

GENDER AND ADVERTISING IN KENYAN PRINT NEWSPAPER: A STUDY OF THE DAILY NATION NEWSPAPER.

¹Millicent Awuor Otieno*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9803-4940>

¹Rongo University, Kenya

*Corresponding Author: mawuor@rongovarsity.ac.ke

Abstract

Beyond promoting products and services, advertisements possess the capacity to influence perceptions, convictions, and attitudes. Advertisements possess the potential to reflect or shape societal norms, thus portraying various groups in manners that either empower or diminish them. This study thus sought to establish portrayal of females and males in Kenyan print newspapers. The study established that in Kenyan print newspaper advertising, gender roles are depicted in an empowering manner, effectively challenging established gender stereotypes. Through a case study and content analysis of a census of advertisements in the Nation Newspaper between January and April 2023. The study ascertained that the gender ratio in advertisements is nearly balanced, albeit slightly favoring males. Additionally, a notable underrepresentation of children and the elderly is evident within these advertisements, suggesting discriminatory tendencies. The advertisements embodied the phenomenon of femvertising, whereby females not only endorse food and household items, but also technology, insurance companies, and financial institutions as authoritative figures and consumers. In contrast, a larger proportion of males are depicted as product authorities. The concept of dadvertising emerges as males are portrayed nurturing their children's education within advertisements for insurance products. Traditional female roles are perpetuated through exclusive female representation in advertisements for food, clothing, and household products. While the prevalence of objectifying a female body is limited to a singular instance, this study recommends complete eradication of such objectification due to its violation of female dignity. It is further suggested to advertisers and newspaper editors that both genders should partake in the promotion of food and household products so as to actively challenge the prevailing gender stereotypes. A call is also made for an equitable representation of males, females in advertisements, to accurately mirror the authentic composition of society.

Key Words: Dadvertising, femvertising, gender and advertising, stereotypes.

Introduction

Contemporary gender construction is facilitated through a variety of gender technologies and individual discourses, including influential theories that wield power over the realm of social meaning. These mechanisms result in the production, promotion, and implantation of gender representations (Popa & Gavriliub, 2015). Within the context of our highly developed, commercialized world, advertising is a ubiquitous social and cultural product. Gender is prominently depicted in advertisements, giving rise to the concept of gender and advertising. This concept pertains to the portrayal of women and, more recently, men in paid-for commercial messages aimed at enticing consumers to purchase the promoted products (Luo, 2022).

The role of advertising in society has been a subject of extensive debate. On one hand, advertising reflects the present reality, albeit often presenting an idealized version of the world that may not always be positive or inclusive (Zawisza, 2019). Tschla (2020) suggests a prevailing consensus that advertising mirrors society in a distorted manner, accentuating and exaggerating certain aspects of daily life. Advertisers are frequently criticized for utilizing such distortion to create attention-grabbing messages that stand out and generate hype in a cluttered media environment.

A long-standing debate revolves around the relationship between societal gender values and gender portrayals in advertising. Two opposing arguments have emerged: the “mirror” argument and the “mold” argument (Corinne & Good, 2015). The “mirror” argument posits that advertising merely reflects existing societal values and perpetuates traditional female stereotypes and roles. However, the portrayal of women in

advertising often lags behind the evolving roles of women in society. Uralge (2021) supports the “mirror” metaphor by highlighting the role of media and advertising in reflecting the prevailing social norms. On the other hand, the “mold” argument suggests that advertising actively shapes and influences the values of its target audience. *This paper sought to establish whether the advertisements in the print newspapers mirror or mold gender.*

Literature Review

The exploration of gender and advertising originated in the 1960s, driven by feminist perspectives, and remained pertinent as societal gender roles evolved, challenging conventional hierarchies and giving rise to ethical concerns about the portrayal of women in the media. Advertisements have faced significant criticism for perpetuating gender stereotypes, thus reinforcing the subjugation of women. Betty Friedan’s influential critique in the early 1960s shed light on the advertising industry’s substantial contribution to the oppression of women, investigating what she termed “the problem that has no name” – the pervasive dissatisfaction experienced by many American women after World War II. In the 1970s, Erving Goffman utilized content analysis to demonstrate that the issue extended beyond sex-role stereotyping, as the composition of ads, such as the relative size and relationship of male and female figures, presented women in positions of deference and subordination, often portrayed in a manner he described as “childlike.” In 1990, Judith Williamson reiterated that ads continued to restrict women to roles limited to either sex objects or domestic laborers (Amy-Chin, 2010).

