

# The portrayal of women in South African television commercials

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## ABSTRACT

Much research has been conducted on the portrayals of men and women in advertising. Advertisers are often criticised for portraying stereotypical gender roles, and particularly for depicting women as dependant (such as a homemaker) or decorative (such as a sex object). The purpose of the study on which the article is based was to identify current role portrayals of women in advertising on selected South African television channels. A sample of 245 commercials was content analysed to determine how women are portrayed in advertising. The findings indicate that women are most often portrayed as product users, and least often as sex objects. In terms of product categories, women featured most often in advertising for personal care items and least often in sport-related commercials. Rational advertising appeals were most commonly used in commercials featuring women. Suggestions for future research are offered.

**Key words:** marketing, television commercials, female models, role portrayal, stereotypes

## Introduction

Studies on gender role portrayal in advertisements have attracted the interest of researchers and scholars on a global scale over the past few decades (Furnham & Schofield 1986; Mwangi 1996; Nassif & Gunter 2008). Traditionally, women in advertisements have been portrayed in stereotypical roles, such as the mother or the

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seductress. The changing social climate and the evolution of the role of woman in the home and in the workplace have given rise to questions regarding the appropriate portrayal of women in the media today. Bailey (2006: 99) asserts that consumers' perceptions of particular models, such as females, may be structured based on their portrayal in the media, often leading to outdated stereotypes being promoted.

Consumers are exposed to a wide variety of advertising in different media every day, and from these exposures, certain thinking patterns evolve. Ibroscheva (2007: 409) holds that gender roles in the media are authenticated through regular exposures and then adopted by the public as the norm. Male supremacy and female subordination are often propagated through gender differentiation in advertising messages (Serra & Burnett 2007: 147). Such gender discrepancies are then accepted as societal norms through consumer socialisation. Murray, Rubinstein and Comstock (in Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 691) emphasise the fact that television commercials are major consumer socialisation agents.

Previous studies on the portrayal of women in television commercials indicate that women are not shown in powerful roles (Furnham & Bitar 1993; Ibroscheva 2007; Sim & Suying 2001). They are usually represented as stereotypical nurturers or sex objects, which does not reflect the changes in society, such as the importance of women in the workplace (Razzouk, Setz & Vacharante 2003: 120), and their managerial roles in big organisations (Koernig & Granitz 2006: 92). Women are also less likely than men to be portrayed as authorities on products (Furnham & Mak 1999: 424). In many instances, they are merely depicted as the product user but not as an expert.

Nassif and Gunter (2008: 753) as well as Mwangi (1996: 207, 212) note that most studies on gender roles in television advertising have been conducted in developed countries. As a developing country, South Africa has experienced dramatic political, economic and social changes brought about by the new dispensation after 1994. Many consumers in previously disadvantaged communities now have access to modern-day communication media such as cell phones and television. The dramatic improvement of the standard of living for many of these 'new role players' in the South African marketplace opened up enormous opportunities for marketers to convey their marketing messages to a much wider and diverse consumer market than previously. Nowadays, South African marketers often feature female models in print, broadcast and outdoor media acting as substitute communicators to convey marketing and advertising messages to the target market. These role portrayals, however, do not always reflect reality and are often limited. Furthermore, an extensive literature review revealed that current research on the use of women in advertising is very limited in South Africa. A study by Rudansky (1991) that focused on the portrayal of

women in magazine advertisements was identified as the most recent South African study in this field. The limited and outdated number of local studies on the portrayal of women representing the diversity of the South African female consumer market, specifically in television advertisements, served as an impetus for this study.

## Research on female role portrayals in television commercials

The stereotyping of females, and especially their use as sex objects, has not only been a popular focus of research over the past few decades, but also a regular topic of debate among scholars and feminist groups across the globe (Lee 2004). Women are often depicted in advertisements in the role of a housewife, mother or a consumer of a product. Sim and Suying (2001: 478) state that the roles assigned to women in commercials were most likely to be depicted as non-occupational, and that women are very often shown as being preoccupied with their personal appearance.

However, in the twenty-first century, the roles of women have changed, particularly in South Africa. Women have liberated themselves through education and occupy prominent positions in large corporations and in government. Almost ten years ago, Myakayaka-Manzini (2002: 1) reported that the South African parliament consisted of 29.6% women; a far cry from the only 2.8% represented in the pre-1994 government. It is evident that women fulfil many roles in society, and the question is the extent to which television advertisements portray the reality as far as the role of women is concerned.

