

ANALYSIS OF GENDER ROLES AND THEIR PORTRAYALS IN SELECT TELEVISION COMMERCIALS IN NIGERIA: CRITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ADVERTISING

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Abstract

Gender roles which define individuals in modern society are powerful socio-cultural instruments which advertisers find attractive for targeting audiences. This study, anchored on Social Constructionism and Cultivation Theory examines the portrayal of gender roles in Nigeria, employing the mixed-methods research design, comprising quantitative content analysis, and focus groups and informant interviews, as qualitative methods; and using 64 television commercials (TVCs), 29 focus group discussants and five key informants, sampled purposively. Findings reveal that while men and women are depicted in advertising using traditional gender roles ingrained in prevailing social norms, the portrayals are strictly in gender binary and stereotypical, in spite of global changes in gender roles, potentially perpetuating traditional gender roles and reinforcing gender inequality. Findings also show that between gender roles portrayed in TVCs and those in people's experiential life, there is often no correlation, suggesting the imperative for advertisers to always reflect gender norms obtainable in people's experiential life. Further findings reveal that although practitioners are sceptical of gender stereotypes, guidelines regulating advertising portrayals of gender roles appear fuzzy. The study recommends that advertisers must eschew gender stereotypes, strive for inclusivity and responsible messaging and be sensitive to the socio-cultural dynamics that impact advertising. It further recommends that Nigeria's advertising ombudsman the advertising regulatory council of Nigeria (ARCON) must raise the ante in the fight against gender stereotyping by embarking on consumer enlightenment campaigns, enacting stringent guidelines and policing practitioners in the industry more effectively

Keywords: Portrayal, Gender Roles, Television Commercials, Advertising, Implications

Introduction

Advertising and gender roles are ubiquitous and powerful social phenomena, so omnipresent in modern life that they seem natural and self-evident (Shaikh, Bughio & Kadri, 2015). Whereas gender roles are important socio-cultural forces for organizing the behaviours, powers, privileges and relationships that define individuals in the society, advertising is one of the most powerful media instruments for connecting consumers to a product and influencing their buying behaviours (Onuh & Nnanyelugo, 2022). As a persuasive component of popular culture, advertising contributes either to the formation and reinforcement of the norms, values and attitudes that undergird society or to their repudiation. Hence, for a commercial to resonate with individual consumers, it must in its broadest form appeal to either their masculinity or femininity, because society has taught people to buy and consume what makes them male or female (Santoniccolo, Trombetta, Paradiso & Rolle, 2023).

Although gender role boundaries are shifting progressively in recent times, with men and women assuming asymmetrical responsibilities in society, advertising is not gaining traction with the phenomenal change and still communicates gender along strict male-female binary templates (Eisend,

2019). Consequently, it has become more complex today for advertisers to portray gender with sensitivity to the changing dynamics of the society than in the past, as the socially constructed male-female dichotomies that are replete in traditional gender roles have become the basis of the oppression, exploitation and overarching inequality that characterize modern social relations (Gurrieri, 2020). Thus, in spite of the phenomenal gender changes experienced recently in many societies, the portrayal of gender roles in advertising has remained steeped in controversies, with advertisers often defaulting to portrayals that are in several ways offensive, inaccurate and misrepresentative of people.

Statement of the Problem

Whereas advertisers find gender roles and their accompanying stereotypes attractive for the promotion of goods and services, the portrayal of gender roles in advertising is largely suffused with controversies, with potential to communicate and perpetuate harmful gender roles and stereotypes. Despite the positive trajectory made in gender advancements across many societies, offensive representations pervade the advertising landscape, with advertisers struggling to portray both men and women in progressive gender roles. While often depicting both men and women in traditional gender roles, some advertising portrayals are not only offensive to individuals, but also replete with harmful stereotypes and objectionable narratives that distort and upend people's perception of gender roles in the society (Asogwa, Okeke, Gever & Ezeah, 2020). Too often, for the simple reason of being male or female, consumers come under intense pressure - beyond their individual potentials and capabilities - to perform in tandem with a gender role expectation.