Various studies have disclosed diverse depictions of gender in advertising, with a primary focus on the

visual representation of men and women. Within this domain, a fundamental distinction emerges in how men and women are portrayed. Men are commonly depicted as competent, assertive, independent, and goal-oriented, while women are often portrayed as warm, sociable, interdependent, and oriented towards relationships. Additionally, women are more frequently depicted as young and preoccupied with physical attractiveness compared to their male counterparts (Anglistika, 2003).

According to Anwen (2020) more women than men are portrayed as product users and decorative figures. This observation was categorized into three modes of presentation: product user, product presenter, and product authority. Male central figures were predominantly chosen to showcase authority and present the product, whereas women were predominantly considered relevant only as product users or decorative objects for the products. This finding aligns with cultural beliefs that women are perceived as lacking the same logical capacity as men and, therefore, are expected to rely on men. Furthermore, Nohara and Aruda (2005) identified three distinct perceptions of female portrayals in advertising: depreciated, idealized, and plural portrayals. *Depreciated females are portrayed as not intelligent or irrational, display of high degree of nudity with body revealing clothes and engaged as housewives. Idealized images of females are depicted as physically perfect- always young , beautiful, skinny and always tidy while modern images of females are potrayed as independent from a man and a super woman who is able to be a mother , professional and a wife at the same time.*

Matthes et al. (2016) assert that common stereotypes in advertising involve depicting women in weak roles or positions, using them as sex

objects, portraying them as housewives, and presenting them as silent figures. The prevalence of portraying women as weak and second-class citizens is evident in advertisements. *Women were presented in an inferior manner relative to their potential and capabilities, while at the same time the data indicated a shift towards more positive role portrayals* (Grau and Zotos, 2016). According to Luo (2022), women in advertising are often represented as white, heterosexual individuals with an emphasis on physical attractiveness and presumed sexual appeal. Female images outside this category are marginalized, subjected to fetishization, sexualization, fragmentation, objection, underrepresentation, trivialization, negation, commercialization, as well as a racialized and gendered representation. On the other hand, Sharma and Bumb (2021) reveal significant differences between males and females regarding the portrayal of women's roles and their willingness to purchase the advertised products. These differences are attributed to varying orientations in the mindset of both genders. Despite an increase in placing women in higher roles and positions in advertisements, stereotypical portrayals still persist.

Gender empowerment has been attempted through advertising, with one approach being "femvertising." Femvertising, envisioned as "female empowered advertising," showcases women in higher positions and roles (Åkestam, Rosengren & Micael, 2017). This method has become more common with the evolving trends of gender equality, societal changes, and advancements in women's rights movements. However, women audiences may not readily embrace femvertising, challenging advertising that seeks to target them based on age and background (Kapoor & Munjal, 2017). Scholars have

highlighted the importance of authentic corporate goodwill in femvertising, as opposed to insincere feminist representations in the media (Becker-Herby, 2016).

A closely related concept is “dadvertising,” which portrays fatherhood in commodified representations, presenting an idealized masculine figure as an involved parent and emotionally vulnerable partner (Middleton, Turnbull & De Oliveira 2020). Similar to femvertising, dadvertising is intended to appeal primarily to female audiences and advocates for gender egalitarianism and familial empowerment. Consequently, men are depicted as heroes to their children, devoted fathers, loving husbands, and occasionally, domestic workers (Baxter, Kulczynski, & Ilicic, 2016). Advertising featuring fathers as caregivers elicits positive responses regardless of individuals’ ideological views on gender, indicating a growing acceptance of men’s involvement in domestic and child-rearing roles (Leader, 2019).

The present study focuses on examining gender and representation in Kenyan print newspapers, particularly investigating the gender and age of individuals featured in product and service advertisements. Additionally, the study seeks to assess how gender is portrayed in these advertisements within the context of Kenyan print media.

