

# Tracing Gender Stereotyping of Women By Companies of Various Industries in their Advertising Efforts

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## Abstract

With increased expenditure on advertising by industries through the years, there has also been an emergence of gender stereotyping of women which has claimed to have been both intentional and unintentional. With an increased number of people realizing the ill-effects of this, these companies have been receiving major pushback in terms of sales as well as the companies' image. While female perceptions of the same have been studied extensively, with increased literacy rates and awareness, males have also begun partaking in this movement. This study aims to analyse whether the perception of the roles of women in advertisements differ with gender. It also studies the effects of certain factors relating to gender stereotyping on the purchase decision of the individuals partaking in the study, through an author generated research model. The results indicated that the perceptions did not differ with gender. It was also found that there was an inverse relationship between perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisements and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

**Key Words:** *Gender Stereotyping, Advertising, Gender Perception, Gender Roles.*

## 1. Introduction to topic

It has been analysed that several recent brandings aimed at female consumers have received major

pushback from the audience for appearing clumsy and patronising, while others have been perceived as meagre stunts with little innate value, through **Slaymaker (2018)**. It has been gleaned that marketers need to think more strategically beyond cheap tricks, making things pink, or adding female icons to labels to reach women. Past research on the same indicates that this has inhibited the reach that these products have had towards women and have thus taken a toll on these brands. This is especially true for products that are used in a household since it has been established that women play a major role in influencing the decision of which brands to purchase. Recent data has shown that digital campaigns have a much harder time targeting and reaching females. Worryingly, this is particularly true for categories such as shopping, retail and travel. Given that women control (or at least influence) the vast majority of household spend decisions, the fact that all of these categories are more effective at targeting men online, ought to be a cause for concern with advertisers and make them question agencies on their approach to this challenge.

These advertising efforts, when aimed at both males and females might also face this issue. Although most studies up until this point have studied these effects on the purchase decisions of females when there is stereotyping of gender roles in these advertisements, especially when the portrayal of women by these advertisements is not acceptable in the eyes of the viewers, this may prove to be a threat in terms of all genders. This is a major area of concern for advertisers, owing to the fact that billions of dollars are being spent of these advertisements but are not being translated

into sales because of misdirected advertising efforts. Up until now, these studies have focussed on women, but there could be a possibility that males feel the same way about gender stereotyping too – not just females. This is what the study aims to find out. Studies have shown the ill – effects of gender stereotyping in advertising efforts towards women alone.

## 2. Gender and Advertising

Companies indulging in the process of selling products and services encompassing various categories rely heavily on the process of advertising as a means of communication to educate the customers about the existence as well as the usage of the product or service. Advertisers have resorted to using gender stereotypes in attempts for the customers to be able to relate to the advertisement and thus opt for the particular brand or service. When this practice began, the concept of gender stereotyping in itself was not very widespread and hence several companies got away with the negative portrayal of women in ads.

According to **Chaudhuri (2001)**, advertisements and gender images in the English print media in India are to this day portrayed in a traditional sense of assuming the role of home – makers and of possessing less power in the household. Although some advertising is seen to be breaking these norms ad showing women to be “globe-trotting corporate leaders”. As mentioned before, the portrayal of women in advertisements has grown through the years. From traditional roles, some companies are now breaking the stereotype and showing women to be more than just home makers.

In the traditional ideas of advertising, men are shown to be the holders of power in the decision making process of the household or related processes. Building on this premise, **Kordrostami (2017)** builds on theories of social power and feminine power and through the research offers a new classification for variations of power of women in advertisements. Apart from this, it also focuses on the concept of sexual power – in specific, the crucial component of sexual power which is the portrayal of pride.

**Menon , Punkambekar, & Bhatia (2015)** have further studies the differences in the perception of the advertisements between men and women - in print as well as in mass advertising. The paper delves into the effects these aforementioned advertisements have on its intended audience. Apart from this, it also compared the usage of humour against serious concepts and how the each of these are perceived by the respective genders

and how a change in this might help the companies improve their outreach. The research concludes that stereotyping, whether intentional or unintentional generates a negative rather than a positive outcome in the minds of the customer and thus suggests a change in the same.

