

Investigating Gender-Based Stereotypes in Advertisement Landscape: A Multimodal Analysis of an Indian Town

Debraj Gogoi | ORCID: 0000-0003-3594-4688

PhD Scholar, Humanities and Social Sciences Department,
Indian Institute of Technology Patna, Patna, Bihar, India
debraj.1495@gmail.com

Sweta Sinha | ORCID: 0000-0001-5524-5927

Associate Professor, Humanities and Social Sciences Department,
Indian Institute of Technology Patna, Patna, Bihar, India
apna1982@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the prevalence of gender stereotypes in outdoor advertising within an Indian satellite town, focusing on the portrayal of women and men in stereotypical gender roles. Images of outdoor advertisements were collected from the busy streets and subjected to purposive sampling for analysis. The analysis was done with critical discourse analysis and multimodal discourse analysis. The results reveal a clear endorsement of men in powerful and high-status positions, while women are consistently depicted as objects and confined to traditional roles as homemakers. The purpose of this study is to emphasize the importance of addressing gender issues, not only for cultural understanding but also for recognizing the pervasive influence of gender-based social conditioning, which undermines the foundation of an equitable society.

Keywords

advertisement landscapes – critical discourse analysis – gender – South Asia – multimodality – gender stereotypes

1 Introduction

Stereotypes are common perceptions or assumptions about a specific group of people that are often overly simplified, inaccurate, and based on incomplete information. These beliefs can be widespread and are typically formed without a complete understanding of the individuals within the group. Stereotypes are not solely the result of an individual's cognitive processes but are also created and reinforced by the broader social and collective context, which serve an ideological purpose by rationalizing and validating the existing social and power dynamics within a society (Augoustinos and Walker 1998). According to Lipmann (1922), a stereotype is a fixed, overgeneralized belief about a particular class or group of people. They are a set of traits that are considered suitable for describing a group of individuals (Vinacke 1957). They have significant effects because they are widely shared among large groups of people in society (Beukeboom and Burgers 2019). They arise from our natural tendency to simplify the complex social world by sorting people into categories. Stereotypes serve as mental frameworks that help us process and remember information about social groups (Augoustinos and Walker 1998). They act as generalizations about a group and its members that naturally emerge from this categorization process. Stereotyping is the cognitive process of categorizing individual components based on broader, overarching properties (Stangor and Lange 1994). Typically described as collections of assumptions regarding the qualities, traits, and conduct of individuals who belong to particular categories (Ashmore and Del Boca 1981), stereotypes influence the judgments of individuals (Biernat and Sesko 2018). Social categorization and stereotyping can result in a preference for one's own group, known as ingroup favoritism, and a bias against other groups, known as outgroup bias (Tajfel 1981). Stereotypes are social frameworks based on theoretical assumptions and durable structures of knowledge that exist in our memory (Augoustinos and Walker 1998). They possess internal characteristics that aid in their organization and are typically acquired by individuals during their formative years. Stereotypes create expectations about how individuals will behave which frequently become a reality through self-fulfilling prophecies (Jussim 1986). Men and women often exhibit variations in their behavior and life decisions that stem

from divergences in their inclination toward prioritizing either agency or care (Ellemers 2018).

Gender is regarded as a crucial aspect in the process of forming an impression of others. Eisend (2010) highlights that when the focus is on the attributes that differentiate the genders, we are dealing with gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes, specifically, are those that associate specific characteristics and behaviors with individuals based on their biological sex. The act of categorizing unfamiliar people based on their gender occurs spontaneously and unconsciously in both children and adults, regardless of whether it is pertinent to the situation or provides any useful information (Ito and Urland 2003; Bennett et al. 2000). Gender stereotypes provide an oversimplified understanding of the world and exaggerate the imagined implications of labeling people based on their gender. Here, women and men are seen as opposites. Men are often considered agentic, having traits such as aggression, adventure, and dominance, whereas women are communal and warm, having traits such as nurturing and caregiving (Biernat and Sesko 2018; Kahalon, Shnabel and Becker 2018; Eagly 1987). This coincides with the fact that certain occupations, like law enforcement, have a higher proportion of men compared to women, while others, such as nursing, have a higher proportion of women than men (Eagly and Wood 2012; Jarman, Blackburn and Racko 2012). Based on these traits, society has a set of predefined roles for each gender and expects individuals to perform specific actions according to their gender. With this in mind, social role theory proposes that people are taught specific roles and behaviors based on their gender, which are influenced by societal expectations and norms (Eagly 1987). Apart from gender, social roles have been observed to influence the regulation of hormones, self-control, and social behavior, leading to varying patterns of thoughts, emotions, and actions in males and females (Eagly and Wood 2012). Studies suggest that variations in gender traits emerge and evolve throughout an individual's lifetime because of the socialization and educational experiences that boys and girls receive (Ellemers 2018). Observing the behavior of males and females leads people to form gender role beliefs, which in turn create a common perception that each gender possesses specific qualities that make them well-suited for the societal roles associated with their gender (Eagly and Wood 2012). These behaviors, be they similar or different for the sexes, are themselves influenced by gender roles (Eagly and Wood 2012). Advertisements mirror such prevailing cultural patterns (Kordrostami and Lacznia 2022) and even perpetuate them.

According to a UNICEF report published in 2021, advertisements in India reinforce harmful gender roles that shape the lives of girls and women in the country (Geneva Davis Institute on Gender in Media and UNICEF 2021).

