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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE ROLES PORTRAYED BY WOMEN IN COMMERCIALS: 1973 - 2008

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper was to examine female roles portrayed by advertising. More specifically, the question that motivated this research project was: What messages about women have been given to society through advertisement? Have these portrayals been changed during the past decades? The study consisted of a systematic content analysis of Brazilian commercials from 1973 to 2008. A probabilistic sample procedure was employed. Ninety five pieces were selected. Our results have revealed that some specific images have changed over the years, however, they continued to be stereotyped and idealized.

Keywords: Advertising; Female; Gender; Advertising; Roles.

1 INTRODUCTION

According to Thompson (2001), symbolic systems are not ideological in themselves. Ideology ⁽¹⁾ is engendered by the way they are applied. Thompson calls this phenomenon the social use of symbolic forms (Thompson, 2001). Indeed, communication tools may become instrumental in the reproduction and transmission of the ideology of the dominant group. Barthes (1989) emphasizes that ideological messages may be harmful to viewers that are not aware of them, since ideologies contribute to legitimize relations of domination and social exclusion (Heck, 1996; Roso, Strey, Guareschi, & Bueno, 2002).

On the other hand, advertising images remain an important topic for marketing and advertising literature because research suggests that visual imagery provided by advertisements has a significant effect on the belief system of a given society. Indeed, advertising produces and reflects values, attitudes and behaviors of the social realm where it is embedded. It gives meanings to words and symbols, playing a special role in the interpretation frame of the current world (Kang, 1997). Actually, advertising molds and mirrors life, and this is enough to pledge our attention. Whereas, advertising's critics have generally held that mass media pictures may well be selective and biased to forge specific ideas, this fact reinforces the reason why these images represent an important historical record, as they denounce how a given society would like to see itself (Belk & Pollay, 1985). This is a reason why the social, cultural and psychological impact of media messages has been of special interest as an object of study for researchers in various areas of knowledge, among them the Marketing area (Gulas & McKeage, 2000; Rocha, 1995; Stern, Russel, & Russel, 2005). The studies of the so-called vulnerable consumers – women, elderly citizens, children and racial minorities – are placed within the context of concern about the consequences of media images in society.

Communication researchers who investigate equity in the media are concerned about the impact of images in society as a whole, and not about their influence on the target public of companies for whom the communication tools or products were developed. Such preoccupations are justified because communication plays an essential role in the construction and re-affirmation of individual identities and offer models to be followed in terms of frames of mind and behaviors (Kellner, 2001). Moreover, media images create **an effect of reality**, i.e. they make people believe in what they make them see (Santaella, 1996).

Research related to female portrayals in advertising has been the focus of attention of many academic studies because mass media messages about women have often depicted them in a stereotypical manner such as: women are irrational, fragile, not intelligent, submissive and subservient to men (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Blackwood, 1983; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Goffman, 1979; Jolliffe, 1989; Kang, 1997; Luebke, 1989; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975). In addition, these investigations have shown that these portrayals haven't reflected changes in female roles in modern societies. Indeed, mass media has concocted women's image mainly as sex object, wife and mother whose primary goal in life is to look beautiful for men (Kosimar, 1971).

It is in this context that the main purpose of this investigation is to examine female roles portrayed by advertising. More specifically, the questions that motivated this research were: 1) what messages about women have been shown to society through advertisements? 2) Have these portrayals been changed during the past decades?

Whereas marketing scientific community in other countries has been examining this topic since the seventies (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Goffman, 1979; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975) very few academic articles published in the main Brazilian academic journals and proceedings in marketing have addressed this subject matter. This void should be fulfilled because advertising portrayals have important social influences. Indeed, studies have revealed that stereotyped portrayals of women produce negative feelings in female viewers, as low self-esteem, depression and anxiety (Acevedo, Nohara, & Arruda, 2004; Martin & Kennedy, 1993; Stephens, Hill, & Hanson, 1994; Stice & Shaw, 1994). Hence, studies in the area not only would widen the research contribution undertaken in Brazilian context to Advertising literature, but also to contribute to the society to whom these images are imposed.

This article is organized in six parts. The first part is the introduction. In the second one, we present a literature review. In the third section we describe the procedure adopted. Subsequently, we present the results and discuss them taking into account previous research. Finally, the conclusion contains the implications of our results, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review of this paper is composed by previous research specifically related to female portrayals in advertising. However, as mass media reflects the society where it is embedded, we have included in this section a brief review of Freyre (2003) description about female roles in Brazilian society in the XVIII and XIX centuries. As Freyre's research is considered to be a sociological, historical and anthropological masterpiece about Brazilian society, its analysis of female positions in that period seems to be the foundation to understand female roles in the Brazilian society.

