

Gender in Financial Services Advertising – Issues and Implications

*Sandhu, N., Mahajan, R., Sharma, S.

Chitkara University, India, Chandigarh-Patiala National Highway, Village-Jhansla, Tehsil-Rajpura, District-Patiala-140401

*Corresponding author E-mail: namrata.sandhu@chitkara.edu.in

Abstract: *This study examines the use of gender in television commercials for financial services in India. Sixty-three taped television commercials were content analyzed across four variables – gender of voice-over, gender of dominant product user, gender of dominant character and gender of decision-maker. Two independent coders of different gender coded the commercials. The reliability of coding was established with the help of Perreault and Leigh's Reliability Index. Gender preference for the male gender was found to exist in all the four variables examined. It is thus recommended that when attempting self-regulation in advertising, gender bias is an important factor to be considered by advertisers and corporate houses. This can be instrumental in serving desirable social and commercial purposes.*

Keywords: Advertising, gender, financial services

1. INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVE AND NEED

Advertising is a potent and ubiquitous medium of communication through which corporate houses and marketers disseminate information and ideas. Though its primary objective is to make the advertised product appealing to the target audience, through its secondary role it creates impressions, which though unintended may be deep and long lasting (Pollay, 2000).

The advocates of the cultivation theory (Fullerton and Kendrick, 2000) believe that over a period of time viewers tend to accept the world created by advertisers as a reality. Hence, it is implied that advertisements have a profound impact on the thought process and belief system of its viewers (Foley, 1999). Given this argument, advertisers need to be wary of the ideologies and messages they propagate.

A particularly worrisome ideology for the perpetuation of which advertisers in the past have been severely criticized is the superiority of men over women (Sharpe, 1976; Mayne, 2000). It is believed that advertising is instrumental in establishing an undesirable gender hierarchy, which places men higher on the social ladder than women (Radhakrishnan, 2001). This accusation is serious and the current study attempts to examine it in the gender neutral category of financial services¹.

Although many researchers in different parts of the world have studied gender in advertisements (Schneider and Schneider, 1979; Sharpe, 1979; Schaffter, 2006; Royo-Vela et al., 2007), the authors did not come across any such study in the financial services industry. The growing advertising budget of this industry (refer to table 1) and lack of research in this product category provided the necessary impetus for this study.

Table 1: Percentage change in advertising expenditure (banking/finance/insurance industry)

	\$US000's
Q3 2009 to Q2 2010	355,229
Q3 2010 to Q2 2011	490,523
% Increase	38%

Source: AdEx India, TAM India Research

1.1 Advertising in the financial services industry

Recent times have seen a surge in the advertising activity of the financial services industry. With a whopping 38 percent increase in its advertising expenditure over twelve months up to June 2011 (see table 1), it is today the fourth largest advertiser in the country (see table 2). Clearly, the financial services industry is a leading source of advertising messages and its content worthy of being researched.

Table 2: Top ten advertising categories in India (July 2010 to June 2011)

Advertising industry	\$US000's
Services	693,462
Food and beverages	534,262
Personal care/Personal hygiene	495,945
Banking/Finance/Investment	490,523
Education	424,076
Auto	406,729
Personal accessories	295,876
Telecom/Internet service providers	280,170
Retail	260,640
Durables	255,305

Source: AdEx India, TAM India Research

2. LITRATURE REVIEW

A review of the relevant literature establishes that gender issues in advertising have been a matter of concern for researchers for quite some time now. In fact they are one of the most researched topics in advertising ethics (Hyman et al., 1994).

Frequently cited concerns are limited portrayals of women (Tuchman, 1979), gender asymmetry (Stern and Taylor, 1997), reinforcing prejudices that women already suffer from (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000), gender role stereotypes (Furnham et al., 2000; Chatterji, 2005), representation of women as inferior to men (Radhakrishnan, 2001), under representation of women (Dang and Vohra, 2003) and emphasis on patriarchy (Lee, 2004).

Past researchers believe that advertisements lead to reinforcement of power roles in the society, which establish the undisputed superiority of men while locking women into subordination (Mayne, 2000). They are responsible for problematizing gender issues by further privileging the already privileged male gender in the society (Schaffter, 2006). Advertisements thus patronize women (Sharpe, 1976) and perpetuate their secondary role in the society.

