

RESEARCH REPORTS

Television Advertising Policies and Practices and Their Implications on Women

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I. Introduction

It has been observed that mass media advertisements present highly stereotyped images of women. Either these women are presented as household figures commonly associated with housekeeping, secondary to and dependent on men for financial, emotional and physical support or as sexual and decorative objects subject to men's desires such that the phenomenon of media exploitation refers more to the woman rather than to the man.

According to S.M. Mohd Idris of Consumers' Association of Penang,

This view and attitude towards women has been deeply ingrained in our consciousness and has left in its wake a callous absence of sympathy, human compassion and sensitivity towards the position of women in society.¹

The study summarized here was done for the author's thesis for the master's degree in Mass Communication; it shows how the local media advertisements, specifically on television, portray women, whether they are depicted as sex commodities, decorative objects or decision-makers. It also describes the usual roles depicted by women and reviews the regulatory policies on women in television advertising.

¹ Consumers' Association of Penang, *Abuse of Women in the Media* (Penang, Malaysia: Zita Offset, 1982), p. 1.

II. The Problem

On many occasions, especially in advertisements, women are used as decorative objects by appearing as vain and seductive or as always in the company of men who appear to be superior to them. If not seductive, their stereotyped image as mothers or wives who are at their best when they are at home or in the kitchen is usually depicted.

Related to the above observation, this research work tries to find answers to the following questions:

- a) Does exploitation of women exist in TV commercials?
- b) Is there a proliferation of women exploitation on television?
- c) How are women portrayed in advertisements?
- d) What are the implications of these television commercials on roles, status, and rights of women in Philippine society?

III. Objectives

The general objective of this research is to study and describe regulatory policies on mass media advertisements, particularly television, the practices and their possible implications on the role and status of women.

The specific objectives are:

- a) To compile and analyze regulatory television advertising policies;
- b) To analyze the content of selected local television advertisement materials;
- c) To determine and evaluate the roles portrayed by women in television advertisements; and
- d) To describe advertising policies on television vis-a-vis the commercials shown.

IV. Theoretical Framework

Media's powerful impact on society can greatly influence the public's perceptions and behavior. It could affect the political, spiritual, emotional and intellectual development of people. Because of media's great effect on people, regulatory policies and rules have to be instituted to properly guide media users in its utilization.

The powerful effect of media, however, does not completely and solely overwhelm the viewers. The net effect is actually mediated or filtered by other variables. Some of these variables are summed up in two theories, namely the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Reinforcement Theory.

The Agenda-Setting Theory states that

Topics are sorted by the media for presentation to the public. Information about those topics is selectively assembled and selectively disseminated. The public then sorts out their interest and concern with this information as a function of both their individual differences in personal make-up and their location in societal strata and categories. Out of this system of variables and factors emerges a list of topics to which varying numbers of people give differential assignments of importance. That list is the agenda of the media audience as a whole.²

Advertisements are produced primarily to convince the consumers to buy the product being advertised. The commercial models acting out the importance of the product play a major role in persuading the consumers to react accordingly. If the viewers are convinced of the importance of the commodity or are able to identify themselves with the roles portrayed, there is a bigger chance for them to buy the product.

V. Methodology

A. Design

This research work uses case study as its design and content analysis as its primary method.

It tries to analyze intensively television advertising policies and practices based on regulatory policies and how these practices affect the status of women. It tries to formulate guidelines that could help enhance further the image of women in television advertising.

B. Methods and Procedures

This study uses the content analysis method wherein the type or quality of messages projected by our local television advertisements regarding women were carefully analyzed and interpreted.

Analysis in this study is divided into three parts:

- a) Review of regulatory policies on local mass media advertisements, specifically television.
- b) Content analysis of selected local mass media advertisements.
- c) Description of the policies vis-a-vis the actual practices.

² Melvin L. de Fleur and Sandra B. Rokeach, *Theories of Mass Communication*, 4th edition (New York: Longman, Inc., 1982), pp. 245-246.

Regulatory policies refer to those issued by the Philippine Board of Advertising in its Code of Ethics, Rules and Regulations for Advertising and Sales Promotions year 1984.

All advertisements that appeared on all channels on television were analyzed for a 25-day sample period. Each television channel was the subject of a five day study which was done one after the other. Only the local commercials during prime time hour, from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm, totalling one hour a day were included in the analysis.

C. Variables and Measures

The principal variables considered in this study are the regulatory policies on advertisements for television and media advertisements/practices. Regulatory policies on commercials are based on those set-up by the PBA, Inc.

Media advertisements on television and the practices of the advertisers were measured by determining the nature and types of images projected by women, whether assertive or non-assertive.

All advertisements that appeared in the sample period were measured and analyzed for trends.

D. Instruments

A content analysis form was formulated for the in-depth study of ads. After categorizing the commercial brand, product category and classification, the advertisements were further analyzed according to:

- a) Occupational role of main female characters
- b) Image projected
- c) Attire of female character
- d) Setting
- e) Social class typified
- f) Male companionship

E. Data Gathering and Limitations

This study is limited to the commercials shown on television channels within a one-hour period assigned for each night for 25 consecutive days.

As originally planned, a simultaneous collection of data on television advertisements on all channels with the help of research assistants was to be conducted. However, based on the observations made during the 15-day trial period, this had to be amended because of the possibility of data fabrication due to boredom and lack of genuine interest. Another difficulty with this arrangement was the inability to hold simultaneous monitoring of the assistants re-

garding their performance on data collection. Because of these constraints, the data gathering had to be conducted personally by the author and the sampling had to be done on one channel after the other.

Five days were allotted for each channel, one after the other, from 7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. only. Originally, time was from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m., and 15 days were allotted for each channel. The time had to be reduced to one hour because, as we observed, not many advertisements were shown from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. due to the economic drawback experienced by the country, as confirmed by one television channel. Commercials were concentrated from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. As to the number of days, advertisements were repetitious and five days were more than enough to get a sampling.

Regulatory policies on advertisements for television were confined to those set-up by the Philippine Board of Advertising, Incorporated (PBA), the self-regulatory body for local advertisements on Philippine television.

F. Analysis

A codebook was provided for coding and tabulation of data. No same commercials were coded twice. If the advertisement appeared several times during the sample period, this was tabulated but when analyzed, it was considered as one observation unit. Only commercials which carried women were analyzed and given a value measurement of one.

VI. Findings

1. Product Classifications

A total of 374 advertisements, regardless of repetitions, were counted but when measured and the content analyzed, a total number of 189 commercials was recorded. These 189 commercials were classified into 15 products namely:

- a) Food and Beverages (F/B)
- b) Personal Hygiene
- c) Medicine
- d) Clothing/Accessories
- e) Home Appliance
- f) Beauty Products
- g) Alcohol/Liquor
- h) Office/School Supplies
- i) Cigarettes
- j) Bank
- k) Home Management

- l) Automotive/Car
- m) Shopping Center/Store
- n) Restaurant/Hotel
- o) Communication

Of the 189 commercials, 81 or 42.8% belonged to the F/B category. Food seemed to be the most common product advertised in commercials because of its high value in a person's daily existence. Since women are considered as major consumers, their roles as mothers and wives in charge of deciding what food or beverage to give or supply their families were reinforced by the big number of commercials featuring food and beverages.

In the advertisement of Nido, the mothers claimed they chose this brand of milk because they considered their children as "number one." Their primary concern was the welfare of their children.

Many advertisements like Yakult Milk, Great Taste Coffee and others portrayed women as the decision-makers in the matter of what kind of food to give their loved ones. Here, the women either chose, endorsed, bought, used or served the brand to their respective families and friends with pride and confidence.

2. Occupational Role of Main Female Characters

Twenty eight occupational roles were projected by the 243 main female characters in the 189 commercials gathered from the television programs during the 25-day sampling period. Roles were classified according to the occupations portrayed by the main female characters in order to show what women do in advertisements.

3. Image Projected by Main Female Characters

The image projected by the main female characters were categorized under "assertive" and "non-assertive" groupings. She was "assertive" when she gave final decisions or was a decision-maker, was authoritative, had a position of authority, was firm or a strong endorser. She was "non-assertive" when she passively submitted to orders/commands, received/accepted/endorsed product or advice, and had no spoken dialogue or was a mere observer/participant in the commercial. These assertive and non-assertive images were used as indicators of women's capacity to make major decisions for herself or for her family.

Of the 243 occupational roles gathered, 120 commercials or 49% projected assertive roles. She was a chemist in Yakult, a doctor in Tylenol, a grandmother in Del Monte and a caring mother in Coca-Cola.

One hundred twenty three(123) commercials or 51% portrayed women in non-assertive roles. Benadryl cough preparation showed the mother as passively accepting the endorsed syrup for her and her family.

The findings showed an almost equal distribution with the "non-assertive" role edging out the "assertive" by only three counts, e.e., 123 vs. 120 or 51% vs. 49%. The small difference of 2% between the non-assertive and assertive roles could be attributed to the probable attempt of the commercials to move away from the assignment of non-assertive roles to stereotyped occupational roles to assertive roles.

