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MULTIMODAL SEMIOTICS IN DOVE ADVERTISING CAMPAIGNS: BREAKING STEREOTYPES

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Abstract

Our entire world is witnessing boom of multimodal networks and it has different modes of delivering information to an audience or audiences. Today due to the advent of communication and technology, there are several semiotic resources and modes that are transmitting knowledge at given time. The researcher has conducted a qualitative research on two Stop the beauty test campaign of Dove and Cost of Beauty: Dove film and toxic influence-dove film of US and analyzed the various semiotic modes used during the campaign. Verbal elements in the form of speech and writing as text were in declarative sentences. Visual elements refer to women in advertisements. Gesture elements include facial expressions, sad expression, dejection, remorse, followed by happiness. Audio elements include background music and voiceover.

This paper examines multimodality in advertising, use of multiple modes of communication in conveying a brand's message to consumers. The paper argues that the assimilation of different modalities of visuals, text, audio, music in advertising not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the ads but also increases their persuasive impact on the consumers. The paper reviews the existing literature on multi-modality in advertising and presents a case study of how different modes were used in recent Dove ad campaigns namely two ad campaigns on Stop the beauty test and cost of beauty campaign and toxic influence dove ad emphasizes the acceptance of oneself and one's beauty breaking all the social taboos and norms implicated by the society.

Keywords: *Multi-modality, Advertising, Dove campaigns, social taboo, beauty, semiotic*

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INTRODUCTION

Multi-modality is an emerging trend in advertising that has gained traction in recent years. Unlike traditional advertising, which relies solely on one mode of communication (such as text or image), multi-modal advertising uses a combination of different modes, including text, image, sound, and video, to convey the brand's message to the audience. Multi-modal advertising not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the ads but also increases their persuasive impact on the consumers. It is an approach where at least minimum two modes are used. Due to the advancement of media and technology, today everything has become interactive and real time based. Multimodal platforms are being used for propagating ideas, concepts and information along with teaching-learning experiences and carrying forward business and e-commerce transactions.

Multi-modal system is a system that has many modalities. Multi-modal systems use an advance paradigm to keep the system interactive in nature. In multi-modality, no two modes are equal. When one combines several modalities, a combination of their expressive strengths is able to overcome any kind of weakness (Tzovaras, 2008)

Important elements of Multimodality

(Kress & Leeuwen, 2001) describe modes are resource that are meaning making material. They are produced by society and in due course of time they become cultural resources. Every society not only uses mode that is available but also available to use. It also has conventions that indicate us to use them in a particular way. Earlier writing used to carry most of the informational load, today most of the websites are carrying maximum load of information, segregation of data, images, videos, etc. Furthermore, (Kress, 2010) adds various form of modes that include verbal, non-verbal, audio, visuals, graphics that contribute to make meaning and,

therefore, multi-modality can tell the utilization of modes.

The photographs that feature on cover page of a magazine has shifted from naturalistic representations to conceptual images that are stylised. Gone are the days when news magazine cover pages used to carry documentary photographs or portrayal of newsworthy people, photos of actual events that are being recorded (Kress, 2010)

Blogs, websites all provide multimodal experiences. Like when you read articles of a newspaper online, you might get a pop-up advertisement or a hyperlink that connects you to another website, or advertisement, all these things bring the experience out of a physical copy. Semiotic modes are shaped by characteristics that are integral or intrinsic in nature, potentiality of medium, values of societies and their cultures.

With the advent of digital media and technologies, has altered the way we produce and consume it. Interactive communication and multimodal media platforms have caused amalgamation of text along with graphics, audio, video.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different modes are being used easily with the help of affordances of new age technology making it possible for multiplicity of modes (Yus, 2006)

In news and current affairs television, distance and angle are important that establishes a symbolic relation between the people on the screen and the viewer. Anchor persons are shown slightly higher up than the viewers and people who are invited at the studio to suggest their authority.

(Dias & Gusso, 2016) conducted Multimodal analysis of two advertisements for blood donation campaigns and found that there is a strong relationship between

verbal and non-verbal elements of advertisements. The way texts are arranged, angle at which image is placed, the look of the participants that are portrayed with respect to the observer and the overall engagement captured in the advertisement all are important part of visual language that persuade to grab attention.

Multimodal Texts

According to (Kress & Leeuwen Theo, 2001)(Redman, 2018) The four domains (strata) in which multimodal texts derive their meaning are discourse, design, production and distribution.

A text will be considered multimodal, if it combines atleast two or more semiotic systems. Let's understand what are different kinds of semiotic systems in a text.

- a) Linguistic- It delves into grammar (oral and written), vocabulary and generic structure.
- b) Visual- Visuals consist of aspects like vectors, viewpoint, color, static image or moving image
- c) Audio- It consists of various aspects like volume, sound effects, pitch, music rhythm
- d) Gestural- It consists of aspects like speed, movement, stillness with respect to facial expression and body language. Body postures are also taken into account.
- e) Spatial- It consists of aspects such as proximity, direction, layout position, organisation of objects in space.

Multimodal texts can be sent using various media vehicles like paper, electronic media or even live recording.

A webpage is a form of multimodal text as we have written language, oral language, still or moving images, sound effects as well as music. A picture book combines both texts and visuals while a live ballet performance has gestures, music and space as their main elements.

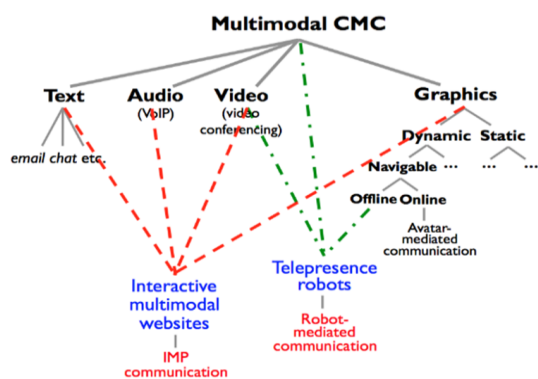
Cinematic writing is a multimodal form of expression in which emotions and information weight gets distributed between the various modes of expression according to the personal interest, skills, intention, and skills of the producer (Redman, 2018)

According to (Kress & Leeuwen Theo, 2006) every semiotic mode need to portray world realistically. The semiotic modes try to present the objects in such a way that they are shown as interacting with others which could be shown by vector image or by a tree structure. Any semiotic mode has to be able to showcase the relations between the producer of a (complex) sign, and the receiver/reproducer of that sign.

