

THE PORTRAIT OF WOMEN STEREOTYPING IN INDONESIA AS DEPICTED IN INDONESIAN TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

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Abstract:

This paper aims to identify the stereotyping of women role as depicted in Indonesian television commercials. A sample of 60 commercials featuring women in eight Indonesian local televisions was examined during the third and fourth week of July by using content code analysis. The findings indicates that the stereotyping of women role portrayed in Indonesian television commercials exist in some aspects. Women are depicted as users of products mostly household and personal care. They are mostly portrayed as nurturing mother as well as an ideal housewife. When depicted as professional career women, still they are occupied with domestic role as a good mother.

Keywords: television commercials, role portrayals, women stereotypes

Introduction

"Ibu sedang memasak di dapur. Ayah sedang duduk dan membaca surat kabar"

These lines are usually found in the elementary school textbooks in Bahasa Indonesia subject as one of core subjects to teach to Indonesian children nationwide. Indonesian starts learning gender role stereotypes unconsciously from early age not merely in a classroom but Indonesian also learns the reinforcement of these gender-based stereotypes in most television programs, advertisements, magazines, or films.

Bailey (2006) asserts that media such as school, institutions, or church construct society's perception on particular model such as females, and this construction often leads to outdated stereotypes being promoted. Moreover, society is exposed to a wide variety of advertising in different media everyday and from these exposures, certain way of thinking patterns evolves. Ibroscheva (2007) argues that gender roles in the media are authenticated through regular exposure and then adopted by the public as norm.

A stereotype in general can be defined as a standardized conception or image of specific groups of people or object. Stereotype represents the opinions among members of a certain group about the other groups. They are internalized during the socialization. They can be a result of our own observations or be adopted from the influence of the significant others, such as family, friends, teachers and media (Nachbar&Lause, 1992)

Because of many simplifications and generalizations that they produce, stereotypes present incomplete, subjective and sometimes false image of the reality. They are often based on tradition and are resistant to change. Although they can both have positive and negative undertone, the latter is much more common.

Even if certain arguments allow refuting a

stereotype, people would rather treat it as an exception that proves the rule, than change the way of thinking. Besides, social categorizations can lead to the effect of homogeneity of the foreign group. Elliot Aronson, another American psychologist, says that stereotypes are used to attribute the identical features to each member of a certain group without taking the existing differences among the members into consideration (1972).

Gender stereotyping in particular, is a public perception of sex differences in personality traits and behaviors (Lueptow, Garovich, Szabo, 2001). A number of researchers have found that men and women are portrayed stereotypically in electronic and printed advertising media. Gornick (1979) finds that advertisements depict people not necessarily how they actually behave as men or women, but how they think men and women should behave.

Milner and Higgs (2004) argue that how men and women are portrayed in advertisements is one of indicators to measure society's attitudes towards gender. Gunter (1995) argues that gender stereotyping in television affects young people who learn gender appropriate attitudes and behaviors.

Silverstein (1974) expresses a concern how portrait of gender roles in television commercials influence society's perception of appropriate gender roles. Hawkins and Coney (1976) on the other hands, suggest that different cultural perceptions of what is seen as a proper role for a woman can result in national differences in how women are portrayed in commercials. One way or the other, men and women on television commercials are portrayed following traditional gender stereotypes. Irrespective of it, if it is the television that influences how society views the roles for men and women, or if television commercials is just a reflection of how gender roles are manifested in society (Courtney and Whipple, 1983).

Gender stereotyping has been studied since 1970s

where Mc Arthur and Resko (1975) were among the first to analyze television commercials. Meanwhile the analysis of television commercials shows evidence of gender stereotypes in many different ways. Research indicates that there are male dominant roles, a professional expert or interviewer (Furnham and Mak, 1999). Males are also portrayed outdoors and often in occupational setting.

Furthermore, more traditional male products like cars and sports are frequently promoted by men and males on television often receives pleasures (Furnham et.al, 2000). Conversely, women are more likely portrayed in dependent roles like parents, wife or housewife (Furnham and Mak, 1999; Gily, 1998), and often in home or domestic setting and promote more traditional female products like home and body products (Furnham and Mak, 1999)

The objective of this paper is mainly to identify the gender role stereotyping of women as depicted in Indonesian television commercials. The commercials to analyze are mainly those commercial featuring women where the stereotyping of women role is mostly portrayed.

