

Evaluate the
principles
underpinning how
audiences are
addressed essay



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‘ Gendering is one of the key ways in which advertisers target specific audience sectors. With close reference to research in the field, critically evaluate the principles underpinning how audiences are addressed as either ‘ male’ or ‘ female’ and map out the ways in which advertisers create differential ‘ wants’ and needs’.

Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that for years advertisements have used certain gender representations to target specific audiences (potential buyers). Body images portrayed by the media through the use of imagery, the display of life-styles, and the reinforcement of values, are communicators of culturally defined concepts such as success, worth, love, sexuality, popularity, and normalcy. Of particular concern over the past two decades has been the excessive use of sexual stereotypes, especially those of women. Stereotypes are oversimplified conventional character, often gender, representations.

Throughout this essay I shall analyse the gender representations that underpin the discourse of advertising. In particular, I shall focus on the use of male and female bodies as organizing metaphors which produce a gendered framework for advertising different types of products. I shall consider who the advertisements are targeted at (whether they are targeted at a particular gender) and what such advertisements reveal about the ways in which ‘ masculinity’ and ‘ femininity’ are shaped within the spaces of everyday life, taking into consideration the affects and influences they have on society.

The media plays a vital role in our society, especially in developing opinions of a targeted audience. It has an intensifying effect on its viewers and sets the trend as to how everyday life should really be. Advertisements are also a powerful source of information. One can see that the advertising medium influences many people of all ages and genders. The media not only develops audience opinion but also conveys imagery which reflects the attitudes of many societies and cultures hence television advertisements are likely to play an active role in shaping cultural values (Manstead & McCulloch 1981). It is this imagery and the way that it influences both the male and female targeted audiences that I endeavour to discuss in this essay.

Within an advertisement we may find sex stereotypes that indicate to the audience a structured set of beliefs about the personal attributes of men and women. It is these stereotypes which have distressing effects on individuals. For e. g. women in advertisements play the roles which the product demands. They are seen as slim, attractive, successful, whilst men are predominantly attractive and authoritative over their female counterparts. The men and women in the advertisements therefore can act as role models for each gendered audience and persuade the viewer of the way men and women are actually portrayed within society.

‘ Because advertising is a dominant feature, its influence on daily life through the creation of role models and the depiction of social interaction probably affects real-life power relationships...’ (Holly 1975)

Durkin (1985) also emphasised the importance of role models. He argued that television models are particularly salient to children for sex role

socialisation. Durkin conducted a study where young children watched a selection of television material, which showed male and female stereotypes. Durkin interviewed the children about the material and concluded that children are able to develop scripts of sex roles, which are often consonant with the stereotypes perpetuated in television. Nevertheless, Durkin emphasises that extensive research is required in order to investigate this connection. Durkin has also analysed British television advertisements and found that men and women were portrayed very differently. In general, women were not shown as frequently as men were. Moreover, they were less likely to have leading roles.

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Manstead & McCulloch (1981) wanted to investigate sex roles in British advertising in a way to emphasise that men and women were shown in remarkably different ways. They also stipulated that this suggests that these differences found in the portrayal of men and women correspond with the traditional sex role stereotypes. This is a clear indication that social stereotypes can be emphasised and further integrated into our social subconscious; the adverts can actually then define our use of stereotyping in society. Therefore, instead of losing old stereotypes through social progression the old ideals continue to be reinforced by the advertising media.

Advertising Campaigns

A first example of gender stereotyping is that of the female sex object. The

Renault Meganne advertisement[URL], portrays a highly sexualized
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representation of femininity, featuring a young model wearing a very short, tight-fitting dress that expresses her sexuality. The caption 'Get the figure you've always dreamed of' is a clever play on words, referring to both the shapely female model and the shapely car. It is clearly aimed at women, suggesting to them that by buying the car they'll 'get the figure they've always dreamed of' as they'll drive and be inside such a sleek, attractive car. This also implies that by driving such a car, they'll obtain a highly desirable image and reputation, like the model who is assumed to drive that car. The advertisement conveys the advantages to women of buying the Renault Meganne by communicating the culturally desirable concepts of sexuality, beauty and popularity. The advertisement for the Citroen Xsara[URL] also portrays women as sex objects who are primarily concerned with their image. It features supermodel Claudia Schiffer seductively undressing, ending up naked, and displays the caption, 'The only thing to be seen in this summer'.