2.1 ADVERTISING IMAGES IN PREVIOUS RESEARCH ABOUT FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS IN THE MEDIA

There has been a stream of advertising research that has focused on the characteristics of female imagery in publicity. One of the most important investigations related to this subject is Goffman's (1979) study. The goal of his investigation was to analyze patterns of gender roles in advertising. The author analyzed nearly 400 print advertisements and concluded that "women are weakened by advertising portrayals" (Kang, 1997, p. 6). Indeed, he found five categories which pictured women in a depreciated manner. They were: *relative size* (related to social weight), **feminine touch** (women tracing the object), **function ranking** (related to hierarchy of functions), **ritualization of subordination** (women is depicted in lowing postures which express subordination and submissiveness) and **licensed withdraw** (women pictured as removed psychologically from the situation).

Twelve years later, Kang (1997) replicated Goffman's study and proposed two more categories. They were: **body display** (it means high degree of nudity) and **independence**. The goal of his investigation was to develop a comparative study in order to analyze which female roles were most common in magazine advertisements in 1979 and in 1991. The study was composed by a random sampling of 504 ads, 252 pieces, as well as in 1979 and in 1991, which were collected from women's popular magazines. Results of Kang' study showed that overall, portrayals of women have not been changed from 1979 to 1991. According to Kang (1997, p. 989) "advertisements are still showing the same stereotyped images of women".

In addition, other studies undertaken in the seventies have revealed that female portrayals in publicity are often cliché-ridden, such as weak, childish, dependent, domestic, irrational and subordinated to men. Courtney & Lockeretz (1971), for example, concluded that four stereotypes prevailed in advertisements: 1) a woman's place is in the home; 2) women should not make important decisions or do important things; 3) women are dependent and need the protection of men; 4) men see women as sexual objects and not as human beings. Moreover, Venkatesan & Losco (1975) found that women were pictured as: 1) a sexual object, 2) physically beautiful, 3) as sexy, 4) as high living, 5) as overachieving housewife and 6) dependent on men.

Furthermore, Belkaoui & Belkaoui's results (1976) indicate that women were depicted primarily: 1) in nonworking roles, 2) as low income earners, 3) in decorative roles and idle situations, 4) as having limited purchasing power. Another course of research examined the efficiency of modern women images in advertising. Jaffe & Berger (1994), for example confront two portrayals, the super woman and the equalitarian. In the first description, "woman manages the demands of both job and home with little help from anyone" (Jaffe & Berger, 1994 p. 32). In the second one, a woman and a man are responsible for the same duties.

Further, the stream of research related to content analysis of female portrayals in advertising has been extended to focus on perceptions towards ad images and their negative social effects. Acevedo et al. (2004), for example, have investigated how women interpret female representations in advertising. The authors interviewed 60 Brazilian women and concluded that women perceive advertising images as **depreciated**, **idealized** and **modern**. Considering the depreciated images, interviewees reported that they perceive that mass media depict women in four manners, that are 1) **women as not intelligent or irrational** 2) **window-display**; 3) **body display**; and 4) as **housewives**. The other perception reported in the study is connected to the idea that portrayals in ads are idealized and hence very far from the real world. The interviewees considered two dimensions of idealization in advertising: 1) **woman as physically perfect**, which is, always young, beautiful, skinny and always tidy; 2) **absence of features of Brazilian women**, which is, the absence of **mulatas**, black and brown skinned women. In this depiction women are blond, tall and have white skin. The third group was that publicity represents women in a modern way, that is, woman as 1) independent from man; and as 2) super woman - being able to be mother, professional, and wife concomitantly (Acevedo et al., 2004).

Another stream of investigation has analyzed the negative social effects (also known as **unintended consequences of advertising**) of idealized images in media. Martin and Gentry, (1997), Martin and Kennedy (1993), Richins (1991), Stice and Shaw (1994) studies, for example, revealed a positive correlation between idealized portrayals in ads, self-image and self-esteem. In addition, Stephens et al. (1994) examined how attractive and skinny endorsers were associated to self-image dissatisfaction and to dieting diseases among women.

Not only have the idealistic portrayals of women been focused by research, but also any type of advertising images that present unrealistic elements have come under investigators close scrutiny. In his study, Everardo Rocha Guimarães, a Brazilian social Anthropologist, has concluded that advertising imagery presents a magic solution to consumer problems. His study has shown that publicity concocts **idealized narratives** which show **another life** and sell **magic solutions** (Rocha, 1995, p. 139). Furthermore, the author states that whereas pleasure is always depicted extensively in mass media, loneliness, sadness, uncomfortable, diseases and exploitation seem never to prevail (Rocha, 1995).