Through the years, companies have utilised advertising to influence the perceptions of the viewers towards the advertised products or services. **Khaneja (2016)** studies various brands in the Indian market and their utilisation of gender stereotyping in their advertising – whether intentional or unintentional to study its effects. These brands ranging from Gucci to Axe deodorant provide an insight into the extent that companies are willing to go in terms of using gender stereotyping to sell their products. The research concludes that even though gender stereotyping in the form of objectification of women still exists in the Indian context, it is slowly changing in a positive direction.

With the issues of gender stereotyping cropping up with the spread of information, another factor that is to be considered is brand genuinity. According to **Baxter (2015)**, “not all brand activism is genuine”. By studying 6 brands under Unilever and Procter and Gamble, 3 of which are female empowering and 3 male empowering –it was found that even though some companies seem to be supporting gender equality through the advertisements, ultimately, some of these companies are actually just practicing faux feminism. Apart from this, it also discusses in detail the concept of advertising a concept that is gaining rapid popularity.

**Zimmerman & Dahlberg (2008)** have studied the concepts discussed above but through the perceptions of young women towards sexually objectified advertising. Using 94 female undergraduates, and their attitudes towards women being portrayed as sex objects was studied. The result of this was that there was a significant change in these attitude when compares to the attitudes in women from the year 1991. It was noticed that women at this time were less bothered by the portrayals than the women of 1991. The result also showed a shocking discovery that compared to 1991, the advertisement had very little effect on the purchase intention on the current respondents – significant change from the past.

### 2.1 Gender Stereotyping in Print advertising

According to **Yorgos C. Zotos (2014)**, the depiction of females in advertisements has mainly been propagated by the emerging feminism

movements and the evolution of the role of women in the society from that of a traditional nature to what they are capable of in this day and age. By utilising a holistic outlook to the phenomenon of female stereotypes in print advertisements, the study through traces its origins, analyses the interplay of stereotypes and advertising, undertakes an exhaustive perusal of the particular stream of literature and addresses methodological issues and proposes directions for further research.

Studies by **Plakoyiannaki & Zotos (2008)**, have aimed to provide evidence on the frequency of the female role portrayals in print advertisements specific to the United Kingdom. It also related the stereotypes to the categories of products to come to the findings. The findings showed that these women were showed as decorative roles and that its presence existed across several magazines in the UK.

## 2.2 Gender Stereotypes in Marketing

Heather Kraft (2012) analysed a variety of factors that continue to influence the changing marketplace in regards to gender differences – the factors being education, income, generational differences, and family dynamics. To carry out the same, subsequent marketing strategies for both genders are displayed with issues such as the appropriate types of marketing promises and themes that ought to be used for each gender. It also draws light on the outcomes associated with the choice of various media channels, and the correlation with sub segments within the genders. By utilising secondary data and a qualitative analysis, it was concluded that every generation and gender has had their own unique set of circumstances and obstacles that make them who they are.

## 3.1 Objectives of the study

1. Trace whether perception of the portrayal of women in advertisements varies with gender.
2. Ascertain whether the perceived gender stereotyping in advertisements ultimately influences the respondents' purchase decision.

## 3.2 Scope of the study

The aim of this study is to understand how stereotyping of gender roles and unacceptable portrayal of women in advertising affect buying behaviour. It would also study how this perception varies with gender. The study will be limited to the women and men of the city of Bengaluru with the age group being people from the age of 18.

## 3.3. Methodology of the study

The first part of the study aims to find whether the perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisements vary with gender. To do so, a chi –

square test will be utilised since the aim is to establish if there exists a relationship between the two categorical variables – Gender and perception of gender stereotyping in advertising measured using a Likert scale.

The assumptions for the same are as follows:

- The two variables which are being measured must be measured at an ordinal or nominal level.
- Two variable should consist of two or more categorical, independent groups.

