UNDERSTANDING GENDER STEREOTYPES AND THEIR TENACITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PORTRAYAL OF GENDER ROLES IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract

Despite the increasing embrace of gender role symmetry in modern societies, advertising is replete with gender stereotypes portraying men and women according to traditional expectations about masculinity and femininity, with profound implications for individuals. Using a mixed-methods research design and drawing on Social Constructionism and Cultivation theory, this study examines gender stereotypes by problematising their uses, types, accuracy, representativeness, tenacity, and implications for the portrayal of gender roles in advertising. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 64 television commercials for content analysis, which generated quantitative data. To obtain qualitative data, five key informants were interviewed, and three focus groups featuring 24 participants were used. Findings of the study reveal the *stereotypicality* and *binarity* of gender role portrayals in advertising, perpetuating traditional gender roles and stereotypes that are potentially harmful to individuals in society. These typical portrayals also reinforce gender discrimination and the patriarchal hegemony of men as the superior, dominant gender. Results also suggest that there is often a mismatch between gender stereotypes portrayed in commercials and gender roles in people's real lives, underscoring the imperative for advertisers to align their portrayals of gender roles with people's experiential gender roles in life. The study further reveals that socio-cultural factors, media reinforcements and marketing considerations are among the overarching reasons why gender stereotypes seem irresistible and persist in advertising, notwithstanding their inbuilt negativities. To improve gender role portrayals, advertisers are urged to eschew traditional gender roles, combat gender stereotyping, and showcase men in nurturing, childcare, and domestic roles, and women in leadership and breadwinning roles.

Keywords*:* Freedom of Expression, Cybercrimes, Stakeholders, Perception, Impact

Introduction

People define themselves in society, consciously or unconsciously, by their gender and the gender roles they perform, an intersection which advertisers find attractive. Thus, for years, advertisers have leveraged gender as one of the most pervasive social categories for segmenting and targeting consumers (Matthes, Prieler & Adam, 2016), portraying gender roles as stereotypes about men and women. Advertisers therefore leverage gender and its accompanying stereotypes to promote products by associating certain attributes and behaviours with a specific gender and aligning them with particular products. Thus, for an advertisement to appeal to consumers, it must appeal irreducibly to either their masculinity or femininity, especially because society has taught people to buy and consume what makes them male or female (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). However, beyond connecting consumers to a product, advertisements serve as integral components of mass culture by shaping people through the creation, moulding, and reinforcement of gender roles, norms, values, attitudes, and culture that undergird modern societies (Onuh & Nnanyelugo, 2022).

Gender roles, which refer to the socially constructed behaviours, attitudes and attributes considered appropriate for males and females, are rooted in stereotypes about men and women; with gender stereotypes being the most pervasive stereotypes impacting individuals. However, while gender stereotypes may simplify audience targeting and provide cognitive shortcuts for advertisers, they are often problematic, as they can either perpetuate or challenge existing norms and stereotypes, with dire consequences for society (Rua, Aytug, Simarasi, & Lin, 2021). Despite progress in gender power

dynamics across many cultures, reflected in greater awareness of gender and its fluidity, the advertising industry is struggling to portray men and women in acceptable gender roles (Akestam, Rosengren, Dahlen, Liljedal & Berg, 2021). Advertisements still portray people in gender roles and stereotypes that have remained resilient to change, raising questions about their enduring nature and their variegated impact in society.

These challenges make the portrayal of gender roles in advertising today more problematic than before (Akestam et al., 2021), underscoring the complexity of using gender stereotypes. While gender roles and stereotypes could be effective in positioning a brand and gaining the attention of prospects and consumers alike, their use by advertisers has a huge propensity to communicate and entrench dysfunctional perceptions of gender roles, with profound consequences for society. Understanding the nature and origin of gender stereotypes, and how they endure in advertising - notwithstanding their inherent flaws - is important not only for promoting a more equitable and responsible media portrayal of gender, but also for disrupting the power dynamics invaluable for reflecting the changing nature of gender roles in society.

