

Marketing Stereotypes Associated with Public Visual Preferences

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Abstract

This paper aims to analyze the public's perception of stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35 that appear in commercials, movies, or series and everyday life. We chose to focus on women stereotypes because marketing has also helped to promote ancient mentalities, often discriminatory, which end up affecting us psychologically. In this sense, our approach was both a qualitative one (semi-structured interview, with a role in substantiating and creating the quantitative research tool) and a quantitative one (online survey, with a descriptive role). The results provide respondents' perspectives on female stereotypes between the ages of 18 and 35 encountered in commercials, movies, or everyday life. It also analyzes the differences between women's and men's perceptions of the clichés studied. Our study also examines the extent to which the most common female stereotypes in commercials or movies can be used to describe women encountered in everyday life.

Keywords

Women stereotypes; marketing symbols; typologies; marketing clichés; advertising metaphor.

Introduction

Clichés are presented as cognitive structures (Nguyen, 2021, p. 124) or mental representations (Eisend, 2019, p. 75). In mental processes, the stereotype functions as a scheme used to classify information (Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015, p. 11). According to cognitive metaphor (Kurylo, 2013, p. 131), for example, individuals constantly maintain their mental abilities (Yoo, 2020, p. 922) while information processing is done quickly, without too much effort, and quite effective (Kaul & Sahni, 2010, p. 17). Thus, as a result of this type of irrational cognitive process (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 767), people create or label stereotypes unintentionally and passively (Fiske, 2017, p. 793).

Stereotypes, symbols, or prejudices have been present in the collective psyche for many generations, modernizing with people and society. These are defined as labels that society establishes for a certain category of people or a certain thing. In other words, a stereotype is a general belief about a certain group of people who have various things in common (Åkestam, 2018, p. 883). Stereotypes can be both positive and negative, of course, regardless of the context in which they are used. Positive stereotypes are far too few compared to stereotypes that express a kind of negativity, being totally inadequate and only used to label, thus often being untrue or totally out of place (Cunningham & Macrae, 2011, p. 603).

Many years ago, gender roles were fairly well distributed, for example, a woman knew exactly that her only job was to take care of her family and home, and the men to support and protect her. Over the years, a rather unhealthy concept has been highlighted and impregnated, stating that men are superior to women, females being humiliated, degraded, and treated as such. As they began to be increasingly noticed among the people, these labels received due attention and came to be studied by researchers. This has happened quite recently, with stereotypes beginning to be studied in depth about 100 years ago (Chu et al., 2016, p. 131).

Society has developed over time, and these stereotypes have become increasingly exploited, being used to attract people's attention and benefit from them. In the past, regarding commerce, merchants have always known the difference between a poor man and a rich man, later using this to customize the way they approach him and sell their products. Using stereotypes about clothes, the colors the customer wore, the way they looked and expressed themselves could influence the quality of the goods they would buy or it could alter their price. Marketing has come to the aid of commerce and the producers because its role is to target and push products and services to consumers. Therefore, marketing accelerates the growth of consumption, and consequently, the growth of sales using various approaches and methods.

Marketing has always been concerned with identifying, anticipating, and profitably satisfying customer needs. For it to be as easy as possible to identify with the client and his needs, it was necessary to create a link between the two parties, so this was also possible through the use of stereotypes, for example, gender, which appears most frequently in any advertisement (Ellemers, 2017, p. 277).

All the solutions and tools that marketing uses to achieve its main goal are framed in the four directions of the marketing mix. Stereotypes are included here because they can be identified in all four areas. A modern trader can influence consumers by using a certain color symbol for the product packaging or can choose to sell their products in certain stores that only the target market of the product frequents. In addition, it can choose to promote its products using stereotypical advertisements or a different pricing strategy for each customer segment that is part of the targeted people (De Meulenaer et al., 2018, p. 910). Thus, seeing that society is much more modern today, but most things have not changed radically but only developed. We also observe that marketing has come to be found in almost any field. In other words, marketing is everywhere, just like in the case of symbols and stereotypes. The interests of

marketing, including sales growth, go back to people, through the use of stereotypes in advertisements, packaging, prices, and stores.