Table 1 provides a summary of international research studies conducted on female role portrayals in television commercials over the past 12 years. These studies were conducted in developed countries (for example, the United States of America and the United Kingdom) as well as in developing countries (such as Bulgaria and Kenya).

Table 1 indicates that academic researchers identified several universal roles featuring women in television commercials in various countries. A brief discussion follows of each of these roles and the associated product/service categories advertised in the commercials:

- *Decorative*: The woman as decorative figure in television commercials is linked to personal care products (Furnham et al. 2001: 24; Mwangi 1996: 211; Nassif & Gunter 2008: 757; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 696). In this role, the female in the commercial represents an image that signifies attractiveness and physical ideals.
- *Homemaker*: The woman as homemaker or housewife is typified by a degree of dependence and is generally depicted in a household setting (Ibroscheva 2007: 415; Nassif & Gunter 2008: 757; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 694). Females portrayed with household products such as food and washing detergents

**Table 1:** Female role portrayals in television commercials from 1996 to 2008

Role portrayal	Sources
Decorative	Furnham & Mak (1999: 429); Furnham, Pallangyo & Gunter (2001: 25); Mwangi (1996: 211); Nassif & Gunter (2008: 756); Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente (2007: 694)
Homemaker	Furnham & Mak (1999: 424); Furnham et al. (2001: 24); Ibroscheva (2007: 415); Mwangi (1996: 210); Nassif & Gunter (2008: 756); Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente (2007: 694)
Work-related	Furnham & Mak (1999: 424); Furnham et al. (2001: 24); Ibroscheva (2007: 415); Mwangi (1996: 210); Nassif & Gunter (2008: 756); Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente (2007: 695)
Sex object	Craig, in Furnham & Mak (1999: 424); Furnham et al. (2001: 24); Ibroscheva (2007: 415)
Social being	Ibroscheva (2007: 415)
Wife/mother	Furnham & Mak (1999: 424); Furnham et al. (2001: 24); Ibroscheva (2007: 415); Mwangi (1996: 210); Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente (2007: 695).
Product user	Furnham & Mak (1999: 424); Furnham et al. (2001: 24); Ibroscheva (2007: 415)

are also classified as homemakers. Such portrayals were prevalent in studies by Furnham et al. (2001: 24) and Mwangi (1996: 210).

- *Work related:* Various studies examined the occupational depictions of women in commercials. Work-related portrayals that were specified as roles include professional, labourer and office worker (Furnham et al. 2001: 24; Nassif & Gunter 2008: 756). In other studies, occupational portrayals were classified specifically as occupational types and not as particular roles (Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 695). According to Ibroscheva (2007: 415), the combination of autonomy as an indicator of an occupational role and location or setting of the image (such as the office) point to a work-related role portrayal. The advertised products associated with this role would typically include computers and products to be used in an office setting.
- *Sex object:* Wearing sexually suggestive clothing in the advertisement is normally an indicator of the sex object in studies on television commercials. The sex object identified in commercials in studies by Furnham et al. (2001: 24) and Ibroscheva (2007: 415) showed relatively high prevalence. In this role, the female is linked to products for personal care and jewellery.
- *Social being:* Although the role of social being was not specified in studies on television commercials, contact with other people was noted, and may be interpreted as indicating social interaction. Females are often portrayed engaging

in physical contact, indicating a social depiction (Ibroscheva 2007: 415). Products such as food and clothes would typically be advertised in these instances.

- *Wife/mother*: The female as a wife or mother is often portrayed in commercials. Many studies combined the categories of housewife and mother (Furnham et al. 2001: 24; Ibroscheva 2007: 415; Mwangi 1996: 210). Generally the woman portrayed as mother is considered a more traditional and gender-stereotyped depiction, which may explain its prevalence in television commercials. In the commercials, the female as a mother or wife is linked to various products such as food, medicine and toys (Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 694).
- *Product user*: People are often portrayed as product users in commercials, as television is an excellent medium for depicting product use. Studies by authors such as Furnham et al. (2001: 24) and Ibroscheva (2007: 415) report on women being portrayed as users of the product, mostly for household and personal care products. Other product/service types in the commercials featuring women as product users include transport, holiday or travel, and banking services (Lee 2004: 5).

