Chapter Eleven. Review of the literature
To better understand the way men, women, children, and the elderly have been portrayed in television advertisements it is important to examine the various researches on the portrayal of these categories that have been established over time in different places at different times. Gender emerges as the most important facet of research in advertising. But since the print media was the most easily accessible format in the media’s domain, researches tended towards the print advertisements. Early studies were hedged on the demography of sexes in the print ads, the gendered role play and the idea of construction of gender identity through advertisements, with emphasis on women and their portrayal. This was perhaps because early research in advertising coincided with the feminist movement of the West. It was during the 90s that research on family work portrayal saw ideological shifts focusing on the role assigned to and played by men in advertising, and construction of the idea of masculinities. Recognition of gay rights and larger social acceptance of the gay rights movements led to the questioning of androgynous masculinity as was being depicted by the advertisements, and a construction of male identity that was gynandromorphous. However a heterosexual backlash and a rising tide of homophobia led to a reversal of the trend and a re-
assertion of the quintessential male, who reverted back to being a quintessential highly masculinized male.

The aim of this exploratory research is not to study gender stereotypes per se but to gain insight into the representation of the various categories: the male, the female, the elderly, and the child. Stereotypes of representation have to be demonstrated before their purpose can be investigated further. The aim is to study and establish benchmarks for future studies, and allow for a greater debate to take place that may well establish new norms for advertising practices in India.

The aim of the current research is to find out the way different categories are represented. Our social world is defined by the rules, norms and regulations, taboos of the cultural order that permeates it. Such a given convention over time tends to become fixed and stable, giving constant meaning to the social order and the social relations that are fashioned within it. This system of convention naturalizes itself and is learnt by members and replicated. A given ‘worldview’ is naturalized so that acceptable beliefs are rendered self-evident and acts as impediments to further significations. Alternative beliefs are denied legitimacy and ignored. ‘Indeed to discuss representation requires that it be placed in the context of conventions and linguistic tropes that help us make sense of our social world’. Verbal and written
propositions along with visual images may help to promote an ideological position if the former are familiar aspects of everyday experiences. A TV Commercial is the very essence of such representation. Television is the most compelling medium because of its audio-visual power and it acts as a socializing agent.

So are those semi-clad sexualized models, those muscular and newly objectified men, street smart kids, and forgetful elderly are part of a much larger scheme of deliberate mis-representation? Is it deliberate and intentional? Far from it. Screenplay and script writers, advertisement film directors, jingle creators, directors of photography are not part of an underground Ideological Inc. They are auteurs. Ideology is a function of the discourse and of the logic of social processes, rather than an intention of the agent. Representation therefore becomes one of the way through which meanings (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination, and the new ideology depends critically on the new media by means of which implicit homogenization of the social field is achieved. The ideological potential of advertisements may be largely an unconscious phenomenon in that images and text in ads are constructed in the absence of any intention to distort and oppress.
The study of advertising is but a part of an over-arching media study. Since this research concerns advertising, i.e.’ media content’, it is important to delineate the way the study of media content has taken place, with special regard to advertisements, and the tools through which this has been effected. Advertising was but the exclusive domain of the campaign manager, the marketing strategist, the motivation analyst etc. Later it came under increasing scrutiny of the cultural theorists, cultural anthropologists, and cultural historians.

Concerns about media’s content are part of the critical cultural studies. Representation and Re-presentation remains at the core of the analysis of media content. Content therefore emerges as the interface of the media industries and their receivers or consumers. Media industry reaches out to the atomized consumers through their content. A study of representation, under-representation, or misrepresentation in media content can be taken as the means through which unequal power relationship in a society can be discovered.

The centrality of TV commercials to the way we perceive our world, establish roles for ourselves, form attitudes and beliefs, have confidence about our own body image has been well researched particularly in the developed world. This research
will present a nation based survey of literature done on TV commercials on men, women, children and the elderly relevant to the current research.

In Italian TV commercials, there was a greater tendency for men to predominate with 64.3% of the primary characters being men, while female lead characters stood at 35.7% only. Women were likely to be shown in a background of children and humour was the sole prerogative of the male.