It is problematic when advertising portrayals discountenance people's self-worth, potentials and vulnerabilities to communicate distorted and inaccurate narratives around gender stereotypes based entirely on individual's innate sex (Tremmel & Wahl, 2023). While societies globally are struggling to be gender correct, the *romanticization* of stereotypes in the portrayal of gender roles by advertisers tends to hurt both men and women and promote gender imbalance and discrimination in the society. Whereas gender roles may not be harmful in themselves, what is harmful and problematic is the gender binary and oppressive power dynamics associated with gender roles and their manipulation by advertisers.

Research Questions

The following research questions were adopted to guide this study:

1. How are men and women portrayed in the performance of their gender roles in the selected television commercials?
2. What are the gender stereotypes used in the portrayal of men and women in the selected television commercials?
3. To what extent do gender roles of men and women portrayed in the selected television commercials correspond with their real life gender roles?
4. To what extent do the gender stereotypes used in the portrayal of men and women in the selected television commercials represent men and women?

Literature Review

Advertising as Mass Culture

The advertising portrayal of men and women in the performance of their gender roles has remained a subject of intellectual scrutiny for several years. As a powerful agent for targeting consumers with a product, advertising is one of the most pervasive ways in which the media generally mirror or mould the society, doing this by communicating mass cultural cues that resonate with audiences. Through messaging constructed around gender roles and stereotypes, advertisers try to convey displays of people's values, lifestyles and behaviours congruent with their gender, while seeking to influence them

to patronize a product (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Consequently, as an active agent in the socialization process, advertising is influential not just in the *gendering* of the individual male or female consumer, but also in the perpetuation of the binary that reflects in gender roles (Heathy, 2020).

In one of the earliest studies in the field, Silverstein and Silverstein (1974) examined how gender roles portrayed in advertising influenced society's perception of appropriate gender roles. They established that through gender roles portrayed in advertising, society builds a system of inclusion and exclusion of what it means to be either a man or woman and concluded that as both a change and reinforcement institution, advertising intersects with gender to either shape or reflect society's beliefs, values and norms.

Gender as Social Construct

There are many ways to identify with being either male or female in the society and gender is one of such ways. According to Santoniccolo et al., (2023), gender is a social construct which does not exist naturally as a biological given, but is created by people and salient in several contexts, yet central to people's understanding of themselves, of others and of the world around them. French scholars, Simone de Beauvoir and Michel Foucault were among the first to espouse the notion that gender is a social construction, unrelated to sex, avowing in their separate studies that one could be born with male genitals yet present oneself as feminine in gender. By this postulation, the gender traits associated with a sex category are not anatomical but socio-cultural constructions.

Put another way, whereas sex is a biological categorization based essentially on genitalia, gender is not physiological sex but the social elaboration of biological sex (Eckert & McConnell, 2013, cited in Eisend, 2019) referring to the social and cultural traits that are traditionally considered masculine or feminine in different contexts. This dislocation of gender from sex, in clear deprecation of the theory of biological determinism is a common string that has emerged from the different theorizations about gender. By extrapolation, all humans are either male or female by agency of biology, but are gendered by social construction, based on their natal sex. Thus, while most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours, including how to interact with others of the same or opposite sex, within households, in communities and in work places.

From this epistemology, most societies conceive gender as a strict binary of boys and girls, men and women; and for many individuals, indoctrination into gender roles begins at birth, as they begin to learn and inculcate what are considered ideal masculine or feminine norms and behaviours (Kagesten, Adebayo & Chandra-Mouli, 2017). Children are taught how to be boys or girls as they grow and at adulthood, men are expected to be assertive and income minded, and in authentication of their masculinity open doors for women, reinforcing the idea that women are fragile and need to be taken care of. On the other hand, women are expected to be domestic-minded as dependable housekeepers and caring nurturers.