2.2 WOMEN ROLES IN BRAZILIAN PATRIARCHAL REGIME

According to Freyre (2003) women who lived in the patriarchal system in Brazil were confined to domestic realm. Their responsibilities were to be mother and to manage the house. Indeed, women were apart from domains as politics, education, public policies, science and literature which were controlled by men.

According to Freyre (2003), women physical bodies represented an important symbol of their function in society. They should be during adolescence, pale, slim and fragile. However, after the marriage it was accepted that she would become fat, deformed into a **shapeless mass**, as well as developing larger hips. In this moment she would be the housekeeper and the mother of the patriarchal family. Hence, this specialization of the body was related to their roles in society. Indeed, woman was anything else than man's **fleshy puppet**.

Freyre (2003) has stressed the idealization portrayal of female body by men. In this idealization women had not only delicate feet, waist and hands, but also big breasts. According to the author, the idealization of women was a strong element of the narcissistic aspect of the patriarchal man. He dominated and “pretended to adore her in order to feel stronger” (Freire, 2003, p. 213). To sum up, the author states that in the patriarchal society women personified **fragility**,

beauty and the **domestic realm**. They were restrained to **artificial situations** in order to provide pleasure to male. Finally, the author stated that Brazilian society has overcome race prejudices much easily than gender discrimination. In this way, according to the author, women's inferiority was stronger than racism in Brazil.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

We propose that images in advertising can be organized in three different groups: stereotyped, idealized and plural portrayals. These three labels are mentioned by the literature related to female portrayals in advertising. In addition, the majority of categories and their operational definitions come from previous research, mainly from Goffman (1979). Nevertheless, they also come from Acevedo et al. (2004), Belkaoui & Belkaoui (1976), Courtney and Lockeretz (1971), Jaffe and Berger (1994), Kang (1997) and Venkatesan and Losco (1975) studies, as it is explained in the procedure part of the article. However, some few categories were developed in a pre-test of the present investigation. Table 1 below presents these three groups.

Table 1 – Women portrayals

STEREOTYPED PORTRAYALS	IDEALIZED PORTRAYALS	PLURAL PORTRAYALS
Feminine touch	Physically perfect	Independence
Function ranking	Caucasian ethnic characteristics	Home and family tasks equity
Ritualization of subordination		Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics
Licensed withdrawal		Function equity
Body-Revealing clothes or Nudity		Rational
Dependent		Women as prestigious or professionals or high income earners
Housewife		
Decorative role		

Women as physically beautiful		
Women as shallow		
Irrational		
Window display		
An object of ridicule		
Women as low income earners		
Super woman		

Source: developed by the authors.

4 PROCEDURE

This study consists on a systematic content analysis of the role portrayed by women in Brazilian commercials during 1973 to 2008. According to Berelson (1952, p. 55) “content analysis is a research technique for the *objective, systematic* and *quantitative* description of the manifest content of communication”. Kassirjian (1977) defines it as **scientific, objective, systematic, quantitative** and **generalizable** description of communications content.

The condition of **objectivity** concerns with the creation of analytical categories. Specifically, the objectivity dimension depends on whether the researcher describes: 1) the rules and procedures; 2) judge training process; 3) the pre-testing of measures; 4) whether judges are independent from the author and work independently from each other; 5) which objectivity index was applied (Berelson, 1952; Karsarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). On the other hand, **systematization** is related to the process of applying pre determined rules to the selection of communication content. This requisite prevents the study to corroborate the analyst’s assumption (Berelson, 1952; Hosti, 1969; Kassirjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). According to Kassirjian (1977) **quantification** differentiates content analysis from ordinary critical reading. The author states that the assessment of the degree of emphasis or omission of any given category is what content analysis is all about.

Sample

Commercials were the unit of analysis for this study. In addition, the population from which this sample was drawn consisted of Brazilian commercials which got an award in international and national festivals from 1973 to 2008. These pieces were obtained from a project developed by a Brazilian organization named *Museu Virtual Memória da Propaganda* (Virtual museum of advertising memory).

Thirty five years – from 1973 to 2008 – were chosen for the study. A two stage sample procedure was employed. First, those commercials which portrayed at least a woman were retained. In addition, repeated commercials were not selected for the sample. In a second stage, all the remained commercials were enumerated and a probabilistic simple sample procedure was undertaken. Finally, ninety five pieces were selected. Using this sampling technique, we intended to assure that the systematization criterion was followed.

