

The Portrayal of Men and Women in Advertisements through Non-Verbal Communication Styles

Madhu Kumari, Assistant Professor
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Banasthali Vidyapith
Niwai, Tonk, India
madhukumari@banasthali.in

ABSTRACT

Non-verbal communication and body language are prominent and engaging aspects of advertisements to attract the target consumers. Non-verbal communication helps in understanding the meaning and nature of verbal communication and also supports the function of meta-communication. In advertising world, the conventional representation of genders through non-verbal styles are often seen and justified by the media and technology. The portrayal of women as sex-symbol or vulnerable and men as dominant or controlling power in advertisements are common. The repetitive or frequent exposures of such advertisements in which women are portrayed as devoting time and energy and taking care of their beauty, youthfulness while men are portrayed as superior and tough, the target audience or consumers believe and try to emulate it in their life. The purpose of the study is to compare and contrast the portrayal of men and women through non-verbal communication styles in various advertisements in India. The research undertaken is qualitative.

Keywords: *Advertisement, Non-verbal Communication, Men, Meta-Communication, Women*

Introduction

Communication purveys messages which are the key to do well in every aspects of life such as family, friends, loved ones, corporate and business. All human being communicate with each other through verbal and non-verbal cues as they are social beings. Human being need to communicate everyday in order to fulfill their needs, wants and desire. Communication being the exchange of ideas, thoughts, experiences, feelings, insight, information and others is a two-way flow from source to receiver and vice-versa. It is a dynamic, constant, unifying and involving process of dissemination and transmission of facts, data, ideas, attitudes, and perspectives. Being the driving force, it boots and channelizes the interactions on various levels such as intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and mass.

Advertising is a powerful communication tool to motivate and persuade the consumers to purchase the products, ideas and services. It is mainly a way of communication and important tools of marketing communication which helps in selling the products, ideas and services to target consumers. It is a highly visible which attracts the attention of target consumers through text, graphics, sound, audio-visual content, gestures, signs, symbols etc. Advertising grabs the attention of public through various creative and interactive contents for the promotion of products or brands.

In general we can say that advertising is a powerful communication force, highly visible and one of the important tools of marketing communication that helps to sell products, services, ideas, images etc. advertising reflects the need of the times. Advertising is basically a way of communication. Any business or company uses the advertising method to communicate with public regarding its brand, product or services. Advertising can also be defined as the way of capturing public attention through paid messages or information which helps promote or sell a product, service or brand. Advertising is also a process of mass promotion which involves audio or visual methods of marketing. A single advertisement has the capacity to reach numerous people.

American Marketing Association (1963) defines advertising as *“It is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services by an identified sponsor.”*

The advertisers promotes their products or brands with very impressive and attractive advertisements which include verbal and non-verbal communication, textual, graphical representation, tagline, slogan, jingles etc to achieve a desired goals and objectives. It is a paid form of communication which reflects the time or space in different form of media such as print, broadcast, and digital for the non-personal promotion of products, ideas or brands.

The advertisements consist of verbal and non-verbal styles or cues for delivering the desired message to the prospective consumers for brand exposures and consumption. The good advertisement can strengthen or enhances the image of the brand and delivers the right message to the consumers and it all depends on the proper communication. An advertisement can lasts a very good impression on consumers’ mind and persuade them to avail the facility or purchase the products. However, the proper communication may strengthen the brand trust and brand loyalty.

Communication involves verbal and non-verbal forms for the exchange of ideas, information, and perspectives through speaking or writing. It also includes the gestures, facial expression, touch, tone, body language, sign, and symbols for conveying the message. Non-verbal communication plays a very important role in advertising for better understanding of the advertisements by the consumers. It sends the powerful message through non-linguistic means to attract the target consumers in advertising. It is a form of communication which is spontaneous, unintentional or involuntary display of human emotions of actions or attributes through facial expressions or gestures, body postures, eye movements, tone, touch, appearance, sound, smell, space, use of objects etc. Moreover, it is a symbolic communication intended to demonstrate sympathy, approval through smile and disapproval by turning up the nose. There are eight types of non-verbal cues:

- Kinesics which includes gestures, facial expressions, body postures, pace of walk
- Paralinguistic is a component of meta-communication which conveys emotions through prosody, pitch, volume, intonation.
- Proxemics is the study of personal space and distance that one maintains in social situation.
- Haptics is a perception by different types of touching which include shoulder pat, handshake, kiss, holding hands etc.
- Olfactory is a sense of smell.
- Clothing and artifacts is an appearance and style
- Color is used to awaken the thoughts and stimulate the sense.
- Chronemics is the study of time which is use to communicate.

