

Gender stereotyping in avertisements

Abstract

Gender and media is a subject that is being discussed frequently. The portrayal of gender as a product and the accompanying body politic in the media is well documented. Media can act as both a perpetrator and protagonist. The use of gender advertising can either make or break a brand image. Gender advertisement refers to the images in advertising that depict stereotypical gender roles and displays. Every day we are exposed to an array of these advertisements, and although we might not realize it, they are affecting us. It seems like recent advertisements have become bolder than ever in their use of gender stereotypes and sexism to try to sell a product. This paper concentrates on the effects of gender advertising and roles of gender advertising. This study will concentrate on stereotypes associated with women in advertisements.

Keywords: Gender advertising, sexuality, stereotypes, masculinity, femininity, massive chests, professional.

Introduction

Today we are plastered by articles, images and audible form of advertising and an average person encounters between fifteen hundred and three thousand forms of advertising each and every day. Of those fifteen hundred to three thousand, more than two third of them portray sexuality. Advertisements guide thinking, action and behavior as people come to accept mainstream ideas through visuals. It is safe to conclude that stereotypes exist and are a part of our lives. People act according to these stereotypes because stereotypes are considered socially acceptable. For example, when people think of an advertisement for a household cleaner, what comes to mind is a woman. (Bardwick & Schumann, 1967). But gender specific advertisements show men as a powerful image and women as weak. Gender characterized in advertising continues to deepen the stereotypes derived by society. Men and women are targeted according to their social beliefs and attitudes towards their self perception brought on by advertisers and society, enforcing them to adopt certain buying behavior to influence purchasing decisions.

How Gender Displays In Advertising

Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perception of individuals based on their genders. It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles. In advertising, men and women are often portrayed in the following ways:

Masculinity in Advertising	Femininity in Advertising
Alert and conscious of surroundings	Touching self
Standing upright	Caressing an object
Eyes open and looking around	Lying on the floor
Bodies are controlled	Sitting on a bed or chair
Mean expression on face	Eyes closed
Gripping things tightly with hands	Not alert
Hands in pockets	Confused
Serious	Vulnerable
Physically active	Body contorted
	Dressed like a child
	Holding an object or a man for support
	Sexy and sexually available
	Seductive
	Playful

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Asian Resonance

Research Concerning Stereotyping of Women in Television Advertisements

One of the first studies that talked about the image of women in television commercials was by Bardwick and Schumann (1967). Bardwick and Schumann (1967) analyzed male and female role portrayals in television commercials and concluded that women are portrayed primarily as homebound or as housewives. Courtney and Whipple (1974) studied the portrayal of women in television commercials and found significant differences between men and women. Women were over-represented in advertisements for cosmetics and were less likely to appear in advertisements for cars, trucks and related products. Seventy-five percent of all advertisements using women were for products found in the kitchen or bathroom, reinforcing the stereotype that a woman's place is in the home. Courtney and Whipple (1974) defined sexual objects as, where women had no role in the commercial, but appeared as an item of decoration. Later studies reaffirmed this (Culley & Bennett, 1976; Dominick & Rauch, 1972; Lundstorm & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; McArthur & Resko, 1975; O. Donnell & O. Donnell, 1978; Schneider & Schneider, 1979).

Research Concerning Stereotyping of Women in Print Advertisements

Most of the studies agreed to varying degrees with the work done by Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) who found that women were portrayed with four distinct characteristics: 1) A woman's place is in the home; 2) women do not make important decisions or do important things; 3) women are dependent and need protection; 4) men regard women primarily as sexual objects and are not interested in women as people.

Female role stereotypes in advertising

In the past women in television commercials have been portrayed as central figures only in commercials about household products. (Bretl & Cantor, 1988). Results for this study indicate that women as central figures are still associated with household products in television commercials. Women are also increasingly being portrayed as central figures in the personal hygiene category. There is no change in the stereotype associated with women in this category. According to different categories we can explain the female role stereotypes in advertising:

Occupation:

According to the stereotype, women are best as mothers or housewives. If they are working then it is either as a secretary or in non-professional jobs (Bardwick & Schumann, 1967).

Product Representative:

Research in this field indicates that women appear as product representatives in very few commercials and when they do appear it is for products used in the bathroom or the kitchen.

