



## OWERRI AUDIENCE PERCEPTION OF GENDER ISSUES IN TV ADVERTISEMENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This research looked at Owerri audience perception of gender issues in TV advertising. The study attempts to provide clear understanding of what the audience think about the way that the genders, especially women, are portrayed in advertisements; and to guess the reasons for gender displays in advertisements, particularly to know if the use of women have any impact on the product acceptance. The stereotype theory was used in this seminar to explain the reasons for gender displays. Survey methods of research came into play to sample and evaluate the responses of one hundred respondents in Owerri metropolis with questionnaire that gave answers to the research questions and brought about the conclusions that advertisement is a gender issue because even though goods are advertised but men are used to gratify women and women also used to gratify women in order to gain the interest of both genders. It was recommended that, among others, gender displays should be encouraged but balance must be stricken, rather than negative objectification of the feminine gender in advertisements.

**Keywords:** Advertisement, gender, TV advertising, public perception

### Introduction

Advertising represents an importance mean by which organization communicate with their customer, both current and potential. Thus, having clear objective for advertising will aid operational decision making for advertising programs in effectively convey the intended message to the audience (Clow & Baack, 2006). Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods, or services by an identified sponsor (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010). There are various forms of advertising like informative advertising, persuasive advertising, comparison advertising, and reminder advertising. Informative advertising is used to inform consumers about a new product, service or future or build primary demand. It describes available products and services, corrects false impressions and builds the image of the company, (Kotler, 2010). Advertising can be done through print media which includes newspapers, magazines, brochures; audio media for example radio, and visual media which includes billboards, and television (Kotler & Armstrong 2010).

Modern advertising is only about 100 years old but the use of advertising actually dates back at least to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. The use of picture in advertisements is necessary. Advertisements with names and symbols on them are always easy for both illiterates and literates to identify. With the developing of printing, advertising made its first appearance in a form more nearly related to its present one. A small poster by William Claxton promoted the sale of a service book published in 1450. The first known newspaper advertisement also was a book notice, which appeared in a German News book in 1591. It is worthy of note that the common forms of advertising at that time were newspaper, street signs, posters, hand bills. The use was made of by United States government of advertisement during the civil war to sell bonds. The radio made its incursion into the advertisement world and began to challenge,

seriously, newspapers and others. Television became very controversial because it changed the role of radio, as it became the major source of in-home entertainments since the 1950s.

Gender issues in advertising refer to the fact that women are used in adverts to gratify men and men are also used to gratify women, therefore these gender displays are used heavily in advertising in order to establish the role of one gender in relation with the other. Some scholars argue that advertisers are obsessed with gender. Ekwenchi and Duru (2016) suggest that gender studies and women are synonymous. It is always about the female gender (Ogunyemi, 2014). It has been found in various studies that women are portrayed more negatively because even advertisements that have men as key players portray them in a more descent way which forms the argument in this research work.

It is argued that in advertising, men are often portrayed in the following ways: alert and conscious of surroundings, standing upright, eyes open and looking around, bodies are controlled, mean expression on face, gripping things tightly with hands, hands in pockets, serious, physically active, bravery, adventurousness, being able to think rationally, being strong and effective, for example, are all "manly" traits that are usually encouraged. So also, is the ability to think independently and take the initiative.

Portrayals of women in advertising: touching self, caressing an object, lying on the floor, sitting on a bed or chair, eyes closed, not alert, confused, vulnerable, body contorted, dressed like a child, holding an object or a man for support, sexy and sexually available, seductive, playful, careless. These are positions of submissiveness and powerlessness (Obi, 2019). This can be clearly seen when women are shown lying on the floor as men are standing over them, literally depicting women as being beneath men. Women are urged to pursue beauty and sex appeal, and part of the sex appeal is submission and nudity for attraction whereas in certain parts of African traditional society, exposing of a females body is termed a taboo, just like the Muslim community forbid women from exposing themselves. The scientific nature of advertising perhaps has created a broad and wide room which impropriated the women folk, and exploitation of their intricate characters and quality. Women traditionally are seen in terms of their appearance, sexually and domestic relations.

