



Sports-themed Campaigns (Re)framing Women in India: A Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

The paper explores construction of female gender in sports themed campaigns to understand predominant media frames used to present women in Indian sports. Semiotic analysis of two popular campaigns *Da Da Ding* by Nike and *#ChangetheRhyme* by Dove shows breaking some of the normative practices in visual and verbal framing of women in the media texts. There is a clear-cut intent to break the beauty, body and profession-based stereotypes that reinforce the traditional frames for women in media especially sports advertising. Conventional frames such as femininity, sexualisation, vulnerability, and beauty, often reported in sports media are not found. That sports are a male bastion is challenged as women were reframed in the sports themed campaigns. It is however noted that cultural signifiers like national identity in sports advertising remained the same.

Keywords: Sports Advertising, Gender, Media Framing, Hegemonic Masculinity, Semiotic Analysis, Qualitative Approach

Introduction

Popular media such as advertising in India have found a new a story to tell, that of Indian sports women. Not that brands alone are conceptualizing around girls/women in sports, but the media and entertainment industry as a whole is exploring this subject in their narratives. The much-acclaimed Hindi film *Dangal* (2016) was the story of two young female wrestlers Geeta Phogat and Babita Phogat who won Gold medals in International Competitions in a high endurance sport. The film presented the context of patriarchal society in North Indian state of Haryana and its reflections. Biopics in Hindi cinema are not new, but biopics on female players are few. Mary Kom (2015), the biopic of a world champion from North East India based on trials and tribulations of the boxer in a society apathetic

towards sports was made from the point of view of the female athlete. Indian General Entertainment Television (GEC) too is telling stories of young girls aspiring to play competitive sport in daily serials like *Udaan* 2014; *Tammana*, 2016; *Meri Beti Durga* 2016. In these fictional dramas, the story revolves around sport as the dream of a young lower/middle class girl; her socio-cultural realities and how she battles the rigid code of norms with respect to gender identity, sex roles, matrimony versus her love for professional sport. Female athletes as the central protagonist in sports media may be due to the rising tally of medals won by Indian women in recent international sports events. On ground, 2016 was the year of Indian sportswomen. PV Sindhu (Badminton), Sakshi Mallik (Wrestling), Deepa Karmarkar (Gymnastics) and Aditi Ashok (Golf) emerged as the winners/achievers at Rio Olympics forcing the mainstream media to take note. In cricket, Team India (women's) lifted the Asia Cup 2016. Captain Mithali Raj became the new 'Captain Cool' in the twitter world. If films and television centered their content around women's sports, advertising was not far behind. Ever Since, several brands have rolled out TV and digital campaigns featuring female athletes or women's sports. These campaigns became news because they constructed new images of women & sport in Indian advertising otherwise infamous for both its absence of women sport as a theme and for perpetuating the gender stereotypes (Jhally, 2010).

Sports, Society and Women: The Indian Story

Though Indian women have participated in competitive sports since 1930, efforts were largely made to encourage the boys in sports through clubs, tournaments in educational institutions and professional sports bodies emphasizing the "image of physical culture as a masculine activity" in India (Prakash, 1990; WS-22). M.K. Singh (Mithlesh Kumari) in her book "Indian Women and Sports" establishes how women and sports in India could never forge natural bonds because of our social grounding in sexism which connotes that female body is not compatible with athleticism, hence sports is inherently male. Menstruation is often used to dissuade girls from entering sports. Prakash records the myth: "menstruation saps woman's strength and makes her unfit, emotionally and physically for competition" (WS-25) in an attempt to debunk biological issues

as a defense to stop women from pursuing professional sports. Also, it propagates Boutilier's mutational binaries: masculine sports and femininity games even though 'Women's sport is an expression of the right to equality and the freedom of all women to take control of their bodies and participate in sports publicly, regardless of nationality, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion'. Amateur athletes from a very tender age are subjected to the misogynistic views of the authoritative paternalism due to which they have to forego the opportunity to succeed further in the sport. Furthermore, Dalit and tribal women face racial vilification for wanting to participate, as sports are used as a tool to create the myth of superiority of race, caste and class or religion (WS-22).

