

4-2014

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Vierra, Natalie, "Gender Stereotypes in Television Advertising During Super Bowl XLVIII and the Sochi Winter Olympics" (2014).
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Gender Stereotypes in Television Advertising During
Super Bowl XLVIII and the Sochi Winter Olympics

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CST 411: Communication Across Barriers

May 2014

University of Portland

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Abstract

This study analyzed the presence of gender role stereotyping in advertising broadcast during Super Bowl XLVIII and the Sochi Winter Olympics. These specific events hold interest because the ratio of male versus female viewers was nearly opposite between the two events (Nielsen Company, 2010). They also aired within a month of each other. The study's design primarily followed Knoll, Eisend, and Steinhagen (2011). Gender stereotyping was assessed based on five categories: age, credibility, location, product type, and relational role. Descriptive results showed some apparent stereotyping differences between the two events, but did not show consistently greater gender stereotyping at one event or in any one category analyzed. However, findings offer insight about the prevalence of gender stereotyping in broadcast advertising targeted to sports audiences.

Gender Stereotypes in Television Advertising During Super Bowl XLVIII and the Sochi Winter Olympics

Advertising itself has been around for many years now, in various forms. When people think of advertising, however, television is the primary medium recalled (Jin & Lutz, 2013). Taking this into consideration, attitudes toward television advertising can be considered representative of attitudes toward advertising in general. Based on this, it can also be generalized that television is the most influential medium for advertising. The objective of most advertising is to get the product or service's name out in order to sell the product. Advertisers hope that people will spread the word about their product to get more people to hear about it, or at the very least keep thinking about the brand, and the medium of advertising affects this (Berger & Iyengar, 2013). Because of the differences in social responses across media, smart marketing campaigns will take into consideration the types of responses they would like certain types of advertising to receive. To have an ad become viral, for example, an advertiser may choose to create a television ad so it can be posted online and viewed and shared after airing. Even if advertisers decide to run ads over other media, such as in magazines, or on the radio, television ads may be the most powerful in reaching and influencing consumer perceptions (Jin & Lutz, 2013).

Gender roles are also a prevalent force in society. The construction of gender roles has created a number of stereotypes about the way that men and women act and carry themselves. According to a study by Burkette and Warhol (2009), men are expected to be public, outdoor people who are active and capable, while women are expected to be passive and helpless while being private and keeping indoors. It is key to note that even though a stereotyped trait may seem positive, it can still be harmful to the generalized

population when that trait is expected of everyone in that group (Fiske, 2010). For example, being caring is typically a positive trait. However, when the trait is carried over to the overall group of women, a negative strain is placed on women who are not as caring as the expectation prescribes them to be. Similarly, physical strength is expected of men, and those who are not as strong as other men become excluded or even mocked.

The combination of gender stereotyping and advertising leads to some interesting results. Disparities in gender representation in advertising begins at a young age – nearly three times more males than females are depicted in commercials targeted toward school-aged children (Hentges & Meier, 2007). This is likely because young boys are more likely to listen to a male authority figure because of the negative social connotations of appearing feminine. According to the same study, males are 3.19 times as likely as each female to be portrayed as an authority figure in television commercials targeted to this age group. Female representation only begins to increase when there is an increase in appearance-based products and feminine products in commercials targeted toward adolescents. This lends itself to the idea that the influence of television is present in people beginning at a very young age. There is no easy way to get a “before exposure” condition when working with television exposure. Messages begin forming in children through this channel, creating predispositions at a young age (Gerbner, 1998).

When there is male and female representation, however, there still exist stereotypes in their portrayals. This leads critics to say that television commercials are not a reflection of the overall advancement of the gender equality movement that has made large progress, especially in recent years (Eisend, 2010). When females are the central figures in commercials, they are typically portrayed as younger product users who are

using domestic products at home or in dependent roles. Male central figures typically take on the opposites of these roles. They are portrayed as older authorities with non-domestic products outside of the home in dependent roles (Knoll, Eisend, & Steinhagen, 2011). In addition, females in television advertising take on a number of more submissive and less authoritative roles. These include being represented visually without speaking, providing opinions or non-scientific arguments, not giving the voice for the end comment, and being presented against a background of mostly other females. These portrayals are reversed for males. Additionally, occupational stereotyping is the most widely used type of stereotyping in advertising, which is disconcerting because of the progress women have made toward equal representation in the workplace and enrollment in higher education (Eisend, 2010).

