

**MEDIA PORTRAYAL OF STEREOTYPES: LANGUAGE
AND GENDER**

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents
who have brought me up with great care and love
and built up me whatever I am today.

Abstract

The present study explores media portrayal of gender stereotypes. The study scrutinizes that how media through language and images portray stereotypes about gender. The study highlights the role of media in depicting males and females as different and unequal from each other. It particularly focuses on how media portrays females through advertisements.

Content analysis of electronic advertisements was done to answer the research questions ((a) whether or not media's content of language portrays stereotypes? (b) Do media portray stereotypes through images?). A sample of advertisements of 50 products of Procter & Gamble, Lever & Brothers, and Cellular companies which were advertised by the media was examined. For the content analysis a Performa was adapted which was proposed by Saez, Morales and Lisbona (2008). A questionnaire was also used for data collection, filled by 30 students of University of Mangement and Technology. In this way through content analysis and questionnaire, data (qualitative and quantitative) were collected. Percentages and frequencies of the data were taken and data were interpreted in tabular and graphical form.

Results extracted from content analysis and questionnaire showed that media contents of language and images portray stereotypes. Results have shown that media portrayal of males and females do not give equal picture of gender rather gives biased and stereotypical picture of gender. Moreover, results have also shown that media, through advertisements, particularly target females. Media do not portray females equal to males and their image is distorted by the media.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The study aims to address media portrayal of stereotypes in the context of language and gender. It is assumed that media portray and strengthen stereotypes in a society. Moreover,, the present study also explores how media project gender and use language in order to portray stereotypes. Stereotypes are social constructs which develop in a society or culture and treated or accepted as true but in reality they are not true. They also promote and portray inequality among males and females. For example media portray males as stronger, ambitious, assertive, knowledgeable, adventurous, autocratic, coarse, dominant, forceful, independent, very logical, direct, self-confident, and active. While females are presented as passive, shy, domestic, dependent, emotional, affectionate, dreamy, sentimental, submissive, weak, talkative, helpless, preoccupied with appearance, sexual object, decorative. Moreover, females are portrayed in lower level occupational roles like a secretary, in clerical jobs, and also presented as attracting and attaining a man and serving him etc. Moreover, Howe (1971) defines sexual or gender stereotypes in very comprehensive way:

“Gender stereotypes are assumed differences, social conventions or norms, learned behaviour, attitudes and expectations. Most stereotypes are well-known to all of us, for they are simple--- not to say simple-minded. Men are smart; women are dumb but beautiful, etc”.

Boverman et al. (1970) state, “Males stereotypes are more socially desirable, and prestigious, as compared to female”. Above mentioned examples of stereotypes about males and females show that in the media portrayal of stereotypes females are more targeted than

males and females are portrayed in traditional, rigid, and typical way which gives traditional and stereotypical views about females and distort the image of females.

The study draws on: (a) Whether or not media's content of language portray stereotypes? (b) Do media portray stereotypes through images?

Media are considered social institutions and powerful elements of a society. Media are of great concern as regard to gender and stereotypes; because of Media's much association with people; and because of their quality of exerting powerful effects on society. According to Molinero (1997), media are considered strong factors of any society and reflect society's attitude with gender, including sexist stereotypes where they exist and how they develop. On the whole, media seem to confirm and reinforce negative and inferior images of females and also depict their participations in subordinate roles.

Stereotypes are universal phenomena which can be found in any country or in any society as Boverman (1970) also found much prevalence and high frequency of stereotypes in the society. Many researchers (Nafziger and Nafziger 1974, Browne 1998, Hawkins and Coney 1976, Hofstede 1984 etc.) state that because of the universal prevalence of stereotypes media project stereotypes in order to make their effects more powerful. All these researchers agreed that media in different way and through different mediums portray and strengthen stereotypes in which males are portrayed as superior, dominant, and better than females. Researchers also show that media portray stereotypes in order to develop a shared experience of identification with their viewers and customers and in this way they portray stereotypes to create and to make their effects on viewers more influential.

It is observed that in Pakistan media portray stereotypes through different means like through images, signs, roles associated with gender and more strongly through language.

Language is considered as an influential tool to create and portray stereotypes. Language effects are more powerful because language is considered a social phenomenon that reflects certain values, traditions, and norms of a society and its people. Moreover, language is a powerful source of emerging any novel idea because of its association with people's mind and behaviours. Because of that association media use language to portray stereotypes. English language reflects gender like in English there are pronouns he/she for male/female which show gender differences and never be replaced with any one neutral word. In addition English language is considered a sexist language because it does not show equality of both males and females rather it gives biased view about gender and it has certain words and expressions in it which show power and superiority of males. Moreover, there are more words in English for males as compared to females like chairman, policeman, steward etc. Males are also associated with positive words more than females. Some occupations are particularly shown as for males only although females are also working there. Like doctors and lawyers are normally associated with males while teachers and nurses' occupations with females always. Similarly, Urdu language also shows gender even more than English language. Apart from certain expressions and words, even Urdu language has discrimination of gender in the use of adjectives as well. All these type of language elements give strength to stereotypes. This fact is highlighted by Burr (1998) that language, either in society or through media, plays a very prominent role in the formation of gender stereotypes and it also gives strength to certain already prevailing stereotypical concepts. Language is considered as an influential source of developing stereotypes because language is fundamental way we think and behave and it not only represents our thinking and behaviour but it also mends and develops our thinking and behaviour. As stated by Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, (1920-1930) language can determine thought and behaviour. Language and its use perform a key role in the production and reproduction of society and its inequalities. Concepts and representation