We have noticed that with the emergence of women's rights and the concept of equal rights in gender, the negative nature of these stereotypes addressed to women present not only in society but also in marketing, in movies, or in everyday life has begun to diminish. Despite some exceptions, we can say that today, the feminine gender is much closer to an equality with the masculine, compared to the situation of the past, but we will never be able to witness soon enough a change in the connotation of feminine stereotypes identified today, these being used despite the ancient mentalities that underlie their creation.

This research aims to highlight whether there are differences on the one hand between the stereotypes promoted in commercials and movies and, on the other hand, those encountered in everyday life.

Research methodology

A purpose of this paper is to study the public's perception of stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 who appear in commercials, movies, or series and everyday life, highlighting the meaning of their perception, respectively this being a positive or negative one. Another goal is the comparative analysis of the perception of some notable female stereotypes encountered in commercials, movies, or series and everyday life.

The people targeted for this research (as requested by the filter questions) are between 18 and 35 years old, have heard of the term stereotype so far, and are from Iasi County, Romania.

To achieve the goal, the research combines a qualitative and quantitative approach that has the following objectives.

Research objectives and hypothesis

The objectives of qualitative research are:

01. Identifying the stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 as we meet them in marketing or advertising.
02. Identifying stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35, as we find them in movies or TV shows.
03. Identifying stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35 as we encounter them in everyday life.

The objectives of the quantitative research and the hypotheses that support them are:

04. Identifying how a stereotype is recognized, depending on the gender of the respondents.

Stangor and Lange (1994) stated that stereotypes are expressed in generics, so they refer only to groups of people such as 'a few', 'the majority' or 'all'. In addition to this

information, Coman (2005) stated that there are differences between women and men that generate various social consequences. Taking into account these statements, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There are differences between women and men in recognizing a stereotype. (Stangor & Lange, 1994; Coman, 2005)

05. Identifying the most frequently noticed stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in marketing, in advertisements.

Caballero and Solomon (1984) demonstrated that the public responds more negatively to the female stereotyping perceived in an advertisement, compared to male stereotyping. The hypothesis created based on this information is the following:

Hypothesis 2: There are differences between the perceptions of women and men regarding the most noticeable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 found in marketing and advertising. (Caballero & Solomon, 1984)

06. Identifying the most common stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35 found in movies or TV shows.

According to the authors Calvert, Kondla, Ertel, and Meisel, in 2001, they expressed the fact that men were more likely than women to perceive the main character as a model, respectively an ideal. Using this theory, we conceived the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: There are differences between the perceptions of women and men in terms of the most notable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 found in movies or series. (Calvert, Kondla, Ertel, & Meisel, 2001)

07. Identifying the most common stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in everyday life.

Eagly and Mladinic (1989) presented that attitudes and stereotypes about women were extremely favorable compared to stereotypes about men. The hypothesis constructed taking into account this statement is the following:

Hypothesis 4: There are differences between the perceptions of women and men in terms of the most notable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in everyday life. (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989)

Stage 1. Qualitative research

First, we conducted qualitative research using a semi-structured interview guide. The persons targeted for this research were the students from the Marketing specialization, year III. The sample obtained consisted of 100 students. They were asked to specify in writing, 3 stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35, identified in commercials, movies, and in everyday life. Based on the answers, I analyzed the frequency of stereotypes specified by them and I chose to use in the second research,

of quantitative type, the most frequently noticed stereotypes of women encountered in the 3 categories mentioned above.

In total, following this qualitative research, we obtained 293 stereotypes mentioned by respondents, of which 94 were found in marketing and commercials; 89 were found in movies or TV shows and 110 were stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in everyday life. After the duplicates were removed, a total of 271 unique stereotypes were obtained.

Stage 2. Quantitative research

At this stage, we conducted conclusive and descriptive research. Therefore, this research is quantitative, using primary data, in an external environment, respectively on some data subjects. The method we have chosen for this research is a survey type, and the tool used is a questionnaire applied online.

We chose, in order of frequency, the first 20 stereotypes of women aged 18 to 35 identified by respondents in commercials, 20 stereotypes of women aged 18 to 35 identified by respondents in movies or TV shows, and 30 stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years identified by respondents in commercials and previously presented in qualitative research.