There are two major arguments laid out to explain the relationship between advertising and society: the mirror argument and the mold argument (Eisend, 2010). The mirror argument claims that advertising reflects the beliefs held by and present in society. In this case, gender roles are portrayed in advertising because gender roles are already present in society. Alternately, the mold argument says that advertising molds society through its prevalence in the culture. This claims that people are influenced by what they see in advertising and carry these stereotypes into their beliefs and actions to create and reinforce societal values. The idea of cultivation analysis falls into line with the mold argument. According to Gerbner (1998), television is full of symbols and provides a medium for pervasive stories, images, and messages to go out to the public. In the United States, there are many repetitive, consistent messages sent out through the medium of television advertising across channels, leading to relatively predictable influences. As a

result, by growing up with television present, a vast number of unrelated people grow to have shared experiences and concepts about the world.

The information from this previous research, combined with the present interest in these current events leads to two research questions to explore:

RQ 1: How does gender stereotyping of females differ between advertising in the Super Bowl and advertising in the Olympics?

RQ 2: How does gender stereotyping of males differ between advertising in the Super Bowl and advertising in the Olympics?

Method

Selection of advertisements

Advertisements were pulled from the broadcasts of Super Bowl XLVIII and the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. These events were chosen because they are both major sporting events that happened in close proximity, within a month of each other. Additionally, according to Nielsen, gender of audience members of the equivalent events in 2010 was approximately opposite between events – that is, the audience of the Olympics was made up of 44% male viewers and 56% female viewers while the audience of the Super Bowl was made up of 54% male viewers and 46% female viewers (Nielsen Company, 2010).

The advertisements were selected based on availability after airing during the respective events. Advertisements were omitted if they did not contain any clear central figures, including those that only included children (with no significant adult voice or appearance) and those that only included music and non-human visuals. Movie teasers and non-commercial Olympic athlete features were also omitted.

Criteria for Central Figure

A central figure was determined by a prominent appearance in the advertisement. Central figures were limited to up to two adults who had the most significant part in portraying the message of the advertisement. Figures must have been present in the advertisement for at least three seconds to be classified as a central figure.

Coding Procedure and Measures

The coding procedure aims to replicate the procedure applied by Knoll et al. (2011), which was modeled on the procedures applied in previous research (Furnham, Babitzkow & Ugucioni, 2000; Manstead & McCulloch, 1981; McArthur & Resko, 1975). Because of their prevalence and repeated success in previous studies, it can be generalized that these criteria are appropriate for reuse. This content analysis utilized the same categories of stereotyping as the analysis done by Knoll et al.: age, credibility, location, product type, and role.

Age is the central figure's portrayed age in the advertisement. Stereotyping occurs when females are portrayed as young and males are portrayed as middle-aged or older.

Credibility is the central figure's level of knowledge on the subject. A central figure can be portrayed as a product user or an authority on the product. Stereotyping occurs when females are portrayed as product users and males are portrayed as authorities.

Location is the central figure's portrayed location. Stereotyping occurs when females are portrayed at home and males are portrayed at work or in a leisure environment.

Product type is the general category of product in which the advertised item fits. Stereotyping occurs when females are portrayed with domestic products and males are portrayed with other, non-domestic products.

Role is the type of relation-based role that the central figure is given. This can be relational, autonomous, or other. Stereotyping occurs when females are portrayed in relational roles and males are portrayed in autonomous roles.

Each central figure was placed into a category for age (old/young), credibility (product user/authority), location (home or domestic/work/leisure/multiple locations), product type (domestic/other), and role (relative/autonomous/other). The stereotyped traits were then counted up between genders and advertising events and converted to a percentage of that group. For example, if there were a total of 12 female central figures found in Olympics advertising, and 4 of them were portrayed as young (the female stereotype), the corresponding percentage for females in the age category would be 25%.

In total, 62 advertisements were used for analysis, providing a total of 87 central figures to analyze. The Olympics provided 26 advertisements containing 37 central figures, 11 of whom were female and 26 of whom were male. The Super Bowl provided 36 advertisements containing 50 central figures, 8 of whom were female and 42 of whom were male.

Results

Age

Stereotyping of age was 2% higher for female appearances in Olympics advertising than Super Bowl advertising. It was 14% higher for male appearances in Olympics advertising than Super Bowl advertising.

Credibility

Credibility stereotyping was 11% higher for female appearances in Super Bowl advertising than Olympics advertising. It was 14% higher for male appearances in Super Bowl advertising than Olympics advertising.

Product Type

Stereotyping of product type was present in females in Olympic advertising 35% more than Super Bowl advertising. It was 10% higher for male appearances in Olympics advertising than Super Bowl advertising.

Location

Stereotyping of location was 20% higher for female appearances in Super Bowl advertising than Olympics advertising. It was 2% higher for male appearances in Super Bowl advertising than Olympics advertising.

Role

Stereotyping of role was 11% higher for female appearances in Super Bowl advertising than Olympics advertising. It was 39% higher for male appearances in Olympics advertising than Super Bowl advertising.