The report even recommends that content creators drive an advertisement landscape showcasing a more equitable and sensitive marketing strategy. Advertisements are crucial marketing tools especially designed to positively impact the sale of a product. The underlying idea is to understand the behavior pattern of the target consumers by connecting them to their cognitive processes at different levels. Advertisements are a part of visual communications. Since ancient times, visual communication has been used to convey messages through cave paintings, pictographic scripts, sculptures, and epigraphy (Košir and Lakshminarayanan 2023). Advertisements can be divided into various types: advertisements broadcasted through digital platforms like television and the internet, advertisements through print media such as newspapers and magazines, and outdoor advertisements such as billboards and posters. Unlike advertising in other media, outdoor advertising stands out among all other forms of advertising because it is exhibited all over public space, making it difficult for a person to avoid exposure (Rosewarne 2005). They not only portray humans in stereotypical roles but also make explicit use of gendered phrases like *men at work* indicating that certain professions are reserved for a specific gender. The linguistic landscape perpetuates gender stereotypes by using images and representations reinforcing gender roles and expectations.

The subsequent paragraph seeks to offer a comprehensive review of prior research on advertising practices and gender stereotypes within various cultural settings, presenting diverse viewpoints and insights derived from global studies. Ojiakor-Umenze, Onebunne and Ekezie (2019) found that in Nigerian billboard advertisements, men are never featured alone in products related to personal care, instead, women dressed in seductive clothes were added along with the men. In their study, Edegoh, Asemah and Okpanachi (2013), observed that women are under-represented in the advertisements. The images and choice of words used in the advertisements are gender discriminatory. It is evident that women are featured more than men in outdoor advertisements (Ojiakor-Umenze, Onebunne and Ekezie 2019; Rosewarne 2005). The advertisements focus more on the model's appearance than the product (Rosewarne 2005). The way women are portrayed in advertising is crucial because it reflects and suggests the traditional roles women are destined to perform in society (Kordrostami and Lacznik 2022). This leads to the gendering of public space. Romera (2014) studied the posters hung in the educational institutions in Palma, Spain, and investigated how gender stereotypes are conveyed in the public space of higher educational institutions. Using a multimodal perspective, the author found that gender stereotypes continue to be an effective tool for promoting educational events and products, particularly in private advertising.

Gender segregation in advertisements has been present for a very long time. According to Cheryan et al. (2017), there are very few girls or women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) because these fields are considered male-dominated and replete with masculine culture. This reality is reflected in the advertisements.

In their study of Saudi Arabian society, Siddiqui and Alahmadi (2021) observed that advertisements are highly gender-segregated and demonstrate that typical gender stereotypes. Their survey found that people like to see male models in specific advertisements, such as those for men's personal care products, sporting equipment, automobiles, and cigarettes, rather than female models. On the other hand, Saudi people want female models to be present only in advertisements for cosmetics, baby care products, and personal care for women. Rubio (2018) observed the meaning potential of pictures in enacting or developing gender stereotypes in a corpus of modern British TV advertising. The findings implied that women are presented in non-remunerated setups, in home situations, and in the company of their children, contrary to the representation of men. Even when men are portrayed in family settings, they are shown in passive roles, while women are actively portrayed as mothers in the company of their children. When presented in remunerative setups, the advertisements stress women's conversational skills as better at interacting with customers and patients. At the same time, men are shown in the role of professionals in financial and medical settings.

According to one study, using female empowerment in advertisements results in less resistance to the message inside the advertisement and more favorable sentiments toward the advertisement itself among female audiences (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017). "Femvertising" is advertising that defies the stereotypical representation of women in advertisements by placing them in positions of authority (Åkestam, Rosengren, and Dahlen 2017). Nevertheless, studies have showed that in Indian TV advertisements women are rarely portrayed as professional career women with lives and interests outside the house (Malhotra and Rogers 2000). Additionally, women are portrayed as young and attractive in Indian TV commercials, and they are rarely seen having professional standing on par with males (Das and Sharma 2017). Indians are obsessed with long hair and fair skin, which is visible in many Indian advertisements broadcasted on television. Long hair and femininity go hand in hand, which is a sign of a good woman, whereas short-haired women are presented as tomboys, these trends have been popularized by the movie and television industry. Media agencies and content creators have not been sensitive to the aftermath of such biased representation. In most TV

commercials related to deodorants, perfumes, and shaving creams for men, women are shown dressed in significantly less clothing and giving seductive signs (Johnson and Kayal 2014). The media depict these women as commodities and objects of sexual desire, further promoting sexism through advertisements. It has also been revealed that audiences did not feel uncomfortable watching when women were portrayed as sexual objects in these advertisements (Das and Sharma 2017).

While brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and advertisement attitudes are undoubtedly important to most marketers, Åkestam et al. (2021) correctly point out that these factors do not fully capture the potential effects of stereotype depictions. The study has already initiated a discussion on the stereotypical characteristic of advertisements. Deaux and Lewis (1984) categorize gender stereotypes as those concerning physical characteristics, role behaviors, occupational status, or personality traits. Advertisements usually portray stereotypes as a combination of the dimensions listed above. The portrayals are often influenced by sociocultural practices and change over time.

1.1 *Gaps and Motivation*

Apart from certain explicit reasons like a lapse in law and order, several implicit factors have gradually paved the way for serious crimes against women, especially in South Asia. This study intends to establish the biased and stereotypical portrayal of women in the advertisement landscape as one factor that normalizes women's subordinate or weak status, often objectifying their bodies for a certain standard of beauty in a typical South Asian social setting. This normalization has an intense bearing on how society perceives them, which is mostly detrimental in nature. The current study attempts to empirically establish whether the advertisement landscape in one of the most populated states of India, Bihar, is biased and stereotypical.

