

## MARKETING PINK

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### ABSTRACT

*Given the enduring sexism in mass media and advertising, the effects of gender-based stereotypes in marketing and advertising are being discussed in this article. The article has analysed that female depiction in advertising can affect both judgments and behaviour. Advertisements make perceivers to categorise women as sexual objects and hence enhance accessibility and potential applicability of this stereotype even in an inappropriate context. This article examines the impact of advertisements that portray women in stereotypical roles and represents that the effect depends on the shadow between the advertisement's portrayal and one's own gender stereotypes. This article extends our understanding of stereotyping and adds to a growing body of literature that documents the social side effects of advertisement content.*

**Key words:** *gender stereotypes, advertisement content, patriarchy*

### INTRODUCTION

From voting rights to equality in the media---feminists' relentless war against systemic patriarchy continues. External primes may become obsolete when trait stereotypes are systematically introduced by those with a medium or high propensity to stereotype women. It has been studied that gender-stereotypical primes would have little effect on subsequent decisions of those with a medium or high propensity to gender stereotype based on this redundancy. Gender traditional primes, on the other hand, would result in classic assimilation. As predicted, low-propensity-to-stereotype participants' judgments are assimilated to the homemaker prime. These findings hold for trait stereotypes and role stereotypes as well as trait assessments and gift selection, and it is their theoretical and practical consequences that are being discussed. Our primary interest is in implicit stereotyping effects in which incidental exposure to advertising unconsciously (i.e., without the perceiver's awareness or intention) has a systematic effect on judgments of

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women and perspectives. From a practical perspective, examining priming effects in the advertising domain is especially relevant given that the average, which translates to exposure to at least 30 minutes of ads. Further, content analyses have found that advertising tends to feature women in stereotypical roles rather than as professionals.

## **BODY**

Today, wielding their ever-increasing buying power, women purchase or influence the purchase of a major segment of consumer goods. The role of women in society as both spenders and earners has undergone a sea change in the past few decades. Has the advertising industry kept up with these changes, or is it the one that is running the show? The answer lies in the fact that art imitates life and life imitates art. Studies on gender and advertisements fork into two sects—mould and mirror. Either gender differences in real life lead to those portrayed in advertisements, or advertisements are responsible for shaping people's perceptions on gender roles.

In 2005, Morris and Lee studied appearances and portrayals of people in commercial print messages from 43 countries and explained them from two cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism and femininity and masculinity. They propound that culture strongly affects advertising content. For instance, in masculine countries, men are more often portrayed in traditional images than in feminine countries.

A study in the developed nations of the U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand yielded surprising results that despite the steadily morphing roles of women and their centrality in the consumer economy, women consistently accounted for merely about one-third of all characters in advertisements. In 2006, 33.9% of characters were women. A decade down the line, the figure had barely budged, reaching only 36.9%.

Additionally, when it comes to women's screen time and speaking time in commercials, no statistically significant change has occurred in 10 years. In 2006, 43.6% of all commercials featured women on screen for 20% or less of their duration. In 2016, the figure was 44.2%. Ads depicting men only were five times as common as ads depicting women only: 25% and 5% of all ads, respectively. Men get about four times as much screen time as women.

The study found similar percentages when it comes to speaking time. In 2006, 42.3% of commercials featured women speaking for 20% or less of the time spent on dialogue, compared to 41.7% in 2016. Analysing the number

of utterances, the research counted about three times as many for men as for women. Ads with only male voices were much more common than ads with only female voices, accounting for 18% and 3% of ads, respectively. Men speak about seven times more than women.

An examination of the content of speech revealed that lines of dialogue spoken by men were about 29% more likely to contain words associated with power and 28% more likely to contain those associated with achievement than lines spoken by women. Furthermore, women's spoken dialogue was analysed to be marginally simpler than men's.

In another study on the language of advertisements by Jie Yang, it was discovered that words like history, legendary, and classic are used to emphasise the superiority of products in advertisements targeted to males. Meanwhile, words like sensitive, tender, gentle, warm, and affectionate are commonly employed to appeal to women's feelings and emotions.

Moreover, being perceived as the “voice of authority”, there is an observable consistent predominance of male voice-overs—a predominance that is more pronounced in Asia compared to other regions. A UNESCO report points towards a general trend on the global status of women in media. The four ways of female portrayal the report defines are the glamorous sex kitten, the devious witch, the saintly mother, or the stone-faced corporate and political climber.

While men may not emotionally tie themselves to ads the way women do, they are more brand loyal and may relate more to products that appeal to their “manhood” and are loyal to their “fraternity”. While women may be repulsed, in stark contrast, men tend to choose products with gender labels. This is attributed to the fact that gender labels threaten women more than men because women have long been marginalised by negative stereotypes, making them more sensitive to marketing that tries to put them in a box.

Perhaps, the most lucid is the stereotypical association between women and body products, or “toiletries,” “beauty products,” and “personal care products,” as well as “household and cleaning products”. On the contrary, for men, loose associations can be spotted between men and television advertisements for cars, telecommunications, electronics, technology, and computers. A meta-analysis illustrates that the odds of women being depicted at home (vs. at work) are approximately 3.5 times higher than for men.