Gender Roles in the Society

Many roles and tasks tend to be performed by individuals in everyday human life based on socially accepted conceptions of gender which define people. As creations of society, gender roles can be conceptualized as behavioural expectations of people anchored on biological sex and refer to how people are expected to act, speak, dress, groom and conduct themselves in the society (Oyerinde, Daramola & Lamidi, 2013). Gender roles owe their origin to the labour-intensive agricultural regime that powered the primitive economies of traditionally agrarian societies. Historically, men tended to work outside of the home, as soldiers in war times and ploughing the fields in tranquil times, while women specialized in domestic activities. Consequently, men did not engage in childcare or household duties and were enjoined to be firm and to refrain from displaying too much emotion. Women, on the

other hand were entrusted the management of children and the household, as they were perceived as caregivers who were typically feminine, accommodating and nurturing, especially in the home. Accordingly, this division of gender-based, agricultural labour generated norms about the appropriate role of men and women in society. Contemporary gender roles have therefore emerged as carry-overs of role-definitions constructed by ancient societies but now are conceived, transmitted and reinforced as stereotypes that vary from society to society, constituting today one of the most constant indices for segmenting and identifying people.

Media and Gender Role Portrayals

Media, in their diverse forms are endemic parts of modern life, with television in particular rated as the most powerful and pervasive form of modern communication in its ability to reach more diversified audiences quickest than all other media (Kuyucu, 2020). Accordingly, the combination of sound and audio-visual offerings confers on television the advantage of creative flexibility, storytelling and cognitive demonstration which are critical for grabbing the attention of target audiences in an informative yet, entertaining way. While most television programmes are by commercial necessity designed for almost everyone in a relatively non selective format, television provides relatively restricted sets of choices for a virtually unrestricted variety of interests and publics, compared to other media channels (Kuyucu, 2020). For these reasons, it is argued, people can easily be influenced to perceive the world according to what is continuously presented to them on television, in consonance with cultivation theory.

Against this backdrop, two prominent theorizations have emerged regarding the role of media in the society: the *mirror* theory and *mould* theory. From the *mirror* perspective, it is held that advertisements are reflections of the values and culture of the society from which media contents are produced. As a result, men and women are typecast in advertisements to conform to the prevailing norms about gender roles in societies (Eirini, 2020). To that extent, advertising and media generally mirror only what obtains in the society by showing commonly held beliefs, norms and values; such that advertising portrayals are mere representations of what is already standard and obtainable in society.

In support of the *mirror* school, Eisend (2019) suggests that given the dynamics that impact the society, advertising seems insignificant as a moulder, as by trajectory, advertising has always reflected rather than challenged existing societal values and norms. On the other hand, the *mould* theory presupposes that the media are what shape the values, beliefs and norms which in turn influence society (Grau & Zotos, 2018). In the context of this study, advertising moulds and impacts the values of its target audiences; and drawing from cultivation theory, people learn appropriate social norms and gender roles by observing how others are portrayed in advertising (Eirini, 2020).

Patriarchal Hegemony and Gender Roles

Since time immemorial, men have always played the dominant role across most societies and the discriminatory portrayal of men and women in advertising and mainstream media using stereotypes is quintessential of patriarchy (Endicott, 2022). In their separate investigations, Sharma and Chauhan (2023) and Pierik (2022) found that patriarchy so reinforces gender roles that it is almost impossible to isolate gender and patriarchy from people's daily lives. While men are portrayed as strong, aggressive providers, women are depicted in many media and advertisements as weak, emotional, submissive and fit only for childcare and household chores. Such stereotypical portrayals, in addition to promoting patriarchy and the proclivity for hyper-masculinity in men and hyper-femininity in women, promote especially the *symbolic annihilation* of the woman in society (Stover & Ibroscheva, 2020).

Beauvoir (2015) laments the plight of the woman who is almost always treated as an object in a gender-role hierarchy that is defined by men, observing that her resultant oppression and subjugation in most

aspects of life are derivations from her place as *the second sex* in the society. Thus, while privileging men and emasculating women, advertising and media portrayals of gender roles have all too often tended to project the man as the first sex, superior to the woman, who is almost always portrayed as inferior. Advertising has consequently been severally criticized as a mechanism which upholds the gendered social structures that promote patriarchal hegemony, as it has continued to perpetuate, reproduce and legitimize male hegemony and suppression of women (Agujiobi-Odoh, 2022). For these reasons, critics, vexed especially about the offensive positioning of women in popular culture have placed much of the portrayal blame on advertising and media reinforcements of traditional gender roles.

