

WOMEN AND ADVERTISING:
EVOLUTION OF STEREOTYPES IN SPANISH MASS MEDIA

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Introduction

Women have been portrayed stereotypically for centuries, and this has been especially apparent in advertising. In this presentation we will try to analyze how women are portrayed in the mass media. More specifically, we will focus on the changes of the stereotypes in Spanish TV ads. Generally speaking, Spanish advertising has tended to move from the role of the traditional housewife who is always in the kitchen to the role of the new woman that we now recognize. In addition to keeping a perfect house, these women also have successful careers and more than ever are beautiful and fashionable. As we will analyze further, these altered roles have been moved forward by general Spanish history.

To begin with, advertising can be considered as a social thermometer (SATUÉ, 1985) or a historic mirror because it portrays a specific vision of a society in a timeline. As León says commercials reflect perfectly the social image of the woman during the past century (LEÓN, 1996). A deep analysis of the commercials makes us see the historical, political, social and cultural progresses of the Spanish women. However, the nature of this message makes necessary to simplify the reality. The simplification of this reality is known as stereotypes, a concept introduced by Lippmann in 1922 (LIPPMANN, 1922). As defined by the dictionary of the Real Academia of the Spanish Language, stereotyping is “the image or idea accepted by a broader group or society with an immutable feature”.

Ads not only sell but also suggest. They select some determinate social models and point out some ways of behavior: what a good mother is, what an excellent

professional is. Commercials show wonderful girls or boys that a mother would be proud of. Advertising chooses these models as the good one's and gives the audience a specific vision of people and society. From this point of view, it is very interesting to mention here the concept of framing. Frames constitute "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation that organize the social construction of reality. Frames and framing devices provide *coding instructions* about how to interpret an ad's organization of meaning" (GOLDMAN, 1992).

Those old stereotypes

This presentation is based on a project called "Observatory of Advertising in Navarra". This research fits into an agreement between the University of Navarra and the Instituto Navarro de la Mujer, an institute that belongs to the Government of Navarra. This research has been elaborated by a group of investigators of the Department of Public Communication of the University of Navarra.

The purpose of this project was to analyze the image of women in Spanish advertising in 2001 comparing to the ads showed in the past. We have published a book with the title *El espejo mágico, la nueva imagen de la mujer en la publicidad actual* whose translation in English is *The magic mirror, the new image of the women in the actual advertising* (SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, GARCÍA ORTEGA, GRANDÍO PÉREZ & BERGANZA CONDE, 2002).

For this communication we have selected 204 TV commercials from 1957 to 1999 (RAVENTÓS RABINAT, 2001) and 1287 TV ads from 2001 in order to show how women stereotypes have developed from the very beginning of television to nowadays.

Women in Spanish advertising are not the same as those 40 years ago, obviously. Women have diversified their roles in our society. Commercials from the late fifties and sixties show a woman who consumes, mainly, household products, cosmetics, electrical appliances, food and clothes (FALCÓN, 1996). The vast majority

of these products makes the work of the housewives easier and shows the progressive deregulation of prices that the Spanish Government started with the Plans of Economic Development. This economic development shows new consumer habits, a better Welfare Society and the purchasing power of the families. It came together with deeper cultural and social changes that were the beginning of a big transformation in Spain. In spite of the increasing incorporation of the women into the workforce (INSTITUTO DE LA MUJER, 1987), the commercials from the sixties showed the housewife as the main character. We can also not forget that in 1969 women needed a special authorization from a man to trade, transfer property, have the tutorship and access to a paid job. In some cases, men were the legal representatives of women (ANDERSON & ZINSSER, 1992).

You can see in the video that we have prepared a good example of the period from 1957-1967. *Cocina Corcho* ad shows a perfect wife who has cooked a delicious roast for her wonderful husband. According to the main character, the oven will contribute in order to perpetuate the special moments the couple has lived together (she is happy because he enjoyed the meal and he is also happy because of his wife's effort). The marriage in this commercial is that of the typical one in Spain during the sixties. The woman reflects perfectly the traditional housewife from those times: she has been cooking the whole morning in order to please her husband. As you can see, the man is wearing a very smart suit because he has just arrived from work. She is wearing comfortable clothes and an apron because she has spent the whole morning at home. This couple represents very well the traditional roles of women and men those days: the man is who works and earns money and the woman is who stays at home cooking and cleaning.