Hindi and Hindustani (Urdu-influenced Hindi variety) are gendered languages (Begum and Sinha 2018; Valentine 1983). This gendered nature extends to the linguistic landscape, perpetuating its gender effect in subtle ways, and leading to a high probability that the advertisement landscape in Hindi-speaking regions is likewise gendered. It would be worthwhile to investigate this situation. Patna, a metropolitan and the capital city of Bihar, has a population that is 69.41% Hindi-speaking (GoI Census 2011¹), and for this reason, was chosen as the location for the current study. The study focuses on

1 <https://new.census.gov.in/nada/index.php/catalog/10236> (Retrieved: December, 2023).

the outdoor advertisements of Patna. As already discussed, outdoor advertising is distinctive in its capacity to prevent individuals from evading exposure irrespective of age, gender, caste, class, or ethnicity. These advertisements are mainly placed in public places, which function as influential arenas for spreading and reinforcing ideologies (Romera 2014). They accomplish extensive outreach with minimal expense by utilizing consistent and influential communication that goes beyond individual preferences and intrudes into private spheres of interaction (Romera 2014). Existing literature in the Indian context has predominantly concentrated on representation of women within television and print media. The primary rationale for centering this study on the outdoor medium is because it has not received significant attention and lacks societal recognition despite being widely visible to audiences (Rosewarne 2009).

This study attempts to investigate the various social stereotypes found in the outdoor advertisements of Patna, Bihar (Figure 1), the third-largest state



FIGURE 1 Map of Patna district of Bihar highlighted in red²

² https://sat.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E1%B1%A8%E1%B1%AE%E1%B1%AB:Bihar_district_location_map_Patna.svg (Retrieved: January, 2024).

by population in India (Alakshendra 2019). Bihar is a linguistically diverse state where various languages, including Hindi, Urdu, Magahi, Bajjika, Angika, Bhojpuri, and Santali, are primarily spoken (Begum and Sinha 2021). The Bihar Official Language Act of 1950 recognized Hindi as the official language of the state (Brass 1994; Begum and Sinha 2021). Hindi is also the official language of India, alongside English as the associate official language (Bhatia 2008, 121-122). In addition, Hindi serves as a regional language in the states within the 'Hindi-Belt' (Bhatia 2008, 121-122), leading many speakers to consider Hindi as their mother tongue. This linguistic diversity of Bihar contributes to its dynamic environment, attracting a significant influx of individuals from across the country for education and work, and vice-versa. Notably, Patna is home to some important government educational institutions for higher education and is, therefore, a melting pot for students and teaching staff from various regions of India. This situation is like other metropolitan and state capital cities of India. The multilingual situation of India facilitates insights about speakers in different parts of the country.

1.2 *Objectives and Research Questions*

The primary objective of the study is to traverse through the approaches in which gender roles are stereotyped in outdoor advertisements. It has already been stated that advertisements play a significant role by subconsciously influencing the mind of not just the target audience but all those who are exposed to them. Therefore, aligning with the motivation of the study, it attempts to understand and identify the dimensions of gender stereotypes present in outdoor advertisements.

From the objective mentioned above, this study intends to answer the following research questions:

- (1) Is the advertisement landscape in the Hindi-dominant region gendered?
- (2) How are gender stereotypes encoded in the advertisements?

For lucid comprehension, the current study is structured as following: Section 1 has already introduced the domain of the current research along with highlighting the gaps, objectives, and the relevant literature. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework together with a detailed account of the methodology employed in this investigation. Section 3 presents the findings before a comprehensive discussion of the results is given in Section 4. Section 5 concludes the study reiterating its relevance and future implications. This section also provides the limitations of the current study.

2 Methodology

2.1 *Theoretical Framework*

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the advertisements based on gender and is chiefly dependent on two theoretical frameworks: Fairclough's (1993) 3D model of critical discourse analysis, and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) multimodal analysis.

Fairclough's model has three dimensions. The first dimension is the Text, which includes speech, writing, images, or a mixture of all three forms. The second dimension is Discursive Practice. It involves the production or constitution of text. Here, the analysis takes place at the textual level and looks at how the text and images are presented in the advertisements, thereby shedding light on the advertisement producers' motives. The third dimension is Social Practice. It involves the standards of society.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) define multimodality as employing multiple semiotic modes in designing a semiotic product or event. Advertisement-makers use various communicative methods (e.g., different types of fonts and vivid colors in outdoor advertisements) because they are eye-catching and use the gaze and gesture of the represented participants, which also plays an integral role. The texts are generally short slogans alongside a figure representing the product. The advertisements must attract the viewers in a single glance. This becomes possible only when the viewers can analyze the advertisements at a glance. Hence, the color schema, font size, and proportion of texts and images in terms of size, etc., make for non-verbal modes, which make the advertisements attractive and easy to process according to desired motivations. These two theoretical models are being employed for the analysis of data, thereby understanding the prevailing gender stereotypes in the Eastern Indian society.