Gender Stereotypes in Advertising

Gender roles manifest in people's everyday lives as stereotypes and are portrayed in advertisements as such. According to Curry, Brown, Wu and Arora (2015), a stereotype refers to a generalized and widely held rigid idea about a person or group based on generalized attributes and characteristics that are largely unproven. It is created and perpetuated when a specific narrative about a person, group or thing is so continuously shared and communicated that it becomes accepted without much questioning by people in society. Eirini (2020) explains that although stereotypes do not necessarily carry negative connotations, many of them are evaluative instruments for reducing persons to a set of exaggerated and usually negative and devaluating traits. Stereotypes which pervade advertisements perform the adaptive function of enabling people to define, categorize and simplify what is already observed and endorsed in the genders as well as making predictions about people (Hentschel, Heilman & Peus, 2019). For example, portraying men as bread winners is stereotypically in tandem with traditional gender norms; just as portraying women overwhelmed with household chores, is in reinforcement of their stereotypical role as housekeepers.

Studies have revealed that gender roles which morph into gender stereotypes are formed very early in life, as one is taught that one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, in endorsement of gender as binary opposites (Morgenroth et al., 2020). While society's observation of appropriate gender roles is impacted by television and advertising portrayals (Ward & Grower, 2020), the portrayals are nonetheless problematic. One reason is that stereotypes are relatively impervious to change because of the inflexibility of people's beliefs and because they have a self-perpetuating quality that is sustained mostly by cognitive distortions and exaggerations (Eirini, 2020). According to Eagly, Nater, Miller, Kaufmann and Sczesny (2020), gender stereotypes manifest in people's lives in different forms, such as physical appearance, personality traits, domestic behaviours as well as in social roles and occupations; and can be descriptive (how one perceives a person of a certain gender to be), prescriptive (how one perceives a person of a certain gender should be or behave) or proscriptive (how one perceives a person of a particular gender should not be or behave).

However, from the advent of the twentieth century, intellectual attention began to shift towards the changing pattern of gender representations in advertising, with Grau and Zotos (2016) avowing that this change was provoked primarily by the advent of feminism which challenged the hitherto prevailing gender status quo and stoked the agitation for equal opportunity for men and women. The changes, so engendered in labour systems globally have engineered significant variation in gender roles, reflecting in men, who were hitherto characterized with aggressive masculine roles being portrayed in advertising doing childcare and household chores; while women are shown in association with leadership and breadwinning traits, as career minded executives, professionals and entrepreneurs.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Social Constructionism and Cultivation Theory. First popularized by Berger and Luckman (1967), cited in Galbin (2014), social constructionism assumes that people do not only construct, create and invent their understanding of the world they live in, but also assign meanings to

phenomena with the collaborative consensus of others in the society. A social construct is a concept or idea that exists not in objective reality, but because people in the society through shared social understanding, experience and interactions with others jointly agree that it exists (Masso, 2023). Cultivation theory, originally attributed to Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signoreilli (1980) posits that what is continuously seen in the mass media shapes people's perception of social reality, such that individuals who are exposed consistently to portrayals that promote traditional gender roles and stereotypes are expectedly more inclined to accept and embrace them as true in their own lives (Ward & Grower, 2020).

Methodology

This study adopted the mixed-methods (Creswell, 2014) as research design, combining content analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions as components. According to Obateru (2022), the value of mixed-methods lies in the idea that all research methods have their inherent flaws, which can best be neutralized when two or more research methods are combined. Using purposive sampling technique, 64 TVCs were selected and content analysed, while 24 male and female discussants were constituted into three focus groups, consisting of eight participants each; with one group constituted entirely of women, the second comprising men wholly and the third group consisting of both men and women discussants.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five key informants to gather qualitative data on their perceptions and attitudes towards gender stereotypes and advertising portrayals of gender roles. The content analysis used coding sheets as instruments of collecting quantitative data, while the units of analysis for the study were TVCs which contained cognitive gender themes, featuring at least one male or female lead character in an audio-visual act lasting at least 15 seconds of broadcast.

Findings and Discussions

RQ 1

How are men and women portrayed in the performance of their gender roles in the selected television commercials?

