

# *An Analysis of Female Stereotypes in Advertising and Film*

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**Abstract:** In an era when individuals are inundated with advertisements, film and television productions, and other forms of mass media, the impact of such media on the dissemination of ideas has been profound, which is particularly evident in the shaping of societal norms and the formation of youth perceptions. The current rapid development of media technology, advertising film and television works as an important carrier of the dissemination of cultural concepts, but derived from a number of gender issues, in which the stereotyping of women's image has been widely concerned. Besides, there has been considerable concern regarding the manner and rationale behind the propagation of gender stereotypes through such media. In this paper, content analysis is utilized as the primary instrument for the categorization of female stereotypes and an investigation of their underlying causes, including traditional patriarchal systems, commercial influences, as well as the limitations of creators' genders, which have had a significant impact on women's self-perception and the advancement of gender equality in society, hindering the establishment of gender equality, and misinformed youth. Thus, the paper aims to facilitate critical thinking among viewers, enabling them to identify stereotypes, promote gender equality within the industry, and provide opportunities for female creators and decision makers.

**Keywords:** Female Stereotypes, Mass Media, Gender Communication, Gender Equity.

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, research in the gender theory has made significant advancements, demonstrating that an individual's gender consciousness is not an inherent characteristic but rather a product of the prolonged cultivation of the social environment and cultural atmosphere. In this process, the mass media play a crucial role as disseminators of information and builders of values and social norms. Advertisements and films serve not only as reflections of contemporary gender concepts but also as active participants in the shaping and reinforcement of the gender consciousness of their audiences. The prevalence of appearance supremacy and characterization in current advertisements and films is both a mapping of social gender bias and an obstacle to women's multifaceted development, the progress of social feminism, and the establishment of equality between men and women. Most of existing research is limited to the description of a single phenomenon, and lack a macroscopic exploration and categorization. Consequently, the paper aims to examine the prevalence of female stereotypes in advertisements and films, explore the underlying causes, and seek effective strategies to break these stereotypes. Thus, the paper employs research research techniques such as content

analysis and case studies, which facilitates the completion of existing research gaps and enhances the comprehension of gender stereotypes, providing a reference for future media content creation.

## **2. Reasons for the Formation of Stereotypical Images of Women**

The stereotype is also known as fixed prejudices, namely, stereotype American scholar Walter Lipomann first pro-posed that stereotype referred to people's flexed views on a group of people or things. The mass media has played an important role in the formation of people's stereotypes. The image of most female media is simple and rigid, and they do not show the true image of women in the new era in social life. Today, the ways in which 'stereotypical media images of women' are reproduced, consciously or unconsciously, and even discriminate against women in news reporting are more complex and subtle. For example, there is a common perception that female drivers are less competent than their male counterparts, and similarly, that female students tend to perform less well in science-related subjects. These stereotypes have been shown to emerge for a variety of reasons [1]. In the field of cinema and media, women are often treated as objects from a male perspective and their image is often reduced to a single stereotype. This image is constructed on the basis of male psycho-physiological culture and needs, reflecting the deeply ingrained male-centred value system in society. As Alan G. Johnson puts it, behind this maps the far-reaching influence of traditional attitudes in which men dominate and are privileged in a male-centred identity [2].

Sociologists believe that the individual is a product of social history environment The language we use ,the education we receive and the indoctrinated norms and values. which all is a part of socialized process or our development including self-perception. The gender division of labor has long been a pervasive and limiting stereotype. The feudal traditional culture generally attributes males to the public sector, and females to private sector [3]. They confines women's roles to being gentle, beautiful, kind, submissive and virtuous, and restricts them to the domestic sphere. As a significant medium of popular culture, film and television advertisements are not immune to the perpetuation and reinforcement of these stereotypes, which reinforce perceptions of women and demands for the "ideal" woman through the images presented on the screen. In addition, the creators and decision-makers in the media industry are predominantly male, who, as vested interests in the patriarchal system, may be motivated by the desire to preserve the status quo. They may therefore use film and television as a powerful cultural tool to subconsciously influence the public's thinking and perceptions, thus perpetuating patriarchal ideology, which continues to exert a significant impact even in today's quest for equality and plurality. Besides, Pierre Bourdieu points out that television introduced ratings, a commercial demand-driven log [4].

