

GENDER BIAS IN PAKISTAN TELEVISION PRIME TIME COMMERCIALS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

Masrur Alam Khan

Television viewing today is more than enjoying your preferred programme. It is highly influenced by commercials – as we sit before the television screen and watch commercials trying to persuade us to buy something. The people behind the production of commercials use glamorous objects to appeal to the consumers and provoke them to buy their product. Originally, commercials began on the radio simply because the radio has been around longer than the television. Once the television was invented and introduced to the public, commercials became more and more beneficial. A variety of explanations exists as to why television advertising is preferred to radio ads. The reasons are; on the television, a consumer is able to see what he may be purchasing; television promotes the selling to individuals as well as a family; on the television commercials come at the proper psychological time for the viewer between shows unlike print advertising; has the same advantages of radio sound and most of the time better quality sound is heard on the television; and more people watch television because it is habit-forming (Seehafer, 1959).

‘Gender bias portrayals of females in electronic media specifically in television commercials require serious attention of the establishment, human right activists and media professionals. Since television is considered the most populaces mode of media, it would be interesting to understand the representation of female in television and its effects on the mindset in negative perspective, mainly when it shows females in repulsive and oppressive manner in commercials.’

The strategy of a commercial is to pursue the viewers and influence their opinion about the world and inform how to get it. Through television commercials, the producers are able to reach a wide range of people and promote their products much faster around the world. Television commercials have exciting effects on people. Many people consider that commercials

influence consumers' behaviour toward a product and make consumers more ready to buy, as well as affects a person's "attitude toward a product" (Baldwin, 1982).

Researchers have observed that electronic media producers have bifurcated audiences to achieve their goals while targeting them according to their motives. Television promoted lifestyle division based on their socio-economic status. "Although segmented markets can engender a tight sense of community among people who share similar backgrounds, such differentiation can also promote suspicion of others" (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000: 367).

Media analysts observed that during a period of 1990s, a television commercial reproduced stereotyped characters specifically focused on race and gender, (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000: 385). The literature provides enough evidence to strengthen such biases in electronic media. Turow (1997) observed such segmentation approaches for increasing racial tensions during the late twentieth century.

Gender is one of the most studied social phenomenons as it is the main pattern that we generally use in determining how to act and interact with others. For this reason, it is important to look at the ways in which individuals receive messages about gender norms. This paper looks at gender biases in television commercials and how such image portrayals frequently come out on the small screen. Gender biases in our socio-cultural context are very frequently depicted in our media, especially in the television industry, that has been blamed as promoter of stereotyping and prejudicial attitudes (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000).

The researchers have noticed that television producers have divided audiences to achieve their motives while addressing them according to their goals. Gender biases in television commercial are one of the popular domains of population diversity that has been a favourite area of interest of media researchers in recent years. Bartsch, Burnett, Diller, and Rankin-Williams (2000) updated the data on the status of gender representation by replicating the studies of O'Donnell and O'Donnell from 1978 and Lovda's 1989 study. A total of 757 commercials from spring 1998 were analysed for product type, gender of product representative, and gender of voice-over. Bartsch, Burnett, Diller and Rankin-Williams (2000) concluded that imbalanced gender portrayal as demonstrated by an overrepresentation of females as domestic product representatives and males as non-domestic product representatives were evident from their content analysis.

Literature Review

There are numerous studies over the past years that look into the role of media and television in the society. These studies have examined various aspects of diversity including culture, race and the effects of biases of gender in print and electronic media using various variables, content of commercials and advertisement based on gender, demographic characteristics and some others (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000; Whittler, 1991; Bristor et al. 1995).

In early 1970s, most of the studies in print media, particularly relating to magazines advertisements, were based on content analysis. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) revealed that magazine advertisements reflected four general stereotypes (a) "A woman's place is in the home," (b) "Women do not make important decisions or do important things," (c) "Women are dependent and need men's protection," and (d) "Men regard women primarily as sex objects; they are not interested in women as people." Subsequently, these studies were replicated by Busby and Leichty (1993), Culley and Bennett (1976), England et al. (1983) and Lysonski (1983). However, with changing socio-economic scenario and as women entered the workforce in growing numbers, television and print media advertisements have increasingly shown women in work settings outside the home (Busby and Leichty, 1993; Sullivan and O'Connor, 1988).

Derkin (1985) states that television is still responsible for gender stereotypes because it reflects dominant social worth, which is further reinforced while presenting them as natural. Besides, males dominate television production and, prejudiced by such stereotypes, repeatedly reproduce a traditional 'masculine' perception, creating men as the dominant gender stereotype. Many descriptions on television are still completely designed to be narrated from a masculine perspective. Viewers are frequently invited to make out with male characters and to objectify females. He further endorsed that girls learn from most television that it is a man's world, and learn to relocate their own viewpoint. It is evident from recent studies that there has been a notable increase in the number of female news presenters while television directors were of the opinion that females were less likely to be considered by the viewers. However, their physical appearance plays a more significant role in their selection than for their male counterparts.