Coding Issues

Objectivity specifies that the categories of analysis are defined quite precisely. In this way, the majority of the labels employed to nominate each category, their definitions and their measurements were based on previous research. However, some few categories were developed in the pre-testing of the present study. In addition, it is important to stress that the categories of this study were not independent or mutually exclusive. The labels, definitions and sources of each category are the following:

- **Feminine touch:** Women are portrayed using their fingers and hands to trace the outline of an object or to caress its surface. This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian touch that grasps, manipulates or holds (Goffman, 1979; Kang, 1997)
- **Function ranking:** When a man and a woman participate in an activity and the woman takes a subordinated role. This activity could happen either within an occupational situation or outside it (Goffman, 1979; Kang, 1997)
- **Ritualization of Subordination through physical postures:** Leaning postures can be read as an acceptance of subordination and an expression of submissiveness (Goffman, 1979; Kang, 1997)

- **Licensed Withdraw:** The woman is psychologically removed from the social situation which surrounds her (Goffman, 1979; Kang, 1997)
- **Body-Revealing clothes or Nudity:** When the woman is portrayed showing a high degree of nudity, as with body-revealing clothes or completely nude (Acevedo et al., 2004; Kang, 1997)
- **Dependent:** women are portrayed as dependent financial or psychologically from men (Courtney & Lockeretz, 1971; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975)
- **Housewife:** In this portrayal, women are presented as full time housewives who don't have a professional income. Taking care of the house and the family is the center activity of their lives (Acevedo et al., 2004; Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975)
- **Decorative role:** When there is a woman in the advertising but she doesn't have any relation with the product. She has only a decorative role in the ad (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Venkatesan & Losco, 1975)
- **Women as physically beautiful:** women are portrayed as their main focus in life is to become more beautiful (Venkatesan & Losco, 1975)
- **Women as shallow:** Woman is concerned with superficial activities and subjects. Her main focus is to spend money, to amuse herself, to buy and consume expensive products or to engage in luxurious activities (Venkatesan & Losco, 1975)
- **Irrational:** refers to the image of a woman who doesn't use her intelligence or doesn't think (Acevedo et al., 2004)
- **Window display:** woman is portrayed as if she was a **hanger**, a **package** or a **shelf** where the product is exhibited to be sold (Acevedo et al., 2004)
- **An object of ridicule:** woman is portrayed as an object of ridicule. She is the object of jokes, malicious comments or she behaves as a ridiculous comic_actress (developed in the pre-test of this study)
- **Women as low income earners:** women are represented in positions which demand low or intermediate level of education, as secretarial, clerical or blue collar positions. They are never depicted in positions which demand high level of education and which are connected to high **status** or high wages (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976)
- **Super woman:** In this image, a woman manages the demands of job, family and home with little help from anyone. In despite of having a job, she doesn't share family and household

chores with her husband. She takes these responsibilities on her own (Acevedo et al., 2004; Jaffe & Berger, 1994)

- **Physically perfect:** this portrayal is related to the imposition of a particular image that is always slim, beautiful and young (Acevedo et al., 2004)
- **Caucasian ethnic characteristics:** woman is depicted as belonging to the Caucasian ethnic group (Acevedo et al., 2004)
- **Independent:** Woman is viewed as being financial or psychologically independent from men (Acevedo et al., 2004; Kang, 1997)
- **Home and family tasks equity:** woman and man share the family and home responsibilities (Jaffe & Berger, 1994)
- **Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics:** women with features of non Caucasian groups (developed in the pre-test of this study)
- **Function equity:** When a man and a woman collaborate face to face and they are likely to perform equal roles. There is no hierarchy of function. This function equality is pictured either within an occupational frame or outside of an occupational specialization (developed in the pre-test of this study)
- **Rational:** refers to the image of women who use their intelligence or base their behavior in a rational thinking process (developed in the pre-test of this study)
- **Women as prestigious or professional or high income earner:** refers to women in a prestigious position, in a high wage position or in a high educated position. Examples are: judges, professors, executives, medical doctors, dentists, scientists (developed in the pre-test of this study).

Operational Rules

The operational rules for each category were taken from a previous research, and were formulated as follow:

Feminine touch:

- Using hands or fingers to trace the objects outlines, to hold it in a protective manner or to caress it or just to touch it.

Function ranking:

- Man teaching woman
- Woman serving man
- Man in a hierarchical superior function in relation to woman
- Man determines what it is supposed to be done.