## **3. Stereotypical Portrayal of Women in Advertisements and Films.**

### **3.1. Beauty Standards Focused on Appearance**

The portrayal of women in advertisements frequently adheres to the "beauty above all" standard, which prioritizes physical beauty over the representation of individual diversity and uniqueness. For example, Vogue magazine presents a multitude of advertisements that place an emphasis on slender physiques and symmetrical facial features. This standard has remained largely unchanged and has consistently revolved around the singular value of beauty. In the digital age, women's images in advertisements are frequently situated within a context that is shaped by gender norms. The digital domain is replete with images of female bodies that are overly prevalent and sensationalized, a practice that not only aims to capture attention and generate web traffic but also caters to the need for low-level sensory stimulation. The portrayal of women in advertising tends to reduce women to objects of visual consumption, devaluing them as subjects with intrinsic value and relegating them to a passive and subordinate position. Such representations reduce the value of women to a mere

reflection of their visual appeal rather than recognizing their individuality and personal qualities. This stereotypical and objectifying representation not only limits the diversity of women's images, but also reflects society's homogenized understanding of women.

### **3.2. Stereotyped Female Characters**

In male-dominated films, the image of women is often reduced to several stereotypical roles, including: the fertility hero type, who represents male reproduction; the self-giving earth mother type; the seductress type, who attracts men with her sexuality; the mysterious and unpredictable witch type, who fights against men but ultimately succumbs; and the sacrifice type, who is affected by the current situation and appears pitiful. These stereotypical images contrast sharply with the wide diversity of male characters, and the portrayal of female characters is usually confined to the domestic sphere, often appearing as housewives and good wives and mothers. For example, the character of Gao Junman in *The Age of Awakening* is simplified in the TV series as a good wife and mother, failing to show her personal struggles and social challenges, despite her active participation in social activities and education in reality. In addition, stereotypical images of women are often accompanied by stigmatized representations, such as the vicious supporting actress, the third party who destroys other people's relationships, the strong woman with a vengeful heart after a divorce, and the evil mother-in-law who stirs up conflicts in the family. These images not only solidify the negative image of women, but also contribute to misogyny in society.

### **3.3. Weakened Character and Capacity of Women**

The portrayal of women in these media often depicts them as weak, dependent, emotional, lacking initiative, and unable to take charge of a situation when confronted with adversity. For example, one of the early Hollywood movie and television works of Asian female image, Lotus Blossom, is the image of Asian women in the imagination of Western white men. In their eyes, Asian women have the softness of the East and implicit, they are pitiful, submissive, and seems to be always waiting for the tall and strong white men to "rescue." They are dominated by love, and once the love disappears or the lover leaves, they often commit martyrdom or depression and suicide, reinforcing a story of pure, devoted suffering and painting Asian women as submissive and self-sacrificing. These images satisfy male desires for protection and control, weakening women's independence and reinforcing the relationship of dependence between men and women. Moreover, gender stereotypes in the workplace are reflective of the image of women in the media. In numerous cinematic and televisual productions, the portrayal of women in the workplace is frequently limited to roles that do not necessitate a high degree of expertise, such as secretarial and restaurant-based positions. This portrayal not only underestimates women's professional abilities but also serves to reinforce gender stereotypes, thereby further affecting the audience's perception of women's roles in the workplace. To some extent, these stereotypes permeate the actual workplace, resulting in women encountering heightened gender bias and professional constraints in the tangible workplace.

## **4. Impact of Female Stereotypes on Society**

### **4.1. Impact on Women's Self-perception and Values**

Advertisements and films exert a significant impact on women's self-perception and value system. For example, advertisements for beauty products emphasize that women must have flawless skin in order to be confident and liked. This creates anxiety, which in turn drives up the demand for beauty products and plunges women into a deep spiral of appearance anxiety, leading to women directing an inordinate amount of attention to external factors, inadvertently neglecting the cultivation of their

intrinsic qualities and abilities. They are preoccupied with conforming to the stereotypical image of being white, tender and thin, ultimately resulting in the dilution or even disappearance of personal characteristics. At first glance, such advertisements appear to be solely concerned with women's self-expectations and self-improvement. Upon closer examination, however, they are seen to reflect more profoundly the male-dominated aesthetic standards that determine the idealized image of women in society. Mass media, as a conduit for patriarchal discourse, plays a role in perpetuating the homogenized presentation of women's image, which contributes to a society that regards women's appearance as an object of value and places undue emphasis on women's external form. In this social climate, women are inevitably subject to a process of erosion of their mental faculties. The prioritization of appearance as the primary value for women, even among those who possess a clear understanding of their essence, results in the formation of appearance anxiety due to external gaze and criticism. This not only constrains women's comprehensive development but also impedes their ability to explore and reveal their authentic selves.