In Australian Television commercials 74% of the central figures were male and 26% were female. Male were more likely to be depicted in independent roles whereas female were more frequently depicted in dependent roles. While men were shown to be concerned with the practical consequences for buying a product, women were likely to provide a reason for buying a product that emphasized social rewards.

In Kenya while there was no significant difference in the proportion of both men and women as central character gender differences were apparent in relations to the products and services, proffered spokesperson, commercial settings and occupational cues. TV commercials were considered conservative because while both men and women were equally depicted in occupational situations choices available to women were limited.
In Beijing area TV commercials, women were disproportionately under-represented as high level business position and professionals, and were likely to be associated with beauty and cleaning products. Even with commercials that had female primary lead actors, men usually provided the voice-overs.

On Portuguese TV Commercials while the differences between men and women was not great in terms of professional roles, there was a greater tendency for the male to dominate as a central figure in the advertisements. Men comprised of 66% of the central figure, while women played a central role in 34% of the Ads. The proportion of male voice-over was the highest at 91%. Men were most likely to be portrayed as interviewers, narrators, or celebrities, women were most likely to be dependent on others and portrayed at home.

Japanese TV commercials portrayed men as ‘middle and old aged worker bees’, women appeared as ‘beautiful and wise housewives’, ‘young ladies attracting people’s attention and “young celebrities”’.

Turkish TV commercials revealed manifest gendered traditional sex roles. Women were shown mostly in home setting, whereas male characters appeared more frequently in outdoor or occupational settings. Also women were significantly more likely to be shown as young compared to men, who are shown in the middle
age category. Female were more apt to be portrayed in decorative roles such as real
life celebrity, home maker or social companion. 

In Nigerian Television commercials men made up of almost half of all primary
characters (50%) while women were shown as sex objects or as mothers and
housewives and constitutes just 25% of all primary characters. The home settings
were the dominant setting for almost half of all women characters, and none of the
female character has any identifiable paid occupation.

In Korea, though more women (57.8%) were shown as central characters than men
(42.2%), women, they were portrayed as young, as nurturing children and at home.
Preparing meals, doing house chores, and nurturing children were the main
occupations for women. Men were more likely to show technical products.

TV commercials in Bulgaria were highly stereotyped, portraying women in
depending roles and in sexually suggestive appearances. Another interesting
finding was the age bias. Almost 765 of the advertisements featured a younger
male or female model. Only 24% featured a middle aged or an old model.
Although the central figure were predominantly female, they ‘appeared for the
most part visually, not speaking’.
Study on Austrian TV commercials was consistent with finding of the other western countries. There were more male than female main characters. Men were to be narrators of voice-overs, promoting real estate and financial products, women were most likely to be depicted young promoting body products.5.

In Saudi Arabian TV commercials, male lead characters occurred in leisure role, significantly more often than did female leads. Female leads performed households’ roles significantly more than did male leads. 69% of all female leads appeared in home based settings. 78% of all male leads appeared in outdoor settings. Women appeared more in domestic roles and settings and less often in occupational or leisure roles and were much more likely to promote body care and household cleaning products.6

But so far the most in-depth study on TV commercials has come out of the US. In 1975, L.Z. MacArthur & B.G. Resko, found that men not only outnumbered women in TV commercials, they also behaved very differently from them.7 Though male characters (52%) only had a slight edge over female primary characters (43%), their majority became a landslide in the evening hours. Women were less likely to be ‘experts’. While men were typically shown as authority, women were portrayed almost always shown as product users. Almost 51% of the female leads defined
themselves in terms of their relationship to others. In 1996, Kenneth Allen & Scott Coltrane reported that in the US, there was a change in the image of women but not of men. For men stereotypical gender display actually increased compared to the 50s, suggesting that masculine gender display had not changed overtime. The male bastion of voice-overs continued unabated. In 1998, findings indicated men were under-represented in commercials of domestic products and women were under-represented in commercials of nondomestic products, while male voice-overs climbed down from 90% to 71%. In 2003, Ganahl, Prinsen and Netzley found no difference in gender representation as it had existed in the 1980s. Although women made most of the purchases they were under-represented as primary characters except in health and beauty products. Older women were the most under-represented groups of all.
The Elderly and Advertising

One of the reasons the Ursics mentioned for studying the portrayal of the elderly was their steadily increasing numbers in the American population. Yet another reason pointed out was their purchasing power capacity. American elderly were not certainly poor. Their average per capita income after tax was $335 higher than the national average, which meant an estimated annual purchasing power between $60 to $200 billion. The image of the elderly may also be looked upon as societies’ responses to elderly and the process of aging.