Research Methods

The study employed a case study design to investigate gender representation in advertisements in Kenyan print newspapers. Case study design was employed due to its ability to enable in depth examination of a specific case thereby enabling generalizability. Nation newspapers was purposively sampled for the study since it is the most widely read print newspaper in

Kenya (Media Council of Kenya, 2022). There are six daily newspapers in Kenya, namely the Daily Nation, Standard, Star, People Daily, Business Daily and Taifa Leo. The People Daily is a ‘free’ news publication. Taifa Leo is a Kiswahili language publication while the rest are English language newspapers, with *Nation* having dominant readership (KMAR, 2021). A census of the advertisement of the newspapers for the months of January to April 2023 were studied. The choice of the period was informed by the fact that each quarter of the year is representative of the patterns of advertisement throughout the year. *A total of 120 newspapers for each day of the four months was targeted. Advertisement that only had images of products or services were excluded. Only advertisements that had images of people were considered therefore a total of 197 images of people* who were advertised the different products and services were studied. *For each advertisement, the researcher sought to establish the gender of the person advertising the product and the portrayal of the gender.* To achieve the research objective, content of the advertisements was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. Content analysis involved textual labeling, with coding variables. Data was analyzed in frequencies and percentages. Data was presented in tables and pie charts.

Findings and Discussions of the Study

The study investigated gender composition in advertisements, what products and services the persons of different gender advertise and gender portrayal in advertisements in Kenyan print newspapers.

Gender composition in advertisements

The study disaggregated the persons advertising different products and services by gender. The table 1. below gives their gender composition.

Table 1

Gender composition of persons in advertisements

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	93	47
Male	104	53
Total	197	100

The researcher acknowledges the diverse gender categories, yet the study exclusively concentrated on the male and female genders. The study's findings indicate a nearly equal distribution of males and females in advertisements, with 53% and 47% of males and females respectively participating in endorsing products and services in the Kenyan print newspaper. Although this represents a significant advancement in gender representation, it still falls short of truly mirroring the male and

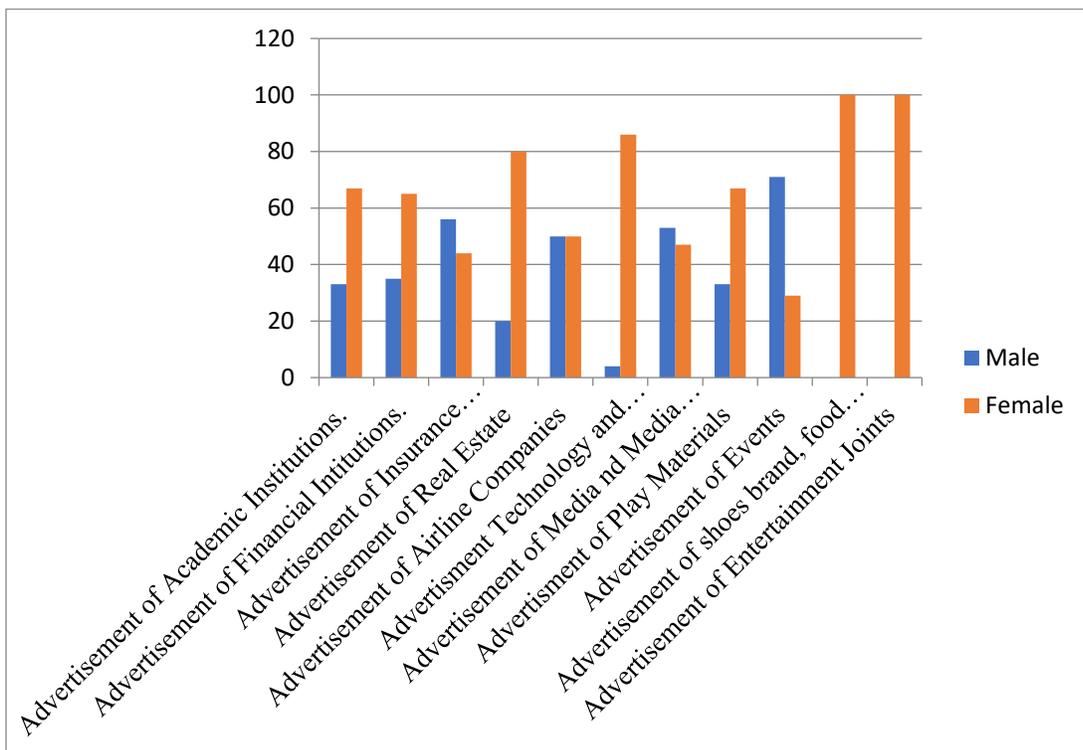
female population distribution in Kenya. 53 % and 47% of males and females respectively advertised products and services in the Kenyan print newspaper. According to the KNBS (2019), the percentage of female population is 50.31% compare to 49.69% male population. Nonetheless, this study finding does not agree with that of Luo (2022) which indicate that females are underrepresented in advertisements.

