

Gender Representation in Billboard Advertisements

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| Received: 06.05.2019 | Accepted: 15.05.2019 | Published: 30.05.2019

DOI: [10.21276/sjhss.2019.4.5.4](https://doi.org/10.21276/sjhss.2019.4.5.4)

Abstract

This study is about gender representation in billboard advertisements. It analyzed how male and female were represented in billboard advertisements in Nigeria. A fleeting glance at billboards in Nigeria often show a disconnect between the models and the products they represent. This observation led to employing the social constructionist theory of representation which posits that meaning is constructed by the individual users of the language to ascertain how the males and females are represented in billboard advertising with the unit of analysis as sex, roles and dressing of the products spokesperson, and product connection. The data for this study which were gathered through content analysis of billboards and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were analyzed using semiotic and textual analysis. This study which is both a quantitative and qualitative study found out that men are located mostly outside the home while the females were always seen within the home and less in the work environment. Again the issue of no-product connection was higher on the female side that mostly played decorative roles. This study becomes timely in the heels of the efforts towards eliminating gender discrimination and stereotypes. It is also hoped that this work will be a stepping stone for further research on gender representation in Nigerian billboard advertisements.

Keywords: Gender, Advertisements, Representation, Billboards, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of advertising in the modern society has been constantly on the increase which has brought about fast development of the society's civilization. It has made its presence, effects and influence felt in every phase of the life of the people. Through even the most insipid of advertising, we are affected by the subconscious power of the image and representations of people in situations start to suggest how we could and should model ourselves [1]. The modern world depends on advertising. Without it, producers and distributors would be unable to sell, buyers would not know, and continue to remember products or services, and the modern world would collapse [2]. This has led advertising to be seen as the rock 'n' roll of the business world [3]. Advertising is any communication that is paid for, identified by a sponsor, directed at a target audience, through the various mass media like radio, television, billboard, newspaper and magazine with the aim of creating awareness about goods and services [4]. Arens [5] defines advertising as a structured and composed non-personal communication of information, usually persuasive in nature, about products, services and ideas by identified sponsors through various mass media.

This definition by Arens appears to have benefited immensely from Dominick's [6] earlier definition which avers that advertising is any form of non-personal presentation and promotion of ideas, goods and services, usually paid for by identified sponsor. Advertising is a very powerful form of communication in modern \society. It offers the most sustained and most concentrated set of images anywhere in the media system. It is important in the discussion of gender representation because it is an essential mechanism for advancing capitalism and patriarchal interest and therefore serves as a mobilizing force for inhibiting the possibility of change [7]. Advertising is a significant agent of socialization in modern industrialised societies and is used as a tool to maintain certain social constructions, such as gender there are many types of advertising but this study will focus on outdoor advertising. Outdoor advertising is one of the forms of advertising which can be a word, letter, model, sign, placard, board, notice, device or representation whether illustrated or not, used for the purpose of advertisement, announcement or direction [8].

Why outdoor advertising? Outdoor advertising presents a unique case in that unlike advertising in other

media, an individual's capacity to avoid exposure is uninhibited. Unlike the private world of magazine and television advertising, outdoor advertising is displayed throughout public space thereby making it inescapable [9].

Research reveals that outdoor advertising has achieved great success. With viewers having to choose from more than 50 channels, it had become increasingly difficult for advertisers to tell their story to a mass audience. But there is one medium that can carry their message 24 hours a day, seven days a week, day and night without interruption. It is never turned off (not until it overstay its welcome), zipped, zapped, put aside, or left unopened. No matter your educational level, you will understand the advertisement because as long as you are not blind, you will see the advertisement because a picture is worth a thousand words. And it is big. For this reason and more, some experts refer to billboards or outdoor advertising as the last medium [10]. Billboards are one of the medium of outdoor advertising. They are big painted posters placed at strategic, well trafficked locations and very catchy in nature. There are 2 forms of billboard advertisements which are poster panels and painted bulletin. Poster panels are the billboards we regularly see alongside highways and in other heavily trafficked areas. They are silk screened or lithographed and then brought and pasted in sheets to the billboards [2]. This form of billboard will be the focus of this study.