Findings from the content analysis show that the TVCs portrayed men and women in traditionally masculine or feminine gender roles, suggesting that gender roles are central to the targeting of specific genders by advertisers (Grau & Zotos, 2016). As shown in Table 1 below, only in rare cases were men and women portrayed using non-traditional gender roles in the TVCs examined.

Vcdig'3

Type of Gender Roles Portrayed in the TVCs

I gpf gt 'Tqrgu'Rqt vt c{ gf	Ht gs wgpe{	Rgt egpwi g
Vtcfkkqpcn'Hgo crg'Tqrgu	58	7804
Traditional Male Roles	20	31.3
Non-Stereotypical Roles	8	12.5
Vqvcn	86	322'

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Findings indicate that men and women were portrayed in traditional gender roles that are stereotypically binary, in alignment with their respective masculinity or femininity. By interpretation, where gender roles were not cast in gender neutral or non-stereotypical manner, they were most likely cast using traditional male or female stereotypes. These findings tend to further suggest that TVCs generally portray men and women stereotypically in rigid, gender binary roles, consistent with findings of previous works (Asogwa, Okeke, Gever & Ezeah, 2020).

Vcdig'4**Sex of Lead Character in the TVCs**

Ugz'qhNgcf'Ej ctcevgt	Ht gs wgpe{	Rgt egpwi g
O crg	4;	675
Hgo crg	57	769
Vqvcn	86	322'

Data contained in Table 2 above shows that more females (54.7%) were featured as lead characters in the selected TVCs, indicating advertisers' preference of female over men as lead characters in the commercials. This result touches on the discrepant findings in literature about gender bias and representation in advertising generally. While some past research findings allude to the underrepresentation of women in commercials generally (Eisend, 2019), findings by other scholars show that more women than men were cast as lead characters in TVCs. While women are portrayed in TVCs in the home space performing duties that define them traditionally and stereotypically as primary housekeepers and caregivers, men are shown largely in STEM and workplaces as breadwinners. These portrayals are congruent with societal expectations of men a breadwinners and women as homemakers in most traditional cultures (Eisend, 2019), inclusive of Nigeria where the prevailing patriarchal system espouses traditional gender roles that consign women to communal and domestic responsibilities, while defining men with agentic gender roles in the society (Agujiobi-Odoh, 2022). In consideration of the global denunciation of harmful traditional gender roles and stereotypes, it is imperative for advertisers to consider whether their messaging is reinforcing or challenging these stereotypes.

Table 3**Product Category of TVCs examined**

Product Category	Frequency	Percentage
Homecare	18	28.1
Foods and beverages	22	34.4
Personal care	12	18.8
Telecom services	7	10.9
Other	5	7.8
Total	64	100%

The data in Table 3 suggest that majority of the TVCs examined for gender role portrayal fell within the food and beverages product category, constituting 34.4% of the TVCs. This data is instructive, considering that food and beverages, together with homecare products and personal care products belong to the range of products generically referred to as fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs), which are everyday consumables that sell quickly with high repurchase value because they are relatively low priced, so people can afford them, especially in the home where women hold sway (Guo & Liu, 2023).

ÇÄ' 4**Locale of the TVCs**

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Home	26	40.6
Outdoor	15	23.4
Home/Office	7	10.9
Other	4	6.3
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The locale portrayed in the selected TVCs is contained in Table 4 above, indicating that majority of the commercials showed lead characters engaged in activities at home (40.6%), congruent with the earlier finding that home care, foods and beverages (FMCGs) were the most prevalent home products advertised in the selected TVCs (as shown in Table 3). In many of the TVCs, men were shown as hardworking income earners in offices, professions and workplaces, away from the home, whereas women were portrayed predominantly occupied with household chores of cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children, as revealed in Table 5 below. It is not unusual that household products like foods and beverages, being FMCGs, would be consumed mostly in the domestic space, in tandem with the *product-locale-activity* match of advertisements.