2.2 *Data Collection*

Aligning with the objectives and the research questions, images of outdoor advertisements ($n = 118$), including shop signs, posters, billboards, and wall-painted advertisements, have been collected from the busy commercial areas of Patna. Signs that featured the same advertisement were excluded from the study. These advertisements were then coded by the three coders (one female and two males; mean age = 30.33 years) based on whether the advertisements were stereotypical or not. The three coders are native speakers of Hindi. Afterward, content analysis of the images was done using the theories of Fairclough's (1993) 3D model of critical discourse analysis, and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) multimodality, as already discussed in section 2.1.

3 Data Analysis

When examining advertisements, it is crucial to consider both the textual and visual components as they work together to convey the message. The text in advertisements consists of brand names and slogans associated with the products being promoted. Alongside the text, there are visual design elements to analyze, including font sizes and colors. The inclusion of human-like images and a consistent color scheme throughout the visuals, including the background, further contribute to the overall impact of the advertisement. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis should consider both the textual and visual aspects simultaneously. With respect to the text, only the slogans underwent coding.

3.1 *Inter-Coder Reliability*

All 118 advertisements were coded to determine whether the advertisements are stereotypical according to guidelines provided to the coders. The guidelines were prepared by the authors based on the literature (see Verhellen, Dens, and Pelsmacker 2016).

The present study employed intercoder reliability to determine whether the advertisements portrayed stereotypical content. The three coders were instructed to follow a two-class ($\kappa = 2$; Stereotypical/Not Stereotypical) annotation schema. Prior to the actual annotation, the coders annotated a sample of 20 images. Their responses were evaluated for consistency using Fleiss' Kappa score (Fleiss 1971), a statistical metric designed to assess the reliability of agreement when there are more than two coders. Kappa (κ) is calculated by the following expression:

$$\kappa = \frac{p_o - p_e}{1 - p_e}$$

Here, p_o is the observed agreement and p_e is the expected agreement.

The intercoder reliability report finds that majority of the advertisements were found to be stereotypical in nature. The Fleiss Kappa score indicates substantial agreement among the three raters and suggests that there is some degree of consensus in their ratings, with $\kappa = .67$.

3.2 *Content Analysis of the Advertisements*

The following section is organized based on identified themes within the scrutinized advertisements to improve readability and understanding of the analysis. The analysis revealed several prominent themes, including depiction of men in power for energy-related products, representation of men in

remunerative occupations and women in less remunerative roles, exclusive portrayal of women as mothers and housewives, portrayal of men and women in different physical appearances, and a few advertisements portraying women's empowerment. Each theme will undergo a thorough examination to elucidate the nuanced aspects and implications inherent in the advertisements.

3.2.1 Advertisements Portraying Men in Power and Energy-Related Products

A battery is a product utilized for generating power and electricity, often serving as an alternative to direct current and commonly employed in household and automotive applications. It acts as a source of energy. Advertisements promoting batteries typically employ male models in various poses. Figure 2 portrays a model with a serious expression, making direct eye contact with his hands crossed. In Figure 3, the model is shown making a fist pump gesture, symbolizing triumph, while in Figure 4, the model's fist is pressed against the chest, implying trust. These poses convey masculine characteristics. Additionally, the choice of brand plays a significant role. In Figure 2, the brand name Livguard correlates with the model's crossed arms, suggesting



FIGURE 2 Livguard Battery (Power and energy)



FIGURE 3 Leader Battery (Power, durability, and dependability)

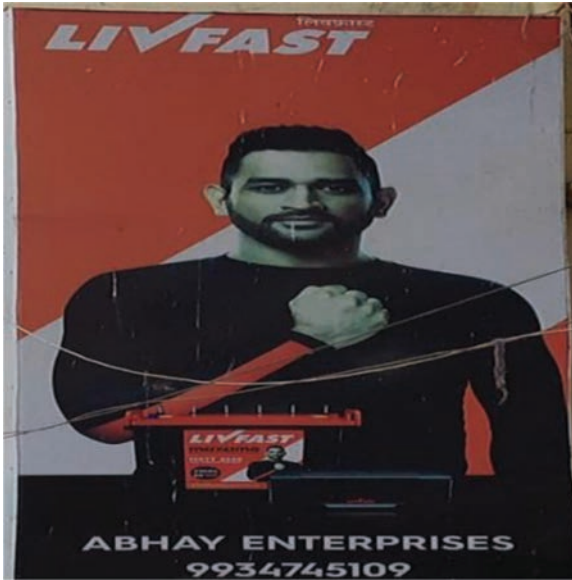


FIGURE 4 Livfast Battery (Power and energy)

defensiveness or an argumentative stance. In another advertisement featuring the brand name Leader, the model's fist pump gesture signifies victory. The advertisement conveys a message that by purchasing the product, customers are placing their trust in the brand, implying a problem-free experience under the guidance of a reliable *leader*.

The advertisement in Figure 4, with the model's hand gesture towards the chest, signifies trust, aiming to assure customers of the product's reliability. Only one advertisement (Figure 5: Luminous battery) depicts the model smiling,

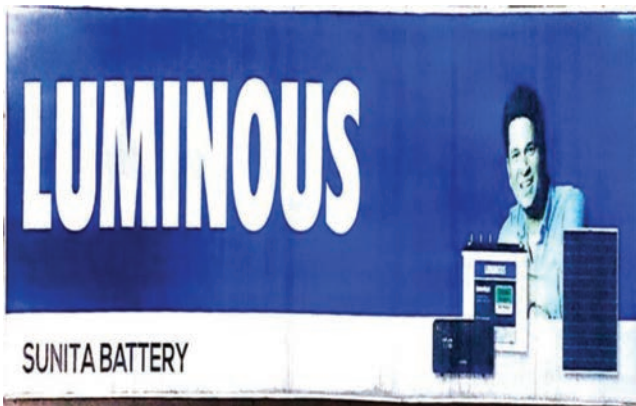


FIGURE 5 Luminous Battery (Power and energy)

symbolizing brightness and positivity. Additionally, two advertisements feature slogans like *energy unlimited* and *energy to perform*, aligning with the brand's name. The headline in Figure 3, *aapko mujh pe bhorosa hai aur mujhe leader pe*, which roughly translates as 'you have faith in me and I have faith in Leader,' further reinforces the association of energetic features and leadership qualities with the male models, complemented by words like 'energy' and 'leader' in the slogans.

