

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis



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ABSTRACT: This paper aims to understand and analyze the politics of gender identity construction in TV adverts; i.e. how different approaches are being used in order to portray and construct gender role, which eventually shape gender identity. Incorporating Stuart Hall's representation theory, Simon de Beauvoir's Second Sex, and different CDA tools -- this paper evaluates and dissects different TV ads, telecasted in Bangladeshi main stream media, to foreground how these TV ads shape as well as construct gender identity, and questions the "realistic representation" of man and woman in the TV adverts. Furthermore, it also re-excavates the manifestation of the repetitive representation of the gender role, and, in consequence of the depiction, how the viewers construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their gender identities based on the TV advertisements without even realizing it.

KEYWORDS: Gender Identity, Gender Role, Othering, Implicatures, Fallacy, Representation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the age-old politics of gender identity construction in TV adverts. The word "politics" here portrays the manipulation and hidden agenda that the TV advertisements project in order to maintain a preferred social order. It is being termed as an age-old politics since it has been talked about and written about for more than 5 decades. However, this paper brings its own point of view by solely focusing on the gender identity construction that takes place in the TV adverts of Bangladesh through language. The motive of this paper is to look into the approaches and discourses that the advertisement agencies have taken in order to portray, or in other words to shape and construct gender identity. Showing how TV advertisements represent genders in a stereotypical manner is not the only focus point of this paper. Side by side, this paper also addresses how these advertisements are working as an active agent to instruct gender role. This study focuses on the identity construction of women as well as of men in TV adverts through verbal, print and written language.

The representation and identity construction that takes place in TV advertisements create and cultivate the stereotypical gender roles and identities of both genders. The paper uses the Representation Theory of Cultural Theorist Stuart Hall as a magnifier to look into the underlying agenda behind TV advertisements and examines the manifestation of the stereotypical representation of gender bias in TV advertisements. Stuart Hall describes representation as "the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, signs and images which stand for or represent things" (p. 1). Along with Hall's Representation theory, this paper takes into account the framework of Simon de Beauvoir's ground-breaking book *The Second Sex* in relation to her statement "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p. 14). Also, the paper uses different Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tools to deconstruct the language centric propaganda created by TV adverts. With the help of these tools, the paper dissects the agenda of the TV adverts by analyzing them through the lens of different ideological discourses. The existence of fallacy, binaries and othering, is vividly present in the TV advertisements of our country. Also, many other partial truths, implicatures and presupposition are used with the intention to mislead the consumer is observed and pointed out in this paper. As language is not limited to written or spoken words. The paper takes into account images, verbal/ written words, dialogues, and lines/ tag lines, used in TV adverts along with the images shown, with or without motion. All these multimodal discourses carry a deeper meaning and assists in forming gender identity construction. This paper dives into the use of various language modes and its role in constructing or reconstructing the stereotypical gender identity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Decoding Femininity: Advertisements and Their Teenage Readers:

In this journal article Currie (1997, 453-477) the author explores the printed representation of femininity or females that indirectly but certainly influence the gender identity construction of teenage readers. The author upholds how stereotypical gender

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

representation in these glossy magazines are manipulating and constructing a generalized and traditional identity regarding womanhood. The teenagers who were interviewed for this journal article associate womanhood or femininity with commodities that are showcased in the advertisements of the magazines. This goes to show that the printed advertisements are creating an image of what or how a woman should look like very effortlessly.

Stylish Hard Bodies: Branded Masculinity in Men's Health Magazine:

In this journal article M. Alexander (2003, 535-554), the author scrutinizes the burden of masculinity that the men of the society have to undergo. The article focuses on the printed advertisements in men's health magazines. These magazines portray how a man is only a man if he has muscles. There is hidden agenda and added burden underneath the good looking magazines that feature heavily masculine men in the front pages. It is a very common phenomenon. It is portrayed in such a manner so that men feel a sense of insecurity and go through a phase of not being "good enough" for the society. Also, the author points out how these magazines indirectly showcase that along with having a masculine physic men need a sense of good fashion that means owning expensive and branded clothes, which leads to the assumption that men need to be financially secure. These hidden burdens of masculinity or manhood are dealt with and analyzed in this journal article.