Accordingly, feminist researchers like Inch (2018) and Busty (2013) conclusively submit that women tend to be shown as submissive, passive and are portrayed largely in terms of their sexuality or domesticity, while men tend to be shown as dominant, active and authoritative. Nowadays, the impact of women in advertisements has generated a lot of controversy in many parts of the world. Some argue that women are used as followers in the advertisements. They see women as ornaments that are used to beautify the advertisement. They further went to say that women garnish the advertisements and make the adverts appealing to the eyes. To them the seductive nature of women helps a lot in creating interest in the product. Perhaps, this accounts for why most advert agencies see or feel the impact of women in advertisements as a powerful polarized force of feminine attraction over masculine, a phenomenon well cherished for quick awareness of advert and sale of product. The argument here reveals a situation of attraction and sustenance as a major factor in any advertisement. Advert agencies use more of women than men in television adverts of both male and general products. There are examples as that of beer and cigarette, which use women widely despite the fact that men actually consume the product more than the females.

It is rare these days to see advertisement on television screens, without women playing prominent and visible roles which often create controversy, such roles range from complementary, subjective, subordinate to major actors in most television adverts, therefore women's impact in advertising is more than that of men. These roles not only enhance the product advertised, but add colour, glamour and pleasant feelings to viewers whose interest, attention and patronage are very much sought after hence the views of the uses and gratification theory of the mass media that commands the acceptance of the audience based on what they want to see and are interested in.

## Statement of the Problem

Women are seen oftentimes in the background performing seductive roles in some advertisements. Based on this background, it is obvious that even though men and women alike use advertisements, women are considered more instrumental in its advertisement because of the seductive pictures that the advertisers paint. Given that it has been established that media emphasizes stereotypes, has this sort of roles created a certain impression about women and men? what is the assessment of Owerri audience of the ways that the genders are treated in advertisements and how gender can be portrayed with creating wrong stereotypes?

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Know if the female gender is portrayed more in advertisements.
2. Determine whether female gender portrayals produce positive impacts on product acceptance.
3. Ascertain if women are mostly perceived to play seductive roles in advertisements.

## Literature Review

### Concept of Advertising

Advertising is any paid form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas and goods, or services by an identified sponsor (Kotler & Armstrong 2010). Although advertising is used mostly by commercial firms, it is also used by a wide range of nonprofit organizations, professionals and social agencies that advertise their causes to various target publics. According to Adekoya (2011) advertising is any paid form of non-personal communication about an organization or its product to a specific target audience through a given medium by an identified sponsor. Adekoya (2011) observes that for any promotional activity to be called advertisement it must be paid for. In its real sense, advertising is it is the method used by companies for creating awareness of their products, as well as making new products known to the new and potential consumers.

In terms of marketing, advertising is a promotional tool which tends to remind, reassure and influence the decisions of the consumers because an advertisement itself enlightens, educates, and persuades consumers on their acceptability of the product offering (Sundar & Kim, 2005). Advertisements in such a media as print (newspaper, magazines, billboards, flyers) or broadcast (radio, television) typically consist of pictures, headlines, information about the product and occasionally a response coupon. Broadcast advertisement on the other hand consists of an audio or video narrative that can vary in range (Busari, 2002).

Many advertisements can also be seen on the seats of grocery carts, on the wall of airport walkways, on the sides of buses, airplane and train, an indication that advertising is a common phenomenon in the daily life of man. Advertisements are usually placed anywhere an audience can easily and/or frequently access visual and/or video (Busari, 2002). So many people have tried to define the concept of advertising and as such various definitions have risen. However, there is what is common in the different definitions; all writers use the words like a communication, a promotion tool, a message delivery, attracting customers, persuading customers, calling customers to buy a product or a service and this information delivery is paid for and goes through a particular medium (Arens, 1986).

## Forms and types of advertising

There are different forms and types of advertising based on nature of the message, medium through which the message is delivered and so on. According to Kotler & Armstrong (1999), there are three forms of advertising that is informative, persuasive and reminder advertising. Informative advertising is used to inform the customers about a new product or features and to build the image of the company. Persuasive advertising is one used to build selective demand for a brand by persuading consumers that it offers the best quality for their money. It persuades a customer to accept sales calls and to purchase now (some persuasive advertising has become comparison advertising, in which a company directly or indirectly compares its brand with one or more other brands. While reminder advertising is one used to keep consumers thinking about the product or service. It is important for mature products or services. It reminds customers that the products may be needed in their near future, where to buy the product and maintaining top of mind product awareness.

