
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social Media Stereotypical Representations: Gender Roles in Advertisements

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ABSTRACT

Mass media play various crucial roles in society. They inform and report on the latest current events, provide frameworks for analysis, sensitise the audience, mobilise them as citizens concerning miscellaneous issues, reproduce mainstream popular culture, update society and entertain as well. Furthermore, the media can be a main agent promoting gender differences and equality simultaneously. Advertising is regarded as a pivotal dynamo in the media realm, since it deploys many strategies and techniques to persuade people to believe in the product and consume it. However, as previously mentioned, it sheds light on the representations of men and women in different contexts, emphasizing the gender based omnipresent biases and stereotypes in multiple life areas. Such portrayals definitely reflect the embedded beliefs or convictions of the society's members majority they still perpetuate. Either on TV, radio, newspapers, social media, movies, video games, apps or platforms, ads do effectively influence the way people think, perceive and interact with their surroundings. This can have detrimental outcomes in terms of restricting the roles of men and women and limiting the potential opportunities for both of them. Ads usually associate females with household chores, kids' upbringing or childcare responsibilities, their attractive physical appearance with their glamour or enticing bodies as a mere object, as well as their ethnicity, race, age or sexuality, which are also targeted. Whereas males are epitomized as strong individuals with muscles, breadwinners and decision-makers. Hence, this paper will attempt to tackle social media ads' serious effects on diverse society segments' psychologies, behaviours and thoughts, including youth and adults, particularly women who are mostly exposed to a great deal of all sorts of violence, and also investigate the advertisements' intrinsic motives behind relying heavily on stereotypes to achieve their aims.

KEYWORDS

Gender Roles, Social Media Stereotypes, Media, Advertising, Bias, Objectification.

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Introduction

Gender stereotypes in media have triggered heated debates as a dialectic issue for a long period of time. In the last few years, a significant number of research studies, notably in Media Studies and Sociology, have tackled gender concerns in advertising and have identified a harmful impact on people and society as a whole, which is attributed to specific portrayals of gender clichés in various advertisements. These stereotypes epitomise ubiquitous thoughts about the mainstream features and roles which supposedly correspond to individuals along their genders or other androgynous identities. In this regard, Dhanesh and Marschlich (2025) claim that "according to Campbell et al. (2023), representation of diversity across areas like age, beauty, body size, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, and race and ethnicity can generate positive and negative social outcomes." (p.303). The representations in ads promote different sample gender behaviours, creating disparate audience reactions. Male characteristics, for instance, depict virility, power and supremacy in multiple spheres, while female traits display a kind of softness,

dociility, emotions and femininity. Such images are based on assumptions assigned to masculine or feminine conduct; the fact that ultimately influences people's perceptions and lifestyles.

The experimental confirmation demonstrates that advertising fosters gender clichés by accentuating, engendering, reproducing and perpetuating them in a steady feedback loop. Then, imposed and reinforced stereotypes on audience can put them in a position of acceptance to normalize things without questioning the media's attitudes in such a perspective. Arendt (2023) states the following: "Importantly, the combination of both general ideas—prejudice-based selective exposure and (reinforcement) effects—forms the process we label as preference-based reinforcement: Prejudiced individuals prefer news that is congenial to their prejudiced views, and exposure to self-selected (prejudice-consistent) media content, in turn, can reinforce their prejudiced views." (p.465). Therefore, gender biases can be implicitly and easily deployed. The gradual willingness of audience to accept and normalize controversial ads has become very significant lately.

Regardless of the omnipresence of gender biases in society for a long time, mass media, particularly the advertising on social media apps and platforms, have helped to ingrain them more and more over the last few years, and have also influenced individuals' personal aspirations in the future. A bulky literature corpus of relevant research elaborates on this issue. Wood (2013) clarifies that social media as a prominent form of mass media ; do contribute effectively in promoting for all ads genres. These ads are rapidly disseminated, exerting a huge inescapable influence, since social media are widely used globally.

Similar pictures mostly pop up everywhere in popular culture, be it written or visual, which reinforces these stereotypes to be taken unquestionably, as well as promoting a marginalising discourse which tends to exclude them from achieving social equality, and fairly practice the different activities monopolised by men. The integration of Stereotypes in ads is never random, since they serve many objectives. As a matter of fact, advertisers do have diverse agendas and purposes behind employing stereotypes in ads. They consider them extremely practical as long as they are swift, familiar, low-cost and persuasive alternatives to create meaning. For instance, any text, be it a thought or a picture, may encompass a certain amount of cultural background; therefore, it helps transmit a message promptly, alleviate the cognitive charge, and affect the audience's attitudes. Tortajada et al. (2013) go further to contend that the segregating biases simplify smooth communication, afford cognitive efficiency and rapid audience awareness, stimulate innovation and storytelling, trigger ideology to convince about the product advantages, distinguish the target viewers or potential consumers, and avoid risks in terms of cultural norms and traditions. Thus, these motives reflect a combination of pragmatic, creative, economic, and psychological purposes.