Construction of Women in Sports by Media: The Conventional Frames

Women's sport has faced representational crisis in the media ever since its entry in the assumed male arena. Smith in her paper 'the less you say' argues that femininity as a trait is not associated with sport or athleticism (quoted by Billings, 2014). Media portrayal of women sports has consistently reported devaluation of female sportspersons w.r.t physical strength, attributes, abilities and skills compared to their counterparts (Sabu & Jenson & Messer; Duncan & Jenson, 1988-1993). Clasen pointed out that since sports have evolved to be a masculine space, women athletes are represented more for their feminine attributes than game-skills and athletic abilities. Visibility, personification, visual imagery and intertextuality (Goddard, A., *The Language of Advertising*, 2002) in media messages direct towards the theory of hegemonic masculinity, where the males are framed as the dominant group where aggressiveness, drive, ambition, strength in and self-reliance is appreciated in males but not in females (Connell, 2005 as quoted by Smith in *Sports Media* ed. Billings, 2014). Hegemonic masculinity exerts its presence the most in sports across the world. Hans Schmidt in his conversations with University students in USA noted, "that female sports were marginalized because of the prevalence of a dominant culture encouraging hegemonic masculinity and male authority in societies" (2015, 60). Critical exploration of media sport has found gender marking, infantilizing, differential framing, and ambivalence, focusing on

femininity and heterosexuality, and different production techniques as strategic ways to frame female athletes as opposed to their male counterparts (Fink, 2014). Radhika Parmeshwaran contends that femininity in Indian advertising includes fairness, slimness, youthfulness, light skin, long legs and big eyes finalising the definition of contemporary Indian beauty. A longstanding colour prejudice is further highlighted in Hunter's expostulation that Indian women see lighter skin colour as a social capital. (Hunter, 2002 quoted by Parmeshwaram & Kavitha 2009)

The New Indian Woman Identity

As societies evolve, questions of equality and identity find more voice. In the postmodern times, normalization of patriarchy is questioned leading to constructions of gender identity that is inherently non-conformist. While advocacy campaigns like #happytoleed¹, #whyloiter² and #Iain'tnocindrell³ completely reject the patriarchal code in India and assert a female identity that is young, aggressive, rebels or protests against unequal gender practices, "the new Indian woman" is a combination of tradition/modernity; femininity/feminism; conformity/liberation (Basu 2001; Munshi 1998, as quoted by Parmeshram & Caldoza, 2009) in line with Rosalind Gill's observations of current neoliberal feminism in which young women should be beautiful but sexy and always up for it. In films or television drama this new India woman finds form, whereas the young aggressive, badass female is a frame more visible in recent advertising and advocacy campaigns. These media frames in congruence with psycho-demographic profile of the cross-viewing TV and Web audience in India makes digital advertising campaigns, a potent site of inquiry. Also, adolescent girls use popular media to construct self-identities (Butler & Zazlow, 2002) based on representations of women in books, advertising and films. As mediascape expands to include interactive spaces, transmedia conversations on representation subsequent discourse on framing of gender and sport in Indian media needs to be explored afresh. Recent studies highlight the role of new media w.r.t women sports (Creedon , 2014 & 1994; Tang & Cooper 2012; Schmidt, 2015). New media is changing the space for women sports by making the combination of

internet, mobile and Television potent for media sport especially women (Vann,2004).

Survey of Literature

Eastman & Billings (2001) reported symbolic annihilation as the most visible framing technique used to marginalize women's sports in the coverage of mega sporting events, including Olympics. Bernstein (2002) in her one of most cited work states that sexualization of female athletes as a media frame, where their appearance and attractiveness is emphasized robbing them of their athletic excellence or skill. According to the Women's Media Centre's report *Status of Women in the U.S. Media 2013*, "Coverage of women Olympians [in mainstream media] struggles between portrayals of athleticism versus sexualised stereotyping". Kane & Maxwell (2011) presented six categories of representation of sportswomen in media namely athletic competence, ambivalence, girl next door, hyper heterosexual, sexy babe and soft pornography while analyzing the response of sports audiences. Kennedy and Hills (2009) in a case study '*Meaning between the Gaps – Humour and Identity in Rugby advertisements*' underline the use of national stereotypic signifiers, hierarchy of identities and the translation of meaning system of heterosexual masculinity and national identity onto the brand advertised.