Talking about power positions, Erving Hoffman in his 1979 book *Gender Advertisements*, rationalises the depiction of women as relatively smaller than their male counterpart, with a body language that is submissive towards the advertised product. In what he refers to as licensed withdrawal, he points out the averted female gaze and their appearance of being removed from the social situation or activity in the advertisement. This disconnect and passive portrayal solidify the objectification of women in our patriarchal society.

Over the decades, female beauty has been institutionalised to the extent of there being created an entire industry devoted to it. A quest to meet the cultural ideal, cultivated through common socialisation experiences, is the fundamental selling message employed by advertisers selling beauty products. With male beauty being equated with physical strength, beauty standards for men are also set.

While on the subject of beauty, we must also delve into the topic of decorative portrayals of women in advertisements. More often than men, women are observed passively decorating the advertisement rather than being actively involved in it. These decorative roles tend to put women in either sexual or alluring positions, reflective of their place in society.

The gendered advertisements do serve an important purpose to the advertisers. Relying on stereotypes connotes quick rapport building, increased familiarity, and reception from the masses. Another aspect highlights the phenomenon of affect transfer that pushes advertisers to cast models that fit their cultural ideals of beauty. Attractive individuals are employed to transfer the positive affect that they induce to the product, thereby, augmenting the persuasive ability of the advertisements.

This purpose barely accounts for the trail of unintended and damaging effects gendered advertising leaves behind. Female portrayals in advertisements are shown to have a significant impact on forming and reinforcing judgements and behaviours. The limited range of gender roles depicted in mass media translates to limited societal roles. The focus of women as homemakers takes away from them being included in several facets of life outside the home. Their passive and subservient portrayal produces negative perceptions of women's abilities and them being dependent on others and incompetent in the workplace. On the other hand, excluding men from domestic roles plasters the belief that men are not equal partners in activities such as child-rearing and housekeeping. Moreover, advertisements strengthen value systems that focus on external beauty, consequently raising an entire generation of women developing body image and self-esteem issues as

well as eating disorders. Lastly, presenting women in a sexually suggestive manner demeans and dehumanises them, leading to their objectification in society.

Gender stereotypes in advertising may seem like an easy way to generate some cheap thrills – currently, the industry code accepts the use of gender stereotypes to ‘simplify communications. However, the lax use of such stereotypes only propagates damaging ideals, and usually an insulted audience.

This year, KFC was slammed worldwide for a ‘sexist’ 15-second advertisement, showing young boys gawking at a woman. The ad was critiqued by the Collection Shout for not only being a ‘regression to tired and archaic stereotypes but also reinforcing the impact of such ads in contributing to ‘a lesser view of women, resulting in their mistreatment’.

If the pull of a positive, equal society isn’t enough of an incentive for marketers, brand positioning surely must be.

The reputational and financial damage caused by careless advertising can’t be ignored. Peloton, an exercise bike company, lost the equivalent of \$2.171 billion in value after a Christmas advert titled ‘The gift that gives back’, centred on a woman’s quest to lose weight. In an attempt to challenge toxic masculinity, Gillette’s ‘A Best A Man Can Be’ advertisement categorised men into three tropes: The good male, the bad male and the passive ‘onlooker’. Whilst the sentiment was progressive, the ad received intense public backlash (becoming one of the most disliked videos on YouTube). Gillette later also lost the equivalent of a \$7.2 billion loss.

Such results are not shocking considering that it is mostly men that are turning the cogs behind the screen.

## **CONCLUSION**

Advertising has a tremendous responsibility towards society. From defining beauty standards to setting benchmarks and expectations of gender roles, the impact is significant.

Gender-tailored marketing messages are commonplace today, however, recent research shows that they can, in fact, veer off consumers, particularly women. Additionally, according to a study by Harvard Business School, these advertisements often backfire to the effect of dissuading women from choosing a product they would have otherwise considered. It is a major missed opportunity since, according to Boston Consulting Group, globally,

women control \$72.1 trillion of the world's wealth. Relying on gender tropes, or suggesting there's a certain way to perform one's gender, risks alienating large groups of potential customers, and a damaged brand image.

Where do these marketing campaigns go amiss? Why do these gender-coated appeals alienate the very audience they aim to attract? The answer lies in the current generation's intense resistance to being categorised or being reduced to a single identity—particularly when the product or service they are being offered reaffirms a stereotype about their gender. Increasingly, people are seeking products that go beyond the binary and are inclusive, consequently reducing the effectiveness of gendered marketing.

A wave of femvertising that saw its beginning with the 2014 Always #LikeAGirl campaign certainly paved the way for a more inclusive future of advertising. Recent trends show that in industries where products have been historically marketed based on gender, some brands are mirroring the changing societal norms and beginning to shun stereotypes and embrace neutrality—or at least being a little subtler in their gendered approach.

Gender is out, neutrality is in, nailing your marketing in the era of gender fluidity is crucial. Social politics has bled more into the advertising and marketing space than ever before.

The dialogue surrounding the breakdown of gender roles has gained traction and has captured the next generation of consumers. Brands that fail to keep up, will fall behind.

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