

A Semiotic Analysis of portraying Gender in Magazine Advertisements

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Abstract: Media play a big role in people's life. There are different kinds of media like television, cinema, advertisements etc. which are portraying and making images of Men and women. In this study, researchers find out how gender roles are portrayed as stereotypes in magazine advertisements. Researchers analyzed 12 advertisements which were taken from Magazine (Femina and cosmopolitan) from January 2016 to December 2016. In this current study, the researchers found that how portrayal of Femininity and Masculinity as a form of sexual object and hegemonic nature in the magazine', respectively. The methodology which has been used in this study is Descriptive qualitative analysis with pictorial analysis based on Goffman's theory of gender analysis where the researchers analyzed and described and interprets the sign of portraying gender in Magazine advertisements.

Keywords: Women, Gender, Advertisement, Women in Advertisements, Men in Advertisements, Semiotics, Hegemony, Sexual object, Femininity, Masculinity, Goffman Theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender advertisement refers to the images in advertising that depict stereotypical gender roles and displays. Gender displays are used heavily in advertising to establish the role of one gender in relation with the other, and some scholars argue that advertisers are obsessed with gender. Advertisers focus on gender relationships, because people define themselves by gender. The effects of advertising on body image have been studied by researchers, ranging from psychologists to marketing professionals. These days we know that the media and body image are closely related. Particularly, the body image advertising portrays affects our own body image. Of course, there are many other things that influence our body image: parenting, education, intimate relationships, and so on. It is argued that these images could be teaching the viewers a vast array of social cues, and even the most subtle ones make an impact on the viewers. Further it is said that gender relations are learned through advertisements. Among these learned gender roles are those of femininity and masculinity. Men and women are portrayed in advertisements according to the constructed definition of femininity and masculinity. To be a woman is to be feminine and to be a man is to be masculine.

1.1 Portrayal of Gender in Advertising

Portrayal of Gender can otherwise be defined as rituals of gender behavior, and they are used to help interpret social reality. This is what advertising mainly borrows from, and for Goffman this is the reason as to why ads do not look strange to the public. Further, Goffman argues that there are codes which can be used to identify gender. These codes of gender can be seen in the portrayals of men and women in advertising. There are four categories under which we can see these codes of gender: *Relative Size, Function ranking, the feminine touch, the reutilization of subordination, licensed withdrawal and body display.*

1.2 Masculinity in advertising

In advertising, men are often portraying 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.

1.3 Femininity in advertising

In advertising, portrayals of women in advertising in the following ways: 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. 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.

1.4 Semiotics of Advertisements

The semiotic analysis of advertising assumes that the meanings are designed by their creators to shape and lend significance to our reality. We are encouraged to see ourselves, the products and the services advertised and aspects of our social world in terms of the mythic meanings that the advertisements promote. Myths and narratives play an important role in generating and maintaining social beliefs and identity. In study advertisements, closely in semiotic terms we need to separate ads from their environment. We need to identify the visual and linguistic signs in the ad, to see how the signs are organized paradigmatically and note how the signs relate to each other through various coding systems. We need to identify which social myths the advertisement draws on and the myths are reinforced or challenged. We also need to recognize that all codes are potentially ambiguous and that different readers have the potential to decode the signs differently. We can assume that anything that carries meaning to us in an ad is a sign. So, linguistic signs (words) and iconic signs (visual representations) all act as signs adding to the cumulative code and meaning. These signs can simply denote something, an object or people that they represent, or they can carry connotations, meanings that have social and cultural relevance. Some of these we recognize consciously, others unconsciously. A model in an ad can denote a young woman in that situation but can also carry the connotation of the mythic ideal of feminine beauty. The ad presents us with a sign, a young woman and this sign signifies a concept or a range of concepts. The ad works because the signs are easily readable. What is denoted has meaning in as far as it leads the reader to comprehend the mythic connotations, the overall message about the meaning of the product.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Studies on Gender Stereotypes in Magazine Advertisements

