

Sexism Representation “Train her to be an Ideal Housewife” Ads: Sara Mills Theory

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ABSTRACT: This study examines linguistic sexism and the portrayal of women in Indian advertising media. It aims to highlight how advertisements reinforce gender stereotypes and contribute to societal inequality. The research employs a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis, using Sara Mills' discourse-level analysis theory from Feminist Stylistics (1995) as the analytical framework. The analysis identifies indirect sexism and the objectification of women in advertising. Women are frequently depicted as housewives rather than independent individuals with career aspirations. These portrayals reinforce traditional gender roles, limiting women's representation in diverse professional and social spheres. The study concludes that gender equality remains unachieved in Indian advertising media, as women continue to be stereotyped and confined to domestic roles. The persistence of these portrayals reflects deep-rooted societal biases that restrict women's opportunities. By shedding light on gender bias in advertising, this study emphasizes the need for more inclusive and equitable media representations. Addressing these stereotypes can contribute to social change and the promotion of gender equality in India.

Keywords: Advertising, Discourse Analysis, Gender Representation, Sexism, Women



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INTRODUCTION

Sexism is a fundamental assumption through gender stereotypes where one gender is seen as superior to the other gender. This can apply to both genders. However, in most cases it shows that women are victims of sexism. In professional settings, societal expectations frequently confine women to domestic roles, leading to significant gender disparities in employment. For instance, as of 2023, only 4.7% of CEOs in India are women, and 10.3% of firms have female senior leadership (Deloitte, 2022). One phenomenon that often occurs is in the field of work. Women are naturally expected to manage households rather than professional jobs. The majority of cases involve women who have had negative work experiences and face gender discrimination, which is associated with lower job satisfaction and higher burnout. Few women become professors, academic staff, or hold positions of higher administrative authority. As a result, it is common to find men who take part more in middle- to upper-class jobs such as

politics, economics, and administration.

As time has progressed, people's perceptions of gender stereotypes have not changed much, especially in India. This country, which has a history of misogyny, ranks 112th out of 191 countries in the 2022 Global Gender Gap Index for gender equality. (UNDP, 2021). According to a newspaper, 85% of Indian women face occupational sexism in terms of salary increases, promotions, and job opportunities. In this case, traditional expectations often relegate women to household responsibilities. Most of them are usually required to do "grah grihasti" (housework) such as sewing, washing, cooking and so on. In line with that, data indicates that women spend an average of 353 minutes per day on domestic chores, compared to 52 minutes by men (UNDP, 2021). This disproportionate burden contributes to health issues, including increased stress and a higher risk of stroke and heart disease. One study shows they spend 299 minutes daily on household chores and 134 minutes on parenting tasks. Meanwhile, men spend 97 minutes on housework and 76 minutes per day on parenting (Kannan, 2020). The WHO also concludes that long working hours can increase the risk of having a stroke by 35 percent, and 17 percent, leading to death from a heart attack (WHO, 2021). This can lead to other health problems such as mental health, which causes them stress and ends their life.

Therefore, this study is intended to analyze the types of language sexism and positioning of women in advertising media in India. This is intended to determine how women's role is represented in advertising media. With this foundation, Sara Mills' theory is relevant to discourse theory, which focuses on feminism. Sara Mills' research model focuses on how social actors are positioned in a discourse. Social actors are people who appear in the text (Masitoh, 2020). Sara Mills intends to show how women are portrayed in a discourse, whether they become subjects or objects. The subject is the dominant position because the subject is the advantaged position. According to Sara Mills, in the discourse context, the subject is the party allowed to speak. This means that women who occupy the subject position in a discourse can provide views according to the conditions and situations experienced. In contrast, the object's position is opposite that of the subject. Women who occupy object positions will be disadvantaged because they are not allowed to speak in public. This causes prejudices when journalists give their point of view regarding ongoing cases. The prejudices journalists write usually circulate in society for a long time. According to Mills (1995) Linguistic determinism refers to the idea that language structure determines how society perceives the world. Language can produce new perceptions.

In addition, Sara Mills also focuses on sexism in a language commonly called sexist language. This language expresses a bias that favors one gender and treats another gender discriminatively (Fitriyah, 2024). It is usually in favor of the male and against the female. Mills distinguished between two types of sexism: overt and indirect sexism. Overt sexism makes unambiguous statements, whereas indirect sexism has an implied meaning that must be understood contextually, about interpreting the surrounding utterances.