In terms of color combinations, black and red are the prominent colors used in the advertisements for batteries, as these colors denote power and energy (Singh and Srivastava 2011). Though in one advertisement, the background is blue, here, blue is used to denote brightness.

3.2.2 Advertisements Portraying Models in Remunerative and Non-Remunerative Occupations

Advertisements often reinforce stereotypical gender roles in the portrayal of men and women in occupational fields. Men are typically depicted in the advertisements here in high-paying job positions, such as an engineer, pilot, chef, soldier, manager in an office, and architect, as seen in advertisements (Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12). The male models in these advertisements are dressed in professional attire, emphasizing their occupation as remunerative. Cement, associated with construction and foundational structures, further strengthens the notion that men play a more prominent societal role.

The advertisements also feature slogans aligning with the male models and their respective products. For instance, Figure 6 includes the slogan *The Engineer's Choice* and *desh ka no.1 cement*, meaning 'the country's number one cement.' The Star Cement advertisement (Figure 8) uses slogans like *solid setting* and *hai tayar hum*, meaning 'we are ready.' Figure 7 showcases the slogan *Dalmia DSP, har ghar ka dhalai expert*, which roughly translates to



FIGURE 6 UltraTech Cement (Engineer, employment)



FIGURE 7 Dalmia Cement (Engineer, employment)

‘Dalmia DSP is the expert in rendering each and every house.’ The SBI slogan reads as *the banker to every Indian* (Figure 10). These phrases and words such as *engineer’s choice*, *no. 1*, *banker*, *expert*, *solid setting*, and *being ready* are used in association with the products. Even though the slogans themselves do not explicitly denote any specific gender, the exclusive use of male models in the advertisements associates these words and phrases with men, thereby perpetuating gender stereotypes.

In contrast, women are often depicted in advertisements promoting paint products, which are commonly associated with home aesthetics (Figure 13



FIGURE 8 Star Cement (Pilot, employment)



FIGURE 9 Shahi Darbar (Chef, employment)



FIGURE 10 SBI (Employment)

and Figure 14). The portrayal of women in these advertisements implies a narrow association between women and beauty, thereby reinforcing gender stereotypes. Moreover, women featured in paint advertisements are often dressed in casual attire that does not suggest high-status or remunerative positions. Notably, one advertisement explicitly portrays a woman as a housewife, further perpetuating traditional gender roles.

Figure 15 represents an advertisement for a sweets shop named Sarvodaya Ghee Bhandar Ebam Dry Fruits (Classified Butter Store and Dry Fruits), where women are depicted cooking in a domestic kitchen setting. While both men and women are shown engaged in cooking activities in these advertisements, men are typically portrayed in professional settings and women in non-professional contexts. These depictions reinforce the notion that women's participation in the culinary domain is limited to the domestic sphere, while men are associated with professional culinary roles.



FIGURE 11 Fight or Flight (Soldier, employment)



FIGURE 12 Architect (Employment)

Additionally, the consistent portrayal of women in these paint and sweet shop advertisements as smiling and happy suggests a reinforcement of contentment with their assigned roles. This perpetuates the notion that women find satisfaction primarily in traditional, non-remunerative positions. It is crucial to emphasize that professions such as engineering and piloting are not restricted to any gender; both women and men can excel in these fields. However, when advertisements featuring male models use terms like *engineer* and *expert* to convey professional prowess, it inadvertently reinforces the perception of male dominance within these occupational domains. This narrative contributes to the underrepresentation of girls in engineering institutions, leading to fewer females pursuing careers as engineers and pilots. These gender-biased portrayals in advertisements have significant consequences, as they perpetuate societal beliefs and stereotypes, reinforcing



FIGURE 13 Johnson Paints (Housewife)



FIGURE 14 Kamdhenu Paints (Youth)

the limited presence of women in certain professions and perpetuating gender inequality in our society.

An advertisement (Figure 16) promoting a coaching institute for higher education shows a noticeable depiction of two boys and only one girl. This representation reflects the existing gender disparity observed in higher educational institutions, particularly in the STEM field, where there is a significant imbalance in the male-to-female ratio. One contributing factor for this long-standing discrepancy is the belief held by parents that investing in their daughters' education yields lower financial returns compared to their sons, as they anticipate that most of the benefits will be enjoyed by girls' future in-laws (Kingdon 2002). Furthermore, the advertisement reinforces gender stereotypes by assigning specific colors based on gender, with the boys dressed in blue shirts and the girl portrayed in a pink shirt. This color differentiation perpetuates the notion that pink is a feminine color. Given that the advertisement targets the school-going population, who are highly conscious of their appearances and clothing choices, such visual cues can profoundly influence their color preferences.