Stereotyping of women as a domestic being in Bangladeshi television commercials:

A critical study of discourse: In the paper the author Haq focuses on the unequal and stereotypical representation of woman in the TV adverts of Bangladesh. The author portrays how woman are confined, dominated, domesticated, overshadowed and only glorified for their appearance and objectified in TV adverts as well.

Simon De Beauvoir "The Second Sex":

Beauvoir asks "What is woman?" She argues that man is considered the default, while woman is considered the "Other": "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not herself but as relative to him." "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Through this theory, the paper concentrates on how these questions and queries raised and analyzed by Beauvoir is still prevailing in the world of advertisement.

Stuart Hall "Representation Theory":

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall breaks down and interrogates the role of representation in images and mass media. According to Hall, there are two "systems of representation" – "The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things – people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc. – and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts." (Hall, 1997) He also mentioned that the process through which language gives meaning to signs, concepts and things is called representation. This representation is creating the gender norms which inevitably constructs gender identities. Meaning of the world around us is created through representation and not the other way around. Taking these two systems into account the paper looks under the umbrella under which the mainstream media advertisement is standing.

III. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and descriptive method has been used in this paper. Data is collected from the advertisements shown in Bangladeshi TV channels such as: NTV, ATN BANGLA, and some old ads have been collected from YouTube. Well known ads from popular brands such as PRAN, Radhuni, Milo, Sandelina, and Huawei have been analyzed. The main analysis of this study is discourse analysis, i.e. CDA. The discourse analysis has been done under the theoretical framework of theorist Simon de Beauvoir's one of the basic arguments of the "The Second Sex", "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" and Stuart Hall's Representation Theory. Also, different critical CDA tools e.g. 'fallacy', 'binaries', 'othering', 'selective quoting', 'presupposition' were used to deconstruct the stereotypical gender representation propaganda created through various languages used in TV advertisements.

IV. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data analysis has been done using the bottom-up data analysis method. After watching different TV ads and looking into different print medias/posters/online images it can be stated that most of the TV advertisements of Bangladesh represent gender roles in a stereotypical and narrow manner. The analysis upholds the misleading gender construction and representation done in media through various forms of language, such as- images, videos, and written / verbal words. The following images are taken from different ads streamed in mainstream media regularly.

In figure 2, it is shown that women must wait for their hard-working husband to come back home and cook meals for the entire family throughout the day (Figure 1) and complete the entire house hold work in order to be the ideal wife.

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 1: Sample 1



(Source: Selected sample from YouTube)

Figure 2: Sample 2



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Figure 3: Sample 3



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Both of these pictures (Figure 1 and Figure 2) are taken from TV adverts created by the renowned masala brand Radhuni. The word “Radhuni” literally translates to “female cook”. The name of the brand itself upholds the stereotypical idea that a woman is the cook of the house and the packaging has an outline of a woman on it (Figure 3). This goes to show that popular brand as such through various discourses is constructing and giving meaning to our understanding that women in order to be the ideal wife must concentrate and devote herself to being a home maker. Her identity is linked with the household work. Through the words, images, and videos the product is constructing an unambiguous gender identity.

In different advertisements for various products women are either there to serve the husband, family or the guests first (Figure 4). Also, the other female, the daughter of the house is serving the guests as well alongside her mother (Figure 4). The male of the family is portrayed as a passive character that has no work to do when he is home, other than socializing with the guests or family members (Figure 5 and Figure 6). These representations unconsciously repel us to maintain such social norms. It is creating a caring and “ready to serve” identity of women. Women are seen as the “other” in family gatherings of social occasions.

Figure 4: Sample 4



(Source: Selected sample from the YouTube)

Figure 5: Sample 5



(Source: Selected sample from the Google Image)

These pictures (Figure 4 and figure 5) represent family gatherings where women are serving the guests (Figure 5). This creates a presupposition that only women will serve the food and eat at the very end, after everyone else has enjoyed their meals (Figure 4). On the other hand, the men of the family are socializing and the gathering is being entertained by the man of the house (Figure 4 and figure 5). This type of representation is constructing the idea that men are the verbal and active entertainer of the social gathering and women are the silent care giver.