Since the 1960s, feminist media studies have highlighted gender discrimination in advertising. Despite the focus and political attention to combat sexist stereotypes in advertising, the perceived unequal representation of women persists. Some studies also argue that the depiction of women in advertising has not changed substantially over decades. (Knoll et al., 2011a; Taylor et al., 2013). Another study conducted by Grau and Zotos (2016) revealed that most advertisements focused

on depicting stereotypes of women which claimed that women were incompetent or. In addition, this ad emphasizes the role of women as housewives, and sexual or even decorative objects.

A similar statement was also made in research conducted by Dwivedy (2009), who examined gender representation in Indian advertising magazines. In this advertisement, women are portrayed as traditional figures, like housewives in a family who are always busy with their household chores (Dwivedy et al., 2009). On the other hand, men are described as people with a higher position, so they can command, make decisions, or focus on careers. Turning to various advertisements in 1987, 1990, 1994, where in Das (2011) It was shown that there was a slight change in the depiction of gender representation in advertisements, but this still did not change the view of women completely. Female stereotypes in various media products and brands are also still considered low. (Sarkar, 2015) The study shows that women are promoted in domestic products to strengthen their absolute representation as traditional women. On the other hand, men are portrayed as skilled people, especially in the world of professional work and as the head of the family.

The difference between previous studies and this research is using a research-based focus. Previously, most of the studies analyzed overt sexism, which was sexism expressed openly or with linguistic markers. Therefore, this study focuses on indirect types of sexism, which often use metaphors, irony, etc. This study also uses data from background history, namely in the 1970s, to find the characteristics of the type of writing in the advertisements.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method approach with descriptive analysis. Writers use qualitative research methods to seek understanding of a phenomenon to be studied. Research using qualitative research methods is presented in narrative form, meaning that the researcher presents the results of his research in an essay, which is explained in detail and continuously. According to Creswell, the qualitative method is a research process that seeks understanding using detailed data analysis to obtain a complex and holistic final result. (Creswell, 2014) This statement shows that qualitative methods are used to process data from a phenomenon to find a detailed and complex result. Qualitative methods are commonly used in social science branches. In contrast to quantitative research methods that use statistical analysis, qualitative methods use more detailed descriptions and contain snippets of documents or archives used for research.

This research data is in the form of advertisements from research data sources. One advertisement, "Train her to be an Ideal Housewife," is examined using Sara Mills' theory.

The data analysis techniques used in this study are as follows: First, read and analyze advertising data, which will then be transformed into research data. Second, the type of sexism and the subject and object placement in the ad should be sorted based on the research objectives. Third, using the Sara Mills method, analyze the content of ads depending on the aspects studied. The fourth step is to summarize the research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the results of the analysis of sexism and the position of women placement based on advertisements circulating in India in 1970. At that time, it still presented idealized gender stereotypes where men wore suits to go to work and women stayed at home fulfilling their role as housewives. Several studies have found that women are used as objects in traditional or simple descriptions of family life, such as doing housework, raising children, and so on (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Sandhu, 2018)

Referring to Sara Mills' representation, there are two types of sexism: overt and indirect. However, in this case, the researcher wants to focus on the indirect sexism contained in the advertisement.

Picture 1. “Train her to be an Ideal Housewife” Ads



The position of women in advertising text circulating in 1970 in India. This analysis will use the discourse-level analysis theory from Sara Mills's book *Feminist Stylistics*.

Indirect Sexism

Sara Mills defines indirect sexism as an ironic form of sexism. Because it both challenges and

reinforces overt sexism. Benwell (2007) Williamson refers to indirect sexism as "new sexism." He also states that it is similar to, but not the same as, earlier forms of sexism that have been so clearly demonstrated. It distinguishes between overt and covert sexism. This new form of sexism renames outdated notions of sexism. That is why Williamson also refers to this new kind of sexism as 'retro-sexism'.

While being sexist, the use of irony and humor does not change the nature of sexism; it is simply another way of interpreting the new sexism. Sexism is a set of stereotypical beliefs about women unrelated to a specific linguistic feature or use (Mills, 2008).

1. Humor

This par exaggerates the group's characteristics, referring to stereotypical lore or comic effect. One example is irony, a common strategy in humorous comments about women. This section's term is frequently used to satirize objects politely. A disparity or contrast distinguishes it between appearance and reality.

2. Presuppositions

In this type of indirect sexism, sexism is difficult to detect because the speaker can deny it while delivering it. It makes assumptions on which sexism is based, Helinger and Bussman (2001:10) term it social gender.

3. Conflicting Messages

This is communicated through metaphorical language and narrative stories about men and women in public spaces. To avoid being branded as sexist, they make non-sexist remarks. However, the message conveyed was the opposite.

4. Scripts and Metaphors

This is conveyed through narrative stories about women and men in public spaces accompanied by metaphorical language. This indirect sexism implicitly refers to women. It refers to objects as things, which can be male or female.