Research Objectives

In light of the ongoing, the study seeks to:
1. Find out why advertisers use gender stereotypes in television commercials.
2. Examine the most common gender stereotypes used in television commercials.
3. Ascertain the accuracy and representativeness of gender stereotypes used in television commercials.
4. Explore why gender stereotypes persist in television commercials.

Literature Review

Gender roles, which refer to how people are expected to act, groom and conduct themselves in society based on their sex, are generally portrayed as stereotypes; stereotypes being commonly accepted, rigid ideas about individuals, people or groups based on generalised attributes that are largely exaggerated (Akestam et al., 2021). According to Ghozlen (2020), stereotypes, which are highly resistant to change, describe the perceived characteristics of people or social groups; while gender stereotypes, which are the most pervasive, are exaggerations made about men or women simply by reason of their being male or female (Odionye, 2023). Gender stereotypes, which are rooted in traditional norms and notions of masculinity, do not just create imbalanced relationships between men and women, but also often do this, especially to the detriment of women (Harrington, 2021). Gender stereotypes, which impact individuals in society, manifest as strict binaries in which individuals are defined mainly by their masculinity or femininity (Adelabu & Sanusi, 2020). According to Adinlewa and Ojil (2018) and Heathy (2020), the gender binary is a socially constructed system that classifies individuals by their sex into two distinct, polarised dichotomies: masculine or feminine, male or female.

Although there are different accounts of how stereotypes emerge in society, the term 'stereotype' began to gain traction in public discourse following Walter Lippmann's 1922 reference to stereotypes as culturally derived, distorted pictures in the mind. The literature records that gender roles and stereotypes derive, in tandem with social role theory, from the timeless distribution of men and women into social roles at home and at work, one of the earliest known specialisations of human labour (Eirini, 2020). They perpetuate when a specific narrative about individuals or a group is widely communicated, leading it to be accepted without much questioning by society. In the olden days, men did not engage in childcare or household duties, as they tended to work outside the home, serving as soldiers in wartime and ploughing the fields in times of peace. On the other hand, women, who were considered tender, specialised in activities mostly within the home: managing the household and caring for the children.

In modern societies, the roles and expectations embodied universally in existing gender structures are learnt, accepted, and internalised by individuals through socialisation instruments such as family, religion, school, peers, and the media. The socialisation process begins in early childhood, when children are taught appropriate gender roles and conduct (Akestam et al., 2021). Girls are taught how to speak, dress and comport themselves; and to remain feminine by being family-oriented and adopting the appropriate body shape and language, while boys are socialised to be independent, adventurous, and not to cry publicly, no matter what. Gender stereotypes are generally rigid, resistant to change and founded on prevailing societal norms, suggesting that one is one's gender only to the extent that one is not the other gender, a hypothesis that endorses and restricts gender within simplistic binaries. Several scholars

(Eirini, 2020; Ward & Grower, 2020) have argued that most advertisements have historically portrayed people in stereotypical ways, making it almost impossible for marketers to navigate the gender landscape without invoking stereotypes.

In Nigeria, scholars maintain that advertisements have continued to thrive on the depiction of men and women in traditional gender roles and stereotypes, which frequently misrepresent, demean or dehumanise them (Adelabu & Sanusi, 2020). Against this backdrop, critics have alleged that instead of gaining traction in tandem with the global drift towards progressive gender equality in contemporary societies, gender portrayals in advertising are replete with offensive stereotypes and lag several years behind (Eisend, 2019). Heathy (2020) believes gender stereotypes are common in the media because they are effective for constructing storylines that audiences can easily relate to. In their assessment, Grau and Zotos (2016) aver that, in addition to being social identifiers and mental schemas by which people are viewed, stereotypes are an inalienable part of human nature; hence, the tendency to stereotype is human, as it is easier to stereotype individuals or people than to attempt to know them personally.