Ritualization of Subordination:

- Lowering oneself physically
- Knee bend
- Body or head leant
- Lying or sitting on the bed or floor

Licensed Withdraw:

- Hand covering mouth or face
- Head or eye gaze aversion
- Maintaining telephone conversation or reading

Body-Revealing Clothes or nudity:

- Female model wearing body revealing clothes (mini skirts, tide skirts, shorts, transparent clothing, bath clothing) or showing nudity (wearing underwear, rolled up in towels, without clothes)

Dependent:

- Financially dependent from men: she doesn't seem to be able to earn money alone to maintain herself. She doesn't have an income or a job. She depends on the man's earnings to live.
- Psychologically dependent from men: in order to complete a task she needs male instruction; she needs male encouragement or reinforcement; she doesn't make decisions alone; she doesn't have the initiative for doing things. She needs a man to take care of her

Housewife:

- Woman concerned or engaged in household chores or cleanliness
- Women concerned about being a good housewife

Decorative roles:

- Woman has no relation to the product. Although, she is in the foreground of the scene, she performs no function.
- Woman has no relation to the product and performs no function. She is presented in the end of the ad, or she is shown quite quickly. In addition, she is in the back of the scene.

Women as physically beautiful:

- Woman concerned with cosmetic products or with extraneous accessories to enhance physical beauty
- Woman concerned with looking more youthful, slimmer, more appealing

Women as shallow:

- Woman is primary concerned about: luxury leisure, expensive adornments, material possessions; spending money; amusing herself

Irrational:

- - Woman makes decisions that are incoherent. Or she is not able to offer solutions in difficult or unexpected situations.

Window display:

- - Woman exhibits the product in her body, as if her body was a hanger or a shelf for the product

An object of ridicule:

- - The woman is the center of a joke or comments with sexual or malicious connotations; she plays the role of ridiculously comic.

Women as low income earners:

- Woman performing intermediate level position job. This intermediate level is related to degrees of education. Examples: clerical or secretarial positions.
- Woman as blue or pink collar worker

Superwoman:

- Woman performs many roles at the same time. She has an occupational role; she is housewife, mother and wife. However, she takes care of the home and family tasks alone. She doesn't share these activities with her husband.

Physically perfect:

- Woman as young, beautiful and slim

Caucasian ethnic characteristics:

- Woman presents Caucasian characteristics: fair hair, fair eyes, and fair skin

Independent:

- Woman as financially independent from man. She has a job and earns a wage which maintains herself
- Woman as psychologically independent from man. She completes tasks alone; she doesn't need male encouragement or reinforcement; she makes decisions alone; she takes the initiative for doing things. She doesn't need a man to take care of her

Home and family tasks equity:

- Man and woman share responsibilities related to family and household chores

Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics:

- Woman presents Non-Caucasian physical characteristics: as dark hair, dark eyes, and dark skin. Or she presents mulata, black, Asian, Arabian, or Latin physical characteristics.

Function equity:

- Woman and man play equivalent occupational roles positions
- Either woman or man determine what should be done (the equality of function is pictured either within an occupational frame or outside of occupation specializations)

Rational:

- Woman makes decisions that are coherent; she offers solutions in difficult or unexpected situations

Women in a prestigious or professional or high income earner:

- Woman as high level professionals. These occupational positions are related to high wages, social prestige and high level of education

All the categories and their measurements were pre-tested by a graduate student and two professors of Marketing. The three of them worked separately. When the definitions of the categories or their measurements were not clear, that is, when doubts emerged the definitions were rewritten until they had become clear. Thus, the investigation procedures conform to content analysis conditions of pre-testing the categories and measurements.

Six graduate students were used to code the pieces of advertisements selected. There was a training period in which the coders analyzed a set of sample and learned how to work on them. In addition, this study employed an independent judge process, which means that the coders were able to report autonomous assessments without inputs from the researchers or other arbiter, since each evaluator worked alone and the authors did not compose the appraiser team. Thus, the requirements of judge independence and training were followed.

Interjudge reliability is the rate of agreement between the coders who are applying the same set of categories to the same content. Hence, it is the degree of consistency between judges. High levels of disagreement among them indicate a flaw in research procedures. The most often reliability index used by previous research is the coefficient of agreement which is composed by the total number of agreements divided by the total number of coding decisions. If more than two judges are engaged, the typical number provided is the percentage of agreement between each pair of judges (Karsarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Berelson (1952) states that the reliability

index should range between 66% and 95% However, according to Kassarian (1977) this coefficient should be above 85%.