The non-verbal communication is used to express the emotion. The facial expressions and gestures convey what is going inside the human being. It also conveys the interpersonal attitude and thoughts. The function of non-verbal cues is to portray one’s personality, character, temperament, outlook and nature. Moreover, the purpose of non-verbal communication is to support verbal communication.

Case study

Stereotypical and sexual portrayal of men and women in advertisements by non-verbal communication styles

In every decade, the stereotypical and sexual representation of genders are very prominent and they are not limited to beauty or self care products only but also seen in wide range of various products, ideas and services such as food, automobiles, household goods, ornaments, attires, gadgets etc.

- **Seagram's Imperial Blue**

From 1997, Seagram's Imperial Blue's communication lines 'Men will be Men and Pyar ki raah mein chalna seekh, Ishq ki chaah mein jalna seekh' has entrenched the mind of consumers. It is the largest brand from Pernod Ricard Group. It is a symbol of lust, greed and materialism. The ads portray the women as objects of desire and eye-candy. In series of ads under this brand, men change their behavior to impress women, show their fake love and care through movement, body posture and pace of style only to attract the women's attention and promote infidelity. The ads show the competition between men through gestures and eye movement only to grab the attention of women for materialistic pleasure. The Imperial blue in every ad tries to normalize the problematic behavior of men.

In October, 2020, the brand came up with new ad titled 'Crossing' featuring Karan Wahi, directed by Abhinav Pratiman and created by Ogilvy to take forward the legacy of male gaze. The ads show that in order to impress a gorgeous women, he helped an old lady to cross the road, meanwhile while crossing the road, they both looked at each other and through eye contact and gesture, and the male gaze and submission of women is normalized. Further, when he saw the other women, he took opposite turn and take old women along with him only to attract the attention of that women.

Through gestures, facial expression and body postures, this brand have established that men are destined to do anything to impress women in a patriarchal society and normalize the sexiest behavior. So when this 'men will be men' take rest?

Axe Deodorant too sexy and sultry

Hindustan Unilever embraces all Axe fragrances which are crafted by the world's leading perfumers of France from 1983. Axe fragrances and deodorants are personification of masculinity of modern world. In 2008, the ad of Axe Dark Temptation deodorant was very indecent and obscene, as it show horde of sexy women gnawed the chocolate man.

The ad was created by Argentinean advertisers shows that the crowds of young, slim and attractive women was licking and nibbling the young man who was wearing deodorant and smelled as chocolate. It shows that young women were taking bites of his body. The gestures face expression, body movements and sense of smell by young women was too erotic and sensual in this advert. It ends with 'as irresistible as chocolate new Axe Dark Temptation'.

In 2020, Axe Mini Ticket advert is also portraying the sexual behavior of men as normal. The campaign says why to add more distance to social distancing? It emphasized on 'Smell ready with Axe Ticket only for just ₹ 35'. The ad shows that the young attractive woman who was wearing mask gets attracted towards the smell of perfume of young boy. It ends with the older bald man hoping to allure women standing next to him in a queue by the deodorant. The portrayal of men as dominant and women as submissive is the uniqueness of this brand.

Progressive representation of genders in advertisements

#StopTheBeautyTest by Dove

Unilever owned Dove personal care brand released a campaign under the Dove Self-Esteem project which is conceptualized by Ogilvy India which urged the people to stop judging the beauty of women during matchmaking process. The ad start with the line 'Yeh sirf humaari nahi, desh ki karodon ladkiyon ki kahaani hai' (This is not just our story, this is the story of million girls of our country).The real stories enacted by real girls namely Mahek, Noor, Rajeshwari, Hemali and Deeksha from four zones of our country depicting the sad and ugly demand of the society for marriage purposes. The girls are constantly judged through marriage lens regarding her body type, skin colour, height, hair, shape etc. The sad smile, taunt, rejection through eye movement, tone was the non-verbal cues used to portray the sad reality of our society. How long do we have to go through this ugly search for beauty? How much beauty is enough? According to report by 'India's Beauty Test (2020)', it has been found that 9 out of 10 women in India feel rejection or judged during arrange marriage process which is also affecting their mental health. So, Dove has tied up with Times matrimonial to shift the perspective of society towards beauty. The brand will also empower 8 million people regarding beauty biasness by 2024. Thus, look for the beauty, not the flaws. Priya Nair, Executive Director, Hindutan Unilever & VP, South Asia said that Dove has always portrayed and emphasized beauty as confidence.