According to Ghozlen (2020), gender stereotypes serve to enable people to define, categorise, and simplify what is already observed and endorsed about gender, as well as to make functional predictions about people. Thus, social psychologists posit that the primary motive for categorisation and, hence, stereotyping is the human desire to reduce uncertainty and achieve cognitive closure in people's daily encounters (Hogg, 2018). This basic need to simplify and process the complex world is, therefore, a tendency that predisposes people to stereotype, especially when information is scarce. For this reason, stereotypes also function as time and energy savers, allowing people to identify others more efficiently; although, as simplifications of social reality, they may distort people's attitudes and perceptions of others (Hentschel, Heilman & Peus, 2019). It is further argued that, because individuals are daily inundated with a barrage of information, stereotyping makes it easier to process it, given that people's mental processing capacity is limited. Stereotypes, therefore, help fill the gap by enabling categorisation or systematisation, making stereotyping highly efficient for understanding people in our social milieu (Quadflieg & Macrae, 2011).

However, notwithstanding their heuristic functions, stereotypes can induce faulty assessments of people, highlighting two far reaching implications: the highly controversial 'falsity hypothesis' which suggests that gender stereotypes are commonly alleged to be false or inaccurate and 'stereotype accuracy' which refers to the extent to which people's stereotypical beliefs about groups correspond to those group's actual characteristics (Beeghly, 2021). While some gender stereotypes may be inaccurate, premised on exaggerations and incomplete information, others are quite accurate and useful, deriving from an inherent kernel of truth, with some stereotypes actually complementary of the stereotyped individuals or groups rather than pejorative (Beeghly, 2021). While not always accurate, stereotypes are ironically also not always inaccurate, and gender stereotypes, being the most prevalent type of stereotypes in advertising, impact all genders both positively and negatively (Eirini, 2020). Thus, even where they appear to be correct or accurate, some gender stereotypes tend to misrepresent individuals.

Empirical reviews in Nigeria reveal that traditional gender stereotypes are ubiquitous and manifest in media portrayals and everyday life, deepening gender inequality and affecting the self-perception and identity of individuals in society (Akpan et al., 2024). In addition to depicting people often in unpalatable gender roles, some advertisements are not only offensive to and derogatory of individuals in society, but also replete with stereotypes which distort people's ideas about gender roles and gendered relationships in society (Asogwa et al.,2020). For example, advertisements targeted at men using the sex appeal of women could, while resonating with men, inadvertently teach or reinforce dysfunctional social cues, with serious, unpalatable consequences on both men and women. In one study, Abanyam, Ushie, Ushie, and Opoh (2024) found that cultural beliefs about the appropriate roles for men and women promote discrimination, with women generally expected to prioritise family, childcare and domestic responsibilities over any career or personal attainment. Thus, due to cultural expectations and negative attitudes that are anchored in extant gender roles and stereotypes, girls in Nigeria encounter significant limitations in their quest to participate in many traditionally male-dominated endeavours, such as pursuing STEM careers.

In a study of the multiple dimensions of gender stereotypes, Hentschel et al. (2019) concluded that stereotypes about gender are especially powerful because, in addition to being readily noticeable and memorable, gender is a commonly occurring social cue for fuelling bias and stereotypic thinking. They pontificated that stereotypes predispose people to make generalisations and conclusions that are not only

simplistic but also largely presumptuous. It is therefore problematic when advertising stereotypes men generally as breadwinners and dominant leaders, while objectifying women as weak, submissive and dependent on men. These types of gender stereotyping in advertising tend to propagate the hegemonic myth that men are the superior, dominant gender, while women are the inferior, weaker gender, in need of pampering and perpetual protection by men (Pierik, 2022). Such portrayals also solidify the postulation by some antagonists that gender roles and their stereotypes are patriarchal instruments for perpetuating the unequal dynamic that privileges men with overarching socio-political and economic power, while emasculating women (Gurrieri, 2020).

Theoretical Framework
The study combines Social Constructionism and Cultivation Theory as a theoretical framework. Social constructionism is a theory in the social sciences which postulates that all meanings and knowledge are derived and maintained by the collaborative agency and interaction of members of a society. First popularised by Berger and Luckman (1967), cited in Onuh and Nnanyelugo (2022), the theory assumes that people not only create and invent their understanding of the world they live in, but also assign meanings to phenomena and happenings with the consensus of others in society. Social constructionism suggests, in the context of this study, that gender roles and stereotypes, masculinity and femininity are social phenomena constructed by members of a society, who assign them meaning through their interaction.

