



Does Advertising Affect Gender Perception?

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Abstract

Gender representations in advertising can easily reflect “fundamental features of the social structure,” such as values, beliefs, or norms. Research has mainly proceeded on the lines of content analysis, which refers to the study of representation of characters in the advertisements from the viewpoint of relative role played by men and women. This paper explores the attitudes of the viewers numbering 451 from Bangalore Urban District towards television advertising. The results indicate that (i) Women perceive benefits of television advertising at higher levels than men. (ii) Women perceive abuse of women in television advertising at higher levels than men.

Key Words: Advertising, Ethics, Puffery, Zapping, Perception, Regulations.

1. Introduction

Television is undeniably a major component of modern society. In the United States, it is not only the dominant media activity but is also considered the most exciting and influential media type (Aaker et al: 1992; FCC:2006; TBA:2006). This observation holds true for the rest of the world also. According to Nathan (2008:85), “Despite increasing competition from the internet, television usage has been steadily increasing and is now at its highest level since viewing data was first collected, a 50% increase since the 1950s, and a 12% increase from 1996.” Much of the daily life of both adults and children is performed to the accompaniment of the television set. Schramm et al (1961) states that children seem to take television for granted. For the most part, people appear to use television to enrich their lives and/or to fill time. For many people, simply having television to help them pass or fill time is “enrichment.” Long back, Folley (1968) found that many used television to help them forget pressures and problems. Hence exposure to television is virtually inevitable in modern life (Grossman: 1989; Green: 2006; Russell and Lane 1996).

2. Review of literature

Gender perceptions on advertising responses are basically the result of women liberation movement. Wortzel and Frisbie (1974) evidenced that the positive attitude towards ads depended on the content of ad involving women’s liberation and negative attitudes were evidenced in stereotyping. However, several studies indicate the persistence of gender bias (Sexton and Haberman: 1974; Soley and Kurzbard: 1986). Woolin (2003) finds men with more selective information processing assimilating only salient cues than women.

Many studies have been made on gender differences in advertisement response. The major findings include: target advertisements rated more sexist by women than men (Rossi and Rossi: 1985); sex image advertisements affecting acceptance of feminism (MacKay and Covell: 1997); both men and women having potential ethical concerns about the use of strong sexual appeals in advertising (LaTour and Henthorne: 1994); females tending to respond more positively to brands they perceive as supporting a favorite cause (McDaniel and Kinney: 1998); both females and males rating most media advertisements as more informative (Woburg and Pokrywczynski: 2001); females having a higher degree of fear than males in accepting advertised messages (Quinn, Meenaghan and Brannich: 1992); no conclusive evidence on the hypothesis that women being more easily influenced than men (Eagly: 1978); women being more persuadable than men and women more conforming than men in group pressure situations (Eagly and Carli: 1981); women preferring feminine brands and also accepting masculine brands as against men preferring masculine brands and not readily accepting feminine brands (Alreck, Settle and Belch: 1982); and ads with young women resulting in positive attitude in men as against women preferring babies and children; continuance of controversies on spokesperson gender effects (Wolin: 2003). . On the link between gender and television-viewing behavior, Shavitt et al (1998) find that males generally report more favorable advertising attitudes than females do and women are more supportive than men of government regulation of advertising. However, Carsky and Zuckerman (1991) find no gender differences in changes in attitudes of men and women.

3. Hypotheses for the study

In the background of the objectives of the study, the following hypotheses were identified:

- H₁:** Women perceive benefits of television advertising at higher levels than men;
H₂: Women perceive abuse of women in television advertising at higher levels than men; and
H₃: Women perceive cultural degradation of society at higher levels than men.

4. Research methodology

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of information. The secondary source of has been extensively used to review the literature related to television advertising. The primary source of information formed the basis of empirical study. The study envisaged the perceptions of the general public by collating the responses of 451 respondents of Bangalore Urban District selected on the basis of stratified random sampling. The respondents were selected from 6 areas of Bangalore Urban District. Based on the objectives of the study and the hypotheses for the study, the responses towards television advertising were received through the structured questionnaire on 11 dimensions of advertising ethics or attitude towards advertising containing 47 statements, which were rated on 5-point Likert scale.

5. Data analysis

The results of the empirical study have been presented in the Annexure from Table 1 to Table 11, which consist of perceptions by women and men in terms of mean values, dispersion levels and p-value towards 47 variables on television advertising ethics being classified under 11 dimensions. These results have been analyzed under (i) Rating of Perceptions; (ii) Differences in Perceptions; and (iii) Benefits and Social Costs.

5.1. Rating of Perceptions:

Rating of perceptions by women and men in terms of mean values have been presented under (a) Information Content of Advertising; (b) Economic Impact of Advertising; (c) Abuse of Women in Advertising; (d) Falsity in Advertising; (e) Ads Creating Affluence Attitude; (f) Cultural Degradation of Society; (g) Exploitation of Consumer Psychology; (h) Puffery in Advertising; (i) Non-Receptivity of Ads; (j) Behavior during Commercials; and (k) Ineffectiveness of Ad Regulation

5.2. Differences in Perception:

The following differences in perceptions between women and women towards all the 47 variables and 11 dimensions were evidenced.