4. Attire of Female Characters

The attire of female characters was categorized into eight. Attire was studied to determine if women were projected as vain and seductive. Body exposure in sexy outfits like bikinis or skimpy swimsuits enabled the author to say whether they were used as sex or decorative objects.

Majority of the women were presented in casual attire in the commercials studied (103 or 54.5%). Most of the time, they were shown as mothers, daughters, or wives busy at home, outdoors for relaxation or indoors for recreation. In Cerelac, the mother in her ordinary dress was shown lovingly feeding her baby.

There were some commercials of alcohol and liquor products like White Castle, Vos Brandy, and Old Captain which came close to projecting women in derogatory roles, i.e., as sex objects who displayed their beautiful faces and bodies in skimpy swimsuits.

Those, however, only make up 4.8%.

Women in uniforms depicting other occupations and preoccupations were also recorded and taken as indicative of the variety of women's physical world.

5. Setting of the Advertisements

One hundred ninety two(192) settings were culled from the 189 advertisements analyzed. Some commercials used more than one setting. The settings were classified into eight, namely:

- a) Home
- b) Outdoors
- c) Indoors
- d) Place of work
- e) Not Clear
- f) Restaurant
- g) Store
- h) School

These were used to determine whether the woman was always confined as a homebody especially in the kitchen, commonly associated with housekeeping. If not, it explored places where the woman could be other than home.

Sixty three(63) advertisements or 32.8% were taken in the "home". Of these 63 advertisements, 21 or 33.3% took place in the kitchen, 17 or 27% in the bedroom, and the rest either in the living room or bath room.

Outdoors or places of relaxation outside the house such as parks, beaches, and gardens were used 51 times or 26.6%.

The women's world indicated by the choice of settings disproved misconceptions that women are solely found at home especially in the kitchen even if there were many commercials which had the home as its setting.

6. Social Class Typified

This was categorized into four, namely: "upper" (A and B), "middle" (C and D), "lower" (E), and "not clear" (upper or lower). In determining the social class, the content of the commercial was analyzed according to setting, profession or occupation, props, and attire used. Income levels were used as indicator of social class to determine what social strata women were usually portrayed in.

More than half of the advertisements (104 or 55%) suggested they were catering to the sections C and D or "middle" class of the society. In Gusto cold cuts, the daughter, son, and father of middle income group were shown dancing happily because of satisfaction from an inexpensive yet delicious product.

This was followed by those in A and B or "upper" bracket with a frequency of 67 or 35.4%. The More cigarette commercial presented the woman in a beautiful car, and then in a first-class restaurant wearing an attractive gown.

The E or "lower" and "not clear" levels got an equal share of 9 or 4.8% each. Yakult milk showed a woman peddler doing house-to-house selling of her product.

7. Male Companionship

The presence of men in the commercials was analyzed by the author to determine whether women as portrayed in the commercials were secondary to and dependent on men for emotional and physical support or as sexual and decorative objects subject to man's desires.

The apparently emotional dependence of the majorette in the Rexona deodorant on men's approval -- she was hurt by their distance -- was not because she was rejected as a woman but be-

cause she had a bad odor. Even men with a bad odor would be equally rejected. Similarly, in the Gard shampoo commercial, the lady model was rejected not as a woman but because of her dandruff. Both commercials, therefore, did not really show any secondary citizen treatment nor emotional dependence of women on men.

Though female attraction is a big boost to the egos of men who drink or smoke certain brands, the men in the commercials never indicated any abuse of the women's attraction to them. Andy Player liquor for instance showed how Eddie Garcia treats the enchanted lady in a gentlemanly manner.

More than two-thirds of the advertisements studied (136 or 72%) featured male commercial models. In all these, there was minimal indication that women were considered as secondary to and emotionally dependent on men or were used as sexual and decorative objects subject to men's desires as in the Old Captain Rhum commercial where the bikini clad woman model was superimposed on the wine.

VII. Analysis

The findings in this study contradicted what was recently published in a major daily, an article entitled "The Asian Media vs. Women." It states that "women are always shown as second to men. Man is the master, the doer, the brain, and woman his supporter, admirer, caretaker, and entertainer. Women's personalities, brains, talents, and strengths are not emphasized."

Though women admired, supported, took care of, and entertained men, they also performed decision-making activities, showed authority, vigor, and strength. In Tylenol, the woman acted as a doctor endorsing the product and vouching with confidence about its effectivity. As a tennis player in Soft and Dri, she showed skill, confidence, superiority, and seriousness in playing the game. Other roles like the mother in Cetrin, the dancers in Palmolive Shampoo, and the singer in Unicharm also echoed these findings.