about females and males are also embedded in the very form and context of our language. Burr (1998) concludes that because of the influential characteristics of language, advertisers and media use language in such a way which gives implicit and traditional representation of genders. In short it is assumed from the above discussion that language used by media invites viewers to look at females and males differently and not equally and through language media depict stereotypes and refer males and females in different way and Moreover, in a biased way.

Although stereotypes about both males and females exist in the society and portrayed in media yet males are more targeted than males. As Mills (1995) stated that although females constitute 52% of total population but they are completely ignored and misrepresented by the media. At another place Gilly (1998) particularly pointed out that females are portrayed differently from males in media. Such biased representation of gender makes media and advertisements sexism. Sexism is a term which signifies biased and stereotypical portrayal of gender in which females are particularly targeted and women are not only portrayed as different from males but unequal also. Similarly, such sexist media portrayal of stereotypes which is extremist in nature particularly makes females' image distorted because media project them more in inaccurate, outdated, and demeaning way in the advertisements. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) found numbers of gender stereotypes present in advertisements and these gender stereotypes highlight the way of projecting females by media. Some examples of gender stereotypes which they found are: a woman's place is in home; women do not make important decisions and do not do important things; women are dependent and always need men's protection and support; and men regard women primarily as a sexual object. So in this way media not only portray females in inferior and traditional

way but at some places in negative way also like a sexual object, and most of the advertisements on media deal females as an object of attraction.

It is also assumed that along with language, the use of images of males and females is another important tool through which media portrays stereotypes. Hofstede (1984) identified that visual images of gender are portrayed by media in such a way that they project rigid, traditional, and unequal picture of males and females. Media project females completely in distinguished and unequal way from males. As Brown (1998) found that media portray males as: more dominant; more vigorous; more forceful; and more functional part of a society than females. On the other hand media projects females as: shy; passive; less instrumental; weak; and a non-functional part of a society. Hawkins and Coney (1976) clear the ideas about stereotypes and about the projection of females, advertisements reinforce certain concepts or notions by reflecting and imposing narrowly defined or very rigid and traditional roles particularly for females and they also portray these roles of females in such a way that they seem as proper, best or suitable for them and then by repeating them again and again without incorporating any changes these traditional concepts become strong and finally turn into socially approved or recognized stereotypes. So it seems from above discussions that in this way through advertisements media develop and strengthen stereotypes and target females and project them in narrowly defined roles and in stereotypical way.

Naffziger and Naffziger (1974) state, stereotypes on media not only highlight differences among gender but they also highlight that how males and females are expected to behave differently. As stereotypes on media refer to males and females as unequal and that is why media assign different and unequal roles to them. Males are associated with prestigious, occupational, and dominant roles while females are shown in trivial, mostly domestic or in low prestigious occupations, and in submissive roles. Moreover, on media males in general

are represented speaking in their public or professional roles, while females are identified with the private sphere. The media mostly show them performing roles as: mothers; the daughters; the wives; the widows; the page 3 girls; the stars etc. Moreover, on media generally females are portrayed as unemployed or employed in traditional females' occupational roles and as dependent on others. On the other hand males are portrayed in occupational settings: as celebrities; and independent. Different people and societies agree that females are always portrayed in rigid and negative roles (Courtney and Whipple 1983, Fullerton 2000, Lysonski and Pollay 1990). Researchers showed that females are more likely to be portrayed in sexist way: as needy; obedient; domestic; without authority; and presented as taking commands; and under the authority of males. It shows that advertisements represent females only for some specific roles which are not powerful and not prestigious. Moreover, Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1958) also identified some roles which are performed by females in advertisements. According to him females are usually shown: in non-working roles; in domestic roles. And females who are shown in occupational roles are shown in secretarial, clerical, and in lower level positions. He further elaborated that females are portrayed as something very decorative and for display to satisfy viewers' aesthetic sense and needs; they are also depicted as having very limited purchasing power. Due to this element that females are mostly projected by the media as an object of beauty and attraction or a sexual object media give the concept that females are not playing any purposeful roles on media and similarly in the society because media distort image of females by showing them in such roles. Media refer to females only in the roles which are not for any specific purpose rather their presence is only to attract the audience by their beauty. Likewise, all modes of media like advertisement, electronic and print media, give rise to stereotypes and portray females in rigid and traditional roles.