Others categorize advertising inform of media, being commercial and none commercial media. Commercial advertising media can include many different advertising media, including the traditional ones and modern means. With advancement in modern technologies, it is expected that more and more means of advertising will continue to surface. Okoro (2014) outlines a number of commercial media including wall paintings, billboards, street furniture components, printed flyers and rack cards, radio, cinema and television adverts, web banners, mobile telephone screens, shopping carts, web popups, skywriting, bus stop benches, human billboards and forehead advertising, magazines, newspapers, town criers, sides of buses, banners attached to or sides of airplanes, in-flight advertisements on seatback tray tables or overhead storage bins, taxicab doors, roof mounts and passenger screens, musical stage shows, subway platforms and trains, elastic bands on disposable diapers, doors of bathroom stalls, stickers on apples in supermarkets, the opening section of audio and video, posters, and the backs of event tickets and supermarket receipts. While there are so many forms of commercial advertising, this study conceptualized in details and empirically examined only three forms, which include media advertising, celebrity advertising and billboard advertising.

## Review of Gender

Scholars have often given simple definition of gender and tried to differentiate it sex because of the confusion that is often generated because of the two concepts. Sex is the biologically determined characteristics or functions of males and females, the physical and biological difference between male and female while gender means those characteristics and functions allocated to male and females. What it means is that although everyone is born with a certain sex either biologically male or female, except for inter-sexed individuals no one is born with a gender as a part of one's innate embodiment of personhood. Brand (1995) had explained that sex refers to the biological and anatomical features of an individual; gender refers to a socially constructed set of traits that are routinely given to men and women. Because gender is socially constructed, different gender performances may exist. Some performances of gender are more dominant than others. From the moment a person is born, the formation of his or her gender identity begins. These gender identities are largely products of cultural values that are written on the "blank page" of the human body (Butler, 1990, p. 166). Bussey and Bandura (2004) assert that children learn that the world is largely organized around this differentiation and that their dress, skills, occupation, and daily activity will be governed by gender distinctions.

Since gender is socially constructed, thereby subject to a cultural rulebook by which males and females are measured, then our conception of our own gender is heavily influenced by how our performance of being either a male or female matches up with the cultural norms. The cultural industries

are constantly influencing the gender performance and building stereotypes by the way they portray each gender.

### **Gender Stereotype in the Media**

Stereotyping is a form of representation but a stereotypical representation will often be negative, inaccurate, limited and partial. A stereotype is a distorted, exaggerated or misleading representation of a person or group of people through the reduction of that person or group to a few essential characteristics (Hall, 2007). Stereotypes basically represent a set of ideas or a set of beliefs about people – an ideology – rather than people as they are. Itzin (1986, p. 128) notes that stereotypes are “deliberately misleading; they perform the function of creating attitudes which, by their very nature, are negative attitudes.” They function as a form of propaganda; they are the language of ideology – the way it is communicated.’

Comprehensive gender studies which do not pay particular attention to gender but investigated how the media projected the two genders have found particular gender traits common in both television and film. Those kinds of studies are mostly of foreign origin, especially from developed economies. According to Wood (2000) there are four perennial themes of gender portrayal in the media. These themes demonstrate how media reflect and promote traditional arrangements between the sexes: women are caregivers and men are providers; men are the competent authorities who save women from their incompetence; women as subject to men’s sexual desire: women as victims and sex objects/men as aggressors; and women’s dependence and men’s independence.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Stereotype Theory**

The idea of stereotype theory was first conceived by Walter Lipmann (1965). Lipmann (1965) cited in Glaveanu (2007), compares stereotypes with stable images in our head that shorten our perceptions. They are economical in the sense that previous experience moulds current perceptions. The stereotype theory explanations on how the perceived image people have of the female gender could translate into the type of role they are assigned as characters in home video films. It emphasizes the view that the mass media reinforce the dominant segment of society's existing patterns of attitudes and behavior toward minorities by perpetuating rigid and usually negative portrayals, which can have the result of keeping minorities in subordinate positions.