5. Collocation

Use words that are related or related to other words.

6. Androcentric perspective.

By his definition, androcentric means "centered/centered on men." So, the androcentric perspective is where sexism is not directly conveyed from a masculine perspective. Analysis of sexist language or expressions in inappropriate sex discrimination is used to draw attention to the grammar used in advertisements to represent women.

The researcher discovered some indirect sexism based on data analysis and linguistic findings from the types of sexist language mentioned above.

a. Presupposition

According to Pratama (2018), Presuppositions are the categories of meaning that underpin utterances or assumptions. A statement can convey a presumption, which can be used to prove sexism. The ad's title, "Train her to be an ideal housewife," demonstrates the prejudice that

women are only considered housewives, where the woman must stay home and do the housework.

In this case, men instinctively believe that women do not have the right to choose, leaving them helpless in the situation. Men believe that women must always obey and understand the various forms of social life. Thus, this assumption results in inequality of opinion for a woman and shows how superior the position of men is compared to women.

Furthermore, the sentence "yes, only you can transform her into capable, economical housewife, a precious asset to her home and family" shows the assumption that women can only be useful if they become capable and economical housewives where sewing work is done every day. This expression limits the decisions and life choices of women, the majority of whom want middle to upper-class jobs at a professional level. Therefore, these expressions are still conservative and seem to doubt the ability of women to be equal to men.

b. Collocation

The word "sewing machine" is closely related to women, but in this case, sewing with a sewing machine is necessary for women to become ideal housewives. This refers to the limitations of women who are only allowed to do housework, giving rise to a difference in gender representation. Sewing tools are considered a valuable asset for women who want to live a married life, which means it becomes an obligation for them, too.

In this case, it is also proven that the advertisements in circulation have gender stereotypes, and indirect sexism is implied in them. However, precisely with this indirect sexism, changing people's thinking will be more effective. This is because the language used is wrapped up in everyday conversations and interactions with others. Indirectly, the spoken or written language can offend the topic's subject. If this cycle continues, social events may occur regarding female gender stereotypes.

Subject-Object Position

Examining the actor's position in the text (program) will reveal how the text's dominant ideology and beliefs operate. In representation, the position as a subject or object contains ideological content. This position will indicate a storytelling point of view from a specific angle. This means that an event or discourse will be described from the subject's perspective as the narrator of an event. As a result, the audience's understanding will depend on the narrator as the truth-teller.

Second, as a subject of representation, the narrator has the freedom to tell events and interpret the various actions that comprise the event; the results of his interpretation of the event are then used to construct the meaning he conveys to the audience.

Third, because the defining process is subjective, the perspective and point of view will influence how an event is defined. When displayed in feminist discourse, the position (subject-object) in the discourse will also place the position of women.

Subject-Object Position Analysis

The positioning of women in this advertisement is also influenced by the concept of women as housewives, it is always written that the emphasis is on women's work in the household, one of which is sewing. One of the best solutions is to buy a USHA sewing machine. Because the

position of women in this advertisement is classified as an object, women are not allowed to choose the work they want to do. Indirectly, women are required only to do household chores. This confuses or even prejudices the reader when he gives his point of view regarding the ongoing advertisement.

Using the word to emphasize buyers' interest in sewing machines can become a cycle, where the researcher also finds similar advertisements on behalf of women or housewives in their advertisements. This endless cycle over time can change people's thinking and worsen their views regarding gender representation, considering that India is a country that has a dark history of misogyny. This can lead to many advertisements circulating in the wider market.

Based on the analysis results, the focus of the story chosen by the ad publisher can be classified into roles within the family/household (domestic role). Based on the selection of indirect sexism, it is clear that the role of women is considered unequal to that of men. Especially at that time, there were a lot of cases like this. Therefore, there is no doubt that women's rights are still underestimated, so they do not have the right to share in choosing a job in their life. This also means that women do not have to show their views and presence in society.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of character discourse in Indian advertisements reveals the presence of veiled sexism, particularly through presupposition and collocation. This implicit bias reinforces unfair treatment and prejudices against women, perpetuating traditional gender roles. Advertisements, as a powerful medium, contribute to shaping long-term societal perceptions, further limiting women's agency and opportunities (Motschenbacher & Hellinger, 2015).

The study highlights how women are frequently positioned as objects in discourse, restricting their visibility and reinforcing systemic inequality. To address this issue, future research should explore the evolving representation of women in digital and social media advertising. Additionally, policymakers and media creators should promote gender-sensitive advertising that challenges stereotypes and fosters equitable portrayals of women. Raising awareness and implementing guidelines for inclusive language in media can contribute to long-term societal change.

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