Gender and advertisements in Kenyan print newspapers

The study sought to establish what products and services the persons of different gender advertise. Fig i. gives a summary of the gender representation in advertisements.

Figure 1

A graph showing percentages of people who advertised products and services



The study established that academic institutions and programs were endorsed by 67% of females and 33% of males. Financial establishments, including banks and saccoes were advertised by 65% females and 35% males, while insurance products and companies were advertised by 44% females and 56% males. *Having more females advertise public institutions is a departure from the stereotypical representation of the females in the domestic sphere. It communicates the strides that have been made in female empowerment.* Notably, 30% of males were depicted as engaged fathers, exemplifying dadvertising, a concept encompassing commercial portrayals of fatherhood that commodify the ideal image of an emotionally involved and gender-egalitarian parent. This form of representation has the potential to reshape perspectives on gender roles and familial responsibilities (Middleton, Turnbull & De Oliveira 2020). Such advertisements use themes of gender egalitarianism to promote personal and familial empowerment. This form of portrayal may change attitudes towards gender roles and division of labor within the family.

Airline companies were endorsed by both genders, with an equal distribution of 50% for males and females, portraying individuals either as passengers or airline employees *thus depicting the equal opportunities the males and females have in the use of the products or services* The advertisements also imply the equal status of males and females. Play materials were promoted predominantly by children, with 33% and 67% constituting males and females respectively. This emphasizes the role of play in child development. Additionally, 53% males and 47% females advertised media and media-related products, while event endorsements were biased towards males, with 71% participation, compared to 29% by females. Real estate

advertisements were endorsed by 67% females and 33% males, with one instance depicting a female architect supervising a construction project. The promotion of technology and technological products involved 86% of females and 4% of males, featuring females as users of these products. These instances challenge the misconception of technology as a male-exclusive domain, effectively debunking associated stereotypes. The technology and real estate advertisements constitute cases of femvertising, depicting females in empowering roles. Scholarly sources by Peres et al., (2017) and Varghese & Kumar (2020) suggest that femvertising aims to counteract gender bias by showcasing women in elevated positions and roles.

All advertisements for entertainment establishments were promoted exclusively by females, constituting the lone instance of female objectification. Notably, a solitary case displayed an image of a woman's thighs and legs accompanied by the phrase *"she may be there tonight."* This statement denotes the sexual availability of the females. This isolated occurrence aligns with Luo's (2022) research that asserts that female depictions in advertising encompass various aspects such as fetishization, sexualization, fragmentation, objectification, underrepresentation, trivialization, negation, commercialization, and a portrayal influenced by both racial and gender variables. Similarly, food and household product advertisements were solely endorsed by females, although they comprised only 3% of all print newspaper advertisements. This finding gave credence to the findings of Sharma and Bumb (2021) which showed that although women are placed in higher roles and positions in advertisements now, stereotypical portrayal is still common. Despite this, it is crucial to acknowledge that advertisements depicting females as sexual

objects and adhering to traditional roles accounted for just 2% of total advertisements. This implies a diminishing trend in stereotypical depictions of women as housewives and sex objects. Although food and entertainment advertisements were exclusively promoted by females, the majority embraced femvertising, projecting women in an empowering light and challenging their confinement to traditional roles.

Gender Portrayal in Advertisements in Kenyan Print Newspaper

The study sought to establish whether the persons in advertisements were portrayed as product users, product authority or decoratives. The posture, the dressing and the activities of the persons in the advertisements were used to establish the portrayals. Figure ii and iii. below give summaries of the gender portrayals in advertisements in Kenyan print newspapers.