Table 5
Activity Portrayed in the TVCs

Work/Activity Portrayed	Frequency	Percentage
Office	10	15.6
Sports	4	6.3
Entertainment	7	10.9
Domestic	29	45.3
Professional	12	18.8
Other	2	3.1
Total	64	100%

Data in Table 5 above shows that the TVCs portrayed more men and women in domestic activity (representing 45% of activity) than any other activity depicted. Notwithstanding, it is not improbable that domestic activity portrayed in the TVCs as the most prevalent activity is just in tandem with the *product-locale-activity* findings of the study. This being the case, findings (in Tables 3, 4 & 5) suggest that the study somehow appears to shed some light on the *product-locale-activity* nexus in advertising.

Table 6
Gender Roles Stereotypes

Participant	Men	Women
Key Informants (KI 1- KI 5)	Strong and aggressive Bread winners Handy fixers in the house Independent Hardworking Decision makers Stoic and unemotional Invincible machos and super heroes	Home makers/House-keepers Nurturers and care givers Loving mothers Making grocery & FMCG purchases Cooks Tolerant Feeble & insecure Beauty and fashion crazy
Discussants (D1-D24)	Head of family Strong & hardworking Bread winners Rational Ploughing & farming the garden Clearing the premises Physically strong and tireless farmers. Authoritative leaders	House makers and housekeepers Subordinate to their male counterparts Domestic workers who do the house chores Sexual objects of consumption by men Compassionate Emotionally-minded Seeking affection from men Happy housewife, immersed always in household chores

Table 6 above reveals the commonly used gender stereotypes identified by focus group discussants and key informants in the portrayal of men and women in advertising. Both sets of participants agree concerning the stereotyping of women as caregivers and house makers, and men are as leaders and bread winners, among other gender stereotypes. This finding is consistent with the universal portrayal of men and women in society, mirrored and perpetuated by advertising and the media generally (Eisend, 2019). According to most of the participants in the study, these gender stereotypes do not just play out only in commercials; they occur in people's daily existence.

RQ 2

What are the gender stereotypes used in the portrayal of men and women in the selected television commercials?

Table 7 below presents a taxonomy of the gender stereotypes, curated by researchers in this study. From review of literature, content analysis, focus groups and interviews conducted, it is evident that several gender stereotypes are commonly used in the portrayal of men and women in TVCs. Nonetheless, men and women are depicted in the TVCs examined performing functions that define them based on essentially four types of gender stereotypes: personality traits, domestic behaviour, occupations and physical appearance.

Table 7

Taxonomy of Gender Stereotypes in Advertising Portrayals Roles

Stereotypes	Men	Women
	Masculinity Traits	Femininity Traits
Personality Traits	Leaders, strong, aggressive, authoritative, assertive, confident, dominant, active, independent, emotionless, controlling, decision makers, tough	Dependent, passive, quiet, submissive, accommodating, empathetic, innocent, naïve, weak, inferior, subservient, subordinated, emotional, vulnerable, needing help, clumsy
Domestic Behaviours	Family providers, protectors, fatherhood, out-going	Homemakers, housekeepers, nurturing, motherhood, cleaning, childbearing, home-oriented
Occupations	Breadwinners, hardworking, professionals, career driven, STEM experts	Caregivers, teachers, nurses, cooks
Physical Appearance	Strong, stoic, active, rugged, athletic, muscular, tall, dark, handsome	Slim, feeble, graceful, sex objects, sexy, seductive, beauty & body care obsessed, fashion crazy

Men and women are depicted in advertisements according to their masculinity or femininity using stereotypes that show them typically in their personality traits, domestic behaviours, occupations or physical attractiveness. For example, all three instruments of data collection used in the study reveal the prevalence of these stereotypes, which perpetuate traditional gender norms and reinforce societal expectations of how men and women should behave; and somehow justify why advertisers leverage stereotypes to appeal to societal expectations and norms surrounding gender roles. All the participants in the study also agree that gender stereotypes are social constructs promoted by advertising and media generally, among other socialization agents, as affirmed by Ghozlen (2020).

RQ 3

To what extent do gender roles of men and women portrayed in the selected television commercials correspond with their real life gender roles?

