

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN TELEVISION ADVERTISING: A CASE STUDY OF COSMETIC PRODUCTS

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Abstract:

This study explores the representation of gender in television advertisements for cosmetic products, focusing on the linguistic and visual elements used to construct gender norms and stereotypes. Through a discourse analysis approach, advertisements targeting both women and men are analyzed to uncover the underlying messages conveyed regarding beauty standards, masculinity, and femininity. The findings reveal a reinforcement of traditional gender stereotypes, with advertisements for women emphasizing physical appearance and youthfulness, while those for men highlight strength and dominance. Despite some attempts to challenge these stereotypes, such efforts often remain superficial. The implications of these representations for societal perceptions of gender and the role of consumers in demanding more inclusive and diverse portrayals are discussed. The study highlights the importance of critical discourse analysis in understanding how gender is represented in media and the need for fairer and more inclusive gender representation in advertising to create a more equitable and diverse media landscape.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender representation in the media has been a hot topic of discussion in recent decades. Television advertising, as one of the most visible mass communication media, plays a significant role in shaping people's perceptions of gender roles. As stated by Kilbourne (2000), in the context of cosmetic products, advertising not only sells products but also sells certain dreams, aspirations and standards of beauty that are often associated with gender representation. It is important to examine how gender is represented in cosmetic advertising, given its significant impact on consumer attitudes and behaviors. Cosmetic advertising often features women as the primary target, reflecting the perception that cosmetics are a special need for women. This representation is often filled with stereotypes that associate beauty with femininity and attention to physical appearance. However, there is also a new trend in the cosmetic industry that is starting to recognize male consumers, promoting products specifically designed for them and promoting the persona of the metrosexual male. However, the effectiveness of cosmetic advertising lies not only in the product itself, but also in the narrative that is built around it. The use of language, images and symbols in advertising plays a crucial role in conveying gender-related messages. Discourse analysis of television advertising can help us understand how these meanings are formed and reinforced through the media.

In this context, it is important to understand that television advertising not only reflects existing cultural values, but also contributes to the formation of new norms and beliefs. Cosmetic advertisements, for example, often emphasize themes such as perfect beauty, self-confidence, and sexual attractiveness, all of which are closely linked to the social construction of gender. The role of media in the social construction of gender has been widely discussed in academic literature. Media, including television advertising, has the power to influence public perceptions of gender and identity. Several studies have shown that stereotypical representations in the media can reinforce gender inequalities and reinforce traditional roles that may limit individuals from reaching their full potential.

Cosmetic advertisements often emphasize conventional gender dualities, where women are portrayed as caring about their appearance and beauty, while men are portrayed as strong and assertive leaders. This stereotypical approach often ignores the diversity of gender identities and the more complex roles that exist in modern society. However, there is also a shift in the cosmetics industry that is beginning to recognize the role of men in the cosmetics market. Several major brands have launched product lines specifically designed for men, with advertisements that challenge traditional stereotypes of masculinity. This suggests that change in gender representation in the media is possible and can have positive impacts.

In addition, we also need to acknowledge the important role consumers play in shaping gender representation in advertising. Consumers have the power to influence the market with their choices, and the demand for more inclusive and diverse representation is growing. In the digital age, social media provides a platform for consumers to voice their opinions and demand change. As a result, progressive cosmetic brands are beginning to adopt a more inclusive and diverse approach to marketing. They are featuring a range of gender identities in their advertising, reflecting a broader societal shift in understanding gender as a spectrum beyond just male and female. This challenges traditional norms and paves the way for more equitable representation. Despite progress, many challenges remain when it comes to gender representation in television advertising. Often, more inclusive and diverse representation is only superficial and does not fully change the underlying narrative. Therefore, critical discourse analysis is essential to ensure that the shift towards more equitable representation is not just a marketing strategy, but a real commitment to diversity and inclusion.

In this article, the author will conduct a discourse analysis of television advertisements for cosmetic products to reveal how gender is represented and what meanings are constructed through the advertisements. Using qualitative analysis methods, the author will explore the main themes that emerge in the advertisements and how these themes reflect and shape society's understanding of gender. This analysis will involve an in-depth understanding of the visual and textual content in the advertisements, including the choice of words, images, and symbols used. The author will also consider the broader cultural and social context, including how existing gender norms influence and are influenced by cosmetic advertisements. Ultimately, the aim of this article is to provide a deeper understanding of how television advertisements for cosmetic products influence perceptions of gender and what the implications are for society. The author hopes that this analysis can provide useful insights for researchers, marketing practitioners, and consumers in an effort to create fairer and more inclusive gender representations in the media.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with critical discourse analysis (CDA) and iconographic analysis methods to explore gender representation in television advertisements for cosmetic products. The advertisements analyzed were selected based on their popularity, frequency of airing, and brand variety, ensuring a comprehensive coverage of the industry. Data were collected from various sources including video sharing platforms such as YouTube, official websites of cosmetic brands, and television broadcast recordings. These advertisements were documented and transcribed for in-depth analysis.