In all, advertising is both applauded and criticized not only for its role in selling products but also for its influence on the economy and the society at large(which comprises male and female). For years, critics have denigrated advertising for a wide range of sins – some real, some imagined [10]. One of such criticisms is that advertising has contributed to the subjugation of women and the maintenance of patriarchy through their placements of male and female as their images. The media contribute to and perpetuate male dominance in a variety of social processes [11]. This is what informed the decision to analyze how gender is represented in billboard advertisements with a view to ascertaining whether the criticism(s) against advertising is/are real or imagined.

Again, Advertising has been criticized for its perpetuation of stereotypes because the negative world of advertising has helped in the subjugation of women and the promotion of patriarchy in the society (www.womensissues.about.com/cs/bodyimage). It has been argued that advertising reinforces discrimination and marginalisation of women and upholds stereotype in role as created by male dominated world in its treatment of gender [11, 12]. In other words, socially constructed ways of being male or female are perpetuated by the media through advertising. This negative world of advertisements is not limited to the realm of print and electronic media. Indeed, one of the

common sights in the urban landscape is the advertising billboards. Billboard are large format advertising displays intended for viewing from extended distance generally more than 50 feet. Billboard messages are permanent and you can expose yourself to billboard over and over again, thus, making billboard messages indelible and easily recalled by the audience [13]. Also, Men and women are forced to live within the constraints where the media put them. Our society is educated by these constructed images of what men and women are and how they should be. A young woman who is forming her self - Identity sees how these images from an array of media outlets (print media, television, etc) could influence her definition of what it means to be a woman. Thus, advertising has been accused of contributing to women's relegation to the background, assigning them a place in the kitchen, ascribing to them a posture to be seen and not heard and generally making women tools for just the advancement of the cause of men. Similarly, for young men, they see the images of an individual who has an overly muscular physique working in the office, and this is the image they strive for. These images could enforce ideas of how one should treat, act and respond to the other. The media act as a kind of mirror whereby you look at it and see what you are or how you are conceived in the society. Over the years, the necessity of modeling in advertising has led to a situation where images of male and/or female are used to represent the concept behind a product, idea or services. The nature and competitiveness of modern business. Necessitated that every business organisation should carry out advertisement on regular basis.

Models are a kind of spokespersons for a product or a company. Interestingly, sometimes, there appears to be an arbitrary use of the images resulting in a situation where there is no defined relationship between the sign, signifier and the signified. This arbitrary use of the signs, have therefore led to the perpetuation of stereotypes. The resulting effect is the life imprisonment of women within the shackles of what they consider to be femininity, while the male gender is thriving on their patriarchal dividend. Within most societies, accepted dominant notion of gender often construct masculinity and femininity as opposites and is greatly influenced by the collective practices of institutions such as school, church, media and family, which construct and reinforce particular forms of masculinity and femininity.

Advertising has a privileged place in the discourse on gender in consumer societies due to its prominence in our daily lives. In trying to portray the world in a way that could be real, advertisers are forced to draw upon the repertoires of everyday life and experiences [14, 15]. As a result, what advertising says about gender is a very important issue to consider.

Man, they say is torn between things on the one hand and human wants and emotions on the other. Models in advertising help make things come alive; makes them able to act almost literally as participant in social interactions. They encipher goods in codes that we can read and act upon [16].

The power of advertising to change, mould and shape public opinion has had a major impact on the lives of men and negatively on women ([www.womensissues.about.com/cs/body image](http://www.womensissues.about.com/cs/body_image)). Thus, advertising has been accused of contributing to women's relegation to the background, assigning them a place in the kitchen, ascribing to them a posture to be seen and not heard and generally making women tools for just the advancement of the cause of men. This study explores the issue of femininity and masculinity as encapsulation in billboards represents final patterns. That is, advertisements tend to portray a 'realistic' display of daily life. Exploring the concept of representation in this study will look at what men and women stand for in advertisements and in their placements and the message they pass on to the audience. It also ascertains the reasons behind the dominant forms of representation of gender and the ways advertising contribute to upholding definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Statement of Problem

By way of problem statement, a fleeting glance at billboards in Nigeria shows a disconnect between the models and the products they represent especially among the female models. In most of the advertisements, it is not clear what the models are doing on the boards because there is no defined relationship directly or indirectly between the models and the products. This observation ignited the interest to do a detailed study on the gender representation in billboards.