Literature on gender has significantly depicted its biases in television very frequently. As of 2003, men outnumbered women in all aspects of television commercials. 54% of primary characters in the commercials

were male (Scharrer et al. 2006), and further analysis of all such characters revealed that male outnumber female characters by more than 3 to 2 (Stern and Mastro, 2004). Similarly, males were more frequently used as the voice-over, with 85.9% of the off-screen describing being a male voice (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000).

Cases of domestic characters were the main consideration of many researchers. In a content analysis of the literature focusing on gender and domestic household tasks in television commercials, Scharrer et al. (2006) concluded that male characters are more likely to be portrayed outside of the home, while female characters are more regularly depicted in domestic environments, particularly in the kitchen, bathroom and laundry area. In such domestic surroundings, female characters were more likely to be involved in housework and childcare than men. When men were shown performing domestic tasks, they were often shown as incompetent, mostly meant to be a source for humour. These portrayals strengthened traditional gender roles by involving that "men are somehow 'naturally' ill-suited for certain types of work, and therefore those chores are best left to women" (Scharrer et al. 2006: 216).

Throughout analysis of empirical data, it has been proven that males are more likely to hold white collar jobs in workplace, twice as likely to hold high-level business roles, and four times more likely to have white collar positions than females (Hong, 1997).

These representations may help to conclude viewers' belief that men are more competent in business roles, particularly those of high power. To the extent that men are shown as more involved in family life, they still tend to depend largely on knowledge and activities that are stereotypically male (Kaufman, 1999). Bartsch, Burnett, Diller, and Rankin-Williams (2000) looked at whether men or women were more likely to sell domestic products such as food, cleaners, cosmetics, etc., or non-domestic products, including things outside of the home, such as travel, credit cards, and automobiles. The study found that woman representatives for domestic products was at 59%, compared to men's 41%, and men (70%) were significantly more likely to be the product representatives for non domestic products, showing an increase in gender bias for product representatives compared to commercials ten years prior (Bartsch et al. 2000).

It is very much evident through literature review that there is a constant and significant variation in the style males and females are displayed in commercials. Craig (1992) revealed that women are shown less in

televised advertisements, and are still identified primarily by their family role as housekeeper and caretaker. Men are shown in stereotypical roles of authority and dominance. Whereas Scharrer et al. (2006) identified that when attempting non-traditional gender roles such as cleaning, men are often seen as incompetent, reinforcing the traditional role of women as caretakers. Stern and Mastro (2004) looked at age variable as these gender differences seem to occur regardless of the age of the primary characters. Finally such illustrations clearly differentiate that males and females should confine themselves to a narrower mindset of conventionally defined activities, and promote inequality through amplifications of difference between the genders (Coltrane and Messineo, 2000).

Gender bias in television commercials is one of the areas of population diversity which has been addressed by researchers in most of the developed countries. Bartsch et al. (2000) replicated a study of gender presentation while analysing 757 commercials from spring 1998 and analysed for product type, gender of product representative, and gender of voice-over. The study found unequal gender presentation as demonstrated by an over representation of female as domestic product representatives and male as non-domestic product representatives were found (Bartsch et al. 2000).

Another area of study regarding biases represented in commercials is age. Age is used as a market strategy for number of products which includes television entertainment programmes as well. Senior citizens are hardly shown in advertisements and commercials (Singer 1983). "Most people are not glamorous; many are over the age of 60 or members of visible minority groups". Therefore using real people ... or accurate representation of real people in commercials can positively impact the effectiveness of an advertising campaign (Singer, 1983: 36).

In the backdrop of literature review, the following hypotheses are drawn to strengthen the social effect and cultivation theories.

- H1: Females in prime time television commercials are primarily younger.
- H2: More females than males are product users in prime time television commercials.
- H3: Females' main job in prime time television commercials is as homemakers.
- H4: Males govern voice-over in prime time television commercials.
- H5: Males are depicted as product representative more often than female.
- H6: Females are shown in inferior positions in most advertisements.

Methodology

The main purpose of the study is to describe the degree to which population diversity is present in televised commercials. The research design necessitates the utilisation of a descriptive research study. Descriptive research is a “type of conclusive research that has as its major objective the description of something.... usually market characteristics or functions’ (Malhotra, 2004: 78). To achieve this, content analysis was the method utilised.

