicacy of the food cooked by the young lady. The one-minute ad in 2016 made the woman looks absolutely stereotypical where she would require to be in the kitchen and expected to perform the usual household duties. The commercial also shows the supremacy of the women in choosing the next generation brides and the command over the family when it comes to take household decisions.

*Ramadan Kareem*, is a beautifully illustrated commercial created on the occasion of Ramadan by Reliance Fresh. The advertisement is about a young boy and his desire to keep Roza, which he is not allowed to, as he is not old enough for the tradition. He did not give up and made a plan to celebrate the occasion in his own way by offering friendly and helpful gestures to the people around him. He offered gifts to one of her sisters, and grandmother, as well as extended help to one of the senior citizens living in his locality. They finally sat in the evening with food

to break their fast and understood the real essence behind the celebration of Ramadan. Although the entire commercial is centered around a little boy, the most prominent supporting character (the mother of the little boy) is shown to be an imitation of a perfect housewife (stereotypical portrayal) who is taking care of the cooking, caring, and other household chores is an example of showcasing women in conventional roles.

*Its good to be tough*, is an advertisement by 'All Out' (mosquito repellent) that shares a wonderful message through the commercial. The advertisement starts with a scene that is showing a family dinner taking place at the end of a usual day where the members of the family are sitting across the dining table. The mother of a young male child is serving food along with another woman to the family members, and also serves a small amount of food to a young child of age around ten. The child suddenly pushed the plate off in protest of being punished. The elderly women of the family started abusing the women verbally as the women punished the child for a nominal cause. Another elderly man and her husband also joined in the abasement. Afterward, one of the elderly ladies went ahead and extended her own food to the male child, however, the child remained unmoved. An elderly man who is the head of the family came in to defend the mother of the child and supported her actions and repelled the abuses coming in her direction. He also firmly ordered the child to take the food which is given to him. Although the ad conveys an important message, the portrayal of women in the commercial is exclusively stereotypical along with the overpowering behavior shown towards them.

*Get an outstanding clean inside the machine*, is an interesting advertisement campaign with a duration of thirty-five seconds. The commercial revolves around the conversation between a young mother and her male child. The rhythmic style of conversation starts with the sun baring a gold medal that he has owned to her mother in a dirty uniform. The mother gets upset seeing the state of the uniform and complains about the same, to which the child gets annoyed and asks his mother about the solution for the situation as he enjoys playing outside which makes his clothes dirty. The kid then ask her mother to wash the cloth in a washing machine to which the mother answered that the tuff stain is not going to be removed from the washing machine. The Tide Ultra detergent comes to the rescue and helps the mother to clean the clothes in the washing machine. The commercial may seem to focus on the detergent power but the woman who is one of the prime characters shown to be in the role of caregiver (mother) and taking care of her child, as well as the household chores like cleaning, is a strong example of stereotypical portrayal of women in advertising.

*Suhana Masala*, came with a funny commercial in 2020 that shows two children who are good friends but with different food habits. One of the two friends receives a call from the other one and learns that his mother is preparing 'Butter Chicken' and is being invited over. This friend then makes an excuse to her mother and goes to this friend's house to have the chicken dish. After having a plateful of 'Butter Chicken' he comes back to find his mother serving the lunch and inviting him over. The mother further asks the kid to have a taste of 'Shahi Paneer' that she tried, to which the kid instantly sits down to have lunch a second time. The Kid then compares the 'Shahi Paneer' with 'Butter Chicken' and the commercial ended up baring shocking expressions on the faces of the kind's family. Although the commercial is about the 'Suhana Masala' that enhances the taste of the cooked food, the portrayal of both the women (mothers of the two children) are depicted in stereotypical ways by showing them as mothers who are cooking and taking care of the housebound workers for their families.

*Can't think of anything to express your love for your better half*, is a contemporary advertisement for a jewelry collection from P.C. Chandra Jewellers. The commercial starts with a light argument between a young couple where the wife complains about the husband being unmindful towards her birthday and do not wish her birthday properly. The husband struggles to find out the right ways to make the birthday wish special for his wife. The jewelry brand came to the rescue and the husband presents a piece of gold jewelry set to his wife on her birthday and the couple is shown to be happier than before. The commercial follows the simple and traditional style of a jewelry advertisement however, the portrayal of the women in the advertisement is conventional and symbolizes the stereotypical ways of presenting and illustrating the role of women in a household.

*Kuch Nahi Hoga*, is a commercial that came in 2022, and depicts a series of interaction between a mother and her male child. The advertisement starts with a scene where a mother is in a process of washing clothes with 'Dettol Antiseptic Liquid' in the presence of her child and their pet dog. The child asks his mother about why she is using Dettol Antiseptic Liquid during the washing the cloths and the mother replies 'Kuch Nehi Hoga' (nothing will happen) and then again when the mother is pouring Dettol Antiseptic Liquid to sanitize the kitchen sink pipe and sanitizing the baby cot. The child gets even more curious and asks his mother what is the usage of Dettol Antiseptic Liquid if nothing will happen, to which the mother replies that in order to keep the germs away, Dettol Antiseptic Liquid is used and nothing will happen to the family related to the germs. Although the commercial is about Dettol Antiseptic Liquid, the woman shown in the advertisement is classically portrayed as the character of a mother who is taking care of the kid, and also the household chores are a recent example of the portrayal of women in non-conventional roles.