This study principally aims at ascertaining the dominant imagery in billboard advertisements; exploring the images of masculinity and femininity evident in these advertisements and the audience interpretation of the advertised images.

Literature Review

Several researchers, Nixon [17], Lukas [18], Lemish [7], Ukwueze [19], have examined gender roles, identification and representation. Each research has concerned itself with how and why women and men have been represented in particular ways. Some of the most provocative research dealing with gender has been in examination of advertisements. Advertisements allow for an in - depth examination of the representation of our culture and display a "realistic" image of daily life.

With the knowledge that meaning is constructed by the reader at the back of his mind, Lukas

[20] undertook a gender advertisements project with a view of ascertaining the different ways gender is constructed in billboard advertisements and providing gender studies educators and students with resources for gender research. In his semiotic analysis of advertised images that relate to gender using 100 billboards from freeways in Los Angeles and the underlying interpretation of the images in relation to what the images say within the context of semiotics, he found out the following:

- Men and women are presented in the concept of power and domination. The difference in the positioning of male and female indicate clear power dimension relevant in the society. Even when both images are used in the same advert, the man will always seem to be in control.
- Advertising commonly uses women's body and sexual contexts that have nothing to do with either. That is, there is no product connection or clear relationship between the product and the advertising image. That is, there is arbitrary use of the images of women and relational use of the images of the males.
- When it comes to sexual appeal, women are used by displaying certain parts of their body in suggestive ways. It is not only about showing some skin but posing and having an expression on their faces which is nothing short of eroticism.
- There is a clear difference in the placement of the models. The males are presented as strong, dependent and in control while the women are submissive, weak and dependent. The common dichotomy of male as independent/women as dependent is realized in the trope of males as hero.
- His findings also prove that advertisements move towards a stereotypical stance. The roles of women in ad are stereotypical and limiting. Lucas writes that the association of women and domestic roles has been solidified in popular culture, particularly, in advertising. Women belong to the private sphere of the home. Caring for the children, cleaning the house, shopping for groceries and making meals for a husband.

Lukas went ahead to write that the maintenance of gender subordination in world culture is very much due to the universal functions and values of the family. Men too are the subject of confusion and psychological conflict as the construction of the good provider role is maintained in contemporary understanding of masculinity and femininity.

In the same vein, Ukwueze [19], studied the portrayal of women in 2 Nigerian television commercials (AIT and NTA Awka). He found out that women often advertise domestic products like golden

morn, Milo, butter etc far more than non – domestic products like cars, banking and so on. He also observed that women are highly stereotyped in Nigerian TV commercials. A careful monitoring of the adverts showed women deriving satisfaction from the achievement or happiness of others, especially men and children. Conclusively, he wrote that in Nigeria, today, women are still largely stereotyped but the sexism rate is low, therefore one can say that there are more stereotyped commercials against women than there is of sexism and that there is limited portrayal of women as professionals in comparison with men.

Similarly Edegoh, Asemah and Okpanachi [12] studied Guinness Stout billboard advertisement (come and drink at the table of men) and gender representation. Their findings showed that media practitioners in Anambra state are very much exposed to the Guinness Stout billboard advertisement and that their exposure is predicated on the many billboards of the advertisement hoisted in several areas in the major towns and cities in Anambra State, in particular and Nigeria, in general. Findings also showed that Guinness Stout advertisement is not gender neutral as the advertisement discriminates against the female gender. Furthermore they found that the gender discriminatory elements inherent in the Guinness Stout advertisement could be found in the choice of words of the advertisement, the images used in the advertisement and the presentation of the product. Based on the findings, the paper therefore concludes that the Guinness Stout advertisement is not neutral, but gender bias; the advertisement discriminates and marginalises the female gender. The paper therefore, among others, recommends that advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON) should always ensure that advertisement approved for public consumption in Nigeria uses gender sensitive images and words, particularly in billboard advertisements.