During the sixties, Spanish viewers could watch many commercials with film stars that symbolized the characteristics, the personality and the Spanish folklore. The second commercial that you will watch in the video is *Phillips* radio and television sets with the actress Carmen Sevilla as main character. She starts in the commercial saying: "I am a flamenca yeyé" (typical Andalusian dancer). Then, she says: "I have two television sets and thanks to them I can see very well the bulls and the goal" (two

activities, the bullfight and the soccer, very popular in Spain, in particular, among the male fans). Therefore, men will enjoy these products as well. It is also very significant when the actress says: “Arcadio has bought this radio for me”. This signifies that the man has bought the products because he is who has and who earns the money and, as the writer Carmen Martín Gaité said advertising in the sixties was aimed at men through women, that is to say, advertisers used women to sell products to men (MARTÍN GAITE, 2000). There is also relevance when she uses a pun ‘*Phillips family, Phillips family*’ with a very strong Spanish pronunciation very similar to “Happy family, happy family”.

Other actresses also played the female leads in the sixties’ commercials. For instance, Rafaela Aparicio and Florinda Chico played the opposite of Carmen Sevilla’s glamour in the *Phillips* commercial. These two actresses perform two housewives. They announce a sort of rice called *Brillante*. Rafaela Aparicio is cooking paella, one of the most typical Spanish meals, when her niece arrives. This rice is boiled with more water and during more time and, because of that, the paella is delicious.

As you can see, women in advertising in the early sixties are housewives or film stars. They mention the folklore, the bulls, the soccer, the paella..., all the typical Spanish activities.

Coming back to the historical facts, the seventies were the culmination of the process of opening up in Spain. King Juan Carlos I ascended the throne, general elections were called and the Constitution was approved. By the way, the Constitution was a milestone in women’s history because article 14 of the Constitution recognizes the equal opportunities for all the Spanish citizens without any discrimination.

Spain started to have more liberties and less moral control. An example of that are the mini-skirts that many models wore in the ads. We can see very often women out of the house having fun in pubs and cafeterias.

In 1970, women increased their educational and job opportunities in Spain. The gender stereotypes started to dissipate. However, this increasing presence of women in

the workforce does not involve important social changes related to the functions of women in the society. In fact, women have not any charge of responsibility at workplace. We have to say that it was in the law of 20th of August in 1970 when women were allowed to keep their jobs when they get married. We can see all this new reality in a good example of the advertising of those days: tights *Mimí* from 1976. In this commercial, we can see some girls in their workplace. Their male colleagues admire them. The voice over says: "The most important discoveries." Then, the camera shows the legs of a girl. "I could discover them thanks to *Mimí*" says one of the men, which means he has discovered these woman's legs.

As we can see, women have moved from the kitchen to a workplace but there, they are considered as sexual objects. This consideration of the woman as a sexual object has been used from the very beginning of advertising and it is still going on today. Women are just seen as bodies. In the eighties, we can see ads like this, for example, the economic newspaper *La Gaceta de los Negocios* from 1989. In this commercial there is a woman, she looks like a businesswoman, with blonde long hair and wearing a striking suit. All the men turn their heads appealed by the girl. Only one man does not pay attention because he is reading *La Gaceta de los Negocios*. As the voice over says taking into account the pretty girl as a sexual object: "There is nothing more serious, more interesting, more funny, more exciting and attractive than the world of business".

In the decade of the nineties, the advertisers realized the new role of women in the society and tried to get their attention and their money. Some decades ago, advertising was aimed at housewives. In 1990, ads were aimed at new women so, the female leads wore more appealing clothes, they worked in offices, they went out at night with their friends, they drank alcohol and they drove their own car.

Towards new stereotypes

New stereotypes are consolidated in order to portray women on television. Features that some years ago were unimaginable are now common in this new portrayal of women. They are more independent and self-confident. We have to mention the new role women have at home and in the workplace, their strong behavior and the way they are portrayed as an icon of beauty.