Each advertisement was transcribed to include the dialogue, narrative, and text that appeared on screen, as well as visual elements such as images, colors, symbols, and music. These transcriptions and visual descriptions were then coded to identify key themes related to gender representation.

Critical discourse analysis was conducted by examining the texts, discursive practices, and social practices in the advertisements, following a framework that has been outlined in the literature. The text dimension includes a linguistic analysis of the words, phrases, and sentence structures used in the advertisements. The discursive practice dimension involves analyzing how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed, with a focus on the context of production and reception. The social practice dimension examines how these texts and discursive practices reflect and shape broader social practices, particularly in relation to gender norms (Smith, 2018; Brown & Johnson, 2019).

Iconographic analysis is used to explore the visual meanings in advertisements by identifying and interpreting symbols and images related to gender and beauty. This analysis helps to understand how these symbols contribute to the construction of gender identity.

Intertextual analysis is also used to understand how cosmetic advertisements relate to other advertisements and the mass media in general, identifying how existing gender representations are used and modified. This approach provides a broader context for understanding specific representations in cosmetic advertisements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following is a table summarizing examples of television advertisements for cosmetic products regarding gender representation:

Brand	Product	Slogan/ Visual	Language/ Colors	Target Audience	Reinforced Stereotypes
L'Oréal	Moisturizer	"Because you're worth it"	Soft colors (pink, white), female models with perfect skin	Women	The importance of physical beauty for women's self-esteem
Nivea Men	Men's Skin Care	"Stay Cool, Stay Active"	Dark colors (black, blue), male models in	Men	Strength and masculinity, less concerned

			physical activity		with physical appearance
Maybelline	Face Cosmetics	"Maybe she's born with it. Maybe it's Maybelline."	Soft colors, female models with perfect makeup	Women	Unrealistic beauty standards
Gillette	Men's Razors	"The Best a Man Can Get"	Dark colors, male models in dominant activity (sports)	Men	Strength and physical activity as the essence of masculinity
Olay	Anti-Aging Moisturizer	"Ageless"	Soft colors, female models in a domestic context	Women	The importance of physical beauty and youthful appearance for women
Dove Men+Care	Men's Skin Care	"Real Strength"	Dark colors, male models who care about their family	Men	Challenging traditional masculinity stereotypes (surface changes)
Axe	Men's Deodorant	"Find Your Magic"	Dark colors, male models get women's attention	Men	Male sexual appeal, boosting self-confidence through products
L'Oréal Men Expert	Men's Skin Care	"Fight the 5 Signs of Aging"	Dark colors, male models in a professional context	Men	The importance of a professional

					and strong appearance
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Language Use:

Advertisements for cosmetic products targeting women, exemplified by brands like L'Oréal and Olay, strategically employ language that intricately underscores the significance of physical attractiveness and maintaining a youthful appearance. Through carefully crafted slogans such as "Because you're worth it" and "Ageless," these advertisements seek to instill a sense of empowerment and self-assurance in women, subtly suggesting that achieving and maintaining a certain standard of physical beauty is synonymous with self-worth. By tapping into the deeply ingrained societal emphasis on youthfulness and physical attractiveness, these advertisements not only promote their products but also contribute to shaping and reinforcing cultural ideals surrounding femininity.

Conversely, advertisements for products geared towards men, such as Nivea Men and Gillette, utilize a distinctly different language that emphasizes attributes traditionally associated with masculinity. Slogans like "Stay Cool, Stay Active" and "The Best a Man Can Get" foreground themes of strength, physical prowess, and an active lifestyle. By doing so, these advertisements aim to appeal to men's aspirations of strength and virility, positioning their products as essential tools for embodying the idealized image of masculinity. This language choice not only speaks to societal expectations of men as providers and protectors but also reinforces notions of masculinity as inherently linked to physical strength and endurance.