#### **4.2. Impediments to the Promotion of the Concept of Gender Equality in Society**

Women's equal participation and development in the political, economic, and cultural spheres have been hindered. For example, in most advertisements of daily necessities, women are depicted as the main body of domestic labor, cooking and washing clothes for the family, while men judge the fruits of women's labor as the enjoyers and express their affirmation of the value of women's labor through praises such as "It's so clean to wash". Domestic work is not only a daily activity of the family unit; and it also serves to reflect the material roles of wives and husbands, as well as the subordination and dominance of women and men under the gender symbols derived from them [5]. Such advertisements for household products deepen the public's traditional feudal concept of "men as breadwinners and women as homemakers," requiring women to devote their bodies, minds, and energies to the family. Subsequently, the advertisements utilize the concept of "love" to persuade women to act in a certain manner and categorize them as "great." Women's responsibility for the family limits women's career development and reduces their chances of career advancement, family status and social status. Under the influence of such advertisements and movies, people default to the idea that women should take care of household chores, and men expect women to make sacrifices for the family to become "good women" in the traditional sense, and at the same time to have the ability to earn money independently in the new era of women. The awakening of women's consciousness has made some women unwilling to give up their self-achievement for the sake of family and marriage, and they think that it is unfair for women to take care of household chores and childcare.

#### **4.3. Misinformation for Adolescents**

For individuals to maintain their identity and character, they cannot use the media as a point of reference for self-understanding. It is time for the media to become more gender sensitive [6]. The essential difference of gender in the "what to do" in the society, as Simone de Beauvoir's classic aphorism: "A woman is not born a woman, but becomes a woman later". The influence of the. "The media influences the formation of children's values, as they learn about gender relations and imitate characters in movies and television. Female minors are taught that "girls are not unsuitable for science" and that girls are not as smart as boys. The concepts of "it is most important for a girl to marry well", or the case of a young woman in a movie or TV drama who marries into a rich family to gain wealth and love by destroying others' families, etc., have rooted the stereotypes of women's image in the minds of underage girls, restricting women's diversified development, and even guiding the immature girls to go astray, and to base their hopes on the path of marrying others. They even lead immature girls to go astray, basing their hopes on the path of marrying a man, voluntarily becoming subordinate

to others, and losing the right to control their lives. Many studies have concluded that the portrayal of stereotypical gender behavior in film and television advertisements is a misleading factor in adolescents' understanding of gender roles and behavior.

## **5. Suggestions to improve the stereotypical image of women in advertisements and movies**

There are many benefits if the audience has a better impression of female characters. It raises awareness of gender equality, especially for women. These films will make female viewers think deeply about their position in the society and raise their awareness to fight for their rights. It can put an end to some of the discrimination that women suffer from in life and work [7]. Therefore, in order to effectively improve the stereotypes of women in advertising films and TV, it is necessary to start from multiple dimensions. First, industry self-regulation and supervision are supposed to be strengthened. Guidelines and standards for the representation of women's images should be formulated and implemented, so as to avoid the emergence of meaningless stereotypical images of women; at the same time, a strict monitoring mechanism should be established to detect and seriously deal with works in violation of the law in a timely manner, so as to form an effective deterrent in the industry. Second, viewers' critical thinking should be cultivated. Through extensive publicity and education, the public's ability to recognize stereotypical images of women, even gender bias hidden in advertisements or film and television productions, should be enhanced. This will further encourage them to actively participate in criticizing and boycotting undesirable works, forming a strong social opinion and commercial force that will push the entire industry in the direction of greater justice and equality. In addition, promoting women's participation in the creative and decision-making process is a fundamental way to change the stereotypical image of women. Since the birth of the film industry, men have been absolutely dominant. Directors, producers and cinematographers are all men [8]. This bias permeates all levels of the film industry, from the structure of the industry, the political and economic logic and the production system, to the text, the use of the camera, the logic of the language and even the aesthetic judgement of the film [9]. More opportunities and platforms should be provided for female creators, and they should be encouraged to show their talents in key positions such as directors, producers and cinematographers. At the same time, it is important to increase women's voice in decision-making in film and television production, advertising planning, etc., to ensure that women's voices are fully heard and respected. These initiatives will enrich the creative perspectives and styles of advertisements and films and will also eliminate stereotypes and prejudices against women at the source.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper discusses in depth the performance and causes of female stereotypes in advertising films and television and their impact on social values. It is found that women's images in advertisements and films are often limited to appearance and body shape, with facialized characters and weakened character abilities. The formation of these stereotypes is influenced by traditional concepts, driven by commercial interests, and related to the cognitive limitations of the creators. Female stereotypes reinforce the notion of gender inequality, affect women's self-identity and development, and distort the notion of family and interpersonal relationships.

To improve this situation, this paper proposes strategies to increase creators' gender awareness and literacy, strengthen industry self-regulation and norms, guide viewers' critical thinking, and promote women's participation in creation and decision-making. These strategies are important for eliminating stereotypical images of women and promoting gender equality. However, there are still shortcomings in this study, such as the lack of in-depth research on stereotypical images of women in cross-cultural contexts. Future research should further focus on the shaping and dissemination of

women's images in different cultural and social contexts, as well as the dissemination and influence of feminism in advertising film and television. It is expected that the advertising film and television industry will realize positive changes in shaping the image of women, and jointly build a social and cultural environment that is equal, diversified and inclusive.

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