Figure 2

Portrayal of females in advertisements

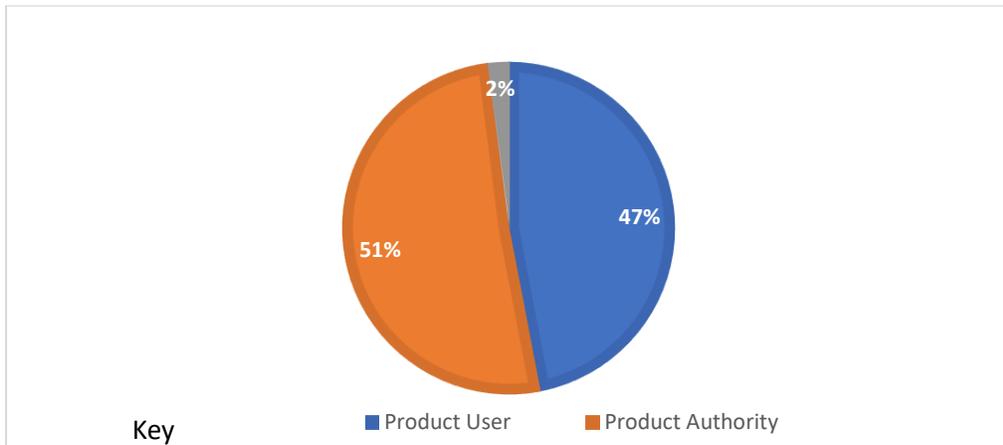
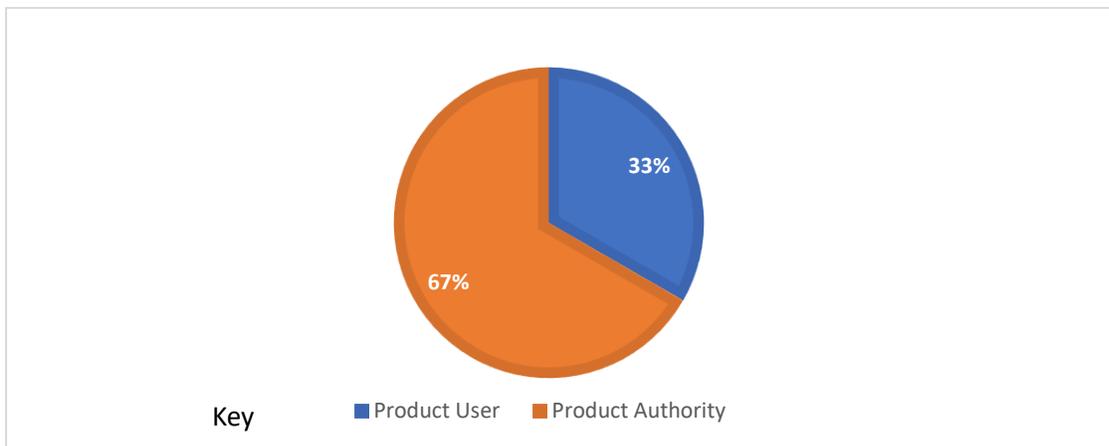


Figure 3

Portrayal of males in advertisements



The study established that 2 % of females were portrayed as product decoratives, 51 % as product authority and 47% as product users. Slightly more males than females were portrayed as product authority while more females than males were portrayed as product users. On the other hand, only a small percentage of females were portrayed as product decoratives. On the contrary, fewer males were portrayed as product

users and more males were product authority. 33% of males were portrayed as product users while 67% as product authority. The findings of a study by Anwen (2020) showed that more women than men are portrayed as product users and decorative protagonists. While male central figures were preferred to show authority for the product as well as present the product, women were considered relevant only as product users and decorative objects for products. For this study, females were also relevant as product authority, though the number of female product authority was slightly lower than that of males.

Conclusion

The gender distribution in Kenyan print newspaper advertisements almost achieved parity, albeit with a slightly higher representation of males. The advertisements in Kenyan print newspapers challenge stereotypical female roles, with only two instances where food and household items were exclusively endorsed by females. To fully counter established practices and stereotypes, involving both genders in product endorsement is recommended. Additionally, although a solitary instance of female objectification was noted, this constitutes an improvement; however, eliminating such objectification is crucial to preserve female dignity. Both genders were portrayed as product authorities and users, with a slightly higher percentage of female product users and marginally more male product authorities. The advertisements depicted both genders in an empowering manner, employing femvertising and dadvertising to challenge gender stereotypes. *The study therefore*

concludes that the advertisements in Kenyan print media are a quasi-mirror of the gender situation in Kenya.

Recommendations

Marketing communication in Kenya should adhere to the principles of presence, perspective, and personality. Despite nearly equal gender ratios in Kenyan print newspaper advertisements, publishers and advertising agencies should aim for gender parity in representations. The demographic characteristics of advertised individuals should mirror the actual population demographics. While the portrayal of females in advertisements largely promotes empowerment, the study recommends eradicating female body objectification and introducing male-female co-representation in food and household product advertisements. Furthermore, the researcher suggests conducting further investigations on gender representation in electronic media. Considering the enhanced portrayal of gender representation in Kenyan newspapers, a study exploring its impact is recommended.