Rosalind Gill (2008) examines three recognizable 'figures': the young, heterosexually desiring 'midriff', the vengeful woman set on punishing her partner or ex-partner for his transgressions, and the 'hot lesbian', almost always entwined with her beautiful Other or double. Katherine A Mannion (2016) while analyzing the relationship between media representation of female athletes and the public opinion of female athletes found that female athletes are more likely to be sexualized than male athletes and are therefore delegitimized in their skill. A corpus-assisted analysis of sports reporting of the tennis athlete Maria Sharapova English and Italian press by Diane Ponterotto on representation of female athleticism reveals the presence of discursive frame which tends to trivialize the body of female athletes. Stacy Nicely (2007) analyzed the texts within three popular sports magazines (*ESPN Magazine*, *Sporting News*, and *Sports Illustrated*) found celebrity as an emergent theme commonly

applied to women in sports besides mental weakness, male reference, motherhood and sisterhood.

Limited research however exists on advertising campaigns that aim to break the gender stereotypes especially in Indian sports. A textual analysis by Arend (2015) on women directed advertisements by Nike in the context of US sports revealed how sports advertising is including feminist values in commodity form and that their agency is being exercised by female athletes in recent times.

Research Questions

Following questions are raised after analyzing existing studies in the light of new campaigns:

RQ1: What was the patterned sign system in these new advertisements?

RQ2: Are these advertisements framing athleticism and aspiration as the dominant value opposed to sexualization and vulnerability in women?

RQ3: How are sporting and non-sporting signs employed to break away from intertwined use of hegemonic masculinity and sports in India?

Methodology

A qualitative study was done to gain deeper insights into the verbal (aural and written) and visual content of the selected campaigns representing new signification on women and sports. Semiotic analysis of the campaigns will reveal patterns of signs, meanings and their ideological simulations.

Sample Selection

Two digital advertisements Da Da Ding by Nike and #ChangeTheRhyme by Blush & Dove released just before the Rio Olympics 2016 served as the media texts for representation of sportswomen in Indian advertising. These two campaigns were

selected as units because they grossed 2-3 million viewers* on Youtube on the first day of their release.

Table 1: Sample description Barbara Stern's model of advertising in communication (Stern, 1994)

	Da Da Ding		#ChangeTheRhyme	
	Description	Creative & Media Strategy	Description	Creative & Media Strategy
Source		Duration:		Duration:
Sponsor	Nike India	3:90 sec It was released on TV and web.	Dove India & Blush	3.09 sec It was released as digital video on You tube and was later shared on social sites like Facebook and Twitter. It is a musical vignette that uses popular nursery rhyme "Chubby Cheeks, Dimple Chin, Rosy Lips Teeth with, in, Curly
Author	Weiden & Kennedy (agency); Rapper Gizzle (music) Franscois Rousselet (Director) Genera8ion (Producer)	It is a musical vignette wherein famous Indian women athletes, a celebrity actor and women playing sports bring forth their love, passion, commitment to the game(s) in the most unabashed celebration of equal status to women in	Mindshare (Agency); Culture Machine (a digital content producer),	
Personna	1 film star + 10 Indian female athletes from the field of Hockey, Football, Cricket, basketball, squash, badminton, athletics		Six female athletes playing hockey, gymnastics, shotput, wrestling.	

		sports. With the advertising copy in form of a rap song 'Da Da Ding' the campaign aims to create a new narrative regarding women sports in India		Hair..." as a visual metaphor to present how female athletes and young sport aspirants re-evaluate beauty stereotypes.
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Note: Three Dimensions of the source considered

Semiotic Analysis and Research Procedure

Semiotic analysis deeply explores the content and form of various elements, how they combine to make meanings besides associations with dominant ideological standpoints of cultural theories and rhetorical schools. (Lee, 2015, 383).