The successful and financially secure male stereotype is portrayed in the BMW M3 advertisement [URL], which features a good-looking young male executive, dressed in a suit, driving the car at what appears to be a high speed. He conveys the culturally defined concepts of success, worth and wealth. This advertisement concentrates on the technical, mechanical advantages, as opposed to those of the individual's image. Technology is conventionally a masculine concept, and this, along with the fact that the advertisement features a man, suggests that it is aimed at men. A second example of this stereotype is found in the Porsche 911 advertisement[URL],

which again features a man and concentrates on the technology and mechanics of the car.

The female stereotype of the housewife and mother is represented in a number of car advertisements, including that for the Toyota Tarago[URL]. This advertisement shows a stressed mother frantically trying to get her children out the house and into the car. Once she is driving, she looks very happy and relaxed, seemingly unaware of her children squabbling in the back. It is evidently targeted at mothers, a point which is highlighted by the fact that the advertisement emphasizes the safety, convenience and practicality of the vehicle – factors we see as women’s concerns – rather than ‘ speed, performance and handling,’ which are factors we associate with men[URL].

The stereotype of the adventurous, heroic, wild male is evident in the Freelander advertisement[URL]. It pictures a man driving the four-wheel-drive across a rugged terrain in the wild. The caption, ; quot; Freelander. Get your hands on one; quot; complements the convention that men like to use their hands and tend to take the ; quot; hands-on; quot; approach to situations. This advertisement conveys the stereotype of the brave, heroic man, thus targeting men. It conveys the typically male desire of machoism. A second car advertisement using this stereotype is that for the Volkswagen Golf[URL], which shows a man braving the bad weather to admire the car. An example of gender advertising in car campaigns see figure 2. Here we have a very young boy looking at a G35 Coupe as if in awe of its beauty. In this advert (figure 2.) the car is the feminine aspect; and it is implying that most men from an early age like to play with fast cars as toys and then buy the <https://assignbuster.com/evaluate-the-principles-underpinning-how-audiences-are-addressed-essay/>

real thing later in life. It infers that cars are a boys dream and that powerful cars such as this are extremely masculine.

Another form of gender stereotyping can be seen in old cigarette adverts. Womens magazines are one of the main ways that the tobacco industry used to target women. They were regarded as a selective medium for reaching and targeting audience. In addition to selectivity, magazines offer advertisers excellent reproduction quality, long message life, and the opportunity for readers to get involved with both the editorial content and advertising. Womens magazines somehow lend the advertisements some social acceptability or stylish impression because of the image of the magazine. As the health editor of British Vogue stated, the publication of an advertisement in her magazine was ‘ as good as a stamp of acceptability’ (Amos 1997).

An example of the feminine advertising campaign for cigarettes can be seen in figure 1. This advert has a more male target to its marketing; the slogan ‘ cigarettes are like women, the best ones are thin and rich’ reads like male orientated joke about women and therefore catches the male market by its effective humour. Although, it also implies attractiveness within women, i. e. ‘ thin’ and ‘ rich’. The man is facing the audience straight on signifying a male dominance. Whilst the woman is side facing, leaning on the man as if for support – in the way that a woman might be seen to be relying on a man for whatever reason. Also, her knee is bent and she is seen to be shorter or lower than him, again signifying a feminine weakness in the advert suggesting that women are a ‘ lower’ gender.

Figure 1. Figure 2.

Many tobacco brands tend to hook women on nicotine with two key female aspirations: being slim and attractive. As early as the 1920s, Lucky Strikes' advertisement stating 'Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet' began establishing an association between smoking and slimness. The timing could not have been better as slimness was coming into fashion along with bobbed hair and short skirts. The positioning of Lucky Strike as an aid to weight control led to a greater than 300% increase in sales for this brand in the first year of the advertising campaign (Howe 1984). Since it is well-documented that smokers have a lower mean weight than ex-smokers and non-smokers (Howe 1984), tobacco advertisements often imply this notion to appeal to those women with relentless desire of being slim. Slim female models are often depicted smoking cigarettes with copy lines that tend to emphasize words such as light, slim, ultra slim, slim line, slender and long. While supposedly describing the versions of the cigarettes, these copy lines also reinforce the female perception of slimness.