Cultivation theory, on the other hand, suggests that continuous exposure of audiences to the same media message leads to the adoption of common roles, values, and worldview. Originally attributed to Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signoreilli (1986), cited in Matthes, Prieler and Adam (2016), cultivation theory suggests that what is continuously seen in the mass media shapes people's perception of social reality because the more time people spend watching television, the more likely it is that their attitude to reality will reflect what they are exposed to on television. Thus, repeated exposure of audiences to advertising portrayals of gender roles and stereotypes tends to shape audiences' attitudes to and understanding of gender roles and stereotypes and their accompanying power dynamics.

Methodology
The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to gather and integrate both qualitative and quantitative data. The mixed-methods design is a relatively recent approach to enquiry that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to study the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). Its value lies in the idea that all research methods have inherent flaws, which can be best neutralised when two or more methods are combined (Obateru, 2022). The mixed-methods study combined content analysis, using the coding sheet as the research instrument; semi-structured interviews, using the interview guide as the data-collection instrument; and focus group discussions, employing discussion guides as the instruments. As a material population, 64 television commercials (TVCs) were purposively sampled and content analysed, with the quantitative results constituting the thematic issues for interrogation by 24 male and female discussants assembled in three focus groups, each of eight members. The mixed-methods approach also included semi-structured interviews with five key informants (all advertising practitioners).

Findings and Discussions
RQ1: Why do advertisers use gender stereotypes in television commercials?
Qualitative data from informant interviews and focus group discussions reveal that gender stereotypes portrayed in television advertisements serve the general purpose of identifying and targeting men and women as consumers with precision. This is instructive, as individuals generally define themselves by their gender and consume what authenticates them in their chosen or natal gender (Santoniccolo et al., 2023; Eisend, 2019). According to key informants, men and women are portrayed in advertisements using gender stereotypes because stereotypes provide mental shortcuts (heuristics) for simplifying and communicating complex messages with brevity to specific demographics and audiences. This simplification reduces cognitive load for both advertisers and consumers by enabling quick, easy communication of information and ideas.

Key informants further affirm that gender stereotypes are attractive to advertisers because they foster familiarity and evoke emotional connections that resonate with audiences, which is critical to the persuasiveness of commercial promotions. Advertising practitioners aver that the use of gender

stereotypes enhances risk reduction as a strategy, as they resonate with audiences who generally appear comfortable with them and are less likely to be offended or alienated by them. According to one advertising practitioner, "gender stereotypes work, and you don't change a winning strategy". They also reveal that gender stereotypes are effective for reflecting existing socio-cultural values and beliefs, as they depict people in roles that align with traditional expectations. Advertisers, therefore, use them to tap into and reinforce prevailing social expectations about masculinity and femininity, thus perpetuating conventional gender roles and stereotypes.

Also, the study shows that while men and women are mainly portrayed in commercials in traditional male or female roles (see Table 1 below), these conventional male or female roles are represented and televised as culturally created gender stereotypes. Thus, gender stereotypes are used by advertisers to portray men and women in the performance of their societal responsibilities.

Table 1: Types of Gender Roles Portrayed in the TVCs Examined

Gender Roles Portrayed	Frequency	Percentage
Traditional Female Roles	36	56.2
Traditional Male Roles	20	31.3
Non-Stereotypical Roles	8	12.5
Total	**64**	**100%**

As shown above, only in rare cases (12.5%) were men and women portrayed performing non-stereotypical gender roles in the TVCs analysed. By interpretation, where gender roles are not cast in a gender-neutral or non-stereotypical manner, they are most likely to be portrayed in commercials using traditionally masculine or feminine stereotypes. This is consistent with the conclusion of Adelabu and Sanusi (2020) that advertisers use gender stereotypes to target men and women according to their respective roles and responsibilities in society.

RQ2: What are the most common gender stereotypes used in television commercials in Nigeria?

