

## **Evolving gender roles in Sri Lankan TV commercials: A discourse analysis of gender representation**

**A.R. Silva<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Languages, Faculty of Management, Humanities and Social Sciences, Saegis Campus, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka

This study explored the evolving portrayal of gender roles in Sri Lankan television commercials, focusing on four relatively new advertisements for milk powder, washing liquids, and menstrual products. The sample selection was based on criteria including relevance to gender representation, recency, and popularity. The research tried to answer the questions concerning what the evolving gender roles in selected TV commercials were, and how the recent shifts in gender roles and stereotypical portrayals influenced societal perceptions. Discourse analysis was used as the methodology to analyze how gender roles were constructed and represented. The narratives and the speech acts were analyzed by verbal discourse analysis while the images and semiotics were analyzed by visual discourse analysis. Finally, a temporal comparison was conducted using three older TV commercials in the same product categories to identify shifts in discourse. In the past decade, these product categories have been critiqued for perpetuating traditional and biased gender stereotypes. The analysis showed that depictions of gender gradually moved from overtly traditional to more complex and diverse gender depictions. Earlier commercials predominantly depicted women in domestic settings and men in authoritative or professional roles. Recent advertisements, on the other hand, offered a wider range of roles for both genders. Some novel advertisements subverted traditional expectations by showing women in strong, diverse jobs while males performing household chores. This transformation reflects a larger cultural shift and growing awareness of gender equality concerns in Sri Lanka. This study added to the knowledge of gender dynamics in Sri Lankan media and provided advertisers with suggestions for promoting more inclusive and progressive gender representations. As for the limitations of the study, it could be said that the selection of commercials may have influenced by the researcher bias, and hence not reflected accurately the wider range of gender representations in Sri Lankan television commercials. Discourse analysis was also interpretative by nature, leading to a degree of subjectivity of the analysis.

**Keywords:** Discourse analysis, Gender roles in TV commercials

---

\*amaviroosarani@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-4414-1091>