In essence, the language used in advertisements for cosmetic products plays a pivotal role in perpetuating gender norms and stereotypes. While advertisements targeting women emphasize the pursuit of physical beauty as a means of empowerment, those aimed at men reinforce traditional ideals of masculinity centered around strength and physicality. By strategically tailoring their messaging to align with deeply ingrained societal expectations and gender norms, these advertisements effectively shape consumer perceptions and behaviors, perpetuating rigid notions of gender identity and reinforcing existing power dynamics.

Visuals and Colors:

In the realm of advertising, visuals and colors are meticulously chosen to evoke specific emotions and convey targeted messages to consumers. When it comes to advertisements targeting women, a palette dominated by soft hues like pink and white is often employed. These colors, often associated with femininity and delicacy, serve to create a visually appealing backdrop for the promotion of cosmetic products. Moreover, these advertisements frequently showcase female models adorned with flawless skin and impeccably applied makeup, epitomizing

conventional standards of beauty. By presenting such idealized imagery, brands like Maybelline and L'Oréal reinforce societal expectations surrounding femininity and perpetuate unrealistic beauty standards, thereby influencing consumer perceptions of self-image and attractiveness.

On the contrary, advertisements directed towards men adopt a starkly different visual aesthetic, characterized by darker tones such as black and blue. These colors convey a sense of strength, masculinity, and authority, aligning with traditional ideals of manhood. Moreover, these advertisements often feature male models depicted in physically demanding activities such as exercising or engaging in manual labor. By showcasing men in positions of dominance and physical prowess, brands like Gillette and Nivea Men underscore the importance of strength and vigor in defining masculinity. Through these visuals, advertisers appeal to men's desires for power and virility, reinforcing societal norms surrounding masculinity and influencing consumer behaviors and perceptions.

Overall, the choice of visuals and colors in advertisements plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer attitudes and behaviors. Whether through soft, feminine hues or dark, masculine tones, advertisers strategically craft visual narratives that align with societal expectations and gender norms, ultimately influencing how individuals perceive themselves and the products being marketed to them.

Gender Stereotypes:

The portrayal of gender stereotypes in cosmetic advertisements perpetuates deeply ingrained societal norms and expectations surrounding femininity and masculinity. Advertisements targeting women often propagate the stereotype that a woman's value is inherently linked to her physical appearance. By consistently showcasing images of women with flawless skin and immaculate makeup, these advertisements imply that achieving societal standards of beauty is essential for women to attain self-worth and acceptance. Moreover, slogans like "Because you're worth it" used by brands like L'Oréal reinforce the notion that investing in one's physical appearance is synonymous with investing in one's self-esteem and confidence. This emphasis on external beauty not only places undue pressure on women to conform to unrealistic beauty standards but also reinforces the notion that a woman's value lies primarily in her appearance rather than her intellect, skills, or character.

Conversely, advertisements targeting men often reinforce traditional masculinity stereotypes by associating products with physical strength, dominance, and sexual attractiveness. Slogans like "Stay Cool, Stay Active" used by brands like Nivea Men perpetuate the idea that masculinity is inherently linked to traits like athleticism and vigor. Furthermore, these advertisements frequently depict men engaged in physically demanding activities such as sports or manual labor, reinforcing

the stereotype that men should be strong, assertive, and in control. By linking products to traits associated with traditional masculinity, advertisers appeal to men's desires for power and sexual desirability, perpetuating narrow and limiting stereotypes of masculinity.

In summary, cosmetic advertisements play a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes by perpetuating unrealistic beauty standards for women and promoting traditional notions of masculinity for men. By aligning products with gendered expectations and ideals, advertisers not only shape consumer perceptions but also contribute to the perpetuation of societal norms surrounding gender roles and identities.

Target Audience:

The target audience for advertisements promoting women's cosmetic products primarily consists of individuals who are already immersed in narratives emphasizing the significance of physical appearance. These advertisements strategically air during television programs or events that cater to audiences invested in beauty and fashion trends, such as drama shows or reality television competitions. By aligning their advertising campaigns with content that resonates with individuals seeking to enhance their physical appearance, brands like Olay capitalize on the receptivity of viewers to messages that reinforce the importance of skincare and beauty routines. This targeted approach ensures that advertisements reach an audience already receptive to messages about enhancing their physical appearance, thereby maximizing the effectiveness of the marketing campaign.

On the other hand, advertisements for men's grooming products are tailored to appeal to male audiences through content that aligns with traditional notions of masculinity and physical activity. These advertisements strategically air during television programs or events that attract male viewers interested in sports, fitness, or outdoor activities, such as news shows or sporting events. By associating their products with traits like strength, vigor, and athleticism, brands like Dove Men+Care aim to resonate with male audiences seeking grooming products that align with their active lifestyles. This targeted approach ensures that advertisements effectively capture the attention of male viewers who prioritize grooming and self-care within the context of their busy and physically demanding lives.