It may be of interest to point out here that gender bias in advertisements is evident in advertisements directed at children too. Even in these advertisements more male figures are seen as compared to female figures and this dominance of males becomes more pronounced with an increase in the age of the characters in the ads (Browne, 1998). This is instrumental in the development and maintenance of gender discriminations and prejudices in the society (Graves, 1999).

Gender bias is a universal phenomenon in advertisements and is found to exist even in advertisements for gender neutral products (Childs and Maher, 2003). Thus, men are the norm in advertising and it is their standards and institutions that prevail and dominate ads (Spender, 1980).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The sample

To start with, an attempt was made to find out the most popular television channels on Indian television network. For this purpose, the TAM peoplemeter system ratings² were referred to. A study of these ratings over a six month period (from 27th December 2010 to 3rd July 2011) revealed that Star Plus, Zee TV and Colors topped the list of popular television channels in India and the top rated programs were aired during prime time (1900 hours to 2300 hours). The current sample of television commercials was then conveniently taped from these three television channels during prime time over a three month period (from 11th July to 9th October 2011).

In all 149 commercials were taped. Excluding duplicates and the commercials which did not fall into the category of financial services the final sample constituted of 63 commercials.

3.2 Research method

Content analysis of taped advertisements was the method employed to examine the use of gender in the advertisements (Childs and Maher, 2003). The content variables were selected on the basis of the literature reviewed.

3.3 Variables

Four categorical variables were used for content analysis of the taped television commercials. Three of the variables used have been adopted from the scale developed by Childs and Maher (2003). However, their categories have been modified to

suit the purpose of the current study. The fourth variable (gender of the decision maker) was added considering its appropriateness in justifying the objective of the study. The definitions (similar to Childs and Maher, 2003 for the first three variables) and categories of the variables are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Variable Used in Content Analysis

Variable	Definition	Categories of the scale
Gender of voice- over	Gender of the voices from unseen source	Male, Female, Both, None
Gender of dominant product user	Gender of the character who is shown using, consuming or interacting with the advertised product	Male, Female, Both, None
Gender of dominant character	Gender of the most frequently seen character in the advertisement/character who is the centre of attraction	Male, Female, Both, None
Gender of decision-maker	Gender of the character who takes the purchase decision	Male, Female, Both, None

3.4 Coding and reliability

For the purpose of coding the taped advertisements two coders of different genders (Royo-Vela et al., 2007) were selected. A training session was conducted by the authors during which the coders were familiarized with the variables and their definitions (Kolbe and Burnett, 1991). The judges coded ten advertisements. During the entire duration of the coding process, the coders were not permitted to speak with each other or the authors.

The reliability of coding was established with the help of the reliability index as proposed by Perreault and Leigh (1989). The results are shown in table 4. The disputes in coding were resolved by the authors together, independent of the coders (Childs and Maher, 2003).

Table 4: Reliability of coding

Variable	Number of observations	Number of categories	Number of agreements	I (Perreault and Leigh's Reliability Index)
Gender of voice-over	63	4	61	.98
Gender of dominant product user	63	4	54	.90
Gender of dominant character	63	4	58	.95
Gender of decision maker	63	4	51	.86

3.5 Hypotheses

Since the current study examines the use of gender in a gender neutral product category, the absence of gender preference in the advertisement sample is likely. But previous studies have established that gender preference exists even in advertisements for gender neutral products (Childs and Maher, 2003). This leads us to the hypotheses that the advertisement sample will exhibit gender preference in gender distribution with respect to the four variables used to measure gender preference. These hypotheses are shown in table 5.

Table 5: Hypotheses

Null Hypotheses	Alternate Hypotheses
H ₀₁ : The advertisement sample will not exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of voice-over.	H ₁ : The advertisement sample will exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of voice-over.
H ₀₂ : The advertisement sample will not exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of dominant product user.	H ₂ : The advertisement sample will exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of dominant product user.
H ₀₃ : The advertisement sample will not exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of dominant character.	H ₃ : The advertisement sample will exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of dominant character.
H ₀₄ : The advertisement sample will not exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of decision maker.	H ₄ : The advertisement sample will exhibit a significant gender preference in the gender distribution of decision maker.

3.6 Hypotheses testing

To test the hypotheses chi-square test was used.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Gender of voice-over

The advertising sample exhibited a significant gender preference ($p=.000$) (refer to table 6) which was as expected and hence H_1 was supported. Nearly 86 percent of the advertisements used male voice over as against only 8 percent advertisements, which used female voice over.

Past research has indicated that voice over in television commercials represents a position of authority (Childs and Maher, 2003) and clearly television commercials for financial services in India establish the authority of males over females.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics of gender of voice-over

Category	Frequency
Male	54
Female	5
Both	0
None	4

Significance: $p=.000$

Significant at 5 percent level of significance, $df = 3$

4.2 Gender of dominant product user

As indicated by the data represented in table 7, the number of males, who were dominant product users in the advertisements studied ($n=35$) far outnumber the females ($n=17$). This indicates that most of the advertisements for financial services are directed at males. This finding is as per expectation and establishes a significant preference for males ($p=.000$) in the gender distribution of the dominant product user in the sample of advertisements used. H_2 was thus supported.

Table 7: Descriptive statistics of gender of dominant product user

Category	Frequency
Male	35
Female	17
Both	11
None	0

Significance: $p=.000$

Significant at 5 percent level of significance, $df = 3$

4.3 Gender of dominant character

Gender of the dominant character in advertisements provides hints regarding the gender preference of the advertisers (Verna, 1975). Since males were the dominant character in 77.78 percent of the advertising sample (refer to table 8), it leaves little doubt as to the gender preference of the advertisers. Females were found to be the dominant character in only 06.35 percent of advertisements. This finding supports H_3 ($p=.000$).

Table 8: Descriptive statistics of gender of dominant character

Category	Frequency
Male	49
Female	4
Both	10
None	0

Significance: $p=.000$

Significant at 5 percent level of significance, $df = 3$

4.4 Gender of decision maker

Past research has claimed that decision making power in advertisements is vested only in men (Sharpe, 1976). The variable “gender of decision maker” tests the validity of this claim.

As can be seen from table 9, males in the advertisement sample were the decision makers in 57.14 percent of the cases. Interestingly joint decisions by males and females were taken in 11.11 percent of the cases, but females were trusted to take decisions alone in only 04.76 percent of the cases. This clearly institutes the dominance of males in the decision making process and this finding is in synchronization with expectations. H_4 was thus supported ($p=.000$).

Table 9: Descriptive statistics of gender of decision-maker

Category	Frequency
Male	36
Female	3
Both	7
None	17

Significance: $p=.000$
Significant at 5 percent level of significance, $df = 3$

5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that preference for the male gender was exhibited in all the four variables used to measure gender preference. This establishes the undisputed dominance of males in advertisements for financial services in India. Past research has indicated that advertisements mirror facts (Courtney and Whipple, 1983). It can thus be said that the findings of the current research are more likely an expression of the existing gender discrimination in the Indian society.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with expectations, in advertisements for financial services there exists a gender asymmetry, which favours men. *Advertisers' bias towards the male gender in this gender neutral category is a matter of concern, as it establishes that women are inappropriate consumers/decision makers where purchase of financial services is concerned.* This implication may manifest itself in two ways.

Firstly, this may have in some way contributed to the low involvement of women in decision making regarding financial matters in Indian households. Women in the Indian society do not have much say in important decisions concerning the household³ and such representations may further add to it. Silverstein and Silverstein (1974) are of the view that an improper depiction of women in advertisements can prove damaging to the society since it can perpetuate misconceptions. Advertisers thus need to consider what kind of misconceptions they are perpetuating by representing men as role models in advertisements for financial services. Are they not indicating that women are unsuitable for taking decisions regarding purchase of financial services?

Secondly, it can have an adverse impact on the purchase intentions of the women who are involved in decisions pertaining to purchase of financial services. Kim and Lowry (2005) indicate that a sexist portrayal of women (where women and men are shown as not having equal rights) can discourage purchase of the advertised product. An undue focus on the male gender may thus have adverse consequences for marketers since it might fail to generate a positive response from women.

It is thus in the interest of society and marketers both to represent women and men in equal roles in advertisements. This can be achieved by symmetrical gender representations or by blending the two genders in a way so that no gender dominates. Therefore, when trying to attempt self-regulation in advertising, gender preference is an important factor to be considered by advertisers and marketers. This can help them serve desirable social and commercial purposes.

Notes

1. Financial services advertising in the current study includes banking and insurance advertising.
2. TAM is one of the two organisations that provide television ratings in India. They do so by physically collecting the data. They release this data weekly. Off late, their ratings have become quite popular and also vital for most media plans.
3. As cited in the report titled ‘Women and Men in India, 2010’ issued by the Central Statistical Office of the Government of India in 2010.

References

- Browne, B. A. (1998), "Gender stereotypes in advertising on children's television in the 1990s: A cross-national analysis", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 27, No. 4, pp. 9-46.
- Chatterji, S. A. (2005), "How advertisements exploit women", available at: <http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.jsp?articleId=281474976719311> (accessed 18 July 2011).
- Childs, N. M. and Maher, J. K. (2003), "Gender in food advertising to children: Boys eat first", *British Food Journal*, Vol. 105, No.7, pp. 408-419.
- Coltrane, S. and Messineo, M. (2000), "The perpetuation of subtle prejudice: Race and gender Imagery in 1990s television advertising", *Sex Roles*, Vol. 42, Nos. 5-6, pp. 363-389.
- Courtney, A. and Whipple, T. (1983), "Sex stereotyping in advertising", *Journal of Communication Research*, Vol. 1, pp. 67-89.
- Dang, P. J. and Vohra, N. (2003), "Portrayal of men and women in television advertising", available at: <http://www.termpaperslab.com/term-papers/61002.html> (accessed 18 July 2011).
- Foley, J. P. (1997), "Ethics in advertising: a report from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 220-231.
- Fullerton, J. A. and Kendrick, A. (2000), "Portrayal of men and women in US Spanish language television commercials", *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 1, pp. 128-142.
- Furnham, A., Mak, T. and Tanidjojo, L. (2000), "An Asian perspective on the portrayal of men and women in television advertisements: Studies from Hong Kong and Indonesian television", *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 30, No. 11, pp. 2341-2364.
- Graves, S. B. (1999), "Television and prejudice reduction: When does television as a vicarious experience make a difference?", *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 55, pp. 707-727.
- Hyman, M. R., Tansey, R. and Clark, J. W. (1994), "Research on advertising ethics: Past, present and future", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 23, No. 3, pp. 59-69.
- Kim, K. and Lowry, D.T. (2005), "Television commercials as a lagging social indicator: gender role stereotypes in Korean television advertising", *Sex Roles*, Vol. 53, pp. 901-910.
- Kolbe, R. H. and Burnett, M.S. (1991), "Content-analysis research: An examination of applications with directives for improving research reliability and objectivity", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 18, No. 3, pp. 243-250.
- Lee, C. W. (2004), "Gender role stereotyping in television commercials: The case of Singapore", *Advertising and Society Review*, Vol. 5, Issue 3, pp. 15-27.
- Mayne, I. (2000), "The inescapable images: Gender and advertising", *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol. 19, No. 2/3/4, pp. 56-61.
- Perreault, W. D. and Leigh, L. E. (1989), "Reliability of nominal data based on qualitative judgments", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 26, pp. 135-148.
- Pollay, R. W. (2000), "The distorted mirror: Reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising", *Advertising and Society Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 16-29.
- Radhakrishnan, C. (2001), "The image of women on Indian television, 2001", available at: <http://www.isiswomen.org/pub/wia/wia101/media.html> (accessed 19 July 2010).
- Royo-Vela, M., Aldas-Manzano, J. Kuster-Boluda, I. and Vila-Lopez, N. (2007), "Gender role portrayals and sexism in Spanish magazines", *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 633-652.
- Schaffter, S. J. (2006), *Privileging the Privileged: Gender in Indian Advertising*, Promilla & Co., Publishers in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi and Chicago.
- Schneider, K. C. and Schneider, S. B. (1979), "Trends in sex roles in television commercials", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 43, pp. 79 – 84.
- Sharpe, S. (1976), *Just Like a Girl*, Pandora, London.
- Silverstein, A. J. and Silverstein, R. (1974), "The portrayal of women in television advertising", *Federal Communications Bar Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 71-93.
- Spender, D. (1980), *Man Made Language*, Pandora, London.
- Stern, B. B. and Taylor, C. R. (1997), "Asian-Americans: Television advertising and the 'model minority' stereotype", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 47-60.
- Tuchman, G. (1979), "Women's depiction by the mass media: Review essay", *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 528-542.
- Verna, M.E. (1975), "The female image in children's TV commercials", *Journal of Broadcasting*, Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 301-309.