In the present study, signifiers were identified and signification affixed based on Kennedy and Hills step by step guide to analysing media sport (Sports, Media and Society, 29-32). Various signs (signifiers-signified) in relation to binary oppositions in sport were analyzed in the advertisements to find the structured pattern of signs in Nike's *Da Da Ding* and Dove's *Change the Rhyme* (Table1).

Derrida's deconstruction⁴ and Barthes 'blissful reading'⁵ (as quoted by W. Lee, 2015) guides the analysis. Post-structural critique forms the theoretical foundation of semiotics in the present study. Post-structuralism argues that that 'the orchestration and manipulation of signifiers' (sound, words, images etc.) will determine the quality and the nature of the signified, hence inverting the relationship between them unlike proposed in linguistic structuralism (Lee, 2015).

**Table 2: Selected Binary Oppositions for the Semiotic Analysis
Da Da Ding and ChangetheRhyme advertisements**

SNO	Binary Opposition	Description	Source
1.	Masculinity: Femininity	Masculinity is associated with power, hard endurance, skill physical strength and dominance	Gramsci Hegemonic Masculinity Theory ; Parmeshram, 2005
2.	Athleticism : Sexualisation	Athleticism is possession of athletic ability and skill. Sexualisation is presenting women as sex objects and person trying to be beautiful for men	Bernstein Brandt & Carstens,2005; Tony Bruce (2012);
3.	Aspirational: Vulnerable		Kane & Maxwell (2011)
4.	Competitive: Casual	Having or displaying a strong desire to be more successful than others. Antonym (Casual)	Oxford Dictionary

5.	Celebrity: Ordinary	Celebrity is a respectable personality in their field who gets significant media attention	Klimes,1981& Boortein,1992).
6.	Beautiful: Ugly	Concept of Colourism where white /light or fair is considered beautiful and dark is ugly	Parmeshwaram & Cardoza, 2009

Source: Self Constructed

Findings & Analysis

The patterned sign system created by camera shots, angles, spoken copy (rap) and background music present how signifiers in the ads invested with meanings that frame women sports in a novel way were analyzed as per the identified themes (Table 2)

I Masculinity: Femininity

Digital campaigns break the convention to identify women with sports

The hegemony of male in sports is reversed in Nike's Da Da Ding advertisement as the female is both the message and the persona. Repeated use of wide-angle shots of women athletes running towards the camera thrice in the final sequence establishes the ownership of women in sports, which has been gender marked until now. In effect, it teases the viewer to prompt the identity of the athlete and their game reneging that sports are essentially masculine. Use of female athletes from different sports represents the generic intent to present sportswomen as the central protagonist. Presence of many female

athletes and absence of male is to negate the existing frames of symbolic annihilation and marginalization in mediated sport. Most sports themed advertising has fed the age-old binaries of masculinity and femininity with a pole advantage given to the masculine identity vis-a-vis gender in sports. In contrast, Da Da Ding equalizes the two binary oppositions. Conventional notions of Indian femininity are broken. Two such scenes illustrate the signification. In one scene where players jump cars, climb poles and continue to play their sport is a break the stereotype moment.

Indian cinema is littered with scenes of men chasing on the streets, young male adults playing on the streets is common in many advertisements, but women playing their sport on busy streets of bustling city urges the audience to redefine femininity. The female personas in the advertisement challenge the established gender order by defying the conventional code of femininity. More importantly, the male becomes the spectator (shots of boys looking at the girls playing on the streets) reversing the stereotype. It is a marked attempt to reset the characteristics that a society delineates as masculine or feminine. In another scene, female players sing and dance in a more masculine space, i.e., in front of trucks (truck driving, transport services is essentially masculine in India). The kinesio-linguistic shots of the girls present an aggressive, edgy and non-conformist persona. Use of rap song throughout, instead of a song again pricks at femininity once described. Furthermore, its spoken copy (rap): *'Let's go hard and show the world that, anything they can do we can do better...'* epitomizes how an ambition to be better than others is not inherently male but vital for any sportsperson regardless of gender identity. Here the female sports person is determined to make sports equal for men and women.

II. Athleticism: Sexualisation

Athleticism, instead of Sexualisation is the preferred media frame

Athleticism is signified in both these campaigns. Shots of players training rigorously, gyming, practicing, playing the matches with the spoken copy "*Let's Go*" convey the 'making of an athlete' in *Da Da Ding*. In this ad in the second shot the camera zooms in to a music system then quickly cuts to a loudspeaker on the street brings in the

freedom of choice and happiness associated with training to become an athlete. Later, in an intertextual reference to a scene in *Bhaag Milkha Bhaag*, biopic of Indian runner Milkha Singh where he is shown preparing for a major sporting event, there is a sequence in Nike's ad in which a female athlete is running on the field with heavy weight tied to her ending with a long shot of the woman running hard towards the camera, emerging out of the dust and grime signifying athleticism depicted in rigorous training. Intertextuality here negates framing sportswomen as sexualized images. Her identity as an athlete is predominant. This sign is intentionally chosen to challenge 'the preferred meaning of these discourses that reinforce hegemonic gender order' in mediated sport (Lee, 2017, 387). In #ChangeTheRhyme advertisement, the camera repeatedly focuses on the face of the player, or the player in action (tight close up of the Archer ready to pull the string and release the arrow) instead of a body part for the male gaze and therefore keeping sexualisation away from imagery. That athleticism includes skill is categorically depicted in the tight close up of the archer's face as she bids her aim.

III Competitive: Casual

Inclusion of competitiveness reflecting the New Identity

The copy in the rap '*Out run the runners, Out shoot the shooters*' in *Da Da Ding* describes her seriousness to compete and excel at the sport. Playing sports in India is not a virtue for an Indian girl, but Da Da Ding creates a signification of pride with competitive sport.

In the ad, a visual clip shows mid shot of a female posing in the front of a shelf full of trophies full of trophies symbolizes that women sports are competitive to the core, where the sportsman aims to achieve recognition and awards framed by the copy or the rap song:

*Look in the mirror like
"Aye girl let's do this"
My only competition is myself
That's why I keep some trophies on my shelf*

The first two sentences provoke the audience to reinvent the meanings embedded in 'looking at the mirror'. Mirror is now invested with fresh symbolism of self-identity as a woman who can extend herself. The copy brings to the fore excellence as the prime motive of the players. To excel or be superlative in performance is the central idea of the message illustrating the competitiveness within the female sportspersons. Use of words and phrases *like* goals set the starting point, "quits in your vocab" is laced with relentless pursuit, the intensity of ambition is evident in "I want this so bad" and the determination to win is epitomized in "will not give up" is an expression of inner resolve to emerge victorious in the end in Da Da Ding rap copy. In both Da Da Ding & #ChangeTheRhyme use of personal pronouns like "I" and "we" in the spoken copy signifies active state of ambition and success. Victory is a frame used for men, yet in these ads, female personas make no bones about their chase for victory or that they are in to win. Use of action verbs like 'got', 'won't', 'don't', 'cannot', 'will not' express a combination of ability, grit and desire to win and not just play the game.

IV Celebrity: Ordinary

Celebrity continue to find prominence, though others too gain visibility

The patterns of the signs in the two ads encode celebrities as leaders, role models and inspiring icons. Both the campaigns are musical vignettes (signifier) that reinforce celebratisation of sports. In these ads, the female characters are professional sports persons. Their selection as faces of the campaign lies in their ability to get audience and media attention. Important to note is inclusion of Deepika Padukone in the *Da Da Ding* ad. She is a movie star, not having played a competitive sport at the international level. The hierarchy within the celebratisation is also visible since, despite not being in sports, point of view shots of the movie star Deepika in the studio and long frames of the celebrity actress practicing emphasize her place her above the real sportspersons. Even in the last scene, the camera glides from the celebrities towards the young school girls creating a

direct relationship between the inspiration and the inspired. This ad signals that the focal point is the celebrity in the sporting world.

V Aspirational: Vulnerable

Un-stereotyping in Sports Themed Communication evident, as Vulnerability as a virtue is discarded

In the campaigns, signifiers like frontal close ups of the female athletes were an attempt to create direct contact between the player and the viewer. In a way, it was to reduce the distance (from public to social) between the persona in the ad and the viewer. Long shots establishing action and movement of the players signified aspirational women instead of pornographic or vulnerable. Sports grounds, basketball court and nets formed the backdrop in the long frames creating an ambience of aspiration and goal driven young women. These subjective interpolations of the players in the ad were clearly underlining the extra value of goals in the life of girls. In #ChangeTheRhyme, shots of women are practicing in broad daylight and in floodlit nights underscore the burning aspiration in the athletes.

VI Beautiful: Ugly

Reframing beauty as new definitions of female beauty are assigned

Ugly is acceptable but not beautiful in the conventional sense signify the advertisements. Descriptions of beauty in Indian women include new attributes. In the final shot in #ChangeTheRhyme advertisement of Dove, the bruised athlete looks straight at the audience with blood on her face says 'No It's not me' responding to the one question 'Is that you?' asked at the end of the famous nursery rhyme "Chubby cheeks, dimple Chin...Is that you?" that forms the copy of the advertisement. Tight close ups of athletes describe female beauty breaking away from the convention of fairness, fragile features, non-muscular shapeliness and long hair at several points in this campaign. When the rhyme as spoken copy plays curly hair, very fair, frontal close of a brown young girl with crew haircut and sweat running

down their face comes up on screen. The final shot (where the frame freezes) is an extreme close up of a female player with bloody nose and bruised face in #Changethe Rhyme ad where she says 'No, It's not me' breaks the beauty stereotype and signifies the new normal of beauty in women.

Da Da Ding also, through the scene when an athlete is shown training, lifting weight with hands under bright Sun, all smeared in dirt, sweat and tanned, questions the convention of beauty and embraces its binary opposition ugly as the new normal. Alongside, the spoken copy hits hard at colourism.

*Play hard 'cause I ain't worried about getting a tan
I'm still just as beautiful, man!*

It rejects the colour prejudice inherent in defining woman's beauty in India. Paradigmatic understanding of pattern of signs present that the use of "man" in the end is not merely a universal expression in language, but contains meanings that reject the demands of female beauty constructed for the male gaze. Self-assessment of looking value of a woman is ideologically challenging the gender stereotype of the male gaze. Athletes (for example: mid-shot of archer Mridula P., back showing her Indian Jersey in #Changethe Rhyme ad) are seen their training gear or national sports uniform underscoring their identity as an athlete.

We see that the signifiers used break some hierarchical binary oppositions on critical points where Femininity, Aspiration and Ugly are the new normal. The privilege accorded to male, masculinity and beauty in mediated sports texts is being reversed. The very name 'Change the Rhyme' is a call to act against the notion of beauty taught to small children in nursery rhymes like chubby cheeks. Every time the rhyme is repeated, its pitch and the tempo increases hinting at the shift from acceptance in the rhyme to anger, then agitation and finally action to reject the normality of beauty as constructed in Chubby Cheeks. New frames for women in sports were found: Aspiration, Athleticism, and Competitiveness. Deconstructing the campaigns brings forth the new found subjective positions gained by the conventionally weak (female, femininity and ugly) idiom in the

binary categorization openly challenging the naturalization of the dominant idea that sports is male, for male and of male. It contests the existing notion that when females play, they are merely attractive objects on ground, showcasing their sexualized images and not predominantly their sport.

Instead of creating continuity in the storyline, the thematic montage was effective in creating a balance between different sports. The two ads reflected of diversity in female sporting world in India. The advertisements did not discriminate between cricketer and non-cricket players. It placed the individual and the team, the popular and the elite all together at the same level. Creation of this level playing field also destroyed the hegemony of cricket in India sports. Importantly these ads are neither about cricket, nor about men, two dominant themes in Indian sports media. It is about girls who chose to play sports and that choice became their identity. Their identity merged with national identity as their aspirations find form and success.