Women And Gender Stereotype

Gender stereotype in mass media, nowadays has a great power and reaches large audience. In order to create a universal medium, understandable and acceptable for numerous and diverse recipients, senders very often use stereotypes, which fill the social life and evoke certain associations.

However, mass media not only provides people with information and entertainment, but also affects people's lives by shaping their opinions, attitudes and beliefs Marshall McLuhan (1964). It controls social life by invisibly transferring the dominant hegemonic ideology.

In the case of gender roles, societies have established the hegemony of males by institutionalizing of male dominance over women. Men have been perceived as the head of the household and women are mainly housewives. Nowadays the differences between male and female roles are smaller; however, mass media still perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes.

Women are more often presented in commercials, because they are seen as responsible for making everyday purchases. Men generally advertise cars, cigarettes, business products or investments, whereas women are shown rather in the commercials with cosmetics and domestic products. They are also more likely portrayed in the home environment, unlike men, who are shown outdoors. According to Steve Craig's research (1997), women can be presented in commercials in several variants. The first one is the most popular: a housewife obsessed by a steam on a new tablecloth or a woman whose main problem is lack of ideas for dinner. The other examples are less traditional; however, they are still very stereotypical.

Gender stereotyping has mainly been studied since 1970s where Mc Arthur and Fresko (1975) were among the first to analyze television commercials. They analyzed the content of television commercials by using a coding scheme. This scheme used seen variables to decode the commercials with its main character or characters. Maximum two main characters were chosen for further analysis and each character was decoded separately.

The central characters were coded after their sex and if they were portrayed as product user or a product authority, which means that their credibility was based possessing facts on the products. The characters were further coded by the role they were portrayed in, spouse, parents, homemaker, worker, professional, real-life celebrity, interviewer or narrator, girlfriend or boyfriend or the 'other' category as well as the locale in which they were portrayed, home, store, occupational setting, or 'other'.

Arguments given by the characters were also coded and were categorized as scientific or non scientific arguments at all. Furthermore was the reward reaped or offered by the main characters coded, the rewards could be social enhancement, self enhancement, practical reward or other reward.

Last thing coded was what product category that was promoted. The products were divided into four different categories including body products, food stuffs and 'other' the later contained pet food and products, sport and recreational products, cars and car products, and insurance.

Indonesian Women In Indonesia Television Commercials

Commercials in Indonesia indicate that more women than men are product users. Women are depicted as users of the products, mostly for household and personal care products. (Furnham, et.al :2000; Valls-Vernandez and Martinez Vicente: 2007)

Female is also often portrayed engaging in physical contact that indicates a social depiction (Ibrascheva 2007). This area includes commercial products such as food and clothes that often used women as the character in their commercials. Whereas the most occupied commercial that women engaged is the portrayal of women as a wife or a mother whose responsible is portrayed as are purchaser household products that include food, medicine, body cleaning and cooking product to nurture her family.

To be able to identify gender role stereotyping in Indonesian television commercials, every commercial featuring woman was examined and relevant aspects were coded in coding form. Sample in this paper including 70 commercials featured women.

This paper identifies specific roles categories which are housewife, product users, and professional career. The result of this study reveals that the stereotyping of women role portrayal in Indonesian

television commercials exist in some aspects as described in the chart below.



The chart shows that female stereotypes as wife or mother was most prevalent in Indonesian television commercials, as it featured 60% of the analyzed commercials that is 36 commercials. This role portrayal is generally found notoriously in various products such as food stuffs, cooking and body cleaning products.

In this category finding, Indonesian television commercials promoted women in traditional gender stereotype. As stated previously by Gunter who defines stereotyping in mass media as sex role stereotyping and sex traits stereotyping. In Indonesian television commercials, women are stereotyped in the first definition that is as sex role stereotyping. Indeed this sex role stereotyping that fulfills traditional gender role as a mother, a wife who devote all her life for the sake of her family is depicted and represented in more than 60% of the total analyzed commercials.