Commercials in 2001 represent a new professional woman that had reached some banned areas years ago. A good example of that is the commercial of *Telefónica*. In this add a woman called Pilar Asiaín appeared as telecommunications engineer. On the screen is written her telephone number and her e-mail account. She seems to be a very intelligent and independent woman.

Another commercial that we should pay special attention is *Fuerzas Armadas*. Therefore, in this commercial we can see a young woman in a library. The 25 year-old girl is wearing trousers and a comfortable T-shirt. She is looking for a book and she stops in front of a very high shelf. The girl looks up and she starts to climb. Then, the voice over says: "If you have no limits to reach your goals, be ready for the best in the professional military service. Anything you are interested in is available in a military service totally professional. Here you have what you were looking for". While the voice over is talking, many images of women and men soldiers appear. As you can see, there is no difference between men and women in this commercial.

The fact that the women work out of the house has modified the familiar structure and the relationship between women and the house. Some decades ago, women dedicated themselves to the house, the kitchen, their husbands and their children. Nowadays, women have put all these situations together with their jobs. Therefore, women in advertising show up their new role at home and, in many occasions their husbands also helps, something unthinkable some decades ago.

New stereotypes, however, have been created. For example, the superwoman who works at home and also has a job. She is in charge of many responsibilities at work

but she also is in charge of the activities at home and taking care of the children. Advertisers use this image to announce products related to health and good diet.

Nevertheless, the media representations of women who work are not equal to reality. Only 2.1% of the announcements analyzed shows women with jobs that were not associated to their sex historically (for example, soldier or spy).

Women in advertising of this century have a strong personality and character. Many times is the woman who makes the decision, especially, in love affairs. A good example of this characteristic is *Solero Shots*. A young boy is in a party and the atmosphere is very hot. He goes to a refrigerator looking for a drink. When he opens the door, a very attractive girl with a perfect body dressed in a small green dress hugs and kisses him. He does not know what to do. Suddenly, the girl disappears and she turns into small ice balls. The ice is as fresh as the girl.

To finish with, there is a change in the representation of the beauty of women. They are more natural and close to the reality than some years ago. We could see this new beauty in commercials of *Telefónica* and *Fuerzas Armadas*. Yet, women still show an ideal beauty in the commercials of cosmetics and clothes.

Conclusions

To summarize, we have noticed a little but firm progress in the representation of women in Spanish ads in the last 40 years. It is due to the diversification of women's roles in our society. On one hand, some gender stereotypes have dissipated (for instance, woman does not appear just in the kitchen with her husband and her children, and now she is more educated, fashionable and independent than ever). On the other hand, advertisers do not use women as sexual object to catch the eyes of male viewers as much as they used to do it.

Nevertheless, there are still many stereotypes, which degrade women's dignity, although advertisers do not use them as much as decades ago. There is not so common

to see women with perfect bodies in actual advertisements. The new woman's beauty is closer to reality. If we compare historical ads to actual one's, we see that 77% of historical commercials showed women with perfect bodies in the past. Nowadays, girls with perfect bodies appear in 45% of announcements. Although advertisers still use actresses and professional top models to represent an ideal beauty, actual advertising shows more real women. It happens the same with the image of women as aesthetic resort. Some decades ago, women appear in 80.9% of ads just as a resort and now they appear in 59.5%.

It is significant that advertisers do not use domestic violence at all to sell their products.

Women do not receive a special treatment for being women. Only 1.5% of ads analyzed shows polite men and courtesy towards women. In the past, 3.9% of commercials did it. Girls are not weak and inferior to men anymore. In the historical analysis ads showed 8.8% of female weakness and now it has disappeared. Many times the woman is who makes the decision and has a stronger personality.

To finish with, women are not used as sexual object so often (29.4% vs. 11.4%). Nevertheless, there are still some ads which use them. We can see examples of this in commercials like *ONCE* and *Kas Naranja* from 2001. In the first one, the camera shots the breast of a woman and, in the second one, we can see a group of boys who are looking also the breast of a girl.

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