Some common themes are used in cigarette advertisements to portray smoking as the habit of attractive women. For example, advertisements often feature young attractive females smoking in the company of laughing friends, with an attractive man usually in a romantic setting, or simply proclaiming her sexual allure. Tobacco companies tend to hire young models in their advertisements because of their attractiveness.

Gender studies

Harris and Stobart (1986) conducted a study which was an extension of Manstead & McCulloch's (1981). They made small changes to the categories, and also added two new categories to the original data sheet used by Manstead and McCulloch (1981). Once again, Harris and Stobart (1986) found that there are many deviations in the way men and women are portrayed. Moreover, these differences are consistent with the traditional sex role stereotypes. In addition, they noted that this phenomenon is much more evident in the evening when compared to the daytime. Harris and Stobart (1985) concluded that this phenomenon is unusually complex, in that the way men and women are shown change during the course of the day. c

The hypothesis, that there is a marked difference in the way men and women are portrayed in British advertisements was not supported. This study fails to replicate the findings of psychologists like Manstead and McCulloch (1981) and Durkin (1985a). There are many differences in the findings of these studies and the present study.

Manstead and McCulloch (1981) found that 66% of the advertisements were with a male as the central character, by comparison with the present study, 37%. It was also found that females were the central characters in 56% of the advertisements. However it must be noted that the timings of the both studies are very different, this may have played an important part in the observation of the advertisements. This is because Harris & Stobart (1986) stated that the visual modality of males and females change over the course of the day. They reported that females were dominant through the daytime and male pre-dominated the evening advertisements.

Although the findings were not significant, there was one finding which was similar to that of Manstead & McCulloch (1981) and McArthur & Resko (1975). Both these previous studies found that there was a tendency for females to be portrayed in dependent roles and males shown in autonomous role; also females were shown at home more often than males and males were more likely to be shown at work than females. The present study summarised the observations as percentages. It was found that 23% of females were portrayed in dependent roles compared to 4% of males. In addition, 27% of females were shown at home compared to 6% of males being shown at home. Moreover, it was found that 2% of females were shown at work whereas 10% of males were shown at work.

There may be a number of reasons for these differences. There were many groups of observers, however the groups were not set any guidelines as to when the observations should be made. That is, there was no observer inter-rater reliability. Harris and Stobart (1986) found that the portrayal of men and women changes during the course of the day. Moreover, these differences are much more evident in the evening than the day. Thus, one group may have conducted the observations during the afternoon and another group may have conducted this during the evening, which may have lead to differences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the methods of persuasion used in advertising, instead of concentrating on the actual product, usually concentrate on the benefits that will be brought to the consumer. The advertisements play on the personal,

emotional desires or interests of the audience they are targeting. For example, they tend to focus on image and style when aiming at women and power and adventure when aiming at men.

‘ If advertising were to emphasise such honest self-expression rather than focus on women reflected through male eyes, it might serve as a forum for womens voices.’(Catterall, Maclaren, Stevens, 2000.)

It has also been found that usually women are portrayed as subordinate to men and also noted that women are shown in a dim manner and portrayed as sex objects (Manstead & McCulloch, 1981). A number of studies have found that men are more used for voice-overs. One reason for this may be because the male voice-over provides authoritative information which is an essential feature of advertisements. Therefore gender stereotyping is a very effective marketing tool used to target a select group audience of a certain gender, thus gaining the highest sales potential for each marketed product. It is also clear that gender stereotyping has had its roots deeply embedded within our society and cultures, again, re-enforcing old habitual stereotypes onto new audiences. So it is pertinent to conclude on the note that stereotypes bind the advertising media together and will continue to be a significant aspect within all advertisements now and in the future.