Numerous studies have documented the ubiquitous presence of female stereotypes in magazine advertisements, which were the first form of advertisements. Erving Goffman's groundbreaking work *Gender Advertisements* (1979) is often referred to as the first book to systematically analyze gender advertisements in magazines. He discusses that the advertisements we see are not focused on how males and females attitude, but how we think they behave or are supposed to behave. Goffman (1979) argues that we should focus on how the advertisements are put together to portray a social situation and how they are constructed to achieve a certain meaning. He noted that the most common theme in those advertisements was of female subordination. In his book, *Gender Advertisements* (1976), Erving Goffman describes how femininity and masculinity is displayed within Western media. By looking at over 500 different photo advertisements and analyzing the different poses, positioning of the body, clothing, and so on, he finds stark contrasts between how males and females are portrayed. In a variety of ways, women are portrayed as soft, vulnerable, fragile, powerless, dreamy, child-like, and submissive. While Goffman mainly focuses on the construction of femininity within advertising he also offers insight in how masculinity is portrayed, as the two are depicted and defined as relative to each other. In opposition to how women are portrayed, men are generally depicted as confident, comfortable, present and aware of their surroundings, even intimidating – prepared for whatever may come their way. Goffman argues that these poses have nothing to do with biology or natural traits, but rather with how our culture defines as feminine and masculine.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is:

- To identify portrayal of gender in magazine advertisements through Semiotic analysis

The following theoretical definitions in Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* are utilized in this study:

(1) **Relative Size:** One way in which social weight (e.g., power, authority, rank, and office) is echoed expressively in social situations is through relative size, especially height. The male's usual superiority of status over the female will be expressible in his greater girth and height. It is assumed that differences in size will correlate with differences in social weight.

(2) **Feminine Touch:** Women, more than men, are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface or to affect a "just barely touching."

(3) **Function Ranking:** When a man and a woman collaborate face-to-face in an undertaking, the man is likely to perform the executive role. This hierarchy of functions is pictured either within an occupational frame or outside of occupational specializations.

(4) **Ritualization of Subordination:** The category ritualization of subordination means that women are constantly being portrayed lying down on their sides or their backs, physically positioning them closer to the ground, instead of standing up tall and holding their bodies erect, like men often do. By lowering themselves, this symbolizes being less in control of oneself.

Often, models will be positioned to lie on beds, couches, floors or anything that can be lounged on, to show their sexual availability. Other ideas that stem off from this category of ritualization of subordination are the knee bend and the body or head can't.

(5) **Licensed Withdrawal:** As Goffman puts it; women are adrift, while men are anchored and present. This is often reinforced by the fact that men are more likely to be portrayed gripping something firmly, or with their hands in the pockets, whereas the woman often is out of balance, or tightly gripping a man, seemingly for support and protection. The woman is often holding onto the arm of the man, and thus "the woman shows herself to be receiving support, and both the man's hands are free for whatever instrumental tasks may arise"

(6) **Body Display:** Sometimes magazine advertisements show little stereotyping of women in terms of relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal, while the female models show high degree of nudity which is another important way of stereotyping. This category was introduced to compare the level of female models' body display (i.e., body-revealing clothes or nudity) between the two years. Body-revealing clothes include mini-skirts, tight skirts or evening gowns which expose cleavage, "short"-shorts, "see-through" clothes, halter dress, or bathing suits. Nudity is defined as unclothed models, including models translucent under apparel and lingerie, models clothed in nothing except a towel, or models depicted with no clothing. "Close-up" shots where the shoulders of the models are bare are considered as nudity.

IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this current study, gender is defined as culturally established categories of sex, such as female and male. The term portrayal of gender is defined as conventionalized portrayals of these correlates. The term gender display refers to six subconcepts: relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, ritualization of subordination, licensed withdrawal, and body display. In addition to, researchers define the Goffman's gender analysis based on semiotic analysis, i.e. the model of sign, signifier and signified. In this study, we have tried to understand the sign and symbol of advertisement through Semiotic analysis.

4.1 Sampling

The Magazine Advertisements was the semiotic analysis for this study. The researchers have been randomly selected two magazine of year 2016 i.e. *Femina* and *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The sources were selected to show how gender discrimination represents in both the magazine, respectively.

V. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS

5.1 Relative Size



Fig.1.1 Cosmopolitan

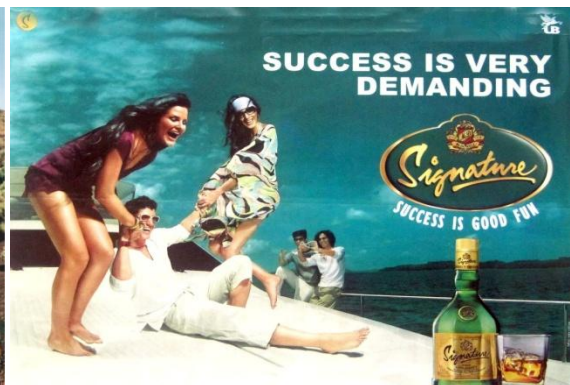


Fig.1.2 Femina

Figure 1.1: Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Less-confidence, Men's control, Powerless, Stressed.
Human	Man	Hegemonic nature, self-control, powerful
Object	Cloths, Footwear	Sexuality, Under control of man

Figure: 1.2 Femina Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Happy but under control, Dependent.
Human	Man	Officer, Hegemonic nature, Powerful, Self-dependent.
Object	Bottle, Liquor	Sexuality, daily life, part of life.

The above fig. 1.1 and 1.2, shows that gender display in both the magazine advertisements. Because of semiotic analysis, researchers found that portrayal of femininity reflects women as a sex object or stereotype or clichés roles i.e. sex object, powerless, Men’s control, unhappy while portrayal of masculinity reflects men as a hegemonic nature, self-control, powerful, self-dependent. Hence, the above advertisements display woman as a part of life, and as a need of man.

5.2 Feminine Touch:



Fig. 2.1 Cosmopolitan Fig. 2.2 Femina

Figure 2.1 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Just touching object sex object, less-confidence
Human	Man	Hegemonic nature, self-confidence
Object	Perfume	Daily uses, part of life

Figure: 2.2 Femina Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Just touching object, sex object
Human	Man	Confidence
Object	Body soap	Daily uses, part of life

As Goffman’s gender display theory describes the feminine touch, as the women are more than men touching the object, i.e. women portrayal as a just barely touching object. After semiotic analysis of above advertisements in both figure that portrayal of women reflects as a touching object and less confidence and man as hegemonic nature and in self-confidence. The advertiser used women as touching object as well as in a form of touchability mode.

5.3 Function Ranking:



Fig.3.1 Cosmopolitan Fig.3.2 Femina

Figure 3.1 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex object, less control in oneself, Men's control
Human	Man	Confidence, self-dependent
Object	Clothes	Sexuality, non-executive

Figure: 3.2 Femina Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	less control in oneself, Men's control
Human	Man	Self-confidence, executive role
Object	Deodorant	Sexuality, Daily uses, part of life

As Goffman's gender display theory describes that when men and women confronting each other, portrayals of men as a executive roles, After semiotic analysis of above advertisements in the figure 3.1 shows that portrayal of woman reflects as a sex object, less control and encircled from girth of the men, so woman portraying in this advertisement in a non-executive form while the portrayal of men reflects the executive role. On the other hand, Fig. 3.2 shows that, man encircled from the girth of women due to portraying of executive role of man.

5.4 Reutilization of Subordination:



Fig.4.1 Cosmopolitan



Fig.4.2 Femina

Figure 4.1 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex object, less control in oneself, Men's control
Human	Man	Confidence, self-dependent
Object	Clothes	Sexuality, non-executive

Figure: 4.2 Femina Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	less control in oneself, Men's control, sex object
Human	Man	Self-confidence, executive role
Object	Deodorant	Sexuality, Daily uses, part of life

As Goffman sates thathe category reutilization of subordination means that women are constantly being portrayed lying down on their sides or their backs, physically positioning them closer to the ground, men holding their body, lying down on the bed. After semiotic analysis of above advertisements in the figure 4.1 shows that woman portrayals as a sex object, less control in oneself, less confidence and lying down on the bed appeared that she is under control of man while man standing on the floor, appearing powerful, self-confidence and hegemonic nature. On the other hand, Fig. 4.2 advertisement shows that woman portrayals as a sex object, less control in oneself, less confidence and lying down on the lap of a man, appeared less control in oneself, Men's control, sex object while portrayals of masculinity in this advertisements in a executive role,self-control,confidence as well as dependent.