Image, text, colour are three modes that are used in outdoor signboards. Each mode is doing a specific function. Writing is a text that is difficult to show, image shows that takes long to read and colour highlights specific aspects of message (Kress, 2010).

Visual grammar makes a range of resources including composition of various elements. Image can be a demand or an offer. Demand refers to gaze of portrayed image directly to the viewer while offer means absence of gaze at the viewer. Visual images need to select a certain frame size to depict the elements in a desired attitude. (Kress & Leeuwen Theo, 2006).

In audio there are different modalities in terms of music, speech, and sound. In visual we have still images and video (motion). While in text, we have printed and handwritten text. In a multi-modal approach, meaning is derived by using several modes of communication other than language.



Interactive multimodal platform (IMP) generally involves text plus any other mode that could include audio, video or graphics. YouTube was one of the first IMPs that allowed users to comment on a shared video. Facebook became an IMP when it provided video chat option along with textual communication. IMPs are used in social media that allow users to comment on multimodal content with multiple channels on a website. Whatsapp is an IMP on mobile device that enables exchange of images, video, audio, in a single conversation (Herring, 2015).

Digital Storytelling is a new modern art of storytelling that uses different tools of audio, visual, animation, graphics that help to narrate a story. Digital story is the telling and sharing of short stories that are longer in duration anywhere that is more than 1 minute, between 2-5 minutes along with narration or music ((Nguyen, 2017).

In a website writing next to the image seems to be specialized to make image more salient or give a context of frame for what this image is actually is that seems to be what writing is doing here. Writing – context, image-more potent and they are organised in a left right relationship. Layout helps in putting things in space in a meaningful way. Ordering is about significance, a sense of proper composition, in which things should be

kind of balanced, in terms of visual ordering.

Today smartphones are no longer dumb. They are a special device that displays media convergence which bring together the different functions of several (formerly) separate digital devices (Kress, 2010)

Translation is also multimodal in nature. Here meaning is moved from one mode in one culture to same mode in another culture. Eg a novel can be translated from English to Russian, staying within the mode of writing. translation is the term used to describe significant shifts in meaning: across genres, across modes, across cultures and across any combination of these.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The aim of the research is to investigate various modes present in Digital stories of four Dove advertisements namely two Stop the Beauty test campaign and Cost of Beauty, Toxic Beauty influence campaign. The paper explores various modes used in the advertisement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted qualitative study of four Dove ad campaigns namely two ad campaign on Stop The Beauty test and one ad campaign on Cost of Beauty campaign by Dove US, and one campaign on Toxic Influence by Dove US. All four campaigns are digital stories that are more than 2 minutes to 3.5 minutes duration.

A scene by scene analysis of the campaigns have been done to understand various semiotic modes audio, visual, camera angles, voiceover, text used in the campaign have been analyzed.

Observation

First Campaign- Stop the Beauty Test



The advertisement begins with voice-over and text is flashed on the screen, that its not a story of us but crores of stories of women.



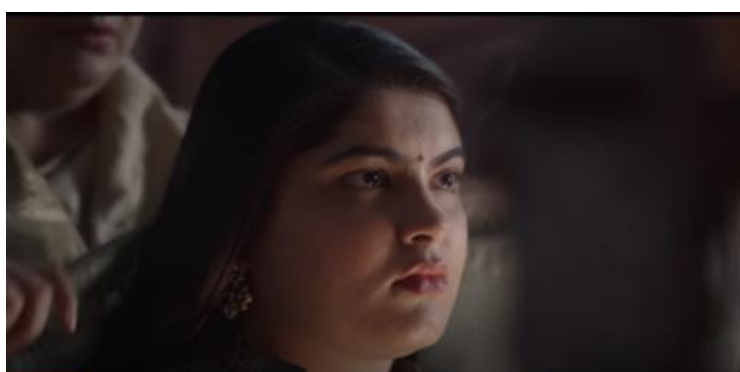
Here we see the mother is cajoling her daughter, saying Mahek is ready...



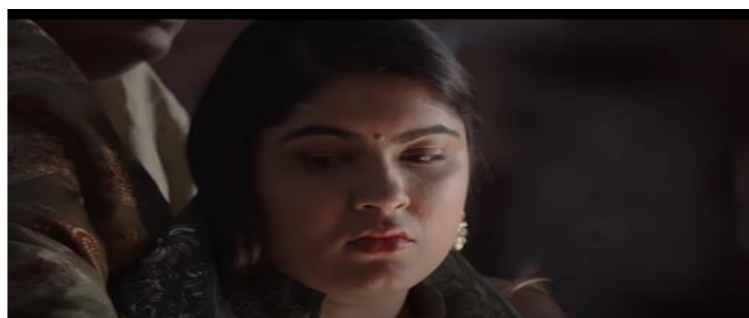
Mahek is carefully looking at her mirror reflection.



Here one relative is complaining to Mahek's mother that why she isn't wearing saree, her weight is showing again. Here Mahek feels sad after overhearing the conversation. Mother puts the duppata and says that weight is showing on this dress as well.



The girl Mahek feels sad, one can see her eyes expression. The relative is telling her mother to do fast, as the groom and his family have come over. Mother tell her to cover the weight with the cloth. Mahek is feeling conscious.



Instrumental music of violin adds emotional component into the situation of Mahek feeling nervous, anxious and sad. Mother tells her to come soon.