In all advertisements related to cooking products, kitchen tools, or home appliances women are shown playing the passive yet magnified role of an attendant. Almost all renowned brands such as PRAN and PRAN RFL advertise their home appliance or cooking products with women as the face of the advertisement (Figure 7). The woman is either cooking or taking care of the family. She is the prime focus when it comes to caring and nurturing the family and making sure the family gets the best quality of food (Figure 6). Men are rarely used or shown in any kitchen or cooking oriented product ads. This creates an

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

image that men are aloof when it comes to house hold work and should remain unbothered. This also portrays that only women are meant to do the household work. Ads as such are harvesting and creating a clear division in identity formation. This is a type of fallacy as the representation is invalid and misleading. As it is refraining men from getting involved in house help, and creating huge pressure on women to be the sole server. This type of fallacy is creating unfair gender identities in our society. Being one of the leading brands in Bangladesh it is obvious that they have a large consumer base. Through ads with binary discourses like these the brads are slowly but surely building a stereotypical gender identity.

Figure 6: Sample 6



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Figure 7: Sample 7



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

The gender identity construction does not end with home appliances and cooking products. Various global brands play a huge role in constructing the beauty standards for women through the unrealistic and unachievable standards for women (Figure 8). Women are expected to be soft, fragrant, and fragile. These products focus on creating a picture perfect and presentable identity of women. The TV adverts feed on the insecurities of the mass and portray an ideal picture of beauty. Most women aspire to look flawlessly beautiful because that is what the society expects and accepts from them. The identity of a woman is highly connected to her feminine outlook.

Figure 8: Sample 8



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

In Figure 8, women are suggested to be soft and fragrant skin for hours. TV and print media ads of beauty products, soap, and talcum powder over sell the appearance of a woman by glorified and glamorized it beyond realistic expectation.

Similarly, another soap and talcum powder brand Sandalina markets its product only for women and they have similar beauty standards for women to achieve. Women must be fair, soft and smooth (Figure 10 and Figure 11). The description of how a woman should look like highly objectifies and belittles woman. These are the basic beauty trades women must have in order to be the proper women. A woman must be pure as the colour white, delicate, and soft as flowers (Figure 10). Women must dress in a glamorous fashion while exhibiting a never fading smile. Thus, creating and advocating an unfathomable feminine identity for women.

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 10: Sample 10



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Figure 11: Sample 11



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Also, as advertised through written language, in order to achieve mental and physical peace, women must be fair and smooth (Figure 10). Furthermore, the product advocates that in order to maintain royalty and tradition women must have a glowing aura surrounding them (Figure 11).

On the flip side, there are some ads where the product is not related to women. However, a woman appears on the screen only to objectify her body and to arouse the curiosity of the male viewer/consumer (Figure 12). The ad represents selective quoting, as the representation of a female officer in this ad is taken out of proportion and context. Why would she handcuff herself to the alleged culprit where as she is the police? Why does she have a “sex-appeal” to her appearance? This goes to show that even in uniform or in work place or during duty, a woman must give the impression of being sexy, attractive, and approachable or are expected to comply with the flirtatious chauvinistic behavior of men. This again leads to presupposition in terms of women and their behaviour. It adds up to creating a rather outrageous gender identity.

Figure 12: Sample 12



(Source: Selected sample from YouTube)

Now, when it comes to portraying men, there is always an outgoing, masculine, bread earning (Figure 16), money making approach to it. Men are always working hard, being energetic (Figure 13), illuminating power (Figure 14), chasing their dreams and fulfilling the needs and wants of the family members (Figure 15). The existence of men is shown in the most dashing and idolizing manner. Selective quoting, fallacy and presupposition come into play in terms of such ads. Selective quoting is present, as the emotional out-break of men are not shown. Men must have a solid exterior and interior all the time. Fallacy is done as men are being misled to become this image of strength and power. Men are expected to always be manly and cannot display any emotions or “feminine” qualities. Presupposition is clearly visible as it is supposed that men will always fulfill the family dream or take forward the family legacy without taking their dreams or goals into account.