Findings of studies by Shrikhande (2003) and Lee (2004) indicate that more women than men are product users in television commercials. In a study to compare gender role stereotypes in television commercials from Hong Kong and Indonesia, Furnham, Mak and Tanidjojo (2000: 2347) coded seven types of products, namely: body, home, food, service, property, electronics and other. The findings of this study indicate, *inter alia*, that the percentage of females presenting body products was almost twice the percentage of men. A more recent study by Valls-Fernández and Martínez-Vicente (2007: 695) found similar results. In their study, the analysis of gender and product type advertised indicated a significant difference between men and women as a function of the product being advertised.

### Advertising appeals used in commercials featuring women

Many factors such as the intense competition in the marketplace, high media and advertising costs, and the fact that consumers are exposed to various advertising and marketing media on a daily basis compel marketers to use the correct approach or advertising appeal to convey their advertising message effectively to the target market. Moriarty (in Belch & Belch 2007: 267) defines an advertising appeal as “something that moves people, speaks to wants and needs, and excites their interests”. Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008: 181) contend that appeals refer to “the cue that should make the advertisement work”. Basically two types of appeals are used by marketers. On the

one hand, rational appeals focus on being factual and informational by targeting the practical, functional or utilitarian needs of the consumer (Shimp 2010: 244). Utilitarian needs include factors such as economy, durability, comfort, convenience, health and quality. The content of the rational advertisement or commercial focuses on facts such as benefits or reasons to buy the product/service. Rational appeals include listing attributes, comparing brands, focusing on price, making a declaration or stating the popularity of the brand (Belch & Belch 2007: 267).

Emotional appeals, on the other hand, depict strong feelings and appeals to the consumer's emotions. This type of appeal aims to influence the target audience's feelings by focusing on their personal (psychological) and/or social needs. Emotional appeals elicit and/or portray personal feelings such as fear, joy, happiness, affection, excitement, acceptance, sadness, love, self-esteem and safety. Women are often depicted in advertisements to convey these personal and social-based feelings (Belch & Belch 2007: 270). Ouwersloot and Duncan (2008: 182) note that sex appeals are used to depict a female in a seductive situation relating to the sexual desires of the receiver of the message. According to these authors, women are depicted in this role for body-care products "by combining a demonstration of the product with a sexual appeal in an overt, yet disguised way". Many advertisements or commercials, therefore, combine the two appeals, thus containing factual as well as emotional components (Belch & Belch 2007: 271).

A review of recent research studies on the use of advertising appeals in advertisements featuring male and/or female characters as spokespersons revealed that researchers tend to focus on print advertising (Um 2008; Moore 1996). The findings in Koernig and Granitz's study (2006: 91) on the portrayal of women compared to men in e-commerce magazine advertisements indicate that more rational appeals are used in *only male* advertisements than in *only female* advertisements. So (2004: 54) investigated cross-cultural advertising by comparing advertising expressions in Hong Kong and Australian advertising. All the advertisements (quarter page and larger) in the selected magazines in the two countries were analysed irrespective of whether females were depicted in the advertisements. The results of her study indicate, *inter alia*, that the Australian advertisements convey more emotional appeals (72%) than the Hong Kong (45%) advertisements. It should be noted, however, that the current study did not focus on the portrayal of women in the magazine advertisements. As no recent local or international studies report on the use of advertising appeals in television commercials featuring women, the study aimed to determine the extent to which rational and/or emotional appeals are used in commercials.

The various roles women portray in television commercials, as discussed, served as a basis and guided the investigation for this study.

## Problem statement and objectives

Although studies on female portrayals in television advertisements have been carried out virtually across the globe, no recent study appears to have been conducted in South Africa. The diversity of the South African population represented by four population groups almost vindicates a local study on this topic. Considering that South African advertisers spend R24 426.1 million per year on above-the-line advertising, marketers want to ensure that their advertising messages reach their target audiences, gaining favourable return on advertising investment (Koenderman 2010: 16). The importance, therefore, for advertisers to make the right decisions regarding the suitability of models used to attract attention to their advertisements, as well as the fit between the role portrayal and the product, is crucial.

The main objective of the study was to identify the roles women portray in South African television commercials. The study also investigated the following: firstly, to determine the number and type of product/service categories advertised in the commercials featuring women; secondly, to determine the product/service categories advertised for various roles portrayed by women in the commercials; and lastly, to determine whether advertisers prefer to make use of rational and/or emotional appeals in the commercials featuring women.

The procedures and methodology used to identify and analyse the specific role portrayals for the current study are explained in the next section.