### ***Advertisements depicting women in non-conventional roles***

*Zigy Television Commercial*, came in 2015 with a short but strong message depicting two different women connected through unspoken love and bonding. The commercial started with a young woman working at her office, and the phone suddenly rings. On the other side of phone there is an elderly lady asking about the whereabouts of the young woman and it seems to be like they are having an argument which quickly turns into healthy laughter and a mischievous smile from both ends. The conversation then turns into the box of medicine that has been delivered to the elderly lady from an online medicine delivery app. Suddenly a pause engulfs both the women and the elderly lady mourns about the separation of the young woman from her son and is surprised at her former daughter-in-law's affectionate behavior. The young woman replies that the separation from her husband has nothing to do with the loving bond she shares with her mother-in-law. The advertisement shares unconventional portrayals of women in society and goes against the stereotyping expectations from society.

*Mia – last thing on my mind*, is a brilliant presentation of six working women in different professions who radiate the essence of women empowerment. The six women characters are seen to struggle in their own ways partly because of their gender and identity. The 3.2 minutes advertisement is not only about the visuals but also has small captions in the form of dialogues like a woman is well capable of managing her job and family, the colleagues get anxious and jealous because if a women colleague gets the promotion, women's views are often subsided as she is sometimes considered as incapable of contributing substantially, women can not raise their voice in the workplace like their counterpart, women should not be working late, women

are incapable of carrying heavier goods, women should not be going to the bars that discourage the women to welcome, a woman should be dressed up according to the profession she is in, women are not great at crafting jokes the would flabbergast men, pregnancy creates unnecessary complications in carrier growth of women and few more. The workwear jewellery from Mia through this ad campaign shows exclusive and non-conventional roles of women and their contributions.

*Feel the picture, feel the love*, was a campaign meant to show the wonderful bonding between a father and daughter. The ad depicts the journey of a woman footballer from a very young age and her aspiration to become a footballer that came from the football match that she used to watch with her father. The young girl faced a lot of challenges as she chooses a non-conventional path for her carrier and also received rejection and disapproval from her father. However, she manages to outperform and establish herself to compete and prove her worth as a footballer. Although the commercial advertisement is made to showcase the stunning visual quality of the Samsung television, the core concept of the advertisement hammers upon the social judgment and stereotypical attitude towards women.

*Bruises can be good*, came with an innovative campaign in 2018- where they involved randomly selected people and exposed them to an unexpected situation by presenting a woman with bruises all across. The crowd has been individually interviewed and the results indicated that eighty-five percent of them thought the woman must have gone under some form of physical abuse from her husband, in-laws, partners, self-heart, etc. The woman then got up and took defensive and offensive poses to show her passion and strength as a martial artist. Although the advertisement from Reebok India was aiming to bring awareness against the stereotyping mentality that comes from the majority of the population with captions like #FitToFight and #BruisesCanBeGood, the campaign ended up highlighting the alternative portrayal of women in society.

*Daughter First*, was a campaign that showed unconventional ways of a women's life that does not include the usual bondage and boundaries drawn by society. The campaign starts with a father asking the guy who is sitting in the back seat of the car whether he would be able to support the woman and how much the young man knows about the woman and her desires as the young couple wished to get married. The series of questions that came from the old man has actually been the set of questions that the women often have been facing from their in-laws as they are about to get married. The later part of the campaign reveals that the elderly man actually is the father of the young male who is sitting in the back seat and wishes to be confirmed that his son was the right choice for the young woman and would continue to support her throughout their togetherness. The ad campaign might have targeted an unusual way to break the stereotyping perception of women in society but also illustrates the empowerment that is reflected throughout the advertisement, by showing the woman in the driving seat, leading the way for men accompanying her on the journey.

*More Together - Pooja Didi*, a wonderful campaign that came in 2020, during the crisis of lockdown based on the crisis faced by the downfall in the economy because of the COVID pandemic. The campaign shows a young woman and her younger brother together struggling to continue their father's milk and sweet shop after their father's demise. The woman took a step to extend her help to the people in her locality who has lost their job due to the pandemic

by employing them in her milk and sweet shop through a post on the vacancy on Facebook. On the following day, the shop overflowed with people seeking employment, and the young woman eventually succumb to the raising expenses and ended up selling her car to manage the financial crisis. The employees came to know about her sacrifice for the sake of retaining the newly employed employees and decided to take a step to bring help to this young woman who has helped them in their crises. They shared a recorded video on Facebook depicting the good deed of the young woman and asked everyone to come to their shop to help her in managing the crisis. The 7.33 minutes long ad illustrates the story of a young woman setting up her business that also highlights the non-conventional ways of depiction of a woman's life and achievement through advertisement.