Also on advertising, Sean Nixon in 1997 looked at how masculinity is exhibited in fashion pages of men's 'style' and 'lifestyle' magazines. He wanted to analyze the 'new man' in the magazine advertisements, and chose the magazine because it was within magazine fashion photography that these images initially emerged. In addition, it was within this form that the images were most extensively elaborated. Using the coding of casting, posture and model's expression, dressing, lighting and cropping of the images, he found out there is a 'new man' different from the conventional man. The old man was seen as strong and virile, financially stable and all powerful but the new man adds a touch of sexiness, and nurturing to his physical characteristics. He found an advert of a man cuddling a baby in his arms. Again, he also found out that what stood out from the images of the new man was a new framing of the surface of men's bodies; one that emphasized not so much the assertive power of a muscular masculine physique as its passive

sexualization. The men's bodies were openly inviting a desiring look which was a first because this feature was a female trend. He also found out that gender identities are not unitary and fixed but rather are subject to social and historical variation. To appeal to what producers and service-providers identified as new groups of male consumers, what was for a long time a female thing metamorphosed into a man's thing (nurturing roles, sexual appeal, being scantily dressed etc.) This shows that there is a changing meaning in the definition of masculinity and femininity.

Furthermore, another study of representation was by Christine Gledhill's genre and gender; the case of soap opera [21], where she wrote that as social construction, representation address us in the practice of everyday life even while calling on our subjective sense of self and our fantasies. In other words, all social practices whether reading newspapers or magazines etc – take place within representation and are saturated with meanings and values which contribute to our sense of which we are – our culturally constructed identities. The objective of the study was to use soap opera to explore how popular fictions participate in the production and circulation of cultural meanings, especially in relation to gender and find out ways in which soap opera as a signifying practice participates in changing definitions of masculinity and femininity. The work also considered the impact of gender on mass cultural forms like soap opera. Her findings revealed that dominant images in the soaps circulate and maintain established beliefs about the nature of the feminine and masculine and the proper roles to be played by women and men, wives and husbands, mothers and fathers. This is faulty because of practical problems in appealing to 'reality' as a means of assessing the constructive work of representation. For instance, the category 'women' does not refer to a homogenous social group in which all women will recognize them. Gender interacts with other social identities during the practice of daily life. A woman can be a worker, student, tax payer etc. And 'being a woman' will be experienced differently according to one's age, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on. She also found out that the domestic sphere of the home and the problems of personal relationships particularly in the family are constructed as being feminine concerns; the work needed to keep the home and family going is not given the same recognition or status (let alone pay) as that performed in the public sphere. Also, women are represented in the traditional ways as wives, mothers, daughters, girlfriends and the stories revolved around the emotional problems generated by these relationships.

Another study was by Dafna Lemish [7] who looked at the portrayal of women in the Israeli media because media texts are perceived to be one of the prime cultural sites through which it is possible to study the position of women in society. She also compared

findings from previous research and found recurring themes. Her finding reveals fundamental principles of patriarchal thinking, including relegating the feminine to the private sphere, restricting the presentation of women to the physical functions of sex and reproduction, and locating women within the world of emotions where rational thought is lacking and behavior uncultivated. Of particular importance was the finding that women are always portrayed as victims whenever they did appear? Again, looking at Israeli women in television advertising, her semiotics analysis identified the ways in which exposed parts of the female anatomy are displayed, in provocative movements, enticing facial expressions, tantalizing glances, finger movements, self-caressing, emphasis on the lips, as well use of lingual and Para- lingual movements. She concluded that through these ways, advertising reduces women to their simple sexual functions [7].

She also noted that women are objectified. The objectification of women is expressed in how extensively they are used as objects rather than as subjects having their own existence: as fruits, colorful, juicy, and tempting to eat; as packages, such as perfume bottles; as animals, identified with the untamed, the natural, the impulsive, and the uncivilized.

Theoretical Framework

Research has proven that meaning is constructed. That being the case, this study is anchored on the social constructionist theory of representation. This theory posits that meaning is a construction. According to Hall [22] meaning is constructed by the individual users of language. Things don't mean: we construct meaning using representational systems – concepts and signs. The translatability is not given by nature or fixed by the gods. It is the result of a set of social conventions. It is fixed socially, fixed in culture. The main point is that meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice – a practice that produces meaning, that makes things mean.