5.5 Body display:



Fig. 5.1 Cosmopolitan Magazine Fig.5.2 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Figure 5.1 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Sex object, stereotype, Men's control, revealing, Sexuality, vulnerable, seducing
Human	Man	Confidence, self-dependent, own control, executive in nature
Object	Perfume	Daily uses, part of life, sexuality

Figure: 5.2 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Vulnerable, sex object, sensual and seductive, stereotype
Object	Perfume	Sexuality, Daily uses, part of life, sexuality

According to Goffman's gender display while the female models show high degree of nudity which is another important way of stereotyping. Above Fig. 5.1 shows that portrayals of woman as a Sex object, stereotype, Men's control, revealing, Sexuality, vulnerable, seducing while Fig. 5.2 shows same as Fig. 5.1 i.e. vulnerable, sex object, sensual and seductive, stereotype.

5.6 Licensed Withdrawal



Fig. 6.1 Famina Magazine

Fig.6.2 Famina Magazine

Figure 6.1 Famina Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Men's control, less control in oneself, dependent
Human	Man	Confidence, self-dependent, own control, executive in nature
Object	Clothes	Daily uses, part of life

Figure: 6.2 Cosmopolitan Magazine

Sign	Signifier	Signified
Human	Woman	Men's control, less control in oneself, dependent
Human	Man	Self-confidence, self-control, self-dependent
Object	Clothes	Daily uses, part of life

As Goffman puts it; women are adrift, while men are anchored and present. This is often reinforced by the fact that men are more likely to be portrayed gripping something firmly, or with their hands in the pockets, whereas the woman often is out of balance, or tightly gripping a man, seemingly for support and protection. The woman is often holding onto the arm of the man, and thus “the woman shows herself to be receiving support. Above Fig. 6.1 shows that portrayals of woman in a men’s control, less confidence in a oneself, dependent on man while portrayals of man in a form of executive, self-confidence, self-dependent. On the other hand, Fig. 6.2 shows same as Fig. 6.1 shows apart from this, the portrayals of man in a hegemonic nature.

VI. KEY SUGGESTIONS

How could the media be an active partner in the promotion of gender equality?

- Media companies should participate in national gender equality programs and in positive action programs to become active partners in the promotion of gender equality.
- Job descriptions in the media companies to break with traditional job attributions and stereotypes (financial themes are treated by men; society themes are treated by women).
- Considering the harmful effects of negative gender stereotypes on self-perception, especially with young people and their perception of gender roles and relations in society, all players in media companies including journalists should be made aware of their social responsibility and best practices should be promoted.
- To ensure a long-term impact, gender equality should be a compulsory module for training in university studies of journalism and communication. Media professionals should be encouraged, by their organizations, to participate in gender trainings. These trainings should focus on the use of non-sexist language and how to avoid gender stereotypes in the media.
- Media literacy in schools needs to be developed. Specific media training to develop active rather than passive consumers of the media should be integrated into school programs. In this context, it would be important to draw attention to messages and language used in school books as well as in all communication tools (internet, video, computer games) which convey stereotypes or incitement to violence.

VII. CONCLUSION

Sexuality related to concept of attractiveness to world that’s creates fantasy. When sex is a taboo of society then women are used as a sex object in advertisements. In conclusion researchers found that the portrayals of femininity depicted more often as a sex object than portrayals of masculinity in magazine advertisements. So, researchers can say that the gender display in this study in a form of stereotype, sex object and hegemonic nature as well as portrayals of femininity depicted more often in men’s control or it can better say that women shows that herself to be receiving support from the men, i.e. men seemingly for supportive and protective nature.

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