Product Types:

Women have been associated primarily with household products (Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Dominick & Rauch, 1972). The dominant characters were coded for product types as follows: a) foodstuffs:

Any type of food or beverages; b) personal hygiene: all personal hygiene products with unisexual appeal like deodorants, soaps, shampoos etc; c) home products: included exterior and interior household goods like furniture, household cleaners, laundry, dish detergents etc.

Female role stereotypes in advertising:

Category	Description
Women in traditional roles	
1. Dependency	Dependent on male's protection; In need of reassurance; Making unimportant decisions.
2. Housewife	women's place is at home; primary role is to be a good wife; concerned with tasks of housekeeping.
Women in decorative roles	
3. Women concerned with physical Attractiveness.	Women in pursuit of beauty and physical attractiveness (e.g. youthful).
4. Women as sex objects	Sex is related to product; sex is unrelated to product.
Women in non-traditional roles	
5. Women in non-traditional activities.	Engaged in activities outside the home (e.g. golf, football)
6. Career-oriented women	Professional occupations; entertainer; non-professional Blue collar
7. Voice of authority	The expert.
Women portrayed as equal to men	
8. Neutral	Women shown as equal to men

Sources: Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976); Mitchell and Taylor (1990); Lysonski (1985); Zotos and Lysonski (1994)

Role of gender in advertising

There are stable images of men and women roles in the society, which are very difficult to change or overcome. Men are usually regarded as strong and clever and women are treated as sex object, housewife, mother and submissive.

•Feminine touch

In ads women are often seen touching themselves, which is sign that their body is delicate. Women are also depicted as barely touching an object or caressing it, whereas men firmly grasp an object, as if to say that they control over their life, while women are merely there.

• Role of women

Women in ads are often depicted as confused, un-alert and mentally unaware of her surroundings while men are shown as alert.

• Placement

Women are presented as subordinate to men. Mostly women are placed below men and can often be found lying on the floor or on a bed while men are standing upright or sitting in a chair.

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- **Social pressure**

Since the 1980s, men's bodies have been used more for advertising; research suggests that men feel social pressure to endorse traditional masculine male models in advertising. A study on male body obsession found that advertisements for everything from cars to underwear depicted body builder images with massive chests and inflated shoulders.

- **Harmful effects of gender advertising**

Every day we are exposed to an array of gender specific advertisements, and although we might not realize that they are affecting us. These advertisements portray an idealistic version of reality, but most people still use them as a measuring stick when it comes to beauty, health or behavior. This in turn creates unattainable goals and expectations that can lead to a variety of negative consequences. Some of the harmful effects of advertising are as follows:

- **Harmful to society, especially women**

Through visual and verbal messages women are portrayed as subservient to man. Women are seen as sex objects and these types of advertisements harms women's self image.

- **Violence**

Advertising messages influence younger generation as well as stereotypical images of men. As a result the objectification and violence against women will continue. This means that women will continue to suffer from discrimination based upon gender.

- **Effect on children**

Eating disorders, diminished self images, and the promotion of women as sexual objects has immediate harms for women and influences the socialization of children. Men as well suffer from stereotypes about attractiveness, body images and sexuality.

- **Steps to control gender based advertising**

As concern for gender equality continues around the world, so do the concerns in how women and children are portrayed and perceived in an ever increasing international media. Since advertising carries those messages, images of women continue to come under scrutiny. so following steps should be taken to control gender based advertising:

- Policies should be established which may ban the promotion of sexist attitudes in advertising.
- Advertisements can be ignored by consumers and deleted at will. Interpretation of ad depends on the attitudes of the receiver.
- Advertiser should understand that people are not products. They have unique traits, emotions and capabilities. Instead of advertising to these needs, marketer tends to illustrate all the things an individual "should be."
- Gender must be evaluated not only in the terms of sex roles but in terms of psycho-social and psycho-analytical terms.

- **Conclusion**

In summary, the research indicates that the females are portrayed in advertisements are younger than their male counterparts, are somewhat less intelligent, and are tied to their home and family. If the

stereotyped woman does work, her job is most likely a non-professional one, such as a secretary. She is always smiling and is usually engaged in some activity. Women are still primarily portrayed as central figures in advertisements for household products. In all the above-mentioned categories there was no change recorded from the past studies. In this context, women's achievement is valued in terms of their responsibilities for running a successful household. However, Gender should be portrayed in appropriate situations.

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