Women are depicted as a mother preparing or cooking food in the kitchen for their husband and children who are eagerly waiting at the dining table. The mother is smiling happily while cooking and serving the food to her family, provides an atmosphere of manipulating message that female devotion in their domestic area is a guarantee for their family happiness.

Still in the kitchen area, preparing tea and then calling her husband who is very busy occupied with his mechanical work in his garage, her daughter who is busy texting and her son who is also busy with his toys. This commercial still deliver similar message that it is women's area to provide their family with food while husband is the one to serve. Other commercial shows a mother preparing breakfast with particular tea

product and laugh happily while bringing the tea and the breakfast on the table. After having their breakfast the husband who is ready to work, takes the children to their school on his way to work. Whereas the mother sends them off in the verandah and implicitly she will stay at home to continue doing her household chores.

Besides domestic setting in the kitchen or verandah, other most depicted setting occupied by women is the bathroom. Indonesian television commercials show women welcoming their children from school or most often from playground. Finding their children dirty the mother just smiles and then takes them to the bathroom and provides them with certain body cleaning product. The children then wash themselves and thank their mother afterward for providing them with the right product they need.

Women are also stereotyped as a heroine for their family children as women are depicted as problem solver to the dirt problem they might encounter in their daily life. One famous widely-used detergent shows twin girls are depressed because their new white shirts get dirty. Feeling terribly guilty they come to their mother by the washing machine and show their stained new white shirts. The mother just smiles, takes over her twin daughters new white shirts, shows them her powerful washing detergent and washes the dirty shirts. Few minutes later, their white shirts are clean and spotless, resulted a big smile both on the mother's face and the twin daughters.

The chart also indicates that women are stereotyped as a body product users which featured 32% of the analyzed products that is 19 commercials. Mostly in these commercials women are portrayed as the consumers of the promoted products which falls

mainly within beauty products such as shampoo, hand body lotion, moisturizer, body soap, clothes, perfume, and slimming medicine products.

The last finding as presented by the above chart is the depiction of women as professional career which featured only 8% of the total analyzed commercials that is 5 commercials only. In this category although women are portrayed as professional still they are preoccupied in domestic setting. This finding shows the double standard of women as a professional as well as a good nurturing mother.

Two of the commercials show a woman as a doctor who is then explaining a body cleaning product that meet the World Health Organization standard. The setting then shifts from working area into the home picturing the doctor proudly telling the audience that she uses the body cleaning product for her family. Another doctor tells the audience a healthy water dispenser, to use for either her patients or her family.

Other commercials show women as a scientist yet she explains the balanced ingredients found in particular brand of cooking spicy and still the space is both in the laboratory that shows their work place and the kitchen where they use the product to. All these commercials have broken the barrier of sex role stereotype yet they still hold strongly the traditional gender role for women; a mother.

From five samples only one commercial that shows woman in her career background as well as her career achievement. This commercial portrays young talented Indonesian actress working on her daily practice as a singer as well as shows her walking in a street in one of the most crowded street in the world to her working place. Unlike another career women who

always depicted in double standard role; as a career woman and as devoted mother, this commercial shows the young lady occupied with her work only.

Conclusion

This paper shows that Indonesian television commercials do promote women stereotyping in three different categories. The first category stereotypes women in traditional gender role as a wife or mother in various products such as food stuffs, medicine, cooking and body cleaning products. This traditional stereotypes falls as the most prevalent in Indonesian television commercials which featured 60% of the analyzed commercials.

The second category stereotypes women as body products user especially beauty products such as body cleaning, cosmetics, and fashions stuff, and it featured 32% of the analyzed commercials. The last depiction of women stereotype in Indonesian television commercial in Indonesia is a professional career woman and it featured 8% of the total analyzed commercials. The professional career women in Indonesian commercials are depicted as career women who devoted to traditional gender role as a good mother or wife.

As the main focus of this paper is to examine women stereotyping in Indonesian television commercials, further study can be conducted to examine the portrait of women stereotyping in printed media then it can be drawn a comparison between both study.

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