References

- Åkestam, N., Rosengren, S., & Micael, D. (2017). Advertising “like a girl”: Toward a Better Understanding of “Femvertising” and Its Effects. *Psychology & Marketing* 34(8), 795-806.
- Amy-Chinn, D. (2010). Gender Advertising Contribution to *The Encyclopedia of Consumer Culture*
- Anglistika, N. (2003). Building ethical considerations into advertising practices – An Indian study. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(18), 291-301.
- Anweh G. I. (2020). Gender Roles Representation in Television Advertisements: Implications for the Nigerian Girl-Child and Role Modelling. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communications*, 6(1), 43-64

- Corinne, N., & Good, J. (2015). Measure of a Man: Outcomes of Gender Stereotyping for Men and Masculinity (Editorial). *Social Psychology*, 46(4), 179-81.
- Baxter, S., Kulczynski, A., & Ilicic, J. (2016). Ads Aimed at Dads: Exploring Consumers' Reactions towards Advertising that Conforms and Challenges Traditional Gender Role Ideologies. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(6), 970-82.
- Becker-Herby, E. (2016). *The Rise of Femvertising: Authentically Reaching Female Consumers*. University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <https://hdl.handle.net/11299/181494>.
- Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company
- Goffman, E. (1976). *Gender advertisements. Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*. Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc
- Popa, D., & Gavriluab, D. (2015). Gender Representations and Digital Media Procedia. *Social and Behavioral Sciences* 180(2015), 1199 – 1206. www.sciencedirect.com
- Urlage J. (2021). *Women in Advertising: The Power of Positive Representation for a Better Society and a More Successful Brand. IPSOS, the power of positive and a more successful brand*. IPSOS.
- Leader, C. (2019). Dadvertising: Representations of Fatherhood in Procter & Gamble's Tide Commercials. *Communication Culture & Critique* 12(1), 72-89 (76).
- Luo, X., H. (2022) Cultural Representation of Female Images in Advertising. *Open Access Library Journal*, 9, e8703. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1108703>
- Kapoor, D., & Munjal, A., (2019). Self-consciousness and Emotions Driving Femvertising: A Path Analysis of Women's Attitude towards Femvertising, Forwarding Intention and Purchase Intention. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 25(2), 137-57.
- KNBS (2019). *Kenya Housing and Population Census*. Government Press.
- KMAR (2021). *The Kenya Media Assessment 2021*. Internews
- Kumar, S. (2017). Representation of Women in Advertisements. *International Journal of Scientific Technologies in Engineering and Management Sciences*, 3, 25-28. https://doi.org/10.22413/ijastems/2017/v3/i1_/41314
- Matthes, J., Prieler, M., & Adam, K. (2016). Gender-role portrayals in television advertising across the globe. *Sex roles*, 75(7-8), 314-327.
- Media Council of Kenya (2022). *The status of the media survey November 2020 report*. The Media Council of Kenya.
- Middleton, K., Turnbull, S., & De Oliveira, M. J. (2020). Female role portrayals in Brazilian advertising: Are outdated cultural stereotypes preventing change? *International Journal of Advertising: The Review of Marketing Communications*, 39(5), 679–698. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2019.1658428>
- Nohara J., & Aruda, A. (2005) Social Representation of Women in Advertising: Listening to Female Narratives. *REAd - Revista Eletrônica de Administração*, 11(5), 1-20.
- Pérez, M., & Gutiérrez, M. (2017). Femvertising: female empowering strategies in recent Spanish commercials. *Investigaciones feministas*, 8(2), 337-351.

- Sharma S., & Bumb, A. (2021). Role Portrayal of Women in Advertising: An Empirical Study. *Journal of International Women Studies*, 22(9).
- Tsichla, E., & Zotos, Y. (2016). Gender Portrayals Revisited: Searching for Explicit and Implicit Stereotypes in Cypriot Magazine Advertisements. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(6), 983-1007.
- Varghese, N., & Kumar, N. (2020). *Feminism in advertising: irony or revolution? A critical review of femvertising*. *Feminist Media Studies*, 1-19.
- Grau, S., & Zotos, Y. (2016). Gender Stereotypes in Advertising: A Review of Current Research. *International Journal of Advertising* 35(5), 761-70.
- Zawisza, M. (2019). *Gendered advertising: Content, effectiveness and effects – psychological perspective*. In S. Dobscha (Ed.), *Handbook of research on gender and advertising* (pp. 8-27). Elgar Publishing