In this study the index applied was the coefficient of agreement. In addition, as we have used six judges the figure provided is the percentage of agreement between each pair of judges. The interjudge reliability index was examined to verify whether the categories and their rules did not contain any bias. Indeed, in this study these coefficients can be considered high. The lower figure was 87,5%, between rater 1 and 3. Actually, the reliability coefficients ranged from 87,5 % to 92,4%. These figures indicate that there is a high degree of consistency between the judges. These indexes are presented in table 2:

Table 2 – interjudge reliability

JUDGE	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	X	90,9%	87,5%	90,8%	88,6%	89,8%
2		X	91,2%	92,4%	90,9%	91,4%
3			X	89,9%	90,1%	90,9%
4				X	90,8%	91,0%
5					X	89,9%
6						X

Source: developed by the authors.

5 RESULTS

Frequencies of roles portrayed by women in advertisements examined are presented in table 3.

Table 3 - Frequency of Female Portrayals in Advertisements

DECADES	1973-1980	1981-1990	1991- 2008	1973-2008
Stereotyped portrayals				
Feminine touch	5.3%	6.1%	0.5%	1.2%

Function ranking	21.3%	8.3%	4.2%	3.0%
Ritualization of subordination	24%	11.8%	5.7%	3.8%
Licensed withdraw	14%	1.8%	2.1%	1.5%
Body-Revealing clothes or Nudity	21.3%	38.2%	37.5%	9.8%
Dependent	29.3%	12.3%	18.2%	5.5%
Housewife	19.3%	11.0%	19.3%	4.7%
Decorative role	18.0%	21.5%	30.2%	6.9%
Women as physically beautiful	9.3%	11.0%	10.4%	3.0%
Women as shallow	9.3%	3.5%	6.8%	1.8%
Irrational	10.0%	6.6%	10.4%	2.6%
Window display	16.7%	26.8%	12.0%	5.6%
An object of ridicule	11.3%	14.9%	20.8%	4.7%
Women as low income earners	2.7%	5.3%	2.1%	1.0%
Super woman	0.7%	1.8%	1.0%	0.4%
Idealized portrayals				
Physically perfect	41.3%	53.5%	49.5%	14.4%
Caucasian ethnic characteristics	19.3%	22.4%	33.3%	7.4%
Plural portrayals				
Independence	15.3%	23.7%	12.5%	5.2
Home and family tasks equity	0.0%	1.3%	1.0%	0.3%
Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics	45.3%	46.5%	40.6%	13.0%
Function equity	5.3%	7.5%	3.1%	1.6%
Rational	5.3%	8.8%	7.3%	2.2%
Women as prestigious or professionals or high income earners	1.3%	2.2%	0.0%	0.4
Number of classifications	150	228	192	1940
Number of ads analyzed in the period	25	39	31	95

Source: developed by the authors.

An analysis by decades shows that in the 1973 -1980 period portrayals most frequent were: Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics (45.3%), Physically perfect (41.3%), Dependent (29.3%), Ritualization of subordination (24%), Function ranking (21.3%), Body revealing clothes or nudity

(21.3%), Housewife (19.3%), Caucasian ethnic characteristics (19.3%), Decorative roles (18%), Window display (16.7%), Independence (15.3%) Licensed withdraw (14%) and An object of ridicule (11.3%). The great majority of these categories belong to the group which we have labeled as stereotyped portrayals. Women were rarely shown as **super woman** (0.7%), as a **prestigious or professional or high income earner** (1.3%) or as **low income earners** (2.7%). Not a single woman was represented as sharing the home and family tasks with man in an equality way.

Images most depicted during the 1981-1990 period were: Physically perfect (53.5%), Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics (46.5%), Body revealing clothes or nudity (38.2%), Window display (26.8%), Independence (23.7%), Caucasian ethnic characteristics (22.4%), decorative roles (21.5%), An object of ridicule (14.9%), Dependent (12.3%), Ritualization of subordination (11.8%), Women as physically beautiful (11%) and Housewife (11%). Eight of these portrayals belong to the group identified as stereotyped. On the other hand, images that appeared less often during this course of time were again Home and family tasks equity (1.3%), Super woman (1.8%), Licensed withdraw (1.8%), Women as prestigious or professionals or high income earners (2.2%).

In the 1991-2008 term most women were portrayed as: Physically perfect (49.5%), Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics (40.6%), Body revealing clothes or Nudity (37.5%), Caucasian ethnic characteristics (33.3%), decorative roles (30.2%), An object of ridicule (20.8%), Housewife (19.3%) and Dependent (18.2%). On the other hand, in this period, only a small percentage of ads depicted women as: Feminine touch (0.5%), Home and family tasks equity (1.0 %), Super woman (1.0%), Licensed withdraw (2.1%) and Women as low income earners (2.1%). In addition, not a single woman was represented as a **prestigious or professional or high income earners**.