In this study, both these assumptions are satisfied as gender is a nominal variable and perception of gender stereotyping is an ordinal variable and both have two and more categorical independent groups. This would be applied for each advertisement to ascertain how each of these advertisements would have an effect on the genders and whether it would vary with it.

For the second section, three independent variables have been considered. These are,

- Support for the message conveyed through the advertisement
- Perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement
- Acceptance of the portrayal of women in the advertisement

The dependent variable considered here is the decision to purchase the advertised product. For the study, each of these independent variables have been inter correlated to study the relationships between them. This has been carried out using the Pearson's correlation. After doing this, each of these independent factors have been studied along with the dependent variable to ascertain a comparison between how each of these factors affect the decision to purchase.

To carry this out, Somers' *d* will be used. The assumptions that need to be fulfilled for the same are as follows,

- One dependent variable and one independent variable and both are measured on an ordinal scale.
- A monotonic relationship between the dependent and independent variable. (It is typically not possible to check this assumption when running a Somers' *d* analysis.)

Thus, with the assumptions being fulfilled and the hypotheses is tested for each advertisement. Thus, for each advertisement, there are 3 hypotheses to garner the relationship between the independent variables themselves and 3 to test the relationship between the 3 independent variables and the dependent variable to compare the results.

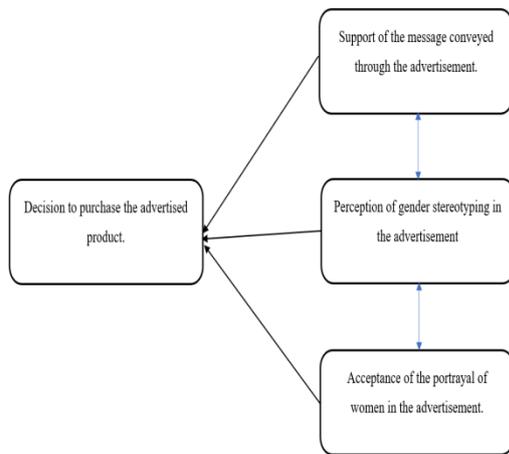


Figure 3.1 Author Generated research model to ascertain the relationship between the 3 independent variables and the decision to purchase the advertised product

## 4. Analysis and Interpretation

### 4.1 General Perception towards Gender roles in advertising

When asked about questions about their perception towards statements and questions that were pertaining to the topic, the following was recorded. When asked about which category they thought was a greater target for stereotyping, it was recorded that there was an observed difference in responses between males and females. The categories provided as options were “males”, “females”, “both” and “none”.

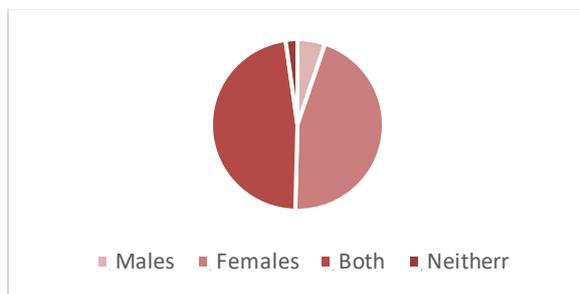


Figure 4.1 Portrayal of the greater target for stereotyping according to the respondents

When analysing the same within the categories of gender, some observations were made. First, analysing the responses from Males, it was found that most males believed that both genders were the greatest targets for gender stereotyping. Following this, the second most preferred option out of the four was females, followed by males and finally, neither with the least percentage. Thus, males

believed that both given genders were the biggest targets for gender stereotyping and followed by females. Analysing the same for females, it was observed that females believed that females were the biggest targets for gender stereotyping – followed by the opinion that both genders were a target for gender stereotyping. These results prove to be monumentally different from the responses of the male respondents in the sense that compared to males, females strongly believe that females are a greater target for gender stereotyping in advertisements, especially when compared to men. This observation has serious implications, especially for advertisers as it portrays that there is a major difference in perception in terms of who gender stereotyping of genders. While females perceive that it is mostly women or both, men perceive that both are targeted.