*Happy International Women's Day*, is a post-COVID advertisement from Titan India that has staged the entire illustration around a woman. The one-minute commercial starts with a young woman finishing off her presentation for a group of her office colleague and being appreciated for her effort afterward. The group longed to celebrate their achievement with a small get-together dinner to which they also requested the young woman to join. The young woman hesitated to join the celebration as she has a scheduled guitar class after her office and she finally managed to convince her superior to shift the celebration from a dinner gathering to an early morning breakfast meeting. The short commercial may seem natural and free-flowing but the symbolic portrayal of a woman as an office goer as well as a guitar player indicates the non-conventional role of women in society.

*Women's Day | Bajaj Allianz General Insurance*, came up with a recent advertisement on the occasion of the women's day celebration in 2022 that culminates the independent nature of women. The commercial start with a scene where a young woman is driving a car and suddenly, she crashes it against a tree. A few men gathered around the accident scene and started passing comments that signify the vulnerability and incapability of the woman to drive the car. The women turn a deaf ear to those comments while continued the process of arranging the repairing assistance with the Bajaj app and finally managed to complete the process to get confirmation from the service provider. Although the advertisement is promoting the app and the goodwill of Bajaj Allianz General Insurance, the commercial also brings forth the non-conventional role of a woman through the advertisement.

*Portrayals of women in commercial (audio-visual) advertisement*

Advertisements showing women in the conventional role				Advertisements showing women in the non-conventional role			
Brand	Year	Ad campaign	Hashtag	Brand	Year	Ad campaign	Hashtag
Dabur	2015	<i>Ek mazboot rishte</i>	No	Zigy	2015	<i>Zigy Television Commercial</i>	No
Tanjara Masala	2016	<i>Tanjara Masala Podi   Tamil</i>	No	Mia (Tanishq)	2016	<i>Mia – last thing on my mind</i>	#BestAtWork
Reliance Fresh	2017	<i>Ramadan Kareem</i>	#ChhotiSiAchhai #FreshFolks	Samsung	2017	<i>Feel the picture, feel the love</i>	No
All Out	2018	<i>It's good to be tough</i>	#StandByToughMoms	Reebok India	2018	<i>Bruises can be good</i>	#BruisesCanBeGood #WomensDay #FitToFight
Tide	2019	<i>Get an outstanding</i>	#TideUltra #TideWhite	Platinum Evara	2019	<i>Daughter First</i>	#DaughterFirst

		<i>clean inside the machine!</i>					
Suhana Masala	2020	<i>Suhana Masala</i>	No	Facebook	2020	<i>More Together - Pooja Didi</i>	No
P.C. Chandra Jewellers	2021	<i>Can't think of anything to express your love for your better half</i>	<i>#SayItWithMugdhaa #PCChandraJewellers #PCCJ</i>	TITAN RAGA	2021	<i>Happy International Women's Day</i>	<i>#ItsYourTime #HappyInternationalWomensDay</i>
Dettol Antiseptic Liquid	2022	<i>Use Dettol Antiseptic Liquid – For Laundry and Surface cleaning- Kuch Nahi hoga</i>	<i>#Dettol #DettolAntisepticCream #KuchNahiHoga #Dettolprotection #fallilllessoften</i>	Bajaj Allianz General Insurance	2022	<i>Women's Day   Bajaj Allianz General Insurance</i>	<i>#WohSambhaalLegi</i>

**Table 2. Portrayals of women in conventional and non-conventional roles in commercial advertisements**

### 5.1. Discussion and Conclusion

The fifth one under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was legislated to bring sustainability through gender equality. The prime objective of this goal is to reduce discrimination and inequality affecting women around the world across different sectors. Advertisements, for decades, have been a prominent medium that imitates society and to some extent often ended up encouraging discrimination through their information dissemination. The changes in approach and viewpoint in advertisements however have also been observed that helps in keeping the aspiration alive to reduce further gender discrimination. The commercials chosen are divided into two distinctive categories, (table 2) one set is illustrating the role of women in conventional ways and another in non-conventional ways to present the stark differences created intentionally or unintentionally by the advertisers. Although the advertisers are primarily struggling to keep the focus centered on the principal offering of the product, the impression of women depicted in conventional or non-convention forms may affect the views subconsciously and bring changes to their behavior.

### 6.1. Limitation and scope of further research

The commercials with female characters were selected to investigate the representation, which was one of the limitations. It has also been observed that the roles women play in various commercials are changing their representations. The advertisements for popular products that have run on major networks from 2015 to 2022 are the centre of this research at a modern urban setting. Further studies can be conducted on measuring the perspective of women and their self-portrayals in media.

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