On advertising policies, upon making a thorough study of the regulations set up by the PBA for the advertising industry through its Code of Ethics, it was noted that there was no specific section in the Code on women. However, in some sections, general rules regarding profanity, exposure of the human body and disparagement were touched upon.

It is probable that one of the major reasons why strictly male product commercials like those for liquors and cigarettes which border to near exploitation of women models playing derogatory roles account for a relatively small percentage of 4.8% is the Board's ad-

herence and implementation of the Code's rule that "advertisements shall neither claim nor suggest that drinking enhances sexual success". Likewise, "... illustrations which are sexually suggestive or which imply a link between smoking and sexual success" curbs any proliferation of cigarette commercials done at the expense of women.

Another probable reason that can be immediately pointed out is the Filipino cultural tradition, that is, the esteem and admiration which Filipino women are accorded. Be it in her role as a respected mother, admired or courted lady or a consulted wife, the Filipino woman has always been treated with honor and respect. These are not written in laws and policies but have been practiced and observed in the Filipino community.

Advertisers' awareness of such a tradition probably accounts for such minimal exploitation of women. We must keep in mind that the goal of advertisements is to win the acceptance of consumers and not alienate them by commercials done in bad taste, even if the target client is strictly the male consumer.

Furthermore, performances for the cigarette advertisements projected a rich and successful image as could be detected by the setting and props used in Winston and Philip Morris commercials. In these cigarette advertisements, women were given first class treatment by the men whose company was sought and given importance.

Discussion of the results showed that Filipino women, as portrayed in the local commercials, in their various roles as mothers, daughters, models, artists/entertainers and other roles were positively projected in general. Commercials analyzed pictured women capable of effective decision-making. The minimal exploitation apparent in the discussion on attire was attributed to the Board's implementation of rules and observance by the advertisers regarding certain cultural values. As pointed out, while the Board protects women from exploitation, the promotion of their status remains a highly desirable end. The need for more commercials promoting the development of women's self-confidence, more opportunities to participate as equal partners in national development in the areas of public life, employment, education, training and community organization is highly desirable at present.

VIII. Conclusion

From the data gathered and the analysis of such data, the author concludes that there exists some amount of women exploitation in television advertisements. Though the woman's priority is her home and family, the television advertisements likewise project her

talents, flexibility and mobility as enabling factors that have allowed women to assume roles other than that of a homemaker.

The sexual stereotyping of women as intellectually inferior beings, physically dependent on men, best left in the home or kitchen busy with food preparation was disproved by the data gathered.

Though women performed traditional roles like "mother" or "wife", important decisions such as what food to give their families, what products to purchase, how to take care of themselves and the people around them were projected as part and parcel of a mature decision-maker.

With regard to the PBA's Code of Ethics, the policies are somewhat general and insufficient to fully promote and enhance the status of women. While they protect women from exploitation, they do not fully enhance the capabilities of women in other crucial areas such as public life, education, training and community organizations. More commercials promoting the development of women's self-confidence and positive values should be encouraged by PBA.

IX. Implications and Recommendations

Advertisements, no matter how boring or repetitious these may appear, could definitely influence the development of the audience---either to preserve or reinforce what is already stored in their belief systems of priorities or to serve as an instrument for social change.

Without clear-cut policies that would protect and upgrade the interests of women, advertisers will not be guided accordingly in helping further uplift the role of Filipino women in society.

Many women still label themselves as "mere housewives" and these women with this kind of attitude "constitute the barriers to the advancement of the status of women as a whole."

Since television is a powerful tool in educating people and helping them accept the new and expanded roles of women in society, extra efforts should be exerted to utilize television as a means to influence women in changing for the better whatever negative stereotyped attitudes they have towards themselves. This holds true for men. Through their proper exposures, they will learn to accept and support women in their changing role as a potent force in mobilizing community development and national integration.

More commercials showing positive attitudes and values of Filipino women such as strong determination, capacity to make major decisions, endurance, ability to initiate change and capacity to mold society for the better should be produced.

To help women further enhance their roles on television advertisements and ultimately in society, it is recommended that a section on women be included in the PBA's Code of Ethics, Rules and Regulations for Advertising and Sales Promotions. This section should contain and elaborate the following provisions:

1. Advertisements shall help promote women as equal partners of men in development and nation-building;
2. Advertisements shall continue to depict women as qualified decision-makers capable of holding key positions in big corporations and society in general;
3. Advertisements that will enhance the role of women in the economic, political, scientific, technological, and cultural developments shall be promulgated; and
4. Advertisements shall not show women as "ever-available, docile, and cheap labor resource to be exploited by investors and transnational corporations."