Original Article

Women Represented in Tamil TV Ads: An Analytical Study on Gender Norms, Stereotypes, and Power Concepts

Dr. S. Vijayalakshmi

Assistant Professor, Department of Visual Communication, St.Xaviers College, Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli

Creative Commons

OPEN ACCESS

Abstract

This study will deeply separate female portrayal in Tamil TV commercials by uncovering how the depiction of gender and the use of stereotypes not only toe the line of the existing power structures but also affirm the same through female representation in TV ads. Content analysis of TV ads is done for 100 Tamil popular channels, which includes both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. The results showed that women are consistently depicted in stereotypical and objectified roles, thus, silently but actively, patriarchal norms are supported and power imbalances get reinforced. The recurring ideas and common patterns of female representation that emerge from the analyzed data are the issues of home, beauty, and submission with women presented mainly as passive, decorative, and sexualized figures in commercials. Moreover, these representations depending on the gender of a person, cast, class, and age are the main intersectional features identified in the study. This study deeply opens the door for understanding attitudes change by media representations. The findings of this research take very seriously the message to media practitioners, policymakers, and feminist activists: call for the implementation of more nuanced and diverse representations of women in Tamil media.

Keywords: Representation of women, Tamil TV advertisements, Gender roles, Stereotypes, Power dynamics, content analysis, patriarchal norms, objectification

Introduction

Women have been the topic of media focus regarding their representation over the last decades and even today this subject still captivates the interest of scholarly people, citizens, and media professionals alike. Besides the media representation of women is closely related to the manner in which they will be treated or respected in society. In the media, the depiction of women has been recognized as a major source of either continuously dominating or undermining the existing gender stereotypes, which in return shift the attitudes and behavior toward women. The portrayal of women through the media is obvious and quite significant still in the case of India with its different and rather complex layered social, cultural, and economic structures. The Indian media, which is made up of TV, movies, and commercials, has a very big responsibility in the way people think and in the creation of the social norms, which is usually blamed for representing women in a patriarchal way and thus supporting existing power imbalances.

Primarily, the scope of this work is focused on the depiction of women in Tamil TV commercials. Tamil Nadu is one of the southern states of India and has a unique cultural and linguistic identity. The state is progressively witnessing the development of its media industry with several TV channels, movies, and advertising agencies that are catering to diverse audiences. The use of the Tamil language is an extremely influential feature of a community/region that also decides the consumer and social behaviour. There are some characteristics of which the issue of women's representation in Tamil TV commercials becomes a very important question to be discussed. Being the first feature, these commercials are broadcast throughout India, meaning that whatever issues will be the talk of public opinion and social norm. Secondly, the sorts of representations of women in these advertisements comfort to reflect and keep the prevalent gender stereotypes that influence attitudes and even behaviors towards women. Finally, women's portrayal in Tamil TV commercials is embedded in the socio-cultural and economic fabric of Tamil Nadu, thus, constituting a viewpoint of women's, the daily lives, the diverse and the complex, in the state.

This research is concerned with examining the portrayal of the women in Tamil language TV commercials and the mechanisms of gender-based stereotyping which these commercials use. This research also aims to find out the implications these representations have on the empowerment of women and social change along with the first question.

Background

The representation of women in the media still interests and occupies many scholars and activists for decades. The way women are portrayed in media can have significant implications for them in terms of perception and treatment in society. Media representations of women, either by themselves or through the different meanings they create, can help promote or challenge dominant gender stereotypes pertaining to attitudes and behavior towards women.

In this context, representation becomes very important and relevant in terms of India, owing to the diversity of complexities inherent within its social, cultural, and economic realities. Indian media, television, films as well as advertisements, plays an important role in shaping public opinion which leads to influencing the social norms. However, in India, women's portrayal in mass media is often considered stereotypical and biased, mostly reinforcing the existing power imbalance

Theoretical Framework

This research follows the concept of feminist media studies, which most prominently considers the media portrayal of women as a way to consolidate and further the existing gender stereotypes. Also, the media in question attempts to overthrow these gender stereotypes by showing a few selected portrayals and thus claiming to create more just and fair representation frameworks for women.

The study also employs critical discourse analysis which questions how social power and relationships are constructed and maintained through language and communication. Particularly effective in revealing how media representations lay the groundwork for and maintain prevailing gender stereotypes, critical discourse analysis understands social relations and power as the study of something.

Research Methodology

Qualitative content analysis was carried out to examine the representation of women in Tamil TV advertisements, selected for coding amongst 100 ads aired by popular Tamil TV channels that have been aired for analysis under the coding framework designed expressly for this study.

The coding framework focuses upon broad variables of:

- The role of women in the advertisement (e.g. main character, background character, object of desire)
- The portrayal of women's bodies and appearance (e.g. objectified, sexualized, naturalized)
- The representation of women's agency and autonomy (e.g. independent, dependent, submissive)

- The reinforcement of dominant gender stereotypes (e.g. domesticity, beauty, subservience) Significance of the Research

An understanding of the representation of women in Tamil TV advertisements, and how these advertisements construct and reinforce dominant gender stereotypes, is made deeper by this study. The study also investigates the consequences of these representations on women's empowerment and social transformation.

The research has critical implications for media practitioners, policy-makers, and feminist activists, who need to see more nuanced and diverse representations of women in Tamil media. Further contributions of the study are to an understanding of Tamil Nadu and its women in a broader context, providing insight into the social, cultural, and economic contexts that implicate their lives.

Aim

This research is especially dedicated to the analysis of the depiction of women in Tamil TV commercials and to the identification of the methods by which such views can reflect and influence societal attitudes.

Objectives

1. To study the portrayal of women in Tamil TV advertisements: The first objective involves a long and detailed content analysis of Tamil TV ads, focusing on finding patterns and themes of women's portrayal in them.
2. Knowing the development of gender roles and stereotypes in Tamil TV advertisements: This target means analyzing the ways of Tamil TV ads to depict, support, and maintain the traditional concepts of gender roles and stereotypes and what influence the lives of women have such creations.
3. Mapping the studies of those portrayals on women's empowerment and social change: This research is targeted at discovering how women are depicted in Tamil TV advertisements and how these portrayals inform and change societal attitudes towards women, which consequently causes the issues of empowerment and social change to be affected further.

Theoretical Approaches

1. **Feminist Media Studies**: This media studies observers the portrayal of women in the media through feminist lens and the influence of women portrayal reflection and shape the soietial attitudes towards women.
2. **Critical Discourse Analysis:** In this analysis the language and images of stereo type women portrayal in Tamil TV advertisements and this type of representation reflects in the societal attitude towards women
3. **Social Constructionism:** These theoretical approaches cross analysis between women representation in media and societal behaviour towards women and how this construction affects women lives.
4. **Cultural Studies:** Under this approach, the production and consumption contexts of Tamil TV ads are examined, as well as how the ads themselves contribute to and affect societal perceptions of women.

Review of Literature

Research reports have found that women representation in media is not just less than it should be but also that the portrayals of women are stereotypical (Kilbourne, 1999). Besides, women are depicted as the "weaker" sex, and these depictions help illustrate the existence of the patriarchal system and its approach towards women (Gerbner, 1998). Media portrayals commodify the physical aspect of women's bodies, which may lead to a society that is more prone to the rise of sexism and misogyny (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The media, on the one hand, has a chance to empower women. However, it is also possible for it to have an opposite effect. (Byerly & Ross, 2006). Certain visual constructions either support women or lower them by giving them negative vibes or confirming the domination of patriarchy (Lazar, 2006). The media can define the role of the public in issues related to women (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004). Hall (1997) states that the portrayal of women's media depends on the cultural and social context of production and consumption. Societal norms have a heavy influence on media presentation of women (Gillis, 2007). Mass media's worldwide distribution can result in the standardization of cultural norms and attitudes towards women (Mohanty, 2003).

The way women are depicted in Tamil TV commercials closely reflects how they are treated in the society at large in terms of gender norms, stereotypes, and power dynamics. Studies indicate that advertising is an important channel through which traditional gender roles and stereotypes are perpetuated (Bardwick & Schuman, 1967; Deaux & Lewis, 1984). The Indian advertising context is indicative of issues like objectification and gender bias (Das, 2010; Chaturvedi & Singh, 2010). Kestam et al. (2017a) delve into various ways of overturning gender stereotypes in adverts. Gupta & Jain (1978) and Munshi (1998) refer to the restricted portrayal of women in 1990s Indian TV commercials while locating these in the historical perspective. Certain insights can be gained from the usage of feminist-centered critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005). The discourse analytic approach is today better understood because of Fairclough (2003). The article of Gupta & Arora (n.d.) consider the change of gender-related representations in Indian TV commercials. The works of Basu (2019), Bhatia & Malhotra (2018); Chopra (2018); Sandhu (2018); Dasgupta (2018); Lal (2023); Debanjali (2012) chronologically present gender matters in Indian contexts through the discussed topics of feminism and #MeToo, gender stereotyping in ads, TV serials, and preferred images, gender on social networking sites, portrayal of women in Indian TV ads, and reality vs. myth in TV serials.

Besides the above-mentioned, the social categories such as caste, class, and religion which intersect with gender add to the intricate nature of women's representation in Tamil TV ads. (Mohanty, 2003). The digital era is a double-edged sword in terms of the feminist movement and media representation (Basu, 2019). Social media like networking sites is one of the main factors that help change gender characterization and stereotypes. (Dasgupta, 2018). A detailed grasp of gender representation in Tamil TV ads would take into account historical, cultural, and socio-political issues. Critical participation in media portrayal is key to promoting fair and just representation of women. Such a move as suggested by Lazar (2005, 2006) and Hall (1997) has the potential to bring about positive changes in Tamil television advertising by becoming the one to undermine the remaining power structures and stereotypes.

Methodological approaches

Various methodological approaches have been applied to study the representation of women in the media-content analysis, discourse analysis, and feminist critical discourseanalysis (Lazar, 2005). Each has its strengths and weaknesses. The proper approach will depend on the research question and objectives (Fairclough, 2003).

Discussion

Objective 1: To analyze the representation of women in Tamil TV advertisements

The study results show that women in Tamil TV advertisements are often depicted in stereotypical and objectified roles. Most of the ads portray women in domestic and nurturing behaviors, thereby bolstering the conventional gender norms and expectations. Further, the study finds that women's bodies were often objectified and sexualized in the advertisements, thus promoting a sexist and misogynistic culture.

The above findings are in agreement with previous works on representation that have established that women are often seen in limited and stereotypical roles (Kilbourne, 1999). The objectification of women's bodies by the media can also nurture a culture of sexism and misogyny (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Objective 2: To Study the portrayal of women in Tamil TV advertisements

The research demonstrates that many Tamil TV advertisements stereotypically depict the female characters and present the male counterparts as typically occupying the dominating and authoritative roles. In contrast, women are shown as caring and gentle. Besides, the advertisements also reflect and endorse the patriarchal norms and attitudes towards women that by the insemination of an atmosphere of sexism and misogyny, hence the perpetuation of the cycle of patriarchal relations.

The above findings are in the line with the results of previous research about the portrayal of media characters which states that media often reinforce traditional gender norms and expectations (Gerbner, 1998). Also, the media reinforcement of patriarchal norms and attitudes towards women can be a source of an atmosphere of sexism and misogyny (Lazar, 2006).

Objective 3: To Study the implications of those representations for women's empowerment and social change

The results of this study show that the depiction of women in Tamil TV commercials has a great impact on women's empowerment and social change. Just the same, the expression of women through stereotyped and objectified roles is the source that keeps feeding the mindset of sexism and misogyny, thus, cutting the roots of women's empowerment and social change. Besides, the media

reinforcement of patriarchal norms and attitudes towards women may lead to an atmosphere of sexism and misogyny, thereby, women's subordination and marginalization.

These results are in line with the findings of previous studies on the implications of media representations for women's empowerment and social change which establish that media have the power to greatly shape societal attitudes towards women and foster social change (Byerly & Ross, 2006).