Literature Review

Stereotypes in advertising are established conceptions or template pictures that are simplified and generalised representations of a group of individuals, which are firmly rooted in the consciousness of the target audience. These representations may be based on gender, race, age, sexual orientation, and social class, among others. They are often used in advertising because they are easy to recognise and can convey a message quickly and effectively. Kniazian (2014) notes that "Gender stereotypes in the mass media have a great power and reach large audiences. In order to create a medium which is universal, understandable and acceptable for numerous and diverse recipients, senders of message very often use stereotypes, which fill the social life and evoke certain associations." (p.83). Once again, stereotypes use remain indispensable, especially if they are implemented in social media, even more than on other mass media forms.

However, they can also perpetuate prejudice and limit the perception of human diversity, and significantly influence the discernment of advertising materials, creating specific associations and expectations. Mainly, advertising in the 20th century was plagued by stereotypes that implicate a great influence on society. During the 20th century, ads performed a pivotal role in maintaining gender stereotypes. Males were often described as suppliers of their households; powerful and dominant, whereas females were portrayed as caregivers and dependent on their husbands. Such a perspective reflects current social expectations and helps maintain them. Thus, these engendered representations affected and still affect the audience's insight about gender roles in society. Some of the most controversial stereotypical representations are the sexualizing and objectifying ones, creating sociocultural compulsion to follow the required body shapes and gender roles.

Trade popped up with a certain desire to show properties and to whom they pertain. In the nineteenth century, the assembly line was fortified and the marketing concept came to light. Later on, diverse products emerged and became popular thanks to brochures and printing, for the benefit of brands that started to gain ground and momentum. Along with the rise of the media, brands flourished since they start to publicise and promote their products and offer a safety guarantee via ads, and both branding

and TV booms surfaced simultaneously. Relatively, Jisun et al. (2019) assert that technology has proven its efficiency in supporting all sorts of ads across mass media, particularly with the highly sophisticated image industry during the past few years.

In the same vein, Restaino (2021) also contends that “So, although a brand is more than its advertising, the truth is that advertising has a sufficiently powerful level of impact, reach and memorability. For companies that invest heavily in this field (not all companies, of course), advertising may be a determining factor in a brand's success.” (p.16). as a matter of fact, advertising plays a crucial role in promoting for the commercialized brands all over the world, deploying appropriate means for a better propaganda, and influencing a greater audience.

TV was and still is a reliable source for viewers or customers to have an idea about the product before purchasing it. Then, since ads peaked in the 1950s, society has started to improve at all levels, yet biases and clichés in ads have been given a huge focus. Gender portrayal in ads has been one of the most debatable issues for a long time, all over the world. Despite the significant amount of research on the serious consequences of assimilating and adopting stereotypical thoughts and roles, gender representations in the contemporary mass media still ingrain and empower gender-based clichés in society. Investors who engage in advertising have often been perceived as perpetrators of harmful biases about both genders. These types of stereotypes incorporate conduct and behaviours regarded as convenient for men and women within a particular culture. They revolve around people's features, just like personality traits and attitudes, physical appearance, professions and social roles. The majority of gender stereotypes highlight the objectification of women and limit their occupations by constraining them as the ones who should assume household chores responsibilities and look after kids through taking charge of childcare, while men are assigned as the primary decision-makers in their communities and breadwinners as well.

As a matter of fact, stereotypical convictions about gender can be classified into three main categories namely; the descriptive type which addresses how one recognizes an individual of a certain gender to be, the prescriptive which is about how one may distinguish a person of a definite gender should be and act in terms of behaviour, and the proscriptive that concerns the way somebody conceives someone else of a specific gender should not be and behave.

In this regard, Anweh (2020) thinks that the medium is considered a highly interesting process whereby a strong influence and a successful advertising takes place. Without consumers advertising would be needless, and to gain access to a huge audience advertisers should have a certain awareness about these consumers' demographic and psychographic features first.

The various existing biases are culture-bound and differ along the cultural context. However, recurrent topics have been noticed as common within the West, such as stereotypes based on communion, capability and agency. For instance, women have been allied with traits overlapped with communion encompassing empathy, encouragement, care and warmth, whereas men have been more affiliated with agency, like being goal-centred, assertive, self-confident, determined and competitive.

On many platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube, users often come across content that portrays traditional gender roles for men and women, which are reinforced and recurrent on a regular basis. Apart from focusing on ads, social media platforms can definitely bolster stereotypes across many mechanisms including, Algorithms, engaging content genres, audience interaction, influencer pop culture based on biases that attract a huge portion of followers and brands relying on gender roles. In the same line of reasoning, Santoniccolo et al. (2023) contend that “Sites focusing on image- or video-based content (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) may be more prone to eliciting social comparison and fostering the internalization of cultural appearance ideals, resulting in more associations to negative body image.” (p. 7). Such widely used platforms do definitely reinforce the integration of stereotypes and at the same time perpetuate their negative impact on the viewers and consumers.

Similarly, Yakın, V. & Çelik, S. (2025) argue the following: “Moreover, the social media context introduces additional complexity. Each platform — for example, Instagram's visual culture, TikTok's entertainment-based format, and Facebook's traditional user demographics — creates distinct advertising environments” (Ji et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2016). Common social network ads stereotypes also encompass women's physical appearance and gender roles. Platforms like YouTube promote male interests like technology or gaming, and female interests foreground beauty and lifestyle, besides Instagram, which concentrates more on the image of the body and the aesthetics of the perfect lifestyle, too.

TikTok emphasises the gender roles of women within their domestic lives, glamour, make-up and fashion, while men are shown as business owners or entrepreneurs. Such ads are sponsored by stakeholders and epitomised by fit, stylish and mesmerising influencers. Similar to the other types of mass media ads, stereotypes on social media apps and platforms can have certain social and psychological effects, just like the pressure of body image, toxic masculinity that is incarnated via emotionally strong men, as well as confined career aspirations and reinforcement of social inequality. In this regard, Scheele and Spangenberg state that social media influencers do own a tremendous influence and invest considerable efforts to persuade the audience since they are well

paid by companies. They employ various persuading strategies and techniques to captivate a huge portion of audience to consume the advertised products.

From another angle, stereotypes in ads are never deployed randomly. A lot of motives exist behind their use. First, they foster quick comprehension. Ads scramble roles, characteristics and correlations which the audience recognises immediately. These ads do not have enough time to convey various messages to the viewers, then stereotypes that are based on mainstream shared thoughts regarding race, age, class, culture, gender and lifestyle might be manifested either on social media or on billboards and wild postings to simplify communication and deliver information in a very smooth, speedy and understandable manner. Dahlén, et al. (2021) claim that besides male or female gender roles, stereotypes can also include children or any other transgender representations as a target in the current ads. Then, clichés in ads can also target kids and any other category of LGBTQIA+ gender identities.

The audience does own a cognitive ability and an emotional appeal in terms of their prompt recognition; when common clichés involve less attention and mental effort, helping the message to be spotted and retained, as long as they make use of existing thoughts and emotions, rendering ads more identifiable. The employed stereotypes contain shared social background data and trigger familiar emotions such as motivation, humour, and sympathy, which empowers the persuasive potential of ads. Then, the audience instantly fathoms the message with its characters and their assigned roles. Also, via storytelling and practical creativity, ads must set up the whole plot in a fast way, including all its elements. For this reason, stereotypes afford ready-made roles performed by characters that untangle the narrative framework. They immediately enable to generate inventive notions and ideas, since they are already recognised by the viewers. Gupta and Arora (2023) point out that: “The powerful influence of advertising on shaping cultural norms and reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes underscores the importance of promoting more inclusive and diverse representations in media to foster a more equitable and progressive societal outlook.” (p.124). This strong need for a variety of representations in media is essential to create equity and justice for diverse perspectives in society.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2021) goes further to contend that “Since the COVID-19 epidemic, children and adolescents are increasingly spending time online, exposed to an expanding variety of advertising, product placement and influencer content which is often inappropriate for their age.” Almost all peoples from various areas around the world including kids and teenagers are getting more and more addicted on social media which contain non-confined inappropriate content for them.

Concerning persuasion power through ideology and the product’s advantages presentation, stereotypes harness the already held ideas and social standards, to make products seem relevant to the object of interest. These ads use clichés that can introduce messages very convincingly by displaying roles or modes of living as simple and normal, imperceptibly influencing the attitude of the consumer. Thus, their strategies focus more on unfamiliar portrayal and exaggerated depiction, showing to what extent the product ultimately solves consumer issues.

As for audience targeting and segmentation, marketers devise their communication boarding along demographic and psychographic aspects. Stereotypes offer basic and practical templates for customising style, graphics and affirmations to a special group of audiences. Such stereotypes help advertisers opt for the appropriate product by harmonising recognised attributes, conduct, or roles related to specific viewers. Another important facet is the marketing regulation and effectiveness, in terms of managing costs and avoiding risks. Deploying familiar clichés decreases innovative risk in launching and media buying customers, and agencies are inclined to afford their consent about concepts which are concise to stakeholders. Thus, stereotypes are easy, simple and practical in enabling advertisers to deliver messages swiftly and cheaply with a minimal cost. They remain predictable and less insecure than using uncommon and unconventional depictions.