An interesting facet of the Nike advertisement is the dance sequence. While the entire commercial revolves around sports training, determined athletes, practice and performance, this sequence breaks the semi-autobiographical storyline and depicts how these female players are making unconventional moves and dancing to challenge the accepted code of conduct for women. Badass dance moves described a strong feminist expression of rejecting the social identity of a 'new Indian woman'. While on one hand it is a rejection of the notion of a conventional good woman, the costumes and the hip-hop dance movements shown in the sequence embrace the globalized image of the females in the neo-liberal era.

Sporting (sports jerseys, football etc.) and non-sporting signs (streets, background music) are juxtaposition to break the masculine hegemony. The campaign interestingly uses intertextuality to invert the paradigm of gender in Indian sports. The scene where the female players crisscross the narrow lanes of the city to chase their goals through the various games they play on the streets is an imagery transferred from many Bollywood films where the Hero and his buddies play entre-stage to stamp authority on the streets. Streets

have clearly been marked as male spaces in Indian cinema, Da Da Ding introduces the new occupants of the streets in a metropolitan city –women and that too sports women. In fact, in the Nike advertisement, the 11 players occupy territories/spaces which were conventionally not theirs. It is in that sense, a call to free the public spaces from the labels of gender. The final scene hints at a new social order where the young girls are uninhibited in expressing their love for sports and thereby their choice. As they move from the inside of the school to the open grounds to play, the acceptability of sports in a female world is conjured up. Admittedly, it is marked by an absence of the rural landscape, from where most players in India come from. However, the target audience is urban therefore they must confront it first. Significant to note is the absence of reaction shots in both the ads. It is a construction of a new female identity not dependent on other's approval or applause, ironically the essence of fandom in sports.

Conclusion

The way women are reflected in popular sports campaigns not only influence culture of sports viewing but also how we view sports in relation to women. Semiotic analysis performed on the two campaigns highlights how new sign relations create meanings that revise the construction of gender, especially women. Even though it uses the composite arguments of Derrida and Barthes, the outcomes of the patterned sign relationship present either new frames or reverse the old frames used for sportswomen. The authors of the campaigns refrained from using bust shots, close up of long legs or bare midriff and used frontal shots of female faces, long shots of athletes training to change the narrative from vulnerable to aspirational. The ads are a first-person narrative of women athletes, pointing out that young women in India know their mind, are capable of making choices on their own, set their targets and equip themselves, understand what it takes to achieve what they set out for. While questions remain on the selection of the female athletes, since all in the campaign are thin and fit (Table 2), the larger objective is to create associations between girls and sports in a society where sports is still very male. It is also a rejection of the New Indian Woman caught up in the duality of feminism. Fathers or male colleagues/relatives are not part of their

stories freeing the female gender from the patriarchal crutches of support or submission. That these ads can change discourse cannot be ascertained, but representations like these can lead to a bandwagon effect, quite common in advertising. Also, since ads create a unique perceptual space for a brand, this new pattern of signs may encourage the marketing innovations that create themes to bridge the differences and not to specify them. It will be interesting to explore the marketability of femvertising, advertising that promote women's equality in sports in future researches.

Endnotes

1. Happy to bleed is an online advocacy campaign to secure temple rights for menstruating women in India
2. Why Loiter is an online campaign to reclaim freedom to be at public places for women at any time
3. Ain't no cindrella is a campaign against sexual harassment on streets
4. Deconstruction, adds to poststructuralist objection to binary oppositions by critical inquiry into the ideological practice of subjectivity in communication through naturalization and objectivity of culturally moderated binary oppositions in society.
5. Roland Barthes in 'The Pleasure of Text', 1976 describes blissful reading as 'writerly', wherein the reader is active and engages with the text while reading creating new meanings of the text and quashing the authors' hegemony over text and subsequently social discourse.

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