

1994

Advertising preferences when presented with various ad stimuli: the impact of stereotypical versus non-stereotypical advertising

Jodi L. Bremer
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bremer, Jodi L. (1994) "Advertising preferences when presented with various ad stimuli: the impact of stereotypical versus non-stereotypical advertising," *Modern Psychological Studies*: Vol. 2 : No. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol2/iss2/3>

This articles is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals, Magazines, and Newsletters at UTC Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern Psychological Studies by an authorized editor of UTC Scholar. For more information, please contact scholar@utc.edu.

Advertising Preferences When Presented With Various Ad Stimuli: The Impact of Stereotypical Versus Non-Stereotypical Advertising

Jodi L. Bremer

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Abstract

Past research has shown that the preferences for different types of advertising shift as social attitudes change. Whereas in the past people preferred advertising portraying men and women in gender-stereotypical roles, today's more liberal social attitudes seem to reflect a trend for people to prefer ads depicting those men and women in non-stereotypical gender roles. In the current study, 30 university students were tested for their preferences among stereotypical, non-stereotypical and neutral ads. Stimuli were 30 magazine advertisements, 10 each of the three types of ads, rated on a five-point like-dislike scale, with higher scores reflecting greater ad appeal. Evidence was found such that subjects significantly preferred advertisements that were non-stereotypical over neutral and stereotypical ads $F(2, 28) = 31.402, p < .001$.

The images of men and women portrayed in advertisements usually portray a limited range of life roles which follow a traditional and stereotypical path (i.e. with the active, work-oriented male, and the passive, domestic female). Abrams, Thomas, and Hogg's (1990) work shows that this distinction between the sexes in advertising is openly apparent. While not necessarily causing the development of gender roles, advertising may reinforce these roles through the content of the ads. The advertising media can be viewed as a powerful force in our society. Exposure to advertising which portrays women in traditional roles may lead to the less favorable attitudes of females toward political participation (Schwarz, Wagner, Bannert, & Mathes, 1987). Other

researchers have suggested that stereotypical commercials may depress women's self-competence and their competence in making independent decisions (Jennings, Geis, & Brown, 1980).

Although many studies indicate that people are more favorable toward advertising behavior that corresponds to traditional gender roles, much of the research is outdated. Further, there has been recent pressure to change the images of the previously considered appropriate roles in American society for both men and women. Rossi and Rossi's (1985) work firmly demonstrated the ability of men and women to correctly evaluate advertising as sexist or nonsexist.

Finally, strong recent evidence suggests a trend for both men and women to prefer advertising that is androgynous in nature. Specifically, men were found to prefer ads depicting women acting in a typical "male" role, while women were found to prefer ads depicting men in a typical "female" role instead of neutral or same-gender advertising (McCallum, Box, Butgereit, Smith and Threatt, 1985). Thus, it appears that gender-role stereotypes may be on the decline. If this is true, attitudes toward the expanding gender role portrayals of men and women in advertising should be received positively.

For the present study, it was hypothesized that both men and women would show a preference towards advertising that portrays individuals acting in non-stereotypical gender roles, rather than advertising portraying gender stereotypical or neutral roles.

Method

Subjects

Fifteen male and 15 female college students from a large midwestern university participated in the study. Students were solicited to participate by the experimenter. The ages of the subjects ranged from 18 to 21 ($M = 19$).

Materials

The stimuli for this experiment

consisted of a set of 30 full-page, mostly colored ads from current nationally circulated magazines. Ads were selected from a larger pool by three raters (second and third year graduate students with teaching assistant positions in the sociology department on campus). Ten ads portrayed a person acting in a gender-stereotypical role (such as a woman rocking a baby), 10 ads portrayed a person acting in a non-stereotypical role (such as a man rocking a baby), and 10 ads portrayed people acting neutrally (such as a woman with a headache).

Design and Procedure

The design was a 2 X 3, within-subjects design. The first independent variable was the gender of the subject with two levels: male and female. The second independent variable was the ad presentation which had three levels: stereotypical, non-stereotypical and neutral. The dependent variable was ad preference, as indexed by subjects' ratings on the five-point, like-dislike scale, where higher scores reflect greater ad appeal.

Upon arrival for the experiment, each subject was greeted and escorted to a private room. A chair and table were provided for the subjects to use, and subjects were tested individually to ensure privacy and an atmosphere with as few distractions as possible.

Subjects were told that their initial reactions to the ads were of interest, so they should try to limit their viewing time of each to a few seconds. Subjects were presented with the 30 ads, each separated by a blank sheet of paper, in order to avoid distraction while looking at a particular ad. The ads were presented in the same random order for each subject. After viewing an ad, subjects rated the ad on a five-point, like-dislike scale.

Results

The advertisement preference ratings were averaged for each subject over the ads in each of the three categories, yielding three scores for each subject. These data were then analyzed using a two-way fixed effects Analysis of Variance

(ANOVA). The mean ratings are presented in Table 1. The results of the ANOVA (see Table 2) indicated a significant main effect for the type of advertising, $F(2, 28) = 31.402, p < .001$; however, as predicted, no main effect was found for gender, $F(1, 14) = .164, p = .211, ns$. Also as predicted, there was no significant interaction between gender and advertising preference (see Figure 1).