## Method

This study employed content analysis to examine and describe the roles portrayed by women in South African television commercials. Berelson (in Neuendorf 2002: 10) describes content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication”. Evidence produced by other researchers in this field, for example Krippendorff (2004: 18), asserts that that this method can be used to make “replicable and valid inferences from text (and other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use”. As such, a content analysis study examines message units (such as commercials) and is a method used frequently in studying advertising.

## Sampling and data collection

Advertisements featuring women aired on SABC 1, 2 and 3, and e.tv channels were included in the sample. The free-to-air channels were selected, as the majority of the South African population has access to these channels and the exposure to

commercials is expected to be reasonably high. The mentioned channels that were included in the study are the most popular according to the SAARF's (South African Advertising Research Foundation) annual Cumulative TV Channel Reach Data. The percentage of total audience figures for the four free-to-air channels for the period February 2008 to January 2009 were: SABC 1 at 98.4%, SABC 2 at 98.6%, SABC 3 at 96.8%, and e.tv at 96.3% (SAARF 2009: 1). Selecting the most popular channels is consistent with the research practices of various other researchers (Nassif & Gunter 2008: 755; Ibroscheva 2007: 412; Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 693).

A non-probability purposive sampling approach was followed, whereby only commercials in prime time (18:00–22:00) on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the month of March 2009 were recorded. DVD and video recording equipment was utilised for the recording and playback of the commercials. The final sample included 245 commercials (excluding duplicates). The commercials selected portrayed adult females with on-camera appearances of at least three seconds (Wee, Choong & Tambyah 1995: 52).

A pre-test of commercials featuring women in advertisements on the four channels confirmed the expectation that the role categories discussed earlier (see Table 1) were applicable to this study. In order to determine the specific role portrayed by the woman in the commercial, every commercial was examined, and the relevant aspects were coded on a coding form. The coding form was used in conjunction with a codebook, which contained detailed descriptors of the role categories. In order to identify the specific role category, the following four descriptions were used: the character (appearance and activities), the surrounding elements (props), the setting (environment) and the product or service advertised in the commercial.

## Reliability

To assess the reliability of the coding performed by three independent coders, Krippendorff's alpha and per cent agreement was used to calculate inter-coder agreement. For the variables with single responses (product category and appeals), Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  was calculated. The multiple response nature of the roles variable necessitated the use of per cent agreement to determine the level of agreement between the coders. Per cent agreement has also been used to determine reliability in previous studies (So 2004: 52).

Table 2 represents the inter-coder reliability scores for this study. The reliability score for the roles variable yielded a result of 84%. The product category variable achieved a reliability score of 1 (100%), and the Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  for advertising appeals 88%.



**Table 2: Inter-coder reliability**

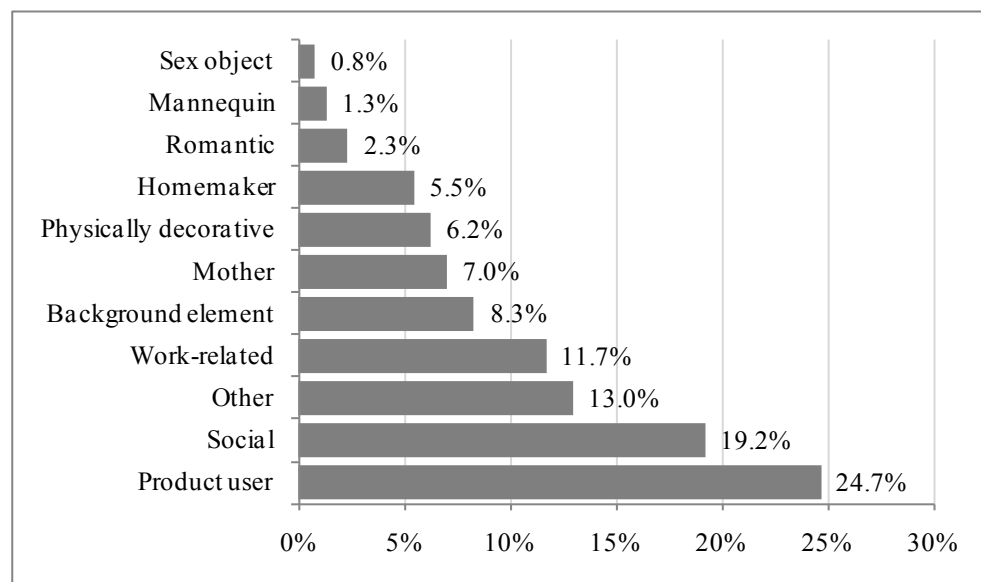
Variable	Krippendorff's $\alpha$	Per cent agreement
Advertising appeals	0.88	NA
Product category	1	NA
Role category	NA	84%

The reliability scores are deemed satisfactory, as according to Neuendorf (2002: 143), reliability scores of 0.80 or higher are considered acceptable.