Using a photograph for an instance, the meaning of a photograph is not hidden or immanent in the picture but is constructed through a range of different signifying practices. During the process of recognition and understanding, we relate what we see in a photograph, the visual signs, to a wider set of understanding. Some of these may be signified directly from what is in the photograph; others depend on cultural knowledge which can be activated by the photograph [23]. This theory is related to this study in the area of construction of meaning. The meanings that are given to the pictures analyzed in this study were constructed by the researcher within a cultural setting. Again, such interpretations were influenced by the socialization of the researcher based on sex, cultural capital and orientation. This means that a picture is prone to different interpretations depending

on the interpreter. This theory, acknowledges that men and women are actively involved in constructing their own gendered identities. We as individuals and as groups, are not passively shaped by the larger societal forces such as schools, or the media, but are active in selecting, adapting and rejecting the dimensions we choose to incorporate, or not, into our versions of gender. Cooper [13], notes that we adopt different masculinity and femininity practices depending on our situations and beliefs. Our understandings of gender are dynamic, changing overtime with maturity, experience and reflection. Thus we are active in constructing our own gender identities, but the options available to us are not unlimited. We are influenced by the collective practices of institutions such as school, church, media and family, which construct and reinforce particular forms of masculinity and femininity.

These widely accepted dominant notions of gender often construct masculinity and femininity as opposites in a dynamic process in which we all play a part. Advertising has been mentioned among those options which influence our identities. Advertising influences our thoughts, feelings and lives. Alluring advertisements with their witty catchy phrase, vivid imagery, and stereotype, works on an aggregate level. They are not 'read transparently' word - for word as it were by the audience, but they do offer 'preferred reading', characters with whom to identify, and general meanings about what should be admired and desired. They do not reflect social meaning and conditions but teach us ways of thinking and feeling generally through fantasy and dreaming [24].

Advertisers use, among other techniques the following line of appeal - the images of or reference to things to tap into our desires and fears. These include images of a happy family which everyone wants to belong to; images of rich luxury lifestyles – everyone's aspirations; images of beautiful women- as men and women like looking at beautiful women, while men admire them, women admire what makes the men admire them. What remains crucial to the critique of stereotype is not only the question of who speaks for whom and with what consequences, but also how stereotype relate to conceptions of what is held to be 'natural' or 'normal', how they create and sustain common sense of the proper limits of what is accepted as legitimate and right [25].

Methodology

The methods of data collection used for this study were content analysis and FGD. Content analysis is an efficient way to investigate the content of the media, such as the number and types of commercials or advertisements in broadcasting or print media [6]. Focus Group Discussion is a research strategy for understanding audience attitudes and behavior. It is used to understand the reasons behind a phenomenon, to see how a group of people interpret a particular

phenomenon, or to test preliminary ideas or plans [6]. For analyzing the data collected, frequency counts and percentage, textual and semiotic analysis were used. Data collected from this study were grouped into frequencies, arranged in tables for easy references and computed. Tables and simple percentage were used. In ascertaining the representational meaning of the adverts with a view of exploring the concepts of masculinity and femininity evident in the advertisements, semiotic analysis was used. Semiotics is an analytical tool which helps in the study of signs and how the reader mediated them. It helps to understand how signs and symbols are manipulated to form structures of meaning [26]. In other words, semiotics enables us to understand how advertisements manipulate powerful symbols to persuade the receiver, viewer or listener [1]. Meaning of a photograph is not hidden or immanent in the picture but is constructed through a range of signifying practices. During the process of recognition and understanding, we relate what we see in a photograph, the visual signs, to a set of understanding. Some of these may be signified directly from what is in the photograph; others depend on cultural knowledge which can be activated by the photograph [23]. Whatever be the case, it is the knowledge of semiotics that will help read the adverts. This explains why semiotics was chosen as an analytical tool for this research.