Table 2: Taxonomy of Gender Stereotypes in Advertising

Stereotypes	Men	Women
	Masculinity Traits	**Femininity Traits**
Personality Traits	Leaders, strong, aggressive, authoritative, assertive, confident, dominant, active, independent, emotionless, controlling, decision makers, tough	Dependent, passive, quiet, submissive, accommodating, empathetic, innocent, naïve, weak, inferior, subservient, subordinated, emotional, vulnerable, needing help, clumsy
Domestic Behaviours	Family providers, protectors, fatherhood, mentors, out-going	Homemakers, housekeepers, nurturers, mothers, cleaners, childbearing, home-oriented
Occupations	Breadwinners, hardworking, professionals, career-driven, STEM experts	Caregivers, teachers, nurses, cooks
Physical	Strong, stoic, active, rugged, athletic,	Slim, feeble, graceful,

Appearance	muscular, tall, dark, handsome	sex objects, sexy, seductive, beauty & body-care obsessed, fashion crazy

The above taxonomy of gender stereotypes reveals the *stereotypicality* and *binarity* of gender role portrayals in advertising, as people are portrayed in extant gender stereotypes that celebrate their masculinity and femininity, according to a strict gender binary. While men were depicted in traditional masculine roles in the TVCs examined as primary breadwinners and authority figures, women were shown in traditional feminine roles as caregivers and homemakers, consistent with findings of many previous studies (Adelabu & Sanusi, 2020; Adelinwa & Ojih, 2018).

Table 3: Types of Gender Stereotypes Portrayed in the TVCs

Gender Stereotypes	Men		Women	
Personality Traits	34	53.12%	20	31.25%
Domestic Behaviours	24	37.50%	34	53.12%
Occupations	4	6.25%	2	
Physical Attractiveness	2	3.13%	8	3.13%
				12.5%
	64	100%	64	100%

Findings further reveal (in Table 3 above) that men and women are portrayed in advertising through four major types of gender stereotypes: personality traits, domestic behaviours, occupations, and physical appearances, a pattern corroborated in the literature (Eisend, 2019). However, both quantitative and qualitative data show that stereotypes of domestic behaviours and personality traits are the most common types of gender stereotypes used to represent men and women in the TVCs examined, and this is instructive, especially as it underscores why advertisers stereotype men and women differently. Quantitative data from content analysis of the selected TVCs indicate that men and women were largely portrayed in terms of their personality and domestic behaviours.

Table 4: Summary of Gender Roles Stereotypes

Participant	How men are portrayed in the TVCs	How women are portrayed in the TVCs
Key Informants (KI 1- KI 5)	Strong and aggressive Bread winners, Handy-fixers in the house Independent, Hardworking, Decision-makers, Stoic and unemotional, Invincible machos and Super heroes	Home makers/Housekeepers, Nurturers, Caregivers, Loving mothers, Making grocery & FMCGs purchases, Cooks Tolerant, Feeble & Insecure Beauty and fashion-crazy
Discussants (D1 - D2 4)	Head of family Strong & hardworking Breadwinners Rational Ploughing & farming the garden Clearing the premises Physically strong and tireless farmers. Authoritative leaders	Housemakers and housekeepers Subordinate to their male counterparts Domestic workers who do the house chores Sexual objects of consumption by men Compassionate Emotionally-minded Seeking affection from men

Qualitative data from both informant interviews and focus group discussions support this finding, showing (in Tables 4 above) that while women are largely portrayed in traditional gender roles associated with their personality traits and domestic behaviours as emotional, submissive, homemakers and nurturers, men are shown in commercials in personality traits and domestic behaviours related to leadership, decision making, dominance and breadwinning responsibilities. Thus, whether in the domestic or public space, women are most likely to be shown as caregivers, deferring to, submitting to, and depending on men (husbands, relatives, bosses, or romantic partners) from whom they seek validation. On the other hand, in and out of the home, men are predominantly portrayed as leaders, providers, experts, and infallible decision-makers, in alignment with traditional norms and expectations set by society.

RQ3: To what extent are the gender stereotypes used in television commercials accurate and representative of men and women?