Earlier, several studies have utilised content analysis to determine the level of diversity in commercial advertising (Bristor et al. 1995; Coltrane and Messineo, 2000). Content analysis allows a systematic, objective, and quantifiable analysis of message characteristics. This methodology is applicable to many areas of study, and is the fastest-growing technique used in mass communications research (Neuendorf, 2001). Content analysis dictates the use of a prior design, as variable, measurements and coding methods are determined before any observations take place.

The present study followed the content analysis techniques to testify the research hypotheses as followed by Krippendorff (1980) and Riffe et al. (1998).

The study was based on a sample of television advertisement run by three popular entertainment television channels of the country; GEO, ARY and HUM. A total of 406 advertisements shown during prime time (2000-2100 hrs) for one week in February 2012 were coded according to the variables used for the hypotheses in the study. The dependent variable is the television commercials while the independent variables are the models used within the commercials such as gender, age, occupation, product type, product representative, and voice-over. These combinations of variables were used by Mastro and Stern, (2003). However, the scope of this article is to only examine inclusiveness of diverse populations and not the wider reaching scope of study that larger research projects have included. Therefore, the variables examined were limited to gender, age, product, product users, and voice-overs.

A television commercial codebook was prepared to analyse the commercials and coding procedure was reviewed to ensure face validity of the data. The most popular entertainment television channels were selected and their primetime commercials were recorded for the review.

Coding Categories

Each television commercial was coded along the following four dimensions.

Age Category: This coding dimension was divided into three categories; under teen age (below 19 years); middle age (20-35 years) and older (above 35 years and coded "one", "two" and "three" subsequently).

Gender Representation: This coding dimension concerned the number of gender (male and female) appearing in a given commercial (coded as "one," and "two" for each category)

Homemaker: Females are shown as the main figure of the commercial involved in homemaking activities and coded according to the time period allocated to the character.

Voice-overs: The genders of recorded voice used in commercials were recorded.

Coders were trained before recording the data while coding one hour primetime transmission from one of the sample channels which comprises 10% of the total sample for inter-coder reliability followed by coefficient computation. The overall inter-coder reliability coefficient was between .85 and .87.

Results and Analysis

H1: Females in prime time television commercials are primarily younger.

The sampling frame of one week prime time television commercials of three leading television channels (ARY, GEO and HUM) of the country yielded a total of 336 commercials in February 2012. Out of the sample period, there were 336 characters shown in commercials. Out of these, 275 was middle age between 20 and 35 years old whereas 41 were under teen and 20 characters were 36 and over. The findings confirm the hypothesis that females in prime time television commercials are primarily younger through a cumulative data of these three channels (Table 1). Moreover, this finding is further endorsed by their respective channel as females were shown as a

central figure in prime time commercial i.e., ARY (45), GEO (87) and HUM (143).

Table 1: Females in Prime Time Television Commercials are Primarily Younger

	Below teen	20-35	36 and above	Total
ARY	15 23.80%	45 71.42%	03 4.76%	63
GEO	12 11.53%	87 83.65%	05 4.80%	104
HUM	14 24.26%	143 84.61%	12 7.10%	169
Total	41 12.20%	275 81.84%	20 5.95%	336

H2: More females than males are product users in prime time television commercials.

Within the study period, females were depicted more often (53.21 percent) as “product-users” than men (26.14 percent). Almost all three channels retained the same status of superiority over male population, as this difference between males and females in the category of product use is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Product Users in Commercials

	Male	Female	Both	Animation	Total
ARY	21 29.16%	39 54.16%	05 6.9%	7 9.72%	72
GEO	36 29.26%	65 52.84%	13 10.56%	9 7.31%	123
HUM	57 24.67%	118 51.08%	42 18.18%	14 6.06%	231
Total	114 26.14%	232 53.21%	60 13.76%	30 6.88%	436

H3: Females’ main job in prime time television commercials is as homemakers.

Females are mainly depicted in television commercials as homemakers and they are very often shown in professional occupations or as celebrities. However, males were portrayed as celebrities (16.30 percent), as professional (13.58 percent) and children (15.21 percent) against female as house wife (39.13 percent) and celebrities (9.78 percent). Table 3 explains this more.

Table 3: Gender Distribution of Television Commercial

	Male celebrities	Female celebrities	House wife	Children	Female professional	Male professional	Total
ARY	11 18.03%	7 11.47%	18 29.50%	14 22.95%	6 9.83%	5 8.19%	61
GEO	21 21.64%	12 12.37%	36 37.11%	13 13.40%	5 5.15%	10 10.30%	97
HUM	28 13.33%	17 8.09%	90 42.85%	29 13.80%	5 11.23%	35 16.66%	210
Total	60 16.30%	36 9.78%	144 39.13%	56 15.21%	22 5.97%	50 13.58%	368

H4: Males dominate voice-overs in prime time television commercials.