Studies have shown that negative stereotypical images have a deep psychological and physiological impact on older people. ‘Negative and or positive portrayal in Advertisement can seriously affect the behaviour pattern of the elderly. Positive or negative images of aging had a significant effect on older people’s locomotional ability. Older individuals shown positive images walked faster, while those shown negative images walked more slowly and more hunched over.
However the objective of the study of the use of elderly in TV commercials is to offer insights into the current ways in which the elderly are represented in TV commercials, base the benchmarks of representations as well as provide establish data for future studies and academicians. This exploratory research doesn’t intend to study the effectiveness of elderly in TV commercials and seeks to restrict itself only to their representation *per se*.

In India, traditionally families have lived together in the extended joint family set up, which provided status and power to the elderly. But globalization, increased social mobility coupled with jobs that require people to ‘move out’, the traditional family system has crumbled leaving the elderly powerless, status less, and increasingly depended on the remittance from their children. With family size decreasing and the number of elderly in India set to increase, we will see elderly rights coming to the fore in the near future. In the existing scenario, the elderly have been transformed from the gubernatorial head of a family to ‘a vulnerable group, needing care and attention’ 24.
As per CEHAT, in 2001, there were about 77 million Indians in the 60+ age category; 21 million in the 70+ age category and around 1 million in the 90+ age category. The percentage of the elderly in India’s population is expected to rise to 9.87% by 2021. This means that around the year 2021, one in every 10 Indian will be an elderly person. Very little is known about the Indian elderly’s purchasing power parity with their American counterparts. However some of the findings of HelpAge India Group show that the oldest of the elderly group (80+) have a monthly household income of less than Rs 2500, and show remittance from children as the main sources of income. A whopping 72% of the oldest of the old (80+) are financially dependent on others and 57% (80+) have lost their life partner, and are widow or widowers. 70% of the elderly in the 80+ age group cited their son as their source of funding for meeting their health expense. About 40% of the elderly people have faced abuse in India. Every year since 2006, the 15th of June every year is observed internationally as World Elder Abuse awareness Day. There are around 77 million elderly people in India.  

Almost a third of elderly victims are abused in their own home and almost as many are abused in residential care. The most common type of abuse is physical, followed by acts of neglect or omission. In 20% of abuse cases, the victim was abused by a carer, partner, or family member. Cases of abuses of elderly are surfacing because of changing global phenomenon, the emergence of the nuclear family or the dual earning family where both the husband and the wife leave home for work leading to physical and emotional isolation and marginalization of elderly people. All this points to a diminished family role that leaves the elderly abandoned emotionally, and physically and financially.

Most of the research in the portrayal of older people seeks to find their demography, behaviour pattern, personality traits, and their cognitive abilities. The themes and the dimension often used to measure portrayal of elderly includes physical (active/healthy; weak/strong), socio-behavioural (happy/content, happy/sad, humourous/disgruntled) and cognitive traits (competent/intelligent, lucid/confused). There also seems to be a concern with the overwhelming association of aging with ill health in advertising.

Heimstra et al, analyzed 136 TV commercials to determine if older people and images of aging were portrayed in negative or stereotypical ways. The most
significant finding of the research was the absence of the elderly in TV commercials. Only 11 of 358 human characters were judged to be 60 or older, only 41 were 50 or older.