Table 4.1: Statistical measures pertaining to the responses towards the statement “I would avoid purchasing the product if the portrayal of women is not respectable in the advertisement”.

Mean	3.96
Median	4.00
Mode	5
Std. Deviation	1.149
Skewness	-.886
Std. Error of Skewness	.209

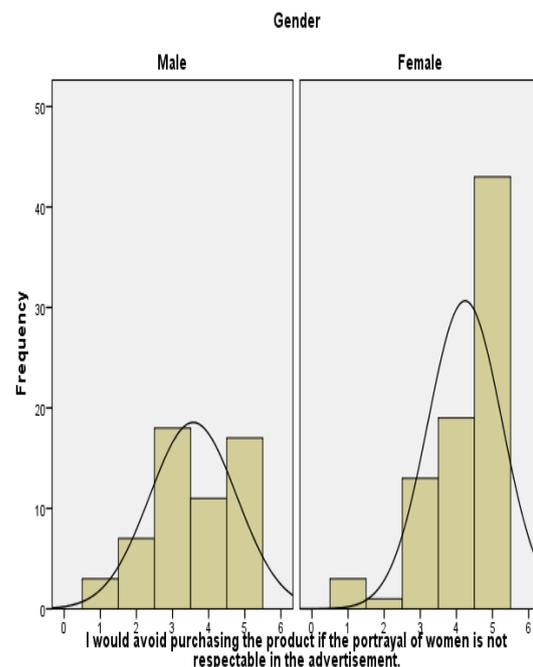


Figure 4.2 Histogram with the Normal Distribution Curve of the responses pertaining to the statement “I would avoid purchasing the product if the portrayal of women is not respectable in the advertisement”.

To further assess people’s perception of gender stereotyping in advertising, a set of four statements were put forward to the respondents. These statements were in relation to gender stereotyping in advertising and aimed to ascertain their views on various facets of it. Thus, to achieve the same, each statement has been analysed against the response provided by males and females to get an idea about the overall response pattern as well as how they differ in terms of gender.

From *Figure 4.2*, it is clearly evident that there is a significant difference in perception between men and women in terms of portrayal of women in the advertisement and their subsequent action based on the same. It is displayed that there is a higher degree of positive response from women compared to men showing that a higher proportion of women strongly agree that they would avoid purchasing the product if the portrayal of women is not respectable in the advertisement.

Table 4.2: Statistical measures pertaining to the responses towards the statement “ Women are depicted as the “weaker sex” in combined Male-Female advertisements.”

Mean	3.36
Median	3.00
Mode	3
Std. Deviation	1.090
Skewness	-.274

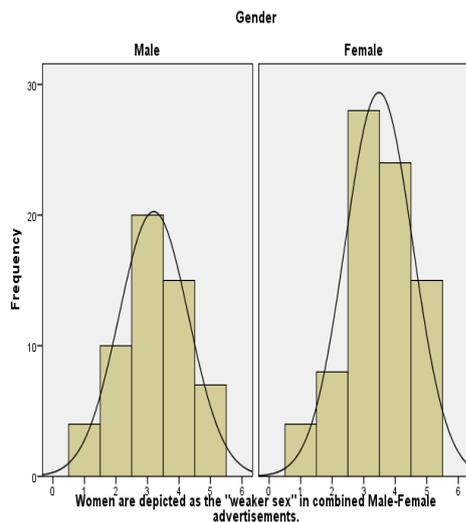


Figure 4.3 Histogram with the Normal Distribution Curve of the responses pertaining to the statement “ Women are depicted as the “weaker sex” in combined Male-Female advertisements.”

The next statement put forward to the respondents was whether “Women are depicted as the “weaker sex” in combined Male-Female advertisements.”

This would essentially aid in gauging the respondents’ perception of the current trends in the advertising practices in terms of advertisements displaying both males and females. Using a scale to ascertain agreement, the results were recorded.