Figure 13: Sample 13



(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Figure 14: Sample 14



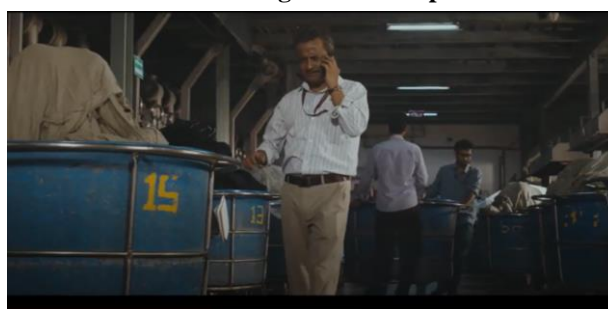
(Source: Selected sample from Google Image)

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Figure 15: Sample 15



Figure 16: Sample 16



(Source: Selected sample from YouTube)

V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Advertisements commonly argue that they are representing the ‘reality’ of the society. However, some also say that they project as per the want of the consumers. According to the ad makers the advertisements can mend the gender roles to an extent but not entirely (Slachmijlder, 98). Advertisements create different versions of reality, in order to suit the consumers. All of these advertisements do not represent the gender roles of the society they create and give meaning to it. By constantly and repeatedly showcasing such images, these adverts turn out to be our reality, our truth. As we get to see a “realistic representation” of our societal gender norms in the TV adverts, we tend to intertwine it with our understanding, identities or the roles we play in the society. We construct, deconstruct and reconstruct our gender identities based on the TV advertisements without even realizing it. Media is a powerful tool that can impact greatly on the expansion, limitation, and confinement of the ideas that we have about the world around us. TV adverts make us believe in certain ideologies. TV adverts advocate and manifest certain gender roles in a coded manner, which directly or indirectly impact our daily lives and our identities.

The pictures that are used in the paper are taken from common TV adverts; they are played and replayed in the media on and off. In most of these ads we can see some conventional construction regarding gender roles. These gender roles are widely accepted and appreciated in the societal context of Bangladesh, as they portray the images that we are habituated with, in our day to day lives. Women are expected to remain indoors, stay presentable at all times, they need to be soft, unselfish, homely, caring, nurturing, family oriented, and overall ‘angel in the house’ (p. 3). These commonly portrayed gender roles are creating a burden of femininity on the women of the society. Women associate and create their identities based on the popular liking of others, which are manipulated by narrow minded TV advertisements. Similar type of burden of masculinity prevails on the men of the society as well. As these TV adverts commonly showcase men as highly masculine, outgoing, career oriented, bread earning member of the family. Men are expected to invest time outside and they cannot invest time in the kitchen as it is not a manly thing to do. They are there to be the entertainer of the guests or helper of the household chores. Men do not have an active role to play when it comes to the indoor household work. This is highly burdensome and is a shallow representation of the potential of men. This leads the men to construct their identities based on what is popularly accepted and yet again it is constructed indirectly though repeated, monotonous and orthodox TV advertisement. These TV adverts portray the gender roles in an unfair, inaccurate, and unequal manner. Men and women, who are unable to follow through or maintain these fixed ideal gender roles, are considered as odd, spoiled or unacceptable.

According to Hall, there are two “systems of representation” – “The first enables us to give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things – people, objects, events, abstract ideas, etc. – and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts.” (p.5). He also mentioned that the process through which language gives meaning to signs, concepts and things is called representation. Meaning of the world around us is created through representation and not the other way around. Taking these two systems into account if we look at the umbrella under which the mainstream media is standing, the politics of it becomes clear. The media is taking our conceptual maps to give meaning to what the hegemonic power politics permits it to show. In the context of Bangladesh, the stereotypical gender roles are vastly accepted and commonly expected. Even though a change in the social development of the gender roles is observed as women are more involved in the work force and men are more involved in the family spectrum, it is not broadcasted, acknowledged or accepted. Similar observations have been found or researched in different countries as well, “men were underrepresented in commercials of domestic products, and women were underrepresented in commercials of nondomestic products” (p. 735–743). Gender representation has been looked into and scrutinized extensively in the past 5-6 decades. However, a stereotypical gender representation still prevails in the TV advertisement sector across the borders. As per Hall, this takes place as the media hegemony shows us limited representation of gender roles. So, typically we are very used to of seeing the stereotypical roles that are shown to us by mainstream media. Stuart Hall looked into the power of

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

mainstream media in representing race, gender, class, ethnicity and religion. The media is an active agent working in building how we see gender and the role of gender in the society. According to Hall, if the mass wants to understand the pseudo representation created by the media and the brains behind it, then they must look into the entertainment section of the media. It is where the actual manipulation is, instead of scripted official news channels. The TV adverts fall under this category as it is a source of not only entertainment but also is used to capture the targeted audience.