Table 1

Mean Ratings for Magazine Advertisement Preferences

Subject	Advertisement Type		
	Stereotypic	Non-stereotypic	Neutral
Males N=15	2.607	3.047	2.973
Females N=15	2.407	3.180	2.873

Table 2

ANOVA Summary Table for the Advertising Preferences

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Blocks/Subjects	11.153	14			
Gender	.069	1	.069	.164	
Error Gender	5.882	14	.420		
Ad Preference	5.778	2	2.889	31.402	<.001
Error Ad. Pref.	2.589	28	.092		
Gender X Ad. Pref	.439	2	.219	1.634	.211
Error Gender X Ad. Pref	2.754	28	.134		
Total	25.910	89			

Collapsing across variables using a comparison of means for the type of advertising preference revealed the ratings for ads that portrayed gender as non-stereotypical ($M = .44$ for males and $M =$

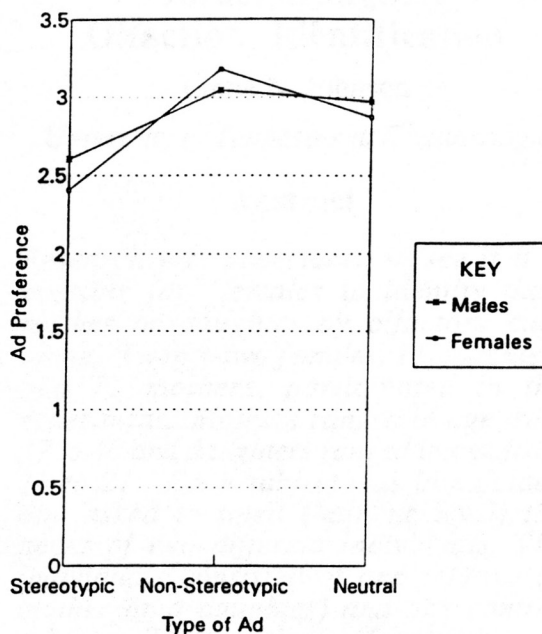


Figure 1. Male and female advertisement preferences for the different types of ads.

.773 for females) were significantly higher than those for neutral ads ($M = .366$ for males and $M = .466$ for females). Additionally, female subjects rated both the non-stereotypical and neutral ads significantly higher than ads portraying gender as stereotypical ($M = .307$), as found by using Tukey's test for multiple comparisons. Therefore, subjects indicated significantly higher preferences for non-stereotypical ads overall, with female subjects also indicating a significantly higher preference for neutral ads over stereotypical ads.

Discussion

Both males and females found advertisements portraying a person in a nonstereotypical gender role much more appealing than those portraying a person in a neutral or stereotypical gender role. In contrast to these results, Costrich, Feinstein, Kidder, Marecek, and Pascale (1975) found preferences for ads portraying a person in a stereotypical gender-role; however, their data were

collected 17 years ago and are probably outdated. Thus, the results reported in this study may be more applicable to modern American college students.

Interestingly, the preference for nonstereotypical ads was highly significant, with preferences for neutral ads even exceeding those of stereotypical ads (slightly for males but significantly for females). It is possible that there may be an element of surprise with the ads portraying individuals in nonstereotypical gender roles. This element may favorably influence the ad appeal due to its "shock value". However, it seems more likely that this preference reflects the current, more liberal social attitude towards what is considered to be appropriate gender-roles for men and women. As women strive to become equal with men in terms of status, the traditional gender roles for each sex may be viewed as undesirable and thus be discarded. The preference for ads portraying non-stereotypical gender roles would thus makes sense, as does the preference for neutral ads over stereotypical ads.

In order to determine whether a society's views affect a person's advertising preferences, studies might be conducted in different societies that hold differing attitudes regarding gender-roles. Preferences seen should thus reflect that particular societal view. One could also argue that advertisements do reflect the present view of a society. Along these lines, an experiment could be conducted using drawn or sketched advertisements so that the peripheral effects (i.e. color and the shock value of the ad) could be equalized. This would allow the gender role manipulation to be more isolated to determine if it still reveals such a strong effect.

Finally, one might wonder if the product in the nonstereotypical gender role ad had a confounding effect (i.e. one product being more popular than products in the other types of ads). Such information might be quite useful to the advertising media for appropriate campaign design.

References

- Abrams, D., Thomas, J., & Hogg, M. (1990). Numerical distinctiveness, social identity and gender salience. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 29*, 87-92.
- Costrich, N., Feinstein, J., Kidder, L., Marecek, J., & Pascale, L. (1975). When stereotypes hurt: Three studies of penalties for sex-role reversals. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 11*, 520-530.
- Jennings, J., Geis, F., & Brown, V. (1980). Influence of Television Commercials on Women's Self-Confidence and Independent Judgement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38*(2), 203-210.
- McCallum, D. M., Box D., Butgereit, A., Smith, L., & Threatt, S. (1986). Attraction to cross-gender role behavior in advertising. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 1*, 37-46.
- Rossi, S. R., & Rossi, J. S. (1985). Gender differences in the perception of women in magazine advertising. *Sex Roles, 12*, 1033-1039.
- Schwarz, N., Wagner, D., Bannert, M., & Mathes, L. (1987). Cognitive accessibility of sex role concepts and attitudes toward political participation: The impact of sexist advertisements. *Sex Roles, 17*, 593-601.