Wide shot of Mahek, followed by close shot of Mahek, with background sound of Mahek come is heard.

Another girl Noor is shown



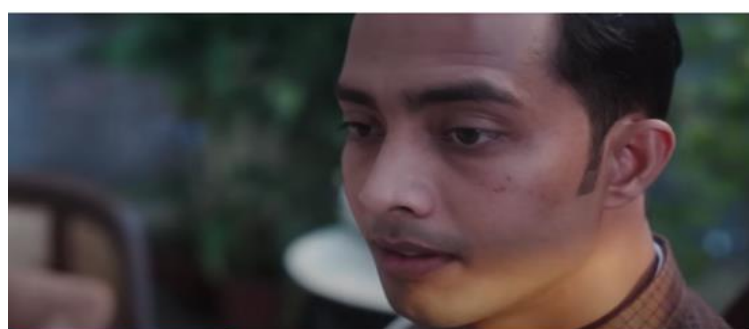
As Noor is entering, she greets everyone with Asalam Valekum



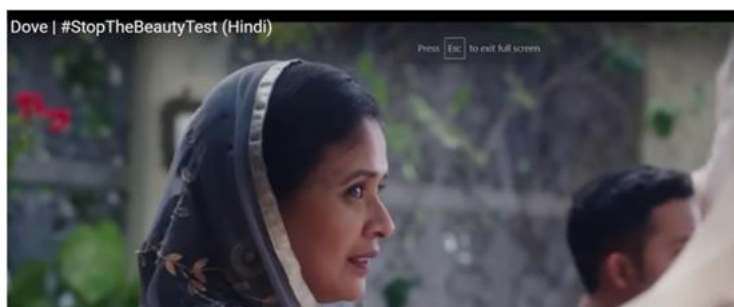
Wide shot of the family and groom's relatives look at her.



Mother's side profile is seen greeting Noor to come in.



The boy is looking at Noor cynically.



The boy's mother is saying that photograph her skin was seeming to be fair.



There is a look exchange between boy and his mother.



Noor sees the non verbal exchange between the boy and his mother. Noor's mother asks the boy to talk with Noor separately.

In another scene



Here boy's mother is making fun of Rajeshwari by saying that Rajeshwari might have to use staircase in order to talk with her son.



Other relative is laughing out loudly.



Father is looking at them, worried.



Daughter is looking back at her father. Violin music is playing at the background.



At the background of the laughter, and track shot scene changes



One lady feels girl's hair saying you straighten your hair, brother doesn't like noodles, commenting upon her curly hair.



POV shot of Hemali looking at the lady.



Mocking and laughing by would be mother in law and sister in law and others as if the society is mocking at Hemali.



Hemali is looking down, sad.



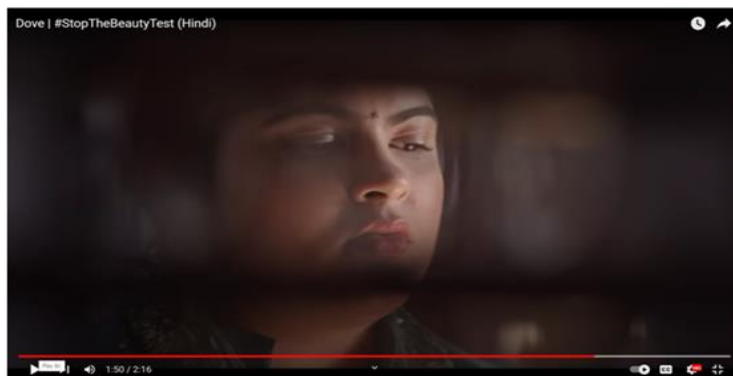
Mother quickly looks at her daughter and cares for her.



Transition to another scene with someone touching another girl Deeksha's face



Voiceover- This scar. The look of happiness changes into sadness.



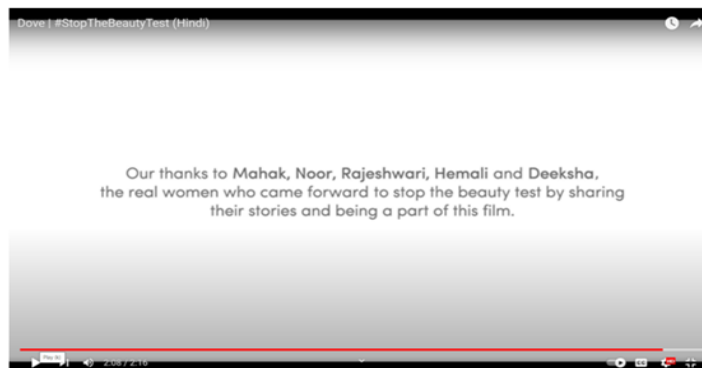
Till what time will this test of beauty with all its ugliness (Voiceover)



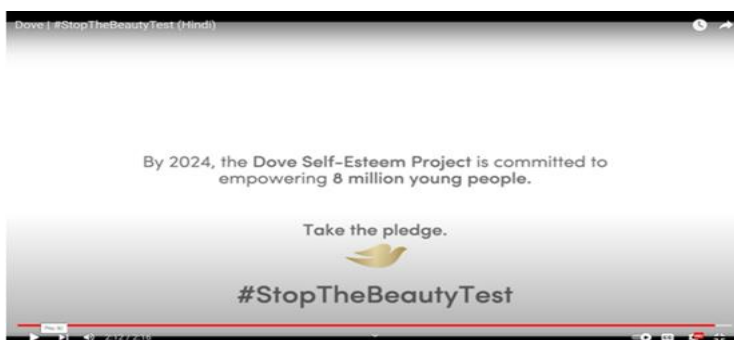
Voiceover- How much of beauty is enough



Dove brand- Voice-over Look at merits and not at the demerits.



This campaign tried to emphasize and talk about beauty standards set by the society namely on weight,height, fairness, face without any scar, curly hair etc. Dove subtly breaks stereotypical projection of women by accepting women as they truly are.



