

**CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ROLES PORTRAYED BY WOMEN IN
ADVERTISEMENTS IN SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA**

By

TANIA HOLTZHAUSEN

94389048

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PROMOTER: PROFESSOR Y JORDAAN

CO-PROMOTER: PROFESSOR E J NORTH

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SYNOPSIS

Women have been portrayed in advertising in stereotypical roles for years. Typical stereotypes include the nurturing mother or the alluring seductress. Since the social climate and the roles of females have evolved through the years, the appropriate portrayal of women in today's media has become debatable. Findings from previous advertising research studies indicate that women are generally not depicted in powerful roles. This may limit the perceptions of women as it does not reflect their abilities and positions of power that they hold in real life.

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements and television commercials in South Africa. Several secondary research objectives were set including *inter alia* the incidence of female models in advertisements and commercials, the ethnic representation of women in advertisements and commercials, and the types of products and services advertised using female models.

Data were collected from full-page and double-page advertisements appearing in nine consumer magazines as well as commercials broadcasted during prime time on the four free-to-air television channels. The research method used was content analysis, which focused on the visual elements in advertisements and commercials - particularly the female model. The sample included 203 magazine advertisements and 245 television commercials. The results indicated that 55 per cent of magazine advertisements and 40 per cent of television commercials featured women.

The findings also indicated various roles portrayed by women. The most prevalent role portrayal in magazine advertisements was that of a physically decorative woman (27%), typified as a woman that symbolises the physical ideal. In television commercials, women were most often depicted as product users, with 25 per cent of the portrayals showing a woman actually using or preparing to use the advertised product. The less prevalent portrayals included career woman, homemaker, mother, mannequin, romantic, sex object, social being, background elements as well as various "other" categories.

From the “other” portrayals, the study has also identified new roles that had not been specifically identified in previous studies. The new roles identified in magazines were leisure woman and sportswoman, and in television commercials, customer and spokesperson.

The results further revealed that women are used as visual attention-attracting focus points in advertisements across a range of different product or service categories. The product category that most often featured women in both media was personal care products (41% for magazine and 26% for television advertisements).

The implications of the study are that South African advertisers need to consider the suitability of the models that are used to attract attention to their advertisements, as well as the fit between the role portrayal and the brand image. From a practical perspective, the study provides insight to advertisers regarding the relevance of female portrayals in advertising. One of the recommendations is that future research should be conducted to determine women’s opinions on female portrayals in advertisements.

The study contributes to the available literature on this topic in several ways. Firstly, current female roles in South African magazine and television advertising have been identified. Moreover, a number of new role portrayals were also identified and described. The information gained in the study could be utilised by other researchers as a basis for future studies.

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