## Results

### Role portrayals

The four television channels in the sample featured a total of 3 556 commercials (including duplicates), of which 1 404 (39.5%) featured women. Only commercials that contained at least one adult female were included for analysis, and duplicates were not included for analysis purposes. In this study, 43.3% of the television commercials depicted women in more than one role. The research identified specific role categories (sex object, mother, housewife, physically decorative, social, career and product user), as well as 'other' and background elements. Figure 1 presents the frequencies of the portrayals identified in the study.



**Figure 1: Role portrayals in television advertisements**

The results indicate that the woman as a product user was most prevalent in South African television advertising, as it featured in the majority (24.7%) of the analysed commercials. The second most prevalent portrayal was that of the woman in a social role (19.2%). Women were portrayed in a career or work-related role in fewer than 12% of the commercials in the sample. The role category that was represented the least often was the sex object (0.8%).

It is worth noting the relatively large ‘other’ role category (13.0%). This led to a decision to investigate the type of roles identified in this category with the aim of identifying whether any new roles existed within this broad category. This process entailed that any role portrayals that were classified as ‘other’ was provided with a descriptive term. For example, a woman depicted as dancing was termed a ‘dancer’. Thereafter, the descriptive terms were examined in order to combine those that were similar into one category under an umbrella term. These descriptive terms were then tested on the basis of specified role criteria. The criteria included the character (her appearance, manner, focus and actions), the props (supporting elements), the setting (indoor or outdoor) and the product. The incidence of the category was also considered in determining the suitability of the category as a possible new role. Lastly, new roles were identified based on the role criteria and incidence. This process uncovered two new roles, namely the client or shopper, and the spokesperson.

### Product and service categories

Figure 2 indicates that 13 product and service categories were advertised in the commercials featuring women.

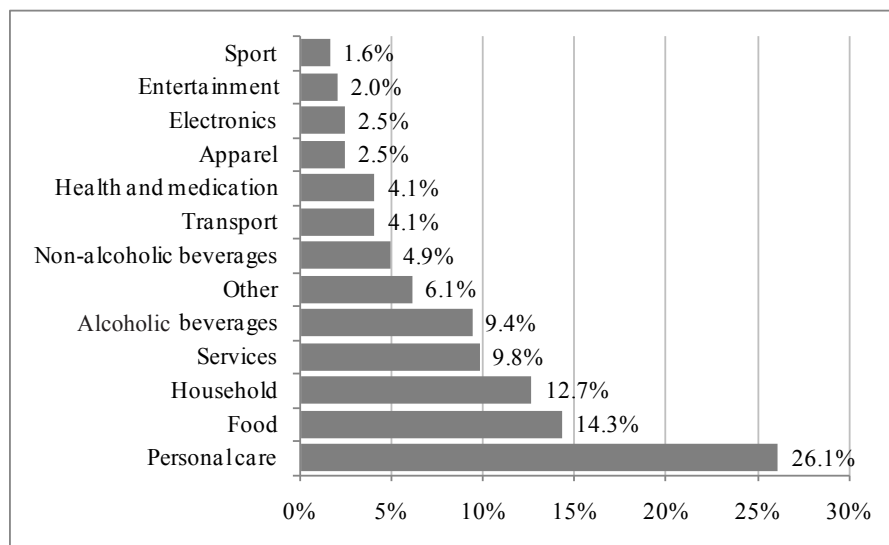


Figure 2: Product/service categories advertised in commercials

Personal care products were advertised in more than one quarter of the commercials. Food (14.3%) and household products (12.7%) were second and third most frequent. Almost 10% of the commercials advertised services and alcoholic beverages (in 9.4% of the cases). The eight remaining product or service categories each featured in less than 9% of the commercials. Women were least often featured in advertising for sport-related products (1.6%).

### Advertising appeals

Rational appeals were used in 39.6% and emotional appeals in 29% of the television commercials. A combination of rational and emotional appeals featured in 31.4% of the commercials.