Above discussion shows that in different ways media portrays stereotypes; these stereotypes exert enormous effects on viewers because they portray them in such a way that they seem real. Goffman (1979) and Fishburn (1982) argue that the pictures portrayed by the media are perceived by the people as real and people look themselves from the perspective of these advertisements and behave accordingly. Actually these pictures or images create such influential effects that people take them very seriously and they develop same point of view and they also observe and behave and associate themselves with such roles which are portrayed by the media. The effects created by media representation of stereotypes are remarkable for viewers and such stereotypical portrayals give biased view about gender and particularly about females because females' images are more distorted by these stereotypes as compared to males.

Some defenders of media like Courtney and Whipple (1983) argue that basically media portray whatever concepts and traditions are present in a society. So in this way, they defend media role that media is reflecting realities of a culture and as media portray stereotypes, these stereotypes are already present in society and media only show them through different means (Gilly, 1998). Although some defenders take the part of media that media portray only realities. Yet in actual, situation is quite different because in today's world of advancement and revolutions everyone knows and admires females' changing role in the society and society also admits that day by day females are becoming equivalent to males in all fields of life but problem is that media are still portraying old traditional roles of females and portraying women in more exaggerated way and in traditional roles and media are not portraying changing roles of females in the society. Media do this so effectively that viewers have developed the same thinking and same stereotypes as portrayed by media due to this fact people never notice something unusual and odd about such stereotypes. The effects

of media portrayal of stereotypes are so much negative and adverse that Bretl and Cantor (1988), Lovdal (1989), Sternglanz and Serbin (1974) criticized gender role depictions of females as dependent and emotional. They also argue that it creates adverse effects and because they give very narrower and gender biased expression which not only affects females' place in media and distorts their image but also the behaviours of females for themselves and behaviour of others towards them as well. They also create feelings of jealousy and embarrassment among females and results into low self-esteem.

It is very necessary and needed to make people aware about the concept of stereotypes and media's role in portraying stereotypes and about certain realities about gender because media impart severe and immense effects on people and distort the image of females and present it in very rigid and traditional way. Otherwise people will have the same rigid and traditional view about gender and particularly about females. Friedman (1977) and Signorielli (1985) also emphasized the need to highlight the impacts created by stereotypes power, in order to make people aware about the harmful effects of stereotypes. Moreover, they argued that portrayal of stereotypes particularly through media can influence judgements of individuals and events and due to such advertisements people view and judge males and females and their roles according to the point of views of such stereotypical advertisements. They become so much prone to such traditional and stereotypical concepts that they never think across these boundaries which are provided by the media.

It is very important and significant to drag people's attention towards this aspect which is related to gender, which is a crucial element of a society. Stereotypes affect greatly images; roles; and place of gender and media act as a primary source in developing, spreading and strengthening these gender stereotypes and in giving the impression of a gender biased society. It is also important to make people aware about this phenomenon and

about harmful effects created by such stereotypes in order to bring equity and to make it possible that females may portray and associated with equal prestigious roles on media. As Nowak (1984) said that media can bring enormous changes in society and by making some changes in the contents of advertisements we can change people's mind and societal behaviours and we can mend the imprecise image of females on media. Through such studies people get awareness about such aspects which are restricting not only the individuals' freedom and equality but also making the whole culture a rigid traditional culture. Such studies by locating such concepts persuade people to think from a different perspective and persuade them to concentrate on themselves in order to identify their own individuality and it is a humble attempt to make females' position better and equal to males on media.

1.2 Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions.

1. Whether or not media's content of language portrays stereotypes?
2. Do media portray stereotypes through images?

1.3 Implications

This study is an attempt to highlight the media role in the portrayal of stereotypes. Study also emphasizes the effects of media stereotypes which particularly distorts the image of females. By analyzing media portrayal of stereotypes, study focuses on the need to bring gender equity on the media so that females may be portrayed as equal to males or at least females may portray out of this stereotypical frame or in their changing and advancing roles.

1.4 Methodology

Study collected the data under both paradigms (Qualitative and Quantitative). For qualitative data collection a sample of 50 products of Procter & Gamble, Lever & Brothers, and Cellular

companies which were advertised by the media were examined. A Performa containing traits for males and females was adapted which was proposed by Saez, Morales and Lisbona (2008). After making certain changes used for the content analysis and language analysis of electronic commercials in order to get deep insight about the depiction of gender through media particularly how females were portrayed. For quantitative data collection the study calculated the ratio of males and females models or characters, roles distribution to gender, and study also considered some other variables like body posture, body language, expressions etc. A questionnaire was also administrated among the students of University of Management and Technology and their responses were recorded. On the basis of all these variables and collected data the results and recommendations were laid. This Chapter capsulates methodology, however its detail version is in Chapter 3.

1.5 Division of Chapters

This study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter is introductory chapter which gives complete introduction about the topic and also brief description about methodology, significance, and implications. Second chapter is Literature Review which is composed of background knowledge about topic and also composed of past researches on the topic. The third chapter is about Methodology which demonstrates in detail complete methodology of study with the information about the methods of data collection and about the instruments used for data collection. Fourth chapter is about Data Analysis in which collected data are analyzed through different analysis techniques. In the fifth chapter on the basis of data analysis results are formulated and discussion on results is made. Sixth or last chapter laid recommendations on the basis of results and discussion and also presents conclusion in the light of findings.