The questionnaire was composed in addition to the filter questions related to age and stereotype term knowledge and the demographic questions from three parts, respectively the analysis of the stereotypes of women noticed in commercials, movies, and in everyday life. Within each part of the questionnaire there is a question in which people will give marks to the most common stereotypes identified from the lists presented above, obtained with the help of qualitative research: *Analyze on a scale from 1 to 5 points the stereotypes of women (aged between 18 and 35 years), depending on the frequency of their identification in marketing and commercials/movies/everyday life. (1 - with a very low frequency, 5 - with a very high frequency).*

Questions number two (*Looking at the commercial below, what are the female stereotypes you identify?*) and three (*Looking at the commercial above, what are the female stereotypes you have identified from the following response options?*) found in all three parts refer to a commercial, a movie or a character. In the case of question number two, the spontaneous one, the respondents will write one or more stereotypes that they have identified, and in the third question, the assisted one, they will tick from a series of stereotypes that they consider to match the specified characters.

The sample was one of convenience, obtained by the snowball method. It was composed of 200 respondents who can be identified in the category of targeted persons, respectively persons aged between 18 and 35 who have heard so far about the term stereotype and are from Iasi County, Romania.

The respondents' answers were analyzed both with the help of descriptive analyzes and with inferential analyzes, respectively statistical tests. First of all, with the help of the descriptive analysis, we calculated averages, having the possibility later, to create

rankings. Second, using the tools included in the inferential analysis, we performed statistical tests such as Independent Samples Test, Chi-Square Tests, or Pearson Correlation.

Findings

Of the total number of respondents who passed the filters, 65% respectively 130 were women and 35% respectively 70 were men. This indicates that women were much more willing than men to participate in such research, their number being almost double compared to men. The respondents are mostly representatives of the female gender who are currently pursuing undergraduate studies, they are unmarried and come mainly from urban areas.

Objective 1. Identifying how a stereotype is recognized, depending on the gender of the respondents.

Hypothesis 1. There are differences between women and men in recognizing a stereotype (Stangor & Lange, 1994).

The questionnaire included 2 stereotypes and 2 sentences that are not stereotypes, wanting to analyze the percentage of respondents who will correctly identify such a cliché. In the first and second answers, the stereotypes are introduced. In their case, more than half of the respondents correctly identified such a label. If we take into account the value of Sig related to these 2 answer variants in the Chi-Square test, we can specify that our hypothesis is rejected. This is because the sig is equal to 0.600, so it is greater than 0.5, so the null hypothesis will be kept. In conclusion, there is no connection between the 2 variables, namely gender and the correct identification of a stereotype. People tend to recognize labels, but we do not have enough data to present the existence of a link between this fact and the gender of individuals. If we analyze the answer variants 3 and 4 which include 2 sentences that are not stereotypes, we can see that quite a few respondents expressed the fact that they know what a stereotype is but did not correctly identify one. The value of the Sig for these 2 response variables is equal to 0.417, so being smaller than 0.5, our hypothesis is confirmed. In conclusion, there are some differences between women and men in terms of incorrectly identifying a stereotype.

Objective 2. Identifying the most frequently noticed stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in marketing and advertisements.

Hypothesis 2. There are differences between the perceptions of women and men in terms of the most notable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in marketing and advertising (Caballero, & Solomon, 1984).

The table below represents the analysis of the 6 most identified stereotypes of women in advertisements, chosen according to the value obtained when we calculated the average. These were analyzed in relation to the gender of the people who participated in this research:

Table 1. Analysis of the most frequently noticed stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in marketing, in advertisements, by respondents, in relation to their gender

Stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in marketing and advertising	Which is your gender? (F/M)	Mean (from 1 to 5)
the seductive woman	Feminine	3.55
	Masculine	3.73
woman shopping queen	Feminine	3.58
	Masculine	3.70
the woman with the perfect hair	Feminine	3.62
	Masculine	3.59
the elegant woman	Feminine	3.63
	Masculine	3.61
the perfect woman	Feminine	3.58
	Masculine	3.64
the hero mom	Feminine	3.58
	Masculine	3.71

Research findings

Using the statistical Independent Samples Test, we can say in the case of the most identified stereotype in this category, namely the hero mom, the fact that men gave a higher score than women. In the case of another stereotype that had the same average, the elegant woman was analyzed exactly in opposition because women are the ones who identified it more often. The stereotypes of the seductive woman and the woman shopping queen were more frequently noticed by men, while the stereotype of the woman with perfect hair was more often mentioned by women. Men can more often observe the stereotypes that refer to female behavior and in opposition, women can appreciate the stereotypes that represent the physical appearance, image, women present in advertisements.