Typical products or services identified in the rational appeal commercials included household products and personal care items. When advertisers used emotional appeals, products such as alcoholic beverages and food were commonly advertised. Commercials that featured a combination of rational and emotional appeals mostly advertised personal care items.

Previous research studies found contrasting results. Koernig and Granitz (2006: 91) studied gender representation in e-commerce advertisements and found that women were significantly more likely to be featured in advertisements that used emotional appeals. Studies that focused on television commercials often included reward type in coding. This refers to the reward the person in the commercial displays as a result of product use (Ibroscheva 2007: 413). Reward type includes aspects that can be classified as rational (for example, practical reward) or emotional (for example, social approval or pleasure). When reward type is used as an indicator of rational or emotional appeals, previous research results suggest that women are more likely to be used in commercials that portray emotional rewards rather than rational ones (Furnham et al. 2001: 24; Ibroscheva 2007: 414). It should be noted that the previous studies did not examine the combination of rational and emotional appeals, as did the current study.

An inspection of the frequency results for the advertising appeals used in the commercials for the various identified roles indicated that many of the cells did not show sufficient counts, which limited further statistical analysis for all categories. A chi-square analysis was computed to determine whether a significant association exists between the two most dominant roles (product user and social being), as indicated in Figure 1, and the use of emotional or rational appeals in the commercials. The results in Table 3 indicate that advertising appeals are significantly associated with the two dominant roles used in the commercials.

**Table 3:** Relationship between dominant roles and advertising appeals

Advertising appeals	Product user role		Social role	
	n	%	n	%
Rational	42	60.9	13	26.5
Emotional	27	39.1	36	73.5

$\chi^2 = 13.57$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < .05$

## Discussion

In this study, almost 40% of the television commercials featured women. This compares favourably with the findings of studies conducted in other countries, which reported that women featured in about 45% of those studies. (Furnham et al. 2001: 25; Mwangi 1996: 211; Nassif & Gunter 2008: 756). According to Ibroscheva (2007: 413), women are particularly prevalent in advertising in Bulgarian commercials (70.9%), although the author cautions that the results of her study should be carefully considered as the sample size was small.

The woman in a work-related role was not found frequently in the current study (11.7%). When it is considered that half of the workforce in South Africa consists of women (Van Klaveren, Tijdens, Hughie-Williams & Martin 2009: 5), the question arises why women are not portrayed in work-related roles more frequently. It appears that advertisers in South Africa prefer focusing on a woman's social image rather than her professional image.

The role with the lowest frequency in the study was the sex object. These results are in contrast with the findings of Ibroscheva (2007: 415), who reported that women were more likely to be dressed in revealing clothes rather than demure apparel. It should be noted, however, that the sample for Ibroscheva's study was relatively small. The results of the present study reflect a movement away from sexual objectification of women in advertising. South African society places a strong emphasis on the rights of women and protecting women against abuse, and this may influence the manner in which women are portrayed in commercials in this country.

The traditional stereotypes of homemaker and mother were also not prevalent in the study. These results are not consistent with previous research that indicated strong stereotyping of women, particularly in terms of traditional roles. According to Mwangi (1996: 212), women were prevalently depicted in domestic roles in Kenyan television commercials. Similarly, women were most likely to be depicted in household settings

(Nassif & Gunter 2008: 757). The woman as mother was frequently portrayed in a study on gender roles conducted by Fernández and Martínez-Vicente (2007: 695).

When the research results of this study are considered, it seems that women are not stereotyped in South African television advertising. Traditional stereotypes were not widespread in the present study, as women were not portrayed frequently as domesticated or overly sexualised characters. Moreover, women were also portrayed in multiple roles in a single commercial, indicating that advertisers pay heed to the multifaceted lifestyle of the modern South African woman.

The woman as product user, which was prevalent in this study, was also prevalent in studies on commercials in Bulgaria and Zimbabwe. According to Ibroscheva (2007: 414) and Furnham et al. (2001: 24), women were depicted as users of the advertised product in the majority of the studied commercials. It should be noted that in both studies, the product user was not classified as a specific role, but rather examined in relation to whether women were depicted as experts or authorities in terms of product use. Ibroscheva (2007: 416) also reported that women engaged in physical contact in almost half of the television commercials investigated, indicating social interaction. The social role was the second most prevalent in the present study, indicating that South African advertisers afford high importance to female consumers' social lives.