Thus, from *figure 4.3*, it is evident that in both cases, the most responses have been recorded in the neutral category with a similar pattern of responses between males and females. The spike in terms of the female category is owed to the higher number of female responses. A difference observed in this factor is that more women have strongly agreed to the statement than men showing that there is more extremity in terms of agreement that Women are depicted as the weaker sex in combined male – female advertisements when compared to the responses by women.

Table 4.3 : Association of various factors with purchase decision relating to Advertisement - 1

	The advertisement would encourage me to buy the product being advertised.
I support the message being portrayed in the advertisement	0.407
"I believe that this advertisement depicts stereotyping of gender roles."	-0.042
"I feel that the portrayal of women in the above advertisement is acceptable."	0.314

Next, for Advertisement – 1 itself, factors relating to the purchase decision have been analysed. For this, 3 variables have been considered –

- Support of the message conveyed through the advertisement.
- Perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement.
- Acceptance of the portrayal of women in the advertisement.

Each of these variables have been analysed with the decision to purchase to ascertain the relationship between these factors and the ultimate purchase decision to perform a comparative study to see which factor has the highest correlation with the purchase decision and how each of these factors relates to the decision to purchase. Since this analysis would require more than just testing the strength of the association, Somer’s *d* has been used to analyse the strength as well as the association of the relationship in the advertisement.

H1 : There is a significant relationship between support of the message being portrayed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H2 : There is a significant relationship between the perception of the presence of gender stereotyping

in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H3 : There is no significant relationship between the perceived acceptability of the portrayal of the woman in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

From Table 4.3, it is evident that the strongest relationship exists between support for the message being conveyed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the product. Following this closely is the acceptance of the portrayal of females in the advertisement. With respect to this advertisement, there is observed to be a negative but weak association between the decision to purchase the product and the perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement. The negative association indicates that when a higher degree of gender stereotyping is perceived in the advertisement, the subject is more likely to reject the product. But in this advertisement, this association is weak, possibly owing to the fact that the general perception towards this advertisement is that it does not contain stereotyping of gender roles.

Thus, with respect to the hypotheses, the alternate hypotheses of H1 and H3 are accepted and the alternate hypothesis for H2 is rejected.

Table 4.4: Association of various factors with purchase decision relating to Advertisement - 2

	The advertisement would encourage me to buy the product being advertised.
I support the message being portrayed in the advertisement	0.731
"I believe that this advertisement depicts stereotyping of gender roles."	-0.357
"I feel that the portrayal of women in the above advertisement is acceptable."	0.654

Next, for Advertisement – 2 itself, factors relating to the purchase decision have been analysed. For this, 3 variables have been considered –

- Support of the message conveyed through the advertisement.
- Perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement.
- Acceptance of the portrayal of women in the advertisement.

Each of these variables have been analysed with the decision to purchase to ascertain the relationship between these factors and the ultimate purchase decision to perform a comparative study to see which factor has the highest correlation with the

purchase decision and how each of these factors relates to the decision to purchase. Since this analysis would require more than just testing the strength of the association, Somer's *sd* has been used to analyse the strength as well as the association of the relationship in the advertisement.

H4 : There is a significant relationship between support of the message being portrayed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H5 : There is a significant relationship between the perception of the presence of gender stereotyping in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H6 : There is no significant relationship between the perceived acceptability of the portrayal of the woman in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

From Table 4.4, it is evident that the strongest relationship exists between support for the message being conveyed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the product. Following this closely is the acceptance of the portrayal of females in the advertisement. With respect to this advertisement, there is observed to be a negative association between the decision to purchase the product and the perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement. The negative association indicates that when a higher degree of gender stereotyping is perceived in the advertisement, the subject is more likely to reject the product. In this advertisement, this association is moderate.

Thus, with respect to the hypotheses, the alternate hypotheses of H4, H5 and H6 are accepted.