One of the earliest studies on the portrayal of the elderly or older citizens concluded that there was a significant use of the elderly in advertisements and the elderly were often portrayed in relatively prestigious work situation, and that older males were used more frequently than older females. Older characters especially elderly women were under-represented compared to census figures. But this research was done on print advertisements only. The most substantial research on elderly in TV commercials by Swayne & Greco showed under-representation of the elderly in TV commercials. The elderly were mostly cast in minor roles and appeared mostly in home settings with members of other age groups. Only 7% of the advertisements carried any elderly character. Even when portrayed in major roles, it was mostly the male elderly who was represented. Food Advertisements, TV promotions and Public service announcements accounted for a number of commercials using elderly models. Content analysis on Modern Maturity the flagship publication of the American Association of Retired People, the largest private organization in the United States, showed elderly characters as capable,
important healthy and socially active. Gender was shown in equal proportion, but this could be because of a conscious effort to improve the image of the retired people, since one of the major goals of the magazine is ‘to improve the image of aging’ 33. In a cross national review of the portrayal of older adults in advertising, Zhang et al., noted that older characters especially female and minority older characters were underrepresented and that older characters were generally portrayed positively in advertisements both from image and stereotyping perspectives. They also noted that research on aging in advertising was still in its infancy in the UK, Germany, China, and importantly India 34. In the US TV commercials, older Americans appeared in 15% of the TV commercials across networks. In those Ads older women were underrepresented relative to men and tended to play incidental roles and portrayed a stereotypical and circumscribed set of products and services. The older characters appeared to play overwhelmingly positive roles 35.

Yan Bing Zhang, Yi Song, and Leilani Jensen Carver analyzed commercials featuring older adult and found that older characters were mostly promoting certain traditional values of health and family within a limited range of products. In general, older adults may have been the family core, as knowledge providers and
tradition protectors, but they were not being used to preach modern values in Chinese Television commercials 36. M Priegler noted that on Japanese TV commercials, elderly appear for a limited range of products almost exclusively for products like pharmaceuticals /health and financial/insurance care products and in fact is the only age group that appears in these commercials. But for products targeted at other age groups, elderly people either appear in a family setting, in a general way as a representative of a generation or not at all. But the most important finding was under-representation37. Another research on Japanese TV commercials, showed that though the number of elderly people had increased from 1997 to 2007 it was still an under-representation and there was an even more pronounced underrepresentation of the elderly female in Japanese TV commercials 38.
Children and Advertising

Like men, women and the elderly, children also learn behaviour from media’s content. And advertising becomes all the more important for them because their ‘experiences of lives’ is comparably much lower compared to other social groups. Children often seek to tackle new situations by learning from others. Macklin and Kolbe noted that, ‘children examine and compare their own external and external characteristics such as physical attributes and overt behaviour relative to the social roles presented by television characterization’ 39. So why such an interest in children? Because even children have spending power and can influence purchasing decisions by other members of the family. American children aged between 4 and 123 years spend more than $24 billion in direct purchases and influence $190 billion in family household purchases every year 40.

What are the major areas of concern with regard to the content of advertising aimed at children and why should it be studied?

The bulk of research on children and advertising has focused on the effects of TV commercials to children’s cognition, attitudes, and behaviour. A relatively small number of advertisements have concentrated on the content of advertisements
aimed at children. Some of the themes that have emerged with regard to children and advertising are adolescents' evolution of sexual imagery and gender role; gender race, and aggression; subject of childhood and media violence; children's understanding of TV advertising; an audit of food advertising aimed at children; portrayal of activities and interactions of children; race representation stereotyping and gender role portrayal in advertisements aimed at children.

Alison et al., found stark differences between children's advertising in the 1950s and contemporary advertising. Contemporary commercials have grown longer from the 30 seconds time frame. Many Advertisements were live ad-libs which made no distinction between commercial and non-commercial message and have since been banned in the US. The research found that commercials of the 50s were markedly differently from commercials of the later decade in terms of commercial time, product type, promotional appeals, age, and gender of participants. However the research had nothing to add in terms of the gender of the child in the TV advertisements.

In other studies notably Robert T. Peterson's, it was discovered that pre-teens and teens were frequently depicted in activities other than scholarly activities. Appeal
made to children is highly gender specific. Where the most typical appeal aimed at male children were action adventure, sports and play, female children were appealed through an emphasis on physical attractiveness, nurturing roles, friendship and romance. The dominant appeals in Advertisements aimed at the male child were competition and achievement; the dominant appeals in ads aimed at the girl child were romance and sexuality.

Adrian Furnham Staci Abramsky and Barrie Gunter noted that even though the number of Ads aimed at girls was higher than boys, males were more likely to appear for in the TV commercials for it.

Again in a comparative analysis of Ads featuring children Janet Hoek and Kelly Laurence observed that while very few advertisements violated the Advertising Standards Authority Code on Advertising to Children with respect to violence and purchase request behaviour, gender stereotype were more pronounced when compared to 1989.
Sex in Advertising

Vague descriptions of sex in advertising are found in advertising literature. The concern of sex in the context of advertising’s content usually pertains to either sex stereotypes or gendered role plays. The current research also seeks to investigate the presence of sex as operationalized through the manifestations of all of the feelings resulting from the urge to gratify sexual impulses and activities associated with sexual intercourse. Sex in Advertising has been described by Courtney and Whipple as, ‘sexuality in the form of nudity, sexual imagery, innuendo, and double entendre…employed as an advertising tool for a wide variety of products’ 63. Past research in the field has often equated sexually oriented appeals in advertising with nudity and physical attractiveness 64. But the problem with this approach is that there can be a sexual appeal without resorting to nudity. An advertisement can be sexually suggestive without any overt form of nudity. Again physical attractiveness may also not the sole means through which sexual appeal is introduced. On the contrary, physical attractive (in the absence of other complementing functional means of operationalizing sexual appeal) may not connote ‘sexy’ at all. Physically
attractive models can be shown in a completely ‘de-sexualized’ environment. Since public outcry, social policing, and various government regulations monitor advertising practices across countries including India, suggestiveness has emerged as the more subtle means through which a sexual appeal can be made functional in an advertisement, and is difficult to operationalize through a rigid definition. A range of representation can be considered ‘sexually suggestive’, ranging from a key being entered into a keyhole to water spurting out from a hosepipe, to creaking sound coming out from behind closed doors to a car heaving in wilderness. So Advertisements often resort to suggestiveness and sexual behaviour to introduce the element of sexually oriented appeal in Advertising, therefore advertisements that are suggestive are considered to be sexually oriented. Suggestiveness is defined in advertising literature as, ‘having or possessing sexual stimuli that triggers or arouses ideas about sex in a person’s mind’ 65. And it can be operationalized through aural and or visual means. Sex in advertising has maintained a presence right from the beginning of the practice itself. Reichert point out that in 1880s to promote the sale of their brand of cigarettes, W.Duke & Sons would insert photographs of sexually provocative starlets inside cigarette packets. Beyond products like fragrances, clothing, and beauty merchandises (that
claim to increase sexual attractiveness), sex has become more ubiquitous and
'sexual information is now being used to promote mainstream products not
traditionally associated with sex'\textsuperscript{66}. A more worrisome practice that emerged in
the 80s was the use of teenagers in sexual poses or advertisements that made
sexually charged suggestiveness either through verbal or physical innuendos. In
1981, a teenaged Brook Shield appeared in a Calvin Klein billboard claiming
suggestively, 'nothing comes between me and my Calvins'. In another advert for
the same brand she proclaims, my mother warned me about boys like you...you
are only after my Calvins'. In 1995 the image of pubescent models for the Calvin
Klein brands caused a debate where it was alleged that the advertisement crossed
the line from fashion into pornography. But with sexual liberalism gaining new
grounds, explicit sexual advertisements began to creep up again. Sex in
advertising broke new ground through inclusion of images of epicene models who
could appeal in equal measure to dominant heterosexuality, but could also appeal
to people who practiced alternate sexuality. Even elderly have not been left
untouched. In 2007, Virgin Money's new home Loans multi-platform advertising
titled 'Everlasting Love' shows an elderly couple in the nude, with explicit sex
thrown in equal measure. An elderly couple is shown cupping the breasts of an elderly woman.

Defining Sexual Behaviour

Apart from suggestive behaviour, characters in advertisements may indulge in sexual behaviour without resorting to nudity. Sexual behaviour is characterized as flirting behaviour and courtship. "Unbuttoned clothing, rolling the pelvis, titling or cocking the head to expose the neck, and preening behaviors" has been identified as some of the means through which sexual behaviour is operationalized on-screen.

In a viewer grounded study to find what constitutes sexual appeal, respondent's characterized sexual appeal as composed of physical characteristics such as general attractiveness of models; sexy involved movements such as winking, stroking themselves, and dancing around; contextual features such as camera effects, music, and lighting; proxemics such as physical interaction between models and voyeurism, fantasy and projection which included visual of someone watching someone else in the advertisement etc.

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In a research on sex in advertising Reichert claims that sex (or sexual appeal) is often operationalized through a variety of combination of all or any of these variables. This kind of a sexual appeal can manifest itself through a variety of means that may range from **nudity** whether manifest or implied (close up shots of a girl bathing); **suggestive behaviour** (sucking an ice-cream, lowering the eyelids, side glances); **verbal innuendo** (The MR Coffee carried the tagline: *Real pleasure can’t come in an instance*) and **visual symbolism** (An advertisement for a condom brand shows a young man unzipping his satchel and trying to locate something while he is being eyed a young girl who smiles at him suggestively). Of the variable identified as having a sexually oriented appeal, Carolyn A Lin speaks of physical characteristics such as body type, cloth revealment, sexually oriented conduct (measured in terms of the presence/absence of physical innuendo, verbal innuendo, and physical contact) model’s sex appeal (measured in terms of physical attractiveness, sexiness and status as a sex object) (See *Lin 1998*).70

Sex in advertising has involved measuring the pervasiveness of the victimization of women in print advertisements.71 Women portrayed as sex objects were also portrayed as victims which may reinforce the association between women’s
sexuality and physical and emotional pain thereby normalizing violence absent
women 72. Depiction of sexuality may create poor self-image for men as well as
women. Unrealistic images get sanctified by the ubiquitousness of advertisements
and are therefore internalized by the subject-viewer as an ideal body form to which
he or she must forever aspire.

While Indian TV commercials face strict laws on nudity, covert forms of
sexuality, double entendres, partial nudity is now a well-established practice in
Indian TV commercials.
In the 80s, Liril soap became the first brand to feature a semi-clad girl bathing under a waterfall wearing a two-piece swim suit. But it was only during the 90s that the Indian sphere witnessed proliferation of erotic visuals. The 90s saw the introduction of a more in-your-face sexuality on the Indian mediscapes. A series of print advertisements for Kamasutra condoms in a soft porn magazine created sensation. It featured a couple in various love making positions with an accompanying text from Kamasutra, the erotic literature purportedly written by
Vātsyāyana. Though the advertisement series was about a contraceptive brand considered as an adult use product, what was interesting was the separation of the erotic celebration from the confines of conjugal routine.

Figure 2. The Advertisement for Deluxe Nirodh

Earlier TV and print advertisements for Nirod, a condom brand manufactured by the government and shown on Doordarshan would hint at their primary use as a means of family planning and spacing for children. But the print Kamasutra condom advertisement focused ‘unequivocally if not solely on erotic pleasure…and foreground the erotic desires and pleasures of the woman’ 73. Men were henceforth, pleasure provider and not just pleasure seeker. In 1995 two Indian
supermodels already in an off-screen relationship posed nude for a shoe brand leading to widespread protests by various groups who demanded not just a ban of the advertisement, but an apology from the models as well. Concerns about nudity in advertisements, were raised in 1998 for an advertisement for a Swiss underwear brand Cadila that featured a male model tugging at the female model’s panty with his teeth.

Figure 3. An Advertisement for Cadila underwear featuring Bipasha Basu and Dino Morea.
The 'sexualization' of the Indian Television took place in the context of 'feverish commodity consumption precipitated by the expansion of mass culture, the liberalization of the Indian economy and the introduction of global capital'. A rise in sex in advertising coincided with a rise in disposable income and rising standards of living. Report of 1996, indicated that disposable income had risen by 47% during the three year period of 1991-1993, and was matched by a greater perpetration of TV across urban and rural households. Sex began to be used to sell commodities not traditionally associated with sex appeal like mineral water, shoes, soft drinks, cement etc.

On the 26th of July 2007, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting prohibited the transmission or re-transmission of the advertisements of 'Lux Cozy underwear' and 'Amul Macho Underwear' on all broadcasting stations with immediate effect considering them as indecent, vulgar and suggestive and thus violative of Advertising Code as prescribed by the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act of 1995.
In 2010, two TV serials *Rakhi Ka Insaaf* and *Big Boss Season 4* came into the limelight for their risqué content that was considered unsuitable for a young viewership. Girija Vyas, Chairperson of the National Commission of Women, asked for ‘an amendment of the Prohibition of Indecent Representation of Women and Children Act immediately so that there will be a regulatory authority to control
shows like the ones which are on air now. In response to allegation of sleaze on Prime Time Television, the government mulled moves to contain sexual imagery and adult talk on Television, by designating two programmes *Rakhi ka Insaaf* and *Big Boss 4* for a late night broadcast. The I&B Ministry issued order demanding that the two shows be shifted from their prime time spots to after 11 p.m. because of “objectionable” content which it deemed unsuitable for younger audiences.

And a TV commentator said

> Television being a huge mass-media which reaches our bedroom, censorship in this medium could be relaxed as compared to the stringent censorship adopted by films. But at the same time the television channels, reality shows and the celebrity judges need to reflect a sense of responsibility that comes with their job.

Though not associated with TV advertisements, the directive brought the content of the media into highlight. All this points to a growing awareness about sex and advertising and their interface. Yet no research so far has delineated the extent of sexual imagery in Indian TV commercials. Gender representation has been the
major pre-occupation in research on TV commercials in India. This current research intends to measure the presence of sexuality and its manifestations on Indian TV commercials.

The TV commercial of a well-known automobile brand begins with four scantily clad girls (on their way to the beach) who on seeing a well-built man get out of their car and ask him if he knows someone who can apply suntan lotion on their bodies. The ad jingle goes somewhat like this

1st girl: We want a sizzling ‘hotty’…

2nd girl: Who’d like to get naughty…?

3rd girl: Do you know any man?

4th girl: Who’d help us rub suntan…

Man (with a confused look): Why don’t you try the beach café?

The girls who had been making suggestive gestures all along with a can of suntan lotion in their hand now cry in unison: Dumb! Dumb! Dumb!

Voiceover: Life doesn’t give you second chances. If you have missed the new (car brand name) you gotta [sic] be dumb.
The TV commercial carries two simple equations. The first equation meant 1) not applying suntan lotion on the body of a female = being dumb. The second equation meant 2) Not buying the car at the price being offered by the company = being dumb. In the 1990s the Advertisements for a brand of shoes showed perhaps for the first time, complete nudity. Though the private parts of the models are covered by a python, it was risqué enough for Indian sensibilities. Indian TV commercials of deodorants, men talcum powder, have scenes of partial nudity, sexual emphasis on body, and various stages of undressing. Even though the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) was established way back in 1985 it is a non-statutory, body exercising only a moral authority and as such its decision is non-binding. One of its guidelines is to, ‘ensuring that Advertising is not offensive to generally accepted norms and standards of public decency....’ Its website proclaims, ‘regulate yourself, or someone else will’. Since it is a non-statutory, the ASCI merely seeks to, ‘propagates its code and a sense of responsibility for its observance amongst advertisers, advertising agencies and others connected with the creation of advertisements, and the media’.

Most of the decisions portend to accuracy and truthfulness in advertisements, not with its bias, its presentation of stereotypes, its under-representation of certain
people, or the role play in which men and women are shown. The 'generally accepted standards of public decency' has nowhere been defined. Most of the decision it has taken so far actually is concerned only with the accuracy of the claims being made, not with the way in which that claim is being made. While Cinema faces laws regulating its public exhibition such as those pertaining to copyright, nudity, and wrongful representation, Television, it's much smaller and more accessible reincarnation faces fewer restrictions. Adult content on Television was kept to a bare minimum. In the 80s and well into the early 90s the state owned Doordarshan commanded a complete monopoly over the air-waves. It only during the 1990s the Indian public space witnessed a proliferation of representations of erotics. The themes of most of the early TV serials in a fictionalized manner showed images of women in extra-marital relationships, smoking, and drinking in male company.
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