Quantitative data gathered from examination of the TVCs may suggest that to some extent, what is portrayed in TVCs is a reflection of what the society offers. However, it is considered by the researchers that given the study's instruments of data collection, only qualitative data from both the FGDs and interviews can answer RQ3 of the study. Whereas findings from the informant interviews revealed that there is some positive correlation between gender role portrayals in TVCs and real life gender roles, data obtained from the FGDs indicate some discrepancies. Key informant KI5 argued that since society has continued to stereotype men preponderantly as strong, aggressive leaders and decision makers, as upheld by scholars such as Adelabu and Sanusi(2020), men generally try to live up to that image in real life and are therefore portrayed in advertisements as such. Key informant KI2's assertion that TVCs reflect real-life gender roles - suggesting a perceived correlation - is corroborated by discussant D20 who opined that *to some degree, the gender roles portrayed in TVCs are congruent with and reflective of real life roles of men and women in the society.*

However, among focus group discussants, there was no consensus about this gender roles alignment. While most discussants opined that gender roles depicted in TVCs do correspond with people's real life situations, a few believed that they do not often mesh with people's true life gender roles. Thus, findings in answer to RQ3 of the study indicate that while some alignment between the two was acknowledged, concerns were raised about potential misrepresentation and reinforcement of harmful stereotypes in commercials, underscoring the need for crafting more balanced and inclusive messaging that resonates with audiences and reflects the circumstances of the genders in real life.

RQ 4

To what extent do the gender stereotypes used in the portrayal of men and women in the selected television commercials represent men and women?

While both key informants and discussants in the study agreed that some gender stereotypes are largely true and representative of men and women, they also agreed that many stereotypes are simplistic generalisations which are largely inaccurate and therefore not representative of the genders. Gender stereotypes serve as cultural schemas for connecting with men and women and simplifying messaging in the creation and execution of advertising campaigns (Agujiobi-Odoh, 2022; Heathy, 2020). Thus, advertisers often customize their messaging to suit specific demographics using their specific gender traits to build brand identity. Jussim (2012) posits that people's beliefs about stereotypes are largely accurate, as most stereotypes that have been examined have been shown to be relatively correct. However, their seeming representativeness of some stereotypes does not obliterate the fact that many of them discountenance the vulnerability of men and women and exert pressure on them to perform according to a stereotype. According to participants in the study, because stereotypes originate from some truth and perform the heuristic function of targeting and simplifying messaging across the sexes, stereotypes may appear to be true, but they also appear to be false because they are stereotyped as such; and people tend to believe the stereotyping that they are consistently exposed to.

Notwithstanding, the gender dynamics are changing, with the traditional gender roles of men and women crossing in many societies. Study participants observed that as women take up more roles outside of the home, they are increasingly perceived from a more positive lens - beyond their hitherto stereotypical characterization as homemakers and caregivers, obsessed with domesticity, fashion and body image, as affirmed by Agujiobi-Odoh, (2022). They also observed that society is now having more men performing care-giving and household chores, in what appears to be a dismantling of traditional stereotypes about masculinity. However, participants were apprehensive that although the Nigerian society appears to be shifting slowly but progressively in its engagement with gender, it remains questionable whether television advertising is portraying this phenomenal change with responsibility and sensitivity.

Conclusions

The study establishes that the portrayal of gender roles in advertising is replete with traditional gender stereotypes which represent men and women in binary frames that highlight their masculinity or femininity as defined by society, in tandem with social constructionism theory. While men are frequently portrayed as authoritative leaders and breadwinners, women are often depicted as nurturing, submissive and focussed on care giving and domestic roles. Advertisers use and perpetuate traditional gender roles and stereotypes rooted in cultural norms because they work in targeting specific demographics and audiences. However, portrayals using traditional gender roles not only reinforce stereotyping, potentially shaping public perceptions of what is acceptable and normal for men and women, but also perpetuate gender inequality and anti-social gender behaviours, in tandem with media cultivation theory.

The *stereotypicality* and *binarity* of gender role portrayals in advertisements underscore the importance of challenging retrogressive portrayals and harmful stereotypes towards promoting greater diversity and equality in the society. Notwithstanding, advertising portrayals are changing in Nigeria and aligning with global trends, as more recent advertisements are appealing to socially active audiences by portraying both men and women in asymmetrical roles and showcasing them from more positive lenses performing roles that radically deviate from their hitherto traditional gender roles.

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