Table 4.5: Association of various factors with purchase decision relating to Advertisement - 3

	The advertisement would encourage me to buy the product being advertised.
I support the message being portrayed in the advertisement	0.663
"I believe that this advertisement depicts stereotyping of gender roles."	-0.352
"I feel that the portrayal of women in the above advertisement is acceptable."	0.532

Next, for Advertisement – 3 itself, factors relating to the purchase decision have been analysed. For this, 3 variables have been considered –

- Support of the message conveyed through the advertisement.

- Perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement.
- Acceptance of the portrayal of women in the advertisement.

Each of these variables have been analysed with the decision to purchase to ascertain the relationship between these factors and the ultimate purchase decision to perform a comparative study to see which factor has the highest correlation with the purchase decision and how each of these factors relates to the decision to purchase. Since this analysis would require more than just testing the strength of the association, Somer's *d* has been used to analyse the strength as well as the association of the relationship in the advertisement.

H7 : There is a significant relationship between support of the message being portrayed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H8: There is a significant relationship between the perception of the presence of gender stereotyping in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H9 : There is no significant relationship between the perceived acceptability of the portrayal of the woman in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

From Table 4.5, it is evident that the strongest relationship exists between support for the message being conveyed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the product. Following this closely is the acceptance of the portrayal of females in the advertisement. With respect to this advertisement, there is observed to be a negative association between the decision to purchase the product and the perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement. The negative association indicates that when a higher degree of gender stereotyping is perceived in the advertisement, the subject is more likely to reject the product. In this advertisement, this association is moderate.

Thus, with respect to the hypotheses, the alternate hypotheses of H7, H8 and H9 are accepted.

Table 4.6: Association of various factors with purchase decision relating to Advertisement - 4

	The advertisement would encourage me to buy the product being advertised.
I support the message being portrayed in the advertisement	0.511
"I believe that this advertisement depicts stereotyping of gender roles."	-0.118
"I feel that the portrayal of women in the above advertisement is acceptable."	0.521

Next, for Advertisement – 4 itself, factors relating to the purchase decision have been analysed. For this, 3 variables have been considered –

- Support of the message conveyed through the advertisement.
- Perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement.
- Acceptance of the portrayal of women in the advertisement.

Each of these variables have been analysed with the decision to purchase to ascertain the relationship between these factors and the ultimate purchase decision to perform a comparative study to see which factor has the highest correlation with the purchase decision and how each of these factors relates to the decision to purchase. Since this analysis would require more than just testing the strength of the association, Somer's *d* has been used to analyse the strength as well as the association of the relationship in the advertisement.

H10 : There is a significant relationship between support of the message being portrayed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H11 : There is a significant relationship between the perception of the presence of gender stereotyping in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

H12 : There is no significant relationship between the perceived acceptability of the portrayal of the woman in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the advertised product.

From Table 4.6, it is evident that the strongest relationship exists between support for the message being conveyed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the product. Following this closely is the acceptance of the portrayal of females in the advertisement. With respect to this advertisement, there is observed to be a negative but weak association between the decision to purchase the product and the perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement. The negative association indicates that when a higher degree of gender stereotyping is perceived in the advertisement, the subject is more likely to reject the product. But in this advertisement, this association is weak, possibly owing to the fact that the general perception towards this advertisement is that it does not contain stereotyping of gender roles.

Thus, with respect to the hypotheses, the alternate hypotheses of H10 and H12 are accepted and the alternate hypothesis for H11 is rejected.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Findings

