

Editor's Desk

What Do We Know About Gender and Diversity?

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Gender and Advertising is a subject that has been a part of my life for most of my academic career. The issue of how women are being portrayed in ads has been top of mind since the 1970s, when disparities in societal roles and depictions in advertising were examined. At the time, the construct of gender primarily was focused on cut-and-dried male/female biological differentiation—a vast oversimplification, as we learned over the next few decades.

The psychological dimensions of gender are both more subtle and more complex. The growing prevalence of transgender preferences—as well as myriad different manifestations of masculinity and femininity—have created a challenge for advertisers attempting to effectively segment consumers in a properly fractured landscape.

To further the gender discussion, this edition of the *Journal of Advertising Research* advances the literature with a series of studies that shed intriguing new light on a subject that demands on-going attention.

In **“Feminism and Advertising: Responses to Sexual Ads Featuring Women—How the Differential Influence of Feminist Perspectives Can Inform Targeting Strategies”** (please see page 163), Hojoon Choi (University of Houston), Kyunga Yoo (Korea Telecom), Tom Reichert (University of South Carolina), and Temple Northup (University of Houston) studied feminist attitudes in Korean men and women and their reactions to the depiction of women in sexual advertisements.

A national sample of 329 respondents showed that advertisers targeting Korean consumers “can use sexual appeals despite the conservative cultural background.” Individuals associated with “liberal feminism” showed positive perceptions of women in sexual ads, while higher levels of “radical feminism” sometimes led to negative reactions.

The authors felt that the use of “femvertising” (emphasizing female empowerment) can “embrace more explicit sexual appeals and could be applied to hedonic product segments, such as perfume and fashion accessories.” They conclude by reminding the reader that feminism is dynamic: what is considered acceptable at one time may become questionable in the future.

Stereotypical depictions of men and women have been prevalent throughout the last 50 years. In **“Effects of Nonstereotyped Occupational Gender Role Portrayal in Advertising: How Showing Women in Male-Stereotyped Job Roles Sends Positive Signals about Brands”** (please see page 179), Karina T. Liljedal, Hanna Berg, and Micael Dahlen (all from Stockholm School of Economics) ran studies with Swedish and U.K.-based respondents and found that when “women were seen in occupational roles that were stereotyped as masculine ... the effects were overwhelmingly positive.”

The study noted that “when brands do something beyond what is expected, positive results emerge because of consumers’ perceptions of brand effort and brand ability.” Even though the results did not differ for the countries that were studied, the authors warn that gender stereotypes still will have cultural variations that need to be further studied. They also suggest that future research should include males in female-stereotyped roles.

The perceived authenticity of the models used in ads is the focus of **“#BeingReal about Instagram Ad Models: The Effects of Perceived Authenticity—How Image Modification of Female Body Size Alters Advertising Attitude and Buying Intention”** (please see page 197). Authors Heather Shoenberger (Pennsylvania State University), Eunjin (Anna) Kim (University of Southern California), and Erika K. Johnson (East Carolina University) employed a national sample of 205 female consumers and exposed them to a series of

Instagram images with the intent to measure their perceptions of the authenticity of the models in the images.

Models that appeared to have been enhanced resulted in lower levels of purchase intention. And, models that were believed to be authentic largely generated positive reactions. The authors further found that “attitude toward the advertisement and intent to purchase items the models wore in the advertisements were highest when a plus-size, not digitally enhanced model was used.”

With that finding, the paper further suggests that advertisers now are able to use a wider array of models in their ads. Using thin models also showed positive results if the thin nature of the model was deemed to be authentic. Interestingly, the findings from the research demonstrated that “even thin-ideal models may not need to be modified to remove ‘flaws,’ such as freckles or tattoos.”

In **“Does Depicting Gay Couples in Ads Influence Behavioral Intentions? How Appeal for Ads with Gay Models Can Drive Intentions to Purchase and Recommend”** (please see page 208), Bradley J. Bond and Justine Rapp Farrell (both from University of San Diego) examined reactions of heterosexual and LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) consumers to advertisements containing heterosexual and LGB imagery.

The results showed that those who saw the images as congruent with their own sexual identity more likely would both purchase the goods involved and recommend them to others. As the LGB community has been growing in size and in purchasing power, these findings suggest that the use of LGB imagery will enhance the success of these ads, and advertisers would be wise to “include an increased emphasis on product offerings most utilized by LGB consumers or placement within media outlets popular with LGB audiences.”

Another interesting finding to this study was that heterosexual consumers are not as averse to LGB-inclusive ads as had previously been found, even as they remained most positive about the ads that were congruous with their own sexual identity.

Gender complexity also was the focus of **“LGBTQ Imagery in Advertising: How Viewers’ Political Ideology Shapes Their Emotional Response to Gender and Sexuality in Advertisements”** (please see page 222). Authors Gavin Northey (Griffith University), Rebecca Dolan (University of Adelaide), Jane Etheridge (Shopper Media Group), Felix Septianto (University of Auckland),

and Patrick Van Esch (Auckland University of Technology) took a detailed look at political ideology, gender, and sexuality in advertisements and the impact of each on consumer attitudes.

Using a sample of 859 U.S.-based respondents and a follow-up replication study, the authors discovered that political “conservatives (versus liberals) experienced a high level of disgust when viewing advertisements containing male-to-male homosexual imagery.”

Interestingly, this aversion was not evident when the same cohort reacted to ads that contained female-to-female homosexuality. And there was the same kind of equanimity for both conservative and liberal research participants when heterosexual couples were featured.

To avoid alienation, the authors suggest marketers should “consider geopolitical segmentation to guide marketing and media strategy.” They offer that “managers therefore can utilize election data as a proxy for consumers’ political ideologies. By doing this, they can develop and run different creative content and messages on the basis of geopolitical segments.”

We are embroiled in a difficult period of time dealing with the all-encompassing impact of Covid-19. We know that this is creating great challenges for everyone, and I want to take this opportunity to tell you that we here at the *Journal of Advertising Research* hope that you and your loved ones are safe and well, and we marvel at the adaptive nature of the advertising and research industries as they evolve to meet the changing needs of the marketplace.

We believe our long-standing partnership with the Advertising Research Foundation will be stronger than before given the lessons that we all are learning. We welcome regular submissions to the *Journal*, and our community of scholars and practitioners has demonstrated its pride and faith by honoring us with a steady flow of papers. Indeed, as the greater economy comes out of the pandemic, we will continue to track the new insights and understanding that will forever change the face of advertising research.

As the *Journal of Advertising Research* continues to grow and evolve, as always, I welcome your feedback.