Each advertisement was coded for voice-overs according to the coding sheet. Results revealed that voice-overs dominance in television is commercial significantly supported by existing data as majority of the commercials depended on male i.e., 50.73 percent whereas females are not preferred (23.89 percent), and in most of the cases they shared voice-overs with male (25.36 percent). The results also support the previous findings as males have been given preference over females for voice-overs in television commercials (Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Culley & Bennett, 1975; O'Donnell & O'Donnell, 1978; Schneider & Schneider, 1979).

Table 4: Males Dominate Voice-overs in Prime Time Television Commercials

	Male	Female	Both	Total
ARY	37 50%	21 28.37%	16 21.62%	74
GEO	79 56.02%	35 24.82%	27 19.14%	141
HUM	90 47.12%	41 21.46%	60 31.41%	191
Total	206 50.73%	97 23.89%	103 25.36%	406

H5: Male is depicted as product representative more often than female.

A frequency test was employed to get the percentages of female and male shown as product representatives in these prime time television

commercials. The hypothesis that more males are portrayed as product representatives than women was not supported. Results indicate that female was shown more as product representatives. The overall frequency count of three television channels for female as “product representatives” was 202 (62.15 percent) and for male 123 (37.84 percent) which gives a glaring difference of gender representation in commercial. Refer to Table 5.

Table 5: Product Representation of Gender in Television Commercials

	Male	Female	Total
ARY	20 42.55%	27 57.44%	47
GEO	35 38.88%	55 61.11%	90
HUM	68 36.17%	120 63.82%	188
Total	123 37.84%	202 62.15%	325

H6: Females are shown in inferior positions in most advertisements.

The hypothesis that females are shown in subordinate positions in most advertisements was significantly supported. One of the aspects of stereotypical portrayals discussed by Masse’ and Rosenblum (1988) was stance. They claimed that most women in television commercials were portrayed in subordinate positions like doing inferior jobs and working at home. After statistical analysis applying cross tabulations in SPSS, the outcome reflects that more female (62.15 percent) than male (37.84 percent) were depicted in lower position (Table 6).

Table 6: Inferior Position of Females in Advertisement

	Male	Female	Total
ARY	30 46.15%	35 53.84%	65
GEO	50 37.03%	85 62.96%	135
HUM	94 45.63%	112 54.36%	206
Total	174 42.85%	232 57.14%	406

Limitations

The study has a few limitations as the sample was confined to only leading television channels of the country and had time constraints. The study was first of its nature in the area of mass communication in the country and the size of sample was very small, so its results could not be generalised. However, it provides a significant direction to future researchers to examine the roles assigned to the models in the commercials. Nevertheless the study provides enough benchmarks for future comparisons of prime time television commercials in the backdrop of gender diversity and advertisers and their agencies' liking for outline of the leading cultural norms.

Conclusion

Based on the review of literature and research hypotheses testified in the present study, it is confirmed that prime time television commercials provide realistic representations of the country's stereotypical reflection of cultural norms. Television commercials play a significant role in today's society. "Researchers argue that the sheer pervasiveness of advertising may enhance its potential to influence television viewers" (Mastro and Stern, 2003: 638). Advertising can make or break stereotypes (Bartsch et al. 2000). Therefore, advertising bring about behavioural change and breakdown social misperceptions of the public.

Gender bias portrayals of females in electronic media specifically in television commercials require serious attention of the establishment, human right activists and media professionals. Since television is considered the most populaces mode of media, it would be interesting to understand the representation of female in television and its effects on the mindset in negative perspective, mainly when it shows females in repulsive and oppressive manner in commercials.

The findings of the study exposed that imbalanced gender representation is dominant in primetime television commercials. Females are over represented as product users for the domestic products and depicted as homemakers in television commercials while males governed voice-overs of all products irrespective of their nature of the product. The findings of this gender bias also endorsed the finding of past researches which confirmed that there is no change toward such approach (Signorielli et al. 1994) and (Garst and Bodenhausen, 1997). Though in previous studies there have been

a common problem of identifying the nature of characters of commercial, however, the present study has explicitly confirms its hypothesis as female were treated in inferior positions while narrating its stereotype approach towards its situation. In conclusion the study suggests that while providing realistic representations of Pakistani cultural richness and subsequently maintaining the social responsibility, advertising should not simply reflect social values, rather than bringing a social change.

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Masrur Alam Khan is a Professor and Post-doctorate in Mass Communication from USA. He has contributed his research work in national and foreign research journals of repute and participated in international and National Conferences, Symposiums, Workshops and chaired several sessions of these conferences. Currently, he is heading a Ph.D. programme at Riphah Institute of Media Sciences at Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan.