Chapter Twelve. Advertising Research &

India
Limitation of previous studies

Research on advertising and TV commercials in India is limited, and few researchers have categorically examined gender-role portrayal on Indian Television commercials. This is understandable because the TV itself achieved its first success as late as the 1980s (as compared to the developed world) with *Humlog* and consolidated its appeal with the broadcast of the Hindu epic TV serials *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Right till the early 90s, TV offered a limited range of choices to the viewers and the advertisers in terms of programming. It came to acquire diversity in the range of its content only in the mid-90s when the cable or the satellite broadcast began to be relayed, and broke *Doordarshan’s*, monopoly over the airwaves. In 1991 (when liberalization was initiated) there were only six TV channels, which eventually rose to 230 in 2006. Not surprisingly the early research on advertising tended to concentrate more on the print media.

In her study of TV commercials Mallika Das notes gender stereotype and symmetrical trends commensurate with the trends found in Western nations. However her study doesn’t concern the portrayal of children, and the elderly.
Abhik Roy has presented a critical piece concerned with dominant ideology and cultural myths and how it fashions television advertisement’s content. But his rhetorical analysis of the symbols used in representing Indian women in their roles as homemakers and mothers in Indian TV commercials, was an approach guided by a semiotic approach which can lend itself to divergent views and interpretations. The technique presented no quantifiable data that could be replicated. Moreover the TV commercials were culled from Doordarshan and didn’t take into account the commercials broadcast on satellite TV channels.

Mallika Das’ study noted that women were less frequently portrayed in lead roles, and in voice-overs, more in relationships and less employed. But the research though current compared to other researches in the area, didn’t investigate the role portrayal of elderly or children. The research also didn’t investigate the body type for men and women, the importance of which is rapidly gaining across the world. A study of body types becomes important because models in TV commercials may often become the benchmarks against which viewers evaluate themselves. For researchers a study of body types can shed light on idealized body for men, and women as advocated by TV commercials. A study of body types becomes all the more important in the Indian context with the introduction of ‘size zero’ in the
lexicon of media and entertainment grammar, and the coming of a ‘new age of Anorexia and related eating disorders in India’ 7. The obsession with body types is not restricted to women alone. ‘Research has found that body disturbance, eating disorders, and the drive for thinness—conditions generally associated with adolescent and college-age women—do occur in older individuals 8. Besides Rohlinger notes that men are also increasingly displaying cues of eroticization and objectification 9. Media images of the ideal body, defined as lean and muscular, can have deleterious effects on mood and body satisfaction in men 10. The present study seeks to fill the gap left by the previous studies and establish benchmark for future studies. It also seeks to study the representation of sexual content in TV commercials.
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