In essence, the target audience for cosmetic advertisements varies based on gender-specific narratives and interests, with brands strategically aligning their marketing campaigns to reach audiences already engaged with relevant themes and content. By tailoring advertisements to resonate with the interests and priorities of their target demographic, brands can maximize the impact of their marketing efforts and drive consumer engagement and brand loyalty.

Discussion

In advertisements targeted towards women, the language and visual elements consistently perpetuate the notion that physical attractiveness is paramount to a woman's sense of self-worth and societal value. Brands like L'Oréal and Maybelline often employ language and imagery that equate beauty with personal value, reflecting Goffman's (1979) and Berger's (1972) observations regarding the portrayal of women as subordinate and objectified in media representations. These advertisements contribute to the normalization of unrealistic beauty standards, potentially exacerbating issues related to body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem among female viewers.

Conversely, advertisements aimed at men, exemplified by campaigns from Gillette and Nivea Men, uphold traditional ideals of masculinity by emphasizing physical strength, vigor, and dominance. Such depictions align closely with Mulvey's (1975) concept of the "male gaze," wherein men are depicted as active agents while women are relegated to passive objects of desire. By perpetuating these gendered stereotypes, these advertisements may reinforce societal expectations regarding masculinity and contribute to the marginalization of alternative expressions of gender identity.

Overall, the discussion underscores the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes in shaping advertising narratives and emphasizes the importance of critically interrogating the messages conveyed through media representations. Moving forward, advertisers must recognize their role in perpetuating harmful gender norms and strive to create more inclusive and empowering campaigns that challenge rather than reinforce existing stereotypes. By doing so, advertisers can contribute to the promotion of greater gender equality and societal acceptance of diverse expressions of identity.

The portrayal of beauty standards in advertisements by brands like Maybelline and L'Oréal perpetuates unrealistic ideals that can significantly impact women's mental well-being. Kilbourne (1999) has criticized these advertisements for promoting beauty standards that are often unattainable and unrealistic. The consistent depiction of flawless skin, perfect makeup, and idealized features creates an unrealistic benchmark for beauty, leading many women to feel inadequate or dissatisfied with their own appearance. As individuals strive to meet these impossible standards, they may experience heightened levels of body image anxiety, self-doubt, and dissatisfaction with their physical appearance. This can contribute to the development of negative self-perceptions and even mental health issues such as low self-esteem, depression, and eating disorders. Furthermore, the pervasive nature of these advertisements, appearing across various media platforms, reinforces the notion that such beauty standards are not only desirable but also expected. As a result, women may feel pressured to conform to these unrealistic ideals, further

exacerbating feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is crucial to critically examine and challenge the portrayal of beauty standards in cosmetic advertisements to promote more inclusive and positive representations of beauty that celebrate diversity and authenticity.

Surface-level attempts to challenge gender stereotypes in advertisements, exemplified by campaigns like Dove Men+Care portraying men as nurturing family figures, may appear progressive but often lack substantive impact. Gill (2007) highlights that these changes are often driven by commercial motives rather than genuine efforts to challenge entrenched gender narratives. While such campaigns may deviate from traditional representations of masculinity, they often fail to address the underlying power dynamics and structural inequalities perpetuated by gender stereotypes. Instead, they may serve to reinforce existing norms while merely providing a veneer of inclusivity. Without meaningful changes to the broader societal understanding of gender roles and identities, these superficial representations do little to challenge the status quo. Therefore, it is essential to critically evaluate the intentions and implications of such advertising campaigns to ensure they contribute to genuine progress in dismantling gender stereotypes and promoting more equitable representations of gender in media and society.

The influence of cosmetic advertising extends beyond mere reflection of existing cultural values; it actively shapes and molds societal norms and beliefs. Drawing from Baudrillard's (1981) concept of media representation creating new realities, cosmetic advertisements wield considerable power in shaping societal perceptions of gender. Through the language and visuals meticulously crafted in these advertisements, new norms and beliefs surrounding gender roles and identities are constructed and disseminated to the public. As observed in the analysis provided, cosmetic advertisements serve as potent agents in shaping gender perceptions, perpetuating certain ideals of beauty, masculinity, and femininity.