Research Design

This study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, it made use of Focus Group Discussion, content and semiotic analysis to gather and analyze data. The units of analysis for semiotics were the images or the pictures on the sampled billboards. The pictures were analyzed based on the role, nature of product, dressing of the model, and whether there was a connection between the image and the products or concepts as the case may be. In order to defy one of the limitations of this study which is that semiotics stresses individual reading of messages; FGD was used to check similarity in reading among different readers. Copies of pictures from billboards were distributed among the participants for discussion on how they saw those adverts. This was recorded and transcribed with the intention of generating qualitative data.

Research Population

This study would have covered the six geo political zones but due to the differences in religious beliefs, a purposeful decision was made to use the eastern geo political zone. According to an advertising agent, billboards are the same across the nation but the pictures will differ accordingly to suit the different culture and beliefs. For example, an advert with a picture of female in strapless gown will be offensive to the Moslems or Northerners while Christians or those in the eastern part will find it less offensive. This

prompted the decision to concentrate on one geo political zone.

Sampling

The research population for this study is the south-east geographical zone of Nigeria which consists of 5 States. To get the sample of this population, Purposive sampling technique was used to choose major cities like Enugu (Enugu state) and Onitsha (Anambra State). Enugu State was chosen because it is a State capital while Onitsha was chosen because of its highly commercialized nature even though it is not a State capital. "A billboard for a campaign can be located across a geographical spread within in Nigeria". A sample of a board in Enugu and Onitsha can be said to be a true representative of what is obtainable in the south east"(advertising agent). As the billboards are similar in all the 5 States, the two States chosen (Enugu and Anambra) would serve a good purpose. Major roads in the selected towns were covered because they always attract the advertising agents' attention which means that there are many billboards on major roads than in the streets. In addition, using snowballing technique, 3 groups of 6 persons each totaling 18 people were chosen for FGD and they fell within the range of youths (undergraduates), middle aged and older people. According to Omenugha [27], snowballing technique is initially using personal contacts and then using the contacts personal friendship network to generate more interviewees; where one contact promise another contact. Even though snowballing technique does not give the researcher the power to choose the participants, it allowed the researcher to choose the number and ratio of persons for the discussions. The rationale behind the use of three different groups is that since they all do not belong to the same age grade, they might not think alike considering the fact that each passing day in our society comes with new changes. The number was put at 18 so that the researchers can handle it without employing extra hands to the stretching of scarce resources. The discussions were not held on the same day or venue to ensure that no group directly or indirectly influences the views of another group.

Coming to the sample size, for semiotics were 100 unduplicated billboards on the major roads of the sampled cities. The billboards were selected on the basis of those that had human subjects with the exception of children. The FGD had a sample size of 3 groups with 6 members each totaling 18 persons. The idea is to halt the sliding in meaning because of the differences in individual interpretation, and to check whether there is similarity in their readings and that of the researcher.

Unit of Analysis/Measurable Variables

The following were observed and noted by the researcher:

- Sex of product spokesperson/ representative

- Nature or category of product
- Roles of men and women in the advertisements
- Product connection
- Dressing of the spokesperson

Afterwards, the study used the coding sheet as the measuring instrument. This was chosen because, coding has the advantage of converting data generated into easily understandable numerical values or memorial symbol representing specific attributes or given variables as indicators [13, 19].

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

On the issue of dominance, the pictures were sorted according to the nature of products. We had Alcoholic drinks ads, non-alcoholic drinks ads, non-consumable products, beauty products, corporate/financial ads, and consumable ads and communications ads. From the figures gotten from analysis, 24 amounting to 24% of the models on the 100 billboards was male, 55 (55%) are females while the remaining 21 (21%) used both male and female. From this, it was found out that the dominant images in the billboards for the females were that of a domestic and happy mom playing nurturing and caring roles, and always being interested in their looks. For the males as can be deduced from the tables, the images were that of an accepted man; career-oriented, muscular, financially stable, and in control and powerful. It was also found out that women have different flavors and can be used for almost any kind of advertisement. They are more flexible than the males who have a rigid form of representation of either being macho, strong or successful. This can be the reason why female models are more dominant in billboards. That notwithstanding, they are not used for all kinds of products. For instance, alcoholic drink ads never used only females, instead, when they decide to feature a female model, she will be with a man who will be doing the drinking while the woman looks on or is simply enjoying the company and not the drink. This may not be unconnected with the pervasive ideology with the Nigerian society, where women who take alcoholic beverages are regarded as misfits and treated with some form of disdain by the society. Also to confirm the assumption that a “woman’s body is her greatest asset”, all the beauty product adverts which includes bathing soaps, body cream, perfumes, washing powder, hair care products etc never featured only males. It was more like a female thing. Out of 23 of the advertisements on beauty products, 16 were only females while the remaining 7 used both male and female and it was for toothpaste and soaps. This seems to suggest that women are more interested in their looks and beauty than men.