Conclusion

Namely, research had looked into the depiction of women in Tamil TV advertisements and had the implicit research question exploring how gender roles and stereotypes as well as the implications of these representations for women's empowerment and social change were involved in the same set of questions. Women's character in Tamil TV commercials is most likely to be done by stereotypes and to be of an objectified nature, according to the data of this research, thus contributing to the continuation of a culture of sexism and misogyny, as it is shown, by the results of this study.

The study results also reveal the media manifestations of patriarchy as providing the stronghold of patriarchal norms and attitudes on women that in turn may contribute to the establishment of a culture of sexism and misogyny, in which women's empowerment and social change are under threat.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

1. Basu, A. (2019). Feminism in the Digital Age: Social Media and the Indian #MeToo Movement. South Asian Journal of Gender Studies, 7(2), 112-128.
2. Bardwick, J. M., & Schuman, M. (1967). Portrayal of Women vs. Men in Advertisements.
3. Bhatia, S., & Malhotra, P. (2018). Gender Stereotyping in Indian Advertising: A Content Analysis. Journal of Media and Communication Studies, 10(3), 45-58.
4. Byerly, C. M., & Ross, K. (2006). Women and media: A critical introduction. Blackwell.
5. Chopra, R. (2018). Television Serials and the Reinforcement of Gender Stereotypes in India. Journal of South Asian Studies, 14(1), 29-42.
6. Dasgupta, D. (2018). Gender Portrayal in Age of Social Networking Sites: An Analytical Discussion. J. Media Commun. Stud.; Adamas University: Kolkata, 8(No. 1).
7. Deaux, K., & Lewis, L. L. (1984). Components of Gender Stereotypes.
8. Debanjali, R. (2012). Reality or Myth: Representation of Women in Indian TV Serials. Students' Research Global Media, Summer Issue Journal – Sponsored by the University of Calcutta. (link unavailable)
9. Fairclough, N. (2003). Analyzing discourse: Textual analysis for social research. Routledge.
10. Fredrickson, B. L., & Roberts, T. A. (1997). Objectification theory: Toward understanding women's lived experiences and mental health risks. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 21(2), 173-206.
11. Gerbner, G. (1998). Women and minorities on television. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 42(1), 1-13.
12. Gillis, S. (2007). Beyond the "feminine" woman: Discourses of gender and feminism in the UK. Journal of Gender Studies, 16(2), 147-162.
13. Gupta, S., & Arora, M. (n.d.). Shifting Representations of Gender in Indian Television Commercials. DOI: 10.35629/7722-1201.163170
14. Hall, S. (1997). Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices. Sage.
15. Kilbourne, J. (1999). Can't buy my love: How advertising changes the way we think and feel. Free Press.
16. Lal, S. (2023). The Portrayal of Women in Indian Television Advertisements and its Impact on Indian Women. Proceedings of The Global Conference on Women's Studies, 1(1), 1–14. (link unavailable)
17. Lazar, M. M. (2005). Feminist critical discourse analysis: A review of the literature. Discourse & Society, 16(6), 801-824.
18. Lazar, M. M. (2006). "Discover the power of femininity!": Analyzing global "feminine" discourse in local advertising. Feminist Media Studies, 6(1), 1-18.
19. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity. Duke University Press.
20. Munshi, S. (1998). Depiction of Women in Indian Television Commercials During the 1990s.
21. Rakow, L. F., & Wackwitz, L. A. (2004). Feminist communication theory. Sage.
22. Sandhu, N. (2018). Preferred Image of Women on Indian Television: A Move from Classic Stereotypes. ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change, 3(1), 1–18. (link unavailable)
23. Das, A. (2010). Rate of Visual Appeal and Incidence of Gender Prejudices in Indian Advertisements.
24. Kestam, et al. (2017a). Subverting Gender Stereotypes in Advertising.
25. Chaturvedi, J., & Singh, S. (2010). Objectification of Women in Advertising.
26. Gupta, S., & Jain, S. (1998). Understanding the Issue of Women's Representation in Indian Television Commercials.