#TouchofCare by Vicks

In 2017, Vicks ad 'Touch of Care' under 'Caring of Families Under Generation' which portray the real story of a Gauri Sawant, a transgender who adopts a girl child and raises as her own. The mainstream media for the first time created a campaign in which the transgender shown as mother. Public in Singapore created this heartwarming ad which was based on real story of Gauri and Gayatri. The ad starts with the narration by daughter Gayatri who tell the story of her early childhood when she lost her biological mother and how her life changed when after she was adopted. Her adoptive mom became her best friend as she taking care of her from past 10 years. The bond between them was real as it was reflected through smile and laughter, the tear in eyes, happiness on face, and gentle care by mother. Gayatri has seen and felt the pain and agony of her mom as being the transgender. She questioned that everyone has basic right so why can't her mother? So, she will become lawyer not doctor in future to fight for her mother's right as it was mentioned in civics book. This progressive ad conceptualized by the director Neeraj Ghaywan to raise the issue, concerns, ill- treatment and injustice towards the LGBT community. The ad ends with the punch line '*everyone deserves the touch of care*'.

#ShareTheLoad by Ariel

From past five years, Procter & Gamble's Ariel started a social awareness campaign to share the load of household work by men and women both. The ad was conceptualized by BBDO and raised a question that '*Is laundry or household chores responsibility of woman?*' Tahira Kashyap Khurrana , Writer & Theater Director after watching the ad said that it reflects the sad reality of our society. The ad shows that a little girl observed that her mother is busy throughout the day and till late at night doing household and office work both. The little girl noticed that her mother is doing multiple things alone and deprived of sleep. When she didn't find her mom at late night on bed, she asked her father to look for her, later they both found her in bathroom sleeping while doing laundry. The ad highlighted that more than 71% of women sleep less than men because of inequality in household work. However, her husband realized his ignorance towards her and started helping her in household work with smile. The empathy and care shown through smile, facial expression by husband to his and a winning hug to mother by her little princess is priceless in this advertisement.

Conclusion

The non-verbal styles or messages used in advertisement have great impact on the sales of the product, ideas and services. The portrayals of gender in advertisements are stereotypical in which men are shown as dominant and women as submissive or dependent from several decades. Advertisement being the carrier of symbolic representation shapes the expectations of gender in consumerist society. But the portrayal of gender in advertisements is changing and supporting the constructive approach for the betterment and progress of society.

In this regard, it is also important to note that over time, companies have been more conscious of their social responsibilities related to gender equality, and some of their advertising has succeeded in elegantly shattering preconceptions.

Examples include Havell's "Hawa Badlegi" commercial depicting the husband adopting his wife's last name after marriage; Ariel's "Share The Load" commercial depicting a father reflecting on his role at home and deciding to assist his wife with the laundry after observing his married daughter juggling work and household duties alone; In Biba's "Change The Convention" campaign, a prospective son-in-law's father is seen criticising his ability to cook, and the latter responds by inviting him to dinner after ten days to give him time to pick up the skill.

As a result, however slowly, there has been a change in the quality of advertisements throughout time. It is heartening to see some companies bravely combating gender norms and working to promote greater inclusivity. With such uplifting and continuous efforts, it is believed that Indian commercials would be able to overcome the glaring gender bias and play a significant part in establishing the society and culture of the future.

It goes without saying that commercials, even if they last only a few seconds, have a lasting imprint on consumers' thoughts and subtly shape their social perspectives. Therefore, it is essential that the marketing industry keeps up with the changes and produces our commercials that accurately portray women in a progressive light, so shattering the chains of long-standing biases and gender biasness.

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