FIGURE 15 Sarvodaya Ghee Bhandar (Housewife/mother)



FIGURE 16 Coaching Centre (Students)

3.2.3 Advertisements Portraying Women as Mothers and Housewives

Advertisements often depict women in specific roles, predominantly focused on purchasing or endorsing products related to kitchen, household, and personal care items. For instance, one advertisement features a woman and a young girl examining an item in a supermarket (Figure 17), and four other advertisements portray women as housewives promoting food and cleaning



FIGURE 17 Consumer Awareness (Housewife/mother)



FIGURE 18 Wheel (Housewife/household)

products. Although one advertisement for detergent (Figure 18) includes a man in the image, the entire process of clothes cleaning is carried out solely by the woman, suggesting the man's presence is optional in the advertisement. According to Goffman (1987), when men and women are portrayed together, men usually assume leading roles, but this dynamic is reversed in a family settings, child care, and the performance of household chores, where men are either absent or portrayed in secondary roles.

These advertisements are accompanied by slogans emphasizing certain messages. For example, slogans like *Samajdari dikhao dekh ke asli maggi hi lao* (be wise and buy authentic Maggi only) (Figure 19), and *swad ki master chabi ... jab apke hath* (the master key of taste ... in your hand) (Figure 20) are used in food-related advertisements. In cleaning product advertisements, slogans such as *mel aur badbu nikale, rakhe kapde fresh* (remove dirt and odors, keep clothes fresh) (Figure 18) and *ek hi irada quality ki wada* (only one intention, promise of quality) (Figure 21) are employed. Additionally, slogans like *pehle istemal kare phir biswas kare* (use it first, then trust it later) (Figure 21) are utilized. These slogans specifically target women, appealing to their wisdom, trust, and expertise as housewives or mothers in cooking and household matters.



FIGURE 19 Maggi (Housewife/household)



FIGURE 20 Pusp Spice (Housewife/household)

3.2.4 Advertisements using Women as Props in Hair and Skin Care Products

Advertisements promoting body care products, such as oils, ointments, and moisturizers, predominantly feature young female models aged 24 to 29, often with fair skin complexion. It is worth noting that male models are rarely used for promoting these products, despite both genders utilizing hair oil, moisturizers, and shampoos. The slogans accompanying these advertisements further reinforce beauty ideals with language such as, *bal 98% tak kam tute, dikhe jyada*, which roughly translates as 'hair fall will decrease by 98% and will become more vibrant' (Figure 22), and *rukhi sakht twacha komal banaye* (dry, rough skin becomes soft) (Figure 23). Additionally, an advertisement for a beauty salon (Figure 24) catering to both brides and grooms, along with their families, prominently displays an image of a young girl dressed as a bride. Despite serving both genders, the advertisement focuses solely on the female representation, perpetuating gender stereotypes and emphasizing the importance of a bride's appearance.



FIGURE 21 Ghari (Housewife/household)

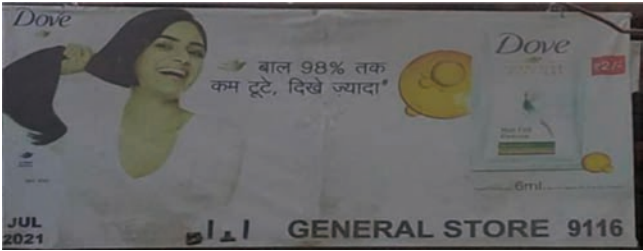


FIGURE 22 Dove (Hair care)

These advertisements consistently convey the message that female beauty is of utmost importance in our society, while male models are rarely utilized for beauty products and jewelry products. The imagery consistently portrays women with fair skin tone, even though the average skin tone of an Indian person is typically brown. This association of beauty with fairness leads to feelings of inferiority among many girls and women who do not possess a fair skin complexion.

3.2.5 Advertisements Portraying Men and Women in Different Physical Appearances

Advertisers frequently employ gender stereotypes in terms of physical attributes, gaze patterns, and gestures as observed in the data. As Goffman (1987) stated, men are commonly portrayed as exhibiting seriousness in advertisements, while women are often portrayed as smiling (a sign of inferiority), gently touching themselves, and withdrawing their attention by lowering their head. Figures 25 and 26 portray male models with muscular physiques, whereas Figures 27, 28, and 29 showcase female models with fair



FIGURE 23 Vaseline (Skin care)



FIGURE 24 The Jawed Habib Salon (Make-up)

skin and slender bodies. Moreover, Figures 27 and 28 presents the female models in childlike poses. The male models on the other hand, are portrayed as serious, with their head held high, holding the product with a firm grip in the advertisements (Figures 25 and 26). Specifically, advertisements featuring male models emphasize strength with well-developed and trained bodies, while female models are mostly depicted as skinny and lightweight, but also as hyperfeminine and sexually appealing (Islentyeva and Zimmermann 2023).

3.2.6 Advertisements Featuring Women in Higher Studies and Technology

A few advertisements exemplify femvertising in that they are positioned in contrast to the prevailing portrayals of men as breadwinners and technology users. Notably, an Indian Bank advertisement features a female student, thereby advocating for female education and emphasizing its importance for a promising future, despite its primary focus on education loans (Figure 30). Similarly, a PhonePe advertisement showcasing a female model (Figure 31) and



FIGURE 25 Pepsi (Youth, energy, masculinity)



FIGURE 26 Sprite (Youth, masculinity)

another depicting a female engineer challenge traditional gender roles often observed in advertising (Figure 32), where male figures commonly represent engineers and other professionals. Additionally, a scholarship program advertisement targeting STEM students uses a female model, thereby actively encouraging women to pursue advanced studies in STEM fields (Figure 33). These instances collectively represent a departure from conventional gender representations in advertising and align with the concept of femvertising by promoting female empowerment and breaking stereotypical roles.