The second objective was on the general concepts of masculinity and femininity evident in the sampled advertisements. The concepts evident from the sampled ads are strength/macho, successful,

couple/family life, sexist objects, decorative roles and domestic/nurturing roles, Masculinity and femininity which are socially defined ways of being male or female has certain characteristics like women in the home, men in the public; the man is large and in charge, the woman is contented with looking good; the man finds satisfaction in his work, the woman finds satisfaction and fulfillment in being a good mother and wife. All these qualities were present in the billboards. One can now understand why the discussants in the FGD did not find anything wrong with the product’s spokespersons. Their concern was about their dressing especially on the female side, even though the youngest group out of the three groups saw it as being trendy. This is where the constructionist theory comes in. meanings were influenced by a number of variables like sex, cultural capital and orientation. This means that a picture is prone to different interpretations depending on the interpreter. This theory, acknowledges that men and women are actively involved in constructing their own gendered identities. We as individuals and as groups, are not passively shaped by the larger societal forces such as schools, or the media, but are active in selecting, adapting and rejecting the dimensions we choose to incorporate or not, into our versions of gender. Cooper [13], notes that we adopt different masculinity and femininity practices depending on our situations and beliefs. Our understandings of gender are dynamic changing overtime with maturity, experience and reflection.

Thus we are active in constructing our own gender identities, but the options available to us are not unlimited. We are influenced by the collective practices of institutions such as school, church, media and family, which construct and reinforce particular forms of masculinity and femininity.

For the third research objective on how the audience read the adverts, the researcher’s reading and that of the FGD participants were uniform with insignificant differences. They were able to recognize the difference in male and female roles. They also agree that women were mostly used for decorative roles and invariably, there is no product connection between the females and the products they represent. In the words of Lemish [7], women were objectified. The objectification of women is expressed in how extensively they are used as objects rather than as subjects having their own existence: as fruits, colorful, juicy, and tempting to eat; as packages, such as perfume bottles or drink bottles.

From the pictures analyzed, the females were always there to beautify the ad to make it look more catchy and attractive. However, when both sexes are used, this anomaly disappears. Based on this, we can support the stereotype that women are meant to be watched. She is the ‘surveyed female’. Thus, she is

turned into an object – and most particularly an object of vision.

Advertisers use, among other techniques the following line of appeal – the images of or reference to things to tap into our desires and fears. These include images of happy family which everyone wants to belong to; images of rich luxurious lifestyles – everyone's aspirations; images of beautiful women – as

men and women like looking at beautiful women, while men admire them, women admire what makes the men admire them.

In any case, what is seen in the billboards is a reflection of what is happening in the wider society. And the advertisers who do not want to turn off potential and existing advertisers follow the stereotypical stance.



Synopsis of Findings

1. More women than men are used in billboard advertisements.
2. Women are not used alone for all kinds of products.
3. Men were never featured alone when the product has to do with improving one's external appearance e.g. soaps, creams, and perfumes.
4. Men are located mostly outside the home while the females were seen more within the home and less in the work environment. That is, there is limited portrayal of women as professionals in comparison with men.
5. Also, the issue of no product connection was higher on the females.
6. All the characteristics of masculinity like strength, success, and, femininity like nurturing, belonging to the domestic sphere were all evident in the advertisements.
7. Finally, it appear that Nigerian advertisers have not embraced the new market of the new man because there was no advert that had the image of the 'new man' as was found in Sean Nixon's study.