Last but not least, cultural transcription for product types is another significant feature. Some products come with standard associations. The role of stereotypes in this context is to help indicate groups and price ranking rapidly, and ads usually show dominant cultural ethics. By recurring these clichés, ads strengthen what the community or society already conceive as “normal,” which can render products socially desirable. Then, through reflecting the omnipresent social roles and audience’s interactions, ads perpetuate the steady mode of stereotypes that are already approved or mainstream in the consumption sphere.

Methodology

This study adopted a certain feasible research methodology, which is called ‘desktop’. This latter refers to secondary data which can be smoothly gathered without any necessary fieldwork. Such a method is basically entailed in data collection from the already existing resources; therefore, it is perceived as inexpensive with a reasonable cost, unlike the field research with its high cost, whole

package fees and charges. Thus, the study focused on published articles, reports, reviews and even some related statistics, along with the easy access of the online related journals, as well as the available library resources.

Discussion and Limitations

Advertising is accessible to everyone, which makes it potent with its pioneering communication forms in the contemporary era. Far from the other media entertainments, stakeholders design various ads to impact people's thoughts and behaviours, which renders such ads more masterful to empower or defy the already existing beliefs. Even though things and circumstances have changed since the 1950s, sexist ads have drastically decreased. However, gender stereotypes still exist, but in new forms and strategies. These representations affect the audience's insights, attitudes and goals. All consumers with different age segments, including children, are inevitably exposed to them almost daily, which makes them shape their expectations and adopt erroneous and value judgment thoughts about both genders, particularly women. People's perceptions and debates are divided into two orientations; some of them see that gender stereotypes are obsolete and worthless, while others claim they are quite pertinent in case they are used appropriately and meticulously, taking reality into account. Dai¹ et al. (2025) demonstrate that the lack of an effective examination of the extent to which individual differences and cultural factors can regulate the impact on females' self-image, which shapes a real hindrance in the face of potential mediations and future solutions to alleviate ads derogatory influence.

Advertising messages' pervasiveness implies that they are part and parcel of the societal background narrative. Consumers retain these messages unconsciously, but gradually they contribute to building people's expectations, attitudes and purposes. This considerable influence embraces a certain commitment since ads aim to instigate consumers' action. Once they are affected by stereotypical presumption, they impact a set of social attributes within a community. The same previously mentioned authors mention that "Furthermore, the psychological impact of advertising on newer platforms, particularly social media and influencer marketing, remains understudied compared to traditional advertising formats significant gap given the increasing prominence of these platforms in women's daily media consumption." (p. 3). It is obvious that advertising on social media apps and platforms is not sufficiently explored compared to the traditional one on other media forms.

Therefore, it is up to ads, propaganda and campaigns to operate a balance between traditional biases and creative approaches to come up with a convenient brand image, and simultaneously avoid consumers' criticism or derogatory reactions. Finally, fathoming such patterns helps the audience deal cleverly with social media ads and inquire about the products' messages.

Conclusion

Mass media play a pivotal role in promoting for miscellaneous types of ads. Social media nowadays specifically has a tremendous influence on people's lives, and might have further negative repercussions on multiple levels as well. Objectification and sexualisation, besides denigration in stereotypes, cause serious and long-term psychological and mental health problems, and reinforce all sorts of violence and gender biases. Advertising not only reflects and portrays society, but also somehow shapes it. Mass communication, and notably social media ads, manifest gender stereotypes in a specific society. Despite the women's portrayal in the whole mass media context becoming relatively more positive than before, gender clichés and discrimination across mass media are still an existing phenomenon. They create new social and cultural standards for the audience or potential consumers they are exposed to, and definitely, the media takes charge of fortifying gender variances and biases. Such transmitted messages provide the most modern, strong, technologically and well-developed stereotypes for building a certain cultural reality. Media companies should thoughtfully reconsider the approaches they deploy in ads by alleviating negative clichés, promoting, encouraging and empowering depictions of women in positive contexts, to pave the way for a safe generation that will embrace the change, voice out strongly, normalise and believe in gender equality. Before launching any ads, advertisers should carry out audience research for the sake of avoiding discriminatory gender images, particularly about women. Getting close to consumers helps understand their needs and perceptions regarding their social and cultural backgrounds, life experiences and values. Such a meticulous study enables stakeholders to know the audience interests, to focus and prepare good ad campaigns with much care, fewer generalisations and a great deal of authenticity.

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