Quantitative data, corroborated by findings in literature (Eirini, 2020; Adelabu & Sanusi, 2020), reveal that many advertisements are replete with gender stereotypes that are either representative of men and women or misrepresentative of them. Key informants and group discussants observed that, in the performance of their gender roles, while women are portrayed in TVCs (Table 3 above) with some stereotypical accuracy as housemakers and housekeepers, men are generally stereotyped almost always accurately as leaders and breadwinners. This is in affirmation of the findings of some scholars that, while gender stereotypes may often be viewed as misleading, they are surprisingly accurate in many particulars and are anchored in a kernel of truth (Eagly & Hall, 2025; Beeghly, 2021). In many of the TVCs analysed, women were portrayed performing duties that defined and consigned them, traditionally and stereotypically, to the domestic space, where their submissiveness to men was perhaps only surpassed by their preoccupation with nurturing and homemaking.

Men, on the other hand, were shown as leaders, hardworking income earners, and decision-makers in offices, professions, and workplaces, largely outside the home. This is the universally typical portrayal of men and women in society, perpetuated by advertising and the media (Agujiobi-Odoh, 2022). According to all key informants and some focus group discussants in the study, to the extent that the gender roles portrayed in commercials also occur frequently in people's daily lives, the stereotypes by which they are portrayed can be considered accurate. However, where they are correct, these stereotypical portrayals tend to perpetuate harmful traditional gender roles of both men and women in society, promoting gender inequality and discrimination and predisposing individuals to the adoption of negative attitudes, such as sexism, decreased self-esteem and extreme gender misbehaviours.

Nonetheless, a few discussants who discounted any correlation between gender stereotypes portrayed in TVCs and people living gender roles observed that too often, gender stereotypes portrayed in TVCs are unrealistic and tend to offend the sensibilities of many advertising audiences. For example, the observation by discussant D16 that men are sometimes incorrectly portrayed in TVCs as being the primary breadwinners in families was upheld by discussant D21, who decried the "distasteful and inappropriate" misrepresentation of women by gender stereotypes depicting them in TVCs as weak, insecure beings, always desiring validation of themselves and their value from men. This finding suggests the imperative for advertisers always to use gender norms and expectations that are real in people's culture. Findings further reveal that by conscripting all men and women under one simplistic definition, which disregards not just their merits and strengths but also their individual weaknesses and vulnerabilities, gender stereotypes used in TVCs inaccurately suggest that gender groups are monolithic.

Furthermore, both data sets convey findings that some stereotypes can be damaging, with the potential to emasculate certain people. Consequently, to the degree that not everyone in a stereotyped group - even with similar traits - is the same, stereotypes are largely inaccurate and misrepresentative of people. Focus group discussants revealed that while some gender stereotypes used in commercials appear to represent men and women as macro entities, others do not reflect all men and women in their micro individuality. It is further argued that even where a stereotype applies somehow accurately to some members of a group, it does not characterise everyone in that group.

Thus, reservations abound, especially in the qualitative data set about how gender stereotypes reinforce

dysfunctional gender expectations, with participants expressing worry that, among other flaws, gender stereotypes have the tendency to conceal the complexity of real individuals, promote gender-based discrimination and inequality and reinforce social imbalance by perpetuating men's dominance and women's subordination. Underscoring the misleading representation built into many gender stereotypes, participants observed that stereotypes may portray men as strong, aggressive breadwinners and women as nurturers and caregivers, but not all men and women fit into these generalisations. In opposition to the gender tropes that abound, many women are the breadwinners of their families and are more assertive and stronger, both emotionally and physically, than some men; just as many men are family-oriented and fantastic caregivers, better at cooking and household management than many women. Participants therefore noted that certain stereotypes often fail to capture the diversity of real-life experiences of people, and that many are unfair, untrue, and demeaning to people who suffer them.

RQ4: What are the factors contributing to the tenacity of gender stereotypes in television commercials?

Findings from both qualitative and quantitative data sets reveal that, notwithstanding their inherent negativities, gender stereotypes are tenacious and impervious to change largely because they are deeply rooted in patriarchy, which treats men and women differently according to predetermined gender roles that privilege men and disempower women. According to advertising practitioners interviewed, gender stereotypes persist in advertising largely because they are ingrained in people's culture and provide commercial convenience and market efficiency through audience targeting. Since advertising mirrors the dominant cultural values of the society, advertisers find gender stereotypes effective and reflective of what target audiences expect as prevailing social norms - such as portraying women as homemakers and men as providers. Findings show that in addition to simplifying audience segmentation and triggering predictable emotional responses, gender stereotypes are tenacious because they are efficacious for targeting specific demographics who are more receptive to traditional gender roles. So, targeting these demographics with tailored campaigns is most effective using gender stereotypes that appeal to their perceived preferences and resonate with them.