The first research question set out to determine whether there were any noticeable differences in gender stereotyping for females between advertising in the Super Bowl and in the Olympics. The Super Bowl had more notable stereotyping in advertisements, surpassing instances of stereotyping in the Olympics in three out of five categories (credibility, location, role). The difference between the Super Bowl and Olympics was also negligible in the age category, at a 2% difference. It is interesting to note, however, that the largest gap in appearance of gender stereotyping could be found in the product

type category where the Olympics showed stereotyping in female central figures 73% of the time, 35% more than in the Super Bowl. The second largest gap between events came in at 20% higher for the Super Bowl in the location category.

The second research question set out to determine whether there were any noticeable differences in gender stereotyping for males between advertising in the Super Bowl and in the Olympics. In this case, the results were opposite: the Olympics had more notable gender stereotyping in advertisements, surpassing instances of stereotyping in the Super Bowl in three out of five categories (age, product type, role). Similar to female stereotyping, the difference between the Olympics and Super bowl was negligible in the location category, at a 2% difference. The Olympics showed gender stereotyping in 96% of male appearances in the relational role category, leading Olympic stereotyping in this category to be 39% higher than Super Bowl stereotyping, the most notable difference in stereotyping between the Olympics and Super Bowl for males.

Other notable commercials

Additionally, there were a couple of advertisements that included a notable female character that did not fit the criteria for being a central figure. One of these, a GE advertisement, aired during the Olympics. The commercial featured a girl talking about the fantastic things she thought her mom did while at work at GE. This is a noteworthy advertisement because the mother, while not pictured, is portrayed as a working woman with a focus on the good work she does. A second advertisement, from Verizon, featured a girl who wants to play football with her older brother and his friends. Her brother does not let her play with them, so she goes off to research how to play the sport and goes on to be a football reporter while her brother and his friends watch in shock. This

advertisement breaks stereotypes by showing a girl in a position of authority in a work environment.

Discussion

Recap

This study set out to look at any differences between gender stereotyping in broadcast advertising from the Super Bowl and the Winter Olympics. Central figures from advertisements were viewed through the lens of multiple categories of stereotyping, including age, credibility, product type, location, and relational role. Instances of these types of female and male stereotyping were recorded and converted into percentages that conveyed the amount of the time that stereotyping was present for each gender in each event. While there were no classifications of stereotyping that stood out as having more stereotyping present overall across an entire event, the data provide an interesting insight into the types of advertising broadcast during major sporting events.

While it is true that gender stereotyping was present in all categories, many did not contain overwhelming amounts of stereotyping. Out of the 20 categories (between stereotyping classification, event, and sex), 11 included less than 50% stereotyping of central figures. Surprisingly, 7 out of 8 categories that included over 50% stereotyping of central figures were associated with male stereotyping. Overall, between genders, age stereotyping, product stereotyping, and male role stereotyping were more present during the Olympics while credibility stereotyping, location stereotyping, and female role stereotyping were more present during the Super Bowl.

Implications

In the future, it may be useful to take into account the results of this research in order to raise awareness of the types of stereotyping present in different areas of society. It is important to recognize that gender stereotyping is still present in society and broadcast to sources that reach a widespread audience. Results should encourage consumers of media, especially television in this case, to become informed viewers and recognize that there are aspects of broadcast messages that may be harmful to one's perception of an equal society.

This may also be interesting for those in charge of advertising to take into account. While this study did not attempt to determine whether the mirror or mold argument (Eisend, 2010) is more accurate, those creating the messages should be aware of the choices made that may influence viewer perceptions of themselves and their place in society.

Limitations

One area in which this study could be improved is the sample size of advertisements for each event. Olympics commercials were especially difficult to come about in comparison to Super Bowl commercials due to the cultural fascination surrounding Super Bowl commercials and the lack of emphasis on most Olympics commercials. Ideally, analysis would have occurred while these events were initially broadcast on television in order to capture the full range of advertisements shown.

A second limitation is in coding reliability. It may have been beneficial to have at least one more person choosing central figures to analyze from the advertisements as well as classifying those central figures into the preset categories.

Another limitation has to do with the number of central figures available for each sex. There were very few female central figures present in the advertisements. Because of this small sample size, results were limited and percentages of presence of stereotyping remained very similar across stereotype categories for females as opposed to males.

Looking Ahead

A potential next step could be to look at the presence of gender stereotyping in real-world society and compare those results with the presence of gender stereotyping in advertising. This would ideally provide some insight into whether these aspects of stereotyping are truly present in society or if the world portrayed in television advertising is a major distortion of reality. While previous research covers this to some extent, social activism is present in the world, so current research and information on potential changes in these specific aspects of society could enhance the present research.

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