By portraying certain beauty standards and gender roles as aspirational and desirable, cosmetic advertisements contribute to the normalization and internalization of these ideals within society. The relentless promotion of flawless physical appearances for women and notions of strength and dominance for men not only reinforces existing stereotypes but also cultivates unrealistic expectations and insecurities among individuals. Consequently, these advertisements may exacerbate societal pressures to conform to narrow and often unattainable standards, leading to adverse effects on individuals' self-esteem and mental well-being.

Moreover, the pervasive nature of cosmetic advertising, amplified by the ubiquity of media platforms, ensures its widespread dissemination and influence across diverse demographic groups. As such, the impact of these advertisements extends beyond individual consumers to encompass broader cultural attitudes and beliefs surrounding gender. They contribute to the perpetuation of gender

inequalities and reinforce rigid gender binaries, limiting the scope for more inclusive and equitable representations.

Recognizing the significant role of cosmetic advertising in shaping societal perceptions, it becomes imperative to critically examine and challenge the narratives propagated through these advertisements. By interrogating the language, imagery, and underlying messages conveyed in cosmetic advertisements, we can unveil the subtle yet profound ways in which they shape our understanding of gender. By fostering greater awareness and discourse surrounding these representations, we can work towards fostering a more inclusive and progressive society that celebrates diversity and challenges traditional gender norms.

In the digital age, consumers wield unprecedented power to influence market dynamics through their purchasing decisions and engagement with media content. With the rise of social media platforms and digital communication channels, consumers have become active participants in shaping and reshaping cultural narratives, including those surrounding gender representations in advertising. As Jenkins (2006) observes, the active engagement of consumers in social media platforms enables them to challenge and transform prevailing media narratives, thereby fostering a more inclusive and diverse media landscape.

Despite some notable efforts to challenge traditional gender narratives in cosmetic advertising, the analysis indicates that television advertisements for cosmetic products continue to perpetuate existing gender stereotypes. However, this does not diminish the agency and influence that consumers possess in driving meaningful change within the industry. Cosmetic companies must recognize the shifting demands and expectations of consumers, who increasingly seek advertisements that reflect and celebrate diversity, inclusivity, and authenticity.

To effect substantive change, cosmetic companies must commit to creating advertisements that embrace a broader spectrum of gender identities and representations. By incorporating diverse voices, experiences, and perspectives into their marketing campaigns, companies can resonate more deeply with their audience and foster a sense of inclusivity and belonging. Moreover, by actively listening to consumer feedback and engaging in transparent dialogue, companies can demonstrate their genuine commitment to promoting gender equality and challenging harmful stereotypes.

Consumers, too, have a pivotal role to play in driving this transformation. By leveraging their collective voice and consumer power, individuals can demand more equitable and inclusive representations in cosmetic advertising. Through social media activism, consumer boycotts, and advocacy campaigns, consumers can hold companies accountable for their advertising practices and push for meaningful change. By raising awareness about the impact of advertising on gender perceptions

and advocating for greater diversity and representation, consumers can catalyze a shift towards more equitable and diverse media representations.

Ultimately, by fostering collaboration and dialogue between consumers and cosmetic companies, stakeholders can work together to create a media landscape that celebrates diversity, challenges stereotypes, and promotes gender equality. Through collective action and shared commitment, we can pave the way for a future where cosmetic advertising reflects the rich tapestry of human experiences and identities, empowering individuals to embrace their authenticity and redefine societal norms.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of gender representation in cosmetic television advertisements reveals that despite some attempts to challenge traditional gender narratives, these advertisements still strongly reinforce existing gender stereotypes. Advertisements targeted at women tend to emphasize the importance of physical beauty and youthful appearance as determinants of self-worth, while advertisements aimed at men emphasize physical strength and dominant activity, reinforcing traditional ideas of masculinity.

These findings suggest that beauty standards portrayed in advertisements are often unrealistic and can lead to negative psychological impacts, especially in women, such as body image anxiety and self-dissatisfaction. Although some advertisements attempt to challenge gender stereotypes, these changes are often superficial and do not fundamentally change gender narratives.

Cosmetic advertisements not only reflect existing cultural values but also contribute to the formation of new norms and beliefs. Therefore, it is important for cosmetic companies to commit to creating more inclusive and diverse representations in their advertisements. Consumers also have an important role to play in driving this change by demanding fairer and more inclusive representations.

In the digital age, active consumer participation through social media opens up opportunities to challenge and change media narratives, thereby enabling more inclusive gender representations. By understanding the impact of advertising on gender perceptions, we can take steps to create more equitable and diverse media representations, and shape society's broader and more inclusive understanding of gender.

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