Also, data from the interviews suggest that where gender stereotypes have worked before in tandem with advertising objectives, it is risky not to continue leveraging them, and even riskier for advertisers to try any new, untested strategy. Consequently, sticking to stereotypes that work appears reasonable as a strategy for overcoming the fear of alienating significant segments of the mass audience who may be rattled and offended by other alternative, untested marketing strategies. Further findings suggest that the stubborn resistance of gender stereotypes in television commercials is also premised on the overarching fact that, despite significant social progress and increasing gender role symmetry, the very system that creates and benefits from gender stereotypes is itself stubborn and remains largely impervious to change.

Conclusion

Literature may be brimming with the propensity of gender stereotypes to cause harm in society, but it is also replete with the benefits of gender stereotypes (Eisend, 2019; Huhmann & Limbu, 2016), suggesting that not all gender stereotypes are negative and explicating somehow, not just why advertisers find gender stereotypes almost irresistible, but also why they persist in the advertising space. However, irrespective of the iota of truth upon which some gender stereotypes are founded, many of them are generally inaccurate, offensive and misrepresentative of the genders, to the degree that they are premised on simplistic exaggerations. It is indicative of insensitivity to the complexity and dynamism of human nature when advertisers portray individuals strictly in accordance with societal stereotypes. Advertising portrayals premised on the *stereotypicality* and *binarity* of gender roles perpetuate not only traditional gender roles that are often harmful, but also reinforce inequality and devalue people in society.

In consideration of all that is known, whether gender stereotypes should be leveraged for marketing purposes by advertisers enamoured with them or eschewed in their entirety for being potentially harmful remains a quagmire. In a world of increasing gender role symmetry and diversity, the pervasive use of gender stereotypes in advertising campaigns predisposes brands to appear insensitive, regressive and out of sync with the dynamics impacting modern society. Today, as consumers expect brands to mirror modern values, they increasingly expect to see the reality of their gendered experiential lives reflected in marketing communications targeted at them. It is debatable whether commercials showcasing

strong, confident, and independent men and women, in both their strengths and vulnerabilities, can redefine traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity and reinvent contemporary advertising.

Consequently, while some advertisers may continue to leverage gender stereotypes for their heuristics, many critics desire to see their supplanting by portrayals of gender in more non-traditional, stereotype-free, egalitarian roles. Thus, the onus is on practitioners to jettison their obvious *romanticisation* of gender stereotypes and opt instead for inclusive and realistic portrayals of people in their inviolable merits and naturalness. The way forward is predicated on communicating an authentic representation of the evolving realities of gender roles' fluidity, equality, and diversity in brand promotion. Consequently, redefining traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity and combating antiquated gender norms and their stereotypes, while sustaining brand equity and audience targeting, remain the overarching challenges facing advertisers today.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings, the researchers propose that advertisers must rejig how gender is portrayed by eschewing outdated tropes and framing gender not as a binary or fixed identity, but as a diverse, intersectional, and dynamic experience shaped by multiple socio-cultural nuances. Advertisers can change the narrative by targeting audiences with model advertising campaigns that depict men and women in roles that challenge or disrupt traditional expectations about masculinity and femininity, and that promote men engaging in caregiving, parenting, and domestic work, and women in leadership, breadwinning, and decision-making roles, respectively.

To upend gender stereotyping, advertising institutions must adopt self-regulatory measures such as evaluating commercials before and after launch, portraying authentic experiences that resonate with audiences, and addressing gender bias and the lack of inclusiveness that characterise their micro-organisational systems. Furthermore, advertisers need to empower consumers to be more socially sensitive about gender portrayals by ventilating complaints against brands that perpetuate dangerous gender norms, while governments and advertising regulators, such as ARCON, need to ban commercials that leverage gender stereotypes negatively.

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