Summary

Looking at billboard advertisements, the study tried to show the ways in which semiotic methods with their emphasis on construction (constructionist theory) and convention have been helpful in analyzing how images are understood in the mass media. The males on their own side were mostly seen outside the home and wherever they did appear, they were surrounded with the social construction of masculinity like being strong,

success-oriented, dominating, and being in charge. Majority of the women are portrayed more in the family environment and less in the work environment.

Also, there was uniformity in the interpretation of the discussants with insignificant differences, age notwithstanding. They were able to pinpoint the areas of disconnect between the models and the products they represent. A point to note is that the disconnection was more on the female side than the males. Again, they agree that advertisers follow a stereotypical stance in a bid to display a realistic image of daily life so as to impress target audience. With regards to stereotyping, most advertisements especially detergents, soaps, beauty products and cooking ingredients indicate that women belong to the home. The images the media present can reinforce and legitimize a patriarchal worldview by glorifying the situation, and presenting it as the 'normal' or expected state of affairs. Betty Fredan's *the feminine mystique* 1963 criticized the idea that women could only find fulfillment through child bearing and home making. She hypothesizes that women are the victims of a false belief system that requires them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children. Such a system causes women to completely lose their identity in that of their family. This had made women's work less meaningful and less valuable. It is even more surprising that some women view the sexualization of women as

all right, without knowing that it is dragging women farther down the road of balanced representation.

CONCLUSION

Our world is a rapidly world, changing for the better in many respects, but unfortunately, apparently changing for the worse in terms of gender representation in billboard advertising in Nigeria in particular. In this world in which the media of communication have become the all-powerful brokers of information, the media have been caught up in the crisis of confidence which has enveloped most modern institution. Advertisers are not left out as they still hold on to stereotyped gender representation for fear of losing existing and prospective clients. This has sharpened the desire, demand and clarion call for more responsible conduct by advertisers and all people who work in the media.

It is not contestable the fact that customs vary as societies. Whatever be the case, it is morally binding on the advertisers, their agents and media practitioners to imbibe the situation ethics of John Fletcher. If the world is calling for gender equality in all aspects of life, they should not hesitate to let go of their conventional ways. After all, the greatest possible good is only realizable when everyone puts aside his/her own self-interest when it conflicts with the common good. In this case, the advertisers' conventional ways are conflicting with the common good of the female gender in our society in particular and the whole society in general.

Be that as it may, we conclude that it not peculiar to Nigeria. The trend is a global happening with just little difference. If that is the case, the big question now becomes, what could be done to bring about the desired change of fair and balanced representation?

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Men and especially women should be selective of the roles their images play since the decision one makes today affects one's life tomorrow. The lots of women could be changed through a politics of representation. If women were no longer seen as objects, if they could control their own image, then they could be liberated from the cages in which oppressive image consigned them. Women are strong and have all it takes to make a difference. Writing on the strength of a woman bell hooks in Sojourner Truth said that "...if the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up...." This they can do by being selective of the roles their picture plays in advertisements. The truth is that this is going to be difficult considering the economic situation of this country where survival is the name of the game, but it is worth a try.
2. Sensitization by NGO's, women and advocacy groups. Again, most women are not aware of the implication of this objectification, sexualization and decorative roles. They don't understand the effects of what they do in the name of survival. The key word here is ignorance. How do we sensitize the people? By starting from something small like close friends and spreading our wings. It won't happen overnight. After all, it has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a step. On a larger scale, NGOs, advocacy and women groups should organize seminars to inform the general public especially the women on their rights to be fairly and accurately represented in advertisements.
3. Advertisers should be more creative. With regards to the culture that women have a scent of attraction, advertisers and manufacturers can contribute their quota by finding alternatives. They should be more creative, after all advertising is all about creativity. The problem is nobody wants to try something new; instead, they are hanging on to the old cultural beliefs that women move market. While it is not in contest that women move market, they should be given the correct and current picture. I believe that if someone comes up with an abstract ad and it works like Sean Nixon's 'exhibiting masculinity', virtually all advertisers will rush into it. But then, how do you know if it works without even giving it a try?

With the above recommendations, billboard advertisements would contribute positively in eliminating gender discrimination and stereotype.

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