4 Discussion

In the analysis section, content analysis of the advertisements was done using Norman Fairclough’s (1993) 3D model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) multimodal discourse analysis.

It has been found that shop owners, manufacturers, and businesses utilize specific genders to popularize their products, associating specific gender roles with their products. Biernat and Sesko (2018) state that stereotypes function



FIGURE 27 Litchi (Youth, femininity)



FIGURE 28 CocaCola (Youth, skinny, femininity)

as a set of expectations that enable us to anticipate and make predictions about our social surroundings, that is they affect perception and memory of individuals. In certain product advertisements, there may not be a direct correlation between the product and the model featured in the advertisement. In India, a significant proportion of both female (74%) and male (70%) consumers feel that advertising misrepresents their true selves.³ Advertisers strive to create a consistent stereotypical image by linking various gender roles with their products. The intention is to prompt viewers to conform to the gender messages conveyed in the advertisements. Previous studies have shown that gender stereotypes can influence memory, causing individuals to recall and alter information in a manner that aligns with gender-based preconceptions (Biernat and Sesko 2018).

3 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/positive-gender-portrayal-in-advertising-lead-to-more-sales-study/articleshow/90964926.cms> (Retrieved June 2022).



FIGURE 29 Nescafe (Youth, femininity)

Furthermore, it has been observed that certain slogans used in advertisements subtly reinforce gender stereotypes. For instance, in Figure 3, the product’s slogan contains the word *Leader* alongside an image of a man, implying that men are leaders. Similarly, Figures 2, 3, and 6 use words such as energy, engineer, and no.1 in conjunction with images of men, perpetuating gender stereotypes by associating them with qualities like leadership, energy,



FIGURE 30 Indian Bank (Female empowerment)



FIGURE 31 PhonePe (Female promoting technology)

and superiority. These words trigger mental associations with images of men. Interestingly, none of the advertisements were found to portray women in such roles of power and energy.

On the other hand, Figures 17, 19, and 20 present slogans targeting the female gender. These advertisements urge women to be wise and sensible in their purchasing decisions (Figures 17 and 19) and portray a woman as expert in meal preparation (Figure 20). Through these images, women are shown

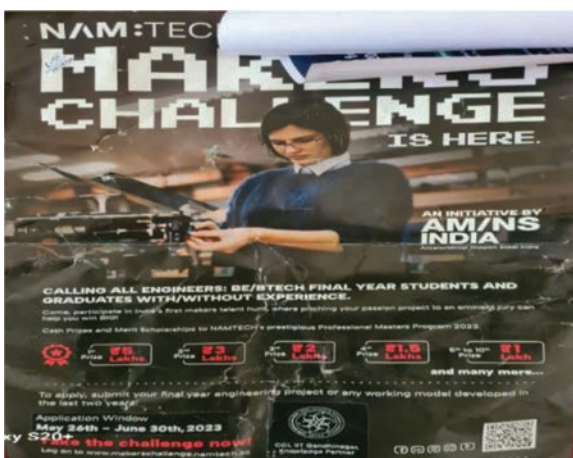


FIGURE 32 Tech Fest (Female empowerment)



FIGURE 33 Scholarship advertisement (Female empowerment)

in subordinate roles within society. The slogans suggest that women are less intelligent, lack wisdom, are confined to domestic spaces, and are primarily responsible for household duties. Such slogans imply that women are incapable of making firm decisions. Studies have shown that men are applauded for portraying agentic traits, whereas the same does not go for women. Women who show agentic qualities are penalized or face backlash (see Rudman 1998).

Advertisements that exhibit a preference for one gender over another demonstrate the presence of gender bias. The men are shown in professional roles (Baxter, Kulczynski and Ilicic 2016), while the women are mostly portrayed as consumers of products, in traditional roles as mothers and wives. Women are prominently featured in advertisements promoting household



FIGURE 34 Shyam Steel (Idle household)



FIGURE 35 Vectus Pipes (Idle household)

items, apparel, beauty, and personal care items. For instance, in Figure 23, an advertisement showcases a woman and a girl child, emphasizing the product's ability to make the skin soft. The presence of a girl child alongside the woman implies that girls should be concerned about their physical appearance from a young age. Additionally, this advertisement portrays women as nurturing and caring figures concerning children. It is important to note that research has demonstrated the influence of stereotypes on the perception and assessment of individuals. Women are evaluated as less capable in environments where men dominate, whereas in environments typically associated with women, women are more likely to be more capable than men (Biernat and Sesko 2018).