The theory proposes that in entertainment content, and in other messages, the media repeatedly present portrayals of various categories of people, such as the aged, women, and major racial and ethnic groups; those portrayals tend to be consistently negative, showing people as having more undesirable attributes and few positive characteristics than members of the dominant groups; such portrayals are similar among the various media--providing corroboration; these portrayals provide constructions of meaning for members of the audience, particularly for those who have only limited contact with actual people of the relevant categories; and thus, members of the audience incorporate those meanings into their memories as relatively inflexible schemata--stereotypic interpretations--that they use when thinking about or responding to any individual of a portrayed category, regardless of his or her actual personal characteristics.

## Research Method

This chapter describes the method or procedures to be used for the work. A sample survey research method was used as a technique for the collection of data in the study. The method has the ability to generate quantifiable data on which conclusions are based. It is also a method of extracting information from people about their feelings and opinions on a phenomenon that involves attitude. This method is chosen for the research because the study has to do with real life situation where the facts are to be tested for validity and reliability. More so, the method involves the use of questionnaire, which aims at eliciting some answers from respondents about their views and opinions on the topic under investigation.

Television viewers in Owerri metropolis is the population of the study, whose exact figures are not known. But the researcher selected a fair sample of 100 persons because of the scope of the study. The study shall be restricted to persons who watch TV, and who can remember a particular advertisement that they have seen on TV. The selection of the people that will constitute the sample was done purposively and in a stratified method that ensures that TV audience at 4 axes (Douglas, Wetheral, Tetlow and Okigwe Rd) were studied.

The questionnaire, which is the measuring instrument for this study was administered to the respondents personally by the researcher. A total number of 100 questionnaires were distributed. It is remarkable to note that during collection, the researcher collected the information personally. This will give her the opportunity to have direct contact with the respondents. It will also enable the persuasion of the respondents to fill the questionnaire. Data collected were coded in the coding sheet to enhance data analysis. The statistical tool for data analysis was the simple percentage.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

Both the descriptive and inferential statistical tools of measurement of data were used in analyzing the data collected. All the responses were assembled in a coding sheet. This was done manually with the aid of a scientific calculator. The coding sheet is used to facilitate data distribution and consequently data analysis. On the whole, responses to each question were calculated on the basis of respondents who respond alike. These then were coded in percentage, and presented in tables. Out of the 100 questionnaires administered, 97 were collected. So, whatever is calculated is done based on these 97 respondents.

### Sex Distributions of Respondents

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	46	47.4
Female	51	52.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

In the above table, the analysis of data in the demographic section showed that in respect of sex, 46 respondents representing 47.4% of the sample were males, while 51 respondents representing 52.6% were females.

**Age Distribution of Respondents**

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
18 – 25	22	22.7
26 – 36	29	29.9
37 – 45	30	30.9
46 & above	16	16.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

None of the respondents was below 18 years. The age group was divided into four. Respondents between the ages of 37 – 45 recorded the highest response, that is 30 representing 30.95 of the sample. 22 respondents (22.7%) were between the ages of 18 and 25, 29 respondents (29.9%) were between the ages of 26 and 30 years while the least number of respondents were from the ages of 46 years and above representing 16.5% of the sample.

**Marital Status of Respondents**

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Married	45	46.4
Single	52	53.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

In terms of status, 52 of the respondents were single. The married respondents were 45 representing 46.4% of the sample, while the single ones represented 53.6% of the sample.

**Educational Level of Respondents**

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
FSLC	5	5.2
GCE/WASC	32	33
OND/NCE	22	22.6
BSC/HND	34	35.1
PHD/OTHERS	4	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

The lowest level of educational attainment for the respondents is the First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC). 5 (5.2%) of the respondents had the FSLC, 32 (33%) had the GCE/WASC, 22 or 22.6% had the OND/NCE Certificates, while 34 or 35.1% are the BSC/HND Certificate holders. Those who had the qualifications higher than the first degree were 4 representing 4.1% of the sample.