- (1) Women rated all the variables of information content of television advertising, economic impact of television advertising and abuse of men with higher mean values than men.
- (2) Deviating from normal patterns of ratings of variables under social costs of television advertising with higher mean values by men, women rated advertising endorsing stereotyping, ads being offensive, ads being too much repetitive, physical zapping, inattentiveness, switching off the TV, regulatory body being a mute observer, and law failing in prohibiting sexually suggestive ads with higher mean values than men.
- (3) Men assigned the highest mean value of 4.68 for channel zapping as against the mean value of 1.84 for advertising being essential at the present level and women assigned the highest mean value of 4.14 for physical zapping as against the lowest mean value of 2.44 for ads resulting in a decrease in price levels.
- (4) From the viewpoint of ranking patterns without considering the mean values, both women and men perceived ads leading to prudent purchase decisions with same rank of 43. However, almost similar rankings were evidenced with regard to ads leading to irrational reactions from consumers (15th rank by women and 16 rank by men), ads distorting values in youth (31st rank by women and 33rd rank by men), switching off (36th rank by women and 37th rank by men), ads being communicative (40th rank by women and 39th rank by men, ads helping in right brand selections(41 rank by women and 40th rank by men), ads creating competitiveness in the market (44th rank by women and 46 rank by men), and ads helping in delivery of products to society (46th rank by women and 44th rank by men).
- (5) With varying mean value ratings by women and men, it was evidenced that differences in perceptions were not statistically significant.

5.3. Benefits and Social Costs:

Benefits of television advertising include information content and economic impact. Social costs include creating affluence attitude, puffer, exploitation of consumer psychology, falsity, non-receptivity of ads, ineffectiveness of ad regulation, behavior during commercials, cultural degradation of society and abuse of women. With these two broader classifications of all the 11 dimensions of television advertising, the benefits and social costs have been analyzed below.

Economic benefits of advertising were rated by women with a higher aggregate mean value 2.92 than men having assigned the mean value of 2.13 only. For both economic impact and information content of advertising, women assigned the higher mean values of 2.93 and 2.92 than the mean values assigned by men at 2.21 and 2.04 respectively. As against these economic benefits, the social costs of advertising, taken as proxies for unethical advertising, men rated these costs with an aggregate mean value of 3.70 vis-à-vis women having assigned the mean value of 3.41. If non-receptivity of ads was rated by men with highest mean value of 3.87, women rated both non-receptivity of ads and

ineffectiveness of ad regulation with the mean value 3.67, which were far below the ratings by men. If women perceiving the lowest unethical advertising with regard to creation of affluence attitude with the mean value 2.92 only, the mean value assigned by men was 3.70 for this variable. It was also glaringly observed that men assigned the lowest mean value of 3.39 for the abuse of women as against a higher mean value assigned by women at 3.55.

6. Testing of hypotheses

Based on the findings of the study related to 11 dimensions of television ethics, the testing of the hypotheses has been presented below.

H₁: Women perceive benefits of television advertising at higher levels than men.

Information content and economic impact of television advertising were rated with higher mean values of 2.92 and 2.93 culminating in total economic benefits with the mean value of 2.92. As against these perceptions, men perceived information content and economic impact of television advertising by assigning the respective mean values of 2.04 and 2.21, both of which resulted in the total economic benefits with the mean value of 2.13. It is true that both the groups perceived the benefits at substantially lower levels and this indicated the unproductive nature of television advertising. However, the perceptual rating by women was higher with the mean value of 2.92 than the mean value of 2.13 assigned by men. Hence the hypothesis that women perceive benefits of television advertising at higher levels than men stands

7. Accepted.

H₃: Women perceive abuse of women in television advertising at higher levels than men.

Women assigned rated ads exploiting sexual instincts, ads projecting women with bad image, ads with too much sexual content, stereotyping, and offensive nature with the respective mean values of 3.91, 3.92, 3.57, 3.72 and 3.92 as against the ratings with the mean values of 3.30, 3.7, 3.50, 3.36 and 3.32 by men. Further, the aggregate mean values towards social-cultural issues towards women were found to be rated higher by women than by men with their respective mean values of 3.73 and 3.36. Hence the hypothesis that women perceive abuse of women in television advertising at higher levels than men stands.

8. Accepted.

H₄: Women perceive cultural degradation of society at higher levels than men.

Women rated cultural degradation of society by television advertising consisting of ads being harmful to society, ads practicing stereotyping, ads creating violent behavior in children, ads being offensive, ads distorting values in youth and ads making children live with materialistic outlook with the mean values of 2.80, 3.72, 2.71, 3.92, 3.15, 3.46 as against the ratings of 2.91, 3.36, 3.44, 3.32, 3.19, 3.83 by men respectively. This indicated that men rated the variables under cultural degradation of society than women excepting stereotyping and offensive nature of ads. On the whole, men rated cultural degradation of society by television advertising with a slightly higher mean value of 3.34 than women with 3.30. This evidence also leads to the conclusion men are more serious about cultural degradation of society by television advertising than women. Hence the hypothesis that women perceive cultural degradation of society at higher level than men stands

9. Rejected.

10. Conclusion

Television is an integral part of human life. However, television without advertisements can never be imagined. The basic purpose of television advertising is to impart information. But its impact goes beyond one's imagination. Its effect is not evidenced in kind (positive or negative), but in levels cutting across all sections of society. It is considered to be twin-edged blade, with one side helping people through information provisioning and spurring the development process. On the side, its pernicious effects are beyond one's imagination. In fact, people are trying to live with television ads without knowing how they are sedated and how they are conditioned to believe that their life without using the advertised products is not worth living. A cross-section analysis of both positive and negative effects of television advertising from the viewpoint of women vis-à-vis men is an issue by itself because of the general feeling that men are superior to women. The present empirical study reveals that women overrate the benefits of television advertising as against men underrating on one hand and men overrate social costs as against women underrating on the other. An interesting conclusion is that when the image of women is at stake, they overtake men in abusing the ill-effects of television advertising from the viewpoint of abuse of women, stereotyping and offending the women community. On the whole, one finds that women have been endowed with as much intelligence and judgment as men and it is uniquely observed from the present st

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