In her book *The Second Sex*, Simon De Beauvoir wrote a very thought-provoking line “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 14). This is exactly what we should focus on and dissect in order to understand the politics of mainstream. It is evident that men and women are biologically different. However, the biological differences do not determine the roles linked to it. Biologically giving birth to a baby is natural for women, but who decides that it is the sole responsibility of the woman to take care of the baby? The gender norms and roles around us make us who we are. The portrayals in TV adverts of women being gentle, caring, dedicated to their families, and unselfish is creating an idea of how a woman should be. Ads as such are indirectly constructing our gender identities. It is sculpting both the gender to fit into a box so that it becomes easier to target and manipulate them. Beauvoir points out in her book chapter “The Data of Biology” that how women are considered as a “womb”. “WOMAN? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her.” (p.41). She also upholds the way marriage is presented for both the genders. It has a similarity with the way TV adverts present marriage. A woman is “taken”/ “given” in marriage whereas the man “gets” married. “it is men’s society that allows each of its members to accomplish himself as husband and father; woman, integrated as slave or vassal into the family group dominated by fathers and brothers, has always been given in marriage to males by other males.” (p. 503) In the images used in the paper, it is evident that only women are portrayed as the care giver of the family and also to be the seductive gender among the both. Beauvoir also points this out in her text “she also has the function of satisfying the male’s sexual needs and caring for the home.” (p. 503). This goes to show that since 1949, the similar kind of outlook towards women are still prevailing. It cannot be just a coincidence, nor can it be natural. It is injected by the society, as many have already addressed the fact that gender is a socially constructed idea. Then why are we still letting this ideas rule and construct our gender identities?

TV adverts are responsible for developing certain gender roles and ideas. They are built in a way so that it seems natural and convincing. The TV ads feed on our insecurities and our ideas regarding genders. However, it is a vicious cycle where gender is represented in a stereotypical manner because it is being observed in that way. Similarly, gender roles are being observed or practices in the orthodox manner because that is the only representation people see in mass media. All the images used in the paper seems acceptable and natural. They do not create any confusion or question, they do not spark any curiosity, as this is what is being fed throughout centuries in the name of gender roles and representation.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the discussion and the TV advertisement analysis it is evident that an unfair representation of the gender roles is still prevailing in the mainstream media. There isn’t enough research or thought put into portraying them in a realistic way. Rather the stereotypical and traditional gender roles are being portrayed. This, the stereotypical portrayal, needs to change and the laws regarding advertisement and media should revise the content created by different brands. The effects of these traditional portrayal of gender are constantly constructing our gender in the same old stereotypical manner which should be analyzed a lot more from a CDA point of view. A regulatory committee should work actively in order to change this unrealistic and unfair portrayal of gender roles. Also, more research should be done on gender role and gender identity construction in order to look into the politics of mass media and the benefit that they get out of these constructions.

CONCLUSION

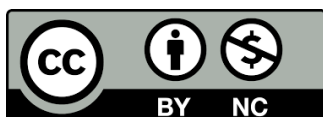
In the end, to conclude the paper it can be noted that with the domination of mainstream media and hegemonic structure of power distribution in the society, the construction of gender identity in the mass is being controlled by the media. The willing submission towards accepting TV adverts and the gender identity construction done through it portrays how deeply rooted the politics of media is. In the context of Bangladesh, even though women and men both are breaking out of their stereotypical gender roles and are reconstructing their identities, it is not depicted or represented in that manner. The monotonous and patriarchal dominance of the powerful is still weighing and portraying the age-old roles of gender through media, leading towards and endless loop of stereotypical gender identity construction. Due to which the expansion of the minds of the mass are falling face first on the ground. The base of this problem regarding ‘miss-representation’ and ‘misleading gender identity construction’ is rooted into the hegemonic media ‘representation’. In each case, let it be the representations of men or women, the hegemonic media organizations offer us a standardized representation of the gender roles. It is done in order to showcase a preferred or dominant meaning in the society. It may sound idealistic, but, when these gender role stereotypes are used repeatedly through years and decades, the lack of diversity undoubtedly narrows down the society’s perception regarding the manifestation of the fact. This leads to constructing a vastly represented and accepted gender identity. By truly understanding the politics behind gender

Gender Identity Construction in TV Adverts: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

representation in TV advertisements the mass should question the representation of reality done through media. The mass should question the gender identity that they/we are constructing of us/them. In order to dissect and break free from the politics of media we should stop being just a passive receiver of these created meaning.

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