Second campaign- Stop the Beauty test Dove campaign that looked at stereotypes set by society for young girl children.

Dove The Beauty Report Card #Stop The Beauty Test



Text- This poetry is inspired from real experiences

Audio- Sound of hustle bustle at home and papers being flicked.



Someone is writing. The camera tilts up to show face of a girl. Name Aditi , 16 is displayed as text.



Background of cooker whistle is being heard, and mother walk in at Aditi's room.

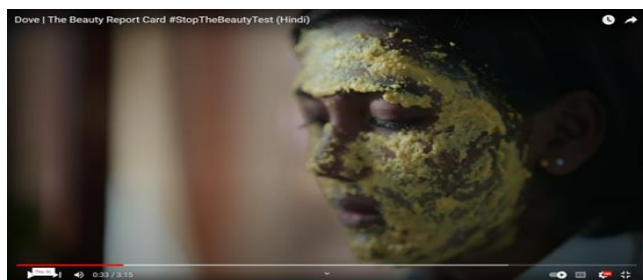
Mid shot of mother and daughter. She calls her daughter to look here from behind.



Mother says to lift her face. Daughter says that I am doing study.



Yes you study. She forcibly applies a home made face cream on the girl's face. Ise rang saaf hota hai means skin becomes fair. Wash it after half hour.



Backdrop of piano music is on.



School is not yet over. My house people are trying to make report card for my wedding.



The home face pack falls on the notebook.



Fairness and beauty how many marks have got cut. The girl looks on.

Transition



Waist- 44



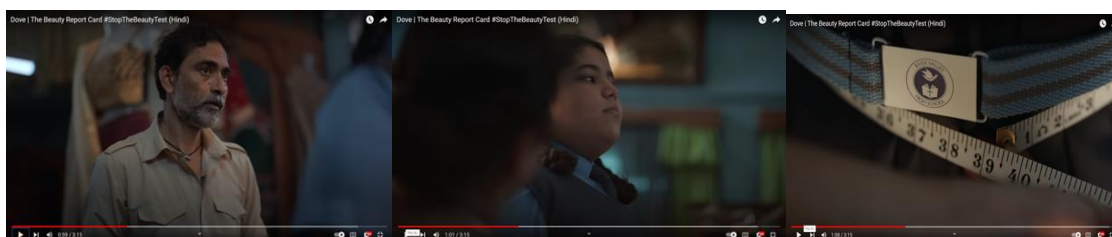
Mother says wait. Daughter, put your tummy inside.



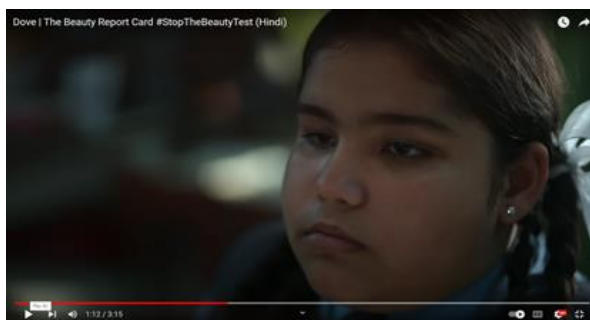
Daughter Garvita looks on



Mother tells her to take a deep breath and pull her tummy inside. She is seen tapping her daughter's tummy. Tailor is looking on seriously.



How many marks got cut due to weight.



They are making report card.

Piano music on the background that plays sentimental music.



Background someone calls out to Vedika. Vedika stops

It is said you are not beautiful. Then your wedding rules will alter.



Yes or no the boy will say.



You will listen. And you will keep quiet.



I might not be capable after my studies, but I need to be capable for a literate person.



Mom comes and adjusts her hair to cover her pimples of her face. The scars that you have on your face, that much adjustments you have to do.

Transition



Daddy will have to give vehicle. Only after that palanguin will take place.



Teacher comes and takes off glasses of Akshadha. They are teaching us from now itself, they are showing us that mirror doesn't love me.



Girl clinches her fist. She closes her eyes. She wears her glasses again.



Please take off your eyes from beauty report card.

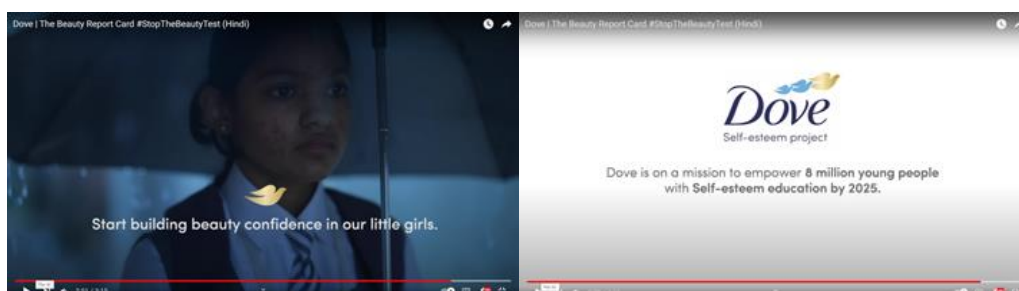


Meet the eyes with my eyes. We see other girl wipes off home made face cream.



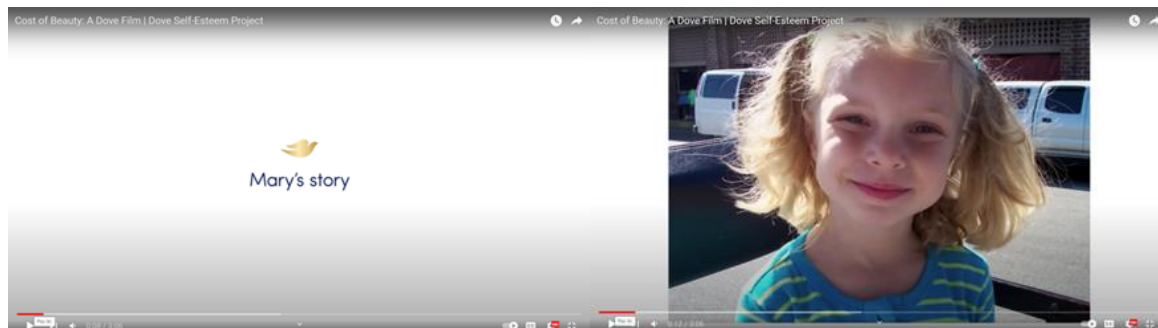
Voiceover- 80% of girls while going to school, have to face beauty test. But dove says to stop the beauty test.

Music- Strong instrumental violin music

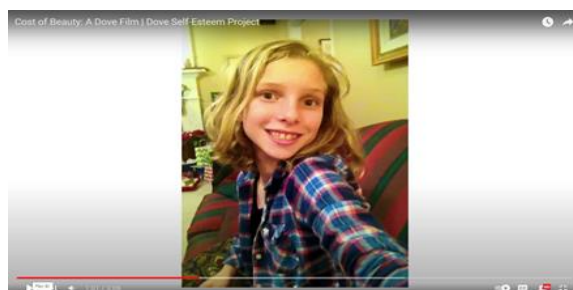


Stop the beauty test campaign focused on young little girls facing taboos of society namely on weight, curly hair, face with pimples, scar etc. It again broke stereotype by subtly through portrayal of young girls to stop being rebuked for one's looks but is asking the society to accept girls as they truly are and not to measure any beauty standard.

Third campaign- Cost of Beauty: Dove campaign US



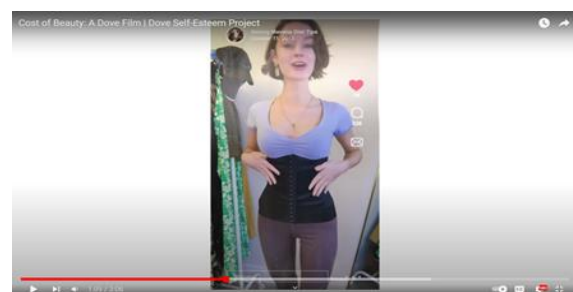
Background music- You are so beautiful song to me. Candid shots of Mary, Mary with her mother.



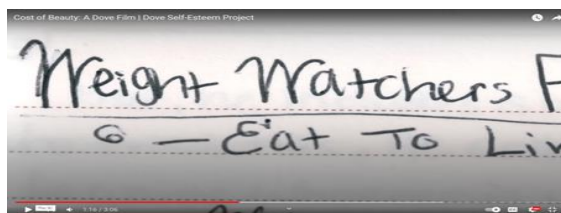
Obsession with social media and severe usage of smart phone and selfies.



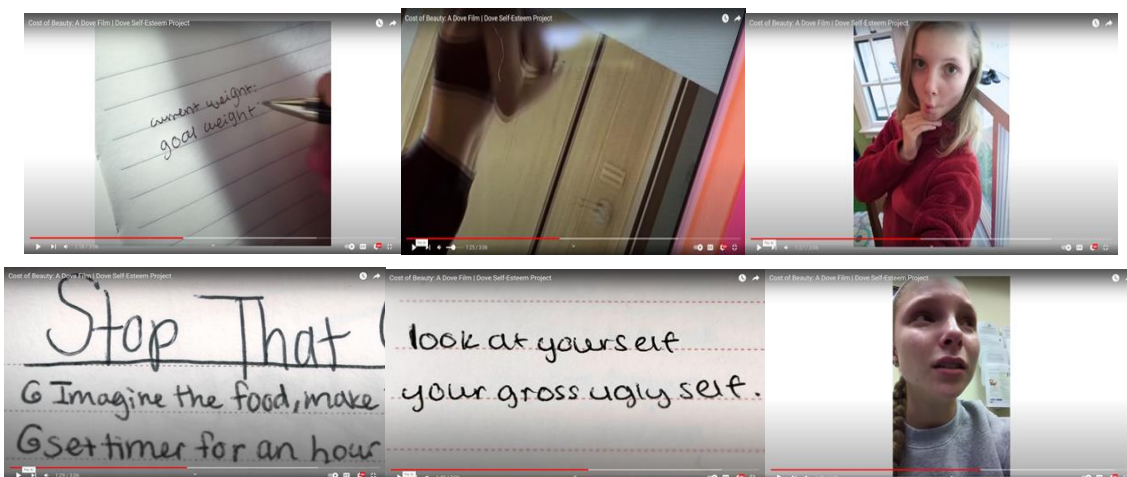
Background- Of small waist being flashed by influencer who is talking via social media, Mary is looking at the video.



Mom is trying to snatch away Mary's phone but she doesn't give it to her.



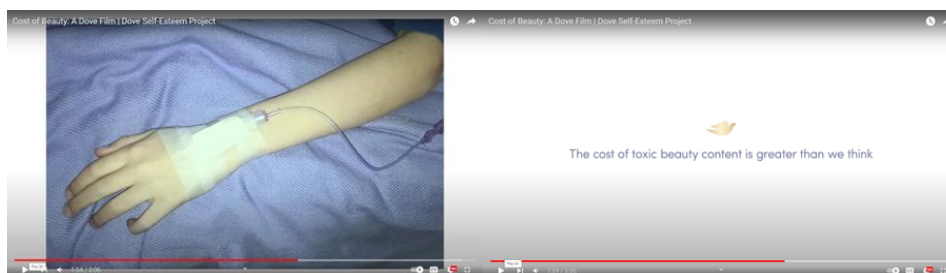
Mary starts penning her thoughts regarding her weight.



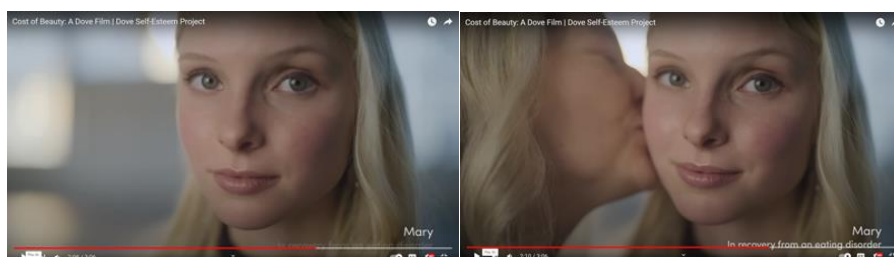
Mary keeps penning her thoughts regarding weight control, feeling miserable about her weight.



Through various images of eating disorder unit, photograph of Mary in the hospital, shows drastic influence of social media on Mary.



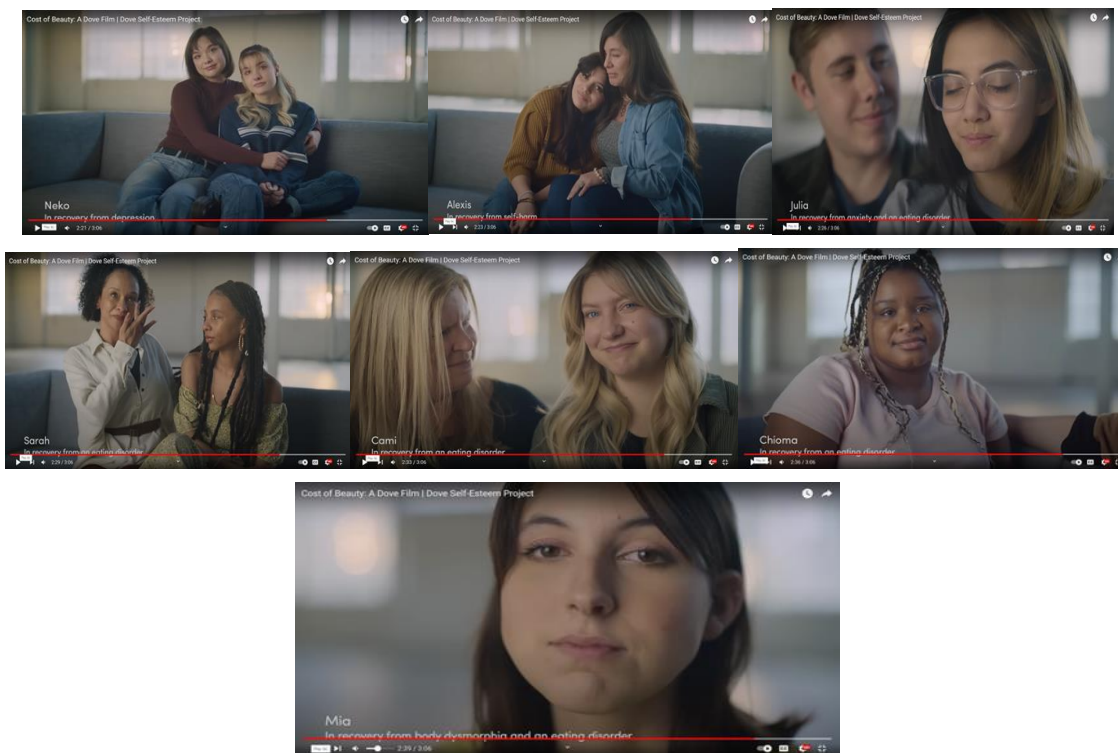
Audio-You are so beautiful to me and to see



You are everything I hope for, everything I need mother sings for her daughter Mary. In text it shows that Mary is a recovery from an eating disorder



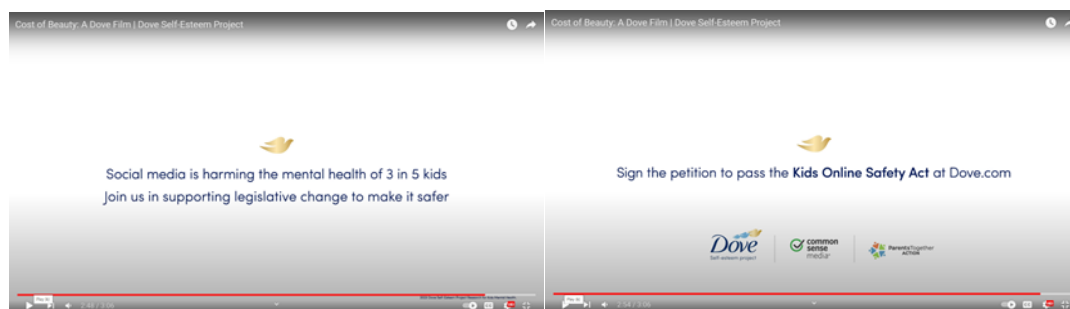
Visuals of various kids having severe illness who are on route of recovery are shown.



Strong emotional sentimental music is played.

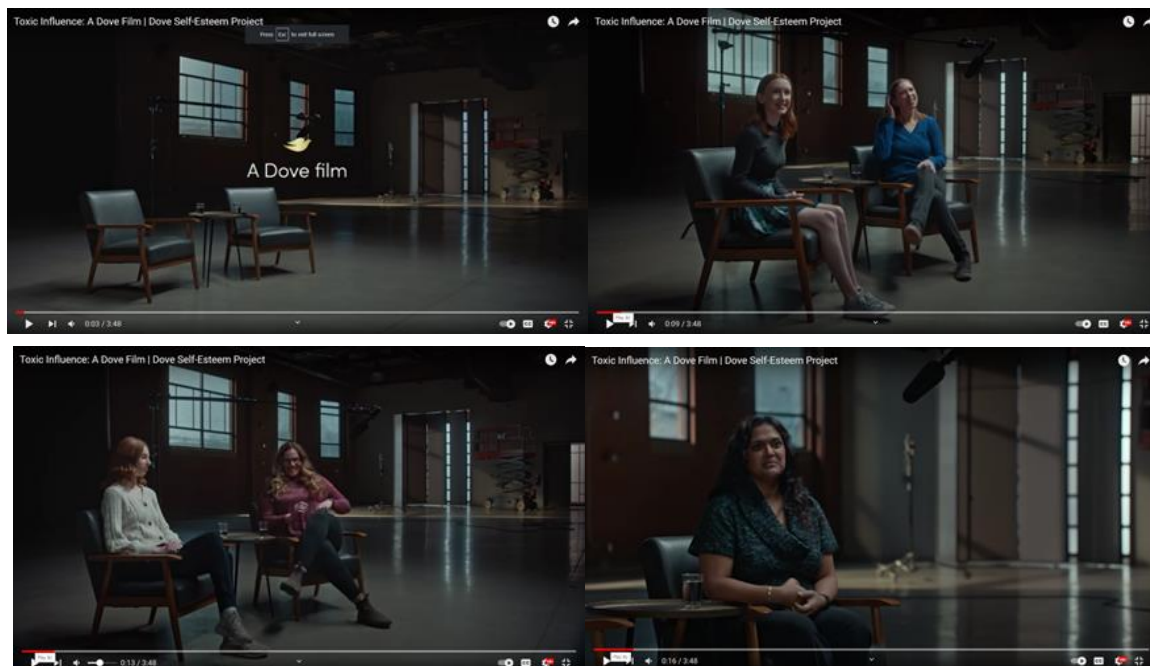


Text strongly emphasizes social media harming mental health of 3 out of 5 kids.

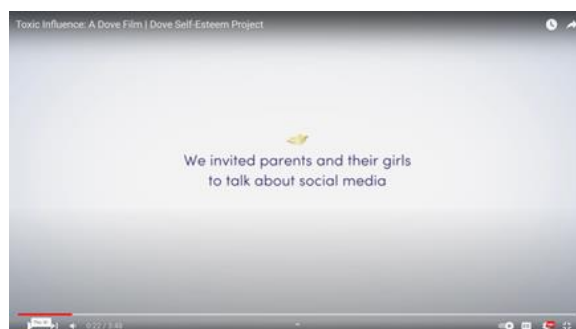


Dove flashes a message as text to sign a petition to pass kids online safety act at Dove.com

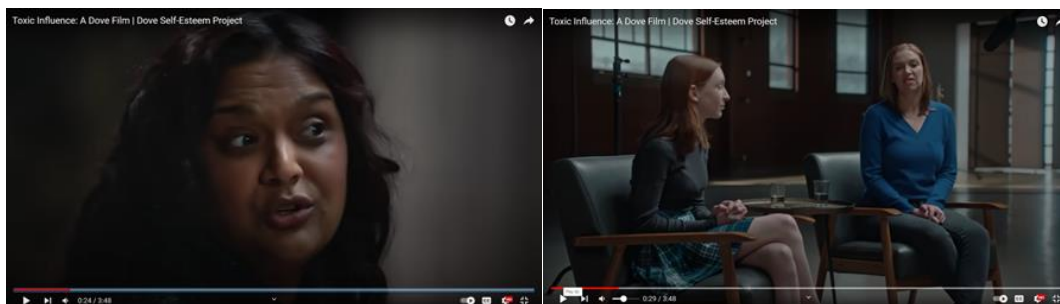
Fourth Campaign Toxic influence: A Dove Film that projects influence of social media on young adolescent girls.



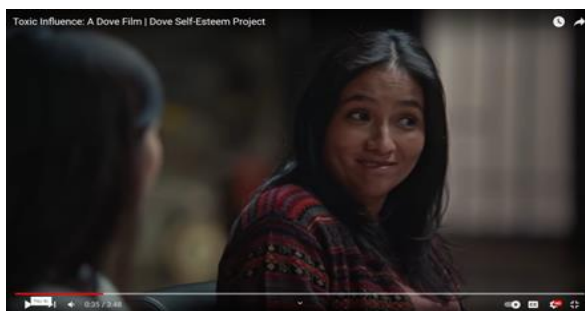
Toxic influence: Mothers were invited with their girl children to talk about social media and its effect.



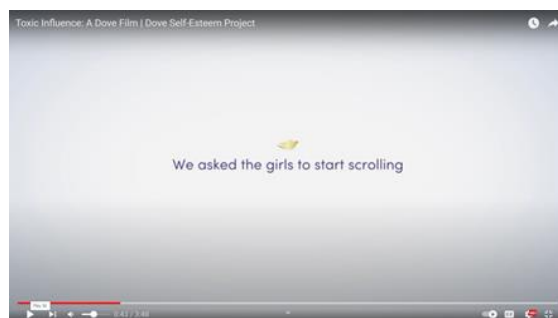
Each mother was seen giving her feedback regarding influence of social media.



Other mother told that social media can build her confidence.



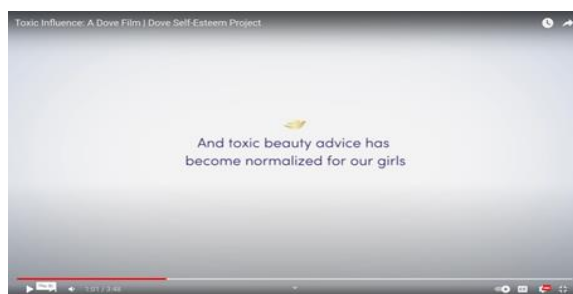
One girl told that social media had positive influence on her.



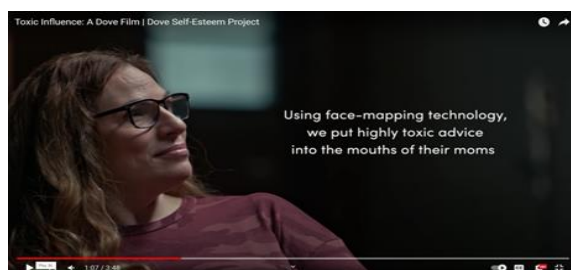
Then girls were asked to start scrolling through a voice. A text is flashed mentioning the same.



Text is used powerfully stating underestimation of toxic beauty advice of social media.



Mothers are seen looking at the projector with their kids.



Face map technology was used and girl's mothers were seen giving highly toxic advice. Mothers were shocked to see the content like short cut to flawless skin, botox is amazing and never too young to start.

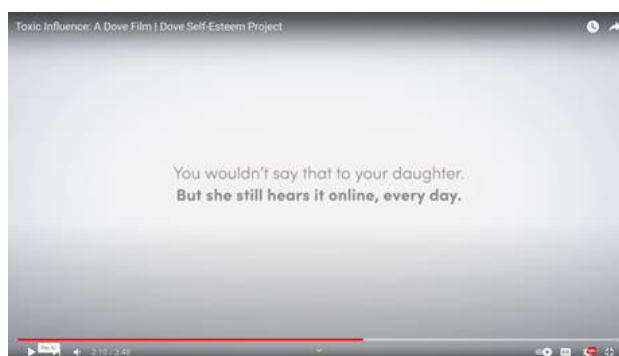
Mother denies that it is not her on the video.



All content emphasized about toxic beauty like using powders that stop reducing hunger to skip breakfast and lunch, using botox, using chemicals to get glowy skin, use fake eyelashes, file uneven teeth with nailcutter etc.



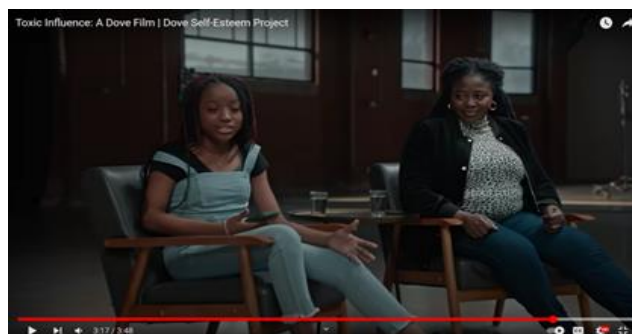
Text is flashed that said as a mother you won't say all that to your daughter.



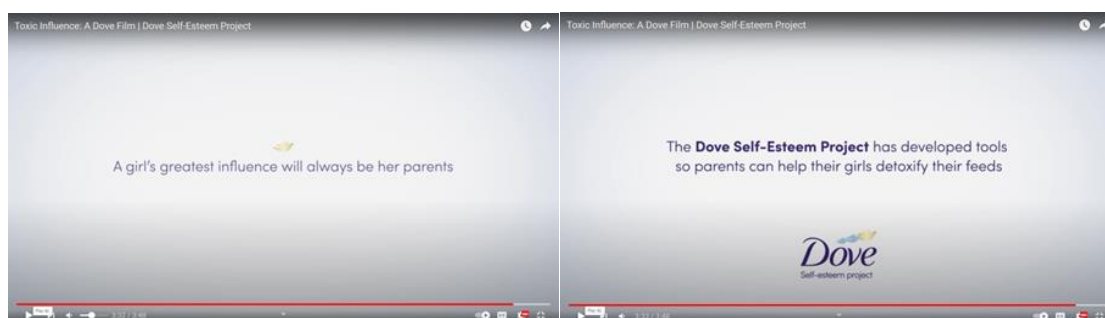
This stuff is on every girl's feed told one of the girls. Mothers look scared, worried, one of them said it scared her that kids are watching this.



One of the mother said that you can't prevent seeing these videos but talk to them about it. One of the mother tells that her daughter can talk to her and discuss anything that she can. Other girl tells her mother has always told her to not listen to others and to be proud of who I am.



Music- Violin plays at high note on the background adding emotional element to the ad campaign.



ANALYSIS

All the four campaigns of Dove, Stop the Beauty test two campaigns in India as well as Toxic Beauty Influence and Cost of Beauty campaign of US were trying to break the stereotypical portrayal of young girls and women to fit into a beauty standard set by the society. Through these campaigns Dove highlighted the toxic measurements and judgement done on little girls, women of marriageable ages and tried to comment upon the wrongdoings of the society. On one hand in India, one can see judgemental behavior of mothers, teachers, grandmothers towards young girls from an early age. While on other hand in US, more and more young girls are getting involved with social media so much so that they are believing the reel world as it is, causing harm to themselves leading to depression, eating disorders, body dysmorphia, anxiety etc. While cost of beauty highlighted the negative impact of social media through a case study of Mary who faces severe eating disorders due to influence of social media feeds, the toxic influence campaign was an experiment conducted wherein

mothers of young girls accompanied them to a studio. They were shown feeds of social media with face mapping technology in such a way that mothers were speaking the words of social media influencers who were giving wrong advises on botox, fake eyelashes, using chemicals to reduce weight, etc. Mothers realized that the content of social media is scary and that they need to protect their girls from its vicious effect by having an open dialogue with them.

CONCLUSION

Dove campaigns on Stop the Beauty test and toxic influence, cost of beauty was highlighting wrong precedent set by the society on beauty standards. With use of multi-modality, the campaigns used audio, visual, narration with voice overs, text along with music effectively in order to inform, educate regarding the beauty stereotypes of the Indian society and the western world. Indian society prefers girls with fair skin, without scars, doesn't appreciate curly hair, dark skin, short height and heavy weight. While the

campaign toxic influence and cost of beauty brought awareness of the ill effects of social media beauty standards that propagated slimness, fairness, ideal body type by using botox, eating disorders, etc. The experiment conducted by Dove for toxic influence where mothers and their daughters were watching social media content and had an open dialogue with each other regarding the toxicity and bad influence of social media and help girls revive their self esteem. All the four campaigns of Dove highlighted negative influence of society, social media on young girls and women regarding their beauty standards through great use of multiple modes of audio, video, text, music and storytelling.

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