A longitudinal analysis of the presence of these images through the three different decades shows that they have followed different trends. Portrayals as Function ranking, Ritualization of subordination, Licensed withdraw, Dependent and Women as shallow declined in later years in comparison to former years. These depictions belong to the group which we have labeled stereotyped portrayals. Further, images as Feminine touch, Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics, Window display and Independence maintained or increased its performances in the second decade (1981-1990) in comparison to the first one (1973-1980). However, they presented a strong decrease in the last term (1991-2008). Again, two of these portraits, Feminine touch and Window display belong to the group designated as stereotyped pictures. The other two images, Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics and Independence belong to the group named plural portrayals.

On the other hand, descriptions as Body revealing clothes or nudity, Decorative roles, An object of ridicule, Caucasian ethnic characteristics and Physically perfect have increased in later years in comparison to former years. Three of these categories belong to the group identified as stereotyped and two to the idealized one. In addition, through the 35 years term, ads have rarely shown the following images: Women as low income earners, super women, home and family tasks equity and women as prestigious or professionals or high income earners. Finally, whereas, some portrayals Women as physically beautiful, Housewife and Irrational did not play an extremely significant position among other images, they were presented in ads in a regular basis during the extent of time under analysis.

Examining the stereotyped portrayals, eight were significantly represented through the three decades. They are: Body revealing clothes or nudity, dependent, housewife, decorative roles, women as physically beautiful, irrational, window display, and an object of ridicule. Four images classified in the stereotyped group were strongly represented only in the first decade. However, from the second decade they have started to decline. These portrayals were: function ranking, ritualization of subordination, licensed withdraw and women as shallow.

Furthermore, the two idealized depictions were always well represented through the three decades of the investigation. Indeed, in comparison to the other portrayals in the study, the image **physically perfect** was one of the two which were most depicted. In relation to the plural portrayals, two of them appeared most often during the 35 years under analysis. They were: Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics and Independence. Indeed, the first one was the picture most exhibited in the 27 year- period of investigation.

Table 4 – Summary of the results

<u>PORTRAYALS THAT HAVE DECLINED IN LATER YEARS</u>
STEREOTYPED PORTRAYALS
Function ranking; Ritualization of subordination; Licensed withdraw; Dependent; Women as shallow
Feminine touch; Window display
IDEALIZED PORTRAYALS
Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics
PLURAL PORTRAYALS

Independence

PORTRAYALS WHICH HAVE INCREASED IN LATER YEARS

STEREOTYPED PORTRAYALS

Body revealing clothes or nudity; Decorative roles; An object of ridicule

IDEALIZED PORTRAYALS

Caucasian ethnic characteristics; Physically perfect

PORTRAYALS RARELY SHOWN THROUGH THE 27 YEARS

STEREOTYPED PORTRAYALS

Women as low income earners; Super women

PLURAL PORTRAYALS

home and family tasks equity; women as prestigious or professionals or high income earners

PRESENTED IN ADS IN A REGULAR BASIS THROUGH THE 27 YEARS

STEREOTYPED PORTRAYALS

Women as physically beautiful ;Housewife; Irrational

THE STEREOTYPED PORTRAYALS

SIGNIFICANTLY REPRESENTED THROUGH THE THREE DECADES

Body revealing clothes or nudity, dependent, housewife, decorative roles, women as physically beautiful, irrational, window display, object of ridicule

STRONGLY REPRESENTED IN THE FIRST DECADE, DECLINING FROM THE SECOND DECADE

function ranking; ritualization of subordination; licensed withdraw; women as shallow

THE IDEALIZED PORTRAYALS

SIGNIFICANTLY REPRESENTED THROUGH THE THREE DECADES

Physically perfect

Caucasian ethnic characteristics

THE PLURAL PORTRAYALS

SIGNIFICANTLY REPRESENTED THROUGH THE THREE DECADES

Independence

Not Caucasian ethnic characteristics

Source: developed by the authors.

6 DISCUSSION

The discussion of this section was structured having in mind the following questions: 1) which are the meanings of our results? 2) How similar or how different are these results in comparison with previous research? Or, how can we connect these results to previous investigations and to our literature review?

Our results have revealed that in relation to stereotyped portrayals, eight of them were significantly represented through the three decades under analysis. In addition, seven of these types of images have decreased over time (from 1973 to 2008). Moreover, three of them have increased, and three have appeared during the 35 years in a regular basis. In relation to the idealized images, both of the categories applied in the study were always well represented through the three decades of the investigation. In relation to the plural portrayals, two of them appeared more often during the 35 years under analysis.

First of all, these results mean that advertisements have always idealized female images. In addition, they show that stereotyped imagery was always present in publicity. Moreover, although some types of depreciated images have declined, others have increased.