Objective 3. Identifying the most common stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in movies or TV shows.

Hypothesis 3. There are differences between the perceptions of women and men in terms of the most noticeable stereotypes of women aged 18 to 35 found in movies or TV shows (Rosen, 1973).

The table below represents the analysis of the 6 most notable stereotypes of women in movies or TV shows, chosen according to the value obtained when I calculated the average. These were analyzed using the Independent Samples Test. These are analyzed in relation to the gender of the people who participated in this research.

Table 2. Analysis of the most frequently noticed stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in films or TV shows, by respondents, in relation to their gender

Stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35 encountered in movies or TV shows	Which is your gender? (F/M)	Mean (from 1 to 5)
the seductive woman	Feminine	3.78
	Masculine	3.70
the perfect woman	Feminine	3.59
	Masculine	3.74

the woman who looks flawless in the morning when she wakes up	Feminine	3.59
	Masculine	3.69
the 90-60-90 woman	Feminine	3.60
	Masculine	3.66
the femme fatale	Feminine	3.58
	Masculine	3.59
the elegant woman	Feminine	3.60
	Masculine	3.53

Research findings

Analyzing the value of Sig we can conclude that in the case of the perfect woman stereotype, we have the value 0.334, being the only one that is below the threshold of 0.5. This may result in not rejecting the original hypothesis, so there is a difference between the sexes in terms of perspective and its identification in films and TV shows. If we analyze the other remaining stereotypes such as the seductive woman, the 90-60-90 woman, the femme fatale, the woman who looks impeccable in the morning when she wakes up, and the elegant woman, we notice that the Sig values are 0.580, 0.707, 0.994, 0.583 and 0.654. In the case of these stereotypes, the value of the sig is higher than 0.5, so the initial hypothesis is rejected, so there is no difference between women's and men's perceptions regarding these stereotypes of women.

Objective 4. Identifying the most commonly noticed stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in everyday life.

Hypothesis 4. There are differences between women's and men's perceptions regarding the most noticeable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 encountered in everyday life (Lungu, 2001).

The analysis of the 9 most prominent stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35, encountered in everyday life, in relation to the gender of respondents can be followed in the table below.

Table 3. Analysis of the most frequently noticed stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in daily life, by respondents, in relation to their gender

Stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35 encountered in everyday life	Which is your gender? (F/M)	Mean (from 1 to 5)
the hardworking woman	Feminine	3.75
	Masculine	3.61
the ambitious woman	Feminine	3.71
	Masculine	3.63
the family-oriented woman	Feminine	3.65
	Masculine	3.69
the stressed woman	Feminine	3.56
	Masculine	3.77
the woman with the fat rolls	Feminine	3.65
	Masculine	3.61
the woman who earns less than a man	Feminine	3.58
	Masculine	3.59
the dreamy woman	Feminine	3.51
	Masculine	3.66

woman shopping queen	Feminine	3.52
	Masculine	3.61
"the 100-100-100 woman"	Feminine	3.53
	Masculine	3.61

Research findings

In Table 3 we can see that women gave higher grades than men in regards to stereotypes of the hardworking woman, the ambitious woman, and the woman with fat rolls. On the other hand, men more often noticed the stereotypes of the family woman, the stressed woman, the dreamy woman, the shopping queen woman, and the "100-100-100 woman". The stereotype of the woman earning less than a man has slight equality in terms of its identification in everyday life, both from the perspective of men and women, with a difference of 0.01 between the average marks given by men and the feminine gender. Analyzing this, we could assume that there is a difference between the ways stereotypes are noticed depending on the gender of the respondents.