**Occupation of Respondents**

Variable	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Unemployed	11	11.3
Students	45	46.4
Business	18	18.6
Civil servants	23	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

This category was divided into four. In this section of the demographic data, 11 or 11.3% were unemployed, 45 or 46.4% were students, 18.6% were businessmen/women while 23 or 23.7% were civil servants.

**Answers to Research Questions**

**Research Question 1: Is the female gender portrayed more in advertisements?**

Based on responses to questions 7 & 9 of the questionnaire, the following were found.

**Agreement that women are portrayed more in advertisements**

Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Agree	61	100
Disagree	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the above table, among those that can remember the advertisements that they have seen (61 in number), all agree that women are portrayed more in the advertisements.

**Research Question 2: Do female gender portrayals produce positive impacts on product acceptance?**

**Respondents’ reactions to the assertion that the presence of Women in advertisements help in the acceptance of the Product**

Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	50	51.6
No	24	24.7
Don’t know	23	23.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table above, 50 or 51.6% of the respondents were of the view that the presence of women in the advertisements help in the acceptance of the product. 24 or 24.7% refuted the assertion that the presence of women helps in the acceptance of the adverts while, 23 or 23.7% of the respondents said they don’t know.

**Research Question 3: Do women play seductive roles in advertisement?**

**Do women play seductive roles in advertisement?**

Categories	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	46	47.4
No	34	35.1
Don’t know	17	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100</b>

From the above table, 46 or 47.4% of the sample were of the view that the participation of women in advertisements are seductive in nature. 34 or 35.1% of the respondents disagree saying that the roles of women in advertisements are not seductive. 17 or 17.5 of the respondents were skeptical in their answers.



## Summary and Conclusion

This study has to a large extent pictured the subject matter being “the gender issues in advertisement, impact and application” as the roles of the display of human body, especially feminine gender displays. In other words, advertisement is a gender issue because even though goods are advertised but men are used to gratify women and women to gratify women in other to gain the interest of both genders to the goods advertised, hence the use and gratification theory of media. It has been found that women are often used in adverts more than men because of their seductive body and roles ascribed to them by the male folk in order to draw more attention to the products advertised and sweep the audience off their feet. These impacts have also been found to be very high and beneficial to the advertisers and boosted patronage of goods been advertised but have also produced high negative impacts on the women who are used in these adverts, the men whose ordinary thinking have been altered by these feminine displays and the society at large who form attitudes and make certain decisions based on the unreal pictures painted by the advertisements which mostly undermines the image of women in our society.

Many studies have been conducted to explain the effects of the objectification of women in advertising. The debate has never centered around if women are objectified; it has focused on the effects of this type of advertising. The effects that have been found are unique and substantial, and how could they not be? According to the American Association of Advertising Agencies, we view up to 3,000 advertisements every day, which adds up to over one million per year. It is clear that this amount of sheer exposure to ads has an impact on people and scholars have found their impact to be boundless. This research shows that the objectification of women in advertising has affected how we view women’s roles in society, desensitized views of violence, and as it relates to the gratification of audience, especially males the uses and gratification theory have led women to have an overall more negative self-body image.

## Recommendations

1. It is therefore recommended that more gender displays in advertisements owing to its effectiveness but that advertisers should carefully strike a balance in the application of these genders in advertisements and not focus on objectifying women negatively to gain the interest of their audience. Though these audiences choose products based on uses, interest and gratification but promoting nudity and pornography will not produce the required positive impact, rather it distorts the actual message. Advertisement will be of no use and wrong if it does not pass across the required message to its audience.
2. At the same time, where balance may not be possible, it is also recommended that the use of animations as an alternative to gender displays as it presents an unusual scenario and draws high level of attention. Only few advertisers use animations and are enjoying the benefits to a large extent as it involves fewer characters but much creativity that paints lasting pictures about the products advertised.
3. Finally, it is believed that since the effect of advertisement messages in our modern society goes a long way to affect the attitudes of people not only about the goods advertised but also their general outlook to life. So, advertisement messages can be great tools for national transformation and women emancipation also as far this research work is concerned.

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