In comparison to previous research, part of our results shows the same patterns of images. Specifically, previous studies have found that female portrayals are depicted in a stereotyped way. We also have found this trend. More specifically, part of our results is consistent with Acevedo et al. (2004), Belkaoui and Belkaoui's (1976), Courtney and Lockeretz (1971), Goffman's (1979), Kang's (1997) and Venkatesan and Losco (1975).

Further, previous investigations also have revealed that women are presented in an idealized manner. Hence this study is in consistency with them. However, what is new in our investigation is that our data have revealed that some plural portrayals have always been there. Nonetheless, some

portrayals which represent women in equalitarian roles in comparison to men are rarely represented in publicity.

In addition, some stereotyped categories mentioned in the literature were rarely represented in the ads of this study, as super women, women as low income earners and feminine touch. On the other hand, our results are consistent with Rocha (1995) results. This author stresses the magic and perfect aspect of advertising imagery. Our results show that idealized portrayals are strongly represented in mass media.

In Freyre (2003) descriptions about women in the patriarchal society, some issues are outstanding, such as: the association of women to the domestic dimension of life, the role of mother and housekeeper and the idealization of the body. Indeed, these themes, in some way, have also emerged from our results. For example, the housekeeper and mother's roles are related to the **housewife** category. On the other hand, the idealization of the body described by Freyre (2003) is related to the **physically perfect** portrayal. In this depiction, the central points are beauty and perfectionism. Moreover, the author's descriptions denounce how prejudice was the patriarchal society against women. They were considered the **fragile sex** and the **fleshly puppet**. Also, they were confined to artificial situations to provide pleasure to men. Besides, gender relations were dominated by men and they were molded in order to satisfy their narcissistic satisfaction. In this way, our results reveal portrayals that are impregnated by prejudice against women. On the other hand, the portrayal of **physically perfect** insinuates a hidden trace of male domination. It denotes a necessity to be always beautiful and tidy in order to be admired by men.

7 CONCLUSION

The main goal of this research was to examine female roles portrayed by advertising. More specifically, we wanted to understand which messages about women have been given to society through advertising, and whether these portrayals have been changed during the past decades.

We understand that the messages that advertising has given to society are that women are not considered equally to men. In addition, we interpret that in Brazilian society there are still many stereotypes against women. Furthermore, prejudices that have roots in the patriarchal regime are still impregnated in social relations in this country. Additionally, women still occupy positions that are inferior to men. Moreover, women are seen as inferior to men and their images are used in order

to give pleasure to men. Overall, some specific female portrayals in advertisements have changed over the years. More specifically, some of them have declined during the period analyzed. However, they continued to be idealized and stereotyped.

According to Sabat (2001) when publicity uses a specific image. It means that this speech already exists in the society. Hence, we can interpret that the categories that were most represented in the advertisements examined in this study reflect society gender relations and female roles. Moreover, as plural portrayals and stereotyped ones are the opposite in relation to each other, we can interpret that Brazilian society is permeated by female role prejudice.

Some implications to managers and publicists can be drawn from this investigation. First of all, advertisers should be alert that women would like to be shown in the roles they play in the society. Those professionals who choose to portray female images in a more realistic manner might benefit from their consumption.

As to any research, this study has limitations that also suggest possibilities for future investigative endeavor. For instance, future research could see into the subject in another technique approach. Moreover, these results suggest the need for more research in female content analysis. Other studies in the area would be useful. In addition, some of the constructs and operational rules proposed in this investigation should be reanalyzed and tested.

Notes:

(1) **Ideology** - This term is applied in this work according with Thompson (201) concept. That is: ideology is the point of view of the Other who is different from us. This definition implies that the meaning is used to establish and sustain assymmetric relations of power, that is, relations of dominance.

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OS PAPÉIS REPRESENTADOS POR MULHERES EM COMERCIAIS: UMA ANÁLISE DE CONTEÚDO – 1973 A 2008

RESUMO:

O principal objetivo deste artigo foi examinar os papéis femininos retratados em propagandas. A questão que motivou esta pesquisa foi: quais são as mensagens sobre as mulheres que têm sido transmitidas para a sociedade por meio das propagandas. Estas representações dos papéis das mulheres na sociedade têm mudado ao longo dos anos? O estudo consistiu em uma análise de conteúdo de comerciais brasileiros transmitidos de 1973 a 2008. Uma amostra probabilística foi utilizada para se selecionar 95 propagandas. Nossos resultados revelaram que algumas representações específicas têm mudado, ao longo dos anos, no entanto, ainda continuam bastante estereotipadas e idealizadas.

Palavras-chave: Publicidade; Mulher; Gênero.

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