- Males believed that both given genders were the biggest targets for gender stereotyping and followed by females. Analysing the same for females, it was observed that females believed that females were the biggest targets for gender stereotyping – followed by the opinion that both genders were a target for gender stereotyping.
- A higher proportion of women strongly agreed that they would avoid purchasing the product if the portrayal of women is not respectable in the advertisement.
- More females strongly agree that they are more sensitive towards the portrayal of women in advertisements than they used to be when compared to the responses by males.
- In the testing of the first hypothesis using the Chi Square test for Independence, it was found that in all four advertisements the null hypothesis was accepted and it was thus ascertained that there were no gender differences in perception of the portrayal of women in advertisements. Thus, this signifies that perception of acceptability of the portrayal of women in the advertisement does not differ with gender.
- With the second portion, an author generated research model was used. Here, the three individual independent variables – Support of the message being portrayed in the advertisement, Perception of Gender stereotyping in the advertisement and Acceptance of the portrayal of females in the advertisement.
- In all cases, it was found that when the advertisement is perceived to portray a higher degree of gender stereotyping in the advertisement, there is lesser support for the conveyed message. Also, when there is perception of a high degree of gender stereotyping in the advertisement, the subsequent acceptance of the portrayal of the female in the advertisement is low.
- when there is perception of a high degree of gender stereotyping in the advertisement, the subsequent acceptance of the portrayal of the female in the advertisement is low.
- When assessing its effect on the decision to purchase, it was observed that in most cases the strongest relationship exists between support for the message being conveyed in the advertisement and the decision to purchase the product.
- Following this closely is the acceptance of the portrayal of females in the advertisement.

- It was also observed that there was a negative association between the decision to purchase the product and the perception of gender stereotyping in the advertisement. The negative association indicates that when a higher degree of gender stereotyping is perceived in the advertisement, the subject is more likely to reject the product. In this advertisement, this association is moderate.

### 5.2. Suggestions

From the findings, two things are evident. Firstly, there is no significant variation in perception of the portrayal of women in advertisements with gender. This means that the decision on whether to purchase the product or not does not vary with gender. Although this does not hold much significance for marketers, this is a huge leap forward for the advertising world itself as it signifies that even if there is a negative perception of the advertisement, it is common for both men and women and there is no variation with each. This could also be a serious implication for marketers in the sense that if there is a perceived degree of gender stereotyping in any advertising put forward by the advertiser, it would have repercussions in the eyes of everyone, regardless of gender.

The second thing is that there is a significant negative relationship that exists between perceived gender stereotyping in advertisements and the decision to purchase the product. Now this is a major area of concern for companies indulging in marketing practices that involve women in their advertisements. This essentially means that it was found that if there was a high degree of perceived gender stereotyping in advertisements, there would be a subsequent low degree of eagerness to buy the advertised product. For this reason, it is advisable for companies to be cautious when they indulge in advertising. They must take time to understand their customer base, review their advertisement before it is displayed and make sure that it goes through considerable analysis to make sure that there is no content that may be perceived as being stereotypical of genders or negative portrayal of women in these advertisements.

### 5.3. Conclusion

With billions of Dollars being spent every year on advertising by various companies in attempts to lure customers in to purchase their products, one thing that several of the advertisers overlook is how their message is being conveyed in terms of sensitivity regarding gender portrayal. As mentioned before, several studies have extensively studied the effects of the advertisements aimed at women which are perceived as being gender –

stereotypical and how it affects their purchase decision. This study on the other hand aimed to find out where these perceptions varied with gender itself. The results, which point in the direction of there being no change with gender is a cause for worry for advertisers. For two out of the four advertisements displayed to the respondents – Ariel 2 and Snickers, not only was the message viewed as being stereotypical of gender and portrayal of the woman – unacceptable, it was also found that for these ads, as well as all other advertisements, these opinions did not differ with gender. This provides the advertisers with a bigger reason to be more weary of what they are putting out in the world as it may affect not just women but men as well. Additionally, there is also scope to study the effects of the same on other genders as well apart from males and females and thus view gender as being non – binary.

It was also found that when a perception of a higher degree of gender stereotyping in the advertisement was accompanied by a subsequent lower purchase intention response. Alternatively, a perception of higher support for the message and the portrayal of women in the advertisement was accompanied with a higher purchase intention response.

These outcomes call for a major change in the way advertising functions these days. Gender stereotyping and unacceptable portrayal of women in advertisements, intentional or unintentional needs to be altered in order to translate advertising efforts in to actual sales. For advertisements with unintentional stereotyping, future course of action would include thorough assessment of the advertisement that needs to put up to deem it fit.

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