Another interesting fact is that in the advertisements, the female models are portrayed as thin, with long black hair and a fair skin tone. According to previous studies, the women in advertisements are typically young, skinny, and white (Kuczynski 1998, as quoted in Sheehan 2013, 96). According to Ruchika Bhotra, a senior psychologist, advertisement-makers use white-skinned models because 'people's deeply established beliefs of what beauty is' make it easier



FIGURE 36 Anmol Hair Oil (Hair care)



FIGURE 37 Amla Hair Oil (Hair care)

to link white skin with beauty.⁴ This again is another stereotype associated with people's skin tone. The average Indian person's skin tone is brown. Using a model with fair skin and selling products related to skin color is one of the marketing strategies most companies employ in India (Sheehan 2013). Advertising has been linked to the creation and perpetuation of unattainable and unrealistic standards of beauty for women (Windels 2016). The images and messages portrayed in advertisements often promote a very narrow definition of beauty that is difficult or impossible for most women to achieve, resulting in low self-esteem and developing feelings of inadequacy among women. Sheehan (2013, 97) also pointed out that, it is not just women; even men are also subject to the cultural ideals of beauty, male beauty being equated with physical strength. This is visible in Figures 25 and 26; men are portrayed as muscular and strongly built. Most advertisements portray men and women in decorative roles, that is, they are displayed as passive and disengaged (Sheehan 2013, 97). Women are more frequently featured in decorative roles than men,



FIGURE 38 Sugar Pop (Skin care)

4 <https://www.newindianexpress.com/business/2021/jul/16/dear-indian-beauty-industry-remember-we-are-brown-2286102.html> (Retrieved: July, 2022).

which suggests that advertisements do not accurately convey the feminine gender role (Paff and Lakner 1997).

Several advertisements employ celebrities to endorse their products, such as Leader battery, Livguard battery, Livfast battery, Star cement, Kamdhenu Paints, Johnson Paints, Pepsi, Dabur hair oil, and the advertisements for steel and pipe. These advertisements feature actors and actresses from the Bollywood industry and athletes from the Indian National Cricket team. Bollywood holds a prominent position in India's film industry, and celebrities are widely recognized and admired. Consequently, the use of celebrities in advertisements garners significant attention. Notably, the actors featured in battery advertisements have a history of portraying action heroes in movies, thus creating associations with power and masculinity. Furthermore, the actress in the Dabur Amla hair oil advertisement is a prominent figure within the industry. The general public often considers these celebrities as role models, and their presence in product advertisements leads consumers to perceive the endorsed products as genuine and reliable.

Advertisements for products such as batteries and construction materials employ bold fonts, symbolizing power, energy, and strength. These font choices serve to associate these qualities with the advertised products. Notably, men are often seen in these advertisements. On the other hand, advertisements targeting female audiences tend to use smaller font types.

Nevertheless, a few advertisements (Figures 34 and 35) did not explicitly perpetuate gender stereotypes. Instead, they portray a social stereotype of an ideal, content, and flawless family. These advertisements target new homeowners and feature well-known celebrity couples, chosen deliberately to convey a sense of happiness and perfection. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the depicted idealized family may not always reflect reality. When advertisements present such seemingly happy and perfect celebrity couples, society often aspires to emulate them. Consequently, individuals may blindly purchase products, believing that owning them will provide them with the same level of happiness they observe in the advertisements.

It should be emphasized that while some advertisements depict female empowerment by showcasing women in higher education and using technology, the overall representation of such empowerment in advertising is minimal.

Furthermore, the makers have also employed gaze as one of the semiotic modes to represent the participants in the figures. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), two types of participants are present in visual communication: the represented participants and interactive participants. Represented participants are the people, places, and things portrayed in the images and

interactive participants are the people who interact with one another (the makers and the viewers) through the images (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021). In most of the advertisements, the represented participants gaze directly at the interactive participants.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) state that when the represented participants are portrayed gazing directly at the viewers, they demand that the viewer enters an imaginary relation with him or her, and the exact relation is signified by the facial expression of the represented participants. For instance, all the advertisements for cosmetics and personal care products (Figures 22, 23, 36, 37, and 38) feature women smiling and looking directly at the viewers. Here, the target population is females. It implies that if they want to be happy and satisfied in life, they must look beautiful, and they can achieve such beauty only by using these products. It is also similar in the advertisements in Figures 18, 19, 20, and 21 where women are shown to be promoting household products happily. This again implies that women are satisfied with household chores.

5 Conclusion

The study had one objective in the form of two research questions. The advertisement landscape of Patna is gendered and promotes stereotypes, thereby creating gender bias. Various multimodal tools are used to encode such stereotypes. What we see in our surroundings constructs our perceptions of social norms, which are then presented, once again, in the form of billboards and outdoor advertisements, thereby strengthening the existing biased perceptions. Indian social situations are no different from those of other South Asian and Southeast Asian countries. Issues related to fairness between genders in terms of social and economic opportunities are problems that exist everywhere. Discriminatory factors affecting the socio-cognitive behaviors of the population are often latent. Women are given subjugated roles, as is clearly visible in the advertisements that saw them represented as mothers and homemakers. In contrast, men are portrayed as engineers, managers, pilots, chefs, etc. The billboards and outdoor advertisements act as significant agents modifying our perceptions. Hence, if minute gender-just changes are introduced into the advertisements, it will lead to a change in our perception.

Based on the findings, this study recommends that producers of advertisements emphasize gender-neutral advertisements. Women could also be represented as engineers for housing and construction product, motivating society to accept women in positions of power and as decision-makers. This study, though limited with regards to data, addresses a very crucial social issue

in which women have long been denied equal opportunities in education, employment, and social power. This study, with its findings and discussions, emphasizes the need to realize that social equality can be established even through making subtle modifications in the representation of gender in the advertisement landscape of a society. Additionally, though there is literature on consumer perspectives of advertisements (see Elliott et al. 1995; Kervin 1990), the current study does not focus on this. Instead, this could be an avenue for future research in the Indian context with respect to outdoor advertisements. Further, since the research location primarily involved local (indigenous) brands, it would be interesting to examine how international brands address the issue of gender stereotypes in other regional settings.

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