If we analyze the Sig in regards to stereotypes of the hardworking woman, the stressed woman, and the dreamy woman, we will have values equal to 0.142, 0.378, and 0.288, they being lower than the threshold of 0.5, thus there are differences between the sexes. In the case of other stereotypes such as the ambitious woman, the family-oriented woman, the woman with fat rolls, the woman who earns less than a man, the woman shopping queen, and the "woman 100-100-100", the Sig values are 0.617, 0.842, 0.804, 0.995, 0.560 and 0.621. All these values are greater than 0.5, so there are no differences between the sexes.

Also within this objective, we chose to introduce a specific person present in the life of any respondent, that being their mother, to see their perception. Respondents were asked to specify in writing the stereotypes of women they identify with their mothers. The same thing was also requested, however, this time the respondents had to choose these stereotypes from a list.

Analyzing these answers, we can say that respondents tend to identify in everyday life when referring to the chosen character, respectively their mother, stereotypes that define a hero mother, a family-oriented woman, housewife, independent and last but not least a woman who helps everyone and has time to solve whatever she sets out to do. In other words, their perception refers to the feminine ideal in terms of wife, mother, and woman. This woman is the normal who most often does not have a perfect body or a flawless complexion but manages both professionally and personally to develop and excel, being, on the one hand, a perfect mother and on the other hand an elegant woman, independent and happy.

Conclusions

In the case of this research, we also took into account the margins of error, the level being equal to $\pm 6.93\%$. The probability of guaranteeing this margin was 95%.

One of the limitations of this research was the participation of people in an online survey, a few people agreed to complete the questionnaire. From my point of view, this

also happened due to the appearance of these completely unexpected situations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, because even though people had more time to work from home, they were much more involved in various activities that probably neglected them over time or simply wanted to relax more, disconnecting from the online environment and spending more time with family. I consider that this is why most of the respondents were undergraduate students who had more free time and a greater interest in such research.

For the first objective, we found that there is no link between the gender of respondents and the correct identification of a stereotype, but there are some differences between women and men in terms of not correctly identifying a stereotype. Because more women participated in this quantitative research, we can speculate that women are the ones who can identify more often than men a construction that resembles a stereotype but is not one, however, if we had an equal number of people of both sexes, surely the results would present other conclusions.

For the second objective, we noticed that there are differences between the perceptions of women and men regarding the most notable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35 years encountered in marketing and advertising. Respondents most frequently identified stereotypes that define the feminine ideal, namely a seductive, strong, elegant, courageous, and last, happy woman.

For the third objective, we found that there are differences between the perceptions of women and men regarding the most notable stereotypes of women aged between 18 and 35, found in movies or TV shows. The ideal woman, respectively an elegant woman, brave, and last but not least seductive, can be found in everyday life, but not as often as it is found in movies or TV shows.

For the fourth objective, we noticed that when it comes to stereotypes of the hardworking woman, the stressed woman, and the dreamy woman, there are differences between the perceptions of women and men regarding the most noticeable stereotypes of women aged 18 to 35 in everyday life. In the case of the character present in everyday life, we found that respondents identified most frequently when referring to the chosen character, namely the mother, stereotypes that define a hero mother, a family-oriented woman, a housewife, independent and last but not least a woman who helps everyone and has time to solve anything she sets out to do. In other words, their perception refers to the feminine ideal in terms of wife, mother, and woman.

Researching other stereotypes such as the independent and strong woman, the housewife, and the seductive woman, introduced in all three analyzes of stereotypes of women between the ages of 18 and 35 encountered in commercials, movies, and everyday life, we concluded that, once they are more and more noticed in commercials or movies, respondents can identify them more and more in everyday life.

To address the target market, marketing felt the need for generalization and simplification by creating stereotypes. This makes it easier to push an idea to the audience of interest. But these clichés are not only found in advertisements because

they are not the creation of marketing. We all use them in our daily lives. This phenomenon has become increasingly dangerous with the advent of social networks. Everywhere in the online environment, we see people who have a perfect life and look impeccable in any post, but this is not exactly a realistic one. If it is true that stereotypes evolve with people and society, they are current landmarks of collective psychology and cannot be ignored.

Our research shows that marketing mainly uses stereotypes that depict the visual preferences of the public, but most of the time they do not coincide with the reality lived in everyday life.

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