In this study, low-involvement products such as personal care, food and household products were most often advertised featuring women. The high frequency of personal care product advertising is not unexpected when considering that the target audience for such products consists primarily of women. In particular, this product category includes commercials for cosmetics, which targets an almost exclusively female market. Similar findings were found in previous research, as women were most often featured in physical care or beauty product commercials (Valls-Fernández & Martínez-Vicente 2007: 694). The same study indicated food products as the second most prevalent category in advertising using women. Other studies found clear links between female models and the advertising of household products (Mwangi 1996: 213; Nassif & Gunter 2008: 759).

The results of the present study indicate that South African companies consistently use women in advertising specific product categories. The prevalent categories of food and household products are also consistent with product categories that are generally considered the domain of the woman in the household. The results also indicate that South African advertisers link women to consumer decision-making for low-involvement products rather than for high-involvement products. Women were seldom represented in product categories that are high-involvement products, such as electronics. The low frequency of women in sport-related product advertising is not surprising as sport is generally considered a male-oriented terrain (Grau, Roselli

& Taylor 2007: 55). South African companies appear to link females with traditional female product categories.

South African advertisers prefer to use rational advertising appeals when women are used to convey marketing messages to target audiences. This result may indicate that South African advertisers associate women with rational, practical purchase motives. The findings suggest that the common perception of women being impacted more by emotional appeals does not hold true. South African television advertisers seem to appeal to the rational, functional motivations of women rather than the emotional.

It is possible that rational appeals are favoured because women have become more involved in non-traditional consumer decision-making than before, leading to a change in the manner in which females make purchase decisions (Cant, Brink & Brijball 2006: 97). Modern women make use of rational, practical thinking to make consumption decisions, and advertisers consider this when developing advertisements. The findings suggest that South African advertisers are aware of the evolving purchasing role of women.

## Managerial implications, limitations and recommendations for future research

For managers, the importance of a good strategic fit between the product and the model that represents the brand in the commercial is crucial. The findings of this study could provide insight to advertisers regarding the relevance of female portrayals in advertising, particularly if follow-up research is conducted to determine the perceptions of female consumers towards the portrayal of women. Relevance is an important part of creating effective advertisements, as relevant information is not only more easily recognised, but also more easily recalled – a desirable outcome for advertisers (Heckler & Childers 1992: 479).

The study uncovered two new roles that had not been identified in previous studies. Firstly, women were depicted in the role of being a client or shopper, where the model is actively shopping or acting as a client. Secondly, advertisers portrayed the female in the role of a spokesperson for the advertised product or service. Marketers could benefit by taking cognisance of these new roles. The spokesperson is inherently an opinion leader that links the mass audience to comprehensive information on the product, which assists other consumers in decision-making as well as differentiation between competing brands. Opinion leaders play a crucial role in initiating word-of-mouth (WOM) communication, and such portrayals in advertising may stimulate positive conversation about the brand.

The shopper is a portrayal of a woman as a decision-maker, often depicted in buying environments. This role portrayal may be useful in expanding the purchasing role of the woman by depicting her in a wide variety of purchasing situations beyond purchases of traditionally female products. Such a portrayal will reflect the differentiated and important role a women plays in household decision-making across a range of product categories.

The study had limitations that need to be noted. The television sample included only the four free-to-air channels. The viewership of these channels is limited to a large, and probably less-affluent, audience. It is possible that the subscriber channels may feature different roles and also provide a different viewpoint as to the representation of women in commercials aired on these channels. Furthermore, the non-probability sampling method utilised in the present study implies that the results may not be generalised.

It is suggested that future content analysis research should be conducted on the subscriber television channels, as these may feature different or even new roles that are not represented on the free-to-air channels. Furthermore, future research should analyse the relation between the two new roles and product categories that feature these roles. The environment within which the shopper is depicted should be examined to determine the associations that are formed between the woman as purchaser and the particular shopping environment. The appearance of the new roles in media other than television should also be investigated.

The differences in cultural depictions across the television channels can also be examined, as differing target markets may dictate diversity in ethnic portrayals. A comparative study could be conducted between different countries in order to broaden the context of the research and to allow comparisons of advertising across different cultures. Finally, it is recommended that future research be conducted to determine women's opinions on female portrayals in advertisements and whether their perceptions impact on their buying decisions.

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## The portrayal of women in South African television commercials

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